'Child Sexual Exploitation' in South-East Wales: problems and solutions from the perspectives of young people and professionals

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The thesis examines a social phenomenon that has come to be referred to within UK policy discourse as 'child sexual exploitation'. It is a qualitative, inter-disciplinary study, presenting new data drawn from a series of semi-structured interviews. Two groups of interviewees feature in the thesis: young people with personal experience of sexual exploitation; and professionals with varied responsibilities for identification and onward referral in this area. The aim of the thesis is to provide an in-depth understanding of child sexual exploitation through a thematic analysis of the rich accounts provided by those directly involved.

The thesis is about child sexual exploitation. At the same time it is about a range of problems – personal, social and professional – that beset and inform this public issue. The thesis explores the wider problems experienced by young people with particular experience of child sexual exploitation, and also the problems experienced by professionals seeking to work effectively with young people identified in this way. However, at root the thesis addresses the possibility that (further) problems might arise from the way in which 'child sexual exploitation' itself is conceptualised within policy frameworks in Wales. In particular, the thesis develops an analysis that is critical of policy that wholly defines and provides an explanation for 'child sexual exploitation' according to a 'grooming model' – and one in which children and young people figure predominantly as the passive victims of predatory adult perpetrators. The findings suggest that there are multiple forms of sexual exploitation, and central to any understanding of sexual exploitation is that underpinning the exchange of sex is the meeting (and taking advantage) of unmet needs. The findings also relay broader messages about the role of care in prevention and intervention work.

Whilst the thesis acknowledges and in no way dismisses 'grooming' as a way of understanding child sexual exploitation, it is argued that a re-articulation of the grooming model is needed in order to recognize that children and young people can be aware of the coercive nature of their relationships, and to give greater weight to the reasons why they may choose to stay in exploitative relationships. In addition, it is argued that 'child sexual exploitation' (as a policy concept) should include other kinds of transactional sex which may be more transient, but equally raise questions about the range of choices available to young people that prompt them to exchange sex for financial, emotional or material reward.

The thesis is exploratory and critical in its contribution to an understanding of child sexual exploitation and professional practice, and seeks to provide insights and understanding to a mixed audience, both academic and professional.

Contents

Chapter one
Introduction

This thesis comprises a multi-disciplinary qualitative study of a social problem that draws upon sociology, social work and social policy to explore a phenomena most recently referred to within UK policy discourse as 'child sexual exploitation' (CSE).[*] The thesis is organised around the analysis of two sets of interview data: accounts from young people with experiences of 'child sexual exploitation', and accounts from professionals who may encounter young people experiencing CSE and who are referred to within relevant policy documents as having a key role in preventing, identifying and intervening in the problem.

The problem has a clear contemporary relevance and urgency. At the time of writing, high profile criminal trials relating to charges of organised child sexual exploitation in Rochdale, Derby and most recently Oxford, have been the focus of significant national media attention, prompting widespread political and public debate, in particular around the 'grooming' of children and young people by gangs of male, predatory adults.[†] A two-year national inquiry instigated by the Children's Commissioner for England is due to report later in 2013 on the nature and extent of *Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups*; the inquiry's interim report opens with this grim assessment: '[t]he reality is that each year thousands of children in England are raped and abused from as young as 11 years by people seeking to humiliate, violate and control them and the impact on their lives is often devastating' (Berelowitz et al., 2012: 5).

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[*] This term is introduced within inverted commas to signal at the outset that CSE is not some neutral or value-free category. 'Child sexual exploitation', as I will argue, is more than just a descriptive policy term for a social problem that can be understood and addressed once labelled in this way; the term itself is caught up in a particular framing of the problem, one which I look to unpack throughout the thesis.

[†] These cases have been widely reported across the UK online and print media over the last 12 months. The most recent high profile case has concluded with the conviction of seven men in Oxford, which the Guardian newspaper reported under the headline *Oxford gang found guilty of grooming and sexually exploiting girls* (14th May, 2013). Much of the reporting on these cases has had a prurient or sensationalising aspect and could be considered as an example of moral panic (Cohen, 2002; see also Cree et al., 2012), in which outrage has focused directly or indirectly, on aspects of 'race', 'grooming', and alleged culpable failures of individual social workers and social work teams.

It remains to be seen how long the problem will remain prominent in the public mind. A number of reports over the last decade represent child sexual exploitation as a new and troubling problem about which little is known and much can be learned (see van Meeuwen et al., 1998; Swann and Balding, 2001; Coles, 2005; Harris and Robinson, 2007; CEOP, 2011; HCHAC, 2013). This is in relation to practice reports and literature which suggest that there is low awareness and a limited understanding of the problem and what should be done to respond to it amongst those working in professional roles with children and young people (see Clutton and Coles, 2007; Jago et al., 2011; Paskell, 2012).

This is not a new social problem. As will be outlined, young people exchanging sex has a lengthy social history; indeed the last 100 years have seen it feature as a re-emerging subject of welfare policy, practice and public concern; and one resurfacing in various guises (see Brown and Barrett, 2002). Concerns and panics around young people's sexuality – when it is legitimate, when it is abused – are also not new (see Hebdige, 1988, for an engaging discussion on this; also Phoenix and Oerton, 2005). Whilst it is not possible to know the exact scale of the problem we can be sure that the harms experienced by young people in these sorts of circumstance are significant.

This thesis then is about a pressing and particular social problem: child sexual exploitation. At the same time it is also about a wider set of problems. These are the problems and difficulties inevitably experienced by any young person identified as having been a victim of child sexual exploitation; these are also the problems and difficulties that, in a complex and sometimes countervailing way, inform and shape the responses made by professionals. These personal, social and professional issues run wider than child sexual exploitation but are, as I will argue, essential to a rounded understanding of the problem and how we should respond to it. But there is one more issue to consider.

At root, the thesis addresses what I suggest are the problems arising from the way in which child sexual exploitation itself is conceptualised within current policy in Wales. Child sexual exploitation is not only a problem *per se*, and in addition one permeated by wider difficulties – personal, social, professional – it is also problematic in regard to its very definition. It will be argued that this is particularly so in respect of the way in which CSE is framed significantly as the *grooming* of *children* by predatory *adults*. Whilst there is recognition within Welsh policy that CSE is bound up with vulnerabilities and risks, the problem has become almost wholly synonymous with, and

located as a problem of grooming. It will be argued that such a focus is narrow and *narrowing,* and can have an inhibiting effect in regard to grasping young people's *actual* experiences, which limits what it is that professionals can see, label and act upon when faced with a young person in need. In this way, rather than simply addressing child sexual exploitation on its own terms, the thesis problematizes 'child sexual exploitation' as a social and policy construct within the Welsh policy context and seeks to reveal something of the complexities of the problem that the term seeks to convey yet may unintentionally obfuscate.

Research aims and questions

The overarching aim of this research has been to provide an in-depth understanding of child sexual exploitation: exploring the perspectives of young people with experiences of it, and of professionals who are 'non-specialist' to this area of work but who hold key roles in identifying, referring and working with young people who may be involved in CSE. More specifically, it explores the ways that young people make sense of their experiences together with their views about the problem itself and what can or should be done about it. Similarly, it also explores the ways that professionals make sense of the problem, and their perspectives on interventions and the difficulties they encountered in responding to it. There are four areas of overlapping concern that formed the research objectives:

(i) To explore the ways that young people understand their experiences of child sexual exploitation; paying attention to how their accounts 'fit' with notions of choice, consent, grooming and coercion.

(ii) To explore what young people say about experiences of support and social care interventions, along with their perspectives on what might best help other young people in these sorts of difficulty and circumstances.

(iii) To consider the ways that professionals conceptualise child sexual exploitation: what they understand the problem to be, and how they position children and young people and make sense of how they come to experience CSE.

(iv) To consider the ways professionals make sense of identifying and evidencing child sexual exploitation and their occupational perspectives on responding to it.

Contribution

At the heart of this study are the perspectives of a small number of young people with experience of CSE; young people who are the subject of much investigation and policy directed interventions but who are rarely involved in a growing body of research that addresses this issue. This thesis seeks to make a modest contribution to that research literature and relevant policy. The study also explores the views of professionals who are also barely represented within research literature, but who have a key role in identifying and supporting young people who may be involved in CSE. In doing so, the hope is to provide new and important insights into this issue, which open up a number of complexities and thereby assist in a better grasp of the difficulties faced by young people and, likewise, the dilemmas faced by professionals working with them. The research was funded by the National Institute of Social Care and Health Research, Wales and my intention is that it will be of interest and application beyond academia. That said, the thesis is primarily an academic report on an extended research investigation. As such it draws, selectively, on a range of concepts, understandings and readings from across a number of academic disciplines, principally social work, social policy, sociology and criminology. Its core concerns – youth, care, transitions to adulthood, childhood, power, inequality – are common to the social sciences, and it is in this way that I seek to position the academic contribution made here – a theoretically informed, empirical study undertaken as a contribution to the social sciences, and for those who have been harmed by CSE and those who seek to help them.

'Child sexual exploitation'?

As indicated earlier, the term 'child sexual exploitation' is by no means straightforward. As will become clear, it is a relatively recent policy term, and a contentious and loaded one. In consequence CSE as a policy category will be treated as a topic in its own right as will be the meanings held by the study's research participants. In short, there are multiple understandings which exist behind the term. The topic of discussion must be called *something* yet to refer to the term 'child sexual exploitation' uncritically throughout would not be appropriate, hence the following conventions. I apply the category 'child sexual exploitation' or CSE as a reference to current policy and practice discourse. My use of inverted commas is a necessary reminder to the reader that the term is not being used uncritically. In the findings chapters I adopt the more neutral

phrase 'exchanging sex' as a means to convey a sense of distance from the narrow and sometimes distorting parameters of CSE as a policy construct. However, when considering the participants' accounts I utilise and reflect back their own phrasing. This varied approach is unavoidably messy but provides the essential contrast and difference that facilitates nuance, insight and the sorts of layered analyses that are called forth by this complex phenomenon.

Seen and not heard

Although this thesis presents data from two respondent groups, children and young people are central to the analysis provided here. Young people's visibility to others forms a key part of the thesis: aspects of their being seen, people looking out for them, their recognition and acknowledgement, are recurrent themes throughout. To *see* is to look out for or look after, to understand, to hear, to recognise. But how do we see young people? And if we see them as children do we see them at all? Consider the old and now rarely heard saying 'children should be seen and not heard'. It is conventionally taken to mean that we should not hear from children; that what children have to say is not important. It has come to be understood as something we no longer agree with, yet it still has relevance. We still want to know where our children are, we want to protect them, we are concerned to know that they are safe. In this way, part of the saying is positively phrased – children should be *seen*, they should be visible to us. Yet how often do we really 'see' children and young people? How often do we *really* want to hear from them, especially if what they have to say might not be pleasant, not something we consider as good for them – or not fitting with our ideas of what they *should* say? For a person be 'seen' they must be heard; and to be heard properly there must be an acknowledgement that they are there, and that what they have to say is worth hearing, worth understanding.

Underpinning this research is the intention to 'make visible' the perspectives and views of young people with experience of this social problem. To repeat, research into this area involving young people is rare – and research inviting their views and perspectives on the problem itself is rarer still. In addition, current policy, certainly within Wales (see WAG, 2011), which provides the 'overarching framework' for work in this field, has, 'at its heart, an absence of the direct experiences and perspectives of children and young people' (Warrington, 2010: 63). In addition, by involving some of those professionals who have the responsibility of noticing these young people, and of

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working with and supporting them, there is a comparative element to the research, not to deflect attention from the young people's accounts but to provide contrast and further illumination. It is hoped then, that much can be learnt from this case study, providing significant and relevant insights for CSE UK policy and practice outside of Wales.

Throughout this thesis runs an important theme – that of (in)visibility. There are many themes within this thesis, as noted above, youth, childhood, identity and care all feature. (In)visibility is different in that it is one which is *recurrent*. It is a telling notion, and one which brings a descriptive language whilst providing a valuable way of making sense of the findings. It is in this way only that I use it – and I make clear here that it is not offered as a 'theory' of child sexual exploitation, neither is it an attempt to engage with specialised and established academic theories related to vision and sight (see Chapter two). Yet it is a theme which permeates much of the analysis. Indeed, its relevance has already been mentioned in the opening paragraphs above. A rudimentary exploration of titles of academic and practice literature on this issue will indicate prevailing concerns about CSE being hidden, unnoticed, unknown. It is the intention of this study therefore to 'make visible' the perspectives of two key participant groups little represented directly within much of the research on this subject, and in so doing contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon itself.

Structure of the thesis

I outline here the overarching structure to this thesis and provide a brief synopsis of each chapter.

Chapter two contextualises the research study within relevant literature, policy and theory. This chapter is substantial in size and is organised into two parts. The first part maps the changing ways that the problem has been conceptualised within (mainly) UK policy, practice and research literature, by providing a review of the literature related to what is known about the problem and about ways of responding to it. In this way, the chapter indicates and provides context to how the problem has come to be conceptualised within current Welsh Government policy. The second part of the chapter connects the debate to related academic literatures about childhood, youth, and sight and seeing, by providing a selective overview of the same. This part of the chapter critically examines the wider constructions of childhood and youth within which we operate, and key related aspects of visibility that bear upon the lives of young people, thus setting out theoretical moorings for the analysis and discussion which follows in later chapters.

Chapter three provides a detailed account of the qualitative research design and situates the study within their methodological context of social constructionism and thematic analysis. I provide an outline of the practical aspects of the research study (e.g., sample selection, gate-keeping, access, locations, safeguarding) before moving on to discuss the rationale for selecting the in-depth semi-structured interview as the core research method deployed. Matters of data management, analysis, validity, together with reflections on the research process and the nature of the claims made in qualitative research occupy much of the chapter. Research ethics are of course a prominent aspect of the discussion.

Chapters four to seven are substantial in length and present the main research findings. Each chapter combines data, theory-informed commentary, analysis and reflection. The four chapters present findings from the two participant groups sequentially, enabling a cumulative and contrasted argument that concludes with key messages for policy, practice and theory. I have taken a less conventional approach to this thesis and forgone a final discussion chapter, relying instead separate the gradual development of argument and summation across the four chapters. It is an approach which best suits the iteration of data and the unfolding analysis of this complex and layered research topic.

The first of the findings chapters, Chapter four, explores the ways that the young respondents made sense of their experiences of exchanging sex. More specifically, the chapter explores the 'fit' between the young people's accounts, and the vulnerability and risk indicators identified within research and established within current policy and practice frameworks in Wales. Also explored are the different ways that the young people accounted for various activities, relationships and settings which were implicated in the way they came to exchange sex. In particular, attention is given to what the young people had to say in relation to the 'grooming' model – a mode of thinking which dominates current policy conceptions of the problem (see WAG, 2011).

Chapter five considers the ways that different professionals made sense of child sexual exploitation. More specifically, this chapter explores the professionals' understandings of what they deem the problem to be, and how they position and understand young people's involvement in it. The discussion then considers the professionals' accounts in relation to the key themes emerging from the young people's disclosures in the previous chapter, and starts contrastive cumulative analysis of 'child

sexual exploitation' socially constructed from these different standpoints and both are compared with the official policy discourse.

Chapter six sets out the young people's thoughts about solutions to (what they typically refer to as) the problem of 'young people being taken advantage of in a sexual way'. Their views on CSE, informed by their own experiences, provide important insights into ideas about prevention, identification, and intervention, but drawn from their distinctive perspective. Such insights are then used to interrogate some of the assumptions present within the literature and in policy and practice responses in this field (see WAG, 2011). The chapter concludes with a discussion drawing together the young people's perspectives of the problems and the solutions to CSE.

Chapter seven provides a consideration of the professionals' perspectives on responding to child sexual exploitation, along with some of the difficulties and problems they encounter when doing so. I consider here their reflections on solutions to the problem, and also aspects of identifying, establishing and evidencing that particular young people may be at risk of sexual exploitation. The final part of this chapter provides a concluding discussion, drawing together the key themes and arguments accumulating across the four findings chapters, thus bringing together insights and arguments from across the thesis entire.

Chapter eight offers a brief summary of the key arguments and findings together with reflections on the research process and thoughts on the integrity of the thesis overall. The chapter concludes with further commentary on why this research matters together with key messages for policy, practice and research that derive from a unique and revealing set of findings.

Final comments

The reader may be relieved to know that whilst child sexual exploitation is the topic of discussion they will find no specific details about its abuses. Neither is there any sensationalism or easy moral outrage to be found here. I have sought to provide a sober consideration of this issue, one which attempts to get behind the official rhetoric about CSE and open up its layered and contextual complexity. There is no search for simple answers or attribution of unreflective blame. It is an attempt to create a better understanding of this problem in the hope that it assists, in an applied and conceptual sense, those seeking to do right by young people in such difficult circumstances. What follows is not an exposé of CSE but an illumination of a much hidden and unhappy

seam of some young people's lives, whilst revealing and questioning the occupational assumptions of those there to support them. Both groups of participants have provided invaluable insights that support new ways of thinking and dealing with CSE. This study would not have been possible without their help and it is hoped that in return this thesis will make some small contribution to a better understanding of the problem and ways of responding to it.

Chapter two
From child prostitution to
child sexual exploitation:
a review of key literature

Introduction

In this extended review of key literature I seek to provide a conceptual context for the research design in relation to two broad domains. The first is the sphere of UK policy and practice in relation to the topic. The second part considers related aspects of childhood, youth and issues of 'visibility' in relation to care and the way young people are seen and understood in an adult defined social world. This thesis and this review starts from the position that children and young people exchanging sex for something is a problem. It is not within the remit of this thesis to consider whether the activity of exchanging sex per se for something is itself problematic, morally wrong, or a concern. For literature that addresses this question one would look to the many sources that examine adult sex work and prostitution (see for example Spector, 2006; Doezma, 1998; Barry, 1979; Pateman, 2006). Notably, many of the authors who address the exchange of adult sex would typically argue that the issues for children and young people are fundamentally different (see for example Nussbaum, 1998). Given then, that the starting point is that children and young people exchanging sex is a problem, we must ask what is the nature of the problem and for whom? As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, the problem of children and young people exchanging sex for something is not a new one, and has been the re-emerging subject of policy, practice and public concern, throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries (see Brown, 2004; also Brown and Barrett, 2002). The terminology and definition of the problem has changed within policy frameworks, redefining it from that of child and adolescent prostitution to child sexual exploitation. This change in terminology, however, signifies a change in the meaning of the phenomena itself (see Kelly et al., 1995). Moreover, both terms are historically situated, contentious and conceptually loaded, creating theoretical boundaries to the ways the problem has been understood and, in consequence, defined in policy and practice responses (Phoenix, 2002, 2010).

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. It provides a review of the policy and practice literature related to what is known about the problem, and ways of responding to it, providing context to the way the problem has come to be now conceptualised within social care policy and practice legislation specifically in Wales. I have organised the beginning of this chapter into four historical phases, providing an overview of relevant literatures relating to child prostitution and child sexual exploitation, situated within their associated policy and legislative contexts. These phases chart relevant key legislation and associated changes in practice responses as well as revealing shifts over time in the way the topic has been framed within selected literature. Consequently, this it is not meant to be an exhaustive historical account (see instead Brown and Barrett, 2002). Rather what is presented is an overview of key perspectives relating to the problem, which have, in turn, influenced and continue to influence the way this subject is defined and responded to.

The latter part of the chapter then moves away from policy and connects the debate to related academic literatures about childhood, youth, and sight and seeing by providing a selective overview of the same. This part of the chapter critically examines the wider constructions of childhood and youth within which we operate, and key related aspects of visibility that bear upon the lives of young people, thus setting out theoretical moorings for the analysis and discussion which follows in later chapters.

Child prostitution

Prior to the year 2000, there was no clear separation between adults and children exchanging sex within legislation about prostitution. The legislation and direction in place for dealing with children and young people involved in prostitution was directed by the 1956 Sexual Offences Act and the 1959 Street Offences Act. Whilst implemented in the 1950's, these are largely unchanged from those in place at the turn of the century (see Brown and Barrett, 2002), and so for the purposes of this thesis the introduction to matters of legislation begins at this historical juncture (for a more developed overview see Aitchison and O'Brien, 1997). These Acts made no distinction with regard to age and set out how to deal with instances of soliciting and loitering for all those aged 10 and over. The Acts were gender specific. The 1959 Street Offences Act refers specifically to females and set out that any behaviours relating to 'soliciting' and 'loitering' for sexual purposes were a criminal offence and punishable by law. This was dependent on proving 'persistence'. If it were proved that the activity had occurred

more than once the female would be deemed by law as a 'common prostitute'. The 1956 Sexual Offences Act applied to males only, and set out that behaviours relating to soliciting in a public place were deemed to be a criminal offence. This Act did not define those behaviours as prostitution and there was no requirement to prove persistence. Responses to child prostitution then, were punitive and a child or young person would be dealt with by cautions, fines, imprisonment or removal to 'safe houses' under the auspices of control and protection (see Gillespie, 2005).

A problem for the bad, mad, or sad

Although the legislation did not distinguish between adults and children, as Gorham (1978) argues, the issue of *child* prostitution became a social problem of some concern if not panic in the late nineteenth century when journalist W.T. Stead in 1885 published his sensationalist accounts of children 'ensnared', 'kidnapped' and 'entrapped' into prostitution. As Brown and Barrett (2002) consider, the sexual standard of the time was for women to be 'pure' until marriage, with an expectation for men to be sexually knowledgeable. In this way, prostitution was tolerated and seen as a necessary evil to preserve the institution of marriage. This view was class based. Men's sexual knowledge could be safely garnered from the lower classes and not affect the expected sexual standards claimed by the middle classes, while also keeping marriages intact by the expedience of an alternative sexual outlet (see Jesson, 1993). At the same time the 'problem' was often cast as the promiscuous girl as a threat to the innocent man, with the responsibility and blame falling on the (female) child or young person (see Brown, 2004). Stead's articles garnered sympathy amongst middle class reformers arguably because of his emphasis on forced abduction – meaning that this was a potential problem for *all* children, and by definition those of the reformers too . Yet, as Gorham argues,

> had they allowed themselves to see that many young girls engaged in prostitution not as passive, sexually innocent victims but because their choices were so limited, the reformers would have been forced to recognize that the causes of prostitution were to be found in an exploitative economic structure.
>
> (1978: 355)

As Brown and Barrett (2002) argue, by focusing on a deviant adult 'other' the problem was located outside of family and the structural issues in society that may cause difficulty for children, leaving them with little choice or other means to survive than to exchange sex to meet their needs. In this way, the problem became located around mythical images of the child as a blameworthy seductress – an aberration of a child – or as an innocent, abducted and chained by an aberrant adult stranger (Ennew, 1986).

Brown (2004) writes of how the issue of child prostitution re-emerged in the interwar period as a result of reformist movements, such as the Association of Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH) and the National Vigilance Association (NVA), which sought to push the attention and blame from children and young people to the adult male 'customer', again drawing on the image of the abused innocent dependent young child as a way of gaining sympathy and support for the cause. However, as Brown and Barrett (2002) note, Hansard records (1933) reveal that the debate in Parliament was once again focused around concerns over promiscuous working class girls as the seducers of innocent middle class men; such girls, by showing a lack of moral fibre, should not be protected.

Child prostitution re-emerged as the focus of attention again in the 1970's. Changes in society since the introduction of the welfare state were seen to undermine poverty arguments, and the rise of neo-liberal arguments brought about a discourse on 'moral decay' and 'the underclass' (see Hickson, 2010). More specifically, the Maria Colwell case in 1974 brought a focus on what were cast as failed leftist social work values (Brown and Barrett, 2002; see also Drakeford and Butler, 2012). As Brown and Barrett (2002: 155) argue, child prostitution became a focal point and something of a moral panic, particularly in the media, in which the issue was again simplified and reduced within sensationalist accounts of innocent younger children 'tricked' and 'betrayed' by older men. Alternative explanations included moral outrage over delinquent 'pleasure-seeking girls' who wanted money for clothes and the 'discotheque'.

A problem of deviancy

Prior to the late 1980's there was little published empirical or applied research into the subject of child prostitution (for a review of the field see Jesson, 1993). Instead, attention was more likely to be paid to studies of deviancy, juvenile delinquency and sexual promiscuity (Brown and Barrett, 2002). Even here, the experiences of children

and young people involved in prostitution would not arise as being of primary interest in and of itself. As Jeffreys (1997) considers, studies into adolescent prostitution were designed to inform an understanding of adult prostitutes by examining the 'causes' of prostitution and knowledge of their early 'careers' in order to gain insight into their later deviancy and promiscuity. These studies were heavily influenced by labelling theory and tended to pathologise young people by their focus upon what 'causes' a person to 'become' a prostitute (see Cusick, 2002: 234). For example Davis (1978) developed a 'career model' from her research, in which she argued that there is a three stage progression from 'adolescent' to 'prostitute'. The first stage is 'drift': here a child or young person gets involved in early sexual activity, is then labelled as 'promiscuous', becomes involved with the wrong crowd, becomes 'curious' about prostitution and is encouraged 'in her first act of prostitution'. The second stage is 'transition': when the child or young person becomes defined by these new activities and sexual experiences, and the 'excitement' is gradually replaced by a work ethic. The final stage is 'professional': when they define themselves as a prostitute and find acceptance through association with other prostitutes. Other studies of the period created similar 'ideal types' of adolescent career trajectories into prostitution (see Weisburg, 1985). The main focus of these studies was examining sexual behaviour or early sexual experiences, as previous experiences of sexual abuse were found to have 'strong correlations' to their involvement in prostitution (see Seng, 1989). In this way, involvement in prostitution was attributed to early negative sexual knowing or sexual promiscuity which was understood to result in adult deviant sexual behaviour (Jeffreys, 1997). This research tended to reinforce understandings of the problem as one of promiscuity and fecklessness, caused by negative sexual experiences, linked to assumptions about weak-minded or deviant individuals (see Brown and Barrett, 2002). In short, child prostitution has over time been associated to varying degrees with children and young people cast as 'bad', 'mad' or 'sad' (see O'Neill, 2001: 99).

Child Prostitution in the 1980s and 1990s

This section explores how the emergence of the rights of the child and concern over issues affecting children saw a renewed focus on child prostitution and a drive to change the way policy and practice dealt with the issue. The introduction of the Children Act 1989 provided a new framework for the care and protection of children. It established new criteria for child protection which, arguably, provided a separate set of machinery

that could be applied to support children involved in prostitution (see Phoenix, 2002). As Aitchison and O'Brien (1997) observe, The 1989 Act introduced a requirement to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need. More specifically, it required local authorities to take reasonable steps through provision of services to prevent ill treatment and neglect, and to reduce the need to bring proceedings for care or supervision orders and criminal proceedings. In addition, as a result of recommendations to the UK government from the 1995 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), it remains the case that while children under the age of 10 cannot be prosecuted for a criminal offence, those aged 14 and older are deemed as having full criminal responsibility. However to convict those between 10 and 14 years old the court must prove that they knew what they were doing was wrong (see Aitchison and O'Brien, 1997). As the same legislative context noted earlier still applied, it was still technically possible to convict a child as young as 10 for offences relating to soliciting and loitering.

In this way, children and young people involved in prostitution became caught between criminal and civil legislation that directed two possible statutory responses – punishment or protection. That punitive measures were as likely a response as protection was a very real issue. As Brown and Barrett (2002) argued, the response from statutory services was more likely to focus on controlling troublesome children, and there was a reluctance to initiate safeguarding responses, allowing criminal justice responses to proceed. Between 1989 and 1995 nearly 4000 police cautions were given to young people aged between 10 and 18 for offences relating to prostitution – most of which were given to those aged between 14 and 18 years (see Ayre and Barrett, 2000).

Prostitution as survival strategy
Research findings relating to child prostitution in the late 1980's did not come from a focus on child prostitution *per se*, but rather from research with other vulnerable groups of young people. For example research with 'young runaways' revealed prostitution as a survival strategy for a significant number of those involved in the research (see for example Newman, 1989). There was a change in research focus to an exploration of the economic and social circumstances around children and young people's involvement in prostitution (see Cusick, 2002). Research began to highlight areas such as economic problems and the need for money (Green et al., 1997). It also suggested circumstantial commonalities; such as the number of young people involved in prostitution who came

from the care system (O'Neill et al., 1995; Shaw et al., 1996); who were homeless; or in vulnerable housing situations (Kirby, 1995). O'Neill's (2001) three year ethnographic study with young people 'on the street' was an attempt to move away from knowing *about* young people involved in prostitution through the sociology of deviance and criminology and to find out from them about their experiences. Findings from O'Neill's research (*op cit*) are themes common to those indicated by other authors. Young people involved in prostitution were found to have destructive interrelationships with adults, such as carers, detached mothers, and abusive male role models. They were subject to negative stereo-typing and labelling by care givers and those working with them through criminal justice work. They were likely to have been subject to bullying and had experienced the care environment as something negative. Violence was a taken-for-granted aspect of their lives, and many had previous experiences of sexual abuse. Many also had histories of offending and experiences of criminal justice proceedings.

Authors also focused on structural inequalities and poverty which left some children with little other option outside of the home and care context (Shaw and Butler, 1998). As Ennew (1986) argued, the 'sexual exploitation' of children must be understood in the context of wider power relationships between children, young people and adults. The disarticulation of citizenship from welfarism to capitalism and individualism meant that responsibility for young people rested with the family, making it difficult for any young person in conflict with their families to live independently of them (Melrose and Ayre, 2002). As Green et al., (1997) argued, the gradual withdrawal of young people's access to benefits and welfare meant that prostitution was often the only option available to some young people. Pitts (1997) argued that young people's lack of stake in society, the decline of provision and services for them, and the increase in punitive measures for young people who, for whatever reason, were out of the mainstream and refused to engage, meant that young people were left with no real choices.

In this way, authors began to consider young people's agency and the reasons behind their involvement in prostitution. Arguments centred on prostitution as rarely chosen devoid of complex circumstances and difficulties. As McMullen (1987: 39) outlined, for some young people, there are many reasons *to* exchange sex and no reasons to not. Further arguing that 'socio-economic factors, unemployment experiences, educational experiences, attitude formations, confidence levels, family scapegoating', can all feature in the reasons behind young people's involvement. As

Shaw et al. (1996: 13) argued, in knowing that young people may not be forced, it does not then follow that they necessarily 'freely choose to enter prostitution'. Moreover, the concept of children and young people giving informed consent when they have no active citizenship is questionable (Kelly et al., 1995). In their comparative ethnographic study into the experiences of street-based young male sex-workers in Cardiff and London, Davies and Feldman (1992) concluded that the young people involved in the research were not always pushed into sexual exploitation, but that 'sex work formed part of a street lifestyle in which the passing of time became an end in itself' (1992:7). They further suggested that rather than understanding young prostitutes as *necessarily* damaged, uneducated and living in poverty, there was a need to acknowledge that some young people considered themselves to be exploiting economic opportunities they were presented with; opportunities which in their view were often better than the other means of employment available.

Grooming

Another aspect highlighted by research was the relationships young people had with 'pimps' and boyfriends, and the coercive element of children's involvement in prostitution (see McMullen, 1987; Kelly et al., 1995; O'Neill, 2001). Research undertaken by voluntary organisations working with children and young people in this field of work, significantly contributed to this body of literature and out of which came the concept of 'grooming' – a model for explaining the involvement of children in prostitution (van Meeuwen et al., 1998). 'Grooming' is the term used to describe the process whereby an abusing (male) *adult* poses as a 'boyfriend' in order to develop a relationship and build trust with a (female) *child* through the provision of gifts and attention. Once trust has been established, the adult exploits that trust and demands repayment or favours, in the form of sexual activity with themselves and/or others. The model emphasises the naivety, entrapment and vulnerability of the child, and the predatory designs of the abusing adult(s) in order to locate responsibility on to the latter (see Swann and Balding, 2002). This model received attention from and became the focus of voluntary organisations campaigning to change policy and challenge societal negative stereotypes of children involved in prostitution. With the language of 'ensnaring', 'total dominance' and 'perpetrators' (see van Meeuwen et al., 1998), the model presented a compelling argument to challenge the punitive legislative direction by locating the child as an unwilling and unaware (and, so, a deserving) victim of an

adult perpetrator, in need of support and help. The argument echoed back to W.T. Stead in 1885, describing 'entrapped' young people (Gorham, 1978), and attempts by reformers to locate the blame or responsibility away from children and on to some adult male 'other' by highlighting a young person's innocence and lack of agency (Brown, 2004).

Redefining prostitution and 'child prostitutes'

The increased knowledge regarding the reasons behind children and young people's involvement in prostitution informed understandings of child prostitution as something other than monetary exchange for sexual activity. One such definition often cited is that put forth by Green (1992) who outlined that children and young people can offer 'sexual services in exchange for some sort of payment, such as money, drink, drugs, other consumer goods, or even a bed and a roof over one's head for the night'. Other authors highlighted that some children exchanged sex for affection, friendship and trust (see Kelly et al., 1995). In the literature from this period there is a noticeable and often explicitly stated departure from references to 'child prostitutes', and terms such as 'young people involved in prostitution' (Hayes and Trafford, 1997), 'children sexually abused through prostitution' (Barrett, 1997), or 'young sex workers' (Adams et al., 1997) appear. It was acknowledged that calling children 'prostitutes' could be stigmatising and was a form of negative labelling (see Melrose, 2004).

Towards the end of the 1990s there was a significant campaign element to the literature that sought to redefine the issue to one of children *abused* through prostitution (see Barrett, 1997, as a good example of this). As Shaw et al., (1996) pointed out, 'child prostitution' carries stigma and pushes blame on to the child, whereas 'child abuse' redirects the focus and attention of punitive measures toward an abusing adult. This literature began to question the legitimacy and effectiveness of the punitive measures brought against children and young people. The concern here was to redefine the issue of child prostitution away from a discourse of promiscuity and criminal offending, to one that located the issue as a form of child sexual abuse, in order to change the statutory response to young people from punishment to protection (see Brown and Barrett, 2002). In such a discursive shift, as Adams et al. (1997) argued, the concerns for 'protection' that had come to dominate discussion about the issue detracted from the policies that created those conditions for prostitution. They warned that protective measures were likely to be perceived and received by young people in the same way as

current measures focused on control and crime prevention. They also disagreed with campaigns to re-frame the issue for children as one of abuse, seeing young people and children in the same way as adults, and different only in their marginalisation. They argued for the legalisation of prostitution, that only a broader change in social policies centred on welfare for young people would make a real change. This view was also supported by Davies and Feldman (1992) who suggested that policy and legislation should be changed from a punitive approach to one that supports young people without 'exiting' being the end goal (1992:2). It was, however, the strength of argument and extensive campaigning from children's voluntary organisations that helped promote a change in legislation that heralded the beginning of the next phase in the problem's history.

Children abused through prostitution: a new paradigm?

At the turn of the new century, as a direct result of some of the campaign literature described above, the UK Government introduced *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* (SCIP) to re-frame policy and practice in England and Wales (see DoH, 2000). SCIP asserted that *children* – defined as those under the age of 18 – involved in prostitution should be treated 'primarily as victim[s] of abuse' (DoH, 2000). Soon after, the 2003 Sexual Offences Act introduced new measures relating to child prostitution aimed at targeting those who bought sex from a young person and/or were responsible for enticing a young person to sell sex, by making these activities punishable by law (for a comprehensive overview see Gillespie, 2005).

In so doing, SCIP reconfigured child prostitution to a child protection and safeguarding concern rather than one of crime and offending. The document stated that child prostitution should be treated as distinct from adult prostitution on the basis of children's differences in capabilities. It also made explicit reference to changes in public awareness and to research indicating that children's involvement in prostitution was the likely result of coercion by an adult. This explanation was reinforced by the *Guidance Review to Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* (see Swann and Balding, 2001) which aimed to review the progress in practice that had been made since the introduction of the new legislation. This document is explicit in its mention of child victims, adult perpetrators and of grooming as the explanation for sexual exploitation. Yet, even with this new focus, SCIP stated that in cases when children voluntarily choose, or refuse help, punitive measures should still be enforced against them:

The Government recognises that there may be occasions, after all attempts at diversion out of prostitution have failed, when it may be appropriate for those who voluntarily and persistently continue in prostitution to enter the criminal justice system in the way that other young offenders do ... Nothing in this guidance decriminalises soliciting, loitering and importuning by children on the street or in public places. The Government considers that the criminal law plays an important role in establishing society's view that "street prostitution" is not welcome nor is it acceptable for children to be involved in it. The law can act as a deterrent and a lever to use as part of a diversion strategy

(DoH, 2000: 10)

In this way, children and young people involved in prostitution were defined as victims of abuse only if they were groomed or when they were unable to consent. The new legislation was welcomed albeit with reservations from those that hoped the Government might do more (see for example Brown and Barrett, 2002; Kerrigan-Lebloch and King, 2006). Others such as Phoenix (2002: 355) argued that SCIP served to 'merely redefine the problem while leaving intact the machinery of more traditional criminal justice responses'. Indeed, separating out a welfare response based on whether young people were persistent and voluntary, or coerced and abused, was, in the view of some commentators, likely to undermine the very purpose of the document (see Melrose, 2004).

Thus, the document introduced a binary depiction of children involved in prostitution, simultaneously placing children both as victims of exploitation and offenders (Gillespie 2007; Moore, 2006), the difference being predicated on choice and persistence. Tellingly, the legislation did not seek to define what it meant by persistence or voluntarily involvement, in order to allow professionals working with children to make their own decisions and interpretation of circumstances (DoH, 2000). Yet, as Lowe and Pearce (2006) argued, by continuing to polarise the issue, SCIP gave practitioners little encouragement to look beyond a young person's behaviour and explore the economic and social situations in which they may be. Concerns were also raised about the possible 'stereotyping of vulnerability' (Gillespie, 2007: 13). Indeed, a young person could be perceived as entirely capable and at odds with an expectation of

what an abused child should 'look like', presenting a challenge to the victim concept (Brown, 2004).

Understanding the problem

The research literature in this field tended to focus on the reasons behind young people's involvement in sexual exploitation in order to inform prevention and intervention practice. Taylor-Browne's (2002) interview-based study with 47 women who had engaged in prostitution when they were younger, found that the reasons came primarily from an economic need arising from unstable housing situations. Once they had become involved in prostitution their involvement was maintained through incentives to stay, such as feeling there was no other option, low self-esteem, drug addiction, losing touch with people because of their life situations, and having no other support or help. Research also revealed insights into the prevalence of sexual abuse in childhood amongst sexually exploited young people, concluding that for some, prostitution was a way of gaining control over their bodies (Pearce, 2006; Drinkwater et al., 2004). As Lillywhite and Skidmore (2006: 356) suggested, 'being paid or 'rewarded' for sex can feel like a big improvement on the sexual abuse they may have previously experienced'. Research also began to highlight the role of local authority care in the problem (see O'Neill, 2001; Pearce et al., 2002). Coy (2008) in her theoretically informed study exploring the life stories of young women selling sex with previous experiences of living in residential care, considered the links between local authority care and selling sex. Key findings suggested that the rules and arrangements of care, characterised by instability and disruption, combined with the additional experiences of abuse, family disruption, substance misuse and negative peer relationships were more likely to act as 'push factors' into selling sex. Coy (2008: 1411) concluded that the 'psycho-social experience of being in care affects young women's sense of identity and decision making processes'. In addition, responses such as placing young people in secure units are likely to increase their risk through an 'internalization of deviance and worthlessness' (2008: 1417).

Responses to the problem

Research findings were used to inform risk indicators or factors, to help identify children and young people who may be experiencing sexual exploitation. Pearce et al.'s (2002) study exploring the experiences of 55 young women who were experiencing

sexual exploitation, identified three categories of risk: those young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation because they face a number of challenges and are engaging in some risky behaviours; 'young people who are swapping sex for accommodation, money, drugs of other favours 'in kind'' (2002:41); and young people 'selling sex' (2002: 55). Similarly, Cole's (2005) study in Wales outlined four categories of risk, on the basis that some young people's actual involvement might not be known, these were: not at risk; at mild risk; at moderate risk; and at significant risk of sexual exploitation. These risk categories influenced practice by enabling professionals to assess a young person's risk level and areas in which they need support (see Clutton and Coles 2007). Practice informed research also highlighted that young people involved in prostitution may be chaotic, disruptive, challenging and hard to engage (Scott and Skidmore, 2006; also Melrose, 2004). The difficulties of engaging and working with young people who are sexually exploited were attributed to the complex issues facing young people, and the previous negative experiences they are likely to have had with professionals, which can mean they may be resistant to being supported (Clutton and Coles, 2007; Pearce et al., 2002). Reluctance to engage with services was also attributed to the grooming process, which could mean that some young people either did not consider themselves as being exploited or were afraid to seek support (see Chase and Statham, 2005; Scott and Skidmore, 2006). Direct services and suggested forms of practice were developed on the basis that the causes behind sexual exploitation are multi-faceted and require a multi-faced, inter-agency response (see Kerrigan-Lebloch and King 2006). Research and service evaluations suggested that successful interventions should be based around outreach work. Barnardo's 'Four A's model' of access; attention; assertive outreach; and advocacy (see Scott and Skidmore, 2006: 6), stressed the need for services to be available and accessible, to provide 'consistent and persistent' positive attention and to advocate with services to ensure young people receive appropriate provision. Similarly, Pearce et al. (2002: 71) suggested that 'therapeutic outreach', when support is continually offered regardless of young people's commitment to it, would demonstrate workers' commitment and avoid contributing to young people's experiences of rejection (see also Calder, 2001).

Defining the problem
The paradigm shift, established by the SCIP brought about a new discourse of 'child sexual exploitation' within the literature (see for example *Child Abuse Review*, 2006).

This was particularly so within practice based research (see Scott, 2003; Coles, 2005; Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Clutton and Coles, 2007). 'Child prostitution' was considered by some to be suffused in stigma and without explicit acknowledgement of the problem as a form of abuse (see Cusick, 2002). The importance of this point for some commentators can be seen in Goddard et al., (2005: 278), who argued that to refer to 'child prostitution', or 'child prostitutes', was to commit 'textual abuse'. Rather unsurprisingly, the discourse within practice and campaign literature emphasised the victim status of children and young people, with a lack of agency, and of coercion and manipulation from adults in order to ensure that professionals dealing with the problem would initiate a care response rather than a punitive one (YWCA, 2002; Unicef, 2001; NSPCC, 2003; Taylor-Browne, 2002). This shift occurred even as authors raised related concerns about how minimising and ignoring young people's agency may serve to undermine them further (see Lowe and Pearce, 2006; Moore, 2006; Pearce, 2007). Yet, as Melrose argued,

> this debate is extremely sensitive since if we are arguing that these young people are victims of abuse, there are certain vested interests in showing that they are involved in prostitution as a result of being coerced by an abusive adult rather than as a result of their own agency

> (2004: 8)

Whilst 'child sexual exploitation' as a term had come to be used informally within practice, and also used as a discourse within the literature about the problem, as considered next, it was this term which entered the policy lexicon and came to define the problem within law and practice.

'Child sexual exploitation'

The discussion now turns to the current context. In 2009, England and Wales launched separate guidance and child protection legislation, replacing SCIP. The Welsh guidance was re-launched in 2011 although much of the content and the definition remained the same. '*Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*' (WAG, 2011), acts as supplementary guidance to '*Safeguarding Children: Working Together under the Children Act 2004*' (DHSS, 2004); and to the '*All Wales Protocol: Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children who are at Risk of Abuse through*

Sexual Exploitation' (which sits within part 5 of the *All Wales Child Protection Procedures*). Under this framework, the problem of 'children abused through prostitution' became 'child sexual exploitation', and is currently defined as:

> Child sexual exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of children and young people into taking part in sexual activities. It is a form of sexual abuse involving an exchange of some form of payment which can include money, mobile phones and other items, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, 'protection' or affection. The vulnerability of the young person and grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent

(WAG, 2011: 9)

Until this new legislation and guidance, there were seven different protocols across the 22 Local Authorities in Wales, each with different definitions of child sexual exploitation. Only one of these stated that punitive measures should be used as a last resort (see Clutton and Coles, 2008). The new legislation framework firmly established the problem as a child protection issue requiring only a safeguarding response. Practice and guidance is directed by the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF), and operates on the basis of identifying established vulnerability and risk factors which correlate to a risk score. The score determines the risk category and its associated child protection action. Those scored at 'mild risk' require no formal procedures but work should focus on prevention, such as making the young person aware of risk and educating them about healthy relationships. Where the score is 'moderate risk' or 'significant risk' it should initiate a multi-agency strategy meeting where a formal protection plan should be arranged.

The current definition in Wales, within which this research primarily situates itself, is one which is explicit in its mention of grooming, and is one which primarily locates the problem not as the activity – the exchange of sexual activities for something – but as the coercion and manipulation of children and young people. There has also been an increasing tendency within practice research and government reports to equate the problem to grooming: so much so that one could be forgiven for thinking that sexual exploitation *is* grooming (see Melrose, 2012). For example, the Child Exploitation and

Online Protection Centre's (CEOP, 2011: 7) report into child sexual exploitation was based on findings from 'a thematic assessment of the phenomenon known as 'localised grooming' … where children have been groomed and sexually exploited by an offender, having initially met in a location outside their home'. A report to the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee also explicitly equates child sexual exploitation to 'localised grooming' (see HCHAC, 2013). In this way, as well as being a model for explaining how CSE occurs, 'grooming' has become a way of describing what CSE is. The concern then is that this can unintentionally obfuscate other forms of CSE.

A hidden problem?

Recent research has been concerned with the lack of implementation of the guidance by Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) and concerns over a lack of awareness of the problem amongst practitioners (see Clutton and Coles, 2007; Clutton and Coles, 2008; Jago et al., 2011; Paskell, 2012). However much of this research is based on data from LSCBs, and little is known about professionals' perspectives and understandings of child sexual exploitation (see Jago et al., 2011, for an example). Similarly, apart from two studies conducted in the 1990's (Davies and Feldman, 1992; Shaw et al., 1996) there has been no further research conducted in Wales on young people's experiences of sexual exploitation, or their perspectives about the problem itself. Research in Wales has been mainly quantitative, intended to understand the scale of the problem, evaluate the safeguarding protocol, and to summarise progress in awareness, practice, and protocol implementation (see Coles, 2005; Clutton and Coles, 2007; Clutton and Coles, 2008). As Warrington (2010) has remarked, there is a need to explore what young people who have experienced sexual exploitation think about this as an issue, as well as their thoughts on how people should respond. This has relevance because, as noted above, research suggests that children and young people experiencing sexual exploitation do not engage easily with services.

Concerns have also been raised that placing sexual exploitation as a concern of child protection may not be helpful for young people (see Pearce, 2009; Pearce, 2010, Phoenix, 2010). Pearce (2009: 71) suggests that much could be learnt from domestic abuse, considering that sexual exploitation is rarely a one-off incident of abuse, where the 'answers to the 'why don't they leave?' question show the complexities of abusive interpersonal relationships, including questions of coercive control, and economic and emotional dependency within the relationship'. As Pearce (2010) argues in later work,

social work is geared towards protecting children from abuse within families. When resources are stretched, they will inevitably be directed towards those perceived as being most at-risk, vulnerable and in need of protection (see also Phoenix, 2010). Concerns surrounding the lack of response to the needs of young people have also been connected to perceptions of vulnerability linked to agency and consent. As Jago et al. (2011: 4) argue, a 'conceptual shift' is needed in social care to recognise older children/young people as also at significant risk of harm. They go on to state that there is a need to challenge 'practitioners' acceptance of young people's apparent consent to abuse' (2011: 6). As Ayre and Barrett have previously argued, 'child protection works most happily when its service users may be seen unequivocally as victims' (2000: 55). Moreover, as Cusick (2002: 241) observes, perceptions of young people's need and risk are inevitably related to people's understandings of the problem and, whilst a formal change may have occurred within policy and guidance, 'the legacy of traditional responses is likely to be with us'. It is to a consideration of that legacy that the chapter now turns.

From where have we come and where are we now?

The chapter has so far provided an overview of the way policy has been conceptualised to date and now moves to a consideration of related concepts and public understandings which have shaped our perceptions of and responses to the problem. As noted above, conceptions of the problem have revolved around mythical images of the child as deviant and the child as innocent abused by an adult (Ennew, 1986). Key to the framing of the problem of children and young people exchanging sex have been concerns around choice and responsibility, and conceptions of children, childhood, and youth. In her study of 20th century constructions of child prostitution Brown considers how:

> over the twentieth century … [t]he negative portrayal of child prostitutes as sexually knowledgeable and experienced, and the assumption of comprehension and choice on the part of the child have been instrumental in excluding child prostitution from being encompassed in definitions of child sexual abuse.
>
> (2004: 345)

As considered above, the problem of child prostitution has been focused around individuals and located within discourses of choice and responsibility or blame. The problem within legislation has moved from that which did not distinguish children from adults – thus holding anyone aged 10 or older accountable for offences relating to soliciting and loitering – to that defining children as victims if they were coerced by another and their involvement in the exchange of sex was not voluntary. The policy discourse surrounding *Safeguarding Children involved in Prostitution* (DoH: 2000) and within the document itself, reiterated and can be seen as a demonstration of those tensions inherent within conceptions of child prostitution occurring throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries. Children are either forced against their will, or are voluntarily choosing to engage in prostitution. The former is deserving of society's care as they cannot be deemed responsible, and the latter should be held responsible, are accountable and so do not deserve support. Thus Ayre and Barrett (2000) observe that child prostitution was the last form of sexual abuse where the victim is held as having some responsibility. And so we arrive at a problem now termed 'child sexual exploitation', one which declares that no child can consent to their own abuse (see WAG, 2011: 11). The problem, located around the behaviour of individuals, has meant that, set within the wider context of welfare and social policy, children and young people's agency is a problem because of conceptions of risk and responsibility. In the context of what has been described as a neo-liberalist policy agenda with its focus on individual responsibility rather than collective solutions to public concerns, this framing of the problem has implications for children and young people involved in the exchange of sex (Melrose 2010). As Valentine (2004: 19) argues, 'individuals are expected to accept personal responsibility for any negative consequences or misfortunes that accrue from their reflexivity and choices'. The focus on the individual has become all pervasive, where the problems within society are frequently portrayed as being caused by individuals themselves and not wider structural inequalities (Phoenix, 2010). These neo-liberalist values are also reflected in policies and practice which over the last 30 years or so have been increasingly designed so that 'only those who behave will receive support and encouragement' (Pearce 2007:207). Set in this context, as Doezma (1998) considers, the discourse around sexual exploitation sets a moralistic framework that categorises people as either guilty or innocent, based on perceptions about their level of choice. O'Connell-Davidson and Anderson (2006: 22) continue this point and warn that the demand for innocent passive victims creates 'moral hierarchies', in which those who

are exploited can be perceived as 'deserving... less deserving... and undeserving' of support or sympathy depending upon perceptions of their competency and vulnerability. In this way, consent and perceptions of children and young people's agency are fundamental to understandings of the problem.

The current legislation in Wales is heavily underpinned by the grooming model, in which children are manipulated or coerced into exchanging sex for something (WAG, 2011). They are left powerless to consent and it is *this* which places them as victims of abuse. The grooming model was developed from practice experience gained over a number of years by children's charities working with children involved in prostitution/child sexual exploitation, and although it is not the intention here to deny its relevance, when presented as the sole explanation, it homogenises the experiences of children and young people into a single story (Melrose, 2012). Perhaps necessarily so. Constructed as it is, this model leaves no room for any doubt about the young person's victim status *because* they are victims of predatory adults. Yet, just as the discourse in the late 19th century, by focusing on passive innocent victims, served to obscure the realities and circumstances for young people (Gorham, 1978), the current rhetoric around sexual exploitation is in danger of continuing to do so (see Moore, 2006; Gillespie 2007; Melrose, 2012). As Phoenix (2002: 359) argues, 'grooming' arguably limits the 'theoretical space in which the full complexity of the lived realities experienced by some young prostitutes can be apprehended and explained'. Melrose (2010; 2012) further argues that the emphasis on grooming means we are in danger of continuing to distort the realities for children and young people involved in exchanging sex by instead focusing the attention on abuser and abused. This serves to detract from the economic and circumstantial reasons young people may be in, and the circumstances surrounding young people's involvement in exchanging sex (see Ayre and Barrett, 2000). Moreover, as Phoenix (2002: 365) argues, even when sexual exploitation occurs within coercive and exploitative relationships, 'grooming' de-contextualises these, reducing them to relationships in which young people will do anything 'for the sake of love'. 'Child sexual exploitation', defined in this way, locates the problem not as one where young people are 'involved in prostitution *per se*, or the social and material conditions that often drive young people – and then justify involvement in – prostitution'. The 'real problem' becomes the abusing men who entice or abuse young people (Phoenix, 2002: 355). As Day points out, the language surrounding sexual exploitation,

makes the complex entanglements of economics, gender and value appear unrealistically simple. There are abusers and abused: traffickers, pimps and victims. Such simplification discourages public debates on alternative action because it promises easy solutions as well as telling us what to think

(2009:1).

Day's argument is made with regard to discourses around trafficking among children and adults, but the point is very relevant. As Edwards (2004) observes, there is a need to understand the powerlessness young people experience in society and to consider the problem not just in terms of sexual abuse, but in the wider social, economic and political context. However as a social care child protection concern, the problem is now framed within that particular field of policy and legislation. Boyden (2006: 197) argues that social work tends to look to the individual for the causes and the solutions, arguing that social work with children, and child protection practice and legislation, 'tends to play down the impact of wider social, economic, political and cultural conditions in the shaping of social phenomena'. Boyden further suggests that ideas of childhood are central to this, a point which directs us to consider such conceptions in relation to the ways in which the problem of child sexual exploitation is understood.

The child in 'child sexual exploitation'

Recent theoretical and conceptual work on childhood identities (and sexualities) would seem central to an inquiry into child sexual exploitation. This thesis, however, draws partially on childhood studies, which is a relatively new field, and does so insofar as it helps address the anomalies and dilemmas that permeate policy and practice in CSE. For example, the conceptualisation of child sexual exploitation, within Welsh and other UK relevant policy, posits children and young people within a particular conception of childhood and draws on a particular construction of the child. It is in *this* way that the thesis selectively invokes childhood studies, and context is given to the findings which follow by discussing key aspects of that body of literature here.

There is a wealth of literature available that will argue that 'childhood' and what is it to be a 'child' are constructed concepts (see Montgomery, 2009; Jenks, 2000; Lee, 2001). Where the biological differences between a five-year-old and a 15-year-old are fairly self-evident, the values ascribed to what it means to be a child, to childhood, and

when that childhood ends are not (Prout and James, 2006). Hendrick (2006) provides a comprehensive but succinct overview of the ways that children and childhood have been constructed and reconstructed in Britain throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, showing how changes in society have shaped what childhood is, whilst also showing how societal conceptions of childhood have shaped social action. The binary conceptualisation of children involved in prostitution as dangerous and a potential menace, and as innocent in need of protection have their roots in Lockean and Rousseauian conceptions of childhood (see Valentine, 2004). The protestant Lockean conception is one of children as inherently sinful and in need of correction; whereas the romantic Rousseauian conception is of children as innocent beings who gradually become corrupted by society (see Kellett et al., 2004). Hendrick (2006) argues that policies around youth offending and those concerned with children as trouble, fused together these two opposing views by placing the construction of childhood within the family ideal. In this way, national interests were bound within conceptions of childhood through their related categories of parenting and family. Concerns for child protection and child welfare have their foundations in the 18th century Rousseauian view of childhood, but with roots to the late 19th century and conceptions of universal childhood as a time for happiness and innocence (see Ennew, 1986). As Brown and Barrett (2002: 37) argue, child protection is based on middle-class values of early reformers and campaigners who sought to 'normalise the condition of childhood across all social spheres – characterised by removal from the economic sphere and from the sexual sphere. In this way, it is the 'demanding ideal' of innocent childhood, and the binary construction of children that has provided the 'rationale and purpose for both voluntary and state intervention' which focuses on care and control (Brown 2004: 346).

Yet 'childhood is neither naturally asexual, nor naturally gendered' (Heinze 2000: 18, see also Edwards, 2004; Kehily and Montgomery, 2004; Renold, 2007). Neither are children passive non-agentic dependents (see for example Prout and James, 2006; Lee, 2001; James and James, 2004; James, 2009). In the history of the problem of children and young people exchanging sex, there has been a demonizing of those who did not or could not conform to this ideal of what it is to be a child (Corteen and Scraton, 1997). As Kitzinger (2006: 165/168) has argued, there is a 'fetishistic glorification' of childhood, in which sexual abuse is constructed as a 'crime against childhood' as much as against an individual child. For children to be seen to choose, no matter what the circumstances or situations they may find themselves in, is to be seen to

reject childhood (O'Connell Davidson, 2005). Children and young people who deviate from those expected norms of childhood become the deviant 'other', or 'non' child (Kitzinger 2006; Montgomery, 1998; Piper, 2000; Moore, 2006). These understandings of childhood sexuality and agency, which we find in academic literature, are largely ignored within the framing of this problem. In its current conception within Wales, 'child sexual exploitation' emphasises that children and young people who are sexually exploited cannot consent (see WAG, 2011). They are sexually exploited because they are coerced and powerless to consent. In so doing this obscures young people's agency, defining them as helpless, and *necessarily so* because it is their agency which is and has been problematic in respect of the ways in which policy has depicted and responded to children and young people who exchange sex (see Melrose, 2004; 2010). As Piper (2000: 27) argues, 'the public image of the child, which has served both to encourage and justify social policy, is of an 'unsexualised' person who is vulnerable, weak and innocent'. Within social care structures and systems, children are seen as inherently vulnerable and there are a multitude of policies in place to safeguard and protect them and to minimise danger. There is limited attention given to promoting wellbeing, and children's agency is primarily viewed as a threat or danger (Daniel, 2010). As Shaw and Butler (1998: 180) argue 'powerful constructions of childhood and adolescence are predicated on the dependence and incapacities of children rather than their strengths and competencies'. This has implications for children, in particular for those who fall into the category of 'young people', who are involved in exchanging sex.

Youth and young people

If childhood studies is a relatively new field, then there is a much longer pedigree of social and cultural studies of youth and young people; and again there is significance here for thinking about how ideas of youth (and childhood) are operationalized within public and policy understandings of an issue such as CSE. The problem of sexual exploitation is one that has particular relevance for and has revolved around young people. In the UK certainly, it is young people mostly in their teenage years who feature most prominently in statistics (see for example Aitchison and O'Brien, 1997; Coles, 2005; CEOP, 2013) and are understood to be more at risk than any other group of experiencing sexual exploitation (see Barrett, 1997; Clutton and Coles, 2007; Pearce et al., 2002; Pearce 2009). Despite this, the term 'child sexual exploitation' may be problematic as applied to young people and youth as socially constructed categories. If

Youth is an ambiguous and interstitial status, distinct from childhood, and lodged somewhere between the latter and adulthood. As such, young people are not children any more than they are adults, or they are both; they are awkwardly placed, as Valentine has it:

> teenagers … lie awkwardly placed between childhood and adulthood: sometimes constructed and represented as 'innocent' 'children' in need of protection from adult sexuality, violence and commercial exploitation; at other times represented as articulating adult vices of drink, drugs and violence.
>
> (2004: 6)

In this way, policy and social problem concerns about youth and young people over the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries are in no way limited to those relating to child prostitution and matters of child protection. Young people are troubling and troubled in ways which link them to a wide range of all too familiar public anxieties – crime, poverty, violence, housing and homelessness, ill-health, disorder – in which they not only figure as the empirical object of public concern, but also play a talismanic or symbolic role (see Hendrick, 2003). As well as being a problem *for* society, youth and young people stand as symbols of wider problems in, or *with*, society. Pearson (1983) provides a revealing history of the ways in which young people repeatedly feature in social anxieties about risk, unruliness and vulnerability, all the way back to the 16th century and beyond. Pearson's work stands alongside sociological studies on youth deviance and the problems of youth, the classic example of which would be Stanley Cohen's work on moral panics (see Cohen, 2002). Cohen's model has crossed over from its sociological home into wider social scientific and public discourse, and has been used to explain and contest the logic behind a number of sensationalist media and moral campaigns targeting identifiable groups and categories (folk devils) as scapegoats for wider, public anxieties. A relevant example here would be Jean La Fontaine's analysis of allegations of 'ritual' child abuse in the 1980s and early 1990s, which draws on both Cohen's moral panic model and anthropological theories of the social role of witchcraft accusations (see La Fontaine, 1998: 13). The reference to Cohen here, however, is more for his original study on mods and rockers and panics related to *young people* as scapegoats themselves, his argument being that youth and youth cultural forms provide an

evergreen focus for moral panics in which teenagers come to stand for 'conflict, resistance and strife' (2002: xliv) thereby deflecting, and providing an outlet for, deeper uncertainties about social order.

Cohen's is a landmark study but is hardly a point of origin. Sociological attention given to youth and young people can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of the 20th century at least. As Hebdige (1988: 27) argues, 'the category "youth" emerges in its present form most clearly around the late 1920's' and its construction can be attributed to the tradition of ethnography within the Chicago School of Social Ecology. Hebdige further argues that those classic works from within the Chicago School have left sociology with two particular enduring images of youth and young people: one of a social group in a period of vulnerable transition, and the other of youth as delinquents who are a product of their (often degraded) urban environment. Hebdige himself belongs to the tradition of youth studies associated with the semiotic, political and ethnographic work which emerged from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) Birmingham in the 1970s. Notable works on youth cultures associated with the CCCS include Willis (1977), Hebdige (1979), Hall and Jefferson (1993); McRobbie (1991) (see Wulff and Amit, 1995, for a brief synopsis of this work). These sought to explore youth culture as something other than 'anti-social' but as necessary and sometimes oppositional attempts by young people to carve space for themselves within dominant social and ideological formations, to 'establish … presence, identity and meaning' (Willis, 1990: 1).

Moving into the 21st century, however, the sociology of youth shifted its focus away from studies of youth subcultural activity (which by the 1990s had become a rather more crowded and compromised field than in the late 70s and 80s) and towards questions of the transition to adulthood and citizenship. Here the issues were less semiotic and spectacular but rather more ordinary – yet still troubling. Arguments, begun in the mid 1980s in the context of high levels of youth unemployment, developed into a wider questioning of the transition from youth to social majority which posited this as a more extended, complex and possibly fractured move than had been the case for much of the 20th century (see for example Morrow and Richards, 1996; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Dean, 1997; Fuller and Unwin, 2011).[*] Young people figure here as

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[*] Remembering Pearson (1983), however, we would do well to view with some suspicion the idea that there was ever a 'golden period' in which the transition to adulthood was a smooth and unitary, untroubled move. The point is at least moot.

immediate objects of concern but also, again, as talismanic of wider changes affecting society as a whole. Today, sociological studies of youth range across a vast array of topics. A glance through Coffey and Hall's (2011) three volume edited series on researching young people shows sociologists and others writing about young people and global and local mobilities, consumer identities, the negotiation of space and place, educational trajectories, substance use, sexualities, social exclusion, body politics and much more. Yet across all these studies and more, youth continues to figure as a relational concept, distinct from but existing only in relation to adulthood and childhood.

This understanding of youth as an interstitial phase is certainly an enduring feature of social policy literature on young people, where the term 'adolescence' can be found rather more than in the sociological literature, normatively understood as the time in which young people come to terms with their changing bodies, emerging sexuality, new forms of relationships, and new identities, as they leave childhood behind and enter adulthood (see for example Coles, 2000). '[T]he "discovery" of adolescence as a distinct transitional phase of life', as Montgomery indicates (2009: 202), can be traced as far back as 1904 and G.Stanley Hall's depiction of adolescence as a time of storm and stress. Wyn and White note the continuing influence of this way of seeing young people:

> 'youth' is associated with dependency, ignorance, risky behaviour, rebellion and a pre-social self that will emerge under the right conditions … the concept of adolescence … assumes the existence of essential characteristics in young people because of their age, focusing on the assumed link between physical growth and social identity.
>
> (1997: 12)

Sociologist Richard Sennett adopts something of the same position when he writes that 'adolescence is commonly thought to be a period of wandering and exploration' (1996: 14). It is this established and normative view that sees young people situated within social policy without the full protective rights afforded children (because no longer children), whilst not yet afforded the full rights of adults (because not quite yet adults

either). They are both at risk and a risk; subject and object of the welfare state (see Smith et al., 2007). They have the responsibility of citizenship but are not given all the corresponding rights; whilst the problems that concern them can be largely ignored or subsumed into those of child policy (Dean, 1997; Daniel and Ivatts, 1998). It is this understanding of youth which can be seen operationalised in the ways in which the problem of children and young people exchanging sex has been, and is, conceptualised within relevant UK legislation. Young people have been excluded from full protective rights, largely due to suspicion and concern over their responsibility, and are now afforded them because they are 'children'.

If young people are betwixt and between more stable identities, and figure as objects and subjects of concern, Hebdige (1988) makes the point that they do so in ways which combine with a particular public visibility. His influential essay *Hiding in the Light* makes the point that youth exists twice over in the public eye: firstly as a policy problem, in which young people are troubled and troubling; but then secondly as a cultural category, in which youth and its cultural forms catch the eye and are sometimes celebrated as commodities. Young people stand for potential, as migrants from the future, yet, and as such, they appear strange, and a part of their potential is as a threat to the way things are and to society as a whole. In consequence, a voyeuristic attention given to youth becomes part of the fabric of society. As objects of close surveillance, as exotic others unlike the rest of us, as threats to social order and as commodities, young people feature from the late 19th century onwards in a *visible* record − Hebdige pays particular attention to documentary photography of urban poverty and advertising for consumer goods and styles − of a wider societal concern. In this way, young people can be observed but not seen; that is, they stand for something (else) and as such are not recognised so much as persons (see Sennett 2003: 13). This leads to some concluding comments on the ways in which the visual register combines with the understanding, recognition and acknowledgement of people, problems and things.

Seeing and acknowledging

Sociological attention paid to the senses and to sensory worlds has increased significantly over the last decade, and is now very well established as a sub-field of qualitative enquiry, analysis and publication. The journal *Sense and Society*, established in 2006, claims to serve '[a] heightened interest in the role of the senses in culture and society [that] is sweeping the human sciences, supplanting older paradigms and

challenging conventional theories of representation.[*] Sarah Pink's recent guide to *Doing Sensory Ethnography* examines 'the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice' (2009: 1) as a methodological challenge drawing together a range of qualitative and interdisciplinary literatures, and again frames an (ethnographic) interest in sensory worlds as something new – which it is, but not altogether new. It would be wrong to say that the topic of sensory perception belongs only to 21st century social science or qualitative enquiry. The visual register, to take just one of the senses, has certainly figured, prominently, in some of the more significant contributions to 20th century social theory. Just two examples will suffice, each one a staple of any sociological syllabus. The first would be Foucault's unforgettable invocation of Bentham's Panopticon as a means of transparent vision, control and regulation, in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Georg Simmel's foundational essay on the metropolis and mental life (1977; originally 1903) provides a second example, in which the problems of modern isolation and alienation are set out in terms of a necessary blinkering of experience, such that individuals turn away from and refuse to *see* the world around them – people, things and images – of necessity, else they would be overwhelmed. Either this or their attitude is blasé, they see (as everyone must) but do not really take into themselves what plays across their eyes. Each of these examples concerns vision rather than any other of the senses, and it can be noted that sight and seeing do not emerge so very well from either Foucault's or Simmel's analysis. Vision is linked to power and the exercise (and abuse) of authority; alternatively it stands for superficiality and a world of surfaces across which the attention must skim.

Vision seems to figure, among all the senses, as a rather unappreciated register. Hardly a poor relation – it is the dominant sense, 'the most comprehensive of all our senses' as Locke has it (1993: 81; originally 1690).` Yet it is this very dominance that can cast it as the least appealing, intuitive and qualitatively attuned of the senses. Much contemporary writing on the senses takes as its starting point that too much attention and significance is already given to the visual, and that the other senses need to be addressed in ways which will balance out this deficit. Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa displays this underdog sentiment when he argues that the primacy given to sight leads to alienation, isolation, and detachment: 'the eye is the organ of distance and separation, whereas touch is the sense of nearness, intimacy and affection' (2004: 46).

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[*] http://www.sensorystudies.org/the-senses-and-society/

Yet, as indicated in my introductory chapter, a *recurrent* theme throughout this thesis is that of things seen and not seen, of (in)visibility; and I use this vocabulary in developing what I intend as a sympathetic understanding of what my respondents have shared with me. In this way I aim to keep faith with vision as a sense that allows for something other than superficiality, distance and authority. This attachment to vision does not follow from any application of visual methods, however.[*] My study is based on interview data and is directed as such by a concern to hear what others have to say and to give them voice. Yet, at various points I use the language of seeing, visibility and invisibility to make arguments and draw out the sense of what young people and professionals have had to say about child sexual exploitation, in part at least because they use this language themselves in explaining the difficulties they encounter in this field of experience and practice. In doing so I distance myself from the condescension of some of the current literature on sensory worlds and align rather more with a commonsensical and more generous understanding of what it is to see. Notwithstanding commentary about the eye as the organ of distance and separation, there is a strong association with seeing and understanding in everyday life (Ingold, 2000). To 'see for ourselves' is what it is to know and appreciate. When we want to be sure of something, or suspect we are being *told* lies, we go and 'see for ourselves' to be sure of something. Etymology links seeing (from the Latin, *videre*) with evidence and the true nature of things; and although we should be cautious about universalising such a point, the connection between truth and sight is one that can be found across cultures and centuries, as Bloch (2008) notes. Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) suggests that sight might be better appreciated if we thought of it less in terms of the act of viewing (passive and distant) and more in terms of the activity we routinely engage in, which is to look – to *look* is to be engaged in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, and it is in that sense that I have found the term useful in my own analysis.

In attending to a language of looking and seeing in developing my own analysis, a key point of reference has been the work of sociologist Richard Sennett. Though he is perhaps best described as a sociologist of work and inequality, and of city life and culture (none of which are my themes here), aspects of social policy, youth, social work, care and welfare intersect in some of his writings, particularly in his book *Respect*

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[*] The methods literature is one place where one *can* find mainstream sociological enthusiasm for the visual register. The British Sociological Association supports a specialist study group in this area, and writing on visual methods is a substantial sub-field (see Margolis and Pauwels, 2011).

(2003), in which Sennett makes a number of observations about the way in which visibility can be at stake in caring and welfare relationships. Recalling his upbringing in an inner city housing project in Chicago, Sennett identifies an ambiguity to welfare relationships, which he describes as having the potential both to heal *and* wound.

> The [other] problem was that the project denied people control over their own lives. They were rendered spectators to their own needs, mere consumers of care provided to them. It was here that they experienced that peculiar lack of respect which consists of not being seen, not accounted as full human beings.
>
> (2003: 13)

Here Sennett makes the important point that people who are dependent on others, in some way, for their care and welfare can experience feelings of humiliation and uncertainty if they do not have any control or management in that care. It is this which can leave them unseen and 'invisible' in two ways. Firstly a person can be unseen as a full person when they are defined only by their need and are not of notice for anything other than that need or deficiency. Secondly, assumptions about needs and dependency can mean that a person can be given little control over the management and receipt of their care, leaving them (again) unseen as an autonomous individual. This leads Sennett to comment on the nature of shame and its relationship to visibility and exposure:

> It would be a psychological error to equate the fear of exposure with privacy, just because the private realm is one in which people feel free to open up, and in particular to expose their weaknesses and needs. As Niklas Luhmann has observed, the intimate sphere defines a degree of trust between individuals which would be misplaced in their relation to institutions. Nor is fear of exposure a matter of hiding a guilty secret. My point is that that statement "I need help" falls into a different category; there's nothing inherently shameful about it, so long as it can be *managed* by the person who makes it… what adults, like children, need is to control the conditions under which they see and are seen.
>
> (2003: 118)

Sennett suggests that feelings of shame and exposure occur when a person's vulnerability or need is made visible before they are ready for it to be seen, or when it is known in a way over which the person has little control. 'Opening ourselves up' can be therapeutic, it can be the means of getting help that we need. It can also leave us feeling ashamed of that need for help if we have been opened up by another before we are ready to be seen. Thus for Sennett visibility points in two directions, it signals our need to be recognised as persons but also the vulnerability that comes with being exposed before we are ready to be seen by others – even those who we want to help us.

In a rather different context, Ingold (2011) makes a link between visual perception and careful action in his exploration of the work of the craftsman (a topic that Sennett has also addressed, see 2008). Ingold argues that it is a fundamental mistake to imagine that the role of the eye in the conduct of craftwork exists solely in the initial framing and assessment, the sizing up, of an anticipated action, followed by its subsequent execution. Instead the skilled practitioner (a woodworker, for example) must allow his or her movements to combine with on ongoing attention to the progress of the work at hand such that 'the practitioner's movements are continually and subtly responsive to the ever changing conditions of the task as it proceeds' (2011: 59). Ingold suggests that it is only through continued, sensitive acts of engaged perception that a person can perform and become sufficiently 'in tune' with a task to be said to be skilled at it. It is a point that could be applied to practitioners within the field of social care just as well as to physical craftwork. The skill within welfare and the caring professions similarly hinges upon the ongoing perception of a person and their needs, and the necessary (ongoing) responsiveness, on the part of the carer, to them as a person, as more than their need, able to participate in their own care.

It is in this way, at particular points in my analysis and also in a wider sense across the entire thesis that I have found it useful to frame my contribution in terms of visibility. There are undoubtedly aspects of the problem of child sexual exploitation which are obscured from view, misrecognised and misunderstood. It is, as noted already, referred to as a hidden problem (see Clutton and Coles, 2007; WAG, 2011). Young people are somewhat missing from or hidden by a framing of the problem as 'child sexual exploitation' (see O'Connell-Davidson, 2005), and their views and wishes are largely absent within the overarching policy frameworks which guide this issue (see Warrington, 2010). Listening to young people with a view to seeing how it is that their problems seem to them, and capturing and understanding their perspectives on the

difficulties they face and the potential solutions or interventions that might help, is an overarching aim of this thesis. At the same time, in speaking with professionals I have also been trying to appreciate the ways in which it can be hard for them to see the problems young people face and to recognise those young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

Concluding comments

This chapter has provided a review of the literature related to what is known about the problem of child sexual exploitation, and about ways of responding to it. By indicating and providing context to the way the problem has come to be conceptualised within Welsh Government policy, it has been illustrated how the problem has shifted, over time, from being defined in policy as 'crime' to one of 'social care'. This also provided a brief overview of relevant sources relating to child and adolescent prostitution, and child sexual exploitation across different social policy and legislative eras, charting relevant key policy changes. This set the scene for the second part of the chapter, which provided key conceptual and theoretical moorings for the following discussion of CSE policy and the challenges that exist for practitioners. These critical literatures on child sexual exploitation, childhood(s), youth, and linked to issues of visibility also provide later chapters with essential illumination of the research terrain in terms of analysis and interpretation. It is towards the matter of study design and the research process that we now proceed.

Chapter three
Methods

Introduction

The principle aim of this chapter is to provide an account of the research process. It is with the intention of transparency that I provide a reflexive, detailed consideration of the research design, process and rationale. I begin by outlining the research that took place, its overall purpose, the participants involved, access, methods, recording and note-taking. The chapter then provides a methodological discussion of the interview as the key research tool. This is followed by the approach to analysis and the subsequent implications for the validity claims made throughout the thesis. The chapter concludes with discussion of the ethical principles that were deployed together with the dilemmas encountered in conducting this research.

Research design

This research was designed as a qualitative interview-based case study inquiry, within an interpretive paradigm. The overarching aim was to provide an in-depth understanding of child sexual exploitation by exploring the understandings and perspectives of young people with experiences of it, and of professionals who hold key roles in identifying, referring and working with young people who may be so involved. The study was small scale and my intention was twofold: I sought to provide practice and policy relevant insights into this social problem, whilst also providing a more discursive academic exploration into the social construction of this public issue. It is hoped the thesis will make both an applied and academic contribution and, as such, the implications of the research may be wide-reaching. Before providing a consideration of the ontological and epistemological perspective underpinning this research, the chapter first turns to detail about the participants involved, and the practical tasks of negotiating access, data collection, recording and transcribing.

Research participants: young people

An opportunistic, purposive sample (see Punch, 2005) of nine young people took part in this study. It is with some care that I use the term 'young people'. It is used as an inclusive descriptive category whilst recognising that the term does not connote an homogenous group of participants. Whilst their diversity is acknowledged there are evident commonalities which mark them as a 'research set', and it is perhaps helpful to situate their key characteristics here. The young people were aged between 14 and 17 years old at the time of the research. Eight were female and one male.[*] All were white Welsh/British, and 'working class' by dint of parent occupation. All were in receipt of support from a specialist voluntary sector service dealing with CSE, and all had been referred for reasons related to significant concerns about sexual exploitation. For ethical reasons, details about their particular circumstances and experiences related to their exposure to what is termed 'sexual exploitation' are not disclosed. Moreover, it is one of the purposes of this thesis to allow the young people to speak for themselves, and it is in the next chapter that they first do so. That said, it is helpful to provide some basic definitional context, and by drawing on Melrose (2012:159) it can be stated they each had experience of the 'exchange of sex for some form of pecuniary reward or some form of material benefit'. In addition to this support regarding CSE, the young people had each experienced some involvement from statutory care services in their lives. Eight of the young people were, or had been 'Looked After Children', that is, the subject of care orders and placed in the care of a local authority (for two of them this was specifically related to concerns around their risk of sexual exploitation). These eight had experienced periods of living in residential and foster care, or of living with different family members for periods of time. Accordingly, this provides a distinctive commonality to the sample and it should be noted that the young people's talk about their experiences of care and support forms a feature within all their accounts. This does not necessarily devalue any claims to generalizability, but rather presents a finding itself. As considered in later chapters, a broader consideration of 'care', stemming from both sets of participants' accounts, provides a reoccurring point of discussion throughout the findings chapters.

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[*]This is a gender ratio reflective of the young people attending the project where I gained access; and is one that is itself comparative to the gender disparity in referrals made in Wales and the UK (see Clutton and Coles, 2008).

Whilst their accounts are retrospective it is important to note that the young people were at different stages of emotional and temporal distance from the circumstances and relationships they talked about: indeed some were not distant at all and were still engaged in abusive relationships and circumstances. Some had been removed from the situations they described (such as being placed in foster or residential care away from their home area, or they were in secure accommodation). Some were being supported to remove themselves from troubling situations and to 'stay safe'. Others were in the process of being supported to ensure there would be no repeat of these experiences. Accordingly, none can be considered – or considered themselves – to have fully 'moved on' (if at all). The young people involved in this research are making sense of that which they were to some extent still involved in. Furthermore, they are young people who are being supported specifically for reasons related to sexual exploitation, by a number of different professionals. This is an important point in that these are young people who have been 'worked with' therapeutically, who have been spoken to and who have spoken about their experiences. Their framing of events in interview may therefore reflect something of the ways in which they had already disclosed and reflected upon CSE with care professionals. This does not 'devalue' their accounts or make what they have to say somehow 'inauthentic' and this point is returned to in later chapters in regard to their accounts and how these are constructed.

Research participants: professionals

The research also engaged with a purposive sample (see Punch, 2005) of 25 'non specialist' professionals from across three local authority areas in South-East Wales. They were selected precisely because they are 'non specialist', in that working in the field of child sexual exploitation is not a key part of their role. Instead they represent the range of professions listed within the Wales (and other UK relevant) policy and practice guidance as holding, as part of their occupational remit, the early identification, referral and prevention of child sexual exploitation. It is in this capacity that they were selected as useful informants about the sorts of service responses that may be offered to young people (See WAG, 2011:15).[*] They each held front-line positions within education, policing, youth justice, social work, youth work, community work, general practice and sexual health, third sector social care organisations, and fostering. 13 were male, 12

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[*] Further detail can be found in Appendix one

were female. Their professional experience of working with young people spanned from between eight months to 35 years. The three local authority areas chosen provides both an urban and rural context to the research and encompasses the areas in which the young people live. It is this which marks them out as being of particular interest as a research set. It was not the intention to make any kind of comparative analysis between these professionals. Whilst I recognise the diversity of these respondents in their background, occupation, and range and length of experience of work with young people I nonetheless use the term 'professional' as an inclusive (but by no means homogeneous) category for the purposes of this research.

Access and establishing research relationships

Access to the younger participants in this study was gained via a specialist voluntary sector service, working specifically with children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation. The service conducts its work with young people through group work, activity and team days, but primarily through individual engagement with young people. Support workers are assigned to specific young people, and they work peripatetically, meeting one-on-one with a young person, usually once a week. The work is both informal and formal, intended to be responsive to the needs of the young person, for example, accompanying young people on placement visits and leisure activities. There is also more focused work exploring, for example, issues around relationships, alcohol consumption and matters of sexual health. At the time of the research, the service was primarily engaged 'long-term' with young people, usually over a period of 12-24 months. The young people's involvement with the service is voluntary.

I based myself in the service for one day a week, over a period of a year. This was undertaken in order to introduce myself to the young people and staff in a gradual and non-threatening way (see Chambers, 2000). A secondary purpose was to become familiar with and gain useful knowledge about the field that would help direct interviews with young people and professionals alike. In addition, I observed three specialist child protection training sessions, as a way of gaining an applied understanding of and familiarity with key discursive features of child sexual exploitation. In this way, observations were not a method of data collection, rather they, and any notes from them, were used to inform the interviews I conducted. As an additional way of becoming familiar to the young people I participated in a number of group activities, including day trips, art sessions, karaoke and dance. I then

accompanied support workers in their individual support sessions with those young people who indicated an interest in finding out more about the research. This provided further opportunities to become known to the young people, as well as the opportunity to discuss the research with them. All the young people whom I spoke with about the research chose freely to take part.

Aspects of time, trust, and respect, whilst important to all research projects (see Coffey, 1999), can be considered to be particularly distinctive features of this study. In a politically sensitive area of work (see Melrose, 2004; Warrington, 2010), on a subject that is itself sensitive, with particularly vulnerable young people, time, trust and respect were crucial in negotiating access arrangements, and my investment in these virtues was sizeable and significant to the success of the research. Support from the service was gained in the early development stages of the research proposal and design. My access to young people was agreed by the service manager to be mediated by the individual support workers with case responsibility for the young people concerned. This meant that individual support workers played a key 'gate-keeping' role in my access to young people, and building their trust and confidence in me and my intentions as a researcher was a crucial and necessary part of ensuring young people's involvement. Having established these individual access arrangements, the service subsequently underwent key staff changes. This meant that my relationships with some support workers ended and, given the sensitive environment, fresh trust and confidence needed to be established with new support workers to enable access to young people. Time constraints brought about by changes to the staff team also meant that advancing my research agenda became a delicate matter. Hence gaining staff support became a more elongated and somewhat less predictable process than originally anticipated. A significant amount of time, as expected, was also needed to become known to and trusted by the young people. Relationships were carefully constructed with the young people on a one-to-one basis. They needed time to ask questions with their support worker about the research, then to decide to come and engage with me, and to then agree to participate. Due to some of the difficulties and frequent changes in their personal circumstances there were, understandably, a number of cancellations and rearrangements. For some young people these changes in circumstance introduced yet further gatekeepers in the form of other professionals, and access needed to be re-negotiated. Every effort was made to ensure that those young people who wished to participate in the research, did so.

With regard to the professionals interviewed, access was sought by contact through email requests to their agency line management or administrators, through sharing information about the research at networking and training events, and through established contacts. All the professionals interviewed did so willingly and none were entreated by their management to take part.

Method

The intention of this research was to explore participants' perspectives and understandings, and as such the research method comprised semi-structured interviews, incorporating the use of more participative activities 'within method' with young people (Flick, 2004: 179). The methodological virtues and limitations of the interview will be addressed shortly but first the practical considerations made in utilising semi-structured interviews as a research technique are outlined.

The time, date and location for the research was agreed in advance with each participant and took place in a confidential setting where they felt most comfortable and in a location accessible to them. Interviews with young people lasted between 60 minutes to 120 minutes and took place in a prearranged setting such as in the service location, their home, another project setting in a closer location, and in a young offenders' institute. Interviews with professionals lasted between 50 minutes and 80 minutes and also took place in work settings, their home, or in office space arranged by me.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with a minimal number of broad and open-ended questions using flexible prompts to direct each interview (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). I adapted these questions as the fieldwork progressed to incorporate emerging themes and lines of inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). This 'loose' design enabled me to allow for, and respond to the different directions that each interview inevitably produced, according to participant's different experiences and accounts (see Arksey and Knight, 1999). This approach was also a way of encouraging individual stories and themes to arise that I could not have anticipated (see Valentine, 1997).

Acknowledging the social nature of the exchange, I viewed the interview as being about engagement, and throughout each interview sought to gain rapport and to ensure that it was not interrogative in any way (Hopf, 2004). I aimed to keep the interview as relaxed, fluid and flexible as possible; which necessarily involved maintaining an active involvement in the interview and of providing direction

throughout (Bourdieu, 1999). This conscious direction came in the form of employing careful listening, verbal and non-verbal responses and prompts, allowing time for people to respond whilst avoiding any intimidating silences or other forms of inappropriate 'violent' language and style (Bourdieu, 1999: 610). Each interview was designed to 'warm up' and 'cool down' (Valentine, 1997), and opened with contextual questions; for the professionals, this involved asking them about their role and work with young people; for the young people this involved starting with a creative activity. The semi-structured use of a check list of topics allowed the encounter to move beyond a predefined set of questions and to explore sensitively and flexibly the ways in which professionals and young people 'theorised' and categorised sexual exploitation, and their views on related interventions in this field (Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). Similarly, my incorporation of activities within the interviews with young people was a way of generating discussion in a non-threatening way. Towards the end of the interview each participant was invited to talk about anything they had expected or wanted to discuss but which they had not yet had the opportunity to do so. Each interview concluded with an 'easy' question to try and end on a positive note asking each participant to reflect on a positive experience they had which they wanted to share. This was also a way of creating narrative distancing, particularly for the young people, from some of the more sensitive areas discussed earlier in the interview.

Recording, transcription and note-taking

Each interview was recorded using an audio digital recorder to enable a more active listening throughout each interview (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).[*] Participants were informed prior to and reminded at the beginning of the interview that it would be recorded. The young people were also invited to become familiar with the device before recording commenced. The total number of recorded hours ran to 44 hours, running to some 800 pages of typed transcription.

Interviews were typed in the Jeffersonian style (see Silverman, 1993). Transcribing the data in this way was a preference, one which is normally utilised for more discursive forms of analysis, but is one which I felt enabled me to retain, and thus

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[*] On one occasion, in which I had permission to interview a young person in a young offenders institute, upon arrival, I was denied entrance with the recorder and told I would need further permission to take it with me. I continued with the research as planned and arranged that both the support worker and I would take notes during the interview. We later compared these as a way of my gaining as accurate a representation as possible of what was said.

recall, a 'feel' for the character of the encounter, and it is one which would also allow for a more nuanced analysis. An example of this transcription style is given in the table below. However, in keeping with the research purpose and approach, data extracts in the findings chapters have been reformatted to a more readable and immediate style.

Example of original transcription style

SO (.) I went (.) went (3) *anyway it doesn't matter* (.) <u>anyway</u> (quietly)
Key:
Normal font to denote regular speech   Capitals to denote louder speech
Italics to denote quicker speech   Underlining to denote slower speech
(quietly) to denote quieter speech   (.) minor pause
(3) number within bracket to indicate number of seconds in the length of pause

Throughout the study I completed a field-work diary. This contained my observations from each day in the research setting, the more detailed notes made at the end of each day, and my detailed notes recorded after each interview with young people and professionals alike. This diary was also used to note initial thoughts about occurring themes arising from interview and when typing my transcriptions. I then referred back to these notes to help reflect upon the developing themes arising from my analysis.

Analysis

I turn to the process of analysis later in the chapter but note here briefly that analysis of the data was conducted without recourse to a software package. I recognise that their use for qualitative analysis has much merit such as with projects with multiple researchers, and perhaps being more accessible in terms of their capacity for storage and retrieval of codes and themes for larger data sets (see Kelle and Laurie, 1995). However, as Lee and Fielding (1991) point out, software packages do no more than the manual paper version does. Computer packages do not somehow make claims of qualitative research 'more valid' and this form of analysis does not (and should not be seen to) somehow replace or change the role of the researcher in the analytic process (see La Pelle, 2004). I was the sole researcher in this study and was not working with a large data set and I preferred the technique of manually handling the data. Analysing the data in this way also enabled me to work with what Richards (cited by Lee and Fielding,

1991: 8) refers to as 'the untypable'; those quick notes, scribbles, doodles and diagrams that aided my reflections throughout the analysis.

Theory of knowledge and the interview

All social research has an underlying ontological and epistemological perspective; a theory of what exists in the world, and an understanding of what can be 'knowable' (Benton and Craib, 2001). How we understand the world will link to the research aims and questions asked, methodology, and subsequent choice of methods. In social research, epistemological perspectives can be roughly separated into objectivist or interpretist paradigms, which reveal the underlying philosophies about what should be researched and how to go about it (Flick 1998). Objectivist theories are concerned with keeping the social sciences closely aligned with the natural sciences (Benton and Craib 2001). There are presumed to be facts that can be gathered 'independently of how people interpret them' (May 2001: 11). The research is conducted to ensure that objective fact is separated from subjective value judgements that could distort the data, therefore reducing the legitimacy of the research (Benton and Craib 2001). Interpretive theories, however, consider that, rather than there being *a* reality, there are versions of reality. The epistemological focus then, is on exploring processes and meanings (Punch, 2005). Interpretive perspectives are characterised by using a qualitative methodology, utilising methods such as the interview, ethnographic, and/or creative methods which allow the researcher to study subjective meanings, processes and/or routine (Mason, 2002).

The ontological and epistemological perspective underpinning this research was an interactionist/constructionist perspective under an interpretist paradigm. The study sought to explore what the young people and professionals had to say about 'child sexual exploitation'. More specifically, its aim was to explore the ways that participants construct and configure this social problem in relation to their unique experiences of encountering it. As such, the research sought to capture abstract concepts and subjectivities that expose the 'everyday' meanings that participants bring to their interactions, and the ways they make sense of their motives and actions (Flick, 1998). Talk is both a reflection of and generator of sense-making approaches and meanings; I was interested in what people *said* not what they did, because it is in those constructions that typical ways of making sense can be found (Mason, 2002). In this way, the research was best suited to a qualitative methodology, which views these as valid topics of

enquiry and directs to an appropriate method that will gain relevant data to answer the research questions (Flick, 2004). Thus the interview, incorporating creative activities (for young people), was utilised as the research method. The interview is also a way of unearthing the often hidden or background assumptions that underpin social action (Flick, 1998). However, it was used on the premise that it is not a way of 'excavating truth' – but rather a way of grasping the taken for granted sense-making approaches in day to day conduct within the social world (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). The epistemological perspective underpinning the research acknowledges that research does not generate 'fact' or 'best available truth', as in more positivist conventions such as experimental models (Atkinson and Delamont, 2005). I do not claim that participants' accounts are somehow 'reliable' statements of truth but are rather their ways of viewing the past and of making sense of circumstance, events and their own actions within them. Knowledge can only ever be partial (Heyl, 2001). Also, narratives are in their own right 'doing something'; they are not 'facts' but 'performative acts' (Atkinson and Delamont, 2005: 825).

Such an epistemological position openly acknowledges the inevitable subjectivity of the exercise (Delamont, 2003). It is the task of the researcher to ensure there is rigour via a coherent research design that will pursue exhaustive lines of enquiry in analysis via empirically and conceptually grounded representation (Punch 2005; Flick 1998). Conceptual development and rigour was sought by introducing relevant theory and research iteratively throughout the analytic process (Flick, 1998). I further checked my interpretation by ensuring in interview that I did not simply assume the meanings of things being discussed but explored whether my understanding matched that of respondents' in order to avoid any unintended bias (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 32). I also involved participants in the analytical process, discussing the findings with them to test the adequacy of my interpretation and to ensure they were plausible re-presentations of meaning and intent (Punch, 2005).

In this way, I do not assert that the findings are *the* truth, rather they are an interpretive construction of 'truths' held by the respondents (Charmaz, 2006). As such, they are not 'cast into the pit of relativism' (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 54) as they reflect if not *the* reality then *a* reality (Holliday, 2002). This position, and the small size of the sample, prevents me from claiming that this thesis stands as a definitive statement on the research subject. That said, credibility comes not from the numbers of participants involved, but in exploring comparatively the different views of carefully

selected participants, which provide a richly nuanced illumination of the case in question (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). I do not make claims that the findings speak for all, but when contextualised in relevant research they may contain a provenance beyond the limits of their number (see Punch, 2005: 146). Moreover, as suggested by Arksey and Knight, 'the general is always in the particular' (1999: 58). In this way, I state that the findings which follow reveal what 'can be learned from a single case' and thus show insights into the wider issue of sexual exploitation beyond the case itself (Stake, 2000: 435).

The role of the researcher

The interview is not a neutral event. As Bourdieu (1999: 608) observes, research 'remains, whatever one does, a social relationship'. What distinguishes research from other encounters and everyday interactions is its objective of generating data and creating knowledge. As such, I acknowledge my presence within the generation of the data, as well as in its analysis. It is an inescapable aspect and it is in the consistency of the research design and the reflexivity of the researcher that the data and findings can reach a plausible degree of transparency and rigour (Fine et al., 2000; Punch, 2005). I engaged in 'reflex reflexivity' throughout, conducting the research with an awareness of my position as a researcher and of my presuppositions in a conscious way that directed me to be aware of 'those inevitable acts of construction and the equally inevitable effects those acts produce' (Bourdieu, 1999: 608). It was thus crucial that I, as researcher, sought 'to reduce as much as possible the symbolic violence exerted through that relationship' (Bourdieu, 1999: 609). This is important for matters of ethical integrity, and for purposes of rigour. I note that another important part of conducting research is the establishment and negotiation of the boundaries of research relationships. The decision to base myself at the project as a way of becoming familiar with young people meant that I needed to ensure that my role as researcher did not become 'covert' (Gillham, 2005). Being present at the project and attending events in the way I did, meant that I could have been perceived as both researcher and 'helper'. Similarly, the presence of support workers at some of the interviews with young people (and that I travelled and arrived with their support workers) could have meant I too was viewed by young people as another 'professional'. I made a conscious effort to assert my identity as a researcher and as someone different to their support workers and other service staff, so that I was, correctly, perceived as an outsider to the professional world. This

asserssertion was one I similarly sought in my relationships with professional participants and service staff. In seeking to generate good research relationships with them, by being conscious of, and in marking those boundaries between myself as researcher and them as professionals working in this field, I was *able* to establish good, respectful, interpersonal research relationships.

Young people

Involving young people in exploring a potentially sensitive subject area has necessarily informed the research design (see Mayall, 1994; Eder and Fingerson, 2001; Alderson, 2004).[*] The histories and backgrounds of the young people who took part meant that, in order to ensure that they were given every opportunity to take part in such a way that they felt recognised and 'visible' as active research subjects, it was necessary for me to reduce the asymmetry of the interview encounter (Bourdieu, 1999). For example, I was aware that the young people were likely to be used to providing accounts to, and shaped by, professionals, and of providing often very intimate details about themselves and their lives. (Later chapters will describe how they found this to be intrusive and less focused on them as individuals and more on their perceived actions and risks.) Therefore, I incorporated activities which would counter this and enable a more explorative engagement in which young people had power to select and reveal views and experiences in ways that they wanted to and felt comfortable about. I was determined to ensure that the interview would be an honouring, enjoyable and creative experience too (Haudrup-Christensen, 2004; Barker and Weller, 2003).

I considered a number of approaches, some of which were piloted and 'honed' through spending time with the young people and consulting with their support workers. Ethnographic group based methods have been commonly cited as an effective way of involving children and young people in research because of their more 'relaxed' focus and non-threatening 'safety in numbers' style (see Prout, 2000; Haudrup-Christensen, 2004). One-on-one methods have also been considered as more appropriate for involving young people when the subject is of a more sensitive nature as it allows for

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[*] To make clear, much of what I discuss in relation to young people should also be given to apply to the professional participants. Matters of ethics and involvement in the research are no less important for them, but they are different. The distinct difference, one that required and guided the extra consideration in the research design that I outline here, is that the young people were talking on a subject that was personal to them; the professionals were talking about their occupational experiences. It is for these reasons that some considerations in the research play out differently for the young people than for the professionals.

discussion of a matter that would not normally arise through conversation and one that which they might not want to discuss in front of their peers (Eder and Fingerson, 2001). The use of pictures, vignettes and life story work have been shown to be helpful in promoting reflective discussion and enabling participants to discuss thoughts based on a third person (see Hill, 1997; Barter and Renold, 2000; O'Kane, 2000; Veale, 2005). Similarly, the use of more creative methods, to allow for active participation with a focus on 'generating' knowledge have been described as ways of ensuring a more positive participative experience (See Barker and Weller, 2003). Visual techniques have been used as a way of instigating talk about complex and sensitive situations without asking direct and uncomfortable questions about people's experiences (Valentine et al., 2001). Consequently, the semi-structured interview incorporated the use of vignettes, film, and a word activity, with the aim of gaining insight into their understandings and their experiences whilst maintaining the ethical integrity of the study. They were designed to encourage and generate discussion on subject areas but with different ways of drawing it out. This meant that if a young person did not want to engage with a particular activity, there was another way for them to focus on the same discussion points (although this situation did not occur). The activities were not fixed to any time scale and were flexible. For example, in some interviews the word activity brought about a more lengthy discussion of their own experiences. In others they spent more time discussing different vignettes. I outline further detail on these activities below.

I began with a discussion around a DVD used in Wales to promote awareness of sexual exploitation, which shows three young people with different stories related to sexual exploitation. This DVD is also used in the work conducted with the young people at the service. It being of a sensitive nature I did not show it during the interview, instead I referred to it as a way of instigating discussion about the stories about the young people shown in the DVD, asking interviewees what stories or aspects might be missing and what they would change or include for people to know about if they were to make their own DVD. I also conducted a word activity, laying out a number of words, based on risk factors identified both from professionals and policy literature. I included a number of words such as 'good', 'bad' and 'no', and some blank slips for them to add their own words or change the meanings of the ones there. They were invited to select words that they thought were relevant to their own circumstances, or that were irrelevant, and to write what they felt was missing. These were then used to stimulate discussion about why they had chosen particular words and the meanings they

held for them. The final activity was a discussion around a number of vignettes I produced, which were partly informed by real past cases referred to the project but made wholly anonymous. They were invited to talk through what they thought was happening, why the person in the story was doing what they were doing, whether it would be different if it were a boy or girl and what they would do, or thought others should do about it (if anything). The research ended with broad open-ended questions based on their experiences of support.

Matters of Reflexivity

Whilst I am mindful of approaches to reflexivity which detail the subject position of the researcher, the reflexivity I am concerned with is that which considers the mode of enquiry and attends to the conditions of the production of knowledge. I was motivated to conduct this research by an interest in the subject area, one which arose primarily from my previous employment in a children's voluntary organisation. I was also motivated by a desire to produce some useful applied knowledge on an under-researched area. Recognition of the relational aspect of research necessarily also acknowledges the effect of conducting the research on the researcher (Coffey, 1999), and this has, at times, been a disconcerting subject to explore. I have also been conscious throughout all stages of this research, of the significant personal and professional 'stake' in the findings from those who have invested in it. For various reasons, at times, I have wanted to 'shy away' from my analysis. Contrary to the aim of some research, and researchers, I did not seek to immerse myself in the lives of others, or in the data. I did not desire to, or imagine I *could* enter the worlds of others in a way that would enable me to experience it or 'see' it as they do; neither have I considered that complete indifference or detachment is possible or desirable (see Coffey, 1999). I consider that the most productive analytical position, one which pays respect to the research participants and the data, is that which acknowledges the importance of distance *and* closeness. It is a position which recognises this tension within all aspects of the research process, but which also sees it as necessary if one is to conduct and produce 'good' research. It is this balance between distance and closeness that I have sought and attempted to negotiate throughout. In this way, it was those reasons that caused me difficulty which also motivated me to push for that rigour, outlined previously, to ensure that what I produce pays respect to all those who were involved in the research.

Data

The object of examination in this research is talk, and so before considering the method of analysis, I relay here something of the character of the data produced. In re-reading the transcripts with young people, it was notable that talk was often tentative. They hedge, pause, are hesitant and at times appear to 'think out loud'. This was by no means the case throughout all the interviews with young people and in almost all cases what may have started tentatively became less so throughout. The young people's language does at times appear to reflect the vocabulary of social work discourse (see Jordan, 2004); an indication perhaps of a fragmented acquisition acquired from their different experiences and past encounters with care professionals. As I have indicated, the young people were used to giving a particular kind of account of their experiences however they do not speak by rote. Their accounts cannot be described as 'rehearsed'. The young people came to the interview ready and willing to talk (as one young person said 'I'll say exactly what I think, so be prepared'). By comparison, the talk with professionals was typically much less tentative, which is perhaps reflective of their adult 'expert' status and different experiences (to the young people's) of being asked to account and state their opinions (Gilham, 2005). The professionals gave lengthy detailed responses and, like the young people, were ready to engage and willing to talk. In many instances, my questioning was little more than small prompts, or reflections back on what had been said by them. The marked contrast in the narratives of the two samples will become apparent in the chapters that follow but are highlighted here in order to intimate something of the effectiveness of the interview method in generating data that reflects the profoundly different worlds and perspectives derived from my two respondent groups and the consequences of this for an understanding of CSE and what to do about it.

Method of analysis

I refer to analysis here as *method*, meaning 'the process of resolving data into its constituent components to reveal their characteristic themes and patterns' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 8). I outline here the process of data handling (coding and sorting) and the interpretation of the data undertaken. Consistent with my methodological approach, the intention was not to conduct or impose a 'top-down' analysis driven by theory, but to create findings that are 'data driven'. As such, I utilised a form of thematic analysis based loosely on a form of grounded theory (see Bohm, 2004; Charmaz, 2006).

'Grounded theory' is produced by a treatment of data that re-presents to the reader descriptive, analytical categories that reveal how research participants 'construct' their day to day worlds with others through talk (Punch, 2005). My intention was not to create 'theory' from the data, but using an inductive approach I sought to generate analytical themes that arose from coding and the creation of categories across the data sets. This style of thematic analysis is closely linked to a constructionist perspective and, as such, is an appropriate method which links both my research design and the data this produced (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

The data was analysed primarily as two separate sets, according to the different participant groups. I began by reading through each transcript, with reference to my fieldwork notes (see above) to identify broad patterns and themes. I then analysed each transcript using a form of 'open coding' (Charmaz, 2006). Initial codes were formed as short passages of the text or a phrase to provide the meaning of the text rather than individual words. This was done to retain some context to the codes. Where there were multiple points/meanings within a phrase, multiple codes were created to ensure I did not lose what might appear as slight nuances within a point but which could add to a separate code when compared within and across the data set(s). Similar to 'axial coding' (Charmaz, 2006), I linked and grouped or merged related codes from across each data set to create potential coding themes and sub themes. I then formulated thematic maps exploring possible links and relationships between these themes, re-organising the data into what were mainly descriptive themes. At this point I conducted a comparative analysis across both sets of data. This enabled exploration of similar and contrastive themes (Bohm, 2004). By analysing the data sets separately I did not 'miss' or exclude those findings that did not 'fit' across the two sets, but by comparing themes across both it created new analytical categories and enabled a more rounded treatment (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). This was accompanied by an iterative process of reviewing the findings with relevant literature and in relation to key policy, to help make sense of the emerging themes (Punch 2005). Finally, I refined and reduced these themes to create overarching thematic categories within and across the data sets (Schmidt, 2004).

My analytical lens was focused on the exploration of themes of meaning from within and across the data sets, yet this did not mean that no attention was paid to the function of the talk in my analysis. Whilst the main analytical focus was on what participants said, and less so on how they said it (as indicated earlier, the research was not designed to provide a conversation or discursive analysis of their accounts),

nevertheless, what the participants said cannot be completely divorced from the way in which they spoke. This meant that there was a selective secondary stage of analysis where I also explored *how* accounts were rendered, as a way of informing and interrogating the themes of the primary analysis. For example, I noted the different ways that professionals and young people used the language of looking and seeing; being overlooked, overseen; of surfaces and of 'exteriors' and emotional 'interiors'. This line of analysis is reflected, in part, in my development of (in)visibility as an interpretive domain beneath which I could explore related themes across the data about the ways in which CSE, and those who are involved in it, come to notice or not. This theme is one which occurs throughout the thesis entire, providing an analytical seam that has enabled me to explore and consider the data and its emerging elements, by juxtaposing these from the different participant groups, and in connecting themes to relevant research literature, concepts and policy on CSE. This approach to analysis features across my presentation of the findings where I seek to contrast and connect the understandings and assumptions of both participant groups.

Ethics

This research has been informed and shaped by a number of ethical statements and guidance. Ethical approval for the research was granted from the Cardiff University Research Ethics Committee. The British Sociological Association's statement of ethics, along with that of the voluntary service, provided guidance to the research.[*] More reflexively however, what can be known about whom and how, the role of the researcher and the approach to generating data is, in essence, to determine the ethical stance itself. The 'reflex reflexivity' (Bourdieu, 1999: 608) I outlined above, necessarily presumes that data is constructed and that research stems from a '*social relationship*'. This is a research directive which is, by implication, an ethical one. Matters of ethics underpin and are embedded within the research purpose, design, method, data handling, analysis, presentation of findings, and dissemination. As such, ethical considerations have been present implicitly throughout this chapter and what follows is a more developed account of their application.

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[*] For the BSA statement of ethics see: www.britsoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx

Involving young people

I acknowledge that the sensitive nature of the enquiry, and the involvement (or not) of vulnerable young people, is an ethical issue in itself (see Valentine, 2009; Iphofen, 2009). Yet it is an ethical decision which extends to any research participant and particularly to all those who are vulnerable and occupy relatively powerless positions within society. 'Children' do not occupy a special place in this respect. This research was undertaken from the perspective that young people are capable social actors who have the right, and should be given the opportunity to participate in research that focuses upon matters that concern them (Christensen, 2004; Archer, 2004; Alderson, 2005; Cocks, 2006). Not least because to *not* involve them could be considered as an act of symbolic violence; reinforcing power relationships between adults and children and young people. As Punch (2002) argues, the difference between research with young people and research with adults arises largely through adult perceptions of children's (in)abilities to make sense of their own worlds. Moreover, to decide that this is a subject that is 'un-researchable' is to impose a judgement about young people's experiences as being *too* difficult or *too* awful to explore (Iprofen, 2009). As Archer (2004) argues, researchers can inadvertently reinforce and further marginalise groups by deciding 'who' and 'what' is unresearchable. That said, there is a difference in how one might *go about* conducting research with children and young people. Their marginalisation is not special to them as young people, but it is different, and this needs to be acknowledged in the research design. To expand on this, it was the intention of the research to recognise and:

> understand children as social actors, as competent research participants with particular communication skills that researchers can draw upon in social research, and as forming a social group who are constrained by adult structures and practices in which they are located
>
> (Morrow, 2008: 4)

As considered previously, the research was designed and conducted to reduce power differences, and to enable young people to feel as active subjects in their involvement. By locating young people firmly within the research design I sought to ensure that their involvement was not a tokenistic 'add-on' but was a key part of the study, and every effort was made to reinforce their control over their participation in the research. In

addition, just as it has been argued that children and young people should be given opportunities to participate in their care (see for example Leeson, 2007), this should extend to the wider level of policy discourse and to research with the potential to impact on that care. Child sexual exploitation in particular is an issue in which the views and perspectives of young people have, for reasons considered in the previous chapter, been largely absent (see also Warrington, 2010). The very purpose of this research was to provide an opportunity to invite the views and perspectives of young people with experiences of what adults around them term sexual exploitation and who are subject to policy and practice in this area.

Another distinctive feature of conducting research on a sensitive subject with vulnerable young people, is negotiating the balance between actively involving young people in research and adhering to formal safeguarding procedures. As noted above, access to young people, for safeguarding purposes, was negotiated through individual support workers; whilst the decision to speak to me about the research and to take part was that of the young person. Similarly, ethical procedures and approval required parental/guardian permission for those young people aged under 16 to take part. I nonetheless emphasised the importance of, and gave credence to young people's own written and verbal consent throughout all aspects of the research.

Information, support and consent[*]

Participants were provided with an information sheet clearly outlining the purpose of the research, and detailing what their involvement would entail in terms of activities, time, location, length, and issues such as confidentiality and anonymity. This also included my contact details and those whom they should contact if they had concerns about the research or how it was conducted. To ensure that the information people received was as accessible as possible, a separate information sheet for professionals and for young people was produced – the latter in consultation with the service manager. Participants were encouraged to ask questions before they decided to take part in the research and it was made clear, both on the information sheet and at the beginning of the research, that they could choose not to answer any questions, not take part in some aspects of the research, or decide to end the research at any time (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002).

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[*] See Appendix Two for information sheets and consent forms

The young people were informed that they could bring someone with them (a friend, family member, or their support worker) whilst the interview took place. Two of the interviews were conducted with the young person's support worker present at the young person's request. I also encouraged the young people to arrange to meet someone after the research took place. The young people were informed at the beginning and at the end of the interview that their project worker was available to talk to them if any issues had arisen for them, and a list of contact details outlining other possible support was also provided. Every effort was made throughout to ensure that no emotional harm occurred. The interview was not interrogative, that is, intrusive detail was not requested and the young people were not asked to recount any painful experiences. It was made clear to the young people before interview what information was sought and that this would not be about, as one young person phrased it, 'the gory details' of what happened.

Each participant involved in this research did so of their own volition. Consent was approached as an ongoing part of the research design rather than as something to be summarily acquired at the start of the study (Alderson, 2004). Written consent was sought from the professionals and the young people, and from their parents/guardian for those under the age of 16. In recognition that this can appear 'contractual' and give the impression that people have 'signed up' and cannot change their minds, verbal agreement was also sought throughout the research process, from both groups of participants (see Warren, 2001; Alderson, 2004).

Part of the research process with young people was to provide opportunities for them to speak individually with me about the research before deciding if they wanted to take part. This enabled me to talk through the information sheet with them and explain the aims of the research; each young person was encouraged to ask questions and did so. They were given time to think about participating and to talk about it with their support worker who could inform me if the young person wanted to take part or not. The primary reason for this being that the young person would not feel uncomfortable declining to be involved. Every effort was made to ensure that each young participant felt in control over what they chose to answer and share throughout the interview. It was my ethical stance that getting data should not be at any cost. Participants were given the opportunity to see the topics that I would be exploring prior to conducting the interview (although none took up this offer). It was also made clear at the start of any research encounter that participants could choose not to answer a question, or not take part at all

if they decided they did not want to. There were two occasions in the research with young people where they declined to talk about a particular vignette and on both occasions another story was chosen by them. I took this as a positive sign, and as some confirmation that they felt in control of their involvement in the research process.

All participants were informed that they could see their research transcript. One participant requested further information on how I might use the data that they had provided and this information was given. None declined the use of interview material they provided.

Confidentiality [*]

The names of participants were made anonymous in both the transcription and the analysis. Names were confidential between all participants so that they are, as far as possible, unable to identify each other in the reading of the study. The name of the service has also been made anonymous, and, as far as possible, I make no identifiable references to any of the service staff. I have provided some outline information about the young people's backgrounds to provide essential minimum context, however specific details about each young person and their experiences have been excluded and remain confidential. Similarly, I have restricted the use of more personalised information provided by the professionals to ensure that they are not identifiable. All transcriptions, notes, recordings and any other data produced have been stored securely in a locked cabinet and in a password protected account, and will be destroyed in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

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[*] The young people attending the project were there because of child protection interventions, about which they were well aware. Hence re-introducing issues about child protection on the information sheet could be confusing, therefore they were informed verbally before the interview took place of my obligation to pass on any matters related to harm or risk of harm. This was announced to each young person thus:

> "I also need to let you know that if someone was to tell me that they or someone they knew was being seriously harmed in some way, or might be at risk of this, or they were going to commit some serious crime then I would have to inform the (name of) project or social services about this in order to protect anyone who could get hurt".

I also received a clearance check from the Criminal Records Bureau, and attended child protection training.

Reciprocity

I consider reciprocity to be a fundamental aspect of the research process. As Coffey (1999: 40) outlines, 'how reciprocity and trust are developed, established, tested and lost in the pursuit of fieldwork is key to understanding the relations of fieldwork'. In the acknowledgement of research as consisting of social relationships, which have the potential to reinforce or realign power differences, reciprocity is a crucial part of giving respect to all those who were involved in it, as participants or otherwise (Edgar and Fingerson, 2001). Whilst there are arguments for providing some form of recompense for people's involvement as part of this recognition (see Barker and Weller, 2003), this did not seem appropriate here. Moreover, whilst I was aware of this from the outset, it became clear throughout the research, as will be apparent throughout the findings chapters, that aspects of 'exchange' and of reciprocity particularly feature and are entangled within this research, perhaps in ways that in other research topics they may not be.

Whilst it is difficult for me to provide an assessment of the 'gains and benefits' for those involved in the research (see Coffey, 1999), it is at the level of my research intentions and of the research interactions and relationships that I sought to establish reciprocity. It is these that I outline here. I set out from the beginning of this research with the intention that it would be an applied research project, one with the aim of making a useful contribution at the level of concept, practice and policy. To ask people to give their time and to ask young people in particular to speak with an adult researcher on such a topic about which they had many negative experiences, would not have been ethical without seeking to produce some applied knowledge and thereby having some impact upon (responses to) the problem. It was for this reason that many of the young people were keen to be involved, in the hope that they may be 'heard' at a wider level of practice, policy, and research knowledge that may contribute to helping other young people avoid what they had experienced. Furthermore, I sought to show reciprocity more generally by seeking to involve the young people in the research in such way that would signal to them that they were acknowledged as individuals, and 'know that their perspectives were important and valued' (Winter, 2010: 190). I took it as some indication of success in this regard that the young people felt able to talk in the open and thoughtful way that they did. Furthermore, some of the young people stated unprompted that they had found taking part to be an empowering experience and how they had appreciated being listened to. The adult respondents, and those service staff who

supported the study, stated they found the research encounter a positive one, largely for reasons of its applied focus.

In addition, I ensured that no participant was 'out of pocket' in attending interviews. Participants were also informed about and invited to presentations based on this research with an offer to reimburse any attendance costs. By the time the fieldwork research with the project had concluded, none of the young people remained with the project, all had exited as planned. I have committed to ensuring that a report summarising the research findings is produced and made accessible to all who took part. I also have a commitment to ensuring that the findings are disseminated as widely as possible.

It is also worth reiterating here the sensitive nature of the topic – at the level of policy and for individuals – and how I have sought to convey this in my presentation and discussion of the findings. In this I have made every effort to treat the participants' stories and accounts with the same respect that I tried to show them in the process of their generating those same accounts. It is my way of respecting the young people, the adult respondents, and the service staff too, who all invested in this research, by presenting the analysis in the way I have, even when their views about child sexual exploitation and mine might differ (Heyl, 2001).

Concluding comments

In this chapter I have situated the thesis methodologically and provided a detailed reflexive account of the research; giving an outline of the research process, detailing the research design, participants involved, access, and method of data collection. I have also provided methodological considerations related to the interview, and the method of analysis, concluding with detail of the ethical structure of the thesis. In the following chapters I present the research findings, beginning with the young people's accounts. It will become apparent upon reading these chapters that there are parallels between the research act and the interactions between the young people and those seeking to help them. This is most obviously so in relation to my asking young people to talk to an adult (albeit researcher) about their experiences which will be shared (in some way) with others. It is also evident in the way professionals assumed my competence to grasp their dilemmas in working in this field and thereby extending to me some shared identity in trying to do right by the young people they work with. That this research relationship and study design, based upon trust, reciprocity and scholarly commitment to good social

research was effective, will now hopefully become apparent in the following four chapters. It is to the first of these, how young people made sense of their experiences of exchanging sex, that the thesis now turns.

Chapter four:
Making sense of 'sexual exploitation': young people's perspectives

Introduction

This chapter will consider the ways that the young people 'made sense' of their involvement in what is deemed by a child welfare discourse as 'sexual exploitation' (see Chapter Two). This term and its explicit and implicit assumptions tell us relatively little about how children and young people themselves understand the circumstances thus defined. Hence, this chapter will explore the ways they made sense of why and how they (and others) may come to exchange sex for something. As indicated previously, there is a wealth of academic and practice-based research outlining 'causes' and 'risk indicators' (see Cusick, 2002). However it has been consistently acknowledged that there is a need to consider young people's own understandings of their experiences in order to provide more meaningful responses to the problem (see for example O'Neill, 2001; Pearce 2009). To repeat, underpinning this research is the intention to 'make visible' the perspectives and views of young people who have experienced 'sexual exploitation'. As discussed in the preceding chapters, research into this issue which has involved young people is rare – and research inviting their views and perspectives on the issue itself rarer still, certainly in Wales but also in the UK more generally. In addition, current policy, which provides the 'overarching framework' for work in this area, has, 'at its heart, an absence of the direct experiences and perspectives of children and young people' (Warrington 2010: 63). Furthermore, this framework presents one particular 'discursive formation' of 'child sexual exploitation' (Melrose 2012: 4). As such, it is the intention here to explore the 'fit' between the young people's accounts, and the vulnerability and risk indicators identified within applied research and established within Welsh Government policy and practice guidance which give the guidance its shape. As already discussed, the current discourse within policy and practice in Wales (and arguably elsewhere in the UK) is informed by the 'grooming model' as *the* way of explaining how young people come to be sexually exploited (see WAG, 2011; van Meeuwen et al., 1998; Clutton and Coles, 2007). As such, I pay particular attention to this throughout my discussion.

The chapter is structured into three parts. Part one considers the young people's talk about what, in their experience, makes a young person vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Part two considers the young people's talk about 'risky behaviours', and considers how these were understood by them as their ways of coping, albeit sometimes almost unthinkingly, with the situations they were in and their feelings of vulnerability. Part three considers the different ways they came to more directly experience exchanging sex.

This chapter introduces the concept of (in)visibility as a key analytical theme (see Chapter one). In this context it is used to explore the complexity of the links between sexual exploitation and the 'things going on' in young people's lives.[*] More specifically, I explore how vulnerability, risk, and routes into sexual exploitation can be understood paradoxically as being both the 'blotting out' of the subject and the 'assertion of the self as subject' (O'Connell-Davidson 2005: 55). As will become apparent, (in)visibility is a notion used by the young people. They understood themselves to be vulnerable and 'at risk' because they and their unmet needs were invisible to significant others in their lives (to their families carers and those tasked to help them). However, they became and were made visible through interactions with an other(s) who exploited them and their needs. Given the participatory aspect of this research, the chapter turns to the young people here to open and set the scene for the discussion and argument which follows in this chapter:

> **Nathan:** it [sexual exploitation] doesn't just happen it happens because
> either things just aren't addressed, people are less able to fend for
> themselves and they don't get the help *they need,* for whatever reason, and
> are put into difficult positions and sometimes it *does* take them there and if,
> people were there to help them in the first place then they wouldn't, then
> this wouldn't happen

It is argued in this chapter that 'sexual exploitation' can be understood as a complex relationship between a young person's unmet needs and lack of care, their subjective

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[*] This is a turn of phrase used by the young people and is one which stands for much of what is discussed throughout this chapter. It also a phrase which I unpack further in Chapter six when considering the young people's perspectives on solutions to the problem.

assertion of the self, and an acknowledgement and expropriation by another of themselves as both subject and object. It is the contention that a conceptualisation of sexual exploitation underpinned by 'grooming', whilst having some clear relevance, does not and cannot encompass young people's different experiences.

In order to explore this complex amalgam of activities, meanings, relationships and settings it will be important to quickly rehearse key characteristics of the respondents in order to set the scene for their accounts and the analysis which follows.

The participants

'Young people' is an overly inclusive category and the term is used with some care. It is (re)asserted that this is not an homogenous group of participants. They were aged 14 to 17 at the time of the research. Eight were female, and one male. While their histories and circumstances were varied, they shared in the claim that they each had experience(s) of the 'exchange of sex for some form of pecuniary reward or some form of material benefit' (Melrose 2012: 159). In addition they were all in receipt of support from a voluntary sector service for young people at risk of sexual exploitation; each had some past or present involvement with statutory care services; eight were or had been Looked After Children (for two of them, this was as a result of their risk of sexual exploitation). As such, these eight had experienced periods of living in residential and foster care, or of living with different family members for periods of time. None could be considered – or considered themselves – to have fully 'moved on' and now living safely with their family or independently. In short, these were young people making sense of exploitative relationships or circumstances in which to varying degrees they were still involved.

Vulnerability: 'It's vulnerable people who've had hard lives'

The analysis begins here by exploring what the young people had to say about why they and others may come to exchange sex for something. Many of the young people insisted that it 'could happen to anyone', however it will become clear throughout that not just *anyone* could be sexually exploited. This part of the chapter considers the young people's talk about the underlying reasons about how they came to exchange sex. There were four themes arising from the data: their feelings of instability; their exclusion from what is 'normal'; their lack of trusting relationships; and their negative/abusive experiences of sex. In presenting this data their commentary is contrasted with the

professional discourse on vulnerability established within research and policy guidance (see WAG, 2011; Wales Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework – see Clutton and Coles, 2007).

Instability: 'home' and care

All spoke of their lives in terms of instability and insecurity. Several talked of experiencing frequent care placement moves and of an uncertainty about when or why they were moved:

> **Sarah**: this isn't *my* home, it's their home, I don't even know how long I'll be here. You just want to get out, get away you know.

> **Katie**: I was in care and I was moved around here and there and anywhere. So I was always doing runners, and then when I met (name of person deemed to be exploitative) it was having someone who was there for me you know

Implicit within both these statements is an uncertainty about their 'place' and where they belong. This sentiment was echoed across all the young people's accounts and most talked explicitly of having nowhere to call 'home', and in this way they experienced a lack of security and stability. Young people who have lived in local authority care feature highly in statistics of young people who are sexually exploited or who enter sex work (Coy, 2008). Yet there is little within established guidance to acknowledge the role of care in the problem (see WAG, 2011). When care is mentioned, it is often because 'running away or going missing from home or care is often a response to abuse, conflict or rejection' (Clutton and Coles, 2007: 23; see also O'Neill, 2001; Pearce et al., 2002.). This presentation of care as a vulnerability does not reflect or fully 'fit' with the claims made by respondents. For example, some did talk about feeling unsafe in care. Some spoke of fears about physical and sexual abuse in care because of 'stories' from peers. Others talked about negative relationships with peers 'who get you into the wrong thing'. For the most part, there were differences between the way they understood care, and going missing as 'vulnerability factors' and how these are constructed within the practice guidance and literature. For the young people, of importance is the idea of 'home' rather than the accommodation itself. In so

speaking, they invoked an absent sense of safety, security, stability and belonging. Their talk of 'going missing' was related to this absence of 'home'. As we can see in the views of Katie and Sarah above, 'getting out' and 'doing runners' were linked to the instability and insecurity of their care placements. They were not at 'home' and did not want to be where they were so they ran away.

Insecurity and instability were related in the views of some young people to a lack of control or ownership over decisions about their care. As can be noted in Sarah and Katie's accounts above, it is not necessarily the changes in care placements which can result in feelings of insecurity but rather the sense that, like other young people 'looked after', they were not consulted about how and when changes to their care would be made (see, Sennett, 2003).[*] As Katie explains, she was moved to different residential units, 'here there and anywhere', but this was not what *she* wanted. This point is also evidenced in Claire's observations below:

> **Claire:** then I had a male um social worker, and he told me I had to do, the video conference with the police, and I haven't heard anything about that ever since, so I've still got that going around in my mind, and I've asked um oh I've got a new social worker in but the third social worker, told me that she's coming down to visit but now it's been 5 to 6 weeks that I haven't heard from her. Now I've got a new social worker coming in that I haven't seen yet. I'm hoping she'll be an improvement.

We can see in Claire's account that she has little control or ownership over when she will see her 'social worker' – a role performed by seemingly serial practitioners about whom Claire has no knowledge (or recollection) of when they will appear next. As O'Neill (2001) has argued, 'care' can be a vulnerability factor in itself. The point however is made that young people's 'vulnerability' due to instability or insecurity may in part be related to their care experience – but this is unlikely to feature in occupational statements about the management and reduction of risk.

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[*] This forms a substantial part of the discussion in Chapter six and is considered more fully there.

Exclusion

The young people also spoke of experiencing a lack of stability because they had been excluded from what they considered to be the more 'normal' experiences of peers. They spoke of not having been in school like 'normal people', and how they didn't have 'normal homes' or live like 'normal families'. Below, Leah expands upon this point:

> **Leah**: if you go to school that's really important. You know it just keeps you around normal people do you know what I mean?
> Sophie: do you mean like if you are in school, it's like a world that stops you from being completely in a different world?
> **Leah**: yeh yeh it's like rules and people telling you what to do. At the time I didn't think that was a good thing but it is, believe me.

Like Leah, all the young people talked about the importance of staying in school. Typically, the reasons given were not linked to the need for scholastic achievement. Rather, school was considered to be a place that provides 'rules'; that is, it provides boundaries and structure. As Leah explains, school is a place where 'normal people' go. The young people talked about how they had been excluded (or had excluded themselves) from school and stated that had they stayed in school their lives would have been better because they too would have been 'normal'. As can be seen below, this narrative thread of 'being like a normal person' was linked to other areas of their lives as well:

> **Danny**: yeh go to school do it all, get through it and then afterwards you can start living do you know what I mean, you know be clean. Like I've done it all when I was younger, which I shouldn't have done. Like on my 18th I went to a pub and I was like oh I've done all this before, you know (pause) just live life how it's supposed to be, at YOUR AGE, don't try and be older or younger than you are, just live it like you are supposed to live it…..

Danny draws on normative understandings of what it means to be 'a child' (see Lee, 2001). Thus she explains there are age appropriate experiences that you have 'to get through' before you should 'start living' and if a young person engages in 'living' before they are old enough then they are not 'living life how it's supposed to be'. A

sense of some regret about not having age appropriate childhoods was notable in several accounts, as was a consequent sense that they considered themselves to be 'outsiders' excluded from a 'normal childhood' and from the things that normal people do. This can be seen in Danny's talk where she refers to being 'clean'. Living life like a 'normal child' is to draw on a powerful normative sentiment about childhood (see Montgomery, 2009). To live like a 'normal child' is to *be* a 'normal child'. We also see this more emphatically stated by Katie:

> **Katie**: If I had gone into foster care I would have had structure. I think it would have been better, I would have been better, it would have been like a more normal child. You're thrown in the deep end with residential and you've no chance.

Katie considered that being in foster care would have given her the structure of an ordinary family life. As Katie states, she would have been like a 'more normal child'. 'Normal people' were considered by the young people to have structure and predictability. Normal people have 'rules', 'times' and 'boundaries' as a guide to help them, whereas the accounts of the young people suggested they were 'left' to work things out for themselves. There was no one there to help them. It is this which as Katie explains, means that young people with similar backgrounds to her 'have no chance'. Indeed, 'Exclusion from school and unexplained absences from school' features as a risk indicator within Welsh Government policy guidance (WAG, 2011: 16). SERAF practice guidance also states that:

> Children and young people who are not engaged in school, who are isolated from positive social networks and who stay out late spend a large proportion of their time away from appropriate adults and protective networks. They are exposed to situations in which they are accessible to those who wish to harm or exploit them.
>
> (Clutton and Coles, 2007: 23)

The guidance of course uses different language to the young people and there are some evident similarities obtain regards school as a protective setting. Likewise, respondents spoke about how they can be isolated from 'positive social networks' by being outside

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of school. Indeed, policy emphasises the 'risk' of young people outside of everyday structured settings such as school because it leaves young people less visible to the gaze and protection of 'positive nurturing adults' (WAG, 2011: 16). Yet the young respondents spoke a little differently about this, talking of their feelings of being 'outside' of the mainstream where they were without reference to the social conventions that shape practices and subjectivities of what they deemed to be 'normal' lives. They were of course not wholly outside these structures of normalcy but by their sense of exclusion from key primary socialising institutions of family, school and positive peer networks they perceived themselves to be 'outsiders' of a kind: somehow different, without protection or help.

Family and relationships

The young people also talked about instability and insecurity in reference to their relationships with their families and carers and those tasked to help and care for them. Across all interviews were frequent and repeated references to a lack of people to trust and an absence of people to help or care for them:

> **Danny**: like I wanted to get out of there (pause) no one would take me you know

> **Sarah**: I didn't have no one to trust really. There's no one there. No one is going to come and help, you know

As Danny and Sarah explain, they did not have anyone to help them when they needed help. This is similar to findings from Coy's (2008:1415) study into young women selling sex. Coy explains that the young women's lack of trusting relationships gave rise to a sense of uncertainty about themselves and an ontological insecurity. Without a web of relationships they felt invisible. This sense of 'invisibility' is one that characterises these young people's narratives about the absence or inadequacy of relationships with people who care for and care about them. They were invisible because they were of notice to no one. We see this expressed rather forcefully by Claire:

> **Claire**: my mum actually walked in and she didn't notice it (Claire communicating with an exploitative adult on the internet)

Sophie: and she could have but wasn't looking for it or didn't notice it?

Claire: yeh, basically, no one would acknowledge *me,* because as the term says with adults, children are like basically don't speak uh what is it?

Sophie: um, do you mean children are seen and not heard?

Claire: YEH, that's it basically, but it's like the other way round, which is, *don't be seen, don't be heard*

As Claire explains, she was not acknowledged by anyone - she was not visible and indeed she was *not* to be seen or heard – she shouldn't *be* visible. Similarly, across all the interviews, references to not feeling wanted, feeling isolated, feeling unloved and having no one to talk to were prominent, and made manifest the importance of positive relationships that is echoed so clearly within policy and practice discourse. Here, 'family relationships', 'neglect' and 'lack of positive relationship with a protective, nurturing adult' are likewise prominent in official accounts about the nature of vulnerability and risk (see WAG, 2011: 15/16). Indeed, the respondents were arguably 'vulnerable' in two ways in that they had not just practical unmet needs but unmet emotional needs – needs that we all have – to feel visible, acknowledged and to connect to people (Sennett, 2003; Jordan, 2004).

Negative/abusive experiences of sex

Many of the young people talked about negative sexual experiences and confused sexual boundaries as 'important reasons' for their experiences of exchanging sex. We can see in the following passage that Katie was unsure about what was 'normal' sexual activity:

Katie: Family is important you know, like my mum worked in a massage parlour and when I was living with my mum my dad used to shout at me 'your mum's a fucking prostitute, that's what you're going to end up as'. Like I thought it was ok I didn't know any different. That was normal to me you know.

Selling sex was perceived as a possibility by Katie, as something 'normal', because of her home experiences of living with her mother. Katie goes on to say:

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> **Katie:** Sex definitely. That's definitely a reason. Like from a young age I
> was dabbling in sex from when I was quite young and you think oh well this
> isn't such a big deal it cheapens it a bit like it isn't so bad.

Katie's perception is that sex is, or can be, 'cheap' and meaningless, so it cannot be somehow intrinsically 'bad' to experience sex in the way that she does. . Sex is now of little consequence because it is no longer of much value or worth. Yet Katie rather emphatically states that this kind of sex is 'definitely a reason' for her later experiences of exchanging sex. If sex were still 'a big deal' to her then it would matter how she would want to experience it. Other young people also talked about having confused or diminished sexual boundaries because of previous abusive experiences of sex:

> **Hannah**: because of what happened with my dad, uh, you don't really uh
> you think it's just all normal….

Hannah was unsure about what was 'normal' to expect or to feel. She later went on to explain that she did not feel in control of her body and talked about feeling 'uncomfortable' with some kinds of sexual activity but of not feeling 'able to say no'. She thought 'things weren't right' but didn't trust her own feelings about it. Similarly, other respondents spoke about how they had felt 'used', and that sex was something they did not have control over or always associate with pleasure. This point is recognised in the practice literature which notes that 'Children who have experienced sexual abuse have already been through a grooming process which establishes as 'normal' a breaching of appropriate sexual boundaries' (Clutton and Coles, 2007: 20)

Yet, notably, reference to previous experiences of sexual abuse and to negative experiences of sex does not appear to feature as a vulnerability indicator within extant policy guidance. Instead it is couched within 'family history of abuse or neglect' or 'disclosure of sexual or physical assault followed by withdrawal of allegation' (see WAG, 2011: 15/16).[*] There may be good reasons for this. As discussed in Chapter two, early research into 'adolescent prostitution' focused on the links between childhood experiences of sexual abuse or promiscuity and prostitution (see for example Davis, 1978). These studies tended to pathologise young people – in which early 'sexual

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[*] this raises the curious inference that those young people who have made a disclosure but have not later withdrawn it are somehow not at risk?

knowing' was understood to corrupt children and young people, turning them into 'abnormal deviants' (see Cusick, 2002: 234; Brown, 2004; Barrett and Brown, 2002). Such a view was not what the respondents shared or intended. Rather, they considered their early and inappropriate experiences of sex had contributed to an uncertainty about their bodies and about sexual boundaries and this was understood to be an important reason for their later experiences of exchanging sex. This perspective would appear unacknowledged within the policy guidance about what might shape young people's attitudes to sexual experiences. .

The 'blotting out' of the self

So far the chapter has considered the young people's accounts about the underlying reasons about how they came to exchange sex. This was contextualised with brief reference to government guidance on vulnerability factors and related practice literature. It has been shown how the young people spoke of themselves as being vulnerable, stemming from complex causes and compounded through their feelings of instability not least through their exclusion from what they viewed as 'normal', particularly their lack of trusting relationships and negative/abusive experiences of sex. As such, these vulnerabilities were compounded in that they were not recognised; in essence the young people had a lack of significant others whom they could turn to for support and to remedy their lack of security and a lack of recognition of themselves and their vulnerabilities.

The young people spoke of having many experiences that could be understood as 'blotting out their subjectivity and individuality' (O'Connell-Davidson, 2005:55). The young people talked of uncertainty and a lack of consultation with themselves about the decisions being made about their care, leaving them feeling insecure and powerless, uncertain of their ability to exert choices. In this way, they were as Sennett (2003) argues, rendered invisible through a lack of reference to them and their ability to set the terms of their care and support. Moreover, children and young people in the care system who are not permitted to be active agents are to varying extents 'invisible' in the structures of care around them (see Winter, 2010). Furthermore, their lack of stability and security – their feelings of not 'belonging' and a lack of 'home' gave rise to a sense of uncertainty about *themselves*. Without a sense of 'place' and meaningful and positive reciprocal attachments they were invisible, blotted out, because they were without inter-dependent relationships (Jordan, 2004). Indeed, there were, paradoxically, *too many*

people involved with some respondents. These were professionals and carers whose relationships were unlikely to be open-ended or unconditional, but driven more by the canons of child protection and surveillance. In this sense the young people were watched by many but noticed by no one. Thus their sense of social and emotional exclusion impacted on them subjectively. They *felt* themselves to be excluded, to be different, vulnerable, unnoticed. This was reinforced by their perceived lack of people to trust and help them. They were outsiders to 'normal life' and they felt of little notice to people who might care, and to the affect and relationships that 'normal' people take for granted (Coy, 2008). Their powerlessness, of not being seen to have an integrity of self that could assert choices or rights, also stemmed from feeling a lack of 'ownership' over their own bodies. As James (2000) argues, the body is the medium through which people encounter social relations, and, as such, it is intimately connected with subjectivity and an authentic self. The young people's confusion over sexual boundaries and practices was inevitably bound up in their sense of self and their ability to control events, to even control their corporeal selves. Much of this discussion is returned to in the following chapters however it is of note and the contention here that a more nuanced understanding of young people's 'vulnerability' is needed to understand better the links between 'risk factors' and sexual exploitation. Hence, the discussion now moves to young people's 'risky behaviours' in the context of the above sorts of vulnerabilities and how these behaviours can be understood, counter-intuitively, as their attempts to assert themselves as individuals and to regain some power in their lives.

'Risk'

Following on from the discussion above, this part of the chapter considers what the young respondents had to say about risk – the things they did that made them more directly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The data revealed four themes about the way they reacted to adversities in their lives. These comprised 'hiding away', 'hanging out', alcohol and drugs, and sex. It will be shown how young people did not typically consider the things they did as 'risky behaviours', instead these were talked about as ways of coping – albeit sometimes made unreflectively – with how they felt and the situations in which they found themselves.

The young people all talked about hiding themselves away as a means of dealing with the emotional turmoil in their lives. 'Hiding away' was talked about in a physical and in a metaphorical way. In relation to the former, some respondents talked about 'locking themselves in their room', 'staying in' and 'keeping themselves to themselves':

> **Danny:** I was quiet a lot, I stayed in and wouldn't go out, you know the only time I would go out was in the night, and that was stupid because that's where I got into the mess, I don't know, I wouldn't go out in the day, I was only out in the night, going on my own for walks

Being 'isolated from peers and positive social networks' features as a key risk indicator in Welsh Government guidance (WAG, 2011: 16). However, Danny's account reveals something of the contradictions that appeared in several interviews with the young people. Danny tells us she *was* isolated, lonely and needed people to talk to, yet she hid herself away from people. Feeling isolated, she isolated herself further by hiding away or going out alone for walks. In this sense Danny hid her self, no one could 'see' her. More generally, the young people spoke about how people can't be trusted and in consequence they hid the 'inside person' the 'real' person from others. Hiding them-*selves* and their feelings from others was a way of protecting themselves from further upset. As we can see below, Claire hid herself in a different way from her family:

> **Claire**: If the family is ignoring the child, they need someone to talk to and they'll just go online and talk to people they don't know really, just for someone to talk to um,.....if your parents acknowledge that you're locking yourself in your bedroom and not coming out unless you're coming out for food or meeting up with your group, that's the other sort of suspicious way of realising that there is a family problem

Claire hid herself away from her family by staying in her bedroom. But whilst she was hidden at home she was 'out' via the internet – a source of people, often strangers, to talk to and be acknowledged by. An 'excessive use of the internet' (WAG, 2011: 16) is deemed a risk factor but as Claire explains, talking to strangers 'online' was a way of protecting herself in that she was hidden, she *could be anyone* and the people she talked

to did not know who *she* was. Similarly, Nathan talked about how he had not 'come out' about his sexuality because he had no one he trusted to talk to. He explained that it was because of this that he went 'online' to talk to people. The internet provided a way of protecting him because he could selectively disclose aspects of his self without revealing his identity. In this way, for many of the young people, hiding away to cope with feelings of isolation and insecurity also involved strategies for being acknowledged, seen and heard.

'Hanging out'

Some respondents spoke about 'hanging out' with peers yet hiding their subjective self by being relatively hidden within a crowd. They also talked about the importance of 'the group' because they gained a sense of membership and belonging, even if this were conditional and a surface form of belonging (see Wyn and White, 1997). For example, Leah talked about hiding her more vulnerable 'inside' self by aggressive acts to get respect from people:

> **Leah:** it's like there's this inside person and the outside person. And um, how you feel on the inside, you do things, and people might not know. 'Cos you look all hard and that. Like I had a reputation for fighting, so I get respect but then people don't know what you're really like, on the inside.

Leah explains that there is the person she is 'inside' that people *don't* see, and the person she is on the 'outside' that she invites people to acknowledge. Other respondents explained that being with a group means not having to be or show your 'real' self. While there is the risk indicator of being 'isolated from peers and positive social networks' (WAG, 2011: 16), young people who appear to have a 'network' of friends and peers (positive influence or not) can enjoy the bonding capital of social relations (Wyn and White, 1997) yet also retain a sense of isolation. The price of membership of the group is often to endorse values and demonstrate loyalty while sometimes hiding a sense of distance or disdain for group activities. The emphasis upon overt displays of support for group norms (Willis, 1990) allows space to hide an inner self (McMullen, 1987). Yet, their sense of belonging in the group was always conditional:

> **Sarah:** you're out with your group, because there's safety in the group. I'd be hanging out with them 'cos it's a place to be. But then you've got to do things to keep up with everyone, otherwise they might think you're not bothering with them no more. You can't always trust people in your group.

Thus when Sarah describes how 'there is safety in a group' but also says that 'you can't trust people in your group' these are not contradictory claims but part of the nature of group life and how we accommodate to the collective and how we accomplish a careful and sometimes watchful membership (see also Jenkins, 2004:70). In this way, the young people considered themselves (and sought) to be invisible in various senses and they nonetheless wanted to belong, and to feel part of something in some way.

Alcohol and drugs

The young people's accounts also revealed a widely shared invocation of the utility of alcohol and drugs as a means of coping. They spoke of how 'being drunk' or being 'on drugs' gave them confidence to do things they wouldn't normally feel able to do:

> Sophie: Do you mean drinking can mean you don't have control?
>
> **Danny:** Yeh well I don't anyway (laughs) you know, you wake up in someone's house and think oh my god where am I how the heck did I get here you know (pauses) I think it's um, you can feel confident when you're drunk and think oh WHATEVER, nothing is going to happen to me you know (pauses) like I'd never walk down a back-alley when I'm not drunk but when I'm drunk it's just, you know, just you do. Cause you can.

As Danny explains, she can *feel confident* when she is drunk, and she *can* walk down a back-alley when she is drunk. When she is drunk she can feel like nothing bad is going to happen. McMullen (1987) suggests that 'streetwise' young people may have a warped perspective of the control they have over situations, which can lead them to take risks and place themselves in more harmful situations than they otherwise would. Yet the young people didn't talk about getting drunk or taking drugs as a way of 'taking risks' and they did not speak of believing themselves to *be* in control by 'getting high' and getting 'drunk'. Drinking alcohol and taking drugs provided a way of *feeling* in control. As Willis (1990) argues, it is necessary to move away from received and

truncated views of so called 'anti-social' behaviours to consider the alternative meanings these have for those involved. Moreover, young people's lives are 'full of expressions, signs and symbols through which individuals and groups seek creatively to establish their presence, identity and meaning' (Willis, 1990: 1). Thus, as Sarah explains below, alcohol and drugs provide a way of asserting one's presence:

> **Sarah**: Alcohol influences you, you know, so you don't know what you're doing, same with drugs, it means you don't care anymore, you don't know what you're doing and you don't have to think about anything. You think you can do anything.

Drugs and alcohol can be a 'good thing' because they help Sarah to not know what she is doing while providing a way for her to think and feel that she can do anything. As such, they provide a way to *not* have to *think* or *care.* In brief, drugs and alcohol were talked about as providing a way for the young people to escape or forget their feelings and emotions and hide these from themselves and others. Getting high and getting drunk was a way to distance themselves from feelings, situations and relationships, thus providing 'an existential freeing of the self' (Willis, 1990: 102):

> **Kerry:** I think that everyone can be hurt and everyone can feel. It's like it doesn't matter what age you are. Yeh like alcohol if you're feeling bad then you drink too much alcohol and then you don't know what you're doing and you feel like you can do anything. Do you know what I mean? But then you get yourself into, trouble (pause) so I think choices and that, they are always connected to how you feel inside in some way

As Kerry explains, drinking alcohol is a way of coping with how she feels. It might get her into trouble, but it is *a* way of coping. In this sense, the accounts of these young people reinforces the relevance of guidance which states '[t]he relationship between sexual exploitation and substance misuse is a complex one which may include the use of substances as a coping mechanism' (Clutton and Coles, 2007: 23). The young people's use of substances was a way of coping with their feelings. It provided both the opportunity to feel in control of their lives – albeit for a short period – whilst also

enabling them to forget about their feelings of loneliness, isolation and need to feel in control.

Sex and 'promiscuity'

Another way in which the young people sought to 'establish their presence' (Willis, 1990:1) was through sexual encounters. To follow on from observations made earlier in this chapter, whilst sex was experienced by some young people as a 'blotting out' of themselves as subjects, it was also a way of reasserting the self. Danny, below, talks about having sex as a way of coping with her experiences of being afraid to say no to sex:

> **Danny**: that's the important one, how you feel about yourself, that's where I go wrong you know I go around sleeping with everyone just to you know because I just didn't feel, good about myself, after it all happened, I just didn't feel good about myself, it's quite important you know ……………………I dealt with it by sleeping with people, a lot of people, and I think it was because sometimes I was afraid to say no, and then that's how I ended up dealing with it all like, it's about coping you know, like, you're just prepared to with anyone for anything like.

While seemingly paradoxical, negative experiences of sex and of 'sleeping with everyone', was a way for Danny to assert herself as subject. It was a way of feeling in (some) control and of feeling better about herself. Sex for some respondents was a way of dealing with negative feelings and coping with the way they felt inside (see also Lillywhite and Skidmore, 2006; Clutton and Coles, 2007). 'Sleeping around' is a way of being in command of their bodies and them*selves*. Katie provided a similar view:

> **Katie:** you think oh well this isn't such a big deal it cheapens it a bit, like it isn't so bad. I may as well get paid for doing it.

Katie considered that sex had become something that had little intrinsic value. To get 'paid for doing it' was to (re)gain authority or ownership over her experiences of sex by reasserting her own (commercial) value to it. Thus sex was both a way of dealing with negative feelings but was also a way of asserting themselves as individuals. As Hebdige

(1988:31) argues, 'if teenagers possess little else, they can at least own their own bodies. If power can be exercised nowhere else, it can at least be exercised here'. This is intimated in Hannah's reflections below:

> **Hannah:** I was SO lonely at the time, nobody was listening to me or anything like that and I think part of me was like sod it, and that's why, stuff started and I ended up in trouble.

Hannah's sense of social isolation, of having no one who would listen to her, was in her view the spur to asserting her external self - to use her body as a way of being, as a way to become heard and seen. Yet as noted earlier, sexual activity per se or attitudes towards sex does not appear to feature in the guidance as an indicator of risk (see WAG, 2011).

'Drift'

It is perhaps important to note that the behaviours and attitudes discussed above were not claimed by young people as them somehow making 'rational' choices. Rather, they were sharing insights into how they were dealing with their lives without necessarily thinking about particular consequences. As Hannah explains, when she does these things, she isn't invoking some set of formal rationalities (see Shaw and Butler, 1998) in which to weigh up life decisions

> **Hannah:** how you feel about yourself because I, I've, you don't actually really feel, how you feel about yourself, until it's all, it's all over and done with, and you're why did I get myself into all this mess why did I do this why did I do that, so I think that's more or less after, it all happens……..you're not really thinking yeh

Hannah, as claimed all respondents, did not think about the consequences of their actions. Hannah did not think about 'the mess' that she might make. As argued earlier, this is partly because the purpose of doing the things they did was to *not* think (see Willis, 1990). Nonetheless, their existential horizons were not somehow of the moment only and several respondents recognised a problem deferred, as Leanne herself suggests:

> **Leanne:** you end up digging a bigger hole for yourself

Nathan also spoke of a lack of support and feelings of social isolation as undermining resilience (see also Pearce, 2009) and as likely to precipitate the sorts of problems described throughout this chapter:

> **Nathan:** It all depends on, the type of like support of the individual. Like I mean (long pause) the more supported they are even though they have issues it can (pause) they have something else, someone else to turn to, you know. Whereas I think the more, isolated you are the more you do what uh can be taken advantage of. Like the more issues you have the more vulnerable you can be and that's, that. I mean, if someone has just one thing then they should be more likely to be able to cope it's like (pause) I don't know it's like (pause) if you imagine each issue is like a little like, taking a brick out of a WALL, and you have to have something to try and support it support that wall. Um, the more issues you have the more gaps you have and the wall will crumble, um and that's when you fall into it (pause) and I think that's, that's the way you could see it

The tendency to drift into difficulties because of the absence of some significant positive figure(s) is explained by Nathan as a gradual almost inevitable spiral into difficulties and danger:

> **Nathan:** No one addresses the diff like I said the difficulties that they FACE. Um, and, sometimes given that they KNOW something bad is going to happen, their emotions just kind of go, I NEED this, um, because no one's been there to help THEM. They … then they just turn to what's available

The young people acknowledged that this drifting into difficulties may be self-destructive but it is still a way of coping. With a lack of acknowledgement, recognition and *care*, the young people found ways to feel present, and to help themselves in ways and means available to them. As such, Pitts (1997) theory of drift provides a useful way of conceptualising their accounts. Pitts emphasises the significance of young people's

social isolation and their lack of a social network to provide 'support and solace' and 'which might ordinarily serve to prevent their drift into self-defeating or self-destructing behaviour' (Pitts, 1997: 149). It is this isolation set alongside socio-economic disadvantages experienced by many vulnerable young people which can lead them, subjectively, to find ways to 'experience themselves as active agents' within behaviours which might otherwise appear as their actually lacking control or informed choice (see Pitts, 1997: 151; Melrose et al., 1999; O'Neill, 2001). Thus while practice literature makes clear the dangers of not having caring and protective networks (see Clutton and Coles, 2007: 23), it does not quite grasp the ontological insecurities and common-sense rationalities that push young people to seek and assert agency through hiding or hanging out, through risky behaviours and through drift. To cope by not coping at all.

'Risk' as an 'assertion of the self as subject'

So far the chapter has presented respondents' accounts about 'the things that they do', with occasional reference to formal 'risk indicators' within government policy (WAG, 2011). It has been shown that the young people's narratives to some extent seem to 'fit' with these established risk indicators. However, in grasping the salience of these indicators it is important to understand how young people themselves perceive risk and agency and the inter-relationship of both in understanding their actions (see also O'Connell-Davidson, 2005; Pearce, 2009; Phoenix, 2010; Melrose, 2010). In government policy (see WAG, 2011), 'risk' purports to mean 'the things that young people do' which indicate their likelihood of being sexual exploited. To return to the practice literature, risk indicators are defined, in essence, as behaviours which mean young people are 'exposed to situations in which they are accessible to those who wish to harm or exploit them' (Clutton and Coles, 2011: 23). Furthermore, explanations for young people's engagement in 'risky' behaviours is often underpinned by attachment theory or conceptions of youth as a distinct transition phase from dependent childhood to independent adulthood (see for example Foley et al., 2004). It is these formal theories about development which are used to explain young people's actions and seemingly 'illogical behaviours'. Yet, as discussed above, what may appear to be 'risk taking' may be young people's situational responses to complex circumstances. What may *appear* to be illogical was explained by the young people as, to them, their understandable ways of coping (see Wyn and White, 1997).

To return to the theme of invisibility it is once more emphasised that the young people's 'hiding away', 'hanging out', use of alcohol and drugs, and sexual activity were 'experienced as an assertion of the self as subject, not as being transformed into an object' (O'Connell-Davidson 2005: 55). In this sense, the young people's engagement in 'risky behaviours' could be considered as forms of symbolic resistance to their perceived circumstances of isolation and neglect (Hebdige, 1988). By making themselves 'unseen' either physically or metaphorically, they protected themselves from their feelings of being unwanted and ignored. Drugs and alcohol were a way the young people could prove to themselves that they did 'exist' and offered a way for the young people to believe they were in control and powerful. In their talk about drugs and alcohol, they gave the seemingly curious assessment that these things enabled them to feel 'inside out'. They were able to feel hidden away 'inside' and, in trying to mask the way they felt inside, they were also able to feel 'out' and in control. Alcohol thus provided the opportunity to be both visible and invisible; they could 'obliterate' themselves and disappear, whilst also having a way of 'being in and seeing the world' (Willis, 1990: 108). Sex too was considered to be a way of dealing with how they felt and a way of asserting themselves as individuals – with young people's involvement in negative sexual encounters as a perverse means of regaining ownership over their bodies (see for example O'Neill, 2001; Pearce et al., 2002; Moore, 2006; Clutton and Coles, 2007). 'Sleeping around' and getting paid for sex, can be understood as an embodied symbolic gesture towards an assertion of the self. It can be seen as 'throwing your self away before they do it for you' (Hebdige, 1988: 32). The young people's 'risky' behaviour can be understood as both an assertion of agency and a function of their lack of support and care.

Exchanging sex

This final part of the chapter will consider what the young people said about how they came to experience exchanging sex. Their accounts suggest four routes into this: 'brainwashing' (grooming); 'bad' relationships (involving transactional sex); because 'nothing comes for free' (transient relationships); and 'doing it to get what you need' ('pimping' and sex 'work'). As in earlier sections, their views are contrasted with policy and guidance in Wales (see WAG, 2011) in order to consider the relevance of official perspectives in grasping the experiences of the young people.

'Brainwashing': 'sexual exploitation' as grooming

Here I introduce those accounts which would seem to 'fit' with a grooming model of sexual exploitation. Leah and Claire talked about how they had met people they did not know through the internet and this *'ended up'* in them *'doing things they didn't understand'*. Claire describes her experience thus:

> **Claire:** they basically, brainwashing you to get you to like them for what they are pretending to be, and, you end up having intimate conversations and end up getting even more intimate and then you end up doing stuff that you don't want to do
>
> Sophie: and what do you think makes young people (be) at risk, what kind of things?
>
> **Claire**: it's easier for the predator to attack young people, because they don't realise they're being brainwashed and with the compliments they are getting they feel more self-esteem and then something bad happens
>
> Sophie: so if I was saying to a young person or an adult, I'd be saying look, you need to watch out about older people taking advantage of younger people?
>
> **Claire**: yep and making them do things that they didn't really, understand or don't know what's happening and they've got no one to talk to and they just hide themselves away

For Claire, the person she met was, in her view, a 'predator', [*] pretending to be someone authentically caring in order to *'brainwash'* and *'attack'* her by making her feel better about herself; by giving her confidence and raising her self-esteem. There is something about the language Claire uses here which appears as an 'exterior vocabulary', as a learned model which she is drawing on to make sense of her experiences (Hall and Coffey, 2007: 280). Nonetheless, Claire is using it to make sense of her encounters in which there was a process whereby someone had artfully gained her trust 'and then something bad happened', in which she 'ended up' doing things she didn't understand. Claire did not recognise the grooming techniques or the true motives

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[*] The analysis here does not unquestioningly adopt the young people's usage of these terms to describe *the people who exploit* or with whom they exchange sex. I go on to consider the ways the young people talked about them in Chapter six

of the person concerned until too late. Her experience is represented prominently in the current definition of sexual exploitation in Wales, '[t]he vulnerability of the young person and grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent' (WAG, 2011:9). Claire and Leah's accounts also fit well with practice literature on grooming. An adult sex abuser 'cultivates' the young person's vulnerability – 'her low self-esteem, her feeling of helplessness and her need for love and protection' (van Meeuwen et al., 1998). However, in the above instance we can see Claire explain that 'something bad happened' and she had no one to talk to so hid herself away. Rather than, simplistically, the predator 'cultivating' her, she was instead made visible, she became of notice to someone, and felt acknowledged as a person through the relationship and intimacy that obtained (see also Sennett, 2003). That she had no one to talk to when things went 'bad' is a reminder of Claire's pronouncement (see above) that she was not heard or seen by others. It was because of her lack of recognition from family and carers that she was talking to people on the internet – putting her in the way of 'the predator'. Yet also, and importantly for Claire, it was this lack of recognition and acknowledgement which made her vulnerable to the person who exploited her. The vital care and attention she was missing from those around her who *should* provide this was given to her by the predator, and it is *this* which made 'grooming' her possible. Thus the young people's accounts suggest that to fully understand grooming as a form of sexual exploitation, consideration must also be given to the wider context of a young person's relationships and circumstances (see also Phoenix, 2002). Moreover, whilst the grooming model provides *a* way of understanding the encounters of some respondents it does not explain all experiences, as is noted next.

'Bad relationships': 'sexual exploitation' and 'transactional sex'

All the young people talked of their experiences as occurring through 'bad relationships'. These relationships were those in which the respondents considered themselves as 'partners', 'boyfriends' or 'girlfriends' or 'going out with' the person in question. The relationships were considered to be 'bad' because of their conditional character, about which the young people spoke of 'pressure' to 'have to do things':

> **Katie:** it's different for different people isn't it? Like my story. They say
> they love you. They buy you things. And then once you're under the

thumb you're fucked. They say oh I do these things for you and you have to do things for them. Otherwise they might leave.

…

Katie: He looked after me. He gave me everything. Everything I didn't have you know. I was safe there. When he knew that he changed. He was like oh come on now you've got to start pulling your weight, you know help him out.

As Katie explains, sex was a condition of the relationship, and exchanging sex with this boyfriend to 'help him out' was her expected contribution. In some ways this story is similar to the experience of grooming discussed above, and finds some congruence with the policy guidance which states '[t]he perpetrator always holds some kind of power over the young person, increasing the dependence of the victim as the exploitative relationship develops (WAG, 2011: 13). As Katie bluntly explains: 'they say they love you'. 'They buy you things'. 'And then once you're under the thumb you're fucked'. Katie's 'boyfriend' was someone who made her feel safe. He was someone who gave her the care and attention she didn't have from others, and this made her dependent on him. Katie also explained how this dependency was increased when he supplied her with drugs for her drug addiction. Many of the young people's accounts also contained this similar sense of feeling coerced to have to exchange sex or to take part in sexual activities, either with their partners or on their behalf – 'to pull their weight' or 'help them out'. This fits with the WAG definition which begins by stating '[c]hild sexual exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of children and young people into taking part in sexual activities (WAG, 2011: 9)'

However there are some important aspects of the young people's experiences which cannot be accounted for solely within the formal definitions offered in regard to the grooming model. While respondents described manipulation and control within their relationships they did not describe being 'brainwashed' in the way that, for example, Claire spoke of above. Thus not all the young people's narratives invoked the notion of being 'powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships' (WAG, 2011: 9). They talked about being aware they were the objects of controlling and manipulative activities, but they explained they were made to feel 'special', 'safe' and 'wanted' and these were sufficient reasons why they remained in such relationships. There are similarities within such rationales with Williams' (1999: 20) idea of 'transactional sex',

defined as 'sex with one person, consistently, in exchange for economic or 'in-kind' support'. However, as O'Connell-Davidson (2005: 56/7) is careful to note, transactional sex is not necessarily exploitative and there are 'no firm boundaries between sex for economic gain or personal advantage, and sex for its own sake (or for love or duty). That said, the concept of 'transactional sex' provides a useful way of understanding the young people's descriptions of events in that these relationships were meeting some of their needs. It was because of this that the young people accepted the conditions put on them. For example Leanne explained that 'anything is better than nothing' and that she 'just wanted to be wanted'. It is important to note that they were not 'blind' within these exploitative relationships or unaware of the motives of others (Phoenix, 2002). Yet leaving the relationship presented them with few and sometimes grim alternatives – a return to being insecure, unsafe, isolated, unwanted. These relationships went some way in their feeling safer, wanted, acknowledged and more secure. Consequently, the young people exchanged sex because otherwise, as Katie explained, the person 'might leave'. Sex, and the expectation to perform certain sexual acts, was understood by some of the young people to be a condition 'worth' accepting. Again, the theme of (in)visibility offers a means of grasping their worlds and can be seen in the following extract from Nathan's interview about vulnerabilities in relation to sexuality:

> **Nathan**: ……..it's really <u>really</u> difficult to know how to describe it because um, because of the lack of choice and thing, with um especially if you're closeted because um, it's very hard to start up a conversation with a person with the same type of orientation and. It's, it kind of leads you into accepting things (pause) which you wouldn't normally if there was more people because (pause) you're alone because you've got a secret and you can't tell people about it (pause) so whoever comes along and is able to deal with it whether that be a person who is just going to use you, the fact that you can tell them and you can speak to them (pause) that uh kind of leads you open to (long pause) because it relieves one kind of *strain* on you and you they've got that little bit of control over you, which means they can *twist things* and it can go down-hill from

Like Claire and Katie, Nathan is describing how he became of notice to someone. He further explains how being able to share his secret about his sexuality enabled him to

share *who he really was.* He went from being 'closeted' – in which aspects of his identity were hidden – to being open and visible to another. Someone who could accept it and 'deal with it'. Thus, Nathan became 'seen' by a specific other but in so doing he also became exposed to exploitative consequences. Drawing on Sennett's work (2003: 117/8), Nathan became visible to someone. He lost control over when and how he became visible, and the person *in on the secret* had control over him by threatening to expose him and make him feel ashamed. Yet as Nathan explains, it was important for him to share his feelings, to make his sexuality a reality, and to not feel alone. In doing so he was prepared to accept being 'used' because the relationship was, in some way, meeting a need to feel recognised and acknowledged. Nathan, as with the other young people describing similar experiences, was exchanging sex for having some particular need met.

The young people's experiences within these exploitative relationships stemmed from their being treated as both subject and object. Of having more emotional needs met while at the same time engaged in more objectified exchanges of sex. Research into why young people become sexually exploited, has shown that there are 'push' and 'pull' factors (see for example O'Neill, 2001; Taylor-Browne, 2002; Drinkwater et al., 2004). There are of course many reasons why young people become involved and remain in exploitative relationships and these need to be grasped and acted upon by those seeking to help young people. But underlying this is the subjective self with vulnerabilities and needs which re-frames the objectification of sexual exchange as somehow acceptable. For example Nathan talked about 'repeating a cycle of being used' because it is 'what you know'. The young people didn't leave the relationships when these became 'twisted' or went 'down-hill', because, as Sarah explained poignantly, it was *'an uncomfortable comfortableness'*. The young people already considered themselves to be ignored, different, uncared for and without support. These bad relationships mirrored and perpetuated these feelings, yet also provided *some* perceived form of acknowledgement and security.

To define these respondents experiences as instances of 'transactional sex' may appear clinical and distanced. Yet it brings sharp focus to the notion of needs being met in exchange for sex and in doing so implicitly acknowledges young people's agency within these exchanges. This is not to suggest that exploitation was somehow absent or in some way linear and uni-directional (see Montgomery, 1998; O'Connell-Davidson, 2005). The young people's accounts clearly indicated that these were controlling,

violent, and physically, sexually and emotionally abusive relationships. At the same time, however, these relationships were meeting a need, and the young people explained how their relationships were the least worst option to them at that time.

'Nothing comes for free': 'sexual exploitation' and 'transient relationships'
I now discuss those experiences in which the young people described a much more limited sense of their own agency, in which the exchange of sex was talked about as somehow expected or inevitable:

> **Danny**: I've woken up and been in really dangerous situations like been taken down to (place name) and stuff. And then you can't say no can you. Because you've taken their drink and they just think you're drunk so they do it anyway.

Danny's account was not untypical in that others spoke of exchanging sex as something that was expected., A point made by other young respondents, as can be seen in what Danny says above, is that there was both 'a troubled sense of ownership over their bodies' (Coy, 2008: 1415) and a feeling of relative powerlessness over their circumstances. Thus Danny explains that she was 'taken' places, and has 'woken up and been in really dangerous situations'. As with others she depicts a subjectivity bound up in uncertainty, powerlessness, and a necessary 'blotting out' of herself in order to get by (O'Connell-Davidson, 2005: 55). A similar sentiment can be seen in Katie's comments below:

> Sophie: ok so it's not about needing a place to stay it's more about the place where you stay?
> **Katie**: oh that too, you know you need somewhere to stay and people put you up but you learn quickly that nothing comes for free

Similarly, other young people spoke of 'obviously having to do things' as a price to pay for whatever it was they got. As discussed previously, James (2000) argues that the body is the medium through which people encounter social relations, and, as such, it is intimately connected with our subjectivity. The reality for some respondents was that their bodies were a currency that they were expected to use in return for *whatever* it was

that was given in exchange. The official guidance recognises the nature of power and control within exploitative relationships and the potential for this to deepen as the relationship persists (WAG 2011: 13). Notably, the accounts provided in this study did not always invoke notions of more durable or 'developed relationships' as in the above guidance. The young people also talked of people they met more fleetingly, 'friends of friends', people who were loosely connected to their group, or people in the houses in which they would wake. There is relatively little of the temporal nature of 'grooming' in these accounts but often a more transient series of encounters in which sex was the expected if not unavoidable currency of exchange. As we see next, there were other contexts in which respondents talked of exchanging sex in transient encounters but through choice.

'You're doing it to get what you need': 'sexual exploitation' as 'pimping' and sex work
Here, the young people's accounts intimate notions of choice and control in relation to the exchange of sex.

> **Nathan**[*]: basically a previous friend was having issues when their parents were supposed to have hit um it was all reported to social services but the social service didn't um found it quite difficult to engage with the family and stuff and because of it um they were, trying to pimp themselves out so that they could avoid going home, um ok so stuff like that

> **Katie:** After I finished with (boyfriend) I had (drug) relapses and half a year on it (selling sex) and didn't see it as work. I felt I was in control because I was doing it for me this time not for others. It was what I had done before for money you know I thought it was normal. I haven't done it for a long time now … you're doing it for money – you're doing it to get what you need. Like even with your friends you can't keep skanking off them to help you out with anything because then no one will be your friend in the end. You need money for everything in life

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[*] In this extract, Nathan is talking about 'a friend' but later clarified that he was talking about his own experiences

Nathan and Katie talk about exchanging sex as a way of dealing with their circumstances. Nathan needed to avoid going home, so exchanged sex for somewhere to stay. Katie needed money for drugs and so exchanged sex for money to buy them. They did not talk of being 'coerced' or manipulated; they talked of 'pimping' *themselves*, 'doing it' for *themselves*, and of being 'in control'. Without resorting to some individualising reductionism, exchanging sex in this way can be seen from their point of view as an active assertion of agency to meet needs: it is an assertion of the self. To deny this would be to deny the young people's experiences as they perceive them. In so stating, they should not be seen as somehow rational actors making rational choices within a social vacuum free of history and context (Shaw and Butler, 1998: 184; Pitts, 1997; Moore, 2006). Nor had the respondents sought to convey they were making a 'career' of exchanging sex (see for example Davis, 1978). Rather there were moments when selling sex was an option to cope with some difficulty (O'Neill, 2001). This point finds some resonance with the views of O'Connell Davidson who argues that:

> many children – especially those who live in difficult circumstances – do nonetheless evaluate the choices they face on the basis of knowledge and experience … children, as much as adults, can and do act upon the basis of their subjective evaluation of the different options available to them
>
> (2005: 54).

This more dynamic approach to choices and motives acknowledges the nature of some degree of agency by young people. In so doing, it directs attention toward the 'conditions of consent' and why it may be that some young people decide to exchange sex (see Pitts, 1997). Yet 'sexual exploitation' is cast by guidance as explicitly underpinned by coercion or manipulative 'grooming' as *the* explanation for why and how young people come to exchange sex:

> the grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent
>
> (WAG, 2011:9).

With such an emphasis on 'grooming', and the explicit denial of young people's ability to provide consent, how, for example are the specific experiences of Katie and Nathan to be recognised given they do not 'fit' this discourse? One conclusion could be that they were not sexually exploited as they themselves promoted the selling of sex. Such a view would seem to be wholly implausible and we might agree with Montgomery (1998:149) in her assessment of similar conundrums related to her own research with children involved in exchanging sex that the children were 'undoubtedly exploited' and could not be construed as engaged in anything other than harmful activities[*]. Yet, as argued in Chapter two, it is a view that has excluded the problem of children and young people exchanging sex from definitions of child abuse, one which, arguably, was implicit within policy and legislation in relation to this issue until 2009.

'Sexual exploitation' = grooming?

Whilst the young people spoke of making choices, of exchanging sex in ways that do not fit within conceptions of grooming, the sentiment of sexual exploitation was present within their talk. They did use the term themselves yet they talked about being 'groped', 'degraded', 'damaged', 'completely fucked up', 'abused', and 'used'. This can be seen in Sarah's comments below:

> **Sarah:** You know secret diary of a call girl you know the TV programme have you seen it?
>
> Sophie: um, yeh I've not actually seen but I know of it, I've seen the adverts yeh,
>
> **Sarah:** yep, right well programmes like that shouldn't be allowed because they influence people you know make them think that's what it's like for us. Bollocks! It's *not* (her emphasis) like that. You think you'll be earning top dollar you know. Like people watch it and think oh yeh that looks like a great job, she makes it look like a one night stand sort of thing, like it's all lovely and she's getting respect. It's nothing like that. It's TV influencing that. It's dirty horrible men disrespecting you. Down back alleys, making you do stuff ……….. Pressure that's a big thing. People would pressure you into doing stuff that you didn't want to do. You'd get blokes, like um how it

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[*] This is taken from Montgomery's discussion about her case study of children involved in prostitution in Thailand

is supposed to work is that they give you the money upfront right, and then you'd get people who would say no I'll pay you after, and they'd pressure you into doing stuff. They'd know you were an addict and they'd say oh come on its late I might be the last one you're going to get tonight and then you'll have the money, or they'd say if you do this I'll give you more money at the end, and then they'd change the money you know the cost and use the drugs as bait and you'd end up doing it for them.

Sarah explains how she experienced 'pressure', and was made 'to do stuff'. The 'blokes', the 'dirty horrible men' with whom she exchanged sex, undoubtedly exploited her need to get money for drugs. Similarly, as discussed above, other young people described a complex and layered experience of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Coercion, manipulation and pressure formed part of their experiences. The young people talked about 'the things going on', a turn of phrase representing the vulnerabilities and risks underpinning how it is that they came to exchange sex which, in turn, made more complicated or further damaged their circumstances. For example, for some young people their experiences had also made them drug dependent, or had left them with little support or a place to stay. They emphasised the lack of help in their lives or how they no longer wanted the help that was offered. One way of coping was to exchange sex for unmet needs. In this way, as Phoenix (2002:362) argues, the 'reasons' underpinning young people's involvement in the exchange of sex can become 'the effects' of it'. Sarah (above) considered herself to be choosing to 'sell sex' but yet she did not suggest or talk about this as if it were somehow a 'good' choice. Similarly, Nathan explained:

Nathan: it's not like it's all going to just stop all of a sudden, and people get used to that type of way of living and even though, you sometimes *hate it*, with a passion…

They perceived that no one could or would help, and spoke of being 'unable to get help' or having no one to 'make it all stop'. They were in subtle and various ways already and made further 'invisible' to those who might or should help. Thus, their needs and circumstances were exploited 'in a sexual way'. They may have been making decisions to exchange sex and/or they may have decided to stay in 'bad relationships' in order to

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cope practically and emotionally, but they were still being taken advantage of. Yet this sense of contradiction – of using agency to consent to sex whilst being exploited – a capacity to make decisions even though they were sometimes 'bad' decisions seems explicitly discounted in guidance, particularly for older teenagers aged 16 and 17 where it is observed:

> A young person who has been subject to a complex pattern of life experiences including sophisticated grooming and priming processes that have brought them to a point where they are at risk of, or are abused, through CSE, are often not able to recognise the exploitative relationships and situations they are in. They may even present as being in control.
>
> (WAG, 2011: 10).

Within the definition of sexual exploitation and throughout the official guidance young people are positioned as being unable to consent and it is particularly reasserted that young people of 16 and 17 cannot consent as they are not 'in control' of events (WAG, 2011: 11). There is no suggestion here that the young people were making rational considered choices within some ideal moral and practical calculus – were such to exist. Neither is it suggested that the young people should be considered as somehow 'heroic survivors' (see for example Williams, 2010), which somehow underplays a more layered grasp of complexity in favour of a more individualised moral discourse of forbearance and courage. Nonetheless, it must be noted that young people can and do 'consent'. Their accounts considered in this chapter suggest just that and provide some insight into the paradoxical and anomalous circumstances that permeate the exchange of sex. However, as Melrose (2012) considers, the discursive power of 'sexual exploitation', underpinned by the concept of grooming and of powerless victims, means that only certain routes into the exchange of sex are now recognised (see also Phoenix, 2002; Pearce, 2006; Moore, 2006).

Some of the young people may not have been groomed, they may not have been coerced or had any involvement with a 'pimp' or 'boyfriend'. They may themselves have decided to exchange sex. Yet all the young people talked about exchanging sex as *people taking advantage* – of them or of a need they had. They were subject to abuse and were without other means of support. The point here is that they may have been exerting agency yet they spoke of themselves as being taken advantage of. The nature of

this consent needs to be understood, for it is only in so doing that recognition can also be given to why and how young people sometimes 'exercise it… whilst on other occasions they do not' (Prout, 2000: 16). Just as the young people's choices cannot be understood to have been made in a 'social vacuum' (Shaw and Butler, 1998: 184), neither can their experiences of exchanging sex be considered in isolation from other aspects of their lives (see also Warrington, 2010: 70).

Returning to the theme of (in)visibility, sexual exploitation can be understood in regard to a complex relationship between a young person's common-sense understanding of their own social world, their perception of and assertion of their agency, and an acknowledgement (by some other) of them as both subject and object. The young people considered themselves, their inner sense of identity and needs, as invisible to family, carers and those tasked to help them who they believed saw them more as 'object', as a problem status requiring protection and oversight. They likewise considered themselves as excluded or invisible within key institutions. Thus they described many experiences which 'blotted out' their sense of subjective self and individuality (O'Connell-Davidson, 2005: 55) whereby, paradoxically, they sought to make themselves 'invisible' in various ways in order to cope and to hide their feelings. It was within these often contradictory and countervailing categories of a subject / object experience that sexual exploitation occurs and was made sense of by respondents.

Concluding Comments

There were four different ways in which young people accounted for their involvement in exchanging sex. Whilst 'grooming' features as one way of making sense of sexual exploitation, this discourse employed within much current policy and practice in Wales does not fully capture or recognise the ways in which the young people made sense of their experiences. Yet neither does a rational choice model fully account for their actions, for as McMullen (1987) suggests, exchanging sex is more complex than a straight decision to meet an economic need. There are other social and economic factors such as identity, attitudes towards sex, and material or economic needs which form part of any involvement.

Sexual exploitation was understood by the young people to be preventable. It is something that 'doesn't just happen'. The young people perceived that had *they* and their needs been acknowledged by significant others, they would not have been in these sexually exploitative situations. Instead they perceived themselves as vulnerable and

without care and in order to cope they exchanged sex. This, in their view, was either inevitable, or a necessary least worse 'choice'. It became 'an uncomfortable comfortableness' for some. Yet it is important to acknowledge that consent and their ability to provide it was a feature of a number of accounts. Yet this is not much recognised within child sexual exploitation legislation which is underpinned by a grooming model. Thus it can exclude or obscure some young people's experiences and by extension some young people themselves.

The current discourse of sexual exploitation tends to simplify the issue to one in which the experiences of individual young people become homogenised and the differences in their experiences 'are virtually obliterated by the fact of their exploitation' (Melrose, 2012: 4). They *cannot* in some informed or authentic sense consent ergo they must have been forced into it. Hence the 'real' problem of sexual exploitation is limited to 'men who exploit' and not the social conditions and problems that young people face (Phoenix, 2002: 359). Yet it is the latter upon which the young people focused their reflections. As such, the young people as real subjective actors become invisible within policy and guidance in three ways. First, the complexities of their emotional and social worlds are not well illuminated by the grooming discourse if at all. Secondly, their different individual circumstances are obscured by the broad cloak of 'exploitation'. Thirdly, their subjective capacity for agency and choice is considered inauthentic and falsely informed. The problem of sexual exploitation is thus simplified and thereby permits the promise of 'easy solutions' (Day, 2009: 1). Solutions which, as later chapters suggest, may not help young people, and worse, may compound their difficulty. Before then, this thesis now turns to consider the perspectives of the professionals on the problem of child sexual exploitation.

Chapter five

Making sense of child sexual exploitation: professionals' Perspectives

Introduction

This chapter will consider the ways that the different professionals who took part in this research 'made sense' of child sexual exploitation. More specifically, it will address their understandings about what this problem is, and how children and young people come to be involved in it. As with the views of young people, there is a paucity of research involving professionals who are not 'specialists' in this area of work, but who nonetheless have a responsibility to identify, refer and intervene. 'Child sexual exploitation' has only relatively recently been established within policy (see WAG, 2009; WAG, 2011). As discussed in Chapter two, this public issue, and the subsequent portrayal of children and young people within it, has been constructed in different ways within policy since its first mention in parliament in the late 19th century. It has evolved, within policy, from an issue of crime and 'child prostitution' – in which a child or young person was considered to be criminally responsible – to one of social care – in which a young person is now depicted as unable to consent and is thus a victim of abuse (DoH, 2000; WAG, 2011; Brown and Barrett, 2002; Pearce, 2009). The issue has been referred to in the literature as a 'hidden' problem. Recent research has repeated concerns about the lack of awareness of child sexual exploitation amongst practitioners, and under-identification of the problem is claimed to be high (see Clutton and Coles, 2008; Pearce, 2010; Barnardo's, 2011). As I have discussed in Chapter two, there are also concerns about professionals' 'subjective' interpretations of young people's risk in which young people's sexual exploitation may be 'missed' because they are more likely to be perceived as being troublesome rather than 'in trouble', or, they may be perceived as making 'lifestyle choices' and so less in need, or less deserving of support (Williams, 2010; Phoenix, 2002; 2010; O'Connell-Davidson, 2005; Pearce, 2009; 2010). Yet, to repeat, there is little empirical research about the awareness and understandings amongst professionals who are not 'specialists', but who arguably have a significant role in both tackling the problem and of managing relationships with young people

when they do (see Jago et al., 2011; Melrose, 2012 for rare examples of this). We are told that they do not always refer and that awareness of the issue is low (see Williams, 2010; Pearce 2010), but such claims been based primarily on occupational case-notes or from assessment data (see Clutton and Coles, 2008; Barnardo's, 2011). This chapter allows us to hear from some of these professionals.

To reiterate, the overarching aim of this chapter is to consider the different professionals' understandings of this social problem. How they position and understand young people's involvement in it, and what they understand the problem itself to be. Whilst the intention is to also consider the professionals' accounts in relation to what we have already heard from the young people, the structure of this chapter is necessarily inverted. Whilst the young people were making sense of their personal experiences, the professionals talk abstractly about young people and sexual exploitation. To make clear from the outset, the ways the professionals made sense of why young people come to be sexually exploited is intrinsically bound to their talk about what sexual exploitation *is*, and forms part of the way they made sense of the aetiology of the problem. Furthermore, they are making sense of 'sexual exploitation' via a policy framework with a particular 'discursive formation' of the problem (Melrose, 2012: 158), something which they were not unaware of themselves.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the different ways the professionals conceptualised 'child sexual exploitation'. They talked of this problem as a form of grooming; occurring through abusive relationships; peer bullying; an outcome of concerning 'party' lifestyles; and as young people exchanging sex to meet a need. In the second part of this chapter there is an exploration of the ways in which professionals' talk about 'risk': what they considered might make a young person be 'at risk', and the ways they made sense of young people's risky behaviours. Finally, the chapter examines their reflections about young people's 'vulnerability', and the ways that professionals 'search for reasons rather than causes' (Cusick, 2002: 236) to make sense of why it is that some young people come to experience sexual exploitation. It should be noted that sexual exploitation, risk and vulnerability are abstract categories which while separable are interlinked and somewhat interchangeable. Although some distinctions are made between them in policy and practice literature, their positioning in this chapter is based upon the way the professionals grasp these terms in relation to work contexts and cases. It is this indexical nature of occupational assumptions that has formed the organising principle.

I continue to develop (in)visibility as a key analytical theme, exploring in particular the ways in which current policy constructions of 'child sexual exploitation' can serve to render young people invisible. Accordingly, the chapter considers how 'grooming' as an operational model can be problematic for professionals, as it does not provide them with a discourse with which they are able to fully explain and account for how it is that young people come to experience sexual exploitation. A number of professionals displayed some confusion and uncertainty, in interview, as to what the problem of child sexual exploitation is; some talked directly about this confusion, recognising it as such even as it inhibited their understanding. Furthermore, young people's agency is not much recognised by these professionals, suggesting that an explanation of child sexual exploitation underpinned by grooming does not encourage or easily enable them to grasp this. In short, my central claim is that the grooming model, applied as the explanation for sexual exploitation, occludes other experiences and forms of sexual exploitation, and by extension some young people themselves, not least because it denies and conceals young people's agency.

In order to set the scene for their accounts and the analysis which follows, the key characteristics of the purposive sample of professionals are set out below.

Participants

I use the term 'professionals' as an inclusive descriptive category whilst recognising they are not an homogenous group of participants. They represent a range of occupational backgrounds (see appendix one for information on this), thirteen were male, twelve were female, and their experiences of working with young people spanned from between 35 years to eight months. To reiterate, the professionals involved in this research were not 'specialist' in that they did not deal with the issue of child sexual exploitation as a key part of their role. However, they represent the range of professions listed within Wales (and other UK relevant) policy and practice guidance as playing a key part in the identification, referral and prevention of child sexual exploitation (see WAG, 2011:15). Indeed it is this shared feature of their diverse occupations and experiences with young people that makes them recognisable as a *research set*. It was not the intention to make some comparative analysis between different professionals but rather to explore their shared and varied understandings of the phenomenon. Thus for example, all the professionals interviewed had an awareness of the term child sexual exploitation and understood themselves to have worked directly or indirectly with at

least one young person they considered as having been sexually exploited. This was itself a useful finding, and confirmed the relevance of their selection for the study. Finally, and important to note, whilst participants referred interchangeably to 'children', 'young people', 'youths', and 'youngsters', they clarified that their accounts were primarily concerned with teen-aged young people.

Child sexual exploitation

Within and across the participants' accounts were different and multiple understandings about the ways that young people may come to exchange sex. These are captured under the following themes: 'grooming' and coercion, 'conditions and rewards' in abusive relationships, peer bullying, 'party' lifestyles, and exchanging sex to meet a need.

'Grooming' and coercion

A prominent theme across all accounts was the notion of 'grooming', or some reference which implied their adherence to a grooming model of child sexual exploitation. Some of the professionals spoke in a way that shared similarities to the grooming model suggested by van Meeuwen et al. (1998). These professionals spoke of how young people – typically girls – were at risk of being 'sucked in' and 'groomed' by adult men who were looking to take advantage of their vulnerability. Carla's explanation is typical of these sorts of accounts:

> **Carla (children's residential care):** when a *man* or whatever well cos it's mainly the girls really isn't it but he says oh I love you, that's all he's got to say even if he don't mean it, and he just wants to take advantage but if he says that and shows a bit gives her a cuddle or *something* warm which is something they haven't had for goodness knows HOW LONG from their families, that they're sucked in straight away, and they'll do anything then for that person

Young people were understood to be at risk because they are 'brainwashed', 'manipulated' and unable to see the calculated intent behind the emotional warmth that is being given. Others spoke of grooming in a way that is more suggestive of the 'sophisticated grooming and priming processes executed by abusing adults' considered by Clutton and Coles (2007: 8). Participants spoke of clever, systematic, targeted

exploitation in which single men or groups of men employ a number of grooming techniques over a period of time. This is summarised well by Andrea:

> **Andrea (healthcare):** there were things like from being really nice and paying my phone contract to, I'm only allowed to use my phone when he's got access because he pays for my phone, I'm only allowed to use it when he can see who I've called and read my texts, so you get those controlling things, and then, the last thing was he then introduced her to friends, so he was now *ready to share her*

'Grooming' itself was talked of as 'giving young people some of the good stuff' – such as affection, attention, security, money, drink, and drugs – whilst employing a gradual increase in control in order to use the young person for sex. This shares similarities with those young people who spoke in a similar way to that of the grooming model. They also spoke of being 'brainwashed', and of not recognising the ulterior motives of the predators until it was too late. Many professionals spoke of young people in situations in which they would be closely connected to people they didn't know very well: such as friends of friends, family acquaintances, neighbours' friends, step-family members. These connections were understood to make young people *accessible* to exploiting males, whilst also giving *legitimacy* to the exploitative relationships. This point, whilst acknowledged within literature relating to child (sexual) abuse, and indicated within Welsh Government guidance (see WAG, 2011:14), is interestingly not much developed within the literature on sexual exploitation (see Kelly et al., 1995). These young people may know their abusers, their abusers may be family members, and/or their families may be aware of the exploitation. However, as with the young people, grooming was not the only way the professionals accounted for sexual exploitation, as the chapter now reveals.

'Conditions and rewards': abusive relationships
Participants also talked of sexual exploitation in a similar way to the young people's accounts of 'bad relationships'. They spoke of sexual exploitation as occurring through 'dodgy', 'unhealthy', and 'dysfunctional' relationships: relationships deemed to be exploitative because they are controlling, manipulative and abusive, but which are also

meeting some of the young person's needs. Faye's comments below bear striking similarities to some of the young people's accounts:

> **Faye (third sector):** some of them were just really plain scared uh, that maybe some of the guys they were with, or boyfriends were incredibly violent and they didn't know what else to do so maybe they got into the drugs, and they, somebody had come up to them and been like OH I'll help you and then been uh acted really friendly to them, and they thought they were great and they would look out for them and suddenly, when they didn't even realise *how* it had turned into this really whole twisted thing where, they were working and giving them the money and actually the guy was going to kill them, and they'd cut off everything with their family and they didn't have anywhere else to go, so it was somehow better to be with *somebody* (pause) even though you knew what they were going to do to you (pause) somebody who, well what else could you do

Typical of other professionals' accounts, Faye speaks in a way that is congruent with elements of the policy discourse of sexual exploitation, in that these speak of young people's manipulation and coercion into the exchange of sex (see WAG 2011:9). However, as with a number of the young people, they did not speak of grooming in the sense that they believed the young person to be unaware of the exploitative relationship. They talked of how the exchange of sex within these abusive relationships formed part of a taken for granted aspect in a young person's life (see also O'Neill 2001). They spoke of how there is a combination of 'conditions and rewards' and so considered that these relationships were meeting some of a young person's needs, albeit in an abusive way. They may nevertheless be manipulated and coerced into exchanging sex, but they were understood to be staying because it was *a way* of meeting their needs. Yet this aspect of sexually exploitative relationships is not much recognised within policy guidance and practice discourse (see WAG, 2011; also Scott and Sidmore, 2006; Clutton and Coles, 2007)

Peer bullying
Sexual exploitation was also conceptualised as a form of sexual bullying between young people. This shared some similarity to their reflections about grooming and abusive

relationships but was distinctive in that it was talked of as occurring between young people. As with Polly's account, sexual exploitation was understood to not always occur in adult/child relationships:

> **Polly (youth work):** I mean it is a form of bullying isn't it, amongst the young people, um although I'm just talking about between young people and I'm sure there are adults that come in and, you know, take advantage of young people … but it's negative peer-relationships that come out of when young people hang around in groups … and there is a problem when they are having sex not because they want to but because they feel they have to

As with Polly, other respondents talked of grooming and of the coercion, manipulation and control within peer relationships in which young people may be persuaded to exchange sex, or to undertake sexual activities. They did not however talk of 'gangs' or organised groups of young people, rather they spoke of concerns about the existence of this form of sexual bullying amongst young people *in general*:

> **Matthew (youth work):** REALLY, you know, the filming, the sort of introducing to friends and sort of things like this, you know, it's the thing on phones isn't it now, and they just film each other doing, and you NEVER want to look at a young person's phone you've just got to go, *not interested not even going to look at the screen*, you know the last thing I want to do is get a glimpse of anything like that

The discourse of sexual exploitation based on grooming does not easily recognise peer exploitation because the emphasis seems placed mainly on 'abusing adults' or 'older boyfriends' (see also Pearce, 2009). Current policy, where peer exploitation is mentioned, refers only to gangs or organised groups of young people, or young people who 'recruit' their peers for fear of their own exploitation (see WAG, 2011: 13/14). However, all the young people involved in this research spoke of an age difference when they referred to grooming or to abusive relationships. When they did make reference to peers, it was in their talk about exchanging sex in transient relationships. Something marginally similar to that suggested within the professionals' reflections discussed below.

'Party' lifestyles

Participants also spoke of young people's entry into sexual exploitation being linked to group membership and parties. They talked of concerns about young people gathering together and the resulting sexually exploitative relationships or exchanges:

> **Matthew (youth work):** There is this sort of, this thing that sort of plays itself out every Friday Saturday night, where, they just sort of get drunk and again, it's sort of concerning now because it's just getting more and more, I don't know why it's kicking off down there again, and the girls go off down there, and then they sort of egg all the boys on, you know shouting, and the girls don't necessarily get involved in the fighting, but certainly they are encouraging it, and that's a big sort of part of it as well, because it's exciting, it's something to do, but then they are all these sort of by-products of it as well, the boys sort of then, they just seem to sleep with everybody, different people will have slept with somebody else and they'll be, who are you with this week and it will be a different person

In a similar way, others talked about young people looking for 'excitement and fun' being invited to parties with or by adult men. This was talked about in a similar way to grooming – only instead of this occurring between individuals, it involves groups of men grooming young people through parties. As Annette explains:

> **Annette (third sector):** That was you know that would be the way *in* you know getting them to come, cannabis, getting them oh let's have a party and lets all share cannabis, let's have a party next week and have a bit more cannabis, lets party next week and have cannabis and alcohol, and lets have, and lets all be friends together, and then de de de de de you know.

This notion of gradual ensnarement shares some similarities with some of the young people's accounts; those in which participants' invoked notions of transient relationships with people they met fleetingly, or who were 'friends of friends', in which they 'ended up' in houses or with other places with people they felt they had to exchange sex with.

Exchanging sex to meet a need

There were also accounts, albeit few, in which professionals talked of young people exchanging sex to meet a need, in which they spoke of the exchange of sex as a 'transaction', as 'prostitution', and as 'renting'; of young people 'doing something sexual *for something*'. As with many of the young people's reflections, exchanging sex was considered by some professionals as a response or a way of coping with their circumstances and unmet needs:

> **Kevin (policing):** the reality is, if your life is, not to put too fine a point on it, *shit,* and you've got nothing and no one, and someone buys you things, then you would think this isn't so bad. This is maybe why, some appear to turn to prostitution, because they have something that that men, boys, teenagers will pay to get.

As can be seen in Kevin's account above, there was no moral approbation of the young people's behaviour, instead they tended to speak of young people who have little support, who were in difficult circumstances for whom the exchange of sex was considered to be a 'last resort' coping mechanism.

> **Faye (third sector):** there was just very vulnerable girls, who uh, had massive drug problems, and the only way they could fund it was through prostitution, so that was what they did

Andrea's observations find some notable similarity with the views of the young people interviewed whereby exchanging sex for money allows some sense of agency:

> **Andrea (healthcare):** I think I see a difference *between* people who are, being sexually exploited and who then understand that actually, they could be a bit more business-like about this, um, and then they will say upfront that that's their way of taking control of the situation is to say well no I'm governing this transaction, so you're not just going to give me that, you're not going to give me, fish and chips, I want 20 quid (pause) and this is what you'll get for it, so they change and they get hardened and, I think

that's people recognising they're being sexually exploited and thinking well I'm going to, get some money for doing this

Sex was considered by some professionals as a perverse means of young people gaining or regaining a sense of power (see also O'Neill, 2001; Pearce et al., 2002; Moore, 2006; Clutton and Coles, 2007). Typically, young people were not talked of as being coerced or forced into exchanging sex, but this was still understood to be a form of sexual exploitation. Young people were considered to be 'selling sex' because it was a way of coping, of asserting some control, it was a viable option from the very few alternatives open to them.

'The worst case scenarios and then there is that whole area in between': understanding child sexual exploitation

As discussed thus far, both within and across the participants' accounts were multiple understandings of the ways that young people may come to exchange sex. This is consistent with literature arguing that sexual exploitation is a complex problem and there are a number of routes into it (see Drinkwater et al., 2004). Whilst this is so, these different understandings also reflect some uncertainty present in many of the accounts, about precisely what this problem is. There appeared to be some confusion particularly related to the boundaries of this issue in regard to what 'counts' as 'child sexual exploitation'. A point Jack summarises aptly below:

> **Jack (youth justice):** you could have the softer end of sexual exploitation with boyfriends you wouldn't be happy with, right down to the murky world of hard end sexual exploitation, so uh, it's difficult really to pin-point it

The vagaries and multiple constructs displayed in accounts suggests the term is understood and deployed more as some portmanteau category in which there are gradations. Child sexual exploitation was talked of as a term encompassing a range of different experiences, yet there was evidently some uncertainty about when particular experiences can be termed child sexual exploitation in some definitive sense. In essence participants' assumptions about how young people come to be sexually exploited are rooted in their understandings of the issue itself. Sexual exploitation was conceptualised as grooming, as abusive relationships, as peer abuse, as the exchange of sex, and as

concerning promiscuous, sexualised, youth behaviour. To reiterate, not all the professionals talked on each of these topics, and as such, there were differences not just in *what* experiences 'count' as being sexual exploitation but also *who* can be counted as being sexually exploited. This is discussed more fully in Chapter seven where the professionals' talk about identification, prevention, and interventions are explored. Thus while participants were aware of the broad formal construction of the problem in policy and within or against which they made sense of their own perceptions of the issue (see also Melrose, 2012), they nonetheless had to judge whether specific instances that came to notice were so defined. In doing this they also had to attend to issues of risk and vulnerability as part of a complex process of deliberation about whether this was sexual exploitation or not. In this way, when the professionals made sense of young people's risk and vulnerability to sexual exploitation, they are making sense of how young people come to experience it, whilst also making sense of the 'it' itself.

Risk

Building on the above, the discussion now turns to a consideration of the professionals' reflections about 'risk': what they considered to make a young person 'at risk' of being sexually exploited, and the ways they made sense of young people's risky behaviours. To make clear from the outset, the ways in which the professionals made sense of why young people come to be sexually exploited is bound to their understandings about what sexual exploitation *is*. It is this understanding that is reflected in three themes arising from the data: predatory adults and others who exploit, sexual experimenting, and teenage rebelliousness and naivety.

Predatory adults and those who exploit

All the professionals talked about how young people are at risk from males who are looking to exploit. They did not speak of women in this way. Some spoke of clever, manipulative, predatory adult 'paedophiles' and 'sex offenders' – those who would be able to successfully target and single-out vulnerable young people:

> **Trevor (policing):** their (young people's) vulnerabilities are IMMEDIATELY evident to the adult paedophiles

Other participants spoke more of 'sad pathetic older men hanging round' and 'silly young boys'. These were considered to target young people not because they are young, as a paedophile might, but because they are more easily manipulated. This was particularly so amongst those who spoke of sexual exploitation as occurring amongst young people. As Matthew explains:

> **Matthew (youth work):** it is, 'if you want to sleep with a girl then get em, get em, out of it', it's that age old thing isn't it, um, so these girls hang round with these older boys and I think most of them, you know they're seventeen eighteen, but when you're talking about twelve, thirteen-year-old girls, the concerns sort of come in really (pause) *there are*, within this area you've got the (road name) crew, you've got some of the boys that, now they are sort of twenty-three twenty-four, and you can't help sort of thinking oh come on now, you know, with thirteen fourteen-year-olds, why don't you just, go to the pub like the rest of us, you know, stop hanging around on the streets, you're a bit old for doing this, can't you get anyone else

All the professionals talked of concerns about the places young people 'hang out', and their subsequent visibility to, and/or association with people who could exploit them. Young people are visible targets by nature of their appearance and likewise the spaces in which they congregate. Participants spoke of concerns about internet chat rooms, young people out on the street, or hanging around outside pubs or fast-food outlets, young people in local authority residential care, and those living on their own in vulnerable housing:

> **Andrea (healthcare):** It was to do with places that she, would *hang out*, and she was associating with people who, were probably, just weren't holding things together but there was that veneer, in uh people have uh older people when they have problems they are able to have that veneer of respectability to give to a younger child who thinks, oh they're alright they can look after themselves, she he then becomes associated with drug use and sex workers and, um, somebody who had been looking after her, worked in a massage parlour, so, if she's in that milieu she's not going to escape it

This is also a similar conception of risk to that within practice guidance literature. As discussed in the previous chapter, policy emphasises concerns about young people who are outside of structured settings such as school. Young people 'living independently and failing to respond to attempts by workers to keep in touch', and who 'go missing overnight or longer' (WAG, 2011: 16) are established risk indicators. The professionals' accounts echoed these sorts of areas. It is young people who are less visible to the gaze and guidance of protective adults, and their subsequent exposure to those who wish to exploit them, who are most at risk. This assumption informed much of the professionals talk about aspects of risk.

'Sexual experimenting' and promiscuity

All the professionals expressed concerns about young people who in their view were inappropriately sexually active. Many shared their anxieties about the sexual values and practices amongst young people, speaking of 'concerning sexual behaviour', uncertain sexual boundaries and 'blasé attitudes' towards sex. Linked to this they spoke of their concerns about young people's understanding of relationships and young people's understanding about the role of sex within these. The views expressed by Dave, Sandra and Marie are typical of those held by most participants:

> **Dave (fostering):** she'd had so much experience of going out and getting drunk and being used that it doesn't mean that much to her anymore

> **Sandra (education):** the ones that we see that say I've been sleeping with this person that person this person that person and that person I'm worried about in terms of their future, of the choices they're going to make, in life

> **Marie (third sector):** they could say no but they can't. Because they think that to get people to like them is not to say no to them

Their anxieties about young people's risky sexual activity were related to the age young people were having sex and the possible physical and emotional health consequences of this. Underpinning their concerns were normative understandings of sexual knowledge related to age, against which young people were understood to be going through a

period of sexual experimenting, when their 'hormones' or exposure to the (previously hidden) sexual 'world' creates potential risk:

> **Carla (children's residential care)**: I could see she was like getting into boys and all that now trying to, 'cos she's been exposed now to this world she wants all of it

> **Polly (youth work):** you know it's that sexual high tension time of experimenting and stuff, you know they have all these hormones flying around

In this way, many of their accounts could be considered to be loosely informed by child development theory, in which sexuality is considered as something emergent that happens during a period of growth rather than something which is somehow learned and culturally mediated (see also Edwards, 2004). Many concerns spoken of by participants were related to how a young person's emerging sexuality is managed:

> **Andrea (healthcare):** young people have this *view* of paedophiles as being, dirty old men in macs who go after very young children and they don't see themselves, as they're emerging into their own sexual selves, they see themselves as quite adult and so you have this sort of middling population who are, um (pause) emerging um and discovering their own sexual identity and yet that can be preyed upon and exploited, and they don't see themselves as potential victims because 'they are so grown up' and *then they are*, and so you get that um, they have physical maturity before they have psychological maturity and they are therefore quite vulnerable, and not able to defend themselves sometimes I see that, and I don't know whether that's to do with, children being sexualised or pressure from their *peers,* and all the rest of it but there's something that um there are children that um who's *boundaries are just not there,* and for, lots of girls it's very exciting to get lots of attention from older men, and it's a bit of a joke sometimes, and you can see how it's a bit of a joke a bit of flattery and then it all gets very serious, and it's very difficult to step out of

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As with Andrea, the professionals spoke of concerns about young people's physical and sexual development which may not be on a par with their (assumed) emotional development. It is this that was understood to be the reason why young people can be at risk – and put themselves at risk – to those who may exploit them. They may be experimenting before they are ready to cope with sexual experiences, they may not have learnt appropriate sexual boundaries, they may be pressured by peers who may also be sexualised too early. Without the mature ability of foresight, young people cannot see that what may seem to be fun, can turn into something exploitative. They may not see themselves as 'vulnerable', but those who want to exploit them can. It is this which means that young people who 'experiment' can put themselves at risk to sexual predators, or to people who will take advantage of them. However, as in the views of Andrea above, there is a point of contention present within the professionals' accounts. Andrea's concerns that young people have a distorted view of 'paedophiles as being dirty old men in macs who go after very young children' is one also shared, as noted elsewhere in this chapter, by the professionals. This view is also one represented within policy. It is *children* who are emphasised as being 'at risk' to '*adult* perpetrators', not young people and not those who may be at risk from other young people - a point which will be returned to later in this chapter.

'It's 'I'll do what I want'': teenage rebelliousness and naivety
Concerns about young people's emerging sense of agency featured within a number of accounts. They spoke of young people who were 'beginning to develop a sense of independence' and who are 'testing boundaries' in negative ways:

> **Dave (fostering)**: I work in foster care and watch children running away and being found in houses (pauses) it's 'I'll do what I want', it's that rebelliousness within adolescence that they think they know better, um, but are actually quite vulnerable, but are not prepared to listen to adults, to tell them otherwise, so I think it can be a lot of things, I think the younger children? *NO,* because they haven't the maturity to understand, I think with teenagers they're going through SO many changes, that they feel they know what's best they can do what they want and they'll rebel, and they think on one hand they're being treated as an adult, but actually they're being abused, but they latch on to that

The professionals spoke of how young people are 'unwise to the ways of the world'. There was the understanding that young people engage in risky behaviours, and are vulnerable to sexual exploitation because of their rebelliousness, their undeveloped sense of awareness and lack of emotional intelligence. Informing many of the professionals' accounts was an assumption of 'essential characteristics in young people because of their age' such as ignorance and rebellion, and an 'assumed link between physical growth and social identity' (Wyn and White, 1997: 12). As Dave observes above, young people can rebel, and not listen to the protective adults around them. It is this which makes young people at risk to abusive adults; abusive adults who treat them as adults, not as the young people they are. As Luke explains:

> **Luke (alternative education):** they may enjoy the sex side of it, the attention and the gifts and the um, you know I guess they would value that. And that's where the exploitation comes in you know, they're child like, they're a child in their brain and development and that is being exploited by someone who um, perhaps has an awareness that um you know that they are not fully developed as an adult as a person who um would perhaps be able to make a valid decision about whether it is a good thing or not

Luke, as did other participants, displayed normative understandings of youth as a stage of transition, drawing particularly on the 'childhood' aspects of 'youth' (see Heinze 2000) to explain why some young people may be sexually exploited. Young people were not always talked about as (fully) agentic subjects, with authenticity attributed to their actions; and it was young people's 'childlikeness', their emotional naivety, their lack of ability to give any kind of informed consent, that was deemed as putting them at risk of being exploited for sex. Thus young people's 'emerging agency' was typically understood to be problematic because young people were seen as seeking adulthood before they were ready to cope with it:

> **Jack (youth justice):** this whole (pause) RUSH into adulthood, in terms of if you drink and you smoke and you're having sex, if you're taking drugs, these are the things that adults do, therefore I'll do them you know, and I think that's, that's part of it isn't it, that's part of the process, the need to be older than you are, to be seen to be older than you are

Many professionals talked of concerns about young people who were not engaged in (what they considered to be) positive activities, so they were without responsibility or structure to guide them. They spoke of young people who were 'party party', and 'looking to enjoy themselves', and of young people taking drugs and alcohol because it was 'exciting', 'fun' and because they had 'nothing else to do'.

'Youth' as risk

As considered thus far, whilst the professionals did invoke specific indicators of risk or 'risky behaviours', they tended to speak in more general terms of young people's risk to sexual exploitation. Young people were talked about as 'at risk' primarily because they are young people. Underpinning the ways the professionals made sense of young people's risk to sexual exploitation were normative (partial) assumptions of youth as an inherently 'risky' period of transition, spliced with conceptions of childhood as a time of (primarily sexual) innocence. 'Young people' were conceptualised by the professionals as leaving behind a time of innocence, asexuality and 'unworldly naivety' (Faulkner 2011: 78) and entering an inherently risky phase of youth. One in which they understood there to be a potential threat of an emerging agency and sexuality; a phase in which young people 'naturally' rebel and sexually experiment; at a time when 'hormones' mean that they may become overly 'sexualised', not act responsibly and rationally, and when they are without the psychological awareness to realise or understand risk. It is 'as if adolescence were a period of 'meltdown' – a crucial phase where the once 'solid' child is recast, via a period of flux, into a new adult 'solid'' (Marshall and Stenner, 2004: 18). It is thus one that provokes both anxiety and suspicion (Hall and Montgomery, 2000).

Bound within the professionals' talk about risk, were concerns about young people who are outside of positive adult influences, protection and supervision. For example, the professionals spoke of their concerns about young people who 'hang out on the street' and 'go missing', and of young people who are 'out of the mainstream', 'streetwise' and 'hard to reach'. Within this fraught time of youth, young people are in need of protection, guidance and supervision:

> **Martin (education):** once the, hormones kick in, at puberty then we know
> that (pause) they are still children who are, going through the transition into

adulthood … usually there is a period of people <u>becoming</u> adults, I feel that during that period, while they are still children, there is a protection that we need to have within a culture, as they are struggling to become the adults that they are supposed to be

Yet, similarly to the young people, the professionals actively sought to avoid providing a pathological or causal explanation for a young person's involvement in sexual exploitation. Whilst the professionals talked primarily of their concerns about young people in care, not in school and of those who may be perceived by society as 'difficult', they also insisted that it was important not to 'stereotype', and spoke of how sexual exploitation could happen to any *young person*:

Linda (community work): It could happen to anyone, I mean that's the problem you know, I think (pause) anyone who is emotionally vulnerable so that could be anyone and that's for all <u>social areas or classes</u>, anyone, um, and teenagers are, um (pause) a sort of wry definition of being an adolescent is that they are all emotionally vulnerable and if someone wants to harm that emotional vulnerability then they can

As Linda explains, sexual exploitation can occur to anyone who is emotionally vulnerable: all young people are emotionally vulnerable by nature of their youth, thus all young people are *at risk* to those who want to exploit or harm them. A shared dictum therefore was that young people who are less visible to the gaze of protective adults are understood to be 'at risk' because, by nature of their youth, they can become visible and accessible to those who wish to exploit them. The professionals' everyday and circuitous constructions of risk were similar to the ways that concepts of vulnerability and risk are applied within social policy relating to children and young people whereby 'vulnerability appears simultaneously to be conceptualised broadly and narrowly with a view that all children are vulnerable, but some are more vulnerable than others' (Daniels, 2010: 235).

'Blotting out' the individual young person?
Yet when risk is conceptualised as above, the individual young person becomes somewhat lost. It is as if young people are empty vessels with an undeveloped 'self'

waiting to emerge, easily directed and influenced by their surroundings (see Wyn and White, 1997). There is little room within this construction to appreciate the nature of young people's agency, or the underlying common sense rationalities behind young people's engagement in 'risky' activities. Moreover, positioning young people in this way arguably ignores young people's circumstances and realities (O'Connell-Davidson, 2005). Instead of 'childhoods' – influenced and constitutive of the psycho-social dynamics of young people's own agency, race, class, gender, and place, there is instead an invocation of a universal 'childhood', or phase of youth' (Heinze, 2000). Informing the views of all interviewees, sometimes overtly so, sometimes not, but always *there* and at work, is the category of 'young people', deployed not only as a descriptive label but also an explanatory one. The category is homogenous and its explanatory power derives from and depends on it being so; young people are all alike *as* young people, in that they are predisposed to behave as they do because they are, at times, irrational, rebellious, hormonal and without maturity. These imputed characteristics may be cast as regrettable, they may be something to cause concern, worry and despair amongst adults who are responsible for young people, but they are perceived as immutable, not something to be escaped from; they are what it is to be a young person – any young person.

This shared assumption marks out a fundamental difference between what professionals and the young people had to say about sexual exploitation and why it happens; in particular, what each of these groups had to say about risk. At times, the professionals spoke of how sexual exploitation could happen to any *young person*, because to do 'risky things' is tied up somehow with what it is to be young. Thus to rebel, to be irrational, to experiment sexually, to drink, to take drugs, and to 'hang out', of sight and away from responsible adults is a consequence of being young. Young people are at risk of being sexually exploited because it is in doing such 'risky things' that they become visible targets to those who wish to exploit them; and they are easily exploited for sex because they are young people, and hold such characteristics of what it is to be young.

This was not so for the young people, who instead spoke of how sexual exploitation is something that could happen to any *one,* any person. That is to say, the young people did not offer up, or seem to call upon, some normative notion of what it is to be young to explain how it is that they themselves and others might find themselves in sexually exploitative situations and relationships. Any reference to their youth was

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made typically in relation to a taken-for-granted assumption of adult authority over them because of their age. They considered 'sexual exploitation' to be something that is preventable, something that could happen to anyone if they too experienced such a lack of support, concern, acknowledgement and lack of care that the young people claimed they had experienced. They talked about risk but did not talk about *being young* as being itself 'risky'. Instead, risk was conceptualised by the young people as their ways of coping with adversity. As argued in the previous chapter, they experienced many factors in their lives as blotting out their individuality and subjectivity. They felt themselves to be excluded, different, ignored. Moreover, they spoke of feeling unnoticed and invisible to significant others while simultaneously perceived as objects of surveillance and of concern, rather than as active subjects. Sex, alcohol, drugs and 'hanging out' with peers can be understood as symbolic gestures of resistance and attempts by the young people to assert themselves as individuals. These 'risky behaviours' were spoken of by young people as understandable, albeit self-destructive, ways of coping by not coping at all. Yet, from the view of the professionals, a young person is primarily at risk *because they are young*. Thus the professionals arguably 'do' what the young people speak of: in conceptualising young people in this way, their individualism and their agency remains unacknowledged and rendered invisible.

The problem with young people,' risk' and sexual exploitation

Yet, the ways the professionals made sense of young people's risk of being sexually exploited, is bound within their understandings of what sexual exploitation *is*, and, as such, forms part of the ways they made sense of the aetiology of the problem itself. As can be seen below, within all the professionals' accounts were references to young people's active choices to place themselves in sexually exploitative situations:

> **Max (children's residential care):** the kids carry on nonetheless, I know what I'm doing, but I'm going to do it anyway, um, they are very difficult to deal with, VERY difficult

> **Nick (social work):** it was something the staff found really *difficult* to deal with, *because,* she was going of her own free will, and they didn't have many powers to stop her

Louisa (social work): they were vulnerable but they were making a choice to leave where it was safe and go and meet these men

Jack (youth justice): young people are to a certain extent complicit in the pattern of behaviour

Cathy (fostering): she had wilfully gone out, with the police as her only means to get home

Whilst the young people were making sense of their personal experiences, the professionals were making sense of child sexual exploitation, and how young people come to be sexually exploited, within a discursive framework that conceptualises this issue in a particular way. One in which 'grooming' dominates, and in which young people are positioned as passive objects, thus negating the idea that a young person might exercise agency (Melrose, 2012). The professionals' talk about risk can *also* be considered to be reflective of how they make sense of and reconcile the challenges presented by the young people they work with, who they perceive as being determined to place themselves at risk, with their understandings of sexual exploitation. They are making sense of young people's sexual exploitation within their own logic and the logic of the CSE discourse itself. Thus when the concept of grooming features so strongly within the professionals own accounts, and within formal policy and practice discourses, the young people they spoke of who appear to put themselves at risk present something of a contradiction. They are not *easily* accounted for, yet they *were* accounted for in that the professionals spoke of them as being 'at risk' and as being sexually exploited. Hence when they spoke of how a young person appears to be 'complicit' or 'wilful' in the knowledge of what they are doing, making choices to leave where they are (presumed) safe, and going of their own 'free will' to these sexually exploitative situations and relationships, it is because they are being irrational, rebellious, hormonal and without maturity. The circularity of the discourse makes sense of any contradictory element because putting yourself at risk to those who sexually exploit is intimately bound up in what it is to be young. However, what is also notable across the professionals' accounts is a sense of unease in talking openly about young people's risk and involvement in sexual exploitation. There was an implicit, sometimes explicit, acknowledgement that 'choices' made by young people could be associated

with blame and just deserts in the minds of some – a point that Louisa sought to distance herself from:

> **Louisa (social work):** they needed to be *empowered,* to make the RIGHT decision and to protect THEMSELVES, and *not* keep putting themselves in that position. And that's, not uh in NO WAY am I saying that it's their fault for what happened or *blaming them*

The professionals are also arguably demonstrating an awareness of normative understandings of risk and responsibility in which risk is conceptualised as a moral issue. Self-discipline and responsibility are central to the neo-liberal discourse surrounding citizenship in which certain behaviours are permissible but others are not. To take certain risks can be blameworthy and thereby to appear to actively pursue risk is to be responsible and held accountable for one's actions (Smith et al., 2007). Indeed, a number of professionals were aware that to acknowledge a young person's agency could be to somehow suggest the young person is responsible for putting themselves at risk, and hence to imply that the young person is somehow *not* being sexually exploited or a victim of sexual exploitation. The passage below is notable because it highlights the moral ambiguities within the occupational imagination and furthermore stands as a rare occasion where an interpretation of young people's choices wasn't explained by reference to their youth:

> **Annette (third sector)**: because she was inviting them into the flat they weren't forcing their way into the flat, they were invited IN, and if they were ever asked to leave they left, so they weren't actually doing anything
> Sophie: Right, I see, so uh in your mind uh, what would you, what did you think about that situation
> **Annette**: Hmmm, I don't uh that. *That* (pause) I struggled with, because I I'm not SURE, THAT I WOULD EVER SAY, that I was ever able to say that these *weren't choices* that she was making because she was given, lots of support, *lots of* opportunities, to (pause) *to turn it around*, or stop it or and it it CLEARLY she was being CLEARLY she was a victim but I (pause) it it's difficult isn't it I mean that sort of victim thing is quite an *emotive* thing, and yes *of course* she was a victim, but I think her being a VICTIM started

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an awful lot, *further away*, than that particular situation, I think *then,* I'm not sure maybe that she really *was* a victim because, I think that she was using it herself I think that she was using it to get what SHE wanted, she KNEW what she was doing, but she didn't KNOW what she was doing, and from THAT in that respect, I think you know we very clearly got to the point, where there was VERY little more that we could do, because she KNEW exactly what she was doing and she was making the choice to do it (pause) um and I think she she was a victim of circumstances right probably from being a little girl she was, you know had led her to that point

The dilemma that Annette illuminates is to acknowledge the young person as both active agent and victim of sexual exploitation. It as if there is some tacit assumption that sexual exploitation and the young person's choices must be considered in isolation from each other, and it is this which Annette struggles to do. It was clear to Annette, that the young person 'knew exactly what she was doing, and she was making the choice to do it'. Yet, Annette still considered her to be a victim of sexual exploitation because the choices the young person was understood to be making were related to the young person's history and circumstances. Annette's hesitancy suggests a concern that to impute choice is to deny victim status. The professionals' talk about risk can also be seen as illustrative of the limitations of the discursive framework of 'child sexual exploitation'. As Biggs (2001: 304/5) argues, 'policies not only respond to social ills, they also consecrate them. They contribute to the constellation of ideas and evidence that create the problem itself … through the agency of social policy formation, certain issues are legitimized. They are shaped and made visible in particular ways'. As discussed throughout, grooming has become a dominant discourse for explaining and understanding child sexual exploitation thus obscuring other possible reasons and routes into the exchange of sex (Melrose, 2012). In so doing, young people's subjective capacity for agency and choice is obscured, as are their individual needs, circumstances and social conditions. Within this dominant discourse there is little encouragement or space for professionals to consider young people's expressions of consent, their agency and the circumstances underpinning their involvement in sexual exploitation (Phoenix, 2002). The young person who is seen to put themselves at risk, must have a reason for doing so if they are to fit within an understanding of sexual exploitation.

Furthermore, this aspect was something many of the professionals seemed not unaware of. They talked of difficulties with getting colleagues to recognise young people as being sexually exploited. They spoke of how people think young people 'are going out there asking for it', and the importance of 'getting people to see that it's not a conscious choice for these young people'. An example of this is given by Andrea:

> **Andrea (healthcare):** sexual exploitation and sexual offences are *really really really difficult cases*, to get through the crown prosecution service (pause) and they have I think the Crown Prosecution Service are not (pause) they haven't got their heads around the sexual exploitation crimes, unless they have groups of people involved, um, or if there is grooming of younger children. So again, in that group where it's the 15 year-old, who is below the age of consent *but who can probably consent because that's their boyfriend and that's alright isn't it.* And if there's lots of professionals from different areas saying no it's not normal at all, because X Y Z then they might listen, but I think there's that feeling of this kind of NO MAN'S LAND. Vulnerable young people who police recognise as vulnerable but every time they process, something as an offence, and it's not going anywhere, and YET it's going to happen AGAIN

As discussed previously, within normative conceptions of youth and childhood, young people are the interstitial category; they are part child, part adult. Children we worry about, adults we leave to themselves; it is 'young people' who *give* us cause to worry. They can be responsible and blameless, 'at risk' and 'a risk', 'trouble' or 'in trouble'. 'Young people' are understood to sit in 'a no man's land', to use Andrea's phrase, because they can be perceived by others as being able to look after themselves and, thus, both their responsibility and their vulnerability – and by extension their sexual exploitation – can be called into question. Andrea goes on to explain how:

> **Andrea (healthcare):** sometimes young people are very plausible and are more articulate and I've seen this in (pause) in other people's assessments when I've read other workers assessments and what's been said, even very young children, so and so is intelligent and articulate. So does that make them all of a sudden not sexually exploited? But there is that um, *oh well if*

they can speak like that and talk like that then they must be fine they must be able to look after themselves

Andrea's concern is that it is perceptions of a child or young person's 'maturity', their perceived ability to look after themselves, which can influence whether they are assessed as being sexually exploited, or not. For young people to be *deserving* victims they must be passive and not active subjects (see also Montgomery, 1998). Some respondents spoke in a similar way about their concerns for the way boys at risk can be perceived:

> **Sandra (education):** the young men that probably need, I would expect *need help*, from sexual exploitation are probably in the custody suites, they are probably seen already as *offenders* rather than victims

Such concerns are echoed elsewhere whereby boys are more likely to be seen as offenders than in need of support (see for example McMullen, 1986; Davis and Feldman, 1992; Palmer, 2001). There is something of a shared assumption that it is not enough for young people to *be* children (that is, as a social category defined within the CSE policy framework and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), they must be *like* children. Ideally, they should evince the characteristics often associated with childhood – innocent, sexually unknowing, undeveloped and in need of protection (see Piper, 2000). We glimpse this within Andrea and Sandra's reflections above. Young people's vulnerability and official acknowledgment of their sexual exploitation can be called into question if they are seen as intelligent, articulate, knowledgeable and responsible. Thus, emphasising a young person's childlikeness can become occupationally necessary in order to claim some authentic status of vulnerable victim even when they engage in risky activities and practices:

> **Mary (healthcare):** I've had a sexual exploitation referral, and I've said *the reason why I am so concerned* is that this CHILD and I try and use the word child as much as possible so it reminds us all that yes this is a child not just a stroppy teenager who is 5 inches taller than me, THIS CHILD is now having anal sex as a method of contraception (pause) This. Is. What. I am worried about, and then everyone will go, UGH, oh oh really

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As Mary explains, it was not enough for her to describe the circumstances the young person was in, but she also considered it necessary to emphasise and invoke the concept of 'child' in order to seek a response from other colleagues. The passage below in which Marie refers to adult women reinforces this point further:

> **Marie (third sector):** it was reinforcing that the women that we are working with, emotionally they are probably only 5 or 6 years old, they are so so damaged, and so you can talk chronological age, as much as you want but then you have to balance that with emotional ability, like my daughter when she was 14 she was probably far more STABLE than an 18, 19, 35, year-old that we see out working on the streets

'Chronological age' is of limited relevance because the women Marie works with are *like* children. They are emotionally damaged and so are child-like in their emotional ability. In fact, as Marie explains, some of these women can be *more* like children than actual children. It is their childlike status which must be reinforced rather than their circumstances, social conditions or the sexually exploitative situations they are in. It is because they are *like* children that we are invited to understand that they are still vulnerable, even when they may put themselves at risk.

This is similar to the ways that some of the professionals struggled to position the boys they worked with, whom they also considered to be exploiting other young people. For example when they spoke of 'sad pathetic slightly older boys' who hang round on the street; they were sad and pathetic because they were 'immature' and 'hadn't quite grown up' yet. Brownlie (2001) discusses how conceptions of youth and childhood are central to constructions of the 'risky child' within policy and practice literature. Children can be perceived as potential sexual victims and threats. They are constructed as vulnerable because of what has occurred to them in their childhood, yet also as potential threats because of the effects on their future adult selves. It is their youth, their child status, which provides hope for their redemption and justification for their need. This is explained by Polly:

> **Polly (youth work):** the victim, the one who is being over-powered is definitely a victim but I think the one who is being overpowering, they've got to have seen that somewhere, um when I, was speaking to my work

colleague about these boys, they knew a little bit more about their background and apparently they came from a really rough, uh mum and dad they were alcoholics so I kind of felt that, they were sort of like, he was a victim as well do you know what I mean, he needed work done on him, um he needed to talk to someone about, choices and um yeh because it is yeh I just felt that he was a victim as well as the girls

Polly reminds us that there is another aspect of the problem of sexual exploitation that is often glossed over: a consideration of those who exploit, and of the reasons why they may do so. Yet, arguably, it was because they were still *boys* that they were talked about as 'victims' and not as 'clever' and 'predatory' in the way that *adult* men who exploit were referred to. *Boys* are victims because they are not men. They are still young people, in a state of youth.

Making 'young people' visible in 'child sexual exploitation'

The above exploration reveals something of the difficulties professionals face in conceptualising young people within child sexual exploitation. At one level, there is no reason why this should be problematic. 'Young people', within policy and within society are still considered to be children. By virtue of this age related category, young people hold a specific set of welfare and social rights. More specifically, policy on this issue is also explicit in its reference to 'young people', whilst also stating that the 'child' in child sexual exploitation applies to all those aged up to 18. Furthermore, the SERAF includes a referral protocol for those who can be classed as 'vulnerable young adults' (see WAG, 2011: 29/30). It is problematic because sexual exploitation exists within policy and practice as a social care issue because it is *child* sexual exploitation. A distinction has now been made between adults and children who exchange sex to meet some need. Whilst this distinction is made with reference to age, 'rights' and distinct sets of entitlements to protection and support, the discursive framework of 'child sexual exploitation' is intrinsically bound to primary conceptions of childhood (Melrose, 2010). It is a distinction made possible because children are presumed to be dependent, innocent, passive and weak. It is this which means they are unable to choose, so they must have been forced into it by someone (Piper, 2000; O'Connell-Davidson, 2005). As Brown argues 'the assumption of comprehension and choice on the part of the child have been instrumental in excluding child prostitution from being encompassed in

definitions of child sexual abuse' (2004: 345). Historically, the depiction of children and young people involved in the exchange of sex has been as innocent victims of an adult other, or as blameworthy deviants (Ennew, 1986; Brown 2004). Those who were perceived to be 'choosing' prostitution were deemed to be responsible and thus treated punitively.[*] This binary representation has been removed in current UK and Welsh Government policy (see WAG, 2011), in which it is stated that the grooming process employed by perpetrators means that no child can give informed consent (see WAG, 2011: 9). The distinction between adults and children within policy is based on and made possible by conceptions of childhood, and it is one further legitimated through a discourse of grooming. We do not have 'adult sexual exploitation' because, within policy, adults are deemed to be responsible for their actions. Children cannot choose and they cannot be held responsible, and it is *this* which means they are in need and deserving of protection (Piper, 2000). It is not the wider issues surrounding sexual exploitation or the exchange of sex, which underpin this policy discourse. It is not that children and young people are politically, socially, and economically more vulnerable (O'Connell-Davidson, 2005), nor is it matters of consent which taxes policy (see Pitts, 1997; Pearce, 2009). As Moore (2006: 79/82) argues, the grooming discourse can be seen as an 'essentialist feminised victim philosophy that robbed children of their agency and thus any criminal responsibility'. However, in doing so it is also one which, at some level, cements the paradoxical status of a child or young person involved in the exchange of sex. The problem of the normative rational citizen – the problem of choice, risk, and responsibility – still exists. The 'hard won campaign' to recognise young people as in need of support, rather than as young offenders (Warrington 2010:70), was possible, in part, because children were positioned as unable to 'choose'. 'Child sexual exploitation' exists *because* a distinction between 'adults' and 'children' within policy has been made (Jeffreys, 2000). Whilst it is important to recognise that the emphasis on children and young people's innocence has been a necessary challenge to previous traditions of blame against victims of sexual abuse, it must also be acknowledged that the emphasis on the assumed innate innocence of children is problematic for children and young people who are not so readily perceived as dependent, passive and weak.

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[*] This binary was explicit in the (re)conceptualisation of child prostitution to an issue of sexual abuse in the *Safeguarding Children abused through Prostitution* document (DoH 2000), in which young people were framed as both perpetrators and victims. Those who were deemed to be voluntarily consenting were to exchange sex were to be treated punitively; those who were manipulated by others deserved protection (Phoenix 2002).

They can be seen as 'non-children', non-defensible, and not so deserving of protection (see Kitzinger, 2006: 168-9). Thus the boundaries of child sexual exploitation mean that a young person's vulnerability, risk, and, to some extent, their sexual exploitation depends upon their being like a child, and fitting within normative conceptions of what it is to be a child and what it is to be 'groomed'.

Thus the discursive construction of child sexual exploitation as grooming, underpinned by ideologies of childhood, can serve to exclude some 'young people'. The difficulty for 'young people' is that they are not safely ensconced within a conception of childhood. Young people are a 'grey area' between the normative, seemingly distinct black and white categories of adulthood and childhood; it is the boundary state, the time of transition, the time of *becoming* adult (Lee, 2001). They can be *like* adults. They have responsibilities, and can be considered able to consent to adult experiences. They can be deemed and held accountable in many areas of social and welfare related policy (Dean, 1997). O'Connell-Davidson (2001: 59) refers to Hoffman's distinction between 'victims' and 'victimhoods'; the latter referring to a pathology within which certain groups are seen by others (and may see themselves) as objects, without the capacity to defend their own interests. Whilst this can elicit responses to pain and suffering, it can serve to minimise the harm that occurs to those who are 'socially imagined as full subjects'. In addition, as Phoenix (2010: 37) argues, 'if sex, sexual exchanges and consuming sex is normalised within society', 'young people', who are accepted as part consumer and part responsible citizen, can be perceived as being less in need: the less child-like the child, the less harm their involvement in the exchange of sex can be perceived to be.[*]

Furthermore, when the distinction between sex work and sexual exploitation rests on a child or young people's psychological inability to consent, rather than their conditions of consent and/or their entitlement and need of support, we lose the opportunity to understand the symbolic meaning of young people's actions and how they assert their agency. The ways young people mark boundaries, articulate identity and difference become lost in binary representations of young people as victim or culprit (Hebdige, 1988). The discursive formation of 'sexual exploitation' necessarily positions young people as object and passive, and means that young people cannot be

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[*] Arguably, it is for these reasons that the discourse of 'child sexual exploitation' is one which particularly serves to exclude young males, transgendered and transsexual young people (Lillywhite and Skidmore, 2006; Melrose, 2010).

spoken of as active agents (Melrose, 2012). Thus when a young person does not act like a 'proper victim' – when they are not groomed, when they appear to wilfully put themselves at risk, when they reject offers of help, when they are young offenders themselves – their status as victims of sexual exploitation can be questioned or go unnoticed (Williams, 2010; Phoenix, 2010). To fully apprehend and understand the aetiology of sexual exploitation, young people's agency and more nuanced understandings of risk must be made visible. As Warrington (2010: 64) argues, 'as long as this remains a secondary priority, the invisibility of these young people continues unchallenged'.

The professionals interviewed operate broadly within this discourse of sexual exploitation. As discussed, their understandings of risk are arguably informed by and are illustrative of it. Normative understandings of youth, strongly inflected with conceptions of childhood, underpinned the ways professionals conceptualised *and* legitimised young people's 'risk' to sexual exploitation. They made sense of, justified and reflected on the problems associated with understanding young people's 'risky behaviours' by drawing on prevalent normative categories of youth. Whilst they recognised young people's active agency, they were careful to not attribute blame or responsibility to a young person. Neither was there any kind of moral projection of deviancy on to the general or specific young people they spoke of. In fact they made efforts to the contrary, to which these conceptions of youth and childhood were central. However, in so doing the professionals homogenise young people and create a pathology of youth. The professionals emphasised that when a young person puts themselves at risk it is because they are 'normal', 'vulnerable', *just like any other young person*, because they are young. A young person is not to blame and not held responsible, because to be at risk to others, to put yourself at risk, is what it is to be young. To reiterate, in order to make sense of and to have others recognise an agentic yet vulnerable and 'at risk' young person, there is the ever present category of young people to invoke. It is homogenising and its *explanatory* and *justificatory* power derives from, and depends on it being so.

Moreover the professionals' talk about risk also appears rather confused when considered alongside some of the different understandings of sexual exploitation, discussed in the opening part of this chapter, and their reflections on why some young people are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation than others. As will be discussed next, more nuanced explanations about young people's 'vulnerability' and choices based on

their needs and circumstances also informed how participants made sense of young people's involvement in sexual exploitation.

'In every case you will find some vulnerability': young people and vulnerability indicators

To reiterate 'how young people experience sexual exploitation', 'risk' and 'vulnerability' are abstract and arbitrary as categories; although analytically separable they are also interlinked and the boundaries between them are somewhat blurred. In the structuring of this chapter the distinction between these categories reflects one which is made by the professionals in the ways *they* made sense of child sexual exploitation. As discussed, professional talk about 'youth' and 'risk' was a way of making sense of how young people come to experience sexual exploitation, of explaining why they may put themselves at risk, whilst also positioning them as vulnerable and in need of support. Yet across all the professionals' accounts was an assumption that there is some form of unmet need or circumstances which make a young person vulnerable (and thus more at risk) to sexual exploitation. The following is a discussion of the professionals' reflections about young people's 'vulnerability', and their 'search for reasons rather than causes' (Cusick, 2002:236) to make sense of why it is that some young people come to experience sexual exploitation whilst others do not.

Instability: home and relationships

Family and the home were routinely implicated by many participants as having an important role in understanding young people's vulnerability to sexual exploitation (see also Boyden, 2006). An aspect of common-sense reasoning by professionals was that young people who have an unsettled or unstable upbringing were likely to have a sense of insecurity that could leave them exposed to exploitation:

> **Cathy (fostering)**: Just insecurity, um um just not having a good, structural home base behind them, I think HOME is a massive thing and families are HUGE for security if the young people don't have family security at home then, you're just then like wallowing in not knowing where you belong, trying to find someone who could accept you so you do things to be accepted (pause) whereas when you're secure and accepted within your home base then there's less need to do that

Cathy's reflections, typical of many respondents bear many similarities to those held by the young people in this study. Young people missing a sense of 'place' or 'home', were understood to have an absent or inadequate grasp of safety, security, stability and belonging; the emotional necessity of which they were considered to try to (re)create in negative ways (see also Pitts, 1997). As Cathy states, 'you do things to be secure and accepted', things that others may not need to do. Young people in care were spoken of as being particularly vulnerable for these reasons; statutory provision of care was understood to be intrinsically unstable. Many professionals spoke of care as inherently 'unsettled', involving 'frequent placement moves', in which young people may experience a number of 'placement breakdowns'.

This sense of ontological instability was also talked of as arising from young people's relationships in which those without a sense of 'family', of inter-dependencies and relational place and belonging were vulnerable. Many spoke of concerns about young people without a trusted adult or of young people feeling 'rejected' and 'unloved'. Whilst there was a reticence within many of the accounts to talk of family, they spoke of problems in families in which there was a 'breakdown in communication', for reasons such as substance or alcohol addiction, or physical and mental ill-health. Families in which parents may be *present* but *absent,* in that they may be incapable of meeting young people's emotional needs. In this way the professionals' talk is arguably influenced by attachment theory – and the need for young children to have a strong relationship with a parent or 'significant other' in order to have a 'healthy' emotional and social development (see Bowlby, 1977). This is also similar to Foley et al. (2004) who, in discussing their work with young people who had been sexually exploited, note that almost all had damaged attachments with primary caregivers. Again, many professionals referred to problems within statutory care in which young people may have multiple and frequent changes in social workers, foster carers, or without the opportunity to develop established secure relationships with those operating in loco parentis. Overall, relationships with professionals were considered to be unlikely to provide the time, continuity and commitment needed to be a 'significant other' in respect of a young person's emotional needs.

'Lack of positive attention': emotional neglect

All the professionals spoke of young people's emotional neglect and lack of positive attention from key people in their lives. They spoke of young people who have low self-esteem, who are isolated, and who lack confidence; feelings which were understood to stem from being unwanted, rejected or neglected by their families:

> **Cara (children's residential care):** I think it's because they feel rejected, from their families and that's why they're in care anyway, and, so they're looking for someone who'll love them (pause) I think that that's the main thing … in Germany their care home system is *much better* and more effective like theirs is based on a more like *loving* approach, where they're very warm you know *cuddles* and stuff like that is *normal* it's like a *normal* family, and it works well over there and I think, like I don't see why we can't do that, because the main problems the main cause of all their problems, whether it's bad behaviour or just *aggressiveness* it's I think it's just down to that really, so if they were having just care and love from us, um, they wouldn't, they wouldn't really *need* to go out and find, criminals and paedophiles to give them that, that's what I think

Cara's perspective was fairly typical across the sample. Young people who have an 'emotional void', 'unmet emotional needs', and 'emotional vulnerabilities', were understood to be vulnerable either because they will look to fill this void elsewhere, or they will be vulnerable to abuse from people who can provide some sort of attention, for good or bad. They spoke of young people 'willing to accept anything because it is something'. Again, young people in the care system were understood to be particularly vulnerable because of the lack of a consistent person in their lives. Andrea's explanation below is similar to a number of the young people's accounts, a point which is discussed further in the following chapter, in which they spoke of having a number of different social workers, or people in their lives, with whom they had little inter-dependent or reciprocal connection. It is this which Andrea describes thus:

> **Andrea (healthcare):** *very often* the children are already part of the care system or have been part of the care system. Their specific needs are not being, *addressed*, so that's then quite a big struggle to find the right people,

um they're often these sort of last resort kids, because they have a social worker, they're on their umpteenth social worker who says they can't care for them

Young people's vulnerability to sexual exploitation was understood to be linked to their unmet emotional needs to feel cared for and loved, whereby they may become attention seeking and craving for affection. These are young people who have a number of different professionals in their lives, and yet they are understood to receive little attention and to be isolated.

'Woolly' boundaries: relationships and sex
Another theme arising from the professionals' accounts was how family and 'significant others' can cause young people to be vulnerable by the examples they give in regard negative behaviour patterns, negative relationship expectations and 'unhealthy' boundaries. Many professionals spoke of concerns about young people having 'distorted' ideas about relationships and sex from having experienced emotional and sexual abuse themselves, and/or having observed domestic abuse in the family home. They spoke of concerns about young people's limited 'worlds' and 'realities', in that these negative relationships which young people see and experience will be understood by them as being 'the way things are' (Jenkins, 1992):

> **Martin (education)**: I think that how people grow up has a huge impact on how they, well, view the world, the options that they see that are possible, and, they would see that as one of the options that is viable, that's how people are, they repeat the pattern, and then it becomes harder to break it. I would assume, that for girls growing up, with a mother who is a prostitute, that, if it seems to be working, and that's the model that they see, then, why would they NOT assume that that's a viable route for them to go down

As with Martin, many professionals talked specifically of their concerns about young people's understandings of the place of sex within relationships. Many related this to the inappropriate expectations held by young people about physical touch and affection – a point mentioned too by the young people in this study who spoke of confused boundaries and confused sense of ownership over their bodies (see also Clutton and

Coles, 2007). This was mentioned particularly in regard to young people in care who may also have previously experienced sexual abuse. As Cara and Jack explain:

> **Cara (children's residential care):** because WE as like workers can't touch the children *really* in any kind of caring way like if I see a child crying which I have I'm quite happy to put my arm round them and comfort him but you can't really just generally just hug kids as you would your own

> **Jack (youth justice):** Care homes are not establishing ways of dealing with young people that exist in normal loving homes

Jack, like many other respondents, spoke of how professionals, particularly those working in statutory care can find it difficult, impossible even, to display physical affection (see also Rees and Pithouse, 2008). As such, 'care' was understood to reinforce those confused boundaries of touch but also of relationships, as discussed above, which are unlikely to be open-ended and unconditional as in many families.

'There was no one looking out for them'

Young people were also considered to be vulnerable when they are out of the protective gaze of adults. Many professionals talked about young people who are 'in the system' but who are not especially visible to social services, in that they had few if any positive relationships with professionals who might be expected to be looking out for them. They had no one in their lives who would question the suitability of a young person's friends, where they went, what they were doing. That said, participants considered how some parents may be ill-informed about risks and not able to see grooming that may be occurring. Others described how parents may be 'stretched' by many responsibilities and lack support themselves, and as such unable to monitor their children effectively. They also spoke of how there may be 'poor or a lack of parenting within difficult families', in which young people are unseen and unobserved:

> **Louisa (social work):** I think the issue was maybe more their vulnerability, and the LACK of um, kind of parenting, and the support they OR the lack of any kind of support or family network, and I think, that they were probably

taken advantage of, because there was no one out there looking out for them and so no one would know if they went missing.

Yet from what or whom would some young person be missing? The young people talked of by professionals were thought to be unobserved or overlooked by significant adults in their lives. Likewise, as noted earlier, the young people too felt themselves to be unheard and unseen. 'Young people going missing' is established within policy and practice guidance as a risk factor (see WAG, 2011: 16), and is one that is well noted within the literature (see Melrose et al., 1999; Pearce et al., 2002; O'Neill, 2000). Yet, arguably, the problem is not that young people 'go missing', because, as both the professionals and the young people explain, there was no one from whom they could *go* missing; the problem is that no one would miss them. As Annette explains:

> **Annette (third sector):** I *felt* quite strongly that *the circles* that they moved in it was those young people that they sort *of latched on* to the sort of party people, who had NO ONE ELSE that there was no one, NO ONE who would *know* that they had been up all night, smoking cannabis, there was no one who would be going to miss them when they didn't turn up, for whatever, school, college, or for work, that there was no one that would ever KNOW and it was *those* I think that were latched on to, I think that the kids that were living at home and having difficulties were not as vulnerable, the kids that were *still going to school* were not as vulnerable. These were the kids you know again the sort of kids that no one would *really care*, and I think from the start they can *see* the culture then of what their lifestyle *was* and those were the ones, who were ripe for the picking then because, *no one cared*

As discussed throughout, the young people considered to be vulnerable arguably have many people in their lives. Indeed, there may be too many people engaged with them: young people can be vulnerable because they are notionally of concern to a number of professionals but are of not much notice to any one worker in particular.

'They were ripe for the picking, because no one cared': the real problem of sexual exploitation

As indicated thus far, there were a number of factors related to young people's emotional wellbeing which were understood by the professionals to make them particularly vulnerable to being sexually exploited. These can be considered as separate to the professionals' framing of risk, which was related to what it is to be young in itself. The ways they made sense of young people's *vulnerability*, why some young people are more vulnerable and thus at risk to those who would sexually exploit them, cluster together under the theme of (in)visibility. Showing strikingly similar understandings to the young people, they observed that it was those young people who were not paid sufficient attention, who lacked interdependent relationships, who were without key adults to notice them and acknowledge them both physically and relationally, who are understood by respondents to be especially vulnerable. These young people are invisible because no one is *looking after* them. The more invisible they are to carers and professionals the more visible they can become, and vulnerable as such, to people who want to exploit them. Chris, a police officer, gave a revealing synopsis of the problem: 'these LAC kids, are vulnerable because they are Looked After Children'.[*] The obvious irony here is that to be a Looked After Child can sometimes mean the reverse. To be a Looked After Child, as understood by both sets of participants in this study is to experience a lack of care, attention, acknowledgement – a lack of that which is needed for anyone to feel perceived as an authentic and integral other. To be 'looked after' is to be the object of concern, and for some, more or less invisible as a subject. As both the professionals and young people explained, a young person's vulnerability stems from complex causes and can be compounded through a number of factors that can be experienced as 'blotting out their subjectivity and individuality' (see O'Connell-Davidson, 2005:55). Such words offer a sharp contradiction, a paradox even, in which to make sense of both participants' understandings of the problem. Thus young people are overseen in many ways by

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[*] This can be applied to both sets of participants' understandings of a young person's vulnerability regardless of whether they may have the legal status of being a Looked After Child. it is worth reiterating here that all the young people who took part in this study had been recipients of statutory care services and every professional spoke of 'young people in care' as those who were most at risk, vulnerable and likely to experience sexual exploitation. This is also consistent with the literature, in which young people in care are noted as an 'at risk' group (see O'Neill 2001, Pearce et al 2002, Scott and Skidmore 2006). Young people in or who have been in care feature highly in statistics related to adult sex workers and to those related to child sexual exploitation (see Coy 2008).

different carers and professionals involved in their lives. Yet while they are visibly placed in care settings and encoded in official records many remain outside the informal structures of family, care and attachment deemed protective of most children. To be overseen in this way is to be looked upon but also to be looked over, to be unacknowledged as an individual; to be missed, whilst not being missed at all. The notice they receive from the many different professionals in their lives can be experienced by young people as their being *objects* of concern, subject to surveillance – yet *beneath notice*, in terms of their subjective selves and inner world.

This raises a further issue, just as troubling yet just as necessary to consider. As O'Neill (2001) argues, power and authority in the relationships between adults and children/young people needs to be examined when looking at why the latter might turn to exchanging or 'selling' sex. This is to acknowledge a wider societal frame not much recognised within policy (see Day, 2009). Whilst the policy discourse surrounding child sexual exploitation does recognise the role of power and control, it does so only in relation to a grooming process itself (between individuals). Yet 'grooming' can, and needs to be, understood as taking place within, and as shaped by, a much wider context of established relations of power and control, command and subordination between adults and children and young people, within which children and young people can sometimes (and also expect to) feel unheard, unnoticed and invisible. Adult 'care' giving as something administered to those who are vulnerable, on their behalf, and the practices of 'child' protection, partake of a general framework of cultural understanding and relations of power that also inform the problem itself. As Ennew (1986: 140/1) has argued, 'the sexual exploitation of children is less a set of abnormal practices than an extreme manifestation of prevailing social and sexual values'. If we are to fully understand sexual exploitation, it must be understood in the context of power relations between adults and children/young people; a point which is considered in more detail in the following chapter.

Yet as Pearce (2009) argues, there is little other way, to understand sexual exploitation other than as individual problems and events. Whilst 'vulnerability indicators' are present within policy, they are there as a way of enabling professionals to assess young people's risk to sexual exploitation (see WAG, 2011). They do not feature as a discourse to help explain the social problem itself because, as discussed above, the theoretical space in which to understand young people's involvement in the exchange of sex is limited to that of the coercion and manipulation of children and young people by

(primarily) adult men (Phoenix 2002). Consequently, there is scant discursive space for professionals to explain young people's risky behaviours or experiences of sexual exploitation in relation to those vulnerabilities outlined in much of this chapter. It may partly be for these reasons that there is a disconnection, or contradiction, in the professionals' talk about sexual exploitation, young people, risk and vulnerabilities. As argued in the previous chapter, it was within often contradictory and countervailing categories of a subject/object experience that sexual exploitation was made sense of by the young people participating in this study. The missing ingredient in the professionals' accounts is the consideration of young people's subject experiences. A young person is understood to be vulnerable because they have many experiences in which they are denied as subjects – through their lack of meaningful reciprocal relationships, their lack of place and home and in their status as objects of care. Yet, in the professionals' talk about risk, they too deny young people as real subjective actors, arguably because, as discussed throughout, young people do not 'fit' easily within the current conception of child sexual exploitation within policy. And therein lies the contradiction and the source of some confusion. For young people (in particular) to be visible within 'child sexual exploitation', they cannot also be visible as active subjects. Young people sit somewhat uncomfortably on the fringes of this issue because, to reiterate, the current discourse with its focus on grooming by adult men is connected to the notion that young people are considered unable to give informed consent in some authentic sense, because they are by definition 'children'. It follows that they must have been forced to participate (see O'Connell-Davidson, 2005; Melrose, 2012). Hence the 'problem' of sexual exploitation is not linked to the sorts of vulnerabilities discussed here or in regard to the ways in which young people resolve or cope with them, but is limited to 'men who exploit' (Phoenix, 2002: 359). Arguably both must be considered if we are to understand child sexual exploitation and how young people come to experience it. As the title quote above states 'they were ripe for the picking because no one cared'.

Concluding comments

The purpose of this chapter has been twofold. In exploring the ways that the different professionals made sense of child sexual exploitation, consideration has also been given to the boundaries of 'child sexual exploitation' as an established social care problem. Child sexual exploitation was talked about by the professionals as being primarily a problem for 'vulnerable', 'at risk' teen-aged 'children' or 'young people' with needs.

Whilst 'grooming' featured in all the professionals' accounts, there were other ways that young people were understood to come to experience sexual exploitation. Across their different accounts were multiple and disparate understandings of this problem. Participants also displayed and talked of a confusion and uncertainty over what this problem *is*. There was clear indication that, as argued in the previous chapter, certain experiences of sexual exploitation and by extension some young people themselves, are not easily accounted for and rendered visible within a discourse aligned to grooming and the manipulation or coercion by an abusive *adult*. This is particularly so for those young people for whom the exchange of sex is a coping response albeit made within severely adverse circumstances. The reconceptualisation of 'child sexual exploitation' to include such young people is necessary in order for them to gain recognition of their needs and get support (see Warrington, 2010). Thus, 'grooming' as a key conceptual mode and operational model can be problematic for professionals as it does not encourage or provide a discourse to enable them to fully explain and account for how and why young people come to experience sexual exploitation.

A notable feature across the professionals' accounts is a seeming contradiction or confusion in their understanding about how young people come to experience sexual exploitation, their risk to it, and what makes them vulnerable. This resides notably in relation to the dominant discourse of grooming which does not encourage or allow space for the professionals to consider young people's involvement in sexual exploitation outside of coercion or manipulation from some adult abuser. This is not easily facilitated when the boundaries of this problem are so intrinsically linked to conceptions of childhood in order to legitimise this as a social care problem, one specifically established as a child protection issue (Piper, 2000; O'Connell-Davidson, 2005). Thus it was argued by professionals that young people's assertions of agency and consent in relation to a sexually exploitative relationship were a result of 'normal' expressions of youthful challenging behaviour. Hence young people are understood to be vulnerable *and* victims of abuse because they are young people. Their risk to sexual exploitation is often understood as a result of their low visibility to protective adults and high visibility to those who will harm them. Yet fundamentally there is a lack of discursive capacity or conceptual insights to make sense of and explain young people's risky behaviours in the same way that the young people did. In summary, there seems little space to understand, recognise and make sense of the paradoxical and anomalous circumstances that permeate the exchange of sex (Phoenix, 2002). As discussed in the

previous chapter, more nuanced understandings of young people's vulnerabilities and risk are needed and young people's agency must be made visible within a discourse of child sexual exploitation in order to fully apprehend both the complexity of their social and emotional worlds and the problem of sexual exploitation itself. As argued earlier, child sexual exploitation as constructed within policy and practice has become unhelpfully simplified to a problem of 'men who exploit', and the consequent need for protection/control of individual children, rather than a problem constructed around the social conditions and problems that children *and* young people face (Phoenix, 2002: 359). It is this narrow construction of the problem that determines the identification, referral and responses that seek to solve or moderate the issue at hand. It is to the young people's thoughts on solutions to sexual exploitation that this exploration now turns.

Chapter six

'Just don't come in with the solutions until you've analysed the problem!' Responding to 'child sexual exploitation': young people's perspectives

Introduction

The principle aim of this chapter is to consider the young people's reflections on "solutions" to what they refer typically to as the problem of "young people being taken advantage of in a sexual way". This reference to solutions reflects a vocabulary used by many of the young people themselves. In so doing, it should not be inferred that the young people simplified the complexities of their needs and circumstances by understanding them to be 'solvable' or that they suggested these could be met through simplistic measures. Neither does this vocabulary suggest a limited ability to reflect on measures for prevention and intervention, or on the problem itself. One of the purposes of this chapter is to explore how the young people presented understandings which suggest a more sophisticated conceptualisation of the problem, and its solutions, than that presented in official policy and practice discourses. It is pertinent to re-emphasise here the acknowledgement within the literature, that to provide more meaningful responses to the problem of child sexual exploitation, there is a need to consider young people's own understandings of their experiences (see O'Neill, 2001; Pearce, 2009), a point which I extend to aspects of policy and practice in general. As previously noted, there is an absence of young people's views and perspectives within much of the research literature and within official policy and practice frameworks (see Warrington, 2010). In light of this, in exploring and 'making visible' the young people's perspectives on aspects of prevention, identification, and intervention, throughout this chapter I interrogate four related seemingly taken-for-granted assumptions present within the literature and in policy responses to this field of practice (see WAG, 2011). Firstly, that young people are unlikely to *disclose* their abuse; secondly, it is because of a grooming process that young people may not recognise their abuse and it is *this* which

is a significant reason why they do not leave the abusive situation; thirdly, that young people experiencing sexual exploitation are difficult to engage in the supportive process; fourthly, awareness raising and education plays a key role in any intervention (and in a similar way to 'stranger danger' campaigns, official discourse outlines how, if young people are made aware of and understand their risk, they will then protect themselves). These assumptions inform a widely shared explanation of sexual exploitation promoted by current policy which places 'grooming' at the centre. Yet, as argued in the previous two chapters, according to the participants within this research study, this model, whilst having some relevance, 'does not tell the whole story' (Melrose, 2004:9). Moreover, as Williams (2010) notes, the solutions to this problem are intricately connected to the problem itself: what the problem of sexual exploitation is understood to be in each particular case determines 'who' and 'what' is of concern and the necessary responses employed.

It is this latter aspect which the young people themselves recognised, and it is this which informs the direction of this chapter. As is emphatically declared by Leah in the title quote above, if we are to begin to consider the possible solutions we must first make sure that we have a clear idea of what *is* the problem. It is the intention of this chapter to do just that. Whilst Leah's statement was made in reference to support for her individual circumstances, it is also an apt summary of the ways the young people talked about solutions to the problem in general. From the outset, this directs attention to two significant inter-related points, which form the overarching framework for this chapter. Firstly, that the substance of policy discourse about 'child sexual exploitation' is not just referred to in a different vocabulary by the young people, but is something which is framed and conceptualised in a different way altogether. Similarly, when young people discuss the matter of individual level of support and care in relation to solutions to 'sexual exploitation' they are also telling us about the very nature of the problem itself.

In the first part of this chapter I demonstrate how the young people considered that the *real* problem(s) were the underlying vulnerabilities which make 'being taken advantage of in a sexual way' possible; and it is *this* which forms the problem that people − family, carers and those tasked to help them − need to address. This was something which the young people felt was not always recognised by those trying to help them because these adults tended to focus more on their behaviour. In the second part of this chapter I address what the young people had to say about interventions. I explore the young people's talk about the important role of their care and support

relationships and the importance placed on talk, and in particular that of uncovering and of establishing meaning about their experiences. The final part of the chapter, in which we hear from the young people for the last time, provides an overview and a summary discussion of what these young people had to say about child sexual exploitation.

Returning to arguments raised in the previous two chapters, the discussion here continues to develop the theme of (in)visibility. Thus Chapter four considered how the young people made sense of their experiences of sexual exploitation through countervailing categories of object/subject experiences: this was also the case with their experiences of care and support. Hence, in this chapter I explore the ways that care and protection (as something administered *to* those who are *vulnerable*, on *their behalf*, without *reference* to them), can unintentionally render young people invisible. The chapter will consider how the provision and practices of care and child protection can be experienced as something in which young people can feel unheard, unnoticed and overlooked, and how young people who are not permitted as active subjects in setting the terms of their own support can feel 'invisible', and more as objects of concern to both carers and the structures of care around them. The discussion also considers that the *how* in any intervention was talked of by young people as being more important than *what* was being done.

The reader should be familiar with the young participants who took part in this study, and so it is not necessary to rehearse their key characteristics again here. It is however important to note that at the time of the research, the young people were all in receipt of support from a specialist voluntary sector service in regard to their involvement in CSE and all had experienced some involvement with statutory care services previously and at the time of interview. That the respondents made few distinctions between support related to their experiences of sexual exploitation and support related to other circumstances or periods of care involvement is telling. It suggests, as will be explored later, that the problem of sexual exploitation was not readily distinguishable to the young people from the wider situational, circumstantial and relational contexts of their lives. Not only does adult care giving and practices of child protection feature in the young people's accounts as being part of the problem, but the instigation of these practices, made as a response to a young person's involvement in sexually exploitative situations, can ignore, or miss, the 'real' problem of sexual exploitation as the young people see it, and may also serve to compound the problem

which it is attempting to prevent and disrupt. This proposition will provide the central focus in this chapter.

The problem: 'It's people taking advantage'

This part of the chapter will consider what the young people had to say about what is referred to within policy, and by the adults around them, as child sexual exploitation. This, in part, provides necessary context to the discussion which follows. As considered in the previous chapter, a consistent theme in the ways that the young people spoke of their experiences of exchanging sex was that of people taking advantage: taking advantage of 'vulnerable people', of 'people who've had hard lives', of their 'needs', 'emotions and feelings', and of them. As Nathan summarises below:

> **Nathan:** Um in a nutshell, it's explaining the fact that it's basically (pause) taking advantage of someone's circumstances whether it's they're emotionally damaged because of their family or whatever, or because of their sexuality and they can't express it or, whether it's uh, you know they're in dire need of money or whatever and just taking advantage in a sexual way uh, using (coughs) uh their weaknesses to get, uh, not favour 'cos that makes it sound like it's good but uh, um (pause) yeh sexual outcome

Nathan conveys the ways the young people typically conceptualised sexual exploitation. It is when someone takes advantage of a person's weaknesses for a 'sexual outcome'. A young person can be taken advantage of when they are in a position of powerlessness, for reasons that can be monetary, emotional/psychological or circumstantial. As argued throughout, the problem of 'child sexual exploitation' is one that is more complex than just grooming and there are a number of reasons why young people may come to exchange sex (O'Neill, 2001; Moore, 2002; Pearce et al., 2002; Pearce, 2009). The young people's accounts suggest that aside from grooming, other psycho-socio-economic factors such as sexuality and attitudes towards sex, material, emotional and economic needs can form part of any involvement in the exchange of sex (see also McMullen, 1987). This is a reminder that sexual exploitation is not a linear process. There is an *exchange*, of some sort, that takes place; one which is in some way meeting a need for the young person, whilst providing a sexual outcome for someone else. This

was fundamental to the ways in which young people's accounts made sense of the phenomenon. Unmet needs are what make sexual exploitation possible and are intrinsic to the problem itself. As Nathan goes on to explain:

> **Nathan:** people don't, sometimes I think they just see the outside of it and they don't give enough time to focus on what's happening on the inside, you know discovering what the vulnerabilities are, to, um, also to make sure that they don't fall into it (pause) as I said, I don't think it (sexual exploitation) starts with a young person needing to do it, or, being tricked or forced into sex, I think it's at the point where, you're becoming vulnerable to getting to that stage.

As Nathan's explanation suggests, vulnerabilities and risks whilst different, are central to the young people's understandings of the problem. Sexual exploitation is not something that can be de-contextualised from other aspects of their lives in the way that the grooming explanation, with its emphasis on adult 'others', implies (Brown, 2004). It is constitutive of 'the things going on' in their lives, to use Katie's phrase. The young people's underlying vulnerabilities, by which they meant their feelings of instability and uncertainty, difference and exclusion, confused boundaries about sex and ownership over their bodies, their invisibility to family, carers and those tasked to help them, are not just indicators of the problem – they *are* the problem. Thus from young people's perspectives, without these underlying unmet needs and issues there would be nothing to take advantage of and, in their talk about solutions, it was on these difficulties which 'people' – those tasked to help them – needed to focus. The young people did not seek to diminish the significance of being taken advantage of, and this was understood to be part of the problem. However, their accounts about 'solutions' spoke much more to the need for professionals to find out and address those pre-disposing factors that Nathan alludes to above.

'People just see the surface exterior'
The aspect of professionals seeing only the 'exterior' of the problem as intimated by Nathan reflected the views of young people more generally. The frustrations of other respondents about this suggested their awareness that they and those tasked to help them had different understandings of the problem. They spoke of how people 'make sexual

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exploitation too simple' and 'not broad enough'; of how 'people think you're not being taken advantage of if you're not being pimped out'; of how 'people need to see the more subtle side' such as the controlling and manipulative side of abusive relationships. There is a further sense of this in what Leah and Sarah have to say, below:

Leah: more emotionally type reasons don't seem to come into it

Sarah: people think you're not at risk until you've started doing it

In talking about their experiences, the young people suggested that people do not give enough attention to the reasons *why* 'it' may be happening, and they do not always recognise that these reasons form part of the 'it' itself. This layered and underlying set of influences requires that the 'problem' is grasped through the ways in which the young people made sense of their experiences of being taken advantage of. This requires an insight into a young person's sense of self and their common-sense understandings of their social realities (see O'Connell-Davidson, 2005). Furthermore, the young people spoke of how without this understanding of the problem, people will not be able to 'see' it. As Hannah tells us:

Hannah: my foster carer actually DID a sexual exploitation uh they actually DID a course on it, while I was with the partner I was with, I don't think she knew what I was up to or what to be looking for really

When it is the underlying needs and vulnerabilities that are the problem, the things the young people did to cope – their use of alcohol and drugs, their hiding away and 'hanging out', their 'sleeping around' – could be seen as signs that there is an anterior problem. Yet it is important to note that the young people spoke of how 'sexual exploitation' could not be bracketed as some separable and distinct problem from other 'things going on' in their lives – by which they meant those underlying vulnerabilities and their ways of coping. In this way, these signs are an indication that a young person is in need of help. They talked of how this is not often picked up by those charged with helping them, who instead focus on their behaviour, what they *do,* rather than on taking the time to understand *why* they are doing it. People don't see 'it' because people don't 'see' young people. Kerry aptly summarises this:

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> **Kerry:** I think it might be because they are sometimes overseen (pause) like um the issues that young people face (pause) aren't (pause) aren't always dealt with. Like people can be dealing with things internally, and no one not many people have the *time*, or put the time in to find out what's *really going on* (pause) they just see the surface exterior and they never try and pursue further to see what the actual person is dealing with (her emphasis)

It is worth pausing here for a moment to consider the narrative structure evident in several data extracts whereby the theme of (in)visibility can be seen to permeate much of the accounts that seek to explain how young people become vulnerable. It is a narrative which provides a way of making sense of what the young people had to say about both the problem and solutions; one in which the young people speak of surface exteriors and the ways in which they or the signs of their problems were missed or remained hidden. To point to Kerry's last sentence above, she speaks of how there is an 'actual person' (i.e. a young person) dealing with things, who is unacknowledged by the carers and professionals around them. A point the young people were concerned to make is that relevant adults do not seem to give the time to find out and address what a young person is feeling or dealing with; instead it is often their behaviour which comes to notice leaving *them* feeling unseen. This has consequences in that key adults do not see the problem for what it is; because they do not see the underlying matters that young people are dealing with - 'people just see the surface exterior'. Furthermore, in believing they are ignored, some young people feel unable to share their experiences. Thus, paradoxically, some young people hide themselves emotionally and physically because they come to think of themselves and their problems as invisible anyway. Nathan makes the point:

> **Nathan:** I think that sometimes people slip through the net, because they are very good at, hiding, and they don't always show what they really feel about things so I think, sometimes too many people get missed … … sometimes it's right under people's noses and they just, don't, recognise it.

According to the young people this aspect of being overlooked or missed compounds the problem in that they come to believe they are left to cope on their own. As discussed

in the previous chapter, the young people spoke of hiding or disguising how they felt, indeed physically hiding themselves away as part of their ways of coping, and how this decreased their visibility to professionals and carers but enhanced their visibility to those who took advantage of them.

A hidden problem?

To repeat, the young people spoke of sexual exploitation as a problem of people taking advantage of their unmet needs and issues. Their accounts suggest a lack of recognition, amongst those tasked to help them of the contribution of these unmet needs to the problem. This lack of understanding or misunderstanding of their needs compounds their vulnerability. It is stated within Welsh Government policy that child sexual exploitation is a particularly hidden form of abuse (see WAG, 2011). Yet, as Pearce (2009: 30) suggests, it is not that the problem is hidden, rather it is that 'there is a genuine lack of knowledge and awareness' about it. As will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, there was a confusion acknowledged by the professionals about 'who' and 'what' counts in relation to 'child sexual exploitation' according to the representation of this problem within policy. Limited to that of grooming, policy simplifies the phenomenon and does not much recognise needs being met through the exchange of sex, and does not provide those tasked to support young people with a discourse to make sense of young people's 'risky behaviours' as ways of coping (see also Melrose, 2012; Pearce, 2010). Indeed, professionals often invoked the notion of 'youth' itself as a time for risky behaviour young people. Such varied understandings did not 'fit' with the accounts provided by the young people. If policy is to recognise child sexual exploitation in the way the young people understand it, it needs to allow for a more nuanced representation of the links between 'vulnerabilities', 'risks' and sexual exploitation, to provide a more complex representation of the problem itself. This might go some way to enabling professionals to both 'see' it and focus upon underlying vulnerabilities and ways of coping. Arguably, sexual exploitation is not 'hidden', in the sense that it is any more or less 'visible' than any other form of abuse. As the young people explained, the problem is linked to the 'things going on' in their lives and so the problem can be made visible if people were to recognise the signs of these underlying needs and act upon them. The young people's accounts suggest that for adults to provide support, they must first understand that sexual exploitation is linked to their feelings of instability and uncertainty; difference and exclusion; confused boundaries

about sex and ownership over their bodies; and their invisibility to family, carers and those tasked to help them. It is perhaps not too obvious to state that in the discussion that follows, when the young people are talking about the solutions they are also telling us much about the complex nature of the problem.

Solutions: 'Now I realise that things in your life don't just happen. Things don't have to be the way they are'

The chapter now turns to what the young people had to say about solutions to sexual exploitation. Almost all of what the young people had to say was related to their experiences of being in care at some point or other. They had strong opinions on what it is that professionals and carers should *not* do as well as what they *should* do. Two clear and interrelated themes derived from the analysis: the importance of supportive relationships and within these, the importance of talk.

'It was having someone who was there for me…: The importance of support

All the young people talked of their needing and wanting support. It is perhaps telling that they did not talk much about the content of this help. They did not have anything to say about what people should *do* in any practical sense, or much about *who* should support them.[*] Instead they spoke of needing '*someone* there', as Sarah intimates about a particular person:

> **Sarah:** I think it's 'cos she's someone who's there and she makes sure I'm alright you know, she lets me know I'm okay

The importance of this becomes evident when considering what the young people had to say about the people who took advantage of them, as is apparent within Katie's recollections:

> **Katie**: I was in care and I was moved around here and there and anywhere. So I was always doing runners, and then when I met (name of person deemed to be exploitative) it was having someone who was there for me

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[*] Each young person was specifically asked whether they needed any practical help, for example: whether they needed money, whether they needed help with alcohol or substance misuse, housing, education etc. Although some responded to this, they did not expand on these responses, or these areas were spoken of as not being those of most importance.

you know… … He looked after me. He gave me everything. Everything I didn't have you know. I was safe there

Katie was with her boyfriend because he was someone who was there for her – he *looked after her* – and gave her a form of stability and safety that she did not feel when she was in residential care. When Katie goes on to explain why her social worker was so important in helping her leave the relationship, she reiterates a similar message[*]:

Katie: When (name) became my social worker. She did it all, she did everything for me, she was there for me, she set everything up, she took me under her wing really.

To repeat, the young people typically invoked a lack of care which they experienced as instability and insecurity, uncertainty and difference. They described feelings of relative powerlessness over their circumstances and a profound sense of insecurity in not having some durable, safe, caring habitus of people and place (see Pitts, 1997). In this sense the problem can be captured in terms of unpredictability and chaos. Thus when everything feels insecure, and unstable, it is 'support', having someone *there* which they craved; someone seemingly solid and immovable in a world of turmoil. Danny provides a sense of this:

Danny: I don't know, just the support I think, I'm glad for the support you know, someone helping me, because if I didn't have this, I'd probably be, I don't know, I don't know where I'd be. I'm just glad for the support really.

The word 'support' means to bear, to hold, to shoulder, to stay, to keep from falling. Its meaning is laboured here to bring into focus the poignancy of the young people's reflections on their experiences of support from family and those tasked to help them. We have heard throughout the young people speak of 'being thrown in the deep-end', of 'falling into it' because there was no one else there, of needing 'someone to make it stop'. Respondents spoke of feeling uncared for, ignored, unnoticed, taken advantage of, and of feeling used. What they wanted was to have someone there to support them.

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[*] The unintended irony, and uncomfortable similarity, revealed by Katie about what it is to be looked after is an aspect of the young people's accounts discussed further in the concluding part of this chapter.

In addition, it was the young people's relationships with their workers – in most cases with one specific worker – which determined whether their sense of security was enhanced or not, and whether change was experienced in a more positive way. The respondents all spoke of wanting help and support. Through a direct and inferred vocabulary all the young people talked of wanting to 'move on', 'move on with things', of 'moving away', of 'moving forwards' as an accomplishment of distance – emotional, physical and temporal from the problem. The young people emphasised that it was having someone there as the source of a necessary security through which change had been possible. It is, as Adey (2006: 86) explains, as if 'social life and the complexities of life seem to require immobile moorings that are solid, static and immobile' adding that 'there can be no movement without context, without something to push off from'. Thus anchored to someone, the young people could feel more certain in themselves and able to move on in a positive way.

The meanings the young people attributed to support and to their movement on and away from the problem can be found in the 'embeddedness' of the relationship – its authenticity and capacity for promoting change (Adey, 2006: 83). Movement as 'moving on' was linked to whether the young person felt in control of their lives. Autonomy requires relationships (Sennett, 2003); thus by having someone there to acknowledge them, by feeling heard and seen, listened to and understood, the young people acquired a degree of security, stability and a sense of their own agency and control, which enabled them to believe they could 'move on'.

Being an active subject in one's care is about being acknowledged as an individual who is seen as more than a person in need of help; it is also to feel a sense of control over that care. In the young people's accounts, it is this interdependence which marks out supportive workers who stand in clear contrast to those deemed unsupportive, as well as those who take advantage of them. Indeed, young people alluded to countervailing categories of object/subject experiences whereby they recognised they were acknowledged and 'cared for' as subjects by those abusing them but also viewed as 'objects' of concern by those officially charged with their care who cannot always see or meet their relational needs. It is when a young person is visible and accounted for as an individual, *as well as* feeling cared for and supported, that the problem can begin to be addressed. As discussed next, it is this which marks out the importance of interdependence within the supportive relationship.

'She doesn't just do it for the job': interdependence and reciprocity

A significant theme was that of the importance of the respondents' relationships with authority figures and those tasked to care for them. All their accounts tell of the importance of feeling that there is some personal investment in that caring relationship beyond it just being someone's job. Many of the young people expressed frustration towards people just 'doing their job', a point which can be noted in Claire's account:

> **Claire:** social workers they go round and they're doing their *job* (her emphasis). When they say I know how you feel, they seriously don't, because when you've had this done to you, you just feel like, what's worth living for like

People who just 'do their job' were spoken of as being 'unreliable', 'patronising' and 'make you jump through hoops'. They were cast as people who 'don't really want to know', 'don't know what to do with you', 'don't really care' and 'don't want to bother'. As Claire goes on to say:

> **Claire:** just don't muck them about, because if you muck the child about they'll just do something drastic and they won't know what to do, because they can't turn to you if you're mucking them about, and saying I know how you feel, and they don't, but if someone turned to me and said I need your help I'm being sexually exploited, can you please help me, then one I'd turn up if they asked me to do that, *two* I know how they're feeling because I've been there and *three* I know I'd help them

Claire's troubling account conveys how the phrase 'just doing the job' stands for so much. It represents indifference and a lack of empathy. It is to feel dependent on people who do not care about them. It is to be reminded that the only people who care, do so because they are paid to, not because they want to. This conveys feeling the object of concern but not recognised as an authentic other, of being seen but not seen; of people seeing but not seeing (Sennett, 2003: 171). That is, the young people spoke of feeling only of interest because of their objectified need; of people knowing all manner of details about their lives but not knowing them as a person. People who just do their job

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made the young people feel powerless and unwanted. Similarly, people who *really care* are people who do more than their job, as Katie tells us:

> **Katie**: like I love my social worker she really helped me, been there for me – she's like my best friend … … she makes sure I'm alright. She doesn't just do it for the job, she does things for me when she's not working

Similarly to Katie, the young people used the language of family and friendship to make sense of the relationships they had with people which they felt were positive. They spoke of people who are *like* family, *like* a best friend, someone they could get on *with*, and someone they had fun *with*. Yet poignantly the young people were not describing people who were like their actual family and friends but rather their ideal of family and friends. For example Sarah described how her support worker was 'like a mum, not like my mum'. Furthermore, people who do more than their job were spoken of as being 'trustworthy', 'safe', 'easy to talk to' and 'friendly'. In so doing, they were drawing on ideas of unconditional relationships in which there was meaning, authenticity and commitment from both parties. This finds a strong parallel with literature arguing that relationships are core to child-centred practice and to 'good' social work (see Holland, 2010; Winter, 2010). The young people's accounts indicate the importance of mutuality and interdependency in their relationships with their carers and those tasked to help them. This can be seen within the examples given by Nathan and Leah below, in which they spoke of instances that stood out for them as being particularly special or helpful:

> **Nathan**: one of my support workers who would always like take me for coffee and I'd have hot chocolate and they'd have coffee and it was kind of like, kind of like a safe environment for me, somewhere where I felt less, stressed and they kind of, we would work on issues but it was more like, we'd *talk* (his emphasis) about an issue, and then maybe when we had done that we would move on to something else not work, and just things like that really, I liked that way that, you know it wasn't too bogged down and horribly serious.

As Nathan observes, 'getting the work done' is dependent on a relationship that exists as more than the 'job' itself, indeed it is the relationship which forms the work. Leah conveys something similar:

> **Leah:** When we went to the um cinema I really liked that
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> Sophie: What was it you liked about it?
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> **Leah:** 'Cos it all went dark and just as it was going to start she goes BOO (laughter) I jumped, I jumped a mile, it was so funny, and she was making me laugh and I was making her laugh and um. She's weird. She's quite good at sort of messing around and being fun. She like, makes, doing work with her she makes it different, she don't make you do it, but like on the other hand other people do, so, it's different. She like, it feels like we are just hanging out.

What can be seen in both Nathan and Leah's accounts is an appreciation of those instances in which the relational aspect of care takes precedence over those formal aspects of work which simply need to occur procedurally. The young people emphasised the importance of being recognised and being acknowledged as more than their need. Not only that, but within these examples and in others like the above, the young people emphasised the importance of interdependency, giving emphasis to seemingly small instances of reciprocity, an example of which is shared by Katie:

> **Katie:** We, I was 7 we went down to the pier you know down in (name) and I ran ahead to the swings and this was with (name of worker) and you know that the pier has those holes in it like where the slats are? Well I looked back and she had stopped still halfway down and she was so scared she couldn't go any further and couldn't go back, she was so scared she couldn't move. I was 7 years old and I had to go back and hold her hand and help her back off the pier (laughs)
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> Sophie: (laughs) ah, that's a nice story. What was it about that time that was so special for you?
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> **Katie:** *she* trusted *me*. I was holding *her* hand.

For the young people to feel safe and cared for there must be a degree of mutuality and reciprocity as indicated above. As Sennett (2003: 219) argues, 'put simply, reciprocity is the foundation of mutual respect'. It is in reciprocal relationships, which implicitly acknowledge the interdependency of care relationships, that the young people felt present as active subjects, and not just objects of concern. As such, reciprocal care and interest was creating a new subjectivity for the young people in that their feelings of loneliness, isolation, their feeling unwanted and of notice to no one, were counteracted in some way by the relationship itself.

'It's the talking that's important, that's what helps really, just talking'
All the young people emphasised the importance of talk. In fact, aside from identifying support and relationships, 'talking to someone' was the only other source of significant impact they identified. The young people described how it is through talk that they and their experiences can be discovered behind the surface exterior and made visible. They explained that it is through talk that people can make sense of the things that they *do*; because it is through talking that they can share how they felt.[*] This insight, while seemingly obvious belies the difficulty in disclosing their histories and how this is likely to occur only when there is trust and mutuality. By sharing how they felt, people would be able to *see* what the problems for them are. They spoke of the need to bring up to the surface the ways that they felt, and the things that were going on in their lives. Nathan makes the point succinctly:

> **Nathan**: this might sound really simple, but the idea that someone, when, the issues arise is there, and this is a good thing about the (name) service, is when the thing is out that the worker really takes the time to try and understand the details of what it is that you are going through,

Despite respondents speaking of how it is talking that helps, most of what they had to say in interview was about the ways that talking can be *unhelpful*, as Nathan also goes on to say:

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[*] In this way, the young people themselves make connections between talking and visibility in the form of recognition and acknowledgement – a point referenced in the introduction and concluding chapters of the thesis.

Nathan: yeh, where I was being asked question and it wasn't like, it wasn't done in a very sensitive manner, it was very um thing you know it was very, they were so direct that it wasn't, you couldn't, you wouldn't feel comfortable answering, and I think that (pauses) yeh, too direct questions can be an issue, I think that things need to be brought up gently, yeh … … … they never (pause) treat every person with the kind of attitude of learning their trust first and get them to open up about the issues that *really* face them, they're faced with, 'cos, I think sometimes professionals expect young people to just sometimes just lay it on a plate for them yeh, and then tell them that there's a billion and one things wrong (pause) but it's not like that, it's normally it's difficult for them to tell people, um yeh that's about it (pause) yeh

The respondents explained how being 'made to talk', being 'made to go over and over things', being made to 'bring up the bad stuff' made them feel worse. When they had to provide a certain type of account, when their story wasn't theirs to tell in the way they wanted or when they were ready to, that made them feel as passive objects – unheard and unacknowledged. The institutional and forensic practices of child protection frequently create an adversarial and intrusive context (see Wastell, 2010). Professionals are required to perform an excavation of the 'facts', of what went on, but in so doing risk leaving a young person feeling as an object of concern, a victim of abuse, seen only for their need. Accordingly, the respondents perceived this official concern more as professionals' indifference to them as unique individuals and this reinforced a sense of powerlessness, of being 'unseen' and unacknowledged as a person. Danny sought to express this experience as follows:

Danny: um *labels*, I think um, some people um people do say sometimes oh you're like *that* because of *this*. They don't really know that do they you know, for a fact, like they've got to listen more like. I've spoke to people and they've just sat there and they haven't listened to me and then I'm going no because I'm not like that because of that and I get frustrated like … even if they might be right, you still want to tell it, to be able to talk about it 'cos they might not be (right).

Danny's account was typical of responses across the sample. They spoke of frustrations when people did not listen to them. They spoke of feeling unheard and how people were not interested in what *they* had to say about their experiences. As Claire explains, this sense of indifference can feel like speaking to a 'brick wall':

> **Claire**: I've noticed that with a few social workers I just feel like I'm talking to a brick wall
> Sophie: …in what sort of way?
> **Claire**: they listen but *it's like a false listening*, they just write it on a piece of paper and, you know we'll deal with it sort of thing but you're not getting any sense of understanding of it.

Claire uses a common idiom (a brick wall,) but it is one that is powerful in symbolising the shared perception of unresponsiveness, of professionals not really listening, not really caring. There is self-evidently no authentic relationship with a person who is like a brick wall. Claire expressed anger about her experiences of care and support. She could not say anything positive about the support she had received, and throughout her interview spoke often of feeling misunderstood:

> **Claire**: the kid may actually flip out, and just say *sorry you don't know how I feel* (her emphasis) and blah blah blah blah blah, and then gets even more angry and that will be the cycle, and then the kid will think, what the hell am I doing here, I'm trying to tell them how I feel, *and they don't believe me* (her emphasis) so then the self-esteem goes down and down and down, and they've got no one to talk to then

Claire conveyed strong feelings of frustration and anger toward those adults presuming to know how she felt by simply garnering this information from elsewhere or from having sought the external 'facts' surrounding the problem from Claire herself. This, in her view, denied her the opportunity to explain and make sense of what happened in a meaningful way for herself. This attempt by professionals to construct and define the problem in their terms, made her feel misunderstood and silenced her. Claire concluded that adults don't listen, don't understand and don't believe what young people say. This is particularly troubling given that Claire explained how she went online 'just for

someone to talk to', and in doing so was groomed by someone who sought to exploit her by seeking to raise her self esteem. It would seem paradoxical to suggest that the young people hide their feelings, or reject help because they feel unseen and overlooked. Yet they spoke of doing just this. They wanted help but they were loath to share personal details and reluctant to disclose how they felt inside to professionals and carers they did not really know or trust.

> **Katie**: people need to spend time talking to them to find out what's really going on, what they really need you know. I said I didn't want help but I needed it.

> **Danny**: um, talking about it, that helps, just like being able to talk to them about it. And even if they don't talk about it, it will come out eventually like I've been like that, so just being quiet and um, 'cos you trust you get trust in that person then, *after you've seen them for a while* they'll talk more

What Danny and Katie had to say reinforced what other respondents had to say about the importance of supportive, interdependent relationships. As McMullen (1987) has argued, trust can be a therapeutic intervention in itself. When people 'spend time', when they show they are there, when they show they are investing something in the relationship, the young people felt able to ask for or accept help. For talking to be helpful, it must be a process of openness and mutuality between two people, and not a 'one-sided' search for the secrets of some abusive encounter. It is not enough for young people to have time to disclose to someone ready and willing to listen to them, it is about talk as constituting a more interdependent encounter in which young people can choose if, when, and how they share the issues that concern them. This implies a more open-ended and equal relationship based upon mutual regard:

> **Danny**: it goes both ways (pause) like I hate the idea of people just sitting there staring at me where they're waiting for me to say something, like you know, what am I supposed to say and then you get nervous and think oh I'm not going to be able to say anything

> **Kerry:** I hate my counselling, I don't think that helped at all. Because I've dealt with most of it myself. I think going over and over it again it's just making it worse. They just sitting there and it's um, I just want to be able to draw a line under it and move on, and it's like, you can't

Whilst the young people spoke of the importance of people listening, and 'taking the time' to understand and 'find out what was going on' this was not always deemed helpful unless there was a relationship in which the young person could choose what to share and how to do this:

> **Kerry:** you've got to move on really so just keep on talking to people, and the more you talk to people the more you come to your senses about what went on really … … … … Well I haven't been in the situation since I came along with (worker's name). She helped me to get myself out of my own situation. And I talk to her a lot about the stuff that have happened. It's been helpful just to talk to someone that I didn't know from before, just to be able to talk to them about it all without them knowing about me first…

As can be glimpsed above, in order to feel recognised as a person, those tasked to help them must also be part of the process of talking, and present within the relationship, able to work at the pace of the young person, and not make assumptions about the needs to be met, but working through the concerns and priorities of the young person. Through the process of talking with another about their experiences the young people were able to move on, because 'just talking' in a trusting relationship is the way they are able to contemplate some kind of change. As Pithouse, et al., (2011) argue, it is in a relational and iterative exchange of knowledge that social workers and young people can create trusting exchanges that make up the work *itself*. The young people spoke of 'needing to see things differently', and 'needing to stop and see what you hadn't seen before'. The importance of time and trust, of professionals allowing young people space to explore events and to move at their own pace, was noted by respondents and articulated by Nathan thus:

> **Nathan:** I think I found that quite useful because I didn't feel like, I was just going, oh this is my problem, and them just I don't know jumping into it but

they were just kind of like, waited to understand, and then they started to,

help me re-programme things, and I think that was good … … … so just

showing them, what's happening and trying to explain it as well, keep them

in the know, keep them from being too blurred by their own issues and

things, um, yeh

As Alexander and Charles (2009: 10) argue, 'it is within relationships that both parties influence the construction of the meaning of any event'. Their perceptions of themselves, their uncertainties about sexual boundaries and relationships, were disrupted in some way by these relationships in which they felt acknowledged, listened to and understood. By 'seeing' other people's perspectives of themselves and their situations, 'the ways things are' could be understood as being not necessarily the way things had to be (see Fox, 2012).

The importance the young people attributed to 'talking' occurs precisely because it is *doing something* more than just talking. It allows for the co-construction of meaning in which the young people were enabled to make sense of their experiences. Talking is important because it makes sexual exploitation and the young people visible. This happens when talk allows the young people control over content and meaning, which is listened to without false empathy in which the young people feel they become objectified as some collection of needs In considering a large body of research arguing that young people do not feel listened to, are not taken seriously and are not involved in decisions about their care, Winter (2010: 194) calls for spaces to 'be created within the context of meaningful relationships with social workers for young people to express their knowledge and make sense of their circumstances. This in turn would enable a deeper understanding of what is significant' to them. It is within the context of such relationships that the young people explained they were able to share their experiences and make themselves visible.

Disclosure or exposure?
Another significant theme was the importance of reactions to disclosure of the young people's experiences and situations. What people do when they initially 'find out' really seemed to matter to the respondents:

Leah: It's just like being able to talk about stuff, things, where they're not going to run off and tell other people and start gossiping and stuff like that, I mean she (support worker) doesn't give a reaction and if she does it's always a positive one she's not like (pause) *oh my god* and make you feel like, oh I must be bad if her reaction's that

Leah's account is typical in that interviewees often spoke of the importance of professionals and carers not being 'shocked', not 'over-reacting', and of the need for such adults to stay calm about what they heard. They were concerned about the judgements people may make about them, and they particularly invoked the importance of confidentiality. They spoke of experiences of having been rejected by significant others in their lives because of public knowledge about their involvement in sexual exploitation. Hence they were now guarded about who they would trust with disclosures about their lives:

Claire: School, that's important. If you talk to your teachers about information about this or this sort of thing, um, then you tell them there's something going on in your life, that's a bad situation because then they'll involve the police and parents and you don't want to be in that situation
Sophie: ok ok, so school is bad because teachers aren't necessarily people you can trust?
Claire: yeh (pauses) and it might not stay confidential in the school you see, and plus when you're in the school you've got your friends as well, who will find out and they disown you basically (pauses) if you haven't got someone to talk to, organise an appointment with the doctors and speak to them because they have to listen and it's confidential.

Without a relationship of trust with those they spoke to, the young people could not be certain of how information about themselves that they disclosed would be perceived and indeed how *they* would be perceived. Yet they spoke of the need to talk to someone to get help. Claire identifies the doctor-patient relationship as a safe area for sharing information in those instances when there is no one else to talk to. This issue of finding a trusting medium in which to feel acknowledged, heard and understood, arose frequently in interviews. The initial 'disclosure' of sexual exploitation can be

considered as the sharp end of this, and one in which it was important for them not to become the object of some care discourse in which *they* were not seen or where they had no control over what was understood and defined. It was critical for them to have some control over what was being revealed and when. As Sennett (2003: 117) argues, shame occurs when we are denied or lose the ability to control the conditions in which we are seen or not seen; when someone is 'rendered visible and yet is not yet ready to be visible'. There is a tension the young people have to manage, between wanting relevant adults to know about their situations because they need help, but of the potential to feel ashamed by people's reactions, and of being 'known' by others who become party to that information and not by the young people's choosing. The importance of this can be seen in what Sarah and Hannah have to say below, in which they convey similar concerns about 'being known' by those who take advantage of them. Sarah describes similar negative feelings about being known by people who have intimate knowledge of her. Hannah, talking about a vignette provided during interview, explains how adults need to be concerned for the character in the story because damaging photographs might be seen by family and friends:

> **Sarah:** I've known what they're like. Even now I'll see them and they'll be with all their family but it's the way they'll look at you. Even now they'll be looking at me 'cos they know

> **Hannah:** like they could have photos of him like um doing stuff then they'll probably um, what's the word um, use it against him and send them to his family and friends, all the photo's um, so he has to be careful about that

This was similar to Claire, who explained how she was afraid photographs of her, taken by the person who exploited her, would be shown to others: these photographs of her were now possibly 'out there' and she had no control over whether and what people might see them.

Individuals have a need to be both visible and invisible. There is a need to feel 'seen' and known in order to feel connected to people, and yet a person also needs to feel they are not *too* transparent; that they can 'keep themselves to themselves'. When someone cannot control where they are positioned within this binary, it can leave them 'exposed' or 'denied'. Young people in particular can find themselves positioned at the

extremes of this binary; lacking authority or the position to control who knows what about them. This is particularly so for young people involved with statutory social services, in which procedures demand that information is gathered and shared by professionals working with young people to ensure they receive the protection, care and support they are entitled to. Yet it is a fear of 'being known' that can mean young people do not ask for the help they need. In essence, when young people do not have established trusting relationships, to ask for help is to risk exposure. It is for this reason that some young people suggested it could be more helpful to speak to adults who did not know them at all, did not know their names, and did not know who they were:

> **Hannah:** sometimes some people find it easier just talking to blank strangers, um (pauses) with no names you don't need to tell them your name or their name or whatever, um (pauses) and they can't pass anything on because they don't know your name or where they got it from

This is an aspect remarked upon by a number of young people who spoke of the importance of not having 'a reputation', of needing to be unknown to move on, to feel unashamed, or to be 'someone different'. For example, Katie described how in 'moving on' it was important to feel visible *and* invisible, and to have some control, or perceived control, over this:

> Sophie: what made you feel differently about the work?
> **Katie:** I don't know
> Sophie: do you or did you feel differently about yourself?
> **Katie:** yeh. I moved up to (place name) you know where I met my boyfriend, and he doesn't need to know about my past. Up there I don't have a reputation. I can be who I want, I can be anything that I want. I can be a hairdresser you know, that's what I want to be.

Such reflections from the respondents reveal something of the troubling complexity behind the claims within policy that 'disclosure of this form of abuse is exceptionally rare' (WAG, 2011: 27). Young people, like anyone, need 'to control the conditions under which they see and are seen' (Sennett, 2003: 118). For these young people in positions of vulnerability, (in)visibility was sometimes experienced as exposure and

denial; of feeling as object, known only for one's need; of feeling ignored by those same people who know personal intimate details about oneself. Alternatively it was experienced as safe disclosure and preservation of self; of feeling as subject, one who is acknowledged, respected and understood. It is the person's control over what they reveal, how it is revealed and with whom these details are shared, that makes the difference for a young person: how they are 'known' can be experienced as therapeutic disclosure or as insecure exposure.

The importance of being (in)visible

To repeat, young people's talk about aspects of the problem and possible solutions can be understood in relation to the theme of (in)visibility: how young people are rendered or made visible and invisible, object or subject in the care they receive. The young people did not typically invoke a need for some specific help such as money, housing, help with addiction, albeit such issues lay behind their involvement in exploitation. This is not to suggest they did not want help in these areas, but rather their focus was on relationships – more specifically, care relationships in which they could feel seen, acknowledged and heard; in which they could feel recognised as people first and where the work by professionals in relation to their needs came second. The multitude of professionals involved in the young people's lives, mobilised only because of their need for protection, meant the young people were *of concern*. Yet, perversely, the relationships with some professionals and carers, driven by the requirements of child protection, could compound those difficulties and issues due to a lack of opportunity for young people to feel they were of concern for reasons other than their 'neediness'.

When a person is defined only by their need they are to some extent discounted as a full and integral 'other'. In many ways, the young people could be considered as having 'experienced that peculiar lack of respect which consists of not being seen, not being accounted as full human beings' (Sennett, 2003:13). The young people felt objectified by perceived feelings of indifference from those tasked to care and support them. Yet the opposite, to feel pitied – that enemy of respect – in which a young person can be objectified through assumptions about their dependence and weakness, was something spoken of as equally harmful. Young people who are able to *manage* the conditions in which they relay and discuss their personal details and experiences, can perceive this as a therapeutic form of disclosure whereby they feel acknowledged and visible in a way that is positive, and which is an essential pre-requisite in tackling the

problem itself. Conversely this same information, garnered in a different way, can leave them feeling visible in a way that is exposing and unsafe; in which they can feel even more vulnerable and further overlooked as a person. In summary, how young people participate in defining their need has consequences for whether, and how, interventions can respond to meeting that need (Williams, 2000; Sennett, 2003).

'Child sexual exploitation': problems and solutions from the perspectives of the young people

Child sexual exploitation is a problem that is preventable. Yet more than that, and significantly from the perspectives of the young people interviewed, prevention *is* the solution to the problem. Sexual exploitation was considered to be something that doesn't have to happen at all, because it 'doesn't just happen'. To return to Nathan's assessment of the problem:

> **Nathan**: it doesn't just happen, it happens because either things just aren't addressed people are less able to fend for themselves and they don't get the help they need, for whatever reason, and are put into difficult positions and sometimes it DOES take them there and if, people were there to help them in the first place then they wouldn't, then this wouldn't happen

Whilst the respondents reported different experiences, and gave a range of reasons for their involvement in exchanging sex, they consistently spoke of it as a problem of 'people taking advantage' of some vulnerability, and as something that could happen to anyone having to manage without the sorts of care and attention that ought to be guaranteed all young people. What made them vulnerable was 'things going on', a vague turn of phrase many of them used, but one that conveys so much, that is, they were without help, they felt uncared for, they found ways to cope only to discover that these compounded their difficulties (see O'Neill, 2001). The problem was therefore preventable, because if there had been no vulnerability, need, or isolation to begin with – nothing to be *exploited* – there could have been no exploitation. The argument here and throughout, is that there is no opportunity to conceive of prevention in these terms within a policy framework organised around the construct of 'children' and the limiting discourse of 'grooming'. According to the young people in this study the *real* problem lies with those issues and unmet needs that make being taken advantage of possible.

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Feeling vulnerable, uncertain, powerless, overlooked and unseen, ignored, misunderstood and without help, these were the problems that, for them, needed solving. Understanding this is a step towards grasping how it might be that for some young people the exchange of sex appears as an expected condition, or a viable option, perhaps the only or best one available at that point. In short, the seeming contradiction of feeling in some ways visible as a person (being appreciated, looked at, 'looked after'), whilst also being exploited, can occur because the objectification in exchanging sex is cast as something acceptable, or, a least-worst option. For young people who consider themselves to be vulnerable and without *care* – without attention, acknowledgement and help – 'sexual exploitation' can be a solution of sorts: 'help' and recognition, of *some form*, from *someone*.

The 'uncomfortable comfortableness'

When Sarah spoke poignantly of the 'uncomfortable comfortableness', it provides a sharp reminder that underpinning the exchange of sex is a subjective self with unmet emotional needs; needs being met to some extent through the exchange of sex. The young people described feeling a sense of difference, uncertainty and powerlessness, and of a perception of themselves as invisible to significant figures in their lives. They felt in many ways unseen by those who *should* care for them and want to help them. They spoke of experiences of exchanging sex that can be made sense of through concepts of 'grooming' (see van Meeuwen et al., 1998), and 'transactional sex' (see Williams, 1999), and by considering their sense of agency and sense of self; which underpinned a perception of sex as the unavoidable or inevitable currency of exchange. Or, conversely, as a way of exerting themselves to meet needs. In being taken advantage of they were simultaneously acknowledged and felt wanted, or were coping, whilst also being abused and exploited.

The young people spoke of how 'anyone' could help, because they needed help, because they needed someone. It is telling that respondents used the term 'people' to refer generically to a diverse range of others involved in their lives. It is perhaps taken as given within policy and practice that there is an obvious distinction between who it is who 'helps', and who it is who exploits. Yet this same assumption is not always made or is clear within the young people's accounts. The category of 'people', so homogenously applied, indicates the blurring that exists across these two categories. When the young people talked of 'people who take advantage', they spoke of them as

'dirty horrible men', 'predators', 'mingers', and as people who 'completely fucked me up'. Yet they also spoke of them as 'someone who was there', who made them 'feel safe', and of 'people who put you up', and 'who relieve one kind of strain on you'. 'People' who take advantage and 'people' who help can be one and the same. Regardless of the exploitative context, a point made by all respondents was that some of their needs were being met in *some way* by those who took advantage of them. They recognised that these exploitative relationships and situations they were involved in were not good – yet there was something good to be got from them.

To repeat, it is outlined within policy that it is by a grooming process that children and young people become involved in sexual exploitation and this is also given as the explanation for why young people do not recognise their abuse, and why they do not leave (see WAG, 2011). Yet, as we have heard throughout, the young people considered themselves to be ignored by significant figures, and as being without the affect and relationships that others take for granted (see Coy, 2008). They were overlooked by the many caring professionals involved in their lives, and felt unacknowledged within their own care. In various ways the young people were 'invisible' to those who might or should give them the care and help they needed. Their certainty of this can be glimpsed in what Hannah has to say below:

> **Hannah:** I would ask for help, I seriously would ask for help. Now I would anyway. I would know there *was* help.

They perceived that there was *no one* there, and so 'anyone' can help means just that. As Kerry explains:

> **Kerry:** because no one's been there to help *them* (pause) they (pause) then they just turn to *what's* available

In this way, exchanging sex is *a* solution, of sorts, to the 'things going on'; that is, the young people's underlying vulnerabilities, and subsequent difficulties arising from their own ways of coping. It is their continued lack of acknowledgement from those who should care and want to help them that can leave them exposed to those who would take advantage of them.

This leads on to a related aspect – one equally troubling. Anyone can help can also mean no one can. 'People', the young people's families, carers and the professionals tasked to help them, can also create feelings of shame, powerlessness and intimidation. As we have heard Claire in particular assert, there is no one who can help. All 'adults', people who exploit and people who are supposed to help, cannot be trusted, do not care, and do not understand. This aspect finds some recognition within policy guidance on why it may be that children and young people reject offers of help:

> Of particular relevance is the impact of those who may have groomed and conditioned children, to coerce and abuse them. Children may also be under very strong pressure, intimidated, afraid and/or dependent on those that have exploited them where substance misuse is a factor. Children may therefore reject offers of help and support and appropriate interventions need to be designed to address this.
>
> (WAG, 2011: 10).

The young people reported experiences of not seeking help for reasons such as being blackmailed, controlled, abused, and because of drug dependency. Yet they also spoke of how they needed help but they did not ask for it because they perceived that there was none; either because they did not believe any help was there, or because they did not perceive what was being offered as help. In addition, as Claire expresses below, feelings of intimidation and fear of exposure from those tasked to help them also formed part of the young people's unwillingness to seek help:

> **Claire:** adults are a bit intimidating, and um, because if they think you're lying, they go into a self-defence mechanism where they fold their arms and stand over you sort of thing, which is very intimidating and they don't understand what's going on

This blurring in the ways the young people talked about people who help and people who exploit provides context to a necessary, more layered understanding of why it is that young people may not ask for help, may reject help, or may 'choose' to stay in abusive relationships. Furthermore, a young person may or may not 'recognise' their abuse, but that it goes unrecognised cannot be attributed solely to the manipulation and

deceit of perpetrators. Acknowledgement must also be given to young people's wider social networks and relationships with others. There were many ways that people tasked to help were perceived in similar ways to those who exploit, and vice versa. Some of the actions employed by the people who took advantage of them were experienced by the young people in a similar way to the child protection and care responses adopted by professionals. To get a sense of the complexity of the problem, what is laid out within policy can be turned on its head. The problem of child sexual exploitation and the resulting care responses can *also* be considered as both the solution and the problem. That is, exchanging sex can be seen as a solution of sorts to the problem of young people's (in)visibility to those who should help them, whilst the 'solutions' outlined within policy, the practices of social care, and more specifically those of child protection, although talked about as fundamental to solving the problem, were also talked about by respondents as partly forming and reinforcing the problem. This point is developed further below.

'No one addresses the issues that they face…'
Katie's story provides an illuminating example of the discussion thus far. Katie described how the insecurity and instability she experienced whilst growing up in residential care formed part of the reason why she met and stayed with her 'boyfriend'. He was someone who was there for Katie, and she explained how she felt herself to be safe with him, even though, as she explained, 'he got me selling myself on the streets'. Katie explained how the relationship was abusive in many other ways:

> **Katie:** I couldn't breathe without him. I couldn't go out to the shops. Couldn't see my mum. He let me go and see my mum on Christmas day for the afternoon that was it. He was there for me and you know I just wanted someone to love me

The relationship was abusive, yet it provided some of the stability and security that Katie craved. 'He' was *someone* who was there for her when she felt there to be no one else. Katie's explanation of the care responses from social services provides a stark outline of their importance in the creation and resolution of the problem:

> **Katie**: Social services put me in a secure unit. I was in care see and they knew he was beating me up and tried moving me around care homes but I would go missing all the time, I was living with him. In the end they put me in a secure unit up in (place name) and I did a runner and phoned him, asked him to pick me up

Whilst removing Katie from the exploitative relationship by placing her in a secure unit may be understandable as a protective response, it can be considered wholly inadequate in many ways. Not least because, in essence, it bears unsettling similarities to Katie's experiences of being controlled and shut away by her boyfriend. Katie's boyfriend gave her feelings of safety and of being wanted. By staying in the relationship her need for drugs was also being met. From Katie's perspective, as she went on to say, in the secure unit she had no one there for her, and she was 'left clucking' (detoxing from heroin) on her own. Previous attempts to help her by moving her 'around care homes' did not help because part of her reason for being with her boyfriend stemmed from her feelings of insecurity and instability. Responding to Katie's situation with her boyfriend by continuing to move her reinforced those feelings. Moreover, her need to stay with 'him' was compounded by her drug addiction. Katie needed support to address her drug addiction, the abusive and exploitative relationship she was in, and her feelings of being unwanted and uncared for, which underpinned the problem as Katie perceived it.

Katie's story, as with the other respondents, finds support from an established body of literature arguing that sexual exploitation is a multi-faceted problem requiring multiple responses (see for example Hester and Westmarland, 2004; Kerrigan-Lebloch and King, 2006; Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Clutton and Coles, 2007). Furthermore, it lends support to my argument of the need for policy to recognise why young people stay in these exploitative situations for reasons other than just that of 'sophisticated grooming and priming processes' (WAG, 2011:10). The matter of unmet needs being met through the exchange of sex brings into focus the need for care responses to address the complex underlying issues that a young person is dealing with. Something recognised, in some senses, by the young people themselves. As I outlined in part one of this chapter, the young people spoke of how people 'just see the surface exterior', both in terms of the problem and in respect of a young person's behaviour. As such, those tasked to help them can misperceive the problem and thereby misdirect their

practice. As Nathan explains, dealing with 'sexual exploitation' on its own will not solve the problem:

> **Nathan**: try and work on the issues that make them vulnerable to it, and then as they become as their life becomes a bit more <u>stable</u>, um hopefully they should be able to withdraw from, what is making turn towards that … … … sometimes I think they try to deal with sexual exploitation on its own, and I think that, it can sometimes sort itself, temporarily but, the underlying issue needs to be, DEALT with as well otherwise they might just come back to it, and sometimes I think that, unless um, yeh the underlying issues are dealt with, and you may not be able to get to them when you start off but they can just quite easily fall into the risk of doing it again

Nathan's account reinforces what the young people had to say about the importance of people finding out about the 'things going on' for a young person, and focusing their attention on addressing these – whatever they may be. De-contextualising 'sexual exploitation' from other aspects of their lives not only ignores those underlying problems, but can also, as Nathan goes on to warn, further compound the difficulties young people face:

> I don't know I think, sometimes I think it can be too, um (pause) slightly too, um, sometimes too strictly and sometimes too harshly, um I think that sometimes people try to PULL others out of situations that are bad for them which is GOOD in a sense, but I think that sometimes, *sometimes not always*, but I think that when people try to PULL them out *really quickly* that sometimes, if it's an emotional issue, it can sometimes CAUSE them damage as well because they haven't, even if it's an unhealthy outlet they haven't dealt with that and so it can just be redirected somewhere else and cause more issues for them somewhere else

The respondents insisted that the focus by professionals on removing them from exploitative situations and relationships does not resolve the *real* problem, and is unhelpful at best and may compound some of the underlying issues at worst. The *Children Act 1989* links the notions of control and care by stating that it is often

necessary to provide control in order to care for a child, if there are concerns that they are at risk to themselves or a risk to others (see Roesch-Marsh, 2012). Yet, as O'Neill (2001) has argued, defining young people as victims of abuse in need of protection does not necessarily create better outcomes for them, and they may become subject to forms of protection that are perceived as punitive in their effect – as expressed by Katie and Nathan above. This echoes concerns within the literature and research, which has shown that the use of 'protective' measures, such as secure units, can be unsuccessful in making any long-term differences for young people (see for example Creegan et al., 2005; Clutton and Coles, 2007; Beckett, 2011). 'Protection', instigated as a sole response, misunderstands the problem as the young people see it, and may only provide a short-term resolution. In this way, protective responses instigated to support and help young people can become risk factors in their own right (Pearce, 2007: 207).

The young people reported experiences of care which were mostly negative. Oversight and supervision were provided but they felt misunderstood, that 'things going on' for them were ignored; needs were identified but not on the young people's own terms. They felt as *objects* of concern, less visible as *subjects*. We are reminded in particular of Claire, who felt misunderstood, unheard, unseen, and could not describe any positive experiences of support or care. Much of what the young people had to say contrasts notably to the way in which child sexual exploitation is conceptualised within policy. Limiting the problem to that of grooming 'does not … tell the whole story' (Melrose, 2004:9; also Cree et al., 2012). Framed as a child protection issue, it can make it difficult for professionals to respond in the ways that the young people spoke of wanting and needing (see Phoenix, 2002, 2010; Pearce, 2009). As Day (2009) points out, the current rhetoric surrounding sexual exploitation oversimplifies the issue, promising 'easy solutions' that ignore the wider context surrounding those involved in the exchange of sex. As I have argued, there is an urgent need to consider young people's own understandings of their situations, emphasising conditions of consent (see Pitts, 1997) *and* the role of grooming, in order to ensure that responses can be directed towards taking into account the help that young people feel they need.

It is not the intention here to make judgements about decisions made by individual practitioners, indeed the next chapter allows us to hear the perspectives of some of these professionals. It is recognised within policy guidance and practice literature that young people experiencing sexual exploitation are difficult to engage, are unlikely to talk about their experiences, and may be suspicious and reject help based on

previous negative experiences with professionals (see WAG, 2011; Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Clutton and Coles, 2007). In many ways the analysis of young people's accounts finds support in this literature. Yet the young people also spoke of wanting and needing support; they spoke of experiences which made it difficult *for* them *to* engage with support. Their accounts suggest that practices of care in which priority is given to investigation and minimising danger, rather than looking to promote aspects of well-being (Daniels, 2010: 235), form part of, and contribute to the problem itself.

This leads to a related point, one raised in the previous chapter. As Ennew (1986: 140/41) argues, support often 'only deals with one aspect of the problem and only very seldom does it try to place that aspect within the context of the social and sexual relations of which it is a part'. Ennew further argues that child sexual exploitation must be understood in the context of power relations between adults and children; in which often the power of one over the other is 'absolute'. Child protection can be understood as a manifestation of power relations between adults and children and young people; relations made legitimate through symbolic meanings attributed to childhood (see Jenkins, 1992). As argued earlier, the existence of child sexual exploitation as a social care policy problem relies upon these symbolic meanings. Also, the depiction of young people within 'child sexual exploitation' policy is that of 'children', who need protection from 'adult' perpetrators, because they are without agency and are unable to consent. In this way, child sexual exploitation is constitutive of, and legitimated by these wider discourses of childhood. Whilst it may at one level be controversial, if not misrepresentative, to state that social care and child protection can be harmful to young people (as contended above), the provision and practice of care and protection devolve from a framework of understanding and relations of power between adults and children and young people that can also compound the problem, when care is experienced as something in which young people can feel unheard, unnoticed and unacknowledged.

Yet the institutional practices and structures of social care, and the discursive formation of 'child sexual exploitation', reproduce these power relations and mean that protection is both a legitimate and necessary response to the problem. As Biggs (2001: 304/305) argues, social policy creates and legitimates social problems partly through contributing 'toward the material conditions, either through action or inaction, that increases the likelihood that a social ill will occur'. The focus on grooming deflects attention from wider socio-economic structures that cause adversity, whilst also

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directing practice to see the needs and wishes of an individual young person as *secondary* to their protection (Warrington, 2010). Young people's participation within their own welfare is based on perceptions of their ability; at macro level within policy, and at the individual level of practice by the professionals working with them (Leeson, 2007). Yet when a young person's victim status depends upon their being without agency, a difficulty arises in positioning young people as 'capable' within their own care. Protective responses are legitimated by discourses of childhood and grooming; and also become *necessary,* whilst ignoring their role in the creation of the problem, as the young people see it.

In this way, the problem *and* the 'solutions' are embedded within these systems of care. Problems and solutions which can be made sense of through considering young people's (in)visibility within care structures, practices and care relationships. Underlying the many reasons why the young people became involved and remained in sexually exploitative relationships or circumstances, are unmet needs and a subjective self which the young people, at times, felt was denied. It is when young people feel powerless, not consulted, unheard, and misunderstood that they can be taken advantage of. It is when they feel exposed and denied, unrecognised as a *person,* and only of notice because of their need, when they feel dependent, when they feel they are *beneath notice*, that care can compound what the young people understand to be the real problem. As argued above, care and protection in which a young person feels acknowledged, consulted, present, and 'visible' can begin to address the problem itself. It is within interdependent relationships, with some opportunity for reciprocity, that the young people began to feel a sense of certainty and control over their lives. Such an insight does not seek to oversimplify the solutions, but rather to contribute to a better understanding of the issue by revealing the often contrary, sometimes counterintuitive, but typically complex nature of the phenomenon and its causes. .

Concluding comments

In summary, sexual exploitation was understood by the young people to be a problem intrinsically linked to the 'things going on' their lives. 'Sexual exploitation doesn't just happen' as one respondent pithily claimed. Indeed, it does not have to happen at all. The young people considered themselves to be without *care*, attention, acknowledgement from people who should help. These sexually exploitative encounters and relationships were, in some way, meeting needs. They were abusive, controlling, degrading and

disrespectful; they were inevitable, expected, and for some, the least worst option. Yet they were a form of help from someone; help that was not considered by the young people to be forthcoming from anyone else. The problem and the solutions can be made sense of through the theme of (in)visibility; the ways that young people are rendered or made visible and invisible, made to feel as object and subject by people tasked to help them, and people who exploit them. As I have considered, not only does adult care-giving and practices of child protection feature in the young people's accounts as being part of the problem, but the instigation of these practices, made as a response to a young person's involvement in sexually exploitative situations, can ignore the *real* problem and serve to compound that which it is attempting to prevent and disrupt. At the crux of both the problem and the solution is whether a young person feels as subject or object in their care. That is, how they are made to feel (in)visible: in how people come to know and understand their situation; in the (co)construction of meaning; and through (inter)dependent and (non) reciprocal relationships. Young people who are not permitted as active agents in setting the terms of their own support, and who remain without recognition from protective adults, are vulnerable in many ways to those who may want to harm them, and are likely to remain so. In addition, it is argued that there is a need for policy to recognise that 'sexual exploitation' is more than just grooming; not least to acknowledge the complexity of this problem, and in so doing to open up the possibility of interventions from professionals beyond narrow child protection responses. It is to the professionals' perspectives on aspects of identification, prevention and intervention that this thesis now turns.

Chapter seven

'We all know what we'd like to do… it's whether we can do it'
Responding to child sexual exploitation: professionals' perspectives

Introduction

The principle aim of this final findings chapter is to consider the professionals' perspectives on identifying and responding to the problem of child sexual exploitation. This has been noted as a particularly hidden problem (WAG, 2011). There are concerns that awareness and identification of the problem is low, that professionals working with children and young people are unlikely to refer, or may not see young people as being at risk (see Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Clutton and Coles, 2008). There is, however, a lack of research on this subject involving 'non-specialist' professionals, and not much is known about their perspectives on responding to the problem (see Jago et al., 2011). More specifically this chapter allows us to hear from some of these professionals about what can and should be done to identify and better support young people in these sorts of circumstances. It also allows us to hear from them about the dilemmas and difficulties they encounter in seeking to do that.

As I noted in the previous chapter, as with the young people, the way the professionals make sense of the problem necessarily informs what they have to say about any responses to it and vice versa. In addition, unlike the young people, the professionals are making sense of possible and desirable 'solutions' within a particular policy and practice directed framework – alongside aspects of their own and other people's professional remits and practices.[*] As Bart (third sector practitioner) says in the title quote above, what the professionals think they and other professionals should or need to do is not what they are always *able* to do. Thus when they disclose their frustrations, difficulties and the challenges they encounter, they are also telling us

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[*] The term 'solutions' is used in a way that is consistent with the previous chapter. As then, the term has no singular meaning and is used to signal aspects of identifying, referring, supporting young people and other forms of response where these are not specifically mentioned.

implicitly about possible solutions. This is reflected in the discussion throughout this chapter.

This chapter is organised into three parts. The first considers the professionals' perspectives on aspects of identifying, establishing and evidencing young people's risk. The second outlines the professionals' reflections on solutions to the problem, exploring the main themes arising from the data, which are structure and security, support, self-esteem and agency, and trusting relationships. The third part of the chapter provides the means for the secondary aim of the chapter. As noted this is the final findings chapter and, in consequence, part three provides an overview and concluding discussion, drawing together the key insights from this, the three preceding chapters, providing a concluding discussion to the analysis accumulating across the thesis entire.

As with the previous chapters I draw on my theme of (in)visibility to agitate the data and shape the analysis. In this context it is used to consider the ways in which possible solutions centre on young people's (in)visibility to key professionals. The chapter addresses how the practice responses talked of by professionals invoke the need for vulnerable young people to be both visible and of concern to someone; for young people to feel acknowledged, supported and looked for. In a similar way, the difficulties professionals described in identifying and evidencing concerns about young people and establishing a sense of risk are intimately connected to how they *know* a young person. Thus when they do not have the information they need, or have trusting relationships with young people which would enable them to grasp what may be going on, then the visibility of the problem is self-evidently in question.

To reiterate, the adult respondents represent the range of professionals outlined in relevant policy guidance as having key roles in tackling CSE (see WAG, 2011: 15). Important to note, is that they all, by nature of their professional role, had some kind of relationship with young people but these were varied, with different purposes and different interactions. Common to all, however, is that they had the sorts of every day encounters with young people whereby they are likely to come across and, ideally, be able to identify and build a positive relationship with those at risk.

A hidden problem? Identifying child sexual exploitation

This part of the chapter considers what the professionals had to say about identifying child sexual exploitation. I begin by exploring the problems and difficulties with

establishing and evidencing young people's risk, before moving on to those associated with identifying the problem itself.

'Something just didn't sit right': a hidden problem

An occupational assumption shared by all the adult respondents was that for various reasons (such as a young person being 'brainwashed', 'controlled', mistrusting of services, and making instrumental choices), sexual exploitation was unlikely to be disclosed to professionals directly by young people. For a number of the professionals, the young people that they might have concerns about were often described as transient. These were young people who they may not have much information about, who they may not see again, who may not give much away, yet remained young people about whom they had concerns for these very reasons. As Andrea explains:

> **Andrea (healthcare)**: Sometimes if it doesn't feel right then it probably isn't. Sometimes that's all that you have … … … When she first came into our service she came under a different name, so I had a name and an address and a date of birth but the name was wrong, and I spoke to an outreach worker and said I'm really worried about this girl and, *I know* that she's not living at home and I don't know who she's living with and, there's just something about her and she's all over the place and you know she's only 14 and you know just general things that didn't quite fit and she said well do you know what she sounds like this other girl, that I met and so well what does she look like and so that can sometimes be the first thing so never mind filling in the risk assessment it's can I just make sure who this person is because *I'm worried* about them so have you got because otherwise you haven't got anything to work with because they're completely transient they're in and out and that's it so finding your way in is not just about uh, not just about having um your risk sheet filled in

In a similar way to Andrea, many of the professionals spoke of having concerns about a young person – 'a gut feeling' or 'a sense of something' – and relayed their difficulties with gaining enough information to evidence these concerns (see Broadhurst et al., 2010). They spoke of how they may 'only get a little bit of the picture'. The task was for them to notice and establish when a young person may be at risk of, or already

involved in, sexually exploitative relationships or situations, and to evidence this. The professionals' reflections revealed a dilemma: in having to act, but not having the evidence to do so, and yet knowing they were unlikely to get this information. This was illuminated in interviews with Louisa and Carla:

> **Louisa (social work):** sometimes you have to act on your gut feeling… if you wait for evidence you'd be waiting a long time

> **Carla (children's residential care):** we need evidence to back up what we say… even if we can tell them, to call a meeting there needs to be a basis for that.

As noted, child sexual exploitation is a hidden problem in the sense that it is not likely to be 'seen' by professionals (see Clutton and Coles, 2007). It is also a hidden problem because, in a similar way to the young people, the professionals spoke of only seeing the surface of the problem – of having an idea that there may be a problem, but of coming across young people who, as the young people also termed it, 'slip through the net'. In ways that mirrored what the young people had to say, respondents noted it was only in having time to pursue matters further, in an attempt to *see* the problem from what the young people may say about the things going on in their lives, that the professionals could gain the evidence they needed to make a referral to social services or justify resources for specialist services working in this field. For example, those with more opportunity to engage with a young person talked of how 'things would add itself up over time', of how their observations and their looking out for young people would mean that 'small changes in behaviour can add up to something major', and where 'over time you get the picture'. Mary provides an illuminating example of the importance of one-on-one relationships with a young person in establishing their sexual exploitation:

> **Mary (healthcare):** nobody was putting um I suppose tying it all together, and saying well actually, what this is indicating is exploitation, so we were on the periphery and aware that there were a lot of worrying factors, but we hadn't, put the picture together … … a big change that happened around that time was that we started having our outreach worker, and then they were able to meet with them and you know find out the fact that they were

known to social services, they'd maybe had problems with the *police,* and then when we started *linking,* particularly the three services together, what we became *aware of* was that there was a lot of information that *we* didn't know about them, but equally the social services and police weren't aware that they were seeking contraceptive services and, well we had a multi-disciplinary meeting where we presented three cases and each of the social services and police and ourselves presented our part of the story (pause) and when you looked at it as a *whole* it was quite *amazing,* when we you know we'd shared that information.

An important point is that it was through the one-on-one relationship between the outreach worker (in this instance) and the young person that uncovered the information needed to inform the multi-disciplinary meeting. As considered in chapters four and five, data from both sets of respondents suggests that the number of professionals in a young person's life can sometimes mean that they become 'missed': missed in the sense that they are not of notice. As one respondent termed it, 'no one is looking out for them': no *one* being the important term here. The professionals' accounts suggest that it is the relationships young people have with them that are key in establishing and evidencing their risk and their sexual exploitation. This point is returned to below. First, the difficulties and confusion spoken of by the professionals in seeing the problem itself are introduced.

A hidden problem… or a problem hidden?
There was uncertainty displayed by many respondents over the point at which their concerns about young people might lead them to think about child sexual exploitation. This was a confusion about which most were aware. As revealed in Chapter five, the professionals were uncertain about what 'counts' as child sexual exploitation, and in particular whether *their* concerns fit within the boundaries set out in policy frameworks. In short, their accounts displayed a shared sense of uncertainty about whether their worries about a young person's sexual activity and relationships could be considered as instances requiring an associated safeguarding response. Matthew considers some of the difficulties below:

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Matthew (youth work): again this whole, um (pause) level of what constitutes, you know, this idea that there is this idealised, you know everybody is happy lovely fluffy, which you know, in reality doesn't exist for many people so we're um, all sort of aware of what constitutes the IDEAL, and then you've sort of got this *massive scale* of what (long pause) what constitutes a really abusive worrying relationship where they are being essentially pimped out by their partner to their friends, you know, *being passed on*, the worst worst case scenarios, and then there is that whole area in between (pause) and what, *would be,* you know in terms of um, in our own circle of friends if we saw that, we'd be fairly concerned if we saw that even if it was fairly *bottom end*, but transpose that into this area and it's um, it's *not normal* in terms of what WE understand of as normal but it's normal for this *area* (pause) but then does that become acceptable, because it's normal or because everybody's doing it, because what happens is you start moving up the scale and, well at some point you'll move right up to the top of the scale and think oh well everybody is doing this, and just accept it

Matthew's insights represent ably some of the shared occupational difficulties faced by professionals in identifying instances of child sexual exploitation – difficulties that can arguably be traced back to the framing of the problem within policy and practice. Underpinned as it is by 'grooming', young people's involvement in the exchange of sex has become increasingly portrayed as a problem in which girls are exploited by an adult older male. A strong focus for prevention is on educating young people about healthy relationships (see WAG, 2011) and guidance on identification suggests looking for signs that young people are in unhealthy relationships – indeed for most professionals this was interpreted as such. Yet as Matthew explains, unless the relationship involves groups of people – those 'worst case scenarios' – it can be difficult to know when concerns can be considered as instances of sexual exploitation. In this way, the narrowness of 'child sexual exploitation' as grooming can, paradoxically, mean it becomes difficult to interpret. As Melrose (2012:160) argues, 'the new semantics of 'sexual exploitation' arguably means that the concept has been stretched to the point where is has become extremely vague and therefore rather meaningless'. This confusion then is one which translates to a related uncertainty about *who* it is who can be sexually exploited – this can be seen in what Polly has to say below:

Polly (youth work): they could do more training on it, um yeh cause we've been trained on relationships and stuff um but um yeh when I worked in (part of the city) we used to come across young prostitutes and they wouldn't talk to us really and if they looked really young I mean they would always say they were 17 so they couldn't get caught but we didn't really know what to do with them

The confusion displayed by Polly is an example of the very real problem with which 'child sexual exploitation' can obscure other instances of *young people* exchanging sex, outside of grooming, from the view of professionals tasked with identifying young people in these sorts of difficulties. As O'Connell-Davidson (2005: 57) argues, when sex involves children it is clearly outside of social conventions and norms - yet sex between young people, and young people exchanging sex 'takes us into more difficult terrain'. In the example Polly provides, she cites the idea of 17 year-old 'prostitutes', who are above the state age of consent for sex, who do not engage with services, appear to have little to do with 'child sexual exploitation' related to unhealthy relationships and grooming; yet are in undoubtedly harmful sexually exploitative situations nonetheless. That these are the very sorts of young people that changes in policy were intended *for* lends weight to Phoenix's (2002) concerns that the language of grooming and choice could lead to misunderstanding among professionals about who may be a victim and thus affect identification of the problem. This was something some of the professionals remarked upon themselves:

Faye (third sector): she walked with a real like SWAGGER, and it was like don't mess, and always came on to the van, took what she needed to, never really engaged but had a real sense of I don't need you I know what I'm DOING, and um I remember one day she came into the drop-in centre she just sort of slipped in and she was wearing like some old joggers and a t-shirt and I just looked at her and thought *OH my goodness you're such a kid you know you're just a girl*, um and (pause) and I just um, it really made me think *gosh*, I've been really taken in by this uh because how she was on the street, was totally different to this kid, who just comes in and was doing her washing or was having some toast or something (pauses) so as a

professional you've really got to think how uh what that young person is trying to put uh is how they are trying to present to you and how you meet them

As Williams (2010: 251) suggests 'the portrayal of the weak, 'innocent', helpless victim is directly challenged by the teen the police or a would-be service provider encounters in the field. Instead of a sad-eyed victim, they confront a strong, wilful, survivor who looks and acts quite differently from the victims portrayed in the media'. This is something that the young people talked about too. As noted in the previous chapter, they spoke of people seeing the 'surface exterior': not seeing the broadness or depth of the problem; and not recognising young people's (negative/risky) behaviour as ways of dealing with, and masking, vulnerability and need. The findings noted here, and in Chapter five, suggest that there is awareness of a problem that is broader and more complex than grooming: yet there is an uncertainty about whether these are instances of 'child sexual exploitation' warranting a safeguarding response. This in turn suggests that this is perhaps less of a hidden problem, and more a problem that is difficult to see, recognise and interpret, partly because there may be multiple forms of sexual exploitation which are not captured by the ways in which policy and procedure encodes the phenomenon.

'It's not about throwing money at it': the 'solutions' to child sexual exploitation
In this part of the chapter I consider the professionals' reflections on what should be done to respond to the problem. Whilst they were invited to speak about how they respond to any aspect of the problem, much of what they disclosed focused on ways to respond to the needs of young people. There were four themes arising from the data: structure and security; support; self-esteem and agency; and trusting relationships.

Structure and security
A significant theme arising from the data was the need for young people to have structure and security in their lives. Many respondents emphasised the importance of the home environment, as Max below considers:

> **Max (children's residential care):** Ideally you want to take all these children and place them in a nice secure family

The professionals talked of the need for young people to be in 'normal loving homes' – homes with boundaries, rules, and 'well-adapted adults' who are able to respond to young people in loving, caring ways. Much of what they spoke of was related to concerns about the adequacy of residential care to provide the environment and family setting to meet the needs of young people (see also Kerrigan-Lebloch and King, 2006), mainly because those working in residential care are unable to act in the ways they would as parents. For example Louisa (social worker) explained how placing a young person in foster care is better than placing them in residential care because 'it is more like home'. She went on to consider how foster care is 'a protective factor' for young people, because foster carers are more able 'to control where young people went and what they did'. They can set boundaries and know where a young person is. Cathy, below, makes a similar assessment for young people who are not in statutory care:

> **Cathy (fostering):** we need to equip parents with the knowledge and confidence to take a more proactive role in being parents and in setting boundaries

In this way, a necessary way of responding to the problem is to ensure that young people are given clear boundaries to help them to protect themselves; whilst those boundaries, when monitored by family, care givers and professionals, also protect young people from those who might harm them (Pearce 2009).

In a similar way, the professionals also spoke of the need to provide and monitor boundaries in young people's day-to-day lives. They spoke of the need to give young people 'positive and constructive things to do to give them some structure', to 'replace the pattern of behaviour that leads to sexual exploitation', and to 'gradually *push* it out' (the risky behaviour). This notion of structure and diversion can be seen in Linda's comments:

> **Linda (community work):** I was trying to get one of them involved in education, because she wasn't going to school, and there was a placement in (place name) so she was going along to that, which gave her a structure which was quite *good* which she didn't have, I think you know before she had a lot of free time and so, she was able to um or um I suppose she didn't

have much to *do* and so she might as well go off and, enjoy herself with these guys

As with Linda, most respondents referred to protecting young people by deploying techniques of diversion. Structuring a young person's day should ensure they are kept safe and distanced from sexually exploitative situations, or from engaging in risky behaviours, as Carla explains:

Carla (children's residential care): I thought uh the best thing to do is to prevent her from *really from going out,* not locking her in but, ENGAGING her in activities like I was happy for her to go to the cinema, you know just take her *away* from, THAT

In so doing, the professionals spoke of how by controlling and directing the things that young people did, they hoped that they would 'grow out of it', 'find another way' or 'think again', and exploitative relationships and patterns of behaviour would be relinquished or dissipate. Underpinning the theme considered here is that of *young people's* need of protection – protection that can be given through structure and security. Thus respondents typically invoked a notion of youth as a stage of risk in which young people need guidance, as well as protection from themselves – from their hormones, their experimenting, their immaturity – and from others who would take advantage of them whilst they are in this vulnerable phase (see Wyn and White, 1997). As Marie outlines:

Marie (third sector): we need to protect them in order to give these young people the opportunity to stabilise

The shared occupational assumption across interviews was that young people need someone watching over them, who will enforce rules and boundaries – someone who will protect them, from others, whilst also providing 'spaces', physical and temporal, to enable young people to think again about the relationships and circumstances in which they are involved. This view shares many similarities with the young people's reflections about how they were taken advantage of because of particular vulnerabilities, not least the absence or ineffectiveness of of protective adults. It may be recalled that

Chapter four revealed how young people spoke of the lack of security and boundaries within their family and home settings as contributing to vulnerabilities. They also spoke of their exclusion from key institutions (such as home and school) as generating a sense of difference – that they were not quite 'normal', not like other children and young people (McMullen, 1987). Yet, whilst the young people considered their lack of boundaries and rules to form part of the problem, they did not speak of their need for this when they spoke of solutions. In fact, as outlined in Chapter Six, they indicated feeling further vulnerable – isolated, powerless, misunderstood – when those tasked to help and care for them focused on monitoring their behaviour and on formal procedures for protecting them. Whilst the need for stability did feature in the young people's accounts, they considered that this stability came from people, relationships, having someone there; a point that the professionals also considered as an important part of responding to the problem.

Support

Another key theme was the importance of support. Many of the professionals talked of the need for young people to have support in the same way that the young people considered the meaning of the term. In strikingly similar ways to the young people, the professionals too spoke of the need for young people to have and know that there is *someone there* for them. As Cathy explains further:

> **Cathy (fostering):** they need to be at the point where they are WILLING to work with somebody and WILLING to make changes if you're asking them to change a pattern of behaviour then you need to have something good to put it in place, you can't just say you know that's not good don't do that (laughs) … um, we need to, people who actually COME alongside young people and are able to befriend them but it involves spending *a lot* of time with the young person to show them another way, um, I'm not thinking getting the right words but, but they're offering (pause) support in a way that always goes the extra mile

As Cathy says, to *support* a young person is to come alongside them. 'Going the extra mile' is the way of showing a young person that the person helping them is someone who does more than the job, is someone who is there for them. The importance of more

open-ended relationships, and of outreach and advocacy, is a point well noted within the literature (see O'Neill, 2001, Kerrigan-Lebloch and King, 2006; Clutton and Coles, 2007; Pearce 2009). Furthermore, as can also be seen in what Cathy has to say, many of the professionals considered that for support to mean something there must be a relationship and a connection to the young person. It is the one-on-one meaningful support that is crucial for young people to make changes and to establish those new boundaries, and patterns of behaviour, as noted above (see also Clutton and Coles, 2007).

In addition, many respondents spoke of how young people involved in sexually exploitative situations are often outside of mainstream support systems, and are unlikely to have the networks available to other young people to call on when they are in difficulty. They also talked about how these young people are often the very sorts of young people who are least emotionally equipped to deal with difficulty in constructive ways (see also McMullen, 1987; O'Neill 2001). Many spoke of the value and importance of outreach or detached workers – those who are able to meet a young person outside of formal service hours – because they provided a form of informal and responsive support for young people that they (the respondents) may not be able to give in their particular occupational capacity. Respondents typically invoked common-sense notions of care, such as, the need for young people to have 'someone to hold their hand', someone who would get them out of bed in the morning, a familiar someone to meet them and make sure they get to the places they need to be, such as appointments, work placements, health visits. Through these acts of practical support, over time a relationship could be established with a young person which would make them *feel* supported and better protected:

> **Polly (youth work):** I used to hope for a way into reach someone to make a
> point of contact and to show a connection to someone um, and you don't
> know what you're doing when you just do a little, a little sign of trying to
> help someone do something that actually means something to them

Much of this also chimes with what the young people had to say about support, and the need for someone to be there for them. Someone they could call on when they were in need, but also someone who was there because they wanted to be. The professionals' narratives about support were congruent with research indicating that meaningful

relationships are established through 'everyday acts of care' (see Holland, 2010: 173). This is similar to research which suggests that it is crucial to provide one-on-one support for young people involved in sexually exploitative relationships and difficulty (Hester and Westmarland, 2004), and research which suggests forms of therapeutic outreach as models of good practice for providing this sort of support for young people (see Kerrigan-Lebloch and King, 2006; Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Pearce, 2009).

'Opening up young people's world's a little bit': self-esteem and agency
Following on from the discussion thus far, many of the professionals spoke of the need for young people to make 'good' and 'safe' choices to protect themselves. Yet underpinning what they had to say about this, is the need for young people to know there *are* other ways of responding to their needs and that there *are* different ways of having relationships:

> **Faye (third sector):** I also feel it's about being really positive and building on their self-esteem (pause) where they feel, today, someone noticed me, I've got potential. I DO think there's a sense of you can work around and there's all these other I think you've got to do both I mean if someone wants to leave a negative unhealthy relationship they need support to do that but that's not particularly our role or our expertise but we try and and do all the other things like give them the confidence to broaden their life out and have more than just, this one, sort of unhealthy relationship, their life revolves around so we're like oh look you can do this and this and this and this, and you and you CAN do this and here we can help you to do this, that kind of thing can make their relationship seem much smaller in their eyes, and the rest of the world seem bigger, and then they might just choose, to probably not even be with that person anymore because actually they've out-grown in and they've come back into their own and, feel that they can do positive things with their lives

Educating young people on ways to stay safe and helping them to make safe choices are key elements in the prevention and intervention agenda within Wales' policy on child sexual exploitation (see WAG, 2011). The professionals' accounts support this, but provide some further context. They suggested that young people need to *know* they have

choices, not just be told those choices are there, if they are to make changes to their lives. Moreover, as can also be seen in what Faye has to say, many of the professionals linked these choices to young people's sense of agency and self worth. They spoke of young people needing to know 'they deserve better', 'to know that they can make choices', 'that they can impose rules in relationships, not just have rules imposed on them'. Many related this to the need to change young people's (negative) perceptions of themselves. They spoke of the importance of building up young people's confidence, and of 'instilling a sense of self-worth'. Young people need to make choices, but they can't make them if they do not know or believe they are there – or that they are worth making. This is again similar in some ways to what the young people had to say about solutions (see Chapter Six). They spoke of how they found it helpful to hear different perspectives on their situations, and to know that things don't have to be the way they are (see also Fox, 2012). Yet a link in the young people's accounts that the professionals in some ways made also, is that it is the relational context to these conversations that seemed to make the difference. Tellingly, Faye, above, makes the point, as did several respondents, about the importance of young people 'being noticed' by someone, and the connection between this, young people's self-esteem, and the choices they made (see also McMullen, 1987). As suggested in the previous chapter, it is the trusting relationship, between the young person and the adult helping them, which provides meaning and makes the difference for the young person (see also Winter, 2010). This was a point that the professionals acknowledged too, as discussed next.

Trusting relationships

A thread running through the findings discussed above, and in previous chapters, is that of the importance of trusting relationships. All the professionals spoke of the important role their relationship with a young person plays in any work they may be able to do with them. They considered that the young people they come across, who may be involved in sexually exploitative situations and relationships, can be difficult to engage and to work with. As Cathy and Faye note below:

> **Cathy (fostering):** a young person can only be helped when they want to, um you know with the best will in the world and lots and lots and lots of training it is very hard to help someone who doesn't want to be helped

> **Faye (third sector):** she was MASSIVELY VULNERABLE. Um, because I don't think she had any sense of, uh, of that herself or *I don't think she would ever admit it*, she certainly wouldn't admit it and it didn't give you anything to work with

Many of the professionals considered that the difficulties experienced in engaging young people were likely to be related to their negative experiences of care, in which they had a mistrust of services and of adults more generally (see Clutton and Coles, 2007; also Melrose et al., 1999; Scott and Skidmore, 2006). Respondents spoke frequently of the difficulties some young people have in engaging with them. They spoke of how young people need to have someone to whom they can expose their vulnerability, people they can trust, and people with whom they can ask for help (see McMullen, 1987; Holland, 2009; Winter, 2011). In this way, a young person admitting they need help and their *wanting* to be helped by professionals was talked about as only possible through developing a trusting relationship. As Faye goes on to explain:

> **Faye (third sector):** there was a slight sense of that I felt where they had to hold it together otherwise, what else where they going to do because they had to get, get through this evening, so if they dropped their *guard* and made themselves vulnerable with *you* and then, they had to pick themselves up and go out doing what they were doing, so, they were never going to do that, and generally they didn't, they would you'd build that relationship and they'd KNOW you and they'd clock you *that evening* and then slowly they'd start to come into the centre and then you'd, start to have conversations with them

As Sennett (2003: 118/119) argues, 'trust… begins at the moment the protégée freely asks for help'. Relationships are vital to any work because they are the means of generating the trust needed for young people to begin to *want* help; and it is this which is the only way they can be helped. It is this which underpins what both the professionals and young people had to say about relationships. As Max explains:

> **Max (children's residential care):** It's building good positive relationships with young people and that being beneficial in and of itself

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The professionals' accounts concur with much of the literature, which emphasises the importance of the relationships young people have with the professionals for any intervention to have meaning (see Clutton and Coles, 2007; O'Neill, 2001; Pearce et al., 2002; Holland, 2010). Yet, whilst the development of these relationships was seen as integral to their work with young people, respondents spoke of their frustrations that they did not have time or the capacity to develop them. Those professionals who did not anticipate developing long-term relationships as part of their occupational remit, for example those working in policing or health care, spoke of frustrations about the lack of time to give to young people to facilitate a relationship that would enable them to disclose sensitive details about their circumstances. All considered that administrative routines and bureaucratic arrangements worked against their being able to provide the sorts of responsive bespoke support needed by young people (see Wastell et al., 2010). As Dave relates:

> **Dave (fostering):** but how often do we give people enough time with children, enough time, to sit with them LONG enough, to try and understand it, because sometimes they wouldn't understand it themselves

If the professionals are to have insight into the problem, and know how to help a young person, they need trusting relationships in which young people can share their experiences. This mirrors the young people's perspectives on relationships and trust. They too emphasised the importance of trust in those tasked to help them in order to disclose their experiences. They too emphasised the importance of time so that professionals could begin to grasp more fully what they were going through. As Dave, above, says, there is a need for both parties to understand a young person's experiences, something that can be co-established between professional and young person (see Winter, 2010). Relatedly, the professionals talked about there being a root to the problem. They spoke of the necessity to 'get to the bottom of things', to establish the reasons why they might be doing the things they are doing.

> **Carla (children's residential care):** SURELY we should be able to do that, you know like have one on one sessions, and not just listening and sitting there like I'll listen you tell me all your problems cos sometimes kids

don't want to talk, you've got to try and get it out of them, but we're not

allowed to ask questions, we're not allowed to ask question because we're,

kind of pulling out stuff which, one, well the main reason I think is because

we're, we'll like, make them think about all that stuff and bring all that up,

which they might have suppressed, and then might not be able to deal with

the consequences, but, to me that's better than just letting it go, and leaving

it

As with other public service professionals, Carla believes there is some causal pattern or problem diagnosis that will get to the root of the matter, and that hearing the young person talk about 'it' is the way to revealing and dealing with the problem (see Winter 2010). This assumption was shared by the young people who all invoked the critical nature of 'talk' within a relationship of high trust and low criticism.

Responding to child sexual exploitation

'Looking after' a young person – noticing, supporting, listening, and watching over them – underpins what the professionals had to say about identifying the problem, preventing it and supporting young people in these sorts of circumstance and difficulty. As noted throughout, the responses to the problem of child sexual exploitation offered by the professionals mirror much of what the young people had to say about solutions. In essence, there is a need for vulnerable young people to be visible and of concern to someone for young people to feel acknowledged, supported and looked for.

As illustrated in Chapter five, the problem of child sexual exploitation was talked about in a number of ways by the professionals. Regardless of how they conceptualised the actual incidence of CSE there was an assumption that young people's risk of being exploited was related to their youth – a time of life normatively conceptualised as a turbulent stage of becoming (see Lee, 2001), a phase in which *all* young people are likely to do risky things, because that is what young people do (see also Wyn and White, 1997). In addition, the professionals also spoke of how some young people are particularly vulnerable to being sexually exploited when they have a lack of stability at home and in their relationships, a lack of positive regard, a lack of people to watch out for them, and 'woolly' sexual boundaries. The solutions by definition tend to collect around the need for vulnerable young people, in a risky stage of youth, to have someone who will *care* – provide protection *and* support – as a way of

safeguarding them from those who might exploit them. In this way, the narratives of the professionals centred on individual young people, and their particular need for support and protection. They did not, for example, say much about targeting the adult men, predators, and boys, who they typically invoked as exploiting young people. Neither did they focus their occupational gaze on wider, more structural concerns, such as poverty. However, as will have been apparent in much of the data above, in many ways they *did* speak of wider problems, in that their depictions of the very structures of official care and interventions revealed their implication in the problem itself. A point returned to later in the discussion.

Child sexual exploitation: problems and solutions

In the introduction to this thesis the study was defined as an exploration of the problem of child sexual exploitation from contrastive viewpoints of young people defined as victims of this, and of those charged with their support and protection. It was indicated then and will be clear by now, that this issue extends outwards into a series of other related problems, most obviously the multiple and concatenating difficulties experienced by young people that make them vulnerable, and which run alongside young people's experience of sexual exploitation. Then there are the challenges experienced by professionals in their attempts to respond to young people identified in this way – dilemmas of practice, some (not all) openly acknowledged. In addition this study has been also about 'child sexual exploitation' as a social problem constructed and articulated in policy and practice frameworks. Given which, and in bringing the current chapter to a close, there will now be a wider and consolidating discussion of the data, analysis and arguments presented throughout the thesis. I begin by considering the wider context of 'care' and its contribution to the problem of child sexual exploitation.

The problem with child sexual exploitation: care

'Care' has been a recurrent theme throughout the data gathered from both sets of participants in respect of the problems and solutions to child sexual exploitation. Cares are worries, troubles and sorrows. Care is given to objects of concern, things or people in others' charge – those in the care of others are under their protection and authority. To care is to provide for and look after, it entails being able to envision and 'see' that someone or thing needs care, it also implicates a notion of authority and oversight. As discussed throughout, it is the balance between these elements that shapes and

determines the nature of any relationship and its likely impact. In its legal formulation, care refers to 'a dangerously circumstanced child … judged fit for official guardianship', hence 'local authority care'. Since the Children Act 1989 the term 'looked after children' has typically been used to make reference to children whose care arrangements have them living away from home and under the supervision of a social worker. All of the young people interviewed in this study had experience of local authority care and several of them were 'looked after' young people. Such young people – in care or looked after – feature explicitly and implicitly in what the professionals had to say as well. Both sets of respondents aligned experiences of official care and being looked after with the problem of child sexual exploitation when talking about where the problem starts. This is a cruel and familiar paradox - being in care, being looked after is often part of the problem. While it would be wholly inappropriate to collapse the care experience as the cause of complex social problems – many children will have experienced harm and been damaged before coming into care – it is nonetheless the case that the role of care in the problem itself is one 'we cannot readily dismiss' (Shaw et al., 1996: 9; see also Melrose et al., 1999; O'Neill 2001; Pearce et al., 2002; Coy, 2008).

Thinking of care as a way of 'seeing' helps develop this point. A thread running through both sets of respondents data is that young people can in many ways be invisible to those who should care for them.[*] If the purpose of placing young people in care settings, where they are overseen by professionals tasked to care for them, is to protect them from further harm by recognising (*seeing* and *seeing to*) their needs and vulnerabilities, then at least some young people seem to experience this attention negatively. Thus young people in this study considered themselves as 'seen' but more as objects of surveillance, defined by their need; outside of this they felt themselves to be unwanted and unacknowledged. As demonstrated in Chapter five, many of the professionals recognised this same difficulty, in which 'care' can contribute to vulnerability, exposing young people to risk even as it seeks to shield them. It can be very difficult for professionals to provide the sorts of care, attention and affection that all children and young people – in fact any person – needs. Looking after others is much easier said than done, just as seeing can signify both the (simple) recognition of visible surfaces and (with much greater difficulty) true understanding. The paradox bears

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[*] It is not suggested that it is *only* young people who are in care who are sexually exploited, yet they feature highly in official statistics relating to this issue, and, also, in statistics relating to adult sex workers. (see O'Neill, 2001; Pearce et al., 2002; Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Coy, 2008).

repeating: the sorts of attention given a vulnerable child or young person by those with an official duty of care can be the attention that makes for further vulnerability if that intervention is experienced as 'blotting out their individuality and subjectivity' (see O'Connell-Davidson, 2005: 55). Engaging in risky behaviours was often understood by the young respondents as their best attempts not only to cope but to assert themselves (even where to cope meant not coping at all (see Hebdige, 1988); even where asserting oneself meant going missing). These young people felt powerless, uncared for, and without help or attention, under such circumstances 'sexual exploitation' can be an answer of sorts, a form of 'help' and recognition of *some* form from *someone.* It is perhaps this that Andrea seeks to convey:

> **Andrea (healthcare):** they're on their umpteenth social worker who say they can't care for them, but their actual behaviour isn't being addressed, and their needs aren't being addressed, and (pauses) they are so desperate for uh for normality really but they end up putting themselves in very vulnerable situations cause nobody can protect them from them (those who exploit) and neither can they themselves

Implied within Andrea's account and noted across the data from other adult respondents was that they and other professionals like them, struggle to meet the needs of the children and young people they are working with. They acknowledged that this can leave young people looking for the sorts of care, relationships and attention that any person needs, and thereby become vulnerable to people who might exploit them for sex.

Sennett (2003) writes about the ways in which seeing and being seen go to the heart of respectful relations of care and welfare. He also argues that the social relationship between carer and cared for is a particular kind when the relationship is a professional one. It is not the same as friendship, and neither can it directly replace familial relationships. It is one which by its own nature requires a combination of closeness and distance, compassion and reserve, if it is to allow the care receiver and care giver to arrive at anything like mutual respect. Mismanaged, such caring relationships can impose concern in ways which people are defined according to their need. Alternatively, if the relationship strays into compassion and sentimentality this may similarly demean. This resonates with much that the respondents had to say. Yet there is a difficulty here. As noted previously, the young people did not tend to speak

(as Sennett does) of reserve or distance as positive qualities within the professional caring relationship. They wanted those relationships to be close, personal and compassionate, and felt unacknowledged to the degree that this did not happen. But the difficulty then is that when the state acts in loco parentis, professionals operating in this context cannot somehow fulfil that role in the way that they might as parents. They must, in short, be professional and maintain boundaries. This is similar for professionals who consider that vital parental support and care for a young person is absent, a point that Matthew alludes to:

> **Matthew (youth work):** the ones you really do, sort of have an affinity with, you want to protect them so much it's like this, sort of, you almost become a surrogate father to them, because again you're um, I'm not making any correlation between the fact that the father or father figure is absent in terms of their *behaviour*, but they do become very, they do sort of try to hug you, and you just have to put your hand on their forehead and sort of push them away and go um just make a joke out of it, and say look, no touching, not hugging, that's not allowed, and make a joke out of it

Whilst the difficulties negotiating care relationships spoken of by the professionals were typically more than just the occupational restrictions on physical touch (see Rees and Pithouse, 2008), the point to note with regards the above extract, is that there are of course different boundaries to the relationships caring professionals can provide, to those found in friendship or family. Indeed, not every young person is one whom professionals have an 'affinity with' as Matthew puts it. Respondents often spoke of 'being professional' as also having to work with young people they did not much like or get on with, yet who still required their care and commitment. However, something like family and friendship is what the young people spoke of as needing and wanting – especially when they were younger - even if in their view they did not so much need it now. The professionals too recognised this elemental need and there is much in what they spoke of as the solutions – prevention and intervention – to the problem that was consistent with what young people reported. However, as has been noted earlier, the professionals identified time, administrative constraints, and professional boundaries as necessarily curtailing their ability to provide the sorts of care that they might otherwise have wished to give (see Broadhurst et al., 2010).

There is then an awkwardness if not paradox in the way that policy and practice frameworks direct work on prevention in regard to educating children and young people about healthy relationships (see WAG, 2011). Aside from the difficulties in establishing what these may look like, respondents' accounts suggest that there is not always much that is healthy about the official 'care' relationships young people have. Young people in care may not have family or friendship networks around them to care for them in the taken-for-granted ways that many of their peers do – and can be solely reliant on professionals tasked to help them to provide this. These relationships are likely to also be the very models of relationships that young people look to (see Coy, 2008). Moreover, as the young people's accounts conveyed, when an 'unhealthy' relationship is the only and expected option available to them, they will take it. It is towards these inappropriate relationships and how the two participant groups understand and identify CSE that we now turn.

The problem with child sexual exploitation: grooming

Having begun with a summary of the problem as conceptualised by the respondents, the discussion now addresses 'child sexual exploitation' as a policy problem. In the previous chapter we heard the young people speak of (child) sexual exploitation as inseparable from the many other 'things going on' in their lives: things such as their feelings of being without help, their feeling uncared for and unseen, their finding ways to cope that often compounded their difficulties. From the perspectives of the young people, these 'things going on' were the real concern and the root of the problem. The professional respondents did not go so far as to suggest that a young person's underlying vulnerabilities and risky behaviours formed part of the problem *itself*. Yet they considered these to be related to the problem in such a way that they could not be ignored. They understood there to be a 'root', a reason or reasons, particular to a young person, which needed to be addressed. These underlying needs and vulnerabilities, spoken of by both sets of respondents, inform an understanding of sexual exploitation that is broader than one which sees young people being groomed and exploited for sex (see also Phoenix, 2010; Melrose, 2012).

Given the above, it is argued that the current policy framework, so explicit in its reference to the grooming of children by adults, is problematic for professionals in four ways. Firstly, it is a way of seeing the problem that oversimplifies, creating too narrow a definition. The grooming model does not measure up to the problem as respondents

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described it (see also Day, 2009; O'Connell-Davidson, 2005). The accounts given by the young people in this study revealed how they exchange sex to meet needs. They exchange sex when they feel it is expected. They can be aware of their exploitation. They can, and do, within constrained and limited choices, *choose* to exchange sex to meet those needs (see also Pitts, 1998; Pearce et al., 2002; Moore, 2006). To say this is not to underplay or dilute the concern we should feel about any young person in such circumstances; it is instead to see young people's experience of sexually exploitative relationships for what it is.

Secondly, the relatively narrow definition within policy does not allow professionals to easily understand child sexual exploitation and so recognise it. As shown earlier, the professionals sometimes displayed uncertainty about the problem itself – one related to confusion about when or whether their concerns regarding a young person they think may be sexually exploited, meet the definition in policy and thereby require a safeguarding response. Indeed, they may not come across grooming but they may well encounter young people who are exchanging sex whom they consider to be sexually exploited. As suggested earlier, it is not so much that the problem is hidden and not easily visible in itself, it is rather that the definition of the problem within policy frameworks constructs a slim aperture through which to look out from (see WAG, 2011). The instances of CSE that professionals perceive and come across need a bigger lens in order to capture and interpret exploitation as such (see Pearce, 2009). Counterintuitively, the highly bounded nature of policy definitions appear to yield vagueness rather than precision, making child sexual exploitation difficult to identify (see also Melrose 2012). If the problem is deemed officially as one of grooming from an adult male, and the preventative focus is on educating young people about healthy relationships (see WAG, 2011), then the variability and complexity of exploitation is not by any means made easy to see. Identifying when and what relationships are exploitative enough to warrant a safeguarding response is, in many cases, very difficult. Sexual exploitation in peer relationships, for example, is one of those instances in which many professionals spoke of finding it hard to know how to respond, and whether to justify as a child protection referral.

Thirdly, grooming frames an understanding of the problem as that of child victim and adult perpetrator, implying and relying on conceptions of children as innocent and dependent. This obscures the complexities of sexually exploitative relationships for young people, and can lead to a (false) understanding that what

professionals should expect to see is someone who fits a conception of vulnerability and innocence (Williams 2010). This point is ably intimated by Louisa:

> **Louisa (social work):** I don't know I suppose when I think about the word sexual exploitation a lot of what comes to my mind is what uh kind of cities and *paedophile rings* and um, *child trafficking*, whereas in my in my experience in work that isn't really what it's been like (pause) um I suppose in my experience it's been a, a bit more kind of about the sexual abuse, and um you know a young person being used and people taking advantage of them … …. I don't know like sometimes using the language like using the language of perpetrator, can bring with it uh, a lot of people automatically associate a lot of things *to that* (pause) rather than, I suppose you can make judgements about a situation that's maybe what I'm trying to say, and you can maybe make judgements about a *victim* and judgements about a *perpetrator* because of the language, rather than being able to analyse it fresh (pause) and seeing everything that's going on

Louisa explains something of the challenge for professionals tasked to identify this problem. 'Child sexual exploitation', underpinned as it is by the grooming discourse, invites us to see the problem as organised groups of adult men exploiting children (see Pearce, 2010; Melrose, 2010). This no doubt occurs, indeed the thesis opened with reference to a spate of high-profile convictions in 2012-13 that matched this model well. However, the difficulty for many professionals is that the instances of concern that they come across day to day are, more often, as Louisa explains in the very same words as the young respondents used – '*young people* being used' and 'taken advantage of' in multiple and often mundane ways, and some distance from notions of organised gangs of predatory males. This creates two issues: how to find ways to justify resources and time to respond to these instances, and the difficulties non-specialist professionals have in *seeing* these as sexual exploitation at all (see also Phoenix, 2010). As Kelly et al., observe:

> We regard it as dangerous to create classifications of sexual abuse which are constructed as mutually exclusive categories. Whilst conceptualisation enables an increasing recognition of the various forms of sexual abuse, the

contexts they occur in and the consequences they have, we need to bear in mind that these are analytical categories, and the boundaries created are often artificial … We must beware the danger of constructing the very problem we are supposed to be investigating - in other words do we only find what we expect to see?

(Kelly et al., 1995:14)

The professionals in this study understood that child sexual exploitation sits in a wider context of problems, which leads to the fourth point. The focus on grooming makes it difficult for professionals to acknowledge and respond to some of the wider issues surrounding the exchange of sex. Even when sexual exploitation does take the form of grooming, it is invariably underpinned by problems and vulnerabilities in the lives of young people, the 'things going on' in their lives – that recurrent, revealing, yet inexact phrase used by young respondents, captures this often turbulent and unhappy background. These need to be acknowledged if professionals are going to be able to identify the problem when it occurs. As the young people often alluded to, as did Louisa above, professionals need to look beyond the presenting circumstances and initial perceptions of young people in order to see all those 'things going on'. It is in exploring this poorly illuminated and overlooked background that professionals may be best enabled to understand and identify that a young person is being sexually exploited.

The problem with child sexual exploitation: young people

As argued throughout this thesis, there are ways in which the current policy framework of '*child* sexual exploitation', underpinned by a grooming model, can be problematic when those affected are *young people* (see also O'Connell-Davidson, 2005). Just as the current conception of child sexual exploitation risks collapsing varied experiences into a singular category (i.e. grooming, see Melrose, 2012: 4), so too does the demarcation of victims up to the age of 18 as children risk homogenising identities, positioning those involved as *child* victims and as such non-agentic dependents (Piper, 2000). Necessarily thereby, the very existence of the problem as an official category of concern is one which depends upon and is premised on this conception. As Brown (2004: 345) argues, 'the assumptions of comprehension and choice on the part of the child have been instrumental in excluding child prostitution from being encompassed in definitions of child abuse'. This is another powerful way of seeing. Yet young people are not children.

As such, and as Dean (1997) argues, they are both object and subject of the welfare state, their responsibilities are as ambiguous as their rights. The ambiguity and contradictions of the social category 'youth' is thrown into sharp relief in the context of 'child sexual exploitation' defined as something that can happen to anyone up to the age of 18. Yet, no one can reasonably deny that the needs and capabilities of a 17-year-old, the responses required by these, and ways to best support such a person, are likely to be very different from those that apply to, say, a 12-year-old (see Pearce, 2010).

As Piper (2000) argues, the children's rights agenda positions children and young people as agentic and autonomous, whereas issues of welfare and safeguarding fit more readily with an understanding of children as innocent and sexually unknowing, undeveloped and in need of protection. Child sexual exploitation fits within the latter and directs solutions toward *child* protection, which can be problematic for responding to the needs of *young people* in a number of ways. As Pearce (2010) argues, current safeguarding and social care work with young people is mostly designed for work with younger children, and their families, to provide protection within the home. In this way, the urgency of finding resources for young people involved in exchanging sex, who are demonstrably agentic, difficult to work with, do not accept help, and claim they are choosing to do what they do, 'diminishes in the face of cases of younger children that more closely resemble traditional child abuse' (Phoenix, 2010: 37). This is something the professionals were only too aware of and it presented them with a dilemma they found difficult to manage:

> **Nick (social work):** you are fire-fighting all the time trying to look for the worse cases (pause) in realism they (professionals making referrals) are right when they say these cases need to be looked into, but the sheer amount of work we have and the resources and the time mean it's not possible

As revealed in Chapter five, many of the professionals spoke of the difficulties they faced getting young people to be seen and prioritised as in need of support. Whilst many did emphasise young people's child-likeness and child status at times, they also spoke of having to do so, having to present young people in this way, in order for others to take their concerns seriously. Many spoke of the importance of the SERAF (see appendix 2) in this context, not because it helped them to assess or reveal a young person's risk level, but because it provided the means to justify their concerns about a

young person. Furthermore, they spoke of the difficulties with finding support and resources to direct towards the young people they had concerns about. Regardless of how they conceptualised the problem, all the professionals spoke of the difficulties working with young people because those they come across reject help, may not see themselves as vulnerable or at risk, may not want to be helped and may not cooperate with services trying to help them. Supporting and working with young people involved in sexual exploitation can require time and cost resources that professionals do not have. Under such circumstances, the professionals spoke of how their responses tended to be directed towards those 'worst cases', which by their very nature more obviously required and so justified protective measures. Measures which, although considered necessary, were spoken of by many of the professionals as not actually addressing the problem:

> **Annette (third sector):** I think because of the drugs I think that she was she was using more and more, I think it could very well have got to the stage where she NEEDED to do what she was doing to get *the money* to fund *the drugs*. I think that would have happened quite quickly and I *also* feel that, you know, you, the men that she was involved with I think very *clearly* obviously no violence had been used up until *then* but that's not to say that there wouldn't have been, once they got her to the point where, they felt confident enough to go down that route *then maybe she wouldn't have any choice*, ANYMORE, you know, I think she was probably not FAR OFF (pauses) getting to the stage where she probably, would *feel* that she didn't have much more choice, but then of course the police stepped in housing had stepped in everybody had stepped IN, and she was taken *immediately* out of that situation but she it wasn't what she wanted, and she was doing everything in her POWER to get back to, being able to do it again

Annette conveys a similar awareness of the short-termism of protection shown in the young people's accounts. As noted earlier, the young people spoke of the ways in which protective responses, forms of care, could actually feed into and exacerbate the problems they felt they faced. They felt that professionals too often focus on the surface of the problem and seldom address or even really *see* the issues that young people face. The dilemma the professionals are presented with, as Annette suggests, is the conflict

between the rights of the young person and their best interests (see also Banks, 2004). Yet as noted above, young people are likely to come to the attention of services when their need is so great that the sorts of urgent responses spoken of by Annette are unavoidable. This is not to say that professionals do not recognise that there are underlying issues to the problem that invariably need to be addressed. But difficulties arise when the conception of the problem does not easily enable professionals to acknowledge young people's agency. Yet, to fail to do so, to fail to see the problem as a young person sees it, is to risk misunderstanding their needs and vulnerability (see also O'Neill, 2001; Coy, 2008). This is a point ably grasped by Luke:

> **Luke (alternative education):** I suppose an adult you know you would always be told that they were able to make their own decision and you could say that young people aren't capable of making that decision, but then I would say that if you discount the (pause) you know to change a young person you have to help them to make a choice, so if you don't value the decision you know not valuing it in a positive way but if you don't take into account that they have made the choice to do what they have done, it's very difficult to reverse it (pauses) um so it's about understanding the choices they have made, and working out what the problems are

The professionals' accounts strongly suggested that there are difficulties acknowledging young people's agency within a conceptualisation of the problem which assumes their lack of it. Yet acknowledging young people's agency and their choices was talked about by the professionals as essential to understanding and responding to any underlying needs and difficulties. In addition, getting to the root of the problem, necessarily involves working *with* a young person, and recognising them as an active subject within their own care (see Sennett, 2003: 118). This was an important aspect underpinning what the young people had to say about any worthwhile response to their problems. This was partly because when care took the form of being *watched over* and monitored, the effect could be an unwelcome sense of objectification – becoming an object of surveillance – and the diminishing sense of being properly *seen* as a person whom others are more fully engaged with, concerned about and prepared to look out for. It was on these terms that the young respondents evaluated whether or not someone – anyone; those who exploit, as well as those tasked to care for them – could really provide the

help they needed. The solutions spoken of by both professionals and young people centred on the quality of relationships with family, adults, and those tasked to care for them. Yet a lack of resources to address such diffuse needs and difficulties inevitably directs responses to the immediate problem, narrowly conceived, which means putting the views of the young person second to their protection (see Leeson, 2007). Whilst trusting relationships were considered by all respondents to be essential to any aspect of prevention and intervention, 'trust' can sit awkwardly within relationship between clients and professionals. This was felt by the young people to be especially so around issues of disclosure and confidentiality, which are essential to gaining evidence and information for professionals in order to do the work of safeguarding, but can be experienced by a young person as exposing and intrusive, making them too visible too quickly to others they don't properly know. It can compound their feeling as 'object', of interest only because of their need.

This leads to a final point about the difficulties for professionals and is aptly represented in Kevin's telling statement:

> **Kevin (policing):** We are trying to safeguard children who are absolutely
> positively convinced that they don't need safeguarding

The problem is that professionals are tasked to respond to the needs of young people, who need more than safeguarding responses made under a policy directive to protect children. Young people are not children, or rather they are not quite children, not altogether children, not children for very much longer. If the matter were clear-cut there would be less difficulty. All the young people interviewed in this study considered that they needed and wanted help. They all felt that there had been times when they had not got that help, when they felt ignored, and they tried to cope as best they could under those circumstances, often in ways which compounded the problems they were facing. These difficulties and vulnerabilities were seen and taken advantage of by others, in ways which involved the young people exchanging and being exploited for sex, doing so because this seemed to meet their needs in some way. (O'Connell-Davidson, 2005). There is then something also telling in what Annette says, below:

> **Annette (third sector):** I think you know we very clearly got to the point,
> where there was VERY little more that we could do, because she KNEW

exactly what she was doing and she was making the choice to do it (pause) um and I think she she was a victim of circumstances right probably from being a little girl she was, you know had led her to that point

Whilst there are no 'solutions' that might eradicate the problem as such, there is an urgent need to direct resources towards the needs of young people to enable professionals to see, support and work with them *as young people*. When responses are designed for children, they are unlikely to be helpful for young people, in the longer-term at least. So here I return to my initial argument, that there is a need to look to the wider context of sexual exploitation, to understand the links between the problem, and vulnerability and risk (see also Pearce et al., 2002; Coy, 2008). An important part of this, as can be seen in what Annette conveys, a point made by all respondents, is that there is a need to also look to the extent, relevance and accessibility of support that is given to vulnerable children, because an important part of any solution rests in the quality and design of preventive engagement. It rests in looking after children and young people.

Concluding comments

The principle aim of this chapter was to consider the professionals' perspectives about possible solutions to child sexual exploitation. It was argued that the 'solutions' – the ways to identify, respond and prevent the problem – collect around young people's visibility to those tasked to look after and care for them. At heart, the findings presented within this chapter and elsewhere suggest that there is a need for young people to have stable consistent and positive relationships within their own milieux and for the professionals tasked to help young people, to recognise and respond to them as active subjects in their own care. In this way, solutions must necessarily recognise that the problem (and needs and solutions) is wider than children and young people being groomed by adults to exchange sex. The findings considered throughout this thesis suggest that the policy framework for child sexual exploitation, underpinned as it is by grooming as the explanation for children and young people's involvement in the exchange of sex, is problematic in a number of ways. It is not representative of the range of experiences, and so occludes other forms of sexual exploitation. By extension, it ignores the wider context and other reasons underpinning young people's vulnerability to and involvement in the exchange of sex beyond that of grooming by

adult men. From the accounts considered here, grooming can be a form of sexual exploitation, yet exchanging sex to meet needs, sex as an expected form of exchange, and peer exploitation, do not fit within this model and so are not easily recognised or prioritised as forms of the problem.

In this way, there are two distinct ways in which conceptions of *child* sexual exploitation are problematic for *young people*. Firstly, the model of grooming, with such a strong emphasis on the manipulation and coercion of children by adults, depends upon normative conceptions of children as dependent, innocent and with a lack of agency. 'Young people' do not easily fit within this conception. Furthermore when the problem itself involves young people who appear to put themselves in risky situations, or who consider it their choice to exchange sex, the limited space for professionals to acknowledge and make sense of this can mean that the needs and the reasons underpinning these young people's sexual exploitation can be ignored – leaving them further vulnerable.

Secondly, in addition, the lack of opportunity for professionals to acknowledge young people's agency presents them with problems in their attempts to get young people help. Young people, with complex needs and who appear to refuse help, do not fit easily within conceptions of vulnerability. This can leave their vulnerability and risk hidden to the professionals they variously come into contact with. Furthermore 'child sexual exploitation' necessarily directs practice to child protection – the sharp end of social work and one which, on its own, does not respond to the problem in the ways the respondents here considered to be helpful. Young people's risk and need of support, although very real and very urgent, when placed against the needs of younger children within families, in resource-stressed and sparse services, is unlikely to be prioritised (see Pearce, 2010; also Pithouse, 2008). Moreover, whilst providing short-term solutions, protective responses may serve to make young people further vulnerable, and are unlikely to make any long term differences to young people. Young people who are not acknowledged as active subjects in their own care may feel increasingly powerless and without help, with their needs still unmet; leaving them vulnerable to those who would exploit and take advantage of them.

In summary, child sexual exploitation is a problem of vulnerable children and young people being taken advantage of and exploited for sexual activity. There are many reasons why, and ways in which, young people may come to be sexually exploited. In most cases is likely to be a young person with unmet needs who considers

themselves, so absolutely, to be without other forms of help. Responses to the problem need to acknowledge that it is this which underpins why it is that some young people may be 'groomed', or feel that the exchange of sex is expected, and is the best (or least worst) option for them. Fundamentally, as argued throughout, there are problems arising from the way in which child sexual exploitation is conceptualised within current policy frameworks. Child sexual exploitation is not only a problem *per se* but is also, in itself, problematic in terms of definition. This is particularly so in respect of the way in which the problem is framed and defined as the *grooming* of *children* by predatory *adults*. It has been argued that this definition is narrow and obfuscating, inhibiting a fuller understanding of young people's experiences, which, in turn, limits what it is that professionals can see and are able to do when faced with a young person in need. In this way, the thesis adds support to others in arguing an urgent need for policy and practice frameworks to explicitly recognise those involved in the exchange of sex outside of grooming in order to acknowledge and promote much-needed support for young people in these sorts of difficulties (see Pearce et al., 2002; Phoenix, 2002; Melrose, 2004; Moore, 2006; Pearce, 2010; Melrose, 2012).

Chapter eight
Conclusions

This final chapter provides a summary of the discussion within each chapter, and an overview of the main arguments in relation to the research objectives. It considers the academic and practice aspects of the study, and the possible implications for policy. It offers some reflexive thoughts about the study's limitations and some possible directions for further research.

Summary of the thesis

In the introductory chapter to this thesis I set out the aims and objectives of the research, situating these within its methodological purpose and its contemporary relevance for policy and practice. The research was conducted as a multi-disciplinary qualitative study into a social problem that has come to be referred to within UK policy discourse as child sexual exploitation (CSE). The overarching aim was to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena via the perspectives of a purposive sample of young people with exposure to CSE, and likewise through the views of a sample of professionals likely to encounter young people experiencing sexual exploitation. Such professionals were typically those referred to within relevant policy documents as having a key role in identifying, referring, intervening and preventing the problem.

Chapter two provided a selective review of relevant (mainly) UK sources and literature related to what is known about the problem and about ways of responding to it, alongside key shifts in relevant UK policy. In doing so, the chapter illustrated how the problem has shifted, over time, from being defined in policy as 'crime' to one of 'social care', thus providing context to the thesis by considering the way the problem has come to be conceptualised within Welsh Government policy. The second part of the chapter connected the debate to related academic literatures about childhood, youth, and sight and seeing and thus set out theoretical moorings for the analysis and discussion which followed.

Chapter three provided a reflexive, detailed consideration of the research design, process and rationale. To summarise, the research comprised an analysis of interview data from two sources: accounts from a small group of young people, and perspectives

from (non-specialist to CSE) professionals who represented a range of occupational backgrounds. This chapter provided detail outlining the main research relationships and activities that took place, together with methodological reflections about the interview as the key research tool. The thematic approach to analysis was set out, as were its implications for the 'truth' claims made in respect of the interpretation of data. Also provided was a full discussion of the ethical principles that were deployed together with the dilemmas encountered in conducting this research.

Chapter four explored the ways that the young people 'made sense' of and understood their experiences of exchanging sex. I considered that the young people insisted that 'being taken advantage of' could happen to anyone if they too had unmet needs and a lack of care. I considered how the young people spoke of their lives as having been characterised by instability and uncertainty, exclusion and difference, of having negative experiences of sex, and of feeling ignored and unnoticed. Feelings they internalised and so *felt* vulnerable. 'Risk' and risky behaviours then, such as their hiding themselves away, hanging out on the streets, drugs, alcohol, and sex, were talked about as their ways of asserting themselves and of coping with these feelings of isolation and vulnerability. These ways of coping, paradoxically, led them to feel more powerless and in further difficulties, which in turn led them more directly to sexually exploitative situations and encounters. The young people's accounts suggested four likely routes into the exchange of sex: 'brainwashing' (grooming), 'bad' relationships (involving transactional sex), because 'nothing comes for free' (transient relationships), and 'doing it to get what you need' ('pimping' and sex 'work').

In this way the findings within Chapter four responded to the first research objective of exploring the ways that young people understand their experiences of child sexual exploitation, by paying attention to how their accounts 'fit' with notions of choice, consent, grooming and coercion, as represented within policy frameworks guiding practice in this field. This exploration began a critique of the grooming model in so far as it is presented as *the* way of explaining young people's involvement in sexual exploitation. Whilst the young people's accounts do evidence elements of coercion and 'grooming', the dominance of this model within policy arguably occludes other experiences of exchanging sex and homogenises young people and their experiences into a single story of young people without agency, groomed by adult male perpetrators. In this chapter it was argued that young people and their subjectivities are invisible within related Wales policy and guidance in three ways: (i) the complexities of

their emotional and social worlds are not well illuminated by the official discourse of sexual exploitation (particularly via grooming) (ii) their different individual circumstances are obscured under the broad and inclusive cloak of 'exploitation' (iii) in consequence their agency – their individual capacity for choice and action – is considered inauthentic and falsely informed.

Chapter five explored the occupational and individual perspectives of key professionals with regard to CSE. The findings here addressed the third research objective to consider the ways that professionals typically encountered and conceptualised child sexual exploitation, that is, what they understood the problem to be and how they positioned children and young people's involvement in the problem. The professionals' accounts of the problem were captured in lengthy semi-structured interviews and analytically re-presented via the themes of 'grooming' and coercion, 'conditions and rewards' in abusive relationships, peer bullying; 'party' lifestyles, and exchanging sex to meet a need. These different understandings of the problem were then connected to the professionals' typical understandings of the antecedents of CSE which collected around three main domains related to youth as risk. These emerged from thematic analysis in relation to young people at risk from predatory adults, peers and others who may opportunistically exploit, sexual experimenting, teenage rebelliousness and naivety. In considered how the professionals drew upon normative conceptions of youth as a stage of transition to explain and justify young people's risky behaviours and involvement in sexual exploitation. They considered *all* young people to be potentially at risk because they are 'young people'. The professionals' accounts of vulnerability were similar to those offered by the young people, whereby they considered there to be some form of unmet need or circumstance which made some young people more vulnerable (and thus more at risk) to sexual exploitation. Yet their talk about vulnerability was not connected to young people's involvement in risky behaviours and sexual exploitation.

The findings within Chapter five suggested that 'grooming' as an explanatory model can be problematic for professionals as it does not provide them with a conceptual framework with which they are able to fully grasp how it is that young people come to experience sexual exploitation. As illustrated, a number of professionals displayed some confusion as to the nature and full complexity of what the problem of child sexual exploitation is. This uncertainty was acknowledged by most respondents and talked of as inhibiting their understanding and occupational effectiveness.

Furthermore, young people's agency was not much recognised by the professionals, suggesting that an explanation of child sexual exploitation underpinned by grooming does not encourage or easily enable them to grasp this notion. Thus the findings within this chapter supported and built on the central claim in Chapter four: that the grooming model, when applied as the only explanation for sexual exploitation, occludes other experiences and forms of sexual exploitation, and by extension some young people themselves. This occurs not least because it denies and conceals young people's agency in relation to exploitative contexts, whilst also reducing the problem to that of grooming, which does not factor in the wider context, nor explicitly recognise other forms of sexual exploitation. Thus having consequences for how professionals make sense of and respond to the problem.

Chapter six considered the young people's perspectives in regard to their conception of 'solutions' to the problem. The findings within this chapter addressed the second research objective by exploring what young people had to say about experiences of support and social care interventions, along with their perspectives on what might best help other young people avoid or extricate themselves from exploitative situations. Interestingly, the young people did not invoke a need for specific help related to those vulnerabilities and risks that were identified in Chapter four. Instead, they focused on the importance of supportive caring relationships – relationships in which they felt seen, acknowledged and heard. Thus the ways that adult care giving, interventions and practices of child protection featured in the young people's accounts as sometimes being part of the problem formed the central focus in the chapter. The findings further suggest that the instigation of these practices, made as a response to a young person's involvement in sexually exploitative situations, can ignore, or 'miss', the 'real' problem of sexual exploitation (as the young people see it), and may also serve to compound the problem which it is attempting to prevent or disrupt.

In short, the findings in Chapter six suggest that how young people participate in defining their need has consequences for whether interventions can respond to meeting that need. Young people who are not permitted as active agents to set the terms of their own support, and who remain without proper recognition from protective adults, are likely to remain vulnerable to those who want to harm them. Through an iterative approach to analysis across previous chapters, the findings in Chapter six indicate and signal the importance of re-framing policy to recognise that 'sexual exploitation' is more than just grooming, and to direct responses to the problem that both consider the

wider problems experienced by young people, whilst also acknowledging young people as active agents in their own care. It is imperative for policy to acknowledge the complexity of this problem and in so doing to open up the possibility of more creative and bespoke interventions from professionals beyond narrow child protection responses.

Chapter seven addressed the fourth research objective by exploring the ways the professionals made sense of identifying and then evidencing child sexual exploitation, and their occupational perspectives about responding to it. The findings suggested an awareness of a problem that is broader and more complex than the grooming of children by adults: yet there was an occupational uncertainty about whether these were instances of 'child sexual exploitation' warranting a safeguarding response. This in turn suggested that CSE may perhaps be less of a hidden problem, and more a set of circumstances that is difficult to see, recognise and interpret. [*] This may be because there are multiple forms of sexual exploitation which are not captured by the ways in which policy and procedures typically encode the problem. The professionals' perspectives on responses to the problem mirrored much of that discussed in Chapter six. Regardless of how they conceptualised the problem, their approach to solutions tended to collect around the need for vulnerable *young people*, in a risky stage of youth, to have someone who will *care* – provide protection *and* support – as a way of safeguarding them from those who might exploit them. While these responses speak to a professional 'common sense' about the centrality of care and caring, they do not quite capture the prior requirement that vulnerable young people need to be visible and of concern to someone to feel acknowledged, supported, looked for and seen as authentic selves. It is then more likely they will disclose the full nature of their difficulties. The final part of this chapter provided a concluding discussion which brought together insights and arguments from across the thesis entire and these are considered below.

Key arguments and contribution

There are three key overarching arguments stemming from the findings of this thesis which are drawn together and summarised here.

Firstly, 'care' was a recurrent theme throughout the data gathered from both sets of participants in respect of the problems and solutions to child sexual exploitation. If

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[*] Insofar that it is no more 'hidden' than other forms of abuse, as claimed within policy and practice literature – see Chapter two.

the purpose of placing young people in settings where they are overseen by professionals tasked to care for them is to protect them from further harm by recognising (*seeing* and *seeing to*) their needs and vulnerabilities, then at least some young people seem to experience this attention negatively. A clear thread running through both sets of respondent data is that young people can, and feel themselves to be in many ways 'invisible' to those who should care for them. The sorts of attention given a vulnerable child or young person by those with an official duty of care can be the type of engagement that makes for further vulnerability if that intervention is experienced as 'blotting out their individuality and subjectivity' (see O'Connell-Davidson, 2005: 55). Yet it can be very difficult for professionals to provide the sorts of care, attention and affection that all children and young people (or in fact all individuals) need. These professionals considered that they and other professionals like them, struggle to meet the needs of the children and young people they are working with. This can leave young people looking for the sorts of caring supportive relationships that any person needs, and which in the absence of a positive nurturing other makes them vulnerable to people who might exploit them for sex. These young people felt powerless, uncared for, and without help or attention. Under such circumstances 'sexual exploitation' can be an answer of sorts, a form of 'help' and recognition of *some* form from *someone*.

The second overarching argument within this thesis suggests that the current policy framework, being so explicit in its reference to the grooming of children by predatory adults, is problematic in four ways. Firstly, it is a way of seeing the problem that oversimplifies, creating too narrow a definition, thus excluding or obscuring some young people's experiences and by extension some young people themselves. The young people in this study revealed how exchanging sex was a way to have various needs met. Their accounts suggest that young people can exchange sex when they feel it is expected. They can be aware of their exploitation. They can, and do, within constrained options, choose to exchange sex to meet those needs (see also Pitts, 1998; Pearce et al., 2002; Moore, 2006). To say this need not be to underplay or dilute the concern we should feel about any young person in such circumstances: it is instead to see young people's experiences of sexually exploitative relationships for what they are. Secondly, the relatively narrow definition of CSE within policy does not allow professionals to easily understand the complexity and variety of child sexual exploitation and so recognise it. The highly bounded nature of policy definitions appear to yield vagueness rather than precision, making child sexual exploitation difficult to

identify. The instances of CSE that professionals are likely to encounter and need to perceive require a wider and more nuanced lens for it to be interpreted and understood as such. Thirdly, the emphasis on grooming, as the coercion of children by *adults*, and in which children do not recognise their exploitation, frames an understanding of the problem as that of child victim and adult perpetrator, obscuring the complexities of sexually exploitative relationships for young people, and can lead to a (false) understanding that what professionals should expect to see is someone who fits some notion of innocence and vulnerability. Fourthly, then, this focus on grooming makes it difficult for professionals to acknowledge and respond to some of the wider and morally opaque issues surrounding the exchange of sex.

The third main argument was related to the way in which 'child sexual exploitation' demarcates victims up to the age of 18 as children. Moreover, current policy posits children and young people within a particular conception of the child and childhood – one which is based on the *child* as innocent, passive and dependent. In so doing, it risks homogenising identities, positioning those young people involved more readily and inappropriately as children and by extension as non-agentic dependents (Piper, 2000). 'Young people' then, are relatively invisible and hidden in such a representation of the problem. This can be particularly problematic. Firstly, this representation of the problem directs solutions toward child protection, which may not always be the most suitable response to the needs of young people. Current safeguarding practices are mostly directed and habituated to working with younger children, rather than hard-to-engage young people who are demonstrably agentic and who may be difficult to work with. This, in turn, can make it problematic for some older teenagers to be seen and prioritised as in need of support (Pearce 2010). For example many of the professionals emphasised young people's child-likeness and child status, indeed some spoke of having to present young people in this way in order for other services to take their concerns and referrals seriously. In addition, a lack of resources to address such diffuse needs and difficulties inevitably directs responses to the immediate problem, narrowly conceived as protection, which may mean less attention is paid to a more rounded approach to needs and to participation by the young person, putting their views second to their protection (see Leeson, 2007). Indeed, the findings suggest that when responses are directed towards protective measures, these can sometimes unintentionally exacerbate the problems experienced by young people. Furthermore, difficulties arise when the conception of the problem does not easily enable

professionals to acknowledge young people's agency – something considered to be essential to understanding and responding to any underlying needs and difficulties. An important aspect underpinning what the young respondents had to say about any worthwhile response to the problem was the need to work *with* a young person, and to recognise them as an active subject within their own care (see also Sennett, 2003: 118).

In summary then, the findings here indicate that the problem of sexual exploitation is one which is intrinsically connected to the emotional and social worlds of young people. The vulnerabilities and risks set out within policy guidance as indicators of the problem (see WAG, 2011), from the perspectives of the respondents in this study, *are* the problem – in that they cannot be separated out from the sexually exploitative circumstances and relationships in which children and young people are involved, and acknowledging this is vital to any full understanding of the problem itself. Thus, whilst there are no 'solutions' that might eradicate the problem as such, a critical point, stressed often in this thesis, is that the solutions will depend pivotally on the quality of preventive engagement and this will entail a service design that is age-appropriate, open-ended and accessible. Moreover there is an urgent need to direct resources towards the needs of young people to enable professionals to see, support and work with them *as young people*. When responses are designed for *children* they are unlikely to be helpful for young people, in the longer-term at least.

In addition, as noted previously, child sexual exploitation is not only a problem *per se* but is also, in itself, problematic in terms of definition. The problem framed and defined wholly as the *grooming* of *children* by predatory *adults,* is narrow and obfuscating, inhibiting a fuller understanding of young people's experiences, which, in turn, limits what it is that professionals can see and are able to do when faced with a young person in need. In this way, the thesis adds support to others in arguing an urgent need for policy and practice frameworks to explicitly recognise those involved in the exchange of sex outside of grooming in order to acknowledge and promote much-needed support for young people in these sorts of difficulties.

The modest contribution this thesis makes is through the collection and analysis of new and densely rich data from two participant groups, little represented within UK empirical research. There was a distinct applied focus to this research, and it is hoped that the findings will contribute toward policy and practice change in this field and thereby have some positive impact upon the lives of children. However, it has not been the aim, nor was it ever the intention to produce a set of explicit proposals for policy

change, that said, there are three obvious levels at which the research has relevance. Firstly, the findings suggest that widening the current policy definition of the problem to explicitly acknowledge and include 'young people', and to better recognise young people's agency and instances of exchanging sex beyond grooming, could contribute to an improved operational definition of child sexual exploitation. Whilst the thesis acknowledges and in no way dismisses 'grooming' as a way of understanding child sexual exploitation, it is suggested that a re-articulation of the grooming model is needed in order to recognize that children and young people can be aware of the coercive nature of their relationships, and to give greater weight to the reasons why they may choose to stay in exploitative relationships. In addition, it is suggested that 'child sexual exploitation' (as a policy concept) should include other kinds of transactional sex which may be more transient, but equally raise questions about the range of choices available to young people that prompt them to exchange sex for financial, emotional or material reward.

Secondly, reference to the latter aspects could inform any new guidance on identification and referral, and perhaps contribute to a better awareness and understanding of CSE amongst professionals, thus facilitating earlier intervention and prevention. Thirdly then, the findings, particularly those insights around the meanings attributed to vulnerability and risk, and the ideal impact of interventions, could enhance practice responses around bespoke durable one-on-one support.

Reflexive thoughts

As with any study there are a number of options I could have chosen but did not. The justification for the decisions that were made in this study are clearly articulated within the discussion of the research design in Chapter three. There are, however, two areas not included in the research which warrant some mention here. The overarching aim of this research was to provide an in-depth understanding of 'child sexual exploitation' by exploring the understandings and perspectives of young people with experiences of it, and 'non-specialist' professionals who hold key roles in identifying, referring and working with young people who may be involved in it. Underpinning this research was the intention to 'make visible' the perspectives and views of young people and this has directed the research to a consideration of policy, informed by theories around youth and childhood in particular. Accordingly, I did not make a feature of gender with regard to the subject matter. I am well aware that the de-facto position within much of the

rhetoric surrounding this issue is that it is a problem concerning girls. This is similarly reflected within the literature, although concerns have been raised about this assumption (see especially Lillywhite and Skidmore, 2006). I am also aware that boys are represented disproportionately in much of the rhetoric and the literature on youth as 'trouble' (see Hebdige, 1988). Whilst it is important to acknowledge this, it is also for these very reasons that I have sought to avoid these 'givens' in the way the issue is typically constructed. Thus the thesis has been about *hearing* from *young people* with experiences of exploitation. That said, issues of sexuality, femininity and masculinity are of course key variables, but it would not have been possible to do justice to this sizeable theme given the explorative design and gender inclusive focus of this study. They require their own study. In this way, gender per se was an analytic casualty when considering the aims and direction of the study design, and is clearly an area that deserves and needs much further research.

On a similar note, limited comparative analysis was devoted to the occupational and individual characteristics of the different professionals who took part in the study. The intention was to gain an understanding of the shared and varied perspectives of a small group of professionals from a range of backgrounds, who were loosely representative as a purposeful sample of 'non-specialist' workers in the field of CSE. Further comparative research both within and across non-specialist and specialist workers in this field could yield important transferable knowledge to aid capacity and competence.

Why this research matters

In conclusion, what I hope to have accomplished here is a theory-informed, empirical study into a public problem, which has academic and applied relevance. It has been an attempt to provide an understanding of a social phenomenon which has come to be termed child sexual exploitation. In so doing, it draws upon disciplines such as sociology, social work, and social policy, and connects with enduring and foundational themes within the social sciences; around children, childhood, youth, identity, welfare and care. The data from the two participant groups is an accomplishment in itself – both of whom are little represented within UK empirical academic studies or indeed practice literature.

It has not been the intention to offer any definitive answers or recommendations regarding this problem, rather it has been my aim to provide insights that reveal the

subtlety and complexity of the phenomena. In so doing I have sought to avoid adding further confusion to what is already a field of some uncertainty and contestation. In illuminating something of its complexity I have attempted to challenge and enhance what is already known about the problem and to 'speak' for those young people who are often obscured or unnoticed, within policy legislation, and by censorious public debate and media reports. These are those young people who, within current conceptions of the problem are not much recognised and whose needs can be difficult for professionals to identify, recognise, prioritise and direct resources toward. These are young people who experience significant trauma, abuse and harm, and who are in need of welfare, care and support. In all this I am well aware that for some readers, as Melrose observed almost a decade ago:

> Acknowledging that there are some young people involved in [sexual exploitation] who have not been forced into it by an abusive adult may seem like political suicide to those who have campaigned long and hard to have these young people accepted as in need of care and protection rather than punishment.

(2004:9)

Yet, as argued throughout, the historical (and continuing) discourse around CSE means that it is *because* campaigners want to see young people in these sorts of circumstance better supported that more recent campaigns have focused on young people's lack of agency and (in)ability to consent, and hence are in clear need of intervention.[*] Almost ten years on from Melrose's statement, we still do not hear much of young people involved in sexually exploitative relationships and circumstances who are not in some way 'groomed'. We do not see their more complex experiences represented within more straightforward definitions of the problem within policy and practice frameworks. Yet, as considered throughout this thesis, the problem of child sexual exploitation is not just one experienced by younger children. It is not just a problem of grooming, and it is not just a problem of *adults* sexually exploiting children and young people. Young people who exchange sex for money, other material goods, for support and care, are those for whom the paradigm shift within policy to one of social care rather than criminal justice,

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[*] See for example:
http://www.barnardos.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/cutthemfree/remembertheyarechildren.htm

yet are those who (according to the findings here) are still difficult to recognise and respond to within the definitions of CSE in contemporary policy. Consequently, they may well go unrecognised by professionals guided by these same frameworks.

I hope to have provided insights which enable those seeking to work in the best interests of children and young people experiencing sexual exploitation, to understand better the reasons for young people's vulnerability and their often severely constrained circumstances due to which they sometimes choose to exchange sex with those who exploit them. As stated at the very beginning of this thesis, for someone to be 'seen' they must be heard. And to be heard there must be an acknowledgement that they are there and that what they have to say is worth hearing, worth understanding. So it is that children – young people – should be seen *and* heard. To listen is to begin to understand, to appreciate, to see. Thus, finally, it is hoped that the modest contribution this thesis can make is one which helps those, with similar experiences to the young people in this research, to be better acknowledged, recognised, heard and looked out for. I conclude by offering the last word to one of the young participants:

> People don't listen to young people do they? They need to listen more, don't they? They need to hear people like me…..

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Appendices

Appendix one
List of professional participants

Pseudonym	Occupational Background
Luke	Alternative education
Polly	**Youth work**
Julie	Community youth work
Linda	**Community work**
Cathy	Fostering
Sandra	**Education**
Martin	Education
Matthew	**Youth work**
Trevor	Policing
Keith	**Policing**
Jack	Youth justice
Chris	**Community safety**
Tony	Policing
Nick	**Social work**
Louisa	Social work
Mary	**Healthcare**
Carla	Children's residential care work
Andrea	**Healthcare**
Faye	Third sector
Annette	**Third sector**
Dave	Fostering
Kevin	**Policing**
Marie	Third sector
Bart	**Third sector**
Max	Children's residential care work

Appendix two
Information sheets and consent forms

Information Sheet for Young People
Are you interested in taking part in some research?

Who is doing this research and what is it about?

My name is Sophie Hallett. I'm doing a PhD degree course at Cardiff University and this research is all part of that. The research is about the needs of young people in South Wales who may be sexually exploited – we need to find out more about what young people think of this problem and the solutions that might best help. This means that I will be doing some research where I will be finding out what young people think about what adults call sexual exploitation and why they think young people become involved in it. So, I would very much like to talk to you about your thoughts on these things.

What's it for and why do you want to talk to me?

I'm interested in hearing what you have to say about all this. You may have some knowledge or experiences that mean that you might have better ideas about what some people think is a growing problem in our society. I think it is really important for young people to get a chance to say what they think about this issue and what to do about it because adults don't always get it right.

How long will it take and where will it happen?

If you prefer to discuss ideas as part of a small group of young people we might spend one or two mornings or afternoons in order to make sure everyone has their say. If I talk to you one-to-one it might take an hour or so and we might do this once or twice only.

I will make sure that anything we do takes place somewhere safe and comfortable. It might be at a (name of) project. I'll make sure that you have transport to get you there and home again if you need it. You don't have to come on your own if you don't want to. For example, if you wanted your project worker or a friend there then they could come too. As long as it is someone you feel comfortable talking in front of.

Will people know I took part and what if I change my mind?

You should only take part if **you** want to take part. You can change your mind at anytime, even if it's during or after you have taken part. Just let me know and I'll simply remove any reference to our meeting and any information you provided. No one other than your (name of project) worker will know you took part and absolutely no one (and that includes your Barnardo's worker) will know what it is you said apart from me (unless you tell them). My study will make sure that no one can be identified and anything you say will be treated in confidence.

What will you do with all the information?

I will type up the information from our meeting and you can read it to see if there is anything you want to take out or add. If we do something together like create drawings then I'll take these with me and I'll make sure that no one else sees them. I'll keep it safely locked up together with any information I type up from our meeting. Once I've finished my study and don't need to keep the information anymore I can either give it back to you if you want it or I'll destroy it.

Whilst we are doing the research, if you tell me about anything which could be harmful to you or other people, I have to pass this on to the authorities. Just like with your workers. I will tell you if I have to do this.

What happens to it then?

I will be writing something called a PhD 'thesis'. This is a bit like a large report or a large piece of coursework, all about the research and what you and other young people helped me to find out.

Will I see what you write up?

Yes you can. But in case you don't want to spend ages reading something really long, I'm going to write something shorter for you to read and keep if you want it. (Name of) service might use this shorter version to make their work better and to help other people help young people better than they might now.

Will anyone else see it?

My research report for Cardiff University will also be read by people in Welsh government who have helped fund the study and by people who provide services for young people, such as (name of project). It is important they read the report in order to help them understand more

about the lives of young people who are in difficult situations and to find ways to help young people a bit better.

If you want to talk to me about the research or to ask me any questions about anything on this sheet please do! You can email me on Halletts1@cardiff.ac.uk or I am based at (project) on Fridays and you could also contact me there by phone on their office number.

If you take part and you have any worries, or problems with how the research took place, then please contact Tom Horlick-Jones, Chair of the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee: Horlick-jonesT@cardiff.ac.uk, Professor Andy Pithouse: pithouse@cardiff.ac.uk, or Dr Tom Hall: HallTA@cardiff.ac.uk. You can also speak to your worker or someone at Barnardo's who will help you to do this.

Thanks,
 Sophie Hallett

Research Consent Form – Young People

By signing below I give my consent to take part in Sophie Hallett's PhD study into the perspectives of young people and professionals into the problems and solutions concerning young people who may be sexually exploited.

Before signing this form I

- have read the information sheet and understand about the research
- have been given the opportunity to ask questions about it and they have been answered
- understand that I can withdraw from any part or all of the research at any time
- have been given a name of someone I can contact if I am unhappy about any part of the research meeting

Name of young person...

Signature ....

Date…….

Name of parent/guardian (if under 16)...

Signature ....

Date…….

CSE Research Information Sheet - Professionals

Purpose of the research
My name is Sophie Hallett and I am completing doctoral research at the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. The research is about gaining an understanding of the knowledge, skills and challenges of professionals who work in the area of child sexual exploitation and who may have a role in identifying and referring children and young people who may be at risk of sexual exploitation. I am keen to engage with professionals who are not necessarily specialists in this field of work in order to explore the different practices and strategies they utilise in the interventions they may make.

What would I have to do?
I would like to conduct semi-structured interviews with you to find out your thoughts on this. The interview should last less than one hour. Interviews will take place somewhere quiet where you feel comfortable; this can be at your place of work if appropriate, or I can arrange a meeting room at Cardiff University. Participation in this is entirely voluntary and you can choose to withdraw from some or all of the research at any time. Your involvement in the research and any information you provide will be completely anonymous and confidential.

What will happen to the information I provide?
The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. I will send you a copy of the transcript and I can take out any information you don't wish me to include. I will give you an opportunity to see my findings and interpretations as a way of ensuring I have accurately reflected your views. Transcriptions of interviews will be held in a secure area. They will be destroyed once the research has ended.

Research outcomes
This research is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government under NISCHR (National Institute of Social Care and Health Research – see project ref: SCS08-002). They and other organisations in this field of work may wish to examine the findings of this study in order to consider their relevance for policy and guidance in this area of work. The study may also impact constructively on the training professionals receive in dealing with child sexual exploitation by identifying levels of awareness and highlighting any gaps in knowledge. It is hoped that the findings will have a positive impact for young people through creating knowledge that contributes to development of services in this area, and which enhance timely interventions and/or by developing new insights into effective interventions.

About me
I have experience in direct work with vulnerable young people, and have worked in the field of social care for 7 years. If you would like to contact me for any reason about the research, or ask me any questions about it, please contact me at Halletts1@cf.ac.uk
If you are unhappy with how the research has been conducted, please contact:
Professor Tom Horlick-Jones, Chair of the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee:
Horlick-jonesT@cardiff.ac.uk, Professor Andy Pithouse: Pithouse@cardiff.ac.uk, or Dr Tom Hall: HallTA@cardiff.ac.uk

Research Consent Form - Professionals

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- understand that I can withdraw from any part or all of the research at any time
- have been given a name of someone I can contact if I am unhappy about any part of the research meeting

Name...

Signature ....

Date..