

# **An Equal Portrayal?: British Media Representations of Male versus Female Child Sex Offenders.**

Dissertation submitted by Georgia Shearman in accordance with the requirements of the University of Huddersfield for the degree of BSc (Hons) Criminology with Law.

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## **Abstract**

The main aim of this research was to uncover if there were any differences in the way the British newspapers portray male and female child sex offenders. Specifically, the labels, language, discourses and narratives were analysed to uncover if and what differences there were in the portrayals. Additionally, the theory which best explained these differences in portrayals was researched, in relation to news theory such as Newsworthiness or feminist theory such as Male Gaze or Double Deviance. Consequently, the main theories drawn on for this research were Newsworthiness and the Ideal Victim and Ideal Offender concepts, along with feminist theories of Double Deviance, Male Gaze and the Chivalry theory.

The chosen methodological stance was qualitative, to understand why the offenders were presented the way there were by the media and subsequently, what theory best explained this portrayal. The sample consisted of three case studies of both male and female child sex offenders who had offended together. Five articles for each individual offender were collected, with a total sample of 24 articles. A content analysis was initially conducted to identify the labels the offenders were ascribed. Thematic analysis was the main analysis, where the language and discourses were explored in depth.

The main finding was there were little differences between the portrayals of male and female child sex offenders. The labels were largely similar, although, females were more likely to have labels of an evil nature compared to males. However, both offenders were labelled as perverts/paedophiles, which is contrary to previous research. The language surrounding the instigation of the offences, portrayed males as the instigators and females as willing participants in the sexual abuse. Excuses were also mentioned for both sexes however, the media did not present any mitigating narratives. Chivalry and Male Gaze theory were not found to be a theoretical explanation of the portrayals due to the lack of comments on the offenders' appearances and lack of gender differences. It was concluded that this change to an equal portrayal may show a change of societal views towards female sex offenders. However, future research should use single cases of male and female child sex offenders, as opposed to pairs of male and female child sex offenders who offend together, as it is likely this impacted on the results due to reporting structures as an offending pair.

## **Table of Contents**

<b><u>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</u></b>	<b><u>Page 7</u></b>
<u>Rationale for the study .....</u>	<u>Page 7</u>
<u>Aims and objectives .....</u>	<u>Page 8</u>
<u>Key terms and definitions.....</u>	<u>Page 8</u>
<u>Defining sexual offences.....</u>	<u>Page 8</u>
<u>Defining male and female.....</u>	<u>Page 9</u>
<u>Trends in statistics.....</u>	<u>Page 10</u>
<u>Structure of the thesis.....</u>	<u>Page 10</u>
<b><u>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</u></b>	<b><u>Page 12</u></b>
<u>Introduction .....</u>	<u>Page 12</u>
<u>Newsworthiness .....</u>	<u>Page 13</u>
<u>Doubly Deviant.....</u>	<u>Page 14</u>
<u>Chivalry.....</u>	<u>Page 17</u>
<u>Male Gaze.....</u>	<u>Page 18</u>
<u>Summary of literature .....</u>	<u>Page 19</u>
<b><u>Chapter 3: methodology .....</u></b>	<b><u>Page 21</u></b>
<u>Theoretical underpinnings.....</u>	<u>Page 21</u>
<u>Media document analysis .....</u>	<u>Page 22</u>
<u>Media sample.....</u>	<u>Page 22</u>
<u>Data retrieval .....</u>	<u>Page 23</u>
<u>Content analysis .....</u>	<u>Page 23</u>
<u>Thematic analysis .....</u>	<u>Page 24</u>
<u>Ethical considerations.....</u>	<u>Page 25</u>

<b>Chapter 4: Results and Discussion.....</b>	<b>Page 27</b>
Phase 1: content analysis .....	Page 27
Table 1.....	Page 27
Social labels .....	Page 28
Dehumanisation .....	Page 30
Medical/sexual pathologisation.....	Page 31
Instigator.....	Page 31
Potential for change.....	Page 31
Phase 2: Thematic analysis .....	Page 32
Negative portrayals of offenders .....	Page 32
Dehumanisation of offenders .....	Page 32
Sexual pathologisation of offenders .....	Page 33
Victim portrayal.....	Page 34
Taking responsibility.....	Page 35
Autonomy/instigator .....	Page 35
Excuses.....	Page 36
Remorse.....	Page 37
Discussion summary .....	Page 38
<b>Chapter 5: conclusions and implications.....</b>	<b>Page 39</b>
Implications and future directions.....	Page 40
<b>References .....</b>	<b>Page 41</b>
<b>Appendices list.....</b>	<b>Page 50</b>
Appendix A .....	Page 50
Synopsis of the case studies.....	Page 50

<u>Vanessa George and Colin Blanchard.....</u>	<u>Page 50</u>
<u>Keeli Burlingham and Colin Blanchard.....</u>	<u>Page 50</u>
<u>Gary and Heather Talbot.....</u>	<u>Page 50</u>
<u>Appendix B .....</u>	<u>Page 51</u>
<u>Table of selected headlines for news articles for each offender</u> <u>.....</u>	<u>Page 51</u>
<u>Appendix C.....</u>	<u>Page 55</u>
<u>Coding manual for the sex of the offender.....</u>	<u>Page 55</u>
<u>Table 2: Coding results sorted by case study.....</u>	<u>Page 55</u>
<u>Table 3: Coding results sorted by sex.....</u>	<u>Page 57</u>
<u>Appendix D.....</u>	<u>Page 59</u>
<u>Submitted and approved ethics form for the present research.....</u>	<u>Page 59</u>

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### Rationale for the study

There is a growing interest in studying female sex offenders and this may be because in previous law women could not legally rape, as the definition of rape only included vaginal penetration (Fisher and Pina, 2013). Therefore, females were the sole victims of rape. However, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 amended the definition of rape to include the penetration of the anus, mouth and vagina. Therefore, males could be victims too, however, the penetration must be by a penis. Therefore, these definitions are still gendered towards males being the perpetrators of the most serious forms of sexual assault and should be updated to show that females can commit sexual offences. These gendered definitions may reflect gender stereotypes in society, which present males as aggressive perpetrators and females as helpless victims (Bates et al, 2019). Feminists in the past supported this view by suggesting that rape was motivated by the male desire to hold power over females (Malamuth, 1996). However, in recent literature, male rape victims and female sex offenders are under-researched (Christensen, 2018; Graham, 2006). Therefore, future research should study sexual assault as a whole, not focussing on males as the sole perpetrators. Consequently, this research adopts this modern view by studying both male and female sex offenders in the media.

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, there is a gap in the current literature, as only one Australian study has compared male and female sex offenders' representations in the media (Landor and Eisenclas, 2012). In addition, no study has solely focused on the British media's representations of male and female child sex offenders. Therefore this research will add to the current findings.

Additionally, the media has a large impact on society when over sensationalising the dangers of usually male child sex offenders. This over sensationalisation creates anxiety (Galeste et al., 2012) or moral panics, where child sex offenders are portrayed as dangerous 'folk devils', and become feared in society (Cohen, 2011, p. xxvi). This results in fear and anger from the public (Zgoba, 2006). This is what happened regarding Sarah's law which was reported on the media's front pages and by the News

of the World encouraging the implementation of a sex offender register disclosure scheme (Jones and Newburn, 2013). This reinforces the power the media has in influencing legislation and society's views, hence the topic for this research.

### Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this research is to explore if there are any differences in the way the British newspapers portray male and female child sex offenders. This aim will be further explored by comparing representations of male and female child sex offenders to uncover if there are differences in the labels, language, discourses and narratives used. These findings will help reveal if these differences, found in the comparison, reflect media theory such as Newsworthiness or feminist theory such as Male Gaze or Double Deviancy theory.

1. Compare the British media representations between the reporting of male and female child sexual offenders to uncover if there are differences in:
  - a. Labels used,
  - b. Language used,
  - c. Discourses and narratives.
2. If the differences reflect:
  - a. Media theory (such as news values and news worthiness) and/or,
  - b. Feminist theory on representation of female offenders (such as via the Male Gaze and patriarchal consideration of females as controlled by male offenders).

### Key terms and definitions

#### *Defining Sexual Offences*

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 lists offences which, on conviction, result in being on the sex offender register in England and Wales. Child sex offences are also defined in this Act. Within this Act various offences include the issue of lack of consent as well



as the commission of direct harm. An example would be rape, which is committed when there is intentional penetration without a person's consent.

However, some critique the fact that sexual offences are identified based on consent, and suggest they are a morality issue instead (e.g. Carline, 2011; Devlin, 1965; Johnson, 2007). Devlin (1965) suggests incest is a moral issue, as the act is done in private, with no issue of consent or harm to anyone else but is still a crime as it is perceived as morally wrong. Similarly, before the Sexual Offences Act 1967 repealed the Sexual Offences Act 1956, homosexual activity was a criminal offence. The sexual acts between two men could have been consensual, however, was deemed a crime because society at the time did not construct homosexual activity as morally acceptable.

Additionally, some offences do not involve direct sexual harm, such as having indecent photographs (section 1 of Protection of Children Act 1978) or images (Coroners and Justice Act 2009, section 62) of children. These Acts include having or distributing images or pseudo images, which are images made by computer-graphics appearing to be a photograph (Protection of Children Act 1978 section 7, (7)). These must be pornographic. However, if the images are created via computer graphics and do not depict a real child, then no direct harm has been done to anyone (Ost, 2010). However, this may promote objectifying children and lead to more child sexual assault cases (Byberg, 2012). Additionally, some argue that child abuse imagery has merely moved to a virtual space as opposed to a real space, so the children are still victims of sexualisation (Jewkes and Wykes, 2012). Therefore, even though no direct harm may be inflicted, the law protects children who may become subject to inappropriate images and indirectly harmed.

### *Defining Male and Female*

When defining males and females in terms of biological sex, a female is someone whose reproductive organs solely produce female gametes, egg cells ("female", 2019). A male, therefore, is an individual whose reproductive organs produce male gametes ("Male", 2019). Sex is therefore biological and usually fixed (Friedman, 2011) however, there are surgeries which can change the sex of individuals (Griffiths, 2018). On the other hand, gender refers to the expression of masculine or feminine traits (Fausto-

sterling, 2012). These traits change over time and cultures (Fausto-sterling, 2012) showing they are culturally constructed (Oakley, 2015). Gender roles are learned through socialisation, boys are taught to be more independent and girls to be more social, therefore, they will adopt the stereotypical gender roles society expects of them (Bem, 1993; Lengua and Stormshak, 2000). Thus, the difference in treatment will impact on the gender roles expressed. Therefore, society constructs what is deemed 'masculine' and 'feminine'. However, in modern society, gender is said to be 'fluid', therefore, individuals can have gender identities that deviate from traditional masculine and feminine conceptions (Diamond, 2020). For this study, the case studies of offenders will be identified by their biological sex, male or female. However, the gender stereotypes will be drawn upon throughout the analysis as explanations of the difference in portrayal.

### *Trends in Statistics*

The official police statistics do not breakdown the number of male and female sex offenders in England and Wales, so using the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) helps gain a better insight to the prevalence. However, importantly, there is a dark figure of crime, as not all crimes are reported to the police and not all individuals participate in the CSEW ("Dark figure of crime", 2014; ONS, 2020a; Scurich and John, 2019). Therefore, it is unknown whether these official statistics are accurate. Despite this, the CSEW found 92% of perpetrators of child sexual abuse were males only, 4% male and female and 4% were females only (ONS, 2020b). This is similar to a meta-analysis conducted in twelve countries, which found 2.2% of sexual offences reported to the police were committed by female offenders (Cortoni et al., 2016). Therefore, although female sex offenders only make up a small amount of the sex offender demographic, they are still present, showing the need for research.

### Structure of the thesis

This dissertation will firstly discuss the relevant literature (Chapter 2) linked to this study: Newsworthiness, Double Deviant theory, Chivalry theory and Male Gaze.

Additional theoretical concepts will also be included such as Ideal Victim and Offenders and Membership Categorisation. Chapter 3 focusses on the methodology of the research and explaining the rationale behind the selected methods. It defines the underlying theoretical presumptions of the research, the sampling and data collection, followed by an explanation of the two methods utilised and the ethical considerations. Furthermore, Chapter 4 consists of the findings and discussions from the content analysis followed by the thematic analysis and a summary comparing them both. Finally, Chapter 5 is the conclusions and implications of the research. Here, the answers to the aims are presented with future research directions and an evaluation of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Recently, female sex offenders have become an area of interest for researchers. However, only a small number of contemporary studies have looked at the media's representation of sex offenders (Christensen, 2018; Hayes and Baker, 2014; Landor and Eisenclas, 2012). Additionally, none of these studies have solely focussed on the British media's portrayals of male and female sex offenders, as they have focussed on Australian media (Landor and Eisenclas, 2012) or a combination of Western countries (Christensen, 2018). Therefore demonstrating a gap in the research. Moreover, there are more reports of female sex offenders in the UK media compared to Australia, so the UK are perceived to recognise the risk of female sex offenders more (Hayes and Baker, 2014). Therefore, the findings in this research may contradict previous findings in Australian media.

Similarly, only one Australian study has compared male and female child sex offenders' representations in the media (Landor and Eisenclas, 2012). Whereas other studies have focused exclusively on female child sex offenders' portrayals (Christensen, 2018; Hayes and Baker, 2012). Therefore, showing limited comparative research. Studies have also analysed public comments found on online newspapers on male and female sex offenders, which found similar results to the media representations studies (Stutz, 2018; Zack et al., 2018). Consequently, the way the media report sex offenders impacts on societal opinion.

The results of the media's representation studies also vary. The most recent study suggests females are viewed negatively (Christensen, 2018). However, older studies suggest that females are sympathised with and mitigated for their crimes (Hayes and Baker, 2014; Landor and Eisenclas, 2012). Again, this indicates a need for a contemporary study in this area to explore the issues.

The rest of this chapter will discuss news values and Newsworthiness in media reporting and discuss how the 'Ideal Victim and Offender' consequently effect Newsworthiness. Followed by an explanation of the Double Deviancy theory and how some research contradicts this theory. Next will be an explanation of Membership

Categorisation in relation to the labels discussed in the Double Deviancy section. Finally, both the Chivalry theory and Male Gaze theory will be discussed as an explanation of mitigation or vilification by the media for female sex offenders.

### Newsworthiness

The media report issues if they decide they are Newsworthy enough. Newsworthiness is shaped by news values; these values determine which stories the media will publish (Greer, 2007, p.26). Some key news values are drama, action, immediacy, violence, celebrities and sex (Greer, 2007). Stories containing sex and violence are deemed highly Newsworthy and so are more likely to be reported on (Moore, 2014).

Another factor influencing the publication of sex crimes is the 'shock' factor (Greer, 2011, p. 55). The 'shock' factor contains elements of unusuality and is needed for a story to be on the front page of the newspaper (Greer, 2011, p.55). As females who commit serious crimes are automatically Newsworthy as they are "rare", this may create the 'shock' factor (Jewkes, 2004, p. 113). However, this 'rarity' may be due to the lack of research and understanding of female offenders (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Smart, 2013). Greer (2011) further suggests that where the victim is deemed innocent, such as a child victim, the news articles are purposely constructed to engender a 'shock' to the reader. Therefore, child sexual assault cases and female offenders enables the 'shock' factor, increasing the likelihood that they are reported.

This 'shock' factor created by reporting on child victims may be explained through the Ideal Victim concept. The 'ideal victim' is defined as an individual or group of people who, when experiencing a crime, are "given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim." (Christie, 1986, p.18). Christie (1986) lists which characteristics a victim must have to be constructed as 'ideal': weak or vulnerable, carrying out a respectable activity, could not be blamed for the act, the offender is able to be presented as big and bad and is unknown to the victim. Additionally the 'ideal victim' is perceived as non-threatening, powerless and is unable to stand up for themselves (Bosma et al., 2018). Children are 'ideal victims' (Greer, 2007), as they are young, perceived as the most vulnerable in society (Greer and McLaughlin, 2012) and have

a lack of power compared to an adult offender. If a story has an 'ideal victim', it will have more media attention than a 'non ideal victim' (Greer, 2007). Therefore, the media can sensationalise the vulnerable and ideal status of child victims to make an emotional and compelling story which will sell (Greer and McLaughlin, 2012). In return this will 'shock' the reader whilst also making them sympathetic towards the victim (Ring, 2018). An example of 'ideal victims' are Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman who were kidnapped and murdered by Ian Huntly. They were young girls, making them vulnerable and powerless, with outstanding school records and came from a middle-class family (Greer, 2017). This was compared with an adult who held a position of authority and power over them (as he worked at their school). This 'ideal' status resulted in mass media reports of the case, even international reports (Greer, 2017).

Consequently, this 'ideal' status will ensure that the offender is cast in a negative light, as the 'ideal victim' creates an 'ideal offender' (Christie, 1986). Therefore, having a young, vulnerable child victim in a sexual assault case will automatically construct the offender to be 'ideal', giving rise to a strongly negative portrayal. The 'ideal offender' is one who does not know the victim and is perceived as someone who creates anxiety, linking to moral panics (Christie, 1986). The 'ideal offender' is assumed to be male and strong (Donovan and Barnes, 2018). This might explain why male child sex offenders have received harsher portrayals in the media, compared to females (Landor and Eisenclas, 2012). This can be seen with the negative labels of "paedophile" and "pervert" for example for male sex offenders and labels of "accused" or "jailed" for female child sex offenders (Landor and Eisenclas, 2012, p.493). This shows that the 'ideal' status of an offender can affect how they are perceived and labelled in the media.

### Doubly Deviant

Female offenders, however, are not as easily portrayed as the 'ideal offender' compared to males, due to their stereotypical caring role (Marsh and Melville, 2009). They are, however, subject the "doubly deviant" portrayal (Lloyd as cited in Jewkes, 2004, p.111; Heidensohn, 2000, p.20). This is a feminist perspective where if a female commits a crime, not only do they deviate from the norms of society by

committing a crime, but they also deviate from the stereotypes of being a woman: maternal and naturally caring (Marsh and Melville, 2009). The media exaggerate this double deviation to portray females as evil or to highlight their sexuality (Heidensohn, 2000). Therefore, sexual crimes committed by females are perceived as incomprehensible and shocking due to this double deviation, whereas male offenders are merely perceived as “manly” (Jewkes, 2004; Messerschmidt, 2001, p.68). This explains why the media ascribe labels of “motherhood” or family status’ such as “wife” to female sex offenders, but not males, as it reinforces their “doubly deviant” status (Hayes and Baker 2014, p. 7; Heidensohn, 2000, p.20; Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012). Thus, traditional gender roles are still being reinforced and reflected through the media.

Consequently, this “doubly deviant” status may result in a harsher portrayal of female offenders in the media compared to males (Heidensohn, 2000, p.20). Christensen (2018, p. 182) and Hayes and Baker (2014) found such “evil” portrayals of female sex offenders in their research. Additionally, Hayes and Baker (2014) found female homosexuality was the ultimate betrayal of femininity, resulting in a sensationalised and demonised portrayal. Thus, supporting the Doubly Deviant theory. However, these studies only analysed female child sex offenders in the media, so there is no direct comparison against male sex offenders. Nevertheless, these are the most contemporary findings on media representations on female sex offenders. They are also contradictory findings compared to previous research, which may suggest a change in attitudes towards female sex offenders in the media.

Alternatively, Landor and Eisenchlas (2012) found the seriousness of female child sexual abuse was downplayed compared to male sexual abuse. This is seen where the terms used to describe the relationship between the female offender and the child were “lover”, “affair” and “the couple” (Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012, p. 495). Thus, despite committing sexual crimes, female offenders’ behaviour is stereotypically reinforced as the carer through the societal assumptions of behaviour, whilst males are labelled as “perverts” (Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012, p.493). Additionally, comments on news articles even suggested the victims were to blame: “this woman did nothing to you that you didn’t ask for” and accusing the victim of ruining the teacher’s life (Zack et al., 2018, p. 70, 71). However, where the perpetrator was male, the victims were described as powerless, “victims” or “sexual playthings” (Landor and

Eisenchlas, 2012, p. 495). It was also found that female child sex offenders' actions were often excused by menopause, vulnerability, "unhappy marriages", or "personal circumstances" (Hayes and Baker, 2014, p.6; Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012). Alternatively, there were no excuses made for male child sex offenders (Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012). Therefore, male child sex offenders are given a harsher portrayal in the media, which contradicts contemporary research findings and the Double Deviancy theory.

Linked to the labels of 'housemother' and 'wife' (Hayes and Baker 2014, p. 7) is the Membership Categorisation theory. The original work on Membership Categorisation was concerned with fixed categories or labels such as mother, wife or child (Leudar et al., 2004), which is relevant to the categories or labels ascribed by the newspapers in the present research (aim 1a). Categorisation studies explore how categories are ascribed in natural talk and analyse inferences behind what is said or written (Lepper, 2000). 'Category bound activities' are action words linking people and objects, and nouns are membership categories or parties in the narratives (Lepper, 2000). So the membership categories are words or phrases used to define a person, for example, 'mommy', this membership category shows she is a mum and has children (Lepper, 2000). These categories and the categorisation process creates a frame of reference which the actions and specific activities can be interpreted against (Stokoe, 2003). An example would be for the 'mommy' category, the woman is regarded as nurturing, gentle and looks after the children. Therefore, with a label or category ascribed to a person, comes values and implied characteristics of expected behaviours.

The media can put unexpected combinations together, such as 'mother' and 'child sex offender' in the headline, which creates a juxtaposition, as along with the 'mother' label comes an expectation of values, mentioned above (Stokoe, 2003). Additionally, the label or categorisation of 'child sex offender' has the complete opposite set of values to the 'mother' category, such as a child predator, manipulative, or dangerous (de Motte and Mutale, 2019). Therefore, there are complete opposite value sets next to each other, creating a juxtaposition. Due to the inappropriate activities of the 'mother' (i.e. not following the values), moral assessments and judgements can be made (Stokoe, 2003). This may explain why the media choose labels such as 'mother', since



it reinforces the “doubly deviant” status, by emphasising the deviation from the category of ‘woman’ and ‘mother’ (de Motte and Mutale, 2019; Heidensohn, 2000, p.20). This juxtaposition of categories may also make the stories more Newsworthy or ‘shocking’, by having an element of unusuality, as females are not usually associated with child sex offending due to their nurturing nature (Greer, 2007, 2011). Overall, Membership Categorisation is an important theory, as it can explain the use of labels used in the media.

### Chivalry

Excusing and mitigating crimes committed by female offenders may be explained through Chivalry, as proposed by Pollak (1950 as cited in Grabe et al., 2006, p. 139). It was suggested that the criminal justice system, which is mainly made up of men, view females as weak and maternal. Therefore, they need to be protected, by being given more lenient treatments compared to males (Embry and Lyons, 2012). However, the number of female court judges in the judiciary has risen to 32% in 2020 (MOJ, 2020), showing there are more female judges now compared to when Pollak wrote his theory, demonstrating it is outdated. However, males still make up most of the population of judges, suggesting in most cases, the Chivalry theory may be relevant.

However, if a female commits a masculine crime such as sexual or violent offences, they are not rewarded with chivalry (due to being “doubly deviant”) and are punished more severely (Heidensohn, 2000, p.20; Franklin and Fearn, 2008; Visher, 1983). However, research on female child sex offenders found chivalrous portrayals in the media such as being labelled as “accused” or “jailed” rather than “pervert or “paedophile” like the male sex offenders (Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012, p.493). This may be explained through female stereotypes, where if females conform to being gentle and unconditional nurturers, dependant on males, subordinate to men, as well as being young and slim (Bradley, 2013; Grabe et al., 2006; Guendouzi, 2004), they are rewarded with such chivalry, despite the nature of their crimes (Jewkes, 2004; Kennedy, 2005). However, females who do not conform and commit a masculine crime may be vilified, so labelled as “evil”, thus explaining the difference in portrayal of female sex offenders (Christensen, 2018, p182). However, gender roles are

changing in society, as the division of housework is less gendered and the laws are changing to criminalise females who commit sexual assault (Sayer, 2010). Therefore, emphasising Chivalry theory is outdated. Additionally, feminists argue that females play a less active role in crimes and this is the reason for the lesser sentence or lighter treatment (Kennedy, 2005). However, this may still be a theoretical reason for why female sex offenders are not represented the same way as males.

### Male gaze

Similarly, another explanation of mitigating females for their crimes (but sometimes vilifying) may be the Male Gaze (Mulvey, 1989). Here, a feminist view, women are the central focus of the media, displayed as sexual objects based on their appearance for the benefit of males (Mulvey, 1989). This highlights the gendered power dynamics in a patriarchal society, as males have the power, they control the representations of females in the media, so can sexualise them for their purposes, as they are the bearers of the “look” (Mulvey 1989; Riley et al., 2016). Therefore, female sex offenders may often have a more lenient and mitigating undertone in the media due to their physical appearance being focused on more than the actual crime.

Since females’ appearances are the subject of the Male Gaze, they should be what men associate with being attractive: young, slim and blonde, otherwise, they are belittled or ridiculed (Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Therefore, like Chivalry theory, females must adhere to these features. In the case of Vanessa George, a child sex offender, the media emphasised her weight and this did not satisfy the Male Gaze. Instead, contradicted the aesthetic of a woman by not being slim (Barlow and Lynes, 2015). Subsequently it resulted in her portrayal as a “monster”, linking with Double Deviancy theory (Barlow and Lynes, 2015). Therefore, the females who do not fit feminine stereotypes may suffer a harsher portrayal in the media than those who do, which may explain the debate in the current literature on how some females are portrayed as “evil” and others as “accused” (Christensen, 2018, p.182; Landor and Eisenclas, 2012, p.493). However, the theory is said to be “male centric” by focussing on how and why the males view females in media, thus ignoring the view of females (Riley et al., 2016, p. 98).

The Male Gaze is found in research into violent female offenders' portrayal in the media. Collins (2014) found that female robbers were sexualised and labelled as "a pair of bombshell bandits", (p. 305), with reference to "fuchsia lips" (p. 10), with no reference to males' appearances. However, this finding was about a violent robbery, not a sex offence. Alternatively, a media analysis found that if a female child sex offender does adhere to female stereotypes, the offence was presented as a one-off deviant act, showing a less harsh representation compared to Vanessa George who did not fit the stereotype (Mickell, 2019). Additionally, a study conducted looking at public comments on the news outlet Huffington Post found female child sex offenders were sexualised (Zack et al., 2018). Some examples of the comments include, "she must be epic, she looks hot to me", "why are all these female perverts so good looking?" and the child victim being perceived as "lucky" to have been sexually involved with his teacher (Zack et al., 2018, p. 70). This shows female child sex offenders are subject to the Male Gaze in the media, despite the nature of their crime which reinforces stereotypical gender roles and portrays a blameless offender.

### Summary of literature

Firstly, the lack of comparative research between male and female child sex offenders will be addressed in this research, closing the gap in the literature. Additionally, from the above discussion, the labels, specifically family labels, the media ascribe male and female child sex offenders can impact on the overall representation, either in relation to Double Deviancy, Newsworthiness or Membership Categorisation. Additionally, the language used to describe the sex offenders' appearances or their actions, such as "evil" or "hefty", can also impact on their portrayal, explained through Doubly Deviant theory, Membership Categorisation, Chivalry theory or Male Gaze theory. Therefore, the labels and language the media use will be further researched (aims 1a and 1b). Also, previous research found mitigation and excuses for female but not male sex offenders, hence an aim to further investigate the narratives of the newspaper articles (aim 1c). Finally, the theory which best explains the differences in the representations will be concluded from the comparative analysis (aim 2). Overall, the main findings

and theories related to the current literature have influenced what will be explored in the present study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the research and defines media documentary analysis. This is followed by an explanation of which case studies of male and female child sex offenders will be used in the study and why. This is followed by outlining the process of collecting articles on such offenders. Next, conducting content analysis will be explained followed by an explanation of thematic analysis. Finally, the ethics of this research will be discussed.

#### **Theoretical underpinnings**

This research takes the constructivist ontological approach, as the researcher believes knowledge and reality are constructed by individuals and this cannot be scientifically measured (Tracy, 2013). Consequently, the epistemological stance is interpretivist, where the researcher explores and analyses the social world from the perspective of the participant (newspaper article/author) and aims to uncover the interpretations and meanings from within the articles (Snape and Spencer, 2003; Walliman, 2006). Therefore, the researcher will explore the way the media portray male and female sex offenders by analysing the labels, language and narratives, thus answering aim 1. This analysis will help the researcher to understand the meanings behind such portrayals, consequently answering aim 2, in deciding which theory best explains such portrayals. These interpretations will be subjective, as the researcher is subject to interactions in the social world themselves (Walliman, 2006). Finally, qualitative research methods (content and thematic analysis) will be utilised as they focus on the meanings attached to the language and words written by the newspaper authors, thus answering aims 1 and 2 (Schutt, 2012). Additionally, as language in the social world “actively shapes and moulds reality” (Frowe, 2001, p. 185), this makes the media portrayals an important area to research, as it can shape the public’s views, which could be inaccurate. Qualitative research often uses smaller samples due to the depth the researchers analyse, meaning the results cannot always be generalised to the wider population of male and female child sex offenders (Ruane, 2016). However, qualitative research aims to gain a deeper understanding, not generalisation.

### Media documentary analysis

Document analysis consists of the researcher exploring the context and meanings within the documents they analyse (Bowen, 2009). Media document analysis is a form of secondary analysis, as the documents already exist, they are not made by the researcher (Schutt, 2012). Therefore, content analysis as an initial analysis will be conducted on the newspapers, followed by an in-depth thematic analysis to uncover such meanings in the data.

### Media Sample

A purposive sample was utilised for this study. Therefore, the case studies were included in the research because they fit a criteria designed by the researcher and suits the purpose of the research (Etikan et al., 2015). As the main aim of this research is to compare the differences in reporting between male and female child sex offenders, opposite sex pairs of child sex offenders who offended together were selected. This enabled a matched pairs design, where certain features were controlled (Kraska and Neuman, 2008) such as the offences, the age, sex and vulnerability of the victims, social context and time of the offence. Therefore, these features were all as similar as possible, whilst still using real cases. This meant a comparison based on the sex of the offenders could be conducted if other features were matched as far as possible. Thus, answering aim 1. Three matched case studies were chosen:

1. Vanessa George and Colin Blanchard
2. Keeli Burlingham and Peter Taylor
3. Heather and Gary Talbot

These cases were selected because they are recent, from 2009-2020, therefore showing contemporary media representations. Specifically, the Vanessa George and Colin Blanchard case was selected because it was a high-profile case, ensuring a significant number of potential articles could be collected. Additionally, all cases were reported in Britain with British offenders, as this was the remit for the study, to focus on British media. For more information on the selected cases, see Appendix A.

### Data retrieval

The ProQuest International Newsstream search engine was used to collect the newspaper articles. The search terms were the full names of each offender, so a separate search was conducted for each individual offender. The selected time period for the search of each offender was the date the offence was first published in a newspaper article, so for Vanessa George, it was 10<sup>th</sup> June 2009. The filters selected were 'newspapers', 'full text', and the results were filtered oldest first. The inclusion criteria for this research was the article had to be a British article and had to have over 200 words to allow for substantial analysis. Alternately, the articles which were excluded were those which were centred around the victim or had little details about the offenders. Therefore, the articles had to mention the offenders' actions with details of the sexual offences and no duplicate articles were collected. The first five relevant and unique articles were then collected for each offender. A total of 24 articles were collected.

A disadvantage of using ProQuest was that not all newspapers from Britain are included, therefore for case study 3, only 4 results were collected. This resulted in a smaller sample (24) than intended (30). However, the case study perfectly fit the sample criteria, so was still included in the study. Despite this, the inclusion and exclusion criteria and set filters for collecting the data allows methodological replication of gathering the articles, upholding reliability (Ruane, 2016). For the titles of the newspaper articles collected see Appendix B.

### Content analysis

The first method of data analysis utilised was content analysis. This method is primarily qualitative (Kraska and Neuman, 2008). However, it allows codes and the numerical frequency in which they occur to be analysed, whilst still analysing the theoretical explanations for the reasons behind the representations (Kraska and Neuman, 2008; Spencer et al., 2003). The units of analysis are features of the newspapers that will be retrieved and recorded from the data, in this research, it was the labels used to describe male and female child sex offenders (Walliman, 2018). This analysis only

looked at labels that the offenders were given, not the descriptions in the text, as this was explored in the thematic analysis. A mix of *a priori* coding, where a set of codes was developed from the literature review in advance of analysis (Stelmer, 2000), and *a posteriori* coding, where codes are identified from the data (Tiferes et al., 2018), was used to develop a full set of codes. Manifest coding was also used (Neuman, 2013), where the number of times a label ascribed to an offender is counted. This method does lack validity as it does not consider the context around the words, however, is reliable, as the word is either used to label an offender or it is not, therefore, the research could be replicated and achieve the same results (Kraska and Neuman, 2008). A coding manual was produced for the sex of the offenders, which can be seen in Appendix C.

A pilot test was conducted where the researcher read through the sample of articles and ensured all labels ascribed to the sex offenders were selected to be coded (Neuman, 2013). The articles for each case study (the male and female co-offenders together) were combined and each article was coded in relation to both offenders, so 10 articles were analysed for Vanessa George, the same 10 were analysed for Colin Blanchard. This is because the offenders offended together, so all 10 articles mentioned both offenders, therefore, no labels were ignored. To see the tables of codes and the frequencies of each code, see Appendix C or Chapter 4. This method allowed the researcher to analyse and compare labels specifically, which may have gone unnoticed without this initial analysis (Kraska and Neuman, 2008). Thus answering aim 1a: to compare the representations between the reporting of male and female child sexual offenders to uncover if there are differences in the labels used. These findings were subsequently fed into the thematic analysis as pre-set themes to be analysed further.

### Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was the main analysis of this research. As stated above, the theoretical framework for this research is interpretivist, so looking at the meanings behind the representations of male and female child sex offenders to understand if the



portrayals are better explained through media or feminist theory (aim 2) (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) structure of thematic analysis was followed. Familiarisation was the first step, so careful reading and re-reading of the articles so the researcher had a complete understanding of all the data (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). This immersive reading allowed the researcher to interpret how the language, discourses and narratives were used to portray male and female child sex offenders in the sample, thus answering aims 1b and 1c. The next step was generating initial codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Codes are features of the data that the researcher views as important or interesting (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The initial codes from the content analysis were also applied to this stage: potential for change, social roles/jobs, pathologisation, dehumanisation, appearance and the instigators in the offending. However, open or inductive coding was also used, where codes were generated from the articles (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Deductive coding was also used where the codes were identified in relation to feminist theory or media theory and previous research, such as excuses or stereotypical descriptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Once the initial codes were identified, the researcher organised similar codes into broad overarching themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes were then refined by reading through all codes to judge if they form a plausible pattern, then judging the validity of individual themes, so determining if the themes accurately describe the meanings in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Finally, the themes were titled to accurately capture what they are about: negative portrayal of offenders and taking responsibility, thus upholding the validity of the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Kraska and Neuman, 2008; Nowell et al., 2017).

### Ethical considerations

As content and thematic analysis is unobtrusive by not involving any human participants, there are no ethical issues in respect to the participants (Schutt, 2012), following the British Society of Criminology statement of ethics (2015). Therefore, the

only harm to consider is that of the researcher (British Society of Criminology, 2015), as sexual offences can be a distressing subject. Therefore, if the researcher needs to, they should seek help from their supervisor. To see the approved ethics form, see Appendix D.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Discussion**

This chapter will first present a summary table of findings from the content analysis, categorised by the sex of the offenders. An explanation of points of interest will be discussed in order of the categories on the table. This is followed by the themes found from the thematic analysis and a discussion of the similarities and differences in the portrayal of male and female sex offenders. Finally, a summary of both sets of findings will be presented.

### **Phase 1: Content Analysis**

**Table 1:** A summary table showing the number of times each sex offender was labelled by each code. This table is split by sex. To see the full list of codes within each category, see Appendix C.

	Articles					
	Females			Males		
Codes	Vanessa George	Keeli Burlingham	Heather Talbot	Colin Blanchard	Peter Taylor	Gary Talbot
Category - Family	15	13	76	5	10	90
Total	104			105		
Category – social status/ personal information	22	9	15	12	9	22
Total	46			43		

<b>Othering - Dehumanisation</b>	6	7	5	5	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>			<b>14</b>		
<b>Othering – Medical/Sexual Pathologisation</b>	13	8	18	9	10	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>			<b>37</b>		
<b>Agency of Offending/ instigator</b>	34	10	9	38	10	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>			<b>57</b>		
<b>Potential for Change</b>	1		2			
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>			<b>0</b>		

Overall, the portrayals of male and female child sex offenders in the British media were largely similar. Despite the lack of difference, this is an interesting finding as it has not been found by previous research. Landor and Eisenclas (2012) found many differences between the representations of male and female sex offenders, therefore the present findings are contradictory. However, recent studies have highlighted this change in portrayal of female sex offenders (Christensen, 2018; Hayes and Baker, 2014), but these studies did not compare the representations to male sex offenders. Therefore, in answering aim 1a, comparing the labels ascribed to male and female sex offenders, there is very little difference. The small differences which were found from the content analysis are discussed below.

### *Social labels*

There are two sub themes discussed in this section, family labels and job titles. The first sub theme is family. Overall, males (105) and females (104) had a similar amount of family labels ascribed, such as husband/wife or partner/married. This is contradictory to previous Australian comparative findings by Landor and Eisenchlas (2012) where men had no family labels, but females did. Therefore, showing an equal portrayals in British media.

However, females were more likely to be labelled as a “mother” (7) and “woman” (8), compared to males as a “father” (2) or as “men” (2). Therefore supporting Landor and Eisenchlas’ (2012) and Hayes and Baker’s (2014) findings where female child sex offenders were more likely to have labels about “motherhood” and stereotypical nurturing roles. This may be explained through the Doubly Deviant theory (Heidensohn, 2000), where females are deviant twice because they deviate from their stereotypical caring nature as well as deviating from societal norms by committing a crime (Marsh and Melville, 2009). Consequently, labelling them as a “mother” emphasises their stereotypical caring role which they deviated from. However, as men also have family labels, this may suggest any person with a family title (husband/wife or father/mother) is expected to act in a certain way. Therefore, a deviation, such as sexual offending against children, contradicts that family title, in return making the story more shocking in relation to Newsworthiness (Greer, 2007, 2011). This could reflect the changing gender structures in society, where the division of housework is less gendered (Sayer, 2010). Therefore, men are also responsible for looking after children, it is not solely a woman’s job. Men in this category, were mostly referred to as “married/couple” (63), however, this was very similar compared to females (62).

Interestingly, if the sex offenders were married or in a relationship, this was mentioned more than those who were not together: “Depraved NI couple” (article 18), “Paedophile couple” (article 23). This potentially emphasises that the sexual behaviour is worse because there are two people engaging in it who are in a relationship, compared to strangers.

Similarly, the social status category in table 1 shows female sex offenders’ jobs (16) were used to label them more than males’ jobs (10). Specifically, Vanessa George was a nursery worker so her job title as a label (13) may be used to emphasise her

“doubly deviant” status (Heidensohn, 2000, p.20). Here, she is not only perceived as caring because of her sex, but also because of her job and on top of that is deviating from societal norms by committing a sexual crime (Marsh and Melville, 2009). However, this could also relate to the Newsworthy theory as it is unexpected and provides a ‘shock’ to the reader as they would not expect a nursery worker to sexually abuse children, due to their responsibility to care for them (Greer, 2007, 2011, p. 55). Thus, the story is more likely to sell. This also links to the Membership Categorisation theory, because “nursery worker” is mentioned alongside “paedophile” (Article 5), this creates a juxtaposition as the two labels have opposite sets of values attached, such as caring versus dangerous (Stokoe, 2003). Therefore, the terms together create a ‘shock’ to the reader, linking again to news theory (Greer, 2011, p.55). Nevertheless, the job role itself may be why Vanessa is given the label so frequently, not necessarily her sex, as if it were a male nursery worker, the results may have been the same, due to the caring responsibility. This is supported by Gary having the second highest frequency of job-related labels (6), as he was a postman and school bus driver. Therefore, questioning if another reason for using the job titles to label sex offenders is to emphasise their connectedness and social ties in society. Therefore, when they commit a crime it also enables a ‘shock’ as they deviate from that respected and connected position in society (Greer, 2011, p. 55).

### *Dehumanisation*

Female child sex offenders were slightly more likely to have dehumanisation labels (18) than male child sex offenders (14). This reinforces the Doubly Deviant theory (Heidensohn, 2000), where women are portrayed as worse perpetrators due to being deviant twice, compared to males who are deviant once. This gendered dehumanisation was seen in Keeli and Peter’s case, where she was referred to as an “Evil Woman” whilst he was a “Paedo” (Article 13). Here, because Keeli is a woman and seen as “doubly deviant”, she is labelled as evil, whereas Taylor is labelled as a paedo due to being deviant once (Heidensohn, 2000, p.20). Therefore, showing a slight difference in the labels given to male and female sex offenders. This supports Christensen’s (2018) and Hayes and Baker’s (2014) research where females were labelled as “evil” (p. 182, p. 5). Therefore supporting the new portrayal of female sex

offender as “evil” as opposed to merely “jailed” as previously found (Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012, p.493). However, both men (2) and women (3) were labelled as evil. Again, reinforcing the similarity in the representations.

#### *Medical/sexual pathologisation*

The “paedophile/pervert” labels for men and women were very similar, this is contradictory to previous research, where the term “paedophile” was referred to as a “male monopoly” (Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012, p.494). However, later research by Hayes and Baker (2014) and Christensen (2018) found female sex offenders to have labels of “pervert/paedophile”. Thus, the current finding may confirm changes in media reporting. However, as the cases in this research involved pairs of offenders, the labels were usually plural (“paedophiles”), so referring to both offenders at the same time. This may explain the similar portrayals.

#### *Instigator*

Most of the labels in this category showed equal participation in the abuse. The offenders were mainly referred to as “pair” for example, showing they were both participating in the abuse. This contradicts previous findings, where female accomplices to male sex offenders were cast as victims themselves (Hayes and Baker, 2014). However, no labels of “accomplice” were found for females, but interestingly, males were labelled as an “accomplice” (3). Therefore, this warrants further investigation in the thematic analysis. This labelling shows a new and equal portrayal of male and female child sex offenders in British media.

#### *Potential for change*

Finally, women were more likely to be labelled with reference to changing their behaviour (3) compared to males (0), however, this was a very small number of codes. Additionally, to uncover if Chivalry is an explanation for this finding, further thematic analysis has been carried out and is explained below.

## Phase 2: Thematic analysis

There was little mention of the appearances of any of the offenders, except one comment about Vanessa's "hefty figure" (Article 10). Additionally, there was little mention of the clothes worn by the offenders in court, although, when it was mentioned, a neutral statement was made, "Gary Talbot, wearing a cream jumper and blue jeans, and his wife, wearing a black jumper," (Article 15), "George, wearing a black T-shirt and black trousers" (Article 4). Therefore, neither the Male Gaze nor Chivalry applies in this research. However, all articles which mentioned criminal charges, mentioned the male's charges first. This may be because the male offenders were usually charged with more offences compared to the females. However, this was a consistent finding. After analysis there were two main themes: negative portrayal of offenders and taking responsibility.

### Negative portrayal of offenders

The first theme is the negative portrayal of offenders and their actions. Throughout all articles, offenders were portrayed negatively with the use of dehumanised words and labels and implying they were mentally ill. This theme contains three subsections: dehumanisation of offenders, sexual pathologisation and victim portrayal.

#### *Dehumanisation of offenders.*

This theme involves the language and labels the articles used to make offenders appear non-human or sub-human. The term "depraved" was mostly used to describe the sexual acts, however, it was used to describe couples and females, but never only males: "Depraved couple jailed" (Article 12) and "A depraved woman plotted to rape her best friend's five-year-old son" (Article 13). This is also seen with "monster": "Married monsters Gary and Heather Talbot" (Article 24). However, as both male and female offenders are mainly referred to at the same time, i.e. "married monsters", the dehumanisation is plural, showing both sexes dehumanised. Similarly, "predatory" was used to describe both males and females by a police officer, "They have absolutely no excuse for their grossly inappropriate and predatory behaviour towards



children” (Article 12). By using “predatory” and “monster”, it portrays the offender as an evil, non-human, thus portraying both male and female offenders negatively. Despite this, “beast” was only used to describe one male, Gary (Article 24). Therefore, although only a slight difference, there are gendered dehumanisation adjectives. Thus contributing to the existing literature, as previously, the portrayal of male and female sex offenders was very different (Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012). These findings support Christensen’s (2018) and Hayes and Baker’s (2014, p.5) findings, where females were referred to as depraved and “predatory”. Therefore, showing a similar portrayal for males and females.

### *Sexual Pathologisation.*

There were also descriptions of the offenders which made them appear mentally ill or them having something wrong with them. For most of the offenders, both them and their abuse were described as “sick”. In the case of Gary and Heather, they were referred to as “sickos” (Article 24), and a “sick couple” (Article 23). Therefore, the media portray both males and females as if they have something wrong with them which made them abuse children. The term “paedophile” was mostly used to describe both offenders together, “The victim of a paedophile couple...” (Article 24). The same can be said for “perverted”, with Blanchard and George being referred to as having “perverted minds” (Article 9) and both Talbots were also referred to as “a perverted Co Down couple” (Article 17). Therefore, in terms of sexual pathologisation, both male and female offender’s narratives are similar. This is contradictory to Landor and Eisenchlas’ (2012) findings, where paedophile and similar labels were specifically for male offenders. However, this supports more recent findings where females were labelled as paedophiles (Christensen, 2018; Hayes and Beker, 2014). However, in Hayes and Baker’s (2014, p. 5) study, females were explicitly referred to as “female paedophiles”, but in the present study, there was no such explicit distinction. This may be because the present study had pairs of male and female sex offenders, so an article concerning one female sex offender on their own may have different results. Despite this, as all offenders were portrayed to have something wrong with them, there may be a need for further interventions for convicted sex offenders.

*Victim portrayal*

Throughout all articles, the victims were portrayed as 'ideal', specifically due to their age and powerlessness. Considering Christie's (1986) Ideal Victim concept, this casts the offenders in a negative light. The victims were constantly referred to as "youngsters" (Article 1, 14) as well as "precious" by the judge (Article 14). Additionally, the judge referred to the victims of the Talbots as "extremely vulnerable and quite defenceless" (Article 22), thus reinforcing their ideal powerless status (Bosma et al., 2018). The victims were young and vulnerable when they were abused, therefore, the media state facts, but by doing this they create 'ideal victims', consequently demonising the offenders.

Additionally, there was a pattern of the offenders betraying the trust of the victims and their families. Vanessa was subject to this:

"In a grotesque betrayal of trust, George had been using her position to commit acts of sexual abuse on children in her charge, film them and then send the grossly indecent images via mobile telephone to two like-minded strangers she had befriended on the internet." (Article 10)

Moreover, a quote from Keeli's best friends said "it was the betrayal from Keeli that hurts the most." (Article 13). The betrayal was found to be from the females more than the male offenders. A reason for this may be because women are stereotypically the nurturers and naturally caring (Marsh and Melville, 2009). Therefore, a deviation from this role, as well as a deviation from the norms of society by not committing a crime, makes the female offenders "doubly deviant" (Heidensohn, 2000, p.20). Additionally, the females took on additional caring roles, such as babysitting or being a nursery worker, thus creating an even bigger betrayal. However, the Talbots also "betrayed the trust" (Article 18) of their victim. Therefore, trust is applied to both male and female offenders, but not solely males, showing a slight gender difference.

### Taking responsibility

The final theme is taking responsibility. This theme involves three subthemes: autonomy, excuses and remorse. This theme focusses on any mitigation in the articles or where offenders have taken responsibility for their actions and consequently if they have a potential to change their behaviour.

#### *Autonomy/instigator*

In most cases the males were presented as the instigator, as they were the “catalyst” (Article 6) or were “manipulative” (Article 13) towards the females which encouraged their participation. Additionally, it was Gary’s fantasy to abuse the children and Heather just “played along” (Article 18). However, the females were still willing participants, as the judge in the Keeli and Peter’s case points this out, ““(Keeli) went along willingly and enthusiastically not only to satisfy (Peter) but also (herself)”” (Article 13). Additionally, in the first case study both offenders ““shared quite willingly and freely images, texts, fantasies of the most serious level you could imagine.”” (Article 3). Therefore, all female offenders were presented as having full agency for their actions despite not being the instigators, thus supporting the feminist view that females do play a less active role in crimes, which explains why males are portrayed as the instigators (Kennedy, 2005).

This supports Christensen’s (2018) findings where males were controlling, however, there were also elements of “willingness” from the female offenders to inflicting the abuse (p. 184). Conversely, in Hayes and Baker’s research (2014), female accomplices to male sex offenders were portrayed as victims themselves. This was not the case in the present research. However, the cases were selected because the male and female sex offenders had committed similar offences, thus potentially explaining the lack of differing mitigation. However, in one case, Colin was labelled as an “accomplice” to Vanessa (Article 1). This may be because Vanessa was the one physically abusing the children, but it illustrates the power relations presented. Therefore, there is an overall difference in the language and narratives around the sex and the instigator of the sex abuse.

### *Excuses*

The media did present some excuses as to the offenders' behaviour. Vanessa's "mother Sylvia died of breast cancer" (Article 8) and "Family members speculated she could have been abused herself by babysitters" (Article 10). Additionally, Colin also claimed to have been "abused as a child" (10). Therefore, these unfortunate events may be used to explain their abusive behaviour, however, the media did not dwell on this, simply stated it, and moved on. Therefore, they did not seek to portray the offenders as having excuses for their behaviour. Research has found excuses, mitigations and tones of sympathy for female sex offenders but not males (Hayes and Baker, 2014; Landor and Eisenclas, 2012). However, this research found excuses for both offenders, but this was not used to mitigate their actions.

Additionally, minimising offences was particularly present in the third case study. Heather was portrayed as downplaying her role through quotes claiming she was "working or shopping when the toddler was abused" and "'she did not think it would go as far as it did'" (Article 18), despite dressing the toddler up for her husband. Therefore, the newspapers presented Heather's excuses next to the facts of the case which were contradictory. Thus, the articles were implying Heather did know what she was doing despite her denials or excuses, which resulted in a subtle sarcastic undertone. Therefore, she was successfully portrayed as not taking responsibility for her actions. Consequently, the way the media presented excuses and denials of responsibility of offenders did not mitigate them from their crimes. This is contradictory to previous findings of mitigation through excuses by Hayes and Baker (2014) and Landor and Eisenclas (2012). However, this is a new finding for the portrayal of both men and women, again demonstrating an equal portrayal.

Finally, in some cases the wording around the sentencing of offenders was different. An example is, Peter "was banged up for 15 years" and Keeli "was handed an 11-year sentence" (Article 11). "Banged" is a more aggressive word compared to "handed", thus potentially showing an element of subtle Chivalry, where the females are still slightly portrayed differently compared to males. However, this wording may have no real meaning and as most of the wording was similar such as "jailed" and "convicted" (Article 12), further suggests the lack of significant meaning.

### *Remorse*

The final subtheme is remorse. The portrayals of females showing remorse differs from that of males. Vanessa had a “deep look of sadness and regret on her face” (Article 3). However, this contrasts with the police officer suggesting he ““didn’t see any remorse”” (Article 3) and the fact she needs to “co-operate with police in identifying all the abuse victims in the photographs” (Article 3). Therefore, her actions do not match her portrayal of remorse. Additionally, although Heather “expressed her remorse for what had happened” she would only apologise for what Gary had ““done to (the victim),” whilst maintaining that “she hadn’t done anything”” (Article 19). Therefore, the females are portrayed as expressing their remorse, however, they are not willing to apologise or help the police, this questions whether their remorse is genuine.

In contrast, Gary’s “admissions allowed for the identification of his victim.... which he did out of a sense of shame and remorse, and to spare the victim having to give evidence” (Article 18). Therefore, the media portray Gary as taking responsibility for his actions. In Christensen’s (2018) research, female offenders were portrayed as showing emotion, but not showing remorse. This is like the present findings where Vanessa and Heather are said to be showing regret, however, their actions did not reflect this. Therefore, there is a slight sex difference where the females are presented as not showing remorse, whereas males are, although, this could be a result of a small sample size. This would be expected to be the opposite way around because females are stereotypically nurturing and caring (Marsh and Melville, 2009), but they are not portrayed this way, again making them “doubly deviant” (Heidensohn, 2000, p.20). Overall, this shows that discourses around females portray them as not always capable of expressing remorse and taking responsibility for their role in the sexual abuse compared to males, supporting Christensen’s (2018) research.

### Discussion Summary

The findings from the content and thematic analysis were similar as there were little differences in the labels, language and discourses of male and female offenders. Additionally, in both sets of findings, women were more likely to be labelled in a dehumanised way compared to males, however, males were still subject to dehumanised portrayals. This supports Christensen (2018) and Hayes and Baker's (2014) findings where female offenders were also portrayed as "evil". Moreover, the portrayal of the instigator was more heavily placed on the males in the thematic analysis, but the offenders were mostly labelled as equal in the content analysis. Christensen's (2018) research supports the former point with females as willing participants, but males as the instigators, however, Hayes and Baker (2014) and Landor and Eisenchlas (2012) found narratives of sympathy for female sex offenders as accomplices.

A new representation found from the thematic analysis was the presence of no mitigation for female sex offenders, thus contradicting Landor and Eisenchlas' (2012) and Hayes and Baker's (2014) research. However, in the thematic analysis, males were portrayed as more remorseful whereas in the content analysis, it was the females who were labelled as more remorseful. In sum, most of the labels, languages, narratives and discourses throughout the articles were similar with little difference between the sexes, thus answering aim 1. Additionally, the Doubly Deviant theory and Newsworthy theory were able to explain most findings in both analyses, however, there was no elements of Male Gaze or strong Chivalrous portrayals in this research.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and implications**

This research set out to explore the differences in male and female child sex offenders' portrayals in the British media (aim 1) and uncover how feminist and news theory, explained this portrayal (aim 2). This was conducted by analysing the labels, language, narratives and discourses in the articles sampled.

Analysis of the labels (aim 1a) showed very little difference between those ascribed to males compared to females. Most interestingly, males were given family labels by the media, which were not present in the first media comparison of male and female child sex offenders (Landor and Eisenchlas, 2012). Moreover, females were labelled in a more dehumanised way compared to males, although males were still subject to this portrayal. This supports Hayes and Baker's (2014) and Christensen's (2018) findings, where females were portrayed as predatory and evil. Finally, both males and females were labelled as perverts or paedophiles which contradicts Landor and Eisenchals' (2012) findings. Therefore showing a difference in modern portrayal.

In terms of the language used to describe male and female child sex offenders (aim 1b) both sexes were portrayed negatively in comparison to the descriptions of the victims, however, it was females who were perceived to have betrayed the trust of victims more than males. Additionally, the language surrounding the instigation of the offences portrayed males as the instigators and females as willing participants. This is supported by Christensen's (2018) research, however, not by Hayes and Baker's (2014), where women were portrayed as victims themselves.

Interestingly, for aim 1c, the discourses and narratives surrounding the portrayal of female offenders were not mitigating as found by Hayes and Baker (2014) and Landor and Eisenchlas (2012). Instead, the excuses put forward by the newspapers were stated, but not emphasised to excuse the offenders. However, excuses were present for male sex offenders which is also a new portrayal compared to Landor and Eisenchals' (2012) findings. Thus, showing new and equal representations.

Finally, in answering aim 2, the findings indicated Newsworthiness, Doubly Deviant theory, Ideal Victim concept and Membership Categorisation were able to reflect the findings and explain the presence of certain portrayals, i.e. family labels or victim portrayals. However, Chivalry and Male Gaze theory were not identified from the analysis, as the appearances were not mentioned significantly.

### Implications and future directions

The findings from this study may be different to those previously reported because of the sampling. Here, pairs of offenders were selected where their crimes were similar, to allow for an accurate comparison based on sex. However, this may have resulted in a more equal portrayal of the two offenders in the case studies, as they both committed very similar offences and it maximised reporting space to report them in the plural. Therefore, future research should focus on single male and female child sex offenders, but with similar offences committed, to see if the portrayal is still equal.

Additionally, alternate search engines could be used since ProQuest does not subscribe to all media outlets, which limited the sample size and the range of articles collected. Most articles collected were tabloid or local newspapers, therefore, the type of news outlet and portrayal could not be compared, which was originally aim 3. Therefore, future research could include the comparison of portrayals in different news outlets, maybe even social media. An additional direction for future research would be to analyse the differences in portrayals of male and female sex offenders over time to confirm if there has been a change in media portrayals.

An additional coder could have been utilised to ensure the findings were an accurate representation of the data, thus upholding reliability, although the researcher would have to ensure the coder understood clearly what they were asked to analyse (Krippendorff, 2004).

Despite these limitations, the sample was beneficial as it allowed an effective comparison of the portrayals of male and female sex offenders, which closed a gap in the present research, as a contemporary comparison. Additionally, it shows a change in society and shift in views where females are less protected as they were previously (Landor and Eisenclas, 2012), as their portrayals are largely like males'. Overall, this research has demonstrated the power the media have in the portrayals of individuals.



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## **Appendix A**

### Synopsis of the case studies

#### Vanessa George and Colin Blanchard

Vanessa George worked in a nursery, Little Ted's, where she would take the children, as young as twelve months old, to the toilet and sexually abuse them whilst photographing/videoing it. Colin Blanchard was an IT consultant and met Vanessa on Facebook and they would email each other images of sexual abuse of young children. Colin was said to be the one encouraging such photographs to be taken. However, they would discuss their fantasies together. They were charged with child pornography, sexual assault and distributing images. Some of the victims were difficult to identify from the images and videos taken and Vanessa refused to help police identify the victims.

#### Keeli Burlingham and Peter Taylor

Keeli and Peter, both 33, were in a relationship and videoed and photographed the sexual abuse. They knew the 5 young female victims they sexually assaulted and would plan their sexual assault via texts to each other. Keeli was encouraged by Taylor to photograph herself touching young girls inappropriately. One of the victims was Keeli's friend's son. Keeli was a café worker and Peter, an auto electrician. They were convicted of sexual assault, making, taking and distributing incident photographs. Peter was also convicted of encouraging the offences.

#### Gary and Heather Talbot

Gary, a 59-year-old male and Heather, aged 58, were married from Newcastle. They were accused of sexual abuse of a young girl, as well as rape and taking indecent images. Heather was said to have bought stockings and underwear for the young girl before her husband sexually assaulted her. There was photographic evidence of both offenders engaging in sexual acts with the young girl, however, Heather denies the knowledge of this and claims she was 'out' when these events happened. Gary was a postman and bus driver, but there was no job description for Heather.

**Appendix B**

List of selected headlines for news articles for each offender.

<b>Offender</b>	<b>Article number</b>	<b>News article title</b>	<b>News paper</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Date</b>
<i>Vanessa George</i>	1	Nursery worker pleads guilty to sex abuse	Belfast Telegraph	Jamie Grierson, Aleisha Scott	1/10/2009
	2	TRIO ADMIT SEX ABUSE	Evening Chronicle (Newcastle)		1/10/2009
	3	Video: Nursery worker admits child abuse horror	The Yorkshire Post		1/10/2009
	4	FACEBOOK MONSTERS: HOW MANY VICTIMS?	Belfast Telegraph	Matt Dickinson	2/10/2009
	5	Parents' agony over silence of sick paedophile	Belfast Telegraph		2/10/2009
<i>Colin Blanchard</i>	6	MOTHERS' CHILD SEX ON FACEBOOK	London Evening Standard	Justin Davenport, Paul Cheston	1/10/2009
	7	THE PAEDOPHILE FACEBOOK FIENDS	London Evening Standard	Justin Davenport, Paul Cheston	1/10/2009

8	Evil abuser never shed one tear of remorse	London Evening Standard		1/10/2009
9	Perverted Blanchard was main instigator	Belfast Telegraph	Pat Hurst	2/10/2009
10	FACEBOOK STRANGERS BOUND BY DEPRAVITY	Daily Mail	Paul Harris, Colin Fernandez, Jaya Narain, Luke Salkeld	2/10/2009
11	Paedo couple filmed themselves sexually assaulting kids and shared sick videos	Daily Star		19/01/2020
12	Depraved couple jailed for their 'sickening' abuse of five children	Manchester Evening News	Chris Slater	19/01/2020
13	Evil woman plotted to rape best friend's	Daily Star		20/01/2020

*Keeli  
Burlingham  
and Peter  
Taylor*

*Heather  
Talbot*

	son, 5, with paedo boyfriend			
14	Twisted couple 'obsessed' with abusing children	Liverpool Echo	Luke Traynor	21/01/2020
15	Co Down couple to stand trial for rape and molestation of girl aged under four	Belfast Telegraph	Paul Higgins	18/01/2019
16	Co Down couple to be sentenced next month for rape of young girl	The Belfast News Letter		14/05/2019
17	Man who raped little girl with help of wife to be sentenced next month	Belfast Telegraph	Paul Higgins	15/05/2019
18	Depraved NI couple told they face 'significant jail time' over rape of toddler	Belfast Telegraph	Michael Donnelly	24/01/2020

*Gary Talbot*

19	LONG SENTENCES' FOR COUPLE WHO ABUSED TODDLER	The Daily Mirror	Michael Donnelly	21/01/2020
20	Man admits rape and abuse of child under the age of 5	Belfast Telegraph	Paul Higgins	20/02/2019
21	Judge's warning to rape couple	Belfast News Letter	Michael Donnelly	24/01/2020
22	'Depraved' couple who raped toddler and took indecent photographs are jailed for 24 years	Belfast Telegraph	Ashleigh McDonald	11/02/2020
23	Your actions will provoke disgust that anyone could act in this way to a child	The Daily Mirror	Ashleigh McDonald	11/02/2020
24	Pervert pair get 24 years for rape of child	The Sun	Jason Johnson	11/02/2020

**Appendix C**

Table of Codes for Content Analysis: sorted by case study and the coding manual.

<b>Sex of offender</b>	
<b>1.</b>	Male
<b>2.</b>	Female

Coding Manual for the sex of the offender: These codes are placed at the top of the table to indicate a male or female sex offender.

**Table 2:** Coding results sorted by case study.

		<b>Articles</b>					
		<b>Case study 1</b>		<b>Case study 2</b>		<b>Case study 3</b>	
<b>Codes</b>	<b>Subcodes</b>	<b>Vanessa George</b>	<b>Colin Blanchard</b>	<b>Keeli Burlingham</b>	<b>Peter Taylor</b>	<b>Heather Talbot</b>	<b>Gary Talbot</b>
<b>Sex</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Category– Family</b>	<b>Mum/ Father</b>	7	2				
	<b>Married/couple</b>	2	3	9	9	51	51
	<b>Husband/Wife/partner</b>			2	1	25	35
	<b>Woman/man</b>	6		2			4
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Category – Social status/ personal information</b>	<b>Job title</b>	13	1	3	3		6
	<b>Debt ridden</b>		1				
	<b>Age</b>	9	9	6	6	10	10
	<b>Where they live/from</b>		1			5	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Othering- Dehumanisation</b>	<b>Warped</b>			1	1		
	<b>Evil</b>	2	2	1			

	<b>Monster</b>	2	1	1		1	1
	<b>Depraved</b>			2	1	2	2
	<b>Vile</b>			1	1	2	1
	<b>Beast</b>						1
	<b>Stranger</b>	2	2				
	<b>Predatory</b>			1	1		
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Othering - medical/ sexual pathologisation</b>	<b>Paedophile (Paedo)</b>	7	6	3	5	7	7
	<b>Pervert(ed)</b>	2	3			8	8
	<b>Rape</b>					1	1
	<b>Sick (os)</b>	1		1	1	2	2
	<b>Sexually Malleable</b>	1					
	<b>Obsessed</b>			2	2		
	<b>Twisted</b>	2		2	2		
<b>Total</b>		<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Agency of offending/ instigators</b>	<b>Abuser/Abusive</b>	5	5			2	2
	<b>Catalyst</b>		1				
	<b>Accomplice</b>		3				
	<b>Equality (pair/duo)</b>	29	29	10	10	7	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Potential for change</b>	<b>Remorseful</b>					2	
	<b>Likable</b>	1					
<b>Total</b>		<b>1</b>				<b>2</b>	



**Table 3: Coding results sorted by sex.**

		Articles					
		Females			Males		
Codes	Subcodes	Vanessa George	Keeli Burlingham	Heather Talbot	Colin Blanchard	Peter Taylor	Gary Talbot
Sex		2	2	2	1	1	1
Category - Family	Mum/ Father	7			2		
	Married/ couple	2	9	51	3	9	51
	Husband/Wife/partner		2	25		1	35
	Woman/man	6	2				4
Total		104			105		
Category – Social status/ personal information	Job title	13	3		1	3	6
	Debt ridden				1		
	Age	9	6	10	9	6	10
	Where they live/from			5	1		6
Total		46			43		
Othering - Dehumanisation	Warped		1			1	
	Evil	2	1		2		
	Monster	2	1	1	1		1
	Depraved		2	2		1	2
	Vile		1	2		1	1
	Beast						1
	Stranger	2			2		

	<b>Predatory</b>		1			1	
<b>Total</b>		<b>18</b>			<b>14</b>		
<b>Othering – medical/ sexual pathologisation</b>	<b>Paedophile (Paedo)</b>	7	3	7	6	5	7
	<b>Pervert(ed)</b>	2		8	3		8
	<b>Rape</b>			1			1
	<b>Sick (os)</b>	1	1	2		1	2
	<b>Sexually Malleable</b>	1					
	<b>Obsessed</b>		2			2	
	<b>Twisted</b>	2	2			2	
<b>Total</b>		<b>39</b>			<b>37</b>		
<b>Agency of offending/ instigators</b>	<b>Abuser/Abusive</b>	5		2	5		2
	<b>Catalyst</b>				1		
	<b>Accomplice</b>				3		
	<b>Equality (pair/duo)</b>	29	10	7	29	10	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>53</b>			<b>57</b>		
<b>Potential for change</b>	<b>Remorseful</b>			2			
	<b>Likeable</b>	1					
<b>Total</b>		<b>3</b>			<b>0</b>		

**Appendix D**

Submitted and approved ethics form for the present research.

NB: The initial aims have changed since this application, as explained in Chapter 5.

## **FINAL YEAR PROJECT ETHICS APPROVAL APPLICATION FORM B – projects not using human participants.**

**NB. ALL projects MUST receive ethical approval, regardless of their aims, methodology and methods.**

The forms:

FORM A: projects that will be collecting data **of any kind** with human participants.

FORM B: projects that will **not** be collecting data with human participants (i.e. they are desk-based or media/ documentary analysis).

**THIS FORM IS FORM B. ENSURE YOU ARE COMPLETING THE CORRECT FORM.**

### Part 1. Your details

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Your name and student number	Georgia Shearman U1852618
Your supervisor	Carla Reeves
Date of ethics form submission	26/11/2020

### Part 2. Details of your project

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**Your project's title:**

**British media representation of male versus female child sex offenders.**

**Give a brief description of the aim of your research and its rationale, your proposed methodology, and method of data collection (if appropriate). (Aim for 150-200 words)**

**Aim:** The main aim of the research is to investigate if the British media represent male and female child sex offenders differently.

1. **Specifically looking at and comparing the differences in reporting in relation to**
  - a. Labels and language

- b. Discourses and narratives
- 2. **If such differences relate to**
  - a. media and/or feminist theory
- 3. **If there are differences across different news outlets**

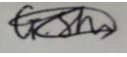
**Rationale:** There are very few studies on the media representation of male and female child sex offenders. There is no study that specifically looks at only British media representations. Media representations are important as they reflect and shape the public's understanding of sex offenders. In the past, the media have helped influence changes in legislation of the sex offenders register in the USA and UK, showing the impact the media has.

**Methodology:** Qualitative media studies methodology, to gain a deeper understanding of how and why the media portray the child sex offenders the way they do.

**Methods of data collection:** I will collect the newspaper articles using ProQuest International Newsstream via the Library. The articles are selected using purposive sampling on 3 case studies where there has been a male and female child sex offender that have offended together (6 offenders all together). The key word search will be for the offenders' names. The top 5 of each set of these results will be collected based on a relevance search (30 articles in total).

An initial content analysis will be conducted, looking at which labels and how many labels are used for male and female child sex offenders, generating numerical data. This will create some initial categories, along with the literature review to inform. The thematic analysis (main analysis) will allow deeper analysis of how and why male and female child sex offenders are portrayed the way they are. The initial codes from the content analysis will be filtered into the initial codes from the thematic analysis, then generating codes.

## Confirmation and submission

I confirm that this project will <b>not</b> involve human participants	yes
I confirm that I will abide by the University's/ Society's ethics policy	yes
I verify that my supervisor has approved this application for submission to the Ethics Panel. <b>My supervisor has approved this application for submission to the ethics panel: yes</b>	
I verify that all of the information contained in this form is correct.	
Signature: 	Print name: GEORGIA SHEARMAN Date: 26/11/2020

END OF FORM