

Child sexual abuse

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Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) engages the core themes of critical criminology, namely power and harm. It is therefore surprising that child sexual abuse has drawn relatively little attention from critical criminologists, other than as an illustration of “moral panic”. This is, to my knowledge, the first dedicated chapter on child sexual abuse in a critical criminology handbook or encyclopaedia. After providing an overview of the major characteristics of child sexual abuse, the chapter begins by reflecting on the neglect of child sexual abuse in critical criminology and the dominance of a dismissive “moral panic” account. It goes on to summarise analyses of child sexual abuse advanced by feminist criminologists and scholars, for whom child sexual abuse is situated within, and reflective of, the structural and cultural forces at work in contemporary societies. The chapter then discusses critical and psychosocial perspectives on child sex offending, emphasising the interplay of psychological and social dynamics in abuse and responses to it. The last half of the chapter identifies four key areas of future research and theorising for critical criminologists, namely 1) accounting for the full spectrum of child sexual abuse, 2) attention to power and intersectionality, 3) developing more nuanced analyses to collective responses to child sexual abuse and 4) critiquing and advancing justice responses. The chapter concludes by emphasising the centrality of child sexual abuse within contemporary power relations and structures. It suggests that critical criminology has an important, if not fully realised, role to play in interrogating the contradictions, inequalities and hypocrisies evident in the commission of child sex offences and broader social and legal responses to it.

The response of critical criminology to child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is a common and impactful crime with significant implications for child victims, adult survivors and the community at large. A recent meta-analysis of sixty five prevalence studies covering twenty-two countries found that 19.7% of women and 7.9% of men had experienced child sexual abuse before the age of 18 (Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gomez-Benito, 2009). Child sex offenders are overwhelmingly male and there are between 2.5 - 3 females for every male victim (Pereda, et al., 2009). Children in all social classes are vulnerable to sexual abuse however institutionalised children and children in care, located at the intersections of poverty, racism, state harm and clerical crime, have been at particular risk (Middleton et al., 2014). The frequency of sexual abuse in the lives of children living with disability highlights how sexual abuse flourishes in spaces of powerlessness and vulnerability, amplifying pre-existing differentials in status and opportunity (Kendall-Tackett, Lyon, & Taliaferro, 2005). The life trajectory of sexual abuse victims includes a disproportionate risk of mental and physical illness, financial insecurity and criminal victimisation and perpetration (Gilbert et al., 2009), at which point adult

survivors may find themselves entangled within the criminal justice system and other punitive institutions in a range of ways.

Survivors of child sexual abuse are over-represented amongst incarcerated populations of men and women (Johnson et al., 2006; Moloney, van den Bergh, & Moller, 2009) and as the clients of alcohol and drug services and child protection agencies (Salter & Breckenridge, 2014). Across jurisdictions, child victims of sexual abuse and adult survivors alike face systematic barriers to the prosecution of the offences committed against them (e.g. Connolly & Don Read, 2006; Cossins, 2006) and struggle to access appropriate health care and social supports (Middleton, et al., 2014). They are frequently stigmatised by the community and in psychiatric contexts for their mental health needs (Warner, 2009). State responses to child sexual abuse are highly inconsistent, as vocal denunciations of child sex offenders and a focus on harsh sentencing distracts attention from ongoing epidemic levels of sexual abuse and the neglect of abused children and adult survivors. Expert and popular discourses of child sexual abuse reflect power relations that structure and limit how sexual abuse can be understood and acted upon (Kitzinger, 2004; Whittier, 2009).

On the face of it, the study of child sexual abuse would appear to be an excellent fit within the critical criminological tradition. Sexual abuse is characterised by differentials in power between victims and offenders in terms of age, while other axes of domination including gender, race and ability are frequently evident. However critical criminology has played a limited role in explicating these issues. This neglect can be traced back to the origins of critical criminology in the Marxist theory and left idealism of the 1970s, which produced a strongly sceptical stance in relation to state intervention and expert discourse (DeKeseredy, 2010). Sexual violence against children did not accord with the naïve left view of crime as a form of resistance against state and social control, and so it was largely ignored by critical criminologists. During this period, the norms of sexual liberation tilted some left intellectuals towards the normalisation of child sexual abuse, with Michel Foucault insisting children can “consent” and are “delighted” when they “throw themselves at an adult” (Foucault cited in Howe, 2009, p. 5).

These arguments provided a counter-weight to rising feminist and public concern about child sexual abuse during the 1970s, and were reflected by criminologists such as Wilson (1981) calling for the decriminalisation of adult sexual activity with minors.¹ Such sentiments became less acceptable in the 1980s and 1990s as empirical evidence of the prevalence and harms of child sexual abuse accumulated, and public awareness and sentiment turned strongly against the abuse of children (Olafson, Corwin, & Summit, 1993). However, transgressive suggestions that child sexual abuse is politically radical and pleasurable for children and adults continue to surface as part of what Ruddick (2015) calls the “bad boy” style of “academic cool”, encapsulated by Zizek’s (2008) nostalgic reference to the “heyday of the Sexual Revolution” when “child sex was celebrated as overcoming the last barrier” of the “ideologically enforced desexualization of children”. While most critical scholarship does not go so far, post-Foucauldian approaches to sexuality have been underpinned by a strong suspicion that efforts to critique any form of sexual expression, including child sexual abuse, are part of a conservative “anti-sex” backlash (Alcoff, 1996). This

¹ Wilson was recently convicted and imprisoned for child sex offences (Condon, 2016).

suspicion informs the civil libertarian strain within criminology and sociology, characterised by assertions that state agencies and society tends towards “panic” and “hysteria” in responding to sexual abuse.

This is encapsulated in the ‘moral panic’ literature on sexual abuse, which brings together a suspicion of state control and media discourse with a disparaging view of public concern about sexual abuse as disproportionate (e.g. Jenkins, 1992). Moral panic literature shares a common set of claims, namely that society and the authorities have become “hysterical” and over-reactive to child sexual abuse, to the point that baseless allegations are believed without question, children are being removed from their families with insufficient evidence, and men are being prosecuted on the flimsiest of pretexts. The evidence offered for these claims are predominantly case studies. Attempts in the 1980s and early 1990s to prosecute allegations of organised and ritual abuse in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere have been presented as symptoms of a sexual abuse “witch hunt” (R. Cheit, 2014; Michael Salter, 2016). Such analyses have been influential in the criminological literature, where therapists and child protection workers have been accused of implanting false memories of abuse, and anti-abuse activists has come under fire for their supposed ignorance of childhood sexuality and intolerance of sexual difference (Pratt, 2005).

Despite its popularity amongst critical criminologists, the empirical basis of the moral panic account of sexual abuse has been shown to be substantially untrue. There is no evidence of an increase in reckless or baseless sexual abuse prosecutions during the 1990s, which was supposedly the height of the “moral panic” (Cross, Walsh, Simone, & Jones, 2003). Child sexual abuse, whether recent or historical, remains very difficult to prosecute, with low rates of reporting, high rates of attrition, and low rates of prosecution across jurisdictions (e.g. Connolly & Don Read, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2006; Kelly, Lovett, & Regan, 2005). In order to establish the narrative that innocent men have been the victims of an epidemic of false allegations, “moral panic” advocates have misrepresented child protection interventions and legal cases in significant ways (R. Cheit, 2014; Kitzinger, 2004; Michael Salter, 2016). This has included championing the cause of convicted sex offenders despite overwhelming evidence of guilt (R. Cheit, 2014; R. E. Cheit, 2001; Olio & Cornell, 1998). Furthermore, characterisations of anti-abuse activism as driven by reactionary and prurient forces do not accord with social movement scholarship, which suggests that pro-survivor groups have advanced complex and constructive critiques of social, legal and psychological responses to child sexual abuse (Whittier, 2009).

There are, of course, important criminological insights to be gleaned from studying the excesses of public and legal responses to child sexual abuse. Harsh sentencing and treatment regimes for sex offenders, ethically problematic legislative measures such as offender registries and extended supervision orders, and the hypocrisies of media coverage have all been the subject of sustained critical comment. For instance, Grealy (2014) provides a fine-grained analysis of collective responses to high-profile Australian child sex offender Dennis Ferguson, whose post-release harassment from the mass media and the community triggered political intervention and drove the development of new legislation and approaches to sex offender management. However these highly visible and emotive mobilisations around child sexual abuse co-exist alongside entrenched inaction and silence, as well as a considerable bulwark

of resistance to interventions into families and institutions where sexual abuse is taking place.

It is clear that “panic” is an insufficient descriptor of social responses to child sexual abuse, and captures only the most visible tabloid responses to child sex offending. While the “moral panic” literature advances a view of society united in condemnation, the social and legal response to child sexual abuse remains uncertain and contradictory. Most abused children do not disclose at the time because it is unsafe to do so, and those who disclose are routinely disbelieved and left unprotected (Swingle et al., 2016). When child or adult survivors of sexual abuse disclose, they can face a hostile response from families or communities who rally in support of the alleged or convicted offender (e.g. Adcock, 2016; Salter 2017a). Daly (2014) offers a compelling explanation of polarised responses to sexual violence, suggesting that “a minimization of sex offending and victimization, on one hand, and a demonization of certain groups as ‘sex offenders’, on the other hand” are “mutually reinforcing” (p 378 – 379). Stereotypes of the “monstrous” child sex offender reinforce the division between child sexual abuse and normative forms of (masculine) sexuality, and offenders who “fit” this stereotype are demonized. However, since “most sex offending bears no relationship to the monstrous sex offender”, the majority of incidents of sexual abuse are overlooked by the media and public (Daly, 2014, p 379).

An over-reliance on moral panic theory can blind scholars to the power dynamics, vested interests and discursive struggles that shape public understanding and responses to child sexual abuse. In contrast, feminism and the school of left realism which has promoted engagement with the lived experience of crime and victimisation as well as its social construction and legal regulation (DeKeseredy, 2010). Situating child sexual abuse within the everyday world of gender relations and inequality, feminist scholars conceptualised child sexual abuse as an expression of male power comparable to adult sexual assault and domestic violence (Kelly, 1988; Rush, 1980). Smart’s (1991) pioneering work on the challenges of prosecuting sexual violence paid particular attention to the specificities of children’s experiences in the criminal justice system. A number of key fracture points identified by Smart (1991) are still evident today, in particular:

a. The persistence of cultural and legal traditions that privilege accused men over children:

Smart (1991) makes the crucial point that the criminal justice system does not function as a child protection mechanism and indeed tends to further harm victimised children. Cultural myths that minimise the harms and prevalence of sexual abuse, diffuse perpetrator responsibility and promote stereotypes of both perpetrators and victims are widespread, and inhibit victim disclosure or the likelihood that a complaint will be taken seriously in court (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010).

b. The conflict between mental health and criminal justice approaches to child abuse:

Smart (1991) emphasised how recent shifts in mental health discourse in the 1980s attributed increased credibility to children’s disclosures of sexual abuse, which had the effect of bringing therapeutic work into direct conflict with the courts. Therapeutic practices that support children and adults to disclose abuse to professionals are at odds

with the criminal justice systems' demand for "uncontaminated" testimony and high burden of proof. A significant body of literature has exaggerated the likelihood that false sexual abuse complaints are being elicited in therapy, contributing to myths that false allegations are common (Brown, Schefflin, & Hammond, 1998).

c. The manipulation of criminal, civil and family law by child abusers

Absent a criminal conviction, Smart (1991) observed that fathers accused of sexual abuse frequently use other legal means to assert their parental rights to contact with their child and to demand compensation for criminal investigations. From the 1980s, lawyers and legal experts began to specialise in defending men against criminal allegations of sexual abuse while ensuring access to their children through the family courts, and using civil law to sue therapists, welfare agencies and police in sex abuse cases. Attempts to sue therapists specialising in child sexual abuse during the 1990s had a chilling effect on the provision of mental health care to this population, and gave "abusers a weapon to use against their victim" (Bowman & Mertz, 1996, p. 551). The manipulation of family law by men accused of domestic violence and sexual abuse remains a major problem that has been neglected in criminology (Dragiewicz, 2014).

Smart's (1999) historical research on early twentieth-century English campaigns to criminalise sexual activity with children troubled the oft-repeated claim that child sexual abuse had been "discovered" in the 1980s. Indeed, archival analyses of legal proceedings and media coverage demonstrate that sexual offences against children have frequently been prosecuted in previous centuries and have been the recurrent focus of media attention (e.g. Featherstone and Kaladelfos 2016; Finnane & Smaal, 2016). However, historical scholarship demonstrates that public acknowledgement and recognition of child sexual abuse is not an inherent good per se, since it has frequently been attended by the construction of sexual abuse complainants as liars seeking financial or some other compensation. This work resonates in the contemporary context where, in the wake of ongoing abuse scandals, stereotypes of abuse victims as vengeful fantasists or blackmailers have been resurgent in some quarters. Criminologists have formed alliances with advocacy networks of people accused of sexual abuse to promote theories of "wrongful allegations" (e.g. Hoyle, Speechley, & Burnett, 2016). The labelling of a complaint of sexual abuse as "wrongful" or "false" if it is not substantiated by investigation, if the defendant is found not guilty, or a conviction overturned on appeal, is not a neutral or scientific act, but a highly partisan one within ongoing conflicts over the credibility of sexual abuse testimony, and the well-known challenges of prosecuting recent or historical child sexual abuse. The outsized role of criminal defence lawyers and academics who routinely act as paid defence witnesses as authors of "false" or "wrongful allegation" literature is indicative of ongoing conflicts of interest in sexual abuse debates that call for increased ethical scrutiny and critical awareness (Freyd & Quina, 2000). There is a need for more reflection on the potential complicity of critical scholarship in discourses of denial and victim-blaming (Bray, 2009).

Critical criminological theories of child sex offending

The previous section emphasises a clear divergence between feminist and post-Foucauldian views of sexuality and hence child sexual abuse. Foucauldian theory has

generally repudiated the view that “pleasures can and should be open to political and moral evaluation and assessment”, since this “would simply increase the hegemony of dominant discourses” to intervene in everyday life (Alcoff, 1996, p. 111). In contrast to Foucault’s (1979) privileging of “bodies and pleasures” as an emancipatory sphere beyond political critique, feminist scholarship has emphasised the enmeshment of desire and sexual expression within systems of domination that includes the sexual subordination of children.² Feminist theories have observed the continuity between sexual abuse in childhood and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual harassment and rape (Kelly, 1988) as well as the embeddedness of sexual abuse within patriarchal family and institutional arrangements (Herman, 1981).

A point of overlap between these two approaches is evident in their shared scepticism regarding the psychiatric and social construction of “paedophilia”. The psychiatric diagnostic category of “pedophilic disorder” describes someone who experiences, for at least six months, “recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children (generally age 13 years or younger)” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). While originally formulated as a clinical diagnosis, “paedophilia” entered public parlance where it is often used as a descriptor and explanation of all acts of child sexual abuse. Scholars influenced by Foucault have paid particular attention to paedophilia as a hegemonic form of expert knowledge and discursive categorization, and also as a stigmatizing label for a sexual orientation and practice (Alcoff, 1996). Feminist scholars have also voiced concern over the use of “paedophilia” to pathologise child sex offending, although from a somewhat different perspective. They have argued that notions of paedophilia have been over-generalised in ways that “ignores the relevance of gendered power relations in sexual violence” and silences, perhaps intentionally, feminist insights into child sexual abuse (Cowburn & Dominelli, 2001). Kelly (1996) was an early critic of this shift:

Paedophilia returns us to the medical and individualised explanations which we have spent so much time and energy attempting to deconstruct and challenge. Rather than sexual abuse demanding that we look critically at the social construction of masculinity, male sexuality and the family, the safer terrain of ‘abnormality’ beckons (p 45).

It may well be the case that some individuals meet the diagnostic criteria for paedophilia, however the evidence suggests that the majority of men who sexually offend against children do not (Cossins 2000). The prevalence of child sexual abuse cannot, therefore, be explained in terms of the psychopathology of individual offenders. Child sex offenders are a heterogeneous group with a range of motivations, however, critical analysis suggests a strong link between child sex offending and the socially shaped formation of masculine sexuality. Since the early 1990s, critical criminologists have made important contributions to understanding the causes and motivations behind child sex offending. A key dilemma addressed by this scholarship has been the predominance of male child sex offenders, a fact that has been largely

² Many feminist criminologists and scholars have found Foucauldian theory useful in their studies on sexual violence while recognising his disinterest in gendered power (e.g. Howe, 2009). A more detailed analysis of the divergences and similarities in feminist and Foucauldian analyses of sexuality is beyond the scope of this chapter, but is addressed more fully by Tomsen and Salter (2017).

ignored by gender-neutral explanations focused on paedophilia and mental illness. As the following section will show, explaining child sex offending requires a psychosocial perspective that acknowledges why most offenders are men, why the majority of victims are girls, and why various sites of male power (such as the family, churches and other institutions) are so conducive to the abuse of children.

An article by Liddle (1993) provided the foundation for subsequent critical interventions into the study of child sexual abuse. Liddle (1993) largely accepted the radical feminist position that sexual violence against children was a (predominantly) masculine practice linked to gender inequality. However, he rejected the proposition that men engaged in sexual violence with the specific intention of “buttressing” an “oppressive gender structure” (Liddle 1993: 190). Drawing on Connell’s (1987) sociology of masculinity, Liddle (1993) developed a psychosocial account of child sexual abuse as a product of the social structures by which masculine sexuality is ordered and desire is focused. He argued that the gendered and sexual structures of contemporary society prioritised sexual expression and dominance as over-riding indices of masculine identity and accomplishment. Such idealised masculine norms produce anxieties over dependency, adequacy and power in men, and encourage the resolution of those anxieties through sexual release. While this tension most often resolves in the production of an aggressive and compulsory heterosexuality, it also incites the desire to abuse children in some men, and creates the contexts in which this might take place. In short, children become objects of arousal amongst some men at the intersection of desire, vulnerability and powerlessness, an unsettling but normative feature of masculine sexual formation (Liddle, 1993).

A focus on male sexual embodiment in child sexual abuse continued with Messerschmidt’s (1999; 2000) life history interviews with adolescent sex offenders, which framed sexual violence as a way of ‘doing masculinity’. Messerschmidt’s interview research suggested that sexual offending often occurs against a backdrop of anxiety about masculine status and honour, in which sexually dominating and manipulating younger children provides a sense of “masculine accomplishment”. In the familial and peer environments of his interviewees, masculinity was constructed in terms of “male power, control of others, and the use of physical violence to solve interpersonal problems” as well as fears over sexual proficiency (Messerschmidt 2000: 297). Bodily and sexual performances are integral to meeting these gendered expectations, constituting sexual violence against children as a potential albeit deviant pathway to masculine identification. This is particularly the case for those boys and men whose own experiences of humiliation and victimisation produced an intolerance of mutuality and vulnerability in relationships. Sexually victimising younger children enabled them to position themselves as dominating, rather than dominated, and seek sexual release without risk of rejection or embarrassment.

The argument that child sexual abuse shares both congruent and contradictory elements with normative masculine sexuality is continued by Cossins (2000). Her ‘power/powerlessness theory’ of child sex offending suggests that male sexuality forms in the context of fluid gendered hierarchies, in which the social fact of male dominance is complicated by masculine experiences of peer harassment, insecurity and feelings of inadequacy. In conditions of gender inequality, boys and men are frequently subject to attempts at subordination by others in their collective efforts to live up to idealised and ultimately unachievable masculine ideals. The perpetual threat

of humiliation and inadequacy plays a crucial role in the aetiology of child sex offending. Cossins (2000) argues that sexual abuse is a practice through which boys and men can accrue experiences of sexualised domination, in accordance with hegemonic sexual scripts, without the risks of rejection or shame that attend consensual adult sexual relations.

An over-reliance on socio-structural explanations for male violence have been criticised for conflating normative masculinity with deviant conduct that is reviled precisely because it is considered “unmasculine” (Jefferson, 2002). In bridging the gap between the structural and the psychological, I have argued that psychoanalytic theory is important in understanding how hegemonic norms of masculinity are internalised and reworked via transgressive acts such as child sex offending (Salter, 2013). Drawing on feminist theories of intersubjectivity, I suggest that experiences of interpersonal dependency and vulnerability, so integral to intimate and sexual relations, can become intolerable for boys and men in contexts where masculinity is defined by autonomy and sexual self-assertion. Sexual violence thus becomes a means by which boys and men can “ward off the intolerable tensions that are produced in the intersubjective process” (Salter, 2013: 21). Children can be constituted as sexual objects for those whose gendered subjectivity is orientated around the avoidance of mutuality (and therefore vulnerability) in sexual relations and towards the control and manipulation of the less powerful. Such propensities are formed with, and intensified by, social and institutional structures of masculine domination where prerogatives of control and power are readily instrumentalised for the purposes of sexual domination (Salter, 2017a). Indeed, child sexual abuse takes on the organisational qualities of the contexts in which it takes shape, reinforcing gendered, classed and other inequalities and dynamics (Salter, 2017a).

Future areas of research and theorizing

Critical criminological scholarship has developed a robust and practical theoretical account of child sexual abuse. As the knowledge base surrounding child sexual abuse continues to unfold, it is important that critical scholarship is responsive and engaged as new (or suppressed) dimensions of the phenomena come to light. This section flags four areas that would benefit from ongoing critical criminological examination, and calls for increased attention to the diversity of sexual abuse including its severe forms, more sophisticated theorizing of the contexts and dynamics of abuse and responses to it, and finally further interrogation of justice mechanisms and processes.

a. Accounting for the full spectrum of child sexual abuse

Critical scholarship on child sexual abuse has often focused on “boundary cases” that illustrate the contradictions of criminalization and public morality. For instance, the emergence of consensual nude or sexual image-making by minor teenagers (often called “sexting”) has prompted calls for law reform, since such acts may be criminalized under child pornography legislation (Salter, Crofts, & Lee, 2013). Public concern over the purported sexualisation of children in artwork and advertising has also been subject to critical analysis (Faulkner, 2011). However, the majority of instances of child sexual abuse are not so morally or legally ambiguous. Indeed, the global demand for child abuse images and video (also known as ‘child pornography’) provides evidence of widespread sexual interest in children that includes their rape

and torture. For instance, a content analysis of 43,762 child abuse images and videos reported to Canadian authorities from 2008 – 2015 found that almost fifty percent of children in the images appeared to be under eight years old and a further 27% appeared to be between eight and eleven years old (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2016, p. 14). Approximately 48% involved explicit sexual activity and assaults, with 2.23% involving extreme abuse such as bestiality, bondage, the use of weapons, and defecation/urination (p 16). The younger the victim, the more likely they were to be subject to more serious abuse and violation (p 17).

This underscores the point made in the previous section that the age differential in child sexual abuse is linked to the desire for domination and control, albeit one that can extend to acts of outright sadism. Feminist scholarship provides a useful link between child sexual abuse, the desire for control and the infliction of pain, particularly in relation to incest. Kelly (1988) observes that “incest is usually thought of as a particular form of child sexual abuse but the actual dynamics of incestuous abuse are, in some ways, more like those in domestic violence”. This is well illustrated in Herman’s (1981) pioneering research, which found that sexually abused daughters are routinely conscripted by their fathers into domestic servitude, where they are expected to meet his needs in a range of ways and their lives outside the home are heavily prescribed. Subsequent research by Goodwin (1993) into the sadistic abuse of children identified a cohort of sexual abusers, frequently fathers, for whom sexual arousal was synonymous with feelings of control over the child, exemplified by acts of torture. I’ve found a similar dynamic at work in my interviews with survivors of prolonged incest and organised abuse. For instance, in one interview, “Grace” (a pseudonym) described being sexually abused by her father from childhood into her mid-20s (Salter, 2013a). She recounted how her father’s obsessive need to control her life, and shape both her subjectivity and sexuality, prompted him to move her family from the city to an isolated country compound. Once there, he worked methodically to alienate her from her mother and siblings and limit her contact with the outside world to ensure that his sexual abuse of her could not be interrupted or detected for two decades. He continued abusing her until her mid-20s. The prolonged incestuous abuse of girls into adulthood is a largely overlooked but disturbing form of sexual abuse (Middleton, 2013; Salter, 2017c).

Fathers engaged in persistent and long-term incest are frequently networked with other offenders to whom they make their child/ren available on quid-pro-quo or commercial basis (Middleton, 2013; Salter, 2013b). In such cases, sexual abuse is structured and facilitated by larger illicit markets. Indeed, offending fathers and abusive families are major sites for the manufacture of child abuse material and child sexual exploitation more generally. A recent survey of 128 survivors of child abuse imagery found that a parent was the single or primary abuser in 60% of cases (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2017). 52% of survivors identified as victims of organised abuse, in which multiple adults (most often a parent) conspired to sexually exploit them and others, including “possible involvement sadistic, torture-related and ritualistic abuse” (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2017). This research correlates with clinical and interview data emphasizing the overlap between incest, organised abuse and the manufacture of child abuse material (Itzin, 2001; Salter, 2013b; Salter & Richters, 2012). Ritual abuse, in which children are sexually abused in a ceremonial fashion, is a recurring feature of reports of organised abuse and the manufacture of child abuse material (Michael Salter, 2012; Salter, 2013b;

Scott, 2001). While allegations of ritualistic abuse have proven to be particularly controversial, clinicians have argued that ritual abuse serves an important role in maintaining child and adult victims of organized abuse in a state of compliance and fear (Schwartz, 2013). The impact on victims is catastrophic, resulting in traumatic and dissociative psychological disorders that have been poorly understood by criminologists (Sachs, 2015).

Despite accumulating evidence of serious child abuse, and a significant cohort of severely impacted victims and survivors, the role of gendered domination and illicit markets in child sexual abuse has been widely overlooked. An expanded exploration of the motives of sexual abuse perpetrators that encompasses control, as well as the accumulation of various forms of capital (whether economic or 'subcultural' in the context of abuse networks), is a logical and productive extension of existing critical criminological accounts of child sex offending, and can offer new insights into perpetrator, victim and survivor experiences.

b. Power and intersectionality in child sexual abuse

For critical criminologists, moving beyond the sexual to address an expanded repertoire of motives amongst child sexual offenders raises questions about the contexts and discourses in which such motives take shape. The chapter has previously emphasised how normative masculine expectations and gendered structures of power are entangled within the production of adult sexual desire and practice with children. However gender and age do not intersect in isolation from co-structuring systems of power such as capitalism and discourses of neoliberalism. Haug's (2001) insightful study of the notorious Belgian criminal Marc Dutroux suggests that certain aspects of child sexual abuse will remain beyond understanding without consideration of the instrumentalising, objectifying rationality of global capital. Dutroux was arrested in 1996 for the abduction of a teenaged girl, which triggered the discovery of a concealed dungeon in which, over a period of years, he had held a number of abducted teenaged girls and women. There is considerable evidence to indicate that Dutroux was paid to source victims to cater for a politically-connected network of abusers and sadists (Haug, 2001).

Haug (2001) observed how the attempts of the European media to brand Dutroux a 'paedophile' and 'pervert' ultimately failed to articulate the full scope and implications of his crimes. By assuming that Dutroux was motivated by sexual pathology rather than profit, journalists were unable to grasp that he was catering to a large and pre-existing market in the sexual abuse of children, structured much like other free markets. Indeed, Haug (2001) asserted that child sexual abuse is congruent with the underlying logics of neoliberalism and draws on its ordering principles:

the degradation of people to mere objects of desire and lust is no longer viewed as a structural problem of capitalist societies which, through the release of market forces and the letting-go of ethically based preventative measures designed to regulate market forces, has turned the whole world into a warehouse of raw materials for the benefit of investment-ready capital. Within this, the trade in human beings, child pornography and prostitution becomes a fertile ground where individual entrepreneurs as well as organized gangs may reap profits on a grand scale (p 76).

The reduction of the child to 'raw material' in the context of global capitalism is also noted in O'Connell-Davidson's (2005) work on children in the 'sex trade' of the Global North, where she argues that global inequalities and macro-economic conditions can position prostitution as the most viable form of income. She criticizes campaigns that focus on 'saving' children from prostitution in developing countries for their individualistic focus on the Western sex tourist as the source of the problem. While not disputing the wrongfulness of child sex tourism, O'Connell-Davidson (2005), like Haug (2001), suggest that an individualized focus on the deviant offender is obscuring the larger structural inequalities within which child sexual abuse and exploitation takes form. Militarization, imperialism and colonization have played a formative role in the development of child sexual exploitation in many parts of the globe, and these uncomfortable histories are erased in the focus on individual offenders rather than structural and historical contributors.

The role of class and social status in creating zones of impunity for child sexual offending is a recurrent feature of abuse scandals over the last twenty years. A watershed moment occurred in 2002, when media revelations about the sexual abuse of children by priests in a Boston diocese became one of the media stories of the decade, earning the journalists involved a Pulitzer Prize (Rezendes 2002). Across the world, revelations of systemic clergy sexual abuse, as well as the inaction and complicity of church officials, police and others, have foregrounded institutionalized power and masculine authority structures in enabling and covering up child sexual abuse (Keenan 2012). The role of social status and power in sexual abuse has also been evident in recent revelations of child sexual by various celebrity or 'VIP' offenders, notably Jimmy Savile and Rolf Harris in the UK, Jerry Sandusky and Jeffrey Epstein in the US, and Robert Hughes in Australia (Salter, 2014). At the level of the individual offender, these examples demonstrate how the power differentials that characterize child sexual abuse can take on very concrete forms for privileged offenders, who enjoy multiple points of influence, compliance and even complicity within institutions and authorities. However they also raise disconcerting questions about a subterranean tradition of sexually transgressive masculinity that is implicated in child sexual abuse and the power structures of liberal democracies, requiring further critical interrogation.

Race and ethnicity are also important factors in shaping how sexual abuse takes place, and the likely response of authorities (Whittier, 2015). For instance, a series of so-called 'sex grooming' scandals in the United Kingdom have brought to light the mass sexual exploitation of teenaged girls in a number of locales (Cockbain, 2013). The disinterest of state and police authorities in the safety of teenaged girls in institutional care has been prominent in a number of cases, where victims and advocates have found a range of agencies unresponsive to evidence of the sexual assault and prostitution of girls in care (Salter & Dagistanli, 2015). However the systemic factors that made the mass abuse of these children possible were overshadowed in public and political discourse by the religious and ethnic background of groups of perpetrators, some of whom were of Asian and Muslim heritage. My research with Dagistanli (Salter & Dagistanli, 2015) has emphasized how the debates over 'sex grooming' were framed by issues of migration and multiculturalism, while the protection of vulnerable children was second order issue. The ethnic status of the perpetrators had a significant role in how the allegations against them were interpreted, and linked to

pre-existing controversies and racist agitation by far-right groups. In contrast, similar allegations against white perpetrators have been overlooked or else cast as unbelievable and confabulated (Salter & Dagistanli, 2015). Research that is attuned to the gendered, classed and racial dynamics of sexual abuse and their contextual intersections may generate new insights into how sexual abuse can be prevented before it occurs.

c. Problematising collective responses to child sexual abuse

As discussed, much of the work of critical criminologists on child sexual abuse has been focused on discourse and its impact on law and public policy. Such analyses have been advanced, largely, via moral panic theory, which has generated a basic asymmetry in literature on the topic. While moral panic scholarship seeks contest and politicise collective responses to child sexual abuse, it typically advances a common sense and ‘depoliticised’ view of child sexual abuse (Bray, 2009). The occurrence of child sexual abuse is accepted as a ‘bare fact’ that is not interrogated in any depth, and moral panic discourse largely sidesteps the “messy political question” of what to do about sexually abused children and sexual offenders, casting many, if not most, interventions into sexual abuse as an over-reaction and intrusion into private life and personal choice (Bray, 2008 p 175). While delegitimising the political theorising of child sexual abuse, moral panic theorists cast *responses* to child sexual abuse as the only appropriate subject of critical theory (Bray, 2009). This asymmetry in critical criminological literature tends to reproduce a problematic form of liberalism that veils sexual relations within the ‘private’ sphere, and any harms that occur therein as ‘natural’ and beyond the reach of state intervention (Tomsen & Salter, 2017).

By framing child sexual abuse as an “apolitical” fact, moral panic theory is unable to adequately conceptualise its relationship with political discourse and public culture. Other variants of critical theory has proven to be more sensitised to the vested interests that determine the boundaries of public discourse and disallow subaltern perspectives and experiences from entering into representation and circulation. For instance, Fraser’s history of the public sphere emphasised how the dominance of bourgeois, white, heterosexual men had a determinative impact on what issues were included on the public agenda, and how those issues were framed and understood (Fraser, 1990). She uses domestic violence as an example of an issue that was thematised in the hegemonic public sphere as a ‘private’ issue until it was reformulated and forcibly placed on the public agenda by the women’s movement (Fraser, 1990). Likewise, the emergence of child sexual abuse to public awareness is primarily the result of feminist agitation. However the ongoing masculine dominance of the public sphere has been apparent in the contours of public debate on child sexual abuse. Research on attitudes to child sexual abuse finds a consistent gender divide, in which men as a group are less likely to see child sexual abuse as a serious issue, and are more likely to engage in victim-blaming (Smith, Fromuth, & Morris, 1998). The over-representation of men as journalists and editors has been reflected in their sceptical and at times hostile framing of child sexual abuse allegations, and the privileging of narratives of “false memories” and “moral panics” (Kitzinger, 2004).

As ‘old’ or ‘mass’ media fragments with the advent of the internet and social media, the power dynamics that have regulated the public sphere are changing with significant consequences for the social construction of child sexual abuse. For

instance, abuse survivors and experts have been able to use social media to directly contest media discourses of “moral panic” and “false memories”, forcing apologies and retractions from journalists in some cases (Michael Salter, 2017b). Social media has also provided a forum through which anti-abuse activism can take international forms, developing far-reaching critiques of the role of social status and power in sexual violence against children (M. Salter, 2017b). New media technologies have also been implicated in the promulgation of polarising gender stereotypes and hyper-sexual ‘scripts’ that shape children’s and young people’s sexualisation and agency in powerful ways (Salter, 2016). These technologies and the constructions of sexuality that circulate them are contributing to unwanted or coercive sexual interactions amongst young people, as well as technologically-facilitated forms of abuse (M. Salter, 2017b). As public culture and media technologies shift, it’s incumbent on critical criminologists to interrogate their impacts on young people, and practices and representations of sexual harm.

d. Improving justice responses

The pathway of child sexual abuse allegations into and through the criminal justice system is fraught for child and adult complainants. Victim-blaming stereotypes are frequently mobilised in the court process, media coverage and in the community against children or adults who report sexual abuse to the authorities, mirroring much of the shame and humiliation of the original crime. Herman (2005: 572 – 573) summarises this dynamic when she said:

Crimes of dominance have a ritualized element designed to isolate the victim and to degrade her in the eyes of others. The crime is intended to defile the victim, so that she will be publicly stigmatized and scorned should the crime be disclosed. It is this dishonoring of the victim that renders crimes of sexual and domestic violence so intractable and so impervious to the formal remedies of the law.

Any form of abuse disclosure is a fraught process, often triggering a crisis for the child or adult complainant, as well as for the accused and their families and communities. This crisis, and the investigation which follows, tends to disproportionately burden the complainant with informal pressures and formal requirements that, as they accumulate, can undermine the quality of their evidence, increase the likelihood they will pull out of the process, and lower the rate of prosecution. This arguably has a feedback effect insofar as child sex offending is rarely sanctioned, constituting a failure of deterrence may be contributing to high rates of sexual violence against children more generally.

Increased sensitivity the dynamics of abuse and the impact of investigations can have a positive effect on victims and court outcomes. For instance, Staller and Faller (2010) documented an American community-based protocol for the management of child sexual abuse cases that has increased rates of successful prosecution . The protocol included a rapid response to abuse disclosure, in which sexual abuse cases are investigated and prioritised immediately, with close cooperation between law enforcement and child protection. The thorough interviewing of the child victim on video tape provided an authoritative account of the child’s version of the facts and aimed to prevent any re-interviewing. When interviewing the alleged offender, police

would present the child's evidence and ask the offender to respond to the child's narrative of abuse. This practice resulted in offenders "co-constructing a legal narrative account of what happened that was integrated with the child's account" (Staller and Faller 2010: 10) from the outset of the investigation. This was distinct from the more common scenario, in which the accused offender developed their own competing narrative of what occurred, whereupon the two accounts are adjudicated in an adversarial fashion at trial. The effect of this is to further expose victims of sexual abuse to the denials, trivialisations and justifications of the offender. Encouraging the "co-construction" of testimony around the child's immediate recollection of events could forestall this eventuality.

While not all aspects of this particular protocol will be acceptable across jurisdictions, it is grounded in awareness of the explicit and implicit factors at work in sexual abuse investigations that tend to disempower the victim. Victims and their advocates have expressed frustration where they feel that there is a lack of effort to develop a rapport with child or adult victims to facilitate their evidence (Salter, 2011; Salter, 2013b; M. Salter, 2016b). Police representatives have highlighted the restrictions placed on abuse investigations and called for law reform in order to improve the gathering of evidence (Newbury, 2014). Research on specialization in sexual assault responses – particularly specialist police teams and crisis services that combine support with forensic evidence gathering and police liaison – finds that they improve the victim experience (Kathleen Daly & Bouhours, 2011). Specialist courts for child victim cases have reduced delay and increased guilty pleas, at least in some jurisdictions (Kathleen Daly & Bouhours, 2011). However, despite a range of measures designed to protect child witnesses to give evidence to the best of their ability, adversarial and traumatizing forms of cross-examination persist (Raitt, 2010). Adult complainants also report being retraumatised through the court process, where the lack of a contemporaneous complaint (or, at least, a complaint that was believed and acted upon by adults at the time) is frequently construed as evidence that they are lying (Shead, 2014). There is a clear need for further research into how criminal justice interventions can address and remedy the power imbalances that persist throughout police and court processes, and avoid reproducing those imbalances.

In recognition of the shortcomings of the criminal justice system, restorative justice and conferencing processes have been promoted by some scholars as potentially appropriate in the context of child sexual abuse. For instance, Daly and Wade (2017) have emphasised the potential utility of conferencing the case of sibling sexual violence, where perpetrators are often minors, and some 'restoration' of the relationship between perpetrator and victim would seem appropriate given their familial bond. However their analysis found that victims were typically too young to participate in the conference, and invalidating conduct from the perpetrator or other family members, and other kinds of problematic family dynamics were observed in the conference setting. Cossins (2008) questions whether restorative justice practitioners or processes can mediate the power dynamics inherent in child sexual abuse, typified by repeated violation and manipulation over time. Research with adult survivors of child sexual abuse supports Cossins' concerns. For instance, Julich (2006) found that adult survivors of child sexual abuse were sceptical about the prospect of restorative justice, due to their concern that the emotional dynamics and power imbalances of abuse would be re-enacted in conferencing. When offered, most survivors of clergy sexual abuse reject the prospect of 'meeting' with church

representatives since, 'far from being a way to 'process the trauma', such meetings carry significant risks of re-traumatisation' (Ellis & Ellis, 2014).

Recognition of the limitation of both criminal and restorative justice for child sexual abuse and sexual violence has prompted scholars to reflect on what justice means to victims. For example, McGlynn and Westmarland (2014) argue for a victim-centred and 'kaleidoscopic' vision of justice with multiple elements, including the principles of social and cultural change, prevention, voice, recognition, consequences, dignity and support. Daly (2017) has formulated a set of victims' justice 'interests', specifically: participation, voice, validation, vindication and offender accountability/taking responsibility. These principles provide broader ways of building and assessing justice processes according to the needs and wishes of victims of sexual violence. Invalidation and the denial of personal experience is a core feature of child sexual abuse (M. Salter, 2012) and hence it is no surprise that, when asked about their understanding of justice, abuse survivors emphasise the importance of telling their story in a public forum, and having their experiences of abuse and its impacts on them heard and affirmed (Herman, 2005; Jülich, 2006; McGlynn, Downes, & Westmarland, 2016). Even where victims pursue civil suits or compensation by other means, their primary motive is often for public validation for the harms they have suffered, rather than for financial gain (Kathleen Daly & Bouhours, 2011).

For abuse survivors, perpetrator accountability does not necessarily require a criminal conviction, but they often express a strong desire for the perpetrator (as well as complicit bystanders) to show remorse and bear some consequences for their actions (Judith Lewis Herman, 2005; Jülich, 2006; McGlynn, et al., 2016). Ideally for some survivors, this would catalyse some transformation of relationships that had been lost to abuse and its impacts, and the restoration of a sense of community. A sense of the collective restoration of the survivor's dignity and worth is crucial to their understanding of substantive justice (Judith Lewis Herman, 2005). However Herman (2005) provides a note of caution here, observing that the supportive "community" that survivors seek does not exist, and can only be created through ongoing political organising and activism. Indeed, many of the expressed desires of survivors of sexual abuse and violence arguably outstrip any particular justice process or mechanism and instead constitute a wish for a more equitable and just society that can only be accomplished through political agitation and social transformation.

Conclusion

Child sexual abuse has presented something of a conundrum for critical criminology. It does not fit well into left idealist views of criminal offending as a form of resistance and rebellion. Concern about 'expert' discourse and state intervention, particularly in relation to sexuality and sexual life, has lent inquiries into sexual abuse a highly sceptical tone. The result is that critical criminologists have largely focused on interrogating the social and legal construction of child sexual abuse while failing to apply a critical lens to the practice itself. Nonetheless, this chapter has foregrounded influential work by a group of critical criminologists on the formation of abusive sexualities and practices linked to structures and discourses of masculinity, sexuality and age. Male psychosexual development within gendered family and peer hierarchies, with their contradictory gendered ideals and expectations, were a recurring theme in critical explanations for child sex offending.

The chapter foregrounded future areas of critical research and theorising that involves asking uncomfortable questions about the recurrence of child sexual abuse within contemporary social and economic contexts. This includes an expanded criminological vision that accommodates all forms of child sexual abuse, including its most extreme and traumatising manifestations. I've argued that this work should be informed by drawing on critical theories that situate child sexual abuse within localised, national and global power structures. Shifts in power relations and the media landscape have significant implications for the social construction of child sexual abuse, and attention should be paid to what is silenced, as well as what is said, in public discourses around child sexual abuse. The scale of the challenge that child sexual abuse presents to criminology is evident in its ongoing epidemic levels after thirty years of law and policy reform. This calls for the development of criminal justice and other interventions that address the dynamics of abuse and the needs and wishes of survivors. As Herman (2005) reminds us, this work cannot be accomplished without political engagement and critical thought, which critical criminologists are well positioned to provide.

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