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SOCIAL WORKERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEXUALLY EXPLOITED GIRLS

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Copyright statement

Abstract

In recent year's child sexual exploitation has received significant attention in the UK politically, publically, and in the media. In particular, high profile cases involving groups of men and adolescent girls have resulted in criticism directed towards safeguarding services. Of specific concern is whether sexually exploited young people have been safeguarded, as they should have been. If they have not been, is this because safeguarding professionals understand young people to be 'making a choice' to be in sexually exploitative situations and therefore they are 'left to it'. Thus, this doctoral research considers how social workers understand CSE, with a focus on the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls as choice-makers and agents. Eighteen social workers, from three local authorities, within one region in England were interviewed. The interviewees work in all areas of safeguarding. To further elicit the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls, the interviewees' understandings of girls sexually abused in the home were also explored. How girls' choice-making and agency are understood and responded to, depending on where, and by whom they have been abused/exploited, is explored. The methodology is qualitative and adopts a social constructionist, feminist approach utilising thematic analysis.

The social workers understand that CSE happens to a certain 'type' of girl: one who is likely to be socially and economically deprived; that is why the social workers understand she is vulnerable to CSE. The interviewees have complex understandings regarding who is to blame for CSE and the lack of overt blame placed on the perpetrators, alongside significant culpability placed on the girls, is striking. Moreover, the confluence of choice-making and blame within the interviewees' epistemological framework concerning CSE and sexually exploited girls is of specific note. The social workers 'wrestle' with their understandings of sexually exploited girls as choice-makers, this is because they associate choice with blame and this leaves them conflicted. The way in which they resolve this conflict is to invalidate certain choices that girls make which they understand 'result' in her being exploited, in order not to blame her. The research concludes that social workers need to separate out choice-making from blame and recognise that sexually exploited girls make choices, within a context but that they should never be blamed for making those choices. Furthermore, their agency needs to be encouraged and enabled in positive directions and blame should always and unequivocally be placed on the perpetrators.

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List of abbreviations

CSE=Child sexual exploitation

CSA=Child sexual abuse

CSE SW=Child sexual exploitation social worker. This is a children and family social worker whose main caseload will be CSE cases.

[…] =data has been removed

[pause]=interviewee stopped talking for a few seconds

LA= Local authority

Part One

Chapter One- Introduction

Little did I realise when I began this doctoral research in 2012 how topical and contentious the subject of child sexual exploitation was to become, in both public and political discourse (see Senior, 2016; Berelowitz et al., 2015; 2013; Casey, 2015; Jay, 2014; RSCB, 2013). Therefore, I hope that the relevance of my thesis and the prescient questions it seeks to answer about social workers' understandings of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited girls offers a timely contribution to literature in the field. This chapter outlines the aims and objectives of the research, the research questions, the 'boundaries' of the thesis- articulating why the research focuses on girls only, my feminist position and finally, the structure of the thesis is explained. The topic of child sexual exploitation is introduced by focusing on how CSE is defined. Following this, is a broader discussion of the cultural and political context within which this thesis is written.

1.0 Aims and objectives

The main aim of this research is to examine and increase knowledge of child sexual exploitation (CSE) in the UK in the contemporary period. The objective of the research is to gain knowledge of social workers' understandings and constructions of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited girls and to elucidate the implications of these understandings and constructions for theory and practice.

1.1 Research Questions

These questions derive from my experiences as a practitioner (I am a youth and community worker by profession) working with parents whose children were being sexually exploited, in the main by groups of extra-familial men from (primarily) Yorkshire and Lancashire. The questions have changed over the course of the doctoral process and this is discussed fully in chapter three. However, the three questions below focus comprehensively on the main areas of enquiry that are of interest within this research:

1. What are social workers' understandings and constructions of CSE and sexually exploited girls?

2. How do social workers understand and construct the agency and choice-making of girls sexually exploited outside the home and girls sexually abused within the home?

3. What bodies of knowledge are social workers drawing from in their understandings and
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constructions of sexually exploited girls particularly concerning childhood, gender and childhood and sexuality?

1.2 The boundaries of the research

The thesis explores social workers' understanding of girls, not boys and there are a number of reasons for this: primarily, my interest in researching CSE and sexually exploited girls developed out of supporting parents whose daughters were being sexually exploited. Furthermore, evidence such as that uncovered in the Jay report (2014) and by Berelowitz et al,.(2013) suggests that girls are more likely to be sexually exploited than boys. Thus, the context in which this research is conducted, and the premise that it is working from, is that *mainly* girls are sexually exploited by *mainly* men.

Despite the focus on girls, I recognise that the sexual exploitation of boys is a significant global and national problem and, like girls, boys face a multitude of complex issues, particularly concerning social constructions of masculinity and heterosexuality (Cockbain and Ashby, 2014; McNaughton Nicholls et al., 2014). However, I understand girls as being affected by specific gendered, structural issues for example, patriarchy, sexism, misogony, gender imbalances and inequalities and therefore are likely to be understood by social workers differently to boys.

Finally, regarding the boundaries of this research, I do not explore the social workers' understandings of different groups of girls, for example, younger girls i.e. pre-pubescent girls or black, ethnic minority (BME) girls; girls who have disabilities or learning difficulties and/or identify as LGBTQ. My reasons for not pursuing these subjects is because I do not want the social workers to be 'distracted' from one of the main areas of enquiry within the thesis, which is their understanding of sexually exploited girls' agency and choice-making and thus exploring different groups of girls is beyond the remit of this research.

1.3 Feminst Position

This research is conducted at a time when the subject of CSE and the grooming of adolescent girls is prevalent in the UK. Moreover, gendered 'sexualisation of girls' debates prevail in public and political discourse. I approach this research as a post-structuralist feminist, drawing on various feminist theories to inform my understandings of sexually exploited girls and in order to better analyse and interpret the social workers' understandings. For example, Egan and Hawkes (2012) and Egan's (2013) feminist analysis of 'sexualisation of girls' discourses and the 'problematic' area if female adolescent sexuality, has been influential in my understanding of gender. Jackson and Scott (2010) and

Jackson (1982) contribute to my epistemological understanding of childhood sexuality. In relation to CSA and CSE, Woodiwiss (2014; 2009) and Reavey (2003), amongst others (see chapter two) also inform my understandings of gender. Both are post-structuralist feminists, working in the field of child sexual abuse and explore how understandings of abuse are understood and constructed differently depending on a person's location and position; this approach has been useful when exploring the understandings of certain groups of people, such as social workers. Woodiwiss' (2014) feminist analysis of sexually abused girls who step out of expected and acceptable boundaries of sexual behaviour, and exert agency-subverting the 'ideal victim' construction, has significantly aided me as I interpret the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls. Woodiwiss' (ibid) work also highlights how social constructions of gender inform understandings of CSA and CSE, often detrimentally for the female young person (see Woodiwiss, 2014)

The research draws on Kelly's (1988) theory that violence against girls and women is perpetrated on a 'continuum' (p. 78); reinforced and maintained by patriarchal systems of violence, power and oppression. I locate CSE, and sexually exploited girls within that continuum of sexual violence. Also informing this research, Kelly (2015) discusses the increasing de-genderisation of the language around sexual violence. Likewise, Lamb (1999; 1996) identifies that sexual violence is made more 'palatable' within the patriarchy, by 'absenting' the maleness of perpetrators and this also informs my understanding of gender in the context of CSE. Furthermore, Hester's (2011) work on domestic violence has also been informative regarding the commonalities in the experiences of victims of domestic abuse and those who are sexually exploited, especially around issues of blaming women and 'absenting' men (Lamb, 1996). Challenging, and critiquing potential gender inequalities in the context of CSE is a key element of my feminist methodological approach, an approach that is discussed further in chapter three.

1.4 Structure of thesis

The thesis is divided into two parts, and within them, there are eight chapters. Part one consists of three chapters: the introduction, literature review and the methodology. Part two has five chapters, which discuss the empirical findings and the conclusion. This introductory chapter includes an explanation about the cultural context of the research in relation to how CSE has emerged in recent years as a topical and contentious issue in the UK. Chapter two, the literature review, focuses on a range of topics that are relevant to the thesis specifically: how childhood has been constructed historically; constructions of female childhood sexuality, particularly around adolescent girls; agency and choice; child sexual abuse; victimhood, blame and consent; child sexual exploitation and social work practices. This

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chapter provides a critical review of my reading; how it has informed and framed the thesis findings is demonstrated throughout the subsequent chapter's four to eight. The third chapter discusses the methodology and the methods utilised within the research. Why a qualitative, social constructionist and feminist approach is adopted is explored and alongside this, a detailed description of the process of the thematic analysis and the themes elicited. The purpose of this chapter is to show clearly how the research was conducted, the processes, the problems, and how the research is replicable.

Part two of the thesis presents the empirical findings from the interviews. Chapter four gives a broad introduction to the findings and considers the social workers' practical and conceptual understandings of CSE and CSA, also exploring how the interviewees understand and respond to cases of sexual abuse in the home, and exploitation outside the home. The fifth chapter discusses the social workers' strong and recurrent constructions of sexually exploited girls as a *type of girl from a type of family* and considers how sexually exploited girls are commonly understood as *multi-dimensional victims*. Chapter six looks at the topic of blame and focuses on two areas, the onus being on the girls and an absence of blame on the perpetrators. Specifically, how much onus is placed on the girls to do certain things if the CSE is to stop (or indeed never start) and, alongside this, the chapter explores how, as a result of this 'onus', blame may be absented from the perpetrators. The final findings chapter (seven) discusses the social workers' complex, multi-faceted and often contradictory understandings about sexually exploited girls as choice-makers and agents, the 'red thread' throughout the thesis. Furthermore, how their understandings of choice and blame are (problematically) confluent is considered. Finally, chapter eight, the concluding chapter, begins by clarifying the main findings from the four previous empirical chapters. Following this is an explanation about why social workers may 'wrestle' with their conflicted understandings of sexually exploited girls as agents and choice-makers. Moreover, and of import, the chapter discusses how the social workers attempt to 'resolve' these tensions. This is followed by considering why another discourse is needed wherein young people are recognised and understood as agents and choice-makers, but not blamed and the implications this might have for policy and practice, social workers, perpetrators and most importantly, young people. Why this doctoral research can be considered an original contribution to the literature is discussed.

1.5 Introducing child sexual exploitation (CSE)
Defining and critiquing CSE
During the 1990s (in the UK), language such as, 'children being prostituted' or 'child prostitutes' started to change. This was, at least in part, due to an increase in campaigning

from (primarily) children's right activists who asserted that a child who was being sold for sex should be understood as a victim of abuse, not as a protagonist, or even a criminal, as was often the case (Melrose, 2013; 2010; 2004; Moore, 2006; O'Connell Davidson, 2005; Melrose, Barrett and Brodie, 1999). However, Melrose (2013) suggests that campaigning organisations, such as children's charities, promulgated this discourse in order to demarcate adults involved in the sex 'industry' from young people (p. 13). The reason for this was to encourage a child protection response to young people rather than viewing them as criminals, and as a concept, this has 'stuck' (p. 14).

Following this discursive shift, a new term, *commercial* child sexual exploitation was commonly used; *commercial* was utilised to emphasise the financial transactional element in CSE (Melrose, 2013; Jones, 2013; Dept of Health, 2001). However, the term evolved further through 2000-2010 into sexual exploitation (losing the commercial aspect), and currently child sexual exploitation is most commonly used when referring to certain types of child sexual abuse (CSA). CSA, commonly referred to as an 'umbrella' term for CSE. The shifting discourse has been led, mainly, by government guidance often compiled in conjunction with other organisations. Most significantly, in 2009, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) produced for the first time (in the UK) a definition of CSE in conjunction with the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children (NWG) (2008). This definition is one of the most commonly used in practice and policy now:

> *Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example, being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or*

emotional vulnerability. (DCSF, 2009 p. 9)

However, at the time of writing (Summer 2016) the DCSF (2009) guidance and definition are being revised by the Department for Education (2016). This is because some have deemed the DCSF (2009) definition unsatisfactory. In particular this is identified by the former deputy children's commissioner Sue Berelowitz in her two-year inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups (OCC, 2015a; Berelowitz, 2013; see also Firmin, 2010). Arguably, one of the difficulties with the DCSF (2009) definition of CSE is that it is being used (in public, political and safeguarding discourse) to describe a broad range of sexually exploitative behaviours; e.g. peer on peer, group, gang, 'one on one' and so forth (see Berelowitz et al., 2013 p. 43 for different typologies *just* within gangs and groups), and this is problematic. As Archard (2004) notes, regarding defining child abuse:

> *The definition must be clear and unambiguous. It should not*
> *generate to many disagreements about what does and does*
> *not count as abuse […] must be substantive […] it should not*
> *be truistic or tautological* (pp. 194-195)

Furthermore, it is unclear whether the DCSF (2009) definition 'understands' CSE to be intra or extra-familial or indeed both. Moreover, it begs the question, are only those young people with, "*limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic vulnerability*" exploitable? (ibid.) and, what does that really mean anyway? As Melrose (2013) notes:

> *This new and expanded language means that the concept of*
> *CSE no longer necessarily signals young people's abuse*
> *through prostitution or commercial markets […] this new*
> *language stretched the concept to the point of*
> *meaninglessness […]* (p. 11)

The ubiquitous and arguably tautological use of the term CSE, and its increasingly embedded place in discourse, has been relatively un-critiqued, resulting in the term being at risk of becoming either "meaningless" (Melrose, 2013, p. 11) and/or simply open to (both) individual and corporate interpretation. Rather than a commonly accepted and agreed upon definition. Significantly, Melrose (2012) identifies another problem with the current CSE definitions and discourses- they are limited and restrictive, constructing sexually exploited young people as being, 'all the same':

> *Young people who are exploited are treated as more or less*
> *homogenous and their differences are virtually obliterated by*
> *the fact of their 'exploitation'.* (p. 4)

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Melrose (2012) argues that this model constructs the idea of those involved as objects, upon whom a crime is enacted, understood purely as passive victims lacking any level of agency. As Melrose (2013), and others note, re-defining children as being 'sexually exploited' and in turn emphasising their victim status fails to recognise the heterogeneity of young people, their agency and the varied and complex reasons why they might be involved in selling sex (O' Dell, 2008; 2003; O'Connell-Davidson, 2005; Phoenix, 2001). The constant portrayal of sexually exploited young people as victims (and often as a young child/childlike) who 'have no choice' (see NWG CSE, 2016 poster campaign; Barnardo's, 2011, 'Puppet on a string' publication), may limit recognition of the more complex nature of sexually exploitative situations and sexually exploited young people. Furthermore, it is questionable, whether discourses that promote sexually exploited young people only, or mainly, as victims, without (or with limited) agency actually reflect the reality of young people's experiences, including their capacity to not only demonstrate agency but also resilience (Dodsworth, 2016; Pearce, 2009; 2007; Kelly, 1988b).

Fundamentally, defining CSE is difficult- encompassing in one, ideally succinct paragraph what CSE is; who is exploited and by whom; where, and how; is undoubtedly very challenging. Compounded by the fact that perpetrators of CSE change their modus operandi. However, the Department of Education are endeavouring to do just that and the following definition is currently under consultation by the Department for Education (2016), as is the DCSF (2009) guidance (ibid.). At the time of writing, this was the proposed new definition for CSE:

> *Child sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse. It occurs where anyone under the age of 18 is persuaded, coerced or forced into sexual activity in exchange for, amongst other things, money, drugs/alcohol, gifts, affection or status. Consent is irrelevant, even where a child may believe they are voluntarily engaging in sexual activity with the person who is exploiting them. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact and may occur online*

(Department for Education, 2016, p. 8)

This proposed definition (again) fails to recognise the agency of young people or the nuances within their experiences. It attempts to define CSE as being the same for everyone and this is problematic and unrepresentative. As noted previously, how CSE is defined matters, and it matters because it appears to be a term that is becoming part of safeguarding (and public/political) discourse, seemingly without much critique. As Shuker

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(2016) notes:

> *If definitions don't demarcate phenomena on the basis of*
> *sound evidence/reasoning, then individuals/groups will on the*
> *basis of experience.*
>
> (Presentation at the NWG CSE Research forum, 2016)

Moreover, if understandings of CSE become too narrow, certain young people may not be 'understood', responded to, or even noticed. Dichotomously, if it is too broad, then the term may lose any real meaning and people may interpret it as they see fit (Fox, 2016; Shuker, 2016). As a result, safeguarding professionals may end up working from 'different pages' with the possibility of disparity in understandings, (and response) ensuing. Thus, for the purpose of this research, it is important to be clear about the type of CSE that is of particular interest, which is, that perpetrated by groups of extra-familial persons as defined by Berelowitz et al., (2013):

> *Groups are two or more people of any age, connected through*
> *formal or informal associations or networks, including, but not*
> *exclusive to, friendship groups* (p. 8)

This is the type of sexual exploitation I witnessed most, when working in the field of CSE. Also a type that has received a great deal of focus and interest in recent years. Personally, whenever I use the term CSE, I always explain which type I am referring to and I always ask people to tell me (when they use the term) which type they are talking about. I think it is important to be clear and not assume we all know what we mean when we use the term CSE. We now move on to explore, the social and cultural context of this research in relation to CSE and CSA. In particular a significant issue that has arisen in the last few years concerning sexually exploited girls who may not have been protected as they should have been, and why that may be so.

1.6 Contemporary context of research on CSE

The phenomenon of child sexual exploitation and how and why CSE has become so salient within both public and safeguarding discourses is now explored. As a corollary to this, the section also discusses the attention given to how sexually exploited girls are perceived, understood and responded to by those responsible for safeguarding them (see Casey, 2015; Coffey, 2014; Champion, 2014). A topic that is very relevant to this thesis. A great deal of confusion has been expressed about *why* sexually exploited girls may not have been safeguarded, as they should have been (see *The Guardian* Newspaper, 2015(c); ITV News report, 2015; Loughton, 2015). How this climate of concern, disbelief and questioning is

relevant to questions addressed within this research, is considered.

Over the past decade, CSE has become a contested subject receiving a great deal of public and political attention (Fox, 2016; Casey, 2015; Jay, 2014; Pearce, 2013; Berelowitz et al., 2013). This is mainly because in recent years, there have been several high profile court cases concerning the extra-familial grooming and sexual exploitation of adolescent girls by, groups of (mainly) adult males. As a result, there has been a number of serious case reviews conducted by local children's safeguarding boards into CSE in various parts of the UK (see TSCB, 2014 and PSCB, 2014; OSCB, 2013; RSCB, 2012; DSCB, 2010). Furthermore, the topic of child sexual abuse more broadly, both intra and extra-familial, has received unprecedented amounts of coverage, especially in the wake of the 'Savile' investigations and claims of abuse made against a number of 'celebrities' (Telegraph Newspaper, 2015; BBC News Operation Yewtree, 2015; Gray and Watt, 2013). Consequently, awareness and concern about the sexual abuse and exploitation of children has, in recent years been intense. Inquiries and investigations have been launched to investigate sexual abuse that allegedly has taken place historically; perpetrated within institutions, local authorities and potentially by numerous individuals across the UK (OCC, 2015; IICSA, 2014).

As a result of such cases and subsequent inquiries, (most recently the Jay Report, 2014 into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, followed by Casey, 2015) the spotlight has focused on the role of local authorities. Politicians, the media and the public have expressed confusion and concern at the responses young people have or have not received (Champion, 2014; Loughton, 2015; Norfolk, 2014; Danchuk, 2013). In turn, criticism has been levelled at safeguarding authorities concerning their perceived failure in protecting young people, not only from being sexually exploited in the first place but, when young people did seek out support, they were often not safeguarded as they should have been (Coffey, 2014; Parton, 2014). The media, politicians and indeed survivors of CSE (see Wilson, 2015, McDonnell, 2015; Girl A, 2013; Jackson, 2010) have been vocal in condemning those charged with protecting young people. Most notably, has been the attention placed on, the aforementioned Rotherham metropolitan borough council, where there have been widespread resignations and indeed commissioners have been brought in to run the council. All of which has been followed by notable disquiet and concern expressed at how CSE cases have been handled historically and presently (Senior, 2016; *The Guardian* Newspaper, 2016; Champion, 2014).

The media in particular has focused on the issue of 'Asian men' and 'white girls' - the girls

invariably portrayed as working class and from 'troubled' backgrounds (see Norfolk, 2014). Indeed, a number of the recent high profile cases (ibid.) have involved such groups however, whether there is empirical evidence that such a model of abuse is endemic in the UK is questionable, and the media's lack of contextualisation of the issue is troubling (Cockbain, 2013). Also missing in wider CSE discourses within the media, and indeed within political coverage/responses, is recognition and discussion about the (mainly) gendered dynamics involved and indeed the wider national and global problem and prevalence of male sexual violence. However, possibly more significantly and of particular relevance to this research, is the issue of blame and where it is, or is not placed.

One of the re-occurring questions asked by both the public and politicians in recent years is why is it that girls, who were clearly being sexually exploited, were not safeguarded, as they should have been? (Casey, 2015; Jay, 2014). Recent reports and inquiries have found that girls were often understood to be 'putting themselves at risk', or 'making a lifestyle choice' and viewed as complicit in what is happening to them (Berelowitz et al., 2015; Coffey, 2014; Woodiwiss, 2014; Pearce, 2013). For example, Berelowitz et al., (2013) found in her two-year inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups that professionals referred to young people who 'put themselves at risk', rather than they are being put at risk (p. 23). This is also reflected in the findings from a serious case review conducted by Oxford local safeguarding children's board:

> *...The language used by professionals was one which saw the girls as the source not the victims of their extreme behaviour, and they received much less sympathy as a result...*
>
> (Oxford LSCB, 2015, p. 6, point 1.2)

Media outlets have also questioned how sexually exploited people are understood and responded to:

> *Instead, professionals blamed the girls, the report said; police and social services were gripped with the mind-set that they were " very difficult " girls who had come to harm because of their own actions.* (The Guardian 3/3/15)

Sir Peter Fahy, the chief constable for Greater Manchester further illustrates the issue of blame concerning CSE and where, subconsciously or consciously it is assigned:

> *Police still haven' t solved the key issue behind CSE, which is how do you protect vulnerable young people who are*

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determined to put themselves at risk and don' t understand
the degree to which they are making themselves vulnerable?
The difficult upbringing they have had will be used against
them to challenge their credibility.

(Speaking on the *'Today'* programme on Radio 4. 13.3.15.).

Fahy states that the *'key issue behind CSE is how to protect vulnerable young people who are determined to put themselves at risk'* (ibid.). When challenged by the journalist to whom he was speaking, about his assertion that girls putting themselves at risk was the *key issue* to be resolved when dealing with CSE, he replied, *'absolutely'*. The language he used, his apparent lack of awareness of what he was implying and the assignment of blame he attributed, consciously or otherwise, to sexually exploited young people for putting themselves at risk and their assumed "difficult upbringing", is concerning on a number of levels. However, Fahy's comments encapsulate a central issue in relation to sexually exploited young people in the context of this research, they are commonly understood to be 'putting themselves' in a position of risk, and therefore, to some degree viewed as responsible, or to blame, for being sexually exploited. Evidence has shown that how social workers, and others understand sexually exploited girls and their choice-making clearly affects how they are responded to. Those understandings, ostensibly have resulted, at least in part, to girls not being safeguarded as they should have been (see Casey, 2015; Jay, 2014).

In response to the political and media furore around CSE a great deal has taken place, at a local and national level in terms of safeguarding initiatives; training; policy and guidelines in an attempt to improve services and better protect children (see Department for Education, 2016; HM Gov, 2016; 2015; NWG CSE, 2015; PACE, 2014; Berelowitz et al., 2013; 2015; House of Commons, 2013; Dfe, 2012; 2011; Jago et al., 2011). This process of development continues and CSE continues be a high priority within politics and safeguarding. However, there is limited in-depth, qualitative research conducted with professionals, including social workers, concerning their understandings of CSE and sexually exploited girls (for some of the available research on this see Martin et al., 2014; Hynes, 2013; CEOP, 2011; Jago et al., 2011; Jago and Pearce, 2011; Pearce et al., 2009b). Thus, this doctoral research aims to contribute to knowledge about this important and contemporary of subjects in the UK. Furthermore, as already noted, this thesis is conducted at a time when politicians and others are looking for answers about why girls (and boys) were not protected, as they should have been (ibid.). The thesis seeks to, at least in part, provide some answers and possible solutions to that question. The thesis now moves on to

the literature review to explore various topics relating to CSE and sexually exploited girls.

Chapter 2- Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The literature review concentrates on six main topics, all of which are chosen because they provide theoretical insights and concepts that better enable me to answer the research questions and aid me as I endeavour to interpret the social workers' understandings. Exploring what others have written about these pivotal issues and identifying potential gaps in the literature is a key feature of the review, as is the critical appraisal of the literature. Thus, the subjects that the review focuses on are constructions of childhood; childhood sexuality; agency and choice; child sexual abuse; child sexual exploitation and finally social work practices. The focus is on these areas in particular, not only because of their relevance to the research questions, but because I am interested in how they all potentially may intersect within the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls.

The first section discusses how childhood has been socially constructed historically and notes significant shifts and changes in that 'process'. Particular focus is on the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries and how the vicissitudes of (Western) social, political and economic climates have shaped and influenced understandings. Following this is an exploration of historical and current constructions of childhood sexuality drawing primarily on feminist literature. The section considers the topic of female adolescent sexuality focusing on the (generally) 'problematic' constructions of female sexuality. Moreover, its gendered nature is especially of interest and relevance when exploring discourses on (female) childhood sexuality. Furthermore, 'moral panics' (Cohen, 1972) such as recent 'sexualisation of girls' discourses is discussed; this is a significant part of the social and cultural context of this research. The chapter then moves on to discuss agency and choice. How sexually exploited girls' agency and choice-making is understood, and how this informs and impacts social workers' understandings and responses to them, especially in relation to blame and victimhood is of central interest within this research. A number of theoretical approaches to agency are considered, particularly concerning how the agency of children is constructed and why young peoples' agency may be denied or ignored. Alternative approaches and understandings of young people as agents, that maybe more empowering for children and young people are explored, alongside considering the potential benefits of recognising and enabling the agency of children, especially those who experience CSE.

The review then explores literature on child sexual abuse (CSA). CSA is clearly a substantial topic. Thus, I focus particularly on how historically and currently it has been socially

constructed. In particular exploring issues around victimhood, blame, and consent. The review then looks at CSE and by so doing expands on chapter one, exploring literature, which considers the origins of the term CSE and its history, how it has evolved and how it may be understood currently. As noted in the introductory chapter, in recent years the terms, CSE and CSA, have arguably become discursively separated and the possible reasons for this is further explored. Finally, literature regarding social work practices is considered. The need and importance of evidence based practice is explored as is how social care so often becomes the focus of vilification and criticism when stories gain public attention. This has been particularly relevant (concerning CSE) in the UK throughout the duration of this doctoral research.

2.1 A brief history of (western) social constructions of childhood and children

Throughout this thesis, I adopt the epistemological position that Western (and global) society's understanding of childhood and children is socially constructed however, I also recognise that these understandings are contested and shift (James and James, 2008; Lee, 2001; Anderson, 1980). Juxtaposed with a social constructionist approach, others have argued that childhood is better understood by an essentialist epistemological approach (for example, Shorter, 1976; Aries, 1962; Piaget, 1955; Parsons, 1951; Freud, 1907). Consequentially, societies' historical constructions of children and childhood have evolved in varying and complex ways (exemplified by for example, Archard, 2004; Hendrick, 2003; Prout and James, 1997; Thomas, 1923). Furthermore, and particularly relevant to this research is how children have been constructed regarding their agency, or lack of it. The status of children and how they are or are not understood as subjects in their own lives has been a fundamental factor in relation to their continued marginalisation, and indeed their oppression (O'Dell, 2008; Archard, 2004; Jenks, 1996). Indeed, for some, childhood has been assessed as an entirely 'governed' state (Rose, 1999), promulgated as a time of freedom and innocence yet dichotomously for most children, completely controlled by parents/carers (maybe even social workers) and teachers. They have little choice about where, or with whom they will be; for some children this offers protection and security, but for others it puts them at increased risk of harm for example, from abusive parents.

Globalisation has contributed to an increasing awareness of how universal constructions of children and childhood may misrepresent the many varied cultural settings that children inhabit, and in turn the diversity of children's life experiences. For example, many argue that to understand Western children, or indeed any children, homogenously, fails to acknowledge the specific cultural contexts they inhabit (James and James, 2008; Boyden, 1997; Rose, 1989). As James and James (2001) note:

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> *any child, at any given time is 'phrased' in culture, subject to change and not static.* (p. 2)

Likewise, Qvortrup (2009) comments that:

> *childhood changes slowly, or rapidly because society changes that way* (p. 8).

Aries (1962) 'Centuries of Childhood' explores the sociological history of childhood, cited by many prominent academics who write on the subject (Prout, 2005; Lees, 2001; Boyden, 1997; James and Prout, 1997; Prout and James, 1997). His in-depth exploration of childhood throughout the past millennium has been pivotal in contributing too many academic disciplines in particular, sociology and psychology (see Zhao, 2010; Shanahan, 2007). Aries highlights how constructions of childhood over the centuries have never been static and are driven more by culture than biology. Most famously, Aries (1962) claimed, somewhat controversially, that childhood, as a concept did not even exist until the twelfth century and that the term 'child' (historically) simply referred to a dependent state rather than age specifically:

> *It seems probable that there was no place for childhood in the medieval world* (p. 31).

However, Archard (2004) challenges this idea and argues that historically society has always had a concept of childhood, just different conceptions (p. 37). He suggests that this was as much the case in medieval times as it is today in the twenty-first century. Gills (1996) suggests that, 'age' as a concept only became an important life marker at the end of the nineteenth century, it was not deemed significant prior to this. Whereas Hendrick (1997) notes that by 1918 there was a clear divide between childhood and adulthood moreover, by the middle of the twentieth century Hendrick suggests that children were actually seen as, 'different', or lesser beings than adults (ibid.). Furthermore, he and others identify how changing social and economic circumstances and events related to class, religion, labour and healthcare have had profound influence on evolving social constructions of childhood (Archard, 2004; Hendrick, 1997; James and Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1996; Rose, 1989; Aries, 1962). However, the one construction of childhood that has been consistently promulgated throughout history, if not more recently contested, has been the notion that childhood should be a time of innocence and naivety. For example, Rousseau (1992 [1762]) steadfastly understood and asserted the construction that children are moral innocents who are inherently naive and close to nature. Although, more recently, Jenks (1996) challenges this thinking and contends that actually children were/are more likely to be constructed recurrently as both 'Dionysian' or 'Appollian', or as angelic and untainted yet,

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dichotomously, self-seeking and 'knowing' (p. 74). The literature on this topic repeatedly illustrates the contradictions in understandings but also highlights the resistance there commonly is to any challenge of the dominant construction of childhood as being, or needing to be, a time of innocence.

The nineteenth century witnessed high levels of child exploitation and child labour, with workhouse conditions for the poorest children (Stead, 1865; Hendrick, 1997). The theory behind child labour was that it would provide children with an understanding of economic, social and moral principles and thus be good preparation for adulthood (Hendrick, 1997, p. 37). However, this thinking soon changed in the minds of many in society as it became clear that much of child labour was more akin to slavery and thus was viewed as an affront to the 'ideal' of childhood. This, in turn, led to the view that making children work in this way denied them a childhood and resistance steadily grew, replaced by an emphasis on the importance of educating and protecting children, rather than using them for cheap labour (Hendrick, 1997, p.39).

The impact of two world wars inevitably had a profound impact on cultures and society, especially in the West. The evacuation of so many families from towns and cities highlighted the level of deprivation some children were experiencing. Lee (2001) comments on the significance of the post-Second World War era and cites how the restructuring of industry, employment and family life led to an 'age of uncertainty' (p. 7). Lee (ibid.) suggests that this was compounded in the 1970's with even less stability particularly regarding the assurance of employment and probably more significantly the hegemony of the nuclear family. Post-modernism and second wave feminism led to a fundamental shift in society's attitudes towards traditional relationships (also see Shorter 1976). Feminism, birth control, increasing acceptance of homosexuality and economic shifts all changed the nature of the family, which Lee (2001) contends led to an uncertain time (p. 16) (see also Beck, 1998; Postman, 1982).

A significant theme that emerged within certain sociological thinking in the middle part of the twentieth century was the concept that children are 'becoming, not being' (Postman, 1982; Shorter, 1976; Parsons, 1971; Piaget, 1955; Marshall, 1950). In other words, children being commonly viewed as 'not there yet' but rather 'en route' to their 'full' state/status of adulthood. Thus, effectively socialising children, or rather societies, 'future adults', was viewed as essential by many, for example- Piaget, 1955 and Parsons, 1951. Parsons (1956) argues that if children are not socialised it may result in suffering for them later in life but, more importantly, the whole of society may suffer. Rousseau (1992 [1762])

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and Piaget (1986) both demonstrate how childhood has historically been viewed as a natural state en route to adulthood, a transition from irrationality to rationality, simplicity to complexity. In turn, Piaget assumes the naturalness and universality of childhood and tends to cast children uniformly, adopting an essentialist approach. Many sociologists in recent years- since the 1970s specifically- have rejected this idea (see James, 2011; James, 2009a; Lister, 2007; Lesko, 2001; Lee, 2001; Jenks, 1996) and challenged the idea of childhood as being a deficient state, a time valued only because it is transitioning into adulthood; instead, they advocate the importance of recognising childhood as being a status in its own right (Wyness, 2006; Uprichard, 2006). Moreover, Qvorturp (2004) questions how helpful it is to portray adulthood as some type of 'golden grail' suggesting that viewing childhood as primarily being a time when a 'child is in waiting' is not helpful and fails to recognise children's agency and inherent value as children. Rather, Qvortrup (2009) and James and James (2001) advocate the importance of listening to young people and valuing them in their childlike 'state'/status:

> *That childhood is socially constructed, children are worthy of study in their own right and children are competent social actors who may have a particular perspective worth listening to.* (p. 2)

Developmental psychology has played a significant role in the construction of children and childhood, particularly in the last half of the twentieth century (Prout, 2005). Piaget (1954) in particular was interested in children's cognitive ability, especially their powers of reasoning. He identified clearly defined stages of cognitive development that he believed children needed to progress through if they were, in his opinion, to achieve the required psychological requirements to attain the status of adulthood and this theory greatly influenced the education systems in the West. However, much criticism has been levelled at his ideas, particularly his Westernised philosophy and his promotion of the theory that childhood is universal and biologically determined (Burman, 1994). Indeed, sociologists such as James and James (2008) and Wyness (2006) now believe children to be far more capable of agency than Piaget proposed (see also Archard, 2004, pp. 94-95).

It is significant that pre mid twentieth century research on childhood was virtually non-existent, simply deemed uninteresting (Shanahan, 2002, p. 408). Indeed, most research conducted was likely to focus on children more as 'social problems' or delinquents (see Thomas, 1923). However, the 1970's as noted previously was, according to James and James (2008), a pivotal time of change regarding the construction of childhood. Sociologists began to significantly focus on the need to recognise the oppression of children (and

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women), especially from within the home (Archard, 2004) and began advocating the importance of listening to children and women (Moore and Rosenthal, 2006; Tolman, 2002; Jackson, 1999). The suggestion being that constructing children (and women) as passive and lacking in agency led to them being muted and disempowered. Thus, the twentieth century witnessed profound shifts concerning how children and childhood is constructed, especially regarding children's rights and citizenship. Indeed, of significance, was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), because it was the first time a:

> *recognisable canon of thought about the rights of the child*
> *had been produced and so globally adopted* (Archard 2004, p.*
> 58).

The convention was a catalyst, viewed by some as a panacea on the subject of children's rights, receiving for the first time (at least on paper) universal adherence and debate (UNCRC, 1989). This section has provided a brief overview concerning how childhood and children have been historically constructed in recent centuries. The review now moves onto explore the complex topic of childhood and sexuality.

2.2 Historical constructions of childhood and sexuality

Social constructions of childhood sexuality have been complex and conflicted throughout history (see Cosaro, 2000; Giddens, 1993; Weeks, 1989; Jackson, 1982; Freud, 1907; Rousseau, 1763). However, it is important to recognise, as Fishman (1982) notes, that documentation about childhood sexuality, as with most previous research on children, has mainly been taken from an adult-centric perspective, thus, how empirical it is maybe hard to gage (see also Kehily, 2012; Egan and Hawkes, 2012, 2009, 2007). As James (2009a) notes:

> *Children were studied predominantly as representatives of a*
> *category whose significance lay, primarily, in what they*
> *revealed about adult life* (p. 35)

Children being or becoming sexual has often been understood as problematic (Egan 2013). Childhood, commonly demarcated from adulthood as being, or needing to be, a time of (sexual) innocence, especially for girls (Robinson, 2013; 2012; 2008; Hawkes and Egan, 2008; Jackson and Scott, 1999; Kitzinger, 1988; Jackson, 1982). The reason this monolithic construction is difficult to challenge or indeed dismantle, as O'Connell Davidson (2005) notes, is that the concept of the 'innocent child' is constructed as providing stability and security in a changing world:

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Collectively and individually we look to 'the child' to give meaning and coherence to our lives, to tell us who we are and what we hold dear to, to provide a bulwark against the encroaching tides of change, and to reassure us that at least some of our social connections are fixed, indissoluble and beyond contract. (p. 10)

However, Fishman (1982) suggests that understandings of children as 'sexual' is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the seventeen hundred's, for example, in the puritanical era of Christianity, little attention was given sociologically to the topic of childhood sexuality. It was in the early eighteenth century that childhood sexuality or children being sexual began to be cast as sinful and harmful. Furthermore, the nineteenth century witnessed the sexuality of children being constructed as a significant threat to not just the child but also, and perhaps more significantly, society more generally. However, as noted, constructions of children and sexuality have often been contradictory, for example, (female) children can be constructed as innocent yet knowing, vulnerable and in need of protection. Yet also, their sexuality (if they 'act on it') is constructed as a risk too other 'innocent' children. The 'sexual child' is primarily a threat to others, they are potentially viewed as 'contagious' (Zhao, 2010; Egan and Hawkes, 2009; Pearce, 2007; Scott et al., 1998). Egan and Hawkes (2007) contextualise these paradoxical constructions by comparing differences and similarities that have occurred throughout history regarding children's sexuality and by doing so illustrate the shifting nature of this paradigm (Egan and Hawkes, 2008). For example, between 1850 and 1905 the Social Purity movement in the UK was particularly influential, perpetuating the idea that once a child was sexualised, the child became a danger to themselves and more importantly, a danger to the broader social order and thus, needed 'managing' (p. 274):

The epistemological construction of the child and its sexuality (as inherently corruptible and once ignited, unstoppable and thus a threat too self and society) exonerates both the problem and the outcome. (p. 276).

The historically conflicted nature of understandings of childhood sexuality are well illustrated by W.T Stead's (1985) publication, **"*The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*"** which drew attention to the plight of girls being prostituted at the age of thirteen, which at that time was the legal age of consent. He advocated the need for the age of consent to be changed to sixteen, which it was. In so doing, he also highlighted the conflicting issues surrounding children's sexuality, but more so, the appalling conditions many girls at the time were subjected to, as a result of prostitution and poverty (see also Self, 2003; Scott and Swain,

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2002; Brown and Barratt, 2002).

In order to trace the historical changes regarding the constructions of childhood sexuality Egan and Hawkes (2009) review and contrast literature from 1903, 1925 and 2006, and identify how the same discourses about children and sexuality are repeated- repress 'it' and control it (p.391). Egan and Hawkes (2012) suggest that discourses such as those promulgated by the social hygiene movement, are similar to the sexualisation of girl's discourses today (see Bailey, 2011). Furthermore, they argue that such discourses are simply an attempt to discourage progressive attitudes towards female sexuality. Similarly, Gagnon and Smith (1974) note that during the nineteenth century the most common way of dealing with childhood sexuality was to suppress behaviour, deny its existence, or avoid thinking about it altogether (p. 112). Their assessment correlates with Egan and Hawkes (2009), who suggest that ideas about childhood and sexuality functioning congruously are historically and currently deemed unfeasible within society. Rather, dominant discourses persist which 'prefer' childhood sexuality to be coupled with danger, the need for protection and social control (Brown, 2011; Lees, 1996; Lesko, 1996). Egan and Hawkes (2007) suggest that at the core of these discourses, which are overtly gendered, is the construction that female sexuality, particularly female sexual pleasure is a, 'danger and a menace' (p. 276) (see also Egan, 2013: Egan and Hawkes, 2012; 2010; 2008; 2007; Durham, 2009; Hawkes and Egan, 2008; Robinson, 2008; Postman, 1982; Janus, 1981). This is of particular interest within the research as arguably sexually exploited girls may (be understood to) subvert the construction of the 'sexually innocent' child, presenting a confusing and challenging paradox.

2.2.1 Social control and moral panic

The notion that Western societies construct children and childhood in order to maintain and perpetuate heteronormative hegemony, is common amongst sociologists (Robinson, 2013; 2008; Shanahan, 2007; Hendrick 1997, p. 35). The understanding being that if this 'norm' is deviated from too dramatically aspects of society, particularly the family, is threatened. In turn, potentially destabilising and unsettling societies (O'Connell Davidson, 2005). The social control of children, particularly concerning their sexuality and its 'contagious nature' (ibid.) is vital. Any dismantling of this 'norm' is constructed as threatening to destabilise societal 'norms' and expectations. This is perhaps best illustrated by the current Conservative government, and others (such as parents) in the UK being resistant to making sex and relationship education mandatory in schools, despite significant pressure to introduce it (see *Guardian* Newspaper, 2016d; OCC, 2015).

Robinson (2008) argues that 'moral panics' are rarely accidental, suggesting that anything
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that is deemed a possible threat to this state of heteronormative hegemony induces a panicked response and the idea of childhood innocence being tainted or threatened is an easy target for politicians:

> *Any challenge to the sacrosanct concept of childhood*
> *innocence generally leads to a heightened level of concern in*
> *society.* (Robinson, 2008, p. 116).

Likewise, Shanahan (2007) agrees that moral panics can be created in order to assist a person or promote an institutional agenda:

> *Historical meanings of childhood have long been constructed*
> *and/or reinforced by social policy toward children.* (p. 416).

It would appear, there is an interconnectedness between maintaining the heteronormative status quo, and in turn the (heterosexual) nuclear family, and as a consequence the preservation of childhood innocence. As Cohen (1972) comments:

> *Social reaction is misplaced or displaced towards a target*
> *that is not the real problem.* (p. 126).

These types of societal panics concerning childhood are well illustrated by Janus (1981) in his research, **"The Death of Innocence"** where he expresses concerns about the state of childhood in the 1970s. Clearly, Janus (1981) demonstrates the moral panic that can be constructed in times of significant cultural, political and social change (see Robinson, 2008). In particular, Janus (ibid.) discusses the effect such change may have on the middle classes (p. 15) and comments:

> *A crippled generation is growing up. Many in this generation*
> *will hardly be able to function themselves let alone become*
> *contributing members of society.* (p. 339).

His main concern appears to be the 'type' of adult the children of the 1970s will become when their childhoods have been so 'distorted' and 'ruined' by such insidious social influences (of the 1970s) as feminism, divorce and increased acceptance of homosexuality. Janus demonstrates how social and political shifts can be used to create 'moral panic' by, in this instance, asserting the view that changes to family life caused by women's liberation, gay liberation, increased sexual freedoms, accessible contraceptives and increased drug use will result in the 'innocent state of childhood' being effectively doomed (Janus, 1981 p.325-339). As Angelides (2012) observes, Janus (1981) clearly produced this work at a specific point in time, borne because of that specific social context (the 1970s) and this trend is not

unusual. Analogously to Janus (ibid.), and at a similar point in history, Postman (1983; 1992) chose to focus on technology, condemning its potentially negative effects on children. He argues that the increasing influence of technology, for example, television, could only harm children's innocence, and indeed may socially erode childhood itself (Postman, 1983. p. 80). Both Postman and Janus exemplify research, which is visceral rather than empirical. However, they spoke into issues that people were especially threatened by or panicked by at the time, such as the rise of feminism and the increasing numbers of 'broken' families (Cohen, 1972). Nonetheless, Shanahan (2007) suggests, with each 'crisis' that centres on the 'state' of children and childhood there is a 'rebirth' regarding how childhood is constructed and this may not be a bad thing.

The chapter now moves on to explore a contemporary 'moral panic' (ibid.) concerning the supposedly increasing sexualisation of girls.

2.2.2 The 'sexualisation of girls' discourse.

The 'sexualisation of girls' discourse was extremely topical in Western society when this research began (2012). Of interest, and relevant to this research, is its focus on adolescent female sexuality. The discourse highlights some key issues in relation to the sexual (female) child, and demonstrates the gendered nature of such discourses. At the middle to the end of the 'noughties', a number of high profile reports and inquiries were commissioned exploring whether girls, were increasingly more sexualised in their dress and behaviours. A significant amount of reports, books and articles argued, somewhat un-empirically I would suggest, that Western girls have never been so sexually objectified and sexualised (see Bailey, 2011; Papodopolous, 2010; Walters, 2010; Roberts, 2010; Durham, 2009; Levin and Kilbourne, 2008; APA, 2007; Rush and LaNauze,2006). Needless to say, the supposed (increasing) 'sexualisation of girls' was not viewed by the aforementioned authors and others, as a good thing. However, on the other side of the debate, (as to whether girls are more sexualised then ever) some feminist academics criticise the claims as hyperbole and as yet another way in which to repress and oppress female sexuality and distract from the pervasive problem of sexism within our society (for example see, Egan, 2013; Robinson, 2013, 2012; Barker and Duschinsky, 2012; Coy and Garner, 2012; Lamb and Peterson, 2012; Kehily, 2012; Egan and Hawkes, 2012; 2009; Robinson and Davies, 2008; Atwood, 2006). There are undoubtedly several problems with the sexualisation of girl's discourse (Egan and Hawkes, 2008). It is conceptualised as universal and irrefutable, resulting in a passive construction of the child (see also Gill, 2012) and it is heteronormative, ignoring the complexity of children and their varied experiences. Furthermore, it is deterministic and conflates all girls' sexual expression with sexualisation and finally it is gendered, and therefore oppressive:

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Sexualisation inspires a far more visceral reaction due to its
subject matter, the sexual subjectivity and desire of girls, and
makes reflexivity and change more difficult.

(Egan and Hawkes, 2008, p. 300).

Ultimately, feminist academics such as Egan and Hawkes (ibid.) argue that sexualisation discourses disempower female children and suggest that the 'evidence' on sexualisation is rhetorical rather than empirical (Egan and Hawkes, 2012; 2010; 2008; Thompson, 2010; Meyer, 2007). They question why these discourses have flourished, and warn feminist writers such as Walters, 2010; Levin and Kilbourne, 2008 and Oppliger, 2008, not to be drawn into the 'panic' rather encouraging them not to ignore the sexism that causes these discourses. As Sue Lee's (1996) and Smart (1982) warned previously, it is all too easy for progress in the area of female sexuality to be quickly erased if discourses around it are not critiqued. Likewise, Egan (2013) advocates reflexivity, and highlights the importance of looking at history to remind us how women's sexuality has so often become a conduit for 'other' social problems. Egan (ibid.) suggests that Western societies historically have displaced their fears about wider cultural and social change onto women and children and that this can be damaging and regressive (pp 70-71) (Egan, 2013; Roberts and Zubriggen, 2013; Coy and Garner, 2012; Egan and Hawkes, 2009; Welles, 2005; Angelides, 2004). Likewise, McRobbie (2007) argues that such discourses create an environment wherein it is very easy for pervasive patriarchy to reassert itself, and, therefore, it is vital that such gendered discourses are rigorously critiqued. Many of the feminist academics who write on this subject argue that the 'sexualisation of girls' discourse is simply a distraction from more pertinent issues around sexism (Tolman, 2013; Purcell and Zurbriggen, 2013; Bragg, 2012; Machia and Lamb, 2009; McRobbie, 2007; Gerber et al.,1994; Klapper, 1960). Therefore, Coy and Garner (2012) argue that there is a need for a more:

politicised feminist engagement with a sexualised popular
culture and contend that, "it is time to put questions and
enquiries that are underpinned by practice based evidence in
the exploration around 'sexualisation'. (p. 298)

Likewise, Robinson (2012) also suggests the need to challenge the heteronormative nature of the sexualisation of girl's discourses and the hegemonic assumption of heterosexuality (p. 262) (Epstein, 2012). As a corollary to this, Egan and Hawkes (2009) advocate the importance of not denying or ignoring girl's agency within these discourses but rather recognizing the importance of acknowledging their (potential and actual) ability to resist and filter information they receive (Bragg and Buckingham, 2009; Qvortrup, 2009; Robinson,

2008): As Egan and Hawkes note, the danger is that:

> *Sexualisation reproduces a moralizing framework that renders girl's passive and highly corruptible and once sexualised in need of regulation.* (p. 307).

Other feminist academics agree, for example Tolman (2012) questions how much, in reality, girls are affected and influenced by the sexualised culture. She acknowledges that girls (especially) are bombarded with sexualised images of the female form, but like Egan and Hawkes (2009; 2008), questions the empirical evidence for its affects, and highlights the need for ethnographic research with young people (James, 2007; Atwood, 2006). Flood (2009) notes, **"*protecting children from sexual harm does not mean protecting children from sexuality"*** (p. 394). This is a common theme in much of the contemporary sociological literature on the subject of the sexualisation of culture. For example, 'clamping down', or visceral reactions to the supposed 'sexualisation of girls' discourse, has a domino effect of constraining female children and young people's sexuality and recognition of their sexual agency, especially for girls. Egan and Hawkes (2012) point too other social 'ills' as a reason why the sexualisation 'panic is such a fervent current debate:

> *It is our belief that this discourse reflects larger anxieties regarding gender and respectability in contemporary culture; one response evident in some, but not all of the sexualisation literature has been a regression back to an essentialist perspective.* (p. 274).

The essentialist perspective that girls are pathologically vulnerable and in need of protection and that, sexually they need to be constrained, is arguably a position being reverted to through dominant discourses on sexualisation (Egan and Hawkes, 2012). As Atwood (2006) also notes:

> *we contend that each relies upon and reproduces a particular version of the sexual child that forecloses the recognition of children as sexual subjects and the possibility of their 'sexual agency.* (p. 391).

Thus, Egan and Hawkes (2009) are keen to move discourses forward and suggest four useful ways of doing this: 1) recognising the sexual subjectivity of children 2) uncouple children's sexuality from adults 3) take sexual difference and multiplicity seriously (in other words, be comfortable with the ambiguities of childhood sexuality) and finally stop using the protection of children to legitimate surveillance and social control (p. 396). Thus, a common

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notion is that the potentially limiting and controlling nature of such discourses regarding children and sexuality have little to do with children and their actual experiences but rather are about social control (Egan and Hawkes, 2012; Robinson, 2008). Likewise, Kehily (2012) and Egan (2013) argue that the focus within the discourses has become all about the protection of girls, protecting them from their own sexuality, the threat of others, i.e. abusers, and protecting girls from the risk their peers may pose to them but also the discourse attempts to constrain and restrict girls' sexual agency. This, in turn, has led to a regression into dominant constructions of (female) children's sexual innocence, especially constructions of female, sexual innocence and passivity. There is perhaps a need, as Stone (1996) suggests, to create a more *"collaborative and democratic context for children and their sexual agency".* (p. 397). Constructing panic about the topic of children becoming hyper-sexualised can make discussions about children and their sexual agency more difficult as dominant discourses that prevail become more about controlling, protecting and even repressing children's sexual identity (Tolman, 2002). As Egan and Hawkes note:

> *Sexualisation panic represents the end point and also the circularity that results from the cultural inability to address dispassionately the presence of agentive sexuality in the young* (p. 202).

The review now moves on to discuss in more detail how female adolescent sexuality has been, and is currently constructed sociologically.

2.2.3 Female adolescent sexuality

The (slowly) changing, yet also obdurately gendered manner, in which Western societies construct female, childhood sexuality is recognised throughout much of the feminist literature (Egan and Hawkes, 2012; Tolman, 2012; Fine, C 2010; Kehily, 2009; James and James, 2008; McRobbie, 2007; Butler, 2006). Indeed, Egan and Hawkes (2012; 2007) contend, that discourses regarding children's sexuality have become even more gendered in the twentieth/twenty-first century than in the nineteenth century. For example, the social purity movement focused equally on boys and girls, viewing both sexes as full of potential vice and in need of transformation (p, 449). This is not to imply that there are not currently concerns being raised about boys, for example the prevalence and influence of pornography (Horvath et al., 2013), however, regarding sexual behaviour, dress, risk and vulnerability and how 'sexualised' girls are perceived, there is still great bias (Egan 2013; Bragg, 2012; Powell, 2010; Bragg and Buckingham, 2009). While a great deal has changed in relation to gender inequalities, there is still a much to be done and progress can be very slow (Jackson and Rahman, 2010). McNair (2002) notes that throughout history, societies have regulated and policed sexuality and people's sexual behaviour through systems of patriarchy (p. 5).
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However, he also points out that feminism has brought about significant change to this hegemonic influence, which he names the, 'democratization of desire' (pp. 11-12). Juxtaposed with this however, are discourses on the sexuality of children that are resistant to challenge and change, especially ones that try to recognise the sexual agency of children in particular, female adolescents (Egan and Hawkes, 2010).

Constructions of childhood and childhood sexuality can be complex and conflicted perhaps no more so then within discourses on adolescent females. Moore and Rosenthal (2006) suggest that adolescent sexuality has always been, and continues to be shaped by a 'complex web of influences' (p. 35) (Brown, 2011). Essentialist views of adolescent sexuality appear to collide with social constructionist views, with some theorists arguing that adolescent sexuality is biologically determined and others that it is socially constructed. A 'blend' of the two would seem most likely, in my opinion. Whilst some sociologists such as Erikson (1968) suggest that adolescents need to traverse through certain stages of sexuality in order to navigate their sexual self through to adulthood, Gagnon and Simon (1974), question the idea that sexual behaviour is primarily about naturalism, biology and essentialism. Their seminal work, "Sexual Conduct" demonstrates how they understand sexuality as a social construction (Plummer, 1995). They propose that we all have, 'sexual scripts' that are learnt over time, and they suggest that such scripts have two primary dimensions:

> *One deals with the external, the interpersonal, the script as the organisation of mutually shared conventions that allows two or more actors to participate in a complex act involving mutual dependence. The second deals with the internal, the intra-physic, the motivational elements that produce arousal or at least a commitment to the activity* (p. 20).

Scripts are informed by many different influences, a person's sexuality is not simply an isolated behaviour, but rather it evolves through the process of socialisation and is particularly influenced by the gendered nature of socialisation (see Jackson, 1999). As Simone de Beauvour (1949) so famously states:

> *One is not born, but rather becomes a woman* (p. 267)

Children often have gendered adult scripts about sexuality placed on them, and adults invariably judge and monitor children's behaviour, sexual or otherwise, through their adult 'lenses'. Gagnon and Smith (ibid.) argue that children do not understand or relate to this adult script, this is because it does not reflect the child's own experience. Adult's lack of

recognition and reflexivity in this process leads to a misunderstanding of children's sexuality and in turn, misinformation is provided to children about sexuality and sexual behaviour. Thus, the child may learn incomplete or inaccurate sexual scripts (p. 31). Moore and Rosenthal (2006) explain the theory of sexual scripts thus:

> *Leant rules of sexual behaviour that consist of directions for what we do and plans of action for how we will do it, and with whom. They provide guidelines as to who will be judged attractive and desirable within a particular culture* (p. 51).

Furthermore, adolescents get a sense of what is appropriate for them in terms of their sexual behaviour from the culture around them, friends, family and media (Tolman et al, 2003). 'Scripts' are greatly influenced by gender, for example the hegemonic discourses that promote the idea women desire romantic love before they will have sex, whereas for men the desire for sex is an inherently biological need that must be satisfied (Fine, 1988; Fine and McClennand, 2006). Tolman (2002) suggests that young women walk a tightrope regarding their sexuality, trying not to be a prude, yet not a 'slut' (p. 7). She argues that it is still dangerous for girls to respond authentically to their own desires, the possibility of losing one's 'reputation' if one did, the likelihood of being socially ostracised possibly resulting in the withdrawal of protection are all problematic consequences. Once 'tarnished' she is left on her own to face the consequences, even if that involves being a victim of sexual violence (Lamb and Peterson, 2012; Robinson, 2012; Lamb, 2010; Moore and Rosenthal, 2006).

Tolman (ibid.) contends that it is 'amazing' that any adolescent girl enjoys sex, or thinks she has a right to enjoy it, with all the added, problematic dimensions. This is not to say adolescence girls are not taking part in, and enjoying sex, it may just not spoken about freely due to the many censors on girl's sexual behaviours, not just from boys/adults either, but from their own (monitoring) female peer groups (Powell, 2010; Egan and Hawkes, 2008; Moore and Rosenthal, 2006; Tolman, 2002; Epstein and Jackson, 1998). Thus, girls face a constant dilemma-represented by the media as overly sexualised, yet at a 'local' level restricted by discourses, which condemn sexually liberated women/girls (Lamb and Peterson, 2012; McRobbie, 2007). Gill (2009) notes that the post-feminist mantra, 'It's her choice', confuses the issues women and girls face even further:

> *Not only are women objectified as they were before, but through sexual subjectification they must also now understand their own objectification as pleasurable and self-chosen.* (p.107)

Gill (2009) argues that discourses perpetuate the idea that women have chosen their current state. However, she suggests that in reality the current discourses on female sexual empowerment are a masquerade but, very difficult to critique. Gill (ibid.) contends that 'tired' sexual stereotypes have simply been re-packaged and re-labelled in a, 'feisty language of female empowerment' (p. 107). Therefore, women are being represented as overtly sexualised and objectified, rather than as equal negotiators in their own sexuality. Gill (ibid.) also argues that being a highly sexualised woman is constructed as a positive, empowering characteristic, deemed to be the route to happiness and fulfilment, becoming the women one is supposed to be (Woodiwiss, 2009, 2008). The sexualisation discourses promote the idea that a woman has to be highly sexualised, and thus desirable, in order to be successful, her primary value is in her (hetero) sexuality (Holland and Attwood, 2009; Woodiwiss 2008, 2015).

Discourses regarding girl's sexuality tend to focus on control and monitoring. Until there is far more equity between how the genders negotiate sex, this status quo is unlikely to change. To enable this 'negotiation' (for girls) research has demonstrated that girls need to be enabled to recognise, acknowledge and embrace their own desires this, in turn, would increase levels of self-esteem and encourage girls to embody their desires and be in 'full occupation' of their own body (Lamb, 2011; Fine and McClelland, 2006; Fine, 1988). Moreover, girls who know themselves like this are more likely to be able to filter and resist the limited discourses available to them, and indeed create a more authentic and empowered sexual self. However, Tolman (2002) argues that in our patriarchal Western society a 'wedge' is forced between girl's bodies and their psyche in an attempt to keep female bodies under control (p. 24). This, alongside yet another dimension for girls to contend with, that they are responsible for boy's sexual behaviour (p. 64). As Jackson and Scott (2010) observe:

> *The notion that boys and men cannot control themselves and that girls and women are responsible for controlling men's sexuality, an absurd expectation when power differences remain so potent in heterosexual relationships* (p. 20).

Thus, girls have significant pressure placed on them, potentially preventing them truly knowing and exploring their sexual self (Lamb, 2011). Tolman suggests that the cacophonies of voices girls are subjected to can be overwhelming (p. 44). The double standard for girls and boys and the entrenched nature of gendered sexuality is monolithic (p. 119), challenged, but far from dismantled. Jackson and Scott (2010) explain that women and girls still face many contradictory expectations, the need for self-reflexivity,

self-surveillance, being sexual enough but not too sexual and the obdurate idea that girls exploring their own sexuality and pleasure still does not 'sit comfortably' (pp. 105-110). Likewise, Brown (2011) argues, that the manner in which discourses regarding children (especially girls) and sexuality have unfolded have been driven by the desire to regulate girl's sexual behaviour and maintain the heteronormative status quo. This pigeon holes girls and restricts them, trips them up and labels them (Robinson, 2008). Kitzinger (1995) also highlights how pervasive and persistent discourses are regarding women's sexual reputation, for example if a woman subverts constructions of 'required femininity', such as being 'pleasing' and sexually passive, then she may risk putting herself outside realms of protection if she should be raped or sexually assaulted. She argues that this discourse 'maintains the heterosexual economy' and perpetuates and maintains inequalities and patriarchal power structures (p. 189). The discourse that girls who are deemed 'slags' are not worthy of protection, she argues, is prolific and dangerous and reminds us that it is vital to remember that the origins of such discourses are rooted in gender power imbalances:

> *When women talk about slags and reputation, they could be talking instead about power and powerlessness, freedom and exploitation, self-determination and oppression.* (p. 194).

As Jackson (1999) comments, *" sexual behaviour is social behaviour "*, (p. 30) and girls sexual behaviour is more heavily scripted than anyone's (Gagnon and Simon, 1969, cited by Jackson, p 736). Furthermore, Gill (2009) identifies how girls are 'prepared' sexually in a completely gendered manner, for example, romantically, preparation for motherhood and rarely taught about their own pleasure and satisfaction. Alder (1998) identifies how adolescence for males is constructed as a time of opportunity, but for girl's it is constructed as a time for constraint (p. 85, see also Scott et al, 1998). As Jackson (1999) observes:

> *Sexual scripts do not exist in a vacuum, but are bound up with cultural notions of femininity and masculinity* (p. 47).

Consequently, to separate our concepts of 'sexualisation of culture' from gender power imbalances is simply incongruous. Corteen and Scarton (1997) and Cain (1989) suggest that children grow up from an early age surrounded by hegemonic heterosexuality and hegemonic discourses on female subordination (Lees, 1993). Children are bombarded with constructions and discourses, especially from the media, that are narrow and prescriptive, heterosexual and heteronormative (Robinson, 2013). Corteen and Scarton (1997) argue that this leads to confusion, suggesting that children are presented with limited and unreflective discourses regarding gender and sexuality, which in turn leads to:

> *the denial of childhood sexuality is an essential component of*

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the broader negation of children and young people as active
citizens (p. 99).

Fine and McClennland identify how the sexual subjugation of young women is still alive and well (p.298) (see also Welles, 2005). Discourses regarding young women's vulnerability, the risks they face from pregnancy, disease, violence and so on and in turn their inherent need for protection, all points to a continuing essentialist viewpoint being perpetuated concerning young women. This is one of the reasons why understandings of girls' sexual agency can be so complicated, even more so for the sexually exploited girl, as is discussed shortly. For now, the review moves onto look at agency and choice.

2.3 Agency and Choice

This section discusses literature regarding various theoretical approaches around agency. Theoretical approaches to 'agency' are varied and often complex (see Giddens, 1984; Archer, 1982). The theories drawn on in this research (concerning agency) are mainly from a feminist perspective and are particularly relevant in the context of young people and social work (Jeffery, 2011; Albanesi, 2010; Smette et al. 2009; Gill, 2007). The language of 'choice' is used as it reflects the language used by the interviewees and agency theory is utilised because this provides a more abstract and analytical approach by which to analyse the social workers' understandings of choice (and structures) in the context of CSE and sexually exploited girls. Agency theories may be varied and contested but essentially agency is, as Van Nijnatten (2013) says:

> *An individual's ability to actively take position in different*
> *times and locations without losing a stabilising anchor that*
> *makes continuity possible, acknowledging the boundaries of*
> *the self and others* (p. 33).

Possessing personal integrity, respecting other peoples' boundaries as well as having one's own boundaries is a central component of being agentic. Van Nijnatten also refers to 'interactive agency', which he identifies as the ability of the individual to take part in all kinds of daily social interactions (p. 48). Jeffery (2011) explains agency as:

> *The ability of the individual/group to behave as subjects*
> *rather than objects, shaping their own lives and achieving*
> *change* (p. 6).

The inter-connectedness of agency and structure/s is unquestionable, this is because, as she says, structures are not monolithic and do not operate or exist separately in a vacuum and therefore, importantly, can change. She argues that by exerting agency we can all

affect and transform the structures around us and indeed shape our own lives:

> *What is now emerging, however, from the new theorising*
> *about agency, initiated by Giddens ideas on structuration and*
> *agency, of agency's transformative potential, and of how each*
> *affects and has an impact on the other* (Jeffery, 2011. p. 29)

Jeffery (2011) reflects on different historical perspectives on agency. For example, in the early 18/19th century, scientific thought overtook individual ideas and structuralists discounted the role of the individual. She cites Durkheim (1892; 1895) who arguably over-emphasised the role of the state compared to individuals, and Weber (cited in 1848 by Gerth and Wright Mills) who suggested society consists of individuals who choose how to act according to their best interests but always within a societal context. Marx and Engels (1848) argue that social structures are self-producing. Freud's (1900; 1901) focus was on the individual and Parsons (1937) tried to reconcile concepts of structure and agency. Foucault (1975; 1981) was interested in sources of power and knowledge, particularly focusing on the centrality of language and discourse to the understanding of power. 'Systems' and 'structures' are key elements within agency theories: 'systems' refers to the practices which when combined lay the foundations for a society that functions effectively (Jeffery 2011, p. 6); 'structures' refer to regarding the 'properties of these systems' (ibid.) such as governments, police forces, education, health and so on. More 'informal' institutions such as, the family and religious organisations may be included in what we call 'systems'. All of the structures that are in place have been there for a long time, started by people and maintained by people, and are often taken for granted and left unexamined. Structures may not be without fault or problems (ibid.), and of course they also (often very slowly) change over time at the hands of both individuals and corporately. Most significantly when discussing agency, is the relationship between structures and individuals. For example, Foucault (1981) and Giddens (1984) are particularly interested in how individuals and society interact and how language and discourse play a central part in understanding and maintaining power (Foucault, 1975, 1981 cited by Jeffery, 2011, p11). Giddens (1984) explains agency as:

> *Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing*
> *things but in their capability of doing these things in the first*
> *place...agency concerns events of which an individual is the*
> *perpetrator...in the same sense that the individual could at*
> *any phase in any given sequence of conduct have acted*
> *differently.* (pp. 17-24)

In his work, 'The Constitution of Society' (1984) he identifies how the agency of the individual is intertwined and indeed monumentally impacted on by structures, or structuration. At the core of structuration theory is the need to understand the duality of 'structures' and social systems:

> Social systems, as reproduced social practices do not have 'structures' but rather exhibit structural properties' and that structure exists as time-space presence (p. 17)

Giddens (1979) argues that agency and structure are never mutually dependent and to discuss them separately is pointless, but more than that:

> It is always the case that the day to day activity of social actors draws upon and reproduces structural features of wider social systems.　　　　　(Giddens, 1984, pp. 17-24)

He also notes that individuals can change structures, they are not powerless. Giddens (1984) and Foucault (1975) both recognise that power plays a key role when exploring structure and agency, and refute any claim that structures cannot or will not change. Rather exhorting the idea that individual agency can change anything (see also Jeffery, 2011, p. 13). However, individuals need to recognise their own power and have self-belief for those changes to happen. Challenging this idea, James and Prout (1995) identify a problem with Gidden's theory of structure and agency, in relation to children. They suggest that children's agency should be recognised and understood differently to adults, that is not to say children are not agentic (far from it) but, that they may employ different methods of exercising agency depending on the varying social environments they inhabit (p. 78) (see also James, 2009a). Environments that may be more governed than those of adults. Indeed, children, similar to a chameleon may learn to '*perform styles of agency appropriate to the relevant social environment'.* (James and Prout, 1995, p. 92) They will often conform to social positions which are a result of hierarchy, and these hierarchies and boundaries contextualise the culture of children. Thus, James and Prout (1995) advocate the need to recognise children's agency from a very early age and, as with so much of their other work, exhort the benefits of encouraging children's agency (see also James, 2011; James, 2007; James and Prout, 1997). Indeed, James and Prout (1997) suggest that children should be viewed as agents *' concerning the construction and determination of their own social lives'*, and of the world around them (p. 8). The idea that children are just passive objects operating within socially constructed structures and processes is, they argue unreflective and unhelpful. They suggest that children should be understood as agents in the same way adults are, and understood as also affected by structures. However, they suggest this is the

dominant sociological framework and as such, is very hard to challenge, as is its universal nature (see also Lee, 2001). James and Prout (1997) suggest that this 'dominant framework' blocks our view of the 'real' child and mutes children giving, in turn, adults all the power. Likewise, Lee (2001) argues that the 'dominant framework' fails to recognise children as fully human and thus is flawed. White and Wyn (1998) also advocate *not* universalising young people but rather recognising the individual's experiences and societal institutional and cultural constraints that they operate within (see Mayall, 2002). Accounts that differ to, or challenge the dominant framework are often silenced because, Lee (2001) suggests, they come from children. He argues that this silencing of children's voices is most influential when enforced by 'childcare professionals', who tend to construct children based on their adherence to, and acceptance of, children as all being part of the dominant framework (pp. 88-90).

In attempting to offer an alternative to this framework, James and Prout (1997) are proponents of the 'Emergent Framework', also advocated by Lee (ibid.), as a more empowering and reflective construction of childhood. James and Prout (1997) suggest that society should view children as being a social phenomenon and understand childhood as both a social construction and a social institution (p. 8). Also identifying the importance of recognising the diversity of children, for example in relation to ethnicity, class and gender and thus the need to study children's relationships independently. Furthermore, James and Prout suggest that the dominant framework needs challenging and changing, the hegemonic image of children lacking in agency needs to shift. However, they recognise that this could be deemed threatening and challenging because it does not conform to the adult view of childhood, it threatens their social control. In other words, viewing children as human 'beings'/agents and not purely passive recipients may challenge, threaten and subvert adult centric culture.

There are several key concepts associated with agency identified in the literatures that are useful in broadening out understandings of agency. For example, Davies (1990) refers to, freedom, autonomy, rationality and moral authority. She notes that a person's agency also (in part) relates to how and if, they access available discourses. For example, in the context of CSE if the only discourse available is one that constructs sexually exploited girls as only having limited agency, then how may that affect the sexually exploited girl?:

> *agency is spoken into existence at any one moment. It is fragmented, transistor, a discursive position that can be occupied within one discourse simultaneously with its non occupation in another.* (Davies, 1990, p. 52)

How structure and agency is interlinked and the need for more nuanced understandings of agency especially for girls is, as Harris and Dobson, (2015) note:

> *The capacity to make free choices has been central to feminist definitions of girls' agency... 'choice' has always been a difficult thing to analyse and to use as a measure of agency, because one's own preferences and decisions can never be disentangled from the social context within which they are arrived at.* (p. 4)

"Choice" is a central concept in neoliberal society. Girls, in particular, have many influencing factors and structures, enabling them (and possibly restricting them) in their choice-making, McRobbie (2007) suggests girls may be constrained by their enablement (Gill and Scharff (2011). How girls make choices and demonstrate agency may already be constrained and informed by conflicting neo-liberal and possibly disingenuous discourses about 'choice' and empowerment'. How sexually exploited girls demonstrate agency, and the contexts they are operating in, the various structures and systems affecting their agency is of central interest in this research. Erikson (2009) contends, that social workers find working with sexually abused/exploited children who subvert the 'norms' in relation to agency particularly problematic. For example, in the context of CSE he suggests that they don't know whether to treat them as victims or as agentic, but struggle to recognise they could be both (p. 442) (see also Warrington, 2013). Therefore, if a child presents to professionals as sexually aware or agentive she/he may be less likely to receive support or protection, possibly even vilified instead (Scott and Swain, 2002; Kitzinger, 1997). Similarly, Cruz and Stagmitti (2007) question how the child is responded to if she does not fit the dominant construction of the sexually abused girl, i.e. passive, but rather is a girl expressing agency.

2.3.1 Social work and agency

> *Acquiring an understanding of how it (agency) operates, its processes and its potential for achieving change, is therefore, arguably, crucial for those involved in the field of social welfare. It is a means of empowering them to become better, more effective practitioners so that they can, in turn, help those with whom they work to discover and exercise their own agency to positive effect* (Jeffery 2011, p, 1).

Jeffery (2011) contends that prioritising understandings and discussion about agency within social work has recently been lost, pushed to the side-lines in the education/practices of social workers, a topic subsumed by efficiency drives and the need for measurable 'outcomes' (see also Ferguson, 2003; Parton and O'Byrne, 2000). Jeffery (ibid.) views this as troubling and advocates the need for social workers to recognise clients as agents who can, and should self-direct' (see also Plant, 1970). Jeffery (2011) advocates the central 'role' of agency theory and how it provides, potentially, a means of 'reinvigorating professional practice' (p. 1):

> *agency theory with its inherent focus on the relationship between individual and society and on how societal and personal change is achieved is, arguably the key issue in understanding the marginal position occupied by those with whom social welfare professionals engage, and how their movement from the periphery of society to a more central position can be best achieved* (p. 1).

She also promotes the need to recognise that clients of social care are such not just because of individual 'issues', but because of structural inequalities, for example, poverty and unemployment, and that encouraging and enabling their agency can dramatically change and inform their life outcomes:

> *acquiring a belief in one's own agency, a sense that we are not simply passive victims of whatever life throws at us but able to act and resist is therefore central to a notion of well-being and something we need to try and foster in services users.* (p. 40)

Likewise, Firmin et al., (2016) encourages social workers to recognise and appreciate structural inequalities that affect sexually exploited young people:

> *Illuminating the social, cultural and structural nature of sexual exploitation evidences the need for social work practice to recognise and engage with public as well as private contexts in which abuse manifests* (p. 2328)

Social work has transitioned through many changes and theoretical influences over the last fifty years (Parton, 2014). For example, the client-centred approach; the psychoanalytic

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approach; radical social work and feminist ideas. In recent years, interest in the issue of agency has re-emerged (Jeffery, 2011, p. 25). Indeed, similarly to Jeffery (ibid.) recognising and enabling the agency of individuals is encouraged by many who write on the subject (see Parton and O'Bryne, 2000; Deacon and Mann, 1999; Orbach, 1999; Lister, 1998). Van Nijnatten (2013) encourages child welfare professionals to be reflective thinkers, suggesting that a significant part of the social workers' role is to build up the individual agency of clients (p. 7). Furthermore, he says social workers should encourage, allow time, and space for clients to explore their inner feelings (p. 101):

> *The task of child welfare agencies is to look constantly for the client's agency, to search for possibilities to re-open the dialogue with them in the hope of involving them once more in relevant aspects of their lives* (p. 99).

However, this takes time, something that is perhaps lacking for many social workers (Ferguson, 2014), but in the context of CSE, as will be further discussed, is highly relevant.

Parton and O'Bryne (2000) suggest that the more agency a person has the more empowered they become (p. 59) endorsing the, *"identification and amplification of personal agency"* (p. 60) within social work practices. Furthermore, they contend that this approach need to be central if social work is to be 'constructive'. If victims/survivors (of all sorts of abuses) are to be self-determining then they should be encouraged to take more control of their lives and be enabled to recognise their individual agency (Spicker, 1990). However, Parton and O'Byrne (2000) discuss social workers who do not necessarily recognise client's ability to be self-determining. Rather, they primarily view clients as a problem in need of solving in turn, not enabling or encouraging the clients to utilise their own agency in solving their own problem/s. To these social workers, they again commend the 'constructive social work' approach (ibid.) and encourage social workers to, in recognising and enabling agency, not allow deterministic discourses to over-power and over-shadow the many constitutes of the individual (pp. 60-62) (see also Van Nijnatten, 2013; Jeffery, 2011). Finally, Jeffery (2011) points out that by believing in a client's self-determination and capacity to exercise agency, social workers can enable them to move from the passive voice to the active one, arguing against taking the view that clients are always to blame when things go wrong (p. 50).

2.3.2 Agency and child sexual exploitation/child sexual abuse

Discussing agency in the context of sexual abuse has always been problematic as Smette et al (2009) suggests, because it is often equated with blaming the victim:

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> *there is always the fear that talking about victims' capacity to*
> *act will inevitably result in victim blaming...we must reject as*
> *axiomatic the idea that any mention of victim, agency equals*
> *victim blaming* (p. 354)

Indeed, Smette et al. (ibid.) identify how easily a sexually abused young person can become stigmatised and held responsible if they do not 'fit' the construction of a sexually abused child. O'Connell Davidson (2005) agrees, suggesting that even the language used around CSA and the common use of the word 'child', even when talking about adolescents is in order to negate blame and reinforce stereo-types of childhood innocence:

> *When children are imagined as a homogenous group, defined*
> *by their passivity, helplessness, dependence and irrationality,*
> *it is impossible to imagine them as either faced by or capable*
> *of making choices [...] the social construction of children as*
> *powerless objects all to easily translates into a stereo-typical*
> *image of the victimised child, such that a child who does not*
> *conform to the stereo-type/a child who is not pathetic,*
> *helpless, doe-eyed and innocent cannot be imagined as a*
> *victim.* (p. 52)

Furthermore, as O'Connell Davidson (2005) notes, a child who does not conform to the stereotype of the 'ideal' (non-agentic) sexually abused child may in turn *not* be viewed as innocent and therefore, not viewed as a 'proper' victim. Likewise, Woodiwiss (2014) argues that the sexually abused young person who subverts dominant constructions of the sexually abused/exploited child may be viewed as non-conformist, confusing and thus, troubling:

> *a young person might be sexually knowledgeable and/or*
> *active and [...] does not conform to the dominant construction*
> *of a 'child' or a victim of child sexual abuse* (p. 144).

The danger of constructing sexually exploited young person (homogenously) as having no agency means that when a child acts agentically for example, in a CSE context they present a paradox to professionals (and others) and this can be problematic:

> *if they exercise a degree of agency either in an attempt to*
> *mediate the experience or because they are not passive and*
> *lacking agency, they risk, being removed from the categories*
> *of 'child' and/or 'victim' and therefore having their*
> *experiences, or at least the abusive element of those*

experiences dismissed. (Woodiwiss, 2014, p. 149)

Thus, Woodiwiss (2014) contends that the sexually exploited/abused child in whatever context, i.e. intra-familial or extra-familial who does not conform to dominant constructions may actually rather than be protected, be blamed for their 'subversion' as they are seen to so challenges dominant constructions of that the sexually abused child is 'supposed' to look like. Woodiwiss (2014) discusses how monolithic constructions that maintain the hegemonic 'ideal' of childhood innocence, constructing all children with sexual knowledge as subverting that 'ideal' is problematic and indeed, may leave young people at greater risk (pp 154-155). Moreover, this 'representation' may be false and fail to reflect the experiences of young people (Robinson, 2008). At the crux of Woodiwiss' (ibid.) argument is that children who are not passive or sexually innocent, indeed they may be sexually active and knowledgeable and exercising agency, must not be blamed for the consequences of such agency in whatever context it occurs (see Firmin et al., 2016; Egan and Hawkes, 2009). O'Dell (2003) likewise criticises the hegemonic 'harm story' regarding CSA, wherein CSA is constructed as always and inevitably resulting in overwhelming, long-term harm for the child, criticising its universality, and heteronormative nature. She regards it as unhelpfully individualising and deterministic, and perhaps most significantly it obfuscates important broader political aspects of child sexual abuse (p, 141) (see also Thomson, 2004; Overlien, 2003; Parton, 1999; Thomson and Scott, 1991).

2.3.3 Who 'benefits' from such discourses?

Some sociologists argue that such 'harm stories' and denial of children's sexual agency are deliberately maintained in order to benefit certain sections of society. James and James (2008) suggest, that the perpetuated hegemonic idea of childhood innocence is used by many charities to their benefit (see also Kehily, 2009, p. 4). Children who are portrayed as pathologically vulnerable and passive, pull at the heartstrings and this motivates people to donate money (for example, NWG CSE, 2016; Barnardos, 2011, *'Puppet on a string campaign'*). This is not to belittle the excellent work of many charities, but it also does not detract from the fact that these images and words which portray children as lacking in agency perpetuates an arguably unrepresentative and disempowering construction of abused children (Firmin et al,. 2016). Melrose (2013), O' Dell (2008) and Kitzinger (1997) concur with James and James' (2008) concerns and criticise charities relentless promotion of children as unable to form any level of defence against the abuse they are experiencing. Furthermore, the constructed passivity and totalised victim-like status (Phoenix, 2005) of child sexual abuse victims is not necessarily reflective of the reality, or indeed helpful (Lamb, 2010). Phoenix (ibid.) also argues that the adoption of the 'Ideal Victim' theory (Christie, 1986) stigmatises loss of innocence, but also possibly marginalises children who

do not 'fit' into the category projected by charities, for example they are agents and do not 'fit' the 'ideal victim' (ibid.) construction. Indeed, Egan and Hawkes (2009) suggest that a child who subverts the constructed image of an abused child may even find themselves outside the realms of protection (p. 392) (see also Woodiwiss, 2014).

Moreover, O'Dell (2008) and Phoenix (2005) suggest that it is vital that the resilient nature of children and their agency is recognised and acknowledged (see also Pearce, 2009; 2007; Coleman and Hagell, 2007). Furthermore, the importance of recognising that many abused children and young people demonstrate agency by finding tactics to defer, delay or prevent the abuse they're experiencing is important as is acknowledging that many children emotionally and physically will go on to live 'normal', 'productive' lives (Woodiwiss, 2009; Kelly, 1988). Fundamentally, those children and subsequent adults who do demonstrate resistance, exercise agency, and do 'survive'-to whatever degree, also need a voice. However, it may be very difficult for people to access such discourses of resistance and recovery when the overwhelming and inevitable harm of CSE and CSA so dominate narratives and discourse.

2.3.4 Why recognise children's agency?

In the last few decades, sociologists have begun to highlight the need for children and young people to be recognised more fully as agents and in turn, enabled to exercise their agency in positive directions (James, 2011a; Corteen and Scarton, 1997); an approach that is analogous with the 'Emergent Framework' identified by, James and Prout (1997). For example, educating children especially about sexuality and sexual behaviour is viewed as one important way of enabling them to make more informed and safer choices (Robinson, 2013; Fine and McClelland, 2006; Moore and Rosenthal, 2006; Tolman, 2002). The argument being that if children are not educated and informed about sex and sexuality it is likely they will be more at risk of harm, than if they are engaged in the subject and 'prepared' for their own and others sexuality. Certain sociologists working in the field argue that by denying, ignoring or repressing the lived (sexual) experiences of children their needs will inevitably not be identified and not responded to effectively. Furthermore, if society insists on constructing children as innocent then inevitably society will fail to meet the specific needs of the individual, and ironically, as mentioned previously, this may make them more vulnerable (Egan and Hawkes 2009, 2008; Cosaro, 2005; Corteen and Scarton, 1997). However, as James and Prout (1997) have noted constructions about children particularly regarding sexuality are extremely resistant to change (Robinson, 2013; Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

One of the reasons these dominant constructions persist, Cosaro (2005) suggests, is that in
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Western society children are still viewed as a social problem and inferior, thus not in need of the same respect or equality that adults demand. Furthermore, and reiterating earlier comments on constructions of childhood (see Janus, 1981), Robinson (2008) argues that societies' concerns are not actually about children, but rather about the adults they will become. The child's status as 'becoming', rather than 'being' is especially pertinent, the idea that their sexual selves will just one day exist is a denial of the inevitable process children will go through on their journey of sexuality (Egan, 2013). To deny them the chance to discuss and be informed about all facets of sexuality is to fail to recognise their individuality, their agency and their need for ultimate sexual autonomy. Likewise, Egan and Hawkes (2009; 2012) argue that the lack of recognition of *girls'* sexual agency, threatens them rather than protects them and it would be of much more benefit for them to be able to discuss their sexuality (see also Egan and Hawkes, 2009; Robinson, 2008). However, problematically, some argue that discourses regarding sexuality tend to exclude, patronise and judge young people, by making assumptions, based on seemingly little empirical evidence (Egan and Hawkes, 2012; Epstein and Johnson, 1998) demonstrating how (female) childhood sexuality is still generally conceptualised within a discourse of protection and danger.

The idea that childhood is understood (by society) based more often on representation than 'reality' is common in the literature reviewed (Prout, 1999). Prout (ibid.) highlights the need for adults to recognise the participatory role children play in shaping their own destiny, rather than viewing them as inert recipients who are just being shaped by adults and societies. James (2007) advocates the importance of listening to children and cites Clifford Geertz (1988, p.145) who notes the importance of not falling victim to, "ethnographic ventriloquism" when researching children (p. 263). Moreover, James (2007) questions how sociologists and indeed society more generally, can ever really know what children think about anything if children are not asked, and listened to. Surely, she suggests, this would be more beneficial than having adults' understandings and interpretations imposed on them, and problematically, usually through a heteronormative lens. Cosaro (2011; 1990; 1988; 1985) and Tolman's (2002) ethnographic studies of children are regularly cited as evidence of how illuminating listening to children's voices and observing their lived experiences can be. James (2007) argues that it is easy to mute children's voices for the purposes of political rhetoric and advocates the importance of understanding that children are culturally situated individuals who access, understand and interpret knowledge from their own perspective in a manner that sociologists and others will only know about if they ask them. Furthermore, James (2007) suggests that children need to be closely involved and participating in research if their true voices are to be authentically represented (Smith,

2009; Alanen, 1988). This approach is particularly relevant when trying to better understand CSE and the experiences of sexually exploited young people (Warrington, 2013; Pearce, 2009; 2007).

2.4 Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

This section of the review focuses on child sexual abuse (CSA), how it has been defined, understood and in recent decades how it has emerged as an issue receiving significant public and political attention. The relationship between CSA and the much newer (in terms of understanding) phenomenon of CSE is also explored. Children have always been sexually abused and sexually exploited but how the terms and understandings of the terms and phenomena may have become discursively separated is very relevant to the research questions.

There is a great deal written on the subject of CSA and there is not enough scope to explore every aspect however, as has been focused on already and of particular interest is how CSA is commonly understood as the 'destroyer' of childhood and a threat to its sanctity. But, even more than this, it is commonly portrayed as having inevitable and devastating consequences into adulthood (Woodiwiss, 2009). It would appear, that CSA (and CSE) discourses cannot accommodate an alternative narrative of, for example, the possibility of a person surviving CSA relatively or even completely unscathed with little (if any) long-term damage to the person (Woodiwiss, 2009). Thus, the inter-play between what childhood should be- a time of sexual innocence, and CSA being the 'ruiner' of that innocence, is a powerful discourse and is explored in detail. As Kitzinger (1997) suggest, debates about the sexual abuse of children are unhelpfully deeply embedded in understandings of childhood, what it is and what it 'should' look like (p. 166) (see also Finkelhor, 2008).

2.4.1 Defining CSA

As far back as the 1870s there have been campaigns (in the West) to highlight the problem of sexual offences against children (Hooper, 1992, p. 53). However, it was in the 1960/70s that social and political awareness significantly grew about CSA and the topic gained attention, mainly because of feminism and awareness raising about the sexual violence perpetrated by men against women and children (Radford et al, 2011; Hendrick, 2003; Kelly, 1988; Ennew, 1986; Parton, 1985; Gersen, 1979; Hooper, 1992; Finkelhor, 1979). HM Government (2015) define CSA as:

> Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take
> part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level
> of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is

> *happening…The activities may involve physical contact,*
> *including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral*
> *sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing,*
> *rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also*
> *include non-contact activities, such as involving children in*
> *looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching*
> *sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually*
> *inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for*
> *abuse (including via the internet).*
>
> *Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women*
> *can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.*
>
> (HM Government, 2015 Working together)

CSA is often referred to as an umbrella term for CSE. However, this thesis takes the position that although CSA and CSE may have become discursively separated, if they were ever joined, there are many similarities between the two, which undoubtedly conflate. For example, all CSA is exploitative and all CSE is abusive, whether a young person is sexually abused by their father or a group of five extra-familial males, both are abuse and both involve the girl being exploited. As Finkhelhor notes:

> *The problem of sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation*
> *frequently overlap and have more in common than not, yet*
> *often they are thought of as the separate domains of sexual*
> *abuse and child sexual exploitation.* (p. 18)

Critiquing social workers' understandings of the terms and phenomenons, CSA and CSE is a central part of the thesis, and is especially pertinent in the current cultural context where usage of the term CSE is ubiquitous in public discourse and far newer than the term CSA.

2.4.2 Constructing CSA

That the sexual abuse of children takes place is indisputable, but how knowledge concerning the subject is constructed is more contested (Metcalfe and Kennison, 2008). How we understand childhood, children and CSA are all important because they affect responses to children and indeed adults who have experienced CSA/CSE. As noted, during the 1970's and 1980's the United Kingdom witnessed an unprecedented 'uncovering' of child sexual abuse (Hendrick, 2003). In more recent years, the issue of CSA has continued to gain significant attention and concern within all echelons of society (OCC, 2015; IICSA, 2014 on-going; Berelowitz et al., 2013; 2012; BBC News, 2013, 2012; Wattam and Parton, 1999 James and Prout, 1997).

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Whittier (2009) provides an insightful overview concerning how the issue of child sexual abuse has 'emerged' and evolved about the past forty years. Initially, concerns about CSA were promulgated by second wave feminists and subsequently recognised by the media and politicians as a significant problem in need of a response. She identifies the speed with which responses to child sexual abuse have evolved, but also how the subject still challenges and divides feminists, politicians and social commentators. She also notes that although different governments and the media have responded to the issue of child sexual abuse, the core concern of feminists that such abuse persists and is so prevalent because of the imbalance of social power/control between men, women and children, has been lost (Whittier, 2009, p. 9). Thus, many feminists argue that the root cause of child sexual abuse is actually gender inequality and gender power imbalances. However, they also suggest these inequalities have become subsumed by the constructed inevitable and irreversible damage CSA does to children (Lamb, 1999; Kelly, 1988).

Phoenix (1995) suggests, those who experience sexual abuse are (mis)viewed as having suffered a type of *'social death'* (p. 29), understood as being completely damaged by their abuse. CSA being commonly viewed by society as the worse things that can happen to a person. Kitzinger (1997) challenges these commonly held constructions about sexually abused children, including prevailing constructions, as noted earlier, about sexually abused childrens' passivity, immobility and lack of agency (Kelly, 1988). Kitzinger (ibid.) cites research which clearly illustrates how much agency, in reality, many sexually abused children actually demonstrate (p. 170). Kitzinger (ibid.) argues that how society constructs childhood dis-empowers children and makes them more vulnerable. Moreover, she argues that to continually perpetuate the idea of children being 'untouched' and 'innocent' is not only a misrepresentation but plays into the hands of paedophiles and abusers who find this desirable (p.168). Likewise, Kehily (2012) observes that to persist in perpetuating 'mythical' discourses in which children are constructed as innocent and unknowing is not only profoundly unreflective of the reality, but also sets children up to fail as inevitably such a construction will be 'punctured' (p. 261). Moreover, the danger is that if the child subverts the norm, he/she may be deemed outside the realm of protection (Egan and Hawkes, 2009). As Kitzinger (1988) notes:

> *The romanticism of childhood innocence excludes those who do not conform to the idea... Innocence is an ideology used to deny children access to knowledge and power.* (p. 7).

Furthermore, as Egan and Hawkes (2009) observe:

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> *If a transgression goes too far in breaching dominant cultural*
> *constructions of childhood and the mystique surrounding its*
> *innocence, children may find themselves outside the*
> *classification of protection of childhood itself.*

> (Egan and Hawkes, 2009, p. 392).

Moreover, the child who subverts such ideals threatens:

> *the sanctity of purity, the body of the sexual child offered a*
> *figure to fight against, a menace that could be assessed and*
> *contained. The knowing child provided the ground upon*
> *which innocence was built and produced and was the*
> *condition for its very indelibility.*

> (Egan and Hawkes, 2007, p. 456).

The risk to the sexually abused girl who subverts those ideals of not being protected is significant, indeed it may be more preferable and beneficial for her to 'play' the 'innocent'. Another important element within the body of the 'knowing' sexually abused child is the risk they may pose to others, especially other children. Scott et al (1998) discusses ways in which such a child may be re-understood or dealt with:

> *One way of dealing with the unruly child, within the spectre of*
> *the demonic child is to declare that child is not a child.*

> (p. 697)

If the 'knowing' sexually abused child is deemed outside the demarcated boundaries of childhood, then they can effectively and justifiably be 'left to it', as may well have been the case in recent CSE cases (Casey, 2015; Jay, 2014-see chapter one).

The paradoxical constructions concerning children and sexuality and, children and CSA presents a sociological quandary that is still far from being resolved or concluded upon (Fine, 2006). **'Corrupt'** and **'knowing'** children are constructed as subverters of childhood innocence, understood to be uncontrollable and a danger to other children, hence, they need to be managed and contained, even possibly criminalised. Moreover, the knowing, sexualised child (possibly the most erroneous of all children) is viewed warily and without compassion or empathy, potentially excusing those who fail to protect them (Woodiwiss, 2014; Erikson, 2009). If a female child/young person is sexually aware and agentic, then they will actually be treated more harshly by society, because they have not only breached

the sacrosanct construction of innocence that each child should anchor itself to, but also she subverts dominant discourses surrounding female sexual desire and agency (Egan and Hawkes, 2012; 2008; Powell, 2010). Thus, if an abused child is 'knowing', does the universality of the 'dominant framework' so inform and dictate the response to that child, that rather than the child's individual needs being met they are deemed unworthy of protection, outsides the bounds of childhood and left more vulnerable to abuse? (James and Prout, 1997). Kitzinger (1997) thinks that it does:

> *Implicit in the presentation of sexual abuse is the violation of childhood is an assertion of what childhood really is, or should be.* (p. 166).

Meyer (2007) concurs and argues that discourses about innocence are problematic and conflate innocence and vulnerability and construct both as innate characteristics' (p. 90). However, the paradoxical construction of children being both knowing and innocent is a resilient one (Ennew, 1986). As Robinson (2012) says:

> *The ' knowing child ', the child who is perceived to ' know too much' about sexuality...for its age, is constituted as the non-innocent or the corrupted child.* (p. 264).

It seems clear that this is unlikely to be a truly representative construction regarding the lived experiences of children; moreover, it is a dangerous one as it means children may be blamed or indeed viewed as complicit in 'their' abuse (Woodiwiss, 2014; Berelowitz et al., 2013; Jago et al., 2011; Pearce, 2009; Kelly, 1988). However, Robinson and Davies (2008) argue that discourses on childhood innocence hold great power, mobilised by adults, for adults with its primary purpose being to maintain critical power relationships (p. 355) (James and Prout, 1997). Thus, discourses that attempt to recognise children having sexual agency are commonly strongly resisted (Melrose, 2012; Egan and Hawkes, 2009). As Kehily (2009) notes, it is adults who stubbornly construct childhood as occupying a state of idealised innocence, resulting in the perpetual idea that children above all else are vulnerable and need protection (p. 5) (Montgomery and Kehily, 2008; Scott, 1999).

In order to better understand the experiences of those who have been sexually abused whether as children and/or adults, Lamb (1999) advocates the importance of listening to female voices, both young and old who have been sexually abused and cautions against 'putting our own spin' on what they say. She warns against reinforcing the essentialist view (of some) that women are pathologically victims, especially sexually, and argues that being positivistic and stereo-typical about women who have experienced sexual violence is

unhelpful and disempowering. For example, she suggests that the reasons such stereotypes persist is that society want female victims of rape to be convincing victims, passive, distraught and quiet. Women are expected (most notably perhaps by juries) to fit in with 'ideal', stereotypical constructions of femininity, especially if they want to be believed. Lamb (ibid.) notes how the majority of women will experience some type of sexual violence in their life-time and suggests more focus needs to be placed on preventing male violence in the first place, rather than just reacting to it (see Hearn, 1987). Her concern is that sexual abuse has become an individual mental health problem, rather than a social one, which denies the role gender imbalance and inequality play in contributing to the problem of sexual violence against women (ibid.).

2.4.3 Effects of CSA

The idea that survivors of child sexual abuse respond in a universal manner is a prominent discourse, however, many children who experience sexual abuse go onto into adulthood and live a life that is fulfilled. The abuse may obviously affect, influence and possibly even shape much of their life but it does not necessarily mean a 'damaged life' (Woodiwiss, 2014; Lamb, 1999). As Marriott et al., (2014) note in their research around resilience to CSA:

> *Maladaptation and mental ill health are not the only possible outcomes following abuse or adversity* (p. 18)

In particular, Woodiwiss (2009) explores how child sexual abuse is constructed as something that has to be recovered from, or there will be inevitable consequences. For example, the abused may become the abuser or, especially for women, they may not become the woman they are 'supposed' to be, especially sexually. She argues that sexuality is held up as a measure of recovery, a woman has to be sexual and/or sexually active to prove that she has recovered from sexual abuse and, in order to be 'whole', thus asexuality is a sign of failing to healing. Woodiwiss (ibid.) interviews women who have drawn on various discourses regarding their own, or their perceived sexual abuse (recovered memory, altered memories). Many of the women were seeking to make sense of their own experiences, some through self-help literature. Much of the literature regarding self-help constructs childhood as a time of innocence, feeding into dominant understandings-demarcated as a sacrosanct time, in need of protection and preservation, if this time is violated, especially by sexual abuse, then that is the most destructive thing that can happen to a person- a notion that Woodiwiss (ibid.) challenges. As Plummer (1995) observes, nothing is static, all knowledge is *'lodged in specific (situational, economic, historical) social movements'* (p. 62). Centrally, Woodiwiss is suggesting that we all try to make sense of our lives and gain comfort or reassurance from familiar narratives to explain our (and others) experiences and lives. However, some discourses are not embodying or reflective of our

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actual reality, there are missing discourses, but we cling to some discourses out of, habit, comfort, fear of change or to maintain control and this may well be the reason why dominant understandings and discourses surrounding CSA and its inevitable damage and threat to childhood persist.

2.4.4 Victimhood, blame and consent

This section briefly explores literature concerning blame, victimhood and consent, topics that are all very much inter-linked to the topic of CSE. Victimhood and blame have been, to some extent covered already, but these pivotal areas are worth exploring in further depth. The social workers' understandings of these areas regarding CSE and sexually exploited girls is an area of interest. Furthermore, as the thesis explores, how these subjects may intersect and inform the social workers understandings of sexual abuse and sexually exploited girls' agency and choice-making is significant.

2.4.5 Victimhood

Shuker (2013) suggests, that a sexually exploited young person should not be understood as though CSE is their *'master identity'* (p. 126). They should not be viewed as primarily a victim but rather, more holistically, their whole character should be acknowledged and valued. Likewise, Phoenix and Oerton (2005) challenge dominant constructions of victims of sexual abuse as **"totalised victims"** (p. 40). They trouble the dominant understanding that sexual abuse is the worst possible thing that can happen to a person arguing that this denies the abused person's ability to resist and/or survive the experience 'intact'. As Phoenix (2002) argues:

> *the rhetoric of victimhood operates to render redundant*
> *discussions of young people's agency and poverty as well as*
> *what should be done about it* (p. 363)

The restrictive and narrow nature of the 'totalised victim' (ibid.) discourse is particularly pervasive in relation to CSA and CSE and, as mentioned may silence the 'voices' of those who do not feel a 'totalised victim' (ibid.). The consequences of this are potentially concerning, for example, how does a jury view/judge the victim of CSA/CSE who does not conform to the 'ideal victim' (ibid.) 'standard' in a court case (Kitzinger, 1988). Perhaps presenting themselves as being, 'okay' and strong, or even angry. If this is viewed as subverting the constructed 'ideal victim' how will she be understood, will it reduce the chance of justice because, she is not viewed as a 'real', 'properly affected' victim. As Warrington (2013) notes, sexually exploited girls' agency is down played so that they 'fit' the victim mould (p. 112). Moore (2006) suggests, it would be better for victims if there was a move from victimhood to empowerment and Daniel (2008) and Hearn (1988)

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advocate challenging our understandings of victims and what they 'should' look like (Warrington, 2013).

2.4.6 Blame

How girls may be blamed for sexual abuse/exploitation that they experience, overtly or covertly is another area of interest. A great deal of the literature reviewed on this subject is from a feminist perspective and focuses on (sexual) violence against women and children and how females are still often held responsible for 'getting their behaviour right' in order not to be sexually abused/exploited. That women are still blamed for sexual crimes perpetrated against them is a commonly held view amongst many sociologists (see Angelides, 2012; Alder, 2008; Atwood, 2007; Kelly, 1988; Cain, 1981). Part of the reason for this is that women are still viewed as gatekeepers to mens constructed 'irrepressible' sexuality (Jackson and Scott, 2010; Powell, 2010; Egan and Hawkes, 2007; McNair, 2000). Viewed as responsible for men's sexual behaviour and furthermore, if women do not behave in the 'right' way, i.e. are sexually passive, dress correctly and so forth, they may be deemed outside the realms of protection (Woodiwiss, 2014; Egan and Hawkes, 2009; Finkelhor, 1981). Mc Robbie (2007) and Phoenix and Oerton (2005) both suggest that it is common to focus on the woman's character and what is wrong with her, rather than the perpetrator (see also Melrose, 2004; Lamb, 1999). It appears that victims of sexual abuse are still expected to conform to certain ways of behaving, pre, and post abuse if they are to be protected and indeed receive any possibility of justice. Even then, justice is far from inevitable.

Blame may be assigned to others as well, especially concerning the safeguarding of children for example, being placed on social workers and their perceived failings, rather than the perpetrators of abuse (see Parton, 2014; Merrick, 1996; Frost and Stein, 1989), thus, blame may be placed anywhere but with the perpetrators. Lamb (1999) and Pearce (2009) suggest that focus must be placed on the perpetrators of such crimes, rather than on the victims, otherwise as Lamb notes, they can essentially be 'absented' and blame misplaced (p 122).

It is helpful to draw on other literatures around violence against women and girls such as domestic abuse, often identified as another crime wherein the victim is blamed by professionals and others, asked to make changes in their own lives-such as move out of their house and so on, rather than the onus being on the perpetrator to move away or change their behaviour (Hester, 2012; Lapierre, 2010; 2008; Landsman et al., 2007). Indeed, Keddell (2014) notes that social workers in his research were more likely to hold women as culpable for exposing their child to harm through domestic violence, than the
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perpetrator themselves. Likewise, as discussed, if sexually exploited girls 'veer' away from, or do not fit into dominant constructions of the sexually abused child they may be left misunderstood, blamed and ultimately unprotected (Robinson, 2013; 2012; Egan and Hawkes, 2012; 2008; O'Dell, 2008; 2003; Shanahan, 2007; Lees, 1993; 1986). Frost and Stein (1989) identify the need for better understandings of blame and where it is placed. Furthermore, they advocate that structural male violence be focused on rather than pathologising such behaviours:

> *structural challenge to male violence, general directions of*
> *welfare practice towards empowerment and away from*
> *pathological models is needed.* (p. 144)

Therefore, CSE should always be discussed within the framework of endemic male violence (Hearn, 1987). Discussions that do not do this, but rather focus on individualising the problem should arguably be viewed with caution and as non-contextual. Firmin et al,. (2016) advocates the need for contextualising abuse and challenging individualising discourses around risk and choice which she suggests, problematically, can misplace blame (p. 2330).

2.4.7 Consent

Safeguarding professionals' understandings of consent has been viewed as problematic in the field of CSE for some time (see Pearce, 2013; Jago et al., 2011; Jago and Pearce, 2008). Young people viewed by professionals as consenting to sexual activity, within sexually exploitative situations being of note and concern. The Sex Offences Act (2003) states that the age a young person can legally give consent to sex is sixteen. That young people under the age of sixteen are having sex is without doubt, and questions around their ability to consent are complex. If sexually exploited girls are saying they are consenting to sex with exploitative adults- it undoubtedly becomes even more complicated for professionals. However, as Archard (1998) notes:

> *Most people would agree that there is an evident difference*
> *between two fourteen year olds having sex and a thirty-four*
> *year-old having sex with a fourteen-year-old... It is hard also*
> *to ignore the disparity in power, influence, social resources,*
> *and economic resources between an adult and youth* (p. 126)

The law, or rather interpretations of the law can be ambiguous, especially if a girl is unwilling to give evidence against the perpetrator, the chance of charging the perpetrator maybe limited. Reports have shown that there is great onus on the girls in this regard (Casey, 2015). How social workers are supposed to understand the law in the context of
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CSE may appear clear for example, if a girl is over thirteen a perpetrator may use the defence that he reasonably *thought* she was sixteen years old. There is no such defence if the girl is thirteen or under (Sex Offences Act, 2003). However, in relation to CSE, understandings may be more nebulous. Pearce (2013) argues understandings of consent in the context of CSE, especially around understandings of a young persons' capacity to consent, need to be troubled, suggesting that the 'Gillick competency test' which is a medical model often used to assess whether a young person is competent to consent, is not suitable for a social issue such as CSE (pp. 52-53). Thus, she suggests a new model by which 'consent' could be understood. She identifies four 'types' of social consent, coerced consent; normalised consent; survival consent and condoned consent (p, 67). Pearce's (2013) model of 'social consent' (ibid.) advocates the need to recognise the contextual nature of consent and the social environment of the sexually exploited young person (Firmin et al,. 2016); ultimately and hopefully helping in the identification and support of sexually exploited young people:

> A *'social' rather than a 'medical' model of consent can help us*
> *to understand the ways consent can be abused, and by*
> *default, then help us to better identify and work with sexually*
> *exploited young people* (Pearce, 2013, p. 58)

Indeed, Firmin et al,. (2016) draws on Pearce's(ibid) model, expanding this idea and suggests:

> *the need remains to align/reconcile contextual safeguarding*
> *within a child-centred approach that does not simply reject*
> *the idea of young people's own agency outright, but finds*
> *space for this within new narratives that emerge* (p. 2330).

More broadly, feminist sociologists identify how young women still struggle with negotiating consent whether in peer on peer relationships or in an exploitative context (which peer on peer could be). Recognising what might breach consent and understanding their own desires and needs are often absented in discourses on sexuality creating a potential void for females as they come to understand their own sexuality, or even asexuality (Fine, M & McClennand, 2006; Fine, 1988). Burkett and Hamilton (2012) identify the problematic and multi-dimensional dilemmas that women and girls face regarding their sexuality and sexual navigation, suggesting that women are still drawing on heteronormative discourses regarding pleasing men, feeling obliged to have sex if they've acted sexually and commonly believing that men have insatiable urges which they as women have a duty or obligation to satisfy (pp. 827-828). They argue that women continue to often acquiesce to having sex

even when they do not want to, and that women may not be as empowered, at least sexually, as is assumed or reflected in discourses of empowerment and liberation (see also Lamb, 2011; McRobbie, 2007) but rather, they may feel oppressed by hegemonic, sexist heteronormative discourses. Ultimately the compulsory sexual agency of post-feminist sensibilities negates the on-going negotiation of consent because women can no longer express distress as the genders are now deemed equal. (p. 828).

Likewise, Powell's (2010; 2007) research regarding how young people negotiate consent in their sexual relationships concurs with Burkett and Hamilton (ibid.). She found that young people are unaware of the law regarding consent and that young women still feel pressured to have sex with a man if they have indicated it might be a possibility. Powell (2010) contends that the pressure young women feel regarding being responsible for men's sexual fulfilment is deeply rooted; a sense of obligation and a desire to please experienced by many of the women Powell interviewed. She also highlights how little education there is for young people around consent and how vital it is that young people are informed about the issues of consent, alongside being educated about the continuum of possible sexual coercion (Kelly, 1988). It is clear, at least from Powell's research that there are still prevalent power imbalances between the genders when it comes to negotiating sexual relationships (see also Beckett et al,.2013; Waites, 2005; Archard, 2004).

Victimhood, blame and consent are three significant and important concepts. As the thesis progresses, these concepts and others are drawn on in the light of the researches findings. The review now moves on to discuss child sexual exploitation.

2.5 Child sexual exploitation

Chapter one describes the social and political context within which this research has been conducted and, by so doing, highlights the significant amount of activity that has taken place concerning CSE in the UK in recent years. This introductory chapter also outlines the commonly used definition of CSE from the DCSF guidance (2009) (ch. 1. pp. 13-14). This section of the literature review does not wish to repeat what has been said but rather aims to expand on that context further by briefly discussing some of the key political and public documents (policy and inquiries) relevant to CSE. This is followed by an exploration of the academic literature around CSE, primarily focusing on research conducted in the UK since the beginning of the millennium.

2.5.1 The language

The sexual abuse and exploitation of children has been written about for many years, both nationally and internationally (see, Woodiwiss, 2014; 2009; Jones, 2013; Rock, 2013;

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Pearce, 2009; Whittier, 2009; Finkelhor, 2008; O'Connell Davidson, 2005; Scott and Swain, 2002; Itzin, 2000; Ennew, 1986; Parton, 1985). Discourses surrounding CSA and CSE, and how societies understand such issues shifts and changes. As discussed previously, the use of the term CSE and its growing use in discourse in recent years is relatively new (Melrose, 2013; 2012: 2010; DCSF, 2009). Although, as Asquith and Turner (2008) identify, the terms CSA and CSE are also used interchangeably. Fundamentally, there appears to be a lack of clarity and/or agreement about for whom, and in what circumstances the term/s (CSA or CSE) is appropriate. For example, the use of the word 'exploitation' has become commonplace, yet its actual meaning, it appears, has possibly become opaque and especially inter-linked with the idea of exchange, for example, the girl/boy receiving something for sexual activity (see Berelowitz et al., 2013; Barnardos, 2011; DCSF, 2009). It is perhaps helpful to re-visit what 'exploitation' or, 'to be exploitable' means, as the term may be at risk of becoming tautological in CSE discourses. For example, the term 'exploited' may have become so inextricably linked with 'exchange' that abuse can only be understood as exploitative if an 'exchange' takes place, usually materially but it could be emotionally, i.e. the exploited girl is given alcohol in exchange for sex, but if she is not given alcohol or anything else-is she still understood as being exploited? The Oxford dictionary (1991) definition is:

> *Exploitation: Make use of […] derive benefit from […] utilise or*
> *take advantage of (esp a person) for one's own ends* (p. 500)

The logical conclusion of this definition is that if both parties are making use of each other, both are gaining i.e. the girl is getting alcohol, the man sex, then are not both of them exploiting each other? Clearly, this is confusing, as few would accuse a sexually exploited girl of doing any exploiting even if she, or even a professional might be saying she is- which anecdotally is not unheard of. Consequently, the term 'exploitation' is being used in an un-nuanced and uncritical manner and demonstrates how such terms can evolve into a life of their own unless there is continual and critical thinking (Shuker, 2016). Wilkinson (2003) notes that exploitable people require two qualities, that of being useful and vulnerable (p. 24). He makes no mention of the *exploited* receiving anything, but rather the *exploiter* only acquires the benefit. Juxtaposed with this understanding is the DCSF (2009) definition of CSE which states that the girl/boy (identified as being exploited) receives something for sexual activity rather than for example, the young person being 'sold' for sex and only the exploiter receiving payment - the young person is understood to be benefitting or gaining from the exploitation. These topics are far from being agreed upon or resolved but highlight how the term CSE is constructed and understood in varying, evolving and some would argue, increasingly ambiguous ways (Melrose, 2013; 2012).

In the UK, the term CSE has been present in public, political and safeguarding discourse in the last sixteen years (since the beginning of the 2000s), replacing the increasingly unpopular term 'child prostitute'. This was an attempt to acknowledge that children who are being 'prostituted' should be viewed as victims of a crime rather than, as the term suggests, prostituting themselves (nb. Barnardos first used the term CSE in 1995, see Kelly et al, (1995)). While some, such as Melrose (ibid.) argue that the term 'CSE' denies children/young people's agency and constructs CSE one dimensionally, the phrase has, nonetheless, become ubiquitous in discourse. Melrose (2013) is critical of the term CSE and what it has come to mean, suggesting that the term has become essentially **"meaningless"** (p.11) and that:

> *distinguishing CSE from other forms of adolescent sexual*
> *activity has become increasingly difficult.* (p. 11)

This research draws on Melrose (ibid.) and her understanding and critique of CSE, conceptually and in practice (Melrose, 2013; 2012; 2010; 2004). Her recognition of its ambiguities and the 'power' the phrase has is especially relevant to the research questions:

> *Over the past twelve years, a particular discourse of CSE has*
> *achieved dominance, conditioning understandings and*
> *determining responses to young people who are involved in*
> *commercial sex markets* (p. 11)

Melrose's (2013) concern is that CSE discourses primarily construct sexually exploited young people as objects and victims, failing to recognise their agency and their potential choice-making in 'sexual transactions'. Rather, their involvement is only understood in terms of, or as a result of coercion and manipulation. She encourages ongoing critique of the term 'CSE', questioning its limitations, meaning and purpose. She also discusses, and urges recognition that social constructions of childhood and dominant understandings of the need for childhood to be constructed as a separate state from adulthood (especially sexually) inform understandings and responses to CSE. However, she argues that this may fail to recognise the individual circumstances of the child (see also Pearce, 2009). Gagnon and Smith (1974) note that gendered discourses can be very resistant to change (especially concerning children), in particular regarding the surveillance and social control surrounding female sexuality and prostitution. Indeed, when referring to prostitution, they interestingly note that if you look back over the time period 1874-1974 not much has changed:

> *The available legal, moral and social scripts that exist for the*

act of prostitution are remarkably stable (p. 219).

Gagnon and Smith (ibid.) contend that human sexuality is more subject to sociocultural moulding than any other form of human behaviour, yet dichotomously scripts concerning prostitution, arguably one of the most controversial types of human behaviour have, in their opinion, remained relatively static (1974, p 261) (see also Egan and Hawkes, 2007; 2012). Hence, the need to critique language that does shift for example, child prostitute to sexually exploited child and our understandings of such phenomena.

Research exploring CSE in the UK has grown exponentially in recent years; this is due to an awareness of certain types of CSE increasing and safeguarding agencies responding to public and political concerns (see Chase and Statham, 2005). This is a result primarily of recent high profile court cases and serious case reviews (as noted in chapter one) leading to policy changes. The rest of this section cites some of the most significant policy documents and inquiries over recent years and highlights some of the academic findings on the subject. Academic research has also grown, most notably conducted by the University of Bedfordshire, International Centre researching CSE, violence and trafficking. Several reports and inquiries are of note, and have contributed significantly to an increase in knowledge on the subject of CSE, in turn drawing attention to possible systematic problems within safeguarding around CSE (see Fox, 2016; OCC, 2015; HM Gov, 2015; Casey, 2015; Jay, 2014; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2013; Firmin, 2013; Muslim Women's Network, 2013; CEOP, 2011; Barnardos, 2011; Jago and Pearce, 2008). Of particular note is, Jago et al., (2011) and their report entitled, "What's going onto safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation?" The report explored how local partnerships respond to CSE finding that only one quarter of local children's safeguarding boards were implementing the DCSF (2009) guidance on Safeguarding children and young people from CSE (Jago et al., 2011, p. 5). Moreover, in response to ongoing concerns about CSE, the Office of the Children's Commissioner launched a two-year Inquiry into CSE in Gangs and Groups which identified that at least 16,500 young people (in England) were experiencing CSE, or at risk of it (p. 8). It also identified at least thirteen different 'types' of CSE occurring in gangs and groups CSE (Berelowitz et al., 2013, p. 102). As a result of this inquiry, the 'See me, Hear me' framework' was designed:

> *See Me, Hear Me has the potential to improve not only the*
> *protection of children and young people from sexual*
> *exploitation but also from other forms of harm. Applying it will*
> *ensure that children who are suffering cannot be dismissed –*
> *the agencies must answer and be accountable to the children*

and young people they are there to serve (p. 6)

("If only someone had listened"- Berelowitz, 2013-Final
report)

Alongside the OCC's inquiry into gangs and groups, extensive research has been conducted by the aforementioned University of Bedfordshire. This research explores the prevalence of pornography (Horvath et al., 2013); young people's understandings of consent (Beckett et al., 2013) and gang associated sexual violence (Beckett with Brodie et al., 2012). As discussed in chapter one, also of great significance has also been recent inquiries into CSE in Rotherham and Rochdale (Casey, 2015; Jay, 2014; RSCB, 2013).

The government has produced guidelines designed to direct safeguarding professionals in their support and response to sexually exploited children and young people (see Home Office and Dfe, 2016; HM Gov, 2015; 2013; 2011; DCSF, 2009). Pearce, the director of the centre at Bedfordshire, has conducted and pioneered research in the field of CSE (Pearce, 2013; 2009; Pearce et al., 2009 Pearce, 2007). Of particular note is Pearce's (2013) 'Social model of 'abused' consent' (p. 58) (see consent section of this review). Melrose and Pearce (2013) edit and contribute to, *"Critical perspectives on CSE and related trafficking*". Trafficking, especially internally (i.e. within the UK) being commonly recognised as an important constitute of the CSE phenomena (Barnardos, 2010; Harper and Scott, 2006). The book covers a range of CSE related topics including, looking at CSE in Northern Ireland (Beckett, 2013) and how CSE affects South Asian women (Sharp, 2013). As previously noted, Shuker's (2013) contribution to the book is also drawn upon; as is her rejection of the idea that sexual exploitation becomes a girl's 'master identity' (p. 126). Other important contributors to literature on the subject of CSE, is from women who have experienced CSE either as a victim/survivor or as professional working in the field. Such as, Senior (2016); Wilson (2015); McDonnell (2015) 'Girl A' (2013) and Jackson (2010). Although some may consider these stories salacious, I have found them to be a helpful way of keeping the 'real-life stories' of those who have experienced CSE alive in my mind. Throughout this literature review, I have repeatedly mentioned listening to the voices of young people, this might seem like semantics however, reading these books and working, as I currently am, in the field of CSE (evaluating CSE projects) has helped keep the young people's voices at the forefront of my thinking.

2.6 Social work practice

The literature review does not focus in too much detail on the intricacies of social work theories and practices, as this is not within the remit of the research questions. However, obviously, when exploring social workers' understandings there are certain topics related to

social work that are of interest. As discussed earlier in this chapter, social workers' understandings of agency in the context of CSE is focused on within this research, not just the agency of sexually exploited and abused girls but also their own agency as social workers.

Another area of interest is the topic of evidence-based practice in social work, concerning CSE. One of the main aims of this research is to hopefully inform social work practices about how to (more) effectively work with, understand and support sexually exploited young people. However, one of the problems for social workers may be the limited time they have because of heavy caseloads and consequently, less time and space for their own reflexivity and development as a practitioner, and this is no doubt a challenge. Part of the reason for this lack of time Munro (2011) says, is that social work systems have increasingly focused on procedures rather than practice with an emphasis on targets and performance indicators and she believes this is to its detriment. Thus, to aid learning and encourage evidence based practice, Sidebottom and Appleton (2013) advocate that it is vital:

> *busy practitioners need easy access to clear and succinctly*
> *presented practical research, which is amenable to application*
> *in their work.* (p. 2)

The bureaucracy involved with social work is also cited by others as problematic mainly because it results in a lack of time being spent with children. For example, Ferguson (2014) notes:

> *the dominant depiction of child protection work […] was of*
> *social workers whose work is micro-managed and constrained*
> *by bureaucratic systems, who have limited time and skills to*
> *do quality work and develop meaningful therapeutic*
> *relationships* (p. 2)

He goes on to say:

> *a system which produces a form of practice where so little*
> *time is spent with children is deeply problematic and*
> *dangerous.* (p. 7)

Ferguson (2014) suggests, that to the professions detriment, less and less time is spent with clients or made available for social workers to develop theoretical ideas about the social world and social work practices. Likewise, Knott and Scragg (2013) advocate the need

for an increase in reflective practice in social work and draw on Schon (1991), who suggests ideally that social workers need to be reflecting before practice, reflecting-in-action and reflecting-on-action. The process of reflection on one's work is necessary prior to, during and after contact with clients (pp. 88-89). As they note:

> *that the doing of 'good' social work has to mean that the social worker is continuously engaged in a process of reflective activities that includes all three of these elements*

> (Knott and Scragg, 2013, p. 89)

Furthermore, Parton and O'Bryne (2000) suggest that a more 'constructive' social work would involve both a process of plurality of knowledge and hearing the client's voices. Likewise, Merrick (2009) says:

> *Social work is in essence, an active and not an analytical profession. Something always has to be done and therefore theory if it is to be taken seriously, must be readily applicable in practice.* (p. 9)

The majority of the literature reviewed concerns the history of social care over the last forty years or so, exploring how social work has changed and how and what has shaped and influenced it. The topic of CSE, and in particular social care's response to sexually exploited girls has been the focus of much media attention and criticism recently (chapter one). Hindsight in this challenging area of work is seemingly a useful and informative tool by which to consider how certain high profile child protection events affect social care, and how 'political' social care is (Hendrick, 2003). It is clear that 'scandals' concerning CSA and social care are nothing new, and as Merrick (2006) points out in the title of his book, social workers are constantly 'walking a tightrope' regarding how they handle all types of child abuse. Indeed, historically, and currently social care is vilified and blamed by the press when cases arise which society and the media find abhorrent (Parton, 2014). Indeed, it would seem that social workers are blamed, or at least viewed as much to blame as the perpetrators of the abuse. (Merrick, 2006, p. 198).

Parton's (2014) review of social care over the past forty years, notes that *children's* social work has become the central concern of child protection work, and this may well have had implications for how adolescents are, or are not responded to. Protecting small children is perhaps seen as a more urgent problem than safeguarding adolescents. This may be, in part, the result of child abuse garnering unprecedented levels of media and public attention over the past four decades. Parton (2014; 2006) charts the most significant events that

have taken place, since the 'uncovering' of sexual abuse in the 1970s. Certain cases concerning usually the death of a child, or the sexual abuse of children have captured the public/media imagination leading to an outcry in terms of reforming child protection, and more recently safeguarding procedures. For example, the case of Victoria Climbie, whose tragic death led to the 'Every Child Matters Agenda' (2004) and the Children's Act (2004) (Parton, 2014; Hendrick, 2003). Much of the literature also discusses how the increasing focus (and blame placed) on social workers/managers and the (often) vitriolic response and scrutiny they receive when something goes wrong, obfuscates the gendered nature of so much of the abuse, i.e. the prevalence of men abusing women and children (Frost and Stein, 1989, p. 144; Hearn, 1987).

Parton (2014) argues that the increased globalisation and individualisation of Western society, and the reconfiguration of the family has resulted in significant social unrest and unease (see also Parton, 2006) and as has so often been the case historically, children become the focus of those concerns and anxieties. Parton (2006) cites Giddens (1990;1991) who says a 'modern society' can be described thus, as having heightened choice; constant questioning of established beliefs; increased sense of reflexivity; lack of embedded biography and increased confrontation with the plurality of social workers and beliefs (p. 57). All these things Parton (2006) suggest leads to ontological insecurities, which focus on 'the children':

> *Pervasive ontological insecurity brings about increased*
> *attempts to create a sense of certainty and existential security*
> *and in the process, there is a greater possibility of both*
> *displacement and projection of anxiety* (p. 58)

This is particularly relevant to this research as within the media CSE has been repeatedly portrayed as being perpetrated by Pakistani, moslem men abusing white, working class girls (see chapter one). Moreover, there has been little comment on how actually the most prevalent offenders of sexual abuse against children (in the home and outside) is white men. As Parton (2006) goes on to say, since the 1990s childhood has become a 'catalyst' of societies' anxieties about the ills of society and government have found it a fertile land for intervention and paternalism (p. 59). Consequently, social care has become a conduit for society's worries about childhood, and a focal point of resentment and frustration (Parton, 2014).

Finally in this section, there is recent research by Firmin et al,.(2016) who advocates the 'contextual safeguarding framework' (p. 2333) for social work practictioners working with

sexually exploited young people. Their work is particularly relevant to this thesis, as they encourage the enabling of young peoples' agency and endorse the need for social workers to recognise the individual contexts of sexually exploited young people, in order to better safeguard them. They argue that this new framework would enable social workers to be constantly refreshing and assessing their understandings of young people involved in exploitative situations- moving their understandings and response to such young people in more positive directions and enabling young people to have "healthier sexualities" (p. 2334):

> *This framework explicitly recognises the interplay between public and private spaces associated with exploitation and recommends that practitioners identify ways to assess and intervene with these environments. This conceptual approach provides a frame- work for developing research and practice that enables professionals to recognise the networked, public and social aspects of young people's sexual relationships and developing sexualities* (p. 2333-2334)

2. 7 Conclusion

This review provides a discussion of the literature read throughout the duration of the doctoral process in relation to the research questions posed, which explore social workers' understandings of CSE and sexually exploited girls. The review begins by providing a broad overview of how childhood has been historically constructed, highlighting its shifting nature; then focuses more specifically on historical constructions of childhood sexuality- particularly concerning adolescent girls and the 'problematic' nature of such understandings, drawing mainly from feminist perspectives. This is exemplified by recent 'sexualisation of girls' discourses and followed by a discussion about why such 'panics' may iteratively emerge. Theoretical approaches around the topic of agency are discussed, followed by an exploration of literatures relating to child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation, including a brief look of victimhood, blame and consent. Finally, literature on social care- particularly looking at issues around workloads; public and political vilification; blame and how developing a more contextual understanding of sexually exploited young people may improve how they are safeguarded (Firmin et al,. 2016)

Of interest is how social workers' understandings of certain topics may intersect for example, their understandings of childhood, CSA and the sexually 'knowing' girl and, if this

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results in paradoxical understandings concerning CSE and sexually exploited girls. How do social workers understand girls who may fundamentally subvert dominant understandings of what a sexually abused/exploited girl should 'look like', indeed of what a *child* should 'look like'. This, amongst other issues is explored further in the next chapters. However, we now move onto the methodology chapter.

Chapter 3- Methodology

This chapter begins by outlining the research questions and explores how and why they have changed, followed by a brief explanation concerning the language used throughout the thesis regarding young people and gender. The reason why I chose to conduct a qualitative, social constructionist and feminist methodological approach is then discussed. The ethical implications of the research are considered, followed by a discussion about the design of the interviews; information about the pilot interviews and how the sample of social workers were recruited, including biographical details about the social workers. Subsequently, the possible limitations, diversity and spread of the sample are reviewed. The experience of interviewing and then the analysis of the data itself is discussed, alongside considering why a thematic analysis approach was used, what was involved in the analytic process, the initial findings and how they ultimately siloed into nine main themes. Those final themes are outlined, as are certain findings of such significance that although not an initial area of enquiry they have been included in the thesis. Issues around external validity, reliability and ecological validity are explored and this is followed by a section on reflexivity. Finally, the conclusion directs the reader towards part two of the thesis, wherein empirical findings of the research are presented.

3.0 Research questions

In my previous postgraduate studies, I conducted research exploring CSE and blame, and how sexually exploited girls were constructed (by four national newspapers) in the Rochdale CSE case (RSCB, 2013). How sexually exploited girls are understood has been a central area of interest throughout all my research and this is reflected in the research questions. As mentioned in chapter one, the research questions have changed over time; this is due to clarification of what it was that I was most interested in finding out from the social workers. This particularly became apparent when designing the interview questions and, when I reflected on the efficacy of the pilot interviews. To illustrate this, I have outlined below the original questions and then the final research questions:

Original questions (2012/2013):

1. What are social workers' understandings, constructions and perceptions of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children?

2. What discourses are social workers drawing from in their construction of sexually exploited children with particular focus on their understandings of gender, childhood

sexuality, consent and agency?

3. What, if any, are the inter-professional differences and similarities in how generic social workers and specialist CSE social workers understand and construct child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children?

The final research questions:

1. What are social workers' understandings and constructions of CSE and sexually exploited girls?

2. How do social workers understand and construct the agency and choice making of girls sexually exploited outside the home and girls sexually abused within the home?

3. What bodies of knowledge are social workers drawing from in their understandings and constructions of sexually exploited girls particularly concerning childhood, gender and childhood and sexuality?

After considering the language used, I decided that the term 'perception' was unnecessary- it potentially denoted a more psychological aspect that I did not want to pursue. I also decided that I wanted to explore specifically how the social workers understand CSE, as a term, phenomena and in their practice. As chapter one points out, it has been argued that the term 'CSE' may have become 'stretched' and opaque (Melrose, 2013; Jones, 2013; Rock, 2013) and I was interested in whether or not this was reflected in the interviewees' understandings: for example, has the term CSE simply become ambiguous, polarised, or even understood increasingly broadly.

To further elicit the interviewees' understandings, I decided to explore how the participants understand and define the term child sexual abuse (CSA). Has this term, that has been part of safeguarding vernacular far longer than CSE, also become opaque terminology? As a corollary to this, I also consider how the social workers understand girls sexually abused in the home and girls sexually exploited outside the home, particularly concerning the girls' agency and ability to make choices about the situation they are in. My interest in this area derives from my work as a practitioner: I remember regularly discussing with colleagues whether social workers (and others) might react differently to a girl (aged 14, for example) who said to them, 'I give a blow job to my (32 year old) dad every night but I don't mind because I love him and he buys me new shoes at the weekend': in comparison with a girl (also aged 14) who says, 'I give a blow job to my 32 year old boyfriend every day but I
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don't mind because I love him and he gives me alcohol and cigarettes'. Thus, I was interested in whether girl's agency and ability to make choices is understood and responded to differently, depending on where and by whom they had been abused.

At the beginning of the research, I was particularly interested in whether there would be any differences between the understandings of CSE social workers (those who just work with sexually exploited young people) and generic social workers, and what implications that might have for practice. However, after interviewing the CSE social workers and a number of other more generic social workers I realised that actually there was very little difference in their understandings. As a result, I concluded that there was simply not enough within the data to warrant a research question on this subject.

The use of 'girl'

Throughout the thesis, the terms child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse are used however, the word 'child' is not utilised within broader writings within the thesis, but rather, girl or young person. The term 'child' is, arguably, misleading and is not gender-specific, also denoting the idea of a pre-pubescent person rather than an adolescent, or a person between the ages of 10/11 and 18 (Melrose, 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 2005). Specifically, girls who are high school age (age 11-18) are of interest for the purposes of this research. Initially I was unsure whether the term 'girl' encompassed the age-range that was of interest, therefore, I decided to see what language the social workers used and incorporate that into my writing and thinking. The language the social workers used when referring to this age group was generally 'young people' or 'girls'. Thus, I decided to use the terms 'girl' and 'young person' interchangeably, in order to denote their gender and age. I would suggest that 'young person' is a term more suited to adolescents. It is of note (as discussed later in the thesis) that I did not tell the social workers which age-group I was interested in, however, it became clear that they strongly associated CSE with adolescent girls.

3.1 Methodology: Qualitative

> *Methodology: a complex political process concerned with establishing the contested connections between epistemology … theory … ontology … as well as reflections on the validity, ethics and accountability of the knowledge that is produced.* (Ramazanoglu 2002, p. 154)

There are several reasons why I chose to conduct a qualitative piece of research; the main one being that I thought it would elicit the richest responses to the research questions

(Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2001). However, to achieve these rich responses, I knew that I had to design a robust methodology, particularly with regard to the design and analysis of the interviews. Another reason was that I wished to explore, in-depth, a relatively small sample of people. I was not looking for a sample that was representative of all social workers or indeed for any particular statistical significance, as interesting as that might be (see Miles and Huberman, 1994). But rather, as noted, I sought the potential 'richness' available from conducting qualitative research through, in this context, semi-structured interviews. As Hammersley (1993) says, and this I hope I have achieved, the ultimate aim of qualitative research is:

> *to produce a coherent and illuminating description of a*
> *perspective on a situation* (p. 202)

Furthermore, I wished to have the space to explore (in-depth) with the participants what their understandings were concerning CSE and sexually exploited girls. To be able to ask follow-on questions, to 'dig' a little deeper and to be able to go 'off script' if appropriate, in turn responding flexibly to the individual interviewee (see Mason, 2002). Moreover, I wanted to enable the social worker to talk about anything else that they wished to talk about. As Skinner et al. (2005) note, there are very specific benefits in conducting qualitative research:

> *The instant ability to redefine questions or follow up muddled*
> *or complex answers; the 'subject' being able to ask the*
> *researcher questions, and find out more about why the*
> *interviewer is interested in them; the researcher's ability*
> *within the interview to accommodate hitherto*
> *unacknowledged themes; and the ability within the interview*
> *to establish the reasons behind, or existence of, a*
> *phenomenon.* (p. 49)

Initially, I considered conducting questionnaires, possibly alongside or as well as the interviews in order to access more social workers (possibly on-line). However, I did not feel that this would be satisfactory in terms of gaining the richness of data that an interview could potentially provide. As Mason (2002) says:

> *Through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of*
> *dimensions of the social world including the texture and*
> *weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and*
> *imaginings of our research participants.* (p. 1)

Of course, as Hammersley (1993) observes, qualitative research can be fraught with difficulties around interpretation, generalisability, reliability and analysis and I will look further at these towards the end of this chapter. However, as I go on to demonstrate, preparation and planning and the use of a robust analytical process have gone a long way to counteract any predicted or actual difficulties, resulting in findings that I believe are both reliable and valid (Silverman, 2013: Bryman, 2008). As Mason (2002) notes, fundamentally, both quantitative and qualitative research have their shortcomings but the *"extraordinary set of strengths"* qualitative research has should never be lost or underestimated, as with its potential to contribute to a developing understanding of the world (p. 1).

3.1.1 Social constructionism

Sociologically and psychologically, there are many ways in which human behaviour is studied; over recent decades, a number of alternative approaches have emerged all of which may be referred to as social constructionism (see Gergen, 1999; Burman, 1999). Social constructionism was born, at least in part by, and through its criticism of positivist/ empiricist science and was a profound (and on-going) challenge to realist thinking (Gergen, 2001, p. 8).

> *Constructionist critiques was enormously appealing to many groups whose voices had been marginalized by science, and to all those whose pursuits of social equality and justice were otherwise thwarted by existing authorities of truth* (Gergen, 2001, p. 8)

Debates between realists and constructionists persist but, fundamentally, constructionism has enabled new voices (often feminist voices) to be heard, giving new ways of understanding issues which, for a long time had either been ignored, marginalised or understood narrowly. For example, social issues such as sexual abuse and violence against women (Clarke and Cochrane, 1998).

However, Hearn (2014) contends, that the terms 'social construction' and 'social constructionism' have become 'loose' in their meaning, or in the way, people understand them. He questions whether the term has simply become tautological (p. 1). Furthermore, Burr (2003) suggests it is important to recognise that social constructionism is not just 'one thing', but rather in adopting a social constructionist position one needs to recognise that there are a 'loose group' of approaches all bearing a 'family resemblance' (p. 2). Centrally, Burr (2003) identifies that a social constructionist approach needs to include all the following central assumptions or 'family resemblances', and I have sought to follow this

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'guide' within my research:

"A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge" (Burr, 2003 pp. 2-3): as a researcher I need to be questioning my own assumptions and knowledge and those of my participants; looking for, and critiquing what stories or narratives are being constructed and why. "Historical and cultural specificity" (pp. 3-4): where we live (d) and when we live (d) greatly informs and influences our knowledge. Throughout history, social behaviour has been, and will again be (re) constructed differently. How my participants and I as a researcher understand phenomena, such as CSE, is dependent on shifting social, cultural and economic factors at any given time. Knowledge is not static and its vicissitudes must be recognized. This has been particularly relevant when exploring CSE (see chapters one and two). "Knowledge is sustained by social processes" (pp. 4-5): one of the reasons our knowledge shifts and changes is because of the people around us. As Burr says, 'truth' or 'accepted ways of understanding the world' are created, maintained and changed by social processes of which people are constantly involved. Finally, Burr notes: "Knowledge and social action go together": different social constructions bring different social actions, *"Descriptions or constructions of the world therefore, sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others"* (p. 5). For example, it is only in recent years that girls have stopped (generally) being referred to as 'child prostitutes' (Department of Health, 2000), now the common language is 'sexually exploited girls' (DCSF, 2009) recognising that the latter term denotes the girl as 'selling herself' rather than being exploited. This change in language reflects the evolving thinking that such girls are victims of a crime rather than girls involved in prostitution and thus require a safeguarding response.

Language, and our use of it transforms as knowledge and social attitudes and understandings shift and evolve. In relation to this, Burr (2003) also refers too micro and macro social constructionism, and I draw on this distinction within my research. The former being social construction that *"takes place within everyday discourse between people in interaction,"* and the latter relating to *"material or social structures, social relations and institutionalised practices"* (pp. 21-22). How social workers construct CSE, and sexually exploited girls particularly in relation to 'structure' is especially pertinent when exploring their understandings of the agency and choice-making of girls, as is further explored in subsequent chapters.

As a researcher adopting a social constructionist position it is helpful to articulate where I 'stand' on the 'spectrum' of social constructionism. I do not think that everything in life is socially constructed for example, the sexual abuse and exploitation of children happens, it is

not constructed however, I do think that knowledge around the subject of CSE and CSA is constructed, and more so, is evolving and complex and therefore in need of ongoing critique (Dodsworth, 2015). Likewise, social workers are influenced and informed by many variables, their own experiences, their training, public discourses and so on. How their knowledge is constructed and which discourses social workers are drawing on is explored shortly.

3.1.2 Feminist methodology

> *Quantitative research often ignores the voice of women, turns them into objects, and they are often studied in a value-neutral way rather than researched specifically as women. Qualitative research allows women's voices to be heard* (Flick, 2009, p. 67)

As a feminist, and as a PhD candidate it is my wish to inform and improve services for sexually exploited girls. Thus, I have chosen a feminist methodology because, as Kelly (1988) suggests, feminist research demands a theoretical feminist premise and should result in practical commitment and action (p. 4). To that end, it is vital that my research recognises and critiques the gendered nature of CSE and the misogynistic, patriarchal, unequal societal context within which girls (and boys) are exploited. All of which are, to some degree allowed to persist because of attitudes and practices within the structures and systems operating within the UK and indeed globally that tolerate such behaviour (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Maddison, 1999). For example, within our justice system which has such a poor conviction rate of those who sexually offend against children and young people and indeed women generally. Moreover, also the current government which is cutting funding exponentially to women and children especially in the area of domestic violence and sexual violence (*The Telegraph* Newspaper, 2015; Stern, 2010; Kelly, 2005).

As outlined in chapter one, I draw on the work of a number of feminists, notably those from within post-strusturalism, to inform my writing and thinking. I embrace and endorse the feminist 'label' and, as is common with post-structuralist feminist thinking, I also reject the essentialism associated with womanhood, and indeed with both genders; rather, I understand gender to be constructed and recognise that there is a plurality of truths in relation to how people understand their own, and others gender.

Discussions about what constitutes a feminist methodology have been ongoing for decades (Mason, 2003; 2002; Maynard, 1994; Harding, 1987). One of the main (agreed upon)

constitutes of a feminist methodology, involves recognising one's own position in relation to one's personal history, race, sexuality, class and age (Cavanagh and Cree, 1996). How my positioning affects and underpins my work, as evidenced later in the reflexivity section of this chapter, is a central reason why I embrace a feminist methodology (Kelly, 1988; Roberts, 1981). Reflexivity is cited by feminist academics as a central and integral feature of conducting a feminist methodology and this has been a significant and essential part of my PhD 'journey' (Skinner et al., 2005; Stanko, 1997). However, Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994) also caution, that just being a woman does not make you a feminist- at the core of all research must be a critical analysis of theory and on-going reflection; this must be a central part of any feminist methodology (p. 127). I do not view using a feminist methodology as just another approach that is open to me but rather, I use it because being a feminist is an inherent part of my ontology and feminist theory provides me with answers as to why gender inequalities persist. How these inequalities can be challenged and hopefully ended is ultimately, as a feminist researcher my main motivation in conducting this research (Kelly et al, 1994). As Stanley and Wise (1993) comment:

> *Feminism appeals because it means something-it touches*
> *deeply felt needs, feelings and emotions. It makes a direct,*
> *emotional and personal appeal, or it means very little except*
> *as an intellectual exercise* (p. 68)

That is not to say that sexual violence cannot be analysed from other non-feminist perspectives however, it seems to me that analysing this unquestionably gendered issue, from a feminist perspective and drawing on feminist theory is the most effective way to analyse and understand the data. Furthermore, recognising that male sexual violence is a result of, and embedded in, long-held social, economic, cultural and religious ideologies of male sexual entitlement upheld by laws that have been made by men, for men is central to understanding why such violence persists (See Hearn, 1989; 1988; 1987 for more on this). Thus, rigorous feminist analysis and the challenging of patriarchal structures and systems is needed when considering the prevalence of male, sexual violence against females globally and nationally and within the context of CSE.

Throughout the duration of this PhD I have found that feminist literature and theory on sexual exploitation resonates with my practical experiences of working with abused and exploited women/girls and has grounded and illuminated my developing theoretical and academic understanding of CSE. Feminist academics (see chapter two on this) and others (Giddens, 1993; Hearn, 1987) who analyse and theorise about gender inequalities and, in particular the highly 'problematic' area of female adolescent sexuality have greatly informed

and broadened my thinking (for example, Woodiwiss, 2014; Egan and Hawkes, 2012; Jackson and Scott, 2010; Atwood, 2007). Thus, I contend that the most effective way to explore the sexual exploitation of girls or indeed any sexual violence against girls and women is through a feminist 'lens'.

3.2 Ethical considerations

The research was granted ethical approval from the University of Huddersfield's social research ethics panel (SREP) in 2013 (see appendix 13). Furthermore, it complies with ESRC (2015) ethical standards (the funders of my PhD) and those of the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2015). As I was approaching more than two local authorities, I also had to seek approval for the research from the Association of the Directors of Children's Services (ADCS, 2015) research group; this was also in 2013. I received approval and this is posted on their website (http://adcs.org.uk/general/research)-accessed 19/7/16.

There were several ethical considerations when planning this research. Of primary concern was how best to protect the social workers from any emotional stress the interview might cause. Thus, they were all offered access to counselling services at the University should they require it. The second issue was confidentiality. Punch (1994) suggests that participants in qualitative studies are especially vulnerable to having their privacy, confidentiality and trust misused. The time the social workers would be giving and the knowledge they would provide was of great value in research terms, as well as potentially being sensitive regarding safeguarding issues. Therefore, their interviews had to be treated with the utmost respect and highest ethical standards at all times. Indeed, Peled and Leichtentritt (2002) go so far as to say:

> *Researchers' commitment to ensuring the well-being of*
> *participants overrides considerations regarding the quality of*
> *the data produced.* (p. 150)

The social workers were assured that their individual identities and that of their employing organisation would be anonymised and treated confidentially within all my data collecting and subsequent writing/presenting. The social workers were given pseudonyms in all writing up and in conference papers. Also, the region and local authority in which they worked is not identified. All recorded and written data was stored on a password protected computer in a locked office. Prior to the interviews, the social workers, alongside a letter of introduction (appendix 1), were also given information sheets (appendix 2) which fully explained the ethical considerations and purpose of the research. They (and me) also had to sign a consent form (see appendix 3, for a copy of that form). The information sheets stated that if any safeguarding issues arose as a result of the interviews, for example, if it was

clear there had been illegal practices or a child was at risk, then I would report this to the appropriate authorities.

3.3 Designing the interviews

The process of designing the interviews enabled me to clarify further exactly what it was I wanted to find out from the social workers. My interest around the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited and sexually abused girl's choice-making was central and therefore, I had to think through how to ask questions in a way that would best elicit the interviewees' understandings. Conducting pilot interviews with two social workers was very useful and helped me considerably in designing and refining the final interview template (Kvale and Brinkman, 2008). I felt slightly dissatisfied with the pilot interviews and I had to think through why that was and what changes I could make. Receiving the (pilot) social workers' feedback about what they thought of the interview was helpful in this respect, for example, one of the participants said he did not understand what it was I was trying to find out. I realised that I needed to ask specific questions and not prevaricate in any way. I also recognised that interviewees (and me) get tired, and an hour or thereabouts, I felt, was long enough for the interview. Moreover, the social workers were all likely to be on tight schedules and I was aware of how valuable, and limited their time was. I also realised that although the interviews may all be slightly different and for example, interviewees may want to talk about different aspects of CSE and sexually exploited girls, it was important that I always stick to the interview questions (even if we went 'off track' for a time) for the consistency and reliability of my analysis. Eventually I narrowed down my final questions to seven main areas:

-the social worker's professional biography and motivation behind them becoming/remaining a social worker

-training they had received around CSE (at university and currently) and what, if any experience of CSE cases they had

-defining CSE and CSA, I asked them how they would describe CSE and CSA

-what were their understandings of, and what (did they understand) motivated the perpetrators

-what did they understand about sexually exploited girls for example, were certain girls more likely to be exploited than others, do they think that perpetrators see something in certain girls

-the three vignettes concerned a 14-year-old who was being sexually abused by her step father and two girls, one aged 13 years old (who had been exploited by a group of men for six months) and another girl who was 15 nearly 16 years old and had been exploited for three years.

-the vignettes were followed up with questions particularly focusing on the fact that all three girls were asserting that they were 'fine' and choosing to be in the 'relationships' they were in. To conclude, I asked what, if anything would assist the social worker in their work with sexually exploited girls and if they had anything else to add (see appendix 4, p. 233 for the full interview template). The chapter now moves on to explain why I used vignettes and more details about the interview process itself.

3.3.1 The Vignettes

The advantage of the vignette … is that it anchors the choice in a situation and as such reduces the possibility of an unreflective reply (Bryman, 2008, p. 247)

Originally, I planned to ask the interviewees to tell me about a case(s) that they had experience of and explain how they had responded, but this was problematic on a number of levels. Mainly, I was worried that it might make them feel judged, or be too personal especially if the case had not turned out well (Finch, 1987). Most importantly though I was interested in finding out their responses to specific types of CSE and CSA, i.e. group CSE, and girls who are sexually abused in the home. Thus, as mentioned previously I designed and presented the social workers with three fictional vignettes and ask them some questions. I presented the vignettes in the same order each time and on reflection I realise that I did this in order of how increasingly difficult I thought the participants might find them. However, none of the social workers reflected on the order, or said it affected their understandings.

The CSE cases were loosely based on my own experiences of working in the field of CSE. The CSA case was designed with the purpose of presenting the social workers with an 'agentic girl' who, like the sexually exploited girls was saying she was 'okay' with the situation she is in. Providing all the social workers with the same cases, rather than discussing individual ones, was also important in relation to issues of reliability and consistency especially in terms of my subsequent thematic analysis (see Mason, 2002; Barter and Reynold, 1999).

As chapter one notes, I did not give any additional information about the girls' ethnicity, religion, any disabilities or sexuality and this was deliberate. I did not want the social workers to be distracted from the main purpose of the vignettes, which was to elicit how they understand the agency and choice-making of the girls. This was my primary area of

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focus, I felt that adding any more information may have diverted the social worker's attention and this I did not wish to do.

3.3.2 Recruitment of participants

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest qualitative samples are usually 'purposive rather than random' (p. 27). My 'purpose' was to interview social workers who had, or were likely to be referred a CSE case and had been a qualified social worker for two years or more. I did make one exception in the case of a new qualified social worker. I felt I could do this because she had been working within social care for over six months, she had a CSE case and in many respects the requirement that social workers be qualified for two year or more was fairly arbitrary, it was their understanding of sexually exploited girls I was interested in more than their length of time in post. I chose two years as I thought if they had been working for that amount of time they were likely to have had some, if only minimal experience of working around CSE and sexually exploited girls. This particular social worker had a considerable number of child protection cases in her first six months and I think her experiences as a newly qualified social worker were very interesting and added to the findings. All the social workers, except the CSE social workers (who generally only had CSE cases) had experience of just one or two cases of CSE, as they identified it (in the main they identified CSE as being that of extra-familial group exploitation. Berelowitz et al., 2013 and see chapter four). It is important to note, that I did not tell any of the interviewees at any stage of the recruitment process or at the interviews what type of CSE I was particularly focusing on and, interestingly, none of the social workers asked me, which I think-in the light of my findings-is quite pertinent.

I was apprehensive about recruiting, I realised how busy social workers are and I was uncertain about whether or not they might have any time in which to be interviewed. Moreover, at the time of interviewing (January 2014) CSE was receiving a lot of attention in the media, much of which was directed negatively towards social care. The region I planned to draw my sample from was in England and had fifteen local authorities (LA). I initially approached four adjacent LAs. If all or some of the initial four local authorities did not want to participate then I planned to approach four other local authorities in the same region and then four more, and so on. If this proved unfruitful, I was going to approach another (adjacent) region in England. Following letter writing, e-mailing and persistent telephone calling, two local authorities declined, saying they were too busy, one local authority never responded to me and the fourth one was keen to participate. Interestingly, I had already recruited two social workers from the latter local authority through networking at a conference. It became clear to me, after a few months, that trying to recruit directly through local authorities was going to be extremely labour extensive and was not proving
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very productive. It was at this point that a colleague suggested I approach social workers studying for postgraduate qualifications at a local University, all of whom were practicing in the relevant adjacent LAs. I did two presentations to approximately forty social workers and I encouraged them to ask their colleagues if they would like to participate. This process resulted in nine interviews, five from one local authority and four from another.

The assistant director of the local authority area that had already agreed to participate invited me to present my research at a managers' meeting, I did this and asked for participants. This resulted in seven interviews and the two mentioned earlier that I had recruited at a conference resulting in nine recruits from this one area. Therefore, my final sample consisted of eighteen social workers, nine social workers from the local authority who had originally agreed to participate and nine through my presentations at the University (four of whom were not actually at university, but given the details by colleagues who were). Thus, the final sample of social workers were divided up between three local authorities in one region in England, and as it turned out all based geographically adjacent to one another.

3.3.3 Limitations, diversity, spread

The sample does have its limitations. The final sample was relatively small and in terms of the 'types' of social work it was diverse. With regard to 'spread', the social workers were all geographically based near one another. The sample cannot be taken as representative of, or generalisable to, all social workers; it does not meet the 'requirements' but this was expected when conducting qualitative research of this size (Bryman, 2008, p. 168). Furthermore, at the time the region from which my sample comes has a particularly high concentration of CSE provision when compared to the rest of England so, for example, if I was to interview in another part of England where there is less intensive provision it is possible the findings might have been different (National Working Group on CSE, 2010). Also, because of the diversity of the sample in terms of the 'types' of social worker interviewed it is again not possible to say for example, that the two youth offending social workers are representative of all youth offending social workers. However, it is of note that there was a great deal of consistency in the social workers' understandings on certain topics and this is discussed more in chapter eight. The fact that such conclusive and common themes were elicited suggests that even though it was a diverse group, their understandings of certain issues around CSE were very similar and I would suggest this adds to the research's validity.

There are many professionals both from the statutory and voluntary sector who I could have interviewed regarding their understandings of child sexual exploitation and sexually
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exploited girls. However, social workers are, in my experience, so often the gatekeepers and co-ordinators of the type and level of support and response that the sexually exploited girl and her family receives. The social workers carry out the primary assessment on the girl that leads to a strategy meeting, the purpose of which is to decide a course of action for the girl. Thus, the social worker's role is central, and their understanding of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children was, in my experience, pivotal to the support the girl and her family did, or did not receive.

3.3.4 My Sample: The social workers

My final sample is listed below, for more details on the participants please see appendix 5. The participants all described their gender, ethnicity and so on themselves.

Table of participants:

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Role	Length of Interview
Mandy	F	White/British	CSE Social Worker	80mins
Azim	M	Pakistani/British	Duty & Assessment	54mins
Kate	F	White/British	CSE SW	89mins
Cath	F	Black/British	Domestic violence	65mins
Josie	F	White/British	Prevent reception into care	62mins
Tina	F	White/British	Prevent reception into care	75mins
Tom	M	White/British	Service manager	61mins
Peter	M	White/British	Youth offending team	64mins
Sadeem	M	Pakistani/British	Youth offending team	60mins
Adowa	F	African	Children & Family	60mins
Kelly	F	White/British	Child protection in CSE team	58mins
Gill	F	White/British	Disabilities services	62mins
Nell	F	White/British	Domestic violence (yp)	74mins
Mary	F	White/British	Targeted youth support	78mins
Barbara	F	Black African	Child protection	61mins
Sue	F	White/British	MASH manager	63mins
Beth	F	White/British	NQ child protection	70mins
Nigel	M	White/British	Service manager	75mins

The final sample consists of thirteen women and five men and most had qualified in the 2000s. Interestingly, the gender mix and the age of the social workers is representative of the broader 'make-up' of social workers in England (for more on this see the Centre for Workforce Intelligence, 2012). I interviewed three social workers who just worked in CSE, one from each of the three local authorities. There were three managers in the sample and

two youth offending social workers. Two social workers supported families around domestic violence, two worked with young people who were identified at risk of going into 'care' and one interviewee worked within targeted youth support. Another social worker supported families where a child had a disability and the other four worked in duty and assessment and generic child protection. One of these social workers was newly qualified. She did not meet the requirement of being qualified for two years but, as discussed, I felt that her contribution would be of interest and included her in the sample.

4.0 The interviews

The interviews took place between January and March 2014. A number of them were conducted at the University, others at the social worker's office. If I had met or spoken with the interviewee prior to their interview I wrote down (the day before the interview) my thoughts and preconceptions about the interview. Before the interview started, I always checked that the interviewee understood what the research was about and advised them that if they had any questions or concerns after the interview they could contact me, or my supervisor. The interviews lasted between 54-89 minutes and were recorded. I decided I required more biographical information about each participant so I formulated a brief questionnaire and gave it to all interviewees. The questions enquired about age, ethnicity, gender, religion, class, sexuality, qualifications post 16 and the year they qualified as a social worker. The interviews all went smoothly and a number of the social workers commented that it had made them 'think', especially about how they understood the terms CSE and CSA.

As time progressed, I became aware, particularly during the third interview, that, subconsciously I was looking for what I perceived as 'right' answers to questions, and when I did not get what I thought was a 'right' answer I kept on asking the question differently; this was a significant point of learning for me. I realised the interviewees were just telling me what they thought, it wasn't my role to decide whether they were right or wrong in their opinions but rather to interpret their answers and analyse how, and why their understandings are constructed as they are. Indeed, sometimes they simply did not have an answer and that was okay to, and of interest. I was very aware of my own knowledge of CSE and experience as a practitioner; conscious that my 'location' in the interview was unique. Adopting a feminist methodology means that rather than deny or ignore my location in the research (Mason, 2002) I should acknowledge it and analyse it by being reflexive; constantly thinking about how to represent the data and about the understandings of both myself and the interviewees (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 109).

Immediately after the interview, I emailed the participant to thank them for their time and

asked them if they would like a summary of my research findings when completed. Twelve months later, I emailed all the participants and gave them the details of a webinar I had conducted (which they could access on-line) in which I presented my research findings.

5.0 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a common approach in data analysis, often incorporated within other strategies such as grounded theory and critical discourse analysis; however, it does not have an identifiable origin or clear cluster of techniques (Bryman, 2008 p. 554; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Opler, 1945). Thus, using thematic analysis can be problematic and has the potential to be methodologically unclear or ad hoc in nature (Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The lack of clear methodological procedures (ibid.) places the burden firmly on me to demonstrate that my findings are valid and my interpretation authentic and reliable (Hammersley, 1993). As will be demonstrated shortly, my analysis has sought to overcome these potential 'traps', at least in part, by meticulously recording the process of my thematic analysis.

Bryman (2008) contends that defining what constitutes a theme can be difficult and a thematic analysis approach has few principles upon which there is general agreement (p. 700). However, Ryan and Bernard (2003) identify a number of indicators to look for when aiming to establish whether a topic is thematic or not:

-repetition

-indigenous typologies or categories

-metaphors and analogies

-transitions

-similarities and differences

-linguistic connectors

-missing data

-theory related material (pp. 89-93)

I have used this as a guide when conducting the data analysis and found three areas in particular that have helped me the most in establishing whether a topic is thematic or not. Firstly, a topic's recurrence within the data, for example, how much something is talked about; secondly, the social workers generally saying the same things about certain topics and thirdly, topics that have similar areas of uncertainty and ambiguity within the social workers' understandings.

The main reason I conducted a thematic analysis was that there were certain areas of

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particular interest that I wished to explore and see what (if anything) the social workers' answers had in common. For example, did they all have a common understanding of the term CSE? Did they have a common understanding of sexually exploited girls' ability to be agentic? Ryan and Bernard (2003) describe themes as both coming from the data and from the researcher's a priori knowledge and understanding of the area of research they are investigating (p. 88), describing the thematic analysis approach thus:

> *Analysing text involves several tasks: (1) discovering themes and sub themes, (2) winnowing themes to a manageable few [i.e., deciding which themes are important in any project], (3) building hierarchies of themes or code books, and (4) linking themes into theoretical models.* (p. 85)

However, Charmaz (1990) cautions the researcher when using this approach to be wary of a priori theorising because it risks the possibility of missing new ideas and linkages and I remained cognisant of this throughout the analysis.

I was further drawn to thematic analysis because of its flexibility, the freedom one has to simply use pen and paper (as I did) and pour over the data repeatedly, immersing oneself in the words and establishing what the themes are through an iterative process of reading, re-reading, recording and checking the validity of one's findings (Kvale, 1996). However, consequently a significant responsibility lies with the researcher when conducting a thematic analysis, as Kvale and Brinkman (2008) note:

> *the theoretical interpretation of the interview texts are not validated by any adherence to a specific methical procedure; the burden of proof remains with the researcher, on his or her ability to present the premises for, and to rigorously check the interpretations put forth, and ability to argue convincingly for the credibility of the interpretations made.* (p. 239)

5.1.1 The process of analysis

The process of analysing the data took approximately nine months. All the interviews were recorded and I did not take notes during the interview, I wanted to concentrate completely on the questions I was asking and any 'follow-up' questions. However, when the interview was over I immediately wrote down my initial thoughts and feelings and any particular points of interest. Within twenty-four hours of the interview, I listened to the recording and wrote down detailed notes. Each social worker was given a pseudonym reflecting their

gender and ethnicity and I compiled individual folders for each interviewee. In these, I stored all the notes I had taken, the transcript of the interview, the consent forms, and their biographical details.

After I had conducted the tenth, and later on the fourteenth interview, I felt the need to write about some of the themes that I thought might be significant. I wrote down a 'loose' list of preliminary themes that seemed potentially important, for example, girls are exploited because of who they are rather than they are being exploited because someone is exploiting them. I also realised that certain things were being repeated so often that I had stopped noticing them or how potentially significant they might be. For example, the social workers saying that sexually exploited girls would generally remain in the sexually exploitative situation (while being worked with), whereas girls sexually abused in the home would be immediately removed. I wrote extensive notes on this at the time because I was so struck with the fact that I could become so used to hearing certain (repeated) themes that I stopped noticing them or recognising their significance.

I waited until I had finished all the interviews before I started transcribing them. I cannot touch type and therefore it took me from the beginning of April to the end of June (2014) to complete all eighteen transcriptions. Although this felt like a laborious process, it was invaluable in terms of getting to know, and begin to interpret the data (Flick, 2009; Kvale, 2007). As I listened and re-listened, I began to notice and record initial (potential) themes and points of interest. Once the transcribing was complete, I decided to place the social workers' interviews into folders according to their local authority area. Thus, I had local authority 1 (LA 1-5 interviewees), local authority 2 (LA 2- four interviewees) and local authority 3 (LA 3-9 interviewees). The purpose of this was simply to create some order to the process of further analysis. I was not looking for, and did not find themes that specifically related to each local authority area. I was always looking for themes for the eighteen social workers as a cohort.

I read each of the eighteen interviews through (again) highlighting, underlining and circling words or phrases, or anything that I thought was significant in a separate notebook. I also took notes, writing on both the transcripts and recording thoughts that I had. I was already getting a relatively clear idea of what was being talked about recurrently, what subjects the social workers were talking about the most and, moreover what was emerging as commonly ambiguous. After re-reading all the interviews, I decided to re-read the interviews from each LA. Firstly, I went back to the five interviews from LA-1. I went through each interview and wrote out a huge list of everything I thought might be a theme from within all five

interviews; I had a very big and unwieldy list of about forty-five topics. Within this process, I realised that just because a topic appeared significant or interesting this did not make it a theme. Furthermore, just because it was significant or interesting in one or two of the interviews, did not make it thematic for all the interviews. It had to be present in all or most of the interviews to be considered thematic. I then took my list (of forty-five topics), placed it alongside the LA-1 interviews, and read them again. This time I reversed the process and marked on the transcripts (in pink), from the list, what was in all/most of the interviews (not just one or two) from my list. As I continued and put a line through things on the list that were obviously not thematic, for all five interviews, the list got smaller; or rather it became clear that subjects I had thought were thematic were not, at least within those five interviews, for example, the role of the media in informing the social workers' understandings. This was significant for some social workers, but only a few. I had to constantly check my own assumptions and location in the research, as I found at times I was looking for what I thought would be (should be) thematic, such as the influence of the media on social workers' understandings. Being aware of this made me even more rigorous in my analysis and determined to elicit the social workers' understandings, and keep mine out of the equation.

Then, I wrote down on a fresh piece of paper the remainder of my original list (elicited from the forty-five) and I counted how many times those topics had come up within the LA-1 interviews. Some of the themes hardly had any marks some had lots. When I had finished this process with LA-1, I started on LA-2 (four interviews). I took the now slightly shorter list of themes and put the list alongside LA-2 interviews and repeated the same process I had carried out on LA-1, seeing what themes drawn from LA-1 were in LA-2. I was always mindful of topics I had discarded and kept an eye out in case they were re-emerging as potentially thematic, I was also constantly looking for anything thematic that I had not noticed previously. When I had completed this process, as with LA-1, I literally counted how many times in the data certain themes (that had been identified) came up, to reassure myself that they were as thematic and as 'talked about' as much as I thought they were. However, the same themes kept emmerging, and I started to have the confidence to delete themes that were not there. For example, government cuts and 'pivotal stories' (see appendix 7 for notes on this process).

I recorded every step of the process in my journals, noting down how I was gleaning and focusing and how I was saturating the data for themes. By the time I had finished with LA-2 and was about to start on LA-3 (nine interviews), I had fifteen potential themes. I used the same process as before, I had my list of themes on one piece of paper and I noted in pink

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on the transcripts where that theme came up, always alert to what was in the data that I might not have noticed or might be thematic after all. However, by the end of LA-3, it was clear that the same themes were again present within these nine interviews. As before, I added up how many times certain themes appeared in the data and by the end of this process, I had narrowed the themes down to nine. These nine were the most salient across all the eighteen interviews (see appendix 7). For each of the nine themes a computerised file was created, any data from each of the interviews that related to any of the nine themes went into the relevant file. This too was a time consuming process, but very helpful. For example, I had files entitled 'type of girl'; 'parents' and 'girls as victims'; every bit of data from all the interviews that was relevant went into the appropriate file. Some of these files would merge later on, as I clustered themes together but the process proved very useful in terms of managing the data and also, later on, being able to easily access the relevant quotes when writing up my findings. After a long process of analysis, I felt confident that these nine themes were the most significant out of all the eighteen interviews and, crucially, I felt that they answered my research questions (Bryman, 2008; Gibbs, 2007).

5.1.2 The Themes

This section discusses the themes elicited from the data and demonstrates in more detail how I narrowed down to the final nine themes, which are:

1. Social workers' understandings of CSE
2. Social workers' understandings of CSA
3. Type of girl from…
4. A type of family (parents)
5. Girls as victims and future victims
6. Onus on the girl
7. Perpetrators (Social workers' understandings of)
8. Agency of girls
9. Consent

I had to decide what I was going to focus on and how I was going to write up my findings the primary aim being, to answer the research questions. Following further reading of the data and my 'theme files', it became clear that certain themes naturally went together. However, to establish this further I drew diagrams and mind-maps in an attempt to try to identify how the themes might cluster together and this resulted in four chapters incorporating all nine themes. I decided to write about the social workers' understandings of CSE and CSA followed by a chapter looking at how the social workers understand sexually

exploited girls as a type of girl from a type of family; within this, I also included the theme of sexually exploited girls as victims. I combined the 'onus on the girl' and understandings about the perpetrators- this was to illustrate how, because so much onus is placed on the girls, there is an absence of blame placed on the perpetrators. The final empirical chapter looks at the 'red thread' salient throughout the data, the topic of girls' agency and choice-making. The issue of consent was complicated and although this is discussed briefly in the thesis, especially in the conclusion, I hope to pursue this more specifically in future research.

Following the identification of these themes, I decided to explore each one in more depth and look in greater detail at what the social workers were actually saying on each subject, for example, what were the themes within the theme (if any). I named this stage of the analysis a micro-thematic analysis. For example, chapter four: social workers' understandings of CSE and CSA- this seemed like a daunting subject with a huge amount of data to analyse. Therefore, I went over all the social workers answers to the question, 'describe CSE and then CSA' and looked for the themes within their answers. All the interviewees said, for example, that girls sexually abused in the home would be immediately removed. I then went over all their answers to the vignettes plus more general findings within the data about their understanding of CSE and CSA. This was a time-consuming process but it helped me see the themes in their understandings regarding for example, the inter-relationship between their understandings (and response) to girls sexually abused in the home and outside of it. I conducted this micro-analysis on each of the other themes as well. This exercise proved invaluable. I was able to go even deeper into the data, a process that really enabled me to make sure nothing was missed and that I had explored each theme (again) as deeply as possible.

6.0 Ecological Validity and Reliability

This research, as noted earlier, cannot be deemed representative of all social workers in England or indeed representative of all social workers from the region within which I interviewed. Furthermore, the research cannot be viewed as generalisable primarily due to my sample size, but that was not ever my intent. As Mason (2002) notes:

> *The key issue for qualitative sampling is therefore how to focus, strategically and meaningfully, rather than how to represent.* (p. 136)

However, it is interesting to note that when I have presented my findings to other social workers (in a teaching environment) and asked them to respond to the same vignettes, I

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have received very similar responses to those I elicited in the interviews. This goes some way, in proving the ecological validity of the research. Concerning whether or not the social workers would respond differently to real cases (compared to the vignettes) is difficult to tell. However, I feel that I have correlated and validated many of my findings by asking other questions, the answers to which correspond with responses to the vignettes. This is evidenced fully in chapter four.

I am aware that the research is heteronormative in its approach, by this I recognise that I do not overtly explore with the social workers anything other than heterosexual (sexual) exploitation i.e. men exploiting girls. I do not, for example, explore with the social workers or discuss in the literature review, women exploiting girls/boys or men exploiting boys, and this could be deemed problematic, or a gap in the research. I also do not address the topic of the perpetrators' or, as noted previously, the girls' ethnicity, sexuality, disability or religion or further issues around intersectionality. Although notably a number of the interviewees brought up the issue of Asian men exploiting white girls. There is also the space for a more rigorous discussion on 'class' especially in relation to the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls. I am aware that there is room for developing and expanding on such areas of enquiry however, within the confines of this thesis I think, as discussed earlier, I have concentrated on the areas I deemed most relevant and significant in order to answer the research questions.

7.0 Reflexivity

Reflexivity entails a sensitivity to the researcher's cultural, political and social context. As such, 'knowledge' from a reflexive position is always a reflection of a researcher's location in time and space. (Bryman, 2008 p. 682)

One of the key components of a feminist methodology is to recognise and acknowledge one's personal location within the research process and to do this one has to be constantly reflexive. It is an evolving process, not a static event, one that I have found to be fascinating and complex. As Bryman (ibid.) suggests, my own location as a researcher in "time and space" is pivotal and important to identify- primarily, because how my own knowledge has been, and continues to be formed concerning CSE effects both my methodology and my interpretation of the data. For example, my reasons for wishing to find out about social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls' agency (and choice-making) derives from my experiences as a practitioner. If I had never worked in the field of

CSE, I would no doubt have different questions and a very different epistemological framework regarding CSE. However, being as objective as possible as a researcher is important, but I cannot simply remove the previous knowledge I have of CSE, thus acknowledging it and recognising how it affects my research design and interpretation of data is important. But, as King (2004) advises, there is:

> *need for researchers to consciously set aside his or her*
> *presuppositions about the phenomena under investigation.*

<div align="right">(p. 13)</div>

Thus, I have had to be wary of my experiences and 'knowledge'. Throughout my practice supporting parents whose children were being sexually exploited, it seemed to me that many of the social workers I had contact with viewed sexually exploited children as complicit in their own abuse; young people who were deemed to be making a 'choice'. I worked with a significant number of social workers (and others) who demonstrated, by their words and actions that they thought little could be done to protect and support the sexually exploited young person they were assessing. As a result, in many cases little or no intervention took place by social workers despite the acknowledgement (by social workers and other agencies) that the young person was at 'significant risk of harm' (Children's Act, 1989, Section 47). The response from social workers perplexed me. I had questions about the training they received and how they personally perceived and understood sexually exploited girls. How was it that a girl could so obviously be at risk of harm, yet so often nothing was done to protect her?

In 2012, a high profile court case took place, resulting in the convictions of a number of men who had sexually exploited and trafficked girls in Rochdale. Subsequently social care in this area, and indeed nationally, were placed under great scrutiny regarding their wider practices concerning sexually exploited children (RSCB, 2013). As more information emerges about certain practices within social care regarding child sexual exploitation it has become increasingly apparent that it is not just my own anecdotal knowledge and experience that provides a valid reason for this research (see Casey, 2015; Jay, 2014; Coffey, 2014; BBC News, 2013; Berelowitz et al., 2013).

When I began this research, I was frustrated by what I had seen in practice. I had felt responsible for the sexually exploited young people and their families; the fact that they were generally, in my opinion, not being safeguarded, as they should have been troubled me. Part of my reflexive journey has involved recognising these strong and often emotive feelings, mainly of powerlessness, and reflecting on them. This I have done, and I have

found the passage of time and the theorising of my experiences profoundly helpful and illuminating. My response has moved from the visceral to a more reflective and considered approach, an understanding that I hope is evidenced in this thesis. It is important to acknowledge that I did not view this research as simply an abstract academic exercise but rather, I care deeply about CSE as an issue and I want to be part of improving and changing systems that I believed were failing sexually exploited young people.

Throughout the interviewing process, I was aware that the subject positions of the interviewees, for example, their gender and/or religion may be affecting and informing their understandings and responses. This first struck me when I conducted one of the pilot interviews. I met the social worker at her church on a Sunday morning and prior to the interview, I sat through a church service that she had invited me to. The service had sexist and homophobic undertones and I recognised that social workers maybe navigating competing discourses. Indeed, different subject positions may inform how the social workers understand issues and people for example, sexually exploited girls. As professionals, social workers should rise above this however, research- including this thesis- evidences that this is not always the case. This is illustrated by three of the male social workers that I interviewed who had, what I perceived to be, a judgemental, patronising manner towards girls. Of note, are two of those interviewees, both Pakistani-moslem men, I found their use of language and attitude towards sexually exploited girls particularly striking. At times, I was quite shocked by their responses and their overtly defeatist attitude towards girls who are sexually exploited. They discussed such girls as being 'other', generally understanding such girls to be poor, un-educated and non-aspirational. A number of the participants appeared judgemental about sexually exploited girls, but the attitude of the Pakistani-moslem men was, for me, the most concerning. If a social worker holds a subject position that incorporates traditional, or strongly religious views on the sexual behaviours of females, for example about how they should dress and act for example, around men, how might that affect their view of, and how they work with girls who may, in their opinion, subvert this perspective. This topic is beyond the remit of this thesis, but is undoubtedly an area where there is more room for research.

We now move onto part two of the thesis. Chapter four introduces the empirical findings from the data and considers how the social workers understand CSE and CSA.

Part Two

Introduction to the findings
Chapter 4: CSA and CSE-The Social Workers' Understandings

(Describing CSE) For commercial gain really for the people that are involved, umm targeting vulnerable girls, umm brainwashing them for want of a better word with gifts or emotional security as well and I think that is what this girl was after as well, she was after something emotionally that she wasn't getting at home and I think these men were offering, perhaps dressing it up as I'll be your boyfriend when actually I think they were being groomed for commercial prostitution really

(Gill)

Part two of the thesis consists of five chapters wherein the empirical findings are explored plus the final concluding chapter. Chapter four introduces the reader to broader findings from the research, in turn addressing elements of all three research questions concerning the social workers' understandings of CSE, sexually exploited girls and child sexual abuse in the home/family environment. This chapter provides an overview of many of the findings and highlights areas that are focused on more specifically within the following three chapters, which discuss chapter five- constructions of the girl and her family; chapter six- blame, and chapter seven- making choices.

Following this introduction, the interviewees' understandings of CSE and CSA are explored. The social workers were asked to describe what they understand by the terms CSE and CSA, the purpose of asking this question was two-fold. Firstly, to see how they define and understand the terms and secondly to see what themes exist within their understandings, particularly around girls' agency and choice-making. Furthermore, throughout the interviews, the social workers discuss their understandings of CSE and CSA and these broader findings are drawn on in this section. Possible confusion within the social workers' understandings about what CSE is, and is not, is also explored. The practical implications of the social workers' understandings are then considered; specifically, how their understandings of sexually abused/exploited girl's influences and affects their responses in practice. To elicit their understandings further, the interviewees were given three vignettes and asked what they thought about each situation and what actions they might take. Particular focus is given within the analysis to any differences and similarities in how the

intra-familial abuse case is understood and responded to compared to the extra-familial cases. The final section provides a brief summary of the findings and leads into the next chapter, which explores more specifically how social workers understand sexually exploited girls and their families.

4.0 Constructing Child Sexual Exploitation

How social workers define and understand the term CSE is an area of specific focus within this research. Of interest is whether understandings of the term CSE have become polarised or synonymous with a certain 'type' of sexual exploitation or, dichotomously has become a nebulous term used by social workers. When asked to describe CSE, the majority of the social workers appeared to find it difficult:

> *oh god it's really difficult to describe when you think about it, it's really hard to describe when you think because [pause] there's so many different types [pause] girls who had taken pictures of themselves, equally gang stuff [pause] the classic, kind of, pimp and older boyfriend scenario*   (Nell)

> *CSE is such a complex area and we've got professionals who struggle to get their head round it*   (Mandy)

> *you see what I, what I, not struggle with but, I think what, what maybe a lot of us [pause] kind of have problems with is the differentiation between abusive boyfriend and then CSE*
>
>   (Josie)

The social workers often commented that they did not realise how difficult they found defining CSE until asked explicitly to describe it; it was something they had apparently never had to think about before:

> *when it boils down to it [sic] the same meaning and does CSE make it less kind of umm [pause] umm, can't think straight, less important cos its labelled CSE and not sexual abuse, does those labels make a difference to people who are working or dealing with*   (Tina)

> *that's not an easy question [laughs] describe CSE, make a fortune*   (Azim)

One of the reasons the interviewees may find CSE difficult to describe is because as a concept CSE is a relatively new phenomenon (discussed in chapters one and two). It is a

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term and concept that has only become part of safeguarding vernacular recently (DCSF, 2009). Furthermore, most of the social workers note that it is only in the past few years that training has become available on CSE, although interestingly all of the interviewees said that it was not mandatory for them to attend such training. Indeed, most of the interviewees had had very limited training on CSE. Most had been to just one or two training sessions on CSE (and CSA) and often some time ago. As Sue (a MASH manager) says:

> *we have a training course on sexual abuse and it were a two-*
> *day training course and that were more like 3 years ago that,*
> *haven't had anything since*   (Sue)

This is despite the fact that all the social workers are likely to be, or have already been referred CSE (and CSA) cases. Moreover, almost all the social workers including those most recently qualified, noted that CSE is not a topic they studied as part of their social work course at university. Indeed, several of the social workers said they did not think university prepared them for responding to CSE cases. Most of the participants mentioned learning about child sexual abuse but this was usually in the context of the family. Nigel, another manager, who qualified in the early 1990s and Beth who qualified in 2013 both had observations on what their Universities offered (at two different times) regarding education on CSE. Nigel notes how CSE, as he understands it, was not talked about in the early 1990s, the focus was on different types of CSA back then, types that were topical at the time. Beth makes the point that despite the current high profile of CSE, she had very little education on the subject at University:

> *No, we talked about CSA and in those days bearing in mind*
> *that I was qualifying in the, doing my Dip SW in the early 90s,*
> *92/93 round about that time umm there was a big focus on*
> *organised sexual abuse, and typically that was really focused*
> *on, abuse within, sexual abuse within the family and sexual*
> *abuse by people outside the family in organised sexual abuse*
> *didn't really feature in, it other than the fairly stereo-typical*
> *model*   (Nigel)

> *no, ooh probably one lecture, yeh that was about it*   (Beth)

A number of the social workers comment that the reason more CSE training is on offer within social care, although they are not generally attending it, is because CSE has recently become much more topical and is on social care's 'radar'. The term CSE is understood

(rightly so) by the interviewees as a relatively new theoretical concept. Furthermore, the interviewees also understand that the sexual exploitation of children or CSE used to be identified under other names such as, 'child prostitution' or child sexual abuse. As Peter and Tom demonstrate:

> *I guess [CSA] it, it falls into the CSE thing, if there's sort of different, sexual abuse, in another, with a different tag line to it, in a way* (Peter)

> *I mean, I suppose it was a long time ago so it wasn't seen as sexual exploitation it was probably seen as sexual abuse to be honest, you know, that some of the young men were targeting young girls […] yeh, yeh, it would have been said they were grooming them towards abusing them* (Tom)

The social workers all identify different 'types' of CSE such as: 'on-line' grooming and 'one on one' sexual exploitation but CSE as a term and phenomena is primarily associated by the participants with the sexual exploitation of adolescent girls and boys by groups of extra-familial persons. The social workers describe CSE using language such as: the 'older boyfriend' model and the 'party model'; grooming; being 'passed around'; being 'transported' and gain being acquired by both parties. Further common descriptions of CSE by the interviewees include: it takes place outside the home; it is extra-familial; involves more than one perpetrator; involves more than one girl; includes giving gifts and affection to the girl; based on a power-imbalance between the perpetrator and the girl; and the girl may think that she has consented but actually, the interviewees understand that she has been manipulated or groomed. To illustrate this, Adowa (below) discusses CSE as involving grooming, being extra-familial and there being financial gain. Also Mandy, who focuses on networks and other 'models' of CSE:

> *It's a child who is under age for sex under 16 [pause] whose been groomed [pause] somebody whose you know older [pause] out of the family [pause] given money* (Adowa)

> *I would look at CSE, although not always, it's kind of within networks, friendship networks and umm perp networks [pause] I would look at more secretive patterns of behaviour outside the family home, relationships, I would look at the grooming model, the party model [pause] it's more social* (Mandy)

Networks of men (and girls) and the transporting of girls (and men) are also critical elements in the social workers' understandings:

> but with CSE its initially sort of unknown people which they get in contact with through like I've just explained networks, friends you know [pause] it has been girls [pause] becoming like recruiters [pause] it usually starts off with one person but then the pool gets bigger (Beth)

> in some ways, you know transported to hotels or umm transported in vehicles or you know buying gifts [pause] umm so for me exploitation is transporting, grooming for their own gains (Mary)

Nigel, who is a senior manager within social care, appeared to struggle when asked to describe CSE; this is notable because in contrast he had spoken confidently and knowledgably to me prior to the interview and indeed after this question, but he clearly found defining CSE particularly challenging. This highlights how, even someone in his position who has significant influence concerning training and managing of staff, found actually describing CSE difficult:

> I'd probably quote the DFe definition [pause] it's really difficult to define it actually [pause] because the definition on its own the transactional element isn't always particularly helpful [pause] there has to be the power imbalance, there has to be gain [pause] in terms of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation becoming polarised well I think they are, we offer two different training courses! (Nigel)

Dominant within the social workers' understandings is that CSE happens to a 'type' of girl from a 'type' of family, namely, a girl from a family that is socially and economically deprived, which makes her vulnerable to CSE, as described by Cath, Mary and Azim:

> I think it involves a young person that might have, sort of low self-esteem, ummm, have issues in their own life umm, generally it's been the ones that have been umm in children's homes or had problems at home with parents where you know that attention is, you know, whether it's umm you know it's attention innit (Cath)

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vulnerable backgrounds cos I think that makes em highly
vulnerable to CSE if they're coming from family where it's
strained relationships and there's emotional issues (Mary)

children from deprived backgrounds   (Azim)

Likewise, the understanding that the perpetrator fills a gap in the girl's life and replaces things emotionally and materially that are missing is common. As a result, she is more likely to be open to the perpetrators attention because of what is lacking in her life:

he [perp] could have just come in at that particular time and
she's more receptive because of what's going on at home or
what's going on in care   (Tina)

family breakdowns, you know they may have experienced
domestic violence, abuse, issues around power and control
[…] may lead them to be perhaps more vulnerable […] more
influenced, likely to engage in, in that type of behaviour so
umm   (Peter)

The social workers pathologise the sexually exploited girl. The interviewees understand sexual exploitation to be a symptom of, or an outcome of the girl herself, her lifestyle, her family background, innate characteristics she has- it is something about her that makes her exploitable. She is viewed as 'damaged', over and above (or rather than) the world around her, or more specifically, the perpetrators being damaged. In relation to this, Melrose (2013) challenges the idea of sexually exploited young people being individualised or viewed separately from the wider socio-economic and cultural processes that can oppress and confine sexually exploited young people:

the 'sexually exploited child' of the CSE discourse is
abstracted from the concrete conditions of her life and re
(presented) as the pitiful personification of a corrupted or
defiled ideal of Western childhood. (Melrose, 2013, p. 10)

Interestingly, although the social workers construct sexually exploited girls as socially and economically deprived, and understand this to be the most significant contributing factor that makes them exploitable, there is little acknowledgement of wider social structures that may further frame the girls' exploitative experience. Such as, sexism; misogyny; classism and other cultural milieus the girl is operating within (Pearce, 2009; White and Wynn, 1998).

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The social workers all describe sexually exploited girls as being vulnerable. The reason for this, according to the interviewees, is (primarily) because of her deprived family situation, which is commonly understood as economically poor and socially 'troubled', for example, because of domestic violence in the family, family breakdown and poor boundaries in place from parents. The social workers discuss her social and economic deprivation significantly more (as being the reason she is exploited) than the possibility that she may have *become* vulnerable *because* of being sexually exploited. Furthermore, the social workers understand that her status as a child contributes to her vulnerability. They draw on discourses that perpetuate the idea of childhood, as a time of 'becoming, not being', and thus the girl is not able to understand her situation fully. She is vulnerable because she is a child, her youth makes her naïve and thus, she does not appreciate her situation (for discussions on 'becoming not being' see Uprichard, 2006; Qvortrup, 2004).

However, another significant part of the social workers' understandings of CSE is that sexually exploited girls are agents within the exploitative context. They are not 'just' passive objects unlike, as will be demonstrated shortly, girls sexually abused in the home. The social workers understand sexually exploited girls as agentic; demonstrated by the interviewees' understandings that sexually exploited girls are (actively) looking for material and emotional benefit. She is understood to be 'doing this' because she is so lacking materially and emotionally in her family life but, nonetheless, she is understood to be choosing the 'gain' (materially and emotionally) that the perpetrators are offering. Thus, sexually exploited girls are understood in a multi-faceted manner; viewed not only as a victim but also as able to make choices within the sexually exploitative situation, as Peter and other interviewees note:

> *the young female [...] parental boundaries that sort of thing weren't really in place, lot of issues going on at home, you know, seek solace in other people who were given attention and affection and it's you know, gifts and, young people who are given drugs and alcohol who may not see the behaviour as exploitative* (Peter)

> *for them [the girl] the reward would be anything from shelter, kind of food, money, cigarettes* (Josie)

Similarly, the social workers understand that sexually exploited girls benefit financially and emotionally from being in sexually exploitative situations, as illustrated below:

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sexually abused by adults in exchange for favours it might be
monetary, it might be jewellery it might be anything really

(Barbara)

the perpetrator of the exploitation has gained financially and
the victim appears to have gained, or believe they have
gained financially   (Nigel)

it doesn't have to be financial, might just be receiving
attention but the benefits they get for that, you know, such as
emotional warmth   (Mandy)

The social workers utilise adjectives and more significantly verbs, when describing the sexually exploited girl; she is understood to be significantly agentic in the exploitative situation as Peter and Josie note, she is "*seeking solace*", being "*rewarded*". Her agency and ability to make choices is recognised; she is viewed not 'just' as an object.

To summarise, the social workers primarily associate the term CSE with the sexual exploitation of girls by extra-familial groups of men. The girls are constructed as a 'type' and their agency is recognised. The interviewees do recognise other 'types' of CSE and also identify how CSA and CSE can conflate or even be the same but essentially they link CSE with 'group exploitation' (ibid.) rather than any other form of CSA/CSE.

4.1 Constructions of CSA and CSE

This section looks at the participants' understandings of both CSE and CSA in order to highlight how the terms have, on the one hand become separated in their understandings but also, on the other, conflate. After being asked to describe CSE, the social workers were then asked to describe CSA. Interestingly, some of the interviewees note how being asked the question made them see how the terms over-lapped and challenged their understandings, as demonstrated below:

sexual abuse I think, it more goes on inside the home but
then, like I say, I am making links to it and sometimes it's
umm interlinked   (Mary)

to me CSA is umm and again I struggle with this [pause] it
blurs the lines between, are we talking about CSA or talking

about CSE, when I think about CSA I have to say I would, my
immediate thought [pause]within the family [pause]whereas
CSE I very much see as outside the family (Nell)

Sue also identifies the commonalities that she recognises between CSE and CSA:

I think CSE umm, I think it, I think it was more likely to
happen outside [pause] than sexual abuse, I think it more
goes on inside the home but then like I said I'm making links
to it and sometimes it its umm interlinked do you know what I
mean? [pause] but generally I think it's more outside the
home I'd say is CSE (Sue)

Nonetheless, despite recognising that their understandings of CSE and CSA conflate, the social workers still revert to binary constructions of CSA and CSE. CSA is generally understood as intra-familial and CSE as extra-familial group exploitation but these understandings are often ambiguous. They were not sure if they were 'right' in their understanding of CSE and CSA, as Gill and Mary demonstrate:

well the child is being exploited isn't she but I [pause] I think,
what, yeh umm she well she, she is being, if this is right she's
being exploited she's being abused she's a child [pause] umm
[pause] but I think that I do separate it out in [pause] to my
mind, of my mind because perhaps of the media (Gill)

for CSA it would be saying it's difficult to sort of define […] it's
sort of inflicted by parents or older peers or sort of family
members it's umm it's it's not going out to for CSE it's not
being transported to places (Mary)

A few of the interviewees comment that the training they receive (as Nigel notes in the previous section) educates them to think of CSA and CSE in certain, separate ways. The social workers are taught that CSE is extra-familial and CSA is abuse that happens in the home. CSA is understood primarily by most of the social workers, as an act committed by a family member or a person already known to the child. In direct contrast to constructions of CSE was the virtual absence of discussion about the type of child who is sexually abused in the home. Fundamentally, CSA is understood as an act of abuse being perpetrated on the child and of particular interest is the common understanding that such a child would have little or no agency, and they certainly cannot give consent in that context:

an act [pause] an explicit act [pause] taken place on a child

without their consent   (Sadeem)

I think abuse you know the young person would be saying no

                                                                                (Josie)

sexual abuse is something, younger kids, and does CSE, that

very phrase makes it less important and less risky and less

dangerous, I don't know   (Tina)

Furthermore, what might make a child vulnerable to sexual abuse in the home is rarely mentioned for example, her socio-economic environment. The social workers do not construct girls sexually abused in the home as a 'type', they focus instead on what is done to her and this is reflected further in the vignettes. This is very different to how CSE is understood wherein such vulnerabilities are understood as the primary reason why girls are exploited. The social workers have different understandings about consent, choice-making and agency depending on where the sexual abuse/exploitation takes place and who perpetrates it. This is a key finding from within the research and subsequent chapters explore this in more detail.

It is common for the interviewees when describing CSA to compare it with their understanding of CSE. They often 'see-saw' between the two concepts in order to try to explain what they mean. Josie exemplifies the differences and conflations in their understandings below. The excerpt particularly demonstrates the complicated understandings the social workers have of choice-making concerning girls sexually abused within the home and outside it:

I think it (CSE) would be umm, the kind of, forcing a child into

some kind of sexual whatever, umm, for, for a, a monetary

gain on their behalf, umm […] I think with the exploitation

there's the thing of that the, that the young person is, is kind

of I, I, I think that they feel that they've given consent to the

exploitation but obviously they have been exploited and

tricked and manipulated, where I think abuse (CSA) you know

the young person could be saying no or held down by force

and I think in the exploitation bit there, there there emotional

kind of manipulations happened umm rather than held by

force, you know what by I mean? Rather than held by force or

held down […] [describing CSA] crying throughout   (Josie)

Josie's construction of girls sexually abused in the home as "crying throughout" and "saying no" reflects the interviewees' common understanding that girls sexually abused in the home are forced into the abuse, they have no choices and are understood primarily as objects not subjects, unlike sexually exploited girls. Josie draws on child sexual abuse discourses in which children are commonly constructed as being non-agentic and passive where no choices are available to them, and where they are always and inevitably scared and upset (for examples of such discourses - O'Dell, 2003; Jackson and Scott, 1999; Corteen and Scarton, 1997). The social workers clearly understand girls sexually abused in the home as victims, whereas their understandings of sexually exploited girls are more complex. Josie understands that sexually exploited girls are "tricked and manipulated" and "feel that they have given consent. This is a common theme in the social workers' understandings. Likewise, the way in which she reconstructs 'their consent' as being invalid because she understands that they have 'given' it because of being manipulated. She constructs the manipulation as being emotional rather than physical, which she understands may cause confusion for the young person who thinks (in her opinion, wrongly) that they have consented. This is opposed to the girl sexually abused in the home who is physically and emotionally forced.

Thus, the common understanding of the social workers is that girls sexually abused in the home have no 'choice' about 'their' abuse (they are an object), they are physically forced (see appendix 8 for a diagram explaining the social workers' understanding on this). The interviewees construct girls sexually exploited outside the home as having more choice about whether or not to be in sexually exploitative situations. This suggests that the social workers understand sexual abuse through physical force voids the possibility of the girl demonstrating agency or making choices. Whereas, with sexual exploitation, the interviewees understand its psychologically manipulative nature makes it more complicated. The social workers understand that the sexually exploited girl is not (physically) forced to 'do it' in the same way girls sexually abused in the home are. She is seen to have more choice.

4.2 Confusion about what CSE is (and is not)

There is general confusion amongst the interviewees about what CSE is (and is not), as Nigel highlights:

> *there are parts of our workforce that feel that if a young*
> *person is at risk of sexual abuse by people who aren't in her*

> *family or her immediate family than that's CSE [pause] so I*
> *think that they've sort of they've got the wrong end of the*
> *stick a little bit about what it is about CSE that does make it*
> *different*   (Nigel)

Nigel's comments are interesting because he is saying his staff have mis-understood what CSE is. It is not just any extra-familial abuse that can be labelled CSE. What is not clear is why he thinks this and why the situation he describes could not be understood as CSE, what it is about CSE that makes it 'different'. He goes on to say that he thinks his staff use the 'label' CSE too quickly or inappropriately, possibly to get a quicker response because they know it is on the 'agenda'. Thus, his understanding and that of his staff appear un-aligned.

The social workers understand that for CSA (that takes place in the home) to be defined as exploitative there has to be certain elements involved. Elements that they strongly associate with CSE perpetrated by extra-familial groups. For example, the receiving of gifts, being 'passed around' and there being more than one exploiter and more than one girl. The social workers understand that these 'elements' are necessary if child abuse is to be considered exploitative. CSA is not understood as exploitative just by its very nature, for example, the act of engaging in sexual activity with a child is exploitative whether gifts are involved or not; indicating how synonymous the word exploitative has become with certain constitutes (see chapter two, pp 60-61 for more on this). For example, in the quote below Kelly (when discussing CSA perpetrated by a stepfather) suggests that because the abuser of the girl was 'mum's boyfriend', the abuse was understood as CSA, but if it had been someone else (the implication being outside of the family) it would have been seen as CSE:

> *that's [pause] he used a lovely grooming tactic there hasn't*
> *he, but he's definitely a sex offender and she's been sexually*
> *abused […] had he not been boyfriend [taps table], umm*
> *mum's boyfriend had he been somebody else that would have*
> *been CSE*   (Kelly)

Clarifying understandings and knowledge when defining such important concepts clearly is important. Social workers' understandings (and more importantly) responses to CSE and CSA may become confused or unclear if the 'labels' they give them become too opaque. Moreover, it is possible that as a result certain 'types' of CSA and CSE are being 'missed', or not being recognised at all. Thus, I suggest that the narrowing down, and confusion amongst the social workers about the term CSE, evidenced within this research is problematic. Furthermore, the findings suggest the social workers have a very complex

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understanding of choice and agency in the context of CSE and CSA. If the social workers understand girls sexually exploited in the home as making choices and girls sexually abused in the home as not making choices that may affect their responses to these girls and this is discussed shortly.

This section has explored central themes that arise from the social workers' constructions of CSE and CSA. Particularly the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls as a 'type' and understandings of sexually exploited girls' agency and choice-making. Exploring social workers' understandings of the phenomenon of CSE is of particular interest and import as they are arguably the gatekeepers to the type of response the sexually abused/exploited young person receives. Therefore, their understandings of the young people with whom they work is significant (Keddell, 2014; Parton, 2014; Frost and Parton, 2009), especially as that understanding will invariably influence how they safeguard. With this in mind, the chapter now moves on to look at how the social workers' understandings of CSE and CSA interweave with, and inform their understandings and responses.

4.3 Responding to cases of CSE and CSA

This section discusses the social workers' responses to the three vignettes. They were given the vignettes after they had described CSE, CSA, and having answered questions about other aspects of CSE and CSA. The interviewees' responses to the vignettes are considered in this chapter however, findings from them are also discussed in subsequent chapters. As discussed in chapter three, the purpose of the vignettes is to elicit further the social workers' understandings of CSE and CSA, I wish to explore in more detail how they understand and might respond to actual cases. Of particular focus, is how the social workers understand girls who are telling them they are 'making a choice' to be in these relationships and situations and are resistant to support and intervention. Of interest is if the social workers have different understandings and responses to girls depending on whether they have been abused in the home, or by extra-familial persons, especially around their understanding of the girl's ability (or not) to make choices.

The first vignette concerns Cara, she is 14 years-old and has disclosed to a youth worker that her step-dad has sex with her at the weekend when her mum is at work, she says she does not mind because she gets gifts and if she doesn't want to have sex she doesn't have to. Secondly, Lisa, she is 13 years-old and has been sexually exploited by a number of extra-familial men for six months, she says she is having fun and does not know why everyone is worried about her. Finally, Emma, she is 15, nearly 16 years-old and has been exploited for three years, she to is resistant to support and disengaged from services, she is thought to be grooming other girls. The interviewees are asked how they would define the
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case, CSE or CSA, or both; how they would respond procedurally and how they feel about the girl saying she is choosing to be in the 'relationship', she is 'okay' with it, she does not feel forced. They were asked to consider any potential problems and challenges that they might foresee these cases having.

Vignette 1- 'Cara'

Cara (14yr old girl) has been referred to social care by a youth worker. Last Friday evening at a local authority youth club the youth worker (who Cara has known for over two years) admired Cara's new watch. Cara told the youth worker that her step-dad had bought it for her; she went on to disclose that she has sex with her (live-in) step-dad every weekend while her mum is out at work. She told the youth worker that she does not mind having sex with him; he is kind to her and often buys her presents, although he has asked her not to tell her mother about the presents or their 'special times together'. She told the youth worker that if she does not want to have sex with him she does not have to, but she usually does because she likes him and likes getting the presents.

The most significant finding from the social workers' responses to this vignette is that, there are no explicit constructions of Cara herself. For example, there is no discussion about her social and economic situation or what it might be about her life that might make her vulnerable to being sexually abused. This reflects the constructions of CSA discussed previously and is quite different to how sexually exploited girls are understood. All of the social workers define this as intra-familial child sexual abuse. They describe it as having similarities with CSE, mainly because Cara is given gifts and they identify her as groomed by her stepfather. These two elements of the abuse are understood as exploitative, but the participants still commonly define the vignette as CSA. The fact that she is not being 'passed around', and it is 'only' him, is mentioned as another significant feature that led them to understand it as CSA rather than CSE. Beth illustrates this:

> *obviously it is sexual exploitation he's, he's exploiting her and he is effectively grooming her and preparing her for it int he? [...] because we don't know if the day after he said will you sleep with my best friend umm [...] but at this point I would say that that's sexual abuse, umm yeh I would say that it's sexual abuse, [...] it borders really [pause] yeh my view is that it's bordering really cos like we say we don't know if he's preparing her for it and he might just be, I don't mean might just, but he, he might be you know, here's your new watch,*

> *here's this, here's that, and giving her that choice [...] but it might also be because a week later he said well you know, carry on doing this we can still have our special times if you do whatever with such and such*   (Beth)

Beth's understanding is similar to many of the interviewees in that she makes the point that not all the facts are known. She understands that Cara's situation may 'border', or be both CSE and CSA, but she is not sure because she does not know what this situation may lead to. If it leads to other people being involved than it shifts into being exploitative, but until this happens she classes it as sexual abuse. Thus, on the one hand this suggests that she thinks one form of abuse (CSA) may lead into another (CSE) but on the other, she also demonstrates the polarised understanding of the social workers and also how strongly they associate certain 'acts', such as being 'passed around' with CSE. Mary, like Beth, demonstrates that for CSA to been understood by the interviewees as exploitative it needs to have certain elements associated with CSE:

> *with that info we were talking about distinguishing between CSE weren't we [...] with abuse within the family home, and for me [pause] he's sexually abusing, and he's probably buying her gifts so that she doesn't tell anybody and pass that info on [pause] is there any other info which he says is he grooming for umm is he having anybody else coming or is he wanting her to sort of go anywhere else or whatever[...] it's just her, so I would see that is that's a really concern and that's sexual abuse within [pause] the family home [pause] it is exploitative because he is buying her things and he is grooming her for his own, for his own gains isn't he [pause] but [...] he's not passing her, he's not passing her round[...] but is it the CSE that is where the then exploitative to the point where they're then umm fetching the friends and then their friends are actually paying umm to fetch young girls to them and this that and other, it's exploitative and it's sexual and it's a safeguarding concern*   (Mary)

Mary thinks the step-dad's purpose in buying Cara gifts is to stop her disclosing about the abuse to anyone. She questions whether anyone else is involved, but moves on to suggest that this is exploitative because he is buying her things and grooming her, although he is not 'passing her round'. This is a central part of Mary's (and other social workers')

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construction of CSE: one of the key elements that makes it exploitative is that the girl needs to be being 'passed around', that makes it 'more' exploitative, as though there is a spectrum in the social workers' understandings about what constitutes abuse being viewed as exploitative.

A number of the social workers suggest that the only reason Cara says she does not mind having sex with her step-dad is because she receives gifts and that she likes getting them, in turn recognising Cara's agency. However, the social workers then always reconstruct this recognition of Cara's agency; she is understood as being completely manipulated and controlled which is the only reason she says she like the gifts and does not mind having sex with her step-dad. Thus, her agency is invalidated. Likewise, the social workers construct sexually exploited girls as agents and choice makers but invalidate *certain* choices they make. This is unlike girls sexually abused in the home; the social workers invalidate (generally) all choices of such girls especially their ability to be agentic within the sexually abusive situation. Discourses, which construct sexually abused girls (intra-familial) as being able to act with agency in this type of situation, are not accessed by any of the social workers. The social workers understand Cara's claim that, she 'does not mind having sex with him' and she thinks the situation is 'ok', is because the situation has been normalised for her by her step-dad and also because she is getting something material out of the situation, which confuses her. Thus, the implication being that the social workers think if Cara did not receive gifts then she might mind having sex with him and would not have said that she is consenting, or making a choice. This is a common theme within many of the social workers' understandings of the vignettes. If girls are receiving something materially then that explains why they may be saying that they are consenting or making a choice. Indeed, Cara's understanding of her situation, in addition to the gifts she receives, are constructed as the only possible explanation as to why she is saying she does not mind having sex with her step-dad. The common understanding of all the social workers is that Cara cannot consent to a sexual relationship with her step-father and if that is how she understands the situation then she needs educating about 'appropriate' relationships.

One of the questions asked of the social workers is, what they think about the fact that Cara seems to be saying she is 'consenting' to sex with her step-dad. These questions had a tendency to close down discussions where Cara was concerned; the social workers all asserting unequivocally that Cara cannot consent to sex. Indeed, when I posed this particular question, the response that many of the social workers gave was quite dogmatic and at times defensive as demonstrated by Tina:

> *well she can't consent cos she's only 14 […] so [pause] you*

> *know [pause] I'd be saying to her you know whether its ok*
> *with you or not it actually isn't ok by law [...] she can't*
> *consent* (Tina)

This response is significant, not only because of how definitive the interviewees are, but also because there is quite a different response when the same question is asked about Lisa and Emma (Vignettes 2 and 3). There is not the same defensiveness or dogmatism at the suggestion these girls could be consenting. The social workers' conflicted understandings about agency are demonstrated again, as is how their understandings shift depending on where, and by whom the sexual abuse/ exploitation takes place. The responses concerning possible procedures that might be implemented in Cara's case are consistent, most notably almost all the social workers say that the stepfather or Cara would be removed from the home immediately, as illustrated by Mandy:

> *he would be removed straightaway while the investigation*
> *was ongoing* (Mandy)

The social workers generally say that Cara and her stepfather would be interviewed; there would be a police led investigation as a crime had been committed, and Cara would be subject to a Section 47 inquiry (Children's Act, 1989) as she is understood by the social workers to be at immediate risk of harm. Cara would be worked with to help her understand what had happened to her. However, it was noted by a few of the social workers that if she did renege on her story, it could be problematic in terms of affecting whether or not her stepdad would be charged. Fundamentally, Cara is viewed as a victim by the interviewees, a victim who needs immediate intervention, help, and support to understand her situation. In order for that to be achieved, she will be referred to other appropriate voluntary organisations. (See a diagram of the social workers' understandings regarding this in appendices 8/9).

Vignette 2-'Lisa'

Lisa is 13 years old and has been referred to social care. Six months ago she and a friend were befriended by a couple of 17-year-old young men at a local park. One of the young men became Lisa's boyfriend and she started having sex with him, usually in the back of his car. He has introduced her and her friend to other young men of a similar age and also to older adult men. Lisa has been having sex (often unprotected) with a number (up to five different men a week) of these men in cars and flats. She has been coming home drunk and is regularly missing from home; she is also truanting from school. She still lives in the family home, but her parents have told you that they cannot control her, and are extremely

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worried for her safety. Lisa tells the social worker that she doesn't know what all the fuss is about; she is simply having fun, going to parties, and having a few drinks. She acknowledges that her boyfriend has hit her a few times and she has been driven to places she was not familiar with where men are waiting to have sex with her. However, she says she does not have to do anything she does not want to, and she likes having a boyfriend because he gives her alcohol and cigarettes and looks after her.

The social workers generally refer to Lisa as a 'stereotypical' or 'classic' CSE case. Unlike in the vignette featuring Cara, where the focus is on what is being done to her, the focus of the social workers concerning Lisa is on the type of girl she is and why she might be 'behaving' in this manner. The constructions of Lisa reflect the social workers' broader understandings of sexually exploited girls. They understand sexually exploited girls as having more capacity to make choices, for example, whether they 'choose' to 'comply' with their exploiters or not. Although, their understandings regarding sexually exploited girls' agency and choice-making is complex. Lisa is constructed as someone who does not realise what is happening to her (or will happen to her), which is why she places herself at risk of harm. This understanding reflects the social workers' multi-faceted understanding of sexually exploited girls generally, as Barbara exemplifies:

> *so making her sort of understanding of this kind of behaviour that it is not appropriate for men to be doing this, to do, and what that entails is doing step by step work with her, direct work with her and then taking it step by step trying to help her understand that this you can't let yourself be in the situation where men are abusing you it's not right for them to be doing that but it takes a lot of time it takes a lot of time because [pause] they're children isn't it they're children and they don't understand that they're being abused at times because of the little present that they're getting so it's working with them direct work with them* (Barbara)

Barbara initially constructs Lisa as making a choice, someone who is *"letting herself be in the situation where men are abusing you";* implying that she is responsible for being in an abusive situation but then she (re)constructs her as not being to blame for being in the situation. Barbara does this by utilising the word **'children'**, possibly drawing on discourses that construct childhood as a time of innocence and ignorance (see for examples of such discourses, James and James, 2008; Lee, 2001; Jenks, 1996). Therefore, offering an explanation as to why Lisa lets herself be in situations where men are abusing her, it is

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because she is a child and therefore, she does not understand. Furthermore, Lisa is 'doing it' because she gets a gift and getting something out of the situation (in the form of a gift) confuses her understanding of the abusive situation. Barbara understands that she is a child who wants a "*little present*", it does not need to be much, and because she is a child, a little present pleases her. Thus, Lisa is constructed by Barbara as not blameable because any choice she makes which 'put her in the abusive situation' is reconstructed as being an invalid choice, she made it only because of her childlike state and because the gifts confuse her understanding. Therefore, Lisa's choice-making has been explained and excused- she is within Barbara's understanding, cleared of blame.

In some respects, Barbara's understanding of Lisa is similar to those of Cara, for example, she is doing it for the gifts, and she does not understand the situation and therefore needs working with to enable her to understand. However, the pivotal difference is that Lisa is constructed as having made a choice to put herself in the situation, she is understood to be allowing men to abuse her and Cara is never constructed in this manner. All the social workers repeatedly imply, by the language they use regarding the role sexually exploited girls 'play' in the 'entering' into and remaining in potentially sexually exploitative situations, that a level of blame is assigned (by the interviewees) to sexually exploited girls that is not assigned to girls abused in the home/family. Azim further demonstrates this theme when he is discussing Lisa:

> *Lisa is placing herself at that risk and it's a kind of the plan*
> *needs to be to educate her and try to give her alternatives to*
> *move away from that […] I would just think she is young and*
> *vulnerable and she can't make that choice, it's not an*
> *educated choice, and that's why we put services in such as*
> *[…] to you know to inform her and educate her around the*
> *risks that are out there*   (Azim)

Similarly, to Barbara and most of the other social workers, Azim constructs Lisa's agency in a paradoxical manner: constructing her as *"young and vulnerable and she can't make that choice"*, but yet also as, *"placing herself at risk"*, and needing *"alternatives"* to the exploitation. On the one hand Azim constructs Lisa as an agent, *"placing herself at risk"*, but also within that construction he draws on discourses about the constructed innocence of childhood blaming her 'youth and vulnerability' as reasons why her choices are not 'educated', or valid. By doing this, he invalidates the choices he has constructed her as demonstrating and as a result, removes blame from Lisa. This again exemplifies the

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difference in how Cara is constructed in comparison to Lisa, wherein the former is understood as not needing to be alleviated of blame.

The interviewees' understanding that sexually exploited girls benefit from being in exploitative relationships is salient, as is the belief of the social workers that it can be difficult to compete with those benefits. This issue was significant and emerged within a number of the interviews as demonstrated by Tina:

> *it is a problem cos your actual agenda is totally, completely opposite cos they are saying I am having a really nice time, and you're saying well actually no this isn't on [pause] and it's very, very difficult to get to to get that across [pause] why it's wrong, well why is it wrong, he's lovely, he buys me stuff, we go out on a Saturday night, we're out in a car, we go cruising in car you know umm [pause] and it's that age int it 13 […] everybody wants a boyfriend; well most kids want a boyfriend at 13 and an older boyfriend how fantastic are you going to feel about yourself* (Tina)

Highlighting difficulties other social workers have mentioned when working with sexually exploited girls, Tina constructs an arguably romanticised idea of what girls are experiencing, perhaps to explain the difficulties involved when working with such girls or, again to assign blame on the girls.

It is possible that all three local authority areas in which the social workers work have slightly different strategies or approaches to safeguarding sexually exploited children. However, all the answers, even within the same local authorities lacked parity, and perhaps more significantly demonstrated a lack of confidence (from the social workers) about the procedures that could be used to protect Lisa. Most of the interviewees commented on the role that the police would need to play, particularly regarding the perpetrators. Child protection plans and Section 47's (Children's Act, 1989: 'risk of significant harm') are also mentioned by most of the social workers. The role of the family is discussed a great deal, mainly regarding work that could be done with families and enabling the parents to support Lisa in the family home. As noted in vignette one, the most significant difference in terms of response to Lisa, compared to Cara, was that either Cara's abuser would be immediately removed or she would be. Whereas with Lisa the expectation was that, she would probably remain in the exploitative situation and be 'worked with' until she recognised what was happening and wanted to get out.

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Vignette 3-Emma'.

Emma is 15 years old (nearly 16). When she was 13 years old she met a 19-year-old man at her local swimming pool. He became her boyfriend and she was introduced to older men and has been having sex with different men for the past few years. She receives drugs, alcohol, gifts and money for this sexual activity. She still lives in the family home but her parents are at their wits' end and have asked that she be moved to foster care. Social workers have tried to engage with her over the past few years, since she was referred by her school, but she will not have anything to do with them. She is known to have been beaten up and dropped off on a motorway; she rarely attends school and has regularly been missing from home often for several days at a time. Social Care has become aware that Emma is hanging around the local park trying to befriend other girls, some as young as 11, while her boyfriend waits in his car. The concern is that she is trying to befriend these girls in order to introduce them to her boyfriend and his friends.

The social workers' understandings about Emma are similar to Lisa, although in terms of how she could be helped and supported the over-riding sense is that because of her age and how long she has been exploited, working effectively with Emma was viewed as likely to be very difficult. The common understanding of the social workers, simarlily to Lisa, but even more so, is that Emma would remain in the situation while she was being 'worked with' and until she decided to leave it. The expectation is that the abuse in all likelihood would continue. As with Lisa, the majority of the social workers focus concerns Emma and who she is, constructing her as a 'type' of person likely to be resistant to any intervention (although the vignette does say that she has been difficult to engage with). Social workers focus on what it is about Emma that makes her exploitable and vulnerable. Furthermore, the amount of words and phrases used to describe Emma concerning her vulnerabilities and risk-level was significantly more numerous, when contrasted to the amount used to describe Cara. Although there was real concern expressed for her from the interviewees, this was interweaved with a significant amount of responsibility placed on Emma regarding how she needs to want to change. Her role in the exploitation, the type of person she is, her behaviour and being nearly 16 was the focus for all the social workers, as demonstrated by Sadeem and Cath:

> *I think it is the age and, and err [pause]err obviously there, there are like I said grave concerns but, but she's at the age where she's deciding for her own self making her own decisions, not like the 13yr old you know can culp, culpability,*

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> *there are issues that she's not really intelligent enough as a*
> *15 or nearly 16yr is more intelligent*   (Sadeem)

> *umm I think, I think people would try and do work with her I*
> *think what's difficult when children get to that this age 15/16*
> *is if they don't want to work with you they won't work with*
> *you, and you know they can just get up and tell you to fuck*
> *off and walk out of room and there's nowt, there's nowt you*
> *can do*   (Cath)

Sadeem understands that because Emma is older she should be more intelligent and thus able to make her own decisions. Most importantly, he understands her as (more) culpable for her actions. He makes no mention of the possibility that her decision-making ability might be compromised because she has been exploited for three years. He also says later in his interview that (lack of) money is a big factor that may prevent a girl Emma's age going into secure accommodation despite the level of risk. Fundamentally, there is little that the social workers believe would work for Emma, even if money was available to, for example, place her in care (which all the social workers thought very doubtful). It seems that the nearer to sixteen a girl is the harder (social workers understand) it is to help her, the main reason being because she is able to 'consent' to sexual activity. The negativity and sense of defeatism about the possibility of any positive outcome for this case is palpable (often in the context of the interview, I, as the interviewer perceived that the mood of the social worker 'dropped'). The interviewees' understanding is that unless Emma *wants* to 'get out' there is little that can be done. The vast majority of the answers to this vignette are characterised in the main by a sense of general hopelessness about Emma's situation and indeed her whole outlook:

> *they're forgotten kids, that's what it is, they're forgotten, you*
> *know, I mean I see umm some girls that have been in and out*
> *of our team and they're basically they haven't changed,*
> *they're still hanging around the town centre the bus station,*
> *working on markets stalls you know and then working for*
> *pound shops that, that, there, just seem to be there like one*
> *or two months then disappear so [pause] and, and, and you*
> *just kind of look at the girls and look at the adults that are*
> *hanging about*   (Sadeem)

> *yeh, it's bleak, her futures bleak I think she's she's already in*

> *that direction, being exploited, so, maybe prostitution things*
> *like that if she doesn't get the help she, the parents are out of*
> *control, yeh*   (Adowa)

Sadeem's comment that they are 'forgotten kids' is significant. He constructs them as 'let down' by the services that are supposed to protect them and, as a result, their future prospects are poor. His understanding that services fail girls is of particular interest. The deterministic and fatalistic construction that girls like 'Emma' will end up as Sadeem and Adowa predict is a common theme within the interviews. These girls are understood by the social workers as victims of their present and as likely to remain victims in the future, a theme that will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

This onus being placed on Emma to want to change and 'get out' is further reflected by the almost complete absence of comments on the perpetrators in this section (only four social workers commented that the perpetrators needed to be disrupted and that intelligence should be gathered), which is perhaps surprising considering the level of abuse being perpetrated. Furthermore, the social worker's knowledge about possible procedures and legislation (as with Lisa) that could be used in a case like Emma's lacked clarity and was generally somewhat 'sketchy'. Most significantly, there simply seemed to be little confidence that the 'system' could protect/support Emma. Procedurally, the interviewees raised possible options, such as section 47 inquiries, child protection plans, working with the family and police involvement. However, the over-riding sense is that if Emma did not want to engage with the social worker, then there is not much they can do:

> *it's, I, it is CSE case [...] and it's unfortunate, it's been going*
> *on for a long time and I don't know what resources they have*
> *put in in terms of trying to get an understanding of why*
> *Emma continues to do this [...] maybe a psychological*
> *assessment would help professionals understand why she's*
> *continuing to be involved and she's going to be even though*
> *she's gone a step further and she's starting to be used to*
> *groom other children as well so, it's really bad [she laughs]*

>   (Adowa)

Adowa reflects a common understanding in that she seems to be unsure about exactly what can be done for Emma. However, as is common amongst the interviewees she places the onus on Emma, by saying that an assessment needs to be done to understand why she

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continues to be involved in the exploitation again implying that she understands Emma is making a choice to be in the exploitative situation.

The most positive and 'pro-active' comments came from two of the social workers who work exclusively with sexually exploited young people. They are much clearer and confident about the relevant procedures and are 'relational' in their approach for example, they focus on developing long-term relationship with girls that are voluntary and built on trust. They identify the need for tenacity, a pro-active approach and advocate the need to try different approaches if others do not work. These social workers' responses are notable because they recognise what might prevent Emma from disclosing, as Mandy says below. However, as will be noted, her understanding also has problematic features:

> *I need to be looking at where she would be placed, cos we would need to end umm (pause) these networks that's she's got, umm, and we have to look at that relationship and if he's got a car he's more likely to be able to come to her, this is one of these horrible horrible cases where sometimes you have to take quite a draconian action to protect, so she is not going to want to come into care[...]we will have to have a tight leash on her (sigh) so it's as though she is being punished and its really really hard because as well as we know of young people that are being sexually exploited, when they are removed away from their networks and their friends and families its exasperates those vulnerabilities, but [pause]there's no other choice, it's really horrible*
>
> (Mandy)

Although Mandy adopts a committed and pro-active approach in her desire to support Emma the focus is, as reflected in the other interviews, still contingent on the girl-in this instance, being moved and having to change her life around. Within the interviews the understanding that first and foremost the perpetrators should be stopped, or put in prison was at best deemed unlikely and at worse, not even considered. This is possibly because the social workers understand it is very hard to prevent the perpetrators unless the girls co-operate and disclose information, so the only way to protect the girls is to remove them, but yet again, it seemed the onus is on the girl, rather than the person(s) putting them at risk. As with Lisa, much of the emphasis is placed on Emma's ability to make choices and take decisions within the exploitative situation she is in and this understanding is a very significant part of the social workers' epistemological framework of CSE and sexually

exploited girls. For example, although Emma and Lisa are constructed as victims, those constructions are much more multi-faceted than they are for Cara. Furthermore, Emma as a victim, (differently to Cara) is more difficult to help, unless she decides to help herself. Therefore, her situation is constructed as being very bleak by all of the social workers.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a summary of how social workers define, construct and understand CSE and CSA in turn, offering answers, at least in part, to all three of the research questions. It has been established that although the social workers' understandings of CSE and CSA at times merge, these concepts have become relatively polarised. CSA is primarily understood by the interviewees as sexual abuse within the family/home and constructed as something that is 'done to the child', the child constructed as a victim in an 'ideal' sense (Christie, 1986). This reflects dominant and resilient discourses concerning childhood, childhood and sexuality and, centrally, CSA (James and Prout, 1997; Kitzinger, 1997; Pilcher 1996). CSE is associated with the extra-familial sexual exploitation of girls by groups of men. Within the interviewees' understandings there are significant 'elements' associated with CSE such as the 'passing around' of girls; material/emotional gain for the girl; transporting the girl, and more than one person being involved both girls and perpetrators. For the social workers to understand CSA as exploitative at least one of these elements need to be present.

To further elicit the social workers' understandings, they were asked what they thought about and how they would respond to girls sexually abused in the home, and those sexually exploited outside of the home. Notably, in all three vignettes, the girls expressed agency regarding their situations. The main themes within the interviewees' responses to the vignettes tend to reflect their broader understandings regarding CSE and CSA. Cara is constructed as a victim who is unable to consent, and the response from the social workers is that either she or her step-dad would be removed immediately. Lisa and Emma's situations are understood as being much more complex, particularly regarding their ability to make choices and take decisions (especially problematic for Emma as she approached her sixteenth birthday). Moreover, of interest is how with both Lisa and Emma the primary focus is on the *type of people* they are, in order to explain why they are exploited, whereas with Cara the focus is on *what is being done to her* (see Woodiwiss, 2009; Finkelhor, 2008; Kitzinger, 1997). Furthermore, the social worker's response to Cara is that she will be immediately protected through either her own or her step-dad's removal from the family home; whereas Lisa and Emma essentially will, in all likelihood, be left in the sexually exploitative situation, despite the high level of risk they are at. These responses appear to link with the interviewees' understandings of sexually exploited and abused girls' agency
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and ability to make choices, suggesting that because of this understanding sexually exploited girls are essentially left in exploitative and high risk situations.

Further discussion and exploration regarding social workers' understandings of the agency and choice-making of sexually exploited girls continues in subsequent chapters. However, now we move onto the next chapter which explores the social workers' constructions of sexually exploited girls and their families, drawing on what has been mentioned previously in this chapter, namely that the social workers understand that sexual exploitation (generally)happens to a certain 'type' of girl, from a certain 'type' of family.

Chapter 5: Constructions of the girls and her family: It's all about the girl (and her parents).

> *U*mm, um I, I think when you look at the child in terms of maybe their (up) bringing, maybe there is poverty at home [pause] and they want to maybe some satisfaction maybe from outside, that's yeh they, they want what their peers have got, maybe they don't have the latest mobile phone and parents or guardians cannot afford and there's this person whose coming showing interest in them and maybe they are not being shown the love at home   (Adowa)

The chapter is entitled; *It's all about the girls (and her family)* in order to highlight the *amount* of data that focuses on the 'type' of girls who are vulnerable to CSE. The girl-orientated focus is in stark contrast to, for example, it being all about the perpetrators, or all about the social and cultural structures that may frame or cause the perpetration of sexual exploitation. Considering that one of the main purposes of this thesis is to explore social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls the fact that a substantial amount of the findings relates to this subject is unsurprising. However, the overwhelming focus on the girls is significant for a number of reasons, primarily because the findings suggest that there is a far from clear demarcation (in the interviewees' understandings) about where blame for CSE should be assigned.

The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section explores the social workers' understanding that sexually exploited girls are likely to be socially and economically deprived and, consequently, seeking material and emotional gain, which the exploiters provide. Secondly, and as a corollary to this the chapter then discusses girls who are 'exceptions to the rule' - girls, whom the social workers understand may be vulnerable too sexual exploitation but are so for different reasons than their social and economic status. Thirdly, the chapter considers the multi-dimensional construction of sexually exploited girls as victims. In relation to this, a brief discussion follows about how the social workers understand that care homes fail to protect girls and indeed can make them even more vulnerable. The chapter then moves on to explore the interviewees' constructions of the girls' parents and finally, the chapter concludes by looking at the implications of these findings and how they lead into the next chapter which explores the topic of blame in more

detail.

5.0 Constructing sexually exploited girls

This section considers how the social workers understand that CSE is likely to happen to a certain type of girl. The interviewees' understanding that there is *something about the girl* that makes her vulnerable to CSE is salient. The girls are consistently described and understood by the social workers as 'vulnerable' and 'doing it', i.e. being in sexually exploitative situations, for material and emotional gain. Both these 'motivating factors' being understood (by the interviewees) as a result of the girl not having her emotional and economic needs met by her parents and consequently being vulnerable to CSE, as Sue and Beth note:

> *it's (the CSE) a, maybe a bit of escapism from what's going on*
> *at home*   (Sue)

> *massive risk taking behaviour but children who are vulnerable*
> *and prepared to take that risk if it means a bit of affection*
>   (Beth)

The social workers all understand that the primary reason most girls are sexually exploited is their individual circumstances and those circumstances are constructed as generally homogeneous (although there are a few caveats, which will be considered later). Thus, rather than understanding CSE as a social and/or political problem relating to the prevalence of men's (sexual/physical) abuse towards women and girls, the social workers pathologise the girls, focusing on what it is about them that leads them to be exploited and victimised. Moreover, throughout the interviews, all the social workers discuss their understanding that sexually exploited girls are exploited primarily because of their circumstances, over and above any other factor. For example, they discuss what it is about the girls that makes them exploitable significantly more than, what it is about the perpetrators that makes them exploit. Another factor within this dominant understanding, that it is something about the girl, is that the interviewees think she is likely to have been known to social care from a young age, a child who, as Nigel notes, should have been taken into care much earlier on in their life:

> *if I was to give you a typical scenario it would be a young*
> *person who we were involved with when, usually she, when*
> *she was very small as a result of poor parenting [...] we are*
> *talking about young females who have, to be blunt, had a*
> *poor experience of parenting, parents who haven't been able*
> *to instil good self-esteem in their children, young people who*

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haven't done well in the education system so they don't have
that area of self-esteem, young people who would be
vulnerable to any form of harm really, that just as likely to
find themselves in a relationship with somebody who's
physically violent towards them, or other form of abuse, that's
the the typical group I would say (pause) we should have
taken this young person into care when she was four (Nigel)

Thus, sexually exploited girls are understood by the social workers as those who have had a tough start in life, understood as likely to have been neglected and been brought up in homes with for example, domestic violence and substance abuse, as illustrated below:

parents that are taking drugs and alcohol and you know that's
the only lifestyle that they know (Sadeem)

I think it's all about vulnerability isn't it, I think you know lot
of the young people we work with come from, I guess you
sort of could term it as dysfunctional wouldn't you (Peter)

it could be a neglectful home, domestic violence all those sort
of things, umm parents being alcoholics, umm it can be sort
of migrants you know they come, you know they live in sort of
squalor, continuously moving, looking for vulnerabilities, what
can they give that young person to...to […] befriend them
really, umm we tend to get a lot of young people within sort
of situations that are neglectful or parents using alcohol or
drugs (Kate)

These social workers highlight a theme present throughout the interviews; that the 'type of' girl who is sexually exploited is likely to have been vulnerable since they were a small child. All the social workers understand the vulnerabilities that have derived from their family/home life as a primary 'characteristic' of the sexually exploited girl and what makes her so exploitable. There are a number of reasons given by the social workers to explain why girls may be vulnerable to sexual exploitation such as, bad parenting, the gain they receive (from the perpetrators), they are looking for affection and they are deprived at home. However, essentially the social workers understand that there is something about the girl herself that makes her more likely to be exploited (than someone else). For example, Josie and Cath understand sexually exploited girls as simply looking different, 'standing out' to potential perpetrators; sexually exploited girls' vulnerabilities are *visible*, or make them

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visible to perpetrators, as they describe below:

Vulnerability […] they say don't they sex offenders can pick out a, you know, a vulnerable person and they can, you know the person whose coming out of school on their own or whose walking a bit funny or a bit shabbily (Josie)

I think they see, umm I think they see that vulnerability, I think there's sort of girls that spose it could be a girl that's (pause) sort of not known but, sort of around quite a lot maybe not at home a lot which gives them an indication that maybe there are some issues at home and I think it's, that much easier to sort of draw them away from that […] yeh, yeh, like after school being like in bus station with their friends and not going straight home or you know on an evening, you know on a, on a Saturday night being, you know in town, and things like that (Cath)

The social workers construct sexually exploited girls as exhibiting certain traits that indicate they are vulnerable and one of those is having un-met needs. These traits are understood as the over-riding reasons why certain girls are so vulnerable to CSE. Most significantly, the social workers understand these traits or reasons (why the girls are sexually exploited) as the result of the girls deprived home/family life.

The word 'vulnerable' is used more than any other to describe sexually exploited girls. The social workers were asked to explain what they meant when they used the word vulnerable and invariably they explain *what it is about* the girl that makes her vulnerable to exploitation. None of the social workers constructs sexually exploited girls as primarily *becoming* vulnerable because *of* the exploitation, rather seeing vulnerability as a pre-existing characteristic of their life beforehand. Azim and Barbara demonstrate this in the following excerpts as they describe how for a young person to be vulnerable enough to be exploited, there has to be 'something wrong' in their home:

vulnerabilities I suppose […] you know the kind of family background, umm are these girls deprived of, umm, maybe material goods, social opportunities, opportunities to socialise that can be tapped into, umm, you know. I don't know, arguments sake, somebody offers you an iPhone you've never had that in your life, maybe you do anything to obtain that,

yeh, I would say from the experience I've had, I would say you know there has to be something wrong [pause] in the family environment for a girl to be vulnerable enough to be exploited (Azim)

for a young girl because of their past experiences where they haven't got that attention from family or from the situation they are tend to think, well let me go with that and these adults they use different strategies, they groom them initially isn't it, so that they build that trust and then they abuse they exploit them cos they've groomed them […] if in those children, […] they were in difficult circumstances at home because of the the circumstances that they are in you find they are being exploited cos of their situation because of the situation (Barbara)

Barbara and Azim understand that the main reason a girl is exploitable is her individual circumstances and this understanding is common. Indeed, Barbara repeats '*because of their situation/circumstances they are exploitable*' three times in the same sentence reiterating her belief that this is the central reason girls are exploited to the exclusion of all others. Whereas it might be assumed that, the main reason a girl is exploited is because people are exploiting her. However, as reflected in these excerpts, there is little mention of the exploiters but rather the reason for the exploitation is understood as primarily being the result of the girls' 'difficult circumstances' at home, which result in her being vulnerable to exploitation.

As noted, a key part of the interviewees' understandings is that the sexually exploited girl has un-met needs. The interviewees understand that the sexually exploited girl does not receive the requisite emotional or material attention (e.g. money, clothes, and mobile phone) at home and therefore is looking for fulfilment and attention from situations and people that might be exploitative. As the excerpts below, demonstrate:

maybe there's something they're not getting at home or you know I imagine sometimes it's about money and material goods for these young people you know if they can't have umm you know, if they, if at home they've not got the best phone or the new clothes or you know and some young

people see that as a way of getting, you know they're

provided with these things   (Peter)

targeting vulnerable girls umm brainwashing them for want of

a better word with gifts or emotional security as well and I

think that is what this girl was after as well, she was after

something emotionally that she wasn't getting at home and I

think these men were offering that   (Gill)

As well as constructing the girls' lives as lacking materially and emotionally, these excerpts also demonstrate how the interviewees understand sexually exploited girls' to be agentic within the exploitative situations. The understanding of all the social workers regarding sexually exploited girls is that their home lives are so deprived that they respond to, or even seek out people, who will provide them with the material and emotional 'benefits' that they are so lacking. Alongside this a number of the social workers seemed to struggle with how they could compete with what the girl receives from the perpetrators and again the agency of the girls is repeatedly recognised, but (again) she is understood to be only seeking out said benefits as a result of her deprivation, as Tina and Kelly illustrate:

it's like my life's (the girl's) great, actually my life at home is

shit, I get nothing, this bloke comes along, and buys me CDs

he gets me cigarettes, drive round in his car and be warm,

you coming in and ruining my life   (Tina)

and if you come from a background where nobody really cares

about you and then he comes along and buys you something,

oh my word, you're going to [pause] and he's got a car and

he takes you to parties and tells you you're gorgeous   (Kelly)

There were many times during the interviews when it seemed to me that the social workers understood that the girls benefitted substantially more from the exploitation than the perpetrators. Indeed, as also noted in chapter four, some social workers appear to have an almost romanticised understanding of how much the girl gets out of the exploitation. Tina's understanding that sexually exploited girls like what they receive from exploitative people and may (as a result) resist social workers' interventions exemplifies how problematic social workers find working with sexually exploited girls-they do not know how to work with them.

The social workers construct sexually exploited girls as a paradox. For example, sexually

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exploited girls are commonly understood to be confident and assertive, yet extremely vulnerable and damaged; absconding from school and going missing and wanting to grow up (too quickly); yet also immature, naive and impressionable. Sexually exploited girls subvert and trouble the social workers' hegemonic constructions of childhood and most significantly sexually abused children. The social workers' understandings also draw on discourses concerning the sexually 'knowing' child and consistently constructs the sexually exploited girl as 'other', or as one who subverts the ideal of childhood innocence, especially sexually. Moreover, CSE is understood by the interviewees to happen primarily to girls who are at the most 'disadvantaged' and 'troubled' end of the social spectrum (Egan, 2013; Casey, 2012; Angelides, 2012). Findings from this research show that social workers construct CSE as happening to a certain 'type' of girl, from a certain type of family, demonstrating how they understand CSE as an individual problem not a social problem. How social workers understand sexually exploited girls when they construct them as so subverting dominant discourses concerning childhood, childhood and sexuality and childhood sexual abuse is significant especially, as noted in the previous chapter, if it affects, or even limits, the level or type of protection they provide.

5.1 Exceptions to the rule?

There are some exceptions within the social workers' understandings about the 'type' of girl who is sexually exploited. However, these further reinforce the 'strength' of the primary construction of the 'type' of girls who social workers understand to be sexually exploited. One of the questions asked in the interview was did the social worker think *any* girl could be sexually exploited. Without exception, the social workers said it could happen to *any girl,* although it was very unlikely, unless something went wrong within that particular family which made the girl vulnerable. *Any girl* equated generally with affluence and being middle-class, but also being previously unknown to social care. This is very different to the common construction of the interviewees concerning sexually exploited girls (and their families) who are understood as being a product of social and economic deprivation and likely to be already known to social care, as Beth discusses:

> *I don't have any personal experience of working with (pause)an affluent family you know, there's no concerns in the family, and umm no worries cos obviously if I am involved, then there are, you know, umm but I think it can happen to anyone, you could have somebody where both parents have sort of fantastic careers and all their needs met and absolutely hunky dorey, but if they are easily influenced and, you know, so they're quite immature for their age*

> *(pause) the people that are exploiting can identify any*
> *vulnerability, so I do believe that it can happen to anyone*
>
> (Beth)

Potential indicators that may result in a girl being vulnerable to CSE are identified by Beth and others as, parents who work long hours, families who experience a bereavement or a parent suffering from depression:

> *if you've got a family that work long hours or have got a*
> *business they spend a lot of time at home on their own that*
> *can be a vulnerability*   (Kate)

> *even with maybe families with strong family ties something*
> *could happen within the family that makes em quite low in in*
> *terms of self-self-esteem and depression and one thing and*
> *another do you know what I mean? so even in your strong*
> *families umm something could happen and, and I haven't*
> *known in, in W where I've had somebody been exploited from*
> *a strong family background so I'm, but I don't dismiss the fact*
> *that [...] it couldn't happen [..] they could have had a*
> *bereavement in family which is made em really depressed*
>
> (Mary)

It isn't the 'habitat' of the girl per se that would cause her to be vulnerable to CSE, as with 'other' sexually exploited girls, but rather an 'incident' or chain of events that would make her vulnerable. The social workers understand that for CSE to happen to *any girl* ('any girl' being affluent and unknown to social care) then something specific has to happen that would make that girl vulnerable. This understanding demonstrates the dual understanding of social workers regarding who is likely to be sexually exploited and one of the clear divides is along 'class' and economic lines. The understanding of the interviewees being that CSE is likely to happen too poorer, working class girls rather than, middle class girls. Social workers understand that CSE is more likely to happen to 'troubled' families (Casey, 2012). It is important to note that, as with the social worker's other understandings of sexually exploited girls, the focus of reasoning or blame as to why girls are exploited is directed towards the girl and her family, rather than the perpetrators. For example, she is sexually exploited because of a death in the family, rather than (primarily) because of the men who are exploiting her. The invisibility of the perpetrators within the interviewees' understandings is again notable and the absence of overt blame placed on them significant, as is discussed in the next chapter. The chapter now moves on to further discuss the social

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workers' constructions of sexually exploited girls as victims.

5.2 Girls as victims

One of the dominant understandings of social workers concerning sexually exploited girls is that of them as victims however, these understandings are multi-faceted and very different to how the 'victimhood' of girl sexually abused in the home is understood (as discussed in chapter four). Nell illustrates this difference by explaining how she understands 'other' social workers view sexually exploited girls:

> *there's less of an issue, and there's less blame I think, girls are blamed more for the child, the sexual exploitation, well they put themselves in that position, they wanted the drink, they wanted the drugs, there is that attitude of well they got something in return, they got drink, drugs, da,da,da,da,da,da whatever, CSA is very much victim, it's, she's the **victim** of that whereas I don't think CSE, that doesn't conjure up the same view.* (Nell)

Nell understands that girls sexually abused in the home are understood as '*very much a victim*', whereas she does not think sexually exploited girls are viewed in the same way. They are more likely to be blamed because they '*get something in return*; *they put themselves in that position*'. Nell again highlights how social workers' understandings of girls' agency, significantly affects their understanding of her validity as a victim. Consequently, social workers construct the 'victim-status' of sexually exploited girls thus:

-They are a victim of their home/family circumstances, which makes them highly vulnerable to being sexually exploited
-They are a victim of CSE
-They are a victim because they do not understand they are a victim of CSE
-The implication is they will remain a victim in the future.

The social workers understand sexually exploited girls to be products of socially and economically deprived homes/families which they consider as the primary reason why they are vulnerable to CSE; this deprived status makes the girl a victim before the CSE even begins. This 'aspect' of their victim-status is discussed more than any other and all other elements of their victim-hood stem from that point. The girl's status as a victim is monumental and supersedes any other status the girl might occupy for example, as a survivor, or her resistance/resilience:

but she's a victim so we would look at her as a victim (Kate)

you know taking umm advantage of her and you know she's
probably got no one else (Sadeem)

you've got to see them as victims (Kelly)

The second and third 'aspects' of the girls' victim status is that she is a victim of CSE and she does not understand that she is a victim:

and if you come from a background where nobody really cares
about you and then he comes along and buys you something
oh my word you're going to [...] and he's got a car and he
takes you to parties and tells you you're gorgeous [...] when
you're inside that box you can't see anything other than [...]
what's at end of your nose (Kelly)

Thus, the girls are constructed as being 'unaware' or in denial about their victim, status because the social workers understand that they are so manipulated and controlled by the perpetrator:

if suddenly people think she is cool, they're horrible people,
treat her like crap but every now and then they might tell her
they love her or…you know so she puts up with it (Mandy)

The social workers also construct the girls as not understanding that they are a victim because they are having material and/or emotional needs met, which are not met at home, furthermore, they may even be having fun. The gain received and possible fun the girls maybe having obfuscates their recognition that they are a victim of CSE; Cath suggests that the cigarettes and alcohol (the gain) makes the girl think she is not a victim illustrates this:

she could be there and forced to have sex with them and she
won't get any cigarettes or alcohol so would she say that I am
in control or would it be it might be a wake-up call saying to
her you're not in control (Cath)

Although most of the social workers construct the girls as being further victimised because they understand girls do not recognise they are being exploited, there is also a common understanding that sexually exploited girls may behave in certain ways because they are scared and being controlled. Thus, although the girls may be seen by the social workers as exercising agency and making choices (for more discussion on this see chapter seven), the

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social workers understand that some choice-making is being demonstrated within a coercive and manipulated context and therefore is not 'real'. Hence, they understand the girl to be a victim whether she recognises it or not.

The constructions of the girls as victims merge in the social workers' understandings. None of the social workers construct the victim 'stages', (as previously identified on p. 130), as possibly *not being* inevitably linked to each other. For example, the girls are never constructed as *not* being a victim in the future, or as being sexually exploited but not having been a victim in the past (of her socially and economically deprived background). Each stage is interlinked with another, constructing the sexually exploited girl as inevitably having a deterministically unhappy past, present and future. In the context of the interviews there was often a sense of defeat and helplessness about their situations, as mentioned in the previous chapter, especially if the girl is nearly 16 years of age, or older:

> *at sixteen in a month's time which means she's free to have*
> *sex with whoever she wants*   (Adowa)

> *ummm, so she's nearly 16, I suppose when she is 16 and the*
> *perp will know kind of what he needs to know in terms of*
> *legislation she don't need consent then to go off, so I am sure*
> *that he, she, that he would convince her to move in with him*
> *and then god knows*   (Josie)

The social workers' understandings clearly suggest that they understand the future outlook for sexually exploited girls as bleak. The interviewees view her as having been a victim of their home life, then a victim of CSE and they will remain a victim in the future, as noted below:

> *you know, I mean I see umm some girls that have been in*
> *and out of our team and they're basically they haven't*
> *changed they're still hanging around the town centre the bus*
> *station, working on markets stalls*   (Sadeem)

> *It (CSE) sets a precedent for further relationships down the*
> *line, you're not going to be fourteen forever (pause) going to*
> *be twenty, twenty-one and what sort of relationship are they*
> *going to have then if this is what they think is normal now?*

> (Kelly)

Likewise, Tom and Nigel, express their understanding that in the future, the CSE will

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probably have an impact on the girl's ability to parent and it is likely she will end up with a violent partner:

> *this is still going to disrupt her you know key years where she is turning from a child into an adult you know [...] otherwise her development as an adult is going to be, you know, quite quite distorted, and then you know her behaviours as an adult and I suppose if you wanted to put it in, like a money context you know, if she then went on to have children, you know, and had had this very fractured personality you know how would she parent her children* (Tom)

> *that just as likely to find themselves in a relationship with somebody who's physically violent towards them or other form of abuse within a, within a relationship* (Nigel)

This research suggests that this dominating victim identity is unhelpful and rather, as Shuker (2013) suggests, CSE should be understood as 'part' of the sexually exploited child's identity, not their *"master identity"* (p. 126). Phoenix and Oerton (2005) also challenge the dominant construction of people who have been sexually abused/exploited as totally ruined and damaged forever. Phoenix and Oerton (ibid.) refer to *"a totalising version of victimhood"* (p. 40). The social workers generally understand CSE to be a destroyer of children and childhood- CSE takes over girls- repeatedly constructing them as a "totalised" (ibid.) victim. This 'totalising version of victimhood' (ibid.) is a significant part of the social workers understanding of CSE and undoubtedly influences and informs their constructions of sexually exploited girls. Most of the social workers draw on discourses that construct CSE as the most damaging 'thing' that can happen to a child, with long term implications for the girl and their future (see on this, Woodiwiss, 2009; Montgomery and Kehily, 2008; Jackson and Scott, 1999). Daniel (2008) suggests that professionals who work with children and young people may become constrained if they insist on constructing their victimhood in ways that do not reflect the child's lived experience. More importantly, it can mean professionals struggle to work out how to best work with children in order to help them understand, or make sense of their own situation. Indeed, Daniel (2008) argues that children are the experts and accessing their knowledge about what help they think they need can be far more empowering than professionals trying to place their own interpretation on a young person's experience (p. 102). As Hearn (1988) notes:

> *We need to write a new sociology that devotes as much space*

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> *and energy to the position and experiences of young people*
> *as that now given to the position and experiences of older*
> *people* (p. 532)

It is notable, that although all of the social workers express a desire to help and support sexually exploited girls, the work that would be required is undoubtedly understood to be laced with challenges and problems.

5.3 Care Homes

The social workers' constructions of girls as victims is compounded by the amount of comment regarding the perceived inadequacies of children's care homes. Social workers appear to have little faith that statutory facilities such as, care homes and foster placements can protect sexually exploited young people in fact they can place them more at risk. They understand that such places are unable to protect because of the high level of risk the girls are at (from exploiters), but also because of the inability of staff in such facilities to be able to actively protect the girls due to a lack of powers. For example, workers cannot lock the girls in or physically prevent them from leaving the home, as Kate and Azim say:

> *she's 15 probably go into residential, she's probably go into a*
> *residential unit, she wouldn't survive cos she'd be just so*
> *vulnerable [pause] she looks vulnerable [pause] she would*
> *not survive in a children's home [pause] she would be more at*
> *risk, because she'd be easier to target, they can't lock them in*
> *their rooms they can't make them if they want to leave*
> *they're free to leave, they can't lock the doors, in foster care*
> *again again you know if they leave they can't grab hold of*
> *them and keep them so*   (Kate)

> *what's foster care going to achieve, you know children at the*
> *age it would probably be a children's home and it would be*
> *easier to go missing from a children's home than from her*
> *home environment*   (Azim)

Research that has explored this topic concurs with the social workers' understandings (for further research see Jago and Pearce, 2008; Harper and Scott, 2005). The understanding that even placements specifically set up to protect sexually exploited girls (and others) cannot protect them arguably reinforces the social workers' understandings of the girls constructed 'totalised' (ibid) victim status further. These girls are understood as vulnerable and further victimised *even* if they are in a place whose primary purpose is to protect them. The social workers generally view children's homes/foster placements as 'not being the

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answer' for sexually exploited children, expressing the view that these places, especially residential care homes, could actually make children more vulnerable to exploitation, as Cath says:

> *it's quite sad really when you, you're sort of tied though,*
> *when I were in the children's home, you know there's nothing*
> *you can do you know, you can't lock them in their bedrooms*
> *but even though you know what they're doing and going out*
> *and if there's sort of a taxi or car waiting outside, and you*
> *know what's going to happen to them and there's nowt you*
> *try and do all you can*   (Cath)

Alongside the social workers' understanding that care homes are essentially unsafe, the possibility of money being available to fund such accommodation is also viewed as being unlikely, especially in the present economic climate. Secure accommodation, where the girl is locked up, (for 'her own safety') is also viewed as not an option for most girls, even if her life is in extreme danger. The problem of money featured significantly and is especially relevant if the girl is nearing the age of sixteen as Azim says:

> *unless there is a clear risk to their life and I know of a*
> *colleague who did obtain a secure order and the girl was*
> *moved out of authority into a secure home, that's seems to be*
> *the only, the only answer, but, they are very rarely offered*

> (Azim)

Thus, the victim status of the sexually exploited girl is further 'confirmed', social workers understand that places set up to protect young people are inadequate or unavailable. Even if sexually exploited girls are placed somewhere that is supposed to protect them, the social workers do not think that they will be safe; in fact, they might be more vulnerable to CSE. This perception of care homes has been commented on not only because it adds to, and further confirms the social workers' constructions of sexually exploited girls' victim-status (that they are difficult to protect), but it also elicits a concerning indictment of the care system as viewed by the social workers. Moreover, highlighting the worrying understanding of the interviewees that perpetrators are able to sexually exploit seemingly unhindered.

5.4 Parents

This section briefly explores how social workers, on the one hand construct parents as partly to blame for having a child who is sexually exploited but simultaneously consider them as possible partners in protecting the child. In many of the interviews, sympathy is expressed for the parents and what they have to deal with when living with a sexually exploited child

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and indeed with the stresses of parenting adolescents generally. Some of the social workers draw on their own experiences of parenting and by doing so highlight what they think a parent needs to do in order to prevent a child from being sexually exploited; they also show how, in fact, they do blame parents, as Gill demonstrates:

> *umm [pause] my daughter wouldn't be vulnerable, umm but*
> *well I am looking at her from an older point of view now, she's*
> *19 now. I, I think of my own daughter at that age and you,*
> *you know me as a, having a warm, safe secure family life*
> *umm you know with a family support network, friends, going*
> *to a good school [pause] I don't, and and me being vigilant to*
> *what was, me being available and vigilant to what was going*
> *off and me being pro-active I can't see that my own daughter*
> *would fall into that, have fallen into that category umm* (Gill)

Gill constructs sexually exploited girls as those who have not experienced what she gave her daughter; she prevented her daughter from being *'vulnerable'* by providing, "*warmth, safe and secure family life, being available and vigilant*". She understands that her own parenting style has been successful in terms of protecting her daughter; in turn, arguably constructing parents whose children are sexually exploited as those who do not parent like her. If parents are to have children who are not vulnerable to CSE then they should parent as Gill does. Gill and many of the other social worker's construct 'good parenting' as a primary buffer in preventing girls from being sexually exploited. As mentioned earlier, all (or most) of the responsibility for whether CSE will happen (or not) to a girl rests with the parents (and girl). It is also notable that, in the main, when the social workers discuss parenting, fathers are not referred to, implying that responsibility for good parenting and making sure your child is not vulnerable to CSE lies primarily with the mother. For example, the role of fathers in bringing up their children and safeguarding them was barely mentioned by any of the social workers. This may imply that mothers are viewed by the social workers as being more to blame for for their child being exploited than fathers and/or that the role of the mother is deemed more significant to social workers then the fathers. It could also imply that girls who are sexually exploited are understood by the interviewees to be more likely to be living in single parent (mother) families.

Although parents are blamed recurrently throughout the data, there is also sympathy. Tina and Beth (below) demonstrate their understanding about how difficult it must be for parents to protect their child:

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obviously from our perspective it would be about parents
protecting, yes they can't, you know, pin her down and chain
her up as much as some parents do get to that point

(Beth)

I thought you know what if it was my, if it was my daughter,
what would I be doing, what actually would I be doing, you
know, [pause] so it were alright going out judging and saying
well, you need to do this, this and this but actually the parent
in that situation on a daily basis 24/7, what would you do?
apart from, nail the door to the, to the frame [pause] my
daughter were in attic she wouldn't have got out   (Tina)

In Tina's interview, she mentions several times how she would '*nail the door to the frame*' if it were her daughter being sexually exploited- to stop her getting out to the exploiters, not, interestingly, to stop them getting in. This suggests that some social workers view stopping the girls getting out to the perpetrators of more of a concern or priority than stopping the perpetrators getting in, again assigning a level of blame. Her understandings are similar to Gill; she says she would do anything to protect her child, or prevent her from being vulnerable to CSE, even by taking extreme measures, such as nailing down a door, implying that these are the lengths any parent should go to. However, she also expresses her understanding that it can be extremely difficult for parents to protect a sexually exploited child and in turn empathises with such parents.

The majority of the data concerning parents centred on them being inadequate and neglectful:

parents can be very umm manipulative [...] if they've been
involved with children's services previously then definitely

(Cath)

she's 14 and mum knows she's 14 and knows he's 19 and it's
like, come on mum, she's two years under the age limit, he's
two years over the age limit, you can't condone it, you've got
parents fortunately not all parents act protectively and some
parents are very worn down by their teenagers   (Kelly)

However, there is also a recognition of the need to work with them and help them understand more about CSE. The need to educate parents and support them is indicative of

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most of the interviews, as illustrated by Kate below. Working with parents to help them protect their child and be involved with such activities as intelligence gathering is seen as important and is understood by the social workers as helpful in terms of protecting the girl:

> *parents umm, struggle [pause] but I don't think we always*
> *umm intervene with parents and give them the understanding*
> *and the knowledge that they need to have to be able to*
> *protect the young people [pause] parents need the work*
> *doing first before we make the decision to whether they can*
> *protect, if they've got that understanding of what CSE is and*
> *how to and how to you know how to sort of you know parent*
> *in that scenario*   (Kate)

Kate and others also highlight the potential inappropriateness of a child protection response as an issue that needs thinking through:

> *I think sometimes we jump too quick to put them on child*
> *protection register for CSE [pause] I mean some parents can't*
> *protect and that's different issue then we do need to look at*
> *child protection but I've had parents who at the end of their*
> *tether, they just don't know what to do and child has gone on*
> *child protection register well that that actually stigmatises*
> *parents that's, you know their child's being on the CP reg,*
> *that, through no fault of their own sometimes, so I do* (Kate)

Kate's sympathy for the parents is a common, if less significant theme when compared to the constructions of them as inadequate within the data. She understands that CSE is a complex subject and that parents need 'working with' in order that they can better understand it and respond to their child's needs. She and other social workers believe that it can be beneficial for both parents and the child if parents can be engaged in safeguarding processes. She also presents an interesting point, as do a number of the other social workers, namely that the assessments used for CSE are not designed for extra-familial sexual abuse/exploitation and that this can be problematic if it is not the parents from whom the child needs protecting (See PACE, 2014 for more information and possible solutions to this).

This section has considered how social workers construct the parents of sexually exploited girls. Parents are constructed as a binary by the social workers, inadequate and neglectful, yet also viewed with a certain amount of sympathy by the interviewees, seen as being in

need of educating about CSE in order that they can work with agencies to try to protect their child.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter discusses how all eighteen social workers construct sexually exploited girls as likely to be socially and economically deprived. Girls who are 'products' of a family that fails to provide for them materially and emotionally which, as a consequence, leaves them highly vulnerable to CSE and thus the girls are viewed as multi-dimensional victims. There is little recognition by the social workers that sexually exploited girls could be anything or anyone else for example, not from a socially and economically deprived family. This reflects what others have said (see Dodsworth, 2015; Hughes-Jones and Roberts, 2015; Melrose, 2013) that it is not uncommon for sexually exploited girls to be constructed (incorrectly) as a homogenous group. Thus, the social workers focus is not on the perpetrators of the CSE or on wider social, economic and political structures within which CSE is perpetuated but rather it is on *what it is about* individual girls and their families that makes them exploitable. The problem with this is, as PACE (2014) notes, that blame is misplaced:

> *The focus for the cause of the sexual exploitation should be on the perpetrator rather than the parents' socio-economic difficulties or domestic issues.* (p. 5)

Furthermore, in addition to these understandings, the social workers construct sexually exploited girls contradictorily, they understand them as 'totalised' victims (Phoenix and Oerton, 2005) but they are also understood as agents seeking out and receiving material and emotional gain. This results in the social workers having a somewhat paradoxical understanding of sexually exploited girls especially when it comes to the issue of the gain they understand she receives. For example, if she is gaining from the CSE, materially and emotionally, then can she be viewed as a 'real' victim?

As is now explored in chapter six, the focus being on the girls and her family and *what it is about them* may be problematic, particularly with regard to how sexually exploited girls maybe viewed as blame-worthy and as a consequence, their 'role' in the CSE concentrated on more by the social workers than anyone else's.

Chapter 6: Blame

*Lisa is placing herself at that risk [...] the plan needs to be to educate her,
and try to give her alternatives to move away from that lifestyle, generally
it's not as exciting as what the men are offering, you know bit of boxercise
or a session at the gym or something* (Azim)

The previous two chapters explore how the social workers understand CSE as something that happens to a *type* of girl, from a *type* of family. The implication being that if the girls changed or were different for example, were *not* vulnerable or had their *needs met*, then the exploitation would probably not happen, rather than primarily considering stopping the perpetrators exploitation as the means of ending the abuse. This chapter continues to untangle the understandings of the social workers concerning who is to blame for the sexual exploitation of girls. It does so by exploring the concept of blame, looking particularly at who social workers construct as responsible for the sexually exploitation of girls. Although the answer to this question might seem obvious, the findings suggest that the social workers have ambiguous understandings surrounding the issue of blame, demonstrated by a recurrent two-fold theme within the data: the onus is on the girls and, an absence of blame is on the perpetrators.

The chapter is divided into seven sections and begins by exploring the social workers' understandings of the perpetrators of CSE before secondly, considering how the perpetrators are 'absented' (Lamb, 1999, p. 122) by the interviewees. This section draws particularly on Lamb (1999) when analysing this part of the data, who suggests that the gender of perpetrators of violence against women and girls is often absented from discussions in order to deny or distract from the prevalence of male violence and structural inequalities. How the social workers construct an absence of blame for the perpetrators is then evidenced by looking specifically in the third section at how they place so much onus/responsibility on the girls to act in certain ways. The fourth section then discusses the understanding of the social workers that the girls have placed themselves in the (potentially) sexually exploitive situation and this is explored as an area of particular interest. How this distracts focus from the perpetrator and draws on anachronistic discourses, which hold females responsible for stopping/preventing, their own abuse is also considered (see Burkett and Hamilton, 2012; Gill, 2009; Jackson, 1999). The fifth section explores the social workers understanding that sexually exploited girls need to understand

their situation and recognise that they are being abused; followed by the sixth section which considers how perpetrators are understood by the interviewees as being very difficult to stop, unless the girls give evidence, reinforcing *the onus being on the girls*. The conclusion draws these various elements together, directing the reader to the next chapter which focuses on the 'red thread' of agency; particularly pertinent (to this chapter) as it illustrates how the social workers reconstruct and (re)understand elements of the choice-making they identify sexually exploited girls as making in an attempt not to blame them.

6.0 Understanding the perpetrators

The social workers were asked what they understand about the perpetrators of CSE and what they think motivates them. The most common answer referred to the perpetrators need for power and control, understood by the social workers as one of the primary motivators behind their actions. However, the interviewees other answers are particularly interesting especially when compared to their understandings of sexually exploited girls. There is notable diversity and, interestingly, caution in committing to a definitive response, whereas, in contrast, sexually exploited girls are more confidently understood. The social workers 'know' why the girls 'do what they do' -because they are socially/economically deprived, and have un-met needs (see chapter 5), but the reasons for the perpetrators actions are less clear and more varied. Many interviewees appear to struggle to describe what might motivate the perpetrators and some comment that it is a difficult question. For example, many said, they do not know or are not sure why they exploit or commented that it was not something they had thought about before. It could be argued that this is unsurprising, as social workers usually do not work with perpetrators but just with the girls and their families. However, the lack of construction of the perpetrator as a 'type' of person juxtaposes starkly with the construction of the girls. Most significantly, the perpetrators are generally not universalised in the same way sexually exploited girls are; the social workers have a more nuanced understanding of them.

The social workers' constructions are also surprising, as they do not, generally, overtly draw on the very powerful and monolithic discourses concerning people who (sexually) abuse children (see Parton, 2014; Finkelhor, 1979 regarding such discourses). For example, the language used to describe the perpetrators is not as visceral or vitriolic as expected. Indeed, the perpetrators are constructed more heterogeneously and indeed tentatively than sexually exploited girls and the social workers appear less willing/able to provide definitive answers as to why these people might exploit. Kate demonstrates this ambiguous and uncertain understanding:

> *what motivates, it's really, really difficult, cos I really don't*

know, umm [long pause] I don't know, I really couldn't say
[pause] umm, [sigh] I suppose [pause][sigh] I mean [pause]
I think some of the perpetrators of sexual exploitation are all
very, very different and I think there's different ways in which
umm [pause]   (Kate)

Kate illustrates a common theme from within the data, an apparent lack of confidence in committing to who might exploit and why; constructing perpetrators as all being '*very, very different*'. This uncertainty is perhaps more surprising as Kate is a social worker who only works with CSE, thus it might be assumed that she would have more understanding due to increased training and experience. However, Kate, alongside the other interviewees, appeared to be *trying to understand the perpetrators.* It is important to note that this should not be confused with the notion that interviewees are sympathetic towards the perpetrators behaviour but rather, they are just not sure what might motivate perpetrators. A number of the interviewees give a type of quasi-psycho analysis when talking about what might motivate perpetrators, for example, Kelly (who, interestingly, is also a CSE social worker):

umm, well they're sex offenders [pause] who have an interest
in children and nobody their own age, they're not interested in
going out with another 25 year old, they want a 14 year old
and I think they have to break down their own kind of internal
and external boundaries don't they[...]might be they drink
some alcohol and snort some coke and they drive around in
the nice car and the girls feel flattered by that, oh well they're
flattered, they're flattered, it's ok, their internal models you
know are, are well I'll, I haven't hurt them, they got in me car
willingly [...] the rationale inside well, you know they're not
really worth that much anyway, anything for a cigarette, if it
weren't me it would be somebody else, and it's how you, just
how you umm internalise it   (Kelly)

Kelly's begins by using the term, '*sex offender*', undoubtedly a strong and emotive term; she goes on, interestingly, to say that the perpetrators have an exclusive interest in sex with people who are younger, to the exclusion of all other age groups. Furthermore, and most significantly, she understands that the perpetrator goes through some sort of psychological process in order to justify their behaviour. She does not, as might be expected, draw on discourses such as, the perpetrators are all 'perverts' or 'evil bastards', a popular construction concerning sex offenders- especially those who offend against children

(McCartan, 2004). Rather, she constructs them as, *'breaking down boundaries'* *'internalising'* and *'rationalising'* their actions, and thus understands the perpetrators as people who act not without thought or even conscience but rather as people who convince themselves that their actions are justifiable because *'someone else would do it if they didn't'* and *'the girl gets in the car willingly,'* *'the girls are flattered'*, *'they are not worth much anyway'*. Kelly's understanding suggests that she is perhaps trying to think as perpetrators do and therefore she can see how they might rationalise their behaviour. She appears to do this by drawing on (her) constructions of the girls as agents for example, she says, 'they get willingly into the car'. This implies that she understands that if the perpetrators understanding is similar then this might enable them to justify their behaviour. The question that arises from her understandings (of both the perpetrator and girls) and the other social workers is whether they blame, or understand the girls as playing a complicit role within the perpetrator/girl relationship. Furthermore, do the interviewees think, to some degree that the perpetrators justification is correct.

Another element within the social workers' understandings concerning the perpetrators of CSE is that they understand there to be different *types* of perpetrators, or different types of exploitative 'relationships'. There is also a lack of clarity about what might, or might not be defined as an exploitative relationship; for example, the term *'inappropriate relationships'* is a phrase used by a number of social workers for instance, where a girl is 14 and a boy 18 years old, as Josie and Kelly say:

> *what I not struggle with but I think what what maybe a lot of us, kind of have problems with is is the differentiation between abusive boyfriend and then CSE […] because abusive boyfriend can then become CSE or it can just be an inappropriate relationship can't it so I think, sometimes when I go on training I con, convince myself that everything is CSE and its and I have, I have to really kind of, check what I am thinking* (Josie)

> *umm we get a lot of, there's a difference between an inappropriate relationship and being groomed and I think there's a bit of a clash […] if a 14-year-old is going out with a 19-year-old, that's inappropriate, it's completely inappropriate but he isn't necessarily buying her gifts, top-ups giving her drugs and alcohol and passing her around […] his mates or even just keeping him, her to himself […] he might be quite*

> *an immature young lad [pause] umm. Maybe he's not got*
> *very good [pause] barriers an understanding of appropriate*
> *age relationships but he int necessarily going out with her to*
> *abuse her*   (Kelly)

Social workers identify that there can be overlaps between a sexually exploitative relationship and an inappropriate one and comment that this adds to the ambiguity surrounding CSE, primarily because it results in confusion about how to respond, in safeguarding terms, to young people correctly.

Possibly complicating things further concerning different 'types' of exploiters, a few participants refer to people, mainly younger people, who they understand to be exploiting 'unknowingly', as opposed to exploiters, usually adults, who exploit 'knowingly'. This suggests that blaming such people unequivocally is not necessary fitting; if they do not 'know' what they are doing then should they be blamed? Consider, for example, male peers of girls who have so normalised the idea of plying girls with alcohol and then coercing them into sexual activity that they do not realise that their actions would be viewed as exploitative by safeguarding professionals. Mandy suggests that this can be a particularly opaque area:

> *there's people that knowingly exploit and people that*
> *unknowingly exploit […]there are persons who know what*
> *they're doing, they are calculating if I give her this bottle of*
> *vodka, you know she […] they like knowingly do it, they know*
> *that what they are doing is wrong, but then I think you get*
> *some others that do it without realising it, without realising*
> *what they are doing; [pause][…] these males don't*
> *understand that by actually giving these girls alcohol and*
> *having sex with them and you know passing them around, I*
> *don't think they actually realise the impact […]what they are*
> *actually doing[…] yeh, and I think they think it's like the*
> *norm, which a lot of society does doesn't it? How many times*
> *does an 18yr lad that's got a 14yr old girlfriend [pause] yeh*
> *[pause] so*   (Mandy)

It may be that as Mandy and some of the other social workers suggest some young men are *'unknowingly'* exploiting girls. It may also be that they are *'knowingly'* exploiting them, but that type of behaviour is viewed as 'normal' or acceptable by the boys involved and indeed the girls, as Nigel also concurs:

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> *at the other end we have a cohort of exploiters who probably*
> *wouldn't see themselves as exploiters [pause] typically at the*
> *younger end [pause]typically at an age a, a young young*
> *male at an age that isn't that different from the people that*
> *they're exploiting [pause] and in much the same way as the*
> *victims don't perceive that's what happening to them is abuse*
> *or exploitation* (Nigel)

The concept of *'unknowingly exploiting'* is potentially problematic and needs troubling. It is important to note that Mandy's knowledge, alongside the other social workers is socially constructed and as has been the case throughout this research little acknowledgement is made by the interviewees of wider structures influencing young people's behaviour such as sexism, misogyny and (sexual) power imbalances and double standards which exist between genders (see Albanesi, 2010; Gill, 2007; Hearn, 1987). This research argues that any analysis of CSE (by social workers or anyone else) that does not recognise such influences is precarious (see Bragg and Buckingham, 2009; Lees, 1996). Of course it is important to recognise that the girls involved (in Mandy's comments) may be acting agentically and may not view themselves as being exploited but rather understand the sexual relations with these young men as consensual and non-exploitative. However, it is important to note that there is always the possibility that these situations may be exploitative or may become exploitative when gender power imbalances are invariably present.

Finally, in this section concerning social workers *trying to understand the perpetrators,* it is of particular interest that a number of interviewees refer to issues that the perpetrators may have in their own lives that could have led to them exploiting, for example, the perpetrator experiencing abuse in the past or having 'attachment' issues. This construction again reiterates that the social workers understand perpetrators do not *just* exploit because they are evil, or because they want sexual gratification or material reward. The reasons are more complex and maybe a result of the perpetrators' personal experiences, such as described in the excerpts below:

> *yeh, maybe it's something about them, and I, I look quite*
> *deep into things, [laughs] I think it's my psychology but*
> *maybe it's something about them as well and their upbringing*
> *or you know, that they need to have that element of control*
> *over someone* (Cath)

> *umm, well, urmm [pause] I don't know some people say just,*

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well I don't know, biological genetics you know, umm,
probably umm maybe learnt behaviour probably them being
umm a victim of abuse you know (Sadeem)

To summarise, the interviewees' understandings of the perpetrators are less confident, abstract, and disparate, when compared with their constructions of the girls. One of the reasons for this, as expressed by a number of the social workers, is that they had previously not thought about *why* perpetrators exploit, or what motivates them. Power and control are understood by the social workers as primary motivating factors for the perpetrators, but this is alongside many other possible 'reasons', as has been discussed. Similarly, to other findings within the data concerning the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls, the social workers' understandings about the perpetrators are never placed in a wider context of gender inequality or social, economic or moral structures or restraints (Pearce, 2009). This abstract way of understanding perpetrators, and indeed sexually exploited girls, Pearce (2009) argues, is problematic. For example, she suggests that if the girls' 'behaviour' becomes the focus of attention for professionals then the girls will be 'blamed' (p. 15). Analogously, this research suggests that another problem that arises from focusing on the girls' behaviours disproportionately is that focus is shifted away from the actual cause of the exploitation, the perpetrators, arguably resulting in the 'question' of who is to blame becoming worryingly nebulous rather than being clearly and fundamentally placed on the perpetrators.

The next section explores how blame is 'absented' from the perpetrators and why this might be the case; the findings are placed in a wider theoretical framework concerning discourses on blame.

6.1 Absence of blame on the perpetrators

Describing the **'absence'** of something, in this case blame, can be challenging as one is essentially trying to describe something that is not there. Nevertheless, the theme- the *absence of blame on the perpetrators* is particularly significant and is best illustrated when juxtaposed with how much of the onus is placed on sexually exploited girls. To that end therefore, the next section of the chapter, 6.2, serves as a corollary to this section by continuing to further demonstrate in greater detail *how* blame is **'absented'** by the social workers by describing how the onus is placed on the girls so monumentally.

The understandings of the social workers, regarding **'absenting'** the perpetrators, draws on wider discourses about how violence against women is often responded to and understood and at this point in the chapter it is helpful to reflect theoretically on the subject of blame.

Lamb (1999) discusses the disproportionate focus commonly placed on a woman's character in rape and sexual abuse discourses as opposed to discussions about the perpetrators (p. 95) (see also McRobbie, 2007; Phoenix and Oerton, 2005; Melrose, 2004). She critiques constructions of women who have been raped, as women who are understood to have veered away from traditional female roles and also considers how within those discourses the 'absenting of perps' (p. 122) can occur as a result. Arguably, sexually exploited girls may 'veer' from certain 'traditional roles' (Melrose 2012; 2010; Pearce, 2009) especially concerning childhood, childhood and sexuality and child sexual abuse. A child that subverts these dominant constructions can find herself ostracised and deemed outside the realm of protection and, furthermore, blamed (Robinson, 2013; 2012; O'Dell, 2008; 2003; Egan and Hawkes, 2012; 2008; Shanahan, 2007). Lamb's (1999) analysis reflects findings within this research, wherein perpetrators are made less significant or less central by the social workers through the significant focus placed on the role of the girls. In particular, the gendered nature of the abuse is obscured. Lamb (1999) notes that it is a wider social problem that, instead of naming the perpetrators of the abuse as male, language is used that blurs the specific problem of gendered violence in order to make it socially more 'palatable' within the patriarchal context. Likewise, Lamb(ibid.) reflects on the 'passive voice' by which the gendered nature of violence is so often 'absent' with the result that victims are more likely to be blamed or viewed as complicit in what has happened to them:

> *While the absenting of perpetrators from reports contributes to victim focus and thus victim blaming, the diffusion of blame between victim and perpetrator is more subtle and thus more damaging* (p. 116)

Lamb's (ibid) analysis is drawn on particularly as it helps clarify why the issue of gender maybe obscured within wider CSE discourses and within findings from this data. Whilst recent discourses on CSE have primarily focused on the ethnicity and religion of the perpetrators of CSE, discussions concerning the (generally) gendered nature of male violence against females within CSE has been largely non-existent (see on this issue Cockbain, 2013; The *Times*, 2012; *Telegraph*, 2011). Also, as so often happens with cases of child abuse/neglect that receive such emotive public attention, much more focus has been placed on the failure of protective services than the role of the perpetrators (Parton, 2014; Merrick, 1996; Frost and Stein, 1989). As Cohen (1972) notes:

> *Social reaction is misplaced or displaced towards a target that is not the real problem.* (p. 126)

Regarding wider public discussions which have expressed anger towards safeguarding

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services (ibid.), thus also 'absenting' the perpetrators, the research finds, unsurprisingly, that social workers do not blame themselves for CSE being perpetrated, and again reflecting wider discourses, they do not generally discuss the gendered nature of male sexual violence against females within CSE. However, the social workers do understand that the role the sexually exploited girl 'plays' within CSE as highly significant. Furthermore, the focus the social workers place on the girls 'role' in the CSE results in them 'absentee-ing' (Lamb, 1999) or marginalising the role of the perpetrator. Although findings suggest the social workers construct more onus on the girls than on the perpetrators, some of the interviewees do recognise that this is unfair on the girls. Indeed, there is a sense of unease from some of the social workers about this status quo as demonstrated by Nell. She compares the treatment of sexually exploited girls with women who experience domestic violence, highlighting the similarities regarding how often in domestic abuse women are viewed as primarily responsible for protecting their children even though they are not the perpetrators (Hester, 2012; Lapierre, 2010; 2008). Keddell (2014) for example, cites research by Landsman et al (2007) which found that, when interviewing child protection workers:

> *workers were more likely to view women as more culpable for exposing their children to harm than their partner, even though in every case, their male partner was the violence perpetrator.* (p. 930)

Nell highlights how futile it is *not to* prioritise stopping the perpetrators because otherwise, the exploitation simply continues and other girls are affected:

> *you might move that girl away and then the next one will come to you, it's like a rolling programme [pause] yeh, you think well they are still there, those perps are still there [...] and especially with domestic violence I really struggle with that because we have, like I said, we have a lot of umm kind of perpetrators who come through, who don't do anything to address what they're doing at all, nothing is done, do you know what I mean? and I find that really difficult, coming it from like a bit of a feminist viewpoint, why are we targeting these mums [...]they've got three kids, conferences, meetings, social work visits and that bloke does nothing [pause] I mean it really gets my back up, cos you know you think well, I, I well yeh alright I'll do that, you know, you get a piece of work and right yeh fine I'll do that keeping safe*

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work with, cos actually you know it's better than nothing, so
you think well alright ok I'll do it, but I suppose when you
really sit down and think about it what are you […] what are
we saying to those girls actually, protect yourself because we
can't protect you, we can't do it, so you have to protect
yourself that's not, to me that's not […]   (Nell)

Nell reflects the dissatisfaction found in a number of the interviews at how much onus is on the girls. Although Nell is quite unique in her articulated feminist viewpoint, many of the social workers express the view that the response sexually exploited girls receive from safeguarding services is concerning and unfair; particularly regarding how so much is expected of them, compared to the perpetrators. Nonetheless, they do not seem to recognise that they are part of that 'system' and that their understanding of sexually exploited girls and how much onus they themselves place on the girls could be perpetuating the problem. Furthermore, little is offered in terms of a solution by any of the social workers as to how this might be changed or challenged, for example, how *less* onus could be placed in the girls and *more* onus placed on the perpetrators. Of particular note, as has been mentioned was the (almost) complete absence of a feminist framing of CSE by the social workers or any recognition of its gendered nature.

Evidentially discourses concerning violence against women/girls, particularly regarding the (usually) gendered nature of such violence is commonly obscured. As Lamb (1999) suggests, this status quo is maintained and perpetuated in order to serve wider more insidious social ends; the most obvious one being the continued oppression of women; marginalisation and denial of the extent of gendered violence in society, nationally and globally; and the maintenance of patriarchy (Lamb, 2011; Gill, 2009; Jackson, 1999). This is reinforced by heteronormative, hegemonic concepts which perpetually blame women and girls for violence and abuse perpetrated against them currently and historically (Angelides, 2012; Alder, 2008; Cain, 1996). The onus placed on women and girls to protect themselves, to be the gatekeepers of men's sexuality and, furthermore, to get the balance 'right' in terms of how they present themselves sexually is a prevalent and resilient discourse (Jackson and Scott, 2010). With the number of competing discourses present concerning CSE, it is perhaps not surprising that ambiguity appears to dominate in some areas of the social workers' understandings. However, this research suggests that *not* blaming the sexually exploited girl for being exploited must become a normal and unequivocal part of all CSE discourses.

One of the most effective ways of further illustrating how the social workers absent blame
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from the perpetrators is by exploring in more detail, *how* the social workers place the 'onus on the girls' and this is what we now move onto.

6.2 Onus on the girls

Within the data the social workers repeatedly construct sexually exploited girls as needing to take responsibility for their 'role' in the sexually exploitative situation by doing certain things if the CSE is to stop and these areas are focused on in this section. As noted in chapter four, this understanding is different to how the interviewees understood the 'role' of children sexually abused in the home. It is useful to reiterate how the social workers place a great deal of focus on the girls and their families and the reasons why they think certain girls are sexually exploited. Thus demonstrating how blame is, at least in part, assigned to the girl and her family. This is inherent in the social workers' understandings of CSE, as articulated below:

> *you know, try and understand you know what their (sexually exploited girls) life has been like and what maybe led them to where they are now, umm,* (Cath)

> *you want to fit in with the adult world and you start experimenting you know with drugs and alcohol and smoking and you know young girls you know the way they sometimes the way they dress and present themselves out of modesty you know umm so* (Sadeem)

> *she's more receptive because of, and that makes her more vulnerable because of what's going on at home* (Tina)

The above comments reflect the social workers understanding that sexually exploited girls are already 'troubled' and therefore particularly vulnerable to CSE; this understanding implies that the social workers view, at least in part, girls and their families responsible for the sexual exploitation. There are three other main areas that the social workers place significant emphasis on concerning the onus being on the girl, and these are now explored in more detail:

-the social workers understand sexually exploited girls to be 'putting themselves at risk'
-the girls need to understand their situation and want to 'change'/leave
-the girls need to disclose, or give evidence, if there is any chance of stopping the

perpetrators.

6.3 'She is putting herself at risk'

A key finding elicited from the data is the repeated understanding of the social workers that sexually exploited girls put themselves at risk of harm. The interviewees' understanding is that girls place themselves in situations where they are going to be, or likely to be sexually exploited, for example, going missing, absconding from school and staying out late at night. The social workers do <u>not</u> say that girls want to be sexually exploited, but they do suggest that she is willing to put herself at risk of harm where this is likely, because of the gain she is receiving (see also chapters four and five). Within the eighteen interviews, many comments were made regarding the sexually exploited girl *putting herself* or, *allowing herself* to be in risky situations. This language and understanding, as identified in chapter one, is nothing new. Recent reports (Casey, 2015; Jay, 2014; Jago et al., 2011) have highlighted that this language is a significant and indeed, problematic issue within some safeguarding professionals' understandings of CSE. Mainly because it implies that some professionals understand sexually exploited girls are at risk of harm <u>first and foremost</u> because they are *'engaging in risky behaviour'* (Berelowitz et al., 2013, p. 23) rather than because they are being put at risk by the perpetrators. This research argues that there is a need for a change in the language used by professionals concerning this issue, wherein girls are always described and understood as being *put at risk by the perpetrators.* Some of the ways in which sexually exploited girls are understood to be as putting themselves in risky situations are demonstrated in the excerpts below:

> *but these are the kind of cases you run around in circles*
> *forever [laugh] because you know if the girl can't see the risk*
> *she'll continue to go missing and she'll continue to put herself*
> *at risk* (Azim)

> *cos they're putting themselves in situations that are*
> *vulnerable, going missing, things like that* (Kate)

The repeated refrain from the interviewees is that sexually exploited girls are being exploited because *they have put themselves* in risky situations and because of that action, more than anything else has, they are being exploited. Barbara and Sue both demonstrate this, Barbara places the onus on the girl for "letting herself be in the situation" and Sue comments that if girls were educated about '*saying no'* CSE might decrease, assigning the responsibility on girls to not be exploited rather than the perpetrator to stop exploiting:

> *trying to help her understand that this you can't let yourself*

be in the situation where men are abusing you it's not right

for them to be doing that   (Barbara)

it's all about risk and it's that risk taking behaviour int it?
[pause]and I wonder if, if young girls were more educated
umm to the degree that they could say no and feel confident
in that I wonder if we could maybe cut down some of this
exploitation   (Sue)

A reason commonly given by the social workers to explain why the sexually exploited girl puts herself at risk is that she cannot 'see', or does not understand what is happening to her. However, all of the above excerpts reflect the understanding of the social workers that the girls are making a choice and placing themselves in situations where there is the potential for sexual exploitation to take place implying, that at least on some level the girls are to blame for being exploited. If they were not putting themselves in these situations, then it would not happen. It is interesting to note that phrases such as, the perpetrators are putting her in that situation, or the perpetrators are placing her at risk, are not utilised by any of the interviewees.

Kate and Barbara refer to other social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls; social workers referring to the opinions of 'other' social workers is common within a number of the interviews, as is distancing themselves from those opinions:

I've heard comments made like, she's a groomer at 15 and I
think, oh god that is so bad   (Kate)

 I've heard colleagues saying, umm which is very wrong, she,
oh she likes it, you know, they don't really acknowledge that
this is abuse if someone is 15 years old they think, well she is
making a choice to like, to sort of lifestyle choice but this is a
child at the end of the day, where if it is a 3 year old it would
be a safeguarding thing […] so that's where sometimes,
there's like that dilemma, that if you think it is not sexual
abuse it is a lifestyle choice cos they are given money or
incentive, so that, that can be sort of difficult, you can use
sort of a different approach isn't it, within that, if you go with
this is not really abuse she's, she's into it as well

                                                        (Barbara)

This reasons the interviewees distance themselves is that they understand that those 'other'

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social workers do possibly overtly blame girls for being sexually exploited. One of the reasons they are seen as being to blame, as Nell notes, is because the girls want 'something' and receive 'something'. This again reiterates the social workers' understanding that the transactional element of the sexually exploitative situation means the girls are not understood so much as a 'victim' because they have received something, unlike, as Nell notes below, with CSA. Indeed, Nell clearly says that she understands quite explicitly that girls sexually abused in the home are less blamed by other social workers, whereas sexually exploited girls are more blamed:

> *there's less of an issue, and there's less blame I think, girls*
> *are blamed more for the child, the sexual exploitation*
> *whatever, CSA is very much victim, its she's the victim of that*
> *whereas I don't think CSE, that doesn't conjure up the same*
> *view* (Nell)

In the next excerpt, Nell refers to girls who return repeatedly to the exploiters and who keep going missing. She identifies that this 'behaviour' can be understood as agentic (although she does not use this term) and that as a result, the girl is not treated as a victim but as a participant in the sexual exploitation. The implication is that repeated 'missing episodes' are further interpreted as the girl making a choice to place herself in the situation and are therefore, after a time, not 'followed up'; the girl, possibly deemed to have placed herself outside the realms of protection (Woodiwiss, 2014; Egan and Hawkes, 2009). Furthermore, the social workers understand that if the girl is going to continue to 'act' in this way then she will be 'left to it'. It appears, according to Nell, some social workers believe that if a girl is understood to be making a choice to be in potentially sexually exploitative situations, then some social workers may feel justified in thinking they are relieved of their legal obligation to protect:

> *the more it happens, so the more kind of the girls go missing*
> *and the more they don't engage […] people kind of think, well*
> *its […] I mean I wouldn't think this, this is not my view but I*
> *can see how people might say well, we've tried everything,*
> *we've done everything we can with that and if she's still going*
> *to go off and do a, b, c, and d then there's nothing we can do*
> *about it* (Nell)

There is a sense from Nell and other social workers that because the girl is understood as a choice-maker some social workers give themselves permission to give up on the girl. As Finkelhor (1981) comments, where the sexual abuse of children is concerned, if a child does

anything that:

> *does not conform to the standards of an 'ideal' victim', then*
> *they are likely to be understood as an 'accomplice'* (p. 24).

Nell highlights that when a girl subverts the 'ideal' (Christie, 1986) standards expected from a victim of child sexual abuse, she presents a paradox and, worryingly, Nell suggests that as a result she may be, essentially 'handed over' to her exploiters and actually not protected (see also Lamb and Peterson, 2012; Moore and Rosenthal, 2006; Tolman, 2002). In contrast, as discussed in chapter four, a child who is sexually abused in the home would be responded to and treated as a child/victim because they do 'fit' the social workers' understandings of the 'ideal' (ibid.) victim of sexual abuse, who has not 'put herself' in the situation, but rather is a non-agentic victim of it, she makes no choices (Woodiwiss, 2014).

The issue of blame and how it is, or is not, assigned, is well illustrated by this section of the chapter. For example, language used so openly and frequently within the data referring to girls as '*allowing' abuse* or '*putting themselves at risk'* demonstrates that the social workers have conflicted understandings of sexually exploited girls' agency and choice-making (Robinson, 2013; Egan and Hawkes, 2012; Corteen and Scarton, 1997). The interviewees understand sexually exploited girls to be, at least in part, to blame for being sexually exploited. They understand that she has put herself in that position of risk and therefore, as will be further demonstrated in the next section, she significantly bears the responsibility for getting herself of it. The agency the girls demonstrate, as articulated by Nell so clearly, is germane to the whole issue of blame and this will be discussed and analysed in detail in the next chapter. However, the chapter now moves on to explore how social workers further understand the 'onus being on the girls'.

6.4 Understanding her situation

The social workers all express the belief that sexually exploited girls do not really understand their situation, which is, in part, why they 'allow' themselves to be in it. The implication being that if they did understand that they are a victim of CSE then they would firstly, not have entered into the situation in the first place by putting themselves at risk and secondly, they would not remain in it. This demonstrates the somewhat un-nuanced understanding of a number of the social workers concerning sexually exploited girls and issues around CSE more generally. Furthermore, the interviewees understand that the reason girls do not understand that they are being exploited is (partly) because of the material and emotional gain they receive which prevents them appreciating the 'reality' of their situation, it confuses their understandings. The gifts convince them that what is happening to them is 'okay'.

Although the social workers generally express a desire to work with the girl to help her come to realise what is happening to her, the responsibility is firmly placed with her to *understand her situation,* and, in turn, *want to change and want to get out.* This appeared to be the priority over and above her, for example, being removed from the exploitative situation or being protected from the CSE and the perpetrators stopped. This is not to suggest that the social workers do not view protecting the girls, or stopping the perpetrators as extremely important and desirable, but this is understood as being very difficult to achieve if the girls do not recognise that they are at risk and want to get out, especially if they are nearing the age of 16. Essentially, the girls are required to play a pivotal role in whether or not the CSE stops, but the social workers recognise that this is not always easily done:

> *the other thing is that there so protective of the ones that are*
> *exploiting [pause] because they are so besotted that they*
> *don't want them to get them into trouble* (Mary)

> *she's more closed down and probably would be trying to*
> *protect her boyfriend cos I think in her head he probably loves*
> *her and you know gives her all these things cos he is nice and*
> *doesn't really see that he's using it to to control her, you*
> *know try and get someone to work with Lisa to try and*
> *understand the grooming* (Tom)

As these excerpts demonstrate, the interviewees understand that one of the reasons girl's struggle to recognise they are being exploited is because of the strong emotional feelings they have for the perpetrators and this makes working with them very challenging:

> *we've talked about the relationship with the older exploiting*
> *person you know and I've said you'll be too old for him soon*
> *anyway and they go no, no, they don't like that at all, but I*
> *will, I'll give whatever I think will impact, impact on them*
> (Tina)

> *I think a lot of our social workers will be able to tell you about*
> *looking at what that young person's getting, umm, from that*
> *relationship* (Mandy)

Sue below suggests, as do others, that the girls may also be convinced that they are having

a good time, which is another reason, why they do not understand what is happening to them. However, Sue struggles with this idea and thinks that in reality what these girls are 'involved' in cannot possibly be 'fun', and rather it is "inappropriate"; however, the very fact that she makes such a comment implies that she thinks these girls actually may well be having fun:

> *it's the appropriateness of it, it, it is at 13 years old is it really*
> *fun going round having men in the back of cars and in flats*
> *and being taken to places where you don't know to have sex*
> *at 13yr old [pause] and it's just about umm educating em and*
> *the appropriateness of that and the risk cos it's all about risk*
> *and it's that risk taking behaviour int [sic] it?*   (Sue)

In order to explain this subversion of her understanding of what a child and/or sexually abused girl is 'supposed' to look like, as is so common amongst the interviewees, Sue reverts to explaining or excusing the girl's behaviour by saying that the girl needs educating, that she does not understand. But she also says, '*it is all about risk and it's that risk taking behaviour',* again absenting the perpetrators and not focusing on the risk the girl is being placed at but rather the risk she is understood to be putting herself in. The other concerning part of Sue's understanding is that she does not mention that a 13-year-old who is having sex is actually being raped (Sex Offences Act, 2003).

Azim and Adowa (below) both further illustrate the common understanding of the interviewees that sexually exploited girls need to make certain choices if their situations are to improve and change. Azim understands that the girl has got to *want to change*, utilising the metaphor, "leading a horse to water but you can't make it drink", demonstrating a rather defeatist and insensitive approach. However, he reflects a theme within the data that without that desire on the part of the girl to exit the sexually exploitative situation, the social worker will really struggle, or indeed may not be able to do anything to help her. Adowa (like Sue) suggests that the girls' understanding of their situation is critical, that is what it "comes down to". By the term *understanding* she appears to be suggesting that the girl needs to realise that this is not a good 'course' to be on and again, she focuses on "looking at the family" rather than the perpetrators. All these excerpts highlight how the focus of the social workers is on the girl (and her family) and the onus being on her to understand and want to change, rather than the onus being on the perpetrator changing or stopping exploiting:

> *you know, if somebody doesn't want to change you can't, you*
> *know, you can only, it's the old saying isn't it leading a horse*

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> *to water but you can't make it drink [laughs] you know, yeh,*
> *unless they want to change, we can offer them the support,*
> *help them change, but if they are so entrenched*   (Azim)

> *well, which it comes down I think to her understanding of the*
> *situation […] that this is wrong it's not for you, you know, for*
> *your own good and it's, it's during the assessment looking at*
> *the family*   (Adowa)

Essentially the social workers construct the girls as needing to traverse through a number of stages if she is to 'get out' of the CSE:

 -she needs to recognise that she is placing herself at risk
 -she needs to understand her situation and want to get out; only then can anything realistically be done to help her.

The onus is thus firmly placed on the girl. Furthermore, the social workers understand that their own ability to make choices regarding the response they can provide sexually exploited girls with is dependent on the choices the girl makes in terms of recognising and understanding her situation. They view themselves as unable or unlikely to be effective (in terms of safeguarding) without the girl's recognition of, and desire to, change her situation (see appendix 11). Cath describes this:

> *you have to, got to learn from your own experiences and your*
> *own mistakes but you need to be able to reflect back and*
> *think[…], it's not quite right and the only way you can make a*
> *change is when they acknowledge that, that something, and*
> *they want to say well yeh I've had enough I don't want any*
> *more I want some help to get out I think otherwise, there's*
> *nowt really you can, you know when they say [pause] you*
> *know it's like with anyone, an alcoholic, a drug user when*
> *they say they want that help you can put that help in place*
> *but if they don't want that help there's nothing, [pause] very*
> *little that you can do int there?*   (Cath)

Cath reflects the understanding that, essentially, the girl needs to recognise and take responsibility herself for any changes in her situation. Cath draws on a powerful construction here of people (adults) who are addicted to drugs and alcohol and who need to 'pull themselves' out of that addiction. This is perhaps a surprising construction on which to

draw when referring to a sexually exploited girl and is very different to understandings of girls who are sexually abused in the home; as is Cath's assertion that *the girl has to learn from her experiences and mistakes.* The amount of responsibility placed on the girl to 'do' certain things, such as recognise the abuse, learn from it and want to leave is very explicit in this particular excerpt.

As noted, all the social workers recognise that sexually exploited girls need to be worked with to enable them to understand that they are being exploited. The social workers are generally willing to do that work but they also brought up repeatedly how difficult the work was because of the heavy caseloads they have and the many pressures on their time. A number of the interviewees appreciate that supporting sexually exploited girls requires a great deal of time and tenacity that often, they simply do not have. As Barbara says:

> *but do we need that cos we know it is happening, are we failing these young people? sometimes I feel we are failing these young people, that we are not really giving them the protection that they need* (Barbara)

Thus, the common understanding amongst the interviewees is that girls need to choose to work with them, and cannot be forced, and that may take a long time. Moreover, and worryingly while the girl is 'recognising the abuse', 'understanding it' and being 'worked with' the implication is that the CSE continues, as illustrated below:

> *there's obviously the support thing, but there's also the intervention of catching them before they get drawn more into it as well, you know, and trying to do the preventative work you know, umm so the intensive support team are quite helpful […] I think it's the grooming line they use, to like, video to help girls and boys understand, you know, how they are groomed what kind of things the adult males will do […] so it's like to give them that understanding so that they can see* (Tom)

> *it's common that they don't recognise, umm they, umm that they're being exploited and again that takes time, because they've done some work with these, these kids umm to be able to get get em to that point so it would take for me, specific creativity to be able to do some work and recognise what good and bad relationships are* (Mary)

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Mary highlights how it can take a long time for work to be carried out with a girl and both Tom and Mary discuss the different types of work that may be necessary. The social workers all identify resources they can use in order to help the girl understand her situation. Nevertheless, the interviewees understand, realistically it can take a long while for a girl to 'understand' her situation, if indeed it happens at all. The somewhat worrying implication of this is, that while this 'process' 'plays out' and time passes, the exploitation continues. The apparent, if frustrated acceptance of social workers, that this is just the way it is, is further evidenced by the fact that no alternative course of action is suggested. This presents a concerning picture, particularly regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of current child protection procedures that are in place for sexually exploited young people (see PACE guidelines on '*The Relational Safeguarding Model*', 2014 which sets out a useful alternative assessment procedure for responding to children sexually exploited outside the home). Findings from this research imply, albeit contentiously, that current child protection procedures do not sufficiently, or quickly enough, protect sexually exploited girls from harm. This is surprising and concerning, especially considering that many sexually exploited children, for example those described in the vignettes in chapter four, would be deemed at risk of significant harm under the Children's Act, 1989, Sect 47 (see appendix 10 for a diagram explaining further the social workers' understandings).

6.5 The girl must disclose

In this final part of the 'onus on the girl' section, the social workers understanding that the girls are significantly responsible for stopping the perpetrators by choosing to disclose and give evidence is explored. The over-riding understanding of the interviewees is that if the girl does not give evidence then it is very difficult to stop the perpetrators. Barbara exemplifies this, by also drawing on previous discussions in this chapter, wherein the girls are understood to be putting themselves at risk:

> *if she makes a disclosure and there is evidence definitely, the police, there will be prosecution, but if she doesn't say exactly, or she doesn't give you enough info, you can try to work with her, you know, like, I think they will try to put a lot of work, a lot of direct work with her, make her understand the risk that she is putting herself in, the risk that is surrounding the circumstances, but it's very difficult when there is no disclosure from a young person, this is one that I am finding very frustrating that if they are not saying anything its difficult, it is difficult for us* (Barbara)

One of the problems the social workers identify is that in all likelihood the girl may choose
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not to co-operate and disclose. It is clear that the interviewees generally find the level of onus on the girl unfair and understand that the chances of stopping the perpetrators without the girl's co-operation very unlikely. They generally found this reliance on the girls and the length of time involved in trying to secure a prosecution frustrating:

> I'd like to see more prosecutions, I don't think there has been enough, and I'd like to know why that is umm, is it because we're not getting the right info that we should be getting umm or is it because do we actually need a disclosure from a young person? This is what I find frustrating Sarah   (Mary)

> it takes years for this, police sort of gathering evidence isn't it, gathering every bit of evidence and it takes a long time and unfortunately its long for these young people being abused[...]and cos they want to sort of link them isn't it, to link information from different groups that they come up with a prosecution and it takes time and the abuse will be just ongoing and I think that's why these adults continue to do it cos they know that they won't really catch us if they don't really have information[...] it is frustrating, it is frustrating, it is very difficult   (Barbara)

Another problem identified by some of the social workers is the tension between what the police require in terms of evidence and what the girls could, or are willing to provide. In a recent report (see below) the problem of how much responsibility is placed on sexually exploited girls to give information in order that cases can go forward to possible charge, prosecution is noted, and this concurs with findings from this research:

> There was an absolute reliance on children to give evidence or cases did not proceed [...] In the view of the Inspectors this placed an enormous often impossible burden on fragile and vulnerable children [...] (Casey, 2015, p. 48)

There is no doubt that the social workers want the perpetrators to be stopped however, there is a sense of resignation that this is highly unlikely because, the understanding is that the girls will probably not co-operate and do not (generally) give 'good' evidence. Sadeem (below) understands that without the girls' evidence nothing will happen to the perpetrators, again illustrating how much pressure is on the girls to disclose information. He also demonstrates another relatively common theme, the interviewee's lack of knowledge about what the police can and cannot do in terms of legislation to stop the perpetrators and
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protect the girls. None of the social workers brings up the issue of victim-less evidence or any other possible ways in which evidence could be collected or perpetrators restricted in their actions or stopped:

> *you see we'd, we'd struggle without it, we'd struggle without*
> *it you know, umm, umm and if there isn't any evidence then*
> *there won't be any convictions*   (Sadeem)

As well as highlighting the responsibility placed on the girls to provide evidence, Peter also brings up another dimension within the social workers' complex constructions of sexually exploited girls' agency. He refers to a case he was involved in wherein a girl, as he perceived it, deliberately omitted information, or (he believed) had provided mis-information about the perpetrators, resulting in no further action being taken.

> *I know with, again from the case that I worked with, it didn't*
> *get enough evidence, this young lady was always clever*
> *enough to give some info but not full info, so there was like*
> *missing names and or surnames or nicknames used so we*
> *never knew enough info and there was never the evidence to*
> *be able to get a strong enough case together for a prosecution*
> *you know*   (Peter)

Irrespective of whether or not the girl intentionally mis-led the police, Peter's example again illustrates not only his understanding of her as an agent, but reiterates how much the onus was on the girl to give the information *necessary* to gain a prosecution.

The common understanding is that perpetrators will continue exploiting and getting away with it. If they are to be stopped, then the pressure and responsibility lies significantly with the girls themselves. As the researcher, it seemed to me that a great deal appears to be expected of the girls and very little of the perpetrators and, arguably the professionals, at least when compared with the girls. Although many of the social workers undoubtedly struggle with this, they seemed reluctantly resigned to it. However, they also commonly recognise that the current system is not fair. Indeed, they especially feel that it is unfair if the only option available to girls is to either be locked up (as Gill notes below) or to remain in dangerous situations rather than the perpetrators being locked up, and this is certainly understood as being far from ideal, as illustrated by Gill and Nell:

> *realising that it felt very wrong to lock up the child and that*
> *that, that, that child needed to be in her family and her*
> *environment and with the support that she needed not, umm,*

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and it was the men who needed locking up you know (Gill)

but that to me is punishing her for his behaviour, that's giving her the message that there is something wrong with her, and it's about her issue, not issues but it's her, it's her fault [...] she's there, we're having to remove you and put you in residential and da, da, da when actually it wasn't her at all, it was a gang of Asian males actually who should have been locked up in my view (Nell)

Gill and Nell reflect frustrations evident within most of the interviews about the perceived lack of justice that there appears to be when it comes to stopping the perpetrators. This, juxtaposed with the reliance on the girls, is recognised as an area where much more needs to be done, especially when it comes to deterring the perpetrators:

yeh, and I think that's the frustrating thing about CSE that [...] umm [...] you kind of think deal with the perps and yeh we can work with the kids but we need to be really targeting and, and really doing everything that we can with the power of the law and and getting, getting these (perps) dealt with

(Tina)

As Tina, Gill and Nell note, unless the perpetrators are stopped, girls will continue to be sexually exploited. Nevertheless, the social workers' commonly shared viewpoint is overshadowed within the data by the focus placed on the onus being on the girl fundamentally *to stop being sexually exploited.* In order to do that, no matter how frustrated the interviewees felt about the lack of deterrent to the perpetrators, the iterative understanding from all the social workers is that sexually exploited girls need *to do certain things.* Sexually exploited girls need to *take responsibility for having got themselves (into) the sexually exploitative situation*, even though they probably did not know it was going to be exploitative ultimately and *take responsibility for getting themselves out of the sexually exploitative situation.* The girl's 'role' in the CSE and the onus on them is significant, especially in comparison to how much onus *is not* placed on the men to stop exploiting and how much onus *is not* placed on the police to charge and convict the perpetrators.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter explores the topic of blame in relation to the social workers' understandings of CSE and sexually exploited girls. The thematic analysis of the interviewees' accounts indicates that there is a disproportionate focus *on the role* and culpability of the girls and

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their families, in comparison with the focus and blame assigned to the perpetrators. The girls are repeatedly constructed universally and deterministically which is in significant contrast to the social workers' understandings of the perpetrators. The overwhelming focus is placed on the girls to *do certain things* if the CSE is to stop suggesting that much more responsibility is placed on the girl to stop being exploited, than is placed on the perpetrators to stop exploiting. The nature of the language used, regarding how sexually exploited girls, 'put themselves at risk', rather than are being put at risk, also points to a level of blame being assigned to the girls.

It is important to note that, although the social workers understand the girls to be 'putting themselves at risk', they understand them to be doing this because (they believe that) the girls do not appreciate their predicament. Therefore, the social workers understand that part of their role is to enable the girls, by working with them, to become cognisant of the risky situation they are in although, as discussed the girl will, in all likelihood, stay in the sexually exploitative situation while this work is being done. The social workers understand sexually exploited girls to be, to some significant degree, to blame for being sexually exploited. They try to explain or excuse the girls' constructed culpability by reiterating how controlled and manipulated girls are. They also repeatedly construct sexually exploited girls as being disorientated or even deluded about the 'reality' of their situation because of the material/emotional reward they receive. Furthermore, they draw on discourses of childhood, particularly the construction of childhood as a time of naivety and inexperience as being a reason why they 'let themselves be abused'.

The social workers tend to find frustrating current practices wherein so much responsibility is placed on girls, in particular when it comes to disrupting and charging the perpetrators. This, they understand, is due to the heavy reliance placed on sexually exploited girls to disclose and give evidence in court. The multi-dimensional nature of the social workers' understandings results in a contradictory and complicated picture, particularly concerning their understandings of the girl's ability to make choices and be agentic; these subjects will be explored further in the next chapter. As has been demonstrated in this chapter, the social workers' understandings of the girls as choice-makers is pivotal in relation to their constructions of who is to blame for girls being sexually exploited. The next chapter now explores the 'red thread' of agency that is so central within this research.

Chapter 7: Making Choices

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*Every child is unique, every situation is unique, you don't club them
together […] you've got to see them as victims, not as feisty young girls
that think they know what they're doing and therefore it's ok, cos it isn't*
(Kelly)

The previous three chapters all discuss, to varying degrees, the interviewees'
understandings concerning the choice-making and agency of girls sexually abused within or
outside the family. Indeed, one of the central areas of inquiry within this research concerns
how social workers understand sexually exploited girls' ability and capacity to make choices
and be agentic within sexually exploitative situations. This chapter addresses the social
workers' understandings regarding these questions in more detail.

Following this introduction, choice and agency, explored in chapter two, are briefly re-
visited. How they are being used in the context of the thesis, and why these concepts are
such a central area of interest is reviewed. This is followed by a brief discussion about the
social workers' understandings of their own agency, an area of particular interest that has
emerged. The main body of the chapter then examines how the social workers construct
sexually exploited girls as choice-makers: primarily, how the social workers construct
sexually exploited girls as choosing to enter into and remain within (potentially) exploitative
situations and how they understand why girls do this. This involves discussing various
aspects, including how the interviewees understand that sexually exploited girls think that
they are in control of 'their' situation. In addition, the social workers' understanding that
girls stay in the CSE because they are too scared to leave it is discussed. Alongside this, and
more significantly, the chapter explores how the social workers understand that girls are
also having fun within the sexually exploitative situations; which the social workers
understand is another reason why they choose to stay. The chapter moves on to examine
how the interviewees understand that there are different choices available to girls
depending on whether they have been sexually abused in or outside the home. Following
this, another (contradictory) aspect of the social workers' understandings is explored,
namely the social workers understanding that sexually exploited girls actually have no
choices. The penultimate section addresses the interviewees' understanding that girl's
choice-making becomes increasingly problematic if a girl is nearly sixteen. Finally, the
chapter considers how the social workers understand sexually exploited girls as *needing* to
make certain choices, if certain 'outcomes' are to be achieved. Specifically, if the sexual

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exploitation is to stop and the perpetrators are to be charged.

7.0 Choice and Agency

The term choice is used throughout the thesis because it is the language the social workers use, and indeed in the interviews it was language I used when posing questions and presenting the vignettes. I did not ask the interviewees about how they understand girls 'agency' and, not surprisingly, the interviewees do not use the term. Agency is not generally used colloquially and is a term more used in academic discourses (Giddens, 1991; 1979; Archer, 1982; Foucault, 1981; 1975). The purpose of using agency approaches is to develop and draw on more abstract and conceptual methods for analysis when discussing the social workers' understandings of choice, in particular, as developed within sociological theory around the social constructions of the agency of children, children's sexual agency and the agency of sexually abused/exploited children (Melrose, 2013, 2010; Jeffery, 2011; Van Nijnatten, 2010; Robinson and Davies, 2008; Lee, 2001; Prout and James, 1997). Furthermore, I am able to explore choice, and how the social workers understand it more analytically when utilising agency approaches, particularly in relation to structures.

Agency theory enables me to explore more structural and contextual factors around CSE and sexually exploited girls and analyse how the social workers *do not* analyse or recognise the structural and contextual factors around girls but rather individualise the girls. Agency is a concept unequivocally related to structure and indeed sometimes post-structuralism (Davies, 1990; Giddens, 1984; Foucault, 1975, 1981). The only structure the social workers consistently construct as framing and informing all sexually exploited girls' experiences is social and economic deprivation. Moreover, agency approaches are being used because they offer broader concepts than choice and can be used more flexibly, positively, negatively or indeed ambiguously, and this enables the 'opening up' of discussion and theoretical reflections on the findings from this research. To illustrate this, Jeffery (2011) describes the practical implications of what it means to be agentic:

> *Agency implies the ability of individuals or groups to act on their situations, to behave as subjects rather than objects in their own lives, to shape their own circumstances and ultimately achieve change* (p. 6)

As Jeffery (2011) comments, agency is generally viewed as a positive attribute for a person to have, although, of course, all of us as agents can act negatively or in a damaging manner. If a person is agentic they have a level of control over their lives and situations; they are empowered and can shift their life's course, they are subject's within a situation and can therefore re-direct the outcome of their circumstances (positively or negatively)

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should they wish to, or if they are able to. The lack of recognition from the social workers that sexually exploited girls' agency could be utilised in positive directions is striking. I would suggest that agency is an attribute that should be encouraged in all young people and particularly those who are sexually exploited.

The social workers understand sexually exploited girls as subjects who make choices, girls who are agentic. The terms 'choice' and 'choice-making' are used (and understood) in particular ways by the social workers when referring to sexually exploited girls, but rarely positively. For example, choices girls make generally are understood to have negative implications, in the present and the future. The possible exception to this is if the girls make the right choices, such as deciding to leave the CSE, or choosing to give evidence against the perpetrators. Nonetheless, the interviewees construct the sexually exploited girl's future as inevitably negative and damaged irrespective of whether she makes the right choices or not. None of the interviewees envision a future for the sexually exploited girls wherein her life might turn out more positively, amplifying the common construction of sexually exploited girls as *multi-dimensional victims* outlined in chapter five.

7.0.1 Choice-making 'outside' structures

The reasons why sexually exploited girls make certain choices (and not others) and what and who shape and inform that choice-making, negatively and positively, is important. Especially if CSE and its causes are to be better understood and responded to. Generally, the choices social workers understand girls to make are discussed as if they are made outside of structures, in a vacuum. This lack of recognition of structural influences is problematic. The social workers, apart from the constructed social and economic deprivation, barely mention other structures that might influence and inform girls' 'choice-making'. Most notably lacking is recognition of structures such as patriarchy, sexism, gender inequality and the threat of male violence. It is vital that issues such as CSE (and indeed all sexual violence/abuse) are understood within the social structures and system in which they are perpetrated. For example, sexual abuse that takes place in Saudi Arabia is perpetrated within different social and religious structures and judicial systems than sexual abuse perpetrated in the UK. The global and national context is important as is (as described in chapter one) the cultural context, i.e. the sexual abuse of children was understood and responded differently in 1970s UK compared to the UK of 2016. One of the reasons for this is social and cultural change in understandings and attitudes to CSA have been influenced significantly by, in particular, feminism. However, changes structurally can be only skin-deep and permeating down to actual change 'on the ground' or within systems can be very slow.

When discussing choice-making and agency in the context of CSE, it is also vital to account for the individual contexts, situations and social influences of sexually exploited girls which the social workers do not do (Vera-Gray, 2016). As Nisbett (2016) suggests:

> *Firstly, we should pay more attention to context. This will improve the odds that we'll correctly identify situational factors that are influencing our behaviour and that of others. In particular, attention to context increases the likelihood that we'll recognise social influences that may be operating […] we should realise that situational factors usually influence our behaviour and that of others more than they seem to, whereas dispositional factors are usually less influential than they seem. Don't assume that a given person's behaviour in one or two situations is necessarily predictive of future behaviour.* (p. 49)

Furthermore, as discussed in chapter five in particular, the interviewees do not recognise structures that might impact upon and influence the agency and choice-making of the perpetrators (Jeffery, 2011; Fook, 2002, see appendix 10) and consequently much more focus is placed on the girls and their 'poor' choice-making. Fundamentally, interpreting the research findings by utilising agency theories around structure and context is helpful as it broadens out understandings and discussions, in turn strengthening the analytic process. The chapter now moves on to explore briefly how the social workers see themselves in relation to agency and specifically how they understand their own ability to make choices.

7.0.2 The agency and choice-making of the social workers

It is worthwhile recognising the potential interconnectivity between the social workers own agency and their understandings of the girls as choice-makers and agents. The interviewees understand their own capacity to make choices as being limited in terms of how they are able to respond to girls (see appendix 11 for a diagram explaining this in more detail). This is because a lot of their decisions and choices appear to be arguably, overly dependent on the choices the girls make. For example, if the sexually exploited girl recognises the abuse and chooses to want to get out then the social worker's capacity to make the 'right' choices is more straightforward. Essentially, the girl is much easier to safeguard. If the girl does not recognise the abuse, or want to get out the social workers understand that their own choices, or how they can safeguard her, are more limited. Thus, the choices the sexually exploited girl makes in relation to 'her' exploitative situation appear primarily to inform how she is subsequently safeguarded. Therefore, rather than safeguarding processes directing and informing strategies to protect the girl, the choices she makes dictate how she is

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safeguarded. Furthermore, the interviewees identify that such things as a heavy caseload and a lack of resources affect their choices. For example, they may want to place a girl in secure accommodation but this is repeatedly deemed unlikely to happen because of a lack of money. Another example of how there are constraints on them is that lack of time results in them often choosing not to attend training on CSE, or even attending supervision. In turn, this may limit their knowledge base and opportunities to be reflexive. Thus, the systems within which they are operating significantly affect their choice-making, seemingly (always) in a limiting and restrictive manner.

A great deal of the social worker's choice-making, unsurprisingly, is shaped by the systems they work within and, in the context of CSE, (as they understand it) by the choices of the girls they support. They understand themselves to be reliant on the actions of others, mainly the sexually exploited girls, but also their employing organisation and other relevant agencies such as the police. This leads to a sense of defeatism emanating from the interviewees that previous chapters have mentioned, a sense of 'our hands are tied', our own agency and ability to make choices is restricted (Van Nijnatten, 2013). The chapter now moves on to examine in more detail how social workers understand the choice-making of sexually exploited girls.

7.1 Girls as choice-makers

The social workers understand and construct sexually exploited girls as agents and choice-makers, whereas girls sexually abused in the home are understood not as agents or choice-makers but rather, victims and objects. The interviewees understand that sexually exploited girls make choices about 'entering' into situations that maybe sexually exploitative, remaining in them, and getting out of them. However, as will be explained, the social workers understand each of these elements differently. Most significantly, the social workers invalidate any choices sexually exploited girls make, which they understand, results in her exploitation. For example, the interviewees understand that sexually exploited girls may choose to get in a car with a group of men or choose to go missing for 48 hours but, they all <u>always</u> invalidate such a choice, that they clearly identify she makes, by backtracking. Reconstructing her as *only* making that choice because she is lacking in affection, materially disadvantaged and so forth. Furthermore, the social workers understand girls as needing to make certain choices if certain things are going to happen. If she wants the CSE to stop then she needs to choose that she wants to 'get out', if the perpetrators are to be charged she needs to choose to give evidence. Yet, contradictorily, her ability to make choices is understood by the social workers as compromised and unreliable because all her choice-making is controlled/informed by her social and economic deprivation (from her home life), the fun she is having and the fear she experiences from the perpetrators (see appendix 9

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for a diagram explaining this). However, she is still understood by the social workers as needing to make certain choices if the CSE is to stop and her ability to make *those choices* is not invalidated by the social workers. The reason for these contradictions is discussed in the rest of this chapter and the next. The main body of the chapter now begins to 'untangle' and separate out these understandings by firstly explaining the choices the social workers understand the girls to be making, and why they believe they make them.

7.1.1 Choosing material and emotional gain

The topic of 'gain' threads throughout the interviews and is such a central part of the social workers' understanding of CSE and sexually exploited girls that it is worth revisiting in the context of this chapter. All the social workers understand material and emotional gain to be a motivating factor as to why sexually exploited girls choose to *put themselves at risk of harm* from the perpetrators (this and other commonalities in the social workers' understandings is striking and discussed further in the next chapter). The interviewees understand that girls choose to do this because they are responding to, or even seeking out adults who they believe will provide for them:

> *yeh, yeh, its attract I, I imagine its attractive to a 13-year-old*
> *umm who's got a boyfriend with a car and can provide things*
> *and has a got job and money*   (Peter)

> *she does it because she likes getting stuff, she believes it is*
> *her choice to do that*   (Mandy)

The understanding of the social workers is that the gain the girl receives, or the prospect of gain, essentially obscures the realities of the sexually exploitative situation. It is important to reiterate that the social workers do not believe that girls want to be sexually exploited but they do think the girls enjoy the 'benefits' associated with exploitative relationships. Thus, although sexually exploited girls are viewed as highly vulnerable by the interviewees, they are also understood to be, at least in part, culpable and responsible for choosing to 'place themselves at risk'. Although that choice is viewed by the social workers as being made because they are misguided, they are still understood to play an active part, be agentic, in 'their' exploitation. Therefore, they are not just seen as a victim of CSE, they are also understood as significantly responsible for getting themselves into and indeed, needing to choose to get themselves out of the exploitative situation. As Kate, Tom and Mandy note:

> *unable to to understand the risk that she was placing herself*
> *at*   (Kate)

neglected at home or not getting the attention they need,

partly why they probably originally start down this road

someone's telling them that they love them (Tom)

some of the young people that I work with are that desperate

for attention you know they they lavish it up instead of

stopping and thinking (Mandy)

Furthermore, the social workers often blame the parents for the choices girls make. Parents, who are understood as failing to provide emotionally and materially are understood as one of the main reason why sexually exploited girls are so misguided in their choice-making. As Barbara and Peter says:

Yeh, if there are issues in the home then they find someone

who they think will be give me comfort then they think its

comfort and they go for that (Barbara)

if at home they've not got the best phone or the new clothes

or you know and some young people see that as a way of

getting, you know, they're provided with (Peter)

The implication is that if parents did provide affection and material things then the girl would be very unlikely to be sexually exploited. She would not make such bad choices because her needs would be met, she would not choose (to look) to have her needs met elsewhere.

7.1.2 'They think they are in control'

Many of the social workers understand that sexually exploited girls wrongly believe they are in control of 'their' sexually exploitative situations and that is partly the reason they choose to stay in it. The interviewees understand that the girl does not recognise she is being controlled and exploited. A number of the interviewees understand that girls simply do not realise how much risk they are at from the perpetrators, but if they did, they would want to get out of the situation. As Mary and Cath say:

Young people god bless em, cos they don't know they're being

dragged into all that [CSE] (Mary)

I think they think that cos they're in control, these guys aren't

controlling me I am doing this because I want to do it,

[pause] they're not sort of, not sort of making that link that

> *they're having to do that, you know do they link that if they*
> *don't want to have sex, I don't know, you know, has Lisa ever*
> *turned round and said I don't want to have sex I don't think,*
> *you know and she came across a situation like that then she*
> *might see things a lot differently*   (Cath)

These excerpts reiterate findings discussed in chapter five concerning the constructed victim-status of sexually exploited girls, she is a victim and does not understand that she is a victim, and the social workers understanding that sexually exploited girls completely misunderstand their situation. As Cath goes on to explain, the reason the girl does not see it is *because* she is a victim which is why she (wrongly) thinks she is in control and making a choice and this is why she stays in the situation:

> *they don't see it, the victim never, you know they don't, it's*
> *always a gradual thing, and it's so gradual that when it is*
> *actually happening you don't see it, whereas someone from*
> *the outside can blatantly see that this is wrong, but she can't*
> *[pause] and its led onto something [pause] you know a lot*
> *bigger which she might not even you know, she's not realised*
>
>   (Cath)

In both excerpts, Cath is discussing Lisa (who is 15, nearly 16 years old) and she reflects the other social workers thinking about choice-making and agency. On the one hand she constructs Lisa as someone who thinks she is in control, a girl who thinks she is making her own choices about being in the exploitative situation and furthermore, someone who also, Cath understands, has the ability to act agentically and stand up to the perpetrators, "*has Lisa ever turned round and said I don't want to have sex*". However, on the other hand, in an unnuanced manner, as is common amongst the interviewees, Cath understands Lisa is wrong in thinking that any choices she makes are authentic, "*you're not in control, these guys are controlling it for you*". Indeed, Cath goes onto say if Lisa was:

> *forced to have sex with them and she won't get any*
> *cigarettes or alcohol so, would she say that I am in control or*
> *would it be, it might be a wake-up call*   (Cath)

Cath thinks that if Lisa did not receive anything materially she would soon realise that she is not in control and recognise something is being done to her- she is really an object, not a subject. The receiving of 'something' the social workers understand, adds to Lisa's misguided understanding that she is in control of the exploitative situation. Cath's excerpt reiterates how the interviewees view the gain girls receive materially as simply adding to
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their confusion about the reality of their situation. Because Lisa receives material 'reward' and because she has sex with the perpetrators she thinks, she is in control but, if she received nothing and 'said no' to them, then Cath believes she would better understand the reality of her predicament. She would realise she has no control and all her choices, that she thinks she is making, are not real, the perpetrators are in control. Moreover, Cath implies, as is common within the social workers' understandings that Lisa needs to understand this 'reality' over and above any other outcome such as, the perpetrators being stopped or Lisa being immediately and unquestionably safeguarded (unlike Cara who is sexually abused in the home, vignette 1, p. 110).

The social workers commonly invalidate girls' choice-making by constructing them as seemingly oblivious to, or misunderstanding the reality of their situation, rather than recognising the individual contexts of girls or adopting more nuanced understandings of girls' choice-making. Rather, the social workers just universally invalidate the girls' choice-making. They construct girls in this way because if the girls' choices are not real or valid then she can be (re)constructed as not to blame for her choices; she makes such choices only because she does not appreciate or understand what she the victim is of. This understanding is further demonstrated in the next section.

7.1.3 She stays because she is scared

Another method utilised by the interviewees to explain the choice they understand girls to make to stay in the sexually exploitative situation is through their understanding that the perpetrators threaten girls and their families and therefore they are living in fear of physical and sexual harm. Nell (below) says that what the girl is doing may appear consensual, it may look like she is making a choice but she is not. She understands that sexually exploited girls are living in fear and going with the perpetrators because they have to, they have no choice; any choices she appears to make cannot be viewed as real or valid:

> because it's almost like they are consenting to go and we
> know that that's not the case quite often that's, that's not the
> case is it, they have to go, they've been threatened, their
> families have been threatened maybe they've you know, God
> knows what's gone on and they have to go, they have to go
> and meet whoever or you know   (Nell)

Kelly (below) highlights how, in the past, before social workers knew about the fear girls lived under and that they had no choice, sexually exploited girls were understood differently by social workers:

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> *I think the feelings before have been well she's 14, if she*
> *didn't want to she wouldn't, or they vote with their feet, oh*
> *well she'd tell somebody, oh well you know it were her*
> *boyfriend, yeh he's a bit older but and I think that's been*
> *[pause] I think that's been a mind-set in the past and we've*
> *learnt, oh no just cos she's 14 she's terrified, they threaten*
> *you, they threaten to bomb your house you know, hurt your*
> *sister [...] they threaten you with pictures [...] they might film*
> *it, I'm going to put it on youtube, you don't want yourself on*
> *youtube do you? so you keep going and going*   (Kelly)

Before Kelly and her colleagues realised what was involved in CSE that girls were scared and frightened, their understanding had been that if the girl did not want to be in the situation then they would make the choice to leave. The implication is that she was left in the exploitative situation because she was understood to be making a choice to be in it; she must have liked it or felt okay about it. Kelly exemplifies broader understandings of the social workers, *now* the social workers understand that girls stay in sexually exploitative situations because they are terrified, they have no choice. The girls' lives and those of their families are under threat, and realising this has changed her and (according to Kelly) other social workers' perceptions of sexually exploited girls. The social workers (now) know why girls choose to stay in the CSE, it is because they have no choice, and the choices they *appear* to make are not real. They '*keep going and going*' (as Kelly says) because *they have to*, they are living in fear. They are a *real* victim, who they (now) recognise as 'fitting' the construction of a sexually abused child, and that type of child makes sense in the social workers' understandings. As Nell and Mandy say:

> *she's scared, maybe she's very scared of that perp, maybe*
> *she feels she's got no choice*   (Nell)

> *they're horrible people, treat her like crap but every now and*
> *then they might tell her they love her, or you know, so she*
> *puts up with it*   (Mandy)

Problematically however, what Kelly seems to be suggesting is that when girls were understood to be making a choice, when Kelly, and others (as she says) did not appreciate that all sexually exploited girls live in fear, they were possibly not supported as they should have been.

7.1.4 She has no choice

As demonstrated in the previous section, the social workers try to reconcile their conflicted

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understandings about sexually exploited girls and their choice-making by (re)constructing sexually exploited girls as having no real choices. Girls can then be re-understood as victims and this 'fits' better in the social workers' understandings. Moreover, if they can understand her as having no real choices then she cannot be blamed for her actions. The social workers constantly struggle to reconcile the complexities in their understandings and therefore they revert to discourses wherein sexually exploited girls are primarily understood as victims, who do not know what they are doing:

> *they might not see that there's anything wrong, they might be*
> *so coerced into it that they trust these people*   (Barbara)

> *she's been, to coin a term, perhaps brainwashed by this, this,*
> *this behaviour, you know, and influenced unduly*   (Peter)

> *they don't recognise umm […] that they're being exploited*
>
> (Mary)

As Azim says, it is not their fault; they are just immersed in what is happening, it has become their life:

> *it's not, it's not their fault, they're vulnerable this is the*
> *lifestyle they have become entrenched in*   (Azim)

Josie further demonstrates the understandings of the interviewees that sexually exploited girls are incorrect in their understanding of their situations, especially if they think their choices are real. Josie constructs sexually exploited girls as *feeling* that they have given consent to the situation but feelings are unreliable. She understands that the girl's *feeling* is wrong, it is not real, the girl only *feels* she has consented but actually she has been tricked and manipulated:

> *Umm, I think with the exploitation there's the thing of that*
> *the, that the young person is is kind of I, I, I think that they*
> *feel that they've given consent to the exploitation but*
> *obviously they have been exploited and tricked and*
> *manipulated*   (Josie)

Notably absent from the data is more nuanced understandings of the girls as choice-makers, specifically a construction of sexually exploited girls as making choices within a temporal context, or within a specific situation/s and still not to blame. The social workers do not (unsurprisingly) state overtly that they blame girls for being sexually exploited, even

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though findings in this research suggest they do. Indeed, Nell and other interviewees understand that they should distance themselves from that viewpoint and thus refer to other social workers (also discussed in chapter four) who they understand openly blame sexually exploited girls for being exploited. Nell and other interviewees think that this is wrong or unfair and Nell explains why the girls should not be blamed:

> *I think people think that those young people have choice, that the 15-year old's got a choice, it's not actually always the case, they don't have the choice, they don't have that, they don't have permission not to go, they have to, they have to disappear for four days and not come back and then turn up on a motorway in *** do you know what I mean they don't have, they wouldn't choose to do that let's be honest* (Nell)

Nell defends sexually exploited girls, constructing them as 'doing it' because they have no choice; they have to do it; they do not have permission not to do it; in other words, it is not their fault, how can they be blamed if they have no choice? However, although Nell and some other interviewees do not want to be seen as blaming the girls, they nevertheless contradictorily construct sexually exploited girls as blameworthy or culpable throughout the interviews. Therefore, in order to alleviate the blame that social workers have assigned the girls they then invalidate the choices which the interviewees understand the girl makes, that results her being sexually exploited. This is illustrated by the question (or statement) Nell asks at the end of the previous excerpt- *"they wouldn't choose to do that, lets be honest"*. The question that arises in response to Nell is, but what if a girl did choose to go off with those men? Why couldn't she have made that choice within a context? In addition, vitally, is she to blame for the consequences of that choice? Would she be blamed for making that choice? If asked I am sure the social workers would answer no, she is not to blame for any consequences, however, findings from this research have shown repeatedly how in order to relieve the girls of blame they have to re-understand some of the choices (they construct) she makes, and (re)understand them as being invalid. The reason they do this is because if she is understood as making a choice to, for example, get in a man's car or go missing for 48hours- then she is blameable. But, if her choices are understood as not valid then her actions can be nullified because - *she doesn't know what she is doing; she thinks she is control but she isn't; she is living in fear; she is a child and the gain she receives confuses her* (see appendix 9). It is important to reiterate however, that the social workers only invalidate choices they understand girls to have made that they understand result in her being exploited; they do not reconstruct or invalidate the choices they understand she needs to make to get out of the CSE, understand the CSE and disclose information about

the CSE.

7.1.5 She stays because it's fun

As discussed, the understanding that girls choose to remain in exploitative situations because they are scared and living in fear is prevalent amongst the interviewees. However, of more significance is the understanding of the interviewees that sexually exploited girls choose to enter into and remain within (potentially) sexually exploitative situations because they are having fun. The fun she is understood to be having is viewed primarily by the social workers because she is gaining materially and emotionally but also because of, for example, her having an older boyfriend who has a car and who can drive her around and provide her with status and validation:

> *how exciting it is for a teenage girl god bless and who is also vulner, from a vulnerable family* (Mary)

> *oh got plastered last night, I've got a lovely older boyfriend [...] he's got a car* (Sue)

However, the social workers understand that the girl is misguided in thinking that she is having fun and believe it is based on her misunderstanding of her situation. As Sadeem and Gill comment:

> *I think she is naïve and immature [...] she doesn't realise you know what fun is and what abuse is [...] I think that area needs to be explored and education and educating her umm and making her aware of her own self, umm* (Sadeem)

> *listening to her come out with this glamorised umm idealistic view of how life might be for a prostitute driving round in big cars and having luxury items and things, there was something, some gap that needed filling* (Gill)

There is recognition from some of the social workers that the girl could actually be genuinely having fun, as Mary and Tina say:

> *she's going it's great, it's brilliant, so her mum and dad get on my case all the time about it, the police are forever knocking on the door and apart from that when she's with him she's having a fantastic time and I'm coming in going, but it isn't right and she is going what do you mean, why isn't it, I am having a lovely time* (Tina)

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we'd do some safety work and she'd go off and do exactly

what I'd told her not to do [pause] it was almost feeding this

need for excitement she thought it were fantastic she just

loved running away, loved it   (Kelly)

However, the choice the girl makes to have 'fun' - to get in the car, drink alcohol- is quickly re-understood by all the social workers as a choice that is being made out of her desperate need for attention and because she does not understand the risk she is at. The recurrent understanding of the interviewees is that if she is understood to be making an autonomous choice to do these things, then she is blameable for her actions and any consequences. Thus, as noted, any choices the social workers identify girls as making which they understand 'results' in her being sexually exploited is reconstructed as being an invalid choice and this is done in order to avoid blaming her. This is further evidenced by the fact that none of the social workers draw on an alternative narrative. For example, that she is making a choice to go for a drive with a man and drink alcohol, but whatever happens as a result, whether she has a *'fantastic … exciting time'* or she is beaten up and raped, she is not to blame for the consequences of her choice-making and agency. They do not access this narrative because their understanding of choice-making in the context of CSE is confluent with blame.

7.1.6 Different choices are 'available'

The chapter now examines the interviewees' understandings of sexually exploited girls as agents and choice-makers in comparison with how they understand the choice-making and agency of girls sexually abused in the home. Girls sexually abused in the home are understood by the social workers as having very few, if any choices concerning whether to be in the sexually abusive situation they are in, unlike sexually exploited girls. Indeed, a number of the social workers recognise that girls sexually abused in the home are viewed differently to sexually exploited girls. They are understood, as Tina suggests, as more of a victim, their situation is seen as more shocking, whereas with CSE, this is perhaps not the case:

I suppose if you read a referral about a girl being sexually

abused as opposed to a girl at risk of CSE what flags up in

your head? does it go, (tuts) oh well CSE yeh umm, but

sexual abuse one, (picking up papers) you go bloody hell, you

know what, what and I don't know, I don't know the answer

to that but I wonder if it does actually conjure up different […]

(Tina)

Girls sexually abused in the home are constructed as (relatively) non-agentic and viewed more as a victim, on whom an act of abuse has been perpetrated, as illustrated by Nell:

> *all that view about she doesn't have to get in the car […]*
> *whereas CSA, it's almost like umm, for me it's more there was*
> *no consent at all […] whereas with CSE well, she must have*
> *consented to something, maybe she consented and it went*
> *too far where you wouldn't necessarily think about that with*
> *CSA you would just think she's, this has happened to her*

> (Nell)

Most significantly, the social workers understand that girls sexually abused in the home have *not put themselves in the situation* where abuse takes place and therefore they do not need to remove themselves from the situation. Unlike the sexually exploited girl who is understood to have placed herself in a situation where CSE might take place. Furthermore, the interviewees understand that girls sexually abused in the home do not need to be relieved of any blame. They did not make any choices about being in their situation and therefore the idea of them being blamed or held accountable in any way is obsolete. This is because sexual abuse in the home is understood by the interviewees as something being done to the girl (she is an object), an act that she is 'purely' a victim of, which is very different to the interviewees' understandings about sexually exploited girls as Azim demonstrates:

> *umm, there might not be a choice in, in, in CSA that's*
> *happening in the home environment, umm, the girls, they*
> *may choose, there might be more of an aspect of choice in*
> *CSE, in terms of their vulnerable but they are actually going*
> *along with what's being asked of them because there is a gain*
> *for them to be made at the end of it, well I suppose once,*
> *yeh, at at the outset yeh, yeh, at the outset I mean they can*
> *choose to walk away but once they are in that circle that, then*
> *choice might be taken away from them […] but at the start*
> *[…] you know,[…] it sounds to corporate, (laugh) but at the*
> *recruitment stage if you like (laughs), umm, you know,*
> *suppose the girl would have a choice whether she wants to*
> *walk away* (Azim)

Azim's excerpt exemplifies the social workers' common understanding that sexually

exploited girls have certain choices available to them that girls who are sexually abused in the home do not have; choices that determine if the exploitation even happens. For example, he understands that at the beginning of the exploitative process the girl has a choice about whether or not to 'walk away' but he understands, as do other social workers, that she stays because there is *gain to be made'*. Indeed, Azim, and a few other social workers, make such girls sound quite mercenary. Notably, he suggests that if the girl does not choose to walk away then her choices become more constrained implying that she may be held responsible for the outcome of such choices. The understanding of most of the social workers is that girls sexually abused in the home have no such availability of choice at any stage of 'their' sexual abuse, whereas sexually exploited girls do. Thus, throughout the interviews, culpability is placed on the sexually exploited girl because she has a choice: she could walk away, but she chooses not to, she goes out to 'it' and she does not *have* to. Therefore, we again see an example of the sexually exploited girl's choice-making being recognised but viewed as misguided. She makes the wrong choices, choices that may be understood as, the girl 'pushing' herself out of social care (and others) remit of protection, as is now briefly reflected on theoretically.

7.1.7 Choosing to 'push herself' out

A possible implication of the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls as choice-makers is that they may understand girls to be *pushing themselves* outside the 'protective realms' of safeguarding boundaries (Egan and Hawkes, 2009; Ost, 2009; Meyer, 2007; O'Connell Davidson, 2005). Moreover, viewed as stepping outside the demarcated, constructed boundaries of childhood, especially in relation to sexual innocence (Robinson, 2012; Kehily, 2012). Indeed, as has happened to others (see Woodiwiss, 2014), girls who do not 'fit' the dominant constructions of the sexually abused child, for example, non-agentic, may even have 'her' abuse dismissed or denied as Woodiwiss (2014) explains:

> *In the case of CSE in Rochdale, UK this story can be used to deny an abusive element to a 'sexual relationship' where a young person might be sexually knowledgeable and/or active and therefore does not conform to the dominant construction of a 'child' or a victim of CSA* (p. 144)

Findings suggest that sexually exploited girls are 'pushed out' of, or understood by the social workers to be 'pushing' themselves out of the 'realm of protection' *because* they are primarily understood as making choices and therefore in the view of the interviewees, to a significant degree, blameable. Furthermore, as is discussed next, reaching the age of sixteen and being able to consent can also cause a sexually exploited girl to be deemed outside the boundaries of protection. Girls 'such as these' who are understood as not

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behaving according to the ideal victim standard may therefore not be viewed as a *real* victim (Smette et al 2009, p, 368). This is troubling at a number of levels not least because the girl may not be protected, but also because her 'subversive role' in the CSE is focused on more than that of the perpetrator, who is thus further absented (Pearce, 2009; Lamb, 1999 and chapter six). Her 'transgression' of dominant constructions of female childhood and the sexually abused/exploited child may be viewed as so troubling that more focus and blame is placed on the girl than on the actual cause of the CSE- the perpetrators (Erikson, 2009; Egan and Hawkes, 2009).

7.1.8 The 'problem' of choice and age

The social workers also understand that the older a girl gets the more capacity she has to choose, or consent to be in situations that maybe exploitative and therefore safeguarding her is viewed as more problematic:

> *teenagers are difficult sometimes to safeguard because they can be challenging, they can resist and often do resist attempts to protect them, because they don't feel that they need protecting* (Nigel)

Moreover, the interviewees understand that the nearer to sixteen the sexually exploited girl is the more responsible she becomes for her choices, particularly the choice to have sex, as at sixteen this is now legal. As Beth and Kate say:

> *no, but it gets very blurred and awkward and frustrating the older, well the closer to 16 they get doesn't it really?* (Beth)

> *the difficulty is, what you've got with 16 year olds there is obviously more choice, they have more choice, they can have sex* (Kate)

The social workers clearly feel less able to help girls at this age. They appear frustrated by this but unequivocally the interviewees understand that the nearer a girl is to sixteen, when legally she can give consent to sexual activity, the more she is viewed as responsible for her choices and the less they understand they can do to help her. Adowa also illustrates this understanding, demonstrating the often defeatist and hope-less attitude adopted by a number of the social workers concerning responding to girls of this age:

> *at 16 in a month's time […] she's free to have sex with whoever she wants, if she consents, you know if she gives the consent […] because the CSE thing is high on the agenda they*

might respond to it, but I think maybe if it was 2 years ago

they just say are you kidding (laughs) you know, what can

you do, in a month's time she will be having sex with whoever

she wants if she agrees to it so, definitely (she laughs) yeh, I,

hopeless because of her age   (Adowa)

Adowa also highlights another area of uncertainty expressed by many of the interviewees, whether a girl nearing sixteen will be responded to at all. If she does get a response (is safeguarded) the understanding is that it will be because CSE is currently a topic regarded as high priority within social care. Most social workers suggest that little if anything would have been done a few years ago for a girl nearing or at the age of sixteen who was being sexually exploited, as Cath says:

now there might be more of a pro-active approach than back

then, cos five years ago, like I say, I can remember working

in children's home and nothing really were getting done

                                                          (Cath)

This is a particularly interesting finding and highlights how responses to sexually exploited girls may have been, in the past, potentially inadequate or even non-existent for this age group. Moreover, Sadeem (below) and other social workers reiterate how uncertainty still exists concerning how social workers should respond to a girl nearing the age of consent. This also highlights another theme amongst the interviewees; they are not familiar with, or unaware of what is required of them in terms of safeguarding sexually exploited girls of this age. According to the social workers, there seems to be no definitive answers or guidelines for responding to this age group. Sadeem and other social workers simply do not know if social care would accommodate a girl at this age:

I think the age is going against her for a, for a start, ok,

umm [...] at 15 my, my experience is, would social services

accommodate her, and doubtfully (he laughs) right, so the

age is going against her and, and she's getting abused [...]16

yeh, yeh, so 16 she can give consent can't she?   (Sadeem)

Sadeem suggests that a girl's age actually *'goes against her'*, her age is problematic despite the fact, as he acknowledges, that *'she's getting abused'*. The implication of Sadeem's and some other interviewees' accounts, is that despite the fact that she is being abused, to which he troublingly implies she is consenting to, they believe she may be left unprotected, because she is sixteen and therefore legally able to consent.

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The social workers' understandings are concerning in terms of policy and practice for a number of reasons, but mainly because the interviewees understand that if a girl is fifteen and nearing the legal age of consent (see Sex Offences Act, 2003), she is unlikely to be accommodated by social care. Not only does this contravene child protection guidelines (DCSF, 2009; Children's Act, 1989) wherein children are legally required to be protected until they are (at least) eighteen, it also suggests that because she can, or nearly can (legally) consent, she will be essentially 'left to it' and the CSE will continue. Her age, and the understanding that she can, or nearly can make legal choices appears to, according to a number of the interviewees, relieve social care of their responsibilities. This finding amplifies the research findings of Jago et al's., (2011) report which looks at how local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs) were implementing the DCSF (2009) guidance on protecting children and young people from CSE:

> The research found that the perception of capacity – and
> indeed blame for a morally unacceptable and harmful
> situation – increases with the age of young people to the
> extent that 16 and 17-year-olds are rarely recognised as
> deserving of protection   (Jago et al., 2011, p. 51)

7.2 Girls need to make certain choices

The chapter now moves on to look at other facets of the interviewees' understandings concerning sexually exploited girls as choice-makers, namely, that the social workers understand sexually exploited girls *need to make certain choices* if certain things are going to happen specifically, if the sexual exploitation is to stop. The topics of *understanding her situation* and *needing to give evidence* is discussed in detail in chapter six and thus is only briefly re-visited in the context of this chapter. The purpose of this section is to more fully 'unpack' how and why the social workers understand the girls as needing to make certain choices in the light of the fact they invalidate other choices they understand she makes.

7.2.1 Understanding her situation

The social workers understand that girls are putting themselves in 'risky' situations where CSE may take place and they blame them for that:

> there's obviously you know issues there, massive issues you
> know, of her well allowing this   (Sadeem)

Throughout the data there is a significant amount of responsibility placed on sexually exploited girls to *stop being* exploited and understand what it is they are involved in. The

understanding of the interviewees is that although she will be worked with to help her realise the predicament she is in, she must take responsibility for getting herself out of it. Furthermore, the social workers recognise that part of their role, depending on whether she will engage with them or not, involves not only educating the sexually exploited girl about CSE but also, enabling the girl to see what an 'appropriate' relationship is, which (hopefully) will help her to recognise that she is being exploited, as Mary also says:

> *It's common that they don't recognise, umm they, umm that*
> *they're being exploited [pause] that's the point of umm trying*
> *to do some real supportive work with them and some real*
> *direct work with them around relationships and keeping safe*
> *and looking at indicators and making them aware of indicators*
> *of exploitation* (Mary)

However, throughout the data is also the understanding that whatever the social worker might achieve by educating the girl, the girl herself has to meet (the social worker) half-way, otherwise realistically little is likely to change. The girl has to make a choice *to leave,* she has to *'get it' as* Sue and Cath say below, and they cannot do it for her:

> *it's almost like bit of a breakthrough you know sometimes it*
> *can take ages, sometimes immediately they think shit* (Sue)

> *cos they can only get out of it if they want to really can't*
> *they?* (Cath)

The understanding of the social workers is that the sexually exploited girl needs to be a *responsible* choice-maker and make (the right) choices about how her future will evolve. So, although on the one hand they blame her for being exploited- she *'allows this'*- on the other hand, they also expect her to make choices which have potentially very significant consequences such as, getting out of the CSE and prosecuting the perpetrators. Moreover, they expect her to make these choices when they have already constructed her as making other choices, such as entering into and remaining in the CSE, from a very compromised position-primarily one of social and economic deprivation and a desperate need for material and emotional reward. The implication of the social workers understanding that girls needs to recognise and appreciate their situation is (again) that girls remain in the CSE until they are prepared to make the choice to change, or make the choice to recognise that they are being exploited. Furthermore, and somewhat worryingly, it is also commonly understood as very unlikely that a sexually exploited girl will be removed, or placed in care, often due to lack of finances, unless there is a perceived genuine threat to her life.

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7.2.3 Giving evidence

Finally, the chapter briefly explores another facet within the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls as choice-makers and agents. The social workers understand that if the perpetrators are to be stopped then the girls need to choose to disclose information and provide (good) evidence. Without the girl's co-operation, the interviewees view it as very unlikely that the perpetrators will be charged, let alone convicted. However, the understanding of the social workers is that girls are very unlikely to disclose information about the perpetrators because they do not appreciate that they are a victim:

> *they won't disclose […] they didn't start off, they don't think*
> *it's being exploited to start off with and then, when they're in*
> *there and it does become exploitative and they're aware that*
> *they are in there they don't disclose and for, or it's very rare*

> (Mary)

The reliance on the girls for information about the perpetrators was substantial and the expectation on them to choose to disclose was significant. Juxtaposed with this however, it is evident that some of the social workers found the amount of onus being placed on girls frustrating (see also chapter six), particularly because so few perpetrators seemed to be charged or convicted rather, as Kate says, they perpetrators are just disrupted for a time:

> *I mean the theory behind that is the more you try and stop*
> *and disrupt these people and bring them in for questioning it*
> *can simply disrupt them, they move off, they move on,*
> *possibly to other young people*   (Kate)

Nonetheless, problematically, the responsibility for desisting the perpetrators is understood by the social workers to lie primarily with the girls; if the girl does not choose to disclose then it is unlikely the perpetrators will be charged and the CSE may simply continue. Indeed, Barbara (below) says, if 'you' do not understand about CSE then 'you' might just think the girl is making a choice to remain in the exploitative situation and not disclose and, consequently she might be blamed for that making that choice and not helped. Barbara illustrates how the girl needs to co-operate and help social workers if a prosecution is going to happen:

> *there is a lot of reasons why they won't disclose and if you*
> *don't understand that, if you don't have that base of why they*
> *are not disclosing then you might get it in your head that,*
> *well, they're just making a choice and you won't give them*

the appropriate support that they need, they've (workers) put
in a lot of support, a lot of people to talk to these young
people to say- these people are exploiting you, we need to get
answers from you, help us so that we can make prosecution

(Barbara)

In this excerpt, Barbara again highlights the confluent understanding other social workers have, and indeed she has, of choice and blame. She comments that if the girl is seen to be making a choice, she might not get the appropriate support. As has been discussed, this conflux in the social workers' understandings is of central interest within this thesis. How the social workers invalidate certain choices that they identify the girls as making in order not to blame them but then also place significant expectations on girls to make certain choices in relation to, and in order that the CSE they are the victim of stops is one the central findings within the data. The findings show contradictions and paradoxes within the social workers' understandings, and this research argues that there is a need for more sophisticated and nuanced understandings around the choice-making of sexually exploited girls and indeed, sexually abused girls. How the social workers 'wrestle' with these conflicted understandings and try to resolve them is analysed in the next and concluding chapter.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

*All that view about, she doesn' t **have** to get in the car* (Nell)

This concluding chapter begins by drawing together key findings from the thesis. Firstly, the conclusions from all four chapters are revisited. This not only addresses how the research questions have been answered but also highlights how the topics of agency, choice and blame have threaded their way through the thesis and how each chapter points towards the most significant finding from this thesis concerning the social worker's conflux in their understandings of choice and blame. This is followed by exploring how and why the social workers may wrestle with such understandings and, subsequently, how they attempt to resolve their conflicted understandings. Alternative ways in which social workers may reconcile this tension in their understandings, such as separating out choice and blame, are considered. This is followed by discussing how a more nuanced understanding of sexually exploited girls' choice-making and agency may be achieved. Then an exploration is presented of the possible implications of adopting such a nuanced approach when working with, or trying to understand sexually exploited girls, and why recognising their agency and choice-making without attributing blame would be a positive approach. How social workers might benefit from further education and training on the subjects of female (sexual) agency in the context of CSE is also discussed. The chapter then presents the implications of this research for practice and policy, why this doctoral study is an original contribution to literature and, finally a discussion about further research that could be conducted as an outcome of this thesis.

8.0 Summarising the empirical findings

Part two of the thesis presents empirical findings, beginning with chapter four, which introduces the social workers' understandings of CSE and CSA. The social workers were initially asked to describe CSE and CSA. CSE is strongly associated in the interviewees' understandings with CSE perpetrated by 'groups' of extra-familial men, although other 'types' of CSE are recognised. CSE is also closely connected by the interviewees with certain behaviours such as the 'passing around' of girls, gifts being given to the girl, and more than one perpetrator and more than one girl being involved. CSA, however, is understood synonymously with sexual abuse in the home and/or family, perpetrated on a child or young person by a known person, usually a family member. For the social workers to consider CSA as exploitative, one or more of the elements noted previously has to be present. Within the

social workers' descriptions of CSE, there is notable focus on the 'type' of girl who is exploited, and what it is *about them* and their family/home life that makes them exploitable. Conversely, girls sexually abused in the home are never discussed as a type, nor is it questioned why they, in particular, might be sexually abused. Furthermore, sexually exploited girls are understood to have more choice about whether to be in exploitative situations in the first place, whereas girls sexually abused in the home are understood to have no (or limited) choice; they are constructed as being trapped, victims in the 'purest' sense (Lamb, 1999; Kitzinger, 1988).

The participants were presented with three vignettes involving one case of CSA in the home and two cases of group CSE outside the home. The most significant finding is that a girl sexually abused in the home will be immediately protected; she is removed, or the abuser is removed. Sexually exploited girls, on the other hand, will be worked with to develop their understanding of their situation so that they themselves may make the choice to get out of it. The implication is that meanwhile they remain in the sexually exploitative situation. This is especially the case for Emma, aged fifteen, almost sixteen, as nearing the age of consent is understood as especially challenging for the social workers in terms of knowing how to respond. Girls of this age are consistently viewed by the social workers as bearing even more responsibility for their choices. This chapter highlights how the interviewees construct differently girls sexually abused in the home and those abused outside of it; this is especially evidenced by their understandings of girls' choice-making and agency. Another interesting finding in chapter four is the social workers' understandings (and usage) of the term 'consent' and how it appears to conflate with their understandings (and usage) of the term 'choice'; this is discussed later in this chapter.

Chapter five considers the social workers' constructions of sexually exploited girls as socially and economically deprived. Sexually exploited girls are understood by all the social workers as most likely to be the product of a 'troubled' family and probably already known to social care. She is understood by the interviewees as a girl who has un-met needs, someone looking for material and emotional gain from (exploitative) adults to fill the 'gap' in her own life. Within this construction, the agency and choice-making of sexually exploited girls is recognised; the interviewees understand the sexually exploited girl, albeit in a contradictory manner, to be making a choice to be in situations that will be 'risky' because of the emotional and material benefits she will receive. Thus, her choices are understood by the social workers to be exercised and derived from an unstable and compromised position.

Sexually exploited girls are also constructed by the interviewees as multi-dimensional

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victims. The girl is understood as a victim of life, being already socially and economically deprived, and as a victim of CSE. Her victimhood is reinforced because the social workers understand that girls do not recognise themselves as a victim. Moreover, the implication is that she will remain a victim in the future. The social workers acknowledge that CSE can happen to 'any' girl, but 'any' girl is equated with being middle-class and affluent. Invariably, the social workers understand that a specific incident must occur to make such a girl vulnerable to CSE, such as a parent developing depression, or a familial bereavement. It is not her *habitat* or social and economic environment that makes her vulnerable in the same way it is for other girls.

Although not an initial area of enquiry within the research, the role parent's play emerged significantly. The social workers appear to have a binary understanding of parents: they construct them either as inadequate and neglectful on the one hand, having 'produced' such an exploitable child, or as themselves victims and deserving of sympathy. The interviewees appreciate that parenting a sexually exploited child can be very challenging and think that if parents can be supported and worked with to achieve a better understanding of CSE, they might be useful partners in protecting their child.

Chapter six explores the issue of blame. Demonstrated repeatedly within the data is an absence of blame on the perpetrators with the onus being on the girls themselves. The social workers do not universalise the perpetrators in the same way they do sexually exploited girls. Rather, they try to explain their behaviour in a more sympathetic way than was expected. As is noted, this is not to suggest that the social workers sympathise with the perpetrators; they reveal uncertainty about perpetrators' motives. Significantly, and juxtaposed with this, there are far more confident and definitive understandings about what it is about certain girls that makes them exploitable. The emphasis on how much *she places herself at risk* rather than the focus being on the girl *being placed at risk* is significant. Furthermore, structures that might influence the perpetrators behaviours, such as gender power imbalances and inequalities, male violence against women, sexism, misogyny, religion and culture are barely acknowledged by any of the interviewees. Instead, the social workers' focus on the girls, who they are, and what they need to do to stop themselves being sexually exploited, rather than focusing on stopping the perpetrators exploitation.

The social workers understand the girl as having to make certain choices if the CSE is to stop and that she must meet the social worker 'half way', or (they understand) themselves as being limited in what they can do (see appendix 11). The social workers also understand that if perpetrators are to be stopped, it is vital that girls disclose evidence and co-operate

with authorities. The social worker will work with, and support the girl, but a lot is expected of her. The expectations placed on sexually exploited girls are particularly striking when compared to girls who are sexually abused in the home: girls abused in the home will also be immediately safeguarded. The main reason for this appears to be because the social workers understand sexually exploited girls as agents and choice-makers whereas girls sexually abused in the home are viewed as non-agentic and unable to make choices. Therefore, sexually exploited girls are viewed as being more responsible and culpable for what is happening to them and, therefore more blameworthy. The tension for the social workers is that they 'know' they should not blame sexually exploited girls, or be seen to blame the girls for being sexually exploited. Nonetheless, by recognising them as choice-makers and agents, they have metaphorically 'pushed themselves into a corner' whereby they could be seen to be (or indeed are) blaming girls for being sexually exploited and must find a way out of that corner.

Chapter seven specifically explores the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls' agency and choice-making. This chapter explains how choice is generally discussed in negative terms in the context of sexually exploited girls, unless the girl makes the *right choices*, such as choosing to 'get out' of the CSE, or disclosing to the police. As noted already, sexually exploited girls are understood by the social workers to be making a choice to enter into, and remain within, situations that are potentially or actually sexually exploitative. There are a number of misguided reasons why the interviewees understand her to enter into and remain in such situations; for example, the girl thinks that she is in control of the situation and that she is having fun, but dichotomously she is living in fear of the perpetrators and any choices she thinks she has are spurious. How the social workers 'wrestle' with their understandings is now discussed and this is followed by how, most significantly, the social workers try to resolve these tensions.

8.1 Conflicted understandings

Previous chapters have examined how the social workers draw on dominant constructions of sexually abused children and childhood within their understandings of CSE and sexually exploited girls (Rock, 2013; O'Dell, 2003). The findings show that the social workers' understandings are troubled by sexually exploited girls. This is particularly demonstrated in their differing understandings of girls sexually abused in the home and those sexually exploited outside the home. They draw on dominant constructions of CSA and childhood when discussing girls sexually abused in the home by understanding them as having no agency, or minimal agency and no capacity to make choices. Furthermore, girls who are sexually abused in the home are constructed as *blameless* victims. Thus, blame does not need to be alleviated from them, unlike the social workers' understanding of sexually

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exploited girls. The social workers demonstrate a limited understanding of sexually abused girls in the home and those sexually exploited outside the home, particularly concerning the diversity of their experiences and the potential they have to be agentic within sexually abusive/exploitative situations. They also reveal reduced understanding of how girls may act with resilience (Pearce, 2007; Raby, 2005).

The interviewees understand sexually exploited girls in a paradoxical way. Girls are constructed by the social workers as subverting dominant constructions of the sexually abused girl and this presents a challenging quandary for them (Ayre and Barrett, 2000). Namely, how are social workers supposed to understand sexually exploited girls when, within the interviewees' understandings, they so subvert their dominant understandings of CSA and childhood? The interviewees understand the sexually exploited girl as a 'child' on the one hand for example, innocent and asexual. Yet they simultaneously understand her as a sexually knowing (agentic) child and, to complicate things yet further, she is a victim, a sexually exploited child (Robinson and Davies, 2008; Meyer, 2007; Kitzinger, 1988). Adding to this already complex intersection are interviewees' understandings of female, adolescent sexuality, historically and currently a discourse that is the recipient of social concern arguably of an unsubstantiated nature (see Papadoplous, 2010; Rush and LaNauze, 2006). Furthermore, adolescent, female sexuality is often constructed as problematic and dangerous because of the potentially 'contagious' nature of the threat sexually 'knowing' (agentic) adolescent females supposedly present (Egan, 2013; Gill, 2012). In the context of CSE, these intersecting discourses appear to be particularly tricky for the interviewees to negotiate; further complicated, as Melrose (2013) observes:

> *The idea of childhood on which the CSE discourse is predicated imagines children as dependent, innocent, pure, unable to exercise choice and unable to enter contracts […] the CSE discourse is produced by and reproduces, particular understandings of 'children' and 'childhood' particular understandings of adolescent female sexuality […] CSE discourses position the young people concerned as always and inevitably passive victims/objects and thereby tells only particular and partial truths about them*   (pp. 9-10)

The question is what happens to girls who subvert this construction, to girls who are not "innocent and pure", but rather sexually knowing and apparently looking for fun. As Melrose and others contend, the current CSE discourse cannot accommodate them, as further demonstrated by findings from this research (Warrington, 2013; Smette et al., 2009; Cruz

and Stagmitti, 2007; O'Dell, 2003).

Thus, the 'troubling' and 'troubled' sexually exploited girl, constructed as embodying all these discourses, has somehow to be made to fit into dominant constructions of childhood and the sexually abused/exploited girl. This is the only way in which she can be (re) understood by the social workers as a victim and hence as someone worthy of protection. Otherwise, she presents as arguably the most erroneous and confusing of girls: an agentic girl who is sexually knowing but simultaneously as a sexually abused/exploited girl. Such a paradoxical construction simply does not fit within the confines of the social workers' understandings (Warrington, 2013; Robinson, 2012). As Erikson (2009) suggests, social workers find working with such girls highly problematic. He argues that they do not know whether to treat them as victims or agentic and so struggle to recognise that they can actually be both (p. 442). Indeed, Erikson's (ibid.) observations reflect findings from this research: how can social workers marry up the concept of the agentic (sexually exploited) girl and not blame her for her agency and choice-making? The findings suggest the only way the social worker can (re)understand her as a real victim is to invalidate certain choices she makes. This issue is illustrated by a high profile CSE case in the UK; in a recent serious case review in Oxford the review highlighted the following about professionals' understandings of sexually exploited girls:

> *The behaviour of the girls was interpreted through eyes and a language which saw them as young adults rather than children, and therefore assumed they had control of their actions […] Firstly, the girls' precocious and difficult behaviour was seen to be something that they decided to adopt, with harm coming because of their decisions to place themselves in situations of great risk. Secondly, there was a failure to recognise that the girls' ability to consent had been eroded by a process of grooming escalating to violent control.*

> (OSCB, 2015 p. 97: 8.4 and section 9.8)

Important questions arise from this excerpt, which reside at the centre of findings from this research. What if a sexually exploited girl does act like an adult? What if she is in control of her actions? What if she is 'precocious and difficult'? What if she is saying she is consenting? Why does she have to be (re) understood as a *child who is not in control and is not consenting* in order not to be blamed? Why can't she just be recognised as an agent and choice-maker but not be blamed and the perpetrators be blamed?

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The answer is two-fold. Firstly, discourses which recognise children's (sexual) agency are often strongly resisted as they so trouble dominant constructions of childhood as a time of innocence and asexuality (Melrose, 2012; Scott et al., 1998). Secondly, as has been discussed, discourses that construct sexually abused and exploited children/young people as choice-makers and agents are intertwined with notions of blame (Finkelhor, 2008). As Smette et al. (2009) note:

> There is always the fear that talking about victim's capacity to act will inevitably result in victim blaming […]. We must reject as axiomatic the idea that any mention of victim agency equals victim blaming. (pp. 354-355)

Smette et al. (ibid.) underline a central problem when discussing agency in the context of CSA and CSE and why it is so contentious: when the term 'choice' is used, blame is inferred. This is one of the reasons why the social workers have such complicated understandings of sexually exploited girls and the issue of choice and blame. The interviewees understand that sexually exploited girls make choices but cannot separate that from blaming them for making that choice and for its consequences.

This understanding is also evident within wider discourses around sexual offences perpetrated against women. The 'blame culture' is ubiquitous in the media and within our justice systems. For example, women are blamed for being raped because they chose to get drunk and stay out until 3a.m., or because they chose to wear a short skirt; all reasons constructed to explain (assign blame) why *this woman in particular* was raped, as opposed to blaming the perpetrator (Lamb, 1999; Archard, 1998; Kelly, 1988). Research, in fact, shows that women and girls are raped whatever they wear, whatever they drink and wherever they are (Morabito et al., 2016). I would suggest that this culture of blaming women for making choices in order to explain or justify sexually assault and exploitation, influences understandings of female children under the age of 16, especially those girls who subvert dominant constructions of the sexually abused child (Woodiwiss, 2014).

This research shows that social workers struggle with trying to 'fit' sexually exploited girls into available discourses. For example, if the sexually exploited girl can be re-understood by social workers and viewed as a small child, drawing on dominant constructions of childhood innocence and naivety, then they become more sensical: she acts in this way because she is *only a child-who just does not 'get it'.* The problem is that the social workers have constructed sexually exploited girls as choice-makers and therefore do not know where to 'fit' these girls within the confines of dominant constructions of childhood and sexually

abused children. Moreover, and problematically, is that findings from this research indicate the response these 'misfits' receive is possibly neither adequate nor effective. Indeed, a conclusion that can be drawn from the social workers' understandings is that sexually exploited girls in the past, and possibly currently, are not safeguarded, as they should be *as a direct result of* how social workers understand and construct their choice-making. The interviewees' understanding that girls are making a choice is at the core of the social worker's dilemma. Woodiwiss (2014) suggests this is a problematic area and identifies the need to disconnect certain discourses around childhood and CSA/CSE if the diverse experiences of the individual and their agency is to be better recognised:

> *We need to separate 'childhood' from 'sexual innocence' and 'harm' from 'wrongfulness' in order to acknowledge the wrongfulness of CSA without necessarily constructing victims as sexually innocent, passive and/or inevitably and overwhelmingly damaged by experiences of abuse* (p. 141)

Exploring CSA and CSE in more nuanced ways, as Woodiwiss (ibid.) suggests, is vital if the diversity and 'reality' of children and young peoples' experiences is to be better understood and, most importantly, responded to effectively (Jones, 2013; Raby, 2005; Overlien, 2003).

I should add that it is perhaps unsurprising that social workers struggle with these concepts. Indeed, as a researcher I have gone through a similar process myself, as can be seen in appendix 12.

8.2 Resolving conflicted understandings

The social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls as choice-makers clearly results in conflicted feelings for them. The social workers do not deny that sexually exploited girls are making choices. However, this understanding leads to interviewees (at least in part) blaming girls for being sexually exploited because they understand girls to make (some) choices that result in them being at risk of CSE. For example, all the social workers repeatedly discuss how girls *put themselves at risk* of CSE. The social workers construct the girls as making such choices, primarily, because of the restricted contexts they are operating within, such as their social and economic poverty. However, irrespective of the context the social workers do not, or seemingly cannot separate out choice from blame, nevertheless struggling with their understanding, 'knowing' they should not blame girls for being sexually exploited. Indeed, and possibly more importantly, they do not want to be *seen* to be blaming them and have to find a way of resolving this tension. The interviewees do this by reconstructing the choices that they understand the girl to make which (they understand) 'result' in her being exploited as invalid or unreal; therefore, the
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girl can be understood as not to blame. The social workers construct sexually exploited girls as unable to be culpable or responsible for their choices, which 'result' in them being sexually exploited, because all the choices they make are under duress and are mis-guided. To illustrate this, we briefly return to the data.

Josie (below) understands that girls are conditioned to believe that 'their' exploitative experiences are normal and, furthermore, reiterating the theme of 'gain, that the presents she receives help her to normalise or rationalise her experiences:

> *it's the norm, it's the norm for her, umm, or she's been kind*
> *of been given a script to say something and she gets these*
> *presents and she's kind of sorted that out in her mind* (Josie)

Likewise, Kelly (below) describes this as being 'conditioned' and demonstrates broader findings from the data wherein social workers understand girls as being controlled and almost 'taken over' by the perpetrators. Thus, the girl does not know what she is doing, having no control over her actions and choices. She further alleviates the blame from the girls by explaining that all of us are susceptible to conditioning. She draws on the example of a dog because they too are easy to condition:

> *and they've been conditioned haven't they […] don't take long*
> *to condition somebody, how long does it take for your dog to*
> *learn to give you its paw? and after that it will do it for the*
> *rest of its life (she laughs) everybody can be conditioned*

(Kelly)

Kelly alleviates blame by comparing sexually exploited girls with 'other people', implying that 'we' are all the same, 'all in it together'. 'We' cannot blame the girls because who is not vulnerable to conditioning of some sort. I would suggest that the comparison with a dumb animal is particularly telling, implying that she perhaps thinks sexually exploited girls are dumb. Moreover, in doing this (as is common with all the social workers), she completely contradicts earlier comments she makes in which she constructs only certain 'types' of girls as being vulnerable to CSE. This is a classic example of the way in which the social workers, on the one hand, construct sexually exploited girls as being exploited because of who they are and where they come from (assigning blame), but then, on the other, invalidate her choice-making to remove the concept of blame. For example, the social workers understand that the girls made those choices because they are conditioned, scared and seeking gain and therefore those choices are not real, she is innocent of blame. The choices the interviewees construct girls as making are nullified for the expressed purpose of lifting

blame off the girls for their sexual exploitation, blame which they had previously assigned them.

8.3 'Separating' choice from blame

Findings from the data suggest several things. Firstly, it is clear that the interviewees find it difficult to separate the idea that sexually exploited girls might be choice-makers from the belief that they should not be blamed for making those choices. Secondly, concerning girls sexually abused in the home, the social workers find it almost impossible to imagine her as an agent and a choice-maker and they certainly do not blame her for being abused. Clearly, girls are understood very differently regarding choice-making and blame depending on where, and by whom, they are being abused and exploited (see appendix 8 and 9). Berelowitz et al.'s (2013) comment is particularly pertinent to these findings:

> *During the inquiry we have heard some professionals at all levels blaming the child or young person for their own abuse […] When a child or young person is sexually exploited their abusers control them. They have no say in what happens to them.* (p. 56)

This quotation in many ways crystallises the lack of nuanced understandings found not only within the findings from this research, but also as discussed in chapter one, understandings of blame within broader discourses on CSE. Berelowitz et al,. (2013) arguably falls into the same 'trap' as the social workers and identifies that *professionals at all levels blame the young person.* Berelowitz et al,. (ibid.) explain that the reason sexually exploited young people should not be blamed is because *they have no say in what happens to them*. As with the interviewees, she invalidates their choice-making so that they are not seen as blameable; the implication being that if they did have a say in what happened to them, then they would be to blame. The only way *not* to blame them is to construct them as passive, non-agentic victims/objects. Warrington (2013) concurs:

> *Historically CSE campaigns have strategically downplayed notions of young people's agency and autonomy: an understandable response to a climate where children's access to support or justice as often been contingent on developing an understanding of them as passive and helpless victims* (p. 112)

Warrington (2013) also notes that practitioners find it difficult to conceive that sexually exploited young people can be both 'victims' and 'agents of change' and that their agency can be utilised as a *"resource rather than a problem"* (p. 110) (Erikson, 2009). Thus, there

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appears to be the need, as evidenced in this research, for professionals to challenge their understandings of sexually exploited girls and view them (and their agency) as part of the solution not part of the problem (Shuker, 2013; Melrose, 2010; 2004; Pearce, 2009). This research therefore contends that it is necessary to separate out choice-making and blame. Social workers need to be able to discuss and understand sexually exploited girls as choice-makers and not be deemed as, or understand themselves to be, blaming the girls for those choices. If discourses on choice and blame can be disconnected, social workers may also not feel the need to reconstruct certain choices the girls make as being invalid to avoid placing blame. Furthermore, if discourses on blame are to shift permanently, then social workers should be educated and encouraged to use language in which the *only* people blamed for CSE are the perpetrators (Gonick et al., 2009).

It is necessary for social workers to recognise that sexually exploited girls might be making choices within a temporal and social context (Pearce, 2013; Gill and Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2007). These contexts often maybe abusive, exploitative and constrained, but possibly not all of the time, recognising the transient and complex nature of the sexually exploitive situation but, irrespective of context, the girl is never to blame (see Firmin et al,. 2016; Vera-Gray, 2016; Melrose, 2013; Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Melrose, Barrett and Brodie, 1999). Social workers need to access a discourse that recognises and indeed enables girls' agency and choice-making in positive directions but never blames them for what might happen because of their choice-making. Furthermore, the language social workers use in relation to sexually exploited girls must shift. For example, the term "she puts herself at risk' needs to become obsolete and the term, "the perpetrator puts her at risk" must become common parlance in safeguarding discourse overtly placing the blame for CSE correctly, on the perpetrators.

This shift, however, is only likely to happen if there is recognition by the social workers that firstly and fundamentally, CSE happens because perpetrators sexually exploit and that exploitation does not happen within a vacuum, as they seem to believe. There must be an understanding that CSE is perpetrated within structures. As Harris and Dobson, (2015) note:

> *'choice' has always been a difficult thing to analyse [...]*
> *because one's own preferences and decisions can never be*
> *disentangled from the social context within which they are*
> *arrived at.* (p. 4)

Consequently, social workers need to be clear in their understanding that CSE is never the

girls fault. Subsequently, the main implication of these findings is that there is an imperative for social workers to have more nuanced understandings of sexually exploited girls' agency and choice-making. How this may be achieved is discussed next.

8.4 How a more nuanced understanding might be achieved

Choice-making, blame and their conflation are complicated and emotive subjects especially, as noted earlier, when discussed in the context of CSE and CSA. Nonetheless, this research shows that social workers need to challenge their understandings because, as Van Nijnatten (2013) notes:

> *Child welfare is a transactional process in which the client's actions and reactions help to determine the further course of the intervention; the professionals' actions and client's reactions mutually affect each other.* (p. 95)

Indeed, understanding and enabling the choice-making of clients is central within ethical debates in social work on self-determination; wherein social workers are encouraged to recognise that their clients are free to make their own choices, decisions, and the client's capacity to act with agency should be encouraged: As Spicker (1990) comments:

> *Social work is generally intended to facilitate or bring about some difference in a client's state or situation […] social workers are agents of change* (p. 228)

This is particularly interesting in the context of this researches' findings. One could interpret the social workers' understanding that the sexually exploited girl must recognise her own exploitation and choose to want to get out as being the social workers' attempt to encourage self-determination, facilitating her 'right' to self-determination (see James and Prout, 1997 regarding encouraging the self-determination of children). However, this seems a subversion of the principle of self-determination because she is at significant risk of harm if she is being sexually exploited. Therefore, unequivocally, she needs to be immediately safeguarded. In this instance, it seems clear that the onus should *not* be on the girl to be an agent of change in the sense of getting herself out of the CSE. It should be on the social worker.

Rather, the self-determination principle, in the context of someone who is being exploited, needs to be applied in a more nuanced manner. In other words, the social worker should certainly encourage the girl's choice-making in positive directions, but leaving her in an exploitative, abusive situation bearing the responsibility of making the right choice (to leave it), is, I would suggest unethical and subverts the principle of self-determination. However,
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troublingly, that is what the findings indicate is the social workers' understanding. It is not that the social workers do not want to be "agents of change", but findings from the data suggest that the social workers' own understandings of what they can change for sexually exploited girls are limited. This is because they see themselves as dependent on the girls as responsible for changing their own situations, even though the girl is in an abusive situation.

Evidentially, the interviewees' understanding of sexually exploited girls as agents and choices-makers profoundly affects how they respond to them and therefore must be analysed and, in the opinion of this research, challenged. Moreover, findings from this research and indeed other sources (see chapter one) suggest that sexually exploited girls are possibly not being safeguarded as they should be *because* they are viewed as 'making choices'. The social workers' understandings about agency might be further developed if they had a fuller appreciation of possible processes involved in sexually exploitative situations; recognising that CSE is not a static event, and is not experienced in the same way by every young person. As Harris and Dobson (2015) suggest, most pertinently in the context of this research:

> *There is a need for a more nuanced-yet readily available-vocabulary for describing girls' locations within structure/agency binaries* (p. 2)

Girls who are being exploited do not necessarily follow a linear process; there may be varying dimensions, conditions and shifting contexts within sexually exploitative/abusive situations. It is important that this be recognised if the experiences of girls are to be better understood and responded to and indeed, of central importance is the need to listen to young people talk about their experiences. As Moore (2006) notes:

> *We must look beyond a simple analysis of the victimisation of girls by coercers and give children and young people a chance to speak for themselves. We must move forward towards a theory of empowerment rather than victimisation.* (p. 78)

The individual experience of each sexually exploited girl may evolve differently. Consider the following example. A girl may get into a man's car on a Thursday evening feeling happy and content, feeling that she is making an autonomous choice. On Friday morning, she may wake up with a hangover and feel tired. She may respond to the man's phone call at lunch time and go out with him again, although this time he says if she does not go he will post naked pictures of her online; she may feel not so happy to go, but feels she has to. By

Friday evening, she may go out again with the man and have a nice time, until two hours later when he asks her to have sex with his friend and she does it but is reluctant and is very drunk. On Saturday morning, she wakes up with a hangover and may regret having sex with the man's friend and not want to go out that lunchtime when the man calls her. However, she does. By Saturday evening she may be feeling fine again and happy to go out. By Sunday lunchtime she may have been made to have sex again, been beaten up and be feeling depressed and scared. Where, and with whom she will be, and how she will be feeling in 1hrs time, 24hrs time or one week's time is unpredictable and changeable. Her feelings about her own ability to make choices and demonstrate agency may well vary dramatically from hour to hour. The point is that time, the accumulation over time of alcohol/drugs, the likely effect on her mental health, previous experiences of relationships, fear, fun, a row with her mum, being tired, being 'in love', getting gifts and so on, all these factors affect the girl's ability to make choices and be agentic. That is not to say she is not being agentic, but her agency is being demonstrated within a shifting, temporal and possibly constrained context with any number of variables involved (Vera-Gray, 2016).

Giddens (1984) notes that being agentic denotes the idea that a person can choose a course of action to take and furthermore, that they have the freedom to change that course should they so desire. He implies there is a certain freedom in being agentic, a state where one is not confined by constraints. Almost a form of *pure* agency. However, one's agency is affected and influenced by many different factors at varying times, especially for the sexually exploited girl. Does that mean she should not be considered an agent because for example, she may have been coerced? I would suggest her agency at different times may be compromised or constrained but is never absent. It is essential to recognise her agency in order to enable her to 'see' a future and not disempower her further. Thus, in an attempt to improve outcomes for sexually exploited girls, I would argue that there is a need for social workers to appreciate and understand the potentially vicissitudinal nature of the sexually exploited girls' situation. Furthermore, the social workers need to better recognise the importance of being tenacious and committed to developing long-term, consistent relationships with girls whereby the girl feels able to disclose information, or ask for support at any time, irrespective of choices she may have made and agency she may have demonstrated, knowing that she will not be judged for such choices nor blamed for them.

8.5 Why recognise the agency of sexually exploited girls?

Ultimately, if social workers do not recognise the potential complexities of the contexts sexually exploit girls may be inhabiting, their specific situations and constraints, it may limit their understanding and problematically their response. As Dodsworth (2015) suggests:

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> *The argument for the recognition of agency as a factor in involvement in selling sex for both young people and adults suggests the need for the recognition of a wider perspective which incorporates both individual and social and situational factors.* (p. 50)

Understanding sexually exploited girls (and girls sexually abused in the home) in more nuanced ways, as individuals who may be exercising agency often temporally and contextually, including with resistance, may prove more beneficial and empowering for the girls and those working with them (Pearce, 2007: Overlien, 2003). Daniels (2008) further articulates how problematic it may be if professionals do not recognise the individual needs of a child or young person:

> *Emphasising risk and victim-hood in work with children may create mind-sets for professionals that can make it harder for them to engage creatively with children's agency (i.e. as active subjects) and with their unique coping skills and strategies. In trying to rescue and protect children, we may be less alert to what children themselves are actually trying to do with the resources available to them to protect themselves and often other family members too. In my experience, failing to engage with how children themselves think about their situations or to elicit from them all the ways they actively try to manage stressful or dangerous family processes can lead to silencing their voices and diminishing their agency. Children and adolescents, while often longing for and actively seeking protection, very rarely welcome being ascribed a victim identity, no matter how benign the intentions are of those who try to confer it.* (p. 92)

James and Prout (1997) also suggest:

> *Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes* (p. 8)

James and Prout (1997) and others advocate the 'emergent framework' in which children, rather than being constructed as objects who are 'becoming', are seen as agents and

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subjects (Qvortrup, 2004; Lesko, 2001; Jenks, 1996). James and Prout (1997) note however, that the social construction of childhood is obdurate and takes time to shift. This is particularly relevant for sexually exploited girls, constructed repeatedly by the participants in this research as having little or no status or power over their own positions or destiny (Such and Walker, 2005). Critically, professionals must listen to the experiences of young people themselves. As Daniels (2008) says, failure to engage with children's own thoughts can lead to them feeling dis-empowered and further lacking in agency. This research suggests that troubling social workers' understandings of agency and choice is necessary if they are to better understand sexually exploited girls and indeed children and young people generally (Van Nijnatten, 2013; Jeffery, 2011). Moreover, if social workers can recognise sexually exploited girls' agency as a positive attribute and enable girls to recognise that they do have control over their lives and, most importantly, help them to understand their capacity to make choices that may change and improve their situations (Firmin et al,.2016; Pearce, 2007; Philips, 1999; Davies, 1990).

As has been suggested, one of the ways this may be achieved is by developing consistent relationships with girls and listening to their experiences, not just interpreting their voices (Warrington, 2013; Cornwall, 2004). However, a finding that has not been discussed in this thesis in any detail, but which is significant, is the issue of time. It is clear that the social workers are dealing with high numbers of cases and complex caseloads, often appearing (and saying they were) tired and over-stretched (Munro, 2015). Having the time to pursue (possibly) long-term and consistent relationships with sexually exploited girls realistically seems unlikely (see Shuker, 2013; Jeffery, 2011). Although this research recommends these types of relationships as an ideal, it also recognises that the social workers' time is very limited and pressurised. This not only limits just how much time they can invest in girls but also begs the question where they would they find time to be reflexive about agency, choice-making and any other aspects of their professional development. It would undeniably be a challenge (Sidebottom and Appleton, 2014).

8.6 Implications

Sexually exploited girls should be recognised as subjects not objects and their choice-making and agency should never be equated with blame. Not only would this be more empowering for the girls, but this approach also acknowledges rather than denies (or invalidates) the reality of their experiences. As Lamb (1996) says:

> *by telling them (victims) that we know more about their*
> *agency in the world than they do, and by informing them that*
> *they are sadly mistaken in their perception of choice and free*

will we do them an injustice […] doesn't it seem strange to advocate a totally deterministic view to women who themselves do not hold that view and to women we hope to empower? (p. 22)

Likewise, Jeffery (2011) suggests that young people being viewed as, and viewing themselves as subjects rather than objects may enable them to regain and feel in control of their lives, rather than 'just' constructed as being in a 'state of passive victimhood' (p, 43). Raby (2005) notes:

> *Young people occupy a specific location in relation to power and identity as they experience a temporary inequality that intersects with other significant identifications, are framed in ways that negate their existence in the present, are shaped by discourses of a fluid, becoming self, and are also diversely shaped through the material inequalities of their diverse lives*
>
> (p. 168)

As well as listening to girls and trying to better understand their lived experiences and situations, it is of prime importance that any reduced understandings of girls' agency (as evidenced in this research) may result in the 'pushing' of girls (further away) from the reaches of protection, in turn possibly increasing their vulnerability, as Melrose (2013) notes:

> *The young person who becomes involved in commercial sex markets voluntarily (continuum) as a result of exercising their own agency, is an anomaly that CSE discourses cannot accommodate* (p. 16)

The fact that social care itself is a 'system' and that this is not identified by any of the interviewees is concerning, as is the lack of discussion about its potential role in enabling sexually exploited girls to recognise their own agency and the possibility for change. Giddens (1984) notes that societal structures and systems are far from monolithic but for change to happen individuals need to be open and recognise their role in that process. When looking at agency within the context of CSE, this observation is highly pertinent, especially considering the findings of this research which discovered a somewhat defeatist attitude to the possibility of change both for the systems around CSE and towards the girls themselves. Giddens (1984) implies that there is hope if people embrace their role in encouraging change corporately (systematically) and individually. However, for social workers to achieve this change, they need more space and time for reflection and require

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training, both at University and on-going training (in practice) to encourage and enable them to develop reflective practices and research. This research can aid them in that process and such research must be made readily available and be accessible (Sidebottom and Appleton 2014; Knott and Scragg, 2013). Whilst this may not be easy in a hard-pressed working environment, seeking to improve practices and better protect young people must surely be worth prioritising. As Nijnatten (2010) says:

> *But knowing that perfection is not feasible does not relieve us*
> *of the task and responsibility of trying* (p. 135)

Thus, to summarise, social workers need to separate out in their understandings choice-making from blame and not feel the need to invalidate the choice-making of sexually exploited girls to avoid blaming them. Social workers need to understand the choice-making of sexually exploited girls in a more nuanced manner, recognising that choices are always made in shifting and temporal contexts. Moreover, sexually exploited girls' agency and choice-making should be enabled (by social workers) in positive directions. Sexually exploited girls should never be blamed for being sexually exploited and the blame should always be placed on the perpetrators.

8.7 Why is this an original contribution

This doctoral research comes at a time of intense scrutiny over the response of safeguarding services to CSE. The questions this research asks and indeed has attempted to answer, explore pivotal areas of concern about the response sexually exploited young people receive from those charged with safeguarding them. The findings concerning social workers' understandings of choice and blame provide some answers to questions posed about why girls may not have been protected as they should have been and, in turn, present a challenge to the educators of social workers currently in relation to their training and on-going learning and development.

This type of qualitative, in-depth analysis of social workers' understandings of CSE and sexually exploited girls has, to my knowledge, not been conducted in the UK previously. Although there have been more general interviews and focus groups conducted with social workers and other professionals, none has been carried out with social workers specifically exploring their understanding of sexually exploited girls' choice-making and agency. Furthermore, when presenting my findings at conferences in the UK regarding the need to separate out choice and blame, people have told me they have never heard this idea before in the context of CSE. This piece of research is, I would suggest, a timely and necessary contribution to the growing body of literature on the topic of CSE in the UK in the present time.

The consistency of the social workers' responses and the similarities within their understandings is striking. As a former practitioner in the field of CSE, this did not surprise me and reflected much of what I experienced (anecdotally) in practice. Indeed, currently, I am part of a team evaluating projects that are working around CSE and this involves interviewing social workers where I am finding (anecdotally) that language such as 'she puts herself at risk' is common place, seemingly uncritically embedded in safeguarding discourse. However, to some, the way in which the social workers so often express the same views and understandings might seem unexpected and I am aware of this. I think it is a virtue of the research and adds to its strength. I hope that the methodology chapter has provided a robust defence and explanation of my methods and shows that my interpretation of the social workers' understandings is reliable.

8.8 Further research

There is undoubtedly room for more research on the topic of CSE and sexually exploited young people. How practitioners working in safeguarding understand CSE is of particular interest. How definitions can aid and indeed hinder understandings and responses is of critical importance in the day-to-day practices for those responsible for safeguarding young people. This research suggests that the term CSE and specifically, the word 'exploitation' has become ambiguous and tautologous. This requires clarification by, for example, the Department of Education who are currently responsible for re-defining CSE. There are also clear implications for training on this subject within social work; what are social workers being taught CSE means at University and within their on-going training; do those responsible for training social workers question their own, and their trainees' interpretation or is knowledge on this subject just taken for granted. In other words, do 'we' all assume we mean (roughly) the same thing when we use the term CSE. Thus, conducting research with more social workers and indeed those from other professions such as the police, education and health into how the term is understood would enable a much more comprehensive picture of exactly what this ubiquitous term has come to mean, or is commonly interpreted as meaning.

Another area worthy of further investigation is the need to gather empirical data concerning what 'types' of girls are exploited. For example, is there a 'type' more likely to be exploited or is this simply an unhelpful stereotype which risks isolating certain young people and not recognising (missing) 'other' young people who may be at risk of CSE (See Hanson, 2016 for some recent research on this). Furthermore, if there is a 'type' more vulnerable than others, what preventative work can be done with such young people to enable them to recognise the signs of an exploitative relationship? Moreover, what work can be done with

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males to prevent them perpetrating such crimes in the first place as, essentially, until males stop exploiting young people, exploitation will simply continue in all its forms, irrespective of the resources that may be committed to educating young people about CSE. In relation to this, I would also advocate the urgent need for schools to endorse mandatory sex and relationship education as advised by, for example, Berelowitz et al. (2015).

Finally, this thesis proposes that there is scope for further research concerning the topic of 'consent'. Findings from this research suggest that social workers' understandings of the term and their usage of it may be confused and in need of disturbing. For example, social workers maybe using the term 'consenting' when actually it might be more appropriate to use the term 'choosing', the terms having possibly become semantically conflated. For example, is it appropriate to discuss a young person (under sixteen) consenting to sex when the law says they cannot. Do we need different language around this subject so that social workers can 'get away' from the obvious legal entanglements and connotations surrounding the term 'consent' and instead have the freedom to discuss the reality of young people as subjects and choice-makers without being seen as, or understand themselves as condoning illegal activity.

The topic of consent has been cited as a problematic area in recent reports concerning CSE in the UK (Jay, 2014; Casey, 2015; Jago et al., 2011). Indeed, Pearce (2013) advocates a 'social model' of consent (pp. 58-68) wherein the context in which young people are 'consenting' is recognised. She highlights that the current model generally used by safeguarding professionals derives from a medical model (Fraser guidelines, 1985-www.gpnotebook.co.uk) and is not adequate or appropriate when working with sexually exploited young people and notes that it does:

> *not enable a critical appraisal of the social pressures and*
> *structures that might impact on the relationship between*
> *consent and abuse* (Pearce, 2013, p. 58)

Consent is clearly a central issue in the context of CSE; indeed, as noted, understandings around the subject appear to lack clarity, especially when working with young people approaching the age of sixteen. If young people of this age are not safeguarded because of lack of knowledge and understanding around the law relating to consent, then this is an area in need of urgent attention.

8.9 Final Thoughts

Exploring the social workers' understandings of CSE and sexually exploited girls has been a

fascinating process and indeed a privilege. Personally, I have learnt a huge amount and I hope to have the opportunity to develop further ideas that have emerged from this research. Most importantly, I hope that this research may in some way contribute to developing social workers' understandings of sexually exploited young people and that consequently young people are always responded to by safeguarding professionals in an understanding and compassionate manner and not blamed for the choices they make. Moreover, I hope that blame is always placed with the perpetrators and that Western society and indeed all societies increasingly adopts a zero tolerance approach and response to all forms of sexual violence against women and girls.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter of Introduction

Sarah Lloyd

ESRC funded PhD Candidate

University of Huddersfield

Human and Health Research School

Centre for Applied Childhood Studies

Queensgate

HD1 3DH

S.Lloyd@hud.ac.uk

01484472667/07864573633

Re: Researching Social workers' understandings of child sexual exploitation.

Dear

I am currently researching the important issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and specifically social workers' understandings of CSE. The research explores social workers' understandings of child sexual exploitation through interviews with, in all, about twenty social workers, both generic and specialist. The interviews use semi structured questions and short vignettes and will last about one hour.

The research is conducted as part of the University of Huddersfield PhD programme. It is funded by the UK national research council Economic and Social Research Council and supervised by Dr Jo Woodiwiss and Professor Jeff Hearn.

The research has been approved by the University Ethics panel and the Association of Directors of Children's Services research group (ADCS ref: RGE 131018) and adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association.

I would very much like you to consider participating in this research and for you to be

interviewed. I will contact you in the next week to follow up this letter.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to get in contact with myself or my supervisors: Dr Jo Woodiwiss University of Huddersfield, Ramsden Building, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH, email J.Woodiwiss@hud.ac.uk: Phone 01484 472171. Prof Jeff Hearn. Email j.r.hearn@hud.ac.uk.

I look forward to speaking with you soon.
Yours truly,
Sarah Lloyd (MSc, MA, JNC-Level 3)

Appendix 2: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of research.

Social workers' understandings of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children.

You are being invited to take part in this study. Before you decide to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me if you wish. Please do not hesitate to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) funded study is to explore social workers' understanding of child sexual exploitation (CSE) borne from both their professional social work qualifications, any on-going training received and practical experience; the research is also interested in the social worker's understandings of sexually exploited children and any inter-connected issues. The findings will be written up and submitted for examination as part of my PhD thesis. Hopefully the thesis will contribute to a growing body of research on the topic of CSE. The findings may also be submitted to academic journals and presented at conferences; this is in order to enhance the knowledge base of practitioners, academics and policy makers. A summary of the findings will also be provided to yourself and your employing organisation should you/they wish to have copy.

Why I have been approached?

You have been asked to participate because you are a child and family social worker, or a specialist child sexual exploitation social worker who has/or is currently working with sexually exploited children.

Do I have to take part?

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It is your decision whether or not you take part. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, and you will be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time or a decision not to take part is completely your choice.

What will I need to do?

If you agree to take part in the research, we will arrange a mutually convenient time and location for your interview. The interview should take about sixty minutes and will be recorded for the purposes of transcribing later. The interview is semi-structured which means that although I will have prepared questions to ask you if you wish to talk about something in greater detail, or if we divert onto a topic not covered in the questions that is fine.

Will my identity be disclosed?

Your identity will be kept completely confidential, and a pseudonym will be used when writing up the findings. The employing organisation that you work for will also be anonymised.
All information disclosed within the interview will be kept confidential, except where legal obligations would necessitate disclosure by the researcher to appropriate personnel.

What will happen to the information?

All information collected from you during this research will be kept secure and as stated previously any identifying material, such as names/location/employing organisation will be removed in order to ensure anonymity. It is possible that a transcriber may be used to type up the interview, they will be required to keep all information confidential and stored in a locked cabinet and encrypted database. It is anticipated that the research may, at some point, be published in a journal or report. However, should this happen, your anonymity will be ensured, although it may be necessary to use your words in the presentation of the findings and your permission for this is included in the consent form

Whom can I contact for further information?

If you require any further information about the research, please contact me or my supervisors on:

Researcher.

Name: Sarah Lloyd. MSc, MA, JNC- Level 3, PhD Candidate

University of Huddersfield. Human and Health Research School. Centre for Applied Childhood Studies. Queensgate. Huddersfield. HD1 3DH

E-mail: S.Lloyd@hud.ac.uk

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Main Supervisor

Name: Dr Jo Woodiwiss

Email: J.Woodiwiss@hud.ac.uk

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Address: University of Huddersfield, Ramsden Building, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

Co-Supervisor

Prof Jeff Hearn

Email: j.r.hearn@hud.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Consent form

Title of Research Project: Social workers' understandings of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children.

It is important that you read, understand and sign the consent form. Your contribution to this research is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged in any way to participate, if you require any further details please contact the researcher (details below).

I have been fully informed of the nature and aims of this research

I consent to taking part in it

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reason

I give permission for my words to be quoted (by use of pseudonym)

I understand that the information collected will be kept in secure conditions for a period of five years at the University of Huddersfield

I understand that no person other than the researcher, her supervisors and possibly a transcriber will have access to the information provided. The only exception to this would be if illegal practices or behaviours were disclosed, in that event the researcher would notify appropriate personnel.

I understand that my identity will be protected by the use of pseudonym in the report and that no written information that could lead to my being identified will be included in any report, including the identity of my employing organisation.

If you are satisfied that you understand the information and are happy to take part in this project please put a tick in the box aligned to each sentence and print and sign below.

Signature of Participant:	Signature of Researcher:
Print:	Print:
Date:	Date:

(one copy to be retained by Participant / one copy to be retained by Researcher)

Researcher

Sarah Lloyd. MA, MSc. PhD Candidate

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Appendix 4: Interview Template

Interview- researcher's template

Introduction

Welcome and thanks. Confidentiality, has she/he read/understood and signed info/consent forms? Interview is semi-structured, ok to talk about other issues, flexible. Purpose of interviews is not to test or judge; just discuss his/her understanding of CSE. Primarily interested in girls. There are seven sections, should take between 60- 90mins, is that ok? Any questions/concerns?

Professional biography.

  How would you describe your gender and ethnicity?

  How long have you been a SW?

  What type of SW are you? Job title? What does this entail?

  Why did you want to be a SW?

  Assuming you wish to remain a SW, what motivates you to do so? (Is this different to the previous answer, if so what has changed?)

Training/qualifications.

How much training on CSE did you receive during your initial SW training?

What, if any, training have you received on CSE in the last year?

Do you find the training useful, applicable?

Do you feel that your training has generally equipped you to respond to CSE cases?

How many CSE cases would you say you had been involved in/what experience have you had of CSE cases?

Definitions.

Can you tell me what you understand by the term CSE? What is it? Do you think SWs share a common understanding of CSE?

Can you tell me what you understand by the term CSA?

What do you see as the similarities or differences? Do you find this problematic?

What do you understand by someone who sexually exploits children? (who does it and

why?)
How do you understand what motivates them?

The girls

Do you think there is something about some sexually exploited girls that makes them more vulnerable to exploitation than other children?
Do you think those who sexually exploit children see something in particular children that makes them target them?

Vignettes

Get SW to read scenarios one at a time and then discuss what they think about it and how would they respond, any difficulties/similarities?

Vignette 1.
Cara (14yr old girl) has been referred to social care by a youth worker. Last Friday evening at a local authority youth club the youth worker (who Cara has known for over two years) admired Cara's new watch. Cara told the youth worker that her step-dad had bought it for her; she went on to disclose that she has sex with her live-in step-dad every weekend, while her mum is out at work. She told the youth worker that she does not mind having sex with him; he is kind to her and often buys her presents, although he has asked her not to tell her mother about the presents or their 'special times together'. She told the youth worker that, if she does not want to have sex with him, she does not have to, but she usually does because she likes him and likes getting the presents.

Can you talk me through how you would respond to this situation and why?
What are your statutory responsibilities to Cara?
What do you think about Cara saying she does not mind having sex with her step-dad?
What if there were no presents, he was 'just' having sex with her?
What difficulties/problems to you foresee, if any?
Would you define this as CSE/CSA or both?

Vignette 2.

Lisa is 13 years old and has been referred to social care. Six months ago she and a friend were befriended by a couple of 17-year-old young men at a local park. One of the young men became Lisa's boyfriend and she started having sex with him, usually in the back of his
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car. He has introduced her and her friend to other young men of a similar age and also to older adult men. Lisa has been having sex (often unprotected) with a number (up to five different men a week) of these men in cars and flats. She has been coming home drunk and is regularly missing from home; she is also truanting from school. She still lives in the family home, but her parents have told you that they cannot control her, and are extremely concerned for her safety. Lisa tells the social worker that she does not know what all the fuss is about; she is simply having fun, going to parties, and having a few drinks. She acknowledges that her boyfriend has hit her a few times and she has been driven to places she was not familiar with where men are waiting to have sex with her. However, she says she does not have to do anything she does not want to, and she likes having a boyfriend because he gives her alcohol and cigarettes and looks after her.

As Lisa's social worker, can you talk me through how you would respond to this situation and explain why?
What are social care's statutory responsibilities to Lisa?
Would your response to this case differ to the previous one, of so how/why?
What are your main concerns/priorities?
What do you think about Lisa saying she is simply having fun, choosing to behave this way?
What problems/challenges do you foresee, if any?
Would you define this as CSE/CSA or both?

Vignette 3.

Emma is 15 years old (16 next month). When she was 13 years old, she met a 19-year-old man at her local swimming pool; he became her boyfriend and she was introduced to older men and has been having sex with different men for the past few years. She receives drugs, alcohol, gifts and money for this sexual activity. She still lives in the family home but her parents are at their wits' end and have asked that she be moved to foster care. Social workers have tried to engage with her over the past few years, since she was referred by her school, but she will not have anything to do with them. She is known to have been beaten up and dropped off on a motorway; she rarely attends school and has regularly been missing from home often for several days at a time. Social care has recently become aware that Emma is hanging around the local park trying to befriend other girls, some as young as 11, while her boyfriend waits in his car. The concern is that she is trying to befriend these girls in order to introduce them to her boyfriend and his friends.

Emma has had a succession of social workers, you are now referred this case, how would

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you respond to this situation and why?

What are social care's statutory responsibilities?

Does her age have any particular bearing on your response?

Does her potentially posing a threat to other children pose a specific problem? Whose rights are paramount, Emma's or the other girls?

What challenges/problems could you foresee with this case?

Would you define this case as CSE/CSA or both?

To close this section, are there any aspects of CSE that are important to you that were not raised by the scenarios or questions? Any earlier question that you would like to come back to?

Conclusion

Is there anything that would assist social workers in their work with sexually exploited girls, for example, materially, politically, emotionally? Anything that would make your job easier?

Finally-is there anything they would like to add, or comment on?

End

Thank them for their time; remind them of confidential nature of interview, if they have any professional/ personal concerns as a result of the interview then they can email/phone me. Remind them of my details. Do they know of any other SWs who might like to be interviewed?

Appendix 5: Data base of participants

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Sexuality	Type of social worker	Year qualified	Class	Most recent qualification	How they were recruited	LA	Religion
Female	34	White/Brit	Hetero	Child protection SW, specialising in CSE	2007	Working	BA hons	Met at a conference	W	None l.d
Male	43	British/Pakistani	Hetero	Child/family SW-Duty and assessment	2008	Borderline working/middle	MA social work	University	B	Muslim
Female	49	White/Brit	Hetero	Child sexual exploitation SW	1996	Working	Numerous social care prior to DipSW	Through another SW (above)	B	C/E
Female	36	Black (Caribbean) British	Hetero	Child/family SW: seconded to DV team	2009	Middle	MA social work	University	K	Christian
Female	41	White/Brit	Lesbian	Child/family SW: preventing reception into care team	2006	Working	Bachlors social work	Through LA contact	W	None
Female	48	White/Brit	Hetero	Child/family SW-preventing reception into care team	2012	Working	Social work degree	Through LA contact	W	None
Male	36	White/Brit	Straight	Service manager for child assessment team	2005/6	Working	Diploma level qual (HND?)	Through LA contact	W	None
Male	36	White/Brit	Hetero	SW for youth offending team	1999	Middle (now)	DipSW and PQSW	Through another SW met at Uni.	K	Christian (C of E)
Male	43	Pakistani British	Not l.d	SW for youth offending team	2000	Not l.d	Social applied studies-B.H	University	K	Muslim
Female	36	African	Hetero	Child/family SW (0-18, Generic)	2009	The ruling class	Bachlors social work	University	B	Christian
Female	47	White/Brit	Hetero	Child/family SW specialising in CSE	1999	Middle	Diploma in social work	Through another SW (uni)	K	None l.d
Female	51	White/Brit	Hetero	SW with disabled childrens service (0-18)	2005	Middle	Bachlors social work	University	K	C of E
Female	29	White/Brit	Hetero	SW working with YP aged 15-19 exp/at risk of DV	2008	working class	MA Ethics of Social welfare	Met at a conference	W	None l.d
Female	49	White/Brit	non l.d	SW working within targeted youth support team	2005	Not l.d	Social work degree	Through LA contact	W	C of E
Female	41	Black African	Hetero	Child protection SW, generic 0-18	2010	Middle	BA hons social work	University	B	Christian
Female	47	White/Brit	Hetero	Manager of MASH-Multi agency safeguarding hub	2000	Working	Masters in Childhood and youth studies	Through LA contact	W	None
Male	44	White/Brit	Hetero	Service Manager	1992	Middle	DipSw	Through LA contact	W	None
Female	22	White/Brit	Hetero	Newly qualified child protection SW-generic (0-18)	2013	Working	BSc Social work	Through LA contact	W	None

Appendix 6: List of themes unpacked

In the end, the process of identifying what my final themes were felt quite clear. To begin with, I had a lot of themes, points of interest (POI) and sub themes; I was identifying themes that were actually just a theme for that specific interview, not a theme for all the interviews. Following supervision with Jo, I essentially began again with my analysis. I had written down the answers to all ten questions for four of the interviews (k) and lots of what I loosely called themes had come out, i.e. she thinks she is in control but she isn't (not valid-choices etc.). I had a huge, unwieldy list, each of the four individual K interviews had produced a relatively small list of themes and I pooled them altogether, but they were a mess of individual themes, POI, sub themes, there was threads but not much clarity. I took a piece of paper and wrote down all the things I thought were thematic, everything went on the list and I had about 40. They all seemed significant, but were they themes, being significant is different to being thematic; being of interest is not a theme, necessarily. So I had this big list and then I began reading the K interviews again and marking on the transcript in pink what was in there from my massive list, and as I went on the list got smaller, or things I thought were thematic were not, for example the role of the vol orgs, 'working together', cuts, media, all were there in the data, but not enough to make it a theme, or rather what the SWs said about it all was not significant enough to make it thematic. However, other themes were iterative, when I had finished the K interviews I wrote down the themes again or the ones I knew had come up the most, and I counted how many times they had come up. Some of the themes hardly had any marks, some had lots, and this pattern was the same throughout all 18 interviews. So when I had finished K, I started on B, I wrote down the shorter list of themes I now had, although always keeping an eye out for the others, not eliminating them just more looking for certain things and the same themes kept coming up, and I started to have the confidence to delete themes that just weren't there, or significant. My whole thought process can be seen in my notepads, how I gleaned and focused, and ended up applying the themes to the data rather than looking for new ones, this was because I felt satisfied I had saturated the data in looking for what themes were present. By the time I had finished with B and was about to start on W, I had got 15 themes, I used the same process, in that I had my list of themes on one piece of paper and I noted in pink on the transcript where that theme came up, at the end of W, I added up all the themes again and had again narrowed it all down to 10 themes. I felt that these themes were reflective of the data, these were the most significant points to come out of all the 18 interviews, without a doubt, the most repeated, the most, at times, ambiguous, the most talked about and challenging and also what my research questions were addressing, I had the (beginning of my) answers to my RQ.

What makes it a theme-recurrent, talked about a lot, answering my RQ, areas of uncertainty, ambiguity etc. (Jeff Hearn)

_____

This is the list of themes I started with-(after answering 10q of K)
Understanding of CSE
Understanding of CSA
Lack of understanding/ambiguity re the above
Type of girl (caveats)
Blame
Victim
Deprived
Agency
Pseudo agency

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Culpability
Consent (confused understanding)
perps
absence of blame on perps
focus on girls
ambivalence about jobs
regret
don't give up
Disillusioned
stories
constrained resources
family
parents
mum
SW as parents
poverty/deprivation
disempowering yp
recognising agency
'other SWs'
'in my day'
not really knowing procedures
Onus on girl
training
Scenario 1-shows up ambiguity in understanding of CSE and CSA
Post 16
Media
Construction of childhood
Hopelessness/pity
sense of desperation/ hopelessness
reconstructing scenarios
Sc3- age doesn't matter
cuts
cse as an emmerging issue
money
things have improved
vol orgs
working together
contradictory
making stuff up
under a lot of strain/people off sick.(nearly 50 points!)*these were all from K, after reading
the 4 interviews and writing everything down that came out.

Then this was seriously gleaned, many of these points came under one theme, they were
elements of one theme, I needed to look at things more collectively, these points were just
that, points, not themes, when you collect them up, what is this really saying then you get
the theme, i.e. onus on the girl, absence of blame etc.
From here the list of themes went to:

(still just from K)

Understandings of CSE
Understandings of CSA
Type of girl
Victim-now
         future
Agency
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Pseudo agency
consent
onus on the girl
blame
adult or child
Perps- who/why they do it
     absence of blame
     trying to understand them
     can't get them
     Asian problem

Story
Role of family/parents
Construction of childhood
Media
Ambivalence
Training now
Vol orgs
Contradictions
dis/empowering yp
emmerging issues/things have improved
Reconstructing scenario
understanding of SW more troubled
Disullusioned/hopeless/pity
'other' people/SWs
'In my day'
Not sure of protocols
POI
No training at Uni on CSE
Cuts(after re-reading K, and marking in pink)

Then I wrote down the above points on separate paper and read through all the B interviews, and marked in pink on transcript where these points came up. I then wrote a new list of themes as a result, some of the above did not come up in the B transcripts so I left them , and here is my revised list of themes after B

Understanding of CSE
Understanding of CSA

Type of girl
Victim-now
     future

Agency not recognised
Agency
Pseudo-agency

Consent
Onus on the girl
Blame

Perps-struggle to understand/don't know
     who are they?/why they do it?
     understanding them
     absence of blame
     can't get them
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      Asian problem
      offering the girl

Story
Role of families/parents

Construction of childhood

Media-portrayal of CSE
      portrayal of SWs

Social Workers
-ambivalence
training-CSE
        Uni
Demands of job
'Other SWs'.
Vol orgs
0-18 working (I remember thinking this would be such a significant theme, and it was of interest but not a theme)
Multi-agency working
Not new
getting better
ignorance
Contradicotory
Hopelessness/defeatist attitude

After this, I really tightened things up, I could see when I counted up how many times certain things were/were not mentioned, that they just were not thematic so I ditched quite a number of topics and I pooled what I thought was thematic under headings. I wanted to make sure I didn't ditch anything important, or lose anything important, for example a number of points came up under 'the SW', and there were various constitutes to this, see below:

SWs understandings of CSE
SWs understandings of SA
Type of girl
Onus on the girl
Girl as victim/future victim
Story
Agency of SEg-agency
        pseudo-agency
         agency not recognised
Consent
Perpetrators
Role of family/parents
Social workers- `Training patchy
Uni-no training
Importance of vol orbs
Media?
'other SWs'
defeatist

Construction of childhood.

In amongst this I did have two outlier interviews, two of the CSE SWs really stood out as different (kind of), some similar constructions but they were very yp centred, very relational, all about empowering the yp, being patient, recognising the difficulties, consistency etc. They were very passionate about the subject, very driven, self-taught.

The next LA was W, Again I had my list, see above for themes and went over all the interviews marking in pink were these themes came up, always looking out for things I may have missed, but very focused on the above themes.
This was my list after W (1), W had the most amount of interviews so 'pinked' group 1, and noted down how many times things were said, then did 2 and 3 and made new list.

W1
Understanding of CSE
Understanding of CSA

Type of girl
Onus on the girl
Girl as victim/future victim

Agency-not recognised/denied
        agency
        pseudo agency

Consent
Blame
Story
Perpetrators -premeditated
          shitheads
          absence of blame
        can't get them
          SWs struggle to explain motives
          try to understand them
          unknowing
          Asian
          offering them something

Role of family/parents
SWs-defeatist attutude
Media
Social workers- 'other SWs'
          ambivalence
           multi-agency
           training
          contradiction
          vol orgs
          cuts
          things improved
          sex education

Construction of childhood.

The following list is made about W 2 and 3.

Understanding of CSE-
Understanding of CSA

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Type of girl
Onus on girl

Girl as a victim
Future victim
Agency-not recognised
agency
pseudo agency

Consent

Story

Blame

Perps- absence of blame
            cant get them
            understanding them
            struggle to explain
            Asians
            offering something
            premeditated/gits
            knowing/unknowing (agency/pseudo-agency?!!)
            why they do it

Role of parents/family

Media

Social workers- new issue
                    defeatist
                    'other SWs'
                    ambivalence
                    multi-agency
                    vol orgs
                    contradictions
                    Uni
                    Training
                    cuts/resources
                    educating kids
                     struggling
                improved

Constructions of childhood

So, this was my list at the end of W, and indeed all the interviews, these are all the key
themes to come out, it has been done through a process of repeatedly going over the data,
checking I am not missing anything, but also through setting up individual files for each
theme I could assign all the relevant data to each file and see it laid out, how the themes
are present in the data.I ditched blame (it returned!) at this stage, it is so immersed in
agency that doesn't warrant a separate theme, so this is the next list of themes:

SW understanding of CSE
SW understanding of CSA
Type of girl
Onus on girl
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Girl as victims
Agency of SEG
Consent
Perps
Role of family/parents
Media
The SWs
Stories(some hinted as significant but not really told, N/Azim, most pivotal-Gill/Beth)
Construction of childhood

I then tried to cluster the themes together more,

SW understandings of CSE and CSA

Type of girl/victim
Onus on girl/blame not directed at perps
Agency
Consent

Perps-cant get them

Role of parents

The SW and media

Stories

Constructions of childhood.

The next stage, as mentioned previously, was cataloguing all the relevant data to each document, this was helpful in seeing how some themes clustered with others, for example how every quote I put into 'onus on the girl' also went into 'absence of blame on the perp'. How so often the same quotes went to 'agency', 'pseudo-agency' and 'agency', it really helped in seeing the crossovers and conflation in understanding of the SWs. Here is the list of themes, as of the 3/11/14:

<u>Final list of themes</u>

1.SWs understandings of CSE and CSA

2. Type of girl/victim
    Onus on girl/family
   Absence of blame on perp

3. SWs understanding/ construction of SEyp's agency -
            agency
            pseudo-agency
            denial of agency

4.SWs understandings of consent

5. Perps-can't get them

6. (a)The social workers and…(training/ambivalence/frustration/ defeatism/ media)
    (b) their stories (spoken and unspoken)

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7. Constructions of childhood.

This is a summary of my themes, I wanted to add my missing discourse theme too, but as a separate thing, girls acting agentically within a context but not culpable.

Following this process I drew a number of diagrams or mind maps to see how/if any of these linked up or merged further, I found agency was a common thread throughout all of the themes, and you can see in my notes my thought process, I wanted to find a clever way of making it all link up but then realised I should not force this, I was also at this point thinking about what I wanted to write about for my thesis, what was I going to focus on, how many chapters, looking at what, and again this process narrowed down- what really was thematic, at least centrally. I realised that some of the above themes were actually things I could write about under the context of other different themes, so for example, social workers- that whole section would thread throughout a lot of the more central stuff, it was too 'bity', I could write a whole chapter about SWs ambivalence etc but it wasn't meaty enough, and ok they were all, pretty much, ambivalent about becoming SWs but was that really a main theme compared to all the other themes, no it was a sub theme really, not worthy or needing a whole chapter, but of interest and something I could refer to, just like the defeatism, frustration and stories, all interesting, but was it significant and important enough to write a substantial amount on, i.e. a chapter or was it something I could refer to. What was the most important or significant themes to write about, what warranted a chapter of this thesis, it all matters, but what really is the meat of this thing. So drawing these diagrams and thinking like this helped me focus in, I wanted to write about things, well, quality, not quantity, and I guess working out what my thesis was going to consist of was an important continuation of the thematic analysis, still at this stage I was realising some things simply were not thematic-enough! they were POI, sub themes, but what was the meat. It really focused the mind planning my thesis outline. For example, construction of childhood is a theme that threads throughout, as is the SWs stories and feelings about their work, I guess you would call it. In my notebooks I have highlighted the pages that were important part of this process, so after this stage I decided on the following chapters

1. All about the girl and her family
2. Agency- SWs understandings of it= contradictory
Agency-pseudo-agency, conflation of the two
3. Consent and SWs understandings of CSA and CSE, esp re consent, exemplified through describing them and the scenarios (Cara she is out, or he is, Emma we work with her in the situ)
4. Perps- absence of blame, you can't get them, trying to understand them.

However, this was again to change!
At this point as well I wrote down what I thought my key findings were

<u>Findings</u>
-Acting with agency-not to blame, missing discourse
-Girl/perp out (CSA)-work with girl (CSE) to get her to understand
-absence of blame on 'perp'-'minor discourse'
-type of girl/ type of family
-girl needs to act agentically and recognise situation (CSE) needs to want to get out, but is also not acting agentically because she doesn't understand/recog what is happening to her- contradictory understanding
-CSE=groups-choice, unanimously understood as within groups
CSA= in home, no choice/no consent
Child protection-not geared up for extra-familial abuse, need specific model (PACE.relational model)
Need more training on the theory, complexities of CSE, resources, time, importance of Vol agencies.
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Again I looked at the chapters and re-thought about how I can make them work together, something wasn't quite flowing with the above groupings, but this is what my next offering was

Intro- context
        media, political inquiries, Saville et al, Parton-social care being a conduit for societies worries about children, Rotherham, Rochdale, CSEGG, JAY, Jago et al, etc
RQ
Aims
Objectives
Lit review
Methodology
Chapter 1- Type of girl and her parents.
Socio-economically deprived, victim, vulnerable, troubled family, parents part of problem and solution. Absence of wider discussion on gender inequality, sexism etc
(theory-constructions of childhood, CSA, Finkelhor)

Chapter 2- Onus of the girl, absence of blame on the perp. Onus on the girls to give evidence/disclose, to be educated to recognise the abuse, got to want to get out.
Also within that-perps=you can't get them.

Chapter 3- Comparision of SWs understandings of CSA and CSE esp re Consent, definitions, polarised, difference, esp agency (may make this chapter 1, set the scene?)

Chapter 4-Agency, the thread throughout it all, the conflation of agency and pseudo agency, the missing discourse, girls needing to be agents if they want to get out.

Analysis Cont-9/1/15.
Before writing up my chapter on CSA and CSE I am going back over the interviews. I am taking the interviews from each LA area, as this is how they are set out in the CSA vCSE comparison doc. I am taking a sheet of paper for each social worker and writing down how they conceptually described CSE and CSA, then I am looking at how they answered the 3 scenarios, then I am looking at the U of CSE and U of CSA docs to collate as much as I can on what they have said about their U of CSE and CSA generally throughout the interview. I am also looking at the consent doc to see what they said. I am then writing a summary sheet for each SW, summarising how they conceptually describe CSE and CSA and then how they answer the scenarios, plus summary of general findings re U of CSE/CSA and consent.
12/1/15
I am realising that consent has nothing to do with anything!it is all about their understanding of agency, have written about this at end of chap 4 in conclusion section, the need to separate out discussion about consent and agency, could be very helpful, all explained in chap 4 conclusion.
So I have finished doing the above for K, and collated all the answers, I am calling this a micro thematic analysis, I have drawn together the themes from how they conceptually describe CSE and CSA, the themes from how they answer Cara, Lisa and Emma, and then the themes from how they answer generally about CSE and CSA and consent, but as I said the reason I have not found a great deal to think about re their understanding of consent, is because they are not talking about consent, they are talking about AGENCY!! This is very important, lets not talk about consent, too legal, too loaded, too black and white and yet ambiguous, lets talk about agency!!
I am now going to go through same process for B, this is time consuming, but methodologically very important for reliability and validity. At end of this, when doing all three, I will collate, and establish what themes are from all three.
14/1/15- I have collected all the data from the 3 LAs, everything any SW has said re their understanding of CSE and CSA has been looked at! Now I have collated all the three LAs, so
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everything B,K and W SWs said about CSE and CSA, conceptually has been collated, and filed, I have collated all they said about Cara, Lisa and Emma, There is so much data is it overwhelming, I have huge lists of all they said, and most of it is disparate, they all say different things, which is interesting in itself, for example in W, there were over 80 phrases/word used to describe CSE by 9 SWs, and the same 9 SWs for CSA used about 20 words and phrases, so interesting. Now I have collated them, all the SWs have used about 150 words/phrases to describe CSE. I didn't know how to break it down, so took two sheets of paper, entitled one, CSE-the girl, and write down everything that the SWs had said about the SEg when describing CSE, then I looked at what was left on my list, not a lot! but a fair bit about the perps, so I took another bit of paper and wrote perps, and wrote down everything the SWs had described about the perps when describing CSE, miles more about the girls, then a few words/phrase were left, so I put them on a separate sheet, kind of miscellaneous things they had said when describing CSE, were not many. I have noted in my notepad, but when describing the SEg it is all about her, very personal, a type, lots of problems and needs, when they describe CSA it is much less about the girl, all about the act of SA, much more black and white. So then, I have taken each scenario individually and collated all the answers the SWs gave, I have divided their answers into two areas, the girl and the procedures and this seems to cover all the answers they give. I do not have time to do more of a thematic analysis than that, these are quite general themes I guess, the girls and procedures, but that about covers what they are talking about. As of today, I need to do Emma, the consent, although will probably leave, that, so little about consent, since my realisation that they are not asking about consent so often, but about agency it has been a revelation. Then I will look at their general understandings of CSE and CSA as taken from the rest of their interviews, i.e. not in the conceptual description section, or the scenarios, drawn from, for example, them telling me their stories about cases, and other things.
22.1.15
I have collated all the answers for the three girls and thematically analysed them, so for Emma, I took three sheets and assigned all the data from all 18SWs to those sheets, they fell into three categories, although also conflated, Emma-the girl/or about her, the social worker-and how they felt about Emma/the situation and the procedures. For Lisa, I did the same and her two sheets was Lisa-about her and procedures. For Cara one sheet was what the social workers think/feel about her, and the second was procedures. I did entitle Cara-about her, but it was not, it was about the SWs thoughts about her situation rather than about her inherent characteristics/vulnerabilities, very different to Emma and Lisa. (*draw on King and Gibbs re thematic analysis)
19/2/15
I have further explored the data for chapter 5, constructions of the girls and their families. This involved looking at the documents with themes entitled, 'type of girl'; 'parents' and 'girls as victims'. I re-read through all the data re this topic and wrote down what was being said recurrently, two main things stand out, the girls are vulnerable because of so many things! but mainly because they are not getting what they need emotionally and materially at home. Certain type of girl this will happen to. I would say a quarter of the data on parents is about involving them in a positive, pro-active way in helping their child. Re victim, need to look again, but think focused mainly on Emma. 'Type of girl' and 'home', really conflate, she is type of girl because of home life. Lot of data negatively about care homes/being in care. I basically pulled together key themes within each section, the main ones throughout constructions of the girls and parents is she is hugely vulnerable as a result of un-met needs in her home life, she is doing it for gain, materially and emotionally because those needs are not being met at home, this covers ch6 and ch 7 as well. Awareness of where blame is assigned, absence of blame on perps and agency of girls recognised. Useful page on positive parent comments, mainly on how they need to be educated on CSE to better understand and protect their child, re victims, v negative about care, 16+, deterministic about girl's future, and UNMET NEEDS of child. What comes out strongly is there is something about the girls, and it could be so many things!
10.3.15- Starting my micro thematic analysis for ch 6- Blame, aka onus on the girls, absence of blame, I had written down already what I was focusing on, as most recurrent

themes, if girl wants out then she has to recognise abuse and leave; common language of 'she is putting herself in the situation', and girls have to disclose if perps are to be stopped. This is what focused on today, re-read 'onus on girls data', and counted up what was most commonly talked about and same as before, most data focused on what I think will be three sections of first half of chapter on 'onus on girls', 1) she is putting herself in the situation 2) she need to understand the situation and want to leave 3) she needs to disclose of perps are to be caught. Imp to mention within this the SWs desire to help her understand situ, and work with her to disclose, however still asking a huge amount from girl, and this will be looked at in contrast to what is being asked of the perps, to which end I have read over theme from data called, ' understanding the perps', added up what is most commonly talked about and most recurrent, and initial common themes within that, or micro themes are , why they do it; how they do it; why are they successful at it and who does it, think this will be nice way of exploring SWs U of perps. If I am going to establish and justify what I mean by absence of blame, need to analyse what they DID say! I have three sections within the data about perps, in absence of blame section, understanding them, absence of blame and you can't get them, going to thematically analyse each one then pool the three together, think collectively will make more sense, get better more balanced overview.

11.3.15- Went over all three sections of perps data, and did micro thematic analysis, see what was most recurrent in data, that I will then focus on in writing, In absence of blame section, the 'top' themes are 'about her and family', unless they want to change; got herself in situation; not disclosing; her need to understand, move yp/lock them up (not perps). In 'perps can't get them' section, themes are, girl not disclosing; police want good evidence, otherwise no charges; try and disrupt perps; FRUSTRATION-of SWs; difficult at 15/16; perps her ignored , focus on girls. Need to now read through and collate.

So I have read through, there are no themes within the social workers' 'understanding' the perps, different understandings, not a homogenous group, which of course is interesting in itself, so unlike the girls. Then the onus on the girls and absence of blame on the perps sections have to go together, what is is about the girls, i.e not disclosing, putting themselves in the situation etc all detracts from the blame, consciously or unconsciously being placed on the perps. This will be main chunk of chapter, then perps-you can't get them, really interesting, going over this, realising high levels of frustration of SWs at this, and tensions between what the police require as best evidence and what the girls can/can't give. Such a tension. SWs want to get the perps, sense of injustice that the girls are moved away, all onus on them, but all feels bit hopeless.

Appendix 7: Themes (Final)

Final Themes

Social workers' understandings of CSE

Initial findings suggest that social workers have a common understanding/interpretation of the term CSE, although I would add a caveat to this; there was, with some social workers, confusion about what constituted an 'inappropriate relationship', and what constitutes a sexually exploitative one, this was an opaque area for some of the social workers. However, ubiquitously CSE is associated with the grooming of young people (mainly female, although the sexual exploitation of boys was recognised) by extra familial groups of adults for the purpose of engaging/coercing young people into sexual activity with the perpetrator and others; there will also be financial/material gain for the perpetrators (and the girls) of the CSE as a result of the young person being 'passed on' to other perpetrators. The transportation/trafficking of young people was also a significant part of the social workers' understanding.

Sexually exploited c/yp are understood to have more capacity to demonstrate agency within the exploitative situations, this will be discussed further later on.
I am exploring this theme in two ways, through the SWs description of CSE when I asked them, and also how their understanding threads through the interviews, and comes up in different ways, often contradictorily. So there is essentially their understanding of the term CSE, or as they would describe it conceptually, and also how their understanding affects more generally their understanding of other elements of CSE, such as the agency of the yp, or the way in which they understand parents. This is a very big theme, not surprisingly, the biggest, and I need to work out how I am going to explain it concisely. I have also done a file comparing how SWs describe CSE as opposed to CSA, I thought this would be helpful if contrasting any differences and/or similarities.

Understanding of child sexual abuse (CSA)

Their understanding/construction of this term was significantly different to that of CSE. The two concepts (CSE and CSA) were generally understood as a binary (until troubled, for example through the vignettes, see interviews) particularly with regards to the agency/culpability of the child. When asked to describe CSA it was commonly constructed as

sexual abuse that takes place in the home, by a family member, wherein the child has no agency or ability to consent to sexual activity. There was a stark and consistent difference in how social workers' constructed c/yp sexually abused in the home, by family/friends and how they constructed young people sexually exploited by extra-familial adults as described above, particularly concerning agency and consent.

I am not so sure this is a theme, or not nearly as major as the previous one, it more than anything highlights how CSE is understood so specifically now, or has become so exclusive a term. Also the SWs understanding of CSA demonstrates how differently agency/consent are understood compared to CSE by the SWs. Of course I would suggest CSE and CSA are conflated concepts and practices, they are both one and the same, all CSA is exploitative and all CSE is abusive, however it is clear within the research, that they have become, generally polarised terms. CSE in particular. So the SWs understanding of CSA demonstrates how CSE is viewed as a separate entity almost, especially re agency etc, the reason I originally put in the question, describe CSA, was in order to see if they were understood differently, and if so how, and I did this because I believed they probably were and in asking both those questions I might elicit more of the SWs understandings, especially re agency/consent, which it did!

'Type of Girl'

Social workers commonly constructed sexually exploited girls as socially, economically and emotionally deprived. Sexually exploited girls were generally constructed as troubled and vulnerable because of their life's circumstances and furthermore were seeking affection, attention and material gain from the perpetrators. The social workers generally focused on the girls being exploited because of *who they were,* rather than blaming the exploitation on the perpetrators.

When I asked the SWs if CSE could happen to any girl, they always said yes, probably, but unlikely, unless again the child was experiencing something negative at home, like parents who worked a lot. Some SWs referred to these girls as from affluent homes, there was a type of dichotomy in their understanding of my question, could it happen to anyone, anyone being viewed as an affluent girl, someone who social care probably would not have contact with normally, again highlighting the dominant construction of CSE happening to 'poor' girls. Discussion about the girls and what was 'wrong' with them and their lives far outweighed discussion about the perpetrators and what was 'wrong' with them.

Onus on the girl

Following on from the previous theme, this idea of the reason why these girls are exploited being exponentially apportioned to what was wrong with them, making the onus on her, if she was different, had a different background this wouldn't happen to her, the almost subconscious assignment of blame being apportioned to the girls, not intentionally (?) over and above the perpetrator.

Social workers generally constructed sexually exploited girls as needing to be responsible for recognising the abuse, understanding that it was 'wrong' and leaving it. This appeared to be the main way in which the exploitation would cease; this was very different to how sexually abused girls (in the home) were constructed, for example social workers commonly said that they would be removed, or the abuser would be removed as soon as possible. The girls need to learn how to protect themselves, for example participating in 'keep safe' programmes so that they realise that what is happening to them is not 'appropriate'; rather than the perpetrators being stopped/prosecuted as this was constantly understood as very difficult to achieve. There seemed to be an acceptance that SEgirls would stay in the exploitative relationships whilst being worked with, there seemed a lack of urgency, she needs to work out that what is happening to her is wrong, rather than this abuse needs to stop now (as with Cara), the idea of leaving Cara to work out what was happening to her, was not an issue, the abuser would be stopped and Cara would be worked with re her understanding of that relationship after the abuse had stopped, whereas with Lisa and Emma and others the abuse would carry on while the girls was being worked with (Important). (Think it was Nell, who said is this all we can give these girls, 'keep safe' programmes, we can't keep you safe, because we can't get the perps, so you try to keep yourself safe)

If the girl does not co-operate, and /or give evidence about the perpetrators to the authorities then probably nothing will happen to the perpetrators.

Girl's as victims/future victims

Social workers' construct the girls as victims of their life circumstances prior to the exploitation; a victim 'now' as a result of the exploitation and a victim because she does not recognise what is happening to her through the exploitation. She is also constructed as a 'future' victim, for example she will probably end up in an abusive relationship and her prospects in life are bleak.

Agency of sexually exploited girls

Social workers' constructed the girls regarding their agency in three ways. They constructed them as demonstrating agency; as demonstrating pseudo-agency, for example, 'she thinks she knows what she is doing but she doesn't; and they denied, or did not recognise the girls' agency. I also identified what I would consider one of my most significant findings from the research, 'a missing discourse' which was not accessed by any of the social workers; the construction that the sexually exploited girl is acting with agency within a context, (possibly exploitative and constrained), however she is not culpable for what happens as a result of demonstrating that agency.

A significant number of social workers referred to 'other' social workers that think the girls are 'choosing a lifestyle' and 'know what they are doing' and do not therefore require/deserve protection. Their understandings were, generally, that the girl thinks she is in control, and thinks she knows what she is doing but she has been manipulated and does not know what she is doing and therefore is a victim and should not be deemed culpable. This idea that the SEgirl is a victim in all of it is important, if constructed as demonstrating agency and making choices, she would be blameable/culpable, she has to be constructed as without agency and then she won't be blamed, however time and again the SWs were contradictory in their construction of SEgirls, and swung back and forth between she is acting with agency, to she isn't, because she doesn't know what she is doing, she is being manipulated etc; the 'missing discourse' was simply not available, and in my opinion would be much more reflective of the reality, isn't this what SWs struggle with, the girls are acting with agency within a context, very difficult concept seemingly for SWs to recognise without being seen to blame the yp.

Consent

There appears to be a binary understanding of consent constructed by most of the social workers, for example, she either can consent or she cannot.
However, when these constructions were troubled social workers often contradicted themselves and it seemed to be an opaque area for them.
The vignettes are helpful in illustrating the SWs understanding of consent, for example Cara often being referred to as, she is 14 she cannot consent, in a quite dogmatic manner, whereas that clarity and dogmatic understanding/view was not as clear with Lisa and Emma, especially Emma who was nearly 16.

Perpetrators

Social workers generally struggled to explain what motivates the perpetrators, they constructed them as having issues in their own lives and wanting power and control. It seemed many of the SWs had given the perpetrators very little thought, to busy dealing with the girls.

Throughout the interviews the absence of blame consciously directed at the perpetrators has been salient, for example, none of the social workers say that the main reason these girls are being exploited is because someone is exploiting them, the focus is exponentially directed at what is wrong with the girl that makes her exploitable.

Social workers have little belief that anything can be done to stop the perpetrators, there is quite a defeatist attitude towards prosecuting/convicting the perpetrators, as mentioned above the onus on the girls to give evidence is significant.

The implication was that the perpetrators were 'ungettable' and social workers found this frustrating.

Role of family and parents

Parents are constructed throughout the interviews as having played a main part in causing their child to be vulnerable enough to be exploited through depriving her socially and economically, neglect, poor parenting etc, however juxtaposed with this is the idea that parents maybe also part of the solution. For example, working with parents to keep the child in the family home and recognising the need to educate parents about CSE.

Media

The influence of the media on the social workers epistemological understanding of CSE was notable. High profile court cases and inquiries, and how it is now 'on the agenda' for the media, politicians and local authorities was identified by most social workers as significant.

The social workers

There was a sense of defeat (mainly with the generic social workers) when it came to discussing how to respond to sexually exploited c/yp especially if they were over 14 yrs old due to issues around consent and lack of 'post-16' support/resources.

There was generally ambivalence about the job, for example, love it and hate it, negatives and positives.

Training was patchy and not mandatory. Some had none or maybe only one session.

All of the social workers said they had had no education on CSE at University, or extremely
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limited (as they identified CSE).

The role of the voluntary sector is essential when it comes to supporting sexually exploited c/yp.

The social workers generally noted a lack of resources and felt overworked/unappreciated.

Stories

Most of the social workers drew on cases that they had had in their constructions of sexually exploited c/yp and CSE. It was clear that the cases they had, had been very difficult and challenging for them and also informed much of their knowledge. SWs tended to return to stories as a way of answering questions or explaining what they did with the yp and how it worked out. It is important to note that most of the SWs (excluding the CSE SWs) had only had one or two cases that they identified as CSE cases.

Appendix 8: Diagram explaining the social workers' understandings of sexually abused girls as non-agents

Sexually Abused Girls

Sexually abused girl (in the home)

↓

She has no choice about being in the home, she has no choice about being sexually abused-she is an object on whom an act is being perpetrated

↓

Her agency is (barely) recognised by the social workers, she makes no choices, she has no choices-she has to be there, she is trapped
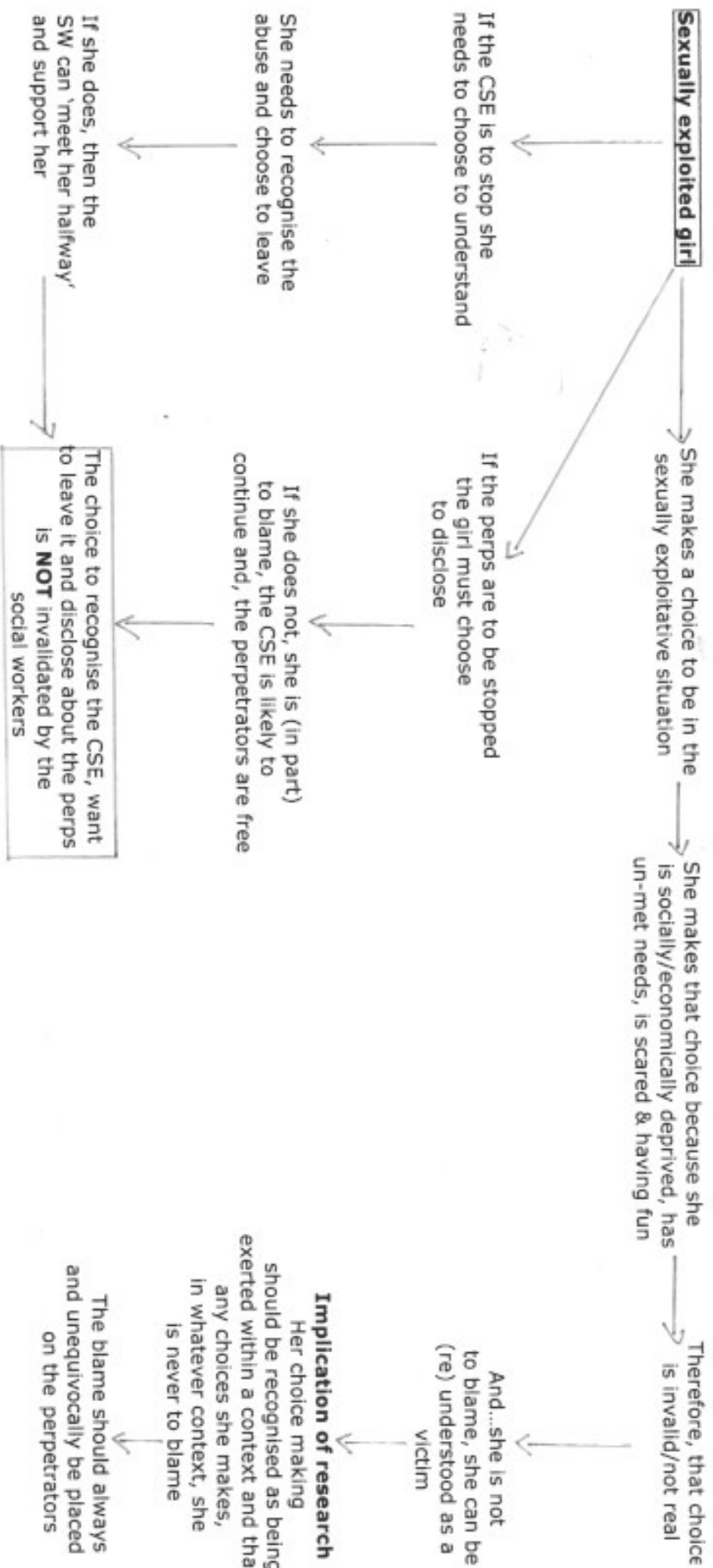
↓

She is a victim

↓

Therefore, she is not to blame- blame does not need to be absolved

Implications of research: Her capacity to be agentic and make choices should be recognised. And, whatever agency she demonstrates or choices she makes, (like the sexually exploited girl) she is never to blame. Moreover, the blame lies with the perpetrator, unequivocally. There is a need for the social workers to have more nuanced understandings of the agency and choice-making of sexually abused girls.

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Appendix 9: Diagram explaining the social workers' understandings of sexually exploited girls as choice-makers and agents

Understood by the social workers as choice makers and agents

Sexually exploited girl

She makes a choice to be in the sexually exploitative situation

She makes that choice because she is socially/economically deprived, has un-met needs, is scared & having fun

Therefore, that choice is invalid/not real

And...she is not to blame, she can be (re) understood as a victim

Implication of research
Her choice making should be recognised as being exerted within a context and tha any choices she makes, in whatever context, she is never to blame

The blame should always and unequivocally be placed on the perpetrators

If the CSE is to stop she needs to choose to understand

If the perps are to be stopped the girl must choose to disclose

She needs to recognise the abuse and choose to leave

If she does not, she is (in part) to blame, the CSE is likely to continue and, the perpetrators are free

If she does, then the SW can 'meet her halfway' and support her

The choice to recognise the CSE, want to leave it and disclose about the perps is **NOT** invalidated by the social workers

Appendix 10: Diagram explaining the social workers' understandings about the perpetrators

Social workers' understandings of the perpetrators

Perpetrators who sexually abuse in the home

If the girl discloses she is immediately safeguarded and the perpetrator (or girl) is removed

(The only potential problem is if she withdraws her complaint-might be more complicated)

The perpetrator is (probably) charged

The abuse stops

Perpetrators who sexually exploit outside the home

The girl is unlikely to disclose

If she does not disclose then the perpetrator is very unlikely to be stopped

The CSE continues whilst the girl is worked with until she recognises/understands that she is being exploited

The perpetrator continues exploiting

Implication of research: Why are both girls not responded to the same? Because the sexually abused girl (in the home) is understood as an object who has no choice, whilst the girl sexually exploited outside the home is viewed as a subject, who has a choice. Both should be recognised as subjects and both should be immediately protected-as the law requires (section 47-The Children's Act, 1989). The onus should not be so overwhelmingly on the sexually exploited girl to disclose, the onus should be on the police and social care to work pro-actively in order to stop the perpetrators; the girl should be immediately protected, even if she does not recognise she is being exploited. This should not happen by the girl being locked up (i.e. secure) but rather by the perpetrators being cautioned, given anyone of the various orders available (Sex Offences Act, 2003) and /or imprisoned.

Appendix 11: Diagram explaining how the social workers understand their own (limited) capacity to be agentic

Social Workers

Social workers' understandings about who and what affects their capacity to make choices

Sexually exploited girl
The girl is making a choice to be in the SE situation
The girl is not engaging
The girl is nearly 16
The girl has to make the choice to leave the SE situation
The girl has to recognise that she is being abused
The girl has to disclose information to the police if the perpetrators are to be stopped

Social care
Social workers have huge caseloads
Social workers time is limited
Supervision rarely happens
Training rarely happens- not mandatory re CSE
CSE is 'on the agenda'
Care homes are not adequate

Social worker

Government
Cuts
No money for secure
Worries about cuts to voluntary sector

Girl's parents
Often not equipped to protect their daughter, need support/education
Often part of the problem

Police and Perpetrators
The police need disclosures
The police require 'good' evidence
The perpetrators are getting away with CSE because so much onus is on the girls (which is not fair)
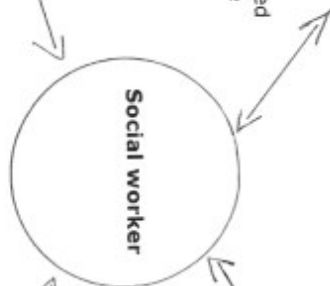
Implication of research-Social workers understand that their agency is significantly constrained when responding to CSE and overtly influenced by the choices other people make; primarily by the choice-making of sexually exploited girls. Furthermore, their agency and choice-making is also constrained by the people with whom they work and the systems within which they are operating i.e. social care, the police and the government. There is a need for a less defeatist attitude/tolerance of this status quo and more recognition from social workers that they are part of the system(and therefore can change it) that, according to them, so relies on sexually exploited girls to stop CSE.

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Appendix 12: My own 'wrestling' with agency

I have found, over the course of this PhD, how difficult it can be to separate out choice-making and blame. For me it involved a significant change in thinking, and that was challenging. In my early discussions on the subject with my supervisor she would talk about a (hypothetical) girl who was being sexually abused by her dad on the weekend and how the girl might manoeuvre situations so that the abuse would take place on a Friday evening, and then it was over for the weekend. I remember being horrified at such a notion. How could my supervisor talk about a sexually abused girl making choices in that situation, surely that meant she was blaming her, but of course she was not.

However, the concepts of agency and blame were so inter-locked in my thinking I could not, for some time, separate out the two. For example, in the context of CSE, how could I say, 'she chooses to get in the car', but not see myself (or be seen) as blaming her. As I have thought about such things and read about, in particular constructions of sexually abused children/young people my thinking has changed. I now know that I can say, 'she chooses to get in the car' and know that by recognising her agency I am not blaming her for being sexually exploited. However, I recognise that I have had the luxury of time to think and digest these new understandings; time and space that is not always available to social workers. Learning to think differently about agency and blame may take time, but I believe it is vital for social workers to take that time if sexually exploited young people are to be better understood and, most importantly never blamed to any degree whatsoever for being sexually exploited. Untangling discourses and obdurate, dominant understandings around this subject are difficult but I believe the findings from this research aid that process and can contribute to improving not only the understandings of social workers but services for sexually exploited young people.

Appendix 13-Ethics Application Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

School of Human and Health Sciences – School Research Ethics Panel

OUTLINE OF PROPOSAL

Please complete and return via email to:

Kirsty Thomson SREP Administrator: hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk

Name of applicant: Sarah Lloyd

Title of study: Social workers' understandings of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children.

Department: Centre for Applied Childhood Studies.   Date sent: August 2013.

Issue	Please provide sufficient detail for SREP to assess strategies used to address ethical issues in the research proposal
Researcher(s) details	Sarah Lloyd. PhD Student, University of Huddersfield. Email: S.Lloyd@hud.ac.uk. Phone: 07864573633.
Supervisor details	Main: Dr Jo Woodiwiss – J.Woodiwiss@hud.ac.uk Co: Prof Jeff Hearn- j.r.hearn@hud.ac.uk
Aim / objectives	The main aim of this research is to examine and increase knowledge of child sexual exploitation (CSE) in the UK in the contemporary period. The objectives of the research are to gain knowledge of social workers' understandings, constructions and perceptions of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children, and to elucidate the implications of these understandings, constructions and perceptions for theory and practice. The research is located at a time of increased governmental, academic and media interest (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2012; Home Affairs Committee, 2013; Melrose, 2012; Barnados, 2011; Jago et al, 2011; *Daily Mail*, 2012; *The Times*, May 2012). This is as a result of increased public awareness about the issue, stemming from several recent high profile UK court cases in which a number of men have been

convicted for the sexual exploitation and internal trafficking of children (BBC news, 2012/2013).

Of central interest within this investigation is social workers understanding of the concept of child sexual exploitation and how they define that concept. Another key element will involve examining how they understand and perceive sexually exploited children they work with. Particular focus will be given to the discourses social workers draw upon to construct the concepts of child sexual exploitation, and sexually exploited children, for example discourses about childhood, children and sexuality, 'knowing' and 'innocent' children, current discourses concerning the sexualisation of girls, issues of consent and the intersectionality of class and gender.

Definitions of (commercial) child sexual exploitation are complex and multi-dimensional, often proving problematic for professionals who work in the field (Barnados, 1998; DSCF, 2009). The DCSF (2009) provides the most commonly adhered to definition, (p, 9). However, recently it has been criticised for not fully establishing or explaining what 'exploitation' means (Melrose, 2012). Therefore for the purpose of this thesis it is important that clear definitions of the 'type' of child sexual exploitation being focussed on is established. Thus (as can be seen below) at the beginning of this research I have produced a definition of the 'type' of child sexual exploitation I am particularly interested in; further on in the research process I will elicit from my interviews with social workers what their common or individual definitions of child sexual exploitation are; and finally I will identify how I conceptualise child sexual exploitation following my analysis of the interview data.

This research plans to utilise the word prostituted, when discussing definitions, in order to make it very clear what type of child sexual abuse (CSA) is being referred too. This verb, one that has almost become outlawed by policy makers and academics when talking about child sexual abuse, as it denoted the idea of a child choosing to sell sex, is arguably much less unambiguous than the term exploitation (Melrose, 2004). The current, questionably nebulous

phrase, 'commercial child sexual exploitation' seems to be creating confusion and possibly leading to inappropriate child protection responses (Jones, 2013; Jago et al, 2011; Melrose, 2012). Therefore I suggest that using the word prostituted, as in, a child being prostituted, would clarify the type of abuse that this research will examine. Thus the type of child sexual abuse this research is particularly concerned with is that of children who are groomed and prostituted by extra familial men from within (at least initially) their own local communities; the child may also be internally trafficked, locally and/or to other areas of the UK by the perpetrators for the purpose of being prostituted. Men who are located in other areas may also travel to abuse the child, organised by the original abuser and/or his associates (Sex Offences Act, 2003; DCSF, 2009). The child may be given drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and so on in lieu of, or in return for, any sexual activity; the person prostituting the child will almost certainly receive a more significant payment from the people who sexually abuse the child.

An important constitute in this type of child sexual abuse (and other forms of CSA) is that despite possibly constrained and limited choices the child may be acting agentically and not identify themselves as being prostituted, sexually abused or a victim; consequentially the child may be extremely resistant to professional intervention and support. The carers and professionals involved with the child may find this highly problematic; this may primarily be because of the likely coercion and violence used by the perpetrators, but perhaps more significantly, as a result of monolithic and paradoxical constructions of childhood embedded in dominant discourses regarding children who are sexually abused, and, sexually active; childhood sexual innocence, and denial and/or lack of recognition of children's agency (Woodiwiss, 2009; Robinson, 2013; Egan and Hawkes, 2009; James and Prout, 1997).
Indeed, children who resist support from professionals, because they do not view their experiences as exploitative, has been cited as a common reason why professionals may be confused about how to respond; this is possibly due to lack of training and knowledge about the nature of child sexual exploitation and in particular the grooming

process, and will be a focus of interest within this research (Pearce, 2009; Jago et al, 2011; Melrose, 2012; OCC, 2012).

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Pearce, J.J. (2009) Young People and Sexual Exploitation: 'It's not hidden, you just aren't looking'. UK. Routledge Falmer

The Times Newspaper. www.thetimesonline.co.uk. Retrieved from 10th February until May 21st. 2012.

Woodiwiss, J (2009) Contesting Stories of Childhood Sexual Abuse. UK, Palgrave Macmillan.

Brief overview of research methodology	The epistemological framework for this qualitative research is social constructionist. Burr (2003) refers to the dual theories of macro' and' micro' social constructionism and this is drawn on within the methodology. 'Macro' social constructionism focuses on the force of

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culturally available discourses and the power relations embedded within these; 'micro' refers to a form of social constructionism that focus on accounts and personal identities within personal interactions. (p. 21-22,203). As has been previously mentioned, of particular interest within the analysis is the epistemological framework of the social workers' being interviewed, and how their knowledge/understanding about child sexual exploitation is constructed. This will be a main focus in the post interview analysis. The study has a post-structuralist, feminist theoretical framework and the methodology incorporates grounded theory and thematic analysis. The method that will be used to elucidate the social workers epistemological framework is semi-structured interviews that will take place with between 15-20 social workers. The initial sample framework will be Yorkshire in the North of England; if this area is unproductive in terms of recruitment then the framework will be extended to Lancashire and possibly further if necessary. This area has been chosen primarily because the researcher lives, and has worked as a practitioner for some years within these local authorities. The North of England has recently been the focus of significant media attention, specifically in Rochdale and Rotherham due to several high profile court cases involving groups of men prostituting girls; these cases have led to a number of convictions and also highly critical reviews of the support services involved, especially social care (Home Affairs Committee, 2013; RSCB, 2013).

Yorkshire has fifteen local authority areas; the densest populations are in the West and South, with the highest proliferation of social service departments being in West, North and South Yorkshire. I will begin by approaching two local authorities; I am not approaching all the LSCB's immediately in case I have an enthusiastic response, as I do not want to turn people away; this is a process that will be under constant review with my supervisors.

The type of social workers' that I wish to interview is a mixture of 'front-line', generic children and family social workers and specialist child sexual exploitation social workers; I would require them to have a minimum of two years professional practice. The reason that

I would like to interview these two types of social worker is because examining and comparing differences and similarities between their practice (if there is any) is of particular interest within this study, this is in order to explore whether having more specialist training/experience of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children leads to different perceptions and understandings and if that has implications for theory and practice. Both types of social worker play a significant and pivotal role in assessing the child/family needs and deciding what response (if any) needs to be implemented. Once a case has been referred through duty and assessment they will essentially be the gatekeepers concerning the level/type of response the child will receive. Social care generally take responsibility for chairing any multi-agency meetings with partner organisations, for example, police, education, health and co-ordinate how the agencies will work in order to protect the child. The social worker's perception of the sexually exploited child and his/her understanding of sexual exploitation plays a significant part in contributing to the formulation and co-ordination of the response the child will receive, those understandings and perceptions, as explained previously, are of central interest in this study.

The interviews will be transcribed and a thematic analysis will be performed (possibly using NVIVO) with the objective of eliciting salient and iterative themes from the data. A priori themes are at this stage (as outlined previously) the social workers understandings, perceptions and constructions of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children.

Discourses that contribute to and/or formulate the social workers understandings of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children will also be identified. The social workers epistemological frameworks will also be explored.

The findings will be collated and the social workers and their managers will be offered a report of my findings and possible recommendations.

Burr, V (2003) *Social Constructionism.* London, Routledge.

Rochdale Safeguarding Children's Board. Serious case review (2013)

	www.rbscb.org/CSEReport.pdf- retrieved 23rd July 2013.
Study Start & End Date	Start Date: October 2012 End Date: October 2015
Permissions for study	Ethical approval will be sought from the University of Huddersfield ethics panel. It is possible that my sample will be recruited from the first two or three LSCB's that I approach however, this is not guaranteed and my research may involve more than four local authorities, therefore I need to seek approval from the ADCS research group which is part of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, Standards, Performance and Inspection Policy Committee (www.adcs.org.uk/research). I can only submit an application to them when I have received the ethical approval of the University of Huddersfield. The guidelines from the ADCS state that a researcher cannot approach a local authority (if more than four) without their approval; if this is granted then they post their approval on their website for local authorities to access. Furthermore each local authority has individual research governance protocols which will need to be adhered to. There is no national guidance for this, so each area can vary in its requirements. However if one local authority gives its approval for research it may be that this can be used as a 'passport' with other local authorities but this has to be confirmed with the individual local authority. Following this, permission from the team managers of the social workers will need to be sought in order to interview the social workers.
Access to participants	Assuming that the above permissions for the study are granted then initial contact will be made by writing to the designated research officer for the local authority and the assistant director of the local safeguarding children's boards who is responsible for over-seeing children's' and family services within social care (see letter). They will be informed about what the research involves and a request will be made for social workers to be interviewed. I will state my intention to follow up the letter (a week from when the letter is sent) with a phone call in order to discuss its contents and answer any questions. Further to this I will request a meeting with relevant people such as the LSCB assistant director, the research officer, and team managers, the reason for this would be to introduce myself and

	also to explain in person the aims and objectives of my research, and answer any questions or concerns they might have. During this meeting I will ask the people attending to filter down the information to the social workers they manage; I will also request to attend a team meeting in which social workers will be present in order to briefly explain my research and hopefully recruit participants. In one local authority area I already have two social workers who have agreed to be interviewed (I met them at a conference) and I am hopeful that this might have a snowball effect for other social workers they work with. If social workers agree to be interviewed then I will advise them that their involvement is completely voluntary and they can withdraw at any time, they will also be assured of the confidential nature of their interviews and that their identity and that of their employing organisation will be anonymised. I will explain that I will be using case studies during the interviews in order to explore how the social worker would respond to a case, I will make it clear that I will not be asking them to talk specifically about cases they have worked on, and not judging their own work or that of their team. Emphasising the non-judgemental approach is of importance. I will provide them with the information and consent forms and arrange a time to meet up for the interview.
Confidentiality	All collected data and ensuing analysis will be stored in a locked draw and/or encrypted database. My supervisors and I will be the only people who have access to the data. It is possible that I will employ a person to transcribe the interviews and I have stated this in the consent and information forms. I have made it clear that they will be bound by the same confidentiality requirements as my supervisors and me.
Anonymity	The employing organisation of the interviewees will be anonymised as will the identification of the social workers being interviewed. The participants will all be given pseudonyms and the locations will be referred to simply as being in England and any identifying features will be removed.
Psychological support for participants	I will explain to the interviewees that I am not a counsellor and be clear that my role is purely as a researcher. I will not be asking them about their own personal experience of child sexual abuse. However I will give the participants information before and after the

	interviews about the University of Huddersfield counselling service. I will also make it clear in the introductory paper work that if any other personal/professional issues arise as a result of the interviews I can signpost them to other support services, such as NAPAC (National association for people abused in childhood), or social care's own therapeutic services.
Researcher safety / support (attach complete University Risk Analysis and Management form)	See risk analysis and management form.
Identify any potential conflicts of interest	From 2006 -2010 I worked as a practitioner supporting parents whose children were being sexually exploited; this involved my participation in strategic meetings with social workers in different parts of the country but particularly in Yorkshire and Lancashire. There are two local authority areas (Kirklees and Rotherham) that I will be not be approaching for interviews as I had professional contacts with their staff concerning what I (and my employers) perceived to be their inadequate level of support for children who were being sexually exploited. This also involved the respective LSCB's as I wrote letters of complaints to them and in one case I met with an assistant director to express mine and my employing organisation's concerns.
Please supply copies of all relevant supporting documentation electronically. If this is not available electronically, please provide explanation and supply hard copy	
Information sheet	See attached
Consent form	See attached
Letters	See attached
Questionnaire	n/a
Interview guide	The interviews will be semi-structured and should take about ninety minutes. As outlined previously the research aims to explore social workers understandings of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children.

The interviews will commence with reminding the social worker about the confidentiality of the interview and also confirming with them that they have read and signed the consent and information forms, re-iterating that they can withdraw from the interview at any stage should they so wish. I will also explain that the interview will be semi-structured and although I do have questions and particular areas of interest the interview is designed to be flexible in nature, therefore if we talk about other issues that are tangential that is fine. The interview is divided into four sections;

Professional biography, for example how long they have practiced and what types of cases they have worked on. I am also interested in why they became a social worker initially and what motivates them currently, for example, a desire to protect children, make a difference, job satisfaction, money. I will also ask them what qualifications they have and what training they receive on child sexual exploitation.

Understanding/definitions, I will ask them what they understand by the terms child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation, this is in order to try and elicit more about their knowledge of CSA and CSE as a concept at the beginning of the interview.

The following section I foresee as the most significant/substantial section of the interview;

Case studies. I will present the social workers with child sexual exploitation case studies and ask them to discuss how they would respond in each case, highlighting any challenges and problems they might perceive and drawing on their own experience. I am providing them with case studies, as opposed to asking them to tell me about cases they have been involved with, in order to lessen the potential of them feeling judged or criticised about how they have dealt with cases. The purpose of this is to highlight any potential issues around definitions and understanding of child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse, a particular focus of interest within this study. This will involve asking questions and giving prompts throughout to try

	and elicit how they construct the sexually abused children they work with particularly concerning the context of the abuse, childhood and sexuality such as class, gender and sexual behaviour; and also to explore the discourses they are drawing on which inform these constructions. I am also interested in exploring with the social workers if they think their training has equipped them to know how to respond in each case, are the procedures clear? Or would they actually do something quite different in practice. The final area of inquiry, **Is there anything that would assist/help the social worker in their work with sexually exploited children**? For example, more financial resources, training, more 'co-operative' children, supportive colleagues, management, media representation, smaller caseload. Prior to carrying out the interviews I am planning to do pilot interviews with two social workers. This will be an opportunity to 'test' my questions, practice my interviewing technique and also receive feedback from the interviewees regarding their thoughts on the interview.
Dissemination of results	The findings of the research will be collated and written up as part of my PhD thesis. I also intend to submit my research to a selection of journals and plan to present my findings at various conferences and other relevant forums. I will also offer each local area in which I have interviewed a summary of my findings and possibly recommendations.
Other issues	I have a great deal of professional experience in the field of child sexual exploitation, and the area of violence against women and girls generally. I have also studied relatively extensively on this subject as demonstrated below. I have a great deal of experience of working with other professionals from a variety of settings such as health, police, and education, the third sector and in particular social care. Ethically I feel equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform this research. My first degree was a BSc in Hotel and Catering management from

Oxford Brookes University. This was followed by a BA (Hons) and JNC in Youth and Community Work with Applied Theology (validated by Oxford Brookes University); as part of my degree/training I worked for three years as a project worker with teenage mothers in a youth and community centre in Cambridge. I then worked for a charity in the East end of London as an outreach worker with sex workers. Further to this I worked as a support worker for women experiencing domestic abuse, during which time I completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Housing Law and Policy (domestic violence pathway) at the University of Westminster. Subsequently I worked for four years at a national charity based in Leeds supporting parents whose children were being sexually exploited in the manner I have identified previously, alongside this I completed a Masters in the Ethics of Social Welfare at the University of Keele. In 2008 I significantly contributed to the BBC documentary 'Panorama' appearing in my capacity as a support worker and expert witness on the subject of child sexual exploitation. Following this I worked for Women's Aid in Leeds in a residential unit supporting women who had been internationally and internally trafficked and sexually exploited. I received an ESRC studentship in 2010 and completed an MSc in Social Research Methods and Evaluation (Social Work). I am now approaching the end of the first year of my PhD studies at the University of Huddersfield.

Access to participants- I recognise that this process could be time consuming and not elicit the participants I am seeking, for example the LSCB's may simply refuse my request or I may not be allowed to attend team meetings. I may have to extend my sample framework if my initial requests are unsuccessful. I am particularly aware that child sexual exploitation is a highly topical and contentious issue at this time, and my research may evoke defensive or resistant responses. I will need to be sensitive to this and work with participating LSCB's in a co-operative and diplomatic manner; accentuating my role as an independent researcher and also re-iterating the unequivocally confidential and anonymous nature of the research.

I am aware that some of the social workers may disclose their own childhood/adult sexual abuse and/or disclose high stress levels and I therefore need to be able to sign-post them to appropriate services(as discussed in psychological support for participants section).

It is possible that the interviews may potentially elicit disclosures of incompetent or even illegal practice. For example child protection procedures that should have been implemented in an historical or current child sexual exploitation case but were not, possibly having placed or indeed placing a child at increased risk of harm. Thus if it becomes apparent that a social worker, or their colleagues/managers have not followed procedures I will need to report them to the appropriate authorities. I have made this clear in the consent/ information forms.

The other issue is where to interview. Ideally I do not want to conduct the interviews at the social worker's place of work, with the potential for interruptions and their work environment surrounding them. One option is to carry out the interviews at the University, and this may suit some people, however it may be uncomfortable or threatening to others, and indeed for those with further to travel simply impossible. Therefore I would ideally like to find a location near to the individual social worker that is neutral and quiet, with minimal chance of interruption.

Another key issue is how to convince LSCB's and social workers that the research is worth taking part in, especially in the present climate when social workers have been so criticised about their response to child sexual exploitation. An emphasis on confidentiality and anonymity is of paramount importance. The reality maybe of course that my findings do not put social workers or the institution of social care in a good light and this may be a concern, expressed or otherwise, of the LSCB's. Reassurances about the researcher's competence and presenting a coherent methodological approach are vital (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). It will be important to highlight how useful it is to hear the voices of social workers on this issue and that

	this research will potentially contribute to developing local and national knowledge, hopefully improving conditions for social workers and also services for sexually exploited children. Furthermore it will increase the knowledge of policy makers, academics and LSCB's regarding the day-to-day experiences of social workers who are responding to child sexual exploitation and will be expedient educationally and politically. Opportunities for social workers to be reflexive about their work is also of value, these interviews will provide them with an opportunity to reflect on their practice and hopefully contribute to a growing body of work exploring the phenomena of child sexual exploitation in the UK today. Guba, E. G and Lincoln, Y.S (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Where application is to be made to NHS Research Ethics Committee / External Agencies	As stated previously, approval will need to be given from the ACDS research group. This will be applied for once ethical approval is given by the University of Huddersfield.
All documentation has been read by supervisor (where applicable)	Please confirm. This proposal will not be considered unless the supervisor has submitted a report confirming that (s)he has read all documents and supports their submission to SREP

All documentation must be submitted to the SREP administrator. All proposals will be reviewed by two members of SREP.

If you have any queries relating to the completion of this form or any other queries relating to SREP's consideration of this proposal, please contact the SREP administrator (Kirsty Thomson) in the first instance – **hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk**

Approval of Ethics Application

From: Kirsty Thomson

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Sent: Tuesday, September 24, 2013 10:39 AM

To: Sarah Lloyd U0975895

Cc: Jo Woodiwiss; Karen Ousey; Nigel King

Subject: Your SREP Application - Sarah Lloyd - APPROVED - Social workers' understandings of child sexual exploitation and sexually exploited children (Ref: SREP/2013/65)

Dear Sarah,

Dr Karen Ousey, Deputy Chair of SREP, has asked me to confirm that your SREP application as titled above has been approved outright.

However for advice, the reviewers commented that they thought some of the data you wished to collect did not contribute to meeting the aim and objectives stated in this application – you may wish to discuss this with your supervision team.

With best wishes for the success of your research project.

Regards,

Kirsty

(on behalf of Dr Karen Ousey, Deputy Chair of SREP)

Kirsty Thomson Research Administrator

: 01484 471156

: K.Thomson@hud.ac.uk

: www.hud.ac.uk

School of Human and Health Sciences Research Office (HHRG/01)   University of Huddersfield | Queensgate | Huddersfield | HD1 3DH

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