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The pickle in the jar & other stories: social and spatial dimensions of safety, risk and rights of boys who have displayed harmful sexual behaviours

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PhD thesis
Department of Sociology
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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2025

Abstract

The pickle in the jar & other stories: social and spatial dimensions of safety, risk and rights of boys who have displayed harmful sexual behaviours

This study explores everyday experiences of boys aged 13-18 who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) to consider social and spatial dynamics of safety, risk and children's rights. This challenges gaps in research and practice that neglect social, physical and relational worlds of young people and the profound influence of social and systemic contexts. This thesis reflects an iterative research journey, illustrated with Riso-printed collages, to reflect layered, multidimensional lives and easily overlooked aspects of everyday life that emerge as significant to safety, risk and rights. Through child-sensitive and rights-respecting research design, the study engages four young people and four practitioners over multiple sessions, through creative mediums including immersive Virtual Reality (VR) technology to traverse space and time, revealing storied experiences embedded in places. Elements of Narrative Inquiry frame analysis leading to a conceptualisation of 'lifescapes', landscapes of life, to present storied experiences of everyday life, safety and risk. 'Landscape' spaces include 'public' spaces, bedrooms, digital realms, past and future lives, schools and the 'care system'. One participant's poignant story of a lonely, rotten pickle in a jar evokes curiosity around the legacies of systemic and practice responses on developing lives. 'Lifescapes' reveal a scarcity of safety and invisibility around children's rights. In stark contrast, risk emerges as ubiquitous, undifferentiated, unarticulated and individualised, at times colliding, leaving young people feeling like 'risk is everywhere' and absorbing systemic and self-identities of being 'a risk'. Dynamics between interconnected contexts emerge as conducive, constricting or collapsing with implications for social and spatial understandings of safety and risk. This thesis concludes by reimagining responses to HSB, shifting from fixing behaviour to flourishing futures, through a commitment to children's rights with systems becoming like orchestras of duty bearers, conducted by the UNCRC, informing new approaches to prevention and intervention.

Acknowledgements

It has been a profound privilege to do this PhD, which would not have been possible without the boys who so generously participated. I'm so grateful for your insights, reflections and so generously sharing your stories with me. I hope that our work together can help people to see things differently. Also, huge thank you to the practitioners who participated for your wisdom and curiosity. Your care and commitment to young people was simply profound. Thank you also to the many practitioners who I met as I travelled through the maze to find participants. I am so grateful for the kindness, encouragement and support you gave me when it felt like an impossible task!

I want to acknowledge those impacted by harm and abuse, including the silent stories that go unheard. I hope in a tiny way this project is part of changing how we can better understand and prevent harm, including the legacies of our systems on lives. We can and must do more.

I am *beyond grateful* to my supervisors – Professor Simon Hackett and Dr Josie Phillips. I was in awe of you both when I was a practitioner and it was like a dream to be supervised by you....but what I could not have anticipated was how safe you have made me feel- safe to be curious, to not know, to be confused, to be shy, to be excited, to dream but most of all safe to be different and safe to be me. I won the supervision lottery, and I am so grateful. I remain in awe of you both.

This PhD was made possible with the scholarship from Northern Ireland and North East Doctoral Training Partnership (NINEDTP). I am so grateful for the support, training and opportunities that this has given me.

I would like to thank all the children, young people and families that I have met through my social work journey to this PhD. I have learned the most from you and, for that, I am so grateful. Special thanks to Christine McCarlie who taught me so much, always encouraging me to keep thinking, feeling and to have hope. Your continued support, wisdom and encouragement mean the world and I could only ever aspire to be like you.

I would like to thank Professor Sarah Banks and colleagues in the Social Work Ethics Research Group – an inspiring group of academics who gave me a space to learn and to grow. Thank you to the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit for our collaborative journey of reflection and learning.

The most unexpected, unique part of my journey started at the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) Local Democracy Academy in 2022 and has grown into our international, interdisciplinary collaborative exploring child focused cities. This has given me opportunities I could never have imagined, including exchanges in London, Sweden, Zambia and Zimbabwe (of all the places in the world- I got to see my sister again after two years!). I am so blessed to be a part of this group with such wonderful and inspiring people – Predrag Milič,

Professor Jua Cilliers, Rejoice Shamiso Katsidzira, Dr Paula Barros and Dr Rongedzayi Fambasayi. To each of you – thank you. Gratitude also to ICLD for bringing us together and for all the support.

I am so lucky to have shared this PhD with very special people who have become my friends. To Angela Long – we connected through our shared experience of PhD parenting in a pandemic, and I am so lucky to still have your support, understanding and encouragement. To Harriet Broadfoot – thank you for being you and all our wonderful messages of ‘knowing’. To Cait Jobson – thank you for your kindness, fun and friendship. And a special thank you to Janelle Rabe – thank you for the special space you have given me and for always being there.

To my Bang Tidy best friends, thank you for your enduring friendship and encouragement over all these decades. My family of friends – Kirsteen, Shona, Staci, Jamie and special thanks to Zoë.

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I dedicate this thesis to my boys, Sonny and Rudy- the greatest gifts I could ever have been given. I’m so grateful for the life we knitted together. I love you both so much and you make me laugh every day! I’m in awe of you both. We have and will continue to follow our own paths, just like one of our favourite books when you were little.

*Then he found a little clearing,
And he looked up at the sky.
“The moon can be so beautiful,” he whispered with a sigh
“Excuse me!” coughed a cricket who’d seen Gerald earlier on.
“But sometimes when you’re different, you just need a different song.”*

...
*So imagine that the lovely moon is playing just for you
Everything makes music if you really want it to.”*

...
*Then he raised his head and looked up
At the moon and stars above.
“We all can dance,” he said, “when we find music that we love.”*

Giraffes Can’t Dance by Giles Andreae

Declaration

I confirm that no part of the material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other university. In all cases, where it is relevant, material from the work of other has been acknowledged appropriately. The contents of this thesis are produced solely for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy at Durham University and consist of the author's original contributions with appropriate recognition of any references indicated throughout.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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A statement on safety

This thesis explores the everyday experiences of boys aged 13-18 who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB). Centring the stories of experience of young people themselves to understand safety, risk and children's rights within social and spatial contexts offers unique insights towards more contextually sensitive approaches to prevention and responses to this complex and pressing social concern.

From the outset, I must acknowledge that many children and young people, including those who gave their time to participate, do not feel safe. The absence of safety – physically, relationally and emotionally – can be traced through so many of the stories shared, including many other young people who pass through or share the spaces that feature in these stories.

Whilst not the focus of the study, this thesis acknowledges the harm caused by HSB. Listening to and looking at the experiences of young people who have harmed does not minimise or deny harm that has been caused. My personal and professional commitment to this journey is to gain a deeper understanding of experiences to contribute towards preventing harm and increasing safety for all when it does occur. I strongly believe we need to look differently and listen to different voices to make things different. This thesis emphasises the fundamental importance of risk management and reduction but compels awareness of how systems practice such 'risk work' in ways that do not cause further harm.

This statement of safety seeks to create a space of sensitivity and care within this thesis, acknowledging the complex and distressing nature of this social issue. Illustrating the thesis alongside the text hopes to 'soften the gaze' upon the words and lives they describe while remaining unequivocally committed to the aims of the study and meanings embedded in the stories. I hope that this allows the reader to encounter stories in a way that is both impactful and respectful, reflecting on complexity and multiplicity of experiences shared of developing and difficult young lives. I invite you to listen to their stories.

24th March 2020



I squealed an embarrassing squeal.

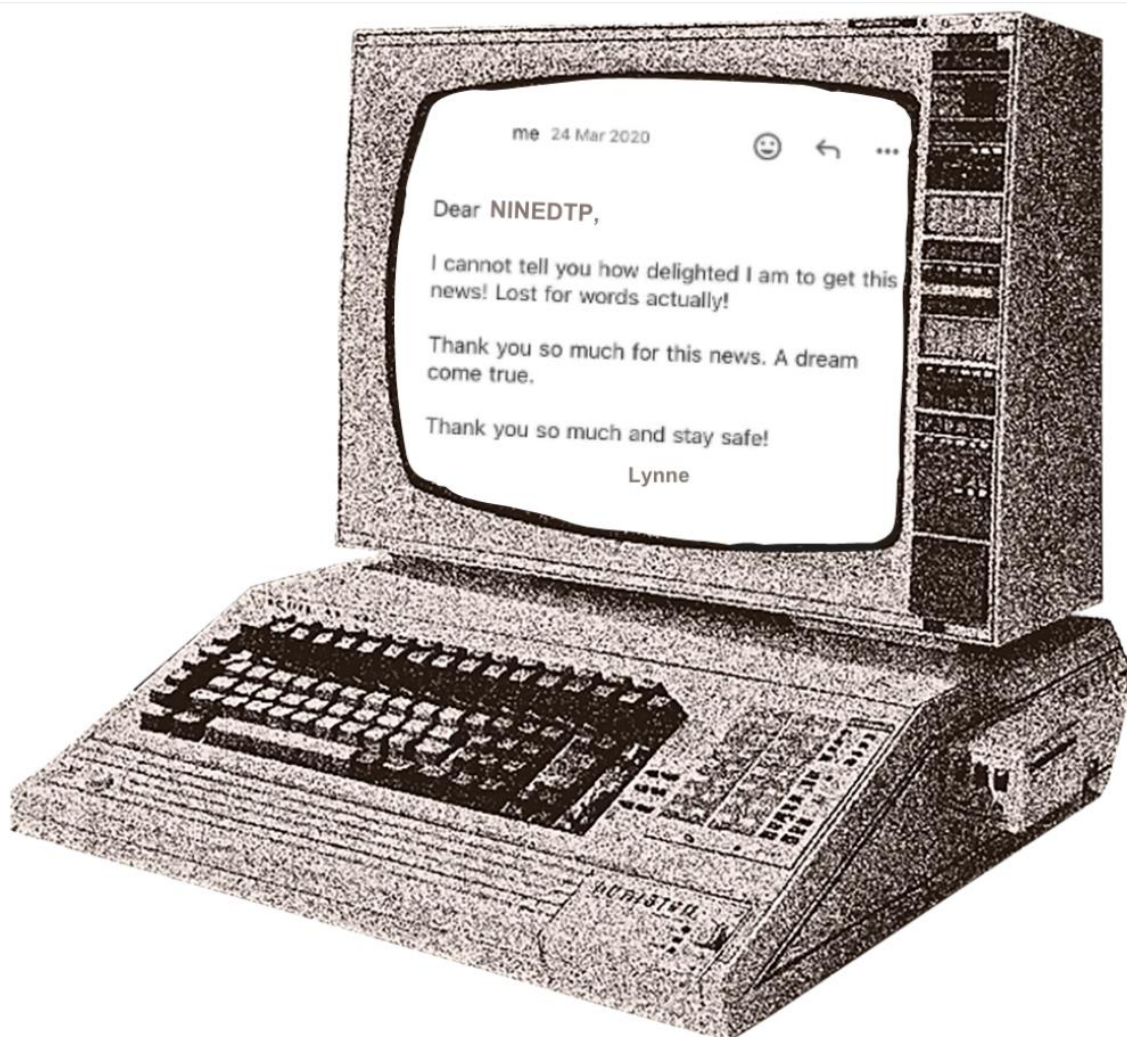
My youngest son rushed out of his room to ask what had happened.

I told him I got the PhD studentship. I hadn't told anyone other than my closest family for fear this was too much to hope for. I cried.

I phoned my parents.

I cried again.

I replied.



And then.....

I stayed in.....

..... my big news was not the only important announcement on the 24th March 2020. It was also the first day of Scotland's first national 'lockdown' in response to the unfolding Covid-19 pandemic. Four days earlier, the schools closed and our home became my work and school for my sons. Over the next six months we would adjust to this 'new normal'.....schools would reopen after summer.....we got a puppy.....restrictions would ebb and flow.....I tried and failed to home-brew beer and bake sourdough bread. I left my job as Senior Practitioner with a voluntary organisation working with children and young people who had experienced abuse and/or displayed harmful sexual behaviour (HSB). October 2020 rolled around and I started my 3.5 year PhD studentship online from my home in the North East of Scotland, two hundred and thirty miles away from Durham. Two months later we were in lockdown again, we celebrated Christmas in my mum's greenhouse distanced from my parents sat opposite in their shed, and the schools would close once again. My world had well and truly shrunk yet my mind was opening up in ways I could not have imagined.....



Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis explores the everyday experiences of boys, aged between 13 and 18 years old, who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB from hereon in). I will use the definition widely adopted in the UK and many other contexts:

‘sexual behaviours by children and young people, under the age of 18, that are developmentally inappropriate, harmful towards self and others, or abusive towards another child, young person or adult’

(Hackett *et al.*, 2019)

Sexual abuse of children and young people is a profoundly concerning issue for society. A ‘deeply serious yet little understood’ aspect of the phenomenon are behaviours displayed by children and young people towards other children which is ‘doubly taboo’ (Barnardo’s, 2016). With no national framework for children, under the age of 18, who display sexually problematic and harmful behaviours, it is impossible to capture the true extent of this pressing public health issue. These children and young people swim through different systemic rivers including health, education, welfare, child protection, youth justice and third sector provisions, each with their own distinct ways of framing and responding to emergent behaviours. In the UK, it is estimated that around one-third of sexual abuse of a child is committed by another child under 18 (Hackett *et al.*, 2019). A study by Radford (Radford *et al.*, 2011) identified two-thirds of a sample of young people reporting contact HSB was committed by another young person.

There were two sparks that ignited the flame that fuelled this research endeavour. The first spark was the launch of an ‘expert group’ by the Scottish Government in 2019 to explore the rise in sexual offences by under eighteens in Scotland where the number of cases of sexual offences against a child by a child (under 18), between 2012-2016, rose by 34% with 96% perpetrated by males (Scottish Government, 2020). Between 2016-2017, 216 children were referred to Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA) for at least one allegation of HSB, of these over 89% were boys and over half were aged between 14-15 years (Scottish Government, 2020). Over 60% of these children had been previously referred to SCRA on care and protection grounds. This brought the complex issue of HSB out of what felt the shadows of social work and into the national collective gaze as a matter that required sensitive yet serious consideration. The second spark was lit by Darren McGarvey’s book ‘Poverty Safari’ (2017) I bought from the Oxfam book shop in Walthamstow, London when visiting my brother in October 2019. The very next day, over a pint of sour beer on Walthamstow High Street, I began reading the book and McGarvey’s articulation of his experience of living with violence, both inside and beyond his home, planting a seed of an idea that grew into this research. On violence, McGarvey reflects that ‘acts of violence are terrifying, but a sustained threat of violence is sometimes much worse’ then articulates his lived experience of this anticipation of violence as:

dread, in this context, being a sense of anxious expectation that precedes a violent incident.....on the one hand, you don't want the violence to happen. On the other hand, you know it is inevitable and would rather get it out of the way

McGarvey (2017, p. 11- 12)

My different training in social work and counselling has made me acutely aware of how different professions look at, and into, everyday life. Most often therapeutic work unfolds in contained, clinical settings yet aspects of social work brought me into children and young people's everyday spaces such as visiting their own homes, collecting, dropping off or meeting children in their schools and communities. Reading McGarvey's words, evoked my curiosity about how safety and risk, violence and harm, may be professionally conceptualised and constructed and how different this may be to how it is experienced in everyday life. Without appreciation of the lived realities of those who encounter such experiences, there will always be an epistemological gap between our clinics and the contexts of ordinary, everyday life. Over my pint of beer, I felt confronted by how blinkered I had become and how practice knowledge can take for granted how complex lives are experienced, instead chopping lives up into risk and protective factors. In his acknowledgments, McGarvey's cited he was the first 'rapper in residence' at the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), a partnership between Scottish Government and Police Scotland. The SVRU, founded in 2005, gained an international reputation for their public health approach to addressing Scotland's serious social issue with violence, following a UN report declaring Scotland as 'the most violent country in the developed world' and Glasgow dubbed the 'murder capital of Europe' by the media in the UK (McVie, 2015). Through a dedicated public health approach to tackling such violence, the SVRU is regarded as pivotal in the significant reduction in violence and prompting many other Violence Reduction Units across the rest of the UK. When the Scottish Government Expert Group reported back in January 2020, just as I submitted my PhD proposal, the Scottish Government highlighted the nation's success in reducing violent crime among children and young people, spearheaded by Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), as offering a 'blueprint' for changing behaviour required to prevent and respond to young people's HSB.

I returned home from my brothers and, inspired by McGarvey's book and the timing of the expert group I nervously cold called, or rather cold emailed, Professor Simon Hackett and the SVRU to share my idea for a PhD to learn about risk and safety from the lived realities of young people who have displayed HSB. My colleagues and I had followed the work of Professor Simon Hackett, often in collaboration with Dr Josie Phillips, for many years and I had been part of the development of our 'Pathways group' for parents and carers who cared for children who displayed HSB. This had been conceived by two of my colleagues in response to the 2006 paper 'Young people who have sexually abused: what do they (and their parents) want from professionals?' (Hackett and Masson, 2006) and our precious Pathways group went on to be featured as an example of good practice of 'interventions' in the first edition of the NSPCC HSB

Framework (Hackett *et al.*, 2016 p. 66). Simon and the SVRU Director both replied and expressed their interest in developing my idea and, as the saying goes, the rest is history.....

This study seeks to learn about the social and spatial dynamics of everyday lives of boys who have displayed HSB, including experiences of safety, risk and children's rights, to consider these in the contexts of everyday environments young people navigate. Gaps in research generate a strong impetus to challenge the predominant focus on individuals and their behaviour thus locating the issue in young people, predominantly boys. Looking beyond individualised adult-centric discourses, my study aims to better locate HSB within the sociological and ecological contexts of everyday life and childhood. Drawing upon participatory methods with young people rarely 'heard' in research, I learned from storied experiences of risk and safety to look differently into everyday, ordinary worlds. These developed into what I conceptualise as 'livescapes' which portray vivid, dynamic and poignant stories of lives to discover different ways to look at issues of, and related to, HSB. Repositioning young people as children, with rights under United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) compels us to reach further than individualistic understandings, consider broader social and systemic ecologies and move from fixing to flourishing over the life course and a life beyond harm.

1.1 Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour in Context

The dominant focus in research on HSB tends to focus on individual risk factors, neglecting the broader social, physical and relational worlds of young people. This narrow lens often shapes interventions that centre on individuals, sometimes also their families, which overlook the profound influence of social and systemic contexts. As a practitioner this often felt deeply frustrating, sometimes even futile as meaningful change- change that enhances safety and well-being- lies beyond the reach of individuals, their families and practitioners. Such change requires a broader approach, disrupting socially constructed dichotomies that polarise those who hurt from those who are hurting to recognising they can be both/and. Meaningful change and prevention also requires changing the contexts that contribute to harm including spaces, systems and spheres that intersect developing young lives. HSB is a critical social issue, particularly given its overwhelming prevalence among boys. To truly understand and address this problem, we must listen to those still living their childhoods. We must learn from their experiences and bring their voices into the conversation, contributing to and challenging the current landscape of knowledge. Learning from lived experiences has the potential to unlock more socially and developmentally sensitive responses revealing new pathways to prevention.

This thesis makes timely and original contributions to knowledge by engaging directly with young people who have displayed HSB, a group often excluded from participating in research about issues which affect them. Their stories and insights are captured through a child-sensitive, rights-respecting research design that prioritises their rights to participate safely and on their own terms. Moreover, this project breaks new ground by incorporating innovative

Virtual Reality (VR) technology, creating immersive and experiential forms of discovery that move beyond traditional research methods. Exploring everyday life through stories embedded in everyday environments, physical and virtual, searches for a greater understanding of the ordinary and everyday aspects of young people's lives to better understand the social and spatial ecologies of risk and safety. Disrupting the potential narrow focus on individuals and incidents towards the everyday and ordinary reveals complex layers of unacknowledged or invisible experience embedded within seemingly mundane daily life. There are some exciting new directions around harm and abuse opening up understanding and responses, such as contextual safeguarding and prevention, and shifts in the Scottish legal and policy landscape that offer conducive conditions towards these taking root (as explored in [Chapter Three: Scottish policy landscape](#)). These include full legal incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law, alongside the Scottish Government's commitment to the Independent Care Review renamed 'The Promise' (2021). The historical legacy of the Kilbrandon Report in 1964 further underscores Scotland's long-standing commitment to child-centred approaches and offers a fertile ground for new, innovative ways of understanding and responding to harm and abuse to grow

1.2 Towards a paradigm shift

HSB is typically framed within positivist paradigms, where children who display harmful behaviours are treated as a clinically distinct population, deviating from a biologically determined path of 'normal' sexual development. Considering HSB through an interpretivist lens, we begin to see the ways in which political, social, and moral narratives about childhood, abuse and risk intertwine. Tracing the socio-historical constructions of HSB reveals how dominant paradigms shape the ways we think about child sexual abuse and adult offending which created pervasive legacies on children and childhood. These paradigms created liminal conceptual shadows where young people who display HSB came to be seen like 'mini-adult sex offenders', neglecting their developmental, social, and contextual realities. Policy, practice and research, whilst evolving, still often rely on models and understandings that are rooted in research with adults that fail to recognise the complexities of childhood. There is growing evidence of shifting paradigms moving away from individual and risk focussed understanding towards more contextual, ecological and developmentally sensitive knowledge. However, there is a distinct lack of focus on the rights of children under UNCRC (1989), which obscures their social positions as children, rights holders, in the life space of childhood and in relation to a range of adult duty-bearers. Much of our contemporary knowledge of child abuse tends towards individualised discourses, targeting individuals involved, through individualised child protection systems, individual level treatment for those who perpetrate abuse and those that are harmed (Firmin and Rayment-McHugh, 2020). Knowledge around HSB is anchored in criminological and psych~ disciplines shaping much of our existing knowledge around HSB, often converging around individual determinants of harmful behaviour. Khan *et al.*, (2020) articulate how critical insights from psych- perspectives have contributed to where we are now but make a compelling call for consideration of social context including institutional and

organisational dynamics. McKillop *et al.*, (2015, p. 38) highlight how harmful behaviours ‘for most part, occur in the milieu of ordinary social interactions’ which highlights the need to understand physical and social dynamics and how individuals vulnerability manifests at particular times and places.

Although family dynamics and environmental factors are known to play a role, there remains a need for deeper exploration into institutional and community environments. Respecting different ways of ‘knowing’, this study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm in contrast to the dominating of positivist approaches to understanding HSB. This situates HSB as a complex and emotive phenomenon, socially constructed over time and place, rather than that a singular ontological ‘truth’. Failure to look at HSB and its social dimensions feels like a form of conceptual blindness that obscures our peripheral vision thus creating blind spots in our understanding. These conceptual ‘blinkers’ may emerge from the ontological dilemmas created through the entanglements of childhood, sex, child abuse and adult offending. This phenomenon of HSB is profoundly spatial, illustrated by the range of disciplinary terminology used across the globe, and temporal, shown through changing language and understanding following the relatively recent ‘emergence’ of child abuse itself only a few decades ago. Professional understandings of child and adolescent harm can be characterised by disciplinary siloes which shape adult interventions, the dominance of clinical and legal discourses, a hunger for risk prediction that permeate the HSB arena. The economic, social and emotional cost of abuse of children is incalculable compelling an urgency to develop greater capacity in research, policy and practice to prevent abuse before it occurs and respond and treat in ways which are effective without causing further harm.

Another significant gap in research relates to how the ‘voices’ of young people themselves have often been overlooked. This could speak to beliefs around deserving/undeserving and the polarising dichotomy of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’, which often intersects the lives of these young men (Gadd *et al.*, 2013). Extending from the notion of static, perpetual victims, critiqued by Melrose (2013), gaps in research potentially position young people with HSB as static, perpetual perpetrators failing to understand how their experiences and behaviours may be shaped by the social conditions which they navigate. Further, failure to listen to young people means we fail to hear valuable insights and knowledge of those who live these realities which may offer compelling contributions to the profound puzzle HSB poses. Balfe *et al.*, (2019) articulate inherent tensions in trying to ‘excavate’ the voices of this ‘marginalised and stigmatised’ group by relying on professional reports which they describe as the:

‘social equivalent of trying to identify an important scientific problem through a microscope, without knowing for sure the full extent to which the microscope’s lens is clear or flawed’

(Balfe, *et al.*, 2019 p. 190).

Deciding on the terminology use in relation to children and young people in this thesis has been an agitating process but I will refer to my participants and other children, under 18, as 'young people'. Terms to describe people under eighteen are often used interchangeably yet these are steeped in social, cultural and disciplinary constructions. My research explores a particular chronological range of 13-18 years old which is a particularly liminal life space reflecting significant inbetweenness (Weller 2006) between their younger child selves and not yet in young adulthood. Knowledge and practice around children and young people who display HSB often demarcates children from adolescents, acknowledging different developmental stages, and the biological, social and relational significance of puberty including sexual development. The life space of adolescence is dominated by notions of normalised, chronological and biologically determined linear trajectories that bridge childhood and adulthood, often lamented as a developmental period marked by intense change and angst 'betwixt and between the unsettling period of latency and settling into adulthood' (Meltzer, 1973, p. 51). Freud highlighted this significant developmental period as a process of internal disintegration and reworking of unconscious early life experiences deep within the psyche through the metaphor of a crystal shattering 'not into haphazard pieces' but coming apart 'along its lines of cleavage into fragments whose boundaries, though they were invisible, were predetermined by the crystal's structure' (1933, p.59). Such intertwining biological and psychological understandings have been hugely influential but tend towards a sense of individual inevitability eclipsing curiosity around the temporal, contextual and social contours of youth. The characterisation of young people in western contexts is far from inconspicuous - raging from concern, consternation and ridicule. From primitive fears of the feral teenage gangs to comic characterisations of awkwardness and angst, such as Kevin and Perry¹ and *The Inbetweeners*², it seems fair to say that conceptualising youth is far from neutral territory. The potency of representations of youth may also speak to adult envy for which youth serve as unconscious receptacles of nostalgia, past shame and the inevitable passing of life. Adults often hold the monopoly on claims of knowledge upon this life stage which has bearing on meanings and understandings made through our adult gaze. Jackson and Scott (2015, p. 42) suggest that retrospective meanings of events and sexual experiences of our childhoods are 'filtered through the lens of adult sexual understanding' and as 'products of adult sexual scripts' which may have very different meanings for children in their childhood than for adult's meanings. Indeed, most adults will themselves have earned their stripes and emerged on the other side of adolescence into adulthood, carrying with them their secret scars and triumphs. Yet, despite being a graduate of my own adolescence, a mother of two teenagers, twenty-four years of practicing and learning about teenagers I am not qualified to 'know' what it is like to be the teenagers I met and heard about through this journey. So, I cautiously use the term 'young

¹ Kevin the Teenager (played by Harry Enfield) and his sidekick Perry (played by Kathy Burke) were characters in the comedy sketch show *Harry Enfield and Chums* from the early 1990's including a spin off movie. At the turn of midnight on his 13th birthday emerges as a comedic nightmare of a 'teenager' much to his parents' horror.

² *The Inbetweeners* is a sitcom series made by Channel 4, between 2008-2010 and two spin off movies, following four teenage boys navigating their social worlds of school, relationships and growing up. y

people' and 'young person' as I feel this is how the young people I met would most recognise themselves. However, there remains an ongoing tension as this contributes to the misrecognition of young people, especially those who display HSB, as not being children within the life space of childhood, which may compound social and systemic denials of them as rights-holders under UNCRC and the role of many around them as duty-bearers.

1.3 Searching for the social

This study aims to explore how boys who have engaged in HSB and the practitioners who support them narrate experiences of risk, safety, and children's rights in their everyday lives. By examining both boys' own perspectives and practitioners' reflections, the research seeks to uncover the social and spatial dimensions that shape experiences of safety and risk. Through this, the study aims to contribute to the development of more nuanced, rights-based approaches to prevention and intervention. To support boys aged between 13 – 18 years old to share their everyday social worlds, including where, how and what might make them feel safe and/or at risk, I developed a safe and sensitive methodology that centred the experiences, meanings and subjective understandings of young people in their everyday life 'as they see it' (Chowns, 2008). I created a 'research toolbox' with different creative mediums, including art materials, figures and Virtual Reality technology, and invited participants to make maps of the places they wanted to share with me. The role of mapping as a method, stemming from the field of children's geographies, supports participation and empowers children's voices to be heard through maps as vehicles for their own views, understandings and experiences to be demonstrated directly rather than through an adult intermediary such as research interviews (Ergler, 2020). Navigating the maze of local systems in Scotland I was able to meet with four boys, between three and five times each. Struck by the reflections by practitioners I met as I made my way through this maze, I amended my research ethics and met with four practitioners who had supported a teenage boy who had had displayed HSB to undertake the mapping sessions, reflecting on their perceptions of that boy's social world, with the 'research toolbox'. Fascinatingly, rather than creating physical maps, each participant shared stories.....many, many stories that illuminated social worlds, traversing space and time. Rather than constrict these valuable stories by reducing them into maps, I iteratively mapped the stories that appeared embedded into spaces and shared through story fragments. This marked a narrative turn in my research journey as I drew upon elements of Narrative Inquiry to make sense of the stories and spaces. Mapping became a heuristic as I reflected on the stories shared through the three-dimensional prism of experience - time, social conditions and place, (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000)- leading to the development of 'lifescapes' as a way of making sense of and presenting my key findings of storied spaces. These 'lifescapes' are not accurate representations of 'reality' but are a way of placing and exploring social, spatial and systemic stories to narratively reflect everyday experience including broader institutional discourses, social stories and 'grand narratives' of HSB and those who display it (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Key sites of these 'lifescapes' are 'public' spaces, bedrooms, digital worlds, past and

future lives, school and the 'care system'. They tell important stories that contrast the louder stories from the field, challenge some taken-for-granted concepts and, perhaps most important of all, tell stories not just about 'them' but also about 'us' – holding a mirror up to those of us in the field of HSB, those beyond the field and the systems that scaffold our understandings and responses to 'them'.

1.4 'Walking backwards'

This study is not a pure Narrative Inquiry as my narrative turn unfolded later in my research journey, after the research was designed and undertaken, but I have learned so much from aspects of this research methodology. One tradition of Narrative Inquiry is the notion of 'narrative beginnings' as a fundamental dimension of reflexivity which recognises that I also have a story, part of which led me here and to these storied landscapes that is part of an embodied way of knowing (Dubnewick *et al.*, 2017). Reflecting on my own narrative beginnings allows me to articulate why this project matters so much to me, how it shapes the research puzzle and the personal, practical and social motivations that justify my endeavour (Clandinin, 2013).

Astonishingly, it was exactly twenty years to the very week that I started at Durham University that I had started my very first social work job at the start of October 2000. Just turned 22, feeling young, bright and shiny with my Master of Arts (Honours) in Social Work from Dundee University, I rather naïvely started as a Residential Social Worker in a secure unit for children and young people who were deemed by justice or welfare system to be a significant risk to themselves or others. The serendipity of this journey is echoed in the saying 'the best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the second-best time is now' (said to be a traditional Chinese proverb including by Smith, 2015). As I have journeyed through my PhD, I realise I did not simply start this Doctorate in October 2020 but seeds were planted decades before, taking root and nurtured through personal and professional experiences that are inseparable from this thesis.



As I have moved forward, through the twists and turns of my PhD, I have also found myself 'walking backwards' (Heraud, 2013) as I make sense of all that came before. Resonating with Heraud, being an older student is a paradoxical experience as I bring with me experiential knowledge yet it can be this very knowledge that can inhibit 'theorising anew the experience that produced this experience' (p. 39). Walking backwards, I can trace intersecting and intertwining threads that weave together to motivate this research, shape my positionality in relation to HSB and form my deep respect for the value of different knowledges to make sense of such complex and confusing social issues. A particularly uncomfortable, confronting dimension of this tacit knowledge is the reality that I am not outside of the issues which I seek to understand but am part of the systems and practices that can generate harms when we are trying to help. This sense of 'walking backwards' whilst I move forward in my research resonates with the concept of 'narrative beginnings' as Clandinin (2013) articulates:

‘who the researcher is in relation to the phenomenon under study, which helps to set the personal practical and theoretical/social justifications and shapes the emerging research puzzle’

(Clandinin, 2013, p. 191)

‘Narrative beginnings’ capture some of the inquirer’s personal story and experiences that led them to their inquiry and the motivations that lie beneath the endeavour of discovery. This is important as it also situates my own story, alongside many other stories, which inevitably exposes my own biases, values and assumptions that shape my interactions with the research subject, my encounters with participants and my sense making of the stories that unfolded between us. Dubnewick *et al.*, (2018) reflects ‘in the telling of our storied lives, we also tell of the storied landscapes that weave in and out of our lives and are part of our embodied knowing’ (p. 414).

In 1996 I left school to train as a social worker at Dundee University with hopes to work with adults with learning disabilities. I volunteered at a local Adult Resource Centre and residential house when I was at school, in the wake of community care and ‘normalisation’ social agendas that witnessed closures of large-scale hospitals for adults with learning disabilities and differences. Throughout my training I still wanted to work with adults with learning disabilities and even took the Community Care elective pathway in my fourth year. However, shortly after qualifying I started my first job as a Residential Social Worker at a secure unit for children and young people as it was close to home and I’d visited it briefly on one of my social work placements. Social work was still an unregistered ‘profession’, and I became part of the first wave of registrants when the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) formed in 2003 as they started with social workers in residential care settings. I was just turned twenty-two, exactly twenty years to the week before I would step into my PhD at Durham University, just three years older than the oldest resident there who was held on ‘her majesties pleasure’ convicted of murder. It was a strange experience, to become positioned as a figure of power and authority, carrying a set of keys on a belt as every single door was locked. I was lucky to be in a stable team led by an incredible Team Leader who created a sense of safety for me that allowed me to feel uncertain, to learn and to grow in an environment that could become uncertain, distressing and unpredictable. This early practice experience was profound and generates the tailwind behind this research endeavour. The thin line between ‘care’ and ‘control’ fused together. At first, I was shocked by the extreme behaviours that children were capable of including serious violence, rape and murder but the confined space brought me close to the young people behind the behaviour, the reports and media headlines. I witnessed the extremes of trauma and vulnerability which often became tangled together making it difficult to distinguish a clear dichotomy of ‘victim and ‘perpetrator’. I learned that abuse can be unthinkable, unimaginable and often unspeakable. Young people would share fragments of

their lives teaching me that abuse, neglect and harm seeps into the ordinary and the everyday, often sustained over time, becoming dislocated from emotions and affect.

I also learned how we become conditioned by our professional environments as when, three years later, I moved to work in a small residential house for children aged 6-12 years old and still felt the need to count the cutlery after every meal and remain hypervigilant of things 'kicking off'. This serves as a reminder that as practitioners are not chess pieces moved around as policies or professional landscapes shift- we too become immersed within the systems and become shaped by our experiences. Over the next three years, I completed a post qualifying certificate in Child Protection Studies and had my first baby. In September 2006, I moved to a different role in a specialist service in a voluntary organisation that worked with children, young people and their families who had experienced abuse or Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Very shortly after starting I learned I was expecting another baby, and some months later went off on maternity leave. When I came back, everything seemed different. A 'sister' project that supported children, young people and their families who had displayed HSB had become co-located into our building as a cost saving exercise. I returned to a climate of anxiety and uncertainty as this move had stirred up anxieties in relation to the safety of the children who had been abused, motivated to protect them from children who abused. Protocols were demanded for the movement of children despite all children being with their workers when they were in the building and many children, regardless of their referral, displaying distressed and difficult behaviours at times that could spill out into more open spaces. The concerns felt palpable for the vulnerabilities of 'our' children, described by one worker as 'our wee lambies'³, and the sense of risk that these 'othered' children posed. A tragedy occurred suddenly in the staff team, so we all stepped in to support the children who worked with our colleague who passed away, prompting us to work with children irrespective of their siloed service identity.

With the passage of time grew a recognition that so many of the children we were working with had experienced significant difficulties and these were not two separate 'categories' of children. Children referred for their harmful behaviour usually came with lengthy, harrowingly complex chronologies and those referred for their experience of abuse could also be followed by adult worries about their sexual behaviour. Over time these two distinct teams merged under a single management structure and all workers carried caseloads of children who had experienced abuse and/or HSB. This opened new opportunities to develop my understanding and practice in working with HSB and interventions used to increase safety for children and those around them. Yet it seemed we were still haunted by ambivalence of children at risk and children who were risk, as if these were two opposing forces that could not be held together in our minds, teams and systems. Implicit within these dynamics were messages about whose safety mattered most, who was at/a risk and a sense of children who display HSB as being perpetually poised to harm – now or in the futures that loomed before them. Despite a name

³ A colloquial term used fondly about children being like little lambs/baby sheep

change to reflect the merging of services, there was a persistence of the service being identified by the name of the 'abuse recovery' service, as if anchored in benevolence and a powerful identification that could not be relinquished easily. My 'narrative beginnings' told me stories about the powerful dynamics around children and young people who display HSB of fears and anxieties, haunted by social knowledge of the 'adult sex offender', and practice consumed by risk work and dislocates children from their childhoods.

Over the following thirteen years, I would work with many children, young people and their families who had experienced a range of complex experiences. We worked to build 'helping teams' around children to think together about how best to increase safety, manage and reduce risk and support the child onto a healthy path of development: emotionally, relationally and sexually. I completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Person Centred Counselling and Psychotherapy, then a Post Graduate Diploma and MSc in Psychoanalytic Observation and Reflective Practice, the pre-clinical training for training as a Psychoanalytic Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist (CAP), full of dreams to follow this path. However, in my final Master's year I undertook a research project which looked at the emotional experiences of practitioners working with risk in the field of HSB and, much to my surprise, found myself really enjoying the research process. I took comfort from psychoanalytic thinking that acknowledged anxieties and emotions as natural when working with difficult issues. Over these thirteen years as Senior Practitioner I felt the suffocating grip of austerity take hold, expectations to do more for less, the brutal market economy of the third sector and the neoliberal veil of change measured by outcomes, outputs and increasingly short-term work. Often the most challenging aspects lay beyond the therapeutic space, beyond the hour a week they met with me, and in the everyday places and spaces of their lives. I felt a growing sense of futility as many of our team worked individually with children who shared similar social worlds like off-site education centres, housing schemes and peer groups yet we had no institutional infrastructure to move beyond the silos of our service provision. We too had become entangled and entrenched in the landscape of our systems.

It is my journey through our systems, siloing young lives and practitioner identities, that exposed fractured lenses through which we 'see' developing lives, generating my strong impetus for this research endeavour. The dominant tendency towards quantitative research on individual factors that contribute to HSB often fails to acknowledge and grapple with young people's social worlds and their age-related dependence on a range of social contexts. Tracing the narrative beginnings of this project, I hope to have shared my own story in relation to this complex social phenomenon and why this really matters to me. My search for the social stems from this journey, as does my belief in the value of young people's contributions to increasing safety and reducing risk.....if we dare to ask them.

1.5 Collaboration with Scottish Violence Reduction Unit

The principal collaborative partner is the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit located in Police Scotland in partnership with Scottish Government. The SVRU is a national centre of expertise on violence and the only police member of the World Health Organisation Violence Prevention Alliance. The key aspects of the collaboration related to knowledge exchange, support to find participants and potential impact after the thesis. After initially proposing my PhD idea, I met with the SVRU to share my hopes and rationale and, after winning the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) scholarship (through Northern Ireland and North East Doctoral Training Partnership- NINEDTP), I was partnered with an amazing Police Inspector in the SVRU who was closest to me geographically. This led to a rich exchange of knowledge, ideas and curiosity around the meaning and realities of public health approaches to violence over many cups of coffee and cake. This created a safe space to grapple with the messiness of intersecting yet often polarising agendas, motivations, and experiences from our respective positionalities (police and social work). To gain experiential knowledge of the SVRU, I joined my collaborative partner to train as a trainer on a roll out of an SVRU program 'Help the Helpers' which sought to support workers in frontline services during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. We then facilitated one 'Help the Helpers' program in a local project supporting vulnerable adults. After my SVRU partner retired, I continued to meet regularly with the SVRU including sharing updates of my journey and networking opportunities at both local and national levels. Despite their support and efforts, I did not meet with any participants through SVRU networks, but it was still a very useful process as I developed a greater understanding of the myriads of local projects and collaborations in the voluntary sector. The SVRU agreed to be the 'audience' for a research output and write to participants in keeping with the Lundy Model of participation ([10.1 Seeing differently for impact](#))

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This introductory chapter articulates my narrative beginnings with seeds planted that grew over 20 years into this exploratory project with young people and practitioners to understand more about social and spatial dimensions of safety and risk in the lives of young people who have displayed HSB.

Following this introduction, Chapter Two begins with the story of Flat Stanley to reflect upon a potential dynamic of 'flattening' of young people who display HSB through dominant discourses and practices. This process of 'flattening' reduces developing lives into one-dimensional representations that are dislocated from their social, relational and physical realities. I then share some of my curiosity around the notion of 'gaze' to explore who and how we 'look' at issues of HSB, often through a narrow, fixed gaze through an adult centric lens. My articulation of where the gaze falls offers a rationale for the creating collages made with Riso prints, photographs and digital images. Presenting my thesis in this way underscores my

motivation to look differently at how we understand and respond to HSB, in part, through a thesis that looks different.

Chapter Three seeks to situate this study within the changing legal and policy landscape of Scotland before Chapter Four positions the research within a broader landscape of knowledge, presented through the 'four directions of inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 50). 'Looking inwards', I explore existing knowledge about children and young people who display HSB highlighting the complex and interconnected nature of their life experiences. 'Looking backwards', I trace the socio-historical roots that shape contemporary understandings of HSB revealing what I suggest as 'ghosts' from knowledge around adult sex offending that continues to haunt the field. These socio-historical constructions further contribute to the 'epistemological flattening' of young lives, obscuring the social and contextual factors that contribute to their risks and vulnerabilities. 'Looking outwards', I reach beyond disciplinary boundaries to explore literature from fields including childhood studies and human geography to develop a broader understanding of social, spatial and systemic dynamics of everyday life, safety and harm. Finally, 'looking forwards', I reflect upon new directions for understanding and responding to HSB including contextual, social and ecological prevention and responses and listening to the voices of young people themselves.

Chapter Five sets out the theoretical scaffolding that frames this study which shifts iteratively from social ecological theories towards elements of Narrative Inquiry - from making maps to mapping stories. Key aspects of Narrative Inquiry orient my sense-making particularly the three-dimensional prism of experience, temporality, place and sociality (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), and the notion of 'big' and 'small' stories (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009) which captures more dominating 'grand narratives', often told through institutional of power including research and systems, alongside smaller, personal stories of lived experience. Listening to bigger and smaller stories creates space for more comprehensive, compassionate and nuanced understandings of complex issues like HSB. I will also situate my endeavour within a relativist ontological and interpretivist epistemological paradigm including highlighting the limitations and contrasts of adopting these philosophical positions.

Chapter Six presents the methodology of my research, which I consider to be like the dilemma of porcupines, as a way of navigating ongoing ethical tensions around rights to participate and protection that intersect and ways I sought to balance these rights, under UNCRC. These include the development and use of the 'Research Toolbox', the role of the 'Research Supporter' and the 'Our Safe and Sensitive Doing Research Plan'. I will also reflect on the research process, in particular, the experience of navigating the maze of local systems and gatekeepers and the value of the Virtual Environment in the 'toolbox' access through Virtual Reality headset and software. I will then detail my data analysis process that drew upon the three-dimensional prism of Narrative Inquiry to present findings through a conceptualisation of 'lifescapes' – spaces where stories of experience are embedded and interconnected.

Chapters Seven and Eight travel through these ‘lifescapes’ spaces to reveal the interplay of storied social, spatial and temporal dimensions of young people’s lives. ‘Lifescapes’ are not fixed geographical locations or easily bounded spaces but attempts to spark shifts in perspectives, disrupting the dominant individualising and behaviour-focused gaze towards glimpses into interconnected, fragile and complex social worlds. Starting with ‘public’ spaces the stories then lead into the seemingly ‘private’ spaces of bedrooms which illuminate the blurred boundaries between ‘public’ and ‘private’ illustrated through exploration of bedrooms as gateways into digital worlds. Traversing the ‘lifescapes’ leads to reflections on past and future lives before gazing into institutional spaces of school and ‘care system’ spaces. A powerful metaphorical story shared by one boy of a pickle in a jar captures some of the intersecting threads of stories, holding a mirror up to our systems and practices.

In the concluding chapters I lean back to consider these ‘lifescapes’ together, circling back to my research questions to consider how the storied experiences embedded in spaces can help me to look ‘sideways’ including bringing ‘us’ into the picture – our systems, stories and practice which contribute to the experiences of safety, risk and children’s rights. This highlights the significance of institutional and systemic spaces and the stories they tell about and to young people. I identify several overarching findings witness across ‘lifescapes’ including constellations of contexts, highly interconnected and interdependent, exposing contrasts between conducive, constricted and/or collapsing contexts which have implications for safety, risk and rights. Overshadowing safety and silencing children’s rights, risk dominates manifesting as ubiquitous, unarticulated, undifferentiated and individualised in storied experiences. Thinking with ‘lifescapes’, I present new directions, oriented through children’s rights, that emphasise moving from fixing to flourishing. To conclude I articulate limitations of my research, my contributions to knowledge and advocate for a world where young people can be supported to grow beyond the confines of the ‘pickle jar’ and flourish.

1.7. A different way of doing

From the outset, it is important to acknowledge that this thesis differs from a traditional PhD thesis. This departure is intentional and reflects both the nature of my research and my personal journey. Rather than adhering to a rigid, linear structure, this work embraces a more reflective, narrative approach, positioning myself within the research process as both researcher and subject. I have illustrated some of the story of this research and use some narrative data in the earlier chapters which is unconventional. Throughout the thesis, I incorporate personal experiences as a lens for sense-making, drawing on my own reflections to shape the theoretical framing. This method may be unconventional, but it is integral to the study, as my practice experience inform the research questions, analytical approach, and broader insights. Additionally, storytelling and narrative elements appear in the early chapters

to illustrate the research process, offering a more dynamic and situated perspective. By adopting this approach, the thesis challenges traditional academic traditions while making a rigorous and original contribution to knowledge. It demonstrates the value of subjective and reflexive inquiry emphasising that knowledge production is not always linear but can emerge through complex, iterative, and deeply personal engagements with the project.

Chapter Two: Different ways of seeing

Early in my doctoral journey I immersed myself in literature, diving deep into familiar and unknown waters such as childhood studies, social and sexual geographies. Whilst some of this felt comfortable and reassuring, it was also destabilising as I was confronted with the ways I have come to 'look' at children, childhood and behaviour. This thesis looks different, with visual collages peppering the text, which I hope compliments my journey to look differently at the lives of young people who have displayed HSB. I would like to share my rationale for looking differently, visually and conceptually, through a childhood story that articulates some of my reflections then explain how and why I present a more creative thesis.

2.1 Flat boys



A story from my own childhood came to mind that captures so much of my sense making around how we come to 'look' at children and what we 'see'. Flat Stanley by Jeff Brown, first published in 1964, follows a boy called Stanley Lambchop who gets squashed by a pinboard, unhurt but flattened paper thin! The now flat Stanley, just half an inch thick, embarks on escapades including being posted to friends tucked up in an envelope, flown as a kite and heroically foiling a heist at a museum by disguising himself as a painting on the wall. With the passage of time, flat Stanley tires of being different from other children, confiding in his brother 'I'm just not happy anymore. I'm tired of being flat. I want to be a regular shape again, like other people. But I'll have to go on being flat forever' (Brown, 1964, p 25). His brother has an ingenious idea and pumps him back up with a bicycle pump as if he has had never been flat at all.

Drawing upon the story of Flat Stanley, I suggest that research and practice around children and young people who present HSB, overwhelmingly boys, can metaphorically 'flatten' young lives and social identities, compressing into one dimensional representations of individual young people. These flattened lives become manifested like paper versions such as reports, assessment, referrals, journals and media headlines (even this thesis!) which can represent them fundamentally different from other children but often without the understanding afforded to Stanley- flat or full. The flattening down into individualised understandings of HSB potentially creates an epistemic echo chamber reverberating and reifying dominating discourses. Not only do we reduce young people who display HSB to one dimensional representations, we place adult-centric narratives upon them, often reductively and punitively, disregarding contextual dimensions far beyond any person's gift, not least young people who are dependent on a range of social systems by virtue of their age.

Central to my research endeavour is the search for social and spatial dynamics of safety, risk and children rights in everyday lives of young people who have displayed HSB. The impetus is to look beyond dominating paradigms that create the contours of the landscape of HSB knowledge which focusses heavily, at times exclusively, on individual factors. Understandings become further compressed by the epistemological genealogy growing from understandings of adult sex offending, holding developing young lives within liminal conceptual spaces – not yet adult offenders but not fitting with social constructions of childhood. This flattening is compounded by the collapsing of broader social and structural factors into individualised microlevel discourses of risk which is characteristic of the risk factor prevention paradigm which largely underplays the role of culture and context (Armstrong, 2006, p. 268). Garside (2009) highlights the preoccupation with interventions aimed towards risks posed by children and young people, thus placing responsibility on them at the expense of socially mediated risks, vulnerabilities and 'risky social arrangements' that they face in their everyday lives which serves in directing attention away from the socio-structural factors that shape their 'riskiness' (p. 14). Furthermore, HSB becomes epistemologically vacuum packed and siloed separately from other forms of harm. In analysis of sexual violence, Rayment-McHugh *et al.*, (2015) reason that offenders and victims must be situated in their natural ecological context, within which risk and protective factors should be located, and conclude that the causes of sexual violence and abuse exist within and beyond the individual including 'family, peer, organisational, neighbourhood and sociocultural systems within which they are socially embedded' (p. 120). Even when we do attend to context of life, Plowman (2016, p.190-191) reflects upon 'flat representations' calling for a move to 'more fluid, emergent and multiscale understanding of context without boundaries enables us to think differently about the relationships between practices, people and things'.

Thinking with the story of Flat Stanley helps illustrate my sense of moving from individualising, flattening discourses and 'grand narratives' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) towards more

contextual, social and ecological perspectives. I suggest that children and young people who display HSB live inherently storied lives, narrated by others as they travel through systems, telling chronologies of lives that are often stark and distressing. Overwhelmingly, these storied versions of young lives tend to speak of incidents, events and concerns- rarely the ordinary and every day, nor what these stories mean to those who lived them. This is not to deny the importance of accurate and appropriate recording and information sharing but rather a reflection on how we often operate within fragments of life stories that can be systemically flattened illusions of the whole story about a child. My early reflections on these narrative dynamics that define and follow young people through systems emerged in a story shared by a practitioner capturing ways through which identities can become fixed and flattened:

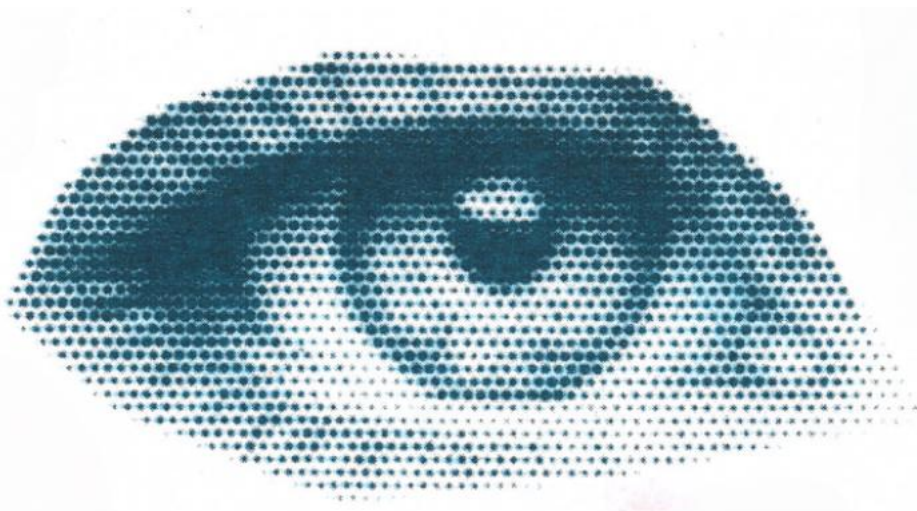
Any child comes in a residential and they've got their report, and the risk assessment comes along with it. And, you think, 'jeez, that child's gonna be absolutelylike, really, really.....(difficult) to manage'! It turns out the exact opposite.....when they settle down and they're actually a dream to work with. It happened on so many occasions when the worker who brought the child in gives you a sort of background to the child plus what's written in some other notes within the formal system and the risk assessment that comes along with them. But (then) you're thinking 'no, that's not happened at all'. They don't go to school, they're always going missing- no, they go to school every day! They haven't gone missing and things like that.....

So when it becomes like, you know, their sexual harmful behaviour- that can be the magnified part of it, as to why they're having to be accommodated and that's not helpful. Yeah, you need to know, and you need to know what safeguards have to be made. But you also need to know about the person. You know, just that part of it is not helpful. Because what that does is it just creates unnecessary anxiety within the team starting reading it, and they're thinking, 'oh my God, how we're going to manage this'. And then like, well, that that's not happened. That's not nice, none of that.....I'm not saying that it's all the time, most are accurate, but you do get it

Practitioner

These systemic stories do not speak to the life that happened in-between of the list of incidents and events and nor the meaning to those whose lives and experiences they belong to. By challenging potentially flattened/ing discourses that dominate the field of HSB, I hope to create space for a more nuanced, compassionate, and ultimately more effective approach to understanding and supporting these young people.

2.2 Gaze and soft eyes



Reflecting on ‘flat boys’ to consider more social and spatial ecological ways of ‘seeing’ invokes my curiosity around gaze. As I have travelled through the past few years, my gaze has shifted upon myself and about the subject. This project created a profound and unique experience of looking differently with young people and not just on their behaviour, harmful or otherwise. My interest of where gazes falls was sparked several years ago at a local psychoanalytic group where Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist Ann Horne presented a (unpublished) paper ‘Children Who Privilege the Body’ (2019). This powerful account featured a case study of a teenage boy who had displayed HSB and had been subject to overlapping forms of sexual abuse. Horne described the ‘perverse’ sexual abuse experienced by the boy echoing Balfe et al (2019) articulation (in their study of the disrupted sociological worlds of children who displayed HSB) of ‘malevolent chaos, a fundamental breakdown in social functioning that was purposely or indifferently directed towards the child’ (p. 189). Horne stressed the need to hold in our minds the absence of an ‘affirming gaze’ of caregivers together with the presence of what she calls as the ‘corrupt gaze’- where the child is seen and used as an object by others. Catching hold of unspoken aspects of sexual abuse, the corrupt gaze- where the body is seen in a way that breaches generational boundaries- often co-occurs within the absence of the loving, affirming gaze from caregivers. I wonder about the gaze our system has upon the children we encounter, particularly feelings of disgust and revulsion that sexuality and sexual harm often provokes. Whilst not corrupt in a sexual sense, I do wonder about how much we may inadvertently mirror a gaze that sees children and young people as their behaviour, not whole beings, in the absence of any systemic affirmation of being anything other but the worst thing they did which may also be experienced as a shameful gaze.

Gaze feels highly relevant in the context of my research as I wonder what my ‘gaze’, as a research gaze, may mean to participants taking part. The research gaze that has dominated the field of HSB has arguably been a scientific gaze (Prout and James, 2015) that may be fragmented and distant from lived, unique realities. Mercer (1998) described how the medicalisation of

sexual harm has been firmly positioned within psychology, psychiatry and penal contexts, generating professional responses and expertise, often by men, as the 'colonisation of rape, child abuse and domestic violence as therapeutic territory' (p. 108). This is communicated through medicalised discourses, clouding the 'endemic nature of sexual violence' which 'shifts attention away from the structural inequalities of gender division, and fixes the 'gaze' upon individual victims and perpetrators (p.108). Some of this ongoing reflection crystalised around my research design including the research focus falling upon everyday social worlds and not the harmful behaviour. My idea for the research toolbox was, in part, designed around softening the gaze in the context of such socially sensitive subject. The power of this gaze could be seen in one Social Worker's email about a boy she had spoken to about the possibility of taking part:

(he) is so worried about anything around the issue that he avoids it, even though I told him all the things you are asking about – but the fact that he knows that you know he did something is enough to make him hide with shame

Gatekeeper email

The social worker's comment that they '*told him all the things you are asking about*' reflects our previous discussions about the project including reinforcing the message to participants that I would not ask about their behaviour unless they wanted to talk about it. Even so, just knowing that I know engenders a shame for this boy. Disrupting the dominant gaze on individuals and their specific behaviour in the service of 'looking sideways' through Narrative Inquiry can disrupt the focus on what is seen as obvious, the focal point, shifting our awareness to experiences that lay beyond our attention (Shaw, 2017).

One profound way that has helped me to consider gaze is Cooper's ideas around using 'soft eyes' in research where he describes how we can find things to answer important questions that are "lying around" if only we know how to look properly' (p. 223). Cooper draws his sense of using 'soft eyes' from an episode in the HBO series 'The Wire' where the detectives speak of 'softening the focus of vision at a crime scene' because 'the 'softer' your eyes, the more likely you are to see the small clue, the unexpected, or the hidden' (p. 233). I found this notion of using 'soft eyes' in my endeavour incredibly useful, particularly in the context of a PhD with expectations around contributions of knowledge and my worry that my many years in practice may blur my vision, leading me to 'see' only what I have come to 'see'. Samah (2013) reflecting on practitioner research, describes how Narrative Inquiry had allowed them 'to see what was happening around me with a pair of new eyes' (p. 101) or, as Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 414) consider, a way of 'experiencing the experience'. This resonates with reflections from another Narrative Inquiry by Knibbs who describes the process of their Narrative Inquiry from practice as 'discovering new and alternative ways of seeing' (Knibb, 2013, p. 25)

2.3 Looking differently and differently looking

To enliven my aim to look differently at the lives of boys who have displayed HSB I have created a thesis that looks a little different to the traditional thesis. I would like to share some of my rationale for illustrating some of my thesis beyond simply making it look 'pretty'. The use of Riso printing and digital art to create collages in my thesis seeks to 'soften' the gaze upon this text and the young lives they describe. Balmer's (2021) exploration of alternative aesthetics in qualitative research highlights the prizing of 'a particular scheme of taste in the translation of life rendered in a monochrome palette' and how transcripts become carved:

into new texts, making more black and white shapes, aligned and spaced in similar styles, blocked out into paragraphs, on paper or screens of a certain size, into writing that has a certain rhythm, a certain orderliness in the presentation

(Balmer, 2021, p. 1143)

Looking back, words with pictures have followed me through my journey through practice and PhD. In the early 2000s, I vividly remember bringing children's colouring books into the secure unit and watching a small group of teenage boys huddled round to colouring in the pictures, that so sharply juxtaposed the sense of violence and trauma that often loomed. Another time, late one night a boy knocked on the little window on his door to ask me to get him a book- 'one like this, with pictures'- holding up in his dark room with bars on the windows, an old Enid Blyton⁴ book with the pages all browned and curled with age. The picture he was pointing to was such a simple line drawing it seemed hardly even a picture, yet it really mattered to him. I cried all the way home and still tear up as I write about this, thinking of this boy locked up for his 'own safety' away from a world of adults who abused him, alone in his room at night lost in this little old book with pictures. Hauntingly, the space where he was routinely abused by adult men appears in the storied 'lifescapes' in this research serving as a harrowing, powerful reminder that when we don't change the spaces where harm flourishes then not enough changes.

Softening the gaze with collaged pictures, alongside words, need not soften the messages and meanings which I strive to convey but potentially increase a capacity to capture and convey complexity easily flattened through words alone. I often used the 'words and pictures process' designed by Turnell and Essex (2006), for working with denied child abuse, as a practice tool to develop a shared understanding of difficult things. The process involved working through iterations of a family's experience alongside professional records to develop a short story with basic pictures about who was/is worried, what they are worried about and what are they doing about it. The simplicity of the process belies the complexity and challenge of talking about distressing and difficult things in ways that can make sense to children. As Turnell and Essex (2006) note, it is not just parents who struggle as professional are 'often at a loss regarding how

⁴ Enid Blyton was a children's author whose published work spanned 1922-1966

to communicate the enormity of the events to children caught up in situations of abuse' (p. 72). It was so profoundly powerful and painful to work closely with parents to tell difficult, emotional stories through words and pictures that a thousand reports would struggle to tell.

The images within this thesis are Risoprinted collages of digital images and photographs that I have taken. Riso is a print method described by Kormurki (2017) as sitting somewhere on a spectrum between screen printing and offset lithography but what sets Riso apart is the unique aesthetic and highly tactile finish of the prints. The prints are created from layers of tracing paper with different images on it that are scanned in, like a photocopier, to create thermographic 'master makes' that develop stencils by wrapping around rotating ink drums. Riso printing has been as much about the process as it is about the images that illustrate this thesis. My regular visits to the print studio exposed me to spaces I didn't feel comfortable, I didn't feel I belonged, I felt distinctly out of place. This was a visceral reminder of some of what I was learning through my research. This discomfort felt important as I was often using the printing sessions as ways of making sense of different experiences that were uncomfortable and lives that felt out of place.



Image One: Risoprinting

There are several aspects of Riso printing and collages that reflect the ethos and process of this thesis. Firstly, Riso prints are created by layers which captures the multidimensions of social ecologies that I was curious to learn about. Riso printing, known for its imperfection due to the inherent constraints of precision, unique marks left roller tracks and feed marks (Amell, 2017), reflects lives and spaces that are not neatly bounded or contained. It was also a slow process as I could only print two layers at a time to give the ink time to dry. Together, the process in the print studio offered a different space to reflect on the stories of experience and

my own research journey. This space to think echoes Rosenberg's (2008) concept of 'ideation drawing' in how the physical and mental experience of creating images, that are both artefacts and process, is a thinking space where thought is not represented but 'rather a space where thinking is presenced' also described as 'a process and always in-process: thinking-in-action and action-as-thinking' (p. 109).

Creating images and prints for this thesis strives to disrupt the epistemological flattening of lives whilst resisting single stories and real, generalisable truths. I hope the reader may find this thesis as I encountered the stories I was privileged to witness: vivid, fleeting, glimpsing, confusing, complex, partial, moving, layered, sometimes hopeful and sometimes hopeless. I hope that the colour in this study shows a different way of representing my textual data which I found to be 'vibrant, profound and buzzing with life' (Balmer, 2021, p. 1144). Yet I also hope that it does not detract, minimise or prettify what is a difficult, complex, emotive and often distressing subject matter that has very real impact on many lives. From my practice experience, I believe that HSB generated profound ambivalence making it very difficult to hold together the young person and their behaviour and some of the 'flattening' serves to distance us from the complexity and conflicts. By bringing together collages with my research I hope to soften and refocus the gaze to look at painful and difficult realities. This allows two lenses to look and to see resonating with Richardson's (2000) reflections:

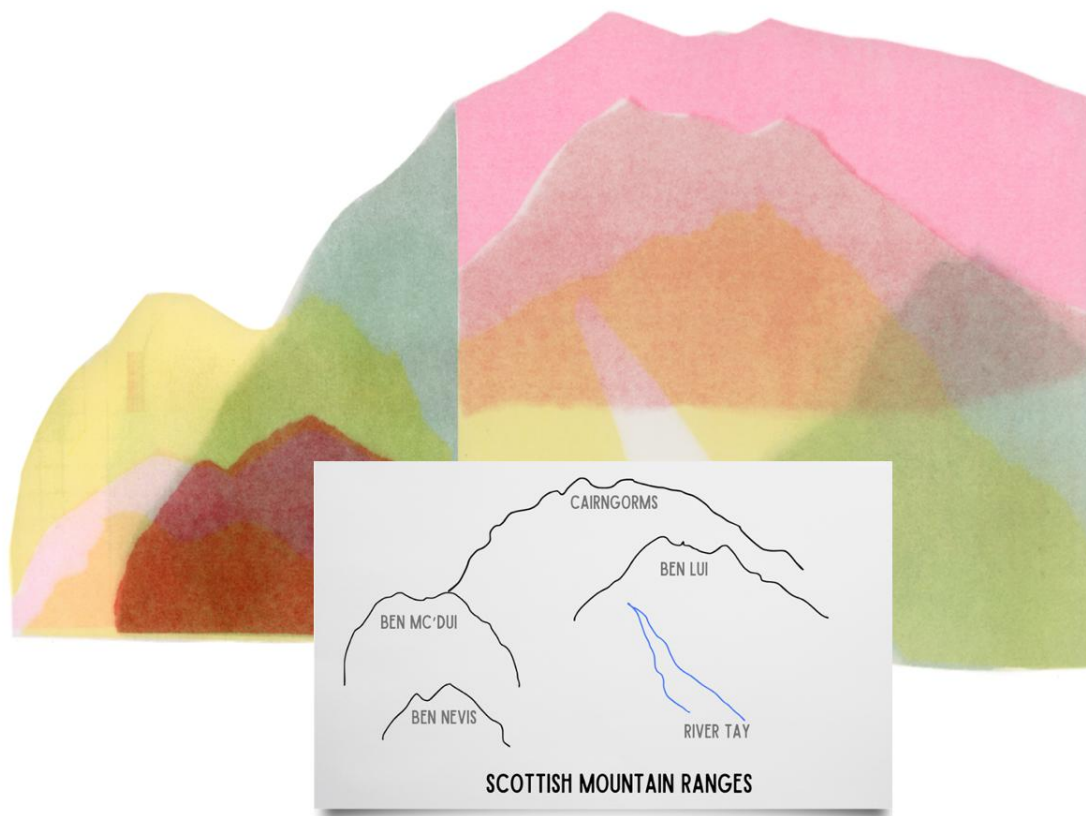
creative arts is one lens through which to view the world; analytical/science is another. We see better with two lenses. We see best with both lenses focused and magnified

(Richardson, 2000, p. 254)

Finally, it is my hope that this more creative thesis acknowledges my ethical commitment to the research subject, the narrators and the audience of the stories I will share. Kara and Pickering (2017) articulate three dimensions that relate to ethical representation using more creative means that include *explicit ethical practice* focused on presenting research that seeks to promote positive social change, *internal ethical practice* involving the use of diverse media forms to more effectively capture the complexity of the subject matter, beyond what traditional presentation methods allow, and *relational ethical practice* aimed at actively engaging with audiences. I hope that the images help to amplify other people's stories (Banks and Zeitlyn, 2015) and through 'aesthetic merit' open up my words inviting the readers interpretations and responses (Richardson, 2000) which may generate 'resonance' which Tracy (2010) describes as 'the research's ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect the audience' (p. 845).

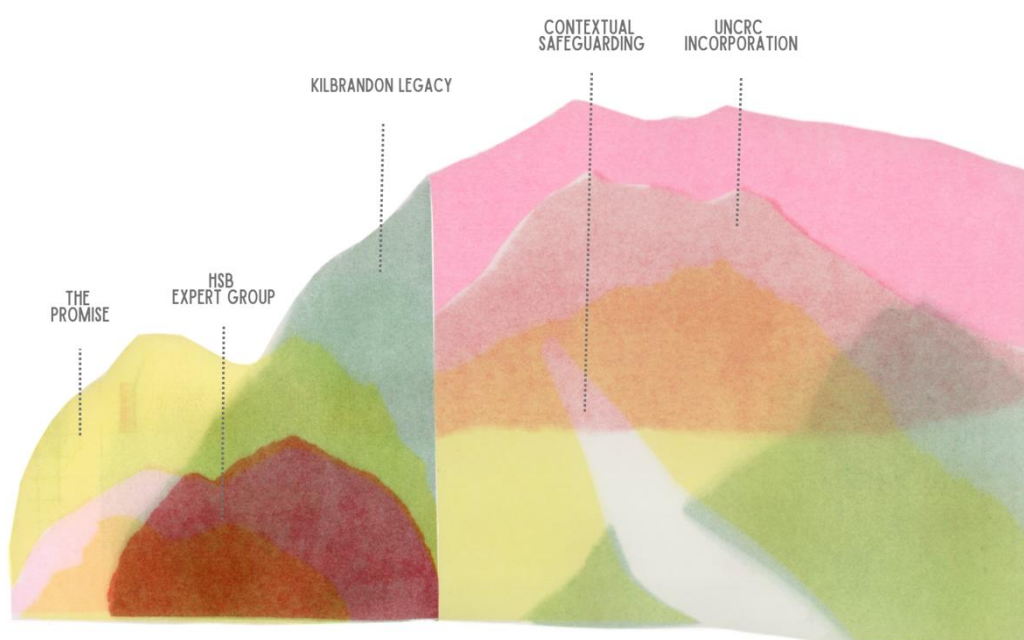
Chapter Three: Scottish policy landscape

It is important to reflect upon the policy landscape in Scotland to situate practice in the national context, and I illustrate my observations using Scotland's mountain ranges to bring them to life and ground them in the unique Scottish context. This overview highlights key legal and policy initiatives, ranging from longstanding legacies to very recent developments, that may help create conditions for more holistic and contextually sensitive understandings of HSB. I believe this landscape offers fertile ground where the seeds from the findings of this PhD could germinate and grow. Reflecting on the policy context like a landscape situates me as the researcher, the participants and the subject within the wider contours of a legal and policy terrain. Marmon Silko (1997) stresses that we cannot be separate from or outside the territory we gaze upon, and, as a viewer, I am as much a part of the landscape as the boulder I am perched upon in this PhD. My reflections on the Scottish landscape acknowledge the 'storied terrains' (O'Toole, 2018) in which individual and intuitional stories can be told and create space to balance both personal, smaller stories and the meaning of participants and the larger landscapes they are told within (Kim, 2016). Gazing at the policy landscape through the three-dimensional prism of narrative inquiry (time, place and social conditions) helps to reflect on this complex and emotive social phenomenon that shifts over time and place.



The United Kingdom is made up of four nations: Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland. In 1997, Scotland and Wales held referendums that voted for devolution, thus decentralising some powers from the UK government to national governments, closely followed by Northern Ireland in 1998. The Scotland Act (1998) established the Scottish Parliament, with legislative powers, and the Scottish Government, to carry out the functions of devolved government led by a First Minister. Unlike Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland did not specify which powers would be devolved instead determining the powers reserved to the UK Government. The Scottish Government hold powers across many of the policy portfolios intersecting with children's and young people's lives, such as welfare provision, health, education, policing, justice and social work.

There is no national legal policy specific to HSB in Scotland or the wider UK. Whilst different policies do intersect, contributing to the prevention and responses around HSB, these may frame the issue and young people in different and diverging ways. These policies reflect a siloed landscape including health, education, statutory, welfare and justice manifested through both statutory and voluntary services. In practice, many of these policies felt very distant and, at times further fragmenting young lives, driving deeper individual-level framings, shaping responses most often at the individual or family level. Reflecting on the legal and policy landscape of Scotland, I suggest that there are several aspects that create potentially conducive conditions for nurturing a paradigm shift in how we understand, respond and intervene around concerns of HSB. Some of these threads are more distant threads, while others more recent, and I hope may weave together to create a new pattern for social policy that situates HSB beyond silos and disrupts current individualised discourses.



3.1 Kilbrandon legacy

Scotland has a distinct social history of children's welfare and justice systems built upon the foundations of Lord Kilbrandon, who, in 1971, set out a vision for juvenile justice that has shaped the systems we know today. The Kilbrandon Report (Scottish Office, 1995) produced a comprehensive set of proposals that set in motion the creation of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and the inception of the Children's Hearing System. Among the many notable elements of Lord Kilbrandon's pioneering vision, The Kilbrandon Report framed children 'in trouble' as equally deserving of care and protection - referred to as the '*needs not deeds*' principle – so decisions should always be made in the child's best interests through the least intervention. These elements shape a distinct welfare approach in Scotland's approach to children who are in conflict with the law and those in need of protection, particularly those who come into contact with the Children's Hearing System, commonly known as the 'Children's Panel', which is governed by Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA). The Children's Reporter, who is often a lawyer or social worker, works with the statutory criteria of referrals where 'a child may be in need of protection, guidance, treatment or control' where it might be necessary for a Compulsory Supervision Order to be made in relation to a child. Referrals to the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration tend to come from police, social work, and education, although anyone can make a referral. The Reporter can call a Hearing of a panel of three laypersons upon a statement of grounds, which includes if the child or young person:

- Suffers from lack of parental care.
- Is falling into bad associations or is exposed to moral danger.
- Is beyond the control of their parent/carer (relevant person).
- The child, or another child in the same household, has been the victim of an offence such as sexual abuse, assault or neglect.
- Is a member of the same household as a person who has offended against a child or young person.
- Has failed to attend school without reasonable excuse.
- Has committed an offence.
- Has abused solvents, or misused drugs or alcohol.

(SCRA, 2025)

The panel can make an order for compulsory measures of supervision, which can include secure or residential care and can detail specific aspects of the measures of supervision upon the child and their family.

The spirit of the Kilbrandon report is woven into the fabric of Scotland's ethos around children in ways that may be especially conducive to changing how we look at issues of HSB differently. As the years have passed, our understanding of the needs of children has changed, and a renewed effort to consider more contextually, socially and developmentally sensitive approach

to 'needs not deeds' feels hopeful. However, the Kilbrandon legacy is not static and will be shaped by the changing political landscape. McAra and McVie (2010) identify four key factors that illustrate post-devolution divergence towards English and Welsh paradigms of youth justice that water down the Kilbrandon principles towards 'more complex and conflicted set of logics grafted onto the system' that are politicised and steeped in managerialism (p.101.). This includes a shift from 'needs not deeds' towards 'victims increasingly being viewed as a discrete community, separate from and more morally deserving than offenders' (p. 182). Key messages include the need for a holistic approach given the association between victimisation and social adversity with more serious and persistent 'offending' and the problems that emerge from the professional pursuit of 'early-identification' of at-risk children who fall under the 'gaze' of social work and Children's Hearing System that may be iatrogenic.

3.2 Scottish Government HSB Expert Group

In 2018 the Scottish Government launched an 'Expert Group on Preventing Sexual Offending Involving Children and Young People: Prevention of and Responses to Harmful Sexual Behaviour by Children and Young People'. This initiative was in response to concerns around the number of cases of sexual offences against a child by a child (under 18), between 2012-2016, which rose by 34% with 96% perpetrated by males (Scottish Government, 2017; 2020a). The expert group was led by independent chair Catherine Dyer, who served as Crown Agent and Chief Executive of the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) between 2010 - 2016. The Expert Group report was published in January 2020, eagerly anticipated for my PhD proposal, which was submitted days after. The Expert Group explored national concerns around HSB through a public health lens, including gendered analysis, making many important recommendations relating to primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. This led to the formation of the Scottish Government HSB Oversight Group, who invited me to present my research in September 2022. Drawing on the Lundy Model of Participation (Lundy, 2007), with specific reference to dimensions of audience and influence, I was delighted that the Senior Policy Officer leading the Oversight Group agreed to read a report and write to participants towards the end of my project ([Appendix One: Letter to Scottish Government and Scottish Violence Reduction Unit](#))

Many elements of the Expert Group findings and recommendations are particularly relevant to the rationale of this study, including recognition around 'the importance of viewing HSB as just one aspect of a child's behaviour instead of a reflection of the whole child', and the recognition of the value of children and young people's participation, highlighting that 'generally there is a lack of research regarding HSB involving children and young people' (Scottish Government, 2020, p. 43).

3.3 Scottish Government Child Protection Guidance and Contextual Safeguarding

The Scottish Government Expert Group findings highlighted another important development in the Scottish policy landscape, stressing the need for contextualised understandings of behaviours. Citing Firmin's (2017) development of contextual safeguarding approaches, the Expert Group highlight 'how context could be the major influence in attacks occurring if incidents were treated in isolation, rather than recognising the contextual risk around places and cultures such as housing estates, schools and particular places where young people gathered' (Scottish Government, 2020, p. 85). Contextual Safeguarding has been embedded into child protection policy, namely the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland, which includes the Expert Group's recommendation for its inclusion (Scottish Government, 2023). In particular, sections 2.260 and 2.262 shift the gaze from individuals and behaviour alone and into the contexts which open new ways of understanding and responding:

Section 2.260: 'Contextual safeguarding emphasises:

- exploration of the dynamic between a young person, their family, peers, school context and areas in their neighbourhood where they spend time, when assessing their needs and developing plans to meet them
- recognition of the increasing 'weight of influence' that peer relationships, and other extra-familial factors, may have during adolescence, and the relevance of this for young people's experiences of harm and safety
- a shift in focus towards the contexts in which young people make 'choices' or 'behave' – so that plans seek to create the conditions in which young people can make safer choices rather than simply focusing on changing young people's behaviour in persistently harmful contexts
- the development of interventions that address the social conditions/environmental drivers of extra-familial risk and harm. This can be combined with support to individual young people and families. Such an approach can create safety for those identified as being at risk of significant harm in extra-familial contexts alongside broader populations of young people who spend time in those contexts

Section 2.262:

Contributing factors such as poverty and structural discrimination, including racism, should be considered as part of the context of risk.

(Scottish Government, 2023, p.80-81)

This signals a significant shift in recognising the everyday social conditions and contexts of young people's lives and its position within child protection guidance disrupts the dominance of a siloed, narrow focus on individuals and behaviours. This shift was then echoed in the

publication of the Scottish Government's guidance on HSB in 2024 which reflects upon contextual dimensions of young people's lives that are interrelated to safety and risk:

Sometimes the different contexts are interrelated and can mean that children and young people may encounter multiple risks. Contextual safeguarding looks at how we can best understand these risks, engage with children and young people and help to keep them safe. It's an approach that's often been used to apply to adolescents, though the lessons can equally be applied to younger children, especially in today's changing world

(Scottish Government, 2024b, p. 22)

The development of contextual safeguarding in the field of HSB reflects a shift in policy and practice, integrating HSB into broader discussions about harm. This approach has significant potential to move beyond solely individualized responses for young people, which, in turn, challenges the heavy weight of carrying risk lying with individual caseworkers.

3.4 The Promise

In 2016, then Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced an Independent Care Review as a commitment to 'come together and love it's most vulnerable children to give them the childhood they deserve' (Scottish Government, 2020, p. 02). This 'roots and branches' review of the 'care system' was led by Fiona Duncan between February 2017 – February 2020 and engaged with 5500 voices, half of those voices being children and adults who had lived in the care system. In March 2021, in response to the care review, the Scottish Government launched The Promise Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021) to transform the 'care system' founded upon the findings of The Independent Care Review, which concluded that the current system is not working. The five foundations to The Promise are: voice, family, care, people and scaffolding. The initial phase was 'Plan 21-24' and in June 2024, The Promise launched 'Reflect, Refocus, Reset - Plan 24-30' with a map towards the 'static destination' to #KeepThePromise by 2030 (Scottish Government, 2024a).

In light of the stories that will unfold in this thesis about young people's experiences in the 'care system', The Promise is even more pertinent to the lives of children and young people who display HSB. Through my discussions with participants, The Promise also feels close in their minds, suggesting the potential proximity between policy and practice and possibilities of hope. During my first meeting with a young person to discuss what taking part would involve, to support decisions through informed consent, he spoke to me about his involvement in The Promise. A practitioner participant directly connected dynamics of stigma connected to HSB and, more broadly, sexuality in the 'care system' to principles of The Promise, which seeks to challenge stigma created through care experience. Stigma is articulated several times in The Promise including:

Care experienced children and young adults have told the Care Review that their time looked after by the state often felt cold, overly professionalised, stigmatising and uncaring.

Scotland should be a good parent to the children it has responsibility for. That means carers and workers must act, speak and behave like a family so that Scotland can be the best parent it can be. Scotland must stop stigmatising the children it cares for.

(The Promise, 2021, p. 87)

The Promise serves as an important reminder that HSB is often not the only complex issue happening in a young person's life, yet it can become the primary frame through which we see them. HSB cannot remain a silo hidden away in the corner, the disciplinary domain of psych~ professionals thus treated behind closed doors. The environments where children and young people are cared for are not merely variables in our research nor factors in our assessments, but very real, confusing and complex environments that young people are navigating.

3.5 UNCRC incorporation

The UNCRC (1989) is the most widely ratified global treaty, representing an internationally agreed standard designed to ensure minimal conditions for children through a global template of understanding and delivering children's rights. The Convention was ratified in the UK in 1991 and all nation states across the world have ratified the UNCRC except the USA. The ways in which the UNCRC is made 'real' in different contexts is complex and varied. Kilkelly (2019) dissects the different approaches that State Parties can adopt to incorporate the UNCRC, highlighting that no one approach can be preferred given the 'diverse drivers at play...from constitutional and legal systems to administrative structures, from political and economic resources to culture and attitude' (p. 332). Direct legal incorporation gives full legal effect of the UNCRC into domestic law. For countries with monist legal systems, such as Belgium and Spain, the process of incorporation can be automatic upon ratification. For State Parties with dualist legal systems, such as the UK, the onus is on the devolved or federal government to enact the UNCRC into law. Other approaches to realising and enacting UNCRC by State Parties include constitutional and indirect incorporation.

In September 2020, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced one of the 'most ambitious pieces of legislation in the 20 years of devolution' to fully incorporate the UNCRC into Scottish law. The Scottish Parliament voted unanimously to pass a bill to fully incorporate the UNCRC into Scot's Law on 16th March 2021. However, the path to Royal Assent of the much-anticipated UNCRC (Scotland) (Incorporation) Bill hit a significant stumbling block when later in 2021 the UK Government raised a challenge at the UK Supreme Court regarding its concerns about parts of the Bill exceeding the devolved powers of the Scottish Parliament. These

technical tensions, resting upon the boundary of devolved and reserved powers, were addressed, and the Bill went through due process before finally gaining Royal Assent on 16th January 2024. The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill celebrated its commencement on 16th July 2024.

It remains to be seen how much impact full legal incorporation of children's rights can make in relation to the national understanding of, responses to and prevention of issues of HSB. The legal backbone and lack of ambiguity around the definition of a child (under 18) hold the potential to foreground our understandings relationally by reframing the position of adults in a range of duty bearers in relation to children and young people as rights holders. Compelling discourses around children who come into contact with the law, in the broadest sense, is articulated by Lightowler:

There is no justice in taking traumatised children; holding them solely responsible for their actions; putting them through processes they don't understand, and are unable to participate in; blaming and stigmatising them whilst failing to give them what they need; putting barriers in the way of loving and caring relationships; and taking existing supports and opportunities away from them

(Lightowler, 2020, p. 02)

There are already shifts in the legal and policy landscape of Scotland in light of full legal incorporation. The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act was passed in 2024 which aims to improve care and justice experiences of children, including the hugely significant step of ending detention of young people under 18 in Young Offender Institutions (YOI). The Scottish Government's guidance on HSB highlights that under the UNCRC all children under 18:

both a victim of harm as well as a child causing harm – must be seen as children first and foremost. All children have a right to nurture, respect, family life, education and social inclusion. These rights must be respected, even when their actions have caused considerable harm to others. Of course, incidents involving sexual abuse carried out by children may be serious crimes, and proportionate management of the genuine risks they present to others will be necessary. In child protection processes the primary professional consideration must be to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of all of the children involved.

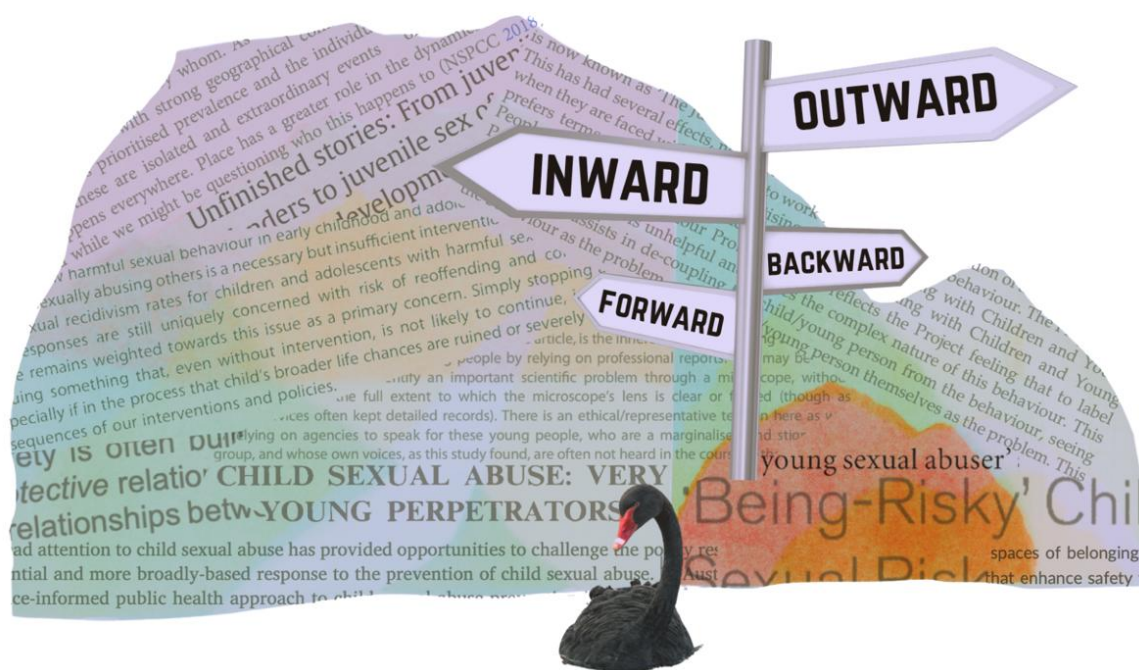
(Scottish Government, 2024b, p. 04)

These reflections on the policy landscape of Scotland seek to share my observations of conducive conditions that could disrupt our dominant focus on individuals and their behaviour towards more holistic, contextually sensitive understandings and open doors to more ecological and interdisciplinary allyships. Arguably, children and young people who display HSB evoke particularly strong reactions and erroneous associations with adult sex offenders so

children's rights must move beyond rhetoric and into action. However, as I acknowledged, the relationship between policy and practice is not neat nor linear. Furthermore, a sobering realisation developed throughout my research journey is that having contact with our systems and shapeshifting policy landscape can, in and of itself, cause harm and unintended consequences.

Chapter Four: Literature Review

This literature review, drawing inspiration from Narrative Inquiry, is structured as a narrative landscape, exploring literature through the "four directions of inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Looking 'inwards', I will explore the terrain of knowledge around HSB forged over time establishing why this is such a pressing social concern. Looking 'backwards', I examine the socio-historical development of the literature, tracing its evolution over time to uncover the layers of understanding that have shaped how HSB is perceived. This exploration reveals the 'grand narratives' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) shaped by intersecting social constructions across place and time. Looking outward, I explore literature beyond the immediate field of HSB, examining insights from social and spatial ecologies of everyday life. These perspectives offer valuable contributions to developing new understandings, responses, and prevention strategies for harm and abuse. I will then conclude by looking 'forward' towards promising new directions including contextually sensitive approaches to prevention and listening to different voices.



4.1 Looking inwards

There is no universal term used to describe HSB highlighting significant variations across global and professional geographies with terminology rooted in temporal, spatial and often siloed framings of how the behaviour comes to be known. The term Harmful Sexual Behaviour acknowledges the array of harms that can result from the behaviours, not solely sexual harm, and the definition adopted for the purpose of this study is:

‘Harmful sexual behaviour can be defined as sexual behaviours by children and young people, under the age of 18, that are developmentally inappropriate, harmful towards self and others, or abusive towards another child, young person or adult’

(Hackett et al, 2019, p. 12)

There is a cost to the (mis)use of vague and imprecise terms when children are labelled so continuum model supports differentiation between normative sexual behaviours to those that are ‘highly deviant’ (Hackett, 2010, 2019). This continuum has been adopted by the Scottish Government as a model which should be used as part of analysis of any concerns around children (2020).

Normal • Developmentally expected • Socially acceptable • Consensual, mutual, reciprocal • Shared decision making	Inappropriate • Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour • Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group • Context for behaviour may be inappropriate • Generally consensual and reciprocal	Problematic • Problematic and concerning behaviours • Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected • No overt elements of victimisation • Consent issues may be unclear • May lack reciprocity or equal power • May include levels of compulsivity	Abusive • Victimising intent or outcome • Includes misuse of power • Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance • Intrusive • Informed consent lacking, or not able to be freely given by victim • May include elements of expressive violence	Violent • Physically violent sexual abuse • Highly intrusive • Instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator • Sadism
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Image two: Continuum of children and young people’s behaviours (Hackett, 2010 – image from NSPCC HSB Framework (2019, p. 15)

Terms such as adolescent or juvenile sexual offender or abuser, still favoured in the US, reflect more criminological and psychiatric discourses. In UK and other jurisdictions, such terms are problematic, not least as harmful behaviour does not always meet the threshold of criminal intent and/or the age of the child is below the age of criminal responsibility. Terms such as juvenile or adolescent sexual offender can be stigmatising and become a fixed identity (Willis and Letourneau, 2018) despite low recidivism levels. These differing terms get used to describe seemingly objective behaviours, yet I am curious as to what gets lost in translation within and between our shared knowledge base. This is not simply an issue of semantic but reflect significantly distinct and diverging framings of individuals, and their behaviour, representing contextually subjective meanings and motivations that are responded to by very different systems. More crudely, is HSB framed as a symptom of badness, sadness or madness in any

given local or national context? However, these diverging terms and meanings all share a very similar component – they all are focused on an individual and their behaviours which become the object of our collective gaze. This reinforces my belief in the importance of understanding social, spatial and contextual conditions. Over time, these schisms may lead to a stronger alignment with other fields of knowledge interested in childhoods - such as geography, public health, and urban planning- rather than our current close association with forensic knowledge bases and law.

4.1.1 Prevalence

In the UK it is estimated that around one-third of sexual abuse of a child is committed by another child under 18 (Hackett *et al.*, 2014,; 2019). A study by Radford (2011) identified two-thirds of their sample of young people reporting abuse reported it was committed by another young person. However, McKibbin *et al.*, (2024) urge caution around interpretation acknowledging that abuse by adults may come to the attention of authorities less than children and young people who harm. In Scotland, the number of cases of sexual offences against a child by a child (under 18), between 2012-2016, rose by 34% with 96% perpetrated by males (Scottish Government, 2020). With no national framework for children, under the age of eighteen, who present HSB it is impossible to capture the true extend of this public health issue. Children and young people who present HSB are a hugely diverse group who have often experienced a range of adversity and find themselves in diverging systems of universal services, child welfare and youth justice systems. Examining data from the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA), the Scottish Government Expert Group (2020) identified 216 children referred between 2016-17 for allegations of at least one sexual offence: 193 boys and 23 girls, aged between 9 and 17 years with 55% of the sample aged being between 14-15 years old. Hackett *et al.*, (2013) identified a sample of 700 young people with 97% male and only 3% female. Masson *et al.*, (2015) explored similarities and differences of boys and girls in a sample and concluded that girls tend to be referred at a younger age, have increased experiences of sexual victimisation and harmed less victims. They highlight that HSB displayed by girls may be more indicative of continuing vulnerability and less of ongoing risk.

4.1.2 Backgrounds

Miccio-Fonseca (2023a) describes young people who display HSB as ‘the black swans’ as, just like seeing a black swan, HSB is unpredictable, improbable (most have experienced abuse, yet most victims of abuse do not go onto harm), has a significant impact and after it happens we tend to come up with explanations to make it seem like it was more predictable than it really was. There is extensive literature that supports the key message that many children and young people, although not all, who display HSB have experienced traumatic and complex lives. I have drawn upon several key studies to present empirical evidence that considers the range and different interactions of such experiences.

Balfe *et al.*, (2019) highlight the 'shockingly wide catalogue of trauma and harm' saturating the highly disrupted 'sociological worlds' of young people who displayed HSB and many of these young people are 'highly traumatised' having experienced high levels of violence, neglect, deprivation, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse (p. 189). Hackett *et al.*, (2013) analysed case records of 700 children, held by nine services between 1992-2000, and identified that two thirds of the sample had experienced at least one form of abuse and trauma. Commissioned by the Scottish Government Expert Group, a study of 97 young people referred for HSB to the Intervention for Vulnerable Youth (IVY) consultation service between 2013 – 2019, Moodie (2021) identified 22% recorded as being sexually abused by an adult, 18% being sexually harmed by another child and 40% of the sample being exposed to pornography at a young age.

McKibbin *et al.*, (2024) conducted a systematic scoping review to develop a pathways model theorising different dynamic pathways to the onset of HSB. They conceptualise the pathways model through five key concepts:

- (1) Driver – the psychosocial experience that sets a child on a path toward HSB onset
- (2) Flow – the movement over time of a child propelled by a driver
- (3) Amplifier – a risk factor that can increase the likelihood of HSB onset
- (4) Tipping point – situations or opportunities for HSB to occur in combination with an unconscious or conscious decision-making process or impulse
- (5) Onset – the moment in time when a child or young person first displays HSB.

(McKibbin *et al.*, 2024, p. 754)

The first pathway, with the most supporting literature, was the child sexual abuse victimisation pathway which featured five 'amplifiers': enduring additional types of abuse and neglect; experiencing prolonged, severe sexual abuse; encountering multiple abusers; lacking social support; and receiving inappropriate reactions from caregivers. A critical moment identified as a potential 'tipping point' in this pathway occurs when a young person who has been sexually abused decides to replicate the abuse on a younger child. McKibbin and colleagues identify a further nine drivers of onset of HSB with associated amplifiers and tipping points. These drivers are (ranked in order with most to least supporting literature) physical and emotional abuse, living with family and domestic violence, sexual arousal, 'antisocial' pathways, pornography, inadequate sexual boundaries, sexual attraction to children and hypermasculinity (McKibbin *et al.*, 2024). The nuanced and dynamic nature of this pathways model challenges any sense of inevitability highlighting critical aspects of a complex and evolving process, conceptualised as drivers, amplifiers and tipping points- critical sites of preventative and sensitive interventions. Furthermore, these pathways map onto the social dimensions of children and young people's lives which expands our capacity to look further than individual level factors and responses.

Faure-Walker and Hunt's (2022) systematic review of prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the life experiences of young people who display HSB highlight that the majority of children and adolescents in the studies examined experienced disruptions to their normal sexual development. Although not all studies addressed every type of ACEs, the most common were physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, family separation, loss or bereavement and exposure to domestic violence. Importantly the authors stress the distinction between correlation and causation, highlighting that ACEs are:

markers of vulnerability as opposed to risk factors. It is much more helpful and hopeful to understand this population as requiring protection, treatment and education rather than criminalisation. There are many intervening events and variables that mediate childhood exposure and later problems. It appears that some children are provided with the support or are equipped with the resilience which serves to mitigate the harm caused by ACEs

(Faure-Walker and Hunt, 2022, p. 1059)

In a further examination through the lens of ACEs, Harris *et al.* (2022) explored the timing, sequence and impact of early adversities among young people in Australia exhibiting HSB. They emphasised the 'profound' effects of ACEs, not only in their widespread occurrence but also in their co-occurrence and extended duration, sometimes persisting for many years. The report pointed out a 'striking concentration' of abuse, harm, and neglect during the first six years of life, often taking place before children even entered primary school (p. 4).

Balfe *et al.*, (2019) drew upon 117 cases from the wider study (Hackett *et al.*, 2013) to explore the family and social contexts of young people who displayed HSB and articulate a continuum of chaos which:

could come and go in young people's lives, though some were exposed to intense chaos over prolonged periods of time.....The chaos some of these young people were exposed to went beyond "normal chaos" however. Some were exposed to moral as well as physical chaos. And some were exposed to malevolent chaos, a fundamental breakdown in social functioning that was purposely or indifferently directed towards the child

(Balfe *et al.*, 2019, p. 188-189)

Family backgrounds are often turbulent including high levels of deprivation, domestic abuse, parental criminality, and economic disadvantage (Balfe *et al.*, 2019; Moodie, 2021). Many experience difficulties in peer relationships ranging from social exclusion (32%), social isolation (49%) to being bullied (22%) and bullying others (14%) (Moodie, 2021). Disclosures and

discoveries of harmful behaviour can also have significant impacts on relationships with family. Hackett *et al.*, (2014) identify a continuum of family responses ranging from supportive (for 25% of sample) to ambivalent responses (28%) and around 7% of responses which significantly shamed or shunned the child. Notably, there was no evidence to suggest that parents with more complex backgrounds or histories of child abuse were less able to accept their child's behaviour than families with more stability. Significant impacts can also be experienced from communities after HSB has happened and becomes known. This can be understood like a 'contagion', spreading fast and snowballing within communities, which can have significant impact on families, affect different aspects of the young person's life and lead to social isolation and withdrawal which is deeply concerning including potential for increasing risk and internalising the negative social identities (Hackett *et al.*, 2015).

Research also highlights the presentation of neurodiversity, disability and mental health in samples of children and young people who display HSB. Hackett *et al.*, (2013) identified 38% of their large sample as being recorded as having a learning disability and Moodie's study (2021) highlighted 12% as having a learning disability, 14% with a diagnosis of autism, 5% with diagnosis of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, 33% with recorded mental health difficulties, 40% as having self-harmed and 24% deemed a suicide risk. McKibbin *et al.*, (2022) analysed 'practice wisdom' of HSB practitioners and applied researchers in the field then articulated clusters of risk including a potentially significant cluster of children and young people with a cognitive disability or one associated with an autism-like condition. This was clustered with being sexually curious, being sexually aroused, living in unsafe family environments and viewing pornography described by one participant as a 'toxic combination'. Another pertinent cluster converged around living with disabilities within unsafe family settings as being pertinent with access to pornography as potentially driving sexual arousal and acting out with an ability to understand nuances around relationships and consent. Overall, participants indicated that the sexual curiosity risk factor cluster may be particularly relevant for children and young people living with disabilities who are also in unsafe family environments. Access to pornography can drive sexual arousal and acting out of what they have seen. Inability to capture the nuances of sexual relationships and consent for children and young people living with disability may also be a contributing factor. McKibbin *et al.*, (2022) suggest that this cluster could support a basis of recurring HSB, beyond therapeutic type interventions, as impulse control and boundary violations requires greater guidance and supervision. This echoes a finding in Kjellgren (2019) study of perspectives of 22 adult males who received treatment related to HSB displayed in adolescence found that all who had sexually reoffended, 7 of the sample (32%), had a cognitive disability which they suggest highlights insufficient interventions to prevent sexual reoffending and the special needs of this particular population.

4.1.3 Contexts

HSB always happens somewhere and there is a growing focus for shifting the focus from ‘who’ and ‘what’ to ‘where’ which compels consideration of spatial dimensions of abuse, prevention and contextual responses (Lloyd, 2022). Existing research studies and report offer some insights into the contexts in which HSB can take place for example Moodie (2021) identified the most frequent location was the family home followed by social settings, then schools then lastly the home of the victim - noting that 41% of records state multiple incidents in multiple locations.

There is growing attention to HSB which occurs with the context of sibling and family relationships. Bertele and Talmon (2023) reviewed empirical research on sibling sexual abuse (SSA) revealing defining characteristics such as early initiation, prolonged duration, and a notably high intensity involving elements like coercion, force, and manipulation. They identified three primary risk factors for SSA: large families with three or more children, low-income households, and unstable environments marked by marital discord, mental health challenges and/or substance abuse issues. A study by Gervais and Romano (2019) emphasizes the ‘collateral consequences’ and wide-ranging effects on safety, emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships for all siblings, not just those directly victimised. These findings stress the importance of increasing awareness and implementing parental informed interventions to address the needs of both affected siblings and others by responsive professionals and family members. This research underscores the broader impact of abuse beyond the immediate victims. Online and digital mediums, often described as Technology Assisted HSB (TA-HSB), is another context in which harm can occur. A report by Vaswani (2022) into the Risk of Sexual Abuse (ROSA) project in Scotland highlighted 62% of the young people analysed were male with a mean age of 14.4 years old and many (44%) having experienced harm and abuse including some boys being drawn into behaviours through their grooming behaviours by adults. Furthermore, the ROSA Project reflected that some young people may be more vulnerable to victimisation or displaying TA-HSB including, young people with ASD, mental health difficulties and LGBTQ+ youth.

4.1.4 Systems

Neglected in the literature is the acknowledgement of previous and/or existing contact with professionals and systems in the lives of children and young people who display HSB. Many children and young people who display HSB live in care settings before and after they display HSB. Balfe *et al.*, (2019) identified 15% living in children’s homes, 13% in foster care and 8% in secure care. The Scottish Government Expert Group examined data from the Scottish Children’s Reporter (SCRA) of the 216 children referred between 2016-17 for allegations of at least one sexual offence. Of these 216 children, 193 were boys and 23 girls with the youngest 9 years old, the eldest 17 years old with 55% of the sample aged being between 14-15 years old. Notably 60% had previous contact with SCRA on care and protection grounds, with 70% of

these were referred on grounds of lack of parental care and 48% on grounds of being a child victim. Reflecting upon systems, this not only highlights the distressing experiences of these young people, but it tells us that they have had previous contact with welfare and protective systems around concerns of their care and safety. The Scottish Government Expert Group led to an Oversight Group which commissioned research examining the experiences of children who were referred for HSB to the Interventions for Vulnerable Youth (IVY) project which shines further light onto systems contact. Moodie (2021) identified that 33% had contact with statutory services before their fifth birthday with 10% having statutory service contact from birth or before their first birthday. Only 9% has no statutory contact recorded or were involved in services on a voluntary basis. Regarding voluntary involvement, it is pertinent to note that Children's Hearings are guided by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 that foregrounds the 'no order' principle, an ethos of least intervention and the paramountcy of best interest. Thus, of the 9% who had no recorded statutory involvement, they may still have had contact with systems but not formally recorded due to voluntary service provision. Moodie (2021) also analysed Child Protection registration which highlights 43% of young people referred to a national consultation service regarding HSB had been on the Child Protection Register with less than 5 still being on a Child Protection Order. Moodie notes that a lack of clarity in records may lead to these figures being underestimated. Often the focus is on individual children and young people, their families and the 'informal' contexts of their lives yet these studies highlight the presence of professionals and welfare systems that may become a part of their everyday worlds raising questions as to how these contribute to safety, wellbeing, risk and other cumulative impacts that may have iatrogenic impacts.

4.1.5 Risk

Risk is a prominent concept and concern in research and practice around HSB. Understanding, assessing and reducing risk is of fundamental importance to how we prevent and reduce harm. Risk assessment tools, instruments and guidance often serve to navigate practice and interventions. When there are concerns about HSB, formal risk assessment tools can be used to assess aspects such as risk of harm, recurrence and levels of supervision. Recent developments in research into risk moves away from typologies and trajectories that may imply inevitability of HSB such as McKibbin *et al.*, (2022) work on risk clusters developed through 'practice wisdom' of practitioners and researchers. These developments reflect shifts in perspectives around assessment and intervention strategies, questioning earlier models that relied on forensic methods to evaluate risk and forecast the probability of future offences (McPherson, 2024). Miccio-Fonsecca (2023b) is highly critical of many risk prediction tools particularly those aligned with forensic practice that have been extracted from data and treatment models rooted in adult criminological paradigms.

As a practitioner, 'risk work' often felt like a heavy and isolating weight to carry so became the topic of my research for my MSc in Psychoanalytic Observation and Reflective Practice explored

‘What are the emotional experiences of practitioners working with risk in the area of harmful sexual behaviour? (Cairns, 2018). Risk is big business and a reality of our human experience. We are all risk assessed in our everyday lives - from buying for car insurance or our credit rating. Ulrich Beck in his propositions on ‘risk society’ deems our preoccupation of ‘risk’ as being a very modern affair suggesting that ‘risk may be defined as a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself’ (2009, p. 21). From scientific and industrial developments emerges a sense that the ‘unknowable’ is in our control and ‘uncertainties can be turned into probabilities’ (Douglas, 1992, p. 42) through development of risk science. The pervasiveness of this concept of risk reaches deep into the facets of our existence, particularly moral and political dimensions of our world, and is dominant in discourses on health, justice and welfare. The desire to control risk can become compelling and the lure of ‘certainty’ brings a sense of ‘ontological security’ which can become woven into our very existence (Shoesmith, 2016, p. 117). In his explanation of the normative horizon of risk in our world, Beck highlights risks’ boundless thirst for reality as it swallows up risk consumers ‘obeying the laws of all or nothing’ (Beck, 2009, p. 4). Risk science becomes central to potentially impossible mandates upon children and young people’s lives particularly in ‘the often messy, irrational emotional terrain’ of child protection work and despite best efforts to predict and prevent, knowledge of clients’ lives are incomplete, fragmentary and intermittent – often luck and chance come to the fore when harm is avoided (Davies, 2008, p. 144). Munro (2010) echoes this in her warning ‘what should be abandoned is any claim to be able to foretell the future with sufficient accuracy as to warrant singling out one child as ‘future menace to society’” (p. 128) as an inaccurate view that human behaviour has linear causality which can cause insidious impacts on children’s wellbeing and aspirations’ (p. 127).

Brownlie (2001, p.525) echoes the consuming nature of risk when she highlights the subjectivities of children displaying HSB as ‘being risky’ rather than ‘being child’. This may underpin some of the difficulty of separating out HSB from adult sex offending, as seen in use of language, and my own experience of children being seen as ‘mini adult sex offenders’. Their ‘riskiness’ is understood in relation what risk may be lying in wait for adulthood because of their past and fears about what they will do next. The reduction in complexity of what ‘being risky’ means can also be witnessed in relation to where risk is located. Individual and ecological contexts can be stripped down and packed into a ‘manageable vacuum’ (Sher, 2014, p. 162) which distances and denies seeing the individual, emotions, relationships and need for support. Risk consideration is often concerned with individual and familial contexts, serving to locate the source of the risky behaviours within the child or young person rather than the social relationships and contexts to which they also belong. The collapsing of broader social and structural factors into individualised microlevel discourses of risk is characteristic of the risk factor prevention paradigm which largely underplays the role of culture and context (Armstrong, 2006, p.268). With a specific focus on HSB, Hallett *et al.*, (2019) articulate this dynamic which creates a ‘focus on the risk that such children and young people may pose, rather than attention given to the risks that they may have faced and their own vulnerabilities’

(p. 455). Garside (2009, p. 14) highlights the preoccupation with interventions aimed towards risks posed by children and young people, thus placing responsibility on them, at the expense of socially mediated risks, vulnerabilities and 'risky social arrangements' they face in their everyday lives which serves in directing attention away from the socio-structural factors that shape their 'riskiness'. Through complex analysis of the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, a prospective longitudinal study of 4300 young people in Scotland, McAra and McVie (2016) conclude striking findings which support consistent and strong associations between gender, poverty and youth violence. Although not specific to sexual violence, they signal the importance of viewing young people involved with violence as vulnerable children, rather than offenders, and their behaviour as 'symptomatic of deeper-seated needs' (p. 76). This resonates with Hackett *et al.*, (2024) study on long term outcomes of young people who display HSB stating:

.....stopping a child from sexually abusing others is a necessary but insufficient intervention goal. Despite the low reported sexual recidivism rates for children and adolescents with harmful sexual behaviour, many policy responses are still uniquely concerned with risk of reoffending and consequently much practice remains weighted towards this issue as a primary concern. Simply stopping a child from continuing something that, even without intervention, is not likely to continue, is hardly a triumph, especially if in the process that child's broader life chances are ruined or severely inhibited by the consequences of our interventions and policies.

(Hackett *et al.*, 2024, p. 3)

In professional practice, risk assessment aims to reduce the likelihood of further harm, reinforcing the implicit expectation that practitioners have the capacity to prevent HSB. This is shaped by the broader child protection frameworks, which operate on the parallel assumption that child abuse can be both detected and prevented. From my own experience I know that this can feel heavy as the cost of a child being harmed couldn't be higher. Yakely (2007, p. 82) warns we should not forget the dangers of developing omnipotent or complacent attitudes that we can ever eliminate risk as mistakes and tragedies will inevitably occur and we must resist the increasing tendency in society to blame. At best we should strive for containing environments where effective communication can help professionals manage risks safely and work to reduce them. The UK has endured wide-ranging critique from the many public inquiries into child abuse tragedies and the 'security' that 'risk technology suggests is seductive' (Broadhurst, 2010, p.1048). Foster (2001) describes risk prediction as being put in place to eliminate rather than understand that risk is unavoidable and inevitable – the function could be seen as both an internal and external social defence system.

4.2 Looking backwards

The landscape of literature around HSB reflects a deeply complex and troubling social issue that impacts a significant number of children and young people. The scale of HSB strengthens the

rationale for this project given the profound impact upon lives, families, communities, systems and societies. On the surface defining HSB appears simple, yet the literature reflects complexities around framing and understanding the problem which are contextually nuanced and shaped by the systems of response. Several commentators draw upon the notion of 'policy resistance' as making issues around HSB particularly liable to resistance at policy levels including the strong public emotions that emerge around child sexual abuse and socially constructed binaries (victim/perpetrator and adult/child) that get in the way of bringing issues together (Letourneau *et al.*, 2014, McKibbin and Humphreys, 2020). Letourneau *et al.*, (2014, p. 225) observe how strong emotions and defences around issues of child sexual abuse generated two distinct 'balkanised professional fields' centred on either victimisation or perpetration rather than shared agenda which 'interfered with the development of a unified, coherent approach to addressing and preventing child sexual abuse'.

4.2.1 Children and childhood

This deeply concerning phenomenon can be conceptualised differently in various academic arenas, but dominating knowledges of HSB is often structured in distinctly positivist paradigms. Children and young people who present HSB are framed as a clinically distinct population violating of developmentally expected, biologically determined trajectories of sexual and social behaviours digressing from assumed normative, unproblematic or unharmful behaviours. Considering HSB from an interpretivist paradigm, threads of dominant political, social and moral constructions of childhood, abuse and risk intertwine. James and Prout (2015, p. 12) suggest that the delinquent child, from the 'scientific gaze' upon a natural and universal evolutionary model of social and rationalisation, becomes framed as a 'failure to be harmoniously socialized into society's functioning' that is, in effect, 'failure to be human'.

In many Western contexts dominant social constructions of child and childhoods, emerging around the 19th century, were of children as innocent, vulnerable, dependent and at risk alongside opposing social constructions as delinquent, knowing and as risk to other and social order (James and Prout, 2015; Jenks, 2005). Robinson (2008, p. 16) suggests that innocence is the 'ultimate signifier' of what it is to be a child and of childhood itself. The indelible potency of childhood innocence is the 'genesis of all child protection and delinquency systems in terms of moral and symbolic crusades' (Piper, 2000, p. 50) and is now culturally and institutionally entrenched (McAlinden, 2018, p. 04). Cook (2019, p. 05) explores the 'conceptual hazard' in Childhood Studies when a child is not conceptually considered a child resulting in 'right' and 'wrong' childhoods going underexplored. This is echoed in Aitken's examination of young people's geographies identifying the 'unchildlike child' who become demarcated as 'other people's children', fuelling moral panics which become a 'moral assault of young people' (2002, p. 147).

4.2.2 The emergence of child sexual abuse, sex offending and HSB

Idealised notions of childhood innocence have become enshrined in the contemporary public image of the child to produce child-as-victim generating traction for protectionist discourses upon which public institutions of childhood are founded. Social stories of child sexual abuse emerged in the UK around the 1980's closely followed by a paralleling counter field of interest in adult sex offenders. Embedded within dominant discourse of child sexual abuse, Kitzinger (2015, p. 145) argues child abuse above all else is a 'violation of childhood' and a fetishist glorification of 'innate innocence'. Implicit within the abuse of childhood itself are pervasive sentiments of what childhood should be and, at any particular point in time, becomes the measure of that which is considered abusive (Jacobson, 2001, p. 232). However, it is important to note that 'clear, consistent and enforced legalistic constructions of childhood do not by themselves change or reinforce protective social norms...those norms that would ameliorate the frequency of abuse of trust and power that leads to harm' (Pasura *et al.*, 2013, p. 206). Further, innocence and vulnerability can render the ascribed 'victim', and diametrically oppositional 'perpetrator', as static and one-dimensional positions whereby the experience and politics of the victim can only truly be understood in terms of its relationship to the perpetrator (McEvoy and McConnachie, 2012). This is particularly problematic for our understanding of the young people with HSB who may simultaneously both 'victim' 'perpetrator' of abusive experiences. Moreover, Munro (2017, p. 425) states that assumed vulnerability in relation to sexual assault 'risks robbing the concept of its critical edge' and 'flattening different experiences and degrees of precariousness and skirting over more complex ways in which situational and structural factors intersect to produce susceptibility to and resilience against abuse'.

Awareness of sexual abuse *by* children became a clinically and socially distinct phenomenon around the late 1980's, indelibly shaped by public responses to the growing awareness of sexual abuse. The social phenomena gained shape and meaning within social processes whereby children's behaviours 'become reconstituted at social, institutional and societal levels to become adult creations including crimes' (Haydon and Scraton, 2000, p. 423). Christie (1998, p. 121) further articulates this process 'acts are not, they become, so also with crimes. Crime does not exist, crime is created. First there are acts, then follows a long process of giving meaning to those acts'. Brownlie (2001, p. 524) highlights how the connection between sex and risk have been played out upon the site of the bodies and minds of children for a long time. Piper (2000, p. 49) notes that it is difficult to 'sustain an image of a child who is both sexualised and deserving to rights to protection'. Such transgressions of the sanctity of sexual innocence render the child displaying HSB, regardless of their own victimisation, within a liminal space suspended between child-victim and child-perpetrator- theoretically everywhere yet nowhere.

In its early stages, the study of harmful sexual behaviour was largely shaped by fields focused on adult offenders, rooted in a positivist framework. Worling (2013, p. 80) highlights five misconceptions that dominated the evaluation and treatment of children starting in the 1980s,

referred to as the 'five Ds': deviant, delinquent, disordered, deficient and deceitful. These criminologically influenced perspectives, as described by Myers (2002, p. 335), primarily labelled children as 'abusers,' focusing on their actions rather than considering important factors such as age, maturity, cognitive development and social or familial contexts. This portrayal of children as 'abusers' operates on two levels: first, aligning them with the idea of the adult sex offender which disregards developmental differences between adults and children, and secondly by assigning them a fixed, stigmatizing identity. Brownlie (2001) argues that this identity, which positions the child as 'risky,' overshadows the notion of them as 'being a child,' reflecting adult fears about their potential future (p. 352). This conceptualisation of children created a prevailing attitude that focuses not only on their problematic behaviour but also on the belief that these behaviours will inevitably lead to adult sexual offending. As a result, professional interventions aimed to interrupt what was perceived as an unavoidable progression toward becoming an adult offender, rather than supporting the child's overall development. This perspective was commonly reflected in academic discussions of the time. For example, Cantwell (1988, p. 579) examined 'very young perpetrators,' suggesting that children as young as six were contributing to a pool of future adolescent and adult offenders. Becker and Abel (1984), as cited in Campbell (2008, p. 75), estimated that a typical adolescent sex offender could commit as many as 380 sexual offenses over their lifetime. These assumptions of inevitability contradicted the prevailing youth justice principles of the 1990s, which emphasized evidence showing that most young people outgrow such behaviours. However, the 'young abuser' was increasingly seen as a distinct type of offender (Masson & Hackett, 2003), as highlighted in an NCH committee report:

‘Current perspectives suggest that untreated sexual offenders typically reoffend, and that without intervention, young male sexual abusers are likely to continue this behaviour into adulthood. Unlike general delinquency, the trajectory for young abusers is perceived to involve escalation into habitual sex offending, making early intervention crucial to prevent the development of long-term abusive patterns’
(NCH, 1992, p. v)

Professional understandings of child and adolescent harm can be framed within disciplinary siloes and often dominated by clinical and legal discourses hungry for risk prediction. In their bid for a contextualised biopsychosocial understanding of HSB, McCuish and Lussier (2017, p. 71) call out the scientific community's continued focus on the 'person' which neglects the 'behaviour' and 'the psychosocial developmental context in which it occurs'. Furthermore, Hallett *et al.*, (2019) highlight that:

‘Stigmatising children and young people who have displayed HSB is therefore highly problematic in that it detracts from the needs and context under which such behaviours arise and occur, while also pathologising children and young people’
(Hallett *et al.*, 2019, p. 444)

4.3 Looking outwards

Situating this thesis within a landscape of knowledge leads me to look further to draw upon concepts that are relevant to social, spatial and systemic dimensions of safety, risk and rights.

4.3.1 Safety

Juxtaposing the heavy presence of risk in literature around HSB, the notion of safety is conspicuously absent in many discourses. Empirical evidence around the nature of abuse experienced by children and young people who display HSB would suggest that many children and young people who display HSB have endured profound breaches to their internal and external safety. These breaches may be multidimensional in nature including disruptions (or complete absences) of safe relationships, safe boundaries, safe care, physical safety, emotional safety and sexual safety. Furthermore, I would suggest that when safety is discussed e.g. safety planning, it tends to relate to safety of others and safety relating to repeated HSB which can eclipse the significance of unmet safety both before and after HSB occurs. The notion of safety represented in safety planning may also reify a representation of safety focussed on the reduction or absence of risk as opposed to the emotional, physical and relational experience of safety. Borrowing from organisationally oriented safety culture literature expands this conceptual confusion around safety and risk as Reason (2000) contends that the ‘pursuit of safety abounds with paradox’ – one of which being safety as ‘defined and measured more by its absence than by its presence’ (p. 3). The language of safety has become entangled in our systemic parlance including a conflation with responses to risk such as the term ‘safe centres’ for secure units (where liberty is restricted) and when children and young people are moved to ‘places of safety’ through legal measures as a way of managing their or others risk. This brings into question the meanings of ‘safe’ including whose safety, what is being claimed and what becomes taken for granted. A report by HM Inspectorate of Probation (2022) highlighted how safety concerns relating to children themselves and the safety of other people were ‘overlapping and intertwined’. Often the locus of change is in the young person rather than social conditions that inhibit their experience of being safe. Extending this further, it also positions our systems and interventions as the purveyors of safety which obscures how contact with systems and institutional practices ‘breaks, interrupts, forbids and forces relations denying the young people relations that can help to establish a sense of care and comfort’ which are critical conduits through which safety can be established (Enell and Willińska, 2020, p. 42).

Drawing on discourses of safety from more distant fields, less HSB-specific literature has been very useful in considering the multiplicity and fluidity of safety as a concept. Shuker (2013) argues for a multi-faceted construction of safety that accounts for physical, relational and psychological security. Shuker considers ontological and psychological security in terms of the health of a young person’s ‘sense of self in terms of coherence, stability and wellbeing’ (p. 135). Wroe and Lloyd (2020) reflect on safety in relation to extra familial harm as practices often

rooted in over surveillance through methods including data collection, monitoring and risk which sit in tension with relationship-based and participatory approaches, using relationships of trust to increase safety of young people experiencing harm. Considerations of safety in the context of HSB are deeply intertwined with risk practices including risk assessments. Safety is not measured through absence of risk but about understanding where and how safety can be experienced and enhanced. There is a significant silence in literature regarding safety needs and experiences of young people who display HSB, despite their often-complex histories and navigation of complex social worlds. We need to cultivate a collective capacity to hold multiple safety needs of different children - not merely as factors explaining behaviour, but as fundamental to human rights. This perspective underscores the importance of fostering safer social environments, relationships and communities, rather than focusing solely on reducing individual risk.

4.3.2 Sexuality and gender

Just like notions of childhood, children and young people's sexuality are not static nor vacuum packed and aspects of the reality of developing sexualities can become consumed by adult narratives, projections and fears. Looking beyond children as ignorant of sexual matters, chronologically asexual, passive and powerless, we can see children in their everyday lives which are nested in social relationships and contexts through which they experience doing, being and becoming sexual. This shifts the gaze towards children as active meaning makers of their own lives and bodies and not 'passive receiver's or cultural dupes' (Bragg, 2015, p. 97). Sexuality comes 'into being' through enactments dependant on and produced through social, cultural, material, relational practices in the everyday lives of children and adults (Sparrman, 2015, p. 124). Children become 'active interpreters' of the social worlds around them, making sense with their peers, and learning, enacting and constructing sexual selves through embodied practices and pleasures (Jackson and Scott, 2015, p. 50). Sexual meanings, identities and scripts are produced and shaped through interpersonal, social and cultural spheres rather than solely through biological and individual internal drives. Allen (2013) illustrates the spatialisation of sexuality and sexual embodiment of young people within the school setting through analysis of the enmeshment of 'official' and 'unofficial' ways young people learn, code and practice sexuality and space. This directly challenges historical and contemporary beliefs around the process of sexual 'knowing', sexual ignorance and one dimensional understandings of sexual development. Analysis of sexual geographies of schooling shines light on how space shapes sexuality, how young people 'access and mobilise agency' within the spatial and material arrangements of school which serves to discourage positive sexual embodiment and regulates sexuality through heteronormative and gendered practices (Allen, 2013). Young people are both constrained by the structural and reproductive nature school spaces yet simultaneously learn, reclaim and recast materials and spaces recoding them as 'sexual', such as changing rooms, playing fields and libraries, through embodied, social and relational everyday practices (Allen, 2013). On the other side of anxiety and fear, processes of *being*,

doing and *becoming* sexual within childhood become multidimensional and developing through complex processes of learning and 'knowing' through hidden curriculums of situated and embodied practices of everyday life.

Missing from many debates are the voices, subjectivities and meanings of boys within these problematic and problematised sexual and social dynamics. Bragg (2015) asserts that potent male sexual subjectivities are rarely framed as concerns for heterosexual male identities and only as concerns for girls. In the waves of moral panic around the sexualisation of girls, prevention measures tend to rest upon individualised, risk averse strategies tackling the threat 'one penis at a time' and, in the case of sexual assault, simplistic messaging around 'don't rape anyone; don't get raped; don't let your friends get raped' (Hirsch and Khan, 2020, p. xii). Sexual and social practices can be understood as part of broader social practices including local, gendered, classed and racialised norms and idealised, hegemonic representations of masculinities (Harvey and Ringrose, 2015). 'Locally specific' and 'socially embodied' hegemonies of masculinities can be symbolised in the everyday lives of boys which hold authority despite most men and boys never achieving this (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Implicit in dominant narratives around harmful sexual behaviours, particularly boys, appears to be the perils of the 'knowing child' and oversexualised, powerful enactment of sexual agency with disregard for the consequences. Yet, in their powerful analysis of (cis heterosexual) sexual assaults on US University campus, Hirsh *et al.*, (2019) illuminate social and cultural dimensions of sexuality including powerful dynamics of (heterosexual) gendered sexual scripts that manifest in individual and interpersonal relationships and behaviour. Hirsh *et al.*, (2019, p. 30) highlight aspects of this including the male's 'gendered job' of pursuing sex and seeking consent and the female's 'gendered job' as 'stopping it or not' which reinforce the troubling logic of 'not saying no' to be consent which is particularly problematic given trauma responses to sexual abuse which can often be fear based physiological protective mechanisms such as freezing. When masculinity is equated with (unceasing) sexual desire and sexuality is socially produced, through gendered scripts including the male's responsibility to secure consent, thus rendering boys and men's experiences of non-consensual experiences as 'culturally illegible' (Hirsh *et al.*, 2019, p. 30) which is particularly powerful when considered in relation to the significant evidence which accounts for the experiences of sexual abuse of boys who display HSB.

Sharma (2015) explores male survivors of child sexual abuse articulating the various ways that sexual abuse can be a 'gender-transgressive' experience for boys and men including profound breaches of hegemonic masculine social roles and scripts, and interconnected notions of heteronormativity, such as invulnerability, silencing and responsibility particularly when the abuser is a female and fears regarding masculinity (p. 125). Messerschmitt (2018) emphasises the fluidity of masculinities, including hegemonic and dominant, which can be fleeting and dependant on the social context. Exploring intersecting forms of extrafamilial harm in adolescence, Beckett and Lloyd (2022, p. 73) highlight preconceived ideas of victimhood and

gendered response to adolescent harm which highlight dynamics at play of hegemonic masculinity in the social construction and production of HSB.

4.3.3 Place

HSB is inherently spatial. It always happens somewhere but there is a tendency to neglect the role of spatial dimensions in research around HSB. I contend that HSB responses are spatialised practices as risk management and reduction entails close attention, regulation and restrictions around the spaces of the young person's everyday life. Furthermore, often responses lead to spatial disruptions such as moves into or within out-of-home care, including secure care, which can involve moves of significant distances. Compellingly, this contrasts with the spaces in where HSB responses are practiced which tend towards adult-oriented professional spaces such as clinics and offices that often operate within working hours of 9am – 5pm.

Discussions on child sexual abuse often revolve around the 'bad apples' versus 'bad barrels' debate, which contrasts individual pathology and personal disposition—the 'bad apples'—with the broader contexts, cultures, and structures that shape their behaviour—the 'bad barrels' (Death, 2015). This has enabled critical insights into individual understandings of HSB, which can help shape interventions and responses, alongside insights into organisational and situational dynamics which also contribute to the abuse occurring. Research in the field of HSB is dominated by 'dispositional conceptions' of the individual who perpetrates the harm which, whilst very important, falls short in understanding 'how, when, where and against whom' sexual harm will occur' (Molnar *et al.*, 2023, p. 02). This echoes Lloyd's call for a greater focus on where harm between young people takes place stressing that the role of 'place has a greater role in the dynamics of abuse than we often assume' (2022 p. 02).

Space and place are pertinent concepts that unveil dynamics of people, places and things that so often gets lost in the literature around HSB which obscures consideration of spatial dimensions as 'not an outcome; it's part of the explanation' (Massey, 1984, p. 04). Massey defined space as relational and 'constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' and always under construction as 'it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed' (Massey, 2005, p. 09). Interrelated, Cresswell describes place as:

Place is a meaningful site that combines location, locale and sense of place. Location refers to an absolute point in space with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations. Location refers to the 'where' of place. Locale refers to the material setting for social relations – the way a place looks. Locale includes the buildings, streets, parks and other visible and tangible aspects of a place. Sense of place refers to the more nebulous meanings associated with a place: the feelings and emotions a place evokes.

(Cresswell, 2009, p. 169)

Thinking simultaneously with these concepts, Clark and Gallacher (2013) consider the concept of 'space' as more abstract than 'place' with 'space as a container filled with things and people' which becomes a 'surface on which individual places can be pinpointed and mapped' (p. 04). For this reason, I will utilise the concept of 'space' through this thesis but recognise the interconnections between 'place' and 'space'.

Reflecting of the landscape of literature around HSB, I notice how these conceptualisations challenge the one-dimensional nature of how space is represented in contemporary discourses. Space is often represented as a static location of the behaviour or daily life blinkering our curiosity and consideration of the social contexts in which they occur. Space tends to be framed in relation to risk and behaviour which repackage young lives into vacuum packaged narratives void of any dynamic, fluid social realities. An illustrative example of this is Allerdycce and Yates (2012) study which considers HSB displayed by children and young people across contexts of home, wider family and in the community yet speaks in concepts of 'victim crossover', 'victim selection' and 'victim specialisation'. I suggest that such framings contribute to the under-acknowledgment of children and young people as being embedded in complex, overlapping social, relational and physical contexts. Rather than viewing these contexts as static or benign backdrops to behaviour, they should be recognised as crucial spaces that shape experiences of harm, safety and prevention. Furthermore, there may also be implicit messages hidden within discourses that focus narrowly on individuals and individual behaviours that implies a sense of inevitability, as if HSB is written in the trauma tea leaves. Challenging this implicit sense of inevitability opens our eyes to how HSB and other forms of harm can also occur within 'perfect storms' of people, space and time generating promising new paths towards prevention that prioritises safety and protection rather than the management and containment of individuals. Disrupting the dominating individualising discourses repositions safety and risk as situated and spatial through which we can understand behaviour through different lenses. Drawing from scholarship around agency in contexts of fear and risk, Lloyd (2022) proposes elements of agency through the lens of situated agency which considers multidimensional intersections that shape negotiations of safety and risk.



Image Three: Model of elements of 'situated agency' (Lloyd, 2022, p. 05)

This also opens pathways to prevention as Rayment-McHugh *et al.*, (2024) stress that 'only attending to the characteristics of those people who perpetrate abuse, or the children who are harmed, limits opportunities to protect children' (p. 05). Furthermore, when we fail to address harmful spaces, we may reduce risk for individuals but often 'these referred youth would soon be replaced by other children and youth who were continuing to be exposed to very similar family, peer, organisational, and community risk factors' (Smallbone and Rayment-McHugh, 2013, p. 09).

It is not just where the behaviour took place but that place also shapes the social and cultural meanings of the behaviour itself and, looking a little further in the field of literature, exposes interplays of space and HSB which are socially and spatially constructed. Looking at other forms of sexual behaviour that are harmful, we can see that it occurs in different spaces that fall beyond the frame of sexual harm and abuse – more simply HSB that isn't seen as HSB. One vivid example of this 'not' harmful sexual behaviour is the social phenomenon of hazing. Hazing occurs in many contexts including sports, higher education, the military and schools and can manifest in different forms that are not harmful. However, some behaviours enacted through social processes of hazing can be sexual and harmful in nature. Fogel and Quinlan (2021)

acknowledge the definitional challenges around sexual hazing including resistance in literature to label this as sexual violence, offering a definition of sexually violence hazing as:

an initiation ritual that involves verbal aggressions such as sexual harassment and threats and/or physical acts such as forced nudity or sexual touching that need not be done for the purposes of sexual gratification but is instead an act of power. Most importantly, sexually violent hazing involves any act between teammates that has the potential to compromise the sexual integrity of the victim

(Fogel and Quinlan, 2021, p. 354-355)

There are several key aspects of the social functions attributed to hazing, including sexual behaviours, that may allude to why it is constructed in such a starkly different way to HSB and sexual abuse yet entangled in many of the same social dynamics of harm. The social meaning attributes to some forms of hazing demarcates it from other forms of bullying and harassment as it is constructed as forms of initiation and self-governance like a 'litmus test' of dedication, unity and group cohesion (Jeckell *et al.*, 2018). Like HSB and other forms of abuse, hazing can be profoundly traumatic yet become normalised and socially sanctioned, further perpetuated through gendered, sexual and exploitative dynamics that often serve to demasculinise the victim and hyper-masculinise the perpetrator (Jeckell *et al.*, 2018, p. 561). Reflecting on hazing in relation to HSB highlights how socially constructions of masculinity and sexuality shape what behaviours are demarcated as harmful which is highly sensitive to local cultures, contexts and times. This serves as a reminder that most research into HSB is founded upon populations that have been socially and systemically identified in a particular way which may not give the full picture of harm.

4.3.4 Institutions

Reflecting on hazing as a form of harmful behaviour that falls beyond the gaze, leads me to consider literature relating to spaces of abuse underscoring the crucial role of space in shaping our understanding and responses to HSB and other interconnected forms of harm. Exploring several key sites of abuse exposes conditions where harm can flourish including institutional spaces of care and control. This is particularly compelling as these can be considered systematic spaces which are often taken-for-granted as safe. At the time of writing this thesis, Scotland is in the midst of Phase Eight into the abuse of children in residential accommodation for young offenders and children, and young persons in need of care and protection. Scotland in one of many countries that have or are undertaking national inquiries into institutional child sexual abuse including England, Ireland, Australia, USA, France, Germany, Spain and Japan. These include the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales (2015-2022) and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses Child Sexual Abuse in Australia (2013-2017) which exposed the abuse of children and young people in institutions of care to an extent that

feels almost intolerable and unthinkable. Within both these inquiries included consideration of HSB displayed by children and young people with the Australian Royal Commission dedicating an entire volume examining the nature, extent and factors that contributed to HSB and making strong recommendations about enhancing prevention and improving responses. Both inquiries highlight the profound ways that HSB is inextricably connected to the contexts in which it occurs and provides confronting and compelling rationale for looking beyond individual children and their behaviour and into the ecologies of their everyday life. Institutions tasked with the care and control of children and young people, often with histories of abuse prior to admission, are places where abuse can flourish. The Australian Royal Commission heard the voices of 6875 survivors and report that 1 in 6 children were abused by another child within institutional settings (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). The Commission reported the multidimensions of contextual factors which contributed to HSB including being exposed to harmful and violent practices which become normalised. Other aspects of institutional cultures that were identified as contributing include:

- encouragement of sexualised behaviours
- physical and emotional abuse and neglect
- bullying and initiation rituals
- hierarchical structures where children held power over other children
- lack of supervision of children
- lack of understanding of children's sexual development and of harmful sexual behaviours
- inadequate provision of sex education to support healthy behaviours.

(Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017, p. 11)

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in England and Wales reported that children in custody in relation to sexual offence grounds may be particularly at risk of further harmful behaviour but also being victims of sexual abuse in custody and sexual abuse within institutions was higher for children who had histories of prior sexual abuse (IICSA, 2018). Within youth secure estates in England and Wales (Young Offender Institutions, Secure Training Centres and Secure Children's Homes) of the 1070 reports of sexual assault, between 2009-2017, over half were assaults by adults and 385 assaults by other children and reported 'unprecedented levels of violence, suicide and self-harm (IICSA, 2019). These are startling figures which convey a powerful message about the young people's safety in state care both from peers but also from those adults who are in positions of power and authority. Another IICSA report into sexual abuse in residential schools (2020) highlighted that 'special' schools, for children who have special educational needs and disabilities, reported ten times the number of concerns of sexual abuse than mainstream residential schools such as boarding schools. These reports highlight significant barriers to reporting and disclosure which skews the harrowing nature of sexual harm and abuse that occurs between young people and by adults

in institutional settings, compounded and often propagated through organisational cultures and practices. The role of guardianship is also a highly relevant dimension of local contexts including in youth-serving institutional settings as explored by Lockitch *et al.*, (2022) who considered the barriers of guardianship in case studies from the Australian Royal Commission concluding the collective and individual importance of many facets of guardianship which include availability, supervision, capability and, highlighted as the most important dimension and key component, 'willingness to intervene' (p. 666-667). The disturbing findings of institutional inquiries are compelling examples of how places and spaces where young people are cared for and spend time are highly significant to understanding the conditions where safety or harm can flourish which further strengthens the collective capacity to look beyond individual level understandings and responses to change spaces not just people.

4.4 Looking forwards

Much of our contemporary knowledge of child abuse tends towards individualised discourses, targeting individuals involved, through individualised child protection systems, individual level treatment for those who perpetrate abuse and those that are harmed (Firmin and Rayment-McHugh, 2017) McCuish and Lussier (2017, p. 71) call out the scientific community's continued focus on the 'person' which neglects the 'behaviour' and 'the psychosocial developmental context in which it occurs'.

4.4.1 Different knowledge and voices

Reviewing the literature reveals shifts in knowledge moving beyond individual factors towards more socially and contextually sensitive understandings. Interconnected with this paradigmatic shift is movement within the landscape of HSB, often dominated by quantitative paradigms, towards different geographical contexts and representation of different voices. Significantly, strong research is growing traction from Australia, UK, Norway and Sweden amongst other areas, which broadens out understandings across systems and contexts. Some of these different knowledges relates to research that engages with professional experiences such as studies learning from teachers' perspectives about the challenges of making sense of HSB, knowledge, support and emotional impact which shine light on systemic dimensions of the important context of schools (Draugedalen 2020, Draugedalen *et al.*, 2021, and Waters *et al.*, 2021). A growing body of literature is also challenging the nature of knowledge through engagement with different 'voices'. This includes learning through the experiences of adult survivors such as Tener *et al.*'s (2022) study with 16 adult survivors of harmful preadolescent sexual behaviour by peers highlighting societal ambivalence which can impact on survivors being believed, validated and recognised in what can be significant and long term impacts into adulthood. A study by Hackett *et al.*, (2022) engaged adults who had displayed HSB in their childhoods about longer term outcomes- successful, mixed and unsuccessful- stressing the significance of actively supporting future focused needs of young people such as social skills, personal and relational development and not just behaviour specific work. My own study has been inspired by the rich and sensitive research conducted with young people who have

displayed HSB such as McKibbin *et al.*, (2017) where young people contributed significant reflections on their own needs including needs around sexuality education, pornography use and own victimisation experiences. Shortcomings in the field to learn from lived realities of children and young people who have behaved in harmful and risky ways contributes to a potential epistemic echo chamber of knowledge in the field.

Another observation relates to the absence of the voices of children and young people harmed by HSB which are almost entirely missing from discourses which exposes a massive blind spot for the field of understanding, responding and preventing harm (McKibbin *et al.*, 2025). I acknowledge that this literature review also reflects this observed absence of the victim behind the behaviour and if we are to truly embrace listening to different voices then this must place far greater value upon the experiences of those harmed. My endeavour to foreground the voices and lived experiences of young people who have harmed is not intended to overshadow or minimise the harm caused which can have lifelong impacts.

4.4.1 Contextual prevention

Conceptualising the social and spatial dimensions of HSB acknowledges that there is always an interaction between a person and their environment broadening the locus of responses beyond individuals and their behaviour. This signals a paradigm shift in the landscape of research towards more contextually sensitive and responsive understandings and interventions including contextual safeguarding and contextual prevention. Rayment-McHugh *et al.*, (2024) describe contextual prevention as:

an umbrella term for prevention strategies that address the macro- and micro-level structures that provide conditions conducive to CSA. Our conceptual definition is based on the premise that human behaviour – including CSA – is influenced by the context in which it occurs, that some contexts present greater risk for CSA than others and that altering contextual conditions can enhance children’s safety. A contextual prevention theory of change is thus based on creating safer environments for children, as the primary protective mechanism against CSA

(Rayment-McHugh *et al.*, 2024, p. 05)

Traction is building within the UK towards public health approaches to harm such as the inception of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) and subsequent Violence Reduction Unit’s around the UK. The developing global agenda towards prevention of sexual violence and abuse can go some way to create the social conditions whereby the epistemic value may be recognised. Further, conceptual shifts in the field of Child Sexual Exploitation may also lend themselves to valuing the voices and embodied knowledge of young people. Whilst it is fundamental to acknowledge that children who sexually harm can cause significant harm and distress, some aspects of the social, academic and professional reframing of sexual behaviour

of young people from illegal and stigmatised child prostitutes to new models of understanding may be very relevant to this endeavour. Underpinning this repositioning to several forms of Child Sexual Exploitation, which includes but is not specific to abuse through prostitution, were shifts in historical parameters, not least the central concept of young people as 'children' (Hallett *et al.*, 2019).

4.5 Inwards, backwards, outwards, forwards: conTEXT

Exploring the landscape of literature is crucial for situating my study within existing research. The literature not only provides the contextual foundation for my thesis but also highlights gaps in knowledge, supporting my claims and underscoring the original contributions I aim to make. The landscape of literature provides the foundations upon which I develop my conceptual position which informs my research design. In a sense, this landscape of knowledge is in and of itself an important **context**, produced and reproduced in textual forms, which propose as a context. This reflection on context resonated with Laws and Urry's (2004) observations of the how social sciences have 'always been embedded in, produced by, and productive of the social' helping 'bring into being what they also discover' (p. 392).

Drawing from Narrative Inquiry, this exploration on the landscape of literature observed the 'four directions of inquiry inward and outward, backward and forward' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 50). I hope this offers a different and distinctive way of **contextualising** the study looking at important knowledges that lie closer or further away from the current body of knowledge. Reviewing the landscape of literature, I first looked inwards at some of the knowledge around children and young people who display HSB which demonstrates the economic, social and emotional cost of abuse of children, including HSB, and the compelling need to develop greater capacity in research, policy and practice to prevent abuse before it occurs and respond in ways which are effective. Casting the gaze backwards, I considered how HSB has come to be known, shaped by intersecting social constructions over time which is important to understand how and why the focus on individuals and behaviour have been constructed creating distinctive contours on the landscape of knowledge that this study seeks to challenge. This informs my conceptual, paradigmatic position scaffolding the research design to address the gaps in understanding social and spatial dynamics that may be valuable in enhancing safety. Looking outwards, I explored literature that orientates my consideration of social, spatial, relational and contextual dimensions of everyday life leading to reflections on looking forward towards contextual prevention and different ways of knowing to support this study's original contributions by address gaps in our current understanding. Through what Frosh *et al.*, (2002, p. 50) describes as 'boy-centred research', focussing on boy's accounts of their perceptions and experiences which can reveal the social constructions of masculinity. This aligns with Prout and James' (2015, p. 07) account of 'the new sociology of childhood' where children are viewed as actively engaged in the construction of their own lives, social relationships and cultures which are 'worthy of study in their own right, independent of the

perspectives and concerns of adults'. This creates a compelling case for research to actively engage with young people, investing in trying to understand what they have to say about their experiences and social worlds from their point of view.

Chapter Five: Theoretical framework

Situating this study within a theoretical framework has been an iterative process shifting in relation to the discoveries I made through my encounters with participants. As my research sessions with participants unfolded, I came to realise that I was bearing witness to stories rather than making maps. To respect the richness of these stories, I looked towards Narrative Inquiry to help make sense of stories embedded in places. In short, my theoretical framework took a narrative turn, from making maps to mapping stories.

In the early stages of my research design, I intended to use social ecological theories - particularly those developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner - to guide my analysis of the social and spatial dimensions of everyday life. Bronfenbrenner first posited the concept of social ecologies through his presentation of Ecological Systems Theory, published in his scholarly work 'Ecology of Human Development' in 1979. Ecological systems theory has been used to identify contextual points of interventions beyond individuals (Neal and Neal, 2013) disrupts the dominant gaze of HSB and engrained grand narratives of HSB. Decentring the individual as the source of all problems allows young people to be seen 'in terms of their relationships, interactions and processes that define and influence their everyday lives and experiences' orienting attention to how 'relationships and social processes function to support or impede young people's positive identity development which, in turn, shapes their development' (Johns *et al.*, 2017, p. 07). My ideas for the 'research toolbox' envisioned developing maps as collages of different objects, notes and drawings representing participant's life worlds. I was exploring different approaches to data analysis that aligned with interpreting the visual and narrative data scaffolded by a social ecological theoretical framework. The analytic process I anticipated would draw upon grounded theory techniques to work in a back-and-forth inductive process with the multi-layered creative maps that are representative of participants' social, physical and relational worlds. Initial coding would be developed and then further analysed using axial coding as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2008) to elaborate on connections and relations between different phenomena on the maps to elaborate on 'the story of the case' (Flick, 2015, p. 182).

5.1 Taking a narrative turn

My journey to find participants, through a maze of ethics applications, services and gatekeepers, proved to be long and slow. Given the challenges of navigating this maze, my data generation sessions were spread across my second and third years. The research design, including a 'Research Toolbox', offered a range of mediums for participants to share what they wanted to, how they wanted to share, yet I hadn't anticipated the depths they would offer of their everyday worlds. My generous participants took me on journeys through their lives, yet

curiously.....we didn't actually make maps! Not least, the maps I had envisioned in my research design that I could analyse to identify dynamics of safety, risk and rights. In my very first research session with a young participant, he began by taking me on his 'walk' to school viewed through the VR headset, and I tried to capture this like a map of the unfolding commentary. Very quickly I realised this just interrupted the flow, pushing my need to stay rigid with the shape of the 'data' I wanted at the expense of the stories to be told, so I stayed with the splinters of stories as they bounced between people, time and place. Some were tiny threads of stories, whilst others were longer, deeper narratives that stand by themselves like testimonies, all entangled in their everyday lives, their pasts and their futures. It was at this juncture that I reflected upon my theoretical framework and began to think about taking a different journey through my storied 'data'. Encountering my 'data' as stories prompted me to iteratively reconsider analysis of narrative data by leaning into Narrative Inquiry towards the end of my data generation journey. My research was not designed as a pure Narrative Inquiry, but I have drawn on elements of this method to approach my 'data'.

5.2 The three-dimensional prism of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry is the study of experience that is understood through the stories people tell. A 'story', in relation to narrative practice, can be considered as 'a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful' (Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). Narrative Inquiry can be understood as:

...a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry is still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of experience that make up people's lives, both individual and social

(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

The historical and theoretical roots of Narrative Inquiry grew from the work of educationalist and philosopher John Dewey, nearly ninety years ago, which explored understandings of experience. This inspired a Deweyan approach to the space of Narrative Inquiry described as a three-dimensional prism of temporality, place and sociality (Clandinin *et al.*, 2016).

On place, Clandinin *et al.*, (2018, p. 07) describe 'every story has a place: every story, every memory, every experience, is placed'. In my data there are many places referenced and explored that come to form the 'lifescapes' of experiences, including homes, bedrooms, corridors, public places, institutional places, online places, offices, past places, imagined places and unknown places. Different connections to places emerged, such as safe places, places of belonging, favourite and fun places, but also mundane places, frightening spaces, unwelcoming spaces and nightmarish spaces. These places can be understood like scenes

where the action takes place and characters come to be known (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). The Virtual Reality headset created an immersive dimension, as I could bear witness to some of the spaces connected to the experiences the participant was sharing, for example, looking in the gardens of their current or past homes, including the flowers their mum planted in different seasons.

In Narrative Inquiry, the idea of temporality emphasises that lives are always in progress, constantly being shaped by new experiences. It recognises that individuals are 'in the midst' of their unfolding life stories, which are continuously shaped by personal and social contexts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Rather than being fixed, experience is fluid - always evolving and transforming as individuals encounter new situations over time. This means that our understanding of someone's experience is never static, but dynamic, being reshaped as life unfolds. Reflecting on temporality, it is important to note that I encounter young people in their adolescence. Caine *et al.*, (2022) describe the significance and poignancy of narratives of the time of adolescence as:

a time that left many marks and has deeply shaped my understanding of the significance of experience'....'it is these marks that are left, that are not only inscribed on our skin and our bodies but that are being shaped as our bodies and worlds grow in new ways

(Caine *et al.*, 2022, p. 18)

This vivid reflection feels compelling in the context of research around young people, bodies and minds that takes place in adolescence, where social identities crystallise at the confluence of stories we tell ourselves, others and the stories others tell about us. These are indelibly connected to narratives and experiences, as Singer describes:

to understand the identity formation process is to understand how individuals craft narratives from experience, tell these stories internally and to others, and ultimately apply these stories to knowledge of self, others and the world in general

(Singer, 2004, p. 438)

The stories in this study are not only temporally placed but are also moments in developing lives, adding to the potency of the stories young people tell and we tell them that become absorbed like osmosis into their developing identities: hopeful, hopeless or harmful.

Sociality, the third dimension of the three-dimensional prism, gazes into the social conditions around experience and how these may shape the stories people tell, highlighting entanglements between individual experiences and broader social influences. Dimensions of sociality emphasise that stories never exist in isolation but are deeply connected to the

relationships and environments in which they unfold. An individual's narrative is influenced by their relationships with others, as well as by the social, cultural, and historical contexts they inhabit. By analysing these personal and social conditions, Narrative Inquiry seeks to reveal the intricate interplay between the self and surrounding social, physical and relational worlds. This dimension acknowledges that personal stories are both a reflection of individual identity and the wider social landscape.

5.3 Big, small and silent stories

Drawing on elements of Narrative Inquiry, stories not only speak to individual experience but also to residues of social and systemic narratives within which experience is constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). Within the stories of experience in this study lies a deeper layer of institutional narratives—stories not just about 'them' as subjects of our professional gaze, but about 'us' and our systems. Narratives of experience are embedded organisationally exposing how practices and meanings are mediated by organisations and the stories they tell. Within Narrative Inquiry, these can be thought of as big and small stories. Gubrium and Holstein (2009) highlight how organisations have 'big stories to tell, which set the scene for the smaller, individual stories that follow along' (p. 174). The notion of big stories chimes with the grander narratives permeating the field of HSB positioning individuals as locus of both the cause and cure of harm. Returning to my idea of 'flattening', alongside the inherently storied lives of young people who display HSB, I argue that big stories are told about incidents and events narrated institutionally of other people's lives and problems. This is not to discredit or minimise the significance of key events, including the contribution to protecting children through attention to accurate, chronological and cumulating records, individually and collectively. Rather, thinking about big stories creates space for the smaller stories that so easily fall beyond our gaze often lying within mundane, ordinary and everyday spaces (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2009). Travelling through the PhD had sensitised me to big stories such as the literature review (the **context**) and presenting at conferences including NOTA⁵ and ATSA⁶ - where the louder, bigger social stories of harm percolate the grand narratives of HSB. This study seems to hear the smaller stories, voices seldom heard, drowned out by the louder bigger stories that echo systemically, leaving impressions, like invisible footprints, on developing young lives. The endeavour to hear the smaller stories is not to rewrite the bigger stories, rather to contribute to a dialogue between one another. It searches between the bigger, overarching stories permeating our systems and the smaller stories from the everyday personal, often fragmented accounts of everyday lives. It is within such liminal spaces that we can appreciate how interconnected, dynamic and mutually

⁵ NOTA (National Organisation of the Treatment of Abuse) is a UK based organisation which brings together research and practice around the prevention and treatment of sexual abuse by both adults and children.

⁶ ATSA (Association for the Treatment and Prevention of Sexual Abuse) is very similar to NOTA in its primary mission around research and practice around the prevention and treatment of sexual abuse based in USA.

shaping they are. Together they could generate new narratives around HSB and expand our capacity to reflect on those who harm ('them') and those who seek to help ('us').

Big and small stories also reflect different philosophical paradigms shaping the landscape of knowledge around HSB; the bigger stories are often rooted in positivist orientations that can make claims to validity and generalisation. Relativist ontological and interpretivist epistemology paradigms reach into smaller stories reflecting suppressed knowledge previously overshadowed by dominant narratives (Knibb, 2013). Rather than rejecting grand narratives, thinking about them together creates space for complementary, contrasting or conflicting knowledge that challenges knowledge and opens new horizons. Smaller stories of everyday, lived realities shine light on nuanced contexts which more quantitative patterns of knowledge may struggle to reach, thus laying foundations for contextually sensitive responses in local and relational social worlds. When big and small stories contrast or conflict, they illuminate blind spots and echo chambers of knowledge that reify only the louder, bigger stories. Such tensions expose new opportunities, perspectives and pathways towards the continuing evolution of knowledge around HSB that contributes to prevention and reduces the significant cost of the complex harm it creates.

A further delicate but important element of stories spoken in this research is recognising the silent and silenced stories that remain untold and/or unheard – those harmed and impacted by the behaviours of the young people I met and heard about. These remain silent yet present, yet I must acknowledge these in this thesis. Remembering these silent, unknown stories poses an ongoing ethical and reflexive commitment that I have strived to remain continually alert to. It was, and continues to be, a complex emotional task holding together the harm, those who harmed and those who were harmed without collapsing under ambivalent emotional forces. As best I could, I navigated these ethical and emotional storms with awareness of *both/and* rather than *either/or* splitting and a belief that we need to use our power to understand, support and prevent those who harm as children and rights holders as an ethical imperative. However, this must never be at the expense of silent and silenced stories of those who have been harmed.

5.4 Ontology and epistemology

The ontological and epistemological foundations of this study shape my research aims, methodology, and interpretations. They shape how I approach the 'reality' of the worlds I seek to understand and, in turn, how knowledge of these worlds is created and can be gathered. Despite the narrative turn in theoretical orientation, the conceptual foundations framing my endeavour remain anchored in the same ontological and epistemological foundations. This means rejecting an objective reality that exists to be discovered about the social and spatial dynamics of everyday life. Rather, the ontological assumption of relativism is that reality and truth are situated, multiple and subjective (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The stories that I encountered do not describe an independent social world 'out there' but are reflective of

multiple realities constructed and shaped by experience, social context and culture. From a relativist orientation, I am not separate from the research nor the stories that unfolded. They are as much about the contextual spaces where they are situated, including the context of knowledge around HSB, as they are about the context of the research space between us which generated stories. This also required an ongoing commitment to reflexivity and noticing myself in relation to the participants, spaces and stories. Stories are slippery with multiple meanings and only ever partial, like glimpses into moments in time of their telling, but they become strengthened through contextualising them rather than reducing them through an 'analytic process of excavating for a skeletal core meaning' (Knibb, 2013, p.28).

Interconnected with the relativist ontological research paradigm lies the epistemological position that determines assumptions of knowledge and what can be known. This study is epistemologically positioned within the interpretivist paradigm and social constructivism. From this perspective, meaning is deeply intertwined with 'reality' considered as 'somewhere knowable but not as separate from human subjectivity' (Porta and Keating 2008, p. 23) foregrounding a commitment to subjective meaning and contextual knowledge. Social constructionism considers knowledge and reality as socially constructed, rather than objective or naturally occurring. From this epistemological perspective, knowledge is constructed and transmitted through social interactions and practices, thus much of what we perceive as reality is dependent on shared assumptions. Such an approach highlights the constructed nature of the HSB, which is reflected in the lack of consensus on terminology - ranging from 'harmful sexual behaviour', used in the UK, Europe and Australia, to 'juvenile/adolescent sex offending/offender' in the US. Different framings of the behaviour may not fit together ontologically yet exist as an unquestioned shared 'landscape' of knowledge. How this behaviour comes to be known is highly dependent on how it is identified, understood and responded to, which is often taken for granted as objective 'fact'. Law (2004) captures the complex nature of constructed 'indefinite objects' which also shapes the contexts in which the phenomenon 'exists':

we slowly came to believe that we were dealing with an object that wasn't fixed, an object that moved and slipped between different practices in different sites. This was an object that, as it moved and slipped, also changed its shape. It was a shape-changing object that, even more misleadingly, also changed its name. It was an object whose slippery shape-changing also reflected what the managers and other participants took, perhaps correctly, to be an expression of organisational dislocation, fragmentation and disorganisation. So its relevant context out there changed too

(Law, 2004, p.79)

This draws attention to what is often taken for granted, falling beyond the dominant gaze – the very contexts which produce knowledge and practice, such as research, policy and practice

arenas. Grand narratives of HSB appear so matter of factly, they obscure what, to use Laws' words, is a very slippery concept highly liable to shapeshifting. This is not simply about being pedantic about semantics ('HSB' or 'juvenile/adolescent sex offender') to tell the same story but shines light on what gets lost in translation, slipping out of view. Different terminologies manifest like veils upon powerful meanings and motivations, including children and young people as mad, sad or bad and as children, abusers or offenders? These smaller, slippery stories and the power imbued in different words matter in very real ways especially to the main characters of our stories – children and young people.

This study is underpinned by a constructivist epistemology which assumes that knowledge, identity and social meaning are co-constructed through interactions and shaped by cultural, institutional and historical contexts. It is important to consider the theoretical framing that underpins how meaning, knowledge and experience are understood within this research. A constructivist approach assumes that reality is socially produced and mediated through language, relationships and institutional practices. This orientation necessarily invites engagement with questions of power- whose meanings prevail, how dominant truths are established and how individuals come to understand themselves within those truths. Given that this thesis explores the 'lifescapes' of young people in contexts marked by social regulation, gendered expectations and experiences of harm, it is crucial to examine the dynamics of power that shape these realities. Within this framework, power is not an external or supplementary concept- it is fundamental. Power shapes what can be known, who can speak, and how meanings and experiences are interpreted. To provide this theoretical coherence, I draw on Michel Foucault's (1991) work, which conceptualises power as relational, productive and embedded in discourse. Situated within this theoretical position, this thesis views power not as a possession or a structure imposed from above, but as a dynamic, relational force that circulates through discourses, practices and social relations. Exploring key concepts such as discourse, subjectivity, hegemony and hypermasculinity is important as power threads through every layer of the study- from my position as researcher to the research relationship and reflections on everyday life. Foucault's work marks a shift from thinking about power as repressive, something that restricts or dominates, to understanding it as productive. Power produces knowledge, identities and 'truths'. For Foucault, power and knowledge cannot be separated: every claim to knowledge is simultaneously an operation of power, defining what is true and what is excluded as false. According to Foucault (1991), power and knowledge interact to shape possibilities by establishing distinctions, definitions and classifications. This process involves ongoing practices of measuring, comparing, standardizing and ranking across dimensions of time and space, carving out the contours of the knowledge landscape within which this study sits. Power operates throughout research itself- my researcher's gaze, the framing of questions, and the interpretation of participants' narratives. As a researcher trained in social work and concerned with ethical practice, I am acutely aware of the asymmetries of power inherent in representing others' stories. The 'research gaze' can never be neutral: it shapes what can be seen and what remains invisible. From a Foucauldian perspective, my

position as researcher is not outside of power but embedded within the very discourses I seek to analyse. Acknowledging this, I have sought to remain reflexive about my own professional and academic authority- my power to define, interpret and write about my interactions with participants' stories and what meanings these may offer. The research relationship itself is a site of power and knowledge production. Following Foucault's view that power is relational, I understand the research encounter as a space where power is negotiated rather than possessed.

Foucault's concept of discourse offers a lens for examining how power shapes the social worlds that participants inhabit. Discourses define the limits of what can be said, thought and done. In this study, discourses of youth, risk, gender and responsibility intersect to construct young people's identities in particular ways. Foucault's notion of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1980) is also relevant here as institutions that appear in stories of everyday life, such as schools, social work and care systems, operate through subtle mechanisms of surveillance, categorisation and normalisation. They do not merely respond to young people's behaviour; they shape the conditions under which that behaviour is understood and managed. These systems create the boundaries between what is seen as acceptable, risky or at risk, thereby producing the very categories through which intervention is justified. In the context of HSB, Foucault's insights allow us to move beyond moral or individualising frameworks to consider how power operates through the discourses that define and respond to harm. The construction of 'harmful sexual behaviour' is itself an outcome of power/knowledge relations: psychological, legal, and social work discourses establish definitions that shape both professional responses and young people's self-understandings.

Moreover, HSB cannot be separated from broader discourses of gender and sexuality. Normative constructions of masculinity, reinforced by media, peers and institutional practices, inform how boys and young men understand power, control, and intimacy. The concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) intersects here with Foucault's view of power as productive - producing not only social hierarchies but also embodied ways of being. A Foucauldian perspective thus encourages a shift from viewing HSB as solely an individual pathology to understanding it as situated within wider cultural and discursive regimes that normalise gendered power relations. Hypermasculinity, an intensified form of conventional masculinity, is marked by the glorification of violence, a fascination with risk and danger, and a detached or exploitative approach to sexual relationships, often emerging in response to perceived threats to dominant masculine norms and widely celebrated in media such as films and video games, as well as within right-wing political movements and online communities associated with the 'manosphere' (Waugh, 2025). Hyper-masculinity becomes an exaggerated form of hegemonic masculinity emphasizing physical strength, aggression and sexuality - produced and reproduced through discourses of power (Hickey & Mooney, 2018) Thus, discourses of hypermasculinity encourage performances of control, dominance and emotional detachment - qualities valorised in some contexts yet pathologized in others. Foucauldian

perspectives on discourse and power reveals the normalizing and regulatory functions embedded within dominant discourses which create the conditions for hypermasculinity (Foucault, 1981, 1982) These discourses do not simply describe reality; they actively produce it. Drawing on Foucault's (1978, 1980) conception of power as diffuse, relational, and productive, hypermasculinity is not seen as originating within individual boys or men, but as emerging through cultural and institutional discourses that privilege particular performances of gender. These discourses circulate through media, education, peer cultures and social work practices, shaping what it means to be recognised as 'male' or 'strong.' In this sense, hypermasculinity represents the intensification of a broader hegemonic discourse that constructs dominance, control and invulnerability as markers of masculine success.

Foucault's later work on subjectivity (1988) explores how individuals come to know themselves through power relations. Power does not only act upon individuals; it also acts within them, shaping how they internalise norms and govern themselves. This process of 'subjectification' helps explain how young people may simultaneously resist and reproduce dominant discourses in their 'lifescapes'. Their narratives often reveal tensions between compliance with social expectations and moments of resistance or redefinition that Foucault might call 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988). Subjectivity is therefore both a site of constraint and of possibility. By understanding subjectivity as constructed through discourse and power avoids psychologising young people's experiences and instead situates them within broader fields of social meaning. This framing also invites attention to the ways young people exercise agency- how they reinterpret, negotiate or subvert dominant expectations in their daily lives.

Seen through a Foucauldian lens, power threads through every layer of this research: from the epistemological stance to the methods, relationships and analysis. It shapes the production of knowledge in the research process; it structures the discourses that define harmful sexual behaviour and gender permeating the everyday practices through which young people navigate their 'lifescapes.' Recognising power in this holistic way brings theoretical coherence to the thesis. It allows connections between the macro (social and institutional structures), the meso (discursive practices and systems), and the micro (subjectivities and relationships). It also sustains a reflexive awareness of my own position within these power/knowledge dynamics. Rather than claiming neutrality, this perspective situates myself as the researcher and the research itself as participants in the ongoing circulation of power.

5.5 Limitations of Narrative Inquiry

Drawing on elements of Narrative Inquiry is not without limitations, particularly the focus on personal stories and experiences, which are inherently subjective – both of participants and myself as a researcher. The epistemological underpinnings create tensions around validity, including any claims I could make as to my legitimacy in representing stories with validity to my findings but also the validity of the stories as shared by participants. As articulated through

my narrative beginnings, my research is deeply entangled in my own story as a social worker and the many, many stories of young people and their families I have supported who have been harmed and/or who have harmed. This makes objectivity impossible, as I cannot deny my own positionality and bias in co-constructing the storied data and interpretation of narratives. I have created space to make sense of myself as a 'researcher' and stay as alert as I can to how my own biases and blind spots play out in my research endeavour. These include making reflective notes, creating written and digital 'stories' for supervision, the thinking space of the print studio and the 'letter' to potential participants called 'To You, From Me: About Us' (Appendix Two: 'to you, from me: about us'). Participant stories are deeply subjective and always shaped by the context of research, my presence and my gaze. Reflections on gaze earlier in this thesis highlight the subtle ways in which some stories can be spoken, shared and seen, while other experiences and emotions remain unspoken, hidden in the shadows. It is important to resist any claims that lie beyond the scope of this study yet recognise that there is space for different kinds of knowledge, especially when thinking about such profoundly distressing and disturbing subjects such as HSB that are, and should be, difficult for us to think about. Cooper articulates practice-near research which brings research close enough to 'smell the real' expanding our capacity for personal, professional and societal self-knowledge including the discovery of 'complex particulars' which:

...just because you are studying specific cases or a small range of particulars does not mean the research has no wider or even universal significance. The closer one comes to a single case, the more its uniqueness and particularity demands to be understood; but equally, the more its value for the illumination of all other cases with which there is a family resemblance becomes evident. This view of matters poses, in my view, a fundamental challenge to the continuing dominance of a positivist world view

(Cooper, 2009, p. 432)

Chapter Six: Methodology

In the literature review, I reflected upon the landscape within which the social phenomenon of HSB is situated and what I describe as the **context** reflecting the power of textual forms of knowledge in shape grand narratives. These prop up dominant paradigms by (re)producing knowledges focused on individuals and individualised responses often enacted at the local level through orientations of welfare and justice. A significant gap of knowledge relates to the dominant gaze upon individuals, individual-level variables and individualised responses which are primarily focused on the individual and their behaviour, which fail to consider social ecologies of everyday life. This creates a narrow focus on behaviour and risk in research, policy and practice despite empirical evidence that points to young people who often experience complex early lives and can go on to have difficult lives. Interconnected with the narrow focus on behaviour and risk, there is also a paucity of research that engages young people who display HSB themselves. This is a complex but curious phenomenon considering the growing traction in the participation of young people around so many other social agendas that recognise the value of their contributions and knowledge. From my practice experience, young people often had powerful and important reflections on their own lives, which inspired this study foregrounding the perspectives of young people. Balfe *et al.*, (2019) highlight the:

inherent tension in trying to excavate the voices and experiences of young people by relying on professional reports. This may be social equivalent of trying to identify an important scientific problem through a microscope, without knowing for sure the full extent to which the microscope's lens is clear or flawed

(Balfe *et al.*, 2019, p. 190)

Young people's perspectives are not only a rich, valuable source of knowledge towards new understandings of responses and prevention but also a recognition of young people as rights holders, including Article 12 of the UNCRC, which recognises rights to participate and express views on matters which affect them.

From the literature review and theoretical framework, I developed the following research questions:

- How do boys who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) narrate their experiences of risk, safety, and children's rights in everyday life?
- How do practitioners, reflecting on boys they have supported (who have displayed HSB), narrate the boy's experiences of risk, safety, and children's rights in everyday life?

- What do the narratives of and about boys who have displayed HSB reveal about the influence of social and spatial dimensions shaping risk, safety, and children's rights?
- In what ways can the stories told by and about boys who have displayed HSB inform new approaches to prevention and intervention?

This study seeks to address gaps in understanding HSB by advancing knowledge on contextually, socially, and spatially responsive perspectives of young people who display HSB. My focus was on exploring the social and spatial dynamics of risk and safety, examining how these factors are shaped by the environments young people navigate. The research was designed to provide a safe and supportive space for young people who have displayed HSB to share their perspectives on their everyday worlds

6.1 The porcupine's dilemma: participation and/or/as protection

The philosopher Schopenhauer penned the parable of the porcupine's dilemma, capturing the dynamics of yearning for closeness which provokes their sharp quills, forcing them apart:

(§396) On a cold winter's day a community of porcupines huddled very close together to protect themselves from freezing through their mutual warmth. However, they soon felt one another's quills, which then forced them apart. Now when the need for warmth brought them closer together again, that second drawback repeated itself so that they were tossed back and forth between both kinds of suffering until they discovered a moderate distance from one another, at which they could best endure the situation

(Schopenhauer, 1851 translated in Del Caro and Janaway, 2015, p. 584)



Luepntitz (2003) drew upon Schopenhauer's fable of the porcupine's dilemma, tensions between proximity and defending pain, as a way of exploring the unconscious dynamics of intimacy. I propose the porcupine's dilemma as a metaphor to illuminate the intricate ethical interplay between children's rights to participation and protection in socially sensitive research. The continual negotiation between these two interdependent rights reflects not only the means through which rights to both protection and participation can be realised but also how participation of lesser-heard voices around sensitive subjects such as harm and abuse can enhance collective protection.

Article 12 of the UNCRC is widely regarded as the fundamental principle which 'must be considered in the implementation of all other rights' and as 'a means through which other rights are realised' (Lansdown, 2011, p. 3). The UNCRC articulates this right to participation as:

State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child

(UNCRC, 1989)

Genuine participation requires meaningful connections with children (under 18) to learn from their perspectives and what matters to them. However, getting 'close' with children, regarded as 'vulnerable' and 'sensitive subjects' in research ethics, invokes risks to the child and, at times, the researcher, particularly around "'forbidden topics' of sexuality, sexual behaviour and sexual abuse' (Dentith *et al.*, 2009, p. 159). Children's rights to protection are enshrined in the UNCRC, including Article 19:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child

(UNCRC, 1989)

This is very important in the context of research as described by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC):

Researchers should ensure that risk and harm in research is minimised, and that adequate protection of children and young people is ensured. They should also consider the ethics implications of silencing and excluding children from research about their views, experiences and participation

(UKRI, 2023)

Furthermore, individual, relational and institutional dynamics contribute to barriers to children's participation motivated to 'protect' them which, like the porcupines, can create distance from their participation rights. Many commentators highlight tensions between protection and participation in research ethics processes, with concerns about protection superseding participation (Hackett, 2017; Warrington and Larkins, 2019, Daley, 2015; Powell *et al.*, 2018). Engaging children under 18 more directly in research related to HSB, sensitive subjects due to their age, is compounded as HSB is a particularly socially sensitive topic, increasing the need to protect young participants. Powell *et al.*, (2018) highlight that under-theorised 'sensitive' topics are 'mutable and dependent of particular context' illuminate aspects of social sensitivity, which is important around HSB, including complex life histories, profound impacts on self and others and a dominating quantitative research paradigm. This dynamic push and pull between participation and protection, analogous with the porcupine's dilemma, helps me consider the ambivalent nature of undertaking more participatory approaches to research with young people and the interplay between ethical tensions and dilemmas.

Considering why children's participation in research matters can be understood from different perspectives. A shift in the sociology of childhood acknowledges that children actively shape their own social worlds, rather than being passive recipients of adult influence. As a result, their relationships and cultures should be studied in their own right, rather than solely through the lens of adult perspectives (Prout and James, 2015). Epistemologically speaking, it can be said that children possess a special knowledge distinct from that of adults. There can be certainty that adult researchers will have themselves been children, albeit contextually socially constructed, this does not qualify us to completely understand life worlds through a child's eyes as Punch (2002, p. 328) reminds us that we 'forget, unlearn and abandon elements of our childhood'. The unique perspectives of everyday life of young people who have presented HSB offer new insights that may not be visible through quantitative adult-centric research. HSB generates powerful feelings that ricochet around them, including strong associations with adult sex offenders, which may contribute to wariness around participation, such as suspicions around unreliability, trustworthiness, minimisation and victim blaming. Sociologically, this echoes with notions of the 'child that is not a child' who threaten the very notions of childhood itself, as the 'more intensely childhood is sacralised, the greater the proliferations upon it and the greater are the felt violations, hyper moral, hyper sacred childhood grows' (Cook, 2008, p. 08). A scoping review of complexities and contradictions in participatory methods with children calls for participatory researchers to consider more creatively how they engage with

children and young people ‘at the margins, lest they experience even greater exclusion than they do in their everyday lives’ (Bradbury-Jones *et al.*, 2018, p. 83). This mirrors Balfe *et al.*, (2019) who flag the ethical challenges that arise when conducting research on young people who have engaged in HSB through the agencies that have supported them, as they are often unheard in their daily lives, with their voices only becoming recognised when they interact with formal systems. Whilst the UNCRC highlights the interdependency and indivisibility of rights, Warrington and Larkin (2019) highlight barriers to participation of children and young people in research into youth sexual violence on protection grounds, calling this a ‘false juxtaposition’. Daley (2015) elaborates this tension further in the either/or participation/protection dilemma, highlighting how vulnerability and resilience are framed as ‘mutually exclusive’. Beckett *et al.*, (2022) argue for the importance of engaging children and young people so we can understand their lived realities and what we need to do to make things different. However, Holland *et al.*, (2010) challenge the belief that participatory research is ‘necessarily more enabling for participants, is ethically or morally superior to other types of research or produces ‘better’ research’ (p. 360). Landsdown and O’Kane (2015) stress the importance of being ‘safe and sensitive to risk’ highlighting the importance of being attentive to risk, including having safeguarding processes in place.

Navigating participation and protection – the porcupine’s dilemma – not only respects interdependent rights, but it can facilitate an additional interplay where protection of children and young people is enhanced through participation in research. Hill and Warrington (2022) describe how participation is not only an:

‘end’ in and of itself’ but also a ‘means’ through which protection can be realised including ‘means to achieving wellbeing and safety’ and a ‘means’...‘to thrive, experience wellbeing, access social justice...though their role in countering a sense of powerlessness and supporting self-efficacy

(Hill and Warrington, 2022, p. 182-184)

Furthermore, young people who have experienced harm and abuse often doubt themselves as deserving of protection, so participation convey messages about their rights to respect and safety both as individuals and as a social group. (Hamilton *et al.*, 2019). Powell *et al.*, (2018) describe how the inclusion of children and young people in ‘social research on sensitive topics is receiving heightened public and political attention given persistent inadequacies and failures (for example, within service systems) to address issues of safety, protection, inequality and injustice for children’ (p. 649). This resonates with Mitchell *et al.*, (2023):

Children cannot be kept safe if they are not heard and cannot be heard where they are not safe. If we are to create the conditions where individual children who have experienced harm have a safe space to speak to their own experiences, then we

must harness the collective expertise of children when planning and developing relevant systems and services

(Mitchell *et al.*, 2023, p. 6)

It was important to develop a research design that supported young people to be active participants, rather than ‘subjects’ under study, and place value on their experiential knowledge in developing broader social understandings of HSB. Building upon my practice knowledge, further strengthened by the literature, underscored the importance of situating safety, risk and rights beyond ‘concepts’ under the research gaze but as fundamental and inextricable from every moment of the research journey for everyone involved, including myself. I strived to embed sensitivity and safety throughout my research study to support young people, regarded as sensitive subjects, to engage in research about such a socially sensitive subject. This process included acknowledging that these are young people who have behaved in ways that have caused harm to others and anticipating that they may also have experienced complex life experiences. From a rights-respecting approach this was to consider participation and protection and the interplay between these rights.

6.2 Safe and sensitive research

The literature review highlights the complex life experiences that many, though not all, young people who have displayed HSB have endured. This generates a very strong impetus to ensure research that engages directly with young people is foregrounded by safe, sensitive and rights-respecting principles. Thinking with the porcupine’s dilemma, I developed a safe, sensitive and rights-based research design striving to develop, embed and sustain a dynamic interplay between rights to protection and participation to support the participants, myself and my research endeavour. Inherent in some of the dynamics around proximity, participation and protection within research with young people, particularly around socially sensitive topics, is the dimension of power. Holland *et al.*, (2010) consider ‘power’ as ‘dynamic and relational, shifting away from the dichotomous view of power where the researcher always already embodies ‘power’ and the research participant always already embodies ‘powerlessness’” (p. 363). Key aspects of my research design and process sought to actively engage with the power dynamics, including close attention to how participants could have a greater degree of choice and control throughout the process, which I regarded as meaningful opportunities for micro-participation.

After designing my research, I was granted approval through the university progression review process, which permitted me to submit an ethics application to Durham University Sociology Research Ethics Board for a full ethical review. Shortly after, I was granted full ethical approval to progress my research project to find potential participants, which felt like entering a maze of local and national systems. Over the next seventeen months I would send over 230+ emails, facilitate 14 online meetings with social work teams, present to the Scottish Government (who

then shared my endeavour through their networks) submit 10 agency research ethics/access applications, receive 3 rejections, gain 6 access approvals and withdraw one as it would not have been accessed within my data collection window (despite having been submitted for 8 months). These processes can be considered as forms of procedural ethics, which are critically important in conducting safe and sensitive research. However, this was just the beginning, not the end of my ethical journey, as procedural ethics are not enough to ensure ethical conduct is sufficiently fostered throughout the research process (Graham *et al.*, 2015) My practice experience became particularly useful to help me to reflexively navigate the research process ethically and operationalise aspects of the research designed to enhance sensitivity to ethical, safe and sensitive relational research and remain acutely attentive to the micro moments of ethics (Graham *et al.*, 2015) that could not always be anticipated.

Over time, I met with four boys, between three and five times each, and revised my ethics to include an additional four practitioners who supported boys relevant to my research. My sense of a maze tells a story about the challenges of accessing 'populations' considered hard to reach. This maze exposed dynamics around being 'hard to reach' that may be less about 'them' and more about complex layers of local systems, fragmentations of services and intense workloads in social work systems exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The journey through the maze of gatekeepers illuminated the locally situated context within which these boys received support and interventions. Gatekeepers and practitioners were positioned in distinct, local systemic constellations, including statutory child and family locality teams, specialist teams, multiagency teams, adolescent teams, youth justice teams, care experienced/'looked after children' teams, residential services teams and the voluntary sector. Some practitioners or teams spoke to me about changes within their local landscapes, such as the merging of more distinct teams into more generic service provision and vice versa. This journey through the maze was shaped by the contacts and connections that I made, so it is likely biased towards more social work practitioners, teams and services. However, it has been a fascinating reflection to observe how different systems are shaped at the local level, leaving me curious as to what this may mean in the context of HSB. My observations of the 'landscape' of HSB and the deep-rooted yet fragmented framings of the behaviour lead me to wonder how differently, yet almost invisibly, the issue of HSB will be understood, which then, in turn, will shape the locus of the intervention. This tells a story of how even within the small geographical nation of Scotland, there are markedly different architectures of systems, creating a kaleidoscope of lenses through which young people and their behaviours will be viewed.

6.2.1 Scope of the study

I developed specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that the sample was relevant within the scope of the study. These criteria guided initial discussions with gatekeepers around aspects of safety without requiring practitioners to disclose information about potential

participants, whilst working towards scaffolding safety and support around any participant who may progress to taking part.

Inclusion criteria:

- Boys between the age of 13-18 years of age (one young person aged twenty was identified and so I gained additional ethical approval from both Durham Research Ethics Review Board and the local authority to extend the age to 21 years if age, but this did not progress further as the Social Worker was off work for a prolonged period of time)
- Have presented problematic and/or abusive behaviour as identified through Hackett continuum (Hackett, 2010)
- The facilitating agency considers the participant is at a suitable point in any risk management and risk reduction plan/intervention to participate in the research
- Are currently receiving support through an agency or can access support as part of the research protocol
- Where HSB could be defined as violent on the 'Hackett continuum' (Hackett, 2010) then a risk assessment will have been undertaken, and engagement in the research process is safe for all involved.

Exclusion criteria

- There are known or potential physical, sexual or emotional risks to the participant and/or researcher that cannot be mitigated by safety protocols.
- The participant is unable to give their informed assent
- The participant is not receiving a service to address their behaviour or cannot gain access to adequate support as part of the research protocol
- The participant is engaged in legal proceedings whereby data collected may be regarded as of evidential value

Fostering and sustaining relationships with gatekeepers, often over long periods of time, proved to be very important in ensuring that safety and sensitivity were in place before, during and after the research process and often early exchanges that progressed into the 'Research Supporter' role. The inclusion and exclusion criteria did prevent some young people identified as potential participants for different reasons. Two different gatekeepers identified three young people who might be interested in the research and taking part. For two of these young people no one could be identified to support them to take part and, as the work had been or was soon to be completed, the service would not support. The third young person was considered emotionally unsafe to take part. These are highly relevant reflections relating to my research focus on safety, risk and rights in everyday life. I'm left curious about the tasks embedded in 'the work' as cases are closed even when they have very little social support from reliable, available adults in the context of their everyday life. Early discussions also highlighted confusions over the needs which might be met for young people by taking part. One

gatekeeper had felt that one of these young people (who could not be supported by anyone) would have benefited from having the opportunity to have a 'safe space to talk'. Whilst I wanted to research space to feel safe, it is troubling that this research could be seen as addressing a recognised need for someone to talk to. Another Research Supporter said that taking part would be 'cathartic' for one participant. During my research with one participant, their Research Supporter reflected on how he would look forward to our research sessions, complimenting me, as he often takes time to 'warm up' to people. These reflections weave together to tell a smaller, yet significant, story about how scarce safe spaces, just to be and talk, may be for these young people beyond 'the work', dictated by adult agendas and resource constraints. This resonates with Balfe *et al.*, (2019) reflections on how the voices of this 'marginalised and stigmatised group' ...are often not heard in the course of their everyday lives apart from when they come to the attention of the police or social services' (p. 190).

6.2.2 Data management: care, contamination and containment

To maintain sensitive and personal data in line with Durham University's expectations, a detailed data management plan was important. What first felt very dull and dry, data management came to feel like a fundamental way to demonstrate my care and respect for the stories shared with me. I also came to realise that it was also connected to my own care and safety as a researcher. I undertook this PhD from my own home, several hundred miles away from Durham University, where I live with my two teenage sons, who both 'aged' through and beyond the age criteria (13-18 years). I am grateful for skills, self-reflection from practice and safe and supportive supervision to make sense of myself, my personal life and my 'work' life. However, after a session with a practitioner who shared stories about a boy's life, I felt my safety scaffolding falter. There were aspects of this that were particularly distressing and manifested into worries as if contaminating my mind. This sense of contamination was not about the boy, but about how the fears and risks in his everyday world somehow breached my own internal world as a person and a mother. Quite surprising to me, I found the process of carefully transferring the audio recording from the device to my secure cloud storage OneDrive account incredibly steadying. Symbolising safety and security, the data management plan created a sense of containment for the feelings of contamination experienced. I found the data management plan a very surprising ally in navigating my own safety as a researcher as well as attending to how I can keep my participants and their stories safe and respected.

6.2.3 Consent and assent

Informed consent is fundamentally important, but amid research around HSB, it felt particularly so. It was important to differentiate, as best I could, notions of assent and informed consent and attend to these through elements of the research design. Parsons (2018) defines assent as an agreement to take part which includes participation as being an active choice, thus also the choice to dissent, made through access to accessible, sometimes simplified, information – a distinguishing feature of assent from informed consent. Informed consent is grounded in the principle that individuals should receive sufficient information to make a well-

informed decision about whether to participate in a research study (Bryman, 2016). Renold *et al.*, (2008) suggest informed consent with young people can be a 'slippery notion' which is 'often conceived in terms of fixity in both its discursive representation (e.g. a non-ambiguous 'permission') and singular practice (e.g. signing of forms or recorded verbal agreement, usually at the beginning of a project' (p. 429). Informed consent may be particularly complex within this research due to breaches, blurring, and at times blatant disregard of consent regarding a myriad of 'things' including their experiences of abuse, harming others and being compelled into compulsory measures of supervision and restrictions of liberty. Within a 'legacy of distorted consent' (Hackett, 2017, p. 129), consent and/or assent in a research situation can leave young people with uncertainty around meaningfully dissenting or withdrawing consent, faith in adults hearing their views and trust in adults keeping them safe.

To negotiate these critical dynamics of assent and informed consent, as ethics in practice, I set out key aspects of how I attend to these issues. These included due attention to:

- voluntary consent that the participant can withdraw at any stage, including terminating any research session, without any explanation. Withdrawal of consent will not impact any service they receive
- talking through what we will likely do in our research sessions with explicit discussion about what information will be collected, the names of people who have access to it and why and how it will be used (including how presented, to whom and why)
- how participants and the information, thoughts and maps they share will be anonymised so they cannot be identified
- how we will work confidentially and the limits to confidentiality
- what the process will be should the participant disclose a significant risk of harm to themselves and/or other people. This would include explanations, with hypothetical examples, of who I will tell, what I will tell them, what will happen then and who will support them
- identifying sources of support for participant if they need it
- a check-in and check-out will be a part of every research contact and they will be explicitly asked if they want any additional support

The processes through which informed consent could be given were organised through these following principles.

- informed Child Assent will be sought from participants under 16 years old and Informed Consent for those aged over 16 years old
- opt-out parental consent for participants under 16 years old unless it is deemed not in child's best interests by the facilitating agency

- an ongoing commitment to exploring consent as an ongoing process, including the right to terminate at any point during data collection (including during sessions) and an agreed period and explicit way for participants to withdraw after data collection.
- emotionally sensitive research approaches to support participants, who may have confused or distressing experiences of consent, relationships with adults, or different ways to share their thoughts, such as externalising in the third person, scripting ways to stop any discussion or session, how and when to withdraw consent for all or partial data produced.
- clear information-sharing protocols in place, with a child-friendly version, which explicitly states the threshold of when confidentiality will be breached for example if information is disclosed which indicates a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of serious harm or disclosure of a recent illegal activity that poses serious harm to the child or someone else.
- taking time to talk with each participant about important aspects of our engagement, including the limits of confidentiality and different ways they can share their reflections in ways that do not trigger a disclosure.

These dimensions were developed into Gatekeeper, Parent/Carer and Young Person's information sheets to provide initial information for consideration (Appendix Three: Gatekeeper information sheet). Appendix Four: Young Person information sheet Appendix Five Parent/carers information sheet)

As part of the ethical approval, one institution required parental consent for over 16's and consent from the Social Work Department. In this situation, the role of the Research Supporter was critical in navigating the balance between institutional requirements of parental consent and the reality of family relationships, including who could act in the young person's best interests. The Research Supporter navigated this in a way that satisfied the external institutional ethical requirement alongside the young person's right to participate and consent in such a way that respected the privacy of the young person and their family relationships (unless they chose to share this in the research sessions).

During one of my meetings with a team, a worker suggested I make a video introduction, which proved to be a brilliant idea. I developed a brief information video for both gatekeepers, to find potential participants, and young people who might be interested in taking part. This was a valuable learning experience, as it allowed me to engage more effectively with potential participants. By seeing and hearing me, rather than just reading a written information sheet, they may have found the information more accessible, supporting their ability to make an informed choice. Appendix Six: Transcript of introductory video for gatekeepers and Appendix Seven: Transcript of introductory video for potential young people show the images and words of video for gatekeeper and potential participants.

It was important that consent was an embedded and ongoing element of the research, which included check-ins at the beginning and end of the session, but also throughout, particularly when the young person shared something that might feel particularly exposing or sensitive. This felt important, as their consent was not a blanket consent, and I wanted them to feel a sense of choice and control over what stayed in or stayed out as 'data'. I relied on the Research Supporter as a link between sessions and as a mediator between myself and the participant to determine if, and when, we would meet again. I felt that this helped to convey the message of consent as being negotiated throughout, not just given at the beginning and assumed, and that they could change their mind at any point. I also drew upon my own reflective practice experience, which is illustrated in one micro-moment. It had come to the end of our sessions together, and I asked the young person if they had decided about the 'About Me' form (detailed below). I'd become acutely aware of the fears this participant has about people finding out what he had done. The participant repeatedly stated that it was my decision whether he completed the form and that he would do so if I wanted him to. This left me uneasy about how to support his ability to give genuine consent, as I sensed that if he did complete it, it would be out of compliance. I felt very torn by this situation, as I later noted:

He says again 'what do I want him to do?' And I say I want him to do what's best for him and explain again the reason it would be good to know about different aspects of behaviours so as I can roughly describe the behaviours of different young people that I met. He seems reluctant and again says, 'what do I want him to do?' I feel quite torn but sense a pressure; in the context of the relentlessness of his running (through fear), I say that what I don't want most of all is for him to feel he has to share anything he doesn't want to, and I am aware, as he's told me lots about this today, that young people can feel great worries about things that have happened to do with sexual behaviour. I suggest that we leave it unless he wants to change his mind. I think he seems relieved after I have said this...I don't know if I've done the right thing?!?!?

My reflective notes

Looking back, I feel this is an example of a micro-ethical moment that I navigated as best I could, drawing on my felt sense, practice experience and the time I had spent with this boy. I suggested for him not to fill this in based on my concern around his passivity or potential for a legacy of 'distorted consent' (Hackett, 2016) that may have made it appear he was consenting to sharing information, which may have disguised his lack of agency and/or a sense of obligation. In a follow-up session with another boy, he said that having a choice about sharing the 'About Me' form was something that he really valued.

6.2.4 Research Supporter

The role of a Research Supporter, someone whom the young person knew and felt comfortable with, was developed to support young people to participate – before, during and after the data generation sessions. Before any young person was approached to consider if they might want to take part, a ‘Research Supporter’, with whom they have an existing relationship, was identified. The had sensitive knowledge that related to individual participants' support needs, which led to my development of a visual consent plan (Appendix Ten: Visual consent used in sessions) to ensure one particular young person could make sense of the information to make decisions as to their ongoing informed consent. The bridging role of the Research Supporter was important, as it can be more comfortable for young people to decline to a neutral or familiar adult rather than to a researcher directly (Daley, 2015). Deciding not to consent felt like an important part of the study, as Bradbury-Jones *et al.*, (2018) highlight how it is ‘important to recognise that for children and young people choosing not to participate, not to speak, and to reject ways of thinking and describing used by adults, can be crucial signifiers of what they mean and think’ (pg. 89).

6.2.5 Engaging potential participants

After I met with gatekeeper/Research Supporter and discussed the inclusion/exclusion criteria, which were satisfied, without sharing any identifying information about potential young people, we then discussed the next steps. The role of the Research Supporter was critical in planning, and I was guided by them as to how to pace these next steps to ensure that the young person had the space and time, they need to decide for themselves about taking part. The Research Supporter would approach the young person and/or their parents/carers (if appropriate) to share information (information sheet and/or introductory video) about taking part. If the young person wanted to find out more, the Research Supporter would let me know and we would arrange to meet up to find out more. The medium of meeting up was determined by the young person and the Research Supporter. I met two potential participants and their Research Supporter online and I met three potential participants in person (two at home and one at school).

During this initial meeting I would talk through different aspects of taking part, highlighting key aspects that are important for the young person to make decisions. To help them get a sense of what taking part would look like I showed them the ‘Session Plan’(Appendix Eleven: session overview) and either brought the research toolbox with me or showed them photographs of everything that was in it. I also left space in the meeting for the young person and to ask me any questions. I then gave them time to think this all through, come back to me with any queries and let me know if they decided they would want to take part. One boy I met with decided that he didn’t want to take part, as he felt he was busy in education, although he had liked meeting me and the Virtual Reality headset sounded interesting.

6.2.6 Our Safe and Sensitive ‘Doing Research’ Plan

The ‘our safe and sensitive ‘doing research’ plan’ (Appendix Twelve: Our safe and sensitive ‘doing research’ plan) was another way I embedded children’s rights into the process and conveyed to the participant the choice and control they had over aspects of the research. It sought to reinforce key messages about taking part (e.g. talking about HSB) and guided discussions around support. The form also had information about how the participant could make a complaint if they were unhappy or uncomfortable with anything I said or did, and we spoke about how they could do this (e.g. directly to my supervisor and/or with the support of the Research Supporter). It also had details of the Research Supporter(s) which sometimes were multiple, particularly when the key supporter may not have been present when the sessions took place. We also spoke about who they or I could go to if they felt distressed or upset and/or if they shared with me anything that suggested they or someone else was at significant risk of harm. This was an important way of talking through potential risks of being distressed and the boundaries of the confidentiality I could offer. Arguably, the participant did not have full control over who I would speak to, as it was limited to people who were available and in roles who could attend to these. However, it still felt meaningful, as the young person did have a degree of choice as to who would be around and who they would prefer I spoke to. This also reduced any isolation I may have experienced trying to navigate unknown systems with very brief information about the young person’s care context. It would have felt neglectful and negligent in my role as researcher to make an informed decision about a young person’s safety in the context of a disclosure of significant harm alone. Having the Research Supporter available after the session provided a crucial layer of support, ensuring both the young person and I had a trusted point of contact. This role helped create a safer and more supportive environment for handling sensitive disclosures should they have been made.

6.2.7 About Me’ form

When designing the study, I created a form called ‘About Me’ (Appendix Thirteen: About me sheet) to gather a broader contextual overview of the HSB within this ‘sample’. This form was designed in a sensitive, child-friendly way that invited participants to share information if they chose to. It asked questions that were not too specific as to the behaviour that occurred but asked about where it happened and who with. Given the sensitivity of this, the ‘About Me’ form was discussed at the engagement meeting and Research Supporter could discuss this further with the young person. One participant completed the form fully in our first research session. Another young person filled in some of the form (the first part related to him, not the behaviour) with his Research Supporter. A third said they would take it away but stated they forgot to bring it each time. I wonder if this was an indirect way of not sharing the information, as at a follow-up session, they spoke about how not having to share information about what they did made them feel much more comfortable in taking part. The fourth appeared very hesitant, as reflected upon in the ‘consent’ section above, so we decided to leave the form unfilled. I can never be sure if I made the right decision but consider these micro-moments of

ethical practice informed by my practice experience and reflexivity that not everything is communicated through words alone.

Given the paucity of information shared by only one young person, this did not serve the purpose intended, but together with the information shared by practitioner participants, I can reflect that the stories that are reflected in this study relate to young people who displayed HSB in a range of contexts, including online spaces and public spaces, and some of whom had additional support needs, disabilities and neurodivergence.

6.2.8 The 'Research Toolbox'

The study sought to explore boy's social worlds from their perspectives, 'as they see it' (Chowns, 2008). The methodology developed for this research project centres the experiences of young people in their everyday lives. The role of mapping as a method, stemming from the field of children's geographies, supports participation and empowers children's voices to be heard through maps as vehicles for their own views, understandings and experiences to be demonstrated directly rather than through an adult intermediary such as research interviews (Ergler and Freeman, 2020). Enabling the 'voices' of the young people who participate in this project values and validates the unique perspectives they possess that 'may or may not acquiesce with social norms and expectations' (Martz *et al.*, 2020, p. 149).

I drew upon my own 'practice wisdom' of working in therapeutically orientated approaches that support different ways of communicating to share what participants want to share and how they want to share it. Enabling participants to have a sense of choice and control was very important, and so I created a 'Research Toolbox', carried in a suitcase, to give a range of different mediums that may be conducive for creating maps.



1. META OCULUS QUEST 2
VIRTUAL REALITY (VR) HEADSET
2. VR TOUCH CONTROLLERS
3. STICKY NOTES
4. MOBILE PHONE FOR TAKING
PICTURES
5. LEGO
6. FIGURES
7. PENS
8. VEHICLES
9. PAPER FACES
10. AIR DRYING MODELLING CLAY

Image Four: Research Toolbox

The different mediums could be used to symbolise people, places and things such as transport on the maps that I thought we would make in the sessions. The large roll of paper and pens became crucially important, as I had made the decision not to record, audio or visually, our sessions together. This decision was informed through careful consideration of literature concerning abuse-sensitive research, which highlights how conventional research methods may be unsuitable for some populations of young participants (Hackett, 2017). Police and child protection interviews are usually recorded on audio/visual recording devices, which may be used in experiences of abuse that participants may have been subjected to in their lives. I made prompt cards with social media symbols, emojis for emotions and other prompt words in the research toolbox but, like many of the other mediums and prompts, these were not used and I found prompts were not needed. The paper became a key space where I could openly make notes and clarify stories that allowed the participants to see what I was writing. I would often check if I had understood correctly and would write in capital letters certain phrases they used when I could. These paper notes bolstered ongoing informed consent, as I would check if they were happy for me to include particularly sensitive and/or distressing stories shared. Whilst no participant withdrew anything, this still felt like an important part of working actively with consent that was sensitive and respectful. I also gave each of the young participants a notebook that they could take with them to make any notes between sessions and share if they chose. Several boys took the notebook, but nobody returned one for data. While I must acknowledge that some data could be considered 'missing', I believe that the approach of not recording contributed to creating a sense of safety given the depth and range of stories that were shared. I developed skill in being present yet observant through my Post Graduate Diploma and MSc in Psychoanalytic Observation and Reflective Practice. A core part of this training was the infant and young child observation modules, where I visited a baby and his family in their own home

for an hour a week for 2 years and then a young child, between 2 and 4 years old, for a year in her nursery. Infant observation is a long-standing psychoanalytic tradition where the observer learns to maintain a steady, benign presence to consider the experience of those they are observing. Infant observation is a rich learning tool, particularly in psycho-social qualitative research, for gaining insight into child development, environmental influences, and the role of our own emotional responses in the learning process (Hollway, 2012).

I also had a mobile phone used only for the purpose of this research should any young person want to take pictures. One boy wanted to show me the places outside school he spends time and took pictures. These would be identifiable, so they are not presented in this thesis but intertwine the stories he shared about that, which are included in Chapter Seven: informal 'lifescapes' and Chapter Eight: institutional 'lifescapes'

I also had three sticky notes that had 'SAFE(ty)', RISK(y) and 'CHILDREN'S RIGHTS' as prompts to understand what these may mean to participants, related to my research questions.

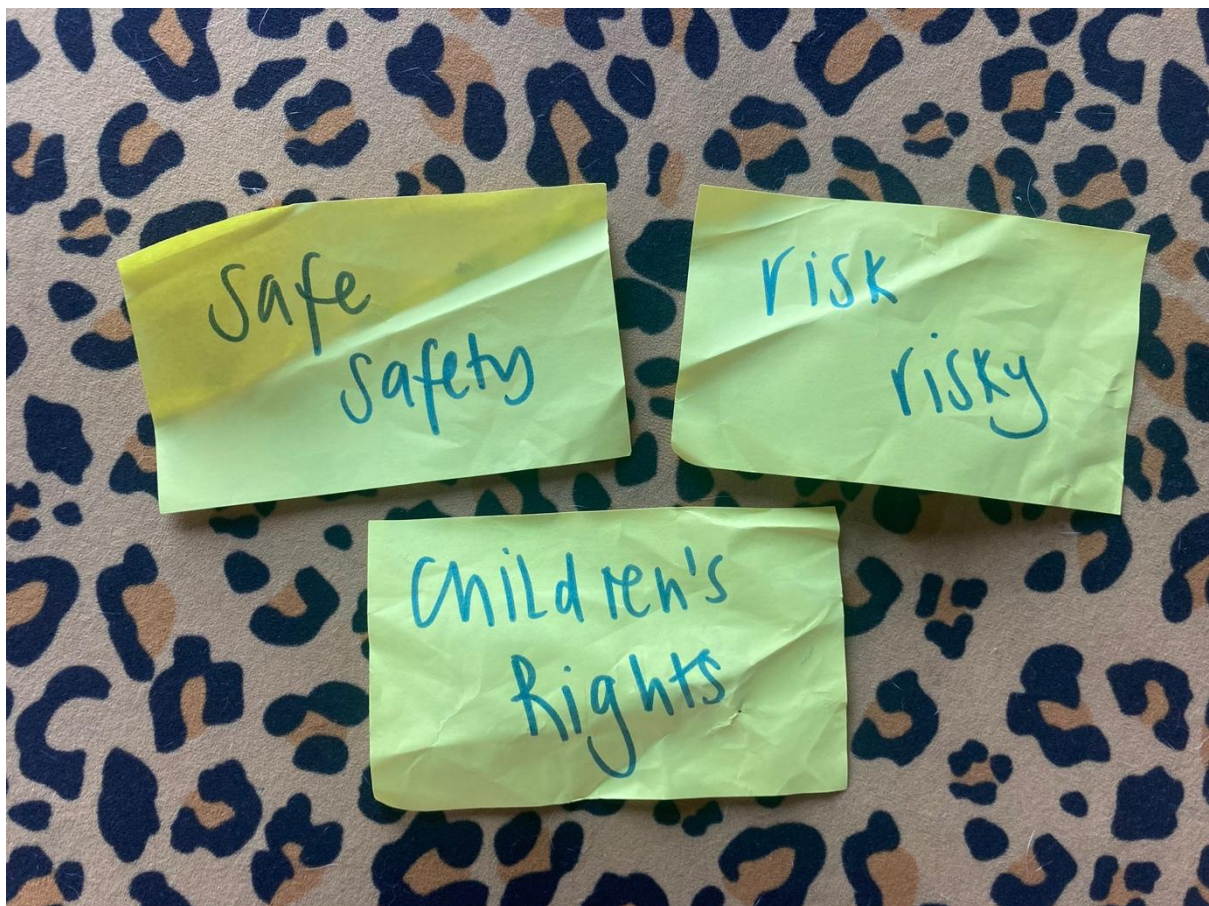


Image Five: Sticky notes (safety, risk and children's rights)

I had stop-pause-go cards present in the session that I often used in practice. These served as a reminder and resource that participants could stop and/or take a break during sessions. Although these were not used, breaks, including walking breaks with one boy, were utilised during sessions.

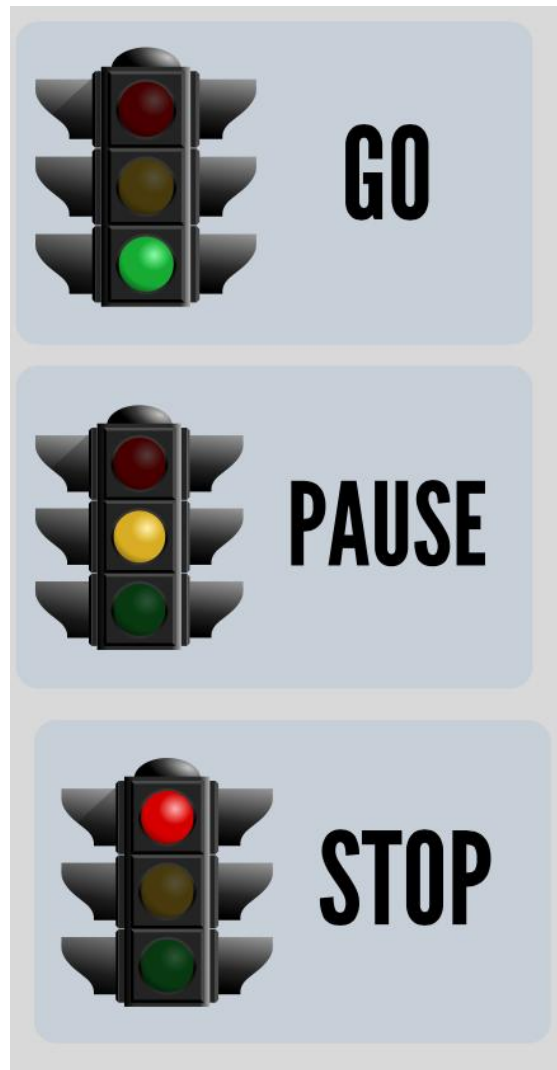


Image Six: Stop-Pause-Go cards

6.2.9 Anonymity and participation

Given the significant social stigma around HSB, it was essential to protect the identities of young people who took part in the research. This included anonymising narratives and disguising aspects to ensure features were not identifiable. No names were written on narrative notes with young people, including names of individuals and places. Practitioner participants referred to young people without using names, but when a name did slip into

discussions, these were omitted at the stage of transcription. To ensure anonymity while preserving the essence of participants' experiences, I adopted a generalised approach to describing places and personal details. Given Scotland's relatively small size, specific locations could be easily identifiable through social narratives or distinctive features. To mitigate this, I used broader descriptors such as 'urban' or 'rural' rather than naming specific towns or landmarks. Additionally, I made slight modifications to certain aspects of young people's stories, such as hobbies, residential histories, or the places they frequented, while maintaining the authenticity and integrity of their stories. These adaptations allowed for a balance between anonymity and the faithful representation of participants' experiences.

From the outset of this research, I was acutely aware of the ethical imperative to protect the identities of the young people who participated. The lives of these boys are saturated with risk, shame and in such a context, safety can be fleeting and fragile. This reality shaped my methodological and ethical stance throughout the research process. Thinking about the 'porcupine's dilemma' as a metaphor for the balance between participation and protection, I approached the writing of this thesis with a deep commitment to anonymity. As a public document, the thesis must not inadvertently expose or identify any participant. To uphold this, I chose to present all data from the boys collectively, without attributing quotes or insights to individual participants. This renders the data undifferentiated, making it harder to trace specific statements back to any one young person. This was not only a methodological decision but a protective one ensuring that participation did not come at the cost of exposure.

This commitment to anonymity extends to the practitioners who took part in the study. Their contributions, often deeply honest and reflective, included not only their own thoughts and feelings but also accounts of young people they had worked with. These narratives too required careful handling to ensure that no identifying details were revealed. The same level of protection and care was applied to their data, recognising that ethical responsibility does not end with the young people but encompasses all participants.

I did not ask young people directly about the nature of their harmful sexual behaviour, recognising from practice experience that while such behaviour was known- and they knew I knew- it often takes time and trust for young people to speak about it. This approach was mirrored in the research, where anonymity and emotional safety were prioritised. Gatekeepers confirmed that the behaviours met the criteria for HSB using the Hackett (2010) continuum, so it was not necessary to ask for details, especially as the scope of the study was not to understand why any individual behaved as they did.

This restricted the opportunities for participants to be recognised for their contributions to research, which is often an important dimension of participatory methods. To address this, I drew upon the four elements of Lundy's Model of Participation to guide me through the ethical dimensions of my research design: SPACE (providing a safe space to express views safely), VOICE (support them to express themselves and their views), AUDIENCE (identifying who will

listen to their perspectives) and INFLUENCE (what feedback can they receive to show that their views were taken seriously) (Lundy, 2007)

6.3 Engaging practitioners as participants

Over time, I realised the significant challenge of navigating the complex systems, processes, and gatekeepers involved in reaching potential participants. In response, I adapted my project iteratively, incorporating practitioners who could reflect on a young person they had supported during research sessions. This pivot was inspired by two key insights. Firstly, I had been struck by the depth of discussions sparked when I met with practitioners, managers and/or teams to discuss my project. They often shared fascinating reflections on some of the touchstones of my project, such as everyday life, safety and risk, yet these remained outside of my data. I was also very inspired by a paper by McKibbin *et al.* (2024) that drew upon ‘practice wisdom’ of practitioners and subject experts to develop five clusters of risk factors associated with childhood experience (namely being sexual curiosity; sexual interest in children; exposure to childhood trauma; living within contextual violence; and pornography use). The nuances and intersections of experiences reflected in these risk clusters resonated with many of the children and young people I’ve supported in practice, and I found this framing and value of practice knowledge fascinating. To enhance my data, I adapted my research design, starting with obtaining full ethical approval from Durham University to adapt my methods to include practitioners who have supported young people who have displayed HSB. This adaptation would be to include mapping sessions and discussions (between one and two sessions) with practitioners in the field, inviting them to think about a young person they have supported and follow the same methods I have used with young people. The key difference between the research with young people and practitioners is that it is their perceptions of the young person’s experiences (based on relationship, practice wisdom and skills and the intervention with the young person) and that the sessions would be audio recorded.

All discussions were anonymised, and no identifiable features were shared in data collection, transcription and writing. The risks in relation to sensitive subject(s) potentially reduced by engaging adult practitioners in data collection rather than young people yet I mirrored many of the features of engagement with young people including the ‘Safe and Sensitive ‘Doing Research’ Plan’. My sample reflected convenience sampling as I engaged with local authorities and agencies, I had existing approval and relationships given the narrowing window for data collection. After initial discussions with relevant gatekeepers, I submitted amendments to the local authorities' ethics review to ensure I had full approval before I progressed to engaging practitioner participants.

This also led to the inclusion of my second research question:

How do practitioners reflect on stories of boys they have supported (who have displayed HSB) narrating their experiences of risk, safety, and children's rights in the context of their everyday lives?

I created new forms for potential practitioners including:

- Appendix Fourteen: Practitioner participant information sheet
- Appendix Fifteen: Practitioner participant consent form
- Appendix Sixteen: Practitioner safe and sensitive plan

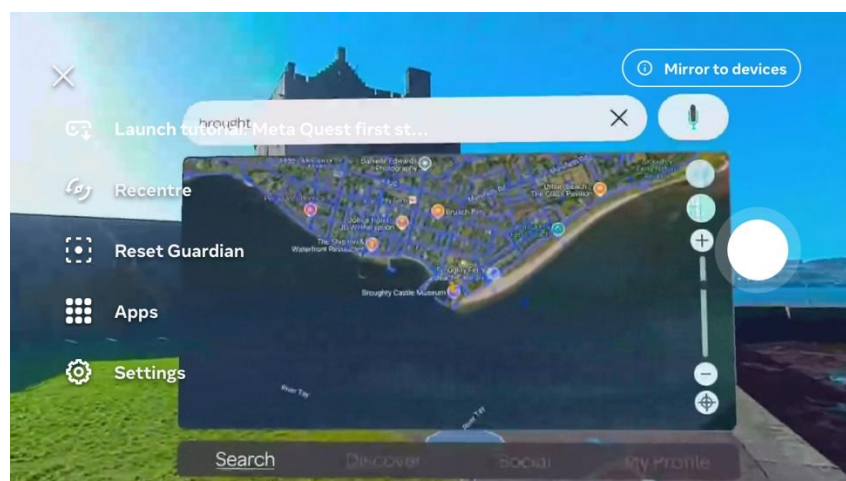
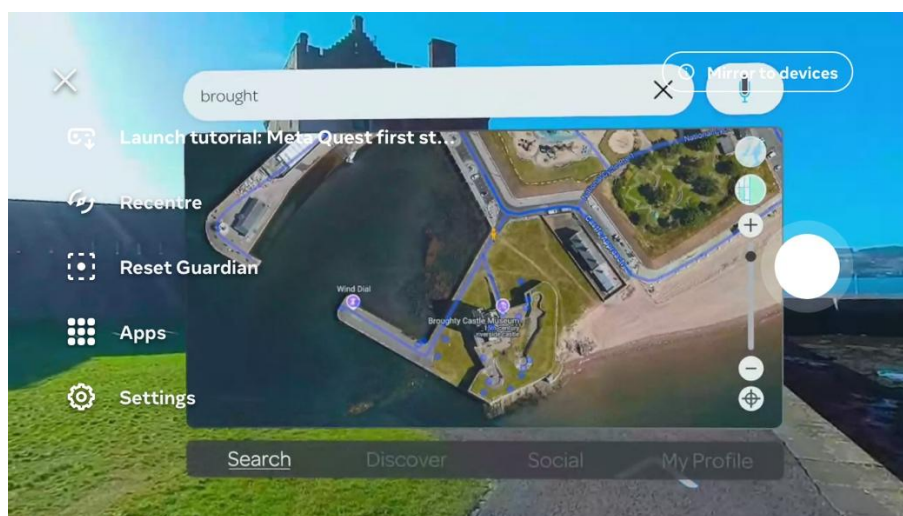
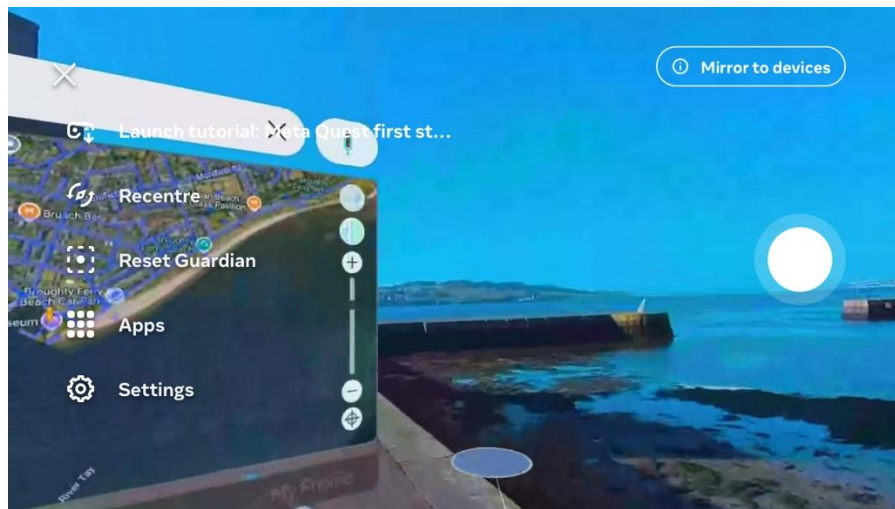
We used the same 'About Me' form for practitioners to reflect upon aspects of the young person they had in mind without sharing information that would make them easily identifiable. Where information was shared, I removed this when I transcribed the recordings.

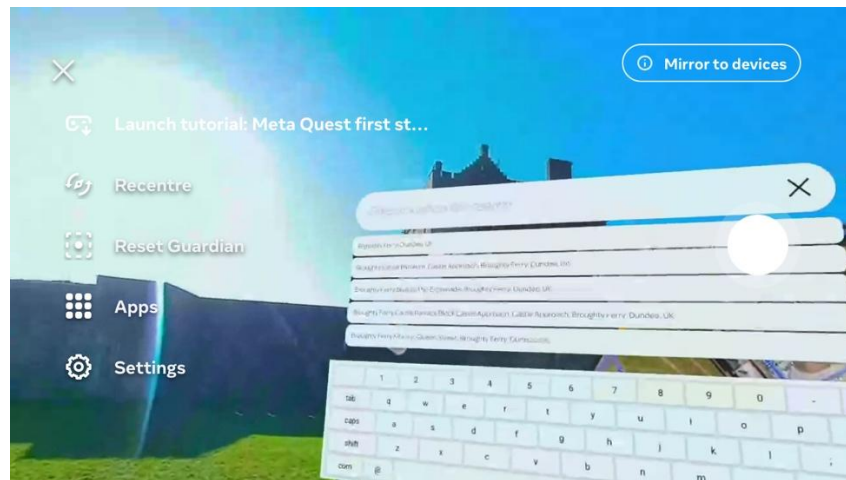
I met with four practitioners – one for a single session and the other three for two sessions each. The first sessions were all in person, and the second sessions were either online (two) or in person (one). All were audio-recorded and transcribed.

6.4 Virtual Reality and Virtual Environments

The medium used most for exploring everyday social worlds in the research toolbox was the Virtual Reality (VR) headset that allowed the participants to explore spaces and places from research space (community centres, social work offices and schools). Each of the young participants used the Virtual Reality headset and controllers to access the virtual map, some for shorter periods and some for almost the entirety of some sessions. One practitioner participant used the VR technology for most of a second follow-up session. After identifying a particular location in the first session, they wanted to explore this further given the complex interplay between risks and different manifestations of harm.

We used the Meta Oculus Quest 2 Virtual Reality set, which includes a head-mounted display that covers the eyes, creating a three-dimensional, computer-generated representation of reality referred to as a 'virtual environment' (van Gelden *et al.*, 2014). Our 'virtual environment' was Meta's Wander application, which is a virtual map that uses data from Google Street View navigated by two touch controllers operated by both hands. The headset tracks user head and body movements and translates them into motion in the 'virtual environment'. Meta's Wander app allows users to navigate and explore various locations with different levels of proximity. It provides the ability to view places at street level for a close-up perspective, from a further distance for a broader overview, and even access some internal spaces. This flexibility enables users to experience different perspectives of a location. Places are 'entered' using the touch controllers, including typing place names and/or addresses into the maps.





The use of Virtual Reality technology to explore 'virtual environments' enhanced the research in different ways. Firstly, it allowed a capacity to traverse space in ways that would not have been possible in a physical research session. Participants could move seamlessly between different places that were significant to them without us having to leave the room. Of course, the shadow side of this strength is significant limitations related to experiencing the physical environment, such as sensory aspects of sound, smell and real-life buzzing around. However, we were able to safely explore spaces that would have required significant time, budget, planning, risk assessments and support to visit physically. These are some examples of ways that we traversed through deeply personal spaces in a way that engaged young people within the research sessions:

He moved his way with the VR and took me to where he lives now. He pointed out the changes they have done to the garden, such as taking little fences and trees down. He points out the neighbour who lets him keep his bicycle in her garage and observes that she has a different car now. He talks about this place compared to where he grew up, and he says people are relatively trustworthy around where he is, as they are either under 13 years old or old people. I wonder about this age observation, and he reflects that people from around 13 to...maybe 40's steal. He tells me that he values money and things he's bought so he wouldn't want to leave his bicycle in the place he used to live, as someone might tamper with it or steal it.

Young Person

Took off (headset), sweaty fringe. That was fun! (he says)

Young Person

The spaces we visited moved between real, imaginary, lived and unlived places, embedded in stories, stirring up emotional dimensions of lives as I reflected on one session after:

As I walk back to the train station after the session I am buzzing! But then I realise he showed me all the places he doesn't live; he stays in his room in the dark, it's like an unlived life. That's really sad to me.

Young Person

Despite each young participant reporting that they had not used a Virtual Reality headset before, I was struck by their digital dexterity as they gracefully navigated the different functions of the controllers and Wander app. On reflection, this digital dexterity enhanced accessibility and communication that may not have been reached with more traditional methods. One boy had some learning differences, which were more noticeable when I clumsily asked him abstract questions that were not so easy for him to answer, such as 'how far away is X?' and 'how big was Y?'. This seemed in stark contrast to his ease using VR technology and the depth of the narratives that flowed. Despite never using a VR headset before, this young person also taught

me so much about how to use the VR technology, which was invaluable as my research journey progressed. My notes capture my wonderment around how the use of digital technology reaches beyond words alone and allows experiential exploration in ways that contribute to greater accessibility and data generation:

I have to watch as I'm asking lots of questions and am not sure how he takes them. He seems to struggle with things like size and distances (big, small, long) but I'm struck and relieved as he seems to connect to the spatial aspects of his life.

(later)

I think what's struck me most is how much he 'took' to the technology. I was still (I now realise) clunkily telling him how to move space (by typing an address to the big map, I could help) but later I realised he was navigating the smaller map. The twirling chair was so useful as he was turned all the way round and at times seemed to dig down when looking down on things like vans. It was an almost perfect, I mean like a constant flow throughout the session at pace. Like a tour....without 'naming' it as getting a super quick grasp of VR propelling forward, staying in the space and 'walking' me to his house, then 'walking' to school! Felt really cool. Without ever asking, he offered a narrative pointing out places.

My reflective notes

The VR technology further enhanced data generation through the capacity for different perspectives on space, which can elevate perceptual capacity and manipulation of context, such as viewing from above street level (Bailenson and Beall, 2006). An illuminating example of this was when a practitioner was exploring an urban space that they associated with multiple forms of harm and abuse. After some time, they reflected on how many businesses were orientated towards adolescents and children—something they believed they noticed for the first time due to exploring the area through VR. The 'virtual environment' provided a fresh perspective, allowing them to see the space in a new way:

Practitioner: 'cause in terms of the headset, I wouldn't have picked up that those shops for.... as orientated towards teenagers.

Me: Oh, do you think so?

Practitioner: No, I think I would have just thought, 'oh, they're just shops

Me: Do you think the headset makes a difference?

Practitioner: Yeah, yeah – I'd have just went 'they're shops'.

Practitioner

Relating to the porcupine's dilemma, creating safety for young people to participate in sensitive research, the VR technology had a curious way of creating space within the research,

allowing participants a greater sense of choice and control. At times, young participants would leap into spaces using the different features of the Wander app, transporting them into unknown spaces around the world. At first, I felt an urge to refocus the session back to my agenda, but sitting with this piqued my curiosity around safety and space. From a therapeutic perspective, this way of creating safe spaces felt like the meaning and function of silence. Whilst I cannot know the exact meaning of this for each young person, I feel strongly that the VR technology added a layer of safety through manipulating space, creating spatial buffers to manage intensity and emotions, always leading back to more familiar spaces entangled in stories to be shared:

He spends the next while looking at Disneyland, often pointing things out, including confirming it is Disneyland with Mickey Mouse. He's then in a desert type place and says it's Los Angeles, then the Wild West. He points out an abandoned building. He's spending ages here just looking around, I can only see his lower face and his jaw is loose, almost dropped in deep concentration. I find myself wanting to move on and get to his spaces but then think this must be different for him. I acknowledge this with him and say that he seems to be enjoying looking at these spaces, and we can maybe move to his spaces when he decides he's finished. Writing this, I forget how immersive it feels when the headset is on your face. He seemed to be really immersed in the space – it felt so blank and vast, but he seemed captivated. Writing this I feel quite emotional, not sure why. I think it's the bleakness of what sometimes I can feel in the world he shows me and his curiosity about this different space. I wonder what sense he was making of this and what it meant....

My reflective notes

After quite a long time, he begins to type in (where he lives) and we are transported back to where we've been. This part of our session felt quite jumpy; at times I felt a bit distracted myself – I wonder now if it was because he was exploring the space a bit himself and how generous he has been without ever being asked at narrating his world, or the world he wants to show me. It was quite jumpy, and we moved to different spaces and places; sometimes he just looked around at them quite transfixed.

My reflective notes

Incorporating innovative VR technology into the research opened immersive and experiential spaces that went beyond traditional research methods for exploring social and spatial ecologies of risk and safety. It enhanced the speed and size of spaces that could be traversed, safety and accessibility for research participants and was also conducive for seeing familiar spaces differently due to the capacity for manipulating how virtual contexts could be viewed. However, one young person highlighted an important potential ethical limitation to the use of

Virtual Environment built upon street views of maps, which often have people within the images. When looking around, he commented on a person who he thought was trying to hide their face, which led to him reflecting on if the people in the maps had given their consent for having their pictures taken. I would later understand that Google has privacy processes to blur faces and licence plates within imagery contributed by Google, and you can ask for additional blurring. However, this is a very important point and reflects a young person trying to make sense of consent and image sharing, which may create ambiguity when we use technology that has images of people and places where consent is not explicitly obtained.

6.5 Data generation

Research sessions were negotiated with the Research Supporters acting as intermediaries between myself and the participants. They helped identify dates, times and places we could meet where the young person felt comfortable. In addition, the role of the Research Supporter in arranging sessions ensured that they were aware and available, or identified someone else, when sessions were taking place just in case the participant changed their mind, became upset or disclosed significant risk to themselves or someone else. A similar process was followed with practitioner participants who arranged spaces suitable for us to meet. I decided that meeting in person with young people was preferable given the sensitivity (although I would have respected a young person's choice should they have wanted to meet online) but for two practitioners we had second sessions through Microsoft Teams. Research sessions took place in a range of settings, including social work offices, community centres and schools. We agreed that sessions would last an hour, but often the Research Supporters booked out spaces for two hours. Without exception, each session with young people lasted for closer to two hours, which may reflect they felt comfortable and had important contributions to make. I audio-recorded sessions with practitioners and made notes with all participants and invited them to also add to the notes, which they occasionally did, such as to draw out things.

I met with four boys, several times, who had all received support regarding HSB they had displayed previously. All had social work involvement related to this HSB, but some also had support related to other aspects of their care and wellbeing. Whilst this was not shared with me, I understand this from initial discussions with young person and their Research Supporter.

All meetings with the boy participants were conducted in person. The following table outlines how many times each participant was met and the setting for each session.

Participant	Times Met	Session Setting
1	Three	Residential care placement
2	Three	Social work offices

3	Five	School
4	Three	Community Centre

Table one: Young Participants

None of the practitioners were specialist HSB practitioners, although some referred to having received additional training in risk assessments related to HSB. All practitioner participants were recruited through gatekeepers and authorities, with full ethical approval and updates provided. One practitioner had acted as a gatekeeper to identify two of the young participants and had worked with both but was not the research supporter for either of them.

Participant	Role	Times Met	Session Medium
1	Residential care – management role	Twice	Session 1 – in person Session 2 – online
2	Social Worker (local area team)	Twice	Session 1 – in person Session 2 – online
3	Social Worker (local area team)	Twice	Session 1 – in person Session 2 – in person
4	Social Worker	Once	Session 1 – in person

Table two: Practitioner Participants

Leaning into the three-dimensional prism of Narrative Inquiry was sparked by the shape of the data, which were often partial, fleeting glimpses into everyday life through splinters of stories. My decision not to record research sessions generated data that was, maybe, less comprehensive and ‘accurate’, perhaps limiting in-depth theoretical analysis. However, I counter that the experiences and interactions observed are inherently tied to the relational space of the research setting. These glimpses into social worlds - such as feelings of shame, distrust of adults, and vulnerability - are influenced by this shared space and interactions with myself and my research gaze. This may also be very true for practitioner participants, encountering my gaze as a researcher and/or social worker, perhaps upon them or their practice, which will inevitably shape what can be seen, heard and shared between us in the research space. Respecting stories to speak for themselves leads me to present longer abstracts of my notes, illustrated at times by collage, which allows multiple meanings and provocations of the reader rather than solely my own sense-making through analysis. Elements of Narrative Inquiry offered a lens through which I could explore different story splinters in and of themselves but also woven together with other narratives embedded in spaces that I witnessed through my research. I endeavoured to stay connected with the experiences of the

narrators whilst holding fragments that do not easily hold together to create a whole or complete picture, like Laws (2004) describes as the:

pains and pleasures, hopes and horrors, intuitions and apprehensions, losses and redemptions, mundanities and visions, angels and demons, things that slip and slide, or appear and disappear, change shape or don't have much form at all, unpredictability's, these are just a few of the phenomena that are hardly caught by social science methods

(Laws, 2004, p. 02)

After each research session I wrote up detailed records from the large sheets we made notes on and my memories of our session as soon as I could. My observation training, which I undertook as part of my Diploma and MSc in Psychoanalytic Observation and Reflective Practice served me well and I wrote down as much as I could remember, including my own reflections. When I came to analyse my data, I took my narrative turn, which lead me to relate to my notes as narratives of experience:

retrospective meaning making—the shaping or ordering of past experience ... a way of understanding one's own and others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time

(Chase, 2005, p. 656)

6.7 Data analysis

As I shared in 5.1 Taking a narrative turn my research journey took a narrative turn midway through my lengthy data generation window as I observed that participants were sharing more stories than making maps. In a sense, this changed my relationship with my data – from making maps to mapping stories. Rather than generating codes through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019), an active reflective process of coding and theme development, I related to my data as stories – some tiny splinters and others more bounded. The data analysis process had always felt intimidating, looming ahead as I searched for participants, which now was compounded by an iterative turn into an unfamiliar methodology so late in the game.

Gergen and Gergen (2003) highlight the 'crisis of validity' and 'rights of representation' that haunts Narrative Inquiry but stress that validity can be reframed, including recognising knowledges as situated, which can be connected in productive, rather than annihilative, relationships with each other (p. 1033). Through analysis, sense-making transforms into an act of reinterpreting and reshaping narratives, ultimately generating a new story - one that also incorporates the narrative of the research itself (Byrne, 2015). A key epistemological implication remains that there is no 'faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower' (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, p. 40). Narrative inquiries are not intended to tell truths

and must always be understood in the context of the listener and the teller (Hunter, 2010). In the landscape of knowledge around HSB, which I earlier described as the **context** of knowledge, my endeavours feel fluffy compared to ‘proper’ research, which makes bold claims of certainty, validity, generalisability, objectivity and credibility. My sense of fuzziness in a context of more certain forms of knowledge may also connect to Mol’s (1999) idea of ‘ontological politics’:

If the term 'ontology' is combined with that of 'politics' then this suggests that the conditions of possibility are not given. That reality does not precede the mundane in which we interact with it but is rather shaped within these practices. So the term 'politics' works to underline this active mode, this process of shaping and the fact that its character is both open and contested

(Mol, 1999, p. 74-75)

With Mol’s notion of ontological politics, I can see how the landscape of knowledge can never be separate but is a fundamental part of how HSB is constructed, and the certainty, such as through correlations and causations, are claims to knowledge that are intrinsically part of the phenomenon under study. My analysis and findings cannot make such claims nor represent the true realities of young people’s social worlds but reflects what Cooper (2009) describes as ‘complex particulars produced through creative engagement with psychosocial everyday worlds, where:

each and every situation of complexity or context is unique and particular and must be understood – ‘apprehended’ in its own terms. It’s character and meaning cannot be read off or deduced from some set of abstract principles

(Cooper, 2009, p. 440)

Striving for integrity and trustworthiness, I welcomed Tracy’s (2010) articulation of eight hallmarks of high-quality research across paradigms that are marked by (a) worthy topic (b) rich rigour (c) sincerity (d) credibility (e) resonance (f) significant contribution (g) ethics and (h) meaningful coherence (p. 839) to navigate me. Narrative Inquirers take different paths through their storied data, as there is no set process or procedure to find insights, even ‘glimmers’, in the data to answer the research questions (Butina, 2015). The central task of qualitative data analysis is to make sense out of my data and is a process of meaning-making which becomes the findings of my study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). My first step was to immerse myself in my notes and use NVivo software to organise the different threads I caught hold of as I went back and forth with my notes. NVivo helped me to organise my data and reflections in NVivo rather than develop themes as I had planned to do if I had stayed with the plan to use Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The initial phase was influenced Braun and Clarke’s (2022) approach of identifying patterns of meaning across the dataset. Using NVivo, I began coding inductively, grouping story splinters into clusters that reflected recurring reflections, ideas, tensions and emotions. This initial coding was recursive and reflexive, involving both semantic and latent coding, and was shaped by my own subjectivity and practice experience. Early codes were

generated inductively and grouped into broader themes through a process of constant comparison and refinement. These groupings were not fixed but fluid, allowing for movement and reconfiguration as deeper patterns emerged.

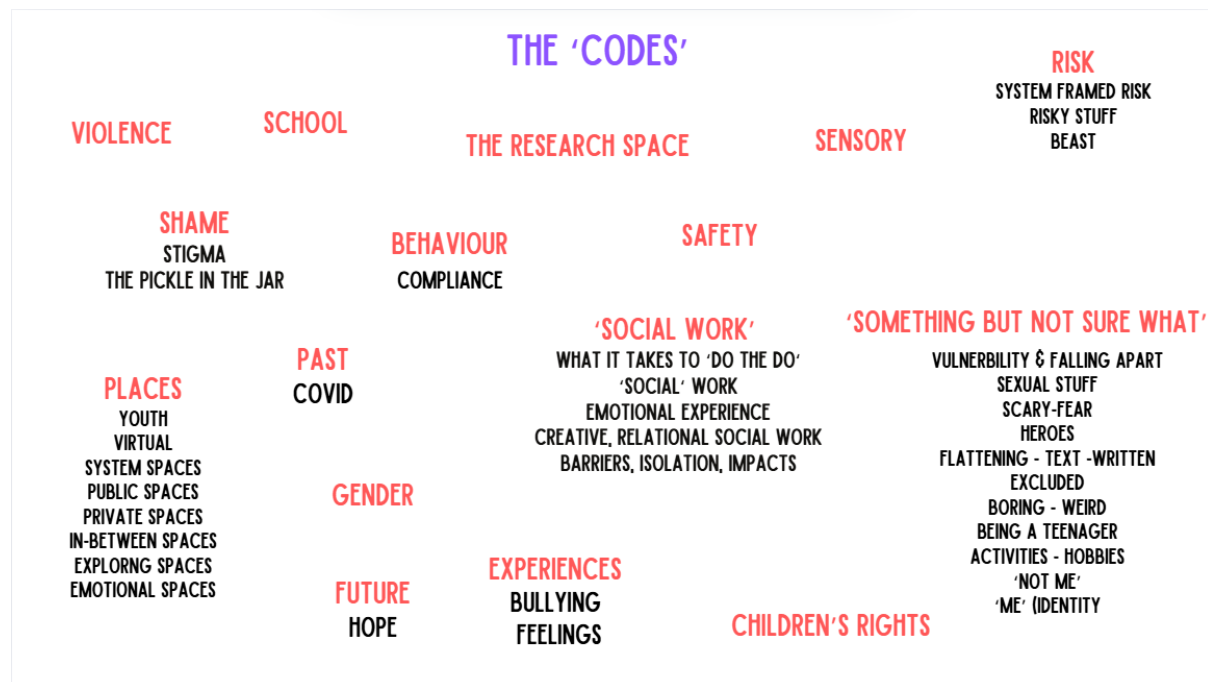


Image Eight: early coding of stories

The challenge then became how I could make patterns from my reflections that could be organised as a response to my research questions. There were very few stories that explicitly referred to safety and children's rights whilst risk seemed to saturate many of the 'codes'. I had to represent the stories with integrity alongside finding a shape to my findings that addressed my aim to make an original contribution to the field. I had to balance making connections between different stories and storytellers without reducing complex, unique narrative experiences that vividly exposed distress and drama alongside the seemingly mundane and ordinary. How could I develop narratives into a more cohesive and overarching story towards this thesis?

Reflecting a lot on the three-dimensional prism, I noticed that most story splinters organised as an NVivo 'code' happened somewhere. I noticed that many of these story fragments were anchored in specific places - schools, care homes, community centres, bedrooms, and digital spaces. After thinking through different ways of bringing more coherence to the different narratives, such as risk, safety and rights or different socio-ecological spheres, I decided to map the stories by the places they were in which they were 'placed'. This spatial reorganisation was informed by the contextual nature of the data, with attention to the physical, relational, and systemic environments in which experiences unfolded. These codes were grouped thematically, but I quickly realised that many of them were also spatially situated—they happened somewhere. This was a process of reorganisation where I mapped different 'codes'

to places to create a sense of coherence. This insight led me to reorganise the codes by mapping them to the places and spaces in which they occurred. This observation prompted a shift from thematic grouping to spatial mapping. I reorganised the codes by locating them within the environments in which they occurred, creating a second code 'map' that reflected this spatial logic. This reorganisation helped me see how risk, safety, and rights were distributed across the everyday contexts of young people's lives, and how these spaces shaped their experiences and identities. I drew upon Lugone's (1987) conceptual metaphor of 'world travelling' to understand another individual, cultural or community which has been used in Narrative Inquiry, helping to situate the relational work on narrative inquiries and capture the process of making sense of data to understand experience (Dewart *et al.*, 2019). I visually mapped these out for supervision, to sense check my process of mapping stories through placing them. In keeping with the relativism paradigm, I describe these 'places' as 'spaces' as they are not fixed, objective nor 'real' physical locations that exist with any truth beyond the research space between us.

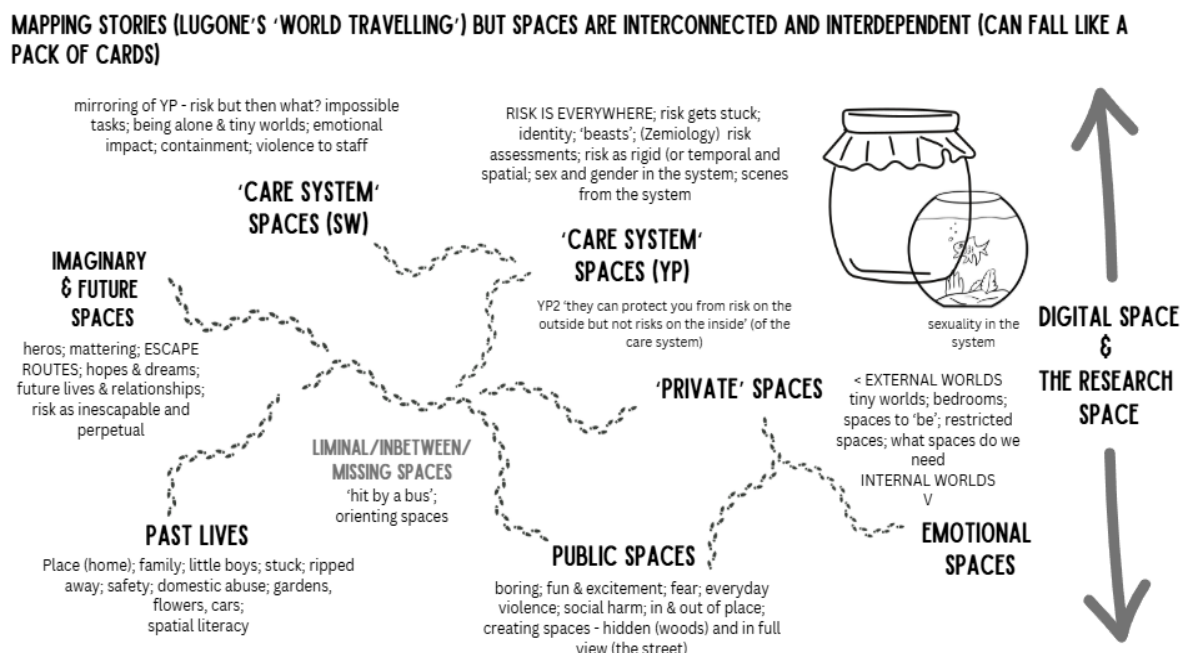


Image Nine : mapping codes spatially

This spatial and thematic synthesis led to the development of 'lifescapes' - visual and narrative representations that captured the relational, contextual and emotional dimensions of young people's lives. Lifescapes became a way to hold together the complexity of the data - combining images, reflections, and voices - to present findings that honoured the integrity of participants' experiences while offering a coherent response to the research questions. In keeping with the relativism paradigm, I describe these 'places' as 'spaces' as they are not fixed, objective nor 'real' physical locations that exist with any truth beyond the research space between us. The sense of spaces where stories were embedded reflects Massey's (2005) articulation of space as relational 'as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of

the global to the intimately tiny', always fluid and under construction and multiple 'as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist' (p. 9). The latter dimension of Massey's depiction of space as multiple, also described as 'the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity' (p. 9) echoes my presentation of storied spaces, not real landscapes of life in a physical sense but, rather, reflecting confluences of stories. I've been deeply moved by the words and stories I have witnessed. Their power doesn't come from offering simple answers to complex social problems but from opening new ways of thinking and looking differently. These smaller stories challenge the dominant narratives and encourage us to look at things from multiple perspectives. This resonates with Coman and Deveney's (2011) work on ecologies of children in care encouraging a freeing of thought to allow us to think how we could proactively shape everyday environments which will impact future outcomes thus noticing and changing aspects of social environments that may be toxic for children as 'preventative intervention' akin to attending to hygiene before surgical intervention' (p. 49).

6.8 Conceptualising 'lifescapes'

Thinking narratively, sparked by the unfolding of stories rather than maps, I foreground listening to smaller, quieter stories in the context of the field's louder grand narratives. My aim is not to understand why anyone behaved in any particular way but rather, as Brownlie (2022) reflects, to respect the social significance of 'the ordinary/mundane aspect of lives, rather than the dramatic, in the context of research – an activity which, in its concerted attention to the everyday, is 'out of the ordinary' (p. 258). Amongst the seemingly mundane and ordinary, I discovered layers of experience embedded within social ecologies swirling around in everyday life. A significant challenge lay in how I present stories, respecting safety, privacy and uniqueness and looking beyond individual narratives towards collective reflections of diverse and often difficult lives. Seeds of the idea of 'lifescapes' like landscapes of life, first germinated in a supervision discussion as we reflected upon the challenge of how to make data sing together as a chorus of findings whilst doing justice to the unique lived experiences of each participant. Conceptualising confluences of stories heuristically as 'lifescapes' seeks to reflect upon complex and interconnected webs of storied experiences. 'Lifescapes' are not tangible, physical landscapes but fluid, layered and relational spaces glimpsed through the intersections of story fragments. The multidimensionality of these 'lifescapes' reflects the three-dimensional prism of Narrative Inquiry (place, sociality and temporality) and is inspired by Massey's (2005) concept of space as relational and constantly under construction, challenging the notion of fixed and bounded places. Safety, risk and children's rights become spatialised, flowing and shifting within and between these relational spaces. They have multiple and fragmented meanings, experienced through connections and disconnections, fleeting between past, present and imagined futures.

Foregrounding the 'voices' of young people and those who have supported them, 'lifescapes' move between seemingly public and private spaces, temporal spaces of past and future, and then move to consider systemic spaces of school and the 'care system'. In conclusion, a metaphorical story told by one boy of a lonely pickle in a jar is presented as an echo heard across the 'lifescapes'. Each 'lifescape' space presents fragments of stories that coalesce around spaces and are closely followed by my own reflections as 'reverberations' that explore resonance to these stories of experience. I draw upon my own position within the research process, including my own experiences that shape my understandings, recognising the subjective and situated nature of knowledge. I have included a reflective letter I wrote for supervision, 'To you, from me: about us' where I articulated my feelings around the cusp of data generation as Appendix Two: 'to you, from me: about us'. In essence, these 'lifescapes' offer a way to look differently at developing lives to explore the complex interplay between individual lives, everyday experiences and wider social contexts. They offer a means of making visible the often invisible and unheard experiences that shape young people's lives to offer unique insights into social and spatial dynamics of risk, safety and children's rights. Presenting these findings as 'lifescapes' I offer creative and engaging provocations to the reader and the field of HSB, including research and practice, and potential interdisciplinary allies towards new directions to respond to and prevent such distressing and disturbing social issues.

Presenting the 'lifescapes', explorations of social and spatial dimensions of everyday life, I have divided these into two chapters. The first chapter presents more informal spaces followed by the second which explores more institutional spaces. Informal spaces encompass the more fluid, everyday environments where young people may (or may not) exercise greater agency and emotional investment. These include bedrooms, public spaces, digital worlds and imagined past and future lives. These informal spaces may be less visible to institutional oversight, shaped by relationships, play, creativity and affect. In contrast, the follow chapter presents more institutional spaces of school and the 'care system' reflecting how these may be shaped by greater proximity to formal systems and adult-led structures. These spaces are often designed *for* young people, with specific goals such as education and 'care' yet characterised by limited autonomy, greater visibility to institutions and a higher degree of regulation. This framing of 'lifescape' chapters is not to suggest a binary between informal and institutional spaces that are fixed and mutually exclusive. Institutional spaces often contain informal dynamics, such as the social negotiations of peers and school corridors or moments of resistance within 'care' settings. Likewise informal spaces are shaped by institutional forces, through surveillance, the design of public space or the socio-economic conditions that structure access to privacy and leisure. Children's spatial lives are therefore best understood as situated within a continuum of governance and experience, where institutional and informal dimensions intersect and overlap.

Chapter Seven: *informal* 'lifescapes'

This chapter explores the informal 'lifescapes' that shape, and are shaped, by young people's everyday experiences including 'public' spaces, bedrooms, digital environments and imagined pasts and futures. These are not simply backdrops to behaviour but dynamic, relational spaces where meanings of safety, risk, identity and belonging are constantly negotiated. Beginning in public spaces, at times described as 'boring' are brimming with tension, surveillance and coded social rules, I explore how young people navigate visibility, suspicion and exclusion in spaces that are ostensibly for everyone but often feel anything but welcoming. From there, the chapter moves inward, into bedrooms- spaces traditionally understood as private, yet revealed in these stories to be porous, contested and deeply significant. Bedrooms emerge as sites of both sanctuary and surveillance, where the boundaries between public and private blur. They are also portals to digital 'lifescapes' where boys navigate 'virtual bedrooms' with 'glass walls' of (in)visibility and vulnerability. These digital spaces offer connection, identity, belonging and escape, but are also spaces where vast harms can unfold. Finally, the chapter turns to the temporal dimensions of 'lifescapes' and how young people's pasts and imagined futures are shaped by systemic responses to HSB and how the long shadows of shame and uncertainty can stretch far beyond the present moment.

7.1 'Public' spaces

Participant narratives bring my 'lifescapes' to life, revealing the richness and complexity of social worlds which resist individualising experiences whilst respecting the uniqueness of individual experience. The first stop on this narrative journey is 'public' spaces. My notion of the 'lifescape' of 'public' spaces encompasses streets, neighbourhoods, parks and urban spaces within stories. Defining 'public' and 'publicness' of place is complex, but I loosely consider 'public' space as open spaces of everyday life, beyond closed doors, which broadly fall under mandates of local governance. Such bounding of space as 'public' reflects three dimensions of basic rights that can be associated with a space that becomes accepted to be 'public' – rights to relative open access, right of use, which embodies the expectation that access enables use and enjoyment, and rights of control and accountability, which implies users have a degree of say over the space, even indirectly (de Magalhães and Freire Trigo, 2017).

7.1.1 Boring

Scattered among the stories, a word piqued my curiosity. Lurking within the texts, the word 'boring' appears juxtaposed within narrative landscapes scarred by emotive and distressing stories. As if hiding in plain sight, the idea of boring felt to be.....a bit boring! Anderson (2004) captures how boredom dulls time and space in its enduring banality and tediousness, but I also wonder if boredom is easily flattened and overlooked when thinking about such profoundly emotionally charged phenomena as violence, sex, abuse and harm. Thinking deeper about the

significance of boring, my attention is drawn to boredom beyond an individual emotional experience towards curiosity of 'boring' as situated within the social and relational experience of everyday life. As we weave through the urban spaces using the Virtual Reality headset, park spaces are rendered boring in two fragments:

He carries on as we go past his old primary school, and he points out the park that has a web-like climbing frame. He is so succinct and descriptive; you climb up it and it has a pole in the middle. They upgraded it because the old park is boring.

Young Person

He breaks the silence..... he tells me there was a park behind the shops, but it got set on fire. He saw videos of the fire on TikTok. I wonder if he went to that park? He says no, as it was boring.

Young Person

In another story, a boy reflects on two contrasting urban areas where he used to live in before he moved to a different place as he entered the 'care system':

He's now moved to [Area Two] park. I wonder what it's like – he says daytime it's ok, but at night it's hectic – people setting off fireworks and stuff. He says his mum and dad tell him not to go, but he does. I wonder why he wants to go, and he says it's more fun, there's more ground space and [Area One] is boring.

Young Person

Community centres, youth clubs and shops are also described as 'boring' by different boys:

He shows me a community centre he used to go to, not now. 'You don't go now?' I ask. 'Nah it's boring'.

Young Person

He tells me, unprompted again, he used to go to a youth club. He doesn't go anymore, as someone tried to push him into the road. His cousin spoke to the other young person, and they have been banned from going back. He hasn't gone back after he was pushed. He says it was boring there but later mentions he used to watch films with a friend there. Now he watches films on his own in his room.

Young Person

He is soon at a shop [shop one] but says it's boring and says 'let's go somewhere exciting' and soon we are at shop [shop two]. I say this is really interesting, the idea of excitement and boring, and wonder what was exciting about [shop two] – no security guards, he tells me. I say that it seems really important to think about

'exciting' and 'boring', and I wonder what they mean? He says boring = parks and shops, and exciting = restaurants and not going shopping.

Young Person

Considering the social dimensions of this representation of 'boring' places the locus of 'boring' moves from internal and individual to 'boring' as a quality of the space across the different stories:

old park is boring

it was boring

Area Two is boring

it's boring

it was boring there

it's boring

boring – parks and shops

Looking in closer detail to 'boring' park spaces, play equipment such as climbing frames and broken slides appear as dimensions of boringness exposing how physicality and embodiment may shape experiences of spaces such as parks:

He carries on as we go past his old primary school, and he points out the park that has a web-like climbing frame. He is so succinct and descriptive; you climb up it and it has a pole in the middle. They upgraded it because the old park is boring.

Young Person

He then goes to the park that seems to be close to [another area of town], which seems to be green space in a built-up area. He points out that the flying fox⁷ is broken. I wonder if he spends his time here, but he doesn't answer....so I wonder if other teenagers might spend time here? He says that other people do but there are fights. I wonder who is fighting? Children he says, it's scary he says.

Young Person

⁷ A 'flying fox' is a playground structure like a small zip line where the user holds onto handgrips or sits on a seat or basket attached to a cable with a pulley

Alongside 'boring' spaces that appear to be avoided are other public spaces where suspicion falls upon young people, as witnessed in this next story fragment:

He leaves the park space, commenting, 'I'm finally out of that delinquent park' although he struggles to say the word 'delinquent', I ask him what that means and he says he doesn't know what it means but it's a weirdo's park'

Young Person

He uses the word 'delinquent,' despite struggling to say it and expresses an uncertainty of the meaning of 'delinquency'. This reflects space as dynamic and further shaped by powerful social and cultural messages about adolescents in public and park spaces who may be both in and out of place, unwelcome and under suspicion.

7.1.2 Everyday violence and fears

Beyond 'boring', young people navigate multiple forms of violence, harm and abuse in their everyday social worlds:

Off again we travel, and he stops again at a street space; lots of fights happen here! I gently enquire, adults or children – adults. He's even seen blood on the ground, and someone once had a knife! I wonder the time of the day – daytime.

Young Person

He's now been assaulted quite a few times as repercussions for some of his behaviours, unfortunately, people have been like if he's been walking down the street close to his home, he's been, like, picked up and put into back of cars and taken places and beaten up.

Practitioner

Everyday violence and harms that the young people navigated came in different shapes and 'siloes', intersecting lives and unfolding in spaces. These included forms of criminal exploitation and interpersonal, intergenerational and community violence where some young people not only negotiate their own safety, alongside others, but also the safety of those close to them:

He was selling drugs - £20 pounds a week to take the risk of selling drugs.....his peer group have similar issues and vulnerabilities, I suppose, and needs. That's not going very well for him, in terms of some of the conflicts he's got into.

Practitioner

.....a number of (young person's) different behaviours have triggered community reprisals..... it's quite a risky place for him to be around but he feels very safe I suppose in the street that his Uncle lives in because you wouldn't cross the Uncle.

So, it's kind of feel safe there, but maybe not for the reasons we (social workers) would like.

Practitioner

He tells me about a boy who lives above his pal – tells me that he's battered him loads. I ask more about this - he's fought loads with this boy but can't even remember why.....he says something about the boy blaming him for stuff and getting him into trouble. He then goes on to say that they are now friends. I ask about the fighting and he says fighting is a part of everything. He moves on again...

Young Person

He has young female social worker and he's actually quite worried about her. He's like, 'but what happens if they see your car and take down your number plate?'

Practitioner

It was not just social conditions that were considered as contributing to dynamics of risk but also physical aspects of space, including the design of public spaces that steals safety away from many young people:

The local council had issues with young people congregating beside the transport hub so put in an alarm system that apparently gave out a high pitch that only worked with teenagers. It was to stop them from congregating there. But maybe it's being a social worker, where else would they go? There's not like a youth club. And I mean there was a youth facility, but you can't, obviously you can't get your buckfast⁸ out in the middle of the youth club in the way they might beside the transport hub! So, you know, I thought that was quite interesting. I guess almost excluding (young) people from certain areas, yes, and it was areas that frightened people because everybody used the transport hub to get in and out and to do stuff. But if it was maybe like somewhere less visible then I don't think anybody would have been that bothered...if it had been outside the corner shop, say in an estate outside the town nobody would have been bothered. But because it was very visible, I think it would be perceived as frightening to like, you know, the population who uses public transport is maybe older people. And there was a few sort of high-profile media incidents of things happening. And all of a sudden, you know, it was targeted to get these alarms that would move all the young people on.

Practitioner

Another practitioner described a space that young people congregated where harmful sexual behaviour occurred. The area has been designed in a distinct way, reflecting urban planning design prioritising pedestrians with a network of walkable spaces and a lot of green space in

⁸ Buckfast is a brand of tonic wine that has a high alcohol content and often sold at a lower price than other forms of alcohol

the urban design. These green spaces, including where the behaviour took place, have been designed with trees and bushes. The behaviour happened at nighttime, where a group of young people were hanging out in a green, wooded area and many of the young people were using alcohol and drugs.

I think there are specific sites that we know young people congregate, and I don't know... it's kind of funny....like there's all these woods, and there's all these planned green spaces. And see if you're driving in and out of here and you don't see houses, you see trees then houses and that's part of the model.... for the idea of like green spaces.....

....well it means that they end up sitting drinking in a bush! or in like a cluster of bushes. Like big bushes.....you know what I mean..... and that would be quite ordinary that these become spaces that young people (hang out)

Practitioner

Reduced guardianship in public spaces is spatial but also temporal, as can be seen in the story splinters at nighttime. This is echoed in a story told by a practitioner about harmful sexual behaviour that happened early in the morning at a park:

So basically, the boy was in the swing park and these two kids that were visiting their Auntie were in the swing park and basically, he took them into the bushes and got them to touch his penis. He looked at them, touched them and got them to touch him but I don't think they were in bushes for long and the kids were that young they didn't really appreciate what had happened 'cause they went home and to their Auntie's house which was right on the edge of the swing park and (she said) 'did you have a good time at park? (they said) 'oh we met this boy and we were playing with him and we were playing doctors and nurses' or something or something like that. I can't mind exactly but that's what had been said and then they went up and the Auntie and the mum went up and chapped⁹ the door of the carer and told them 'look we are calling the police' and that's what happened....

....how can you prevent things like that? What makes space safer?.....there being young people supervised from responsible individuals, but that's unrealistic to think that every swing park in the country is gonna have someone supervising the young people using it.

Practitioner

⁹ Chapped the door meaning knocked on the door

7.1.3 'If these streets could speak....'

There was one particular space shared through discussions with a practitioner who drew maps and shared the space through the Virtual Reality technology. This was a curious space, as it also appeared at the edges of one young participant's story. Gubrium and Holstien (2009) reflect on these interconnections as public spaces holding stories which 'return to storytellers to shape their own accounts and their identities, roles and relationships' which simultaneously 'exemplify and ramify big stories' (p. 147). As a means of anonymising and further disguising the space and the storytellers, I have approached the retelling of this space as if the streets could talk, positioning the streets as the narrator drawn from the words of participants. This space serves as a compelling illustration, weaving together threads of boredom, fun, excitement and risk, to create a tapestry of a deeply troubling urban milieu hiding in plain sight. Rather than time, space and design reducing guardianship – this is a space in full view.

If these streets could speak.....they'd admit they are a bit run down, not like the glamour of the high street close by. Most adults only pass through these streets on their way to somewhere else, especially as it's so close to a transport hub. They might just see us as a bit run down but look at us closely; we have important stories to tell.

If these streets could speak..... they'd whisper to us their legacy that reaches back decades. These quiet whispers would help us to understand that the social history of these streets echoing similar stories from those they tell today has always been a space of meeting, with a hint of shame, like an urban legend that swirls around them.

If these streets could speak..... they'd explain why they consider themselves to have such a pull for young people, enduring over many years. Pointing out the intersections of transport, they would tell us how they are at the heart of different bus routes connecting big coaches to outlying cities with small buses from nearby areas. This makes these streets a unique intersection of different people from different places. Sometimes, children who live in 'care system' spaces come here as they build up their independence, supported by staff. They might wonder about the Scottish Government policy giving under 22-year old's free travel, a continuing headline in the national press, but these streets would remind us that even before this, young people would find their way to them to hang out here.

If these streets could speak..... they'd describe their features, including several fast-food-style restaurants that open long hours. They wonder if these spaces are important for young people and are curious if their toilets make them particularly useful places, because public toilets in this town have all closed. They also have lots of shops on them, and if you look closely, you can notice that many of them are themed around selling things that matter more to children and young people – reflecting

fashion, toys and sweets. Even the names of these small, locally run businesses reflect the focus on childhood interests. There is also a new shop that has a rude connotation in its name – you couldn't make this up! Drugs are frequently bought and sold here. Although these rundown streets lie behind the bigger shops of the town, it has a particular constellation of shops that reveals a microeconomy entangled in risk....

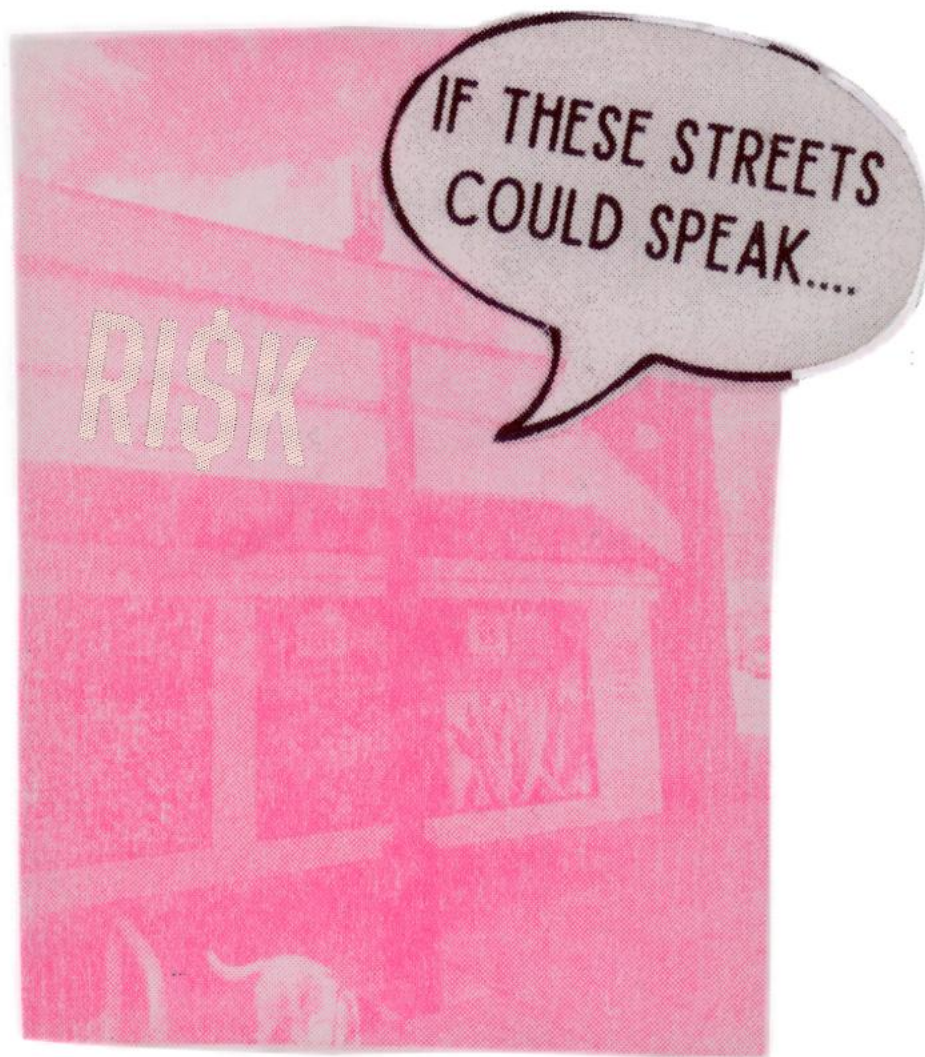
If these streets could speak..... they'd spot how some of the young people coordinate between themselves going to these streets as a way of managing safety. They'll use social media, like messaging and posting virtual flags, as a way of working out who will be going. They wouldn't want to be outnumbered as they'll think it wouldn't work out well if fights started. Sometimes they group together in 'young teams' from different areas or identities. Even a group of young people in a 'care system' space have formed a 'young team'. The streets would tell us that 'young teams' reflects a sense of identity and looking out for each other. Sometimes young people take time out from these streets; they'll say they're 'off it' for the weekend. This can sometimes be due to feeling like they used too many drugs or alcohol.

If these streets could speak..... they'd admit that it is well-known as an unsafe place, a local urban legend. Sometimes, when young people tell adults who care for them about the harm that they encountered, their adults say things like 'what were you doing there anyway?' or 'what do you think is going to happen there?'. These streets acknowledge they can be an intimidating space even for adults, particularly older adults who pass through on their way home.

If these streets could speak..... they'd scream at us to see the adults who also know the huge pull of young people to this unsafe place – it can be a pull for perpetrators too. Like the man who offers teenage boys' small amounts of cash to come back to his home. Like the old man in the restaurant late at night, chatting up young girls. People look at him and think 'look at that filthy old man'. We think these girls are vulnerable around him late at night drunk and they are not safe to be around him. Like the local shop owner who had a flat above his shop and was convicted of raping girls when they came to the shop searching for safety and sanctuary.

If these streets could speak..... they'd wonder why adults didn't do things to make the streets feel safer for the teenagers, like make the police more present, instead of waiting till somebody gets stabbed, then sending them in and setting up mobile CCTV cameras. They look like alien spaceships and get put up after incidents, like murders have happened, which is a bit past the point. Maybe it's to reassure the community, but it's not going to bring anybody back, is it? The streets would tell us that they do notice that there are some youth workers, though.

If these streets could speak..... they'd show us the different forms of intersecting harm that young people are exposed to. They see teenagers 'off their faces' on drugs, selling drugs to other young people for adults and getting paid only small amounts of money. They carry weapons for adults, as they would get fewer charges for being under eighteen. They see young people using these weapons when they feel unsafe, often when under the influence of drugs. They've spotted young people who have displayed HSB using weapons to harm other young people who call them names like 'beast'



7.1.4 Reverberations

Reflecting on the story splinters converging around 'public' spaces, I am fascinated by how they crystallise aspects of places that so easily slip out of gaze. Curious storied threads of boring spaces peek out within the narratives, nuanced from feeling bored in places exposing, just like risk and harm, how boredom easily becomes perceived to be lodged within individuals rather than their social ecologies. Looking at boredom beyond individual feelings or emotions exposes social and structural facets. Thinking sociologically, Darden (2020, p.18) conceives boredom:

as a socially devalued emotion we experience in a setting where the drama fails for some reason; when the only scripts and props available are too well rehearsed and overly familiar; when any roles which exist are undesirable and without the possibility of negotiation; there are not other roles we can or want to take and we feel distant from our roles.

(Darden, 2020, p.18)

Echoing this, Ohlmeier *et al.* (2020) highlight how individualising causes of boredom may 'unintentionally and mistakenly reinforce the perspective that the individual alone instead of the whole social system is responsible for his or her boredom' so boredom better understood as a 'consequence of social inequality' and as a 'socio-organisational-dependent phenomenon' (p. 209). Social perspectives of boredom spark curiosity around what 'boring' places may tell us about young people's experience of social environments. Weybright *et al.*, (2020, p. 363) suggests that 'developmental and contextual factors may create a 'perfect storm' where individual and situation interacts, leading to boring situations that are hard to exit in a healthy way'. Svendsen (2005), connects boredom to personal meaning, positing that, where there is an absence of personal meaning, deflections will be employed to substitute, as an 'ersatz meaning' (pg. 26). Drawing from Svendsen's philosophical reflections cast upon social worlds, I suggest that boring spaces may imply a lack of personal meaning imbued in place, capturing a sense of dislocation of life from the environment of the everyday contesting the notion of equally open 'public' spaces, including parks for young people.

This connection between boredom and dislocation, cutting off or pushing away, could also be seen within the research space. I noticed other ways 'boring' appeared in my notes, including my fears that I was boring my participants!

(at the beginning of a session with a young person) I go through the 'paperwork' –
'boring' I say, 'but really important for him'.

(after the end of sessions with a young person and our goodbyes) I feel I spoke to
much, bored him...

Reflective notes

Delicate dynamics around beginnings and endings became caught up in being 'boring' or 'bored' drawing further curiosity around my sense of 'boring' as connected to cutting off – person to place, person to person and perhaps person to feelings. This was poignantly witnessed in story fragments of one participant and his family. All but one young person spoke about their family fleetingly, often only glimpses at the edges of narratives, reflecting families as distant or absent figures. Yet for one boy, his parents featured in our research encounters as supportive and proud, with an almost magical quality, and it was clear they mattered so very much to him. In stark contrast, fragments of his stories sat incongruently with these stories, leaving me quietly wondering but acutely sensitive to what was shared – maybe how he wanted me (and perhaps himself) to see his life. This was until the very end of our final session when suddenly he tells me:

No one else in his family wants to see him. He looks flat and almost hunched. He says he's seeing his step-uncle tomorrow as he still will see him.....then he's sighs and says this is boring....and goes back to talking about school.

In this saturated moment, I learn that no one in his family other than his step-uncle, will see him, told through his words and his body before being snapped away as 'boring', disappearing as quickly as it could be spoken and seen between us. 'Boring' emerges as multidimensional and complex, serving a function of cutting something off or being cut off – severing a moment, feeling, relationship or space.

Public spaces appear to be socially structured and ordered, pushing young people out through explicit exclusions or dislocations made visible through being 'boring' which may lead to young people searching for space in the edges of the urban milieu. This reflects literature on childhoods and public space in the Global North that are ordered by adults, leading to withdrawal from space to what are described as 'acceptable islands' (Matthews *et al.*, 2000, p. 63) or 'archipelagos of normalised enclosures' (Stavrides 2015, p. 9). Parks are encoded as bounded 'public' spaces for children, reflecting Jenks' (2005) articulation of children as 'sited, insulated and distanced, and by their very gradual emergence into wider adult space is by accident, by degrees, as an award or as part of a gradualist rite de passage' (p. 74). These stories expose tensions around legitimacies of belonging in park spaces that appear implicitly designed for younger children, thus compounding adolescents' sense of being out of place, expressed through designation of places as 'boring', like social pollution as described by Douglas (1999, p. 109) as 'matter out of place'. 'Boring' places may indicate inhibited access and restricted placemaking in spaces that may be safer for young people, highlighting how young people become excluded from public spaces through social policies characterised by 'the search for more cost-effective, 'scientific' means of identifying and eliminating risks' (Disney and Lloyd, 2020, p. 09).

Placemaking in the stories appears entangled in searching for and creating spaces of belonging, meaning, and identities. These spaces are made around the edges of 'public' spaces in ways that can be 'seen to be outside of adult control and ordering, where the fabric of the adult world has become scrambled or torn, and the flows of adult order are disrupted or even abated' (Cloke and Jones, 2005, p. 312). This does not explain why young people display HSB but draws the gaze towards social and spatial dimensions of harm that unfold, including HSB, criminal exploitation, sexual abuse and exploitation, violence, stabbings, drugs and alcohol. Participant's stories juxtapose 'boring', mundane spaces with fun, 'hectic' and exciting spaces, exposing an interplay between individual experiences of self in spaces with structural dynamics, social hierarchies and exclusions. This resonates with Lyng's (2004) articulation of 'edgework' as a way of making sense of risk-taking and making activities which rest at the edge between order and disorder illuminating macro-level and micro-level dynamics. Lyng (2004) describes how structural constraints create conditions where the edges are negotiated with a sense of hyperreality, including the ordinary routines of institutions. Millar (2004) expands the concept of 'edgework' through risk-taking and seeking sensations of fun and excitement to alleviate boredom as:

an attempt to escape an otherwise oppressive, constraining and alienating social world. Delinquent activities can provide juveniles with a sense of excitement and personal autonomy that allows them to momentarily transcend a routine, alienated existence that is controlled by adults. It is the intense feelings of fear and excitement and the sense of control that make the edgework experience, in this case delinquency, particularly seductive

(Miller, 2004, p. 158)

Holding together expressions of 'boring' spaces with articulations of risky behaviour in the different stories I witnessed, including hanging out in the woods, using alcohol and drugs and 'the streets' if they could speak, the concept of 'edgework' illuminates the interplay between individuals and their everyday social worlds. This is not to explain HSB causally through the concept of 'edgework' but to recognise how these 'edges' hold potency for risk and harm to occur. Looking at the edges of social worlds challenges our individualised, decontextualised responses to behaviours that may unfold within spaces. Articulating 'lifescapes' of seemingly 'public' spaces shines light on young people's experiences in social contexts that agitate paradigms and practices that locate risk and safety in individual young people in social and environmental vacuums. The significance of social hierarchies around 'public' spaces cannot be underestimated, as they create contested terrains around rights to space and, importantly, safety. Entangled in the storied spaces are elements of control of space and the creation of space, which can often be at the edges, where some young people avoid 'boring' spaces while navigating terrains of violence. These edges are not always hidden out of view; indeed, they were illustrated as hiding in plain sight, often generating revenue through illegitimate (drug dealing) and legitimate (child/youth oriented) means, illustrating mini economies of risks. We

see the use of 'mosquito nets' to push young people away, whilst society and systems turn a blind eye to the risky nectar that can attract youth like butterflies, only to then blame and shame them for the harm they may encounter. This paints a very different picture from the static, fixed, flattened and often absent understanding of risk in the field of HSB. 'Lifescapes' of 'public spaces, woven together by storied threads, demonstrate how complex, fluid and dynamic risk and safety is experienced within 'public' space including challenging the very notion of 'public' spaces for youth.

7.2 Bedrooms

The departure point for this narrative journey through 'lifecapes' began in 'public' spaces, exposing entanglements of social, structural and spatial conditions, questioning the very notion of 'public' space for young people, especially those who may behave in ways that challenge social hierarchies and public order. A similar topsy-turvy realisation emerges as I encounter what I first considered to be 'private' space, namely the bedroom, which has now challenged my assumptions around 'public'-outside spaces and 'private'-inside spaces. In the story fragments that follow, bedroom spaces emerge as significant spaces in and of themselves, but also in relation to the boundaries and meaning of private/public. Bedrooms matter, as they are contexts where HSB can occur, including in at least two of the young people who participated (as shared in 'About Me' sheets). These are partial, fleeting glimpses into young lives, but they provoke reflections on what are easily taken-for-granted ordinary spaces, almost mundane in nature, that become meaningful and dynamic through thinking narratively.



7.2.1 Safety and sanctuary

At first glance, bedrooms appear unambiguous – private, functional spaces to sleep – yet become spaces that are particularly fluid, partial and contradictory. Strikingly, bedrooms were the only place (named by/for three out of the eight boys – four whom I met with and the other four who practitioners spoke about) immediately and concretely connected with safety.

The sense of bedrooms as a safe space is vividly illustrated in this story fragment:

We sit a little, and he then says he used to go out with his friend, but his friend punched him twice in the head. He says his Auntie went to his friend's door. I say that I was really sorry to hear this and this must have been horrible. He nods and says he doesn't go out anymore. I wonder if this is because he was punched, and he says it was. He tells me that he spends his time in his house, in his room, and there is a bit more energy as he says 'his room'. I wonder what he does and he seems brighter still telling me he plays on his [gaming console].....

.....His cat scares him when he jumps on his bed in the night. He also purrs loudly on his window, and he has to let him in the door. This leads to him telling me his cat is scary in the night because his cat is black. His room is always dark; even if there is a little bit of sunlight, he has to cover his head with a pillow. I wonder about the school holidays (coming up) if that's what he'll do, and he nods. He likes his room.

Young Person

I feel it was important to him that I bear witness to the meaning of his bedroom as a safe place, shut off from light –physically and/or symbolically. Between our first and second session was a school holiday and at the very start of the second session, he tells me early on a similar story of his bedroom:

I wondered how he was and acknowledged the school holidays had passed since we last met. He nodded and said he was still in his room in the dark. I felt there was an eagerness in a way to tell me – it feels important, maybe literally, maybe also symbolically.

Young Person

His bedroom, as a safe space, contrasts with his experiences beyond his home:

He used to go to a Youth Club, he doesn't go anymore, as someone tried to push him into the road. His stepbrother spoke to that person. They have been banned from going back. He hasn't gone back after he was pushed. He says it was boring

there but later mentions he used to watch Netflix with a friend at the Youth Club. Now he watched Netflix on his own in his room.

Young Person

A similar dynamic around the significance of the bedroom for safety is echoed in another story, told by a practitioner:

his room was his safe place. He spent lots of time in his room and he would double lock the door and you know that he wasn't going to come back out because he'd double locked it and at times you would like, you know, he wouldn't sit at the table where others were as it was too much for him to do.

Practitioner

He reflects on the boy's extreme, almost primal, fears about what lies beyond the bedroom door in a 'care system' space including his response to new young people moving in:

there are other times where he was fearful if we had a new young person come in. His first question would be, as I would sit with him in his room and watch him play his games, and he would say 'do you reckon I could batter¹⁰ them?'.... as in do you think if I fought them, I would win? I'd say...'well I don't think they're going to cause you any hassle, they're a nice person and you know they're just settling in so they're not gonna.....you don't have to worry about things like that, it's not an issue you need to be concerned about'.... (young person would say) 'But if I did, would I win?'...'And I'd say 'I don't know the answer to this I'd just sooner you got on with that young person'..... so eventually he would come out of his room, eventually.... we're talking weeks later! Weeks later!

Aye – he wouldn't come out... (the practitioner would say -) 'come on out'....but he would say 'nope I'm too busy' and he then just have his meals in his room and.... obviously we fed him in his room, whatever he wanted but eventually he would come out.... but if that young person engaged with him and over maybe a period of weeks, you'd find that (as if thinking for the young person) 'I know I am more powerful than you, I can now, I would be able to beat you in a fight' he would then target them more.... There was a young person who was moved cause he kept saying to him 'I'm gonna abuse you'....it didn't happen and he didn't but.....

Practitioner

The practitioner goes on to talk about the boundary of the bedroom door and how this boy would have to build up to crossing the threshold between his bedroom and the 'outside' world:

¹⁰ Colloquial term meaning assault

times when I'd go in with his dinner and say '[YP name] coming out for your dinner?'...(young person says) 'yeah ok' and he was behind the door, standing there as if he was open the door but couldn't just automatically, (he illustrates it by saying) 'if you (me/Lynne) want leave this room, you'd just open the door (points to the door of the research space) and go out but it wasn't the case for him.' There was times when I'd open the door 'oh were you coming out?' (young person) 'yeah', (Practitioner) 'ok then come out' – he'd been standing there building up to coming out

I ask what he thought might be happening?

(Young person would be thinking) Who's in – child-wise? What staff are on? We started telling him what staff were on night shift and what staff were on day shift – he needed to know; it helped.

Practitioner

Listening to stories, there is a sense that safety may be felt like a sanctuary away from hostile and unwelcoming social conditions beyond the boundary of their bedroom and home. The practitioner reflects on a boy's extreme responses to any changes in the social world beyond his bedroom in a care space, which is experienced as a threat to flee from but then attack. The practitioner described how they would 'work' within the intimate life space, the bedroom. Sometimes the boy would make a small space in the corner of his bedroom, almost nest-like, and allow the practitioner to watch him play video games in his safe sanctuary:

on a subject area that was good at he loved to be praised like playing [computer game] he loved to be praised 'oh you're brilliant at that'. He would consider the buildings and the stuff you need in the game. And this great and when he was doing it, he would say as much - you know because he would keep going back to 'you like this game don't you, you like it this game'

Sometimes he would make you a space in his room (to watch him play his games). He had this beanbag seat. and he would get his cover off his bed, you'd get all of it. There were a couple of times he fell asleep.

Practitioner

This poignantly reflects the practitioner's sensitivity to the depths of this young person's needs and fears. This could not have been easy given the distressing and persistent verbal, sexual and physical 'attacks' on those around him, adults (staff) and children, which eventually led to him moving on from the placement. The practitioner made connections to early life experiences of the boy, which included 'severe neglect at a very early age' (Practitioner), exposure to adult

violence and drug use (including during his gestation) being locked alone in a room for days and several moves within the 'care system'.

7.2.2 Invisible prisons

Another practitioner spoke about a boy whose bedroom was significant due to very real physical threats of violence directed towards him compounded by exclusions placed upon him through crime prevention restrictions:

...certain opportunities are only available for him in [another town] and he can't go to those places (due to a crime prevention restrictions)he stays in his bedroom every night on his computer

he's worried about if he goes a walk to the shop, there's a risk if somebody could, if they see him, could pick him up bundle him into a car and assault him and... he's basically just in his bedroom or he's taken out by social workers.

Practitioner

For another young person, through the narratives of a practitioner, his bedroom and his home became his 'whole world'.

he just doesn't even leave the house to go.... like step a foot out. So it's like, it's like a prison, and it's for him and his mum. It's really difficult because she doesn't like to leave him. He's got, you know, lots of different needs. He can be left, but she doesn't like to go for long. You know, she's not able to go out for, like, hours and hours and hours without worrying. So, their world's been really restricted.

And so it is like his world is like small, small, small.

Practitioner

As the story unfolds, the practitioner reflects on two important elements that contributed to the shrinking of this boy's social world, which connect to the HSB he displayed in differing yet interconnected ways. One element is the very slow pace of intersecting welfare and justice systems following disclosure of the HSB that thwarted earlier opportunities to engage and support. The other aspect is emotional impact, described as experiences of 'exposure' and 'stress' compounding the invisible 'prison' this boy lives within:

I think the stress and the idea of like, you know, all these things have all happened to him now for almost two years, it's been since the (sexual offence) charges. it's been it's been a long time.... it took a long time, as it always does, for the decision for it to go to [welfare system] and it took a long time, as it always does, before it come to us [practice team] so no work was done with him after it happened for something like 8 months. From the point of being charged, the point of me

becoming involved and then I took probably another four months to actually even remotely get my foot in the door.

And then we're coming up for a year. Yeah. So it's been a really long process for him. So in that time, I do, I think..... what do I think about them? I think there probably is a level of.....I don't want to say, like, guilt or shame, because he's never vocalised that and I don't get that from him. But I think there's been a level of like exposure almost.....so like he's been seen as behaviour has been seen..... a little bit more about him.....EEEEEEEEEE (high pitch)..... like other people outside his house have seen what he had got up to. And so, it's like he's kind of like withdrawn to be a bit more recluse to be like, oh, like, I need to get further inside so that nobody sees anything else

Practitioner

I ask if people actually know about the behaviours, but the practitioner clarifies that it is more a felt sense rather than a reality:

well, no, I mean, not really..... I don't think. I mean like some professionals know. So no, no, I mean even his mum's best friend doesn't know. But I just think in terms of, like, not even the public..... I don't think he's worried about going outside and bumping into someone, but it's more the..... like, the literal, like I've been exposed... almost like someone's, you know, taken his bed cover off. And so it doesn't mean to say that everyone on the street will have experienced the bed cover being taken off, but because it's happened. He wants to be like, you know, he wants to hide away further.

Practitioner

There were additional aspects of this young person's life, including complex additional support needs, which likely compounded barriers to 'physical' social worlds. The practitioner notes that the Covid-19 pandemic public health measures, including school closures, marked a shift when the boy stopped going to school. It is particularly fascinating that the practitioner uses a bedroom-related metaphor to capture the sense of exposure that they think compounds the retreat into a very tiny, isolated physical world akin to *'bed sheets being pulled off'*. This practitioner described a process of internal exposure that contributes to a shrinking from the outside world into their bedroom. The bedroom space seems to symbolise the smallness and darkness of experiences of social worlds, illuminating the aloneness of some of these boys.

7.2.3 Intrusions, exclusions, or seclusions?

Another curious dimension of bedrooms as safe sanctuaries, sometimes invisible prisons, relates to the context of boy's bedrooms and, listening to stories of boys who live in group care environments and practitioners who work in them, the notion of bedrooms as bounded,

private spaces becomes particularly contested. It is as if bedroom walls become tissue-paper thin due to everyday cultures of institutional 'care system' settings. These previous stories of bedrooms as safe sanctuaries reflect a sense of bedrooms becoming thickly bounded, like symbolic walls, that protect them from dynamics of the outside world. For other boys, their bedroom space feels more thinly bounded, diluting any sense of the bedroom as being their personal space. Here a practitioner describes bedrooms in 'care system' spaces like '*goldfish bowls*' when they reflect on the discovery of a personal object (for sexual pleasure) in a young person's room (not the young person who had displayed HSB we had been thinking about)

if you're in a residential setting and, why it's difficult enough if you're in a residential setting, but you're kinda a goldfish bowl in terms of people knowing everything about you and having no private..... you know, you have got private space, but..... to what extent? Because that was in their room and it was found when they were putting the clothes away for him.

Practitioner

As if mirroring the bounded spaces of bedrooms, veering between opacity and transparency, during my meetings with the two boys who had spoken about group living and bedrooms, people interrupted the research session space! It was as if these breaches in the research space reflected the sense of space as belonging to others and privacy as highly contested.

at one point someone came into the room, I felt he (young person) was annoyed and said to them 'if it says occupied then it is'. I said it's quite reflective of what we are talking about.

we're interrupted 3 times; someone even came in to measure up the room.

it all feels like there's no boundaries to the spaces, he's pliable.

from my reflective notes in different sessions

In some 'care system' contexts, bedrooms appear as simultaneously spaces of exclusion and seclusion. Young people do not always have access to their bedroom spaces related to perceived risks, while, for others, a key to their bedroom was a reward for good behaviour and symbolic of trust. Yet, in these contexts the bedroom was also used as a space of seclusion where young people are sent as consequence for their behaviour. During one of our research sessions, an incident unfolded outside the room we were in, and, unprompted, the young participant shared his sense of what was happening. His generous narration illuminates how exclusion from the space, such as a bedroom, can lead to searching for space that then, in turn, results in seclusion to their room:

(reflecting on the young person involved in the incident) they'll have gone to sit in the hall, they won't want to sit with the others, and I don't think they've got a key to go to their room. They don't all have this. He says bedroom doors get closed, as doors can be wedged closed, things can get pinched, etc. They (the young person shouting outside) will want space in the hall but will be moved on; they won't want to go to their room, but they'll (the staff) tell them. He says that sometimes when young people are put to their rooms, he'll make a joke 'well that's the door shut' and staff will tell him off. He says what do they expect – be petrified or act like that's not happened?

He tells me sometimes young people can be going through a really tough time, but they look fine. He says things can build and build. He says it's a sad thing...it's quite sad living in a group environment. They are all about the same age, with hormones all over the place, seeing family and not seeing family. He says there's a lack of space.....(counts up the number) X teenagers in this small space..... all aged between 12 and 18.

Young Person

7.3.4 Reverberations

In the beginning, exploring the story splinters, the concept of the bedroom felt like the most obvious and easy to articulate, yet bedrooms emerge as complex, contested and highly contextualised spaces. A strong connection with safety emerges, reflecting both the inside space of the bedroom and what lies beyond outside the bedroom door. The sense of safety in bedrooms connects to complex social ecologies, serving as tiny retreats or sanctuaries shielding from hostile, feared social worlds and the catalogue of 'hurts' experienced in social contexts like youth clubs and communities. Some of this is compounded by early trauma and processes of 'exposure', shame and stigma felt after displaying HSB. Systemic responses such as restrictions and risk management may further contribute to the meaning and importance of bedroom spaces.

Bedrooms are significant temporally as well as spatially, particularly in the context and aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic public health measures and restrictions. Recurring and prolonged 'stay at home' orders changed relationships with our homes, which often became the locus of our whole lives for prolonged periods of time. In my 'narrative beginnings', I shared how my journey through this PhD began in the context of Covid, but this is also reflected in the storied experiences of participants:

...they (the family) felt COVID impacted this... their lives hugely.....he went to a school that has support for people with additional needs. He doesn't have a disability but would have difficulties so he would have been more high functioning

than a lot of people that have been at school.... but even then, still no groups and or things like that, but you probably would have gone out to the shops or things. Mum said that they would sometimes go to a community celebration as they'd gone before but they planned to this year and right at the last minute he wouldn't go so they didn't go..... so they've got opportunities for the world be a bit bigger but he doesn't.....

Practitioner

I ask about how old he was when he moved to the (care system placement), and he works out the numbers – he went in there in 2020 and was maybe about 14. I comment that this would have also been through Covid, and he tells me he had Covid 6 times....that 'isolation is the house wasn't...lets just say tip top'. He says the first time was the worst – he was stuck in his room for two and a half weeks. He spoke about feeling very sore in his bones for the first week, and it really affected him that time. He told a story about the manager coming in to talk at the end, and he was annoyed – he said she either didn't know or didn't bother that he had Covid. I say it's like he had a double isolation

Young Person

As our homes shape-shifted into our social lives, workspaces and schools, many bedrooms morphed into classrooms, offices and clinical quarantines. There may be residues of this time that linger or perhaps more permanently alter the meanings of our homes and bedrooms, heightening the significance of bedrooms with implications relating to safety and risk. Bedrooms are highly contextual, ranging from the bedroom as a private space with a sense of belonging and ownership to a thinly bounded space shaped by dynamics of intrusions, exclusions and seclusions.

7.3 Digital spaces

The next stop on our journey through 'lifescapes' is digital spaces, which follows on very closely to the previous section on 'bedrooms' where I learned that bedrooms were significant spaces for safety and became sanctuaries, at times invisible prisons, for some boys. In a physical sense, bedrooms seem like closed-off spaces, yet this next story fragment highlights the significance of bedrooms and entanglements of social worlds:

...certain opportunities are only available for him in [another town] and he can't go to those places (due to a crime prevention restrictions)he stays in his bedroom every night on his computer

Practitioner

7.3.1 Bedrooms as gateways into digital social worlds

Whilst online digital spaces are accessible almost everywhere and anywhere, bedrooms appear in stories like gateways into digital social worlds. Such online spaces present in boy's everyday worlds are not easily mapped as beyond the physical gaze but were often made visible through the narratives of objects that make visible the 'Internet of Things' (Manches *et al.*, 2015), including gaming consoles, computers and mobile phones.

His favourite things are PS5 and his phone; he uses his phone to play games and chat with his cousin on Snapchat, the same cousin that used to force him to go out.

Participant

he nods and says he doesn't go out anymore. I wonder if this is because he was punched, and he says it was. He tells me that he spends his time in his house, in his room, and there is a bit more energy as he says 'his room'. I wonder what he does, and he seems brighter still, telling me he games. He plays sometimes with his cousin on [gaming console].

Participant

The sheer vastness and boundarylessness of digital space contrast with the starkness of tiny, shrinking social worlds glimpsed through narratives of bedroom spaces. One practitioner reflects on how offline social landscapes create barriers which contrast with multitudes of online social worlds accessible from this tiny world:

their world's been really restricted. I think as well, like you obviously are social worker too, you learn about that like, you know that quality of life and how it's all

connected to our worlds, when they get small because the health-related reasons or you know disability and his world has got smaller because of his mental health

Practitioner

Gaming consoles and phones act like bridges into online social worlds where young people can belong, develop social identities and meet many of their needs:

from what I get, I think a sense of purpose, and a sense of a..... what's the kind of word I'm looking for..... like a role almost, and also a position of... kind of... power but I don't think power is maybe the right word..... like that's where his world is and he can be. A bit about being in online worlds, playing Xbox and different online worlds, playing Playstation...and different online worlds, playing something on his phone. So he has all these different places.

Practitioner

The sharp contrast between experiences in the 'real' physical world and digital worlds is vividly reflected:

but you know, not that I can diagnose him with this, but I would say is addicted to the game.... he will stay up all night and you know, there's a real sense of like, you know, he can't pull himself away from it at all. There's maybe some have to do with (disability) that he gets started to game he has to finish but it's very addictive. He wants to be in these worlds – he doesn't want to really be in the physical world.

Practitioner

These representations of online worlds resonate with emotional and relational needs and pressures related to belonging, social identities and fitting in that are also significant in 'lifescapes' of school (8.5.3 Fitting in)

he does have a physical world because he has these things that he wants to do to his physical self (connected to personal style). It's not like he's totally lost connection with that person. But it's almost just like that's just a part of him, the physicalbecause online he can be whatever he wants it to be.

Practitioner

However, unlike school, digital social worlds lie beyond our physical gaze, creating complex challenges for understanding safety and risks. The vastness of space generates an almost boundaryless space of potential harms as young people develop digital ways of being agentic and mattering, creating profound vulnerability and risks. The number of children who have been harmed through the online HSB of one young person was profound and acutely

distressing. The practitioner supporting him articulated the sense of separateness and starkness between these two worlds:

a tiny, tiny physical world and an almost prolific one online

Practitioner

Risk assessment, management and supervision and risk in digital spaces feel qualitatively different from associated risk practices in 'physical' social worlds, posing complex challenges and anxieties as expressed by practitioners. They described the sense of how digital social worlds feel so cut off and separate alongside the sheer magnitude of the space and enormity of harm that can unfold beyond our 'physical' gaze:

he does have an online world. I don't get to be privy to quite what that is.

Practitioner

...it's just nobody checks his phone, nobody checks anything, because there's nothing in place....

Practitioner

If his physical world was this big, everyone would be concerned – his home is safe for him but can be unsafe for others.

Practitioner

Perhaps the most 'visible' relational object of the 'Internet of Things', bridging social worlds, was mobile phones. Phones were not only visible in stories, but they were also present in the research process and space, further highlighting an ever-presence of phones as connections between people and digital worlds. My phone served as a transitional object that connected between myself and participants and, for us together, to explore social worlds, known and unknown, beyond the physical space of the session rooms. I used the 'hot spot' my mobile phone to connect the VR headset to the internet, allowing exploration of spaces simultaneously cast onto my laptop. In other moments, boys showed me things important in their lives on their phones, such as beloved pets, hurts or travel journey's they had taken since we had last met, creating micro-moments of connections between us:

he shows me pictures of his Auntie's dog with cute little puppies and he's holding one.

Young Person

tells me about his weekend, and he shows me on Google Maps on his phone the adventures he had on two road trips. He shows me where his friend lives and the routes they took

Young Person

shows me a picture on his phone of his cut finger. He says he cut it on a can of juice and got sent out of class yesterday to get a plaster.

Young Person

talks about fast cars he likes and even shows me pictures on his phone. Different big cars, bright colours, expensive cars, cars he thinks are silly, and also a short video of a sports car that the owner is letting people rev up.

Young Person

7.3.2 Connections and disconnections

Stories frame mobile phones as relational objects and sites of connections and disconnections made visible in different stories. Several boys talk about how significant their mobile phones are for connecting to their social worlds, expressing frustrations about adult's perceptions of phones:

he says adults shouldn't take phones off kids..... it's a different generation and they (young people) can't just go knocking on people's doors to see if they want to come out...sometimes you don't even know where people live.

Young Person

he thinks that phones are necessary – adding, 'I need to speak to people and keep in contact'

Young Person

Poignantly, one boy got his phone back between two of our sessions, as it was removed when he moved into the 'care space'. He describes how he reconnected with friends from his past:

seems so excited about his phone. He tells me he got back in touch with his friends....and it went better than he had expected. He thought it might be one or two (friends) as it's been so long, like a year and a half. But he's in a group chat. He says they were either crying or thought he'd been hit by a bus. He says I didn't know whether to comfort them or laugh. Next he hopes to meet them in person.

Young Person

Phones were not only connectors for past and present relationships but also had the potential to be conduits for new social connections, including boyfriends and girlfriends, through social media and apps. During one session I had a glimpse into 'virtual' social worlds, juxtaposed with the tiny worlds some boys live from their bedrooms:

he's still very fixed on his phone and I can see what still looks like a girl's face. It goes on for some time and I'm not sure if I should ask... a while I decide to say something like, 'I wonder what you are looking at?'. He beams a smile and tells me he's using an app that turns people into anime characters. He then shows me his phone, and it's a girl, so I ask who it is. He tells me it's his girlfriend and appears both proud and coy. He met her on [app]. He tells me it's for meeting people and making friends. He met his girlfriend here – she is homeschooled, he tells me, and lives in a country that starts with the letter, but he doesn't know how to say it. I wonder why teenagers might use an app like this, and he tells they can have someone to talk to. I wonder if he talks on the phone, but he says he talks through text. I wonder about what other apps they might use, and he tells others.....

Young Person

.....he's back on his phone again, so I just move on, saying this has been really interesting to learn about the spaces in his life, like apps and online. I later say something about how maybe when he doesn't like being outside and with other people and people haven't always been nice, maybe it's important to make friends online. I'm left with a sense of his vulnerability but a stark and strong feeling about the need to make friends and have people and how online spaces must feel so inviting and important.

My reflective notes

7.3.3 Restrictions, rewards and safety

Three of the four boys I met with spoke about the significance of phones, which often centred around loss and restrictions of their phones. It is notable that the three boys who spoke of phones being removed were cared for in 'care system' spaces. Sanctions around phones may not be unusual for many young people, regardless of the context of their care, but it may highlight a difference around access and control of mobile phones between children and young people who are in the 'care system' (away from home) or not. Further, it raises questions around how phones are restricted and managed when children or young people have displayed HSB.

he says he gets his brick¹¹ phone to go out for free time. I ask about this and he tells me, as if a secret, that they call it a burner¹² phone (this makes us both laugh!) I ask more about the phone and why it is like this.....he says very animatedly 'back to that big word risk'

¹¹ A colloquial term for an early style mobile phone that is large and old fashioned, often with no capacity for connectivity to the internet

¹² A colloquial term for a phone that is cheap and requires no contract, often lacks or has limited capacity for connectivity to the internet

Young Person

he says in (the 'care system' space) phones are given back as rewards, and he has got his phone! He says all the staff will agree – he's worked his socks off. I ask what it means to work your socks off, wondering particularly what it means to 'work'. He tells me it's things like going about my daily business, working with my therapist, not getting into trouble, doing well at school and not doing stuff with troublemakers, doing well

Young Person

you have been good – you can get your phone back for a time

Young Person

For some, they felt the threshold of being 'rewarded' phones was unfair and unequal:

he doesn't get a phone but others do – but he doesn't do the same things that other (who get phones) do like getting restrained or running away. These are the reasons phones can be taken away

Young Person

For some, phones appeared to be removed due to miscommunications, creating conflicts:

he begins to talk about them (staff) taking his phone from him, and whilst he understood why this was, it caused more problems. Even though his phone had been returned, he would try to tell staff, who would take it off him, but they thought they knew better. He said the information wasn't passed on and he explained that it had changed but they would still take his electronics of him as someone didn't get told. He said there was a lack of communication

Young Person

There is also some mention of phones being checked by adults:

makes a comment about adults not being on the same level. He says adults shouldn't be looking through phones; he understands there might be worries, but not every day....he begins to almost mimic what adults say – you can't swear on texts – you can't FaceTime during this time. He says that you can teach kids a lesson – I wonder what he means – and he says 'take something else from them.'

Young Person

Phones were also represented in some stories as important ways of negotiating safety:

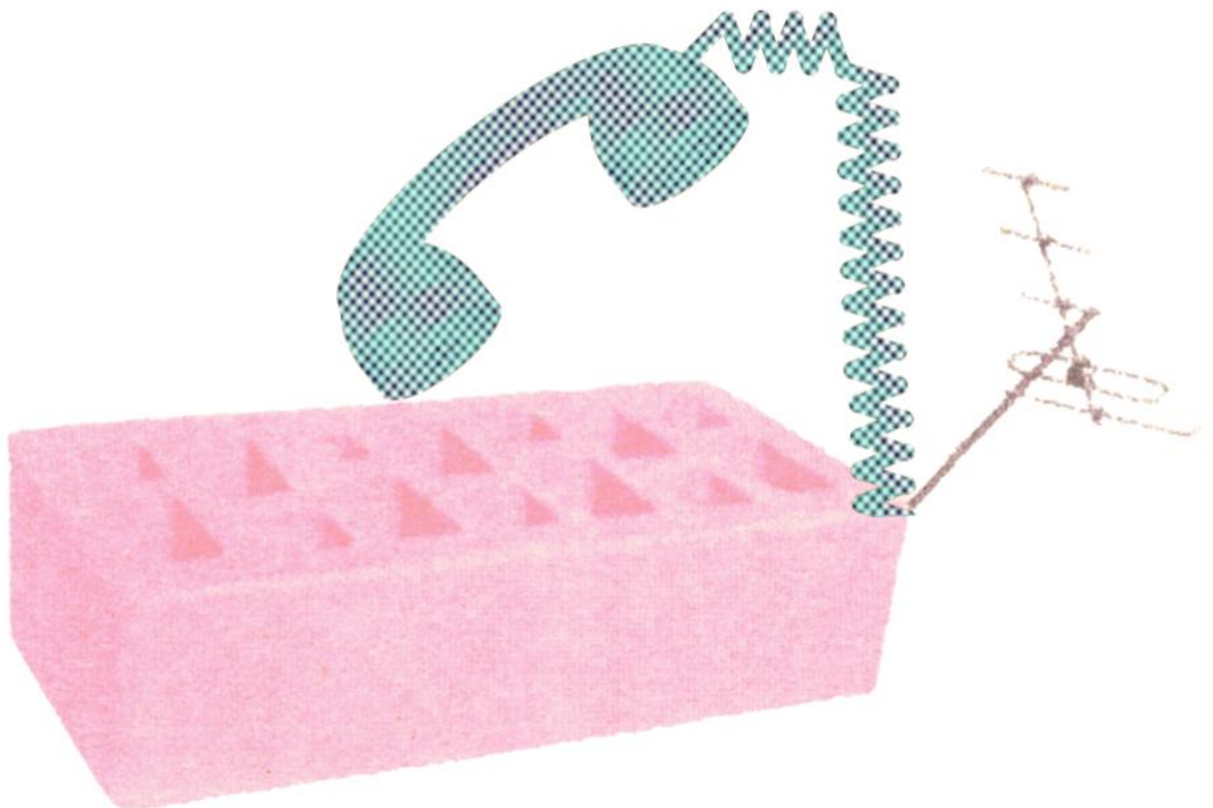
I wondered why people might take his phone, and he said it was seen as a risk, and he'd be up to no good. He said, 'but I'm a teenager – my generation, we are lost without our phones – I feel lost if I don't have it'. He began to tell me it matters if something goes wrong and about one time he was out and had an accident. He could only phone emergency services, as he had limited coverage, and he was found.

Young Person

Social media apps, accessed through mobile phones, can also be used as a medium through which safety can be socially organised. A practitioner reflects upon the informal safety planning some young people undertake together to visit the space featured in 8.1.3 'If these streets could speak....'

they'll try and work out who else is gonna be there cause if you're the two boys from (X TOWN) and you're going there and there's twenty boys from (Y TOWN) that's not gonna end well for you. So, they negotiate... they use Snapchat and stuff like that, and you can put a flag up..... they will coordinate by social media

Practitioner



7.3.4 Reverberations

By weaving together thread of ‘lifescapes’ of bedrooms, I illustrate through stories how bedrooms can be significant spaces bridging to digital spaces, not least because personal computers, gaming consoles and mobile phones were often in young people’s bedrooms. However, this was not as evident in the context of ‘care systems’ bedrooms, which could be contested, which also connects to the previous chapter around boundaries of bedrooms. It feels important to acknowledge the significance of digital mediums and spaces with pornography despite not being present in any of the stories – perhaps due to the sensitivity and proximity of the research design that may create a more exposing or embarrassing space to talk about pornography. However, reflections on safety and risk in digital spaces are highly relevant around exposure to and use of pornography.

Exploring the different stories has led me to consider the fusion of seemingly separate social worlds – the physical and the digital. The distinction between these two worlds is perhaps an illusion as:

digital social worlds are part of the fabric of everyday experience for many people who already drift continuously between presence across different facets of the digital technoscape (including internet, social media and gaming) and the analogue worlds, potentially finding meaning, connection and identification across them

Henry and Horgan, 2024, p. 01

This shatters what are often binarized representations between online and offline experience, which is particularly significant in the context of HSB, which is often categorised as Technology Assisted HSB (TA-HSB). This may highlight a potential false dichotomy between digital and physical contexts, determined by where the behaviour happened, which may neglect the relevance of digital social worlds in our understanding of ‘contact’ HSB and vice versa. Stories of bedrooms as significant and complex spaces laid the breadcrumbs, though (internet of) ‘things) such as gaming consoles, which led me to compelling conceptualisations of ‘virtual bedrooms’. Fascinatingly, the meshing of bedrooms and digital space in these stories echoes youth and media studies discourses where social networking sites are often made sense of through parallels between bedrooms and platforms, including spatial metaphors of ‘virtual bedrooms’. Bedrooms become understood both as ‘real’ physical spaces and as ‘virtual bedroom’, a way of conceptualising digital-like extensions of bedrooms as private and personal spaces where identities can be developed and performed and connections created with a sense of control (Lincoln, 2012). Lincoln and Robards (2016) draw parallels between bedrooms and social media platforms, highlighting how they serve as environments where personal and

collective identities can be explored, recorded, and experimented with. Crucially, the combination of bedrooms and social media creates a blended space, where the virtual and physical boundaries provide different degrees of privacy. Similarly, Pearson (2009) uses the metaphor of the 'glass bedroom' to capture the negotiation of space in digital spheres:

The metaphor can take a number of forms, but at its core it describes a bedroom with walls made of glass. Inside the bedroom, private conversations and intimate exchanges occur, each with varying awareness of distant friends and strangers moving past transparent walls that separate groups from more deliberate and constructed 'outside' displays.....It is a bridge that is partially private and public, constructed online through signs and language.

(Pearson, 2009, para 12)

Conceptualisations of 'virtual' or 'glass' bedrooms contest and expand flattened representations of seemingly distinct 'public' and offline worlds with digital and 'private' spaces. Drawing from media and digital studies helps reframe spaces in social ecologies as interconnecting and intersecting. They contest traditional boundaries between 'public' and 'private' through spatialising the notion of digital spaces as significant public spaces, or networked publics. Boyd (2014) invokes the idea of multiple 'publics' in youth digital connections conveying gathering, connections and community which intertwine and 'get tangled up in one another, challenging any effort to understand the boundaries and shape of any particular public' (p. 09). This illustrates the significance of digital spaces as contexts that blur the boundaries between physical social worlds of communities and peers. Participant stories trace some of the connections between contexts, including similarities and the significance of digital contexts for social identities and connections.

Burrowing into digital media literature, I discovered the fascinating concept of 'context collapse' which could offer a different lens for understanding the social and spatial relationships between different contexts of everyday life. Lincoln and Robards (2014) define context collapse as:

the conflation of various complex social worlds (made up of family, friends, old school mates, romantic interests, work colleagues, and so on) into a singular performative medium: the profile that is at the core of the social network site

(Lincoln and Robards, 2014, p. 928)

Context collapse has been developed in relation to social media, but I contend it is a useful concept to capture dynamics between online and offline social worlds. Glimpses of context collapses can be witnessed in some stories, particularly visible around the boy whose whole world is:

a tiny, tiny physical world and an almost prolific one online

His absence in a physical social world, beyond his front door, is powerfully juxtaposed with an '*almost prolific*' presence in digital social worlds. For the different boys whose bedrooms were their safe place in the bedroom 'lifescapes', their use of gaming consoles, personal computers and phones appeared important ways they socialised and spent their time. Their 'physical' worlds are experienced as overwhelming and hostile, which could be compounded by crime prevention restrictions that illuminate how contexts may collapse into digital contexts as a way of finding meaning, identity and connections. Rather than bedrooms being merely 'private' spaces, their tiny worlds inside their bedrooms may also be gateways into online worlds which may compensate for sparse, unwelcoming and restricted physical worlds. These may not be complete collapses but may reflect constricted contexts where digital spaces offer respite, where they can just be '*who they want to be*' and belong. However, the dynamics of safety seeking and placemaking in digital spaces, when other contexts become constricted or collapsed create perfect storms.

Bedrooms become sites where digital social worlds, like virtual bedrooms, become sanctuary-like spaces where 'codified constructions of self and setting take on different performative frames' and where some interactions are 'constructed with an awareness of the users beyond the glass walls and play to them, exchanging information and ideas using common signs and symbols' (Pearson, 2009, para 13). In different stories, common social 'signs' and 'symbols' beyond these glass walls were social currencies of branded clothing, smoking weed and being cheeky to teachers – as seen in the 'schools' chapter. The 'signs' and 'symbols' inside the glass walls, including codes and symbols, were deeply disturbing and harmful, particularly in stories that involved producing and exchanging child sexual abuse material as part of a '*prolific*' online presence. Examining the glass walls of the virtual bedroom, (harmful) behaviours may be connected to social and spatial dynamics of developing identity, negotiation of status and peer sociality (Boyd, 2007). Rather than separate spaces, absence in physical environments may create sanctuaries in bedrooms and 'virtual bedrooms' where contexts 'can collapse for lack of spatial, social or temporal boundaries' (Kaul and Chaudhri, 2017, p. 02).

In the stories, there is also a sense of being or feeling different, which plays out in young people's experiences of their everyday social worlds – 'physical' and digital. Notions of ambient belonging and exclusion are useful to make sense of these almost invisible social and spatial dynamics. In the field of computing science, Cheryan *et al.*, (2009) articulate 'ambient belonging', a sense of fitting in, as encompassing a:

fit with the material (e.g., physical objects) and structural (e.g., layout) components of an environment, along with a sense of fit with the people who are imagined to occupy that environment. Ambient belonging, we argue, can be ascertained rapidly, even from a cursory glance at a few objects

(Cheryan *et al.*, 2009, p. 0146)

In the contexts of physics and astronomy, Malcom-Piqueux (2024) describes ‘ambient exclusion’ to articulate how subtle exclusions are embedded in social, relational and structural environments and signalled through ambient cues, which often fall under the gaze of dominating groups. There may be layers of ambient exclusion in physical worlds in children and young people’s everyday social milieu that create undercurrents of discomfort that lead to avoidance. This may resonate with dynamics of exclusion, cutting off or dislocation that I identified in narratives of ‘*boring*’ spaces. These pervasive yet unarticulated barriers may be particularly relevant for young people who are different from those who more easily fit in to dominating social and structural conditions, such as neurodiverse or disabled young people. Unspoken social rules, expectations and dynamics may create spaces where young people feel socially disconnected. Yet the vast expanse of digital space offers infinite possibilities for ambient belonging, a feeling of fitting into one’s material and social environment – accessible even from your bedroom. This creates significant differences in the ‘size’ of social spaces, as young people inhabit small physical social geographies from their bedrooms while being part of big online social worlds. The limitations of supervision and guardianship in online spaces seriously compromise the safety that many young people may seek. Considering contexts that collapse into digital spheres, such as public and school spaces, may highlight how ableist, neurotypical and heteronormative (amongst others) structures and spaces may compound access and inclusion in spaces of everyday life. Curiously, a review of Stop It Now! Scotland’s action research project called the Risk of Online Sexual Abuse (ROSA) project for children and young people who engaged in technology-assisted HSB highlighted that complex needs in relation to mental health and neurodiversity included 42% were LGBTQ, 18% ASD and around 23% were described as socially isolated, which may increase risk and vulnerability in online spaces (Vaswani *et al.*, 2022).

Attention to constricting and collapsing contexts is not bound to physical spaces, such as bedrooms, but sparks curiosity about connections/disconnections between contexts, including expanding and shrinking life worlds. Narratives reflect the multiplicity of meanings of phones that compound and contest notions of risk. Stories show how phones can be objects that fall under concrete risk management, such as checking, restriction and removing phones from young people, but stories reflect meanings that sit in tension with these including phones as important for safety and connections. For some young people, phones offer sanctuary and space to develop connections with friends and have fun, such as the boy who shared with me how apps can be used for making friends. For others, mobile phones become critical conduits for developing and maintaining connections in the physical world, including reaching across physical distances when young people move in care placements. Walsh *et al.*, (2009) articulate the myriads of functions that mobile phones can play in social psychological wellbeing, including belongingness (including over distance), social identity and being connected to others. I notice that stories of conflict over access or privacy with phones are told from the context of the ‘care system’ echoing the briefing paper by Simpson (2020) exploring the use of mobile phones for children in care in Scotland. Simpson (2020) calls for a more balanced view

of phones for connections with family and friends, beyond an overdependence on risk-averse procedural approaches, to embrace 'socio-genealogical connectedness, which stresses the importance of charting and taking account of children and young people's broader social network that incorporates both their extended family and home community' (p. 12). This captures some of the essence of my proposition of how social, structural and systemic practices can contribute to constricted or collapsing contexts where risk and/or safety can be concentrated.

7.4 Past and future spaces

Traversing ‘lifescapes’, another dimension of space less visible to our gaze emerges, which I describe as past and future lives. These feel partial and delicate, so it is important to respectfully represent them as important parts of personhood, not reduced to chronologies, variables or risk factors.

7.4.1 Past lives

The Virtual Reality technology was useful for moving not only through space but also through time. All but one of the boys traced back spaces of their pasts, which was an aspect of the virtual environment, memorialising spaces. I noticed a time lag in the Virtual Environment (Google Street View used by Wander) so the spaces we ‘visited’ felt like snapshots suspended in time. Past lives were shared through stories of the ordinary and the mundane that set the stage for everyday life. Spaces were brought to life by the stories embedded within them, evocatively reflecting relational memories and generously narrating our journeys together like tour guides of their lives:

he’s like a tour guide; I sense things that can’t be thought about or shared but just gently glide past yet are ‘seen’. We are at flats— where he used to live. Lots of time here – he knows by levels and points them out. I feel he’s taking care to share his world, like the tour guide of this life world; it feels very considerate. There’s a park by the flats but he stopped going. His grandad would sit on that bench. Once, his dog ran away from here.

Young Person

then we’re at the beach. He spends time looking at the beach and tells me he has been there; his wee brother ate the sand.

Young Person

we then go to his mum’s house. There are huge sunflowers in the garden that she grew, and he talks me through the garden that has the sunflowers and flower beds and strawberries.

Young Person

we are at his cousin’s house – he points out the trampoline in the garden. He tells me that it’s his cousin’s mum’s boyfriend’s house. He shows me their car. He’s been for a sleepover there.

Young Person

Some stories, told by or about boys, connect to more distressing experiences in earlier lives entangled in harms and hurts. Reflections on traumatic early lives seemed more articulated by practitioners, perhaps reflecting how much easier to tell someone else's difficult stories than it is to tell our own:

he was quite a vulnerable young boy – he came from a family where he had witnessed a lot of domestic abuse; his parents split up, so his Auntie took care of him, but she had a learning disability and treated them quite harshly, so he was taken away from her care, and that's when he was put into foster care. He was a young boy who just wanted to impress you, wanted to be liked, wanted to be loved.....just a nice wee boy that sadly got himself into that situation.

Practitioner

he had a traumatic life; he had a very unstable life

Practitioner

his mum's had a terrible life herself, she was sexually abused by a family member. So isn't it just..... is a pattern? You know the stereotype... of patterns repeating within families, but like, how does this pattern repeat?! Her children have now been sexually abused by her boyfriend. She's really draconian on her son.

Practitioner

he's been in care since he was a toddler.....significant levels of substance abuse. His parents went on to have other children. I suppose that would be really hard for him because he's seen these other kids get cared for and nurtured....he doesn't get birthday presents or Christmas presents..... it's as if he never happened

Practitioner

Some boys shared their own difficult earlier life experiences:

(talking about risk) He immediately says 'where do I start and laughs! He says risk could be anything, could be working in a practical woodwork class or cutting your finger or getting a skelf¹³. He said there can be risk of safety... but this can vary, some young people are in family situations, and they can't use social media as family members will know where they live. I wondered why this might be and he says people will say 'being battered by ma da'¹⁴..... he tells me that most young people are in the care system because of domestic abuse. I gently try to wonder if he means between adults or adults to children (given 'the battered by ma da'

¹³ A skelf is a Scottish word for a splinter, like splinter of wood

¹⁴ Scottish colloquialism – 'battered' meaning beaten or assaulted, 'ma da' meaning 'my dad' - similar to 'being beaten up by my dad'

comment). He says couples. He says they go to the care system for safety like him, he was 10 and the oldest of 5 siblings. The two youngest were lucky as they went to a family member. The other two siblings went to different foster carers, but they were lucky as the foster carers knew each other, and they would see each other. He said if they had been together, they could have supported each other.

Young Person

he tells me, 'I was emotionally unsafe with my mum but in residential houses you are physically unsafe'. He says it depends on what you can live with – some people can live being emotionally unsafe, some people can live with being physically unsafe – it depends on what you can live with.

Young Person

For some of the participants, the incident of HSB appeared to have huge impacts on their lives, at times with experiencing significant rejections from close family, compounding already complex family dynamics. Sometimes, it seems that individual boys were left to carry shame and stigma for adults whose own behaviours had impacted their families adding a particularly profound dimension of complexity:

(practitioner talking about the intergenerational harm in the family including significant violence) his Dad is very, very negative to him and also very hypocritical cause his dad told him that you're bringing shame on the family, but I think no YOU'RE bringing shame on your family?! (practitioner is incredulous and laughs), not that we work on a sort of a shame model but.....!

the practitioner shares significant behaviours by the father and extended family. I then ask what aspect of the boy's many behaviours and vulnerabilities were shameful

'.....the sexual stuff. Yeah, apparently a lot of stuff (e.g. violence, criminality, harm) is OK. But the sexual behaviour crossed the line..... his dad stopped speaking to him'

Practitioner

Legacies of shame are reflected in a young person's story:

he goes on to talk about how some staff 'judged him more than his family' and talks about what sounds like a destructive situation in his family – he says he 'messed up' his own family. He doesn't care about the others like his step-Uncle, who he says they think it is his fault they divorced, and they still won't talk to him, but all he cares about is his mum, siblings and grandad, and they are now talking to him. He says he feels responsible. He says he's done a lot of reflecting with

people and he can know that he is responsible but what matters is his mum, grandad and siblings but also the others like his step-uncle, maybe their actions had repercussions too but then whether his actions affected them he doesn't know but doesn't think about that.

Young Person

This is a significant reminder about how systems can flatten lives into single stories, exposing what lies beneath our case records and chronologies, including the personal meanings of professionals and processes:

he says his social worker wasn't 'that bad'.... not like his little sister who had 13 Social Worker's and how they all did the same thing – been once, make crappy notes, then are never seen again. He then says that if the first few Social Workers social workers had done their job right, then she'd have gotten her diagnosis years ago. He says they were all affected and put on a Child Protection Plan.

I ask what he thinks would have been Social Worker's doing their job right?

he says really clearly 'you're in a job, you're making a commitment to a family to make a difference, but you end up leaving the family feeling worse...they feel like a helpless cause.

Young Person



7.4.2 Reverberations

Thinking about children and young people's life experiences is common practice in research and practice around issues of HSB. However, these stories remind us that they have deeply personal and profound meanings, complex and conflicting, that are far more than 'incidents' or 'factors'. Whilst understanding pathways that contribute to HSB is critical, I am left wondering how experiences can become emotionally detached, dislocated from meaning through the machinery of our systems, and forced into ambivalent dichotomies of being victim or perpetrator. We must not forget that they are not our stories – they belong to those who lived them. Most of these stories don't easily make sense because they are, in many ways, senseless. They represent profound breaches of children's rights to safety, rendering safety and protection as scarce. They reflect that sources of safety and protection can simultaneously be sources of abuse and neglect, including at times our welfare and child protection systems. They speak to past lives where love, care and sex become entangled in violence, abuse and harm that transcend professional narratives flattened down into chronologies, referrals and assessments. Safety becomes fragmented, which is important for thinking about how we understand physical safety, relational safety and sexual safety in everyday life.

7.4.3 Futures of freedom, fun and friends

Further beyond the physical gaze, glimmers of futures could be witnessed through some of the boy's stories as they shared hopes for lives that lay ahead of them. Some of these are beautiful in their simplicity, conveying a belief that life can be different. In this story fragment, one boy talks through his future in steps towards his adulthood:

....he hopes to meet them (his old friends) in a café when his free time gets increased. His support worker will come with him to begin with but sit a bit further away. Eventually he can say to his support worker, 'I'm off to meet my pals'. One of his friends is struggling, but when they meet, all the jokes will be flowing! His friends have been saying, 'we're coming to meet you!'

Young Person

But the past isn't too far away in his mind, as he shares:

they have asked him, 'where did you go?'. He has only shared a little information – he just said he'd moved on but soon he can say that he's just one step away from his own house.

I wonder what might be difficult about talking to his friends....

he tells me it's a wee bit too much for them to process, he doesn't know how they'll feel about that. But before he moved on because things had happened but now he can say he's moved on to somewhere and the next steps.

Young Person

He shares these next steps for the future that seem inextricably linked to his sense of being his own person, freedom, autonomy and independence.

he'll move onto a supported flat. You can get up at 9:30am and be home by 10:30pm! He tells me soon he can learn to drive a car and even a motorbike if he wants!

Young Person

There is such hopefulness, but what strikes me most is the sense of ordinariness to his dreams of the future. They are dreams of a life that are the same as many young people – hopes for a future career, saving up his birthday, Christmas and pocket money to buy things. I feel moved by the sense that, despite past difficulties, some young people can believe in a life that lies ahead for them.

he tells me he has big dreams he feels he can accomplish, and he can get round. He wants to do (job) – he'll take a part-time job in McDonald's if he needs to and keep going with his skills.

Young Person

It is interesting that the job that this young person wants in the future is related to his hobby for wildlife and nature, which he shares with another young person in the 'care system' space where they stay. Another boy shares his big dreams for the future that connect to his hobbies and interest. This boy spoke of his love of art, so I bought coloured pencils and a sketchbook to add to the Research Toolbox in light of this discussion. He also drew me a beautiful picture of a dog for me to take with me after the sessions ended. He has hopes of developing his creativity in his future life:

he's going to have a clothing line and create training for people who want to make their own businesses. He seemed really pleased and said his support worker was proud of him.

Young Person

This echoes another young person whose future interconnects with his love of old cars. The research sessions are peppered with future plans, often showing me maps and pictures of his travel plans.

he's quite animated as he tells me that it signifies his freedom; he can visit spaces he never knew existed, like (and names places, including places he went at the weekend, which he shared at the start of the session). He goes on.... residential (care) is limiting of new situations – he didn't meet people; he only could meet people in school but only in school time. He tells me that he's met people through car restoration that he speaks to on a day-to-day basis and can talk to them about anything. He's met people that are important to him.

....and in another session.....

he says that they give him freedom, and he's met so many people and friends he's got through his hobby. This leads him to tell me that if he was in the unit, he would bet me he would never have been allowed to work with the engines. He says 95% of the people he knows he knows through his hobby, but he wouldn't have been allowed it, as they controlled his life. He says everything in his life was risk assessed, but they can't block risk entirely. He says how his interest – I note down key words in this – gives him freedom, fun and friends Car restoration has given him opportunities he would never have had.

Young Person

The young person reflects on how his hobby has given him freedom, fun and friends but, thinking with these stories, I would add 'futures', as hobbies and interests appear to anchor hopes for the future. Whilst career aspirations matter, the sense being active agents in writing their own stories, despite the difficult things that have happened and the difficult things they have done, emerges as important.

7.4.4 Long shadows of shame

In stark contrast, other stories reflect a sense of hopelessness for future life as illustrated in these painful accounts from practitioners:

sometimes when we have an appointment, he ignores me on purpose, then other times he's not..... he's just not going to be able to talk. He played music for me once, as I'd talked about music being relaxing. As a thought, I said, 'I'll put some music on that I like and that might help a bit here' because it might start a conversation. I am starting to get Spotify on. And then before I can play, he has got a song up, and it was really..... it was really pretty.....it was really pretty sad. Not just the song. It was Frank Sinatra 'That's Life'. We've sort of spoken about, you know, consequences and other things already..... [describes legal and welfare proceedings in relation to the HSB] and so he's kind of thinking 'is my life over?' And that's the song he played.

Another practitioner echoes a sense of hopelessness of life being over:

he does actually talk to his social worker about a lot, and he's really, really open... like we know he's still drug dealing 'cause he's admitted that he's still drug dealing. We do a harm reduction thing.....but he believes he's headed to jail and it's quite hard for us to kind of argue against the narrative of he's definitely going.....because he's not definitely going to jail. But he's told by so many other people in his life he's definitely going to jail, I think they have to do stuff in terms of criminal exploitation and (say) 'well you're going to jail anyway so take this package (of drugs) into (place).....you know you're going to jail anyway'. And we're trying to say, 'well you know you will have a court date at some point and if we can show you're doing really well, we would want to maintain you in the community. And do you love seeing social work! you, you be up for seeing us once a week, wouldn't you! You actually see us more than once a week!' And he's like 'fair point, you know' (laughs)

Practitioner

These stories highlight how sensitive practitioners can be regarding how hopelessness and other difficult and painful emotions are expressed in different ways. These practitioners bear witness to loss of hope and, particularly in the second story fragment, illuminate how practitioners can hold hope for the young people and be important emotional resources for young people, especially as they navigate justice systems.

The words of another boy also resonates with this sense of a long shadow that is cast upon futures. This shines a light upon less visible dimensions of living *with* risk and *as* risk, the latter manifested as a social and systemic identity. The thought of the future can feel utterly exhausting, the relentlessness of a life under a long shadow of shame that cannot slow or be still for the threat that looms.

(he tells me) maybe if he made money, they would come and find them. He starts to talk about going to college in [another country]. Apparently, you don't have to pay fees, or maybe [another country] because you don't pay taxes and maybe someplace else like thinks you don't pay cheap pay taxes. He asked me if he can change his name on his birth certificate so no one knows him? And he tells me how he's made up two names for himself. He tells me the first one and then the second one. He talks about his business ideas and if it blew up, he'd be lucky but he has to keep it low key

Later...

He's talking quite fast, and it's hard to catch hold of he's talking about moving to the top of Scotland, then Ireland, and then to the very bottom of England. He says that in (the area he lived) he'd be at risk...he says that's the risk I'm in. He'd be safe for a couple of months, but it could spread fast you need to always be on the move if people know. He describes this as being like an old roller coaster – the ones that go up, up, up, then down he says. I draw this out to help me be clear I understand. I didn't quite get it to begin with. When the rollercoaster is up this is when it's risky and when it's down, it's safe. But it can get stuck at the top and in the risk, then a little bit of safety and then some risk (as it moves past the top towards going down), but still some risk, and then it goes down to safety. But then there's a slow creep up he tells me. Although it may even become faster, or it could get stuck in the risk. It could be for five minutes, or it could be for two days. I say that this is a really useful way to think about what it can be like to live around things like harmful sexual behaviour.

Young Person

I cannot know for sure what fears chase him but wonder if it relates to shame and stigma akin to the morally and socially communicated 'stain' of sex offenders articulated by Levin's (2023). Seen alongside earlier life, the omnipresence of fear may be compounded by complex early lives and trauma, not just the sole result of displaying HSB. Reflecting on my encounters with this boy feels important when situating this story as part of a research process and not just as textual data. He was energetic and very funny, always waiting on time for me to arrive for our session despite often feeling tired from the school day and sport. I found this outward brightness sharply contrasted with the powerful, painful stories that unfolded when we were in the research space. Each time we left, especially the last time, I felt a deep sadness that stayed with me long after we had said goodbye. This sadness feels connected to the realities of everyday lives that are almost invisible, hidden away out of the gaze of the world, heavy and utterly exhausting. Through the stories, this boy is making his way through life independently and described as 'doing really well' yet carries inside him a foreboding future, trapped on a hamster wheel of fear.

A different story captures how contact with our systems also contributes to this long shadow cast upon young, developing lives. This exposes blind spots of dominating discourses, such as risk factor prevention paradigms, that focus on risk of recidivism, yet young people appear to face multiple harms in their future, including legacies of our interventions. This highlights potential absences of our understandings of risks and harms, including legacies that we leave on lives:

I wonder what 'children's rights' means to him. He begins to talk about being care experienced, and it feels to him that children's rights should be more for children

and young people who are care experienced, also saying that after 26 you are just seen as a regular adult. He says being 'care experienced' means you have experienced things that have changed your life. He says that they should be able to get help even when they are an adult; definitely something must be in place, like if they need a referral, like for therapy. I wonder what people might be dealing with, and he says, like self-harming issues. He says it would be horrible if they are not eligible. He begins to talk about not knowing what you'd need to disclose when you go for a job. At first, I'm not clear but then he says, like, if a [welfare system process] about HSB said no further action and concerns were dismissed, what would you need to disclose? ...

a little later....

He tells me his piece of advice to anyone is 'see when you're in (a care setting) don't get involved with others (negatively).... he used to.....that's how he's moved on....he's really progressed,' he tells me. This idea of moving on seems so powerful.

Young Person



7.4.5 Reverberations

These stories feel different. In different ways they reflect the hopelessness and inevitability of futures that lie ahead. One appears characterised by flatness and futility, ‘that’s life’, a hypo-experience that is juxtaposed with the other, more dynamic, edging into desperate, hyper-experience that is relentless and overwhelming. The third is a more pragmatic account of how the future becomes determined by the past in uncertain, unarticulated yet overbearing ways. The question of disclosure is raw yet profoundly significant. It also does not have an answer. After this session, I asked a legal professional in the Children’s Hearing System about what information would be held and disclosed, by or about, in future lives of children and young people who had displayed HSB that was never established through both civil and criminal legal measures. In the context of the Children’s Hearing System, that would need to be considered on an individual case-by-case basis, and legal representation would likely be required to establish what information was held and when it would be disclosed. Clan Childlaw and the Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice recently published a briefing paper on understanding disclosure after offence grounds have been accepted or established at a Children Hearing which describes the disclosure of offences as a ‘daunting process’ with ‘considerable confusion’ around disclosure when applying for jobs, volunteering or training endeavours, for example, through Disclosure Scotland (Lightowler, 2024). For young people convicted of sexual offences, this will be disclosed. However, in contexts such as Scotland, where our legal and welfare infrastructures strive away from punitive and justice-orientated systems, many children and young people will never go through formal adjudication, so, like the boy who poses this issue, they do not have any convictions for sexual offences. They must navigate adulthoods, where information may or may not be disclosed as ‘other relevant information’, considered to be reasonable and relevant, highlighting uncertainty around what, when and why information may be shared. This raises a significant, silent story of the long shadow that our systems may cast and the legacy of concerns around HSB that may impact adulthood, particularly around disclosure. Disclosure and other public protections are significant dimensions to keeping people safe, but what if the information that stays connected to children and young people, travelling alongside them in adulthood, has been formulated without access to fair justice? While I strongly support diversion from prosecution and greatly appreciate our Scottish welfare-orientated Children’s Hearing System. Children always have legal representation; however, there is only a civil threshold of proof, and the grounds of referral are either accepted or not by the child. If the grounds are disputed, then it would then be referred to the Sherriff to decide if the grounds can be upheld. Fears for the future, founded on whether HSB is unproven or only alleged, stay with the young person, and confusion around future disclosure emerges as an important issue that falls beyond the gaze of dominant discourses and debates in the field of HSB. It raises questions around welfare and safeguarding systems which may inadvertently mimic justice measures, yet behaviours remain uninterrogated by justice processes, often saturated by fear and shame as heard in so many stories.

It felt like a profound privilege to bear witness to hopes, dreams, futility and fears. Many of the boys have experienced complex, harrowing early lives, echoing the landscape of literature which supports that many, although not all, children and young people who display HSB have experienced difficult early lives. These story fragments make visible hopes, dreams, and sometimes nightmares for the future, highlighting fundamentally important yet underacknowledged dimensions in the field. These stories tell us that futures matter, and ‘good’ futures are not measured simply on whether behaviour in childhood is repeated. Whilst this notion is of fundamental importance, these stories remind us it cannot be our only measure of successful futures of complex young lives. Having a sense of a future matters – it really, really matters. Our hope, and our responsibilities, for future lives of young people who display HSB needs to be interrogated and understood as beyond success as the absence of harm. Hackett *et al.*, (2024) capture this in their study into longer-term outcomes in adulthood when they say:

.....stopping a child from sexually abusing others is a necessary but insufficient intervention goal. Despite the low reported sexual recidivism rates for children and adolescents with harmful sexual behaviour, many policy responses are still uniquely concerned with the risk of reoffending, and consequently much practice remains weighted towards this issue as a primary concern. Simply stopping a child from continuing something that, even without intervention, is not likely to continue is hardly a triumph, especially if in the process that child’s broader life chances are ruined or severely inhibited by the consequences of our interventions and policies.

(Hackett *et al.*, 2024, p. 03)

Hackett *et al.*, (2024) highlight a sense of ‘being in control of life (not controlled by it), optimism about the future, hope and personal ambition and being able to separate from the abuse ‘I’m not longer that person and I’m not a risk” (p. 9). These mirror the different stories about future hopes and hopelessness, and it is imperative that young people have relationships with people that can help them to make sense of themselves and their futures. This chimes with the work of Scotland’s former Chief Medical Officer Sir Harry Burns, who championed public health approaches to social issues, including interrogating what, how and why we can be healthy, beyond the absence of disease. Burns (2014) conceptualises health as ‘a spectrum with complete health at one end (ease) with a complete lack of health (dis-ease) at the other’ (p. 104). Burns connects this to sociologist Antonovsky’s concept of ‘satutogenesis’, understood as having a sense of coherence where people need to ‘understand their lives and they have to be understood by others, perceive that they are able to manage the situation and most importantly believe that it is meaningful enough to find motivation to continue’ (Lindstrom and Eriksson, 2006, p. 241). It is not simply about naively encouraging the hopes and dreams of the

young lives we encounter; rather, it foregrounds our role as inextricable to their current and future lives, far beyond the narrow focus 'will they do it again?'

The informal 'lifescapes' explored in this chapter reveal the fluid, intersecting and often contradictory spaces of young people's lives. Whether navigating the hypervisibility of public parks, the fragile privacy of bedrooms, the expansive yet precarious terrain of digital worlds or the uncertain contours of their futures, these stories challenge static understandings of risk and safety. They show how young people's lives are shaped not only by what they did but by where they are, who they are with and how they are seen. They call us to attend more closely to the everyday geographies of young people's lives, to recognise the complexity of their experiences and to reimagine safeguarding with respect for relationships, identities and hopes for the future – not just their risks.

Chapter Eight: institutional ‘lifescapes’

This chapter explores more institutionalised ‘lifescapes’ reflecting on the social, spatial and relational stories shaped by formal systems such as schools and ‘care’. These are not just backdrops to young people’s lives but active sites where norms, power and harm are produced, negotiated and sometimes resisted. They draw attention to the structured environments that often define how harm is recognised, responded to or denied. Through stories shared by young people and practitioners, this chapter examines how institutional settings of schools and the ‘care system’ can both obscure and amplify harm. These spaces are often governed by scripts and expectations, yet they are also shaped by the informal actions, beliefs and relationships of the adults within them. The chapter pays particular attention to how institutional responses to harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) are entangled with broader constructions of childhood, sexuality, gender and risk and how these constructions are embedded in the institutional architecture of education, care and control.

8.1 Schools

Schools emerge as a significant aspect of ‘lifescapes’ echoing through the stories narrated in the research space. Some spoke about primary school (from around 5 – 12 years old), secondary school (from around 12 – 18 years old with leaving age from 16) and some about further education such as college. Some shared their education was disrupted by life events, including changes in their care, such as moving geographical location or care setting. Given the time this research was undertaken, all the boys will have experienced education amid and after the Covid-19 pandemic, where unprecedented public health measures led to the closures of schools. One boy spoke about his experience of school through the pandemic:

He was still in primary when lockdown happened. They went to a hub and this was fun as they got to play games and even got to the shows and got on the rides for free.

Young Person

Although most stories did not explicitly discuss to the Covid-19 pandemic, it would be remiss to ignore the potential individual and collective impacts on children and young people’s everyday lives and futures shaped by such a profoundly significant time in our collective social experience.

8.1.1 School is not safe!

A particularly resounding message expressed by several boys was that schools are not safe. When I asked where might be safe for teenagers, one boy told me:

no, not school

Young Person

For another boy, I noted:

he talks about school – he doesn't like it

Young Person

One boy showed me the different spaces around his school (both with the VR headset and we walked around it) but he made the distinction that inside the school space that doesn't feel safe for him:

I see different entrances to school, and I wondered about spaces around school that felt safe or maybe not. He says school. I'm unclear but then he says the classrooms don't – I clarify, the classrooms and the school are the spaces that don't feel safe? 'Yes,' he says.

Young Person

One boy spoke in greater detail about his experience of school:

He says emphatically, SCHOOL IS NOT SAFE! I wonder more about this, and he says that anything can happen in the school, and he tells me about people being told not to vape but they vape, but then he goes on to say about how you can make the wrong move at school....you can just think, 'I don't like that boy' and someone will go after you. I wonder what 'going after' someone means. He tells me it means they'll batter you, adding not that it's happened to him, but he's seen what happens to other people. He says that a lot of people will go after you.

Young Person

The threat of violence feels palpable, with a distinct social dimension captured in how he talks about 'they' implying a group of young people using violence.

8.1.2 Classrooms and corridors

Boys spoke about the strategies they used to negotiate safety within and beyond the classroom. For one boy, the sensory environment was overwhelming, so he found sanctuary and safety in the liminal spaces of corridors:

He says he liked getting sent out of class, and I wondered why. He said he felt safer in the corridors, as he didn't trust the classroom, as everyone was shouting.

Young Person

Another boy tells a dynamic story of negotiating spaces and this hidden curriculum of social rules in school:

he talks about a teacher who gave him into trouble lots for drawing and doodling in school. He talks very animatedly about how this teacher told him it was a disgrace that he was drawing..... the teacher took it and ripped it up. He then went on to talk a lot about pranks they played on this teacher, how they would be silent until he (the teacher) had his back turned, then they would be shouting and swearing, and then when he would turn around, they'd be silent and then shout again when he had his back turned. Eventually the teacher shouted, 'shut the fuck up'....

later...

he talks about the two different secondary schools he's been at (in two different towns due to care changes) He used to like maths, but you're not allowed to be seen to like maths, and you have to be the class clown.... he would do his work, and then he would take time out by going to the toilet, and when he came back in, he'd make a big scene. When the teacher said 'What have you been doing?'. He'd say he was taking a big, fat piss...and everybody would laugh....

later...

he said another thing he did was when he was in class, he would do his work as fast as he could - you do the work fast, then don't say you're finished, just wait then asked to go to the toilet then come back and make a racket and then move on to the task again and again until the class is over. He said he couldn't show he good he was at maths. Another thing he would do is he would do one page right and one page wrong and then he takes it home and he would rub out the pencil of the wrong paper and write in the correct answers. He said these were secrets he kept. I wondered more about this, and he said that it was a way that he isn't seen to like maths. He says it's a bit weird.

Young Person

Here, stories reveal strategies to manage the tensions generated by conflicting official and unofficial rules of school. It feels stressful and exhausting for everyone, including the teacher, trying to negotiate the formal expectations of learning, structurally and socially organised through the framework of curriculum - yet tensions bubble beneath the surface.

8.1.3 Fitting in

Violence, shaming and retribution become entangled in social rules of school and more stories unfold on the pressures of being a teenager, including transitions from primary to secondary school and having to change to fit in.

he says that you have to change yourself to fit in. When he went up to high school it was hard to make friends. He used to like Pokémon but you have to change your

personality. He talks a lot about his hair in an animated way – he says his auntie used to shave his head but now he wants curly hair, girls like curly hair. He says you risk people not being your friend for things like not having curly hair. He goes on to say that he was good at maths and liked history, but he couldn't show it, he knows lots of others act dumb too just to fit in. He then begins to focus on clothing – you can't wear the wrong shoes. This is almost a stream of dialogue. He loves shoes and he got these shoes with his birthday and Christmas money. He begins to list what can't be worn – Puma, Fila, Primark¹⁵ shoes but they are also not good quality, next, river island, dress shoes and fake shoes. He says he once had a pair of fake Yeezys¹⁶ but when people pointed this out, he explained that they kept his expensive shoes good as he has lots of good shoes.

Young Person

Fitting in can also involve taking risks:

he starts to talk about the rules of school again. He tells me the things that you've got to do to fit in..... You've got to vape to fit in. You've got to smoke weed¹⁷ to fit in. You've got to drink to fit in. He tells me he's popular because everybody knows him. He said he used to use weed, but it was more to manage a bad time he was going through.

Young Person

As if navigating the ever-presence of violence in the social and institutional space of school wasn't enough, this moving account of the 'invisible' social rules, like a secret society, feels complex and exhausting. Even I fall under this critical adolescent gaze! My trainers seem to make the mark, despite some questions of their authenticity, but my dungarees fall woefully short, as I later note:

he comments on my trainers – Adidas Gazelles – they are ok but some people might only have two stripes (fakes) and when it's pointed out they'll say one fell off but people will say they are stitched well.

Young Person

he said you can't wear dungarees – what I am wearing.... I wonder about this to myself.... am I being seen? I wonder if I am being dressed down almost, and the energetic then poignant stream seems to shift between advice for others, like 'I tell people just be yourself', and the pressure and vulnerability of being a teen. I also wonder if I was to be impressed, attacked and to both see and not see his

¹⁵ Primark is a high street store selling budget friendly clothes

¹⁶ Yeezy is a fashion and media brand founded by celebrity Kanye West

¹⁷ Weed is slang for cannabis

vulnerabilities. There's something about gaze, being seen and not seen. It feels pressured.

My reflective notes

School is illustrated as an intense site of social and spatial rules where young people strive for belonging, encoded through hidden social curricula, alongside pressures of the academic curriculum. The palpable pressure to 'fit in' feels like a heavy and exhausting weight to carry, appraised through the critical and unforgiving gaze falling upon young people's external bodies, upon clothes, shoes and hair. There are also risks associated with getting these social rules 'wrong':

He says you can't wear Japanese stuff – he used to like anime, but you'd get called wussy and a wuss.

Young Person

You can't have a moustache as it gets called a peado tash

Young Person

I wonder about the latent meaning under the surface when the authenticity of trainers (the Yeezys or my Adidas Gazelles) is questioned, suspicious of fakes masquerading as their acceptable and genuine counterparts. This can be seen as both physical and 'real' but also symbolic of many of the profound negotiations made by young people to manage social worlds with 'risky' identities or as 'beasts', as will be explored in detail in 'care system' spaces.

8.1.4 Risks and vulnerabilities

An additional layer to these school dynamics relates to the social knowledge surrounding HSB. One boy spoke about being called 'a beast' by peers and the saturation of adults who keep him safe:

he says there are 300 adults there; some have 1:1, there are school support staff, and the teachers don't turn a blind eye to things like that.

Young Person

Adults appear important for his physical safety, painting a stark picture, particularly as '300 adults' feels more symbolic than physical, implying his need for adults, in large numbers, to feel safe.

The risks associated with containing social knowledge of HSB appear in another story where a practitioner reflects on a boy who does not feel safe in school:

when he was at school, he was monitored during the lunch break. He had his lunch with.....there was a group of kids that had their lunch in school and were involved in activities, and they didn't go outside, so he was part of that group..... Well, he

was part of that group anyway, so he was..... like I'd say he was quite a vulnerable wee guy and he'd been bullied a few times; a couple of people had taken advantage of him and he felt safe in that group so it was fortunate that group was there and he was already a part of it. So school was fine and school were great, school had a lot of time for him; they were desperate for him to do well.....he got bullied but because the school was aware, they took care of that and he had friends in that wee group so that was significant

Participant

The importance of belonging shines through this story, reified by a school who were '*desperate for him to do well*'. It is a moving account of the care and compassion scaffolding this boy in the school space, but it also casts light social, spatial and temporal conditions conducive for safety as told by the practitioner:

I mean, like I say, I've done some really good work with him; whenever he felt vulnerable or he felt he was gonna act in an unsafe way or (put) someone or himself at risk, he knew there was people he was to go and talk to.... and that happened a couple of times. He's done that...he'd used advice given and, it wasn't because he was gonna behave in a sexually harmful manner. It was because he was getting bullied and he went and reported it. It (the bullying) was in the past. The school were saying that's good he was doing that because they found out it had been happening for a long time, but he hadn't passed it on, but now he was telling the school who the people were and that people were taking... He was getting money to spend at lunchtime, and people were taking money off him or getting him to buy cigarettes for other people at school and all that stopped he had the courage to go in and use the advice that was given to him.

Practitioner

This practitioner aptly described this as having '*courage*', capturing the pride for a boy who had experienced distressing life experiences to trust that adults could help him. These relationships in school with 'people keeping an eye on him and supporting him' have such a different quality to 'risk management' as adults (school staff) hold together his behaviours and vulnerability alongside everyone's safety to think with and for him about the shifting patterns of his school day. This is further illustrated when the practitioner talks about how the school navigated the Social Worker's presence, pre-empting the gaze of curious peers:

yeah they (the school) were committed to supporting him and fae day one. I cannae mind what they told them (peers), why he was meeting me. I cannae mind what it was, but it was something that they (peers) all bought into and they all believed and stuff so (the boy) was never really questioned from the people in his class when he was meeting me.

Practitioners

On the surface it is empathetic and respectful of his rights to privacy. Looking deeper, this highlights an easily overlooked dimension of safety and risk in the context of HSB, which connects to stigma and social identity. It offers a way of thinking about how adults can sustain the capacity to think about, with and for young people to manage their safety and the safety of others in nuanced ways, considering both space and time. This reflects how systems can generate safety around young people, but as the story develops, the precarious dynamics that young people who have displayed HSB live within are further illuminated. Here the practitioner reflects on what would have happened had the 'knowledge' of the HSB been known:

OOHHHH.....(sighs).....I think it would have been horrendous for him. I think he would have been labelled as a... a lot of young people use this expression 'beast' and I think that's what would have happened to him

Practitioner

This is a powerful reminder of the critical importance of adults supporting children and young people with profound social stigma that can become enmeshed in their identities, creating significant risks so easily overlooked. The story of this boy continues, which feels important to highlight. School was a key anchor, and the staff were sensitively attuned to the tempo of the day, and his needs were balanced with their responsibility for managing everyone's safety, including his. However, the developing story really captures how important it is to understand contexts of life as inherently interconnected. The practitioner poignantly reflects on the impact of his care placement, which broke down through no fault of the boy:

Yeah...well the placement broke down; it was just like a deck of cards – it just fell..... I mean, his life didn't change that much after the (HSB) incident...he still had his clubs, he still had the club in the community centre, he was still going to school and he was supervised at all these places and when he went out to play, his best pal – an older boy in the placement, who he looked on as his older brother – and they'd go out with a ball and they'd play football so the plan was that the older boy didn't let (the boy) out of his sight even though they didn't know what had happened in the park..... his relationship with the other two kids was really strong and he was devastated when he was moved away cause he looked on them as his brother and sister....long pause...yeah....

(I say 'the collateral damage of it all eh')

Yep..... yep.... yep...and that's what I'm saying. He was a lovely young boy, who was vulnerable. He was doing reasonably ok at the school; he was maybe a below-average student, but he was doing ok. He had qualifications and stuff and was working towards qualifications, but then he ended up in [Y area] – he didn't like the school he went to and had no pals so I heard through a colleague that that

placement broke down and he found himself back in [X area] and a support worker had helped him getting a flat but he ended up with other young people taking advantage of him, using his fault as somewhere to stay using his flat to have parties in, so they basically had to get him out the flat and away from these people.....(long silence.....deep breath).....it's rubbish

(I say 'It really is eh')

.....(mubbles.....silence).....but like I say, you look through the reports when I took the case on, and I looked through the reports and the case notes for (the boy) and like I say, he had a traumatic life, he had a very unstable life, and just for a wee while there it looked like things were looking good for him....listen.... I mean, I don't.... hopefully he pulled away from that crowd he was with but hopefully he's doing reasonable ok....long silence....I hope so...I hope so...I mean, that's what I want to hope..... that's how I try to picture it....I mean, you can't walk about in life thinking about the worst-case scenario. I mean it.... would just bring you down, eh (emotional)

Practitioner

These emotions paint a picture of the harrowing nature of young lives, including the impact on those who care deeply about them. Spaces of everyday life are not separate but interconnected and interdependent – each dependant on the others for sustainability.



8.1.5 School sexual scripts

Stories of school spaces unveil social dynamics of institutions that easily slip beyond the gaze, obscured by more dominant narratives of schools, safety and risk. This is captured powerfully in a story about a school response to allegations of a serious sexual assault by a pupil, which exposes hidden landscapes within the institutional space of schooling.

The alleged behaviour took place in a public space where groups of young people socialising in an urban space. Allegations of a serious sexual assault by a boy were made by a girl – both were in the social group on this evening. This story fragment begins with the practitioner shares an account of a formal statement made by a female teacher then their reflections:

he was charged for the sexually problematic behaviour, statements were taken from teachers at school. I think one of the teachers didn't really realise that she

was making a formal statement and said to the effect of 'I don't believe he would need to sexually assault her any girl, that girl was....you know.... for her to be her and to be going with him...nah... he wouldn't need to have sexually assault her'

(I ask what practitioner what they think the teacher meant)

I suppose she was just.... she wasn't accepting this this girl's narrative at all. She was basically saying that boy's too good looking, he doesn't need to go and rape girls. And I suppose like the assumption there is that sexual assault is actually to meet a sexual need rather than maybe the reality of.... you know..... it's a power thing.

Practitioner

The story unfolds as the practitioner shares their experience of the school's response:

...it was interesting because obviously we (Social Workers) were wanting to maintain him in school, and it's a faith-based school that he was going to, and they were going to do their [Sex Education resource] with him. I said, 'I need to see this!' I was like, we get a copy of [Sex Education Resource]. And I was like – 'this can't be true'! I became convinced I was being wound up a wee bit to be honest. I presumed they're not telling 15-year-olds who are sexually active this. But they were!

I ask if the practitioner could share more

it's like a sex education programme. We (Social Work team) all read it and some workers were like 'oh no that's what we got to school in like the 80s, we thought things had moved on'. It's things like breasts are for breastfeeding, sex is for having children, you need to be married, let's think about abstinence...I think he was beyond that kind of level of intervention which actually you'd think primary school level rather than 15 and I don't even know if you want to give those messages now do you? You maybe want to be able to know that you can have pleasure through your body. The thing that really offended people in the office – obviously we're majority female – was the idea that breasts are for breastfeeding only ... that did not go down well within the team! But it's just.... it's interesting because we don't always know what intervention schools are doing and we just assume it's something good.

Practitioner

This glimpses into less visible social conditions of the school space, which is highly significant relating to children and young people, including those who display HSB and those harmed. The practitioner's mistakenly gives 'informal' views in what was a formal, legal statement to police. Not only a literal differentiation, but this also symbolises institutional dualities where explicit, visible dimensions co-exist simultaneously alongside 'informal', less or invisible dynamics. The

practitioner believes that the teacher 'didn't really realise' her statement was formal, implying that had she realised, she would not have given her views quite so honestly.

In the story splinters above, the teacher perceives that the boy wouldn't have 'needed' to sexually assault which contrasts a practitioner's story of another boy, younger and just starting secondary school:

he is getting an education now, he is supervised at all times...and what's worse, as we (Social Workers) said, it would be OK for him to walk to school. I've don't a problem with him walking to school. He's got a late start. And they are like, 'oh no, sometimes with children coming in late, he could go for one on the way in.'

Practitioner

Fears for this boy's perpetual risk, perceived like unsatiable masculine sexual drive, is made visible by comments that he could '*go for*' another child on the way into school. This view was at significant odds with the Social Worker's assessment of the boy's risk. Here, risk could be viewed through intersections of social constructions of masculinity and sexuality, where the image of a young adolescent with unrelenting sexual desire conflates into a static, uncontrollable and unpredictable risk of harming or '*going for*' another child at any time. The boy becomes caught between divergent views of his risk that seep into patterns of his everyday life including how and when he walks into school in stark contrast to the boy who provokes no such concern as he is '*good looking, he doesn't need to go and rape girls*'.

One practitioner reflects on concerns held by Social Worker's about a boy being criminally exploited, which are rejected by school staff:

and they're like 'he's not been criminally exploited'. And it's like they don't....I don't mean they don't in like an othering way..... but it's just like I wouldn't know how to teach a class something, you know, and they maybe are like because he's (the boy) so charismatic, he's always got a huge big smile on his face..... they're like he's not been exploited by anyone.

Practitioner

A different account from a practitioner tells the story of a school meeting where school staff debates whether the boy, referenced above and supervised, at all times, has been sexually abused by an adult male and if he should be believed. The practitioner is adamant these behaviours constitute child sexual abuse (and I would strongly concur):

we'd have to have a debate about what sexual abuse meant. This boy....he's such a victim - such a victim, he is a victim, 100% a victim of (the adult male in family).....you can see why he's... well.... he said that he's been exposed to.... and also then, when he is telling or talking about abuse it's like (teachers say) 'well he tells these stories'.

Practitioner

Gendered, heteronormative sexual scripts, embedded in schools socially and structurally, become a lens through which risk is viewed and projected into the relational landscape in powerful ways. This can be seen in a story a practitioner shares in the context of a 'very male environment' within the school staff:

I recently had a meeting, and I can only really speak from..... it just coincided with this coming (this research meeting) and like a meeting in a school and it's not really changed throughout my whole career, that type of meeting, to be honest, you go into like the school and they have, like, a boardroom type thing, which is quite formal, and there's a million and one people there.... that doesn't actually really need, in my view anyway, that doesn't need to be all these people there. You know, you've got like Head of Year, Head of Guidance, Head of, you know, this that and the other. So I can feel a wee bit intimidating because it's like, well, you know, you're walking in as the one social work person and there's all of the senior management team of the school sat there. And so it's.....quite intimidating environment to be in. The one I had most recently, it was, it was a wee bit different and there's a lot of like people in in there like sports gear, basically, and I was a wee bit like....I don't know how I feel going to a formal meeting and people are sitting in short shorts, their legs spread, and they're discussing what we were discussing was.....a young person who has sexually assaulted his cousin and went on to sexually assault another child

Practitioner

The story unfolds as this (male) practitioner reflects on how this staff culture shapes how risk is viewed through the male (senior) staff's deliberations, on risk management and one to one support of the boy, through appraisals of the female staff's attraction:

...just as a very male environment..... I just felt like a very male environment. And you know....like they (male staff) were like, [a female staff member] please don't take offence but he's not going to fancy you so that you can do one to one work with him.....you know, these are young men who're younger than me. And this is about how..... there's nothing to suggest he's got sexual interest in a 55 year old classroom assistant....which does make you feel for the worker, she really wants to continue to work with him

Practitioner

This story paints a picture of a humiliating, shaming and sexualised systemic encounter where the male gaze falls upon female staff, rendering them inherently vulnerable to this 12-year-old boy depending on their attractiveness to senior male staff. Adult male's heteronormative gaze upon the perceived sexual attractiveness of their colleagues becomes projected upon risk

management planning. Attractive female teachers are more vulnerable to a boy's insatiable sexual risk. This offers more glimpses into informal, invisible, socially organised 'risk assessments' conducted through the minds and gaze of teachers, calculating risk through heteronormative, gendered and sexualised beliefs. The boy's needs, vulnerabilities and risks (through structured professional judgements) are utterly invisible under this collective adult, sexual and hegemonic male gaze. It is both deeply distressing and dangerous, creating ambivalence between the prizing of unceasing male sexuality and entitlement alongside group denial of understandings of HSB, safety and wellbeing that is meaningful and respectful to everyone in the space.



8.1.6 Reverberations

Stories from the 'lifespans' of school expose layers of spatial and temporal dynamics unfolding throughout the school day. Young people vividly illustrate the exhausting ways in which they navigate violence, identities, bodies and minds – often in supercharged micro-moments within

and beyond the confines of the classroom. The weight of informal social rules feels overwhelming and is deeply entrenched within the social milieu of school spaces for both young people and the adults. Some 'risky' or disruptive behaviour can be currencies exchanged for social safety, such as being sent out of class, vaping and not listening to adults. This highlights nuanced dynamics and very real risks that young people who display HSB must navigate, not solely due to their behaviour but often as part of an ongoing story of complex, difficult lives. It also reveals the temporal, social and spatial aspects of risk and safety swirling around in different places and times during the school day. This is poignantly illustrated by stories of one school sensitised to safety, risk, friendships, belonging and mattering across the school day and space. This shines as a powerful example of how 'risk management' can be facilitated in ways that hold together both potential risk and the needs of the young person.

The huge significance of care and attention from safe, supportive adults during the daily dance of school is twofold. Firstly, it stresses the interconnectedness and interdependency of micro-moments and micro-movements of the school day, which are fragile and easily toppled, including social knowledge of HSB which, conflated with being a 'beast', could get out. Secondly, this emphasises how interconnected and interdependent all spaces of children and young people's lives are as even if one space, like school, is going well when the care placement breaks down the safe and protective context of school 'fell like a pack of cards' which may reflect the dynamic of context collapse that I proposed earlier playing out. Even with such complex and nuanced work of the adults in school, the collapse of the care placement pulled with it the protections of other contexts, including school, highlighting how fundamentally interdependent different contexts are for maintaining and sustaining safety.

Narratives in school spaces expose powerful dynamics so often unseen, invisible and beyond the collective gaze. Stories shine light on ways in which young people are 'seen' by adults in positions of power, further compounded by messages conveyed by the (in)formal curriculum conveying moralised and politicised messages about young people's bodies and minds. These story fragments make visible sexual and social relations of the school environment situated at the epicentre of hegemonic constructions of childhood, innocence and masculinity. Social and structural representations of boys, girls, sex and bodies, manufactured through the formalised machinery of schools, become amplified through passivity and acceptance. This is vividly illustrated by one teacher's informal statement of alleged sexual assault that appears more akin to professional gossip than a legal and binding professional statement as part of an investigation into a deeply serious and distressing incident. Culturally embedded ideas around childhood and sexuality mesh with constructions of gender. The teacher's denial, related to boy's social identity, tiptoes around a neutralised notion of 'going with' rather than an assault but is quickly rejected, as the boy would not have 'needed' to assault the girl to get what he wanted or was entitled to.

Such stories make visible social and systemic layers that can be understood as sexual scripts enacted by the adults and the institutions. Simon and Gagnan (1986) describe three layers of scripts applied to sexual behaviours – cultural scenarios (collective meanings), interpersonal sexual scripts (social and relational) and intrapsychic sexual scripts (individual sexual meanings) which can conflict with one another. Arguably, the field of HSB focused the gaze upon intrapsychic sexual scripts of individual children and young people, with some interpersonal and inter-relational scripts within families. Yet these stories expose sexual scripts encoded and enacted systemically, saturated in heteronormative, gendered, sexualised and sexualising social norms profoundly shaping how young people, HSB and risk become viewed. Of course, it may be that the teacher who gave the informal statement is alone in her sexist, harmful views, but my interest lies in the social and environmental aspects in which individuals are situated within. The different teacher's and school's responses to risk and harm appear entangled in deeply rooted 'scripts' of sexual and social relations which become systemically and institutionally enacted. These may collude, conflict or contradict sexual scripts of individuals within institutional scripts in context but can escape our awareness, as 'heteronormative scripts are so deeply embedded in our culture and socialization processes that they are often enacted unconsciously, despite conscious resistance to them' (Harvey *et al.*, 2023, p. 1208). These vivid story segments expose aspects of systemic sexual scripts, including the denial of harm, under/over responses to risk, the incompatibility of boys as victims of abuse and exploitation and risk as gendered and sexualised by the adults in charge. The teacher comment's crystallise rape myths and denials, which compels close attention to what is being reconstructed and reproduced in the space of only a few sentences, saturated in heteronormative, gendered scripts of unceasing male sexuality, enacted in polarised ways. Hirsh *et al.*, (2019) articulate heteronormative gendered sexual scripts as rooted in beliefs around gendered roles where males are to pursue and initiate sexual encounters, driven by innate sexual desire, and females are the gatekeepers of consent to their bodies. Also caught up in these systemic sexual scripts are social dimensions that propagate rape myths, distorting the events and experiences. Social hierarchies shape the teacher's denials resonating with Clarke and Stermann's (2011) articulation of victim characteristics, including physical appearance and body size, which contort judgements, leading to limited sympathy for the victim, more pronounced attribution of responsibility and increased sympathy for the perpetrator. So often the collective gaze falls upon young people, creating professional projects for adults to address, yet these story splinters, like so many others in this thesis, illuminate how adults are central to complex social issues but positioned beyond the gaze as if neutral and benign. This resonates strongly with research on sexual harm in school contexts, which identified that school staff toleration, reinforcement, and engagement in conditions that were conducive to HSB that reified individualised, victim-blaming, and harmful norms (Firmin *et al.*, 2020; Lloyd and Bradbury, 2022). This school's response vividly clashes with the other school, which systemically held in mind the boy and his harmful behaviour to create a spatially, socially and temporally sensitive safety plan that also upheld the young person's dignity in his work with his social worker.

The systemic structuring of the sexual scripts is made visible even further when juxtaposed with the social work team's discussion about the Sex Education Resource, where female workers so comfortably spoke with their (male) colleague, the participant, challenging constructions of gender and sexuality encoded in the education resource. Reflections on this resource make visible how socially and systemically organised sexual scripts are complex and contradictory. The gendered, heteronormative component of systemic sexual scripts collide with constructions of childhood and sexuality, which can be observed in the school's response (their Sex Education Resource) embedded in notions of childhood innocence. This seems to clash catastrophically with the reality of such a serious social situation, igniting powerful denial in both the teacher and the school. This systemically organised denial minimises the significance of behaviour on the girl harmed whilst denying the boy supportive relationships with adults who can bear to tolerate thinking about both him and his behaviour that has caused significant harm to others. Young people have very little agency and autonomy in the curriculum structurally organised at state and local levels. Once again, social constructions of childhoods come into conflict around dichotomies of innocence and knowingness or corruption and childhood as a state defined by 'lack of adulthood' (Hawkes and Dune, 2013, p. 631). The reality of the behaviour is rendered irrelevant in the pursuit of bestowing structurally sanctioned and sanitised sexual 'knowledge' suffocating any sense of sexual autonomy and agency. The practitioner later describes the school ethos as embodying a strong identity of forgiveness, which they connect to the young person:

'any kind of idea of rehabilitation was linked to religion'

This illuminates a complex interplay between social constructions of childhood, which not only represents the pervasiveness of childhood with sexual innocence enacted in what is seen and done, including attempts to restore innocence and rehabilitate the sexually knowing child through teaching him sexual innocence.

Stories reveal a powerful ambivalence around holding young people who display HSB within the life space of their childhood, as they can be seen through the lens of adult, male, heteronormative sexual scripts organised systemically. Such systemic sexual scripts cast the roles of individual young people – one boy is cast like a high school idol whose sexual prowess and entitlement is prized, yet another younger boy carries the role of a predator who could 'go for' anyone at any time. Under the collective male gaze, the needs and risks of the young person and everyone around him – both children and adults - become sexualised. This not only deprives each boy of supportive adults who can see both them and their behaviour - potentially critical resources for them to address what has happened - it also extinguishes the capacity to understand other aspects of their complex lives. For each of these boys in different school systems, their experiences of criminal exploitation and sexual abuse are rejected as they are

incompatible with the roles they are cast in through systems scripts, which echoes Hirsh *et al.*'s (2019) recognition that:

Gendered scripts may create barriers to men's recognition of their own experiences of nonconsensual sex by equating normal masculinity with unceasing sexual desire..... The intensive focus on men's responsibility to secure consent contributes to the cultural illegibility of these nonconsensual experiences.

(Hirsh *et al.*, 2019, p. 30)

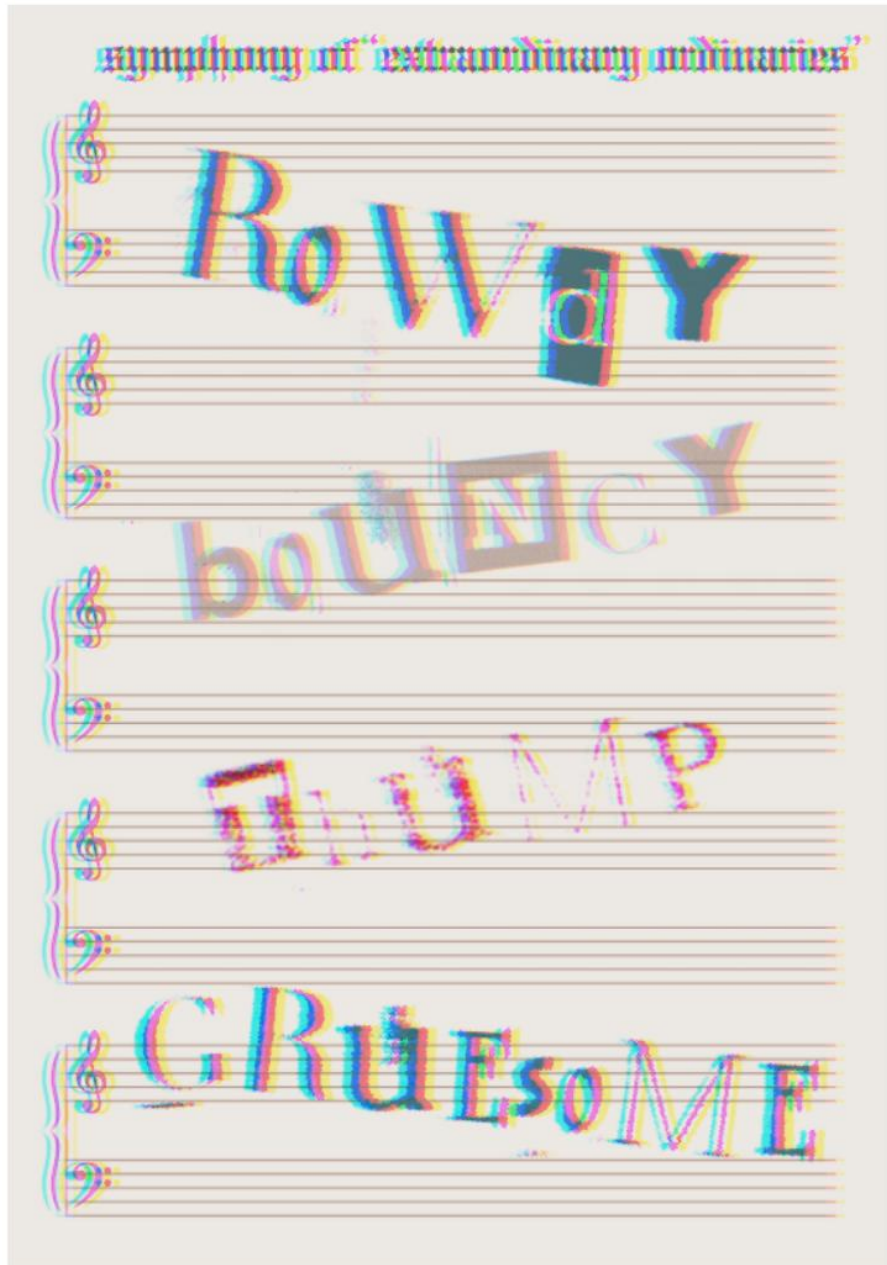
Social constructions of sexuality, gender and childhood become organised in barely visible systemic infrastructures, encoded through sexual scripts, that shape how risk and safety are perceived, understood and managed by adults. These create significant barriers towards the recognition of needs, the role of context and adults creating conditions that can contest or collude with harm and that are simply impenetrable through treatment goals with individual young people.

8.2 'Care system' spaces

A significant space of 'lifescapes' that featured in many of the stories of both young people and practitioners were 'care systems'. I use the word 'care system' because this was the term used by one participant when he starkly told me that '*the care system is the worst place*'. I use 'care system' to reflect the different spaces children and young people live beyond the care of their family through formal arrangements, voluntary or compulsory. In the Scottish context there are a range of 'care system' placements, including kinship (family) care, foster care, residential (group) care and secure care. I draw upon the storied experiences of the participants, but some of the research sessions also took place in these spaces, allowing me to experience them as part of the research process. An additional dimension of reflexivity in encountering narratives in care spaces is my own experience of these systems, as for the first six years of my qualified professional career as a social worker, I worked in two distinct 'care system' spaces – secure and residential.

8.2.1 Extraordinary ordinaries

The social dimensions of care spaces, as told by participants who live and work within 'care systems', reveal the ordinariness of everyday experiences that are often anything but ordinary, which I reflect on as 'extraordinary ordinaries'. This is in no way to imply that living away from home is not 'ordinary' nor that those that live within them are 'extraordinary'. Rather, it is to bring into the gaze dynamics of space that easily fall beyond the edges of awareness to grapple with what it feels like to be in these spaces where the extraordinary so easily becomes ordinary.



8.2.2 Safe and sound(s)

Reflecting on narrative experiences of 'care spaces' I noticed it was not simply the words or stories but also sensory elements, movements, what is present and what is absent. This was enhanced by my decision not to record my meetings with young people, as I can't rely on recordings to listen back to or the exact words to look closely at what was 'said'. I feel I am listening with my senses, including my felt sense. This is not to reflect the 'truth' of the young person's experience but to think more about experience as multidimensional and in motion. Describing the 'milieu' of the residential care environment, Smith (2009) remarks on an intangibility which can be thought of as:

.....particles in the air'. It is the 'feel' of a place. As you enter a residential care home, you pick up very quickly what it feels like, whether there is a tension or a 'buzz' or a sense of calm. What a place feels like, while it might be hard to measure, is likely to have a profound effect on those who live and work there

(Smith, 2009, p. 87)

Sensory experiences swirls around all our everyday and ordinary lives, creating an ever-present tempo that is highly subjective even when we are in the 'same' space, as can be seen from my notes after a session:

this seems to be the only noise he notices– I notice the bang of the doors and the constant movement outside – it's sensory (I remember this but I don't think it registered till now as I write my notes)

My reflective notes

Some of the story fragments and my reflective notes capture some of the sensory dimensions of 'care system' spaces:

'bouncy'

(on living in residential care) he says loads of people say it's crap but he didn't and he still doesn't. He tells me when he first came, he thought, 'oh my god - these people are psychos'.....He says he was like a zombie when he first came – he'd been in the countryside, and it was so quiet – he is now in a CITY!!!! He talks about trains that pass by close to the house. He says he heard the sound of sirens and describes his surprise. He says that his mind needed to get used to the noise. He describes it as bouncy. He talks about a new younger person that has just moved in and he's bouncing all over the place.

Young Person

The young person vividly articulates the stark sensory and spatial transitions when he first arrived. Despite the dusting of humour, his fear of others being 'psychos' and himself being like a 'zombie' are powerful descriptions of his first experiences of these new people and places. His reflection on 'mind' as needing to adjust to the noise is so powerful, yet how often would we ever consider the sensory, physical calibrations of young people when they are displaced, most often all alone? His own experience of becoming zombie-like is juxtaposed with his kind description of a younger peer who recently moved to the house. My sense from observing this new resident on my visits is of a child who is embodying his distress in physical ways that may be unsettling to be around. The participant seems to convey a sense of empathy through his acknowledgement of the sensory and embodied sense of his peer 'bouncing all over the place'.

This idea of sound and movement as sensory embodiments of emotions can be observed in other stories:

‘thump’

we look again at the prompt post-it notes that say ‘safety’, ‘risk’ and ‘children’s rights’. He says he didn’t need much safety, but other people in the residential house did, more than him - they needed more safety than him. He tells me about two young people that needed this extra safety – physically and emotionally. He says it would disturb anyone.... he says it was to do with suicidality... he says one threw themselves over the balcony and he was in his room; he heard the thump.

Young Person

This story is profoundly disturbing. I noted after that I felt that this young participant’s acknowledgement of how this story would ‘disturb anyone’ was a fleeting moment of vulnerability he allowed me to see. The impossible balancing act between who needed safety more and which dimension of safety they need conveys such a depth of empathy and a sense of ‘knowing’ between young people who travel through these spaces.

The desperate dichotomy and scarcity of safety is echoed in another story:

he tells me he was emotionally unsafe with his mum, but in residential houses you are physically unsafe. He says it depends on what you can live with – some people can live being emotionally unsafe, some people can live with being physically unsafe – it depends on what you can live with.

Young Person

The starkness seems connected to safety as it seems such a rationed resource, alongside the ‘thump’ story, weaves a harrowing depiction of experience living in groups with other peers, sharing an understanding that safety is conditional and scarce.

‘rowdy’

he talks about being angry and a time two girls came in drunk and were getting rowdy, like setting off fire alarms. His friend was also in her room and had sensory issues and would be getting upset with the loud noises. He said that he asked if he could sit with her but was told to go to his room. He told me he paced around his room. If the girls had come into the girl’s room (his friend) and he was there, he would be annoyed.

Once again, empathy and understanding between young people in care spaces is evident as this participant shares this night-time experience. Resonating with ‘lifescapes’ of ‘private’ space, bedroom walls are represented like paper-thin boundaries of both spaces of restriction, a place to be sent to yet such precarious, fragile boundaries that are so easily invaded. The participant bears witness to the unfolding drama from the confined space of this bedroom, and his auditory experience foregrounds his sensory experiences. One can only wonder how this may mirror experiences and invoke sensory memories of young people who have lived difficult sensory experiences such as family violence. As one boy will later share his view that ‘most young people are in the care system for domestic abuse’, young people may be navigating present sensory experience amidst legacies of their past.

‘gruesome’

the next story he tells me is ‘gruesome’. He explains that all the doors were all locked, but the staff had gone to stand outside. Another young person got out the door and got some glass and slashed their wrists. They came in with their arms slashed up, and blood was dripping on the carpet. He told them to get away from him. He talks about feeling worried for his brand-new white shoes – they cost £200. He tells me he wasn’t trying to be cold-hearted (by worrying about his trainers). He said the staff were dealing with the young person who was hurt, and the manager came down to tell him (participant) and another young person to clean up the blood. They got out a mop and bucket to clean the blood from the floor. He looks at my three-prompt post-it notes (safety, risk and rights) and says that one story was all three post-it notes!

Young Person

This story was sparked by the post-it notes on the table – safety, risk and children’s rights - which the boy powerfully proclaims this story as ‘all three’! This disrupts any sense of safety and risk as being static or bounded and vividly represents multi-dimensions of these concepts that fall far beyond much of our risk work. This ‘gruesome’ story serves like a tableau of how the extraordinary becomes rendered ordinary and how scarce care and safety can feel. The participant and his peer are not seen as children exposed to such a harrowing experience but become cast in the role of cleaning up, physically and symbolically, to contain the contamination of distress.

These extraordinary situations unfold in the ordinary milieu of experience for everyone, including adults who work within them. Another example of the extraordinary ordinariness of experience in ‘care system’ spaces happened immediately outside one of our research sessions:

something is happening outside the room – it's hard to know but, but there's lots of shouting. The participant says there's a restraint happening. I worry a little if they burst in here and I'm not sure what to do. The participant is still, wide-eyed, just the way he is. After a while, I tell him I can feel adrenaline with the shouting, and it makes my hands shake. I explain I'm not scared my body reacting. He tells me it's good I can see this happening and I feel he's generous with his research position. He tells me the first time he saw a restraint, he was scared. He says he was 'hitting the shakes' but now he can carry on an ordinary conversation. He can read the situation outside and offers insights. He says staff can antagonise. He tells me he's sympathetic and tells me about what has happened in the young person's life right now, who is being restrained, and it is utterly harrowing.

Young Person

This situation unfolded very fast and was longer than it seems represented in my notes. It was distressing and dysregulating to hear – we could not see anything, so it was the sounds that crashed into our space. Whilst I did not feel scared, I have been in many difficult situations, and I recognised my adrenaline rush as I thought through where we should move to if this spills into our room. Although unsure, I was glad I named my experience, as he then reflected on his, which captures my sense of how the extraordinary morphs over time into the ordinary, dislocated from emotion and affect. The boy's articulation of transitioning from '*hitting the shakes*', perhaps similar to my response, to being able to '*carry on*' an '*ordinary*' conversation illuminates a process of acclimation and accommodation of experiences in 'care system' spaces that are anything but ordinary. This is not simply a subjective individual process but appears socially organised as a way of everyone navigating and surviving extraordinary experiences. The situation unfolding is distressing for everyone – the participant shares something very difficult happening for the boy tomorrow that I later note '*feels heart-breaking to me*'. We hear the chaos, staff trying to talk to him, voices getting louder, and soon the young person outside the room's distress can be heard through his shouts '*you peado, you beast, you're touching me, I'm going to kill myself*'. All the while the participant shares with me a commentary on what is happening for everyone, including sharing his reflections on what is happening, which is connected to searching for and/or creating space:

he tells me that he thinks that the young person being restrained will have wanted space, but the place he's gone (a corridor) will not be ok with the staff. They will move him on, and then when it escalates, they'll tell him to go to his room, but he won't want to.

on restraints, he says they are all based on safety and risk. He talks about a young person being a dick in the lounge...say [football team one] and [football team two] are playing. But he (the other boy) doesn't even like football but will cheer on

certain sides. He'll be asked to take time out.... staff will go hands on.....the young person will kick off. He (participant) knows from the tone – tones change. He talks about the restraint that unfolded outside our room.... he says names will be exchanged, all the feelings have been building up, he won't care what he said, he won't care what's done. He thinks it might have kicked off as they all have chores to do; he'll have wanted to do his chores early, he'll have then said, 'let me sit here for a minute'. Some (young people) want to sit outside on the step, but they might get into a fight. One boy makes space sitting on the step; another goes wandering on the campus.

Young Person

In many of the different story fragments, sound is not only a part of the backdrop of what is happening in the milieu but also a key part of navigating safety and risk in the space:

he knows from the tone – tones change

he can tell by the tone of all the voices

he knows from tone – see when you've lived here you know the different tone between joking or in distress

All from one Young Person

Beneath his humour, joking 'well that's the door shut', emerge two diverging emotional responses which are both deemed incompatible in the intense situation. Being 'petrified' conveys a natural emotional response to witnessing such a heightened, distressing situation. However, 'act like that's not happened' appears to become the expected incongruent response from the adults – a similar enactment to young people cleaning up blood with the mop and bucket. They symbolise cleaning up, clearing out and cutting off from ordinary experiences to extraordinary events that become part and parcel of everyday life for young people in 'care system' spaces. This next story fragment highlights how emotional and physical incongruence can even be demanded in these intense social and sensory experiences:

he can tell by the tone of all the voices. I say it must be hard being around it – he says he's used to it. He says that sometimes when other young people are put to their rooms (in an escalated situation) he'll make a small joke of it saying, 'well that's the door shut' and staff will tell him off. He says 'what do they expect – be petrified or act like that's not happened?' I say that sometimes not seeing but hearing the noises can make people feel lots of things and they might have things in their past – he says 'yeah they can be triggered'.

Young Person

Such incongruence and denial appear to numb the pains and losses of growing up in these spaces:

he tells me sometimes it's difficult for young people to explain how they feel – sometimes they can be going through a really tough time, but they look fine. He says things can build and build. He says it's a sad thing...it's quite sad living in a group environment. They are all about the same age, with hormones all over the place, seeing family and not seeing family.

Young Person



8.2.3 Reverberations

'Extraordinary ordinary' everyday experiences were illustrated through closer attention to the sensory soundscapes in the story splinters of some of the boys. These highlight the vivid and complex milieu that become accommodated as a way of managing what can be deeply distressing social situations. This reveals vivid, complex interplays of acclimatising to the soundscapes as part of the transition into a strange new environment that requires young minds to '*get used to the noise*' akin to '*sonics of suffering*' (Gunaratnam, 2009, p. 03). Yet, the

group living environment encounters dynamic shifts with new young residents moving in, ushering in new tempos of distress and dysregulation. Whilst the process of transition may settle, the stories vividly capture the tension of everyday life where intense, distressing experiences of other residents living in such close proximity unfold around one another. These story splinters draw attention to the embodied and sensory experiences in the everyday, present lives of young people, amplifying deep care, empathy and profound ways of knowing between young people, where safety is a scarce resource, interspersed with violence and harm. At times adult (staff) responses fall so far from any sense of care, suggesting that, within the social and systemic dynamics, adults must also acclimatise to the rhythms and tempos of the 'extraordinary ordinary'. From my experience as a social worker, residential care was often regarded as the 'poor relation' of social work, yet these narratives reflect the complexity and extraordinary aspects of care, including young lives severed from their families, trauma, grief, violence, self-harm, adolescence, alcohol and physical restraints clashing together. Even the language we use becomes dislocated from the complexity of the work - 'care system' that are uncaring and 'secure units' or 'safe centres' that are locked up – and this story reflects how distress becomes translated as justification for a restraint:

he tells me 'staff have to restrain – they'll say they restrained because a young person was distressed....he tells me, but he didn't look distressed....he looked hyped

Young Person

Thinking about the social dynamics in the spaces of 'care', different stories highlight how pain and distress become cut off, which may be a way of containing and managing anxiety. The 'extraordinary ordinary' becomes a means through which everyone can survive their everyday experiences in such dysregulated and painful social spaces. Drawing on Menzies-Lyth's (1960) seminal work around the social organisation of defences in institutions, we can see how patterns of social defences become institutionally organised and accommodated by young people and staff as a means of managing the profound anxieties relating to the primary task of 'care'. Yet the reality of caring and being cared for, imbued with idealised notions of benevolence, guardianship and protection, encounters profoundly distressing experiences that unfold in the midst of everyday life. At times, the social defences in the stories are more aligned with Steiner's concept of 'psychic retreats' where systems of defences are employed 'to bind, neutralise and to control primitive destructiveness whatever its source' (Steiner, 1993, p. 04). One cannot remain 'zombie like' for too long, so acclimatisation and accommodation of the 'gruesome' experiences is required for everyone to emotionally survive 'lifescapes' of 'care systems'. Adults look to young people as if they become wallpaper to the distress that unfolds in front of them, and everyone has to contain and mop up the pain, sometimes quite literally, as a means to get by. Thus, what becomes ordinary is often anything but....

8.2.4 Taming shaming the beast

Staying with the sensory, there was one sound – one simple word, one short syllable – that I ‘heard’ in stories that was profoundly distressing to me.....’beast’.

he says people will say I’m a beast. He begins to talk a lot about how he and some other boys are, almost constantly it seems, referred to as ‘beasts’. They say ‘you even look like a ‘beast’’. He says even the staff get it – they get asked, ‘how can you work with those ‘beasts’?

Young Person

In other stories, this plays out around young people and they must manage their own safety in the social and spatial micro-moments of life:

he says that is the biggest risk for free time out of the house. He describes how he will move if he sees other young people; he says’ I’ll walk this way, but I’ll walk at a slower pace’ (so as not to cross/meet them). There were three boys in particular, recently, who would go off their head about ‘beasts’

I hear it shouted through the wallso I turn my music up

Young Person

Not only does the dangerous, contagious social knowledge of HSB get branded upon young people but also workers who are associated with services to support children and young people who have displayed HSB. Harrowingly however, this registers starkly differently, as both the institution and young people appear to distinguish between the harm of young people being labelled as a ‘beast’ or adults working with ‘beasts’

tells me again even, ‘even the staff get it!’ People say, ‘how can you work with them?’ He says that teenagers get called a ‘beast’...(shrugs).... But the adults?!? That’s when they (the institution) really, really get it – when other people are picking on the staff. He says adults shouldn’t get pulled up for the place they work, he’s sorry to say, but staff don’t get a choice, they apply for a job, but they didn’t apply for a specialist job. He says staff just get chucked in... he says you’ve got to have experience with sexually harmful behaviour. I wonder what staff might need, and he says they need to refer to the books. I wonder what the difference is. He tells me they don’t speak about it being a specialist service, but you can see it.

Young Person

Looking deeper at this social dynamic exposes the potency and toxicity of a distinct form of bullying that is hyper-visible yet simultaneously invisible as it happens so frequently, not only in full view of adults but also directed at adults who become institutionally connected to the 'beasts'. This hyper (in)visibility is compounded when reflecting on previous story splinters that expose this destructive social construction of a 'beast' that appears to be constantly negotiated and used as sharp attacks on others:

the young person shouting at the adults – shouting 'peado' 'beast' 'get your hands off me' 'I'll kill myself'.

My reflective notes on the restraint outside the room

OOHHHH.....(sighs).....I think it would have been horrendous for him. I think he would have been labelled as a..... a lot of young people use this expression 'beast' and I think that's what would have happened to him

Practitioner (on a young person in school)



8.2.5 Reverberations

These story splinters capturing the word 'beast' further illustrate how pain and distress in 'care system' spaces become socially organised and contained through social defences that become numbed into 'extraordinary ordinaries'. Entrenched in the social knowledge of adult sex offenders, young people get offered up, socially and systemically, like sacrifices for 'public executions' (Lohmeyer, 2024). This form of public shaming appears simultaneously seen and heard yet invisible, unchallenged and passively accommodated by these young people and everyone around them. That is until the adults, working with 'beasts', get 'picked on' and 'pulled up' through association, which renders the bullying visible as the institution then 'really, really get it' implying only then can it be acknowledged and addressed. The stories illustrate social and systemic infrastructures, beyond individuals alone, locating this bullying, as form of

social violence (Schott, 2014, p. 37), anchored in 'origins of violence in the institutional and moral norms and context' (Lohmeyer, 2023, p. 492).

Piercingly, the boy expresses his sympathy to staff who 'don't get choice' in working with young people, like himself, who display HSB which offers a glimpse into the depth of pervasive the notion of being a 'beast' may saturate internal and social identities. In the context of such hyper (in)visible dynamics around perpetual bullying echoes levin's (2023) conceptualisation 'the stain' about adult sex offenders, which is morally communicated within prisons:

A stain is something which seeps into your whole being, which sets you apart, and which pollutes you. Like stigmata, stains are indelible and communicative. They are impossible to escape, and they say something about who you are. But unlike stigmas, stains are inherently physical and disgusting. They seep and spread, oozing through and past the boundaries of the body and attaching themselves to anyone or anything that touches them, accumulating in layers on people who have already been marked

(levins, 2023 p. 43-44)

Shaming through such staining may be an additional dynamic that supports our systems and institutions collusion with children and young people being 'othered', including research, policy and practice. Although no-one in the narratives refers explicitly to 'shame', I sense it permeating through the stories, invisible yet hauntingly present, at times saturating every corner of everyday life. Shame can be a meaningful emotion to learn about oneself in our social and relational worlds, helping us to regulate and navigate boundaries of self and others. Being able to move past shame is social and relational, and from infancy we are dependent on relationships with our social world – from communities to social systems – to help us to regulate ourselves and make sense of the shame when we get things 'wrong'. Braithwaite (1989) highlight shaming, through social and state responses to criminality, as social acts of expressing disapproval that aims to elicit remorse in the individual being shamed and/or encourage condemnation from others who witness the shaming. However, without social and relational systems to support the reintegration of shame, it remains disintegrated. Cairns (2002) conceptualises disintegrative shaming as a process where 'the child does not experience shame as a transitory unpleasant effect – I have done a shameful thing – but as a pervasive area of self-definition – I am a shameful person' (p. 62). Disintegrated shame can become 'bonded to other innate or developmentally generated aspects of the human condition' creating 'shame binds' where shame can become a core part of identity (Cairns 2002, p. 63). Arguably, disintegrated shame does not keep anyone safer and potentially increases risk if the need to soothe the shame is sought in destructive and harmful means, to the self or others.

Empirical evidence of children and young people who display HSB reminds us that many, although not all, have experienced complex and traumatic experiences. Such experiences may generate high levels of shame for prolonged periods and perhaps even create lives where shame is ubiquitous to life itself. I would suggest that it is not just what happened, such as sexual abuse, that can induce pervasive shame but is compounded by absences or inconsistencies of relationships to make sense of and reintegrate the shame. It may also be that, if present, those relationships of care are also the source of the harm and shame. Disintegrated shame may be compounded socially and systemically with absences of social relationships conducive for reintegration, such as disrupted care, schooling, loneliness and social isolation, which was identified by Balfe *et al.* (2019) as the most common problem in their study of 117 young people who displayed HSB. McAlinden (2005), in an exploration of re/disintegrative approaches, highlights myriads of state and social responses to sex offenders as based on 'disintegrative shaming strategies' such as formal or informal 'naming and shaming' that do not prevent offending, safeguard victims, or achieve substantial long-term reductions in reoffending, aside from possible short-term effects (p. 380). These stories elucidate social and systemic dynamics of shame that seep into every context of everyday life. Some continually run from the shame in their minds, while others may create their own invisible prisons as sanctuaries from the social and systemic shaming. Closer attention to reintegrate shame that relates to HSB may be a very important aspect of making sense of what has happened and moving beyond to have a safe, healthy and meaningful life. Among longer-term outcomes, Hackett *et al.*, (2024) identify two factors relating to successful outcomes as 'being ashamed of childhood behaviour and taking responsibility for it' and the 'ability to separate from the abuse 'I'm no longer that person and I'm not a risk''. These two dynamics echo the importance of supporting young people, individually, socially and systemically, to reintegrate shame relating to their behaviour.

However, shame sneaks into our social and systemic responses, which perpetuates and may indeed contribute to disintegrated shame. The shame is not just what they did but it potentially becomes who they are and who they will always be, staining young people's developing identities. We must take very seriously the ways in which shame is encountered in the ecologies of everyday life and work with the shame to support reintegration, ensuring we do not collude with or create systemic processes that hold shame as disintegrated. We cannot do this solely within therapy or social workspaces. It is imperative for the field of HSB to consider how we work with the contexts that disintegrate shame, including public stories of HSB, and actively advocate for young people, exorcising the ghosts from the legacy of adult models of understanding. Being called a 'beast' is not an insult – it is an identity. It is the stain.

8.2.6 Risk is everywhere!

Moving on from sensory dimensions of 'lifescapes' in 'care system' spaces, I would like to consider a significant element in many stories but particularly noticeable in 'lifescapes' of 'care

system' spaces stories – risk. Spatially, stories speak loudly to risk as being 'everywhere' reflecting care system spaces as saturated in risk:

risk is everywhere

he was risk assessed for everything

everything in his life was risk assessed

everything is risk assessed

all from Young People's narratives

Compellingly, one young person differentiates between risk 'inside' and 'outside' of the care system in different ways:

shut me off from risk on the outside, but they couldn't shut me out from risk on the inside. He goes on to say that they get to decide what risk is more important

I wonder about the Post-it notes – Risk! He exclaims! Risk – it gets so much when you're under social work – you get risk assessment after risk assessment! There feels like a power behind what he says as his pace and volume increase. He says everything is risk assessed. I ask him what 'risk assessment' means – he tells me anything that can be classed as dangerous will get risk assessed. He says still does have meaning (when I ask him more about this) but it is overused

Young Person

Notably, these stories are situated in residential care environments which may, or may not, concentrate risk practices experienced by young people. I suspect these stories trace the unspoken and invisible ways that 'risk' plays out in systems and which may be experienced stronger or more diluted depending on proximity to our systems.

8.2.7 Being a risk

A profoundly powerful dimension relating to risk illuminates how young people are ascribed and absorb identities of risk communicated through direct and indirect practices. Strikingly, this resonates with my earlier reflections of flattening (see Flat Boys) and the flattened textual context presented earlier, which considers the ways through which understanding and interventions to HSB are reified through textual forms of knowledge:

.... I wonder how they decide what risks are.... he says whatever is written on the paper is what risk you are seen to be.

Young Person

These rigid systemic risk identities shape patterns of everyday life socially and spatially through practices including restrictions and curfews, as illustrated by two different boy's stories:

...he describes having a curfew, and I wonder if this was even towards the end of his time in [care placement]. He says no, it changed, but he was only ever (at the end) allowed out for four and a half hours. He says this would be impossible to do anything and describes how if he wanted to go to (city) he'd want to travel, go for food and go for the shops but on his curfew, he'd not have time to do these things or would have been late. I wonder more about this - was this just for him? He explains that there were different reasons why different people had different curfews – so for him it was his sexual behaviour but for others it was self-harm.

Young Person

'risk is everywhere' but he says, 'there's a risk of tripping on a pier, a risk of tripping on a construction site'. He says it's not just people posing risks; it could be objects! He says the risks are often about going out and harming yourself as some people do that - they are on safety plans – staff are worried about them self-harming

Young Person

This is echoed in another story:

he says there are different reasons why rules around going out would be made – they are the reasons why they are in there (in care placement), the reason you are in there is the reason that you are seen as risky..... risk is judged by why you're there

Young Person

These highlight systemic, siloed risk categories becoming enmeshed in young people's social identities, seemingly fixed from when they first arrive. Most compelling is the sense that the risks are for why they are in care (positioned individually) obscuring risks that may be around them (positioned contextually). These individualised systemic risk identities appear to represent risks that individual young people pose, such as HSB or self-harm, without any sense of the risks they may navigate in the ecologies of their everyday social worlds. Furthermore, systemic risk identities appear to contaminate relationships and relational safety as young people are solely seen for the risk they 'are'. A particularly difficult story brings together many of these different threads around risk that seem to 'get stuck' to a young people:

says he couldn't have really expected people to care for him as it's not like one of your own, how you might care for someone who wasn't a random stranger. He says they only based it on what was written on paper. He connects people, not caring for him, as he said he was clear from the start he didn't want to be there - he would do the work and all the reflecting but didn't want to be there long. He says they (staff) knew he wasn't fond of them, and they weren't fond of him. He says they base everything on the reports – he says that not everything will be sunshine and rainbows but the reports will have the worst things that have happened so they know what's coming in. I suggest that there is a whole lot more to people than just the worst things that they have done. I wonder what his thoughts are about harmful behaviours, and he says yeah, to start off with, they judge you off the harmful behaviours but when they get to know you, they keep judging off the mistakes you make. He goes back to the reports – he tells me that he will guarantee me that everything written about him will be everything told to them by his mum, auntie and uncle. I comment that he's often reflected on being judged on the things that happened, just in different ways. He tells me that risk is still stuck to him even now, but his family don't judge me off it now.

Whilst risk remains a fundamental aspect of practice, the young person's harrowing account illuminates how these systemic narratives can become a singular story of a young life – the single story of the worst thing they ever did. It is important to distinguish this from denial, as he is not denying the HSB – he did 'the work and all the reflecting' and now works and lives independently. Rather, his story reflects on his three-year journey through a care placement and how what he did became 'stuck' to him, the story of who he is, impacting on his experience of caring relationships at such a critical period of adolescent development.

The sense of an all-consuming risk identity is mirrored in a story fragment of a practitioner as they reflect on different parts of a young person, including their harmful sexual behaviour:

that's only part of that person. It's a major part of the person, perhaps at that point in their life if we don't do anything about it then it may actually become worse for them. But they've got all of these different social and environmental factors that have led to where they are and how their brains developed and how their brains had to cope with the different situations that they've experienced over the time, that they've had..... that kind of traumatic experience that they've had... because they will have had traumatic experiences and whether that's been, you know, just simply neglect and it might be unintentional neglect but it's gonna have a harmful, harmful effect on the synapses of where the brain connections are made and where they don't. Because they just can't..... be in fight/flight mode for a long time and we all know that our brains developed at the age of four, so it's hard then.... to then, you know, to think of just somebody in relation to that one subject area of

harmful sexual behaviour. I mean, I suppose it's an expression of absolutely everything that's come before.

Practitioner

Risk identities appear reified through risk assessment, particularly in relation to who and what is being risk assessed. Many young people who display HSB will engage in a specific HSB risk assessment, which one young participant reflects on here:

then describes a traffic light system – red, amber and green. He says he was red to begin with as it was brand new....just freshly happened. He says he worked with his worker, and they (the traffic light colours) moved the more he worked. He says there was one thing he was still amber on – but his worker said it can't go down (to green) as it was that the thing happened (I think to myself that this might reflect a static risk factor). He says he's done all the work but he's told he's still got one amber – no one can change what happened...I wonder what this means about or to him? He says he didn't care that he was amber in their eyes – in his eyes he was green. He says he's seen too many of these crappy things.....he says he was risk assessed for everything.

Young Person

This story illuminates the experience being the subject of a risk assessment and reflects his worker's attempts to help him understand how they are making sense of risk and the progress he is making. However, the amber element (likely a static risk factor) is communicated as fixed and immovable. His story poignantly captures the systemic gaze falling upon him, 'in their eyes', as still being a risk but he is working hard to reject this identity, to move on. Static risk factors will always have happened; we can't change the past, but we can change the relationship to what has happened, and the risk connected to that. Yet our risk practices, rooted in quantitative actuarial risk instruments, appear to convey messages that he will always 'be amber' as if being systemically branded.

8.2.8 Risk collisions

Listening closely to stories reveals the systemic machinery of risk, including glimpses into what I describe as collisions of risk, intensified by proximity to our systems, highlighting how health and safety risk in institutional spaces also shape everyday life:

I gesture towards my Post-it notes and wonder about what 'risk' might mean to him smiles knowingly and says 'ah that big word risk!' and refers to a joke he shares with a worker. He says, 'everything is a risk assessment' and animates asking permission - 'can we go on a cycle?' risk assessment done'. I ask him what a risk assessment means, and he says people running away, self-harm, things like

this. He then says (as if staff talking) 'oh we've done a risk assessment; there's no risk, it's fine; everything's cool'. He says that there's none of those risks for him – 'I'm in, get my head down and back out, that's what staff love about me, how easy I am; I take directions.'

Young Person

Another boy talks about a hobby he took up after moving from a 'care system' space. This hobby was connected to driving, which would be ordinary for many young people not in state care:

he says he knows 95% of the people he knows through [hobby], but he wouldn't have been allowed it, as they controlled his life. He says everything in his life was risk assessed, but they can't block risk entirely. He explains what his interest in [hobby] has given him, and I note down key words in this – it gives him freedom, fun and friends. He tells me [hobby] has given him opportunities he would never have had.

Young Person

These story fragments capture a curious dynamic around how risks are represented and responded to – either denied or omnipotently squashed. Yet, boys themselves grapple with the reality of risk in everyday life as fluid and dynamic, which can't be 'blocked entirely,' as opposed to being static, rigid and entirely within our control - 'oh we've done a risk assessment, there's no risk; it's fine, everything's cool'.

In another narrative, a boy offers a metaphor for living with and as risk, a poignant reminder that many young people lived lives saturated with risk long before they themselves became seen as a risk and navigated this social and systemic risk identity. It also highlights how little regard is given to the risks that young people navigate that remain beyond the gaze of risk work and practices:

he's talking quite fast, and it's hard to catch hold of. He's talking about moving to the top of Scotland, then Ireland, and then to the very bottom of England. He says that in (the area he lived) he'd be at risk...he says that's the risk I'm in. He'd be safe for a couple of months, but it could spread fast you need to always be on the move if people know. He describes this as being like on an old roller coaster – the ones that go up, up, up, then down, he says. I draw this out to help me be clear I understand as I didn't quite get it to begin with. When the rollercoaster is up this is when it's risky and when it's down, it's safe. But it can get stuck at the top and in the risk, then a little bit of safety and then some risk (as it moves past the top towards going down), but still, some risk, and then it goes down to safety down. But then there's a slow creep up he tells me. Although it may even become faster,

or it could get stuck in the risk. It could be for five minutes, or it could be for two days.

Young Person

Describing risk as like ‘an old rollercoaster’ profoundly captures the relentless fragility and uncertainty of living with risk and as a risk. It is important to remember that these are young people who have ‘done the work’ when we met. While I don’t know about their everyday lives and care arrangements, other than what they shared, I know they often would travel to meet me independently after their day at school, college or work. This makes me think that their feelings of living in liminal risk may reflect invisible legacies of risk work and practices on young lives.

8.2.9 Reverberations

Listening to young people’s stories of being subject to risk practices exposes systemic constructions of pervasive risk, management and tools which are used uncritically, raising questions if they are part of the problem or the solution (Gillingham, 2006). Risk is a part of life. All caregivers navigate risks with their children, building safety and mitigating risks in ways that are not subject to assessments or narratives of ‘risk’. From my own reflections as a mum, this is very personal to each child, their capacities, their needs and building them up to manage risky things transitionally, including walking to school, social media, going out alone and drinking alcohol. This is not to discount the importance of attention to risk but is a reflection on how institutional and systemic practices potentially convey messages about risk, questioning the impact and what risks are being represented. These stories speak to formalised, rigid risk machinery that individualises and internalises the sense that ‘risk is everywhere’, as if risk is inside you and risk is who you are. Risk practices appear routine and repetitive, yet only certain risks fall under the scope of our wieldy risk machinery. Different stories from ‘care system’ spaces speak to the myriads of risks that young people navigate, including everyday violence, isolation, pervasive bullying, exposure to the distress and trauma of others, stigma, and fear of being exposed and family rejection, yet these do not seem to be articulated as risks to be assessed. There are distinct shapes to the risk that falls under the professional gaze, particularly behavioural, physical and health and safety risks. There is a sense of omnipotence around health and safety risk assessment that churns ‘risk’ through our risk machinery, rendering it contained and controlled - *‘oh we’ve done a risk assessment; there’s no risk, it’s fine; everything’s cool’*. This reveals an element of risk that appears to be more about the machine than the appraisal of dynamic social, relational and physical situations. Risk assessment appears to protect the systems and institutions, capturing and containing ‘risk’ or risky individuals, obscuring complex and contextual risks.

Risk practices appear to consume everyone in the ‘care system’ with structural and social conceptualisations of risk collapsing upon individual young people and workers. Rather than

supporting reflections on intersections and cumulations of risk, the stories reflect risk processes as mechanical, bureaucratic and performative. Parton (2010) highlights how risk practices can increase surveillance and generate intended and unintended consequences. Stories illustrate temporal, social and spatial restrictions under the auspices of risk which lack sensitivity to intersections of spaces, times and activities that arguably would take place for many young people growing up, naturally, not bureaucratically. Reflecting on unintended consequences, these stories of risk loop back to my considerations of context collapse, as rigidity around time and space may inadvertently create constricting and collapsing contexts that may be particularly important for young people in our 'care systems'. Activities often considered important transitions towards independence, such as learning to drive and socialising, may be inaccessible for many young people in the 'care system', in part due to bureaucratic and defensive risk practices. Such hobbies are not only essential for 'fun, freedom and friends', but also as critical hooks of hopes that futures become hung upon. Social transitions are opportunities to develop skills for safety and navigating risk and are best titrated through relational and social learning. Some of these storied representations of risk machinery rob young people of learning vital skills through which they can assess, manage and mitigate the everydayness of risk that we all inevitably endure in our journeys through life.

Messages about the self, through direct and indirect practices, appear pernicious, as stories reflect how identities of risk appear reified textually and procedurally, strengthening silos of risky and/or harmful behaviours, including self-harm and absconders. D'Cruz (2003) describes how child protection practices construct meanings and identities as 'negotiated outcomes of social interactions' connected dynamically between knowledge and practice thus simultaneously operating as 'representational of knowledge and an exercise of power' (p. 238). The entanglement of academic knowledge and professional practice seems to play out in micro-relational exchanges resonating with one young person's articulation of 'inside' and 'outside' the 'care system'. This may be a form of social harm through the lens of Zemiology which bridges 'everyday accounts of harm and the meso institutional and macro structural drivers that are often obscured from everyday experience' (Wroe, 2022, p. 02). These stories reflect a particular typology of relational harm – harms of recognition which Pemberton (2015) articulates as resulting from:

the symbolic injuries that serve to misrepresent the identities of individuals belonging to specific social groups..... If 'public identities' are imposed on people by others within society and presented as 'spoiled' or 'blemished' in one way or another, so that they are viewed as 'other' and therefore distinct from mainstream society, this can have serious consequences for people's ability to participate in society.....In addition, the internalisation of pejorative and stigmatising identities can result in feelings of shame, guilt and humiliation – which are damaging to people's ability to maintain relationships as they may seek to conceal stigmatising

aspects of their identity from others or withdraw from particular relationships altogether

(Pemberton 2015, p. 31)

These stories weave together to tell an important story about constructions of risk and risk identities situated at structural and systemic levels, including knowledge production in dominant individualised and risk-focused paradigms. These appear to saturate the everyday worlds of young people who are in closest proximity to our systems due to their care arrangements. They draw attention to the siloed construction of risk and resultant systemically constructed identities including 'self-harmers' and 'absconders' alongside how risks collide with other risk practices particularly health and safety.

8.2.10 Sex in the system

Other stories that contribute to 'lifescapes' of the care system illuminate fascinating aspects of sexual 'stuff' shifting the gaze from individual sexual behaviour to systemic dynamics playing out in social and systemic infrastructures.

8.2.11 (sexual) health, health, health, health, health

In this story segment, a practitioner reflects on their frustrations about the medical framing of developing sexualities in 'care system' spaces from their vantage point in residential care:

I think that within residential overall the topic of sex, sexual health, sexual relationships, it's still pretty much a taboo. And it's something that will be all 'that's health' and call in the school nurse.

I think it's medicalised - sex and sexuality, it's all medicalised. It's all about sexual disease, it's all about stopping being pregnant. It's not taken in the context of the social reality and environment that it actually takes place (in), and that's what's missing in relation to that....and we overly medicalise everything. It's, you know, 'wear a condom', 'go on the pill'. It's all health, health, health, health, health. But sex takes place in a social setting - it doesn't take place in the hospital or a clinic. That's where you go, you know, afterwards necessarily if you (need to)

I mean, again, if you're getting sex education at school, it'll be the biology in the main that you're taught. And again, it's medicalised isn't it.... as health. It is relevant, I'm not slating it, but it's like one channel, one funnel and actually all of these relationships and contexts take place in a social environment, not in a medical environment. And it's about where would they get that information from? I suppose like youth clubs, but then it might be the Internet and might be Snapchat and might be TikTok, and it might be rubbish. And therefore, there's a failure by ourselves within residential to actually support people, even on that level. And

that's not sexually harmful, but it could cause harm if they're not given the right information or given good sources of information.

Practitioner

There are several important intersecting components to this articulation of sex, health and development as being the domain of 'health' and not 'care'. First, the practitioner articulates their experience of a broader framing of sexual bodies and minds as 'medicalised', reified within education and anchored in 'biology'. As such, sexuality becomes positioned as property beyond 'care system' boundaries, to be dealt with somewhere else, by someone else. Health-related responses seem to focus on health-related risks such as sexually transmitted infections (STI) or early pregnancy. This leads the practitioner to interrogate absences created through the systemic dominance of sexual health and a potential vacuum of knowledge that becomes filled by the internet and social media.

It is particularly compelling that the practitioner highlights that this is not relevant just in the context of HSB but also unhelpful or, in their words, '*standard regular*' and '*typical*' sexual development through reference to the continuum of sexual behaviour (Hackett *et al.*, 2019):

...if we are not able to support children and young people that are actually going through a standard regular, you know, typical kind of development, but we're not, and don't get me wrong, there's policies and procedures in place within our council for this kind of subject. But the reality of it being even part of a discussion, a general discussion or anything like that is very limited. But then, if we're not supporting it at that basic level, how can we be supporting someone that is maybe on the continuum, that is, you know, seriously, you know, at risk in terms of their sexually harmful behaviour? So it's like there's a lot of work to be done really.

Practitioner

This practitioner pulls the issue of HSB away from being dislocated and 'othered', firmly squaring this as part of a continuum of sexual development and locating the issue as the holistic needs of all children who are cared for in care spaces and not as the needs of the few who display HSB. Perhaps most powerful, in the words of the practitioner, is the (re)positioning of the 'sexual' in the '*social*', including social care and social work, as they are intertwined and inseparable:

.... you're there to care, but my sort of thing is, it's like we do need to, within social work, social care practice, bring back the social because there has been a lot of influence from psychology, psychiatry, biology, medicalization...and that's not the landscape that we work in.

Practitioner

The practitioner's call to '*bring back*' sexuality into the realms of the '*social*' is a compelling call that feels particularly meaningful for the lives of all young people who navigate our 'care systems', including those who display HSB. It serves as a sobering reminder of the neoliberal chokehold that can be felt within social work and social care, suggesting we look back to our social roots to 'bring back the social' which may meaningfully resonate with many practicing in social work and social care spaces.

8.2.12 Bodies and boundaries

Through other stories, I learn about other aspects of sexuality that can become pushed out or away in 'care system' spaces' through relational practices. I would argue that at the heart of sexual 'stuff' in our systems, including the 'care system', are not policies, procedures or practices but people - people, old and young, each with their own deeply personal, intimate sexual subjectivities and internalised sexual scripts. These different stories illuminate some of the collisions that occur beneath the surface of relationships in the 'care system' space around sexual 'stuff':

I think with certain generations the discussion of anything sexual is limited, and that's just obviously been the culture growing up, you know, and therefore anything that is overtly sexual is deemed as inappropriate from a cultural or value-based perspective and is gonna be met with probably disgust and therefore a negativity. And I think as well that there may be some staff that have experienced sexual instances in their life that have not been acceptable, and therefore it might be a really, really difficult subject for them to tackle. But I think, in general, you will have some practitioners that the minute you mention anything sexual to them about the young person it's demonized, it's made to be kind of a wrong in a sense.

I suppose.....it's like, I think, if you spoke to most people that say they wouldn't want to necessarily speak to their mum and dad about, you know, sexual relationships necessarily, especially if they're like at the teenage years and it's suppose it's a bit like that where, as an adult, and you're talking to a 13, 14, 15, 16 year old about the subjects they might not be comfortable with you saying this, but they might be. And it's about broaching it, really, and if they're not comfortable with it, that's fine, (but) you've broached it. You know where they stand on it and they, you know, they've got other avenues that they can be sort of like, you know..... But I think that we just don't broach it cause it's embarrassing

.....the personal value base tends to override any professional codes of conduct, that you're supposed to implement, with some generations of worker. And I suppose that's their defensive practice at play, and I suppose that's them trying to protect themselves by saying 'this isn't a subject matter for me'. And this is how I'm

going to portray myself in relation to it so that I defend myself against having to do anything about it.

Practitioner

These different stories capture the potency generated by sexual 'stuff', playing out within the milieu of 'care', where relationships serve as the conductors for emotionally charged dynamics. The narratives of worker's response to sexual 'stuff', including disgust, negativity, demonising, embarrassment and being wrong, reveal the power engendered around supporting young people and their developing sexual selves. This story also highlights glimpses of the worker's individual sexual scripts that are shaped by their own experiences, including unacceptable sexual contacts and cultural and generational factors. It also exposes what I described earlier as systemic sexual scripts (see School sexual scripts section) that transcend individual scripts and become socially organised and enacted within the systemic space. This story splinter illustrates how systemic sexual scripts can play out in the everyday spaces of the 'care system':

I'll give you an example there was a young person (who had not displayed HSB) who was over 16, and one of the staff had found an (toy for sexual pleasure) in his drawer.....(this information) went round the whole team as some kind of..... something to joke about and, you know, 'they'll (the young person) need to be watched'. You know, as if he were deviant in some kind of way? And it's all this kind of negative understanding of the young person exploring their sexuality, at the end of the day, because that's what it was. And it's like if you're in a residential setting, it's difficult enough if you're in a residential setting..... you're kinda in a goldfish bowl in terms of people knowing everything about you and having no private, you know, you have got private space, but..... to what extent? Because that was in his room, and it was found when they were putting the clothes away for him. And it's like it can... it's often met in my experience with certain practitioners as pretty much a negative, and it can't be seen as anything other than negative and something that needs to be monitored and watched and controlled. And for me – no everybody's got the right to experiment with their sexuality etcetera and that is never.... no, not never.... seldom taking an account.

Practitioner

This story matters – the response to a young person's sexual exploration, not in relation to a young person who has displayed HSB, reveals the practitioner's reflections on how the adults in residential care can respond to sexual 'stuff'. It is also fascinating in relation to my reflections on the significance of bedroom spaces (see Intrusions, exclusions, or seclusions? section) illuminated dynamics of intrusion encountered in 'care system' spaces. This raises fundamental questions about the role of the physical environment and sexual development, including how and where privacy can be respected and how this is sensitively balanced with risk. There appears to be a particular potency of sexual behaviour that is fuelled by systemic sexual scripts

that hold little space for sexuality as precious, nuanced, intimate and developmental, which may require sensitive support to be safe and flourish. This becomes particularly complex when we add harmful sexual behaviour into spaces dominated by difficult systemic sexual scripts that contribute to stigma:

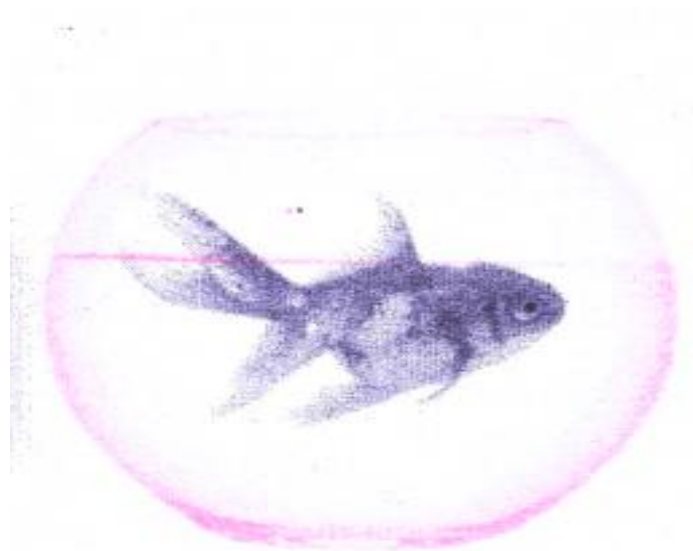
I think it's stigma at its finest and the stigmatization of the young person because sex, sexuality, etc is a subject that's difficult for people to talk about within a professional environment a lot of the time. I think that you have preconceived ideas of what you mean by 'sexual harmful behaviour' and you'll be thinking of that they're gonna hurt younger children and that negative connotation that's what that's about. And it might not be, it might not be. That is a stigma that we really shouldn't... we really need to defend against; we really need to defend against that in whatever way possible.... because it is not helpful in any way, shape or form. And if you look at The Promise that says that if there's stigma within residential childcare, any stigmatizing practices at all, then get rid of them.

That's what I see, what I think and what I perceive it to be - that it's definitely stigmatized and that might be intentional or unintentional..... because you're led sometimes by feelings, and the feeling might be negative, but then that's on you. You need to think the process through in an appropriate way and manage whatever risks as per how you would manage any other kind of risk, whether it be risk of violence in the community by an individual or something. You know, it still has to be managed with the same sort of holistic context...to see the person as a whole, not just one part...just focusing in on that one part. Because if you only focus on in that one part and you forget about the basic care or you forget about activities and how you can expand someone's experiences.

(when the behaviour is seen as) deviant behaviour and that then colours their view about that individual and that's not healthy or helpful to the person developing....an understanding of sexual relationships, etc, etc. They might not have said anything to the young person, but that's how they view them and (they) start from an internal negative understanding of that child

Practitioner

The practitioner's reflections highlight how difficult it can be to sustain thinking about healthy and harmful sexual behaviour within the context of 'care systems'. A range of emotional responses are communicated by staff that are particularly potent in relation to young people who have displayed HSB, echoing many of the previous findings, including systemic sexual scripts, the calcification of risk and risk identities and intersections of constructions of childhood and sexuality.



8.6.13 Reverberations

Exploring literature around sexuality and children in the 'care system' bears out the practitioner's perspective that needs in relation to sexuality are often framed through a health lens. Much of the literature is published in health-related journals, situating health disciplines such as nursing as key professions, and risks are often described in relation to sexual health, particularly around pregnancy, contraception and STI's. An example of this is an excellent paper by Nixon *et al.*, (2019) (published in British Medical Journal) exploring how personal and institutional factors impact (foster carers, residential carers and social workers) which describes role ambiguity, conflict and overload for carers. Similarly, another fascinating article by Hyde *et al.*, (2016) explores perspectives of practitioners delivering relationship and sexuality education with young people in state care in Ireland (published in Health Education Journal). Whilst far from conclusive, this does give some credence to the 'split' between medical and social understandings of sexuality articulated by the practitioner. The medicalisation of sexual behaviour can be traced back in time with a distinct shift around the second half of the 19th century from religious institutions as moral arbiters of sexual behaviour towards medicalisation and medical authority governing sexuality, which contributed to an overmedicalisation where social and interpersonal dynamics become overlooked (Hart and Wellings, 2002). Reflecting on what I describe as the **context** of knowledge around HSB (see Inwards, backwards, outwards, forwards: context section), we can trace different medicalised languages, such as 'treatment', that become co-opted by the field, including the 'treatment' of individuals and not the 'treatment' of the broader social, emotional and environmental

factors. Considerations of supporting sexual development in care settings from health perspectives are significantly important, including and beyond sexual health outcomes such as early pregnancy or STI's. Hyde *et al.*'s (2016) study is a perfect illustration, as they identify five themes relevant for young people in care that resonate powerfully with HSB, including recognising the complexity and multidimensionality of sexual health, incorporating personal and emotional growth education to tackle issues such as low self-esteem, emotional detachment, and difficulties in recognising and expressing emotions, developing social skills around managing relationships, encouraging the use of positive social skills in everyday interactions, and providing factual education around sexuality. It strikes me that so much relates to the big feelings of relationships, intimacies, bodies and everyday skills, which feels so important in relation to developing sexual safety and harmless sexual behaviour.

Representing sexual health and risk from a medicalised paradigm may create a chasm between risks of harm and risks of health, further fragmenting sexuality and behaviour. Sexuality is a developmental, intimate, sensitive, complex and confusing dimension of all our personal subjectivities which may get lost within a dominant 'funnel' that leads to clinics. This seems like a mirror image of how risks around HSB became framed through psych~ discourses, detached from the contexts of everyday life, creating 'funnels' to the therapy room or Social Work offices. It appears sexual 'stuff' becomes represented as disease, such as STI's, or disease, such as discomfort or embarrassment. Risk becomes socially organised, fuelled by defences against discomfort, embarrassment and fear, where sexuality becomes projected upon our health system, becoming someone else's job, someone very unlikely to be present in the everyday milieu of a care setting. Sexuality and risk become enmeshed with one another, entangled with systemic sexual scripts that engender shame and fear of everyone in this 'lifescape'. Sexuality becomes conflated with behaviour, risky or unhealthy, that leads to 'education' to redress. This reflects a hierarchical and unidirectional delivery of information that, in the context of these narratives, is mediated by adults either in health roles or who feel big feelings (such as embarrassed, awkward, worried or disgusted) about sexual 'stuff'. Many young people in our 'care systems' carry with them a vast knowledge of sex and relationships. However, this may be complex and confusing knowledge accumulated through experiences, including exposure to adult sexuality, intimate emotional or bodily boundary breaches, and relationships that include violence and fear. Children are not blank canvases, awaiting the 'grand reveal' of the mechanics of sex, titrated by adults according to our agendas and timelines. These stories capture how individual sexual scripts, of adults and young people, come together and encounter one another. Smith (2009, 126) draws on Fewster's (2004) ideas around the contact boundary between two selves which is the 'crucible' where 'profound and transformational learning takes place', urging residential care workers to actively seek out opportunities to work at the contact boundary to generate change' (Smith 2009, p. 126). The idea of 'the self' as being at the heart of the relational contact is particularly meaningful as sexuality is an inherent, intimate part of the self. These stories illuminate a contact boundary where sexuality touches on difficult, powerful feelings that generate defences, including

avoidance, redirection, shame and humiliation. In keeping with the research endeavour to look beyond individuals, these stories speak to what can easily be 'taken for granted' highlighting the complexities of working at the contact boundary between lots of people, in adulthoods and childhoods, with their own personal sexual selves and stories. Thinking with the stories, these expose another potential contact boundary – between individual sexual scripts and systemic sexual scripts – that frame sexuality as risky, harmful or unhealthy, prompting suspicion and surveillance. These systemic sexual scripts may act as containers for the strong emotions provoked through individual sexual scripts clashing at the contact boundary, ranging from discomfort to disgust. The swirling tensions manifest in systemic avoidance of sensitivity to nurturing developing sexual selves. These appear like unconscious but socially shared manoeuvres such as jokes, avoidance or pathologizing. It is my contention that sex and relationship education, whilst essential, does not go far enough for children who have learnt about bodies, boundaries, relationships and sexuality through exposure to adult sexuality, including abuse and violence. We need to embrace the magnitude of complexity of developing sexual selves and strive to find coherence around such sensitive, shameful, confusing and often traumatic dynamics. It is like trying to teach children how to swim on dry land and then expecting them to swim to safety without life jackets in stormy oceans.

8.3 The lonely, rotten pickle in a jar

As I move towards the end of my exploration of 'lifescapes', narrative collages of stories embedded in spaces, I would like to present a particular story told by one boy that compels to be presented in full. It is not a place, space or thing that can be positioned in the map of 'lifescapes' yet weaves together so many threads of other stories witnessed. For me, the power of this boy's words serves as a provocation rather than a simple story of a singular reality. In this sense, it is an invitation – not a conclusion.

8.3.1 The filing cabinet in my mind

The story of the pickle in the jar stemmed from a boy's narrative of moving to a care space in a different place from where he lived before with his family. He shared with me how he manages everything in his mind:

he says he can't tell people why he's here. No one. Then begins to tell me the ways he manages how to talk to people about why he lives in this different place.

he tells me he's done research on what to say to people about why he's here, and one way to talk about being bad is to tell people that he was drinking (alcohol) and smoking weed and things like that. He then tells me that his mind is like a filing cabinet. He has to keep things in the filing cabinet to manage his mind. He says [the adults who care for him] don't know how he's able to keep these things in his brain.

They say 'how have you been able to keep these things without telling anybody else in your mind?!' But he does. And he has since October. He says it stays in the filing cabinet. He puts it in and it will get lost, but then sometimes it will get found in his mind. And then he'll put it back in but it'll get lost again. And maybe by the end of the year he can put it in the shredder.

Young Person

I don't know the reason why he has moved to a different area, it may or may not relate to displaying HSB, but this is a powerful account of internal and external 'work' that feels relentless and exhausting. His story speaks to the emotional labour that children and young people must do to make sense of experiences, including when they moves into 'care systems'.

8.3.2 The pickle in the jar

Shortly after reflecting on the 'filing cabinet in his mind' a story of a lonely, rotten pickle in a jar unfolds. It is sparked with a story about his cousin who got in a 'pickle' then develops when I wonder what it might be like for a pickle who can't tell people why they are where they are, gently prompted by the filing cabinet in his mind story:

he says he's got a lot of secrets in his head about his friends and his family. He begins to tell me about his cousin who was 'rolling with him' and was getting into difficulties, but he helped his cousin. He says his cousin is like a pickle in a pickle jar, the long pickles, and other pickles around his cousin the bad people.....So he has to take out his cousin; he has to remove him from the situation, he says. He says to me 'I might be skinny but I can still put up a fight,' and he gestures with his arms as if to show me he is strong...

....I wonder about what he said about the pickles in the jar, and how it's made me think about what he's told me about the filing cabinet in his mind - that he doesn't tell anybody about some things..... I wonder what it would be like for somebody that can't tell people about things? He said it'll be a would be a lone pickle that can't be with anyone, and he starts to tell me about this. I try to follow the story and suggest he could draw it, which he does. He draws a pickle in a jar, in the middle, and he says it's all rotten, drawing squiggly lines down it. There are other pickles in the jar draws but he is the rotten one.



Image Ten: The lone, rotten pickle in a jar drawn by Young Person

he then draws this like a circular process – 10 weeks later, he says – and all the pickles in the jar all get rotten, so they get put in the bin. He draws a wheelie bin and then says they get taken to the dump in the bin lorry – he draws the bin lorry with the jar in the back and wiggly lines to show it is stinking. Then it gets put on the dump – he draws a picture of a sweetie and the pickle jar and a tin of something on the rubbish dump... and then the rubbish gets set on fire. But then he draws a line back to the pickle and pickle jar as if it's back at the beginning of the process again.



Image Eleven: The process of the pickle in a jar drawn by a Young Person

I say I think he used the word 'pickle' the last time we met to talk about someone who was getting into 'pickle' (like difficulty) and say it might be a really useful way for other people to think about when young people have gotten into difficulties with their sexual behaviour. I noticed there was something about the jar- you can see through jars so you can see the pickle in the jar- it's visible to everyone. He says that those pickle jars have got to be super-glued shut, then they've got to be gorilla¹⁸ taped and then put in an industrial safe and then another safe and then a vault and then a cybersecurity vault, and then they don't see it at all.....it has to be buried and buried deep as far as a human can. But one day, that can get dug up and then launched up to space where no one can get it...it goes through 7 billion black holes.

He says maybe one day someone will take me out of the jar. But they have to be big, big Chunga friend¹⁹ and they have to be bigger. They (the pickle) can get taken out and looked at but then put back in. I say it is difficult to think about what it would be like for someone to feel picked out and put back in again. He says that you can look fine, you can get through it, but you'll just get put back.

¹⁸ Gorilla tape is a brand of strong duct tape

¹⁹ I think by this he is referring to the gaming/meme term 'big chungas' which is a fat Bugs Bunny character https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wabbit_Twouble#Reception

8.3.3 Reverberations

This story of a pickle in the jar resonates with many different contours of ‘lifescapes’ of stories which resist neat or simplistic meanings but rather ‘allow for multiple, if somewhat disjointed ways, of seeing a fractured reality which can be known in different ways, yet can be connected, if somewhat tenuously at times’ (D’Cruz, 2001, p. 21). Presenting the story as written in my notes invites the reader to make sense of this story in their own way. I will also share my reflections on this metaphorical story without trying to reduce it from its complexities.

Getting in a pickle

The symbolism of a pickle is simply profound. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘pickle’ as a noun – describing the salt or acid liquid in which food, especially vegetables or fruit, is preserved – but as a colloquial term, it means ‘a (usually disagreeable) condition or situation; a plight, a predicament’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). The use of the term as a predicament or plight can be traced back to Shakespeare’s *Tempest* (written in 1623) ‘I have been in such a pickle since I saw you last’ (Shakespeare, 1969, v. i. 284). The metaphor of getting in a pickle may capture the notion of young people getting into difficulty with their sexual behaviour. This is not to diminish the harm or significance of behaviour, but it may hold utility in reminding us that HSB is not always intentional nor inevitable. It can be a manifestation of difficulties that cause profound distress for others. In practice and research, treating the individual and their behaviour without due attention to the challenges that may leave them still in a pickle.

Being a pickle

Another resonance is to consider the pickle as representing the young person, not only their behaviour. In the story, the pickles are people, including his cousin and ‘bad people’. When I probe about what it may be like for a pickle/person ‘*who can't tell people about things*’, the pickle metaphor unfolds as he tells himself as if he is a pickle – this time, a rotten pickle. The story moves around; sometimes he is the pickle, but other times I can’t be sure, sometimes alone yet drawn beside other pickles. The metaphor also shifts between being in a pickle and being a pickle, but rotten and ‘*a lone pickle that can't be with anyone*’. This sense of being a rotten pickle by itself echoes psychoanalytically informed concepts of object relations. Melanie Klein, an early pioneer of child and adolescent psychoanalytic psychotherapy, considered relationships between subject (self) and object (others) as dynamic, generating different internal positions (Ogden, 1983). In early infancy and during times of extreme anxiety, psychic processes, including splitting, unconsciously hold apart intense feelings that would otherwise generate overwhelming internal conflict if they came together in one’s mind. One aspect of splitting is splitting into good or bad ‘objects’ which can further become split into ‘part objects’, which represent the whole ‘object (person or relationship)’. The story of the pickle in the jar

resonates with other story splinters about the construction of social and systemic identities of being 'risky'. It is as if in the face of intense anxieties generated by knowledge of HSB, young people's identities become split and they are seen as a 'part object' of their whole – their behaviour/risk. This pulls on threads of other stories that reflect the systemic processes that flatten developing and complex young lives into static social identities of HSB (or other risk identities such as self-harmer or absconder).

it still has to be managed with the same sort of holistic context...to see the person as a whole, not just one part...just focusing in on that one part. Because if you only focus on in that one part and you forget about the basic care or you forget about activities and how you can expand someone's experiences.

Practitioner

Another story splinter, narrated by a young person, resonates with being part object-like also:

the reason you are in there (the 'care system') is the reason that you are seen as risky.....risk is judged by why you're there, he tells me. He goes on to say that they get to decide what risk is more important.... I wonder how they decide what risks are.... he says whatever is written on paper is what risk you are seen to be.

Young Person

This is also echoed in Brownlie's articulation of young people's subjectivities becoming swallowed up by 'being -risky' at the expense of their 'being child' (2001). The lonely, rotten pickle in the jar can be a useful way of thinking about how young people can become seen as only their harmful behaviour - 'the risk they are seen to be.'

Pickling

The pickle may also illuminate social and systemic processes whereby risk moves from an adjective to a noun as risk seems to become part of a young person's developing identity. The symbolism of the label that the boy drew on the jar feels particularly significant and further reifies the sense of risk as calcifying to become a fixed, static and enduring label or identity. This chimes with a practitioner reflection on a boy he supported and a 'worst-case scenario' (which unbeknownst to him is so very close to the lives of at least two of the boys I met with/heard about)

look at the behaviour and not the person; he'd just a young vulnerable boy who was experimenting who just.... got himself in a situation.... I mean, I can tell he regretted it, but listen, it's done; he did it. We got involved, and we worked with it, and we made sure that he was able to move on. For me, the self-esteem stuff and confidence and to make sure that young people aren't isolated is, for me, the most important thing. The last thing you want is them feeling bad about themselves,

labelling themselves as a bad person and trapped in their bedroom, not going to school, not seeing their pals – I mean, that's the worst-case scenario.

Practitioner

A particularly striking part of this narrative is the idea of being 'able to move on' reflecting growth, development and flourishing. The opposite, or 'worst-case scenario', is 'feeling bad about themselves (perhaps akin to rotting?), 'labelling themselves as a bad person'(perhaps like the label on the jar?) and being 'trapped in their bedroom' isolated and alone (perhaps symbolic of the jar tightly shut?). It resonates with the process – suspending something (or someone?) in time within the pickling solution. The plight of the pickle may reflect how responses to HSB can inadvertently contribute to the development of social, systemic and self-identities that are fixed and fragmented rather than a focus on futures and flourishing.

Pickle jars

A final reflection on this story relates to the jar which may represent emotional containment that is perhaps needed to be able to hold together the many powerful and often ambivalent feelings that relate to HSB, such as distress, disgust, anxiety, fear, care and hope. The pickle jar may symbolise a similar sense of containment as bedrooms did (see Safety and sanctuary section) becoming like safe sanctuaries where some young people become dislocated from social worlds beyond the bedroom door. Some of the language of the cycle described may reflect seeking safety and security:

industrial safe and then another safe and then a vault and then a cybersecurity vault

Young Person

Notably, a similar metaphor around the transparency of the jar was used by reflecting on bedrooms and developing young lives in 'care system' spaces:

..... you're kind of in a goldfish bowl in terms of people knowing everything about you and having no privacy, you know, you have got private space, but... to what extent?

Practitioner

The symbolism of being shut off 'inside' features in another story:

he uses an interesting turn of phrase – turn off risk. He says they shut me off from risk on the outside but they couldn't shut me out from risk on the inside

Young Person

The jar may be symbolic of being inside the 'care system', a bounded space with risks 'inside' and 'outside', with a lid that is tightly shut that cuts young people off from risks outside but not inside the system (or jar?). Perhaps the cycle of rotting symbolises some of the iatrogenic impacts of our individualised, risk- and behaviour-focused interventions that obscure the social realities of everyday life?

This story of the pickle in the jar is partial, fleeting and agitating, resonating in different ways. For me, the most powerful is my realisation that pickles never start as pickles. They start as living, growing things. We pickle them to stunt and sustain them. We must consider how we can find new ways of sustaining growth and development when we intervene in lives that don't pickle them. I think this will spark my own curiosity and reflection long after this thesis.....

The stories shared in this chapter reveal how institutions are not benign, neutral containers but active participants in shaping the 'lifescapes' of young people. In schools, informal comments by a teacher reveals hidden sexual scripts and heteronormative assumptions that circulate beneath formal policies. These scripts not only shape how young people are seen but also how professionals see themselves and each other, often reinforcing harmful norms and silencing complexity. In the 'care system', particularly in residential settings, the intensity of relationships and the scarcity of safety create 'lifescapes' where risk is not just everpresent but often amplified. These are spaces where young people and workers alike must navigate emotional, physical and institutional pressures, often without the tools or support to do so safely. The narratives from these spaces challenge the dominant focus on individual behaviour by highlighting how harm and shame are produced and sustained within institutional cultures and practices.

One boy's poignant story about the 'pickle in a jar' offers a powerful metaphor for how institutional responses to HSB can shape young people's identities. The image of the pickle- sometimes rotten, sometimes alone and always contained - captures the emotional and systemic processes through which young people become defined by their risk, rather than seen as whole, developing individuals. The jar itself evokes the institutional containment of care systems- transparent yet confining, offering surveillance but little privacy, safety or growth. This story reminds us that pickles don't start as pickles but begin life living and growing. Institutional 'lifescapes' must find ways to support that growth, rather than suspending young people in static identities of harm.

Institutional 'lifescapes' demand a shift in focus from fixing young people to reflecting on the systems around them. They call for a deeper interrogation of how professionals, policies, and environments contribute to the conditions in which harm occurs or is denied. By attending to these stories, we are invited to look not only at the young people in front of us but also hold mirrors up to institutions themselves.

Chapter Nine: Looking sideways

This study sought to ‘look sideways’ (Shaw, 2017), moving attention away from the obvious and the central focus to notice and engage with experiences that might otherwise go unnoticed. Taking a sideways look from individual factors to everyday life with young people and practitioners has revealed stories of social, physical and relational worlds. Rather than making maps as first anticipated, stories led me to draw upon elements of Narrative Inquiry to iteratively map ‘lifescapes’ as spaces where stories and experiences intersect to reveal the complex interplay of social, spatial and temporal dimensions of young people’s lives. ‘Lifescapes’ emphasise the interconnectedness of experiences across different spaces and times where safety, risk and rights are not fixed but flow and shift within relational spaces. They also foreground the ordinary and everyday aspects of young lives that are often overshadowed by ‘grand narratives’ of individuals, incidents and risk in the field of HSB. The stories of the young participants often reflected how they are understood through ‘the worst things that happened’ neglecting nuances, complexities and potential for growth and change.

This study addresses gaps in understanding HSB by contributing to knowledge that considers the contextual, social, and spatial factors shaping young people's experiences. My focus was on exploring how risk and safety dynamics are influenced by the environments young people navigate. The research was designed to provide a safe space for those who have displayed HSB to share insights into their everyday lives to consider the following research questions:

- How do boys who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) narrate their experiences of risk, safety and children’s rights in everyday life?
- How do practitioners, reflecting on boys they have supported (who have displayed HSB), narrate the boy’s experiences of risk, safety, and children’s rights in everyday life?
- What do the narratives of and about boys who have displayed HSB reveal about the influence of social and spatial dimensions shaping risk, safety and children’s rights?
- In what ways can the stories told by and about boys who have displayed HSB inform new approaches to prevention and intervention?

9.1 Questions one and two

The first part of my research puzzle sought to explore how boys who have displayed HSB narrate their experiences of risk, safety, and Children's Rights in the context of everyday life. I expanded the scope of the study to engage practitioners to reflect on how boys they have supported might speak of these experiences using the same methodology. I wondered:

How do boys who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) narrate their experiences of risk, safety and children's rights in everyday life?

How do practitioners, reflecting on boys they have supported (who have displayed HSB), narrate the boy's experiences of risk, safety and children's rights in everyday life?

The focus of these questions relates to understanding young people's and practitioner's perspectives through their storytelling, paying close attention to experiences of risk, safety and rights.

Stories shine light on layers of difficult and stressful experiences in ordinary and everyday life. Dominating paradigms often focus on individuals and incidents, but these stories remind us that there are many other things that young people are contending with when professionals are intervening in their lives. Some stories relate to constellations and cumulations of harm, compounded by proximity to systems, that shape everyday experiences. Other stories reflect the pleasure and pain of being a teenager trying to find one's sense of place and meaning in the world. Fitting in, friendships, fun, freedom and futures were some narratives that reflect many of the struggles and joys of adolescence. This tells us that young people who display HSB are navigating everyday social and developmental tasks of growing up alongside 'extraordinary ordinary' challenges, often without consistent, sensitive and available relationships alongside them. Dominating discourses that 'other' young people and behaviour may squash our capacity to hold in mind the space of adolescence that can be a time of risk and stress yet also hope and change.

Other stories highlight experiences of adversity and loss of young people who become tangled in our systems, stressing the importance of drawing out this emotive social issue out of its criminological genealogy and aligning it within broader social agendas around childhood, wellbeing, safety and social harms. Lifescapes' offer a broader narrative of space, highlighting its fundamental role in daily life—not just as a setting for behaviours but as a network of social connections and disconnections. Stories also contrast with the taken-for-granted ways we think about space, particularly around 'public' and 'private'. Seemingly 'public' spaces such as parks and streets appear to exclude young people through implicit and explicit ways, and 'private' spaces, particularly bedrooms, may serve as portals into 'networked' publics, which

has significant implications for how we understand and enhance safety in physical and digital spaces.

Paying close attention to stories embedded in spaces situates those in the field of HSB as more actively involved in social and systemic constructions than is often acknowledged in the landscape of knowledge. It is as if we have positioned ourselves behind the gaze, like a photographer behind the camera, rather than as a part of the landscape. Institutional and systemic spaces emerge as significant contexts within stories, particularly schools and the 'care system'. Looking beyond individual young people also means looking beyond individual adults and school systems to consider the physical, social and relational conditions of school environments. A distinction highlighted by a practitioner of a teacher's 'informal' statement revealed harmful heteronormative systemic sexual scripts which tell stories about unofficial and invisible dynamics of social relations between young people but, perhaps more importantly, between school staff. Alongside HSB, other forms of harm, including child sexual abuse and child criminal exploitation, also ignite the intersections of potent and pervasive social constructions of childhood, sexuality and masculinity embedded in the institutional architecture, creating confusions, amplification and denials of harm and vulnerability. Counter to the focus on young people that become adult projects, stories illuminate how harmful norms are produced and reproduced within institutions, stressing the need to look in the mirror at professionals and systems and not just at problematic young people and families. The care system, particularly out-of-home residential care, was prominent in the narratives that emerge as spaces that are intense for everyone, young people and workers, to navigate. Risk appears to amplify within care system spaces, and safety can be scarce.

9.2 Question three

The second part of the research puzzle explored narratives of and about boys to consider the influence of social and spatial dimensions on experiences of risk, safety and children's rights by asking:

What do the narratives of and about boys who have displayed HSB reveal about the influence of social and spatial dimensions shaping risk, safety, and children's right?

I discovered that experiences of risk, safety and children's rights were not captured in maps as first anticipated, exposing my assumptions about experiences of everyday life. In my search for safety, risk and rights, I have learned that they are not easily mappable – they are fleeting, partial, nuanced, contextual, dynamic and complex. They flit across time, between the past, present and imagined futures, and move across spaces fluidly.

9.2.1 Invisible and hyper visible: safety, rights and risk

Leaning back to look at ‘lifescapes’ to ‘answer’ my research questions, I observe an invisibility safety and rights in the stories of experience juxtaposed with a hypervisibility of risk. I can grasp hold of representations of risk that I can ‘see’ in stories, yet safety and children’s rights appear much fuzzier in comparison.

9.2.2 Searching for safety

Starting with safety, the experience of safety and being safe is conspicuous through its absence in narratives. Where safety does appear, it is often related to what is not safe, such as ‘schools are not safe’. Safety seems scarce, at times a rationed resource that young people in ‘care system’ spaces understand and navigate between themselves. Whilst it was more difficult to differentiate safety socially and spatially, sensory and temporal dimensions of safety could be observed through storied experiences. Glimpses into social worlds where a sense of safety felt scarce may shape how the world can be ‘seen’ which is illustrated during one research session when a young person was exploring a park through the VR headset. On the virtual map we could both see a woman on the periphery of the park, and, through his narration, I became aware we saw the virtual scene before us differently. I saw a woman jogging, but he suggests she thought she was being chased and moved within the virtual environment to confirm that no-one was chasing her:

he says ‘stop running there’s no one chasing you’ then he takes the VR pointer and looks a length of space behind her as if to check and confirm no-one’s chasing her.

Participant

There may be many contributing factors that create an internal sense of being unsafe, compounded by many stories of living in social worlds that are arguably externally unsafe, such as being subject to or witnessing everyday violence. ‘Lifescapes’ paints a picture of young people who can experience safety as scarce in the social, physical and care realms of their everyday lives.

9.2.3 Missing in action: children’s rights

Exploring the stories through the three-dimensional prism of inquiry (time, place & social conditions) reflects that recognition of young people as rights holders under the UNCRC also appears scarce and, at times, entirely absent. This mirrors my observations that literature, policy and practice around HSB are also silent around children’s rights.

I had three post-it note prompts – ‘safety’, ‘children’s rights’ and ‘risk’ - inviting participants to share what these may mean to them. The ‘children’s rights’ post-it note prompted two boys to tell stories that they connected to rights. One boy told the ‘gruesome’ story, where he and another young resident mopped up the blood of another distressed resident who had cut their

arms [see GRUESOME section], reflected how that ‘that one story was all three post it notes!’. It is as if, in this moment, he is not ‘seen’ by staff as a young person but becomes a resource to be pulled upon within the distress. This feels symbolic of how the absence of children’s rights discourses may reflect how young people, including those who display HSB, are not ‘seen’ as children within the ‘lifespace’ of their childhoods, which obscures their recognition as rights holders.

In the past and futures lives section, another boy shared his concerns around disclosing information about his HSB in future employment, highlighting temporal dimensions of children’s rights and the indelible impact of behaviours and systems contact that travel into future lives. The policy landscape of Scotland advocates for diversions from prosecution and welfare-based responses to offending and harmful behaviour, so many, if not most, young people will never be disclosing adjudicated sexual offences. Many young people will accept grounds or have grounds upheld at a Children’s Hearing which may fall under ‘other relevant information’ held by police that may be disclosed at disclosure, particularly roles or training that require higher-level disclosure. Lightowler (2024) highlights significant uncertainty around what may be considered by Police Scotland as ‘relevant information’ to be disclosed, including necessity, proportionality and the human rights of the applicant and others. There may also be many young people who have potentially ‘relevant information’ that may be disclosed that they are unaware of, such as information held regarding sexual behaviour that led to no further action. Given the profound shame that echoes around so many of the stories, I can only wonder how many young people could navigate this alone, highlighting the need for rights-respecting approaches that consider contact with our system and potential impacts longer term.

9.2.4 Rights and wrongs

Other story splinters capture an additional dimension related to the invisibility of children’s rights exposing potential tensions around notions of (children’s) rights and wrongs. This first emerges when one boy seemed unsure as to what the prompt post-it note that said ‘children’s rights’ might mean to him. After some time thinking about this, he said that it means ‘to be right’. This boy’s fascinating association with children’s rights as meaning being right connects to the word right(s) as being a homonym: a word that is spelled and sounds the same but can have different meanings. Harmful behaviour is intrinsically getting something wrong, sometimes very wrong, with significant consequences for those harmed and those who harmed. Orienting responses to HSB through a children’s rights-based framework is essentially using rights in response to wrongs. In many respects, this is perfectly obvious - yet this boy’s narrative may alert us to potential ambivalence around children rights and sexual ‘wrongs’. This is echoed in a practitioner’s narrative when they reflect on the challenges they experienced when trying to advocate for a young person’s rights that were in tension with risk management plans. The practitioner says:

I get the people are doing their best, but I don't feel he really has anybody to advocate for him and his rights. And it's almost seen as like 'ah but he's done this', you know?

Practitioner

This appears to capture how conflicts between 'rights' and 'wrongs' are also socially and systemically organised, generating distancing and denials of young people who display HSB as being rights holders. In turn, this renders professionals' and systems' positions as duty bearers invisible, reserving rights for those who 'deserve' them. The practitioner reflects upon the challenges of being attentive to both rights and risk which can feel uncomfortable:

And sometimes I think I come across like Mr Liberal social worker. And they must just be going well of course, you think that....pat on the head....

No wonder it's stressful job, because one minute you're Mr Liberal. In the next minute you're like, no, hold on.....that (behaviour) is not OK.

Practitioner

Recognising the invisibility of children's rights in the 'lifescapes' of storied experiences embedded into place illuminates curious deeper dynamics, including tensions between rights, wrongs and risk. This highlights the need for challenging ambivalence to increase visibility of children's rights under UNCRC which are never conditional nor in competition with any other right or any other child's rights. When tensions do arise, such as when risk management comes into conflict with rights to play, family life and education, I would argue that, rather than turn a blind eye, these are the areas that duty bearers need to work together to plan, intervene and review - operationalised by rights-respecting principles.

9.2.5 Ubiquitous risk

Risk appeared as hyper-visible narratives creating a sense of ubiquity in the everyday experiences of young people who have displayed HSB, expressed by two different boys that '*risk is everywhere!*' The storied 'lifescapes' reveal a distinctive construction of risk as 'everywhere', which becomes compounded by proximity to systems. Sometimes the ubiquity of risk seems shapeless and hard to catch hold of, yet at other times, risk seems to shapeshift and synergise with other risks that loom and lurk – '*ah that big thing risk*' (young person). In some of the stories of boys in 'care system' spaces, constellations of HSB risk, health and safety risks and sexual health risks collide. Risk becomes gobbled up by risk machinery in the form of 'risk assessment' that often has an omnipotent quality, as assessments at times appear to neutralise each external risk, like going for a bicycle ride:

can we go on a cycle? risk assessment done'

(as if staff talking) 'oh we've done a risk assessment, there's no risk, it's fine, everything's cool'

Young Person

However, the institutional machinery of risk seems to brand individuals as a risk, which shapes developing individual self, social and systemic identities and is a part of who they are, such as the amber risk factor that cannot be changed. This makes visible how risk and risk assessments appear to play out in unfiltered and unmediated ways, internalising, like osmosis, inside some young people, resonating with my early reflection of 'flat boys' and a context where HSB 'knowledge' is reproduced through flat, textual accounts such as reports or referrals. Accurate and reliable information is fundamental to professional practice, and this is not to deny or minimise the importance of sharing information and assessments and how vital it is that we can think about risk beyond personal, unstructured judgement. However, these stories problematise some practices and reflect potential iatrogenic qualities that breach the boundaries of 'what is relevant for adults to know' which becomes conflated with 'who this young person is'. Interestingly, story splinters echo a similar dynamic as relating to other silos of becoming conflated with identity, such as self-harm and absconding. When these institutional representations of risk encounter other versions of risk, such as health and safety, vacuum-packed through the risk machinery of assessments and reports, some young people are submerged in social conditions where risk seems everywhere around them and inside of them.

9.2.6 Undifferentiated risk

Thinking about risk in relation to the storied experiences highlights the issue of undifferentiated risk. Whilst some young people appear hyperaware of the myriad of risks that loom in their everyday worlds and identities, from the stories, it feels hard to grasp the sense of how these risks can be thought about, mitigated, what would increase or decrease the risk, who is at risk and when etc. Whilst the risk assessment processes may very well be making sense of such dimensions, it appears that the residue imprints on young people and their everyday lives are undifferentiated. Rather, they are left with an undifferentiated and unprocessed sense of risk. The risk assessment machinery emerges omnipotent and triumphant (*'oh we've done a risk assessment, there's no risk, it's fine, everything's cool'*), or impotent and defeated in the face of risk that cannot be conquered (*'he's done all the work but he's told he's still got one amber – no one can change what happened'*). The practice of risk assessment, as reflected in some of the stories, raises the question around purpose, including a sense of routineness to defensive, institutionalised practices that tick boxes rather than engaging with risk in thoughtful, nuanced, responsive ways that acknowledge we can never have full control or perfectly predict the future.

9.2.7 Unarticulated risks

Across the 'lifescapes' stories, multifaceted experiences that seem to evade recognition or articulation as being 'risks'. It is as if some risks can be named and tamed whilst others hide in plain sight, thus unarticulated in our risk work and practices. A particularly powerful story I presented as 'if these streets could speak' explored a seemingly well-known urban space where harm and abuse unfold between and towards young people. Other unarticulated risks include the everyday nature of violence that some of the young people experience, being called a '*beast*' on a daily basis and the precarious nature of being in the care system. These seem to sit like open secrets that go unarticulated, thus unmitigated, as risks that harm young people.

9.2.8 Individualised risks

Focussing on individual risks, whether risky individuals or risky activities, communicates risk as static and fixed, conquered or futile, which fails to recognise risk in the life space of adolescence and in life itself. Often empirical evidence exploring young people who display HSB are separated into individual factors or variable, but I suggest these are better understood as cumulations of risk within constellations of contexts. Many of these risk factors lie way beyond any young person, family or practitioner to change, so thinking more ecologically is hugely significant. Some young people are exposed to poly-victimisation across a range of contexts, at times for prolonged periods of time, including violence, breaching of personal, intimate and bodily boundaries, social isolation and lack of safe, consistent adults who care and love them. Reflecting back on the literature review, 'grand narratives' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and gaze upon individuals which fail to account for cumulative and reinforcing interrelationships of both risks and safety. This compels a reimagining of the role of practitioners, such as social workers, to embrace inter/transdisciplinary collaborations to explore what has traditionally belonged to the psych~ disciplines. This was powerfully articulated through one practitioner's call to action for the social work profession:

.... you're there to care, but my sort of thing is it's like we do need to, within social work, social care practice, bring back the social because there has been a lot of influence from psychology, psychiatry, biology, medicalization...and that's not the landscape that we work in.

Practitioner

These findings also stress the need to consider language and meaning in everything we do, particularly around concepts of risk. The greater proximity to the system seems to generate collisions between representations of risk, such as health and safety risk and sexual health risk and HSB 'risk work' appears to be persistently communicated to young people, particularly in 'care system' spaces, through every day and often mundane activities. Cumulations of messages communicated about risk, including HSB risk assessments, leave young people feeling risk is '*everywhere*'. These collisions and cumulations may leave young people unable

to navigate risk as they travel into their adulthood and internalise self and social identities of being a risk that become '*stuck*' to them.

9.2.2 Constellations of contexts: conducive, constricted and collapsing contexts

Perhaps the most powerful observation of the contexts, as reflected in stories, was the intricacies of connections between different contexts that appear inextricable from one another. Thinking about contexts as interconnected and interdependent leads me to suggest conceptualising them as constellations to think about space, distance, significance and relationships between different contexts. These are not static but spatial, temporal and relational and may have multiple and contradictory meanings.

Some 'lifescapes' appear constricted through different social and ecological influences. At more structural and cultural ecological levels, I witnessed the pressures of '*fitting in*' and experiences of socially hostile worlds, including insidious, normalised violence and social worlds primed by neurotypical worldviews and experiences. Gendered and heteronormative sexual scripts can constrict some contexts, including boys and risks viewed through the lens of the male, sexualised gaze rather than careful consideration of what, who and where risk may increase or decrease alongside their needs and patterns of the day. The 'care system' appear particularly influential in the ways that it may constrict social contexts that young people can experience and participate in. Systemic stories of '*who you are*' follow young people from their entry point into the 'care system' through their journey of care, anchored in reports, chronologies and referrals which construct static, indelible systemic identities. Whilst these will be important for people to know and understand, they appear to be fixed to identities of risks such as HSB, self-harm and absconding, thus obscuring the different experiences of young people who may engage in different risk-taking, risk-making and safety-seeking behaviours at different times.

Some stories highlighted conducive conditions such as the school working sensitively to balance risk alongside a boy's needs, from where he ate his lunch, supporting friendships and even narratives around who his social worker was, to diffuse other young people's curiosity. Drawing on the practitioner's words, interconnected and interdependent contexts can be precarious and can '*fall like a deck of cards*'. Drawing on the idea of context collapse from social media studies, socioecological contexts appear to constrict and sometimes collapse, creating hyper-concentrated spheres, such as digital space, where their needs, relationships and development can be met. Thinking about interconnected, interdependent contexts, these can collapse quickly, such as placement breakdown and subsequent moves, or more slowly through cumulative factors that lead to collapse over time, such as transition into secondary, agitations of adolescence, bullying and the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, collapsing contexts may be creeping or crashing, with significant impacts on wellbeing and may have incalculable potential to create conducive conditions of catastrophic harm in digital spaces due to the absences of such things as safety and guardianship. I propose the concept of context collapse

has the potential to orientate our thinking around spaces as present or absent in developing young lives. It compels attention to what may be missing in young people's and strengthens contextual understandings and responses. Listening to young people's stories also disrupts flattened representations of social worlds as traditional boundaries become very blurred particularly regarding 'public' and 'private'. We may also have to work in contexts that may appear less obvious, such as creating spaces for mattering and belonging in offline spaces when young people are displaying harmful behaviours in online social worlds.

9.3 Question four

Through this study I also sought to consider the ways the stories told by and about boys who have displayed HSB can inform new approaches to prevention and intervention agendas to answer my final question:

In what ways can the stories told by and about boys who have displayed HSB inform new approaches to prevention and intervention?

Here, I outline key implications and explore new directions for prevention and intervention, grounded in rights-based approaches. These reposition the gaze from looking through metaphorical microscopes, reflecting more scientific and individualised understandings, to telescopes towards broader social agendas that could bring HSB out of the silos to become part of more global, overarching agendas.

9.3.1 Rights in practice: UNCRC as the conductor of the orchestra

Arguably, the most significant global agenda that is connected through looking through the metaphorical telescope is the UNCRC, not least because Scotland has fully incorporated the UNCRC into Scot's Law ushering in legal accountability and recourse. The bigger stories around HSB rarely acknowledge young people under 18 as rights holders, while smaller stories of this research speak to dynamics of ambivalence around (children's) rights and wrongs, which systemically silences our collective capacity to foreground rights in practice. Reading around children's rights brings me to a play on words around language around some of aspects of practice, in particular, the language of 'instruments'. UNCRC is considered one of the most ratified legal 'instrument' of international law (Archard, 2014) and the language of 'instruments' is familiar in risk paradigms, as evident in journal articles including 'Validity of Risk Assessment Instruments Among Juveniles Who Sexually Offended: Victim Age Matters' (Krause *et al.*, 2021) and 'Review of Risk Assessment Instruments for Juvenile Sex Offenders' (Hempel *et al.*, 2013). Whilst unlikely to all use the term 'instruments', many different professionals (duty bearers) that reach into everyday lives and spaces of young people, such as teachers, health, urban planning and law, will all draw upon their disciplinary tools like instruments of professional practice.

Considering the connections between different ‘instruments’ of everyday practice, positioning the UNCRC as the conductor of an orchestra of duty bearers could bring together a range of professionals around individual young people or local contexts. The UNCRC, as the conductor of an orchestra of duty bearers, each with their own professional knowledge and instruments, can help us make sense of different aspects of young people’s lives. The power of the UNCRC conductor is to transcend individualising silos, steered by a moral imperative that relates to rights holders and not solely their behaviour or ‘the risk they are seen to be’. The UNCRC has rich utility to disrupt the dominant focus on risk, which inadvertently neglects the complexity of other aspects of their lives and those around them. Children’s rights provide a meaningful framework to operationalise more contextually sensitive, social and ecological foregrounding of the professional responses beyond solely stopping the behaviour. The frame of children’s rights should disrupt the systemic gaze from the behaviour to a more holistic view of the young person’s needs, moving from an ethos of fixing behaviour to flourishing through long-term positive outcomes and prevention.

9.3.2 Participation and/as protection

A central contention of this thesis is that rights to participation and protection are not only pillars of the UNCRC, but participation is also a means through which individual and collective protection can be enhanced. I truly hope this study can be an example of the power of listening to the voices of young people seldom heard in research, policy and practice. Despite only meeting with four young people, the depth and range of their distinctive stories illuminates social, relational and spatial contexts that offer new avenues for more contextually sensitive approaches to creating safety and reducing risk for many young people, including those who display and are harmed through HSB. Young people have important things to tell us and shine a particular light on what can easily be flattened into the mundane micro-dynamics of everyday life. I argue that young people’s participation and inclusion, foregrounded in their rights to participate, are fundamental in every aspect of the field, including everyday practice and research.

The relative invisibility of safety and rights in the narrative leads me to conclude that we need closer attention to the rights of protection being respected for young people who display HSB. There are many splinters of stories that reflect multidimensional harms that young people who display HSB experience, ranging from violence, exclusion, isolation, bullying and stigma that can be layered on previous experiences of cumulative trauma and abuse. Rights to protection of young people who display HSB are not forfeited when they behave in harmful ways and recognising the harms they encounter should not mitigate risk management and reduction plans. Decisions need to be made which may include restrictions and care placements for young people who have been harmed, but foregrounding decision-making and planning from a rights-based framework ensures that the focus is rooted in upholding rights and limiting impacts of conflicting rights.

9.3.3 Child-focused cities and spaces

'Lifescapes' weaves together narratives and reflections on eight young lives, but there is a cast of many, as the storied spaces intersect with many other young people. The young person raped by the shopkeeper, the young person with thirteen care placements, the boys offered money to go back to the man's flat, the distressed young person who cut their arms, the other young person who mopped up the blood, the young person mocked for having an intimate object in their room, the young person restrained outside out room, the many young people sharing digital spaces, the siblings placed elsewhere and the others walking past everyday violence on their way to school.....these are only some of the supporting cast in these storied 'lifescapes' which cannot be heard as single stories in social vacuums. This underscores the importance of 'looking sideways' (Shaw, 2017) into social, relational and physical environments to create safety far beyond the individual experiences narrated in the stories.

Stories emerged in the study to paint a picture of 'public' spaces that often serve to exclude teenagers through explicit means (e.g. exclusion zones, high pitched alarms) or implicit ways (e.g. negative public attitudes, 'boring' parks welcoming only younger children). UNCRC General Comment No. 20 (2016, p. 05) focuses on the implementation of rights during adolescence and explicitly addresses attitudes to adolescents, stating that the committee 'regrets the widespread negative characterizations of adolescence leading to narrow problem-focussed interventions and services, rather than a commitment to building optimum environments to guarantee the rights of adolescents'. Participants in the research described landscapes where violence and fear are a part of everyday life, contributing to teenagers creating spaces where they can meet their needs, including fun, excitement and belonging. However, dynamics within these spaces can contribute to risk and harm to or between young people. This relates to both the presence of influences that could heighten risk (e.g. drugs, alcohol, harmful adults) and the absence of influences that could increase safety (e.g. community guardianship, spaces that they can legitimately belong and have fun).

The concept of child-focused cities, an agenda initiated by UNICEF for over 25 years, can be understood as:

'A city, town, community or any system of local governance committed to fulfilling child rights as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is a community where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, programmes and decisions. Thus a Child-Friendly City is a city that is fit for all.'

(UNICEF, 2018, p. 08)

I have been incredibly fortunate to be involved in the creation of an international, interdisciplinary working group on 'child-focused cities.' This collaboration brings together six

members from diverse fields—including Urban Planning, Urban Design, Architecture, Law, and Social Work—spanning Brazil, South Africa, Austria, Zimbabwe, Australia, and Scotland. We argue that (child) friendly is not enough, calling for a shift towards ‘child focused’ cities, emphasising a stronger commitment to accountability and meaningful inclusion to close gaps in current urban development practises and narratives surrounding child participation (Cairns *et al.*, 2024). My particular frustration about child-friendly agendas is how many young people become positioned as ‘foes’ not ‘friends’ of the child-friendly city, which plays out in some of the narratives where young people are explicitly or implicitly designed or pushed out of space. Iveson (2006, p. 50) contends that the distinction between the ‘child’ and the ‘anti-social youth’ is that the former is understood as a ‘future citizen in need of community protection’ in contrast to the ‘anti-social youth’ as the ‘anti-citizen from whom the community needs protection’. Changing spaces, not just individuals, through commitment to rights-based approaches to physical, social and relational safety has potential to prevent HSB, which McKillop *et al.*, (2015) highlights ‘for most part, occur in the milieu of ordinary social interactions’ and highlighting the need to understand physical and social dynamics & how individuals’ vulnerability manifests in (HSB) at particular times and places’ (p. 38). Changing spaces also resonates with Smallbone and Rayment-McHugh’s (2013) contention that when criminogenic factors were captured at intersections of systemic levels of spaces, even if treatment was effective with individual young people, those spaces continue to pose the similar risks to other young people who spend time there.

Under UNCRC (1989), Article 31 relates to ‘rights to play’ which brings into question what ‘play’ means in the context of adolescence? Public spaces appear to be socially structured and ordered, pushing out young people who search for spaces, often in risky, marginalized edges of the urban milieu. Designing parks with and for different ages, genders and needs of young people, orientated by children’s rights, could create more sensitized spaces that uphold older children’s rights to play. Designing ‘risky play’ spaces, defined as ‘thrilling or exciting forms of free play’ that involve uncertainty of outcome, differentiates ‘risk’ from hazard by reframing risk as potential of personal development and situational evaluation (Beaulieu and Beno, 2024, p. 255). Nuanced spaces that consider social dynamics, such as age, socioeconomic factors and gender, can also unite rights to play and be safe. An example of this is Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA), often called sport’s ‘cages’, which are small sports areas often situated in densely populated urban areas. Such multiuse spaces are significant social contexts which help young people to feel valued by their communities and which enhance their sense of belonging’ (Billingham & Hackney Quest, 2020, p. 06).

9.3.4 Rights in digital spaces

In the service of spatialising children’s rights, the ‘lifescapes’ of stories embedded in space highlight the blurring of boundaries between ‘private’ and public spaces often mediated through devices such as gaming consoles, laptops and smartphones. It is fascinating to reflect that the articulation of the UNCRC was adopted in 1989 – the very same year that the World

Wide Web (WWW) was invented by British scientist Tim Berners-Lee! The right to play is a key distinction between children and human rights, yet the right to play in digital space, possible through phones small enough to fit in our pockets, would have seemed like a fairytale back in 1989. ‘Lifescape’ stories evocatively illuminate that we no longer live a dichotomy of online/offline spaces and, thirty-five years on from the UNCRC, children’s rights are equally relevant in digital and physical spheres. However, the profound realities of participation and protection in digital spaces feel overwhelming. The vast temporal and spatial dimensions allow harm to unfold, reaching across the globe at lightning speed, juxtaposed with our slow, sluggish capacities to safeguard and increase guardianship, including in digital spaces. Children’s rights - specifically rights to participation, protection and play in digital spaces - emerge as a significant agenda in creating safer spaces and preventing harm, including HSB. Just like limitations of individual-level factors and responses, digital rights and safety must embrace socio-ecological levels and compel inter- towards transdisciplinary collaboration. Colvert *et al.*, (2024) highlight dimensions of ‘safety by design’ that attend to micro levels (individual interpretations and use), meso levels (interaction and connections) and macro levels (private and public sectors) that contribute to respecting children’s rights in the digital environment. While this focuses on digital play, children’s rights in digital spaces are equally crucial for strengthening legal and social accountability around online pornography and Big Tech platforms that facilitate child sexual abuse material, abuse and exploitation. Expanding the concept of child-focused cities and spaces to include digital environments is essential as this movement gains momentum.

9.3.5 Sexual citizenship

Our collective gaze falls upon sexual behaviour that goes wrong, yet this is deeply intertwined with contested social and cultural constructions of what it means to get sexual ‘stuff’ right. Put simply, we need to consider what harmless behaviour means for many young people, including those who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour. The stories in this study and empirical evidence presented through the literature review speak to different ways that sexuality, development and relationships become disrupted, including exposure to and experiences of neglect, trauma, abuse and violence. The narratives also shine light on more indirect, less visible ways, such as systemic sexual scripts and competing and conflicting social constructions of boys, girls, bodies and ‘beasts’ play out in everyday social worlds of young people navigating systems of care and control. As one of the practitioner’s powerfully reflected, this is about the continuum of sexual behaviour (Hackett, 2010) for all young people and not only those whose sexual behaviour falls under the gaze of concern or scrutiny. The practitioner reflects on the range of responses that expressions evoke in ‘care system’ spaces, including embarrassment, medicalisation, disgust, ridicule, demonisation and negativity, and evocatively reflects on the lack of privacy of growing up in ‘goldfish bowls’ which has striking resonance with the pickle in the jar metaphor. Taking a rights-based approach, the concept of sexual citizenship, which has multiple interpretations, is particularly meaningful, connecting sexual rights of self and others and bringing into focus complexities of developing sexual identities. Sexual citizenship reflects the evolving capacity for sexual rights, self-determination, and safety for oneself and others.

Richardson (2000) outlines how sexual rights are legitimised and regulated by the state, including conduct-based rights, highlighting rights to pleasure, agency, and safety, with an emphasis on the 'right to engage in sex without fear' (p. 114). Hirsch and Khan (2020) position sexual citizenship as a social goal, one that is fostered and supported institutionally and culturally, not something inherent in some people but absent in others. This view shifts the focus from individual behaviour to broader understandings of the interplay between family, community, social and cultural dynamics – placing special emphasis on the sexual rights of young people. The relationship between children and sexual citizenship has often been seen as contentious, described by Robinson (2012) as precarious and 'difficult citizenship'. The literature review highlights how prized social constructions of children emphasise innocence, passivity, and the need for adult protection, set apart from the sexualised child who is seen as knowledgeable about sexuality. Reflecting on empirical evidence about young people who display HSB through the lens of sexual citizenship reveals what I would describe as *especially difficult* sexual citizenships by virtue of the (sexual) harm they have caused compounded by the (sexual) harm they may have experienced. Hirsch *et al.*, (2019) emphasise that sexual citizenship is not innate but shaped by institutional and cultural support and connected to rights to sexual self-determination, forming the basis for giving meaningful consent. According to Hirsch and Khan (2020), meaningful consent involves not only recognising and asserting one's own right to sexual autonomy but also respecting the same rights in others. This may offer a useful lens through which young people's sexual citizenships are nurtured or constrained, as well as connections with sexual rights and sexual literacy. Critical aspects of a young person's development, such as family, peers and social norms, play a role in forming sexual literacy, self-knowledge, and understanding of both their own and others' sexual rights. However, these areas are often fragile or chaotic, both before and after concerns about HSB arise. From a rights-based perspective, many young people displaying HSB have experienced violations of their own sexual rights and have been exposed to conditions that likely hinder their development of sexual citizenship. Framing the understanding of relationships and sexual behaviours through the lens of sexual citizenship helps orient away from positioning adults as the beholders and bestowers of sexual 'education'. It also recognises that sexual behaviour is not only motivated by sexual needs and wants but can be fraught with complexity and confusion. Young people who display HSB may have 'learned' about themselves, relationships, bodies and sex through exposure to abuse and adult sexuality. They may also have experienced disruptions to steady, available relationships and spaces to 'learn' about intimacy, respect, bodies, pleasure and mutual consent. Sexual citizenship opens important dimensions of relationships to self and others, including love, friendships, care and support that offer different ways of 'seeing' the needs of young people exposed to harm and disruptions and chaos in their caring environments across the whole continuum of sexual behaviour (Hackett, 2010). Sexual citizenship orients our understanding to getting things right - through children's rights - not just when things go wrong.

Finally, the intersections between these different threads of possibility may illuminate new frontiers towards safer spaces. Participation, protection and play in digital spaces emerge as a complex space that poses profound challenges for how we make sense of and engage with these 'networked publics' (Boyd, 2014). Sexual citizenship is a promising and powerful concept to understand 'disrupted' sexualities, unlocking new ways to develop more sensitive and meaningful responses to and prevention of sexual harm. Setty *et al.*, (2024) propose the concept of 'post-digital sexual citizenship' acknowledging blurred and interconnected boundaries of online and offline experiences, grounded in a rights-based framework. Thinking about child-focused digital spaces as sites where sexual development, connections, identities and behaviours (harmful or harmless) unfold positions young people as critical partners of knowledge generation. Participatory research with children and young people around safer digital spaces, including protection, participation, play and post-digital sexual citizenships, signposts important directions of travel for the field of HSB and beyond. These could shape socio-ecological responses ranging from accountability of Big Tech and social media platforms around breaches of children's rights to protection to innovative gaming interventions that explore tricky and sensitive areas like self-regulation, bodily boundaries, feelings and consent co-designed with young people themselves.

Chapter Ten: Seeing Differently, Doing Differently

10.1 Seeing differently for impact

As I neared the end of this research journey, I reached out to the Research Supporters that supported the four young people who participated, as we had agreed. With each young person, I had shared that I would make a 'briefing', something to tell people about what I had learned and would check back in to see if they would like to help. My primary rationale for this creative briefing relates to my endeavour to embed the Lundy model of participation (Lundy, 2007) - space, voice, audience and influence – into my research design. Prior agreement was sought 'in principle' from the Scottish Government Child Protection Unit, who lead on the HSB Expert Group Report Oversight Group, and the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) who would be the 'audience' to the young people's participation. They agreed to write a letter to each young person (who opted in) to reflect on their learning from the young people's participation which relates to Lundy's element of 'influence'.

Each Research Supporter discussed meeting up again with each participant. One boy decided he 'would leave meeting up again just now' which, in the context of informed consent, felt important and quite reassuring that he was able to decline through the Research Supporter. Another boy expressed he wanted to meet up, but he was unable to due to work commitments.

I did meet up with the two other boys individually, and I had Riso printed an overview of my learning with key spaces from the 'lifescapes' like a booklet, where I also tried out the use of anaglyphs and glasses. During my meeting with each boy, I spent time going through this, sharing my reflections and how I had used their stories alongside other boys and practitioners to figure out these important things that people need to know. Whilst I invited them to help design what I would make; each seemed to want to talk rather than 'make' which echoes with the data generation sessions. We discussed what 'name' they would like to use when the Scottish Government and SVRU write letters in response as 'audience and influence' of their participation to ensure the letters would feel personal but respect their privacy. One boy added a message to the briefing - 'you can't change the past, but you can change the future'.

I then created the research briefing that folds up into a small booklet, including Risoprinting the inside page like a map of key messages from my 'lifescapes' section.

of himself to see how I had used stories he had shared and how we both hoped this would help other young people and those who are trying to help them. He spoke about how he wished he could share his story by coming with me to tell people, which felt like a painful reminder of the ‘porcupines dilemma’ of participation and protection, which can limit opportunities to participate in socially sensitive research. In many other areas of participatory research with young people, there are ways in which they can be more present and agentic, but this also identifies them with the research focus. This remains a stark limitation of this project despite my attempts to include participants beyond the data generation alone.

A final reflection I would add, without sharing details, I was left feeling deeply saddened when I met with both boys. They were each as engaging, reflective and insightful, as I had encountered them before, but time had moved on. They shared with me how things are now, leaving me acutely aware that they continue to live within fragile social and systemic ‘lifescapes’. We can only ever get glimpses into lives and the words in this thesis are very real, difficult stories that continue far beyond this thesis.

10.2 Doing differently in practice

It is essential to consider what my PhD thesis means in practice as this research should not exist in isolation. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, I hope to ensure that my findings are meaningful and can spark different ways of seeing young people and compel more reflective, contextual and relational practice. To translate my research into actionable insights and ensure my work has impact beyond academia, I have developed a set of practice recommendations. Each practice recommendation offers insights into key findings and, whilst acknowledging all rights under UNCRC are relevant and intrinsically interdependent, highlight particularly relevant rights.

This table presents practice recommendations drawn from the ‘lifescapes’ of young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), framed through the UNCRC. These ‘lifescapes’ challenge dominant “grand narratives” that individualise risk and pathologise young people, calling instead for systemic, relational, and rights-based approaches.

Practitioners are repositioned not as treatment providers for ‘risky’ individuals, but as allies in supporting flourishing futures, prevention, and long-term wellbeing. The recommendations below highlight how rights can be made real in everyday spaces, and how practice can shift from managing risk to enabling recovery, belonging, and hope.

Messages for practice	UNCRC Articles & Significance	Implications for Practice
Respect rights in everything we do: <i>Children’s rights must underpin responses to both</i>	Article 1 – Defines a child as anyone under 18, challenging adult-centric views of HSB. Article 2 – No	Recognise all under-18s as children with full rights. Challenge adult sexual offending frameworks.

<i>those who harm and those harmed.</i>	discrimination; rights are unconditional, even when a child has caused harm. Article 3 – Best interests of the child must guide all decisions, including difficult ones. Article 42 – Children must know their rights; duty bearers must actively promote rights-based practice.	Ensure decisions are rights-informed and transparent. Promote rights literacy among young people and professionals.
Participation really matters: <i>Young people must be heard, especially those whose voices are often excluded.</i>	Article 12 – Right to express views and have them taken seriously. Article 9 – Participation is vital when separated from parents, especially in care or justice settings. Article 24 – Right to health includes access to sexual health knowledge. Articles 28 & 29 – Education must support personal development and rights awareness.	Embed participation in all decisions. Co-create plans with young people. Ensure access to health and sexuality education. Respect and amplify marginalised voices.
Interconnected contexts: <i>Young people's lives span multiple spaces — safety and wellbeing must be considered across all of them.</i>	Article 15 – Right to freedom of association; young people must be able to socialise safely. Article 31 – Right to leisure, play, and culture; includes digital and offline spaces.	Avoid siloed responses. Support safe socialising and play. Address exclusions and isolation. Ensure safeguarding policies enable participation without compromising others' rights.
The search for safety: <i>Safety is relational, contextual, and must be co-created with young people.</i>	Article 19 – Protection from violence, abuse, and neglect; safety must be understood socially and structurally. Article 31 – Young people need safe spaces to relax and play, not just risk-managed environments.	Move beyond static or adult-led safety plans. Understand where and with whom young people feel safe. Challenge systemic harms and exclusions. Prioritise safety in everyday and institutional spaces.
Focussing on futures: <i>Young people need hope, connection, and</i>	Article 3 – Best interests must guide all responses, including restrictions. Article 6 – Right to life,	Support recovery and reintegration. Prioritise hobbies, friendships, and social life. Avoid practices

<i>opportunities to build positive futures.</i>	survival, and development; practice must support long-term flourishing. Article 15 – Futures are built through friendships, hobbies, and freedom. Article 39 – Right to recovery and reintegration; support must go beyond behaviour management.	that reinforce hopelessness or shame. Focus on identity development and future opportunities.
Looking in the mirror: <i>Systemic sexual scripts shape how young people are seen and treated.</i>	Article 28 – Right to education, including sexuality and relationship education. Article 29 – Education must promote respect for rights and personal development. Article 34 – Protection from sexual abuse; responses must be prevention-focused and trauma-informed. Article 36 – Protection from exploitation; challenge systemic bias and discrimination.	Challenge gendered, heteronormative, and adult-centric narratives. Promote rights-based sexuality education. Address exploitation and bias in systems. Build trusted relationships to help young people make sense of complex experiences.

Table Three: Practice Recommendations

As witnessed through this thesis and in the many conversations I have had through my research journey, practitioners can be hugely significant resources for young people. Change does not happen in isolation and communities of practitioners are pivotal in changing conversations within and beyond the field of HSB. The weight of risk and reducing and preventing harm cannot be carried on the shoulders of practitioners alone. Preventing and responding to HSB is everyone's job.

Chapter Eleven: Endings and insights

11.1 Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this small-scale doctoral project. The study engaged a small number of boys and practitioners over several sessions, which may be considered a limitation due to such a small sample size. Taking a narrative turn towards elements of Narrative Inquiry is conducive to small numbers given the intention of exploring experiences of individuals in search of social and spatial dimensions of everyday life. The long, at times hopeless, search across Scotland to identify, engage and sustain relationships over long periods of time tells its own story of fragile and sometimes fractured systems that impede young people's participation and the immense pressures of practitioners working in these environments. Navigating the 'maze' of local systems and gatekeepers incurs a level of bias given the opt-in nature of connecting with and supporting the research endeavour. Arguably, the process of gatekeepers opting in created connections with practitioners and teams that were interested in the research endeavour and recognised the value of young people's contributions to knowledge. This may, or may not, mean that those I did meet are a representative sample of practitioners who support young people who have displayed HSB.

The research was designed within an intricate scaffolding of considerations to enhance safety and sensitivity to support young people to participate. This study respects the ethical and representational conflicts in research that depends on adults to give voice to the experiences of young people often stigmatised and overlooked, except when they come to the attention of professionals (Balfe *et al.*, 2019). In the service of striving to create a child-sensitive research space (Hackett, 2017) I made the decision not to audio record sessions with young participants given the potential for triggering difficult memories of being recorded, such as recorded child protection and police interviews. This decision, based on creating safety within the space of the research session, will always bear the cost of missing data. As best I could, I noted the words of the young person, often rechecking, on large sheets of paper in front of us to ensure I understood – accepting this as a fallible process balanced with the endeavour of being present to witness their stories. Prioritising participant safety and comfort may have resulted in the loss of detailed data and my reliance on hand-written field notes could have led to the omission of nuances and complexities in the participants' narratives. However, I would argue that missing data may be a trade-off for creating a safe and sensitive research space and the rich, complex and vivid stories that unfolded. In light of the depth and range of narratives, not recording may have contributed to conditions conducive to safety and sensitivity in conducting socially sensitive research with young people regarded as sensitive research subjects. Future research that supports participation could explore developing more options around recording, such as given participants choice and control over audio or video recording. My own extensive experience as a social worker with many young people who have experienced abuse and/or displayed HSB will shape my framing and sense-making of the stories I gathered. Some of this may be valuable tacit knowledge and skills, yet it may also create blind spots in my sense-

making. Additionally, the dataset of notes required a theoretical framework that could account for both the surface and depth of the narrative data. However, it may lack the necessary detail to apply theories that delve into the micro-level social conditions of specific contexts and examine social processes such as power, gender, social norms, and culture. There are limitations to the capacity for the research methods to explore digital spaces, which emerged as a significant space in the 'lifescapes' given the methodology that orientated more towards physical spaces. This may have limited understanding of the complexities of digital spaces and the dynamics of safety, risk and children's rights in digital environments.

A final and especially important limitation relates to stories that were not heard in the study – the silent stories of those who were harmed by the behaviours displayed by the boys who participated. I acknowledge this as an ethical and moral limitation and emphasise that listening to the experiences of those who have harmed does not in any way diminish the experiences of those who have been harmed. Whilst this thesis sought to foreground more silent stories, I must acknowledge the stories that are silenced, as highlighted by McKibbin *et al.* (2025). My concern for this weighs heavy as I think about the many children and young people I have supported who have been harmed by other young people, often in their family or in school. The impact and harm through HSB are no less significant because it is displayed by another young person. There are silent/silenced stories behind these stories, and I hope that by amplifying the voices and experiences of the young people in this project I do not inadvertently or insensitively further silence the experiences of others harmed by HSB.

These limitations suggest areas of future research including

- Exploring experience in digital spaces using methodologies sensitive to the unique dynamics of online environments.
- Engaging diverse perspectives through broader sampling strategies that go beyond convenience sampling and access through gatekeepers.
- Developing methods for capturing richer data while maintaining ethical considerations of safety and participant comfort, potentially exploring alternative recording and transcription methods.
- Conducting research that centres the voices of those harmed by HSB to inform more comprehensive prevention and support.

Despite these limitations, the PhD thesis offers valuable insights into the social and spatial dynamics of HSB in young people's lives, advocating for a more nuanced, compassionate and rights-based approach to understanding and addressing this complex social issue.

11.2 Contributions to knowledge

This PhD thesis makes several original contributions to the understanding of HSB displayed by young people that reaches beyond the dominant individualistic paradigms to explore social and spatial dynamics of everyday life.

This thesis introduces and develops the concept of 'lifescapes' that transcend fixed geographical places to explore interconnected subjective experiences across different spaces and times, highlighting the relational and fluid nature of safety, risk and children's rights. This novel and creative concept makes an original contribution towards contextually sensitive, holistic and life course impacts, opening new potential pathways to prevention. I hope that by curating a thesis that is different, I am contributing towards the telling of a different story(s) that offers society, systems, practitioners and young people different ways of looking at this complex, confusing and deeply distressing social issue.

This thesis privileges the storied experiences of boys who have displayed HSB, who are often excluded from research. The participatory approach, anchored in a child-sensitive and right-respecting research design, recognises the value of intergenerational contribution and lived realities and respects the rights of young people under the UNCRC to participate. These powerful and evocative stories stress the importance of listening to young people and the critical value their contributions can make towards upholding the rights of others, individually and collectively, as protection through participation. This study situates its findings within a framework of children's rights, which is often missing in research, policy and practice. This makes an original contribution by foregrounding young people as rights holders in relation to a range of duty bearers and advocates for responses that move beyond 'fixing' behaviour to fostering their overall wellbeing and flourishing. Furthermore, I contribute through identifying tangible ways that rights-based approaches can orient new directions in responses to and prevention of HSB beyond individuals alone.

This study utilised Virtual Reality (VR) technology to explore Virtual Environments that go beyond traditional research methods to create immersive and experiential spaces for exploring social and spatial ecologies of safety and risk. This is an original, innovative and novel approach that enhances understanding of everyday life that is easily overlooked by traditional methods. This pioneering use of VR expands the methodological toolkit of child-sensitive research that advances theoretical and practical knowledge towards new pathways of contextually sensitive, collaborative and rights-based prevention and responses to harm.

Listening to smaller stories among the 'grand narratives' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) challenges positivist paradigms that often frame HSB as a clinical issue by illuminating institutional stories embedded in social, political and moral narratives around childhood, harm and risk. This approach exposes the limitations of individualistic and risk-focused understandings and argues for a more holistic and contextually sensitive approach. Research, policy and practice are not neutral endeavours – they also contribute to shaping the reality they

seek to understand, highlighting the need to critically examine the social and political forces that influence the field of HSB.

Finally, this study contributes to the practice of 'risk work' by exposing unarticulated and underacknowledged risks that often go un/under-recognised or unnamed in the machinery of risk, including risk assessments. These risks are often embedded in seemingly mundane aspects of everyday life and challenge the focus on individual behaviours as the sole source of risk. This endeavour illuminates the multidimensionality of risk and safety, which has practical and theoretical value and builds bridges towards allyships and collaborations from the local multi-agency level towards transdisciplinary discoveries.

In conclusion, this PhD thesis provides an original, creative and timely contribution to the field of HSB research, offering new insights, methodologies and frameworks for understanding and addressing this complex social phenomenon.

11.3 In conclusion

This doctoral thesis explored the everyday experiences of boys, aged 13-18, who have displayed HSB to challenge dominating individualistic paradigms that flatten our understandings through close attention to narratives and social and spatial dynamics of their everyday lives, including the systems they navigate. I aimed to contribute to more contextually sensitive responses and prevention strategies that support wellbeing and safety far beyond the point of any response or intervention. Put simply, I hope to reimagine responses to HSB that shift from fixing to flourishing. These unique and original contributions generated were facilitated by creative and novel methods scaffolded by child-sensitive and rights-respectful research methodology. Thinking with the 'porcupine's dilemma' I embedded safe and sensitive creative methods within a research design attentive to both participation and protection. I offered 'lifescapes' as a heuristic to consider social and spatial ecologies of everyday life, capturing the complex and interconnected nature of these storied experiences. Drawing on Massey's (2005) notion of space as relational and evolving, 'lifescapes' represent a softer and more curious gaze upon social and spatial contexts that shape the everyday and ordinary, which can be extraordinarily complex, difficult and confusing. One boy's poignant story of a lonely, rotten pickle in a jar offers a way of thinking about what we do and why we do it and a cautionary tale about how systems can sometimes cause harm even when they are trying to help. This research identifies several key findings that challenge dominating positivist, individualistic risk paradigms in the field of HSB. These findings include constellations of contexts as interconnected and interdependent, which can be conducive, constricted and/or collapsing, which have implications for safety, risk and children's rights and can thwart flourishing and longer-term meaningful outcomes and lives. Juxtaposing scarce and often absent experiences conducive to safety and respecting children's rights, 'lifescapes' highlights manifestations of risk, including ubiquitous, unarticulated, undifferentiated and individualised

risk made visible through stories. These perspectives offer new ways of understanding issues related to HSB that transcend interdisciplinary boundaries and professional silos. They position children's rights—under the UNCRC—as the central framework that connects key concepts, including participation as a form of protection, child-focused cities and spaces, digital environments, and sexual citizenship. This broader approach helps shape sexual rights and subjectivities for all children and young people, particularly those navigating institutional systems.

Appendices

Appendix One: Letter to Scottish Government and Scottish Violence Reduction Unit

A request for consideration for a response to PhD research findings to recognise contributions made by participants

Lynne Cairns – PhD Researcher

WHO?

As part of my PhD I will engage with a small number of boys who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour to map their everyday experiences and perceptions of rights, risks and safety. I hope that together we can produce unique insights into how risks and safety are experienced by young people who themselves pose risk but also exciting ideas about what could enable boys to act differently to increase safety, safeguard rights and reduce risks.

This request is for an agreement in principle that someone representing the Scottish Government and/or a partner will look at a co-produced briefing at the end of the project and write a letter as a form of feedback that can be shared with each participant by way of recognition for their contribution to Scotland's commitment to contextual safeguarding and the safety and wellbeing of every child.

WHY?

Research in the field of HSB is almost exclusively on children and young people, very rarely with them, and I think my research will be one of the first to engage with boys using participatory methods to learn about their lived realities. I am planning to frame this within a Children's Rights perspective which includes their (unrecognised) rights to participate in research and decisions that affects their lives as laid down under Article 12 of UNCRC. I am drawing upon the Lundy Model of Participation to guide me through the ethical dimensions of my research design. The four elements of participation are SPACE (providing a safe space to express views safely), VOICE (support them to express themselves and their views), AUDIENCE (identifying who will listen to their perspectives) and INFLUENCE (what feedback can they receive to show that their views were taken seriously).



WHAT?

I would like to be clear with participants from the outset who will be part of the 'audience' of our research findings and what 'influence' this may have. It is important that I do not promise anything that cannot be achieved. Towards the end of my PhD project, I will invite each participant to join me in co-producing a research briefing which could be a poster, animation, words and pictures story to share important messages from our work together. I would like to ask the Scottish Government to consider agreeing to be an 'audience' for our co-produced research briefing. All this would require was an agreement that a person or a group would look at this and reply in a letter that can be shared with each participant. There is no prior expectation that any 'influence' or 'impact' is generated from the research findings. The purpose of the letter is to represent that someone has paid attention to the project and recognises the young person's participation.

WHY?

At the heart of my PhD is the ethos of participation and respect for the value of listening the voices of boys despite how we might feel about their behaviours. My research endeavour engages sensitive subjects on a sensitive topic and, as such, an ongoing commitment to ethics will be embedded into my research design. This includes being clear about what I will do with our findings and who will pay attention to these. Given the sensitivity and stigma around Harmful Sexual Behaviour, which necessitates due regard for protecting the identities of the boys who will participate, I have carefully considered how I can recognise and respect the contributions made my participants. The request for a response to a co-produced research briefing (should any participant chose to) protects confidentiality whilst recognising their efforts and contributions.

WHEN?

Any research briefing will be produced in the latter stages of my PhD which will be late 2023/early 2024.



Appendix Two: 'to you, from me: about us'

(Simon and Josie, I had this idea after our last supervision session. I suppose I'm trying to make sense of what I'm going to do, what the data looks like and also consider some of my own feelings as I am on the cusp of data collection – in the form of a letter to my as-yet-unknown participants. I hope this shares some of my thoughts about what the data might look like, my positionality and reflexivity from a unique point in the journey. It's helped me feel more comfortable to embrace the next steps and I would like to write a similar letter in a years time to my participants. I don't intend to share these or certainly not in this form!)

To you, from me: a letter about us

Dear You,

I don't know who you are but you've been in mind for a long time now. You are a participant who may help me with my project. You are faceless, yet familiar, a stranger, but I've met other boys who may have behaved in similar ways yet we are all utterly unique. I feel such a sense of gratitude to you for the hope that you could help me with such a personally and professionally significant experience. I am writing this letter to mark this moment in my journey before we have even met. I have a sense of anticipation of meeting you, a slight dread I can't find you but by writing this way I am making sense of what we do together and the 'data' we will create. I

will write to you again, maybe a year, did I find you and what happened? What did I learn about you, about me and about us that might help people like us?

You.....

It's important that I don't expect you to know everything or like Hollway and Jefferson (2008: 298) say 'to tell it like it is' nor be the 'incontrovertible expert' of your own experience. I get more than a little confused about ontology and epistemology to say the least, but I know that these are fundamental in our journey together. The paradigms that dominate this field of research tells me a powerful story of 'othering', the sexual component of your behaviour ricochets and reverberates so much louder than other forms of youth violence and abuse. I'll need to take more time to figure this out but we will likely have more in common as people than what sets us apart. Gadd (2012, 03) captures this from a psychosocial criminological perspective when he describes the 'challenge of explaining crime and reactions to it in ways that neither shirk the responsibility for coming to terms with the most monstrous manifestations of human behaviour nor neglect the mundane, commonplace and essentially normal nature of much crime and deviance'.

You are not just an object of my research but I am aware that I have so much more to gain from our work together than you. I don't need you to tell me things that have happened in your life nor to know the details of your behaviour but you can if you chose to. Research and my practice experience tells me that you may have had some difficult experiences and as an adult I may not be safe to you. I've always worked with children and young people who have been hurt and abused by other people, at times also hurting and abusing other people. I've locked them up, I've tucked them up and I've met them in sessions to think about things. Yet, for me, it is not always the 'horror' of the acts of abuse, sometimes singular, sometimes multiple, that upsets me. Rather, it is the everyday impact that this has on people that I find hard to bear sometimes, that's the head f*ck. Adults, especially those like me who are armoured up in our professional identifies use words that barely touch the lived reality of abuse. Neglect is the little girl sat in my car as I drove her back to school, casually reminiscing about how her 'mummy didn't mind' (remember) her, pointing out that her mummy wasn't on holiday and she did know her name....she just didn't always remember she was there when was with her. Parental mental distress is the terrifying and terrified teenager who shared pages of her life story with me, scribbled when waiting to be transferred secure units after taking another child 'hostage', about how when she was little she thought there was something wrong with her as she couldn't see the people her mum was talking to in her schizophrenic episodes.

Your behaviour is hyper visible for the world to see and it floods everyone with big feelings, said and unspoken, but maybe this protects us from the horror of the everyday, the agony of your ordinary. I wonder if is easier for the world to see you as a 'perpetrator', comfortable and protective, because it is intolerable look beyond your behaviour into your everyday. In no way

does that mitigate what you have done. But in no way does it mitigate what was done to you either. How will I feel being a researcher with you? I won't know your stories or the behaviour that has likely harmed you and someone else. But perhaps your everyday will be hard to 'see' which I why I want to pay close attention to space and emotions in your ordinary and everyday life. I'm not going to crack any code, I can't even begin to say anything about why you did what you did but I am interested in what Horton (2008, p. 365) reflects on as 'a succession of overlapping realisations, reminders and acknowledgements of the presence and fundamental importance of hitherto underestimated aspects of everydayness'. I will do my best to do this by focussing on what I can see, hear and feel when we are together (and my thoughts in between) by writing my own observations and reflections down as field notes which, together with the maps we create (and fieldnotes you may choose to make), become the data. You may share what you are feeling with me – about doing the research, about the spaces you share with me and about the process of doing research. But I also know that you may not and some of my own reflections of the process, including my own emotional registering, will help me to consider your emotions in the process and data.

Me.....

I wonder what you will think about me but I will probably never know. Different aspects of 'me' mean different things to different people. You are likely to have ambivalent, splintered and confusing associations with different aspects of what I represent as a 'Social Worker', my collaboration with the Police and my interest in you may feel persecutory, passive or perverse. As an adult I know that adults will likely have used and misused power over you in different ways at different times. I am a 'mother' and an 'Other' – I have two sons who will be around your age. I wonder how my feelings about my own sons gets tangled up in other people's sons....and vice versa. When I first started in the Secure Unit I became aware of how my gender was protective for me, I could diffuse violent incidents sometimes because I was less of a threat. But I have also felt a sickening disturbance over my years of practice, that may be in my male colleagues everyday professional experience, that I am not safe to you as a female or mother as I have worked with those who have been abused by their mothers or other women. I wonder how my age now plays a part and wonder now if me being older creates more space to think about sexuality than when I was a younger Social Worker. All of these I simply will never know but I hold these thoughts in my mind when I think about our task ahead, as I thought about them in my practice.

But I also I hope that if I can go at your pace and you can feel a sense of support from the person you know supporting you, that you may feel a benign presence from me – one that can hold in mind that you have displayed harmful sexual behaviour but that you are more than that and you hold knowledge that matters to other people.

In the autumn of 2019 I was lucky to hear child psychotherapist Ann Horne present a paper at a Scottish psychotherapy group. She spoke about 'gaze' which feels even more important now - what my gaze may be like and, more broadly, the research gaze upon you. Horne's presentation was around psychoanalytic thoughts of ideal ego (who we want to be), like power and violence like defensive shields against around humiliation and shame and spoke about a corrupt gaze. It was a fleeting mention but, as I understood it, links to a gaze on children's bodies and minds by abuse and is juxtaposed with the holding function of the (maternal) gaze which we internalise as infants. Horne (2019; 05) expands:

'we must keep in mind the consequences, not simply of the absence of this affirming gaze but also the presence of a gaze which is corrupt, the prelude to the infant as an object used to contain the adult's perverse projections (not uncommon in referrals to our clinics today) and which leads to the favouring of the body as the only source of validation of the self of a kind that the child can find'

The sense I make from this is around an almost wordless dimension of absences of the assuring gaze and presence of corrupt gaze upon a child's mind and body. I felt the power of Horne's words but it also leads me further.....to consider the gaze of adults cocooned within systems, when children behave in harmful sexual ways which may, although unintended, create a gaze or maybe better described as a glare that operates a double function. Not only may this glare convey unspoken feelings like disgust and revulsion about the harmful act but the act becomes hyper visible, the focus of the glare obscures the gaze upon their experiences of abuse or harm as if cancelling them, rendering null and void

Of course, these are just my reflections but they matter here because I think this glaring gaze is evident in practice, policy and research which I am embedded and entangled within. I feel like I know this glare because it falls upon me too as if there is a right side of violence and a wrong side of violence to work with and research. I want to stay open to the idea of what my gaze may mean for you and what this creates within our research encounter. I hope that I have designed my research to divert the gaze from your behaviour and into your ordinary and everyday. I hope that I have created methods that allow you to have a sense of control and choice over what I can see of your everyday life. I hope that I can bring what I have learned through my past work to consider how shame might flood your body and mind if I don't go with your pace. Cooper (2018; 233) often draws upon the TV series 'The Wire' in his writing and refers to the episode 'Soft Eyes', highlighting the detectives way of 'softening the focus of one's vision' as the 'softer your eyes, the more likely you are to see the small clue, the unexpected, or the hidden' to similar to using observation research to study what is there to be 'seen' if we look properly. I can draw on my experience from using psychoanalytic observation from my MSc which included two years of weekly one hour observations of a baby from 3 weeks old and one year of weekly one hour observations of a 3 year old child in her nursery. This is a way of experiential learning to take a neutral stance and sustain steady attention on you, myself and

the spaces between us. It was also such a revelation to as so often our attention is tangled up in what expect to be there, what our training and life experience tells us should be there freeing us up to see what is there. Whilst I won't fully engage these psychoanalytically informed methods I am going to use what I have learned about myself and observations for these next steps we will take together. This is to suspend 'knowing' and get a tight grip on my hopes, expectations and concerns about my capacity to be a 'proper' researcher....then I can see what emerges.

Folkes (2022; 05) suggested that starting at the beginning of the research process when reflecting on positionality as 'it is impossible to ignore how researchers come to their research areas, which is often driven by personal experiences (our in/visible tools) and motivations'. I trained as a Social Worker after leaving school, with a naïve hope of wanting to help, and large helpings of luck and chance have led me to this PhD. I have been surprised by the sense of relief stepping back from practice, as if I am coming up for air, which speaks to the emotional labour of working with distress, trauma and risk for so long. My motivation comes from the children and young people and this matters so much to me because so often it felt futile to work individually in such siloed systems but then I feel a sense of guilt as I lean back and learn as I should have done and spoken up more. I am sharing this as I carry these into the 'field' with me. For me, it is about accepting what I do not yet know and embracing 'not knowing'. Sometimes the less certain I feel as a researcher the more tightly I hold onto being a Social Worker but this will shape the process. I will pay attention to this as we go and hold on more to quieting my busy mind and focussing on not being responsible for you but the process in which we come to meet – this is about being not doing.

Us.....

I have mentioned the methodological dimension of emotions in this data but I have a bit more work to articulate the theoretical distinctions between emotions and affect. For now, I hope it will suffice to borrow Hadfield-Hill and Horton's (2014; 137) reflections on emotion/affect as 'we do not habitually display such a rigid distinction in everyday life about experiences and feelings. This settles my mind and helps me not to 'overthink' in the service of producing knowledge especially at a time where I feel uncertain. Hadfield-Hill and Horton (2014; 137) validate some of this tension when they reflect on an 'implicit tendency to understand emotions as belonging to the individual researcher and as readily knowable, capture-able and represent-able'.

The maps we create and any field visits we arrange will be spaces that are relevant to you and you have chosen to share. You will have the choice and control over what can be seen and remains unseen between us. Anderson and Jones (2009; 299) remind me that conducting research within places of young people 'creates opportunities for the emotional ties that bind individuals to places to be uncovered' which can be hidden from view in other methods. I hope that we can discuss these places so you can share what these spaces mean to you. They need

not be spaces of drama and distress but the dull and mundane dimensions of your everyday life matter to me too. Extending this further, the space we meet together matters and I hope this is something that you, our Research Supporter and I can negotiate together so it is somewhere that you feel comfortable. The space we meet together may have multiple and contradictory meanings to you. Both of us will have field note books and I am interested in what it's like taking part as I think that adults need learn more from young people in research. Two aspects of space that I think are helpful for us are being in and out of place (Weller; 2009: 50). I think that these ideas speak to us both – we are creating space together but may at different times, with different things and different spaces we may each feel a sense of belonging and exclusion. I have shared how I feel out of place at times as a researcher but when I concentrate on what I can see, hear and feel during our time together I feel settled and confident. Although you may not use the words, your map may have linkages to spaces of being in and out of place. I will pay attention to the different feelings I, you and we may experience in relation to the different spaces we research in and on. Perhaps our moments of being together, even fleeting, may be form a challenge to expand the field of research towards being closer to people not as others, but through embracing uncertainty, unknowing, emotions and spaces with risky young people in their everyday lives we can see with softer eyes, listening ears and emotions, the latter not as an afterthoughts but as a 'resource for challenging ourselves and the systems in which we operate' (Blaisdell et al, 2021: 06)

Thinking this through helps me to contain my feelings about the research process: feelings around failure, can I find anything, can I do this rigorously or will I just have bland observations that don't really say much? By writing this I feel I can park this up because these are not yet knowable. Cooper (2009; 439) writes that the closer we come to the 'raw emotional, relationship based, turbulent, messy, visceral data' the more we are forced to become aware of the 'complexity of particulars' where the closer we come to the singular case 'the more its uniqueness and particularity demands to be understood; but equally the more its value for the illumination of all other cases with which there is a family resemblance'. This too settles me. So I will wait and see if we meet and I will write again in time.....

From me

28th June 2022

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RESEARCH PROJECT ON RISK, HARM, SAFETY & RIGHTS WITH BOYS WHO HAVE DISPLAYED HSB

This leaflet is for people and projects who might be interested in supporting young people to participate in my PhD research study. I hope it offers more information but I would love to meet with you and discuss it more!

Please contact me: lynne.o.cairns@durham.ac.uk

WHO?

My name is Lynne Cairns and I am doing a PhD at Durham University. I have been a Social Worker in Scotland for over twenty one years and worked for a long time as in a Senior Practitioner role with children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB). I am supervised by Professor Simon Hackett and Dr Josie Phillips and am collaborating with the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit.

WHAT?

From my practice experience I know that HSB can be very difficult for young people and families, including the young person themselves. There is a tendency in research and practice to focus on the risks posed by individual young people but I'm interested in the social dynamics that could help us understand the social contexts of risk and safety. Young people with HSB are rarely engaged as active participants in research so I hope that I can support a small number of young people to engage with me safely and sensitively so we can learn from their thoughts and experiences of their everyday lives. I know that girls display HSB but for this study I am particularly interested in understanding boys perspectives.

WHO?

I hope that I can support a small number of boys, aged between 13-18 years old, who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour. I know that different professions and agencies will see HSB different so it important that I stress that there does not have to be any formal processes around the concerns but it is important that the young person is getting support. To help clarify I am thinking about HSB as being towards the harmful end of the sexual behaviour continuum used by many people.

Hackett (2010) used in NSPCC
Framework for HSB (2019)

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
• Developmentally expected • Socially acceptable • Consensual, mutual, reciprocal • Shared decision making	• Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour • Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group • Context for behaviour may be inappropriate • Generally consensual and reciprocal	• Problematic and concerning behaviours • Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected • No overt elements of victimisation • Consent issues may be unclear • May lack reciprocity or equal power • May include levels of compulsivity	• Victimising intent or outcome • Includes misuse of power • Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance • Intrusive • Informed consent lacking, or not able to be freely given by victim • May include elements of expressive violence	• Physically violent sexual abuse • Highly intrusive • Instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator • Sadism

(If the young person's HSB was considered violent we can consider how participation can fit within any risk assessment)

To ensure that young people who take part are supported safely and sensitively it is important that I ensure that they are at a suitable point in any plan to participate. I would need the services supporting each young person to help me with a couple of things including supporting planning sessions, identifying how young person could access support if they were upset during sessions and a clear plan of how I would manage any potential disclosure of significant harm to participant or someone else.

Each agency may have their own ethical processes that I will have to follow but we can plan this together before any information is shared with any potential participants

HOW?

I would like to support boys who take part to have a sense of choice and control around what and how they share information. I will meet each boy individually for around three sessions, each lasting approx. one hour.

I will invite the participant to make a map of their everyday life using a 'Tool Box' I will provide with different ways of making their map. I will also have some questions as prompts, if they want to use them, to think about safety, risk and their rights as children. If they want, we could arrange to do a 'field visit' to look more closely at certain places on their map and what they mean for the young person.

WHERE?

We will meet in a place that is suitable and comfortable for the young person taking part. This would be discussed and arranged with the person who is supporting us. We would also make sure we all know who I would contact if I was worried about anything.

WHEN?

This project is about learning about the social and contextual dynamics of HSB which I hope will contribute to new ways of thinking about risk and safety for young people navigating them in everyday life but.....what is most important to me is that this project is foregrounded in the recognition that young people's perspectives really do matter and these should not be ignored in research. It is essential that any participation is supported in a safe and sensitive way so everyone involved feels comfortable. It would be important that the adults begin by getting all the ethical and procedural aspects of safety agreed before any information is shared with potential participants. Then, if any young person is interested we can then think together about what this involved so they can make a decision around consenting to participant. At any point during the process, they can withdraw their consent without the need for any explanation.

**IF YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN HEARING MORE ABOUT THIS,
I'D LOVE TO CHAT MORE WITH YOU. PLEASE DO GET IN TOUCH!**

LYNNE.O.CAIRNS@DURHAM.AC.UK

Appendix Four: Young Person information sheet

A RESEARCH PROJECT LEARNING ABOUT SAFETY AND RISK



My name is Lynne and I am a student at the University of Durham. I'm doing a research project to learn more about what helps young people feel safe and what can be risky.

THIS IS ME!



I'm interested in young people who have got into difficulty with their sexual behaviour which can be called 'harmful sexual behaviour'. This is important to me because I've worked with lots of young people who have shown harmful sexual behaviour and they matter to me. Sometimes adults decide what they think young people need but young people can see everyday life differently. So I think it is better if we ask young people themselves about their lives to understand how best we can make things safer for all young people.

I think we need to keep learning about what can help them feel safer and help them with things that are risky. I am doing this project to learn about **where and how young people feel safe, feel risky and how they see their rights as children**. I would also love to know what they think **adults could and should do better to help all young people feel ok**.

WHY HAVE I BEEN SHOWN THIS?

You have been given this leaflet as the person who has shown you it wondered if you might be interested in taking part in the research with me? I don't know anything about you and I will only meet you if you would like to find out more about taking part.

WHAT WOULD TAKING PART INVOLVE?

If you think you might be interested then I can come and meet you or we can meet online if you'd prefer. I can tell you more about the project and what it would be like taking part then give you some time to think about it

If you decide to take part then I would meet you somewhere that is comfortable for you. We will ask someone who you know already to help us sort some of this out. We would meet for about three times for around an hour each time. I would like to make a big map of the things you want to show me about the places you spend your time. I would like to learn about things like feeling safe, stuff that seems risky and what helps and doesn't. BUT it's totally up to you what you want to share and how you want to do this! You can stop the session or taking part at any point and don't need to explain anything.

I've thought about things that young people might use to make maps of their life and I'll make these up in a 'tool box'. This will have things like this but I'll bring it to show you when we meet before you decide about taking part.



IF I TAKE PART WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You can tell anyone you want about me and what we do but what you share with me will be kept safe and private so no-one else can know that you said it to me. These are the ways that I will do that: MAKE THIS ALL MUCH BRIEFER

- I will not make any notes with your name, where you live and the places on the map.
- Take some pictures on a phone that I only use for this project, but only so I can remember where we put things on the map. This phone will be locked and only I can open it. I will delete everything on the phone after I have finished this research project.
- I will not use any pictures we take when I write about what I have learned. I will use Lego bricks and people to show things that might be important so no-one knows where anything is in Scotland or who said it.
- I will not ask you or your person supporting us anything about your behaviour or past. I do not need to know this (but you can talk about it if you choose). It would be good for me to know a bit about the boys who take part so I will give you a form with some questions that you can fill in if you choose. You can do this and put in an envelope or you can fill a form in the computer. You can do this at the end of taking part.
- I will not use your name or any other details that would let someone else know who took part. If you want you could pick another name that I can call you when I write about what I have learned.
- If you decide to stop taking part at any time I will delete everything I have made notes about from our time together.

The only time this would change would be if you told me something makes me worried about your safety or someone else's safety or if you tell me something that is against the law that would really harm you or someone else. Before you decide to take part we will make a plan together about what I will do if this happens, who I will tell and what they will do. We'll also put on the plan what we can do if you feel upset by anything during taking part. When we make our plans we talk about ways you can share things and still keep the details private such as talking about an imaginary person.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I TAKE PART?

After you have taken part I will take time to think about everything I have learned from all the young people who took part. You can still change your mind up to 8 weeks after we have said goodbye and I will delete everything we did. I will write a very long report making sure nobody knows who took part. I will write about what I have learned about where and who helps young people to feel safe, what makes things riskier and what adults can do differently to help teenagers feel safer and that their rights are paid attention to.

I would then like to tell people who are involved with young people in different ways. This might be me talking at a conference or writing in a journal. I hope that if I do this I can help change the ways we support young people with harmful sexual behaviour.

Before we say goodbye I'll ask if you would like to help me make something to share. I will ask each boy who took part and put this all together to show people. You can help me think of who we can show. The Scottish Government (who make big decisions for all children in Scotland) and the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (who are based with the Police and want to help people including the police do better for young people to feel safe) have said they want to see this and they will write a letter to thank you (even though they won't know your name or anything about you).

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE RESEARCH?

You only need to take part if you want to! It is important it is your choice and you can stop at any point and do not have to explain to anyone. It will not affect the support you get.

IF I WANT TO, HOW DO I TAKE PART?

If you think you might want to take part then you or someone else can let me know. We can then meet to talk more about taking part. We can chat on the phone, meet online or I can come and meet you and the person who will support you taking part. I will then leave you to think about it and ask any questions. Once you decide you do want to take part we can arrange our sessions.

My email address is lynne.o.cairns@durham.ac.uk

A RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT SAFETY AND RISK PARENT & CARER INFORMATION SHEET

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

My name is Lynne Cairns and I have worked for a long time with children and young people who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB).

I am doing research as part of my PhD qualification. There isn't very much research on the everyday lives of young people with HSB and where they feel safe, risky and how everyone around them respects their rights. There is very little research that listens to what they think about these things and what the adults who work with them could do better. Boys and girls can display HSB but some research suggests more boys so I am doing research with boys only.

You have been given this leaflet as someone supporting your young person wondered if your young person might be interested in taking part.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH FOR?

From my work, I know that Harmful Sexual Behaviour can be very distressing for everyone. The focus becomes keeping everyone safe but this is often through a focus on the young person. I think it important that we don't forget about the people, places and spaces the young person spends their time in and how these contribute to them feeling and being safe. I also strongly believe that we must listen to young people's views as these matter and can help us develop better ways of keeping young people safer.

WHAT DOES TAKING PART INVOLVE?

Firstly, it is really important to me that any young person chooses to take part. In sharing this leaflet, someone who supports your young person will have decided that they might be interested. They will then share information about the research and taking part and if they are interested I will talk with them more about it.

If they choose to take part we will meet for three 1-hour sessions over a period of about 6-8 weeks. I WILL NOT ASK THEM TO TALK ABOUT THEIR BEHAVIOUR.

I am interested in where they feel safe, at risk and how they feel their Children's Rights are respected or not.

DOES MY YOUNG PERSON NEED TO DO THIS?

Your young person does not need to make part and they can change their mind at any point and do not have to explain their reasons. By withdrawing consent, I will delete all notes I have taken from our work together

BENEFITS AND RISKS

I can't say how your young person will feel by taking part. I would hope that they might feel like their thoughts and ideas matter and other people can learn from them. However, sometimes young people can get upset so we would plan how I will support them before we begin.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALLY

Everything that your young person shares will be kept private and anything I write or talk about will be anonymised so nobody could know who they are. The only time I would not keep something private was if they say something that might worry me. Before we start working together we will make a clear plan about how we will deal with this so your young person understands what and why I will do.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER?

After your young person has taken part they will still have 6 weeks to change their minds and withdraw consent. I will then look closely at all the work I have done with all the participants and write a very long thesis about what themes come out about safety, risk and Children's Rights for young people who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour. I will try to present this in different ways to reach as many people as I can such as talking at conferences, and writing for journal.

If your young person wants, they could also help me to make something like a briefing paper or a short animation that we can show to other people (making sure no participants can be identified). The Scottish Government and the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit have said that they would like to see this and would write to each participant to recognise their contributions and thank them.. I really hope other people will be interested too.

HOW DO THEY GIVE THEIR CONSENT TO TAKE PART?

To respect their rights to make safe choices, I would like all young people to voluntarily decide if they want to take part. One way of doing this is respecting their right to consent to take part and asking them, after everything has been explained, to consent themselves. For young people under 16 years old I will also ask for parent/carer consent but for young people over 16 I would ask parents/carers to OPT OUT if they do not give consent.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me to discuss this further. My email is lynne.o.cairns@durham.ac.uk and we can then arrange to talk more.

Appendix Six: Transcript of introductory video for gatekeepers

I think you'll be seeing this little video because the person who shared it with you wondered if you're working or supporting a young person that might be interested in taking part in some research that I'm doing. So I'm Lynne and my background is in social work and I've worked for a lot of years with children and young people who have experienced abuse and also young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour. And right now I'm doing a PhD at Durham University with Simon Hackett and Josie Phillips and I'm interested in the social dynamics around issues of harmful sexual behaviour.



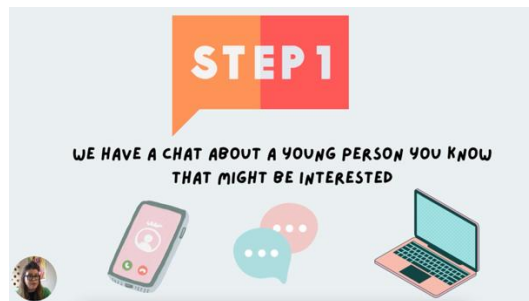
So two things that are really important to me and why I'm doing what I'm doing. First, a lot of what we know about harmful sexual behaviour is about individuals and individual risk factors. But children and young people never exist in social vacuums and I don't think research pays enough attention to the everyday lives which might have important pieces to the puzzle to reduce harm and increase safety. and secondly, there's hardly any research that actually asks these young people themselves what they think about things. And I don't think we'll know what life's really like unless we actually ask, and also because they have rights to participate in matters which affect them, including research, just like all other young people.



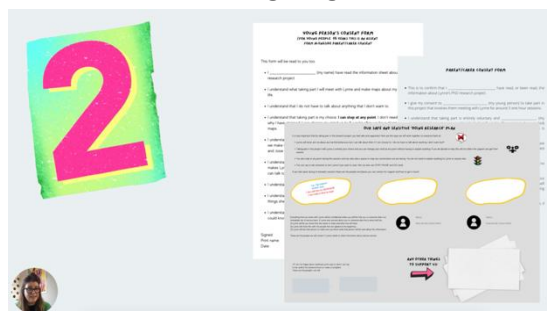
So I'm looking for a small number of boys aged between 13 to 18 across Scotland who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour. They can choose what they share, how they want to share things, and I don't need to know about any behaviours unless they choose to share. I'm interested in the places to hang out, the things that they do and the people that matter to them, things like that.



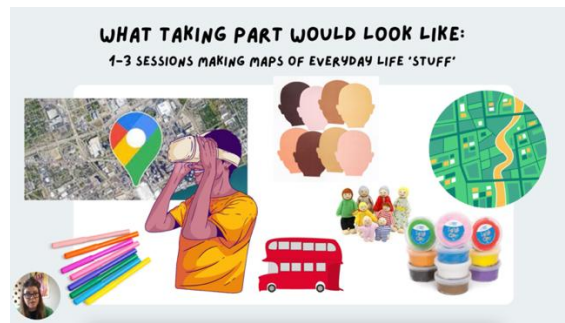
So the first step would be for us to have a chat on the phone or online, just to check out a few things that might be useful to think about to support a young person if they were interested in taking part- I don't see the support role as being a really big task, but just about support and making practical arrangements, and also so we're all clear what I'll do if a young person became particularly distressed by taking part or disclosed significant harm- things that I don't anticipate happening but just good practice to make sure you have all these things in place and the young person understands all this.



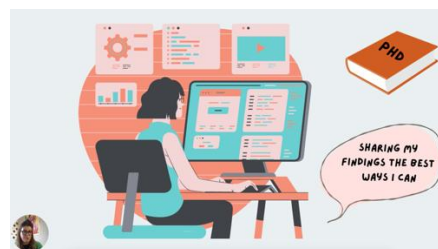
Second step would be for you to talk to the young person themselves to see if they'd be interested in it, interested in finding out more then we'd make a plan as to how we can take that further so that the young person can understand more about what taking part would be like and then make informed decisions about giving their consent to participate.



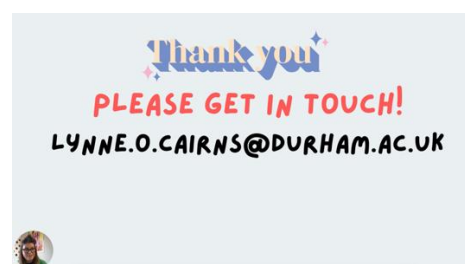
And then the next step is the research part of it that I see has been between one and three sessions with the young person in a place they're comfortable with, and where we will make maps of their everyday life. To give them a sense of choice and control I've created what I call a sort of toolbox. It's got lots of different materials to make maps with, including a VR headset that's connected to the Google Earth so the young person can choose to show me places that they might want to, that are important to them.



And after that, I'll take time to really think about and analyse what this means I'd write up these findings as part of my PhD thesis but it's also important to me to think about how I can best share these with other people that are working with young people with harmful sexual behaviours. I'd be really keen to co-produce something with any of the young people that took part so they can be part of sharing this. This might be making a research briefing or a digital story, or making Minecraft maps to show how different spaces and places can feel more safe or risky. And I have agreement in principle from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit who will look at anything and write a letter to participants to show that they've paid attention and explain how they think they'll use what they've learned and have arranged this as it is important the participation is not just having a voice but also knowing that people have listened and responded.



So realise that's probably quite a lot of information, I'd really love it if you got in touch and we could think about how we can sort of have a chat about how we could take this forward and I'll really look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.



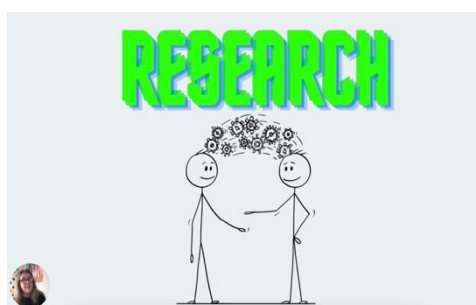
Appendix Seven: Transcript of introductory video for potential young people

Hello! I'm Lynne and you'll be seeing this wee video because the person that's shown it to you

has thought that you might be interested in taking part in some research that I'm doing. I'll keep it short and it's really just to introduce myself and tell you a bit about what I'm doing.



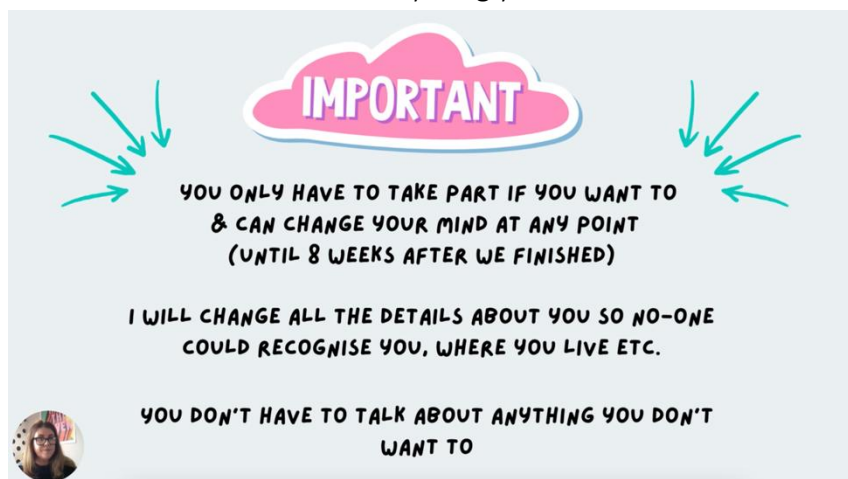
So research is about learning new things such as things we need to do more of or better or differently. But almost all research that's about young people's lives or things that affect young people are done by adults on young people. But I think it's better to do research with young people because they think they'll have important and interesting things to share. So this research is about what matters to young people and the everyday ordinary lives, in particular young people who have gotten into difficulties with their sexual behaviour. I am not trying to understand why anybody's done what they've done or looking at anybody's behaviour, but what is important to me is learning about what helps keep them safe or feel ok and what doesn't, and what adults could do differently so I can share this with other people who step into young people's lives, such as social workers and teachers and people like that.



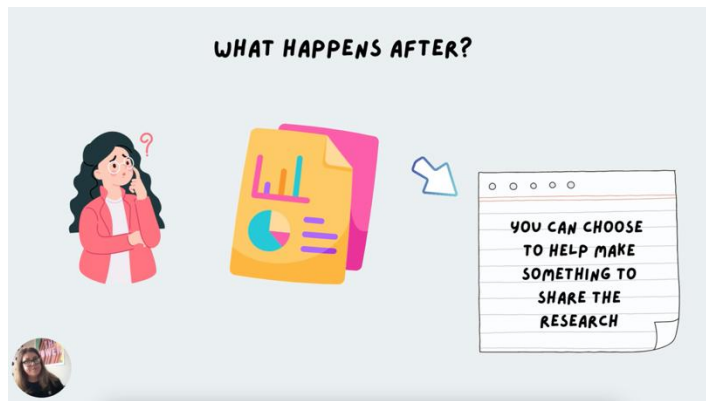
So I'll tell you a few things about what it would be like taking part. We'd meet about three times, if you wanted, and we'd make maps where we chat about your everyday life, things that matter to you, where doesn't..... people, places, things. I've got lots of different ways that you could make your maps like drawing stuff or figures, vehicles but I've also got a VR headset where we can look together at places through Google Earth, and there would also be an option if anybody wanted to go for a walk and we could talk in any particular place that was on your map. But you'll always have the choice and control over what you share and how you want to share it.



If you're interested then we'll obviously talk more so you can make a decision about taking part but a couple of really important things. You only have to take part if you want to and you can change your mind at any point without having to explain to anybody. I would make sure that anything that I then write about that everything about use is changed, all the details about who you are, where you live has changed so nobody could recognise you or where you live. And you also don't have to talk about anything you don't want to.



You might wonder what happens after taking part- so I would do a lot of thinking about the things that all the young people that took part shared with me and what I've learned about what keeps young people safe and what causes harm and I'll write this up in a really big document. But I'd also like to make a report to share with adults that have a role in young people's lives. I'd be really keen for anybody that took part to help make something that we could share, like an animation or a digital story, and we can share this with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit. And they would let us know what they what they'd learned about the research and what this might mean for them and the jobs that they do.



So please have a think and let this the person who showed you this know if you'd like to meet up and find out more. We can have a chat online or I'll come and meet you and the person that's supporting you so as you can learn more and then make decisions about whether you'd like to take part or not. But thanks very much for listening to the video and maybe you'll hear from you.



Appendix Eight: Young person consent sheet

YOUNG PERSON'S CONSENT FORM **(FOR YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 16 YEARS THIS IS AN ASSENT** **FORM ALONGSIDE PARENT/CARER CONSENT**

This form will be read to you too.

- This is to confirm that _____ (your name) have read, and been read, the information sheet about Lynne's research project
- I understand that by taking part in this project I will meet with Lynne and we will make maps about everyday life. I don't have to share anything I don't want to.
- I understand that I do not have to talk about my behaviour or anything else that I don't want to.
- I understand that taking part is my choice and I can stop taking part at any point. I don't need to explain my choice to anyone. I can change my mind up to 8 weeks after we have stopped making maps.
- I understand Lynne will make notes when we meet and might take photographs of what we make together or places we might visit. Lynne would only show her bosses Simon and Josie who help her. Lynne will not use my name or the names of the places on my map.
- I understand that everything I share with Lynne will be private unless I say something that makes Lynne worried about mine or someone else's safety. I will know who Lynne will talk to if she was worried and what will happen then.
- I understand that if I feel upset during the project I will know the people I can go to.
- I understand that Lynne will not keep the notes or pictures we make but she will share things she has learned with people who make decisions and help young people feel safe.
- I understand that Lynne will 'anonymise' everything that I share. This means that no-one could know who I am, where I live or where I spend my time.

Signed:

Print name:

Date:

Appendix Nine: Parent/carer consent sheet

PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM

IF YOUR YOUNG PERSON IS OVER 16, YOU CAN OPT OUT OF THEM PARTICIPATING BY LETTING LYNNE OR THE PERSON SUPPORTING THEM KNOW.

IF YOUR YOUNG PERSON IS UNDER 16 YEARS:

- This is to confirm that I _____ have read, or been read, the information about the research project conducted by Lynne Cairns
- I give my consent to _____ (young person) to take part in this project and know that it involves them meeting with Lynne for around 3 one hour sessions as part of Lynne's PhD project around safety, risk and rights of young people who display HSB
- I understand that taking part is entirely voluntary and _____ (young person) can stop at any time (including 8 weeks after sessions have ended) without having to give a reason and they can ask that their contributions to be destroyed.
- I understand that Lynne will keep all information about my young person private and stored securely. Only Lynne and her supervisors Simon Hackett and Josie Phillips can see the information.
- I understand that anything that my young person shares will be anonymised so no one can identify them or the places on their map. After Lynne has written up what she has learned, she will destroy all the notes and pictures used for the project.
- I know that if I am unhappy with anything that Lynne does I can raise this and make a complaint by talking to the person supporting my young person or Lynne's supervisors. I will be given details of how I can contact them before my young person starts taking part.

I agree to let _____ (young person) take part in this project if they choose to as I am their parent or carer.

Signed:

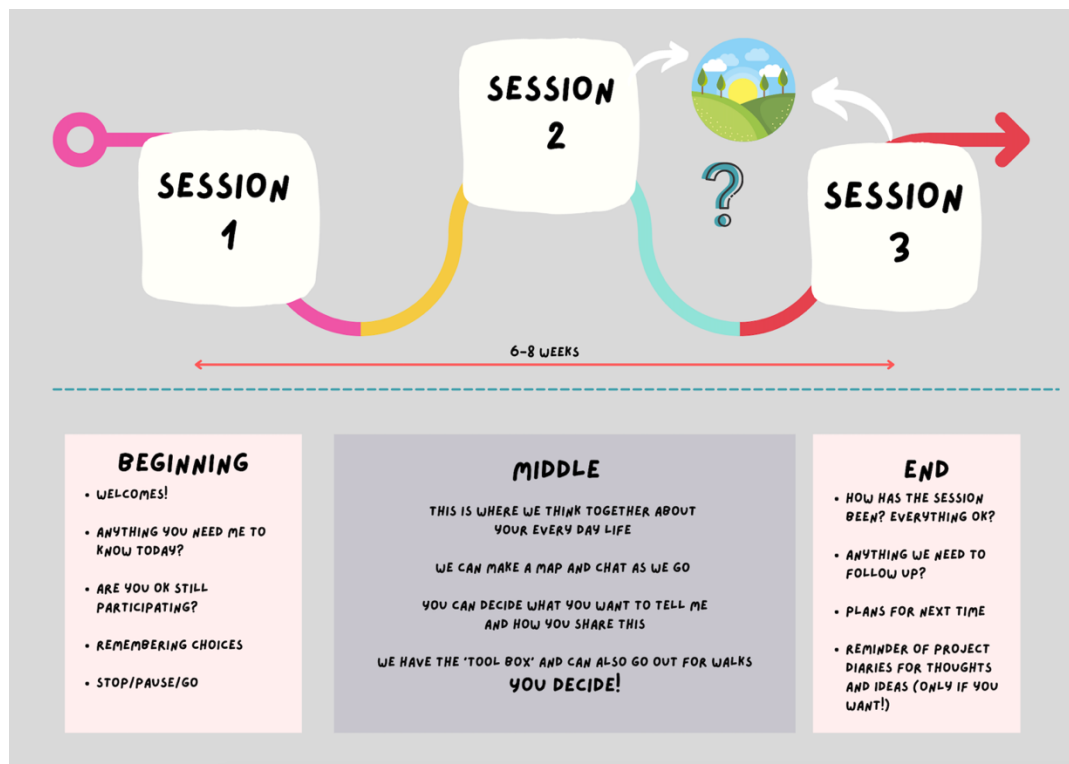
Printed:

Date:

Appendix Ten: Visual consent used in sessions

Taking part in Lynne's research consent to meet with Lynne means it is always my choice to say yes or no!	
	I CAN CHANGE MY MIND AT ANY POINT (UNTIL 8 WEEKS AFTER WE END) AND THAT'S OK!
	I DON'T HAVE TO TALK ABOUT ANYTHING I DON'T WANT TO
	I KNOW WHO LYNNE WILL GO TO IF I AM UPSET OR SHARE A BIG WORRY
	LYNNE WILL CHANGE THINGS SO PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHO I AM
	LYNNE WILL KEEP HER NOTES (NOT NOT MY MAP) TO HELP HER SHARE WHAT SHE HAS LEARNED

Appendix Eleven: Session overview



Appendix Twelve: Our safe and sensitive 'doing research' plan

OUR SAFE AND SENSITIVE 'DOING RESEARCH' PLAN

It is very important that by taking part in this research project you feel safe and supported. Here are the ways we will work together so everyone feels ok.

- Lynne will never ask me about any harmful behaviours but I can talk about them if I can choose to. I do not have to talk about anything I don't want to!!!
- Taking part in this project with Lynne is entirely your choice and you can change your mind at any point without having to explain anything. If you do decide to stop this will not affect the support you get from anyone.
- You also stop at any point during the sessions and can also take a pause or stop any conversation we are having. You do not need to explain anything to Lynne or anyone else.
- You can say or ask someone to text Lynne if you want to stop. We can also use STOP, PAUSE and GO cards.

If you feel upset during or between sessions these are the people and places you can contact for support and how to get in touch:

*e.g. my support worker, Jane
I can call her on 012345678
I can make a time to meet*

Everything that you share with Lynne will be confidential unless you tell her that you or someone else is at immediate risk of serious harm. If Lynne was worried about you or someone else this is what she'll do:

- (1) Lynne will let you know that she wants to share and what she will share
- (2) Lynne will share this with the people that we agreed at the beginning
- (3) Lynne will ask that person to make sure you know what that person will do next about this information.

These are the people we will contact if Lynne needs to share information about serious worries:

Name:	How we will contact them:
	
	

If I am not happy about anything Lynne says or does I can say to her and/or let someone know or make a complaint.
These are the people I can tell:

ANY OTHER THINGS TO SUPPORT US:





ABOUT ME

IT HELPS ME TO KNOW A BIT ABOUT THE BOYS WHO TAKE PART BUT I WILL NEVER TELL ANYONE ANYTHING THAT MEANS THEY WOULD KNOW WHO YOU ARE. THIS SHEET WON'T EVEN HAVE YOUR NAME ON IT.

Remember it is your choice what and if you answer. You can also ask someone else to fill this in.

Diagram showing five shapes with arrows pointing to them, indicating where to fill in information:

- Shape 1 (Pentagon): Your age
- Shape 2 (Rounded Square): What you would say your ethnicity is?
- Shape 3 (Star): What area do you live in?
- Shape 4 (Rectangle): Would you say you have any disability or neurodevelopment condition?
- Shape 5 (Hexagon): (This shape is part of the second section, 'A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR...')

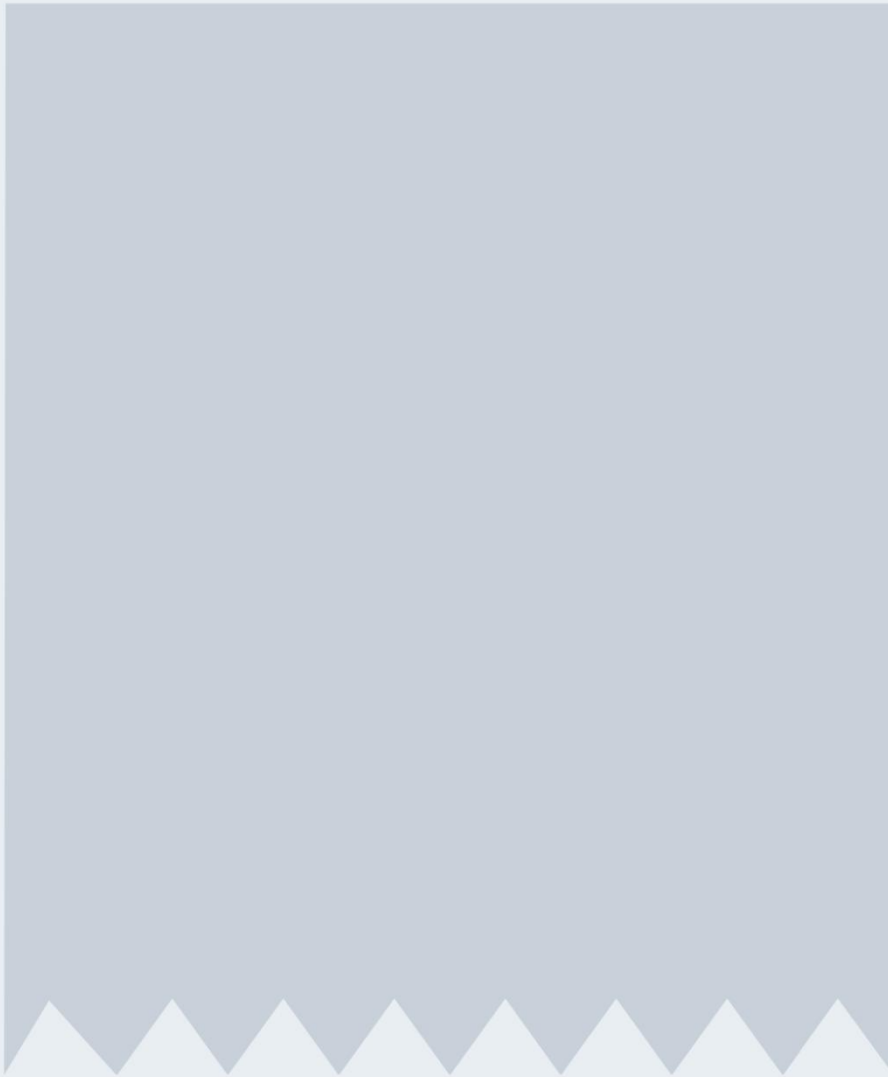
A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR...IF THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW DIFFERENT BEHAVIOURS YOU COULD USE THE OTHER SHEETS

Where would you say it happened?
(such as inside, outside or a particular place)

Were you on your own,
with someone
else or a group?

If it happened with someone else: what was your relationship to them? Could you say their age?

**ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE ME
TO KNOW?
(REMEMBER I WILL BE VERY CAREFUL WITH EVERYTHING YOU
SHARE WITH ME)**



Appendix Fourteen: Practitioner participant information sheet



PHD RESEARCH PROJECT ON SAFETY, RISK AND RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE DISPLAYED HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR



INTRODUCTION

You are invited to take part in research about mapping the everyday lives of teenage boys who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) with a particular focus on how, where and with who they may experience safety, risk and their rights as children (UNCRC). I hope that by learning more about where and how young people feel safe, feel risky and how they see their rights as children I can contribute to more contextual and social responses to enhancing safety and reducing risk for young people.

I have full ethical approval from Durham University and approval through the authority/agency that you work within.

It is important to stress the research is not trying to understand any young person, their behaviour or any assessment or intervention you have undertaken. It is about trying to consider the world through their eyes.

ABOUT ME

My name is Lynne Cairns and I am doing a PhD at Durham University. I have been a Social Worker in Scotland for over twenty years and including as Senior Practitioner with children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB). I am supervised by Professor Simon Hackett and Dr Josie Phillips and am collaborating with the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

There is a tendency in research to focus on the risks posed by individual young people which can obscure our capacity to understand their experiences of the world which can often be complex. I'm interested in the social dynamics and social contexts of risk and safety.

The first stage of my research has been to try to engage the perspectives of teenage boys who have displayed HSB by making maps about their everyday lives with a focus of people, places and things that make them feel safe or not. This has been very important to me as young people with HSB are rarely engaged as active participants in research.

I am now expanding my scope to explore the perspectives of practitioners who have supported a young person who has displayed HSB. I would like to draw upon what is described as 'practice wisdom' to learn from people who have experience in this field of practice.

WHAT WE WILL DO

The best place for us to begin is an initial meeting to talk things through and I can answer any questions you may have. If you decide to take part, I would ask you to complete the consent form. We would then arrange two meetings together. I will ask you to think about a young person you are or have supported and imagine the world through his eyes. We will discuss how we will manage together protecting their identity and negotiate this throughout the research. We will also ensure that you cannot be identified and the agency/authority in which you work. Just like I did with boys who are taking part, I will ask you to make a map of the everyday life of the young person you are thinking about.

I have created a research tool box so you can do this the way you choose – this includes a VR headset connected to a virtual map, paper, pens, figures and clay. I have prompt cards to provoke reflections if you choose. I will also give you a ‘research diary’ that you can choose to capture any thoughts or reflection’s in between out meetings and you can decide if you wish to share this with me.



We would meet for a second session which serves as a debrief where we can reflect on your experience of taking part and further reflections on the map we made.

I will audio-record and then transcribe our discussions and take pictures of our map so I can analyse features. Only myself and my supervisors can see my transcriptions and they will be stored securely on Durham University’s OneDrive multifactor cloud storage.

TAKING PART

Taking part is entirely voluntary and you can change their mind at any point during the process including up to eight weeks after our final meeting. I would like to follow the same process as I have with young participants so, just like when I meet with young participants, we will consider who you could go to should they feel upset or distressed by taking part. We would also agree what we will do should the practitioner share any risks of significant harm and the next steps we would take.

I hope that by taking part you would feel like you have an opportunity to be part of research which aims to better understand what life may be like for boys who display HSB which often experience complex lives themselves. I hope that by learning from their maps and maps drawing on your ‘practice wisdom’ I can gain important insights into contextual and dynamic safety, risk and also how we can consider rights.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSENT

The information you share is confidential and I take very seriously the importance of ensuring that you and the young person you have thought about cannot be identified. We will work together in our discussions to not identify the young person and I will then further anonymise as I transcribe and ensure that when I write and talk about my research no person or place is identifiable. I would only breach this confidentiality if I was concerned about the risk of significant harm to someone and would discuss what steps we would take should this arise when we initially meet. You can change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time, up to eight weeks after our final session, and no explanation is needed.

AFTER TAKING PART

After I have gathered all my 'data' from young participants and practitioners I will analyse and write up as my PhD thesis. I hope to share my findings in reports and articles that will be of interest to people who play a role in supporting the safety of all young people, not only but including young people who display HSB. I will also make a research briefing which I will share with any participants. I also hope to make a creative research output with any young participants that take part so they can feel they have a part in sharing the learning I have made through their participation. I would also share this with you.

If you are unhappy with any aspect of the research or my conduct you can contact my supervisor Professor Simon Hackett who will listen to you and your concerns – simon.hackett@durham.ac.uk



INTERESTED TO TAKE PART?



**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TALK ABOUT TAKING PART I WOULD BE DELIGHTED
TO HEAR FROM YOU. PLEASE EMAIL ME**



**LYNNE.O.CAIRNS@DURHAM.AC.UK
AND WE CAN PLAN OUR NEXT STEPS!**



Appendix Fifteen: Practitioner participant consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: RESEARCH PROJECT ON SAFETY, RISK AND RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE DISPLAYED HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

PHD RESEARCHER: LYNNE CAIRNS

SUPERVISORS: PROFESSOR SIMON HACKETT AND DR JOSIE PHILLIPS

Please read and sign:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet about the research project and have had the opportunity to ask any questions.
- I understand what taking part involves including meeting with Lynne to make maps about my perspectives of everyday life of a young person that I have in mind. I can then meet for a follow up session with Lynne to reflect upon my experience and reflections of the process and share my research diary should I choose to.
- During the research sessions, both Lynne and I will work together to ensure any young person's privacy is respected and all information about people, places and things will be disguised or anonymised during our discussions. Lynne will then fully anonymise transcripts to ensure myself and the young person are not identifiable.
- I understand that taking part is entirely voluntary and I can stop and/or withdraw at any point without giving any explanation, I can change my mind up and withdraw my consent to 8 weeks after our final session.
- I understand that our discussions will be audio recorded and transcribed. Pictures will be taken of the maps we make. Research Diaries will be transcribed. All data (visual, audio and written) will be fully anonymised and only accessible to Lynne and her PhD supervisors.
- At the beginning of the sessions I will identify who I would go if I experienced distress taking part. Should Lynne or myself become concerned about issues of significant harm we will discuss together and agree how we will respond through my own local arrangements.
- I agree to take part in this project

Signed:

Print name:

Date:

Appendix Sixteen: Practitioner safe and sensitive plan

OUR SAFE AND SENSITIVE 'DOING RESEARCH' PLAN

Taking part in this research project aims to learn from your 'practice wisdom' and understanding of young lives to try to improve young people's sense of safety, including young people who display risky behaviour. Together, we can try to create a safe space for you to share reflections the way you choose to. However, when we reflect on young people's lives that we may care or have worried about there is always a possibility that we can experience difficult feelings. This plan is similar to the one each young person who takes part will co-create and is a way we can proactively and collaboratively consider who and where your supports are should you need them through taking part.

DURING THE SESSIONS WE CAN...



BETWEEN SESSIONS YOU COULD...

(LET'S IDENTIFY SUPPORT THAT IS AROUND FOR YOU)



ALSO

BREATHING SPACE
0800 838 587



MIND
0300 123 3393

BRITISH ASSOCIATION
OF COUNSELLING
& PSYCHOTHERAPY



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