'Go on, Go on, Go on': Sexual Consent, Child Sexual Exploitation and Cups of Tea

Abstract

This novel paper critically addresses a currently popular sex education resource which compares sexual consent to tea drinking. Drawing from a study which considered the meaning of consent through focus groups and interviews with young people and professionals, we argue that the central 'risk avoidance' message of such resources individualises the potential risks of non-consensual sex and ignores the gendered social structures which shape interpersonal relationships. We suggest that simplifying and extrapolating sexual consent from broader cultural understandings is problematic. Conversations with young people are important, but they need to address the complexity of sexual consent, coercion and gendered sexual norms.

Key words: Young women. Sexual consent. Child sexual exploitation. Gendered power.

 Introduction

In recent years an animation comparing sexual consent to hospitality around tea[1] has circulated on the internet and been promoted by UK based professionals as useful when trying to make the idea of consent simple to young people. Its free circulation on the internet means that the origins and cultural context are divorced from the resource and, like its use, are to some extent unknowable. To us, as British academics, well versed in the habitus of tea consumption, we find this quite troubling. Whilst we understand and agree with the motivations of opening wider conversations about consent to try to reduce levels of sexual assault, we are not convinced that the tea analogy is actually helpful. In particular, what this animation does not seem to either explore or explain is that, in British and Irish culture at least, often one cannot refuse tea without being at best impolite and at worse offensive. Indeed, often one has to accept the tea, but try to find a way to not drink it without being noticed. Or drink the tea, when you didn't want to do so. In other words, not only can refusing tea be difficult, the capacity to do so and the meaning of the refusal is embedded in wider social norms. Tea drinking is of course a cultural practice influenced by issues such as class, ethnicity and age. Our observations on tea-drinking practices in the paper are overgeneralised and simplistic to illustrate further why simplistic sexual education resources are problematic. The title of this paper has been inspired by Mrs Doyle, a television character from the programme 'Father Ted'[2], who would offer tea profusely to all, and not take no for an answer. Using the analogy of this sexual education resource, we aim to set out

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[1] The Cup of Tea animation has been circulated on the internet, often without attribution. As far as we aware, the copyright belongs to Emmeline May at rockstardinosaurpirateprincess.com and Blue Seat Studios. It can be seen here: http://www.consentiseverything.com/ . Other similar resources have been produced.

[2] Father TED is a situation comedy made by Hat Trick productions, following the lives of three Irish priests and their housekeeper Mrs Doyle. Central to Mrs Doyle's character was her insistence that everybody needed to drink the tea she made at every opportunity, even though they often tried to refuse. Her catchphrase was 'go, on, go, on, go, on' A clip can be seen here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N20wHvMPTGs

why simplifying and extrapolating serious issues from broader understandings of sexual culture limits our understanding of the issues.

This paper, which focuses on the lives of young women, draws from a study investigating young people and professionals' views of sexual consent, sexual coercion and exploitation. It builds on a body of work exploring child sexual exploitation which has sought to raise questions and problematize the current policy discourse. Our paper adds to these understandings by focusing on the continuum, from sexual pressure to sexual exploitation, experienced by young women. It highlights how heteronormative relationships do not necessarily leave young women in a position to refuse sexual activity and how this can move into violence and coercion. Alongside other researchers in this field we argue that the emphasis on grooming by adult perpetrators is inadequate in explaining the continuum of problematic sexual situations that young people can find themselves in. Moreover the construction of specific policy problems, such as child sexual exploitation (CSE), often seem to overlook wider understandings of gendered sexual cultures and understandings of domestic abuse and violence. This paper will argue that young women's experience of risks and relationships needs to be understood within this broader context and that simplistic understandings of negotiating consent may further stigmatise those who have been subjected to sexual violence.

Background

As many have noted, neoliberal understandings of individualism have had an impact on the ways in which some young women understand their lives (Scharff, 2013). Gender as a structural system of inequality may go unacknowledged in the ways they reflect on choices that they make (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2013). This can mean less attention to and less understanding of sexism and gendered heterosexual power relationships. There has been growing acknowledgement of high levels of sexual assault, often linked to 'lad culture' (Phipps and Young 2015). This has influenced the development of training courses for young people, such as those entering higher education (see for example BBC News 2014). Whilst there are campaigns and initiatives that challenge sexual violence against women[3], such as the Everyday Sexism project and the more recent #metoo campaign, the focus is rarely on sexual encounters within relationships. Sexual coercion and violence within adult relationships is widely recognised in research around domestic abuse, however, as Donovan and Hester (2015) have pointed out, the violence often goes unrecognised because of the heterosexual imaginary. Ideas about family, love, romance and 'for better or worse' provide a cultural script in which minimisation, denial and victim-blaming are not uncommon (2015:176). Adult relationships are usually recognised but abuse may not be. For younger women the main framing around their sexual encounters appears to be risk of abuse and there is little recognition of the complexity of their sexual relationships.

As Hallett (2017), amongst others, has illustrated, CSE re-emerged as a policy problem in 2009 and then developed rapidly in public discourse and policy initiatives to the point where this is a dominant discourse. There is little agreed definition, but most often it is associated with the 'grooming' of young people by adult perpetrators (Hallett, 2017). For example the College of Policing describes CSE as:

> It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. (College of Policing, 2017)

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[3] https://everydaysexism.com/ ; https://metoomvmt.org/

Whilst this definition could be read in other ways, usually it is implied that the perpetrators of abuse are deliberate and strategic in their actions. This idea fits into the model of a paedophile as a deviant adult who is beyond rather than part of normal society (Goode, 2011). In public imagination, cases such as in Rochdale, England, where a group of men worked together to abuse and traffic young women, and the exposure of 'celebrity' child abusers, such as Jimmy Savile, have cemented existing discourses of the paedophile as the 'deviant other'. Whilst there is now recognition that sexual perpetrators can appear 'ordinary' rather than just being dangerous strangers they are still seen often as aberrant rather than part of their community (Kitzinger, 2004). However, whilst in public discourses of CSE, this image of the adult male paedophile may dominate, in practice those designated as victims or 'at risk' can be in a range of different sexual situations (Hallett, 2017). Moreover, the framework allows agencies and professionals to exercise judgement over the suitability of any sexual relationship in which a young person gains love or affection (Smith and Woodiwiss, 2016), often whilst using tools of assessment which have not been evaluated or validated (Franklin et al, 2018). This raises questions about the appropriateness of responses to concerns around risk or harm.

Alongside the concerns about CSE, there has also been attention paid to young people's (lack of) understanding of sexual consent. In many places, legislation around sexual consent rests on whether or not consent was given and the capacity of the complainant to give consent freely, without necessarily defining consent at all (Beres, 2007)[1]. For example, Section 74 of the UK Sexual Offences Act 2003 defines consent as agreement by choice where there is capacity to make that choice, but does not give any indication as to how this should be assessed in encounters beyond the common sense notion of 'reasonable'. The Act only gives guidance around issues such as a lack of mental capacity or breach of trust. Hence, we argue that this socio-legal construction of consent is based on a dichotomous 'common-sense' understanding, which fails to recognise issues such as gendered power relationships. Yet, as we have argued elsewhere, negotiating consensual sexual activity is complex, and many young people recognise this complexity (Brady et al, 2018). Normative sexual scripts, whereby men are positioned as active and women as passive, structure encounters where men are responsible for asking and women are responsible for giving consent for sexual activity (Brady et al, 2018; Jozkowski and Peterson, 2013; Lowe, 2005; O'Byrne et al., 2006). The giving and receiving of consent can involve verbal or non-verbal signals which can differ depending on the specific sexual encounter, for example, negotiations within ongoing relationships may be different to with new partners (Brady et al, 2018). As our previous research has shown, young people are aware that neither verbal nor non-verbal consent is sufficient to be sure of a partner's intent, as people can say yes, but their body language indicates no, or nothing can be said, but the physical encounter is consensual (Brady et al, 2018).

Broader understandings of love and romance can position refusing sex as rejection of the relationship, especially by women (Barter, 2009; Hird and Jackson, 2001). Fantasia's (2011) interviews revealed young women had agreed to sex with male partners as it was expected and found non-consensual sex was normalised. The young women accepted 'unwanted' sexual encounters as part of a relationship and did not see these as a sexual assault. Hyde et al., (2008) argue that the ambivalence over sexual consent is more broadly related to wider societal understandings and sexual pressure can arise from peer expectations, as well as within interpersonal sexual activity. The complexity of gaining consent led to Kelly (1998) arguing that rather than a dichotomy between consensual and non- consensual sex, we need to understand sexual violence as a continuum. This may be a more accurate way of understanding experiences but clearly does not fit the legal framework. It can be argued that not all heteronormative relationships encounter challenges in negotiating consent, many men can be responsible and are able to negotiate, but as sexual violence exists on a continuum the potential for coercion is always present. A focus on a continuum, however, allows understanding that consent arises from and is embedded within gendered social relationships situated within the frameworks of

wider society. Indeed as Coy (2016) has pointed out, seeing CSE in isolation rather than connected to wider understandings of violence against women has led to a focus on equipping young women with 'protective behaviours' rather than considering broader patterns of coercion and control. Coy argues that:

> even where gendered patterns are named, policy framings remain flatly descriptive rather than also engaging with the meanings of how gender is negotiated in the everyday lives of sexually exploited young women and men, by men (and women) who abuse and exploit, and how discourses surrounding gender shape policy and practice responses (2016:583).

Ellis and Thiara (2014) also argue that public health prevention approaches to sexual health education and programmes, like those around protective behaviours, which nominally seek to address harassment and violence against young women, do not tend to take a structured approach to gender. Chung (2005) found that a lack of understanding about gender inequality disadvantaged young women as they were unable to 'name' any violence they were subjected to because they had 'chosen' their partner. This seems to fit into the neoliberal imaginary described by Scharff (2013) and others mentioned earlier. Moreover, understandings of pressure and coercion within a particular sexual encounter can change over time (Beres, 2007). This may be seen most strikingly in those who, as adults, come to understand childhood sexual encounters as abusive.

Moreover the emphasis on young people protecting themselves is overly simplistic. For example, one organisation describes protective behaviours as:

> a practical down to earth approach to personal safety. It (…) encourages self-empowerment and brings with it the skills to raise self-esteem and to help avoid being victimised. (…). The Protective Behaviours process encourages an adventurous approach to life that satisfies the need for fun and excitement without violence and fear (Protective Behaviours Training Partnership, 2018)

As this quote implies, the whole emphasis is on the ability of people to avoid becoming a victim and making 'good choices' in their leisure and pleasure. This implicitly suggests that victims who fail to identify risks could be seen as partially responsible. Whilst some of the training recognises that there are structural constraints, there is little or no acknowledgement that individuals cannot always avoid danger. Indeed, that women in particular may become gradually immersed in controlling relationships which develop from normative expectations of female behaviour that may not provoke fear (Stark, 2007) is overlooked.

Towns and Scott (2013) found that the 'ownership' that young men exercised over young women was similar to adult relationships where there is domestic abuse. In this context, young women normalised levels of surveillance and control over their lives, sometimes changing their lifestyle and behaviour in line with the expectations of their partners. These practices are normalised because of their association with romance and love (Towns and Scott, 2013) so are unlikely to show the 'early warning signs' that those trained in protective behaviours are supposed to be able to see. Moreover, unless and until normative heterosexuality is restructured to reduce gendered positionings, wider initiatives that focus on individual responsibility are only likely to have limited success. Barter (2009) has argued that we need to understand the gendered context, levels of agency and the ways that young people understand their relationships if we are to reduce the levels of sexual pressure and violence in young people's lives. This paper contrasts how young women describe the process of navigating sexual encounters against the back-drop of a specific educational resource on sexual consent. Whilst, as we will show, it is possible to exert pressure and coercion around tea-drinking, the legal context of

consent is obviously different. Yet, as we will argue, simplistic understandings which overlook the disciplinary norms in which sexual encounters are embedded may leave young women blaming themselves for being unable to protect themselves. Our critique of this particular intervention used in sexual consent education adds to that of others engaged in furthering critical understandings of resources used in sexual violence awareness raising, such as a range of films shown to young people which depict sexual exploitation and violence #nomoreCSEfilms campaign.[4]

Methods

This paper arises from a project which sought to explore the boundaries between sexual consent and sexual exploitation and focuses predominantly on young women's heterosexual experiences. In policy and practice, consent and exploitation are often seen as distinct issues. Concerns about sexual encounters without consent have been raised about peer relationships. In contrast, CSE is constructed as a risk of adult perpetrators and is often linked to young people regarded as disaffected or outside of mainstream education. Nevertheless, we felt that there were potential links between the two and sought to explore this through focus groups with young people and interviews with professionals who encounter young people, including cases where CSE was identified within their work. The research also included a stakeholder workshop where we shared our initial findings with the participants, the notes from the discussion from these were included in the dataset. The study took place in a West Midlands city, at the time of the study CSE was a key priority for both public sector and voluntary organisations and a multi-agency approach was in development to facilitate the sharing of concerns and information.

In total, we carried out 7 interviews with professionals and practitioners working in the area, one being a joint interview. These were undertaken first to enable us to understand how the issues were understood in the local area. The interviewees included people with a CSE role in the local area. These included a strategic lead in the local authority; general youth workers with specific responsibility for looked after children (LAC) and CSE; and representatives from specialist services, such as for substance abuse and sexual violence. In the interviews with professionals questions ranged from their general understanding of issues that arose in young people's relationships to CSE more specifically. Understandably, the professionals displayed considerable concern about CSE, and the extent to which current resources were able to really meet the needs of young people, especially those who did not fit the framework of an 'innocent victim' groomed by an adult perpetrator. These findings of professional uncertainly about the issues raised, as well as how to respond, are similar to Hallett (2017) so are not discussed in detail here.

Young people were recruited through local colleges, groups with a remit for supporting young people and specialist support services (see table 1), we aimed to recruit from a variety of backgrounds. We were not as successful as we had hoped in recruiting young people from minority-ethnic backgrounds, response from potential gatekeeping organisations working with diverse communities was not forthcoming within the timescale. For example, no young people from an Asian background took part. Six focus groups were conducted with 54 young people aged 14 to 25 years, of which 37 were young women. One focus group included just young women, whereas the others included both young women and young men. Despite including young women and young men in the data collection, it was notable that the young men could be less vocal. Table 2 gives more details about the young women

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[4] The campaign #nomorecsefilms discourages the use of film scenarios of exploitation in prevention education work because it is claimed that many are victim-blaming and unhelpful or even harmful. See for example: https://www.victimfocus.org.uk/campaigns

who participated, although not all of the demographic information was given. In order to protect the identities of the young women, we have not given individual demographic information.

The focus group used a semi-structured schedule to explore general issues around sex and relationship education, forming and having relationships, negotiating sexual consent, and perceptions of sexual exploitation. We did not ask specifically about personal experiences, although many young people mentioned experiences of themselves and friends. All the focus groups were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically. We also took along art-based materials so that the participants could create visual responses in relation to the session. In this project the research team's enthusiasm for creative approaches to data collection was not matched by the young people who, in general, preferred to sit and talk. All young people received a £10 High Street voucher to thank them for their time. This was not used as an incentive to recruitment, and participants were only made aware of the voucher at the start of the data gathering session.

Research with children and young people needs to strike a balance between respecting the confidentiality of the research process and ensuring adequate child protection procedures are in place. As the design of the project sought to investigate the ways in which sexual decision-making is affected by differing contexts it was important to ensure that young people had the possibility of ongoing support after the research had finished. This formed part of our decision to recruit and conduct the research on the premises of organisations that had existing relationships with those we were meeting. Young people participants were made aware that disclosure of information that suggested that they were at risk of harm would mean that we would need to inform someone from the organisation and thus there was no absolute guarantee on confidentiality. This is a widely-adopted practice within organisations for young people and they readily accepted that this was the case. We provided a range of options for further support, carrying information with us to distribute if needed. In two of the focus groups, the gatekeepers made it a condition that they were present in the room, this could have limited the data as on both occasions they interjected during the discussion. In another case, the gatekeeper told the young people that they had to stay to the end to get a voucher and we had to make it clear that this was not the case and that they would not be penalised if they wanted to leave at any time and/or withdraw from the research. In both cases, the gatekeepers were the people who work day-to day with young people who might act as an advocate in different situations. Whilst their presence probably stemmed from what they understood as their professional responsibility, it illustrates the difficult balance between care and control. Ethical approval for the research was given by Coventry University.

The data was analysed thematically in line with the stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This begins with close reading identifying codes within the data set. The individual codes are then sorted into analytical themes, checking to see that they are a good representation of the data. The initial coding framework used themes which arose in the literature and these were supplemented with those that emerged in the data. Drawing mainly on the accounts of the young women and the professionals, this paper sets out the links between the pressure felt in everyday negotiations of sexual consent and the situations of sexual abuse by peers or adult perpetrators. By exploring the continuum of sexual violence we can situate young women's experiences within broader gendered power relationships, this is central to understanding the complexity and links between 'consensual' and abusive sexual encounters. Whilst a small scale study such as this cannot be generalised, we feel that our data raises important issues about understanding the complexity of young people's experiences of sexual consent.

Pleasing people

Many of the young women spoke of the pleasure of sexual activity and informed us that they could negotiate consensual heterosexual encounters with partners. Whilst needing to become sexually active and 'lose your virginity' was often important, after this they often enjoyed learning and experimenting with their sexual partners and developing a sense of their sexual selves. However, alongside this were stories of the difficulties of negotiating consensual sex, which we have noted elsewhere (Brady et al, 2018). Young women recognised that sexual consent was a grey area, and needed a range of embodied communication strategies to ensure that they understood the combination of verbal and physical signs that indicated that their partner was happy to have sex. However, there were other stories of more difficult encounters that need to be understood as gendered pressures, in which consent was described as unclear. These seemed to be far from the legal understanding of sexual violence, and indeed none of the young women would describe them as this. Nevertheless, they could not be seen as enthusiastic consent either.

Many of these accounts described variations of needing to develop or maintain relationships with a partner. In other words, they agreed to have sex in order to please them. Examples of this include:

> "It's not that they don't want it and it's not that they do, they just go with the flow, if that makes sense. I do think there are people who have done that, because it's just happening, but it's not that they've wanted it to happen, they've just wanted to please the person" (FG6)

> "I think if you were kissing it might be interpreted that you want sex, but it might not be, well it depends on where you are, if you are sat at home on the sofa kissing and that, it could go onto more, but you don't want that and you don't want to say anything….
> (…)
> Yes it could ruin your relationship" (FG2)

In these accounts we see the idea that sexual activity is a necessary part of maintaining relationships and a refusal to have sex might be read by a partner as a statement about the relationship itself. It was clear in the data that maintaining relationships was a concern predominately for young women. This can be related to broader understandings of gendered behaviour in which young women are deemed to want love, whilst young men want sex (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012). Whilst obviously these stereotypes are not necessarily reflective of individual behaviour, they can lead to situations where young women accept sex to ensure that their love relationship continues. As Holland et al (1998) identified many years ago, young women often think about their own needs and desires as secondary to those of their male partners, and may struggle to negotiate their own sexual pleasure.

As well as individual relationships, the young women also identified pressure from peers more generally to be engaging in sexual activity. 'Proper' relationships included having sex and not doing so could be seen to undermine the status of the relationship more generally. This had implications for the maintenance of relationships as well as the formation of them.

> "I don't get the pressure, I purposely don't get boyfriends for that reason […] I know that there's no way I would have sex. I know that a man doesn't want a girlfriend and not to have sex with her so what's the point of trying to start a relationship? It's ok to interact with males, to flirt with them, but not to take it serious because that's not what a man wants" (FG3)

The general pressure within relationships to have sex for it to be maintained as a proper relationship could be experienced as being stronger to the point where it does verge into a clearer description of

sexual violence, albeit one that the young women themselves may not recognise. The following account is a useful example of this:

"… like if you want it to start with and you start doing it and then you start to feel a bit uneasy or a bit uncomfortable, then you can think to yourself, yeah, well I'm going to stop but then you start thinking about will he get angry or will it upset him or something like that and then you think let's just finish it and get it over with and it'll be done and I don't have to do it again if I don't want to. So you consent to start with but after that you start to feel uncomfortable with the way you look, with the way he's treating you, doing it, then I don't know but it comes down to that" (FG3)

Here we see an escalation of concerns about the sexual activity being undertaken, to the point at which consent seems to have been withdrawn. Yet, due to a concern about potential conflict, rather than try to stop the activity the young woman describes accepting that it will continue, to avoid potential conflict with her sexual partner. The strategy adopted is to refuse *future* sexual activity rather than challenge her partner at the time. Again, here we can see that it is partially about the concern for the partner's feelings, that they might be 'upset', but this is also aligned with the potential for a more aggressive reaction in terms of his anger. Implicit in this example is the notion that male sexuality is not, or should not be, stopped once underway (Flood, 2003; Wilton, 1997). This needs to be understood as part of the gendered power relationships within heterosexuality (Brady et al, 2018; Burkett and Hamilton, 2012; Holland et al., 1998). Moreover, that young women need to consider that ordinary relationships could become aggressive or violent is part of the continuum of sexual violence, whereby fear of specific events shapes young women's behaviour even if there has been no explicit threat from their current male partner.

Returning to the "tea analogy", the resource which seeks to illustrate sexual consent, these examples clearly illustrate our position. That social norms around everyday encounters mean that there can be an obligation to accept the tea even if tea is the last thing that you want, or you would like English Breakfast and instead your host insists that you have a herbal variety. To save face, not be awkward, not to stand out and/or because you implied you were thirsty, sometimes you just accept and drink a cup of tea. Whilst we appreciate that a short animation cannot explain the complexities of social life, its viral internet promotion (including support from organisations such as the Police) seem to suggest that sexual consent is simple, and by default, positions those who find negotiating sexual consent more difficult as unable to follow straightforward instructions. In other words, those who are unable to negotiate sexual consent unproblematically are thus positioned as at least partially responsible for their behaviour[5]. Moreover, considering the everyday experience of pressure within these young women's heterosexual relationships, in which refusing tea is not something that they necessarily feel able to do, it is not then surprising that a drift into explicitly coercive relationships can happen.

From Pressure to Manipulation

Most of the young women talked about pressure and having concern about their partner's feelings, which could lead them into sexual activity that they did not necessarily want. They spoke of being 'pestered' or 'nagged' and of worrying about the ongoing consequences for their relationships. It was noticeable that the idea of young women being manipulated was common within the professional

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[5] This is not to suggest that this was the intention or the responsibility of the creators of the animation. Rather we suggest that the circulation and promotion of the animation without a broader context of gendered power relationships might be problematic.

accounts (as we will illustrate later) and it also occurred in the focus group in the descriptions of the young women who were part of a support group for recent victims of sexual assault.

> "One of my friends was going out with this lad and she didn't want to have sex with him and he pressured her into it and she did it in end, but she was like "oh, why did I do that? I could have saved it for someone else' and then she got with someone else and he treated her so much nicer and she took his virginity …and I think if you get pressured into it then you can see how it can happen" (FG6)

> "things like pressure and stuff where you might out loud say 'yeah, ok' but you're not actually consenting because the pressure that's been put on you might manipulate you and things" (FG1)

It could be that the idea of being manipulated arose through exposure to an ongoing professional discourse around CSE, and it would not necessarily have been part of the young women's vocabulary. Nevertheless the young women could describe situations where the levels of sexual coercion were stronger than the more general accounts of power. For example:

> "I was with him for a year and a half and in the first half he was alright then, as it got on, it just got worse but I was too like quiet, I'm not now but I was then, and I didn't want to say anything to him because he was like, for those of you who don't know him it's hard to explain, he was bigger than me" (FG3)

This young woman was describing a past boyfriend who was described as older and quite influential. When asked to explain the description of 'bigger', it became clear that this was not necessarily a description of physical size and others in the group described him as 'up on the food chain'. That someone with more social status is able to exert more pressure is illustrative of the ways in which gendered power relationships are crucial in understanding the ways in which sexual exploitation can and does occur.

When we asked the young women directly about their understanding of sexual exploitation they most often talked about 'sexting', both in terms of being pressured to take pictures and the ongoing threat that this posed to them. For example:

> "when I was in Year 9, so I would have been 13 in the summer holidays, between year 9 and year 10, my ex-boyfriend did that, he made me take a picture and he said that if I didn't do it he'd come to my house, he used to hit me and stuff, and if I didn't do it he said he was going to come to my house […] when that happened to me I didn't know that I'd done anything wrong and I think that's quite bad because now I've been taught about it all what he did was well bad, the stuff that he was making me do was just degrading - it was horrible but then I didn't know and I think guys should know" (FG6)

> "I know a girl who had done it to a guy she fancied and he said he didn't want anything else and the next minute you see a full nude, she had her face in it and everything so you knew that it was her and it went round all of the boys then all of the girls saw it… (…) she's in college now and I think it's gone round there as well so it's still out there (…) it's never really deleted – it's out there for the world to see it" (FG3)

In the first of these examples, the young woman was threatened into taking pictures whereas in the other the account suggests that the picture was taken without significant pressure but in the hope that it would maintain a relationship. In both cases, the pictures were distributed to others, exposing the young women to ongoing circulation. The risks of sexting were readily discussed by the young

women, and at the time of the focus groups, they all seemed to have a good understanding of the potential consequences. Yet they also recognised that young women came under pressure to send their partners' photos but still felt that they could be to blame for any consequences:

> "a lot of girls do feel pressured to send pictures and they think oh if I send him a picture then he might get with me, maybe he fancies me, but then what happens if he sends it to his mates and they send it to their mates (…) but it's your own fault for doing it if you send a picture" (FG 6)

That young women could be held responsible for the circulation of photos that they had given to someone in private can be related to wider patterns of blaming the victim in relation to sexual assault. Significantly, none of the focus groups suggested that the solution to the problem was for young men to stop circulating pictures they had been sent in private.

Just like in the accounts of general pressure, the capacity to refuse in these accounts of sexual coercion are not as simple as a cup of tea. In the cases of sexting, the young women were either compelled to accept tea they did not want, or wanted a private tea party and were subjected to a crowd of unwanted visitors – potentially for the rest of their lives. Moreover their accounts also reveal the potential for coercive control to develop within everyday patterns of relationships in which pressure becomes sexual bullying. Given that is the pattern within adult domestic abuse, it should not be a surprise that this happens to young women. Indeed, it can be difficult to see a clear divide between exploitative and non-abusive relationships and instead pressure develops into coercion. This picture was reflected in the professional accounts.

'Risky' relationships

Although professionals recognised the adult grooming model of CSE, particularly with reference to gangs or groups, they also stressed the everyday ways in which young women could be sexually exploited. Moreover, their accounts also illustrated the ways in which ideas about relationships were important, both in terms of making young women vulnerable and in preventing them from seeing the abuse:

> "what we're seeing at a lower level which is probably more they're being exploited sexually, but they might not experience sexual violence so to speak, so although they might be doing things that perhaps they wouldn't have done it's not necessarily at the same level of violence. (…) in terms of manipulation I think to get people to do things that perhaps they wouldn't have done normally" (Youth worker 3)

> "you probably wouldn't call it exploitation at all, you'd have to kind of make them aware of what different ways people take advantage of you. But I think a lot of young people would be in denial and again that thing of protecting the people that are doing the bad things to them (…) They don't want to accept it" (Youth worker 5)

Similarly to Hallett's (2017) research findings, these professionals struggle to fit what is happening to the young people they work with into the model of CSE that is based on adult grooming. Their accounts suggest it is a 'lower level' or a victim of 'sexual bullying' which is not quite exploitation. They are clearly identifying what is happening as a serious issue, but one which may not cross a legal threshold of sexual violence or CSE.

Moreover the accounts of the professionals situate the young people's experiences within a broader understanding of relationships, albeit if this is only seen from the young person's perspective. As our participants described it:

"'you're trying to stop me having a relationship, because they're not all bad', because that's what I have found out experientially is that sometimes young girls might think that that was their first love and so there's a sense of misplaced loyalty to that person who might have groomed them" (CSE strategic lead)

"that thing of 'he loves me' – it shocks me how strong that is (…) We see it in domestic violence, how people go back to that person over and over again (…) They are almost in too deep, they still trust this person, they still believe the lies they are being told. They still think it'll get back to the time when everything was nice" (Youth worker 5)

In these latter accounts we can see how the cases of exploitation that the professionals are encountering do not fit well with the CSE model of adult grooming and instead seem to fit better under a domestic abuse framework. This is especially the case where the issues are between peers rather than a group of adult perpetrators. Being, as one of our participants described it, both fearful but also 'in love with their perpetrator' (Sexual Violence Service worker), is the situation that many adult women find themselves in. Moreover when professionals try to tell young women that they are being abused or exploited when the young women think that it is just their boyfriend 'going in a mood' (FG1), is not necessarily very helpful. The relationships are likely to be real to them, albeit that they are experiencing coercion to do things that they may not want to. Whilst clearly the level of violence may meet the legal threshold, the patterns are similar to the issues involved in negotiating sexual consent in everyday relationships and wider issues of power and control experienced by adult women.

Crucially, within the framework of coercive control (Stark, 2007), power can be exerted through everyday actions, such as making tea. Your partner might suggest you both have tea, but get angry if you use the wrong cups. If you suggest you are not thirsty, they might explain that tea is always served at 4.00pm. Because you care for your partner, and believe that you are responsible for their emotional wellbeing, they are able to exert control through dictating how and when tea should be drunk. Thus, rules are often both inflexible but also subject to change and women often feel like they are walking on eggshells as they cannot predict the exact tea ceremony that is required on any particular day. Love can be given and withheld within a relationship through specific requirements, such as drinking tea.

Conclusion

Everyday practices, whether it is making tea or negotiating sexual consent, are always embedded in wider social norms, and these may include normative understandings of gendered heterosexual relationships. Research on domestic abuse has illustrated the extent to which violence works through the microdynamics of everyday life (Stark, 2007). We are not arguing that sexual coercion and violence should be minimised or overlooked. Instead we argue that a lack of understanding of the complexity of young women's sexual relationships is unhelpful in reducing levels of violence. Whilst clearly education and discussion about sexual consent is very important, simplistic understandings which ignore gendered power relationships may, instead, reinforce young women's feelings of culpability when they have been assaulted. The wide circulation of videos such as the Cup of Tea animation, without any meaningful engagement with the complexity of seeking or giving consent, risks reinforcing unhelpful tropes, rather than overturning them. The resource reduces the chance of having a conversation about sexual consent as it implies that it is so simple to understand it does not need any discussion, anyone can understand that you don't force tea on a person. As stated above, the resource can also be victim-blaming – it is *so* simple to understand that if you then experience non-consensual sex it must have been your fault – everyone knows that you 'just don't drink the tea'. The originators of the resource have clearly tried to find something that many people can identify with - tea drinking is a cultural habit - although each culture, social class and generation has its own etiquette around tea

drinking, meaning that the nature of sexual consent can be dependent on the context; this makes it hard to define, talk about or practice consent in any kind of standardised way. It is an embodied process rather than a one off event and, at times, non-verbally negotiated.

This paper draws on data gathered in one West Midlands city from young people of statutory school age, including those above and below the age of legal consent plus a small number of professionals. So whilst our findings cannot be generalised they can be used to illustrate the complexity of the continuum of consent. We deliberately did not ask young women and men about their personal experiences, which limited the opportunity to explore individual experiences in depth. Whilst here we have focused on young women, young men's experiences of negotiating sexual consent are also important, they too have concerns about the everyday negotiation of heterosexual activity. As we have discussed elsewhere (Brady et al, 2018), as sexual consent is on a continuum the nature of consent changes, depending on the type of sexual encounter, the relationship, the verbal and non-verbal exchange. Young men are consciously wary of the risk of being in a non-consensual situation and engage with concerns of risk and responsibility in enacting consent (Brady et al, 2018). However, whilst the lives of young men and young women are all influenced by gender, power and the social construction of heteronormativity, in individual encounters the pressure felt to please a partner and to maintain a relationship disproportionately falls on young women in heterosexual relationships, 'it's not that they've wanted it to happen, they've just wanted to please the person' (FG6). So whilst the opening up conversations with young people is positive, and the resource message has indeed been enthusiastically taken-up by some young people, we question whether the comparison to tea drinking is actually beneficial to meaningful and relevant relationship and sex education. As our examples of such practices have shown, social life can be intricately complex over what appears to be the simplest of things, ultimately shaped by social structures. The implication is that young women are free to resist the pressure to drink tea and young men are free not to manipulate them to drink it yet capacity to consent is influenced by gendered power relations, normative assumptions, social status, social pressure and other factors. Resources which indicate that sexual consent should be simple fail to consider social and sexual norms in social life, education on sexual consent needs to be rooted in understandings of relationships - which includes reference to sexual selves, desire, gender, power and inequality. We suggest that the central 'risk avoidance' message of this resource individualises the risk of experiencing non-consensual sex and ignores the gendered social structures which shape interpersonal relationships.

The young women in our study spoke about sexual pressure and sexual coercion as normative experiences and used this knowledge in making decisions about future sexual encounters. In many cases they did not describe difficult sexual encounters as psychologically or physically damaging, even when the situations recounted could be construed as a sexual assault. Hence there is an alternative view of the "tea analogy", which may not be well received. We can be persuaded to drink tea that we did not necessarily want, or changed our mind about whilst it was being made, we go along with it for a myriad of reasons, but we chalk it up to experience and think that next time we will be firmer about not accepting the tea. The presumption within much of the England and Wales policy framework is that where professionals have labelled sex as CSE, it is always damaging and traumatising, regardless of how young people have understood the experience. We feel this is unhelpful. Indeed, the presumption that there is a 'right' way to react to sexual assault has been identified as contributing to the low numbers of rape convictions (Ellison and Munro, 2009). Consequently, we find that the rapid expansion of the concept of CSE to encompass a wide range of sexual encounters may be problematic.

For the avoidance of doubt, we are not arguing in favour of sexual violence, but we are saying that it is important to recognise that feeling pressured into norm-compliance may not always be damaging.

We need to start from young people's understanding of their experiences (which may or may not change over time). Making the assumption that young women who reject their victim status are still under the influence of their oppressor(s) is unhelpful. Just like adults, young women's sexual encounters are complex and may involve choice, agency, pressure, manipulation and force and take place within the gendered norms of heterosexuality. Telling young women that sexual consent is as simple as accepting or refusing a cup of tea, or that they should always be able to identify the early warning signs to protect themselves from harm, individualises the risks and ignores the social structures which shape interpersonal relationships.

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[1] For example, Section 74 of the UK Sexual Offences Act 2003 defines consent as agreement by choice where there is capacity to make that choice, but does not give any indication as to how this should be assessed in encounters beyond the common sense notion of 'reasonable'. The Act only gives guidance around issues such as a lack of mental capacity or breach of trust.