



**A Solitary Place: a phenomenological examination
of male-on-male rape and sexual abuse**

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Bimsara Kennath Suwaris Widanaralalage Don, hereby declare that the body of work presented in this thesis has been composed by me and is based on my own work, unless stated otherwise. All sources consulted for this thesis have been acknowledged and listed; all quotations from and references to these sources have been cited and referenced. No version of this thesis, either in its entirety or in part, has been submitted to any other institution to obtain an academic degree.

Signed:

Date: 18th of March 2022

Abstract

Male-on-male rape is a critically under-researched area in the sexual violence literature. This is in part due to narratives that portray sexual violence as a female-only issue, which has led to substantial gaps in the current knowledge on male-on-male survivors' experiences. However, evidence suggests that male sexual violence is prevalent and carries significant psychological consequences for men. Furthermore, additional barriers exist for male survivors due to regressive gender norms that restrict emotionality, discourage men from seeking professional help and reporting to the police. As such, a detailed exploration of male-on-male survivors' experiences is desperately needed to understand i) the challenges for recognition and disclosure, ii) the barriers to access and successful therapeutic support, and iii) the challenges in accessing and involving the police and the Criminal Justice System (CJS). The current research programme addresses the gaps by utilising a phenomenological approach to examine male-on-male rape in two interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA: J. A. Smith et al., 2009) studies. Study 1 examines the accounts of 12 service providers working in specialist organisation in the UK, and their experiences of providing therapeutic support to men affected by sexual violence. Study 2 examines the experiences of nine male survivors of rape and sexual abuse and their experiences of victimisation, recovery, accessing and engaging with support, and involving the CJS. Bringing together the perspectives of professionals and survivors, the thesis contributes to the current literature by emphasising the need to recognise male-on-male rape as a distinct form of sexual violence. Traditional masculinity ideologies defined participants' experiences, with male survivors having to negotiate between norms and 'male' standards that reject emotionality and distress. Furthermore, such ideologies shaped encounters with public stigma and informed male-rape-myths experienced both externally and internally as barriers for successful recovery. Findings and implications are discussed in relation to policy and practice, with an emphasis on how therapeutic interventions must be catered towards meeting specific male-needs, by tailoring support to how men view themselves in relation to constructs related to masculinity and sexuality. Furthermore, findings highlight the importance of targeting survivors' beliefs around rape to support them in rationalising their victimisation and facilitate recovery. Broadly, the thesis provides recommendations to tackle and address the stigma and false beliefs encountered by the participants across both studies in a variety of settings in the public, third, and criminal justice sector.

Table of contents

Declaration of Authorship.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Table of contents	4
Disseminations of findings	11
Acknowledgements.....	13
List of abbreviations	15
List of figures and tables	16
Chapter 1	17
Introduction to the research.....	17
1.1. The rationale for the thesis.....	17
1.2. The aims of the thesis	22
1.3. The structure of this thesis	25
Chapter 2	28
Review of the literature on male-on-male rape.....	28
2.1. Legal definitions of rape in the UK.....	28
2.2. Prevalence of male-on-male rape	31
2.3. Men and masculinities: paradigms, ideologies, and hegemonies	39
2.3.1. Theoretical paradigms of masculinity.....	40
2.3.2. Traditional masculinity ideologies	45
2.3.3. Hegemonic Masculinity.....	48
2.3.4. Masculinity and male-on-male rape.....	50

2.4. Psychological consequences of male-on-male rape.....	51
2.4.1. Depression and Suicide.....	52
2.4.2. Anger	53
2.4.3. Negative self-evaluative emotions: guilt, shame, and self-blame	54
2.4.4. Self-esteem	57
2.4.5. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).....	57
2.4.6. Problems with Sexual Functioning, Sex and Gender identity.....	58
2.4.7. Summary.....	62
2.5. Understanding male-on-male survivors' reluctance to report.....	63
2.5.1. Male-on-male survivors' reasons for not reporting	64
2.5.1. Male-on-male survivors' reasons for reporting.....	65
2.5.2. Current issues with policing of rape cases in the UK	68
2.5.3. Police culture in the UK: hegemonic masculinity and male rape	72
2.5.4. Summary.....	75
2.6. Rape myths and male-on-male survivors	76
2.6.1. Theories of Victim Blaming.....	76
2.6.2. "Traditional" rape myths, their function, and the relationship with gender norms....	77
2.6.3. Male-rape-myths	80
2.6.3.1. Denial: masculinity myths ('real men cannot be raped')	81
2.6.3.2. Sexuality: the gay-rape myth.	82
2.6.3.3. Masochism: a man who is raped by another man must have wanted it.....	84
2.6.3.4. Minimisation: male rape is not (as) traumatic (as female rape).	85
2.6.4. Measuring Male Rape Myths: predictors and male-rape-myths functions	86

2.6.5. Summary.....	92
2.7. Conclusion.....	93
Chapter 3	96
Methodology of the research.....	96
3.1. Introduction.....	96
3.2. Qualitative methods of research.....	97
3.2.1. Quality and rigour criteria for qualitative research.....	100
3.2.1.1. Sensitivity to context.....	101
3.2.1.2. Commitment, rigour and transparency and coherence.....	102
3.2.1.3. Impact and importance.....	103
3.2.2. Qualitative research on male rape.....	104
3.3. Philosophical and analytical paradigms of this thesis.....	109
3.3.1. Philosophical assumptions of the qualitative elements of the thesis.....	110
3.4. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.....	112
3.4.1. Phenomenology.....	113
3.4.2. Hermeneutics.....	115
3.4.3. Idiography.....	117
3.4.4. IPA in this thesis.....	118
3.4.5. Quality indicators for IPA studies: J. A. Smith (2011) and Nizza et al. (2021).....	120
3.5. Construction of the IPA studies in this thesis.....	122
3.5.1. Recruitment strategy: purposive sampling.....	124
3.5.2. Interviews, transcription, and analysis of the studies following an IPA framework.....	126
3.5.3. Researcher’s positionality and reflexivity.....	128

3.6. Ethical considerations	132
3.6.1. BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct.....	133
3.6.2. Ethical considerations of this thesis	134
3.6.3. Safeguards for the researcher	139
3.7. Conclusion	140
Chapter 4	142
Service providers' experiences and challenges of supporting male-on-male survivors of rape: an interpretative phenomenological examination.....	142
Abstract.....	142
4.1. Introduction	143
4.1.1. The present study.....	146
4.2. Approach and methods	147
4.2.1. Participants	148
4.2.2. Materials	151
4.2.3. Procedure.....	153
4.2.4. Analysis.....	154
4.3. Results and Discussion.....	155
4.3.1. Theme 1: Masculinity: managing survivors' need for agency, safety, and control	157
4.3.1.1. Agency: the cycle of self-blame and shame.....	157
4.3.1.2. Safety: anger and antisocial behaviours in a dangerous world.....	161
4.3.1.3. Control: unhealthy stoicism and the internalisation of trauma.	165
4.3.2. Theme 2: Managing the impact of male rape myths and their challenge to therapeutic intervention.....	168
4.3.2.1. Real men cannot be raped (male survivors are not real men).....	169

4.3.2.2. The gay-rape-myth: “only gay men are raped”	173
4.3.3. Theme 3: Managing survivors’ expectations around reporting and the police	178
4.4. Summary of findings and recommendations.....	187
4.4.1. Limitations of this study	191
4.5. Conclusion	193
Chapter 5	194
Examining the lived experiences of male-on-male survivors of rape and sexual abuse: an interpretative phenomenological examination	194
Abstract.....	194
5.1. Introduction	195
5.1.1. The present study.....	199
5.2. Approach and Methods	199
5.2.1. Participants	200
5.2.2. Materials	205
5.2.3. Procedures.....	207
5.2.4. Analysis.....	207
5.3. Results and Discussion.....	208
5.3.1. Theme 1: The gendered narrative: the invisibility of male rape and male rape myths	210
5.3.1.1. The invisibility of male-on-male rape.....	210
5.3.1.2. Real men cannot be raped	215
5.3.1.3. The gay-rape-myth	218
5.3.2. Theme 2: Coping with the abuse: unhealthy levels of self-blame and “reckless” behaviours	221

5.3.2.1. Unhealthy self-blame	223
5.3.2.2. Compensatory behaviours: recapturing control, agency, and safety	226
5.3.3. Theme 3: The role of masculinity in survivors' post-incident experiences	230
5.3.4. Theme 4: Reporting to the police as a negative and retraumatising process	236
5.4. Summary of findings	244
5.4.1. Implications and Recommendations	249
5.4.2. Limitations of this study	253
5.5. Conclusion	256
Chapter 6	258
Discussion of findings, reflexive account, and final conclusions	258
6.1. Summary of findings across the three key areas of interest	259
6.1.1. Survivors' recognition and disclosure of their victimisation	259
6.1.2. Internal and external barriers to access and successful therapeutic care	261
6.1.3. Involvement of the police and the Criminal Justice System	263
6.2. Implications and contributions to methods, theory, policy, and practice	265
6.2.1. Male-on-male rape, masculinity, and therapeutic implications	268
6.2.1.1. Male-on-male survivors and the "struggle" for hegemony.	269
6.2.1.2. Therapeutic implications: male needs and male-informed interventions	271
6.2.2. Recognising male rape mythology.....	274
6.2.2.1. Understanding the aetiology of male-rape-myths.....	275
6.2.2.2. Challenging the culture of male rape: therapeutic and societal implications..	278
6.2.3. Male-on-male Rape, Masculinity and Feminism	280
6.3. Limitations of the thesis and future research directions	284

6.3.1. Use of IPA in this thesis.....	284
6.3.2. Lack of racial and ethnic diversity.....	286
6.3.3. Childhood and adult male rape experiences.....	287
6.4. Reflexivity and personal development.....	288
6.5. Final Conclusions.....	298
References	303
Appendices	336
Appendix I: Service Provider Interview Script – Study 1	336
Appendix II: Survivors Interview Script – Study 2	338
Appendix III: Information and Consent Form Study 1	340
Appendix IV: Debrief form, Study 1	342
Appendix V: Information and Consent Form Study 2.....	343
Appendix VI: Debrief form, Study 2	345
Appendix VII URDSC registration and proposal approval.....	346
Appendix VIII: UWL SHSS Ethics Panel Approval.....	347
Appendix IX: data sharing and storage agreement.....	348

Disseminations of findings

Submissions:

- Widanaralalage, B. K., Hine, B. A., Murphy, A. D., Murji, K. (2022) “It’s a secretive place to be for men”: a qualitative investigation of service providers’ experiences supporting male survivors of rape and sexual violence. The study is under review in *Violence and Victims*.
- Widanaralalage, B. K., Hine, B. A., Murphy, A. D., Murji, K. (2022) “I didn’t feel I was a victim”: a phenomenological analysis of the experiences of male survivors of rape and sexual abuse. The study is under review in *Victims and Offenders*.

Conferences

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List of abbreviations

CJS	= Criminal Justice System
CSEW	= Crime Survey for England and Wales
IPA	= Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ISVA	= Independent Sexual Violence Advisor
MoJ	= Ministry of Justice
MPS	= Metropolitan Police Service
MSP	= Male Survivor Partnership
NFA	= No Further Action
ONS	= Office for National Statistics
PTSD	= Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SOIT	= Sexual Offences Investigative Trained
STO	= Specially Trained Officer

List of figures and tables

Figure 1: Overview of aims, objectives, questions, study design and analysis of the thesis (Chapter 1)

Figure 2: The phases of data collection/analysis and corresponding chapters (Chapter 3)

Figure 3. The cycle of self-blame and shame (Study 1, Chapter 4)

Figure 4: Anger, aggressiveness, and safety as functions of masculinity (Study 1, Chapter 4)

Table 1: The four quality indicators of good IPA, with descriptions (adapted from Nizza et al., 2021, p.3) (Chapter 3)

Table 2: Demographic, diversity, and work-related information for the participants in the study (Study 1, Chapter 4)

Table 3: Interview schedule with representative questions (Study 1, Chapter 4)

Table 4: Table of superordinate themes and subthemes with descriptions for Study 1 (Chapter 4)

Table 5: Demographic information of the participants in the study (Study 2, Chapter 5)

Table 6: Interview schedule with representative questions (Study 2, Chapter 5)

Table 7: Table of superordinate themes and subthemes with descriptions for Study 2 (Chapter 5)

Chapter 1

Introduction to the research

This thesis presents the findings from a series of qualitative studies investigating the phenomenon of male-on-male rape and sexual abuse. This chapter introduces the context and the rationale for the thesis, highlights areas of interest, and outlines the aims, objectives, and research questions. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1. The rationale for the thesis

The rape and sexual abuse of men is a widely misunderstood and somewhat belittled phenomenon in modern society. Typically, incidences of sexual violence are characterised by gendered narratives that distinguish between men, as perpetrators, and women, as legitimate victims (Davies & Rogers, 2006). However, whilst official data suggest that as many as one in three women experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2013), evidence also indicates that sexual victimisation is prevalent among men (1 in 4: S. G. Smith et al., 2018) and boys (1 in 6: Dube et al., 2005). Yet, despite such high rates of male sexual victimisation, there has been limited academic interest in involving men in sexual violence research. Indeed, some scholars have argued that one of the unfortunate effects of the extensive focus on female victim-experiences is the development of a socio-cultural disbelief and denial of the possibility that men can also become victims of sexual offences (Anderson, 2007).

In an attempt to explain the dearth of knowledge and lack of attention on men's experiences of sexual violence, academics have proposed that since the 1970s, the feminist narrative of rape culture (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Lisak, 1991; Lonsway

& Fitzgerald, 1994; Posadas, 2017), which views patriarchy in society as legitimising rape and shaming female survivors, has fundamentally shaped modern understandings of sexual violence (Fisher & Pina, 2013; Lowe & Rogers, 2017). However, whilst these feminist approaches are both valuable and legitimate, scholars have further argued that the generalisation of rape as a form of heterosexual, male-perpetrated violence has led to the oversimplification of rape victimisation as an exclusively female issue (Doherty & Anderson, 1998). Consequently, men have been excluded from discussions of rape and thus encounter unique barriers and challenges in every aspects of their victimisation: from the unique psychological distress, the conflict of being a victim and maintaining a stereotypically male persona (Walker, 2004), the disbelief that survivors experience when disclosing both publicly and to immediate social groups (friends, partners, and family), to accessing services and specialised support (Lowe & Rogers, 2017), and the CJS (Rumney, 2008a).

The need to reconsider men as plausible victims of sexual violence is best demonstrated by research indicating that the impact of sexual violence on men is as devastating as it is for women (Lowe & Rogers, 2017; Pearson & Barker, 2018). After being abused, men find themselves in need of therapeutic support for a variety of psychological issues, including depression (Peterson et al., 2011), suicidal thoughts (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2006), negative self-evaluative emotions (Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005), sexual functioning (Peterson et al., 2011), and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD: Voller et al., 2015). Indeed, these psychological issues appear to be common in victims of sexual violence, with female victims reporting similar psychological sequelae (Campbell et al., 2004). However, a key contributor to male survivors' mental health issues is their self-perceptions of masculinity, with evidence indicating that men experience a deterioration of their

masculine identity following abuse (Walker, Archer, & Lowe, 2005). Traits and norms attached to masculinity are incompatible with the experiences of vulnerabilities commonly associated with being a victim (Javaid, 2015b; Rock, 2002), which then create gender-specific barriers to recognising and disclosing sexual victimisation, especially when perpetrated by other men (Abdullah-Khan, 2008). Importantly, men's desires to avoid feelings of anxiety and powerlessness may explain why male survivors are at high risk of psychopathology (Kimerling et al., 2002), and are less likely to seek professional support than women (McCart et al., 2010).

Encouragingly, the influential role of masculinity in male survivors' experiences with recognising their victimisation, disclosing to others, and seeking therapeutic support has received increased attention in the growing male rape literature. Among the challenges experienced by men is the treat associated with labels such as 'victim' or 'survivor' to how their self-perceptions as functioning men (Weiss, 2010). Studies show that male survivors experience confusion over their sexual and gender identity, further supporting the need to examine sexual victimisation in terms of victims' unique needs. For men, disclosing vulnerabilities (and victimisation) is challenging (Stanko & Hodbell, 1993), as male socialisation is often linked with a reluctance towards help-seeking (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Indeed, masculine traits of resilience, independence and stoicism (Berke et al., 2018; Kong, 2019; Mahalik, Good, et al., 2003) create an environment in which men do not feel that professional help is a viable solution, fearing stigma and ridicule instead (Delker et al., 2020). Such norms, in conjunction with the disinterest surrounding male rape, represent further barriers for male survivors.

Research from the United States has examined the topic of disclosure and help-seeking in male survivors of sexual abuse and found that a number of interpersonal and socio/cultural barriers refrained survivors from disclosing (A. E. Ellis et al., 2020;

Kia-Keating et al., 2005; Sorsoli et al., 2008). However, no comparable research exists in the UK. Given the importance of cultural expectations of men's adherence to masculine norms, particularly in British societies that still perpetuate standards such as the popular notion of the "stiff-upper lip" (Capstick & Clegg, 2013), there is a critical need for research on UK male-on-male survivors' experiences of recognising and disclosing their victimisation, as well as accessing professional therapeutic support. Besides addressing a substantial gap in the sexual violence literature, such research is needed to identify specific barriers and needs that exist for male rape survivors, within the unique socio-cultural circumstances of the UK.

In addition to its psychological impact, sexual violence affects both male and female survivors' ability and willingness to involve the CJS (Brown, 2011). Thanks to the efforts of feminist campaigners, there is more awareness around female sexual victimisation (Fisher & Pina, 2013), with recent increases in recorded sexual offences (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2021) suggesting that women seem to be less reluctant to involve the police. However, whilst the same ONS report also suggests an increase in recorded offences against men, there is a substantial discrepancy between estimated prevalence rates (155,000¹) and actual recorded cases by the police (16,127). This indicates that men are still reticent to involve the police (Pino & Meier, 1999; Walker, Archer, & Lowe, 2005; Weiss, 2010). Such evidence indicates that substantial barriers still exist for male rape survivors and that most sexual offences against men are unreported (Lowe & Rogers, 2017). Therefore, research on barriers and facilitators for reporting of male rape allegations is essential to make sense of the mixed findings on withdrawal rates in male rape cases, ranging from 20% (Hine et al.,

¹ An estimated 0.7% of all men (155,000) aged 16 to 74 experienced sexual assault in the year ending March 2020 (based on CSEW 2020 data: ONS, 2021)

2021) to 55% (MOPAC, 2021). This is even more important in light of the well-documented gap between recorded and prosecuted offences in the UK for both male and female victims (Hine et al., 2021; Hohl & Stanko, 2015; Murphy et al., 2021)

The barriers and challenges encountered by male-on-male survivors are worsened by rape myths. Representative of the issues outlined above, traditional rape myths are built on gendered narratives, which has led to a dearth of research on the existence and prevalence of male-rape-myths. Some research is available however: Turchik & Edwards (2012) postulated that male-rape-myths are widely accepted and are closely related to expectations around masculinity and sexuality. Male-rape-myths typically describe male survivors as less masculine, gay, masochists, less traumatised than women, and less deserving of sympathy (DeJong et al., 2020; Hine et al., 2021; Walfield, 2018). Similarly to female-rape-myths, scholars argue that male-rape-myths shift the blame from the perpetrator to the victim, positing that the victim's actions and/or character justify the actions of perpetrators (Chapleau et al., 2008; Hine et al., 2021; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). However, little is known about male-rape-myths beyond attitudinal studies (e.g. Anderson, 2007), or within specialised populations (e.g. police officers; Davies et al., 2009). Indeed, virtually no research has provided an account of male-on-male survivors' own understanding of rape mythology, the psychological impact of male-rape-myths, and the extent to which their post-abuse experiences are affected by encounters with these established narratives. Such research would help understanding the extent to which men are affected by the widespread beliefs and narratives that surround male accounts of sexual violence.

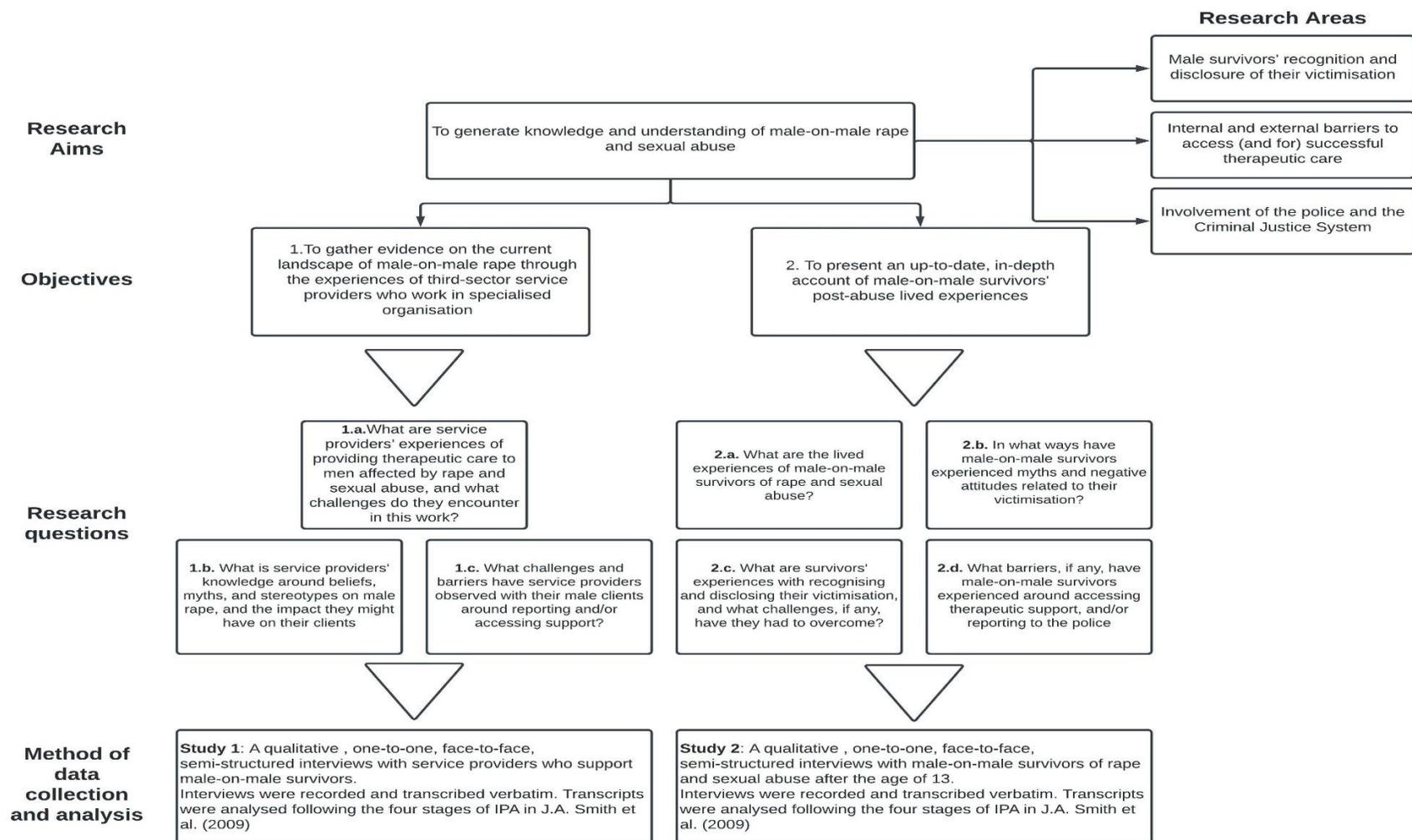
Therefore, research on male survivors is desperately needed, given how widespread the phenomenon is (Dube et al., 2005; ONS, 2021; S. G. Smith et al., 2018) and the substantial psychological damage it carries for men (Bullock & Beckson,

2011; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005; Weiss, 2010). Indeed, despite clearly needing professional therapeutic support, several internal and external barriers exist for men which may affect male-on-male survivors' willingness to seek help. Together with the fact that male-on-male rape is often characterised by stigmatising, hostile, and damaging narratives, it is not surprising that some reports suggest that male survivors are reticent to involve not only voluntary agencies (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Javaid, 2016a; Lowe, 2018), but also the CJS (Jamel, 2010; Javaid, 2015a; Rumney, 2008a). Overall, there are key questions that have been overlooked by research, specifically around what challenges and barriers exist for male rape recognition, disclosure, accessing therapeutic support, and involving the police. The present thesis aims to address these important questions.

1.2. The aims of the thesis

With this thesis, the researcher aims to generate knowledge and understanding of male-on-male rape and sexual abuse. This will be achieved by examining the topic across three key research areas: i) the challenges encountered by men in recognising and disclosing their victimisation, ii) the internal and external barriers to access (and for) successful therapeutic care, and iii) the challenges in accessing and involving the police and the CJS. Figure 1 provides an overview of the aims, objectives, questions, study design, and analytical methods of the thesis.

Figure 1: Overview of aims, objectives, questions, study design, and analysis of the thesis



The objectives of the thesis are:

1. To gather evidence on the current landscape of male-on-male rape through the experiences of third-sector service providers who work in specialised organisations. The focus is on gaining insight into providers' lived experiences of supporting male victims, the therapeutic challenges encountered, and the barriers to access and disclose as observed by experts in the sector.
2. To present an up-to-date, in-depth account of male-on-male survivors' post-abuse lived experiences, focusing in particular on identifying barriers to disclosure, accessing therapeutic support, and reporting to the police.

These objectives are achieved by answering the following research questions:

- 1.a. What are service providers' experiences of providing therapeutic care to men affected by rape and sexual abuse, and what challenges do they encounter in this work?
- 1.b. What is service providers' knowledge around beliefs, myths, and stereotypes on male rape, and the impact they might have on their clients?
- 1.c. What challenges and barriers have services providers observed with their male clients around reporting and/or accessing support?
2. a What are the lived experiences of male-on-male survivors of rape and sexual abuse?
2. b In what ways have male-on-male survivors experienced myths and negative attitudes related to their victimisation?
2. c What are survivors' experiences with recognising and disclosing their victimisation, and what challenges, if any, have they had to overcome?

2. d What barriers, if any, have male-on-male survivors experienced around accessing therapeutic support, and/or reporting to the police?

These research questions are addressed by examining male-on-male rape from the perspectives of both service providers and male survivors. Firstly, providers' close involvement in individual recovery plans and their role in organisations solely devoted to raising awareness and providing support to all male survivors (Survivors UK, 2018) will provide a third party, professional perspective into the landscape of male-on-male rape in the UK. Secondly, directly involving male survivors is paramount to understanding the unique challenges encountered by men. Therefore, the thesis presents the qualitative findings from one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with third-sector service providers (Study 1, Chapter 4) and male-on-male rape and sexual abuse survivors (Study 2, Chapter 5). The two studies are designed and conducted independently to carefully explore participants' individual experiences and appreciate the uniqueness of each account (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). Following qualitative frameworks (see Chapter 3), participants' accounts are placed at the centre of an interpretative phenomenological analysis process (IPA: Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; J. A. Smith et al., 2009) aimed at accessing and interrogating the meaning and significance participants give to their knowledge and experiences. The dual insight presented in this work provides a unique perspective into the current landscape of male-on-male rape in the UK.

1.3. The structure of this thesis

The thesis will be structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduces the thesis, provides the context and rationale for the thesis, and presents an overview of the aims, objectives, and research

questions. It also includes a description of the proposed studies and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Presents a review of the current literature on male-on-male rape. The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of male rape with sections detailing: an overview of the legal definitions of rape in the UK; the prevalence of male-on-male rape in the UK; an analysis of the psychology of men and masculinities, paradigms, ideologies, and hegemonies; the psychological consequences arising from experiences of sexual violence against men; the barriers and challenges of reporting male-on-male rape cases; rape mythology and male-rape-myths and how they shape the narratives around male rape.

Chapter 3: Provides an overview of the methodology of the research, focusing on the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of employing a phenomenological research design in the construction of studies aimed at gathering and exploring qualitative and experiential data using IPA (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This chapter will discuss how qualitative methods have been previously used in male sexual violence research, the philosophical assumptions of IPA, and how qualitative research methods were utilised and implemented across the empirical components presented in this thesis.

Chapter 4: Outlines Study 1: a qualitative study which explored the lived experiences of service providers who provide therapeutic support to male-on-male rape survivors accessing specialised services. The study gives insight into providers' unique and expert knowledge of male-on-male rape and the barriers to disclosure, reporting, and engaging with therapy. The

study followed an IPA, based on one-to-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with experienced service providers. Three superordinate themes were identified from the IPA analysis regarding the challenges encountered by providers around managing: i) survivors' need for agency, safety, and control as functions of their masculinity ii) the impact of male-rape-myths and their challenge to therapeutic intervention, and iii) survivors' expectations around reporting and the police.

Chapter 5: Outlines Study 2: this chapter presents the findings from an IPA study with male-on-male survivors of rape and sexual abuse after the age of 13. The study provided men with the opportunity to present their personal account of their experiences after the incident(s), focusing on challenges and barriers they encountered with the public, the psychological consequences of rape, and experiences with help-seeking and reporting to the police. Study 2 was based on one-to-one, face-to-face, semi-structured video-interviews with nine male-on-male rape survivors. Four superordinate themes were identified from the IPA analysis of male survivors' accounts, which describe their experiences around i) gendered narratives, ii) coping with the abuse, iv) masculinity, and v) reporting to the police.

Chapter 6: Brings together the findings of Study 1 and Study 2 and assesses how the empirical components of this thesis contribute to the current knowledge on male-on-male rape across the three key areas of interest outlined in Chapter 1, section 1.2. Importantly, the findings are discussed in relation to the available literature, the theoretical and therapeutic implications, limitations of the thesis, and future research

recommendations are provided. Finally, this chapter presents the researcher's reflexive account, before drawing the final conclusions.

Chapter 2

Review of the literature on male-on-male rape

This chapter presents an overview of the existing literature on male-on-male rape. Drawing from reviews and studies, mainly from the UK and the US, this chapter will address key areas of concern in six domains: i) male rape in the context of the law, focusing on definitions, legislation within the British CJS, and the concept of gender-neutral laws; ii) the prevalence of male rape, with an emphasis on how this phenomenon has not yet been explored to the same extent as female rape; iii) an overview of theories of masculinities, with a focus on paradigms, masculinity ideologies, and hegemonic masculinities; iv) the psychological consequences of rape and sexual assault experienced by male survivors; v) the challenges of reporting sexual offences to the police, with a focus on current issues with UK rape policies and the influence of police cultures; and finally, vi) an overview of rape myths, concentrating on stereotypes specific to men as well as the relationship with traditional female-rape-myths, with an emphasis on how male-rape-myths operate as a product of traditional gender stereotypes surrounding masculinity.

2.1. Legal definitions of rape in the UK

Before the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994, the statute law for England and Wales on sexual offences was under the Sexual Offences Act, 1956. Under this legislation, only women could be considered rape victims. The victimisation of men was legally defined as "buggery" (sodomy) (section 12 under the

category of Unnatural Offences). Since 1533, the term buggery was used in British Law to describe anal sex “committed with mankind or beast” (in Lowe, 2018), and constituted a criminal offence. Until the introduction of non-consensual buggery in 1967 and its subsequent removal in 1994, buggery defined sexual relations between men and was often associated with homosexual sex. Furthermore, boys could not be victims of rape or other sexual offences, as the Act only included offences against underage females. The relatively recent legal recognition of men in rape and other related sexual offences legislations is representative of how the experiences of male survivors have been historically dismissed and overlooked in British society (McLean, 2013). Before 1994, men in the UK had essentially no legal standing in the CJS, as their victimisation would be treated as unnatural, which arguably intensified the socio-cultural stigma around male sexual victimisation.

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994, saw the inclusion of men in the definition of rape for the first time under non-consensual anal penile penetration, which led to the removal of the term ‘buggery’. The introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act laid the foundations of the legal recognition of male rape and sexual assault and led to the subsequent introduction of the *Sexual Offences Act 2003*, which defines rape as:

A person (A) commits an offence if:

- a. he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis,
- b. B does not consent to the penetration, and
- c. A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

With the introduction of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the definitions around rape and sexual offences became more explicit. For example, oral penile penetration was

included in the definition. Moreover, the Act redefined sexual offences and moved away from the ambiguous concept of indecent assault (Lowe & Rogers, 2017), by including assault by penetration of any object and forced non-penetrative sexual acts. Similarly, in Scotland and Northern Ireland the introduction of the *Sexual Offences Act 2009* and *Sexual Offences Order 2009*, respectively, saw the rest of the UK align with England and Wales in the definitions of sexual offences and rape.

However, under these legislations, rape can still only be committed by a man, meaning that rape is still a gendered crime in the UK. This is apparent when comparing UK legislations with other English-speaking countries. For example, in the US and Australia, rape is described as the penetration with any object or body part (Lowe & Rogers, 2017). Furthermore, Canada abolished rape as an offence, and substituted it with three graded categories of sexual assault (basic, with a weapon or threatened violence, aggravated), with no requirement for proof of penile penetration (Somerville & Gall, 2013). Such differences with other Western countries raise questions around why the UK seems to be lagging behind in gender neutralising rape legislations. Indeed, gender-neutral laws have attracted criticisms in the UK. For example, Mooney (2006) questioned if such laws hindered the gendered analysis of rape as a social and legal issue, and whether they “obscure the gender issues and imbalance already present in the law, institutions and society” (Mooney, 2006, p.62). In response to these criticisms, Rumney (2008b) argued that concerns around gender-neutral legislations are caused by the misunderstandings that gender neutrality is concerned with anything other than the inclusion of men as survivors of rape and sexual violence. He goes on to state that the enactment of gender-neutral laws should be seen as an important step towards the recognition that sexual victimisation causes equal harm for both male and female survivors. It also allows the same criminal responsibility and

culpability to be assigned to perpetrators. Moreover, it provides survivors with a label for their experiences of abuse, which has critical implications in terms of public and self-recognition, disclosure, and reporting (Rumney, 2008b).

Inclusivity in legal definitions does not discourage the study of sexual violence as the by-product of issues around gender. As a matter of fact, many scholars who study and discuss male rape have drawn from feminist paradigms around the impact of masculinity ideologies, patriarchy, gender roles and victim blaming in their discourse on male sexual victimisation (e.g. Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Anderson & Doherty, 2007; Capers, 2011; Cohen, 2014; Javaid, 2015b, 2016; Pretorius, 2009). However, despite the legal recognition of male rape, the perception that this phenomenon is rare is still widely held by the public (Javaid, 2018). To better understand why this crime is perceived as rare it is first necessary to understand the challenges in measuring prevalence of male rape in the community, and to assess how researchers have attempted to do so.

2.2. Prevalence of male-on-male rape

Given the hidden nature of rape (Raphael, 2013) and the reluctance that men display when it comes to disclosing and reporting their victimisation (Brown, 2011; Stanko & Hobdell, 1993), it is difficult to estimate the scope of male sexual victimisation. As previously mentioned (section 1.1.), global evidence indicates that 1 in 4 men (S. G. Smith et al., 2018), and 1 in 6 boys (Dube et al., 2005) experience some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime. Moreover, UK figures suggests that 23% of women and 5% of men experienced some form of sexual violence from the age of 16 (ONS, 2021). As rape statistics have been widely available for female victims, Davies (2002) argued that researchers had overlooked prevalence rates of male sexual victimisation in the community. In fact, compared to female rape, it is evident that there

is a paucity of prevalence studies on men, which increases the difficulty of providing a reliable estimate of the frequency and incidence of male rape in the community. This is demonstrated by the fact that the majority of studies on male rape prior to the 1980s focused on prison institutions (see A. J. Davis, 1968; Fisher, 1934), which in part contributed to the limited attempts to determine prevalence rates in the community, because of the belief that male rape was a phenomenon restricted to penitentiaries.

To the candidate's knowledge, the first epidemiological study that included and reported on men's experience of sexual violence was conducted in the US by Sorenson et al. (1987). The data used were collected as a supplement to the Los Angeles Epidemiological Catchment Area Project (1983-1984) which aimed to assess the prevalence of mental health disorders and support-seeking behaviours in the general public. This was one of the first Western studies that investigated history and prevalence of sexual assault in a sample that also included men. Of the 1480 men interviewed, 9.4% reported experiencing sexual violence. In two related studies (Siegel et al., 1987; Sorenson et al., 1987) the authors separately investigated adult and childhood sexual violence. They found that 7.2% of male respondents experienced adult sexual violence (after 16 years of age), of which 28.4% reported being forced to have oral or anal intercourse. Moreover, 56.5% indicated that the assailant was an acquaintance or a friend, and 23.9% indicated that the assailant was a spouse or a lover. It was also found that 3.8% of the respondents experienced childhood sexual abuse (before 16 years of age). Of those, 31.5 % of the respondents reported being assaulted by a friend, 27.7% by a stranger and 15.6% by an acquaintance. On average, participants had approximately four (3.9) incidents of childhood abuse, with 29.9% being forced to have intercourse.

Whilst data from Sorenson et al. (1987) and Siegel et al. (1987) underlined how pervasive and common histories of adult and childhood sexual violence were among men, little attention was given to expanding on their findings. By contrast, research on female sexual victimisation was making remarkable steps in recognising and exploring issues affecting women. Indeed, since Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1975), feminist authors made significant efforts to underline how widespread sexual violence against women was. The identification of sexual violence as "a critical point of intersection and of separation of power relations by gender, class and age" (D'Cruze, 1992: p. 387) shaped much of the focus around sexual violence as a female-exclusive issue. In particular, the interest on male rape was so minor in the UK that, to the candidate's knowledge, the first comprehensive study of sexual violence against men was conducted by Hickson et al. in 1994. The study was a community-based report on 930 sexually active gay men and their experiences of non-consensual sexual activities. The findings of this study provided the first profile of male sexual victimisation in the UK. Two-hundred-and-fifty-seven (27.6%) participants reported being forced into non-consensual sex at some point in their lives, of which 96.1% involved a male perpetrator and 45.2% were subjected to anal penetration. In 19% of the cases the perpetrator was acquainted with the victim, in 12.5% the perpetrator was either a family member or a family friend, and in 10% of the cases the assailant held a position of power, such as authority figures in the context of children (i.e., teacher or father of a friend). Of the participants who were assaulted when they were over 21 years of age, 65.4% were assaulted by a regular or casual sexual partner. Of these, 75.8% reported being anally raped.

The findings from Hickson et al. raised concerns around the prevalence of male rape in gay communities and the factors refraining survivors from disclosing their

experiences of abuse. One of the most interesting findings of the study was that 29.2% of the respondents who reported having been sexually assaulted also reported prior consensual sexual activity with the perpetrator. By prior consensual sexual activity, the authors described incidents where the survivor reported willingly engaging with the perpetrator in sexualised behaviours (e.g., kissing and/or fondling). Hickson and colleagues also found that anal rape was significantly more likely to occur if the victim consented to some prior sexual acts. The finding is of interest as it highlights key challenges for male survivors because the presence of prior consensual activities may hinder survivors' ability to recognise the abusive nature of the incident and refrain them from disclosing their victimisation.

An important limitation of Hickson et al.'s (1994) study was the specificity of the sampling and recruitment criteria (sexually active gay men) which hindered the generalisability of their findings to the wider male community, and other sexual orientations. For this reason, Coxell et al.'s (1999) study is regarded as one of the major UK studies on male sexual victimisation as the first, non-clinical, community study investigating history of sexual violence in England, indiscriminate of respondents' sexual orientation. Coxell et al. aimed to determine lifetime prevalence of sexual violence in a sample of 2,474 men. They were also interested in identifying psychological and behavioural problems arising from sexual abuse. The study revealed that 2.89% of participants experienced non-consensual sex after 16 years of age and 5.28% before 16 years of age. Non-consensual sex in childhood significantly predicted adult victimisation. While the authors did not offer further explanations, it would appear that, similarly to female survivors (Messman-Moore & Long, 2003), childhood abuse was a risk factor for future re-victimisation. It was also reported that respondents who had sexual relationships with other men were six times more likely

to have experienced sexual abuse in adulthood. Coxell et al. (1999) explained the finding as indicative of gay men being more promiscuous and situated in a subculture characterised by anonymity, secrecy, and stigma (Nagoshi et al., 2008), thus arguing that gay men were more at risk of sexual victimisation, as demonstrated by the high victimisation rates within other gay samples (e.g., Hickson et al., 1994).

Findings from Coxell et al. (1999) revealed the importance of investigating how a history of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) experiences predicted or increased the risk of future sexual victimisation in adulthood. This link was further examined by Paul et al. (2001) among 2,881 men who had sex with other men from four major US cities. Participants were ranked according to the severity and instances of the childhood abuse experiences reported. Moreover, the authors measured participants' history of adverse familial experiences, substance use, depression, abusive relationships, "one-night stands", and adult sexual victimisation; all factors regarded by the authors as symptomatic of CSA. The study revealed that 20.6% of the sample had experiences of CSA and another 14.7% reported adult sexual victimisation. Almost 78% of the victims who reported CSA experienced penetrative acts. High levels of abuse severity significantly predicted abuse by an intimate partner in the past 5 years, depression, and risky sexual behaviours, such as unprotected sex under the influence of drugs and alcohol and "one-night stands". Besides confirming the long-lasting impact of CSA in men, the study highlighted the importance of clearly defining and measuring sexual trauma in men, in light of the variety of psychological and behavioural consequences resulting from CSA. Moreover, the study emphasised that sexual risk in gay and bisexual men not only is associated with prior sexual abuse, but also to current and future sexual violence experiences.

The association between psychological/behavioural disorders and interpersonal trauma such as sexual abuse was further explored by Mueser et al. (2004) in a clinical sample from US mental health facilities. A closer look at the male cohort in the sample (N=461) revealed that 29.2% reported childhood sexual abuse, 24.5% reported adult sexual abuse, 7.6% reported being sexually assaulted in the previous year, and 40% reported being sexually assaulted at least once in their lifetime. History of sexual violence, both in childhood and adulthood, significantly predicted and increased the likelihood of men presenting PTSD diagnosis. Whilst the prevalence rates reported by Mueser and colleagues are likely to be inflated by the clinical setting of the study, as victims are more likely to access services than non-victims, the findings of their study underscored the importance of determining if male patients diagnosed with PTSD have a history of sexual trauma.

Drawing from the established association between history of childhood abuse and substance abuse disorders (Berry & Sellman, 2001; Kendler et al., 2000), Plant et al. (2004) investigated how lifetime prevalence of sexual violence predicted misuse of alcohol and psychoactive substances on a large representative sample in the UK that included 975 men. The study revealed that 11.7% of men reported being subjected to sexual abuse before 16 years of age. Interestingly, the figure dropped to 3.2% for adult sexual abuse, which is similar to what was found by Coxell et al (1999). Experiences of childhood sexual abuse significantly predicted alcohol problems in adulthood. The same could not be said about adult victimisation, possibly due to the smaller number of respondents who reported such experiences. Additionally, illicit drug usage was common in both adulthood and childhood male victims, 48.2% and 35.6%, respectively.

From the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994, followed by the Sexual Offences Act 2003, men were included in official statistics such as police records and the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW: previously known as the British Crime Survey). Police records cover all sexual offences as legislated by the law and reported to the CJS, while the CSEW gathers self-reported information about individual experiences of victimisation in the last 12 months. Due to these varying methods, there are inevitably challenges in evaluating the veracity of the figures produced by these sources. This is exemplified by the substantial discrepancies observed between the two, particularly in relation to sexual offences. For example, from 2009 to 2012 the CSEW reported an average of 473,000 adult victims (72,000 men) of sexual violence, while the police in 2011/2012 recorded only 53,000 offences (Ministry of Justice [MoJ], 2013). The discrepancy between the two sources is indicative of victims' reluctance to involve the CJS (later discussed in section 2.5). While police data did not distinguish between female and male cases, it is likely that the majority of police records are on female cases, and that male respondents from the CSEW did not disclose or report their victimisation to the police.

The MoJ's decision to bring together the two different sources from 2013 provided a comprehensive overview of how prevalent male sexual victimisation is in the UK and quantified the attrition of male sexual offences in the CJS. At the time of writing this thesis, the latest figures available on sexual offences in the UK were released by the ONS in March 2021. The report analysed sexual offences from the CSEW and police records from the year-ending March 2020. The report showed that 4.7% of all men experienced sexual abuse at some point in their lives after the age of 16. The figures reported by the ONS (2021) are higher than lifetime prevalence rates previously found by Coxell et al. (1999) and Plant et al. (2004). Moreover, an estimated

0.7% of men experienced sexual violence in the previous year alone, representing almost 155,000 between March 2019 and March 2020. The report indicated that less than 0.5% of all men experienced rape or sexual assault by penetration. Because of the relatively small number of male respondents, the ONS aggregated data from March 2018 to March 2020, focusing in particular on the relationship between the respondents and the perpetrator. The analysis revealed that 50.8% of perpetrators were partners or ex-partners, while 9% were family members. Further examination of the data showed that more than 20% of the victims were aged between 5 and 9 and that 30% were aged between 10 to 14 years. While data seem to suggest that men were more likely to be subjected to sexual violence in childhood, it should also be noted that data from the CSEW indicate that only 1 in 5 male victims reported to the police. Therefore, it could very well be that adult male victims not only do not disclose to the police but are also reluctant to open up in victim-based surveys. Despite the fact that females still clearly constitute the overwhelming majority of victims of sexual offences, it is also evident that there has been an increase in the number of men coming forward about their sexual victimisation, almost 10 times more than what was reported by the MoJ in 2013.

In the last 20 years, renewed interest from governmental institutions and researchers allowed for more accurate estimates of the incidence of male sexual victimisation in the UK to be identified, with lifetime prevalence rates around 3 to 5% in the public, and up to 20 to 27% in the gay community (Coxell et al., 1999; ONS, 2021). Despite issues with measurements, including lack of recent community studies and studies not differentiating between the gender of victims, the prevalence data presented above revealed important characteristics and risk factors to be further investigated. For example, recent findings from victim surveys (e.g., CSEW, ONS)

indicate high rates in the community that do not translate in recorded offences by the police. This suggest that male survivors encounter specific barriers that refrain them from involving the CJS. It is also important to determine the current scope of sexual victimisation in the gay community, the members of whom seem to be inherently more at risk of sexual abuse (Coxell et al., 1999; Hickson et al 1994; Paul et al., 2001). Moreover, authors often highlighted the significance of history of CSA as a predictor of adult sexual victimisation (Plant et al., 2004), diagnosis of PTSD and other psychological/behavioural disorders (Mueser et al., 2004).

The prevalence rates examined in this section emphasise that male survivors exist and the need to expand on the limited knowledge that is currently available. However, before examining the psychological consequences of sexual victimisations, it is worth turning our attention to the psychology of men and masculinities. Understanding how/if experiences of victimisation are shaped by gender socialisation is a key argument in the sexual violence literature (e.g. Chan, 2014; Mert et al., 2016). Importantly, the following section provides key theoretical foundations of the thesis, which shaped later methodological, and analytical decisions.

2.3. Men and masculinities: paradigms, ideologies, and hegemonies

The aim of this section is to examine what factors could affect aspects of survivors' post-incident experiences (e.g., psychological consequences, disclosing, help-seeking, reporting). As this thesis focuses specifically on male-on-male survivors, questions inevitably arise as to what separates men and women in their victim-experiences, if anything. Indeed, some evidence suggests that men's experiences with interpersonal violence and trauma are in some ways different from women's (Dunn et al., 2012; Iverson et al., 2013; McGruder-Johnson et al., 2000). On the other hand, researchers such as Michael Addis have argued against examining sex

differences discretely, as such endeavours fail to provide insight into the within-group differences (e.g., Addis, 2008; Addis & Cohane, 2005; Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Put simply, not all men (and women) are alike. For these reasons, it is not the intention of this thesis to place male rape as the opposite of female rape; nor it is intended to deny or neglect the experiences of female survivors. On the contrary, by acknowledging that gender is something one does or performs within a socio-cultural context (West & Zimmerman, 1987), it is intended to examine *how being a man* could shape the experiences of sexual violence later discussed in this thesis. Therefore, this section will examine the psychology of men and masculinities, by providing some key theoretical frameworks and research paradigms to examine these male constructs.

2.3.1. Theoretical paradigms of masculinity

Addis and Cohane (2005) provide a summary of key conceptualisations of masculinity through four different, yet at times related, social scientific paradigms: psychodynamic, social learning, social constructionist, and feminist frameworks.

Psychodynamic approaches examine the psychology of men and masculinity by focusing specifically on early developmental phases. In particular, attention is given to boys' interactions with caregivers, seen as fundamental in shaping their emotional and interpersonal development, relatedness, and sensitivity. Pollack (1995) argued that early in their lives boys are pressured to 'dis-identify' with their primary caregivers, which are typically female. This process is described as a *normative gender-linked developmental trauma*: a premature abrogation that is believed to leave adult men with repressed emotional needs for intimacy and connection. Drawing from Pollack's dis-identification, Krugman (1995) observed that boys have anxieties related to rejection and shaming from others, and put considerable effort to avoid these negative responses. In this psychodynamic framework, Krugman argued that shame was

central in the development and structure of men's affective processes. Put simply, as men and boys are ill-equipped to cope with emotional threats, they are more sensitive and attuned to shaming responses from others. The developmental trajectories described by psychodynamic paradigms aid the understanding of masculinity as the by-product of early-life events, which in turn affect how men negotiate with their subjective/personal masculine identities when relating to others in adulthood (Langa, 2016).

As an alternative to psychodynamic approaches, Addis and Cohane (2005) argue that social learning approaches are the most common research paradigm in the study of gender. Such approaches are underpinned by the assumptions that gendered behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes are socially formed through interactions with others. In this sense, men 'learn' and acquire masculine schemas and belief-systems through reinforcement (Landers & Fine, 1996), punishment (Dietrich et al., 2014), and modelling (Wang et al., 2021). A key construct in social learning paradigms is the sociological concept of roles: 'prescribed repertoires of behaviour that form particular social position' (Addis & Cohane, 2005: p.367). Social learning approaches diverge from psychodynamic approaches in the way that masculinity is not seen as an expected outcome of normal male development. On the contrary, masculinity is seen as fluid and representing changing male roles that reflect current gendered norms, stereotypes, and ideologies. As such, masculinity ideologies (see Thompson & Bennett, 2015) vary across societies and cultures. However, they are commonly characterised by a 'cult' of physical toughness (Fowler & Geers, 2017), emotional stoicism (Gorski, 2010), anti-femininity (Sánchez & Vilain, 2012), power and authority (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), competition (Wagoner, 2007), self-reliance (Pirkis et al., 2017), and homophobia (Diefendorf & Bridges, 2020). Importantly, social

learning approaches emphasise the psychological consequences of men's rigid adherence to traditional masculine ideologies. Examples in the literature include gender role conflict (Fragoso & Kashubeck, 2000), strain (Levant, 2011), and stress (Jakupcak et al., 2006), with evidence suggesting that higher scores in these measures are significantly related to negative mental health outcomes.

Similarly, to social learning approaches, social constructionist paradigms view and study gender as a socially formed construct. However, constructionists depart from viewing individuals as just passive respondents to processes of reinforcement, punishment, and modelling. Instead, social constructionist paradigms understand gender (and masculinity) as directly shaped by how individuals specifically construct meaning in specific social settings/circumstances (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In other words, the individual becomes an active agent in how he/she performs gender. Consequently, social constructionists reject the existence of a singular masculinity, and instead propose a plural conceptualisation of masculinity, and expect contextual variability in the constructions of masculinities (Everitt-Penhale & Ratele, 2015). As such, masculinities constitute flexible and 'dynamic repertoires' enacted by men when interacting in their social environment (Addis & Cohane, 2005). Examples of constructionist masculinities can be seen in hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity (these will be explored later in this section).

The social formation of gender can also be found in feminist paradigms. In many ways close to social constructionist perspectives (Addis & Cohane, 2005), feminist perspectives focus primarily on examining and analysing gender in the difference of power between men and women across different social, cultural, and interpersonal systems (Allen, 2016). These perspectives present gender as a construct that organises male and female relationships in such a way that men are

always, across all levels, the dominant group. Feminist paradigms argue, therefore, that masculinity cannot be understood without analysing men's privilege in society. In this sense, masculinity reflects how power is experienced by men, as well as how men's behaviours facilitate and maintain the power (im)balance. For example, feminist perspectives would argue that men's reluctance to seek therapeutic help (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Gorski, 2010; Mahalik, Good, et al., 2003), can be explained as men seeking to avoid looking weak, being exploited (thus losing power), and to construct men as stronger and better equipped than women to deal with emotional/psychological distress (thus maintaining power). Importantly, such processes do not need to be conscious. Indeed, masculinities, in feminist terms, are established and routinised practises that maintain power relations between men and women (Addis & Cohane, 2005).

Discussing the contributions of these perspectives on the current understanding of masculinity is critical to theoretically ground and assess the logic of claims made around men's (and women's) lives. Clearly, the use of any of the paradigms discussed above provides a different, nevertheless useful, understanding of how masculinity operates. In the context of male rape, and male rape survivors' experiences, it is important to understand how men's relationships with their masculinity shape their lived experiences of abuse. It is possible to trace how these perspectives have been used in the literature. For example, in psychodynamic terms, the development of trauma can be assessed in terms of relational issues, particularly around shame and rejection experienced by male survivors by the hands of others (e.g. Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Weiss, 2010). Furthermore, social learning theories have been used as a framework to understand how male survivors' self-perceptions are related to learned masculinity ideologies, and how these impact on their mental

health (e.g. Ellis et al., 2020; Kia-Keating et al., 2005; Sorsoli et al., 2008). Finally, social constructionist and feminist perspectives have respectively allowed the examination of how male survivors (re)construct their masculinity after the abuse, and how, in their attempt to re-establish their masculinity, they maintain power relations within hierarchical masculine structures (Javaid, 2015b, 2016a).

For the purposes of this thesis, it is worth paying closer attention to the concepts of traditional masculinity ideologies and masculine hierarchies. Often used interchangeably, these terms describe different concepts of masculinity. Masculine ideologies provide insight into how norms and beliefs dictate appropriate gendered behaviours and are essential components of the psychology of men (Thompson & Bennett, 2015). In contrast, masculine structures and hierarchies provide a theoretical framework to explore how men understand dominance, power, and authority in a constructionist and feminist sense (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In the context of male-on-male rape, *both* these concepts are important to understand how survivors: rationalise their victimisation in relation to learned and accepted internalised belief systems (ideologies); and construct their masculinity after the abuse in relation to the current masculine hierarchies. Importantly, ideologies and hierarchies are related in the sense that dominant masculinities embody the current and most respected masculine ideology. Conversely, failure to embody the dominant ideologies results in being relegated to the margins of the masculine hierarchy. These two related conceptualisations of men and masculinities have been recently examined in the context of male rape (Javaid, 2015b). In particular, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has gained increased attention in the male rape literature. Therefore, the following section will examine how masculinity ideologies and hegemonic masculinities can be used to examine male rape.

2.3.2. Traditional masculinity ideologies

Thompson et al. (1992) used the concept of masculinity ideologies to describe prohibited and permitted social norms that guide how men 'perform' masculine behaviours. Levant and Richmond (2008) also observe that masculinity ideologies are internalised cultural belief systems and attitudes towards masculinity and men's roles (p. 131). Masculinity ideologies govern how men should behave in society as well as dictate related expectations and prohibitions. Importantly, authors have argued that masculinity ideologies are normative, and are, therefore, located within socio-cultural traditions and practices:

'From this perspective masculinity ideologies are properties of particular times, places, and groups, not individuals. They influence - although they do not wholly determine - how people think, feel, and behave in gender-salient matters.' (Thompson & Bennett, 2015, p.1.)

Thompson and Bennett (2015) critically reviewed the existing measures of masculinity ideologies and observed that researchers have often distinguished between ideologies as 'cultural things', being historically and geographically grounded (Connell, 2005), and individuals' internalised belief systems (Pleck, 1995). This distinction emphasises the dual nature of masculinity ideologies as i) internalised systems that are ii) culturally reinforced and policed by interactions with other men. As previously mentioned, many authors warn about viewing masculinity ideologies as a singular construct, precisely because of the role that history and culture play in their formation (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Thompson & Bennett, 2015). However, evidence suggests that there are shared norms across masculinity ideologies within the Western World reflective of a *traditional masculinity ideology* (Levant & Richmond, 2008), and of the existence of a dominant (or hegemonic) masculinity ideology.

Indeed, an examination of the empirical measures and scales of traditional masculinity ideologies highlights a number of recurring themes and established male norms: avoiding femininity, concealing emotions, achieving status and respect, self-reliance, emotional and physical toughness, risk-taking, negativity towards sexual minorities, importance of sex, and dominance (Brannon & Juni, 1984; Levant et al., 2010, 2013; Mahalik, Good, et al., 2003; McCreary et al., 2005; Thompson & Pleck, 1986).

The usefulness of masculinity ideologies to understand the psychology of men is highlighted by the abundance of empirical research examining their impact on a variety of psychological and behavioural outcomes. Importantly, evidence strongly suggests that rigid adherence to traditional masculinity ideologies results in serious mental health consequences across all ages (Wong et al., 2017). For example, studies with undergraduate men have found that adherence to norms around emotional control and self-reliance predicted higher help-seeking difficulties, including self-stigma, and anticipated risk of self-disclosure (Heath et al., 2017). Kaya et al. (2018) also found that masculine norms around power and being a 'playboy' were negatively associated with prospective wellbeing, a concept encompassing individuals' self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, personal growth, autonomy, and positive relationships (Ryff, 2014). Masculinity ideologies are also associated with risk-taking in young adult men, including sexual risk-taking, alcohol use, drug use, and speeding while driving (Giaccardi et al., 2017). Moreover, King et al. (2020) found that higher conformity to violent and self-reliance norms were associated with higher suicidal ideation in a sample of young Australian adolescents/men (between 15 to 20 years of age); conversely conformity with heterosexuality reduced the odds of reporting suicidal ideation.

The examples presented above emphasise how traditional masculinity ideologies still play an important role in the mental health wellbeing of adolescent boys, and young adults in Western Countries. Such evidence is replicated with older samples (Wong et al., 2017). Furthermore, evidence suggests that in environments that promote masculinity ideologies, traumatic experiences are seen as emasculating. Neilson et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review of the literature and examined the relationship between traditional masculinity ideologies and PTSD in veterans. In the review the authors highlighted how, culturally, veterans are situated in a context (i.e. the military) where traditional masculinity is emphasised, encouraged, and followed more strictly than other environments (Abraham & Cheney, 2017). Nielson and colleagues found a positive relationship between endorsement of traditional masculinity and PTSD severity, specifically emotional stoicism, and toughness. Qualitative research mirrors findings on masculinity and PTSD, with Elder et al. (2017) finding that their participants described trauma as incompatible with being a man. The psychological conflict is even more exacerbated in cases when veterans survived sexual trauma, with men reporting engaging in casual sex to re-establish their heterosexuality (Elder et al., 2017; Monteith et al., 2019). Behaviours such as aggression and/or hypersexuality can be described as compensatory, where men perform and exaggerate stereotypical gender-appropriate behaviours to heighten their sense of masculinity (Gilbar et al., 2019).

The re-occurrence of specific masculine norms (e.g., stoicism, heterosexuality, sexual risk-taking, anti-femininity) suggests the existence of a set of broad traditional masculinity ideologies. Importantly, as argued by Wong et al. (2017), examining conformity to specific norms is useful to understand if and how masculinity determines specific mental health outcome. For example, drawing from the evidence on veterans

above, it is also possible to make inferences on the experiences of male survivors, and to understand their victimisation along the diagnosis of PTSD (later discussed in section 2.4.5.). However, masculine norms on their own provide only a partial understanding of the psychology of men. Indeed, as previously mentioned, men's perceptions of dominance and submission within the framework of hegemonic masculinities can provide a more complete understanding of how men affected by sexual trauma construct and position themselves in relation to specific historical, geographical, and cultural parameters.

2.3.3. Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity can be traced back to the 1980s when authors were attempting to analyse social inequalities as a product of multiple, gendered hierarchies. Such work laid the foundations for other research examining class and ethnic differences in expressions of masculinities (Davis, 2011; Hooks, 2000). Similarly, the study of power and difference gained increased attention particularly from the gay liberation movement, resulting in studies on power relations between oppressed men and oppressing men. The analysis of power imbalance experienced by this group resulted in the formulation of a hierarchy of masculinities, used to examine gay men's experiences of stigma and prejudice from straight men (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005). Other influences include empirical social research, which documented gender hierarchies and cultures of masculinity in schools (Willis, 2017) and male-dominated workplaces (Cockburn, 1991).

Connell and Messerschmitt (2005) provide a detailed analysis and discussion of hegemonic masculinity. The authors argue that hegemonic masculinities are a product of patriarchal gender systems, therefore existing within a set of specific historical circumstances. In other words, hegemonic masculinities are not fixed but

rather represent the current accepted or dominant masculine ideology. They conceptualised hegemonic masculinity as a “pattern of practice” that allows men to maintain their dominance over women (p.832). Importantly, dominance is exercised not only against women, but also on marginalised groups (based on sexual orientation, ethnicity, and socio-economic status). Indeed, Connell and Messerschmitt emphasised the “policing of heterosexuality” as an important aspect of hegemonic masculinity (p.837). The hierarchical structure of hegemonic masculinity, therefore, distinguishes between dominant and submissive men, meaning that only a minority of men in society are enacting and embodying the essence of being a hegemonic man. Connell and Messerschmitt emphasise the normative nature of hegemonic masculinity, representing “the currently most honoured way of being a man...it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it” (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005: p.832).

Within a hegemonic understanding of masculinities, it is possible to find the concept of toxic masculinity. The recent ‘explosion’ of the term in both popular and academic circles is of interest, given how often it is used to theorise about men and male behaviours (Harrington, 2021). Originally, toxic masculinity was believed to be the product of emotionally distant relationships between fathers and sons (Biddulph, 1997; Pittman, 1993). It was believed that, in the absence of healthy and strong bond with a father/male figure, boys would develop into men who adhered to stereotypically, and toxic masculine strategies (Eberly, 1999). Importantly, the association between emotionally absent fathers and toxic masculinity, emphasises how early scholars viewed toxic masculinity as something that was 'curable'. Moreover, it promoted heteronormative lifestyles where engaged fathers would provide a civilising influence on men (Randles, 2013, in Harrington, 2021). The label of toxic masculinity has often

been applied to marginalised men, such as prisoners (Kupers, 2005) and low income ethnic minorities (Bhana, 2005). Harrington (2021) argues that toxic masculinity has become a term to describe all male violence, circumscribed to a minority of men, and presented as a wellbeing concern. Therefore, discourse of toxic masculinity maintains and reinforces the idea of gender hierarchies as the actions of marginalised, violent, men are seen as natural (Harrington, 2021; p.348). Toxic masculinity is a subset of hegemonic masculinity because it describes extreme behaviours, including violence, domination, aggression, misogyny, and homophobia, that maintain and reinforce gender hierarchies (Harrington, 2021).

2.3.4. Masculinity and male-on-male rape

The framework of hegemonic masculinity can help guide our understanding of male rape survivors as part of a marginalised, nonhegemonic group. Importantly, studies on hegemonic masculinity often focus on norms around sexual dominance and antifemininity and have linked hegemonic masculinity to male sexual aggression (R. M. Smith et al., 2015). However, little is currently known about how Connell's framework can be used to understand male survivors' experiences. Javaid (2015b) attempted to address this gap by examining the issue of male rape through different social constructionist frameworks, including hegemonic masculinity. In his analysis, Javaid argues that failure to meet gender norms during victimisation (e.g., physical toughness, resisting the perpetrator) affect male survivors' self-perceptions, and result in men engaging in a number of behaviours designed to regain their status as functioning men, in line with the established hegemonic masculinity. For example, male survivors following the abuse might engage with excessive drinking and displays of aggressiveness (Weiss, 2010), or even avoid seeking help, and/or reporting to the police (Lees, 1997). Furthermore, Javaid goes on to argue that male rape challenges

the dynamics and norms of hegemonic masculinities, which in turn explain the hostility and prejudice around male sexual victimisation across the public, voluntary agencies, and the CJS. Importantly, Javaid's (2015) points, while interesting, are not supported with primary data, highlighting the challenges of recruiting male survivors for academic purposes, and the need to test these research questions around male rape and hegemonic masculinities directly with male survivors.

The evidence presented in this section highlight the importance of ideologies, norms, and hierarchies on men's lives, behaviours, and wellbeing. The literature also emphasises the challenges around defining masculinities as demonstrated by the different research approaches discussed by Addis and Cohane (2005). However, the study of masculinity ideologies and hegemony provide a theoretical framework to understand men's experiences of violence and sexual abuse, particularly around psychological difficulties with recognising vulnerabilities (Stanko & Hodbell, 1993), disclosing (Sorsoli et al., 2008), and accessing support (A. E. Ellis et al., 2020). Importantly, men's self-perceptions of masculinities will shape their experiences of the psychological consequences arising from being raped and/or sexually abused.

2.4. Psychological consequences of male-on-male rape

The act of rape affects survivors in their day-to-day lives, with serious short and/or long-term psychological consequences. Importantly, evidence on both male and female victims suggest their tendency to diminish their experiences as they fail to recognise the psychological and behavioural consequences of their victimisation (Banyard et al., 2007). However, differences between male and female survivors' mental health following the abuse are not clear. Indeed, whilst some research suggest that men and women experience similar psychological issues (e.g., Heidt et al., 2005; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005), others argue that men are more likely to report acute

psychiatric symptoms, history of serious mental health problems, and history of psychiatric hospitalisation (Kimerling et al., 2002). These mixed findings emphasise issues discussed in the previous section (2.3.) around examining victimisation in terms of sex differences. Instead, it is more beneficial to acknowledge that the role of gender cannot be underestimated in shaping the unique challenges and barriers that exist for *both* groups of victims. With this in mind, the following section will outline the available evidence on male survivors' psychological reactions to sexual assault and rape.

2.4.1. Depression and Suicide

Male survivors often report experiencing symptoms related to depression after the incident (Carpenter, 2009; Peterson et al., 2011). Walker (1993) found that 76% of male rape victims in her sample reported depression, with 42% attempting suicide and 71% developing thoughts of committing suicide. Similarly, Huckle (1995) reported that participants in his study showed high levels of depression, with several cases of attempted or thoughts of suicide. More recently, 39 out of 40 male rape survivors in Walker, Archer & Davies's (2005) study reported experiencing depression: 22 survivors reported developing depressive thoughts in the immediate aftermath of the assault; more than half of all participants in this study admitted to having attempted to commit suicide. A comparison between survivors and non-survivors revealed that victims were nearly three-times more likely to contemplate suicide (Ratner et al., 2003). They were also nearly two times more likely to attempt suicide.

Evidently, there is a concern that male survivors are at increased risk of taking their lives, with suicidal thoughts seemingly characterising and distinguishing male and female reactions to rape. In fact, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2006) found that a higher percentage of incarcerated men reported thoughts of and attempting suicide after being sexually assaulted in prison, compared to incarcerated

female rape survivors. While prisons have their own situational characteristics which could increase risk of suicide (Suto & Arnaut, 2010), the findings are noteworthy as they highlight how men are likely to develop depressive thoughts in the aftermath of sexual violence, and that, if not treated, could result in survivors considering and trying to take their own lives. Drawing from the broader masculinity literature (2.3.2), it is possible to understand how and why male survivors consistently report depressive and/or suicidal symptoms. It could be argued that male rape constitutes a violation to masculine norms related to self-reliance and sexual independence. Indeed, evidence shows that infringements on those norms cause significant psychological distress, including increased rates of depression (Iwamoto et al., 2018). Given the lack of knowledge on male rape, the evidence on depression emphasises the need to seriously consider the presence of sexual trauma in men displaying depressive and/or suicidal symptoms. This is a question that is particularly relevant for those services that are first points of contact for male survivors, such as health services and the police.

2.4.2. Anger

In response to feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, studies suggest that some victims' experience increased and persistent anger (Mgolozeli & Duma, 2020), which can lead to violent behaviours (Gilgun & Reiser, 1990). Anger is a reaction that seems common for male victims, with Walker, Archer, and Davies (2005) reporting that 38 out of 40 male rape victims in her study experienced anger and, furthermore, fantasised or planned to retaliate against their abuser. Moreover, 42.5% of the participants reported fantasies of killing the abuser or planning violent and/or public retaliation. In an interview with a survivor, Walker (1993) reported a victim becoming obsessed with being "tough" and aggressive, in order to prevent the incident from

happening again. The same survivor reported hating himself for his new coping strategies. In fact, some victims seem to struggle to express their anguish externally with anger, and, as a consequence, find themselves directing their frustration towards themselves (Woollett, 1994).

The frustration and anger arising from the sense of hopelessness and powerlessness, have important behavioural and psychological consequences that, if untreated, result in depression (as previously discussed) or even self-destructive actions. This may lead survivors to be less likely to engage in risk-resistant behaviours in the future. For example, Myers (1989) reported that male survivors engage with excessive drinking and seek out unprotected sex with women, and that they are more likely to have a history of substance abuse treatment (Kalichman et al., 2002; Tewksbury, 2007; Walker et al., 2005). Furthermore, Kalichman et al. reported that some male survivors started to trade sex for drugs and money. It is therefore evident that survivors' inability to channel their frustration and anger has a negative impact on their wellbeing and increases the likelihood of engaging in self-harming behaviours. Such evidence mirrors findings from veterans with histories of sexual trauma, where hypermasculine behaviours helped mitigate feelings of anger and distress (Elder et al., 2017; Gilbar et al., 2019; Monteith et al., 2019). It could be argued that, whilst anger is typically viewed as a male-appropriate response (Jakupcak et al., 2005), it does not mitigate feelings of vulnerability experienced by male survivors and leads them to engage in further compensatory behaviours (sexual risk taking, alcohol and drug abuse), which seem to be designed to re-capture a sense of masculinity and agency over their lives (Neilson et al., 2020).

2.4.3. Negative self-evaluative emotions: guilt, shame, and self-blame

Negative self-evaluative emotions are often reported by victims of interpersonal violence, from domestic violence (Frieze, 1979; O'Neill & Kerig, 2000), to adult (Janoff-Bulman, 1979) and childhood rape (Filipas & Ullman, 2006). Negative self-evaluative emotions are personal feelings of dissatisfaction that arise from events and behaviours that threaten one's ability to maintain a positive or coherent view of the self (Dijkstra & Buunk, 2008). Among such emotions, guilt, shame, and self-blame are common reactions to behaviours that are judged as inadequate or incoherent to personal and/or social values and norms (Higgins, 1987). Shame and guilt are often used interchangeably, yet they captured distinct (albeit related) emotions. Guilt defines an "unpleasant emotional state associated with possible objections to his or her action, inactions, circumstance, or intentions" (Baumeister et al., 1994, p. 245). It differs from fear and anger as it is based on the possibility that one may be in the wrong or others may have such a perception. Whilst guilt concerns one particular action, shame is an emotion that pertains to the entire self. Thomas Scheff (1988) argues that shame is "the primary social emotion generated by the virtually constant monitoring of the self in relation to others" (p.397). In other words, shame arises by viewing oneself from the standpoint of others. Underlying both guilt and shame are intentional attribution and evaluative processes that are used by individuals to take responsibility for and cope with the events in one's life. Janoff-Bulman (1979) described these strategies as self-blame. She described self-blame, in the context of sexual violence, as a predominantly maladaptive psychological mechanism "related to harsh self-criticism and low evaluations of one's worth" (p. 1799). In this thesis, self-blame is conceptualised along Janoff-Bulman's distinction of behavioural and characterological self-blame (1979, p. 1798). Behavioural self-blame refers to an evaluation of how one behaved in a specific event and is designed to identify ways in which negative outcomes can be avoided in

the future. Characterological self-blame refers to an evaluation of the self (i.e., one's character) and is designed to identify character flaws that might have facilitated past events.

Self-attribution strategies and emotions are also seen in male rape victims, with Walker, Archer, and Davies, (2005) reporting that in their 40 male rape victim sample, 33 men reported feeling guilty and blaming themselves because they could not prevent the assault. In particular, male survivors are negatively affected by their inability to defend themselves and, as a consequence, blame themselves for the incident (Mgolozeli & Duma, 2020; Myers, 1989). Feelings of guilt and self-blame result in victims' lifting the responsibility of the assault from the assailant: they believe that they got what they deserved and often focus exclusively on their own behaviours and actions. By adhering to these beliefs, survivors rationalise the incident as the result of their carelessness for putting themselves at risk (Boyd & Beail, 1994).

While feelings of guilt and shame are also reported by female victims (Resick, 1993; Romano & De Luca, 2001), there are researchers that argue that reports of negative self-perception arising from the incident are more common in male survivors (Langan & Innes, 1986). A number of explanations can be given, such as the impact of victims' own gender role expectations, confusion over their own sexual identity, and perceived inability to maintain the status of "real men". Furthermore, Dimmock et al. (1991: in Walker, 2004) argued that male survivors became ashamed about their own gender: in other words, to belong to the class of men. The authors argued that male victims start viewing men as evil, hurtful, and abusive, as a consequence of the assault. It was argued that this new perception of their own gender produces in victims a deep sense of ambivalence and confusion in their own identification as men. Consequently, the sense of shame and guilt, which are reinforced by the male need

to take responsibility (thus self-blaming), will have important consequences on how survivors' view their self-worth.

2.4.4. Self-esteem

It should not be surprising that after being sexually victimised male victims experience negative thoughts and feelings in regard to their own self-esteem. The earliest suggestion of this can be found from Janoff-Bulman and Frieze (1983). However, Walker (2004) advanced that there was not enough research focusing on this important measure of person's wellbeing. Myers (1989) reported that all of the 14 participants in the study reported problems with their self-esteem and self-confidence. Victims report that the incident affects their self-esteem and, consequently, the image they have of their selves (Mezey & King, 1989). More information is provided by Walker, Archer, and Davies (2005) who found that the majority of the male rape victims interviewed reported a loss of self-respect and a damaged self-image.

2.4.5. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Clinical evidence suggests that symptoms following sexual victimisation can be associated to PTSD (Lowe & Balfour, 2015; Walker et al., 2005). PTSD is an anxiety/stress disorder. According to the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) the disorder develops after exposure to traumatic events in the patients' lives (e.g., death, actual or threat of serious injury, actual or threat of sexual violence). PTSD manifests itself with a number of alterations in the normal cognitive and mood functioning of the patient. For example, common PTSD symptoms are irritability, aggression, risky or destructive behaviour, hyper-vigilance, heightened startle reaction, difficulty concentrating and sleeping (APA, 2013). Myers (1989) reported that half of the male rape victims he was treating showed PTSD symptoms, with three patients showing chronic levels of this disorder. Huckle (1995) found that nine out of

22 male survivors that were referred to a forensic psychiatric unit met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. In a sample of 1,872 Gulf War veterans who applied for PTSD disability benefits, Voller et al. (2015) found that male sexual victimisation was positively associated with the severity of PTSD symptoms. Moreover, the correlation between sexual trauma and PTSD was still significant even after controlling for combat status in a military (Kang et al., 2005). A specific feature of PTSD is that patients re-experience the event persistently via intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and flashbacks. This is demonstrated by a recent qualitative study where Mgozeli and Duma (2020) reported male survivors experiencing and describing intrusive thoughts about the assault, which took the form of fantasies and persistent preoccupations of revenge.

The clinical and military evidence presented supports the notion that the male experiences of sexual victimisation resemble several psychological characteristics that are associated with PTSD. While this is an important aspect of both recognition and treatment for support services, there are also practical implications to be considered around the CJS, because PTSD is also known to affect the victim's ability to recall key features of the traumatic incident (Halligan et al., 2002). Therefore, it could influence survivors' ability to give reliable and coherent witness testimony of the event, particularly in juridical and police settings, where the officers' line of questioning could further enhance survivors' distress if and when the mental health of the complainants is not accounted for (Jordan, 2008).

2.4.6. Problems with Sexual Functioning, Sex and Gender identity

Among the many psychological consequences of being raped, evidence suggests that sexual functioning is deeply affected (Peterson et al., 2011; Romano & Luca, 2001). Male survivors often report a loss of sexual interest, a decline in sexual pleasure, physiological problems (i.e., with achieving and maintaining erections and

ejaculations), and discomfort when touching or being touched by partners during consensual intercourse (Walker et al., 2005). The sexual challenges reported by survivors manifest in different ways, from complete inactivity to sexual promiscuity, both reflecting their fear of re-experiencing the powerlessness associated with the assault (Mezey & King, 1989). These potentially unhealthy approaches can carry over time, with Walker (1993 in Walker, 2004) finding that 90% of her sample reported long-term sexual dysfunction problems, even several years after the incident. In particular, 19% of the victims interviewed reported that they feared making other sexual partners do something without their consent.

Issues with sexual functioning characterises some survivors' experiences, with evidence indicating higher levels than in non-victims, in both male and female samples (Elliott et al., 2004). Survivors are likely to experience varying degrees of psychological disturbance (caused by the challenges observed in their sexual life) that are further exacerbated by recollections of physiological reactions during the assault, which are not uncommon (Bullock & Beckson, 2011). The complexity of these conflicting thoughts and the attempts to rationalise their past and present sexual experiences seem to be at the root of the sexual confusion that survivors often report. Survivors seem to confuse physiological arousal with implicit signs of consent (Hickson et al., 1994; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Consequently, they are left in a state of confusion over their own sexuality, questioning whether their own behaviours, at the time of the incident, facilitated the assault (Turchik, 2012). The broader implications are a gender identity crisis, because of the apparent lack and loss of masculinity as both the cause and consequence of their victimisation (Walker, 2004), which seems to be a unique feature of male survivors' experiences of victimisation. Evidence from incarcerated participants who suffered from unwanted sexual contact supports this, as a higher

percentage of male prisoners' reported concerns about their sex-role identification and reputation compared to female prisoners (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2006). Another manifestation of this sexual crisis appears in survivors' understanding of their own sexual orientation, with Walker (2004) reporting that three quarters of the victims interviewed described experiencing long-term sexual orientation crisis. Walker argued that survivors' sexual identity crisis arises from a perceived damage to their masculinity, as victimisation is seen as a failure to adhere to specific masculinity scripts related to sexual independence (Mahalik, Goode, et al., 2003)

In addition to the challenges experienced by male survivors around sexual functioning and identity confusion, sexual orientation plays an important role. For example, while some heterosexual survivors reported a sense of dread and hate towards homosexuality and gay men, others instead reported to be actively seeking same-sex relationships (McMullen, 1990). In contrast, gay victims perceive the assault as a form of discrimination against their sexual orientation as if they were punished by the perpetrator for their sexuality (Carpenters, 2009; Walker et al., 2005). Garnets et al. posited that consequently victims experienced increased phobic and aversive feelings associated with their normal sexual behaviour, simply because it involved another man. Moreover, drawing back to Hickson et al.'s (1994) findings (section 2.2., page 34) on the prevalence of prior consensual activities, gay male survivors may naturally struggle even further to maintain a positive view of their sexuality. It could be argued that in these cases what was once considered a consensual activity, by being associated with traumatic and intrusive memories (as discussed in section 2.4.5.), is then associated with feelings of humiliation and shame. The psychological implications of sexual identity crises can be dramatic for both heterosexual and homosexual survivors, in terms of their damaged self-identity and self-acceptance (Abdullah-Khan,

2008). Practically, it could further exacerbate their sense of shame around disclosure, access to services and reporting, as they forecast being subjected to a similar line of questioning by family, friends, practitioners, and police officers.

2.4.7. Summary

The psychological consequences presented above are based on the limited and often out-dated literature currently available. Nonetheless, it is clear that male survivors experience an overall sense of inadequacy and powerlessness, as indicated by reports of depression, suicidal thoughts, persistent anger, low self-esteem, shame, guilt, self-blame, problems with sexual functioning, issues with gender identification, and PTSD. Authors have suggested that beyond the traumatic nature of rape itself, the socio-cultural context in which the phenomenon of male rape is situated has far-reaching consequences in shaping survivors' victim-experiences and psychological sequelae (Javaid, 2015b). Thus, there are important considerations to be made. Firstly, experiences of rape have to be considered as serious and severe for men as for women. The belief that male rape is not as traumatic as for other groups of victims creates a stigma that follows survivors in their rehabilitation process, impacts their ability to recognise and rationalise their abuse and disclose, and access appropriate services (C. D. Ellis, 2002). Secondly, it is crucial to assess whether key entry crisis-points, (such as GP and other non-specialised mental health service) are aware of male risk factors and how psychological/behavioural problems in men could be indicating a history of sexual victimisation. This is particularly important given how evidence consistently indicates that men are extremely reluctant to seek professional help for mental health problems (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). As such, male survivors, refrained by fears and anxieties related to their masculine socialisation, may avoid seeking therapeutic support and thus the psychological consequences detailed in this section may potentially worsen. Finally, given the extreme levels of shame and confusion reported, it is not surprising that male survivors are reluctant to involve the CJS and report their victimisation to the police (Rumney, 2008a). Indeed, there is a

critical need to determine the extent to which the psychological barriers described in this section shape how men interact and engage with police services.

2.5. Understanding male-on-male survivors' reluctance to report

Studies on female victims' experiences post-abuse suggest that the barriers and challenges faced by victims are, in part, shaped by gendered stereotypes (Schuller et al., 2010), rape myths (O'Hara, 2012), and victim blaming (Grubb & Turner, 2012), all of which contribute to the generally low levels of reporting of sexual offences (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). It has been argued that gendered narratives around sexual violence are so widespread that they permeate different platforms and institutions, including the CJS (Javaid, 2015b). As such, research on the attrition problem for sexual offences against women provides a framework to understand the challenges encountered by male survivors, as similar processes and institutions are in play. However, as with the other areas explored in this literature review, the lack of research on survivors' experiences with the CJS represents another important gap in sexual violence research. This is particularly concerning given the legislative changes that have recently occurred in the UK, which would warrant such exploration.

As previously discussed, (section 2.2), from the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act in 1994 (which criminalised anal rape), to the institution of the Sexual Offences Act (2003), there has been a significant increase in the number of sexual offences against men recorded by the police. In 2004-05, the number of recorded sexual offences against men by the police was 1,135 (Nicholas et al., 2005); in 2020, the number rose to 16,127 (ONS, 2021). This substantial increase in figures suggests that male survivors are possibly becoming more aware of their rights and know that rape against a man is a crime in the eyes of the law. However, it is important to also acknowledge the substantial discrepancy between police records and victim-

based surveys (see ONS, 2021), which clearly suggests that at least 90% of male victims of sexual offences do not report to the police.

2.5.1. Male-on-male survivors' reasons for not reporting

Whilst official data clearly indicate that the vast majority of victims do not report experiences of sexual violence, only a few authors have tried to understand why that is for men. Mezey and King (1989) interviewed 22 men who experienced adult sexual violence (over 16 years of age). Only two men in the study reported their victimisation to the police, which resulted in successful court proceedings. Most of the participants were scared of the stigma associated with sexual violence. Moreover, they showed reluctance to involve the police because of a perceived culture of homophobia in the force. It should also be noted that over 81% of the sample were sexually assaulted by their partner or ex-partner. This might have contributed to their reluctance to involve the police, in fear of the legal repercussions on someone intimate. However, the fear of homophobic responses from the police appears to be unique to male rape cases, reflecting survivors' belief that officer would base their judgements on the gender of those involved and minimise the severity of the case.

Similarly to Mezey and King, Rumney reported research conducted by the male rape support-organisation Survivors UK², which found that in 1992, only eight out of 70 male victims (11.4% of the sample) reported to the police (Rumney, 2008a). While Rumney did not offer any explanation as to why the majority of these men did not involve the police, it is fair to assume that public mistrust in the early 1990s (Jackson

² Survivors UK is a London-based organisation that supports those aged 13+ with male and non-binary identities who have been sexually abused, assaulted, or raped. They provide a wide range of services, including counselling, groupwork, outreach and engagement, training and workshops, specialist clinics, and helplines and webchats. <https://www.survivorsuk.org/>

et al., 2012), coupled with the lack of legislative acknowledgement of male rape in the UK, may have deterred men from reporting.

Unfortunately, even after the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, the number of men who reported to the police stayed relatively low. In 1997, M. King and Woollett investigated male rape victims' help-seeking behaviours by conducting face-to-face clinical interviews on a sample of 115 men. They found that only 15% of the participants reported to the police. Among the reasons for not reporting, participants indicated shame, fear, inability to talk about the assault, desire to forget the traumatising event, and mistrust of the police. The authors found that the perpetrator was known to the victim in almost 86% of the cases, substantiating the theory that level of acquaintance with the perpetrator could have, at least partially, some effect on men's reluctance to report. Similarly, Walker, Archer, and Lowe (2005) found that only 5 out of 40 survivors (12.5% of the sample) reported to the authorities, with only one of the cases resulting in a conviction.

Despite the developments in legislation and policy, those who report clearly represent only a fraction of the whole. However, it is useful to explore what factors and profile characteristics facilitate and encourage men to report and engage with the CJS processes. Therefore, the following section explores male survivors' reasons for reporting their victimisation to the police.

2.5.1. Male-on-male survivors' reasons for reporting

There is virtually no up-to-date or comprehensive research that systematically explores men's experiences of reporting sexual violence in the UK. Some historic evidence can be obtained from the US, where Pino and Meier (1999) conducted one of the only studies exploring the impact of gender in reporting sexual offences. The authors ran logistic regression to estimate the odds ratio (differences in likelihood) of

participants reporting. The analysis showed that women were 1.5 times more likely than men to report to the police. Women's decision to report was influenced by all the independent variables included in the analysis (e.g., relationship to the perpetrator, being robbed by the assailant, presence of a weapon, level of income/education, presence of injuries and need for medical assistance after the assault). In contrast, male participants were only influenced by the presence of injuries and need for medical assistance, which increased their likelihood of reporting by 5 and 8 times, respectively. While it is true that the differences in sample size (females, N=897; males, N=81) affect the generalisability of the findings and warrant some caution when interpreting on the reporting trends observed in this study, it is of interest that men felt more entitled to report depending on the severity of their victimisation. Pino and Meier suggested that men were inclined to report only when they could produce physical proof of the abuse. It emphasises men's endorsement of authentic rape beliefs (i.e., violent sexual assaults), where injuries that required medical attention were seen by male participants as undisputable evidence of being overpowered by the assailant. The authors went further to suggest that the ability to demonstrate that they were unable to protect themselves served the purpose of avoiding questions on their sexual orientation and masculinity by the police.

In the UK, a study by Jamel et al. (2008) provided a qualitative perspective into the experiences of male survivors who decided to report to the police. In many cases, the police service was seen by participants as a pathway to access other mental health service to support them emotionally and psychologically. Moreover, reporting was a way to legally validate survivors' experiences as rape. However, survivors' experiences were often negative as they encountered confrontational attitudes from police officers, who questioned their sexual orientation and the reasons for delayed

reporting. The attitudes reported in this study reflected officers' adherence to stereotypes, with one survivor reporting that a female STO believed that male survivors could not be sexual victimised: "as a man I was by nature more guilty of this crime and could not be a victim of it" (Jamel et al., 2008: p. 500). As noted by Angiolini (2015) officers' behaviours have significant consequences on survivors' willingness to progress with their complaint. Indeed, the likelihood of withdrawing from the investigative process will inevitably increase if the survivors are met with disbelief and hostility.

Overcoming the hesitancy around reporting for male survivors of sexual violence is clearly incredibly challenging. The combination of their traumatic experiences and the knowledge that their victimisation does not comply to the stereotypical, "authentic" rape scenario (Du Mont et al., 2003) affect their willingness to involve the police service. The evidence presented in this section consistently indicates that male survivors of rape are not trustful of the CJS and prefer to avoid involving the police. Importantly, such pre-conceptions could significantly affect their experiences with reporting, their attitudes towards officers, and investigative processes. Additionally, for male survivors who are contemplating whether to report or not, evidence also suggest that fear of being labelled 'homosexual' has a significant influence in their decision (Rumney, 2008a). Abdullah-Khan (2008) suggests that this is a concern for both gay and heterosexual survivors. Firstly, gay survivors fear that officers would conclude that the complaint is false and that they would be subjected to homophobic reactions; at the same time, heterosexual men fear being labelled homosexual (Abdullah-Khan, 2008). Secondly, there are some indications from male survivors that they expect to encounter negative and derisive responses from judgemental officers if they were to report (Javaid, 2015a).

Survivors' mistrust towards the CJS and fear of officers' reactions seems to be worsened by on-going issues with negative self-evaluative emotions previously discussed in section 2.4.3. Importantly, even when survivors do decide to report, the reactions they encounter seem to confirm their expectations. Despite, the changes and provision made by the police service to improve and raise awareness around the most effective and open investigative process to support victims, the evidence suggests that officers are still not equipped to deal with the unique needs of male survivors. This results in exacerbating and worsening survivors' sense of alienation, which could have critical psychological consequences (Rumney, 2008a).

Whilst it is evident that male survivors have a series of fears and anxieties around reporting their victimisation to the police, it is not clear what factors shape their negative attitudes of the CJS. Moreover, besides reluctance to report, issues emerge around survivors' experiences during the investigative processes (Jamel et al., 2008), which could explain the substantial number of men withdrawing their cases before receiving a police outcome (Hine et al., 2020). Therefore, it is useful to understand how current issues with rape policing in the UK create an environment in which male survivors not only are discouraged from reporting, but also from progressing their cases.

2.5.2. Current issues with policing of rape cases in the UK

The legislative changes outlined in section 2.1. explain to an extent the increase of recorded offences by the police. It is also possible that the growth in recorded offences is partly due to attempts in the 1990s to improve the management and treatment of male complainants by the police services (Rumney, 2008a). One of the interventions that has majorly changed the treatment of all victims of sexual violence was the introduction of the chaperone scheme by the MPS in 1992 (McMillan, 2015), which

evolved in the modern role of the Specially Trained Officers³ (STOs). A review of how rape cases are handled in England and Wales by Baroness Vivien Stern (hereafter referred to as the Stern Review, 2010) highlighted the practical challenges of having STOs always available, with forces and constabularies forced to introduce training for some officers' as 'first responders', to give survivors a preliminary overview of the investigation process. Often first responders must make the most of the first contact with victims while forensic evidence is still available, which is why some forces across the UK also introduced early evidence kits (EEKs). EEKs allowed officers to conduct less intrusive forensic examination, to collect, for example, urine and swab samples to test the presence of drugs and alcohol, which could have incapacitated the complainants. The Stern Review highlighted the necessity of experienced first responders when STOs are not available for the treatment of survivors. If the first responders do not have adequate experience and familiarity with the complex procedures that need to be followed, there is a risk of hindering the collection of evidence, as well as neglecting the wellbeing and safety of the complainants (Jamel et al., 2008).

The issues with training of first responders highlighted in the Stern Review were confirmed in a later review by Dame Elish Angiolini in 2015. Angiolini found a lack of consistency in responders' actions in the early stages of the investigation, for example around the correct use of EEKs and with some even failing to contact Sapphire⁴ to

³ The denotations vary across the UK forces, e.g., SOITs in the London MPS. STOs are officers specifically trained to work solely with sexual violence complainants. Their job consists in taking witness testimony, arranging forensic examinations and being the principal point of contact throughout the investigation. In London, STOs are directed and managed by an overarching specialist rape unit known as the Sapphire Unit (Stern, 2010).

⁴ Sapphire Units were developed in 2001 across London by the MPS in response to the increasing demands of investigating sexual offences. Sapphire Units are dedicated teams that deal with rape investigations and utilise officers who only investigate rape and are trained in dealing with both investigative and complainant care aspects (see Angiolini, 2015, p. 46).

have STOs assigned to the case (8%: Angiolini, 2015). Angiolini further suggested that responders were not equipped to handle the psychological demands of responding to a rape complaint. Some responders believed that there were high numbers of false allegations, using the drunkenness of the complainant as evidence, or even suggesting that young people would use the term 'rape' to justify their actions and avoid future trouble for putting themselves at risk. The beliefs reported by Angiolini reveal that non-specialised officers' hold significant blameful attitudes towards complainants of rape, which reflect adherence to 'authentic' rape beliefs (Du Mont et al., 2003). This is important for the policing of male rape considering that sexual offences against men are less common (compared to female allegations) which could influence and strengthen officers' scepticism when presented with a male complainant.

While Angiolini highlighted that most complainants reported generally positive experiences, it should be also noted that the majority of cases dealt with were with female complainants. In fact, Jamel et al. (2008) revealed that more than half of the STOs in their study dealt with no more than three male cases in their careers and an additional 11% never worked with a male survivor. Given the reports of lack of training of first responders and the fact that most victims of sexual violence withdraw their complaints in the earliest stages of reporting, it is reasonable to question whether the police in the UK is equipped to handle the unique challenges of investigating male sexual offences. As noted by Angiolini (2015), the barriers that exist around reporting for women are magnified when it comes to male complainants. She reported that the worldwide agreed terminology 'violence against women' may further exacerbate male survivors' reluctance to involve a service that seems incapable of accommodating to their unique needs. The reviews by Stern and Angiolini did not explore the experiences

of male complainants in any detail, leaving the question of how male rape is currently policed in the UK largely unanswered.

Recently, a study by Hine et al. (2020) examined 122 male rape cases reported to the London Metropolitan Police between 2005 and 2012. The study attempted to produce a descriptive profile of male rape cases and examine the relationship between case characteristics and case outcomes. Findings revealed that 29% of cases received an outcome of no crime, 27% of no further action and 22% of victims withdrew their complaints. Interestingly, history of mental health issues and voluntary drug/alcohol use (prior to the incident) significantly predicted higher likelihood of no crime outcomes. The study highlighted how case progression seemed to be significantly affected by factors related to victims' credibility, consistent with findings on the influence of 'extra-legal' factors on officers' investigative decisions (Hohl & Stanko, 2015). However, it should be noted that the study's timeframe (2005-2012) and its findings come after reforms to case classifications, high profile case operations (e.g., Operation Yewtree⁵) and commissioned reviews (Angiolini, 2015). Evidently, more up-to-date, and comprehensive reviews of male rape cases progression within the CJS are needed.

Evidence from Jamel et al. (2008), Stern (2010), Angiolini (2015), and Hine et al. (2020) emphasise the need to explore whether the police service *itself* as an institution fosters the negative attitudes held by survivors who are not willing to report. Put simply, it is necessary to understand the CJS, and its members, as a subgroup of society with unique ethos and features. Understanding the police as a culture can

⁵ Operation Yewtree was an investigation into sexual abuse allegations, predominantly the abuse of children, the British media personality Jimmy Savile and others. The investigation, led by the Metropolitan Police Service, started in October 2012, resulted in 11 criminal cases, leading to 7 convictions.

provide insight into the experiences and encounters reported by male survivors in the aforementioned studies. Indeed, an important factor in reporting decisions is what survivors make of the police. Among the challenges for the police in presenting themselves in a positive light to the public, is the perception that its members belong to a distinct, and almost conflicting, social group. These issues relate to the concept of *police* culture, which are discussed in the following section.

2.5.3. Police culture in the UK: hegemonic masculinity and male rape

Providing a definition of police culture is complex. Police culture has many aliases (canteen, patrol or street culture, police subculture) as the concept is fluid and dependant on social and political developments (J. B. L. Chan, 1997). A starting definition can be drawn by Waddington (2008) who defined police culture as:

‘...the mix of informal prejudice, values, attitudes and working practices commonly found among the lower ranks of the police that influences the exercise of discretion. It also refers to the police’s solidarity, which may tolerate corruption and resist reform’ (Waddington, 2008, p. 203).

Among the key values associated with police culture are discretion, cynicism/pessimism, suspicion, conservatism, and isolation-solidarity (Cockcroft, 2012). These characteristics portray an image of the police as a social group that is distinct from the general public and that has: some degree of freedom to apply laws how they best see fit (Jones, 2008); negative feelings towards the wider public and minority groups (MacAlister, 2004; J. B. L. Chan et al., 2003); sceptical attitudes towards behaviours that do not align to preconceived notions and beliefs; a sense of alienation emerging from the public’s antagonism, which reinforces “the camaraderie of the police...sustain the division between police and public” (Cockcroft, 2012, p. 58).

Importantly, police culture is founded on traditional masculine values, including machismo, misogyny, and heterosexuality (Abdullah-Khan, 2008). Despite the legislative and policy attempts to reform the service and make it more inclusive, there are still blatant, among others, gender imbalances, at individual, structural and cultural levels (Silvestri, 2017, p. 290). Indeed, much of the literature of police culture and gender refers to “the cult of masculinity” to explain the gender discrepancy within the service. For example, to summarise the cult of masculinity within the police, Fielding (1994) proposed the following characteristics:

“(i) aggressive, physical action; (ii) a strong sense of competitiveness and preoccupation with the imagery of conflict; (iii) an exaggerated heterosexual orientation, often articulated in terms of misogynistic and patriarchal attitudes to women; and (iv) the operation of rigid in-group/out-group distinctions whose consequences are strongly exclusionary in the case of out-groups, and strongly assertive of loyalty and affinity in the case of ingroups” (Fielding, 1994, p. 47).

The image that emerges of the police is one that closely resembles the concept of hegemonic masculinity in which the male patriarchal domination is legitimised in favour of subordinating women and other male populations, who are marginalised for not being ‘authentic men’ (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Among the characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality and homophobia are also included (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016), which could have important consequences in the experience that male survivors have of the police.

Police culture fosters an environment of hyper-masculinity among police officers (Atkinson, 2017; Loftus, 2008). Masculinity ideologies reinforce many of the male-rape-myths (discussed in section 2.6.) that are prevalent within modern society and could explain the potential hostility and negative bias towards male survivors of

sexual violence (Javaid, 2015a). It is particularly problematic if, as it would appear, this hyper-masculine culture within the police reinforces the myth that a real man cannot be sexually assaulted or raped. Javaid (2016b) argued that this could have an impact on the effectiveness of officers' ability to communicate and interview complainants and suspects; the likelihood of officers to dismiss cases as false reports filed by complainants to cover regretted sexual interactions; the number of cases that are recorded as no crime. Moreover, Rumney (2008a) reported that there is evidence to suggest the presence of homophobia within the police. This is not surprising when observing the prevalence of characteristics such as machismo, masculinity, and heterosexuality, which are incongruent with beliefs supporting same-sex intimate relationships (Panter, 2015; Rumens & Broomfield, 2012). For example, Abdullah-Khan (2008), reported that 71 of the police officers she interviewed believed that it was not possible for them to be sexually assaulted. Officers offered a number of reasons to substantiate their belief, such as being too strong to be overpowered and capable to defend themselves. This position towards male rape seems to imply that officers view male rape victims as not masculine enough, because they have been unable to defend themselves and in turn are somehow responsible for what happened. Rumney (2008a) argued that levels of homophobia, coupled with police culture, result in police officers equating anal or penile sexual intercourse as less masculine, and, therefore, homosexual. In earlier studies (Mezey & King, 1989) it was reported that male rape survivors were aware of the prevalence of this negative bias towards homosexuality and therefore tried to conceal their sexuality. However, given the lack of recent research, it is crucial to determine if these perceptions are still valid and how they influence and affect male survivors' encounters with the police.

2.5.4. Summary

Similarly, to other areas of male rape research, the evidence around survivors' experiences of reporting is limited and out-dated. Little is known about the reasons why some survivors decide to report their victimisation, with some evidence suggesting that the police are a gateway to access therapeutic support and that by reporting survivors seek legal recognition of their traumatic experiences (Jamel et al., 2008). However, evidence also suggests that the police is currently not well-equipped to provide support and cater for the unique needs of rape victims (Stern, 2010; Angiolini, 2015), which is reflected in the high rates of victim withdrawal of both male (Hine et al., 2020) and female cases (Stanko & Hohl, 2015). Whilst some authors have proposed police cultures as possible explanations for survivors' mistrust and negative experiences with the police (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Javaid, 2015a, 2016b, 2018), there is virtually no primary data examining issues with reporting and engaging with the CJS in the UK. This lack of research with male survivors reflects issues highlighted throughout the present literature review, despite clear indications that male rape is prevalent (section 2.2.), that men's experiences of sexual violence are shaped by traditional masculine norms and ideologies (2.3.), and that male survivors experience severe and debilitating psychological symptoms that have serious consequences in their lives (section 2.4.). Moreover, the challenges with reporting and the CJS described in this section, further emphasise how limited our understanding of this phenomenon is. It is clear, however, that underlying the challenges and barriers encountered by male survivors are stereotypes and myths that shape public perceptions on male rape.

2.6. Rape myths and male-on-male survivors

As the recognition of and interest in male rape and the surrounding stigma has grown, theorists have sought to apply existing frameworks concerning attitudes towards female survivors to better understand male rape. Arguably the most important of these applications is the concept of rape myths. Rape myths provide a theoretical framework to understand the gendered narratives that exist around sexual violence in modern society. The concept of rape myths can be considered as one of the most important contribution of feminist research, starting with Brownmiller's (1975) and Burt's (1980) seminal works which are to this day regarded as instrumental for the development of the modern understanding of how stereotypes influence attitudes on rape and sexual violence. However, before discussing rape myths in detail and their application to male rape survivors, it is important to first understand more about general theories of victim blaming, specifically how and why external observers are inclined to (negatively) judge victims of sexual violence.

2.6.1. Theories of Victim Blaming

Observers' judgements are influenced by social expectations of "authentic" rape (Du Mont et al., 2003), with negative consequences, in particular for victims (Grubb & Turner, 2012). However, often rape cases do not meet observers' expectations, thus survivors are viewed unfavourably (Viki & Abrams, 2002). Therefore, it is important to understand how and why responsibility is allocated in the context of rape. Drawing from Heider's (1958) *Attribution Theory*, victim blaming is explained as a function of internal attribution processes, where victims are believed to be targeted by perpetrators for some of their unique characteristics (personality, behaviour, and appearances). Attribution theories are the foundation of research on the phenomenon of victim blaming. For example, *Defensive Attribution Hypothesis* (Shaver, 1970;

Walster, 1966) explains rape victim blaming as a process of perceived similarity between the observer and the survivor: the observer focuses on distancing him/herself from the observed, to safeguard the future self from being held responsible in the event of something similar happening. Similarly, *Just World Beliefs* (Lerner, 1980) are often used to explain why and how rape survivors are blamed for their victimisation. Negative perceptions of and attitudes towards victims are the result of 'overcompensation for a seemingly undeserved act' (Grubb & Turner, 2012; p.444). Victims' behaviour and personal characteristics are seen as instrumental in explaining why they have experienced abuse (Strömwall et al., 2013). These beliefs underpin a need to view the world as a place where actions have consequences, and those consequences are justly deserved. Simply put, good things happen to good people, while bad things happen to bad people. This view of the world gives observers a sense of control over their surrounding environment and their own life. It would appear that Heider's (1958) internal attribution contributed to Lerner's (1980) Just World Belief: observers do not understand events based on their context but instead in the victims' moral attributes and behaviour. Therefore, in the eyes of the observer, rape does not exist "out there" independently from the victim; it occurs because of the way the victim is or has behaved. Similarly, to Defensive Attribution Hypothesis, belief in a just world underpins the same self-protective motive.

2.6.2. "Traditional" rape myths, their function, and the relationship with gender norms.

The blame-attribution processes presented above are at the source of the existence and wide endorsement of female rape myths, which are widely documented across a number of studies (Bohner et al., 1998; B. E. Johnson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; McMahon & Farmer, 2011; O'Hara, 2012; Ryan, 2011; Suarez &

Gadalla, 2010). Rape myths can be described as “prejudicial, stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists” (Burt, 1980, p. 217). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) posited that rape myths not only are unfounded and endorsed by large groups in society, but also ‘serve the function of denying and justifying male sexual aggression against women’ (p. 234). Rape myths acceptance (RMA) reflects society’s disbelief of claims of rape, exoneration of the assailant, victim blaming and beliefs of a “typical” rape victim (Gerger et al., 2007). Holding mythological beliefs around sexual violence results in the trivialisation of victims’ experience and the downgrading of perpetrators’ sexual aggression (Bohner et al., 2006). Thus, rape myths are intertwined with society’s tendency to blame victims of rape (Grubb & Turner, 2012). This is exemplified by Ben-David & Schneider (2005) triadic conceptualisation of rape myths, where observers’ attitudes are shaped around three major components: i) victim masochism (‘victims enjoy being raped’), ii) victim precipitation (‘they put themselves in the situation that resulted in the rape’) and iii) victim fabrication (‘victims lie about their victimisation’).

Rape myths play the function of delegitimising victims’ experiences, creating narratives, and characterisation of those involved. There are four types of rape myths which i) place the blame on the victim, ii) minimise victims’ experiences, iii) exonerate the perpetrator and iv) insinuate that there is a ‘typical’ rape victim. Rape myths play an important role in shaping how victims and perpetrators will be viewed. External observers adhere to these myths to rationalise and make sense of rape, by holding victims accountable and perpetrators excusable. Importantly, evidence suggests that rape myths are accepted not only by the wider community, but also by victims themselves (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004), perpetrators (Marshall & Hambley, 1996), and police officers (Hine & Murphy, 2017, 2019).

As with other areas of sexual violence research, rape myths are informed by feminist approaches. The relationship between gender norms and rape was identified by feminist scholars, who recognised that gender inequalities were at the root of the social justification of men's sexually violent behaviours (Lisak, 1991; Posadas, 2017). Drawing from gender role beliefs (Mencarini, 2014), the social expectations that are attached to men's role in society (and in sexual interactions) shape the narratives of sexual violence. A number of characteristics and norms arise from these expectations. Firstly, around what constitute masculine personalities and behaviours: men are supposed to be both physically and mentally strong, independent and responsible for their lives, assertive and in control of their relationships (J. A. Smith et al., 2007). On sex, men are expected to be initiators of sexual intercourse (Bridges, 1991), as well as promiscuous and sexually driven (Malamuth, 1998). In other words, men are expected to be sexually 'insatiable' (Stemple & Meyer, 2014) and motivated by a desire to find sexual partners, which influence the traditional rape myths that exonerate perpetrators as sexually motivated. Consequently, the attributes that are attached to masculinity are reflected in traditional rape myths only discussing men as potential perpetrators (McLean, 2013). Additionally, there is a clear conflict between masculinity and how rape survivors are perceived in the eyes of society. Heterosexual narratives present sex as a transaction of power (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010), where men 'conquer' and women 'submit'. Thus, male rape is rejected because it defies social expectations of what constitutes 'authentic' rape, and of men being perpetrators and not victims (Denov, 2003). Furthermore, because stereotypes around sex are informed by heterosexuality, observers superficially seek male rape's closest comparison term, which is homosexuality: the sex of the victim and/or perpetrator is misconstrued as their sexual orientation to rationalise the incident as sexually

motivated. These are the processes behind the development of specific stereotypes, known as male-rape-myths

2.6.3. Male-rape-myths

Turchik and Edwards (2012) suggested that male-rape-myths are accepted by a considerable part of the population and are closely related to gendered expectations around men's masculinity and sexuality, which are in conflict with the stereotypes associated with being a victim. Indeed, the social representations of men (i.e., as strong, assertive and capable of defending themselves: J. A. Smith et al., 2007) are in stark contrast with how victims are viewed (i.e., as individuals who are often weak, gullible, and inherently at risk of abuse: Jägervi, 2014). Male-rape-myths are embedded "in our history, culture and socio-political institutions" (Turchik & Edwards, 2012: p.221). Drawing from Judeo-Christian literature, which is at the root of Western civilisations (Nathan & ToReferepolski, 2016), the narratives of men being raped by their enemies depicted those instances as the up-most form of humiliation and emasculation (Harris, 2009). Harris argued that these accounts are the source of the stigma that exists around male rape, defined by perceptions of defeat and helplessness.

The stigma attached to male-rape-myths can be observed in the extent to which male rape is ridiculed (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Over the years, ironic and discriminatory representations in the media have significantly contributed to shaping the belief that male sexual violence is not a serious issue. For example, in a content analysis of a decade of media coverage of male rape cases in the UK, it was observed the reoccurrence of male-rape-myths, describing male rape as consensual, concerning only gay men, and portraying victims as liars (Abdullah-Khan, 2008). These trivialising depictions were present in nearly 50% of the articles included in the

analysis, which is testament of the cultural denial, minimisation, and discrimination of male accounts of rape and sexual violence.

By drawing from traditional rape myths, the triadic conceptualisation proposed by Ben-David and Schneider (2005) seems to also be applicable for male victimisation. At the same time, while the broader themes might stem from similar blame attribution processes and gendered beliefs, it is important to acknowledge the specificity and uniqueness of male-rape-myths. Drawing from Hine et al. (2021), the following sections outline some of the most common male rape myths identified in the literature and the functions they perform in shifting responsibility onto male survivors from perpetrators. Specifically, four themes will be discussing: denial, sexuality, masochism, and minimisation.

2.6.3.1. Denial: masculinity myths ('real men cannot be raped')

The denial of male rape can be considered a corollary of the beliefs and the cultural expectations on masculinity discussed in section 2.3. Indeed, male survivors tend to be criticised for behaviours that contradict masculine norms, for example not fending off the attacker (Groth & Burgess, 1980). These perceptions are further encouraged by the familiar notion that women are at greater risk of becoming victims of sexual violence. The immediate consequence is the myth that 'real men' could not be sexually assaulted and thus, male survivors are lesser men. The perception of men being powerful, assertive, and therefore perfectly capable of dealing with confrontational circumstances, results in a cognitive incongruence, making the idea of a man being forced to have non-consensual sex inconceivable (Gonsoriek, 1995; Hine et al., 2021; Stermac et al, 2004; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). This is exemplified by the police officers in Abdullah-Khan's study (2008) who firmly believed that they could never be sexually assaulted because of their strength and self-defence abilities, which is

indicative of traditional victim-blaming rape myths function where observers distance themselves from the victim. It also demonstrates how widespread and far-reaching male rape myths are.

The real-men-myth is also encouraged by fictional and media accounts of male rape, where, for example, rape only occurs in prison settings (Eigenberg & Baro, 2003) or the military (Turchik & Edwards, 2012) and survivors have either lost their freedom and independence (and therefore their assertiveness). Consequently, survivors of rape in the community are judged by their standing as free and adult men in society. They are expected to fend off unwanted sexual attention (Chapleau et al, 2008), and hence their inability to do so questions their “male status” in society. It is important to also recognise that adherence to the real-men-myth has ramifications that extend beyond the denial of male rape. Evidence suggests that male survivors themselves endorse the real-men-myth, with important psychological consequences on their wellbeing, including feelings of shame and guilt for not meeting male expectations (Walker et al., 2005). Indeed, the psychological consequences presented in section 2.4.6. emphasise how male survivors experience sexual and gender identity confusion following the abuse, in part because of masculinity myths that deny male victimisation. However, masculinity myths account only for a part of the prejudice and stigma attached to male rape. Other related myths often focus instead on victims’ sexuality.

2.6.3.2. Sexuality: the gay-rape myth.

Sexuality myths superficially presents male rape as consensual sex between gay men. Drawing from masculinity myths, homophobic assumptions are made regarding male rape survivors (Hine et al., 2021). Victims are assumed to be gay, because the sex of those involved is used to infer their sexual orientation (i.e., only gay men would have sex with/attract the attention of other men: Hickson et al., 1994). This is an extremely

common interpretation of male rape (e.g., Gonsiorek, 1994; Turchik & Edwards, 2012), where survivors are believed to be gay (Stermac et al., 2004), have attracted the perpetrators with 'gay manners' (Coxell & King, 2010), or that *only* gay men are raped (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991).

In complete contradiction, sexuality myths also deny that gay men can be sexually assaulted. Sexuality myths portray gay men as consensual victims (Mezey & King, 1989) because the act of anal penetration itself is seen as natural for gay men (Cotton, 1992). Consequently, the nature of the act and the sexuality of the victim are used to portray gay men as consensual victims (Mezey & King, 1989), delegitimising the experiences of all male survivors. Again, these forms of sexuality myths reflect both masculinity norms (i.e., sexual readiness, assertiveness: Bridges, 1991) and homophobia, as sex between men (consensual or not) promotes responses of disbelief and disgust (Hine et al., 201). At the same time, adherence to sexuality rape myths play the traditional function of justifying and exonerating the perpetrator whose actions are seen as homosexually motivated. The immediate implication is that observers view male rape as a crime concerning only the gay communities. Moreover, the perception of male survivors as gay men minimises their experiences as consensual, because of narratives that view gay men as hedonistic and risk-takers (Nagoshi et al., 2008). Thus, it is important to understand how the stigma that arises from the sexuality rape myths has its roots in homophobia (Kassing et al., 2005), with evidence showing that rape myths are significantly related to negative attitudes towards gay men, gender role attitudes, and victim blame (Davies et al., 2008). It could be argued that the hostility towards gay men is transferred to male rape, resulting in the trivialisation of survivors' experiences. Moreover, it also reflects observers' tendency to look for evidence that questions the element of consent, which is crucial

in the legal handling of sexual offences. Indeed, as previously discussed (section 2.5.3.), homophobic reactions to male rape victims are not uncommon within the CJS (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Javaid, 2015a).

2.6.3.3. Masochism: a man who is raped by another man must have wanted it.

As previously mentioned, attitudes towards rape tend to focus on survivors' behaviours, questioning whether they somehow facilitated the assault, and "wanted it". This tendency to doubt survivors is amplified in the context of male sexual victimisation, because men are expected to protect themselves (Abdullah-Khan, 2008). Moreover, the notion that men are in a constant state of sexual readiness (Stermac et al, 2004), encourages and promotes the belief that men cannot be forced to have sex without implicitly giving consent. These expectations around men's role in sexual interactions translate to male-rape-myths that survivors 'must have wanted' to have sex with the perpetrator (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996). The endorsement of this myth explains why observers view the presence of erections and ejaculations in male rape cases as the physiological synonym of consent by the victim (Gonsiorek, 1995). In fact, the belief that men are unable to function sexually unless there is some level of psychological arousal (R. E. Smith et al., 1988) strengthen this myth, particularly when there is evidence of some consensual intimate activity, like kissing or fondling (Hickson et al., 1994).

The endorsement of masochism-myths is indicative of the fact that external observers tend to cast judgement superficially: male rape is minimised and belittled on the basis of physiological reactions (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). At the same time, the belief that survivors are somehow pursuing and facilitating the abuse is indicative of a deeper, almost instinctive, rejection and denial of the existence of male rape. The self-serving motives behind endorsement of masochism-myths is reflected on how

men have been found to consistently endorse these typology of myths (Chapleau et al., 2008; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Walfield, 2018). It could be argued that by endorsing masochist-myths, individuals are distancing themselves from male survivors to protect hypothetical future selves, by portraying victims as depraved and hedonistic anomalies (Nagoshi et al., 2008).

2.6.3.4. Minimisation: male rape is not (as) traumatic (as female rape).

While it is generally recognised that sexual violence has a significant impact on the psychological wellbeing of a woman (Campbell, Sefl & Ahrens, 2004; Hanson, 1990; Resick, 1993), it is often believed that rape is not as traumatic for male survivors. There is a tendency to believe that sexual assault on males has fewer psychological repercussions compared to females (Gonsierek, 1995). This is despite empirical evidence suggesting that assaulted men report similar, if not greater, trauma than women (see section 2.4.). Drawing from masculinity and masochism myths, the public holds the belief that, because of a man's inherent strength and resilience (Pirkis et al., 2017), he would not be psychologically affected if sexually assaulted as extremely as a woman and would not be traumatised (Hine et al., 2021; Turchik & Edwards, 2012).

The adherence to myths that minimise the experiences of male survivors has important consequences to be considered. Firstly, it could be argued survivors would not access therapeutic support, nor report to the police, for fear of being dismissed and ridiculed. Indeed, as men typically struggle with help seeking (section 2.3.), it would be unsurprising if encounters with narratives that delegitimises male rape experiences as trivial compared to women led to men refraining from engaging with services. By rejecting these experiences as non-traumatic, minimisation myths further exacerbate the stigma and secrecy that has been historically projected on the phenomenon of male rape. Moreover, it can result in some men not being able to

recognise their own victimisation and underestimate their natural psychological reactions (Roos & Katz, 2003). Finally, downplaying men's sexual violence experiences intensifies the traditional rape myth functions of denial of the phenomenon and exoneration of the perpetrators. Most importantly, it provides further justification that somehow male survivors should be held accountable for their victimisation.

2.6.4. Measuring Male Rape Myths: predictors and male-rape-myths functions

The sections above outlined the variety and uniqueness of male-rape-myths. However, another important aspect to be explored is how researchers have identified and operationalised male-rape-myths both in survivors and the public. This is important because rape myths provide a useful measure of public perceptions of victims, as well as an indication of what barriers and narratives victims encounter post-incident. While evidence suggests that survivors' struggles are partly due to the negative attitudes and judgement that surround sexual violence, there has been little and not enough focus on determining the actual influence of male-rape-myths on observers' attitudes towards male rape victims and perpetrators. The need to conduct attitudinal research should not be overlooked, as it could be the key for addressing the social stigma that surrounds male rape, by assessing how male-rape-myths shape the strategies behind the variety of blame-attribution processes outlined in the previous paragraphs. The limited number of studies that have investigated observers' perceptions towards male rape constitute an important and non-trivial gap in research on sexual violence. In the following paragraphs, an overview of some of the studies of interest on male-rape-myths will be given, and how testing the effect of these constructs informed researchers' understanding of public perceptions and attitudes towards male rape.

Among the first to operationalise male-rape-myths, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992) presented participants with a set of statements related to male and female rape. The items in the study addressed myths such as “it is impossible to for a man (woman) to rape a man”, “most men who are raped by a man (woman) are somewhat to blame for not being more careful”, “most men who are raped by a man (woman) do not need counselling”. They found a significant effect of myth item, participants sex and perpetrator sex. Male participants were found to be more accepting of the rape myths presented. In particular, 22% of male participants endorsed the myth that a man should be blamed for not escaping a male assailant, and 22% of men believed that male-on-male rape victims should be blamed for not being more careful. Despite the popularity of the scale, a number of issues were identified with the measure (particularly around incorporating both female and male perpetrators: see Hine et al., 2021). Recently, to address the lack of reliable, validated, targeted, and comprehensive tools to measure male-rape-myths, Hine and colleagues (2021) developed the Male Rape Myths Acceptance Scale (MRMAS), measuring myths in six key areas: masculinity (e.g. “real men cannot be raped”), sexuality (e.g. “male-on-male rape only happens to gay men”), pleasure (e.g. “it is reasonable for the victim's erection to be viewed as consent”), effect (“men are less traumatised by rape than women”), context (e.g. “most male rape cases include a weapon”), and perpetrators (e.g. “only big and strong men are able to rape other men”). The analysis of the structure of the scale suggested two latent factors on Blame and Minimisation/Exoneration, indicating that male-rape-myths focus around blaming victims for their victimisation, that only certain types of men are targeted, and exonerate the perpetrator or minimise the incident (Hine et al., 2021: p. 16). Whilst no empirical studies have yet been conducted using MRMAS, the scale correlates well

with proximal and previous measures of male-rape-myths (i.e., Walfield, 2018), traditional rape myth scales, and related attitudes, such as homophobia. Overall, MRMAS appears to improve on previous measures, whilst measuring a broader range of attitudes towards male rape.

Drawing from Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's (1992) findings, Chapleau et al. (2008) investigated underlining factors behind university students' acceptance of male-rape-myths. They compared male and female rape-myth-acceptance, as well as investigating the effect of the gender of the victim on participants' levels of endorsement. In addition, they tested how participants' acceptance of interpersonal violence, adversarial sex beliefs, and ambivalent sexism towards men related to rape myths. Similarly, to Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992), Chapleau and colleagues found that male participants showed endorsement to a number of myths, such as victims' responsibility for being raped, male survivors would not be distressed after being assaulted, and that male rape is impossible. Importantly, male respondents' levels of rape myth acceptance did not significantly differ depending on the gender of the victim, suggesting that men are more accepting of rape myths in general, regardless of the sex of the victim. They also found that benevolent sexism towards men was related to male-rape-myths, which the authors argued reflected participants' endorsement of the male invulnerability stereotype (Mahalik, Good, et al., 2003). Therefore, participants seemed to believe that survivors either provoked or allowed the assault to take place. Interestingly, hostile sexism (male exploitation of women for sex and power) did not affect participants' endorsement levels. The authors argued that hostile sexism would not be as relevant outside the realm of heterosexual interactions, which further reinforces the notion that male rape is believed to be a sexually motivated crime and, thus, homosexual.

Moreover, Chapleau et al. (2008) found that acceptance of interpersonal violence strongly predicted support of rape myths. This supports the argument by Du Mont et al. (2003) that posits that normalisation of sexual violence may result in a trivialisation of rape incidents. The authors cautiously concluded that their findings show that female and male-rape-myth acceptance share underlying ideologies. This is important because it places male rape as a consequence of the same social constructs and structures that have been identified for female rape. Drawing from Rumney's (2008b) review of Mooney's (2006), Chapleau et al.'s findings support the fact that a gendered analysis of male rape is indeed possible and recommended, to contextualise the culture of denial of male rape within the realm hyper-masculinity dimensions, such as benevolent sexism and interpersonal violence.

Further evidence on the impact of measures of intolerance in support of male-rape-myths can be found in Walfield (2018), where the relationship between myths adherence and a number of demographic and attitudinal factors related to female rape myth acceptance was examined on a large representative US sample (N= 1220). Findings revealed that participants endorsed the myth that a man's resistance is a major factor in determining if he was raped (32%), disbelief that men can be sexually assaulted by women (31%), male rape happens only in the homosexual community (30.8%), men would enjoy being raped (25%), men claimed to be raped to hide that they consented to homosexual relations (17%), and that physiological reactions were synonymous with pleasure (16%). Men were more likely to adhere to male-rape-myths. Additionally, negative attitudes towards homosexuality, acceptance of traditional sexual double standards and endorsement of traditional gender stereotypes were positively related to rape-myth-acceptance. Simply put, Walfield's findings strengthen the argument that male rape myths arise from homophobia, gendered

beliefs around sexuality and sexual interactions. Moreover, although based in a US sample, it could be argued that it supports the notion that male rape is still a widely misunderstood and discriminated against phenomenon.

Recently, DeJong et al. (2020) conducted a vignette study examining whether different contexts (prison, conflict, military, or college) could affect undergraduate students' level of support on denial, blame, minimisation, and sexuality myths. Besides demographic information, participants (N=314) were also measured on their level of intolerance (homophobia, religious intolerance, racism, sexism, and classism). DeJong et al.'s study is consistent with previous literature, with men and white participants significantly more likely to support male-rape-myths. Interestingly, the authors also found that prior sexual victimisation or knowing a victim of sexual assault predicted less support of rape myths. However, in terms of contextual factors, only the military context significantly affected level of endorsement of male-rape-myths, with students reporting less support. Importantly, DeJong et al.'s findings could only be generalised to undergraduate students, routinely described as convenience samples (Leiner, 2016) which are not representative of the adult population (Gallander Wintre et al., 2001). Clearly, further research is needed to examine the impact of contextual factors on support of rape myths in the general public.

A different approach to operationalise male-rape-myths was provided by Anderson (2007), who asked participants to provide written descriptions of typical male and female rape scenarios. In male scenarios, perpetrators were described as more powerful and stronger than victims. Descriptions often alluded to the sexual motive behind perpetrators' actions and how the assault was not premeditated but opportunistic. Survivors were often described as smaller than the perpetrator, homosexual, attractive and feeling guilty. Interestingly, male rape scenarios were

extremely sexualised, including mentions to penetration, sexual orientation of the victim and perpetrator, sexual motivation, and sexual contact. Sexual components were found in 36% and 22% of descriptions by male and female participants, respectively. This is particularly interesting considering how sexual mentions did not significantly affect participants' descriptions of female rape. The authors argued that because female rape is normalised in modern society, participants did not feel compelled to give more detail when describing a typical rape of a woman. Alternatively, the fact that participants gave more space to describe sexual elements in a typical male rape could be related to the "real men" myth that men can only be victims if violently and viciously assaulted. It could also be argued that male rape perceptions are highly charged with sexual referencing, reflecting the myth that male rape is a sexually motivated crime.

Understanding how male-rape-myths function can provide a framework to better understand survivors' experiences post-abuse, in terms of disclosing, accessing services and reporting to the police. Acceptance of male-rape-myths is associated with stigmatising beliefs, such as that male survivors provoke and cause the incident (Chapleau et al., 2008). Studies highlight how observers judge victims' behaviour against stereotypical masculine traits of strength, as reflected by studies showing that survivors are blamed for not resisting, defending themselves, or escaping (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Another function of male-rape-myths is to describe male rape as a sexually motivated act (Anderson, 2007; Hickson et al., 1994), which influences how observers perceive victims and perpetrators. This is exemplified by recent reports of observers believing that male rape concerns only homosexual men and that survivors enjoy being raped (DeJong et al., 2020; Walfied, 2018). The evidence presented in this section clearly portrays the complexity and scope of male-

rape-myths. Crucially, the lack of studies testing how widespread and relevant male-rape-myths are across different layers of society hinders the current understanding of male rape. In particular, it is important to assess if male survivors themselves could be endorsing and accepting such myths and use them to rationalise their experiences.

2.6.5. Summary

Rape myths have been proposed to be synonymous to victim blaming (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Observers are found to use themselves as the measure of comparison with the stimuli they are exposed to (Shaver, 1970), and, in the context of rape, to distance themselves from victims to avoid cognitive dissonance (Grubb & Turner, 2012). These cognitive procedures are well documented in female rape research (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Hayes et al., 2013; Van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014) and are also present in male cases (Sleath & Bull, 2010). Men are held responsible for being raped, for not being able to escape, and for not defending themselves (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Male victim blaming is instigated by the belief that men should be held accountable (real-men-myth), which in turn is reinforced by the trivialisation of survivors' sexual trauma. Moreover, victim blaming is particularly accentuated depending on survivors' sexual orientation (Kassing et al., 2005; Wakelin & Long, 2003), with gay and bisexual men seen by external observers as immoral, deviant, and, therefore, deserving to be sexually assaulted (Hine et al., 2021; Turchik & Edwards, 2012).

There is a dual implication on placing responsibility on the victim. Firstly, there is evidence to suggest that men are aware of this sentiment and fear being held accountable (Scarce, 1997). This could negatively affect their willingness to disclose to family members and authorities, as well as stopping them from seeking therapeutic and medical assistance. Secondly, blaming survivors results in the displacement of

responsibility from the real perpetrator and ultimately legitimises male rape in modern society. The evidence available on male-rape-myths highlights that, similarly to women, male survivors are systematically discriminated against, blamed, dismissed, and not believed. As outlined in the sections above, while there are different forms of male-rape-myths that have specific characteristics and meaning, the ultimate objective is to delegitimise survivors' experiences as unnatural and rare. The myths presented are intrinsically related to social expectations around masculinity, which shape the judgements of external observers, including practitioners (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996) and police officers (Abdullah-Khan, 2008).

2.7. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to present an overview of the literature available on male rape, which revealed key areas where knowledge is substantially limited. The evidence presented clearly shows that male rape and sexual abuse is prevalent in the UK (2.2.), and that gender-specific barriers exist for men to recognise, disclose, and seek support (2.3.). These challenges are compounded by the severity of the trauma experienced by sexually abused men, with symptoms including depression, suicide ideation, anger, negative self-evaluative emotions, sexual and gender identity confusion, and PTSD related symptoms (2.4.). Additionally, evidence also suggest that men are extremely reluctant to involve the CJS, and when they do, they are met by judgemental and hostile responses from officers (2.5.), as evidenced by the number of men withdrawing their cases before receiving an investigative outcome (Hine et al., 2020). Underscoring the issues on measuring prevalence, gender-specific barriers, symptomatology, and involvement of the CJS, the present literature review highlighted the role of male-rape-myths (2.6.) in shaping the narratives that deny, sexualise, dismiss, minimise, and belittle male survivors' experiences of rape and sexual

violence. Crucially, such narratives not only exist in public and institutional discourses (i.e., practitioners and police officers), but are held by male survivors themselves, with damaging consequences on their self-image, willingness to seek help, and report their victimisation to the authorities.

The issues raised in this review are noteworthy, considering that in recent years the UK government has publicly recognised that a significant number of men suffer every year from both domestic abuse and sexual violence. In the Government's strategy to end *Violence Against Women and Girls*⁶ (VAWG) (2019), the government moved away from gender-exclusive definitions of intimate violence, to be more inclusive of different gender identifications and sexual orientations. Moreover, governmental reviews (Angiolini, 2015; Stern, 2010) have clearly recognised the inadequate service provided by the CJS to male complainants of sexual offences, and how more needs to be done to improve their experiences of reporting. While there is a need to determine what happens once a male complainant reports to the police, there are still no studies specifically investigating male survivors' experiences with reporting, police officers, withdrawing their cases, or progressing with the investigation, after Operation Yewtree and the Angiolini Review (2015). The recent institutional recognition and the growing awareness of sexual violence (Mendes et al., 2018) and gender norms (Bragg et al., 2018) warrants research examining how men's experiences have changed along with these recent social developments. Only through a detailed account of survivors' experiences will it be possible to determine if and how

⁶ Position statement on male victims of crimes considered in the cross-Government strategy on ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). In this statement, several initiatives and funding strategies were set out to support specialised services, including male services, as well as improving the response of the CJS.

the social pressures discussed in this review are still responsible for survivors' reluctance to disclose, access support, and report to the police.

In conclusion, the research aims, objectives, and questions previously outlined (see Chapter 1, section 1.2. for overview of aims and research questions) attempt to address some of the issues identified in this literature review on male rape research. Therefore, the thesis presents two qualitative studies, separately investigating service providers' (Study 1) and survivors' (Study 2) accounts. The thesis is structured around a phenomenological methodology, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology of the research

3.1. Introduction

The aim of the chapter is to discuss the methodological decisions behind the qualitative studies presented in this thesis, which have been designed to generate knowledge from the experiences of male survivors and their service providers. To do so, appreciation must be given to the complex nature of the phenomenon of rape and sexual abuse towards men, and the subsequent methodological challenges and considerations this invites. For example, irrespective of victim gender, rape and sexual abuse are extremely personal and individual experiences that need to be explored by accessing the lived experiences of those affected (Kahn & Mathie, 2000). Moreover, due to the stigma and cultural bias associated with male victimisation specifically, any investigation must acknowledge the impact of these social pressures on all aspects of the event (as outlined in Chapter II). Examination of victims' experiences with external institutions, such as support services and the CJS, are also fraught with risk of so-called secondary victimisation through re-traumatisation. In response, robust yet delicate approaches are essential.

The following sections will therefore outline: approaches to qualitative research in psychology and general quality and rigour criteria; how qualitative methods have been used previously to investigate male sexual violence; the philosophical foundations of the phenomenological enquiries used in this thesis; the methods and the design of the studies in this thesis; and finally, the ethical considerations associated with these methods. This section will describe how a phenomenological

approach was employed across both studies, placing the experiences of male survivors and third-sector service providers at the centre of the research inquiry.

3.2. Qualitative methods of research

Qualitative methods of research provide a framework that allows for the careful exploration of individual experiences and an appreciation of the uniqueness of each account (Willig, 2013). The domination of quantitative methodologies in psychological research has led to the unfair belief regarding qualitative methods as unscientific, because of the importance placed on the researcher's interpretation of the data and the small samples typically studied (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In qualitative research, the researcher becomes an active and influential element of the research process, by engagement and interpretation of participants' accounts of their experiences. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), the renewed interest in qualitative methods was believed to stem from the emergence of philosophical movements, such as feminism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and social constructionism in the 1980s, which opposed traditional positivism in quantitative Psychology. These movements questioned the positivist assumption of an independent, observable, and measurable reality. Instead, the individual experience gained a more central role, believed to shape and create multiple versions or constructions of reality. The aim of this section is to outline the key characteristics of qualitative research and how this method of inquiry informed and shaped the studies of the present thesis.

According to Silverman (2000, in Braun & Clarke, 2013) qualitative research is fundamentally different from quantitative research in terms of data used, data collection techniques, how theories are generated, and the role of the researcher. Firstly, words (written and spoken) are used as the medium to access participants' experiences. In contrast with quantitative methods, words cannot be reduced to

numerical variables and are to be studied in the context of how they are used by the participant. Secondly, data collection occurs in a more naturalistic way, such as interviews, conversations, or writing. Again, in contrast to quantitative research, there is no attempt to design experimental conditions to get closer to the reality of the phenomena studied; on the contrary, the researcher is interested in understanding and evaluating the data in the context in which they were collected. Moreover, qualitative research marks a shift from the interest in identifying relationship between discrete variables to the meaning that participants give to the accounts of their experiences. It means that the researcher does not engage in a deductive process of theory generation, but rather in an inductive, bottom-up approach. It does not mean that qualitative research starts without a theoretical framework. It implies that data are not collected to accept or reject a hypothesis, but rather to use participants' personal experiences to seek patterns as well as exploring differences across each account (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Finally, the role of the researcher's positionality, subjectivity and reflexivity become central elements in qualitative researcher. According to Braun and Clarke (2013):

“...we, as researchers, bring our own histories, values, assumptions, perspectives, politics and mannerism into the research and we cannot leave those out of the door. The topics we find interesting to research, and ways we ask questions about them, the aspects of our data that excite us - these and many other factors) reflect who we are; our subjectivity” (p. 36).

The researchers' own experiences are believed to shape and influence the data collection and analysis. Therefore, it has to be considered an essential part of the research process, by utilising a reflexive stance (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Reflexivity is a dual process by which the researcher critically evaluates the knowledge generated,

while evaluating the impact of the researcher, their role, biases, and histories on the generation of said knowledge. Willig (2013) distinguished between personal and epistemological reflexivity. Personal reflexivity refers to the critical evaluation of the impact of personal values, experiences, and beliefs on the research process. Epistemological reflexivity requires the researcher to identify how decisions and assumptions on the research design have influenced and shaped the results found.

As previously mentioned, the rejection of positivist paradigms saw an ontological shift from realism to relativism. Indeed, qualitative researchers oppose the positivist paradigm, which saw the development of philosophical positions that rejected positivist realism to shift towards an ontological relativism. Qualitative methods are based on constructivism, which is a non-foundational approach to knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is posited that there are multiple realities which are “apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; p. 110). The nature of knowledge is rooted in the individual experiences, making each account unique and valid. The language used takes a central role in the development of knowledge: the same object can be described in different ways, giving rise to different perceptions and conceptualisations that are neither wrong nor right. Epistemologically, constructivism draws an interactive relationship between observer and observed, where the researcher takes a proactive role in the generation and interpretation of the data by interacting with the participants. Moreover, the researcher takes a pivotal role in the interpretation of the entities observed, as their own subjectivity is considered the only source of reality (Guba, 1990). Therefore, qualitative methods provide researchers with the means to access participants’ thoughts and feelings, and to explore in depth their personal experiences of the researched topic (Banyard et al.,

2007). Moving away from narrow ontological and epistemological perspectives, the qualitative researcher endeavours to make sense of how individuals understand and rationalise the events and circumstances in their lives. This is especially important in the context of traumatic experiences, known to vary significantly depending on a number of subtle, individual differences that are difficult to operationalise and measure in traditional quantitative designs (Gooberman-Hill et al., 2011).

Before turning to discussing how qualitative approaches were followed in this thesis, it is important to explore how quality and rigour are determined in qualitative research.

3.2.1. Quality and rigour criteria for qualitative research

Among the challenges of conducting qualitative research is the identification of parameters, conventions and standards that can be used to ensure the quality and rigour of the research and proposed findings. Whilst in quantitative psychological research there are a number of well-established and acknowledged parameters (i.e., reliability, validity, generalisability, representative samples of adequate size), it is difficult to define a similarly recognised set of guidelines for “good” qualitative research. In the absence of established criteria, qualitative research was often criticised from a positivistic perspective as “merely subjective assertion supported by unscientific method” (Ballinger, 2006, p. 235). To address these issues, Lucy Yardley (2000) proposed four sets of characteristics for good qualitative research: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance (p. 219). These characteristics will be discussed below in the context of the present thesis and how the researcher endeavoured to meet the guidelines in every stage of the research project.

3.2.1.1. Sensitivity to context

Whilst an awareness of the relevant literature is essential for any research endeavour, Yardley observed the importance of sophistication for the interpretation of data as crucial for qualitative analysis. This is because of the interest in “vertical generalisation”, where the author attempts to link the particular to the abstract and to the work of others (Yardley, 2000). In this project, an extensive literature review was conducted, addressing both the topic of male rape specifically and touching on broader constructs related to this phenomenon (i.e., sexual violence research, gender studies, policing rape in the UK, general and specialised service provision, as discussed in Chapter 2). Yardley (2000) also highlights the importance of adhering and following the philosophical foundations of the chosen methodology, as was the case in the current thesis (see section 3.4.). Sensitivity to context also refers to the need for awareness and sensitivity to participants’ perspectives. This was achieved by engaging with services affiliated to the Male Survivor Partnership (MSP⁷), who provided information, guidance, and advice on how to approach the subject throughout the project.

Additionally, it is crucial that the researcher is mindful of the consequences that certain action could have during the research process, (i.e., language used and dialogue) which are paramount in the context of research involving vulnerable participants. In the studies of this thesis, questions were developed to ensure that participants felt at ease to answer or reject any question (see interview scripts in Appendices I, II). For example, this was achieved by suggesting that the individual

⁷ The Male Survivors Partnership (MSP) facilitated the distribution of the information sheet and recruitment of service providers for this study. MSP is a national organisation in the UK that functions as an umbrella agency for regional and local organisations that work and support boys and men who experience unwanted sexual contact, sexual abuse and/or rape.

topics 'may or may not' be relevant to the individual participant, designed to create an environment where there were no right or wrong answers. Instead, participants could direct the conversation to where their own lived experience was most significant.

3.2.1.2. *Commitment, rigour and transparency and coherence*

These criteria are usually expected in psychological research and describe how data are gathered, analysed, and reported. Commitment refers to engagement with the topic and competence in the methods used (Yardley, 2000) which in the case of the researcher stems from higher education studies in Forensic Psychology, both at Bachelor and Master's level, with previous research projects focusing on attitudes towards rape victims and public perceptions around criminal behaviours (this will be further discussed in relation to the researcher's reflexivity and positionality in section 3.5.3.)

Rigour refers to the completeness of the data collection process and analysis, which can also refer to adequacy of the sample used, in terms of its ability to provide the information needed, and not of sample size. Given the design of the thesis (later discussed in sections 3.4.1. and 3.4.4.), the researcher employed purposive sampling (as outlined in Phase 1 and Phase 2, section 3.5.1.) of participants directly and indirectly affected by the phenomenon of male rape (survivors and service providers). In terms of completeness of how data were gathered and studied, the analysis of the qualitative studies in this thesis was conducted in consultation with the supervisory team, who challenged and interrogated the researcher's interpretations and the superordinate themes identified. This process of open discussion allowed the researcher to rigorously argue for his interpretation of the data and to demonstrate how these were thematically represented in participants' accounts.

Similarly, transparency and coherence refer to "clarity and cogency - and hence the rhetorical power or persuasiveness - of the description and argumentation" (Yardley, 2000; p. 222). In this thesis, the presentation and description of themes and findings were accompanied by several illustrative examples from multiple participants and were situated within the relevant literature, to clearly outline the conceptual foundations of the discussion presented. Transparency also refers to providing the reader with complete information on all the research processes, from designing the studies, recruitment, and data collection to how data were analysed. Indeed, one of the purposes of this chapter is to provide a clear, transparent explanation of the methodological foundations of this thesis to allow for scrutiny. Finally, Yardley (2000) observes that transparency may also refer to researchers' reflexivity regarding their personal perspectives of the phenomenon and motivations for undertaking the research process. An account of the researcher's positionality and reflexivity is provided later in this chapter (3.5.3.) showing how a reflexive stance was maintained throughout the research and how it influenced the phenomenological process of capturing participants' constructions of reality (Bruner, 1991; Freeman, 1993; Smith & Osborne, 2008)

3.2.1.3. *Impact and importance*

For Yardley, the utility of any piece of research is the decisive criterion by which any piece of research must be judged (p. 223). She goes on to argue that to determine the value of research it is necessary to establish what were the objectives of the analysis, what was the intended application, and the community for whom findings were deemed relevant. Qualitative investigation often aims to generate knowledge within novel areas of research (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), as was the case with this thesis. The thesis was constructed around rigorous qualitative studies addressing specific

research questions, aimed at exploring the phenomenon of male rape and sexual abuse from the perspectives of survivors and those who support them. The findings presented in the following chapters provide a much-needed contemporary overview of survivors' experience, with results discussed in relation to current service provision in the UK, barriers to effective support and access to the CJS, and avenues for improvement and future research are suggested. By exploring the lived experiences of survivors and providers it is believed that this thesis accomplishes the aims and objectives set out in the Introduction (Chapter 1), and that the studies have robust "theoretical worth" (Yardley, 2000; p. 223).

In summary, the present research closely follows the quality and rigour criteria presented by Yardley (2000) on sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. By adhering to these theoretical and practical guidelines, it was possible to examine how qualitative methods have been used to study male rape and identify methodological and analytical strengths and limitations, which could inform the design of the empirical component of this thesis. These will be further examined in the following section.

3.2.2. Qualitative research on male rape.

Qualitative methods have attracted interest in psychological research thanks to an ability to investigate participants' accounts in-depth, as well as allowing the researcher to take a pro-active role in the interpretation of individual experiences (Willig, 2013). Due to the lack of knowledge surrounding male sexual victimisation in modern society, qualitative methods of research can and have been used to study male rape directly from the experiences of survivors. Moreover, because of the stigma surrounding male victimisation, qualitative studies provide an opportunity to place survivors' accounts at

the centre of the research process, legitimising their experience, as well as gaining access to what it means to be a male victim of sexual abuse.

There have been some attempts to qualitatively study male victims' experiences. This section will provide a selective overview of how different qualitative techniques have been used to study the sexual victimisation of men. The aim is to identify the qualitative method most suitable to address the research questions of a thesis that is concerned with exploring the lived experiences of survivors and service providers on the phenomenon of male rape.

Qualitative methods have been used to investigate male victims' experiences in different ways. Indeed, the flexibility of qualitative "tools" have allowed researchers to access a population that historically has been neglected by the research community. One of the first studies in the UK to study male victims' personal experiences was conducted by Mezey and King (1989). The authors invited participants to take part in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to give voice to survivors' accounts. Interestingly, Mezey and King report that those who attended the interview stages of the study showed initial fear of not being taken seriously by the researchers. At the same time, most of these participants reported a sense of relief for being able to disclose, with some participants indicating that they never discussed their victimisation before taking part in the study. The positive responses from participants seem to suggest that Mezey and King's decision to conduct semi-structured interviews after collecting extensive information, facilitated disclosure and honesty from the few participants who took part.

Semi-structured interviews are the most common method of data collection in psychological qualitative research (Willig 2013). This approach is designed around an interview agenda, where the interviewer identifies areas of interest and questions that

could inform the overarching research question. However, semi-structured interviews are designed to use the interview agenda as guidelines rather than a rigorous template (Longhurst, 2003). The objective of the interview is to place the interviewee's account at the centre of the research process, by allowing participants to speak freely and openly about their experiences. It is then the role of the interviewer/researcher to maintain a balance between allowing participants to freely respond to the questions, as well as keeping the direction of the interview towards the area and topic of interest (Adams, 2015). In this sense, semi-structured interviews are particularly useful to explore novel or "hidden" areas of research, by giving participants space to discuss their personal experiences, whilst allowing the researcher/interviewer to be in control of the process and, gently, guide participants through different broad, open-ended research questions (Horton et al., 2004).

Face-to-face interviews are not the only data collection method used in male rape research. Mixed methods have also been utilised by researchers to include qualitative sections in quantitative designs to allow participants to give more extensive information on their experiences of victimisation, as well as offering their personal views on the research questions. For example, Walker (2004) conducted content analysis on a series of open-ended questions with male survivors. These were conducted in conjunction with other descriptive and inferential analyses on demographic information. The study is of interest because of the inclusion of a qualitative element used to inform and complement the descriptive analysis. Moreover, the use of open-ended questions as a part of the questionnaires allowed participants to elaborate on aspects of their victimisation that could not be simply reduced by numerical answers on quantitative measures, such as the Likert scale. Similarly, Anderson (2007) asked participants to provide written accounts to describe

“typical” scenarios of female and male rape incidents, with the intent to determine if participants used rape myths to inform their descriptions. Participants were instructed to:

“...include in your description information about what led up to, what happened during, and what followed the events. Can you also describe as many characteristics of the characters as possible, including their thoughts and feelings?” (Anderson, 2007; p. 230).

The author developed a coding framework that was used to analyse the content of the scenarios and to identify patterns and stereotypical beliefs behind participants’ “typical” scenarios (see section 2.6.4.). While the technique used by Anderson was extremely flexible, the use of written accounts does not allow the researcher to be as involved in the generation of the data as much as in face-to-face interviews, where the researcher gathers the data directly from participants. Moreover, content analysis restricts participants to answer a defined set of questions, while it also restricts the researcher’s ability to further explore participants’ accounts. Therefore, whilst there is certainly value in the qualitative analysis of written answers to open-ended questionnaires (Harland & Holey, 2011), they do not give the researcher the level of freedom that comes with face-to-face interviews. Indeed, it is because of the ability to dialogue and build rapport with the participants that interviews are desirable, whenever possible and sensible, to explore and investigate in-depth individuals’ lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2013).

Recently, qualitative studies with male survivors of rape and sexual abuse have been conducted in South Africa (N= 11; Mgozeli & Duma, 2020) and in India (N=5; Das et al., 2020). These studies used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA: J. A. Smith et al., 2009) with the intention of exploring the experiences of participants

and how they made sense of important, life-changing events. There are interesting sampling differences to be considered, with Mgozeli and Duma opting for purposive sampling and Das et al. using snowball sampling. Purposive sampling (see section 3.5.1.) consists in the identification of an “expert” sample, with extensive knowledge of the research topic (H. R. Bernard, 2006). Whilst this strategy allows to construct a qualitative study based on rich and detailed experiential accounts, it is limited by participants’ ability to articulate eloquently their experiences (Palinkas et al., 2015). Instead, snowball sampling starts with a small number of participants who are then invited to recommend the study to other participants, who (they think) might fit the recruitment criteria (Browne, 2005). This strategy works well with hard-to-reach populations; however, it is also built on participants’ networking ability and their willingness to be so closely involved in the recruitment process. Indeed, Das et al. reported that they personally knew one of the participants and through snowball sampling got acquainted with the rest of the sample. Whilst this decision was dictated by well-known challenges in accessing vulnerable male populations (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997), there are some potential issues with bias that would suggest that purposive sampling of individuals who meet criteria established *a-priori* is the preferred strategy whenever possible (see section 3.5.1.)

Despite addressing important gaps in the literature, particularly as they explored the experiences of communities of non-Western participants, both studies (Das et al., 2020; Mgozeli & Duma, 2020) had key methodological limitations. For example, Mgozeli and Duma, whilst presenting several themes to describe their participants’ experiences, failed to construct compelling and unfolding narratives in the discussion of the themes. Similarly, Das et al. did not fully exploit the tools provided by IPA frameworks by failing to provide any significant extracts from the interviews in

their study. Underlying the limitations of both studies was the absence of a clear positioning of the research in relation to its philosophical and analytical paradigms.

3.3. Philosophical and analytical paradigms of this thesis

Past and recent attempts to qualitatively investigate male rape failed to capture the lived experiences of survivors, either because of methodological restrictions (e.g. open-ended questionnaires; Walker, 2004) or ineffective analytical strategies (Das et al., 2020; Mgozeli & Duma, 2020). Considering these limitations, this thesis endeavours to access male rape survivors' accounts by giving them the space to explore the meaning they attach to their experiences of sexual violence. The qualitative tools discussed in the previous section, including semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling, and IPA (these are discussed in detail on sections 3.5.), allow the researcher to access hard-to-reach populations such as male rape survivors, whose accounts and experiences are often hidden and bathed in secrecy in modern society. Moreover, qualitative investigations allow to conduct studies with smaller samples than quantitative studies, by focusing on personal experiences and uniqueness of the respondents, and circumnavigating the issues related to sample size that constrain quantitative research.

Given the interest on meaning and personal experiences, the phenomenological studies previously discussed (Das et al., 2020; Mgozeli & Duma, 2020) placed participants at the centre of the research process, which is particularly important in novel research with vulnerable, hidden populations (H. R. Bernard, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate method of data collection (Willig, 2013) as it allows participants to be central in the data generation process. It is also acknowledged that by attempting to access an individual's experience there are ontological assumptions made on the relationship between

observer and reality and epistemological consequences on how knowledge of such reality can be generated. Thus, the following section will provide an account of this philosophical assumptions and how they informed the design of the studies in this thesis.

3.3.1. Philosophical assumptions of the qualitative elements of the thesis

The underlying assumption of conducting qualitative research on male sexual violence is considering participants' experiences as observable and accessible realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Put simply, individual accounts are used as a gateway to investigate the phenomenon of sexual violence through the lenses of those who have personal experiences and knowledge of it (Kennedy, 2019). However, the formulation of the rationale for and the related qualitative questions of this research, required to consider the question of what the philosophical implications were of accepting the existence of a truly independent "reality". Specifically, whether there is a reality that exists independently from the observer (i.e., the researcher) or whether its existence reflects the account and experiences filtered by the observer. This ambiguity could only be resolved by placing the research in a broader ontological context (de Giadino, 2009).

There are two extremes that characterise ontological underpinnings: realism and relativism. Taking a realist position implies a commitment to view data and knowledge as true and unequivocal reflections of the truth/reality. Ontological relativism instead posits that the obtainable knowledge is inevitably influenced and dependant from where and how the knowledge in itself is generated (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This means that there cannot be a unique, transcendental reality independent from the observer. Contrastingly, the investigator can only be exposed to a finite number of constructions that result from the methods used. The limitation of a relativist approach is that it does not allow the phenomenon to exist beyond the experiences of

the participants that are accessed for the current research. To resolve this conflict and ambiguity, qualitative research often sits somewhere in between those two positions: a critical realist position. Critical realism advocates a tri-partite view of reality, distinguishing between the real, the actual, and the empirical (Parr, 2015). The empirical accounts only for what is directly experienced by individuals; the actual represents events which may or may not be experienced; the real describes mechanisms and powers driving events and experiences. Therefore, every phenomenon has an inherent structure that is produced by the interaction of individuals, groups, and the social world. These structures exist “behind and affects social manifest phenomena” (Matthews, 2009: 352). The ontology of critical realism views social phenomena as both socially constructed and real, regardless of the interpretations.

In the context of this research, interviewing victim-survivors and service providers is seen as a gateway to an objective representation of the phenomenon of male rape. However, there is a noticeable contradiction in taking a realist stance, specifically concerning the participants targeted for this research. Namely that, service providers do not have a direct and personal experience of what it means to be a male victim of rape. Their knowledge of the truth is constructed by an indirect experience of male rape through the support provided to their clients and working in the care sector. Therefore, the use of service providers’ accounts underpins a relativist position. Consequently, the study of service providers, in conjunction with male survivors, supports the acceptance that reality is shaped by those who observe it, making the accounts of participants a valid representation of the reality investigated. However, taking a “pure” relativist position would also imply that the knowledge reported by participants in the present research could only apply to their experiences and not be

more broadly transferable to understand other male survivors' experiences of sexual violence.

For the purposes of this thesis, a critical realist position was taken to acknowledge that male rape exists beyond and independently from the experiences of the participants that are involved in the research studies. It is also recognised that the obtainable knowledge is necessarily influenced by social constructs and frameworks. For example, the concept of "experience of sexual violence" is inevitably shaped by survivors' individual experiences, which are subject to their individual beliefs, values, and unique characteristics. Therefore, by taking a critical realist position it is acknowledged and accepted that what will be achieved and obtained from this research could only ever be a partial and inevitably subjective representation of the reality of the truth. Nevertheless, because participants' accounts sit within the same independent reality of other male survivors, taking a critical realist approach allows to draw comparisons across the sample, as well as identifying patterns within the samples used in the studies (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is because of a critical realist stance to the aims and objectives of this thesis that led the researcher to develop and design a series of qualitative, phenomenological studies.

3.4. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Once the research aims and objectives were placed in the associated ontological reality, the use of IPA was deemed as the appropriate qualitative 'tool' to address and answer the questions of this thesis. IPA is a validated method of analysis in research with victims of sexual violence (Das et al., 2020; Farrell, 2009; Mgozozeli & Duma, 2020), which has its roots in the philosophical principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. IPA is a phenomenological method of qualitative analysis as the individual, lived experience of participants takes a central role in the

research and interpretation process. As a methodology, IPA is informed by hermeneutics: the IPA researcher engages in a process of interpretation and deconstruction of how participants make sense of their own experiences, as well as taking in account his/her own personal constructs and how they inform the researchers' interpretation processes. Finally, IPA is an idiographic method of research, where the researchers' endeavours are focused on appreciating the details and uniqueness of each participants' account. The idiographic nature of IPA is reflected on the relatively small samples that are commonly used for IPA studies. IPA is also characterised by the use of semi-structured interviews, where an interview script is flexibly used to enable participants to give voice to their "lived experiences" (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The interviews are then transcribed and qualitatively analysed case by case through a systematic procedure where the researcher engages in the hermeneutic process of interpretation.

To justify the employment of IPA as the most suitable method of inquiry for the present research, it is necessary to give an overview of the philosophical foundations that underpin this method of analysis.

3.4.1. Phenomenology

The phenomenological approach is often described as a dynamic philosophical method of inquiry (Creely, 2018), used to formulate a descriptive and detailed account of the phenomena studied by taking in consideration both objectivity and subjectivity (Spiegelberg, 2013). Phenomenological methods of research depart from epistemological dualism and are concerned with the study of the consciousness and its role in constructing the real world. To achieve this, importance is placed in generating rich and contextualised descriptions that are based on experiences. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered by many as the father of phenomenology

(Davidson, 2013). His work was underpinned by an interest in investigating the human consciousness and how it could be responsible for the actual formation of phenomena in the world. He believed that it was not possible to distinguish between the object of research from the subject investigating it. A key feature of Husserl's phenomenological approach was the concept of intentionality. Husserl viewed the human consciousness as an active capacity, meaning that our consciousness, to exist and be called so, must be and is always directed towards a perceived object. This quality of the human consciousness is responsible for the perception and interpretation of the external world (or phenomena). Husserl was convinced that the consciousness's intentionality was the only source of all knowledge. In order to best use consciousness to generate knowledge, Husserl introduced the concepts of phenomenological reduction. It consists of a departure from the acceptance of pre-conceived notions about the external world, by a process of bracketing held knowledge and setting it aside (Spiegelberg, 2013). This procedure is known as epoché. Zahavi (2021) describes epoché as the abrupt suspension or exclusion of all presuppositions and attitudes to allow a purer version of the consciousness to access and interpret the phenomena. Husserl believed that it was possible to access the consciousness itself by a process of different reductions (Davidson, 2013). This concept forms the basis of the reflexive stance of the IPA researcher.

Husserl's successors moved on from transcendental phenomenology to a version which acknowledged the "grounded and embodied nature" of the subject (Davidson, 2013; p. 321). Among these, Heidegger's ideas mark the shift of phenomenology, from Husserl's transcendentalism towards a focus on existentialism. Heidegger was concerned with the study of the Being. He believed that in order to investigate the concept of Being it was necessary to examine one's perception of their

own Being. He viewed this as a circular process where the method of investigation used would access a partial version of the Being, which he called Dasein. As an ontologically driven term, Dasein is not a synonym for Being but rather it illustrates how humans view themselves. Heidegger saw in phenomenology the method of investigation to access the Dasein. However, Heidegger understood that the study of the Being was inevitably influenced by one's own preconceptions of it. Heidegger did not separate "understanding" from "interpretation". Interpretation is defined as a "projecting of the understanding [in which] entities are disclosed in their possibilities" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 151, in Davidson, 2013). By viewing human experiences as a reflection of the Being, Heidegger placed understanding in time and space. It is a clear departure from Husserl's transcendentalism to a circular and contextual phenomenology, that appreciates and accepts the interpretative nature of understanding and experiencing, in the quest of finding (or getting closer) to the Truth.

3.4.2. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a key principle of IPA, defined as the theory of interpretation of messages and texts (J. A. Smith et al. 2009). Text is intended in a broader sense, as anything that is interpreted by human beings in their day-to-day existence. The term hermeneutics was first used by Dilthey (1833-1911) to describe the art of interpreting human behaviour and language (speech or writing), by utilising methods of interpretation not applicable to the natural sciences. The modern concept of hermeneutics is more closely related to Heidegger's philosophy. According to Heidegger, hermeneutics is an essential element to phenomenology (Howitt, 2016). It is seen as a process of deconstruction. The interpretation of a text is constructed by the person(s) involved in the interpretation process. Heidegger posits that the original meaning of a message is lost because it is filtered through the lenses of the

researcher. Thus, deconstruction is required to “estimate” how much of the interpretation is a contribution of the interpreter. This process of deconstruction applies not only to the researcher, but also to the participants. Participants’ accounts are seen as immersed in their personal values, beliefs, and social constructions. The phenomenological researcher appreciates that participants do not provide a “pure” version of their experiences and that their role is to uncover the hidden messages that lie behind the participants own interpretations. Another key principle arising from hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle, by which “parts of the text are studied in relation to the entirety in a backwards and forwards, looping process” (Howitt, 2016: p. 345). In other words, the research interprets each element of the text in the context in which it was retrieved (i.e., sentence, paragraph); to understand the overall context the researcher has also to go back to the part. J. A. Smith et al. (2009) view IPA analysis as an iterative process, where the research is not bound to rigorously follow steps or procedures, but rather is encouraged to engage in different ways of thinking, by also introducing their personal context into the research process.

The aim of the hermeneutic process is to assess the extent to which the observed phenomenon has been already “contaminated” by the reality where the observation takes place. As a consequence, interpretation needs to be understood as a process in which both observer and observed are involved in. Smith (2004) described this with the concept of double hermeneutics, in which the researcher’s goal is to make sense of how participants make sense of the experiences they describe. In the context of this thesis, the researcher attempted to generate knowledge from participants’ own understanding of being a male victim of sexual violence. The hermeneutic framework in IPA allows the researcher to build upon the reported experiences of the participants to develop abstract and conceptual understanding of

the data generated. Most importantly, hermeneutics in phenomenological research gives the researcher the tools to question and interrogate survivors' accounts, while challenging his/her own assumptions. At the same time, it permits to place participants' accounts at the very centre of the phenomenological interview, because of their status of interpreters of their own experiences and not only as observers.

3.4.3. Idiography

At the core of IPA as a method of data analysis is its idiographic nature. Idiography refers to studies where the individual is the unit of measurement in a study (Colman, 2001). While most quantitative research could be considered nomothetic, concerned with the study of group with the intention to generate laws and generalisation for a wider population (Howitt, 2016), IPA values the individual experience as the cornerstone to progress in research. This is reflected by IPA's focus on in-depth analysis of participants' accounts, treated as individual case-studies. To achieve the level of depth required by IPA, data collection is restricted to contained samples of participants with shared experiences (J. A. Smith et al., 2009), necessitating a purposive sample (later discussed in section 3.5.1.). Purposeful sampling focuses on identifying a target group that have extensive knowledge on the research topic and, importantly, have the ability to articulate their experiences in an efficient and reflective way (H. R. Bernard, 2006). The methodological rationale behind the sample size commonly used in IPA studies is ideal when working with vulnerable population, not only because it facilitates the recruitment process, but most importantly because it values the uniqueness of participants' accounts. In the case of this thesis, an idiographic approach that focuses on the particulars, rather than the general, of survivors' experiences would help the researcher to appreciate the true personal meaning attached to being a victim of sexual abuse and rape. It should also be noted

that transferability is still possible and expected by IPA analysis. As mentioned before, participants' accounts are initially treated as stand-alone, case-studies and then the interpretation process moves on to include the entire sample, in an attempt to identify patterns within the individual experiences and provide transferability.

3.4.4. IPA in this thesis

Drawing back to Chapter 2, the issues raised around the stigma and unawareness surrounding men's experiences of sexual violence indicate the need to consider male rape as a "hidden" phenomenon in society (Das et al., 2020; Javaid, 2016b, 2018). The central aim of this thesis was to generate increased knowledge and renewed understanding of male rape (Chapter 1, section 1.2.). As such, taking an idiographic and inductive approach was essential to explore and investigate the *unique* challenges faced by male survivors upon victimisation, accessing services, reporting, as well as care provision (from providers' perspectives). Thus, after careful ontological and epistemological considerations (section 3.3.1.), a phenomenological approach was deemed to be the appropriate qualitative method to address the research questions of this thesis.

Among the different phenomenological schools, IPA provides an accessible, versatile, yet systematic approach to examine participants' experiences and their active role in interpreting the events in their lives (Tuffour, 2017). In this sense, IPA encourages research questions that are designed to be open and inductive, while emphasising the importance of studying idiographically individual accounts (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA's phenomenological commitment to elevate personal, lived experiences were instrumental in designing the empirical components of this thesis. Indeed, the desire to access "hidden voices" in this thesis, echoes research conducted in Health Psychology, with IPA proving to be the most appropriate tool to

access the experiences of marginalised groups (i.e., Almegewly et al., 2019, A. S. Walker & Tobbell, 2015). By “metaphorically shining a light on a small area” (Oxley, 2016: pp. 55), IPA studies aim to enlighten and reveal the whole, and foster renewed interest and knowledge. These epistemological commitments have underpinned the designing of the research question of this thesis, making IPA the most suitable qualitative method of analysis for the accounts gathered in this thesis.

One of the key strengths considered when evaluating IPA’s suitability, was that it encourages the creation of a richly interpreted phenomenological account of participants’ data, emerging from a careful and in-depth engagement between the researcher and a small sample size (Wagstaff et al., 2014). The researcher seeks to gain an insider perspective of participants’ accounts by “giving voice” and “making sense” of their experiences, two central commitments in IPA (Noon, 2018). This is possible thanks to the emphasis that IPA places on the researchers’ positionality and reflexivity, as well as its comprehensiveness as a methodology grounded in philosophical and theoretical principles (phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography), with clear guidelines for data collection and analysis (see J. A. Smith et al., 2009). At the same time, there is a degree of flexibility in the use of IPA, with Brocki and Wearden (2006) observing that IPA is suitable for complex and novel areas of research because of its concern in meaning and context rather than prevalence or causality. For the purposes of this thesis, IPA allows to place at the centre of the research individuals who are directly and indirectly part of the phenomenon of male rape, to take a central role in generating knowledge in this under-researched area, whilst giving the researcher the opportunity to understand the meaning and significance attached to participants’ lived experiences.

3.4.5. Quality indicators for IPA studies: J. A. Smith (2011) and Nizza et al. (2021)

In taking the decision to conduct a phenomenological inquiry it was also important to consider specifically what criteria for quality and rigour exist for IPA and how these would be applied prior to the construction of the studies in this thesis. Together with Yardley's (2000) general guidelines discussed in this chapter (section 3.2.1.), the candidate looks to the work of J. A. Smith (2011) and Nizza et al. (2021) who proposed and discussed key quality indicators to achieve excellence in IPA studies.

J. A. Smith (2011) conducted a comprehensive review of IPA studies published between 1996 and 2008 (N=293). This review led to the development of the first guideline to assess the quality of IPA studies across three levels (unacceptable, acceptable, and good). Smith evaluated papers as *acceptable* when they demonstrated: an adherence to the philosophical foundations of IPA (phenomenology, hermeneutics, idiography); transparency and coherence in the analysis; sufficient sampling from the corpus, clearly showing the density of evidence for each theme (N=1-3, extracts from every participant; N=4-8, extract from at least three participant per theme; N>8, extract from at least three participants and an indication of prevalence). Papers failing on one of these criteria were deemed *unacceptable*. Three additional criteria were identified for *good* IPA papers: keeping focused and offering depth; presenting strong data and interpretation; engaging and enlightening the reader.

Recently, Nizza et al. (2021) set out to help researchers to write and reviewers to assess high quality IPA papers, by introducing four additional quality indicators and illustrating how these can be achieved in practice drawing from two publications they considered to be exemplary (Dwyer et al., 2019; Conroy & de Visser, 2015: in Nizza et al., 2021). These included: constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative;

developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account: close analytic reading of participants' wording; attending to convergence and divergence (Table 1). Each indicator was seen by the authors as expressions of the underlying theoretical principles of IPA and demonstrated how these qualities overlap as they provide "different lenses onto the thing of substance being explored and so they can be seen as different parts of the same overall gestalt" (Nizza et al., 2021: p.17).

Table 1: The four quality indicators of good IPA, with descriptions (adapted from Nizza et al., 2021: p.3)

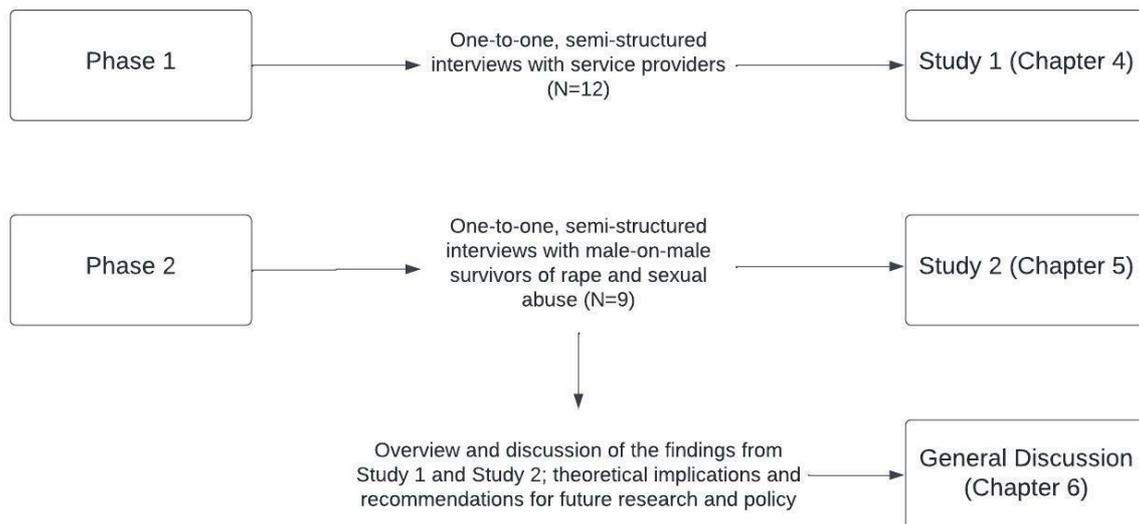
Quality indicator	Descriptions
Constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative	The analysis presents a persuasive and coherent narrative, which is built cumulative through an unfolding analytical dialogue between carefully selected and interpreted extract from participants
Developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account	Focus on the important experiential and/or existential meaning of participants' accounts gives depth to the analysis
Close analytic reading of participants' words	Through analysis and interpretation of quoted material within the narrative helps give meaning to the data and the experience it describes
Attending to convergence and divergence	Idiographic depth and systematic comparison between participants create a dynamic interweaving of patterns of similarity and individual idiosyncrasy

In summary, the methodology of this thesis was constructed around careful considerations on general (Yardley, 2000) and IPA specific (Nizza et al., 2021; Smith, 2011) quality and rigour criteria for qualitative research. Through a close examination of established guidelines, it was possible to design a series of rigorous qualitative studies, in which transparency, coherence and attention to theoretical underpinnings were key to the development of the empirical components within this body of work. Therefore, the following section presents the implementation of these methodological consideration into the construction of the IPA studies in this thesis.

3.5. Construction of the IPA studies in this thesis

This thesis is constructed around a series of qualitative studies which are underpinned by an IPA framework. This framework informed the researcher throughout the thesis, from designing the study materials and procedures through data collection and analysis. To answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 (see section 1.2. for overview of aims and research questions) data collection was conducted in two phases (Figure 2).

Figure 2: the phases of data collection/analysis and corresponding chapters.



- **Phase 1** consisted of one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with 12 service providers from different local rape and sexual abuse support services. These interviews formed the basis of Study 1 (Chapter 4) and were conducted to explore the experiences of individuals who work closely with male survivors, with an interest of their lived experiences around male rape and the challenges of providing support to this vulnerable population. Phase 1 allowed the researcher to familiarise himself with the current landscape of male rape,

specifically around the rehabilitation challenges and coping mechanisms as observed by experts professionally involved with male survivors.

- **Phase 2** followed a similar design involving semi-structured interviews with 9 male survivors. The data collected in this phase constitute the main body of the thesis, with survivors' lived experiences after the incident taking a central role in the phenomenological inquiry. In the associated Study 2 (Chapter 5), the researcher aimed to address important gaps in the literature, around myths and stereotypes encountered by participants after the abuse and the challenges they encountered when accessing services and reporting to the CJS. Most importantly, the IPA framework allowed to analyse and appreciate the meaning and significance that survivors attached to their experiences of rape and sexual abuse.

The two phases of data collection and analysis were intrinsically related, as the researcher's understanding of service providers' experiences was enhanced and expanded when observed through the perspectives of male survivors, and vice-versa. It is important to mention that recruitment, data collection and analysis for each phase were conducted independently and as stand-alone research outputs. The details and findings of each stage of the studies will be separately discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. This thesis brings together the findings of the two qualitative studies by presenting a general discussion of the themes that emerged from service providers' and survivors' accounts of male rape and sexual abuse, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Instead, the following sections in this chapter will focus on general considerations around the recruitment strategies in the two phases of data collection, how interviews, transcriptions, and analyses followed phenomenological framework.

An account of the candidate's reflexivity and positionality will be also provided, in line with Yardley's (2000) quality and rigour criterion for qualitative research.

3.5.1. Recruitment strategy: purposive sampling

Among the many challenges of researching male rape, access to participants represented an important barrier to the construction of the empirical components of this thesis. Male-focused services are limited in the UK (Lowe, 2018) and male rape survivors are a vulnerable population that are known to be particularly hard-to-reach (Sorsoli et al., 2008; Walker, Archer, & Lowe, 2005) as outlined throughout this thesis. Issues around stigma and taboo around male rape meant that the recruitment strategies needed to be clearly defined and discussed to ensure that participants in both phases would feel comfortable and safe in taking part in the studies, especially given the sensitive nature of the research questions of the project. Moreover, given the specific philosophical foundations of IPA enquiries, the recruitment criteria needed to ensure that the accounts accessed would yield the level of depth and detail required to phenomenologically explore participants' experiences, engage in a hermeneutic process, and adhere to the idiographic commitments of J. A. Smith et al.'s (2009) approach.

In line with these considerations, purposive sampling was employed across both phases of data collection. Purposive sampling is generally recommended in IPA studies (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling involves the identification and selection of participants that are informed or experienced about the topic of the research. Authors have argued that purposive sampling places importance on participants' availability, willingness to participate, and their ability to "communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner" (Palinkas et al., 2015: p. 2). H. R. Bernard (2006) observed that purposive samples

are “widely used in pilot studies, intensive case studies, critical case studies and studies of hard-to-find populations” (p.190).

There are a number of purposive sampling strategies that vary according to the research objective (for a review of different purposive strategies see Palinkas et al., 2015). In the context of this research, the interest was to narrow the range of variation of and focus on common patterns, whilst appreciating and giving space to individual differences in the accounts collected in line with IPA’s idiographic commitments (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). For example, in Phase 1, the interest was to explore the current scope of male rape from the experiences of service providers and understand the recurring therapeutic challenges encountered by providers in supporting male rape survivors. Similarly, Phase 2 aimed to explore the unique meaning that male survivors attached to their experiences of rape, whilst identifying differences and similarities in the way in which survivors rationalised and dealt with the aftermath of their victimisation (e.g., disclosure, access to support, reporting). For these reasons, *purposive criterion sampling* was determined to be the most suitable approach for this project. This involves the identification and selection of cases that meet some predetermined criteria of importance (Palinkas et al., 2015), with an emphasis on similarities. Prior to data collection, a number of criteria were determined to narrow down the variation in the demographic characteristics of participants, from level of experience and type of support provided in Phase 1, to age at the time of the incident and access to services and reporting in Phase 2 (specific recruitment criteria are later discussed in chapters 4 and 5). In terms of number of participants to be recruited, as the saturation of content discussed by participants is not a desired outcome in IPA (J. A. Smith et al., 2022), it was established *a-priori* to recruit between 8 to 12 participants for each Phase, after reviewing the literature on recommended sample size for

phenomenological studies (Alase, 2017; Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

3.5.2. Interviews, transcription, and analysis of the studies following an IPA framework

After establishing the sampling strategy and recruitment criteria to be implemented in this project, attention was given in identifying the best way to generate rich and detailed accounts of participants' experiences. As previously mentioned in the selective review of the qualitative literature on male rape (section 3.2.2.), interviewing participants would provide the researcher the opportunity to access their lived experiences, by placing them at the centre of the research process as expected in phenomenological enquiries (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Given the number of research objectives and questions associated with each study, semi-structured interviews were designed to guide the data collection process. In line with IPA guidelines, semi-structured interview schedules were designed for each study, and used as a framework to engage participants in open conversations on a number of topics and issues related to experiences of providing support (Phase 1, Appendix I) and to their experiences of victimisation (Phase 2, Appendix II). The guiding principle behind both interview schedules were to invite participants to freely speak about their experiences, whilst feeling safe and supported when taking part in the interviews, with reminders for the researcher to focus on participants' emotional comfort and building rapport (Donalek, 2005; Shaw et al., 2020). Alongside the interview schedules, informed consent and debrief forms (Appendices III, IV, V, VI) were designed to ensure that participants would be aware of their rights, as well as to signpost participants to further support, in line with the ethical consideration later discussed in this chapter (section 3.6.).

For the purposes of analysis, interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in non-Jeffersonian transcription style. It was not the aim of this project to conduct analyses that required the complex level of details that are characteristic of transcriptions for conversational analysis (Jefferson, 2004). Considering the volume of data generated, the type of analysis, and the need for timely transcription and analysis, it was decided to develop a more explicit and accessible level of detail to transcription which prioritised the requirements for a meaningful phenomenological analysis. This is recommended by J. A. Smith and Osborne (2008: p.65) who argued that IPA transcription is generally at the semantic level. The decision to transcribe participants' accounts "word-for-word" was intended to minimise the influence of the researcher's interpretation in this first, crucial stage of the data-generation. For example, conversation fillers ('uhm', 'uh', 'you know', 'like') were not removed from the initial transcription of the interviews to truly reflect as much as possible participants' natural conversation, with its pauses and hesitations (Lala et al., 2019).

Following the guidelines for excellence in IPA research discussed in section 3.4.5., the analysis closely followed the philosophical underpinnings of IPA. The phenomenological foundations of IPA imply that the researcher is interested in accessing the psychological world of the participant. Participants' meaning making takes a central role in the process which requires the researcher to engage in an interpretative relationship with the transcript (Smith & Osborne, 2008) and sustained engagement with the text. Once data were transcribed the researcher started the analysis following the four-stage process described by J. A. Smith et al. (2009). Each interview was interpretatively read a number of times to familiarise oneself with the individual accounts, both with and without the recording being played out. Throughout the reading process, initial annotations were made on the left-hand side of the

transcripts to highlight points of interest. Some of these comments were attempts to summarise or paraphrase the data conceptually, some were associations and connections that came to mind or preliminary higher-level interpretation. These annotations were then closely examined and refined. After reaching the point where the transcript was fully annotated, a separate document with coded annotations was generated. These codes formed the basis of emergent themes, which were in-turn interrogated across the behavioural, cognitive, and affective domains, and a thematic representation of the individual case was made. After a process of summarisation and nesting of related themes, personal experiential themes were identified for the individual account. The decision to examine each case individually was in line with the idiographic foundations of IPA, focusing on one specific case at a time. This process was then repeated individually, case-by-case, for each of the interviews, allowing to generate a master table of themes that represented the data overall. The table was then used to compare and contrast master themes across the different transcripts and identify superordinate themes that permeated participants' experiences.

The processes of data analysis were conducted separately and independently for service providers' (Phase 1) and male rape survivors' (Phase 2) data. However, throughout both phases of data collection and analyses, particular attention was given to understanding the candidate's positionality and reflexivity in respect to these empirical components and to the thesis in general, as discussed in the next section.

3.5.3. Researcher's positionality and reflexivity

As previously discussed in section 3.2.1, Yardley's (2000) work was used, alongside that of Smith (2011) and Nizza et al.'s (2021) IPA-specific guidelines, as a framework to ensure the robustness of the methods employed in this phenomenological research. As part of the commitment to transparency in qualitative research, in this section I will

be presenting a reflexive account of my role as the researcher of the studies in this thesis. Shaw (2010) defined reflexivity as the explicit evaluation of the self. It is a process of questioning personal attitudes, thoughts, and actions to define the role of the researcher in relation to others (Bolton, 2010; Holloway & Biley, 2011). It requires an examination of the researcher's involvement and how behaviours may influence or affect participants. In this chapter, the interpretative aspects of IPA were delineated as central to the processes of analysis. Considering the double-hermeneutic process outlined by Smith and Osborne (2008), the need to examine how the researcher's preconceptions and assumptions may shape the interpretative processes is acknowledged: "the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (p. 53). Part of this process of self-evaluation is to recognise my positionality as a researcher, which refers to the multiple overlapping identities, and how then meaning is generated from different aspects of these identities (Kezar, 2002). Therefore, in the following paragraphs I will be reflecting upon how my multiple *identities* contributed to the research process.

As previously discussed in section 3.2.1.2., my interest in studying the phenomenon of male rape stems broadly from my undergraduate and post-graduate studies in Psychology. For my first degree, I conducted a research project focusing on attitudes and myths surrounding rape against women and how those shaped allocations of blame and responsibility. In this first research project, I had the opportunity to engage with important and formative areas of the literature that shaped much of my interest in understanding the gendered narratives at the root of how victims and perpetrators of sexual violence are perceived and judged. In particular, I was struck by how myths and attitudes originated from important social paradigms on

appropriate sexual behaviour and gender norms. At the time, my focus on studying attitudes towards female victims meant that I had a narrow and limited understanding of the broader implications that these narratives had on public perception. Later in my post-graduate studies in Forensic Psychology, I started to consider how the feminist focus on patriarchy seemed to exclude voices and experiences that were not female. This led me to question whether the notions and ideas I developed as a Psychology student could be applied to other populations, in particular men. What was merely an academic exercise led me to a 'hidden' area within the sexual violence literature. Among the studies that struck me the most, the work by Coxell and King (2010) on adult male rape and tonic immobility (TI) responses was pivotal in shifting my research interests. Tonic immobility refers to 'a temporary state of motor inhibition believed to be a response to situations involving extreme fear' (Abrams et al., 2009). In particular the observation that "although tonic immobility occurs in both sexes, to the extent that the myth of the 'real man' is prevalent in society it may be that the experience of TI is more distressing for men as it is in sharp contradiction to the cultural myth of the aggressive defence of the self" (Cosell & King, 2010: p. 377) radically changed my perspective on sexual violence leading me to engage with the male rape literature in more depth and reaching the decision to shift my research focus on this topic.

From reading Coxell and King's work, I delved into the male rape literature and, at the time of writing this reflective account, have been studying this area for the past three years. This academic interest has compelled me to re-evaluate much of my understanding on masculinity and the consequences of this social construct not only for victims of rape, but also for myself. As a heterosexual male, I had to consider my relationship with and understanding of the meaning I attached to my gender and sexual identification. This process was neither challenging nor traumatic as compared

to experiences of abuse. However, I believe that this process of reflection brought me marginally closer to the experiences often reported in the literature of male survivors questioning their sense of masculinity and the confusion around their sexuality (Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Walker, 2004). Whilst I cannot and do not claim to comprehend what it means to be a victim of sexual violence, I believe that reflecting on my own masculinity and sexuality allowed me to recognise, acknowledge, and empathise with some of the challenges that a man affected by this type of violence might have experienced.

In the first stage of data collection of Phase 1, I had to overcome a sense of inadequacy when interviewing third-sector service providers. At the time of concluding the first two interviews, I recall feeling unprepared and not competent enough to engage in meaningful conversations about the complex topic of providing support to male rape survivors. This was my first experience as an “outsider” researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), as I did not have any personal experience of sexual violence, did not know, to the best of my knowledge, of anyone who was a victim, nor did I ever provide professional support to a victim of any crime. Part of the reflexivity as a researcher was around acknowledging to participants (in both studies) of my positionality as an outsider and that I could not claim to “understand” personally their experiences. This is in line with recommendations to make qualitative research interactive and participatory, by bringing forward researchers’ personal role, answering participants’ questions, and sharing knowledge and experiences (Oakley, 2016). For example, after the interview, I would always acknowledge how challenging it could be for the participant to discuss personal experiences of abuse to a stranger. I would also comment on how I did not have personal experiences, and that I asked how they felt knowing this about me. These efforts for honesty and transparency with participants

were always reciprocated and, I believe, created an environment where participants appreciated the motivations of my research. This was often confirmed by participants in the debriefing stage of the interviews, which significantly helped me to overcome the sense of inadequacy I felt in the initial stages of data collection.

Acknowledging my insider-outsider position had an important effect on how I approached the interpretative stages of the analysis of the data. As an insider I sympathised with much of the conversations around masculinity, heterosexual norms, male mental health, and the stigma associated with men disclosing emotional distress. As an outsider, I recognised my lack of personal experiences with this type of violence. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) describe this position as the “space in between”, whereby the researcher acknowledges both the intimacy of qualitative research in interpreting participants’ lived experiences, whilst acknowledging that the role of the researcher will not qualify him/her as an insider. Placing myself within these two positions was an exercise in reflexivity that allowed me to recognise my role as a researcher in relation to the men (and women) who took part in my studies.

3.6. Ethical considerations

The sensitive nature of the subject required a careful consideration of the ethical implications of discussing such intimate and personal experiences of rape (and/or supporting victims of rape). The thesis was constructed and designed following the framework of the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Conduct and Ethics (2018), with details on how the researcher adhered to the guidelines provided in this section. The overall research proposal was approved by the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee (URDSC) at the University of West London (UWL) (Appendix VII). The empirical studies in this thesis were ethically approved by the UWL School of Human and Social Sciences (SHSS) Ethics Panel (Appendix VIII).

3.6.1. BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct

Throughout the project, the researcher fully complied with the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009; 2018), to ensure the highest level of professionalism and maintain the standards required from the BPS. The researcher followed the following four ethical principles:

- *Respect* for the dignity and worth of all participants, with particular regard to their rights. This included the standards of general respect, of privacy and confidentiality, of informed consent and of self-determination.
- *Competence* in providing services (or conducting research) that is within the researcher's own ability. It also referred to the importance of maintaining standards and developing further skills for professional work. This included standards of awareness of professional ethics, of ethical decision making, of recognising limits of competence, and of recognising impairment.
- *Responsibility* towards participants, the general public, and the profession and science of Psychology. In particular, the researcher must aim for the avoidance of harm and the prevention of misuse or abuse of their contribution to society. This included the standards of general responsibility, of termination and continuity of care, of protection of research participants and debriefing.
- *Integrity*, understood as the need for the researcher to be honest, truthful, accurate and consistent in every aspect of the research project. This included the standards of honesty and accuracy, of avoiding exploitation and conflicts of interest, of maintaining personal boundaries, and of addressing ethical misconduct.

Overall, the four principles of respect, competence, responsibility, and integrity informed every aspect of this research, from planning the recruitment strategies,

designing interview schedules and procedures, as well as data management and storage. From these guidelines, specific ethical considerations were implemented for each empirical phase of the thesis, as outlined in the following section.

3.6.2. Ethical considerations of this thesis

Specific ethical consideration was applied by the researcher to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the participants involved in the empirical studies. In designing the methods and procedures, the researcher acknowledged the sensitive nature of the subject investigated and the likelihood of some participants finding the topics discussed challenging and potentially distressing, particularly for the population in Study 2. Moreover, despite the fact that participants in Study 1 (third-sector service providers) were expected to be more prepared to engage in discussions around male-on-male rape, the same ethical considerations for both studies were applied:

- Participants were informed that the data collected were confidential and anonymous. Participants were asked to choose a fictional name which was used to refer to them throughout the research. In the analyses and discussions of the studies, there were no personal information that could be traced back to the participants. These considerations were clearly stated in the information sheet provided to participants prior to the interview. In it, participants were also informed about the overall purpose of the study, in order to prepare them to take part in the interview. Data and codes and all identifying information were kept in password protected folders on the researcher's computer and backed-up in password protect OneDrive folders, accessible only to the research team.
- Participants were made aware, both within the information sheet and during the introduction to the interview process, of the limited exceptional circumstances that could compromise the confidentiality of disclosed information. Specifically,

risk of harm disclosure procedures associated with this study were made explicit, in line with the BPS Practice Guidelines and Code of Human Research Ethics and constructed in consultation with the MSP. As such, it was clearly outlined to participants that if they disclosed information which suggested that they posed an immediate risk of harm to themselves or to others, the interviewer would be obliged to report this information to their associated support organisation. Importantly, it was also stated that this did not include information relating to risk of harm which originated from another individual (e.g., if the participant disclosed that they were still in a relationship within which they suffered abuse). This recognised that participants who had been identified as being under the therapeutic care of a third-sector organisation had opportunities to disclose such risk previously, and after taking part in the study. This also protected participants' rights to freely disclose information about their experiences in the knowledge that doing so would not put them at greater risk.

- Participants' right to withdraw was made clear, and participants were routinely reminded, if and when appropriate, that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason. The right to withdrawal covered the entire duration of the study, from demonstrating an initial interest to the conclusion of the interview. Participants had the right to withdraw their data up to one month after the completion of the interview. The proposed timeframe was decided in conjunction with MSP as appropriate for victim-survivors. In the case participants requested to withdraw their data, these would be excluded from analysis and publication.

- It was the researcher's responsibility to make sure that participants were able to progress with the study. Participants were made aware that they could take breaks and were encouraged to do so if they felt they needed to.
- Participants' narratives were central to the study. The interviews were therefore structured in a way that put the participant in control of the procedure. The aim of this consideration was to build a positive relationship with the participants and make them feel safe.
- Participants were fully debriefed at the end of the interview. The researcher gave a detailed and comprehensive explanation of the rationale for the study and the objectives behind the questions asked. Participants were able to contact the research team through their affiliated organisation or personally with email contacts provided in the debrief form. They were also signposted to charities and professional organisations for ongoing support.

As outlined in section 3.5.2, the recruitment of male survivors in Phase 2 was affected by the national restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to progress with data collection and after discussions with Survivors UK, it was decided to recruit and interview participants through video-communication platforms (i.e., Microsoft Teams). New procedures were designed which had an impact on the ethical considerations for Study 2. Therefore, an amendment to the previous ethical approval was sought from the UWL SHSS Ethics panel to include the following considerations:

- In discussion with Survivors UK, it was agreed that that communication and recruitment would go through the Head of Services, in order to ensure transparency and legitimise the research as approved and supported by Survivors UK. Participants were to be informed by the organisation about the new procedures of the study, and the revised information and consent forms

were sent and returned prior to the video-interview. Before commencing the video-interview, the researcher would re-iterate the rights to withdraw and anonymity, to ensure that participants were fully aware of the new procedure and what it entailed. Once the interview started, the researcher stated on record that the participant provided consent to take part in the study. During the interview, the researcher paid close attention to the wellbeing of the participant and ask, throughout the process, if the participant was happy to progress with the interview. At the end of the interview, the researcher debriefed the participant and answered any question he might have. Upon advice from Survivors UK, it was agreed that participants would be signposted to their point-of-contact for further debriefing after completion of the interviews. As stated, participants would have been supported by Survivors UK by video-call before this point, and, therefore, be familiar with this format.

- It was also acknowledged that, by collecting recordings of both the video and audio of the interviews, there were considerations to be made around the data collected. The principal researcher and the supervisory team adhered to the original data storage and sharing agreement stipulated between UWL and MSP, the specifics of which are provided in Appendix IX
- Finally, in order to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the participants, the principal investigator and the supervisory team worked closely with Survivors UK to outline the necessary measures to be followed prior, during, and post interviews. These measures were agreed prior to data collection, in order to ensure that participants' wellbeing and rights were fully accounted for before the interviews.

In spite of these changes, recruitment through third-sector services yielded limited success. Consequently, in order to achieve an adequate sample size for a meaningful IPA analysis, the researcher sought ethical approval to include social media advertisement of the study to recruit male survivors for Study 2. The following ethical considerations were included and approved:

- The proposed amendments did not fundamentally change the central ethical considerations and mitigations previously set out for Study 2 and this new recruitment strategy did not change the researcher's commitment to prioritise the wellbeing and safety of the participants. However, there were still some considerations to be noted regarding access to therapeutic support. In the original proposal, participants were recruited through services as a way of maximising the chance of support availability both during and after the study. This was not an ethical necessity but was in place to maximise the availability of support and minimise the possibility of participant distress. Therefore, whilst online recruitment strategies are common in research with victims of interpersonal violence, it was acknowledged that these new parameters will potentially open up avenues of recruitment to individuals who may not already have direct and ready access to therapeutic support. However, in order to prioritise their safety and wellbeing, the principal investigator ensured that before the interview stage, participants were made aware of the support services available for them both regionally and locally.
- Participation was still voluntary, anonymous, and confidential; participants were still reminded of their right to withdraw at any point during the interview. Upon completion, the principal investigator paid even closer attention to the debriefing process, informing participants clearly on the objectives and

anticipated outcomes of the research, and, if appropriate, the investigator reminded the participant about services available and ensured that the participant had access to these contacts. This ensured that, as before, even though participants may not already be engaged with a service, they had plentiful knowledge of where to go to access such support should they need it.

3.6.3. Safeguards for the researcher

In designing and reflecting on the ethical considerations necessary to ensure the wellbeing of participants of any research that involves sensitive and potentially distressing conversations, it was also acknowledged the importance of the personal wellbeing of the candidate. From the outset, it was recognised the need for safeguards to mitigate the potential impact of the interviews on the researcher. The following safeguards were followed in order to protect the researcher and progress with the project smoothly.

- The interviewer to ensure to establish a professional relationship with the interviewee, keeping adequate emotional distance, and keeping in mind their own wellbeing.
- The researcher/interviewer to ensure to contact via phone-call the supervisory team at the end of each interview, to discuss with someone involved in the project how the interview went and any concerns, personal or regarding the participant(s).
- Because of the sensitive nature of the proposed studies, the researcher prioritised their personal wellbeing by a) keeping a personal journal to track his emotional state, b) keeping in regular touch with the other researchers involved in the project c) ensuring that a social and emotional support network was

available to support the researcher throughout the duration of the research project.

Throughout the thesis and research project, the close and collaborative working relationship with the supervision team was pivotal, not only academically to ensure that the considerations outlined in this section were upheld at all times, but also as a reference point of contact, when and if necessary, for discussing general and specific personal concerns around the project and the interviews conducted.

3.7. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a detailed explanation as to why the present thesis employed a phenomenological methodology to investigate the phenomenon of male rape. Previous research showed some attempts to qualitatively investigate the topic, with mixed results due to the methodological limitations outlined throughout the chapter. Importantly, the lack of recent research investigating male-on-male rape across its different facets provided the opportunity to propose a series of qualitative studies that explored the lived “male rape experience” across different perspectives. For these reasons, IPA was deemed to be the most appropriate qualitative method to make sense of participants’ relationships with their world, through a process of interpretation of the meaning that participants attach to male rape and sexual abuse. Moreover, after clearly outlining the different phases of recruitment, data collection and analysis, this chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the criteria for quality and rigour applied throughout this qualitative thesis, with a reflexive account of the researcher’s positionality. Finally, this chapter outlined the general and specific ethical considerations which were the foundations of how this research project was conducted, with a review of the parameters and guidelines set out to acknowledge the vulnerabilities of the target populations, as well as the sensitivity and potentially

distressing nature of the conversations in the interview. Further and specific methodological and ethical considerations are discussed in the following empirical chapters in this thesis.

Chapter 4

Service providers' experiences and challenges of supporting male-on-male survivors of rape: an interpretative phenomenological examination

Abstract

The literature presented in Chapter 2 clearly outlines that research on sexual violence has predominantly focused on the experiences of female victims. This has resulted in substantial gaps in our understanding of the risks and barriers that exist for men affected by rape and serious sexual abuse. An important voice that often goes unheard is the one of third-sector service providers, who work closely with male survivors and provide a unique perspective into the barriers encountered by their clients around disclosure, recognition, help-seeking, and reporting to the police. The present study provides a detailed account of semi-structured interviews with twelve service providers from specialist organisations in the UK. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) revealed three superordinate themes regarding the challenges of managing i) survivors' needs for agency, safety, and control as functions of their masculinity, ii) the impact of male-rape-myths and their challenge to therapeutic intervention, and iii) survivors' expectations around reporting and the police. The role of masculinity and social stigma permeated participants' accounts, with negative stereotypes and male-specific rape myths influencing reporting, access to services, and survivors' coping mechanisms. Results are discussed in relation to current service provision within the UK, and avenues for improvement are suggested.

4.1. Introduction

Chapter 2 outlined recent growing academic interest in researching male rape and the experiences of male survivors. As stated above, research on sexual violence has historically been predominantly female-focused, largely as the result of feminist approaches which have sought to highlight the pervasive issue of violence towards women and its aetiology (Whisnant, 2009). This focus has led to important developments in terms of recognition and awareness of the experiences of female survivors that few would refute. In contrast, research on male rape is estimated to be 20 years behind that on female rape (Pearson & Barker, 2018), despite global evidence suggesting that 1 in 4 men (S. G. Smith et al., 2018) and 1 in 6 boys (Dube et al., 2005) have experienced some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime. Indeed, in the UK, whilst official figures suggest lower incidence rates for men versus women (4.7% versus 22% since the age of 16), this still equates to approximately 155,000 men being sexually assaulted in 2020 alone (ONS, 2021). As such, gender-specific risks and barriers for male survivors are gaining growing recognition within academia. For example, it is now recognised that the stigma attached to male rape is likely to negatively influence survivors' willingness to disclose their experiences (Hammond et al., 2017), which, incidentally, could have an impact on the reliability of prevalence figures currently available. Moreover, research has demonstrated that societal stereotypes about male rape are reflected in survivors' fear of not being believed, having their cases dismissed, and being discriminated against by police officers and the criminal justice process (Pearson & Barker, 2018).

Understanding the experiences of male survivors, and why they might be reluctant to disclose their victimisation, is arguably crucial in determining which rehabilitative pathways may be appropriate, or how these can be shaped around the

potentially gender-specific needs of sexually abused men. For example, men who have been raped often find themselves in need of professional support for depression (Peterson et al., 2011), suicidal thoughts (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2006), unhealthy self-blame, shame, and low self-esteem (Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005), problems with sexual functioning (Peterson et al., 2011), and PTSD (Elder et al., 2017; Voller et al., 2015) all commonly reported. These needs are reflected in work with female survivors, which identifies a variety of mental health needs post-incident (Campbell et al., 2004). However, for men, gender norms attached to hegemonic masculinity typically reject vulnerability (Connell, 2005) and male survivors' sense of shame following victimisation seems to be influenced by their perceptions of masculinity as synonymous with power and authority, which provide gender-specific barriers to recognising victimisation and/or the decision to involve support services. This is seen in findings which show that male victims are less likely than female victims to seek support from mental health professionals (McCart et al., 2010).

Rape-myths have been identified to be also influential in men's help seeking processes, despite being traditionally associated with female victims and male perpetrators. Turchik & Edwards (2012) postulated that male-rape-myths are widely found in society and are similarly related to gendered expectations. Male-rape-myths describe beliefs around masculinity, sexuality, pleasure, effect, context and perpetrators (Hine et al., 2021). Given the role of men's gender role socialisation on their reluctance to seek professional help (Addis & Mahalik, 2003), male-rape-myths represent additional socio-cultural barriers to disclosure, as their victimisation is viewed as both unacceptable, taboo and evocative of other negative attitudes such as homophobia (Sorsoli et al., 2008). Unhelpfully, survivors' fears of being held responsible (Javaid, 2015a) are often confirmed by encounters with rape myth-related

attitudes at key entry points such as the CJS (Jamel et al., 2008) and therapeutic services (A. E. Ellis et al., 2020). However, it is still not entirely clear how male-rape-myths specifically shape survivors' experiences of engaging with therapeutic support, and how they influence the ability of professionals to provide said support. Exploring this in the context of service provision is therefore particularly important, as such organisations are often responsible for rehabilitation of victims and provide gateways for reporting to justice bodies (Robinson & Hudson, 2011).

Since the establishment of Survivors UK in 1986, there has been a steady increase of male-oriented support services across the UK (Lowe & Rogers, 2017). Such services work specifically with men who have had experiences of sexual violence (including both childhood and adult sexual abuse). These organisations provide a range of services catered towards the unique needs of men, with both individual support and/or group settings available (Survivors UK, 2018). The importance of such services is reflected in the rising number of individuals who attempt to access them, with Survivors UK reporting over 2500 calls every year to their helpline. The support provided in these services is built around the notion that survivors have gender-specific needs, which in turn makes the sector more gender-inclusive. In 2018, the MoJ recognised the need to provide support to these organisations by pledging a significant increase in the funding available to rape crisis centres, which included services specialising in male rape. Male victims are also beginning to be reflected in policy frameworks previously exclusive to women and girls, such as the first Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) position statement on male victims, provided by the Crown Prosecution Service in 2017 (CPS, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 2 (sections 2.5.2., and 2.7.), these recent developments recognise the importance of

specialised services for male survivors, as they often represent a first, key entry point for disclosing their victimisation (Jamel, 2010).

However, despite growing provision, research has neglected to investigate the challenges experienced by service providers who specifically support men affected by rape and sexual violence. As such, understanding the difficulties encountered by providers is particularly important due to the genders-specific needs of male survivors, which shape the type of support required and place unique demands on the therapeutic relationship. Moreover, the professional expertise provided by practitioners allows for a unique insight into post-incident male rape experiences, as well as best practices for supporting male victims. The present study aims to address this important research gap.

4.1.1. The present study

A qualitative study was conducted with service providers, focusing on their support work with male rape survivors. Third-sector service providers work closely and on a regular basis with male survivors and have unique access to survivors' experiences. They provide specialised and professional therapeutic support within organisations, whose mission is to be inclusive and support male rape survivors. By exploring their lived experiences of supporting rape survivors through the challenges of reporting and engaging with services, service providers can help generate a greater and nuanced understanding of male rape. Following a phenomenological framework (Chapter 3, section 3.5.), this study aimed to explore and understand the experiences of service providers working with sexually abused men, including the challenges of providing therapeutic care and guidance upon disclosure. The study aimed to answer to following research questions (see Chapter 1, section 1.2. for overview of aims and research questions):

- i. What are service providers' experiences of providing therapeutic support to men affected by rape and sexual abuse, and what challenges do they encounter in this work?
- ii. What is service providers' knowledge around beliefs, myths, and stereotypes on male rape, and the impact they might have on their clients?
- iii. What challenges and barriers have service providers observed with their male clients around reporting and/or accessing support?

4.2. Approach and methods

The present qualitative study was designed around an IPA framework (J. A. Smith et al., 2009: see Chapter 3, section 3.4.). By following the methodological foundations of IPA (phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography), participants' accounts were placed at the centre of the research process by focusing on their lived experiences of providing support to male rape survivors. As discussed in Chapter 3, the study was constructed on one-to-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Because of the interest in producing a comprehensive and in-depth account of how service providers "make sense" of their clients' experiences of male rape, semi-structured interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate method of data collection (Willig, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are designed around an interview agenda, where the interviewer identifies areas of interest and questions that could inform the overarching research objective. However, the interview agenda is only intended to be used as a guideline rather than a rigorous template, allowing for the natural flow of the conversation between the interviewer and the participant and to explore participants' experiences in great detail, in respect of the idiographic nature of IPA as a qualitative method of analysis (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

4.2.1. Participants

In conjunction with a steering group⁸ made up of gateway service-providers, this study utilised purposive sampling (Chapter 3, section 3.5.1.). The target population consisted of third-sector service providers; therapists, counsellors, and Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) specialising in providing one-to-one, trauma-informed, mental health treatment and support to male survivors of rape. Their expertise and knowledge allowed them to provide professional, third-party perspectives on post-abuse experiences⁹. Participants were also required to have direct and regular contact with male survivors, by providing individual support and/or facilitating group settings. As this study focused specifically on the experiences of those in a support-role, participants were not allowed to be part of a specialist criminal justice population (i.e., police officers, prosecutors).

MSP was consulted to develop the study and to facilitate the recruitment of service providers from different organisations across the UK. In this study, MSP played a mediatory role between the research team and the local organisations that were contacted for this study. The design and interview schedules of this study were developed collaboratively with MSP, to ensure that participants were safeguarded throughout the process. Once the study met MSP's guidelines, the researcher made initial contacts with senior members of five local organisation affiliated to MSP, by sending a digital copy of the approved research proposal. Three organisations showed

⁸ The steering group was made of three service providers in management roles and responsibilities across the three organisations. They were included in the overall analysis of Study 1 to capture their day-to-day work and the challenges they experienced in the management and outreach work of their organisation. For confidentiality, participants who were part of the steering group are not identified.

⁹ One of the participants revealed during the interview stage that they had experiences of sexual victimisation.

interest in the study and informed their practitioners of the opportunity of taking part in the research. The organisation presented an information sheet detailing the broad objectives and the key procedures of the study to their staff. Those who wished to be interviewed communicated their interest to the member of staff who was in contact with the research team. In total, twelve service providers were recruited to take part in Study 1. Participants were affiliated to different local organisations across the UK: Survivors Manchester, Menkind (Brighton), and Survivors in Transition (Ipswich). The majority of participants had many years of experience in the sector, with broad and varied experiences supporting specifically men affected by rape and sexual abuse.

A total of 12 service providers were interviewed, aged between 26 and 54 years old (mean age = 43.92, six female). The majority of participants were of White ethnic background, with one participant of Mixed ethnicity. Table 2 outlines the demographic and work-related information for each participant. The final sample consisted of experienced providers and demonstrated broad and varied experience supporting male survivors. This level of expertise in the sample is ideal and recommended for IPA analysis (H. R. Bernard, 2006), to provide expert accounts of lived experience. To ensure anonymity, participants chose an alias to be used in all forms of dissemination.

Table 2: Demographic, diversity, and work-related information for the participants in the study

Participant Alias	Age	Ethnicity	Sex	Organisation of affiliation	Years working with male survivors	Role in the organisation	Number of cases worked on	Current caseload (one-to-one sessions)
Kai	37	British White	Male	Survivors Manchester	6	Client Service Lead, Therapist, ISVA	Unknown	Unknown
Lydia	47	Mixed – White & Black British	Female	Survivors Manchester	2	ISVA	Unknown	Unknown
Helen	54	White British	Female	Survivors Manchester	<1	Counsellor/Psychotherapist	Unknown	Unknown
John	41	British White	Male	Menkind (Brighton)	5	Counsellor/Psychotherapist	100+*	6
Sam	44	British White	Male	Menkind (Brighton)	9	Counsellor/Therapist	100+*	6
George	54	British White	Male	Menkind (Brighton)	5	Therapist	30+	6
Emma	44	British White	Female	Menkind (Brighton)	4	Counsellor	48	6
Craig	46	British White	Male	Menkind (Brighton)	6	Counsellor	40	6
Noel	45	Irish White	Male	Survivors in Transition	1/2	Trainee-counsellor	7	2
Kay	53	British White	Female	Survivors in Transition	3	Counsellor	20	3
Aurora	36	British White	Female	Survivors in Transition	5	Support worker/Therapist	30+	7
Sarah	26	British White	Female	Survivors in Transition	3	Support worker/Therapist	30	0

*Participants conducted both pre-assessments and one-to-one sessions

4.2.2. Materials

Participants took part in one-to-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. A comprehensive and in-depth interview schedule was designed and used as a guideline, allowing for the natural flow of conversation between the interviewer and the participants (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The interviews took the form of a discussion on issues surrounding male rape, such as: a) attitudes and myths on male rape, b) the issues faced by survivors, such as disclosing, reporting, and accessing services, and c) the challenges of providing support to these men (see Table 3 for interview schedule with representative questions).

Drawing from the literature, the areas covered in the interview schedule were used to gain insight of participants' lived experiences of the prevalence and impact of the male-rape-myths identified by researchers such as Turchik and Edwards (2012) and Hine et al (2021), but also to investigate what factors, if any, shaped their clients' experiences of disclosure, help-seeking, and reporting. Finally, the researcher placed particular importance on providing participants with the opportunity to speak about their unique experiences as providers and the difficulties that may arise from supporting a vulnerable population. As previously mentioned, before conducting the interviews, the researcher and stakeholders at MSP agreed to an interview schedule (Appendix I) that was appropriate and prioritised participants' safety and wellbeing throughout the research process.

Table 3: Interview schedule with representative questions.

Section	Representative questions
Initial Rapport Building	So (alias), how old are you? What are your current circumstances? How did you start working in this role?
Free recall about experiences	Now I would like to ask whether you can tell me anything about the experiences you have with working with male victim-survivors. This can be talking about the general nature of this work, or about specific experiences with clients.
Beliefs, myths, and stereotypes	I'd like to hear about stereotypes you think male survivors and/or society have about the idea of a male survivor. Are there any preconceptions, ideas, thoughts, or beliefs you think exist about male-on-male sexual violence/rape?
Experiences of, and challenges/barriers to, reporting	After the incident, what do you think goes through survivors' minds in relation to who to tell and how? Do you identify any external challenges to disclosing the incident to any persons (e.g., friends) and any particular groups (e.g., the police)?
Challenges faced as service providers	What is it like to be a service provider? What challenges do you encounter?

4.2.3. Procedure

The researcher made initial contacts with senior members of five local organisations; three organisations showed interest in the study and informed their practitioners of the research opportunity. Those who wished to be interviewed communicated their interest to the senior staff in contact with the researchers. Participants were interviewed at the premises of their organisation, to ensure a familiar and safe environment, with support readily available if needed, given the sensitive nature of the interviews. The procedures were designed to ensure that participants would feel supported and safe when taking part in the interviews, by focusing on participants' comfort and building rapport (Donalek, 2005; Shaw et al., 2020). Data were collected prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, thus social distancing measures were not required. The interviews were conducted in rooms usually set up for individual support work, catered to encourage private and confidential conversations. Upon arrival, participants were welcomed and briefed informally on the aims of the research. The rights of participants were clearly outlined to make sure that participation was voluntary, that the interviews could bring up sensitive and distressing information, and that this was acknowledged by the researcher. Before starting the recording, participants returned a signed informed-consent form. The researcher provided an overview of the broad format, emphasising the semi-structured design of the study and encouraging participants to expand on any areas they found of interest. Interviews lasted approximately 1-hour (interviews ranged between 45 minutes and 1 hour and 20 minutes). During the interviews, the researcher paid particular attention to the wellbeing of the participants. Refreshments and tissues were made available, and, if appropriate, breaks were suggested. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher fully debriefed the participants on the aims and objectives of the study and

provided contact details, in the case that the participants wished to provide any further input at a later point.

4.2.4. Analysis

Following the methodological decisions discussed in Chapter 3, the analysis followed an IPA framework (Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). In this study, the aim was to appreciate participants' experiences of providing support to male rape survivors. As a method of analysis IPA is grounded in three main philosophical assumptions (Chapter 3, section 3.4.1): phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). IPA is a phenomenological method of qualitative analysis where the singular experience drives the research and interpretation process. As a methodology, the researcher engages in a hermeneutic process of interpreting how participants interpret and rationalise their own experiences, while considering how the researchers' personal constructs inform their interpretation processes. Finally, IPA is an idiographic method of research, where the researchers' endeavours are focused in appreciating the details and uniqueness of each participants' account before constructing broader trends in the data overall.

Once data were transcribed the researcher started the analysis following the four-stage process (see Chapter 3, section 3.5.2.) described by J. A. Smith et al. (2009): i) interpretative reading and annotations, ii) generating codes and emergent themes, iii) seeking relationship and clustering into master themes, iv) comparison of master themes across the sample to identify overarching superordinate themes. To ensure the credibility and strength of the findings, the researcher and the supervisors of this thesis were closely involved in the interpretation of the data. The researcher and third supervisor separately engaged in the first step and compared, and contrasted codes and themes subsequently generated. Upon agreement of

representative master themes, these were presented and discussed to the first and second supervisors of this thesis. This process of collaborative discussion led to further interrogation and questioning of the data and to the development of three superordinate themes that best described participants' experience.

4.3. Results and Discussion

Three superordinate themes were identified from the IPA analysis regarding the challenges encountered by providers around managing: i) survivors' need for agency, safety, and control as functions of their masculinity ii) the impact of male rape myths and their challenge to therapeutic intervention and iii) survivors' expectations around reporting and the police (see Table 4). Service providers discussed at length the importance of gender in understanding male rape and how survivors' coping mechanisms were defined by their need to compensate for a perceived lack of masculinity generated from the incident itself. Participants also described the impact and the prevalence of male-rape-myths, particularly around how they defined social perceptions and stigmatisation of male survivors as non-authentic men, as well as the oversimplification of male rape as homosexual. Finally, participants commented on the challenges of managing their clients' expectations with the police. Barriers to disclosure and reporting were discussed, particularly around survivors' perceptions of the CJS as inaccessible and untrustworthy, which was reinforced by experiences of officers' scepticism and dismissal of male rape cases and reflected their adherence to a gendered misconception of male rape. Below, each superordinate theme will be examined within participants' unique experiences and discussed in relation to the broader literature on male rape.

Table 4: Table of superordinate themes and subthemes with descriptions for Study 1.

Superordinate Theme	Subtheme	Description
Survivors' need for agency, safety, and control as functions of their masculinity	Agency: the cycle of self-blame and shame	Service providers observed how their male clients reported negative self-evaluative emotions. They observed how male survivors blame themselves for not acting manly enough during the incident, which in turn give rise to feelings of shame. This sense of shame was seen by providers as reflective of men's need for agency in their life, whereby they feel responsible and accountable for the events in their life.
	Safety: anger and antisocial behaviours in a dangerous world	Service providers observed the recurrence of aggressive behaviours by their male clients. Participants observed how anger provided their clients with an avenue to express their emotional distress in a "male appropriate" way. Crucially, participants observed how anger and aggressiveness, as male appropriate emotions, and behaviours, helped survivors to increase their sense of safety from future victimisation by improving self-perceptions and concealing vulnerabilities.
	Control: unhealthy stoicism and internalisation of trauma	Service providers observed that some of their male clients preferred to fully conceal their emotional distress by portraying an outward image of stoicism. Stoicism was seen by providers as reflective of survivors' need to maintain and portray an image of masculine resilience and invulnerability. Service providers observed that these internalising processes resulted in a number of negative outcomes, such as minimisation, suppression, and overall denial of trauma, with negative consequences on their ability to support male survivors in their recovery journeys.
Managing the impact of male rape myths and their challenge to therapeutic intervention	Real men cannot be raped (male survivors are not real men)	Service providers described how their clients often experienced narratives that questioned their masculinity, whereby "real men cannot be raped". Participants observed how the real-men-myth affected how male survivors are portrayed. Crucially, participants observed that the real-men-myth had important consequences on their clients' self-images and sense of isolation.
	The gay-rape-myth: "only gay men are raped"	Service providers observed that male rape was often associated with homosexuality. They observed these narratives not only in the public, but also in the issues brought forward by their male clients such as confusion over sexual orientation, sexual fantasies, and unconscious internalised homophobia.
Survivors' expectations around reporting and the police		Service providers provided insight into the challenges they encounter in supporting male clients in entering and engaging the CJS. They observed the use of stereotypes and myths in officers' responses to their clients. Crucially, throughout the interviews reporting was seen as a therapeutic challenge of its own right as their client experienced poor communication and stigmatising attitudes and responses.

4.3.1. Theme 1: Masculinity: managing survivors' need for agency, safety, and control

The service providers in this study reported that their clients experienced an internal conflict between being a victim of rape and the need to maintain an image of masculinity, stereotypically characterised by toughness, assertiveness and resilience (Kimmel, 1994; Mahalik, Good, et al., 2003; Mahalik, Locke, et al., 2003). In other words, survivors struggled to reconcile their victimisation with the societal pressures that exist around masculinity. In particular, participants observed that their male clients took unhealthy levels of responsibility for their victimisation. Put simply, the conflict between being a man and a victim drove the pattern of coping strategies identified by participants, such as unhealthy self-blame, aggressiveness, and unhealthy stoicism. These responses reflected underlying representations of masculinity, which highlighted three core functions and needs: agency, safety, and control.

4.3.1.1. Agency: *the cycle of self-blame and shame.*

Participants' descriptions of self-blame and shame in their clients reflected a need to adhere to masculine norms and to maintain a sense of agency in their lives. Unhealthy self-blame in victims of violence is a well-known phenomenon in victimisation literature, from domestic abuse (e.g., Frieze, 1979; O'Neill & Kerig, 2000), to adult (Janoff-Bulman, 1979) and childhood rape (Filipas & Ullman, 2006). This tendency reflects individuals' biases in self-attributing causality, as well as self-implicating perceptions of avoidability (C. G. Davis et al., 1996). In other words, to be agents, victims seek to influence deliberately their functioning and life circumstances (Bandura, 2006; p. 164) particularly around their victimisation, which can be achieved by identifying behaviours that could have caused or/and could have prevented the incident. The process allows them to maintain a sense of agency, as intentionality and

independency (Bandura, 2006). This seemed particularly powerful for men because of the juxtaposition between victimisation and masculine norms:

Kai: There's like transfer of responsibility. So, depending on kind of historical or current - it's still similar. So often the survivor will take on unhealthy levels of responsibility for what's happened. So, "It's my fault, I could have done this better. I could've fought them off. I could've said something sooner." It's much easier for a male survivor to feel that they're at fault than it is to, um, believe that somebody else- could've had the power or control- over them.

Kai's clients shifted the focus away from the abusive actions of the perpetrator by placing their own actions under unforgiving scrutiny. By faulting themselves, male survivors can maintain agency in their own life; by focusing on avoidability, survivors also reinforce the distress of failing to adhere to the expected masculine norms. Kai's observations suggest a representation of masculinity closely related to Connell's (2005) definitions of hegemonic masculinity as a construct of power and authority. It could therefore be argued that the need for agency stems from a sense of inferiority to "dominant" men, who are idealised for successfully meeting masculine expectations (Fields et al., 2015). Research on other groups of discriminated and oppressed men (e.g., Black and/or Gay men) identified men's tendency to display hypermasculine traits to compensate for a perceived discrepancy with the ideal image of men in society (Whitehead et al., 1994). The social denial of male sexual victimisation places survivors within the subgroup of other oppressed and marginalised masculinities (Javaid, 2015b, 2016a) which could exacerbate their sense of failure and increase their need to hold themselves accountable for their victimisation.

In terms of treatment, one of the difficulties reported was to engage with survivors' sense of responsibility for the incident and need to feel ashamed of it. The

main challenge was to disentangle the layers of shame that reinforced survivors' self-blame:

Noel: So, there's so many ways where shame can layer: shame of how I behaved - and that's quite hard to a person. I think it can be very hard for a person to work on and because, sometimes you feel, a client can feel, and I've been here myself as a client, you feel like "I should feel ashamed, that's just right, and as it should be. The shame that I carry is what I should [be carrying] ... is mine. It's my just desserts." ...and that can be a really difficult thing to shift.

Noel sympathised with survivors' active pursuit for accountability, both as a man and someone who accessed support. He observed how shame and self-blame co-existed in survivors, highlighting a global negative self-evaluation (Lutwak et al., 2003), associated with *characterological* self-blame (see Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Noel also noted that survivors reported a need to "own" their sense of shame, which supports the notion of agency as a function of masculinity: by viewing their own shame as appropriate and deserved, survivors seem to be pursuing an idealised male image. Consequently, survivors distort their role in the incident, as suggested by Kay:

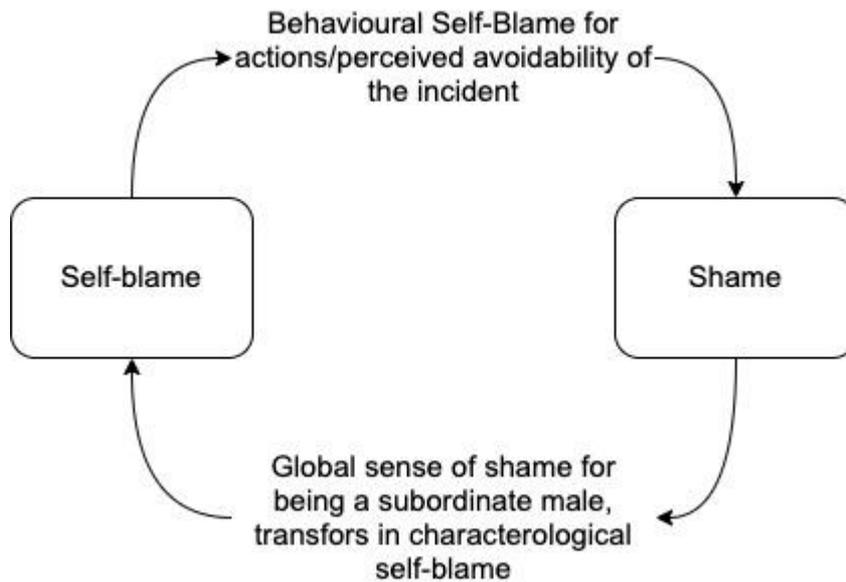
Kay: So, theoretically if they're sitting there with a client and you were to say "This person over here had this happen to them", they would accept that and allow the other person to not have any blame "of course it wasn't their fault, absolutely it wasn't" so on an intellectual level they totally get it... but when you turn it back on to them it's like "No, no, no I'm full of shame and guilt" and it's very difficult to sort of persuade – they can understand it from somebody else's point of view, intellectually they're getting it, but emotionally and psychologically they're not.

Kay...They'd be given money or sweets or treats or something to go along with it...so they see it as a way of empowering [the abuser] and they see it as a way of their acceptance of the abuse

Throughout the interview, Kay reported that when clients were asked to make judgement on other survivors' childhood experiences, they were capable of correctly placing responsibility and blame on the perpetrator. However, when the focus was shifted to their own experiences, survivors seemed unable to be as forgiving with themselves. This discrepancy on judgements was indicative of the extent of survivors' internalised self-blame, particularly for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Indeed, participants who worked closely with childhood abuse survivors reported that their clients were often manipulated and rewarded by their abusers. Memories around accepting rewards impacted survivors' own perceptions of complacency during the incident, as they equated their acceptance of rewards as a synonym for consent. Kay's experiences emphasised how male survivors also engaged in *behavioural* self-blame (Janoff-Bullman, 1979) as they experienced shame for their actions. When asked about the reasons why her clients struggled to be as forgiving with themselves as with other survivors, Kay pointed out that from behavioural self-blame, survivors seem to develop an internalised global negative self-perception: "they've carried it for so long... becoming great part of their personality".

Participants' experiences of survivors' need for agency, as a function of their masculinity, can be modelled as a cycle of self-blame and shame (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The cycle of self-blame and shame.



Initially, behavioural self-blame arises from a sense of failure for not acting “manly” enough during the incident, which, in turn, seems to generate a global sense of shame arising from self-perceptions of inferiority and subordination (Fields et al., 2015). Shame transforms self-blame from behavioural to characterological, suggesting a shift from blaming/being ashamed about specific behaviours to an unforgiving evaluation of their overall (lack of) masculinity. The sense of shame reinforces the need to self-blame, and vice versa (Lutwak et al., 2003), which suggests that the cycle plays a compensatory function that allows survivors to move closer to an ideal of masculinity, by taking responsibility and punishing themselves.

4.3.1.2. Safety: anger and antisocial behaviours in a dangerous world.

The expectations that are attached to male emotionality are heavily influenced by gender role stereotypes and are often associated with anger and aggression (King et al., 2020; Simpson & Stroth, 2004). From a young age, boys are expected to refrain from showing internal distress such as sadness, fear, or anxiety, which are characterised as non-conforming emotions (Moon, 2019). Adult men are left with limited avenues for emotional expression, with anger playing an immediate regulatory

function that helps the suppression of non-confirming emotions (Jakupcak et al., 2005). Therefore, it is not surprising that the providers in this study reported that some of their clients, particularly those who had childhood abuse experiences, had issues with anger, which manifested in a history of antisocial behaviours. As noted by Sam:

Sam: So then years later they are still caring around an idea that they've done something wrong...and then, it's all related in my opinion in the sense that the inability to deal with that and to voice that whether that's because taboos in society or lack of services available to people to explore that, it will come out in a kinda resentment and anger so often people have come here, there's issues with...trouble with the law, addiction, violence, acting out...these sort of behaviours usually flag up that there's a problem...and often that's the incentive to approach us initially

Sam observed that the social barriers that exist for men to disclose their experiences and the restraint enforced on men's emotional expression, pushed his clients to behave antisocially as a way to channel and express their frustrations and distress. Sam also highlighted an important association between the time of the incident and the scope of survivors' internalisation of maladaptive coping mechanisms ("So years later they are still carrying around..."). Self-disclosure is particularly challenging for men (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Stanko & Hodbell, 1993) and individuals with histories of childhood trauma (Paine & Hansen, 2002). This could be particularly relevant for those survivors of childhood abuse who grew up in environments that discouraged the expression of emotions related to their vulnerabilities. It could be argued that survivors, by accepting an image of masculinity associated with toughness, experienced shame, and distress for feeling non-conforming emotions (Jakupcak et al., 2005). Therefore, the

prevalence of history of antisocial behaviours reflects not only the regulatory functions of aggressiveness, but also an attempt to maintain their male invulnerability:

Helen: they felt angry for a long time, they just didn't know why. I'm thinking about two or three of my clients - they had real reputations in their teens, in their 20s. They would fight anybody and anything over any matter. They had a local reputation as hard men. Maybe that's a kick, against what they experienced as kids. That, "I'm not going to be overpowered again. It's not happening to me again like it did." And maybe, especially if they're heterosexual men. It's sort of a reinforcement of the male power: 'I've got to feel like I'm really 100% male, whatever that means to me'...Because society expects this stereotypical conforming, you know, this is what it means to be a man.

In Helen's experience, anger and aggressiveness were not consciously employed as self-regulatory mechanisms. The frustrations and distress resulting from the abuse, coupled with the incapability to express their internal emotional state, are known to leave male victims of abuse with a sense of humiliation and shame (Harper & Arias, 2004). While it is not clear to what extent survivors were aware of the reasons behind their excessive aggressiveness, Helen's clients appeared to associate masculinity with safety as they increased their confidence by enacting stereotypically hypermasculine behaviours. Safety as a function of masculinity could be described as a state of readiness and the ability of defending oneself against any threat. Helen went further to suggest that survivors' behaviours were the result of a belief of a dangerous world:

Helen: They've got to look after families and protect their families after what they've experienced. Surrounded with big bad people out there. A lot of them have this protector role, very strong figures, in their psyche.

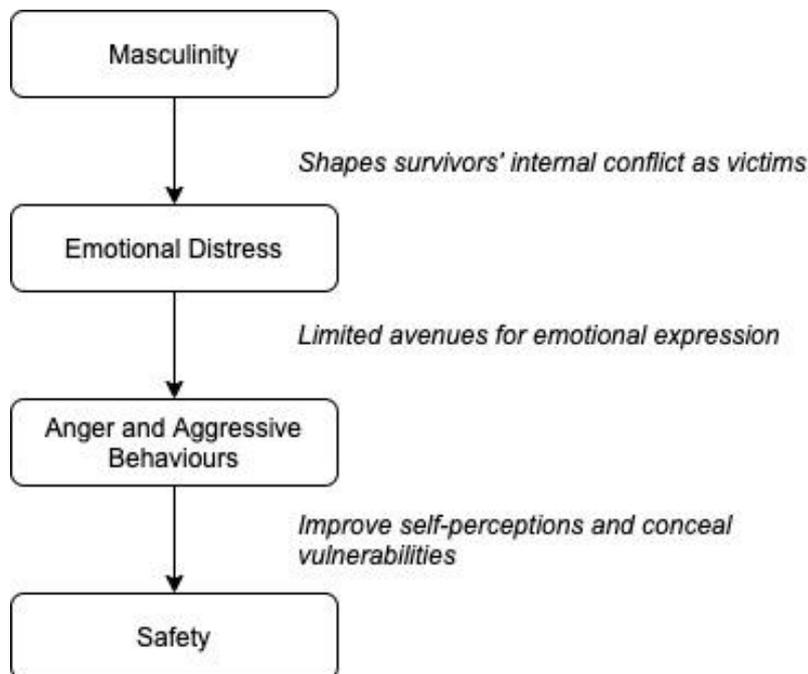
While socialisation is one of the contributing factors to the gender differences in fear of crime (May et al., 2010), fear of sexual violence is generally characterised as a female issue (Stanko, 1995; Chui et al., 2013), thus not seen as concerning for men. However, Helen's clients seemed to develop fear of future sexual victimisation for themselves and their families, which might explain why survivors appear to be drawn to displays of aggressive, hypermasculine behaviours: it allows them to enhance their sense of safety, while improving their own self-perceived masculinity. This sense of safety, achieved by concealing self-perceived vulnerabilities, was further elaborated by Craig, who reported:

Craig: Some men become more aggressive because they're feeling very vulnerable – so when other incidents happen, not necessarily around sex, they're feeling vulnerable, they're feeling being looked down. I've talked to a client who was experiencing some racial abuse and when people were being racist to him, he was feeling upset and vulnerable. That sense of vulnerability and upset was triggering, reminding him of his sexual abuse because he was feeling vulnerable at that point – so he reacted very strongly in an aggressive way back to these people. It's kind of complex, but what happened in that obviously is that people are affected by that, they can be violent to people, they get in trouble with the police. But what's been missed in all of that is that there's his vulnerability. Because what people see is hostility that is triggered by what's upsetting him.

Aggressive reactions allowed Craig's clients to conceal their vulnerabilities and re-establish a sense of power and safety. Craig highlighted how survivors' aggression was the manifestation of a sense of inferiority (“...being looked down”) from other men (Fields et al., 2015). Police involvement for antisocial behaviours was also reported by other participants, who highlighted survivors' experiences as offenders with the CJS.

Survivors' behaviours are misinterpreted as exclusively antisocial, overlooking the complex reality of survivors' maladaptive aggressiveness as an attempt to re-establish a sense of safety in their lives (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Anger, aggressiveness, and safety as functions of masculinity.



As male socialisation rejects expressions of distress such as sadness, fear, shame, and anxiety (Moon, 2019) and favours anger as the accepted masculine emotions (Simpson & Stroth, 2004; Berke et al., 2018), by enacting appropriate masculine behaviours survivors increase their confidence, conceal their vulnerabilities, and, in turn, associate aggressiveness with safety from future victimisation.

4.3.1.3. Control: unhealthy stoicism and the internalisation of trauma.

While some clients' frustrations manifested in aggressiveness and antisocial behaviours, others resorted to conceal their emotional distress by adhering to the male social expectation of being stoic. Stoicism is associated with the denial, suppression, and control of emotions (Wagstaff & Rowledge, 1995). Stoicism is a defining characteristic of masculinity: men are expected to refrain from emotional involvement, avoid emotional expression, and be in a constant state of vigilance and control over

their own emotions (Berke et al., 2018). Through the lenses of masculinity, stoicism shapes men's reluctance to seek help and disclose their emotional distress, as it was observed by Kai:

Kai: I think culturally we unintentionally tell men that they can't-speak out. Um, put that alongside, you know, the, the very stereotypical views of masculinity, and being a man. And the stiff upper lip and "just have a pint down the port". Don't talk to your mates if you feel a bit shit. That kind of stuff, all those things add up to "I'm just going to hold this myself".

The notion of "stiff upper lip" associated with masculinity, particularly in British culture (Capstick & Clegg, 2013), prevented survivors from disclosing their abuse. As stoicism is culturally reinforced, men conceal their emotions and vulnerabilities to avoid further humiliation from other men (Kia-Keating et al., 2005). Kai noted that to maintain their self-perception as "real men", survivors insulated themselves from external judgements by suppressing their emotional distress and expression. To be in control over their emotions, survivors appear to be engaging in "expressive suppression", which involves "inhibiting ongoing emotion-expressive behaviour" (John & Gross, 2004; p.1304). Importantly, some participants seemed to believe that this need for control was consciously pursued:

Helen: Men come in with all these kinds of social stereotypes. "I've got to be strong. I've got to hold it together. I'm going to bury my emotions.". Because that's the safest thing: "I can't risk either letting the anger out, or letting anyone see how upset and destroyed I am. So, I'll push it away." Sort of maybe more denial. "Maybe I'll just more I'll just- if I push it away, as I suppress it, I can forget about it." And that works for a bit, and they do, they do tend to forget about it for a bit, but then something it'll trigger it again.

Helen highlighted how survivors' suppression/denial were motivated by their need to "forget about it" and re-establish that sense of control associated with masculinity. In contrast with other accounts, anger was not an option for some of Helen's clients, who preferred to suppress their frustration by self-inhibiting their anger, distancing themselves from the event, and denying the psychological impact of the abuse. This was also reported by Noel, who observed that some of his clients often minimised their experiences, by drawing comparisons with other survivors' experiences:

Noel: I've noticed, my male clients diminishing their experience, whereas I haven't really noticed [that] with female clients... "I only had one incident; some people were abused for years". This client in particular had one sexual assault, but it was really violent, with a knife, but he managed to diminish it straight away. Or they may have experienced prolonged abuse, and they'll say "some people it was violent, in mine there was no violence" ... "Am I really as bad as some people? Yet I'm here - should I be here?"

The literature on childhood trauma indicates that survivors tend to minimise and deny the extent of their own victimisation (Mert et al., 2016). This is particularly relevant for survivors of rape because memories related to the abuse appear to elicit feelings of shame, fear of future victimisation, and conflict with gender role expectations (Bullock & Benson, 2011). As previously mentioned, men are expected to be capable of independently dealing with their emotional distress. In Noel's experience, survivors, after accessing the service, were in conflict between needing support and maintaining a sense of masculinity: consequently, survivors diminished their experience as less important than other survivors. This conflict reflects the extent to which norms around masculinity shape the psychology of men and male survivors' victim-experience. Participants indicated that the limited avenues for emotional expression explained

survivors' unhealthy coping mechanisms (suppression, denial, and minimisation). Drawing from Noel's extract, the thought process behind minimisation and comparisons of trauma is indicative of survivors' shame and need to re-establish a sense of masculinity in their self-image.

The psychological challenges experienced by survivors put them in a position where decision have to be made around effective ways of maintaining a sense of masculinity, as control over their emotions in their lives. As anger and outward expressions are seen as undesirable, some resort to stoicism. Participants clearly outlined the consequences of not addressing symptoms of trauma. As survivors develop unhealthy coping mechanisms (suppressing their emotional distress, minimising the consequences of their trauma, and denying their victim-experience) survivors are not capable to effectively deal with their victimisation, as many of their maladaptive behaviours and cognitive processes are internalised.

4.3.2. Theme 2: Managing the impact of male rape myths and their challenge to therapeutic intervention

Male-rape-myths were identified as key features of participants' accounts on providing support to male survivors. While working in the sector, both when engaging with their clients and outside the place of work, participants often observed the impact of male-rape-myths on survivors' psychological wellbeing. The implications of rape myths were highlighted by participants as the backdrop of survivors' victim-experience, characterised by internal conflict and self-blame, which reflected the shifting of blame from the perpetrator to the victim (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Similarly, to female-rape-myths, the character, sexual history, and behaviours of survivors were questioned (Grubb & Turner, 2012). In particular, two narratives were discussed by participants: the "real men cannot be raped" and the gay-rape-myths.

4.3.2.1. Real men cannot be raped (male survivors are not real men).

Rape myths are closely related to what is socially expected from men and women, specifically around what are believed to be appropriate behaviours in sexual relations (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), with men expected to be initiators of sexual interactions (Archer, 1996; Bridges, 1991). Consequently, the “classic” rape scenario (female victim and male perpetrator) often sets the benchmark, which male survivors are compared to:

Sarah: I think it's a complete role reverse from what people typically think of what a sexual relationship is, where it's led by the men or leaning towards a heterosexual set up. So, there's already the stigma there.”

Sarah argued that rape myths cast doubt over the authenticity of male survivors' accounts. Disbelief shapes the myth that men cannot be raped and, therefore, that male survivors cannot be considered “real” men. It is reflected in the observations of the participants of this study, who reported that their clients were often treated and described in derogatory and denigrating terms. This was supported by Lydia who outlined the conflict between what a man should be, and the negative attributes associated to sexual victimisation:

Lydia: So, if we think someone who's strong, who makes good decisions, and this type of thing... and something awful has happened, this man has been sexually assaulted or raped, and how a man that's supposed to be this big, masculine, strong... nothing like that could ever happen to you because you're a man? How do you then say, "Actually, this happened... This happened to me." Because then that kind of strips away all those labels that society's put on you as a man, are taken, in a way. So, what you're left with, being less of a man?

This discrepancy between being a stereotypically masculine male and being a victim of sexual assault shapes the denial of male rape and the minimisation of survivors' experiences. Lydia believed that this disbelief not only affected social perception, but it had important implication on survivors' self-image. The "stripping" of all the qualities that made competent and self-realised men, placed survivors in an environment where their experiences were dismissed. Among these qualities, Lydia emphasised physical strength, described to be the main feature to be questioned because men were expected to unequivocally resist the assailant. Traditional rape myths place on the victims the responsibility to protect themselves, both for female victims (Grubb & Turner, 2012) and for male victims (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). It should be noted that some researchers have stated that blame attributions differ between male and female victims, where men are blamed behaviourally and women are blamed characterologically (Howard, 1984; Perrot & Webber, 1996). However, an extract from Kay revealed that such distinction may be too arbitrary:

Kay:...victims have a sort of stigma of weakness around them, and, so, the perception that the outside world has of the survivors, is that they're going to be very weak, vulnerable...perhaps intellectually challenged, because it's more, it's easier for, allegedly, this is not the truth...this is the idea that people have outside of here, is that they must be intellectually lacking, not so much in education, just in general mental ability. I think that they sort of dumb it down a bit, they think they must be sort of mentally challenged if they got like that...there's that all "oh they must be weak if they got, if they can be that easily persuaded" ...and because there's that general stigma outside, sometimes the survivors come with that in their heads as well.

In this extract, the typical male survivor is blamed characterologically, meaning that something about themselves (in Kay's experience a perceived gullibility) caused the abuse (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Kay's extract suggests that myths are used to rationalise rape, by questioning survivors' behaviours during the assault, but also portraying victims as physically and intellectually deficient. Put simply, male rape is justified on the presumption of survivors' inherent weakness, which does not comply with masculinity (Rock, 2002). Kay's explanation supports the gendered characterisation of rape (Fisher & Pina, 2013) as an issue that generally does not concern "real men". This stigma manifests in comparisons to female rape, seen as the legitimate and authentic form of this type of violence (Anderson, 2007; Javaid, 2015b).

The psychological consequences of the minimisation of survivors' experiences were described as isolating by Craig, who said:

Craig: I guess the sexual abuse stuff is particularly acute for men, because there is an idea that it shouldn't happen to men...there's also a societal idea that it doesn't happen to men. So, the idea is, you know, [the] stereotypes is [that] women get attacked sexually by men and men are perpetrators. So, for men there's still a very broad societal thing that that's the way it is set up. And so then for men to access counselling is like you are not just part of a band with lots of women who had this experience. I think you can feel very isolated in there, like this doesn't happen to men... 'coz society tells it doesn't happen to men...So I am a bit different, there's something wrong with me..."

As Craig pointed out, the characterisation of rape as a female issue result in male survivors being singled out as isolated anomalies. By drawing parallels with female sexual victimisation, Craig highlighted the discrepancies in terms of sympathy, awareness and support received. Researchers have repeatedly highlighted that this

feminist characterisation of rape cast a shadow over male survivors' experiences (Davies & Rogers, 2006; Mezey & King, 1989). Craig's experience supported the existence of this characterisation and reinforced the publicly held belief that rape typically did not happen to men and that survivors' experiences were treated as anomalies. Put simply, the real-men-myth has its root deep in male socialisation and survivors' own self-image is shaped by unconscious adherence to it. Therefore, among the challenge for service providers was that their clients may not recognise themselves as legitimate victims, worthy of therapeutic support.

Other participants also reported that the real-men-myth permeated across society and, importantly, other mental health services:

*Emma:...*I hear that as judgement in society generally, even in the counsel-not in this service...because I think we are fully aware...here of the stereotypes and the myths...but in my counselling work in general, even amongst other counsellors kind of just assuming that if it's an attack on adult man...by someone who therefore might be a similar size and similar strength...that's it's kind of not as traumatic because they could've, they have got the physical capacity...to stop it happening...which is maybe viewed differently when it's a child or a women.

Emma's reflection may appear surprising, considering the rise in awareness and the increasing number of organisations supporting male survivors in the last decade (Lowe, 2018). However, Emma confirmed the need to target and dispel rape myth acceptance across non-specialised support services. A vignette study conducted by Kassing and Prieto (2003) showed that trainee counsellors blamed more a male survivor if he did not resist. While dated, this study demonstrated how even professionals, arguably less susceptible to rape myths, still hold damaging beliefs around male survivors. Emma's reflection suggests that non/specialised services

endorse the narratives that portray adult men as physically strong enough to defend themselves from a perpetrator. As Emma points out, male survivors' victimisation was downplayed as less traumatic compared to female and child victims, which is another common male-rape-myth (Campbell et al., 2004; Hanson, 1990; Resick, 1993). Emma's account suggests that rather than being two distinct myths, the real-men-myth affects how severe a survivors' trauma is estimated. The underestimation of the psychological impact of rape originates from the stigma associated with male mental health (Vogel et al., 2014). Therefore, adherence to the real-men-myth is synonymous with the demand for men to be in control of their psychological wellbeing and not in need of therapeutic support.

4.3.2.2. The gay-rape-myth: "only gay men are raped"

Almost all participants, when asked about the most common stereotypes they encountered in their work as service providers, reported that male rape is often associated with homosexuality (i.e., male survivors must be gay). This is in line with the literature on male-rape-myths where the sex of those involved is used to make assumptions around their sexuality (Hickson et al., 1994; Hine et al., 2021; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Participants observed that their clients often experienced psychological confusion around their role as the victim, as they were likely to be unconsciously adhering to the gay-rape myth prior to their abuse. Indeed, when describing their clients' experiences post-incident, participants even reported that they often brought forward questions around their own sexuality:

Emma: I think also the stereotypes about being men who were gay...people often think when I say where I work that all the men must be gay...which is a strange thing to sort of think through really... something that men who come here from counselling, if it's something that's happened in childhood or adulthood, either

actually, often brings up questions for them about what their sexuality must be...because of having been target for that kind of crime. Or, because with what they are left with from it, so yeah, I mean, some men are left with certain sexual fantasies or confused sexuality because of what's happened to them, like when they are trying to work it out...and it leaves them wondering if they might be gay or bisexual or, yeah, just confuses their sexuality...I think the main effect is that men think that it's their fault somehow, they feel ashamed...

In Emma's experience, male survivors' confusion reflected an attempt to understand the reasons behind why they were the target of the abuse. The strength of the association between male rape and sexuality in society had a direct effect on her clients' attitudes towards rape. It pushed them to rationalise their victimisation as the result of some (perceived) ambiguity in the displays of their sexuality prior to the assault. The use of sexuality to explain the abuse is indicative of the intrinsic relationship that exist between sex and power in modern society, where sex is often described as conquests or surrenders, implying a power imbalance between the partners involved (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010). In rape cases, victims are often subject to sexual objectification which allows external observers to justify perpetrators' aggressions as sexually motivated (P. Bernard et al., 2015). Survivors' confusion suggests an attempt to maintain power as a survivor, whereby they view their victimisation as the result of their sexual appearance rather than a surrender of their sexual power. However, as Emma observed, the main effect is that they feel ashamed. Interestingly, Emma reported that confusion over sexuality is common to both childhood and adult rape victims. It is endemic of the social expectation of men being sexually motivated and independent (Bridges, 1991) regardless of age, with damaging consequences for victim blaming and survivors' self-blame. Indeed, participants often

reported the expectation of sexual independence, with Lydia, an ISVA, highlighting the impact it had on underage male prostitutes (“rent boys”):

Lydia: Somebody who’s got the insight or knowledge would not use that phrase. “Oh yeah, but he’s just a rent boy, so he’s doing that anyway”. You know, someone’s actually 14 or 15 – and sold in sex. They’re not a rent boy – they’re a victim... They feel they put themselves in that position, “Well something terrible has happened, therefore it must be my fault, and that’s how everyone else is going to think about it.” And I think even if you don’t believe it, if they don’t believe it’s their fault, they’re worried that other people will think it’s their fault. I think a lot of the time these guys feel it’s not worth anything, because this is what they do anyway. They have sex with men for money. So, if somebody- perhaps even if it’s not seen as rape, these guys don’t even... don’t consider themselves to have been raped.

Lydia’s example highlighted one of the main functions of traditional rape myths in questioning both motives and characters of victims (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Financial gain was used to question the motivation and the character of underage survivors, supporting the view of sex as transactions between consenting partners (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010), which is an additional layer of stigma, blame and accountability on minors who accept rewards from the abuser. Similarly to female sex workers, the belief that they voluntarily accept a compensation in exchange for sex, places male survivors at increased accountability (Sprankle et al., 2018). By highlighting how survivors themselves dismiss their abuse, Lydia emphasised one of the challenges for providers to manage and reframe their clients’ negative self-perceptions, which appear to be rooted in rape myths and in social expectations on how consensual relationships should look like.

What participants described as the expectation of sexual independence on men and boys, coupled with the gay-rape-myth, seemed to shape their clients' experiences in different ways. For example, Noel reported that some of his clients started fearing and distancing themselves from other gay men, seen as potential perpetrators:

*Noel...*one guy in particular he got some good friends who were a gay couple, but he didn't feel comfortable being with one of them on his own...he also said he found himself becoming triggered when they went to a pub and after a short time realised it was a gay pub... he started having a panic attack because he knew that a gay man is gonna come in

*Noel...*they've got two things going on at once: "I've got absolutely nothing no negative views towards homosexuality...but I'm bloody not one.

Noel's examples suggested how the gay-rape-myth has a substantial effect on survivors' beliefs systems, with important psychological consequences. These attitudes and the associated fears and anxieties stem from historical stigma and taboo around homosexuality (Sullivan, 2004). The need to distance themselves from labels and other gay men supports the notion that, initially, some survivors hold and perpetuate the gay-rape-myth. Moreover, it also suggests that survivors develop unconscious internalised homophobia (Gonsiorek, 1995), exacerbated by their experiences of sexual violence, and reinforced by society's negative attitudes towards homosexuality (Cornish, 2012: p. 122).

In discussing the gay-rape-myth, participants also reported that survivors perceived internal conflict was often exacerbated by experiences of physiological reactions during the abuse, associated with psychological arousal and sexual pleasure.

Kai: Questions around sexuality are common. So, for the purposes of this study, we're talking about male victim and male perpetrator. If the victim has experienced an erection during the rape, they have lots of questions around their own sexuality, whether they identify as straight, bi or whatever. Because it's hard to understand that it's a physiological reaction- and not a psychological reaction. And so, they can start to question- um, everything about themselves really. It's like taking somebody, kind of shaking them all over the face. And then asking them to put everything back together.

While involuntary physiological reactions (i.e., erections and ejaculations) are known to occur in the context of non-consensual anal penetration (Bullock & Benson, 2011), these are often mistaken as indicators of consent, delegitimising the abusive nature of the incident (Hickson et al., 1994; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). This is rooted in the denial of male rape by external observers, whose perceptions conceptualise the act as at least partially consensual because men are expected to resist unwanted sex. Put simply, physiological reactions are seen as indicators of both consent and sexual orientation because they exemplify male sexual pleasure (Janssen & Everaerd, 1993). Thus, the gay-rape-myth is reinforced by both external observers, who potentially question the element of consent, and by survivors themselves, who question their own role in the abuse. More broadly, the negative attributions that arise from the misinterpretation of physiological reactions as psychological arousal, reinforce one of the traditional functions of rape myths of victim masochism (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005) where survivors consensually enjoying the sexual interaction with the perpetrator.

The male-rape-myths that were identified in participants' accounts reflected some of the challenges for service provision, with the prevalence and adherence to

false and damaging beliefs revealing a broad and widespread denial and lack of awareness of the possibility that men can be victims of rape. The existence of the real-men-myth is indicative of how stereotypes and beliefs on rape are grounded in gendered narratives around masculinity and the role that men supposedly should hold in sexual interactions. The physical and psychological characteristics that are stereotypically attributed to men reinforce the sense of inadequacy that arises from the conflict survivors' experience between their sense of masculinity and their status as rape victims. Moreover, the denial and minimisation of male rape is further exacerbated by the gay connotations that was often reported by participants, who witnessed in their clients' various attempts to rationalise their victimisation by accepting classic stereotypes that sexualise incidents (focusing on the sex of those involved and confusing physiological arousal for indications of consent).

Taken together, the real-men-myth and the gay-rape-myth shape the internal challenges that survivors experience in recognising their victimisation as well as the external barriers that reflect the environment of denial of male rape. Importantly, survivors' tendencies to self-inflict and adhere to these myths represent significant therapeutic challenges for service providers, as they engage with damaging internal belief systems that affect survivors' self-image and acceptance of their victimisation.

4.3.3. Theme 3: Managing survivors' expectations around reporting and the police

Barriers to disclosure and reporting are shaped by a number of factors, including homophobia, male-rape-myths, masculine stereotypes, and a general mistrust towards police officers and how they would respond to allegations of male rape. Importantly, the themes identified in this study were directly connected with male-rape-myths and masculine expectations shaping survivors' experiences in terms of the

internal and external barriers they encountered, in particular when engaging with the CJS. To understand male survivors' relationship with the police, John observed that it was necessary to contextualise historically how the sexual victimisation of men has been viewed by the general public and how, consequently, these wider perceptions permeated attitudes in public institutions such as the police:

John...it was really hard for them to come forward and talk about the abuse partly because there are some attitudes...even I can think in the last five years there was a male student abused by his female maths teacher and the way it was portrayed in the press was "Wasn't he lucky? How cool is it to have sexual attention from an older woman? How exotic". And if it was the other way around and it was a girl and it was a male maths teacher, you'd be calling it abuse...so there was all that, which doesn't lend itself to boys or men coming forward. The police didn't take it seriously they would scoff "no, no don't be daft, how can you possibly, don't you know..."

Focusing on childhood experiences, John observed that the stigma experienced when reporting was reinforced by masculine stereotypes on the active role of men in sexual interactions (Archer, 1996; Bridges, 1991). Drawing from examples of high-profile cases in the media, John highlighted a discrepancy in public and institutional responses which supports reports of biased police treatment in male cases compared to female offences (Jamel, 2014). John's emphasis on gendered narratives revealed his belief that these set the tone of the conversations around abuse and severity. Moreover, John's account suggested that boys were attributed the same responsibilities as adult men and were expected to desire and initiate sex. These expectations permeated across different institutions and affected police officers'

responses to male survivors' complaints, characterised by disbelief and stigmatisation at the time of reporting. Kai also observed similar responses in adult male rape cases:

Kai: There's things around police questioning the sexuality and the integrity of the men that are trying to report. We have men who've felt like they've been questioned as if they're guilty of something, rather than somebody who's trying to report. And I think that really links into the whole idea of male and masculinity and it's much easier I think for society to see men as perpetrators and females as victims. I don't think it's ever intentional, I don't think the police kind of ... "Oh, let's make this man feel really bad." Uh, it just comes from a place of not really understanding, um, and being presented with something that you're not familiar and not even comfortable of.

The responses reported by Kai's clients are in line with what has been observed in different studies across the sexual violence literature (e.g., Rumney, 2008a; Sleath & Bull, 2017), with officers' responses reflecting their adherence to the classic real-men-myth (Hine et al., 2021; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Moreover, Kai observed that their displays of disbelief and incredulity reflected officers' adherence to wider public attitudes around masculine stereotypes and gendered representation of "authentic" rape cases (Doherty & Anderson, 1998; Du Mont et al., 2003). Importantly, Kai commented that officers' actions were not deliberately intended to diminish survivors' experiences. Instead, they reflected officers' lack of awareness and familiarity with male rape cases, which affected their ability to address the needs of survivors. Kai's account also highlighted the important psychological consequences of officers' treatment on survivors' self-blame, which could potentially increase their reluctance to disclose in the future. Furthermore, he noted that the stigma and disbelief around men

disclosing their experiences of sexual abuse could be understood by comparing the discrepancy in reports of male and female rape cases:

Kai: Men take longer to come forward than women. And that's just fact. I don't think a police officer would necessarily be shocked by a female presenting to report rape. But a male presenting to report rape, just fundamentally goes against what they expect. So, although police officers are there as impartial upholders of the law, you can't turn off all of your internal biases, and things that we all have as humans. And I think that's what plays a part in why the responses are so different [between men and women].

According to Kai, his clients were aware that their complaints would be treated as anomalies and that this awareness explained the overall differences that exist in terms of reporting to the police between male and female victims (e.g., Pino & Meier, 1999). Among the reasons as to why such difference existed, Kay pointed again to officers' familiarity with female rape cases, which increased the likelihood of officers viewing male rape cases as non-authentic and potentially explaining their inadequacy to address the psychological needs of male survivors. Importantly, participants argued that officers seem to not be immune to the widespread prejudice and misunderstanding around men experiencing sexual abuse. Put simply, officers' unfamiliarity, coupled with their adherence to wider myths and beliefs, seem to have an impact on survivors' experiences with the CJS. Consequently, it is important to explore the extent by which survivors' perceptions of how they would be treated by the police influenced their decisions to (or not to) report. Broadly, the question is about the public's confidence in and perceptions of the police as an institution. According to Lydia:

Lydia: The public's perception of what the police are like or who the police are, I think that's another barrier because you don't know what you're going to walk into. Has an officer just come off crowd control, and "Would you like to come through, sir? I'll take your statement." You've just been raised to believe that. So, there's these officers are having special training in order for them to help support their role with their investigations. But there's sometimes, one officer in particular, because this guy's case and reports were historic, it's just like, "But I mean it was 30 years ago, wasn't it?" It's like, "Oh God."

Lydia's explanation highlighted the complex relationship between survivors, as members of the public, and officers, as public servants. From her account, police officers and their institutions are perceived by the public as existing to serve and support victims of any crime. However, these expectations were often failed, with some officers in particular questioning survivors' motivations to report, in particular undermining the severity of historic cases of rape. Face-to-face experiences with officers are one of the main contributing factors to confidence and satisfaction with the service (Myhill & Bradford, 2012). If survivors repeatedly experience scepticism and disbelief by police officers, it is not surprising that the majority of the participants reported that their clients were reluctant and sceptical of reporting. Alternatively, Lydia also proposed a perspective based on fictional representation of the police in popular culture:

Lydia: Because Joe Public oversees the police on what TV programs they're watching or the newspapers. They don't have the confidence to go and speak to the police about things because they're just worried that that's what they're gonna

get. They're gonna get some kind of Sweeney type CID¹⁰ guy...you know, who just doesn't get it. There is still some of that. One of our guys...He's actually a rape campaigner, he had a terrible experience with the police, you know. They kept him sitting in the same clothes for hours and hours. Just left him a room basically, without much interaction. He didn't know what was going on. When after the fact he could've gone home, he could've had a shower, he could've... you know, and his experience was awful.

Lydia observed that the public's perception of the police is to an extent shaped by fictional representations of corrupt, cynical, tough and unemotional officers ("who just doesn't get it") (O' Sullivan, 2005). Her clients encountered officers who were apathetic to the practical and psychological needs of complainants of rape. If survivors mistrust authoritative figures to begin with, officers' actions and handling of their cases could be deemed inappropriate and stigmatising, further damaging the already fragile relationship between victims and the CJS. Lydia seemed to suggest that survivors' fear of "Sweeney type" officers was a barrier to reporting, indicating a perception of the typical officer that closely related to the cult of masculinity in police culture (Silvestri, 2017). Participants also highlighted that officers' treatment, beyond its immediate psychological impact, would affect survivors' decisions around future disclosure:

Aurora: I think huge percentages probably don't report to the police. I think it's to do with stigma. I had one client who tried to report his abuse to the police when he was younger - the police officers didn't pick that up and told him to go home, back to his family and to not talk about it again. So then later on he tried to report

¹⁰ Lydia is referring to "Criminal Investigation Department" (CID) officers.

it again, but his abuser had died, he tried to put a complaint about this. Police officers were pretty much not taking it any further...To be able to disclose that to the police officer when he hadn't disclosed that to anybody else...that was a huge step for him, and then to have that dismissed that almost was the lid on the box, "If I can't even tell a police officer, when he is supposed to protect me then I'm just not gonna tell anybody. I think he was around, 11 or 12...And his abuse started around 3 or 4 possibly younger...so it had been going for quite a long time, but yeah, I think, there's a humiliation, they feel like they'll be humiliated, again.

Aurora presented an example of how prolonged and continuous experiences of disbelief increased her clients' reluctance to disclose again in the future. While men are, typically, extremely reluctant to disclose any form of victimisation (Stanko & Hodbell, 1993), Aurora highlighted that in her experience the few survivors who did report often encountered responses that reinforced a sense of humiliation. It emphasised how officers' behaviours throughout reporting had far-reaching effects on survivors' self-esteem and sense of responsibility. If those who decided to report were met with doubt and scepticism, Aurora's historic example raises questions around the number of young boys whose reports have been dismissed as non-crimes by the police. The consequences of the investigative decisions reported in this study clearly extend far beyond the recording of crimes but could be actually increasing male survivors' likelihood to be at risk of future victimisation.

Barriers to report are not only external but can be also the result of internal mechanisms that come into play when survivors entertain the idea of reporting and consequences of it:

Emma: Often people don't want to report...Part of that fear that they won't be believed I think it's caught up with their own fear...and that feeling of shame that maybe they were a part of it or they asked for it or brought it on or didn't stop or they could have done something...Sometimes people don't wanna go through the whole trauma, having to talk about it to the police and in court and everything, or might not be very trustful of authority...There are those who report as well and often I don't hear very good experience from them, in terms of police even following up on what they say they are going to do. I only hear it from the side of clients, but they often find that quite difficult if it's not something reliable and consistent...um, and, I mean that's not all the time, I also had clients say that police officers are very supportive, which is good to hear, um, but out of those that report, often cases get dropped...

Internally, Emma's clients had to negotiate with their sense of shame and self-blame before considering the possibility of involving the police. Survivors' mistrust of authorities was reinforced by their fear of being subjected to questions around their behaviours before, during and after the incident. This is indicative of how survivors' self-perpetuated stereotypes around rape victims' responsibility. However, it also suggests that the perception that officers endorse those myths is a barrier to reporting for male rape survivors. Emma also observed that for those who involved the police, the responses were "not reliable and consistent". Official reports support the notion that officers in the UK struggle to investigate sexual offences, taking on average 77 days to assign an investigative outcome (Home Office, 2019). While official data do not differentiate between male and female cases, service providers' experiences suggest that officers' communication during this time frame is poor. In fact, participants reflected that part of their role in providing guidance and therapeutic support was

around managing the expectations of clients during the investigations, preparing them for what was often described as an inevitable disappointment and to be ready for the expected psychological repercussions of having their cases dropped:

Lydia...our job as well, is to manage people's expectations. And a really important thing is ... Which, I always start by saying, "No matter what happens, it's not because you've not been believed." Because that is the worst thing - these guys carry this abuse with them for so long, quite often because of the fear of not being believed. And then when they find the strength and courage to disclose for it not to go to court, and ... Like they always thought this would happen."

Sam... it's an old historical case the police would not prioritise it. If it's new and there's something to go on, they'll go for it a bit more...but a lot of the work I do is working with the client around the frustration that the process is not getting there, not feeling that they've been heard, not feeling they've been taken seriously, having to be proactive with the police, having to constantly ring them up and ask them for updates. We'd often be supporting them through that process or obviously through that kind of work right to the end, where often the police have just dropped...they say they can't take this any further. And we got to pick up the pieces anyway.

The accounts from Lydia and Sam paint a stark picture of the impact of officers' handling of male cases on survivors' mental health. Survivors carry their victimisation for many years before reporting (Rumney, 2008a; Walker, 2004) and have to overcome a number of psychological barriers to do so. Participants in this study highlighted the strength needed to overcome these barriers to report. It is not surprising that survivors reported increased shame, self-blame and humiliation following their encounters with the police. Officers' unfamiliarity also affects their ability

to provide adequate support to survivors and reinforce the barriers that already exist for men to come forward and disclose their victimisation. This is supported by evidence suggesting that officers' investigative decisions on male rape cases are partially built on perceptions of victim credibility that are based on both legal and 'extra-legal' factors, such as presence of mental-ill health, drug use, and previous false report in (Hine et al., 2020), all of which compromise the construction of prosecutable cases.

4.4. Summary of findings and recommendations

The aims of this study were to provide an account of the experiences of service providers working closely with sexually abused men, and to explore the challenges of providing therapeutic and guidance upon disclosure. As such, this is the first study to provide insight into specialised service providers to male-on-male rape survivors in the UK. Several therapeutic challenges emerged from the analysis, with service providers finding themselves managing i) survivors' need for agency, safety, and control as functions of their masculinity, ii) the impact of male-rape-myths and their challenge to therapeutic intervention and iii) their clients' expectations around reporting and the police. By placing each individual experience at the centre of the phenomenological inquiry, the accounts presented in this study revealed not only the complex work of supporting a vulnerable, often traumatised population, but also the moving extent to which providers are invested in the therapeutic recovery of their clients.

Firstly, participants observed that survivors' acceptance of traditional masculine ideals shaped the challenges of accepting themselves as victims of a sexual crime; an identity stereotypically deemed as only associated with women (Fisher & Pina, 2013). The needs identified by providers illustrated important psychological mechanisms. Survivors' desire for agency reflected biases in self-attributing causality

and self-implicating perceptions of avoidability (C. G. Davis et al., 1996) commonly reported by victims of intimate-violence (Filipas & Ullman, 2006; O'Neill & Kerig, 2000). Survivors also blamed themselves both behaviourally and characterologically (Janoff-Bulman, 1979) to take away power from the perpetrator. The accounts on agency and power reflected the importance of traditional, hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) as well as the stigma on sexual violence and male mental health (Delker et al., 2020; Vogel et al., 2014) on survivors' lives.

By describing survivors need for agency, providers highlighted how men are left with limited avenues for emotional expression leaving survivors with needs around safety and control. Concerns around safety from future victimisation encapsulated how men are ill-equipped to deal with emotional trauma (S. T. M. Chan, 2014) and engage with aggressive, toxic behaviours to address in perceived gender-appropriate ways their frustrations and emotional distress (Berke et al., 2018; Simpson & Stroh, 2004). Alternatively, some providers observed that men exercised control over their emotional distress by engaging in unhealthy stoicism. This is significant particularly within the typically British "stiff upper lip" (Capstick & Clegg, 2013) preventing survivors from disclosing and seeking help. Being in control meant avoiding humiliation from other men (Kia-Keating et al., 2005), which resulted in the dangerous mechanisms described by providers in terms of suppression, minimisation and denial of the victimisation.

Minimisation and re-allocation of blame were also reflected in findings which demonstrated the pervasiveness of 'real-men' and sexuality rape myths. Participants discussed how male victims are subjected to narratives that characterise sex as power conquests or surrenders (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010). Such narratives are built upon the physical and psychological characteristics that are stereotypically attributed to men

(Addis & Cohane, 2005; Mahalik, Good, et al., 2003; Thompson & Bennett, 2015), which, in turn, reinforced survivors' sense of inadequacy and the psychological conflict between their masculinity and victimisation because of their acceptance of the real-men-myth. This denial and minimisation of male rape was further exacerbated by the homosexual connotations often reported by service providers, who witnessed their clients' various attempts to rationalise their victimisation by accepting classic stereotypes that sexualise incidents (P. Bernard et al., 2015). Together, the "real men" and the sexuality-rape myths shaped the internal challenges that survivors experience in recognising their victimisation, as well as the barriers for effective therapeutic support, with participants reporting the complex ramifications of male-rape-myths on their client's self-perceptions and confusion over their victimisation.

Finally, participants' accounts explored in detail the relationship between male survivors and the CJS, supporting the existence of bias in officers' handling of male rape complainants (Javaid, 2015a; Rumney, 2008a). In this sense, themes 2 and 3 were related as male-rape-myths were also observed in officers' handling of male rape allegations reflecting their unfamiliarity and the use of extra-legal concepts such as 'authentic' rape cases (Doherty & Anderson, 1998) and credible victims (Hine et al., 2020; Hohl & Stanko, 2015). Providers discussed at length how the process of reporting represented a therapeutic challenge of its own right as their client experienced poor communication and stigmatising attitudes and responses. Taken together, providers' accounts indicated that despite attempts to improve the CJS, the notion of secondary victimisation (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Javaid, 2018) is clearly still true when it comes to male rape survivors.

The accounts in this study thus underscore not only the crucial role played by services in survivors' journey through rehabilitation and recovery, but also the need

for wider recognition of male rape in society. As whole, the themes identified suggest that gendered narratives on sexual violence are so pervasive that they fundamentally shape the barriers for both providers and service users. The existence of these barriers is thus a clear indication of the need for wider availability of specialised services that cater their support towards men's unique needs within the UK. However, it is also clear that services alone cannot overcome the barriers abused men face, and that increased awareness and expertise in non-specialised services and the CJS is crucial. The complex psychological needs observed by the professionals in this study highlight the benefits of trauma informed approaches (Reeves, 2015) across the mental health and criminal justice sector. For example, antisocial behaviours cast a shadow over the psychological motivations behind their actions. Providers clearly indicated that officers (and practitioners) need to be more attentive in determining the causes of such behaviour and establish if men have histories of sexual victimisation. Similarly, participants also reported the importance of raising awareness of symptoms and indicators within other 'first-contact' services for survivors (e.g., General Practitioners, the NHS and other mental health services), to facilitate the identification and referral of male rape survivors to specialised organisations. Importantly, they argued that providing more specialised training to other services could significantly reduce the delay between victimisation and access to appropriate support, which is crucial to improve and expedite the identification of male victims and facilitating referrals to specialised services (Hine, 2019).

In addition to increased awareness within services, participants highlighted the importance of breaking down social prejudice and stigma that exists around male emotional expression and help-seeking, particularly in response to sexual assault. The accounts in this study highlighted that men are emotionally trapped in masculine

expectations, where their experiences sit within social views of rape as a female issue (Cohen, 2014), discouraging men from disclosing and, consequently, coming to terms with their vulnerabilities. This study therefore highlights the need for social change in order to challenge the notion that men should not be concerned with sexual victimisation. Additionally, the accounts presented clearly showed that myths and harmful beliefs are rooted deeply in individuals' socialisation (Grubb & Turner, 2012), meaning that education and targeted information among younger generation is needed to create a more informed and welcoming environment for male survivors of rape. Gender inclusive discussion on sexual violence across both the public and support services sector can arguably only start by educating the wider community on the complex nature of sexual violence and its victims, perhaps in earlier educational settings, such as schools. By raising awareness around male sexual assault, and available support services, the gap between victimisation and access to professional support can be significantly decreased.

4.4.1. Limitations of this study

The recruitment of service providers implies that the findings reported in this study are inevitably based on service providers' personal interpretations of their clients' experiences. It led the researcher to engage in a double hermeneutic process of interpreting how participants' made sense of their clients' own interpretation of their experiences. This is an important limitation for a study that had as one of its research objectives to understand how male survivors personally cope with societal pressures to be masculine and why reporting is feared. The findings of this study therefore have to be treated with some caution, as survivors' experiences have been 'filtered' through the subjective interpretation of service providers. Nonetheless, purposive sampling of a target group that have extensive knowledge on the research topic is common

practice in IPA research (Palinkas et al., 2015), partly because of their ability to articulate their experiences efficiently and in a reflective way (H. R. Bernard, 2006). In fact, the sample of this study consisted of service providers who had on average 4.5 years of experience and worked on more than 400 cases (combined: see Table 2). Given the expertise of the service providers in this study and the professional nature of their relationship with survivors, it can be argued there is significant credibility to these findings. However, qualitative exploration with male survivors' directly is clearly still desperately needed (Study 2, Chapter 5).

Throughout the interview and data collection processes, it became clear that there are key features that distinguish adult and childhood survivors of rape. Participants in this study often described fundamental differences in terms of developmental trauma for childhood sexual abuse survivors, against "one-off" incidents of adult sexual abuse. Some participants were reluctant to comment on the differences between the two groups of survivors, in part because they lacked familiarity and experience of working with adult survivors. A limitation of this study therefore was that the initial recruitment strategy did not account the fact that adult survivors seem to represent the minority of the clientele that access services, which means that accounts of some participants cannot be reliably generalised to describe adult experiences of rape. Moreover, whilst adult and childhood survivors will share many of the pressures and barriers that naturally exist for men who have been sexually victimised, the impact of when and how victimisation occur is an area that needs to be addressed in future research, which should focus on separating the accounts of service providers based on the typology of clients supported (adult rape versus childhood rape), in order to study male survivors as a diverse and heterogeneous population.

4.5. Conclusion

This study gave voice to the experiences of individuals who, on a daily basis, provide support to a 'hidden' victim population. The accounts and emerging themes were therefore unsurprisingly reflective of the social denial and dismissal of men's experiences of rape, and this stigma around male rape was described as very much a part of survivors' lived experiences post-abuse. Such attitudes also seemed to be underpinned by broader narratives around victim blaming, homophobia, hypermasculinity, and male mental health. The findings of this study thus provide a framework to further explore survivors' experiences and the strategies they use to cope with today's rape culture and male mental health crisis. They also indicate the critical need for wider availability of specialised services across the UK, as well as awareness-raising on male sexual victimisation across other key entry points, in order to facilitate referrals to appropriate support pathways. Most clearly, it appears crucial to challenge the stigma attached to male mental health more broadly, by developing more gender inclusive approaches across various institutions, with targeted education of support services, the CJS, and the wider public.

Chapter 5

Examining the lived experiences of male-on-male survivors of rape and sexual abuse: an interpretative phenomenological examination

Abstract

The aim of the present study was to provide a detailed account of the lived experiences of male survivors affected by rape and sexual abuse. The study focused on survivors' post-incident experiences of psychological distress, male-rape-myths, challenges in self-recognition and disclosure, and barriers to accessing therapeutic support and reporting to the CJS. Nine male survivors with experiences of rape, sexual assault, and/or sexual abuse after the age of 13 were recruited to take part in one-to-one, semi-structured video-interviews. Following an IPA framework, four superordinate themes emerged from the analysis of male survivors' accounts, describing their experiences around i) gendered narratives, ii) coping with the abuse, iv) masculinity, and v) reporting to the police. The themes described in this study emphasised the stigma and hostility repeatedly experienced by male survivors after their victimisation. Participants also provided an account of short and long-term psychological issues following the abuse, emphasising the role of self-perceptions of masculinity in the development of unhealthy coping mechanisms. Importantly, participants' accounts highlighted the prevalence of prejudice, and rape mythology, which characterised negative encounters within the public, voluntary agencies, and the CJS. The findings are discussed in relation to current service provision in the UK, recommendations for

future research, and avenues for improvements across multiple vital entry points are suggested.

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the experiences of service providers were used to gain insight into the current challenges in supporting male rape survivors in the UK. The findings from that study (Study 1) addressed important gaps in the literature, particularly around the challenges of delivering therapeutic support to male survivors, the role of masculinity and male-rape-myths in the development of male-specific needs and unhealthy coping strategies, and the negative impact of reporting on survivors' rehabilitation. These findings expand on recent academic efforts to describe the scope of male rape (Lowe & Rogers, 2017; Pearson & Barker, 2018), male rape phenomenology, psychology, and physiology (Bullock & Benson, 2011), male-rape-myths (Hammond et al., 2017; Hine et al., 2021; Sleath & Bull, 2010; Turchik & Edwards, 2012; Walfield, 2018), and police responses to male rape allegations (Jamel et al., 2008; Javaid, 2015a, 2016b; Rumney, 2008a; Hine et al., 2020). However, somewhat surprisingly the majority of academic outputs are either solely quantitative, or do not explore the lived experiences of male survivors. Therefore, the current knowledge of male rape is largely based on public attitudes, members of the CJS, and reviews of past literature, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The lack of research directly involving male survivors is likely due to the challenges of recruiting men, known to be reluctant to discuss their experiences and take part in research (Javaid, 2015b; Sorsoli, et al., 2008; Stanko & Hodbell, 1993; Walker et al., 2005). Such recruitment difficulties appear to be particularly relevant in the UK, where only a limited number of qualitative studies examining the experience of UK male survivors after the age of 13 have been conducted in the past 15 years

(Jamel et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2005). Understanding and exploring how men live with their sexual victimisation is essential to better understand the challenges and barriers routinely brought forward by scholars. In this sense, qualitative methods provide the tools (Chapter 3, section 3.2.) to access hard-to-reach populations and explore hidden areas of research of sexual violence through the lenses of those who have personal knowledge and experience of it (Kennedy, 2019). Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by discussing and providing a contemporary, detailed insight into the experiences of male survivors of rape and sexual abuse after the age of 13, legal age of consent for children under the Sex Offences Act (2003).

The literature identified a number of prominent and recurring psychological symptoms experienced by men following sexual assaults, abuse and rape, despite the limitations of the evidence on survivors' lived experiences. These include depression, helplessness, persistent anger, negative self-perceptions (guilt, shame, self-blame), problems with sexual functioning, confusion over sexual and gender identity, and PTSD symptoms (Elliot et al., 2004; Kalichman et al., 2002; Mezey & King, 1989, 1992; Peterson et al., 2011; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1996, 2006; Walker, 1993; Walker, Archer & Davies, 2005; Voller et al., 2015). Whilst there are some similarities with female survivors (Weiss, 2010), which indicate that the nature of sexual offences itself is instrumental in shaping the symptoms experienced by rape victims, there are scholars who have argued the need to examine the gendered narratives and norms that surround the phenomenon of male rape (Cohen, 2014; Davies & Rogers, 2006; Javaid, 2016a). Indeed, Study 1 highlighted how male survivors' psychological sequelae needed to be contextualised within the cultural expectations attached to masculinity, such as male physical and psychological invulnerability, resilience, and sexual independence (Mahalik, Good, et al., 2003; J. A.

Smith et al., 2007). However, despite the fact that the broader social consequences of gender norms have been discussed at length within the male sexual violence literature, there is a need to examine how these norms and expectations affect men's understanding of their own victimisation personally.

Rape mythology is also instrumental for the understanding of male survivors' experiences of hostility, prejudice, and disbelief. Previously defined in Chapters 2 and 4 as "prejudicial, stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists" (Burt, 1980: p.217), academic efforts have determined the existence of male-specific beliefs that question and delegitimise the experiences of male rape in modern society (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Drawing from feminist perspectives on sexual violence (Brownmiller, 1975; Lisak, 1991; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Posadas, 2017), male-rape-myths are narratives that perpetuate constructs of hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), where male survivors fail to adhere to their masculine gender roles by being submissive to others. Indeed, stereotypes around male survivors are charged with homophobic characterisations (Bullock & Benson, 2011; White & Yamawaki, 2009), sexism (Chapleau et al., 2008), and hypermasculinity, which circumscribe male rape as a rare phenomenon concerning a minority of marginalised men. Examples of male-rape-myths include: male rape only concerns gay men; real men cannot be raped; men who are raped asked for it; male rape is not traumatic (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008; Coxell & King, 2010; Davies & Rogers, 2006; Hine et al., 2021; Turchik & Edwards, 2012; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). As previously highlighted in Study 1 (Chapter 4), service providers also reported that their male clients not only encountered these narratives in the public, but also adhered and internalised some of the stereotypes outlined above (Davies, 2002; Lowe & Rogers, 2017). In light of these findings, there is a need to

further explore male survivors' personal experiences with rape myths, in what settings such narratives are encountered, and how myths affect their self-perceptions, self-recognition, and willingness to disclose,

Indeed, examining the relationship between male-rape-myths and survivors' experiences with disclosing is particularly relevant in the context of reporting to the police. Findings from Study 1 supported evidence suggesting that, in general, police officers' response have psychological consequences on survivors' wellbeing, with several recent study highlighting the use of rape myths in female rape cases (Hine & Murphy, 2017, 2019; Hohl & Stanko, 2015; McMillan, 2018; Parratt & Pina, 2017; J. Shaw et al., 2017). In the last 10 years alone, a number of reviews have been conducted, highlighting specific recommendations and changes required to improve the overall service provision in the CJS (Angiolini, 2015; Stern, 2010). Whilst the overall response to victims of sexual violence has improved (Fisher & Pina, 2013; Lowe & Rogers, 2017), earlier evidence suggests that men are met with a range of negative responses, including scepticism, disbelief, and ridicule (Jamel et al., 2008; Rumney, 2008a) with police officers allocating more blame to male victims than female victims in hypothetical rape scenarios (Davies, et al., 2009). However, as with other areas of the male rape literature, the evidence available on survivors' experiences is critically outdated. While fewer than female counterparts (Hohl & Stanko, 2015), little is qualitatively understood about why 1 in 5 male survivors withdraw their complaints in the UK (Hine et al., 2020). Moreover, service providers in Study 1 strongly emphasised the prevalence of negative experiences with the police, and the resulting mental health consequences reported by their clients following reporting. Therefore, there is a need to explore what barriers men encounter upon reporting and how

experiences with the CJS result in the high rates of victim withdrawal of male rape cases.

5.1.1. The present study

The present study aims to generate greater understanding of the experiences of male rape, by providing detailed insight into the personal accounts of men affected by sexual violence. By directly accessing survivors' own experiences of sexual violence, this study attempted to provide a unique, up-to-date, and detailed review of the meaning and significance men attach to their experiences of abuse. Post-incident accounts were accessed through in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured video-interviews with 9 male survivors. Following an IPA framework (see Chapter 3, section 3.5), it was aimed to answer the following research questions (see Chapter 1, section 1.2. for overview of aims and research questions):

- i) What are the lived experiences of male-on-male survivors of rape and sexual abuse?
- ii) In what ways have male-on-male survivors experienced myths and negative attitudes related to their victimisation?
- iii) What are survivors' experiences with recognising and disclosing their victimisation, and what challenges, if any, have they had to overcome?
- iv) What barriers, if any, have male-on-male survivors experienced around accessing therapeutic support, and/or reporting to the police?

5.2. Approach and Methods

This qualitative study was conducted with male survivors of rape and sexual abuse. Similarly, to Study 1, this study uses IPA frameworks to explore and understand their experiences of victimisation, including the barriers encountered post-abuse around

recognising their victimisation, accessing therapeutic support, and reporting to the police. The study was reviewed and approved by the University Research and Ethics Committee (UREC) at the University of West London.

5.2.1. Participants

Purposive sampling is recommended in IPA studies (Palinkas et al., 2015) as it allows the researcher to identify and sample from a population that has extensive knowledge and personal experiences of the research topic (see Chapter 3 section 3.5.1., and Chapter 4 section 4.2.1.). In this study, the target population consisted of male survivors of rape and sexual abuse. Participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- i) Being over 18 years of age at the time of the incident: the aim of the study was to explore the post-incident experiences of adult men.
- ii) Over 13 years of age at the time of their victimisation: this age-criterion was chosen in line with the cut-off proposed in the Sexual Offences Act (2003), which states that children below the age of 13 cannot legally give consent to sexual activity. This legal framework was therefore chosen to maximise participation (i.e., to allow those who experienced abuse after the age of 13), while at the same time excluding those survivors who were legally children at the time of the incident, because of the differences in how the law is applied in those criminal cases.
- iii) Having no self-reported learning difficulties. Considering the additional needs and vulnerabilities associated with learning difficulties (Wishart, 2003), it is acknowledged that such area warrants further research. However, given the existing challenges for recruiting male participants, the study was designed to

understand and explore the base barriers and challenges encountered by all men, rather than exploring the phenomenon within a specific subsection.

- iv) If the incident was reported to CJS, it has reached a definitive conclusion within the criminal justice process (i.e., their case has been classified as 'No Crime' or 'No Further Action' by police officers, withdrawn by the survivor, or has received an outcome in court). This criterion was implemented to avoid conflict between legal and ethical consideration that could arise during the interview stages (Finch, 2001). It is recognised that information gathered from participants with on-going criminal cases could place the researcher under legal obligation to divulge information. This would compromise the ethical obligations, such as confidentiality (BPS, 2009: 2018) that apply in this thesis (see Chapter 3, section 3.6.1).

Recruitment of participants occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic (Chapter 3, section 3.6.2.), with national restriction and social distancing measures in place across the UK. In light of the challenging and complex circumstances arising from Covid-19, it was not possible to follow the recruitment strategy through services affiliated to the MSP used in Study 1 (Chapter 4, section 4.2.1.), as it would breach social distancing rules, and place both participants and the researcher at risk. Therefore, after approval from the ethics committee supervising this thesis, it was decided to expand the recruitment criteria to include video-interviews in the procedures of the study and to use an in-built recording system to collect the data. The researcher would contact services about the possibility of advertising the study with their clients, who would then decide whether to pass on the information to male survivors who met the recruitment criteria of this study. If participants showed interest, the organisation would put the researcher and the potential interviewee in touch via e-mail, to further discuss the

broad aims and the procedures of the study, before arranging the interviews. Throughout recruitment, the organisation would be copied-in to supervise that the agreed recruitment strategy would be followed and to ensure that participants' safety was prioritised during this process.

This recruitment strategy through third-sector support services yielded limited success, with four participants taking part in this initial stage of Study 2. However, the challenges arising from the Covid-19 restrictions significantly affected services' abilities to support external research, as they had to prioritise resources towards clients. Moreover, because of confidentiality, they were not always able to advertise the study to clients who had completed their rehabilitation programmes. However, some services expressed a willingness to share the study on their social media platforms. Advertising the study online through services was expected to increase visibility, expand the recruitment pool, and thus allow to achieve the ideal sample for a meaningful and comprehensive phenomenological analysis (Chapter 3, section 3.5.1.). After obtaining ethical approval, a social media advertisement (Appendix X) was shared across social media platforms, including a link to a survey for participants who were interested in taking part in the study. Upon clicking the link, participants were asked to fill in a brief questionnaire to determine if they met the exclusion criteria set for this study. Participants who met these recruitment criteria, and indicated interest in taking part in the study, were asked to provide their preferred email address. The researcher contacted participants, thanking them for showing interest in the project and providing them with an informed-consent form to be completed before arranging the video-interview. Participants who did not meet the recruitment criteria were directed to a debriefing page, thanking them for showing interest, explaining why they could not take part in the study and providing them with contacts to the research team

and to the appropriate national and local support services (i.e., MSP helpline, Survivors UK).

Through the different stages of recruitment (recruitment through services and then social media platforms), a total of 10 male survivors were recruited to take part in one-to-one, semi-structured online interviews. One participant was excluded from the final analysis, as he did not complete the interview. During the interview, safety concerns emerged around the participant's wellbeing, therefore, in agreement with the participant, the interview was interrupted. In the debriefing stage the participant expressed that he was not interested in continuing the interview at a later date. Therefore, the final sample consisted of nine male survivors of sexual violence. Table 5 outlines the demographic information collected prior to the interview of each participant. In order to ensure anonymity, participants were asked to choose an alias/pseudonym to be used in the writing-up of the study.

Table 5: Demographic information of the participants in the study.

Alias	Age	Ethnicity	Self-identified sexual orientation	Age at the time of the incident(s)	Reported to the police (yes/no)	Time between incident and reporting	Accessed support services (yes/no)	Time between incident and accessing support
Nick	37	White (British)	Gay	18 and 28	Yes	3 years	Yes	3 years
James	57	Mixed-Caucasian	Straight	13	Yes	43 years	Yes	42 years
Michael	58	Afro Caribbean	Straight	13 to 17	Yes	40 years	Yes	25-30 years
William	45	White (British)	Gay	22	No	-	Yes	22 years
Phil	38	White British	Gay	16 and 20	Yes	<1 day	Yes	2-3 years
Chris	39	White British	Gay	20 and 36	No	-	Yes	18 Months
Leyton	49	White (British)	Prefer not to say	15	Yes	27 years	No	20 years
Sorel	54	White	Bisexual	16	No	-	Yes	32 years
John	23	White (British)	Bisexual	21	Yes	2 days	Yes	1 month

5.2.2. Materials

A comprehensive and in-depth interview schedule (Appendix II) was designed and used as a guideline, allowing for the natural flow of conversation between the interviewer and the participants (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The interviews took the form of a discussion on participants' experiences of male rape and sexual abuse. The areas covered in the interview included: a) their experience of rape and sexual abuse, b) the attitudes and myths on male rape, c) the challenges faced upon disclosing their victimisation, and c) the barriers and facilitators to access effective therapeutic care and reporting to the police (see Table 6 for the interview schedule with representative questions).

Table 6: Interview schedule with representative questions.

Section	Representative questions
Initial Rapport Building	So (alias), how old are you? What are your current circumstances (e.g., job, family if appropriate – survivors to advise)
Free recall about experiences (optional*)	Thank you for telling me a bit about yourself. Now I would like to ask whether you can tell me anything you'd like to about your experience. If you'd prefer not to take this approach, don't worry, I have questions we can start with instead
Beliefs, myths, and stereotypes	Moving on, if you can cast your mind back, I'd like to hear any thoughts or stereotypes you might have had about the idea of a victim of a male-on-male sexual attack prior to your incident. For example, what you believed, thought, or had heard about male-on-male rape or sexual violence before.
Challenges faced upon disclosing	So, after the incident, what went through your mind in relation to who you tell and how? What internal challenges did you have to negotiate (e.g., how did you decide to disclose and what, if any, feelings did you have about it)
Experiences of, and challenges/barriers to access therapeutic care, and reporting to the police	Did you identify any external challenges to disclose the incident to any particular groups (e.g., the police)?
Conclusion	So, given your experience, in what ways, if any, have your views changed about how men would or indeed should respond? What advice would you give to a man who experiences this type of crime?

* Some participants provided an account of their experiences during the initial rapport building phase.

5.2.3. Procedures

Following the recruitment and assessment of participants' eligibility to take part in the study, participants received a digital copy of an informed-consent form detailing the general purposes of the study, to be signed and returned before commencing the video-interview. This sheet particularly emphasised participants' rights (such as confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw). After obtaining consent, participants took part on a video-interview conducted on the Microsoft Teams platform. Initially, the interviewer provided a brief introduction to the interview and an overview of the broad format. Once participants provided consent to be recorded, the interviewer activated the in-built recording feature on Microsoft Teams and the interview commenced. The interviews lasted on average 1 hour and 30 minutes (interviews ranged from 55 minutes to 2 hours and 30-minutes). During the interview, the researcher paid close attention to the wellbeing of the participants and asked, when and if appropriate, if they were happy to progress with the interview, and/or if they needed to take a break. Upon completion, the interviewer paid close attention to the debriefing process, informing participants clearly on the objectives and anticipated outcomes of the research, and, if appropriate, the investigator reminded the participant about services available, and ensured that the participant had access to these contacts. After the interview was terminated, participants received a debrief form detailing the aims and objectives of the study, reiterating the researchers' availability for further questions, and signposting participants to support services specialised in male rape and sexual violence.

5.2.4. Analysis

The analysis followed an IPA framework (Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). As discussed in Chapter 3, IPA examines how individuals make sense of their lived

experiences on a specific topic (J. A. Smith et al., 2009) by placing participants' accounts at the centre of the research process. As a method of analysis IPA is grounded in three main philosophical assumptions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (J. A. Smith et al., 2009: see Chapter 3, section 3.4.). Following verbatim transcription the researcher started the analysis following the four-stage process described by (J. A. Smith et al., 2009), and applied in Study 1 (Chapter 3, section 3.5.2.): i) interpretative reading and annotations, ii) generating codes and emergent themes, iii) seeking relationship and clustering into master themes, iv) comparison of master themes across the sample to identify overarching superordinate themes. Similarly, the same process to establish credibility and reliability of the analysis applied in Study 1 was used in this Study (Chapter 4, section 4.2.4.)

5.3. Results and Discussion

Four superordinate themes emerged from the IPA analysis of male survivors' accounts, describing their experiences around i) gendered narratives, ii) coping with the abuse, iv) masculinity, and v) reporting to the police (see Table 7).

Table 7: Table of superordinate themes and subthemes with descriptions for Study 2.

Superordinate Theme	Subtheme	Description
The gendered narrative: the invisibility of male rape and male rape myths	The invisibility of male rape	Male survivors observed a general hesitancy around recognising and acknowledging the existence of male rape. Participants felt silenced from freely disclosing, as if their experiences were a taboo. Participants experienced the “invisibility” of male rape in a variety of encounters with the public, friends, families, and crucially third sector services.
	Real men cannot be raped	All participants reported expectations and norms around how men should behave in dangerous circumstance. “Real men” standards affected how survivors rationalised and understood their role and responsibilities during the abuse. These narratives also increased survivors’ reluctance to disclose for fear of how other would react.
	The gay-rape-myth	All participants were confronted by the narrative that male rape survivors must be gay. They reported experiences of this myth in a variety of settings, with the duplicity of sexuality myths emerging in how they justify perpetrators and condemn victims.
Coping with the abuse: unhealthy levels of self-blame and “reckless” behaviours	Unhealthy self-blame	Survivors reported a need to take responsibility for their victimisation, by questioning and scrutinising their own behaviours and characters. Participants’ accounts highlighted the challenges for self-recognition, with self-blaming processes mitigating their confusion by suppressing and internalising their trauma.
	Compensatory behaviours: regaining control, agency, and safety	Participants reported using coping strategies to manage the emotions arising from the abuse. These behaviours ranged from antisocial actions, engaging in risky sexual behaviours, and seeking fights.
The role of masculinity in survivors’ post-incident experiences		Participants’ accounts were defined by societal ideas and images related to masculinity. Masculinity was discussed as an expression of power, whereby male survivors “lose” their power to consent. Crucially, participants attached specific meaning to their masculinity, from being “ordinary”, “being strong”, “being straight”, and/or acting tough by looking for fights.
Reporting to the police as a negative and retraumatising process		Six participants reported to the police. Civic duty and institutional validation motivated participants. However, participants often reported negative and stigmatising responses by police officers. Participants described feeling retraumatised and often decided to withdraw their cases to avoid further psychological repercussions

5.3.1. Theme 1: The gendered narrative: the invisibility of male rape and male rape myths

When discussing the perceptions and their thoughts around rape, participants' accounts reflected the existence of gendered narratives that described men as perpetrators and women as legitimate victims of sexual violence (Cohen, 2014; Fisher & Pina, 2013; Graham, 2006; Javaid, 2016a). This portrayal of sexual aggression as a female-only problem had important consequences on participants' lived-experiences as survivors, characterised by disbelief, hostility, and prejudice. Three principal narratives emerged: the invisibility of male rape, that real men cannot be raped, and that only gay men can be raped.

5.3.1.1. *The invisibility of male-on-male rape*

Participants often reflected that there was a general hesitancy around recognising and discussing the existence of male rape. Participants described male rape as hidden and invisible, with some survivors indicating their unfamiliarity with the phenomenon prior to their victimisation:

William: No, certainly not before I realised that I had been, you know, victim of rape because I wasn't too conscious of, uhm, male rape to be honest. Since coming into contact with the charity it is been, uhm, kind of humbling to meet people who don't fit the stereotype. Straight people who've been raped by women, that one really took me by surprise. Uhm, straight men have been raped by...yeah, uhm, the people who go to the groups, there are a huge variety of people, there's, uhm...I think some people have more of a challenge than others. I think there are a couple of transgender survivors and that, that's gotta be tough.

In this extract, William suggested that his understanding of rape, before and after coming to terms with his own victimisation, was still largely informed by stereotypes. Meeting other survivors was revelatory for William as he came across a number of experiences he felt were ignored or overlooked, from heterosexual men sexually assaulted by women to transgender survivors. The exposure to realities that 'don't fit the stereotype' was often reported by participants, who developed a sense of the extent to which male rape was a largely misunderstood and ignored reality. William went further to explain that the invisibility of male rape stemmed from a repulsion around even discussing the topic:

William: I don't know the statistics, but my take on it is, it's less common. It's also a question of masculinity, you know. Men don't like to hear about other guys getting fucked...it's a graphic physical, uhm, visceral experience. And men and women are just not comfortable hearing about it, acknowledging it, uhm, uhm, yeah. And that goes back to an overall sense in the world of misogyny, I believe.

Interviewer: In what way?

William: Men are the stronger sex and should therefore not be assaulted and raped.

Interestingly, William observed that the general reluctance around discussing male rape was rooted in misogyny, which traditionally describes hostility, hatred, and prejudice towards women within patriarchal systems and ideologies (Manne, 2017; Richardson-Self, 2018). However, William used the concept of misogyny to explain the discomfort around 'hearing about' male rape. He explained that the idea of men having sex with other men is almost repulsive ('a graphical, visceral experience'), particularly to men who adhere to traditional masculinity norms commonly associated with homophobia (Diefendorf & Bridges, 2020). Parallels can be drawn to evidence

suggesting that benevolent and hostile sexism play a part in authenticity ratings of rape scenarios, where victims are blamed more for not obeying to traditional gender roles (Abrahms et al., 2003). Participants' accounts suggested that these intimidating and stigmatising responses were the result of the same socio-cultural context that deny and resent non-conforming experiences of sexual violence. Unsurprisingly, participants felt upset and frustrated about the existence of these gendered narratives:

John: I think a lot of the stigma, and I did start to look into it and it just upset me, so I stopped [laughs]. Uhm, but I don't know how the terming is legally, but morally how it sits with me...and as I've experienced, society sees it as: men can rape, women can't rape, men can't be raped, women can be raped. I find both of those, uhm, descriptions utter bollocks, because, in my eyes, rape is having sex...sexual interaction with someone where it isn't consensual, irrelevant of what happened, irrelevant of what goes into where and how it happens -don't care. If it wasn't consensual, it's rape...doesn't matter whether you're male or female, you can still be raped.

John's experience of sexual violence was characterised by institutions not acknowledging nor recognising the psychological impact the abuse had on him. In his journey to make sense of his victimisation, he realised that the scepticism and disbelief he encountered around male rape were rooted in narratives that arbitrarily distinguish victims and perpetrators by their gender. In this extract, John highlighted the importance of legal definitions, whereby only men can rape (Sexual Offences Act, 2003). John seemed to imply that legal definitions had important consequences in generating false assumptions that men cannot become victims of rape themselves, as only men can be legally charged with rape. John strongly questioned and resented this narrative, observing that the introduction of gender distinctions undermined his

experiences and the importance of consent in sexual interactions (Weare, 2018). Simply put, John seemed to be advocating for a reconsideration of rape as any non-consensual, forced sexual activities. By emphasising the emergence of gendered narratives in UK legislations, John's account raised questions about the extent to which legal definitions contributed to the public unawareness and discrimination experienced by male victims of rape.

The invisibility of male rape was also experienced as a function of the inability of close networks to provide help after the abuse:

Nick: ...when it first happened...my family struggled. I just don't think they could compute what happened. But I think like my friends - I just told a few - I don't think they had a reference point, because rape of men was just not something that was discussed. If one of my female friends said to me "Oh this happened to me", I would have personally had reference points to go to in the media or I would maybe had other people say, "Oh, I've got another friend, this happened to" whereas there's just nothing like that, no one could kind of conjure up any like...all the empathy wasn't because they'd experience something similar or heard about something similar, and I think that was one thing. There was literally no awareness of men being raped...certainly that was reflected in my family when I told them. I just don't think they understood.

Nick felt that his family and friends could not meet his needs because male rape, as a topic, had no public relevance. Interestingly, he speculated on how male and female victims would be received by close networks. He believed that because female rape is a known or 'visible' phenomenon in society (Anderson, 2007; Javaid, 2015b), support networks are equipped to empathise with women from a more informed, thus more effective, position. Therefore, Nick seemed to suggest that society's widespread

awareness of female rape had a negative effect on *his* experiences of disclosure, as he described feeling that his emotional needs could not be met. The invisibility of male rape emerged in participants' accounts as barriers to effective and emphatic care to male survivors. Importantly, some participants encountered these narratives also when accessing therapeutic support:

James: This organisation on their own website says their run primarily for woman. It's the only local resource I have access to. They do take me in...and they sort of say the reason they're primarily for women is that these crimes are primarily propagated almost exclusively by men.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

James: Made me feel shit, actually. I said "I think this is actually a really wrong thing for you to say. I think it's fundamentally wrong because you are actually...whenever I read something and realise that they're focusing on the perpetration, not victim, I know that there's actually a disconnect... the victim is forgotten from that point onwards...That's what you're doing. And I didn't choose to be male, and I didn't choose to be abused." So, I said that to them, and the result was, they said "You know what, actually we think next session...I've spoken to my line managers, and we don't want to see you again." I was basically fired as a client 'because I was a male! (laughs).

James felt that his victimisation was denied and dismissed by this rape support organisation. A sense of powerlessness emerged from his account, as he described feeling attacked by the service's use of his gender to characterise rape as male violence. These experiences were not uncommon, as other participants indicated that the limited availability of male specific support services (Lowe, 2018) led them to access female-oriented services that adhere to narratives that describe men as

sexually aggressive and abusive towards women (Posadas, 2017). James's account highlights how the acceptance of these narratives within services have important ramifications that extend beyond survivors' self-recognition and public awareness. Indeed, participants often indicated feeling let down by these voluntary agencies that reinforced social narratives that portrayed their victimisation as secondary to female accounts, further refraining them from disclosing or accessing support in the future.

Participants in this study felt silenced from freely disclosing their experiences. The responses from family, friends and even services reinforced the sense that their victimisation was a 'taboo'. Given how participants were often met with hostility, the narratives outlined in this section emphasise the degree to which participants felt inhibited from talking about their victimisation, affecting their ability to come to terms with the trauma that is often associated with male rape (Walker, 2004). The pervasiveness and prevalence of gendered narratives on rape was explained by participants as rooted in feminist paradigms (with men as exclusively perpetrators) and hostility towards non-conforming rape victims. Moreover, these negative attitudes reported by participants seemed to take the form of specific and distinct myths, used by external observers to further delegitimise survivors' experiences.

5.3.1.2. Real men cannot be raped

The real-men-myth is characterised by judgements of male rape against expectations and norms around what a 'real man' should be (Smith et al., 2007). Simply put, the myth describes the impossibility of men being raped and the consequent scepticism around male rape cases (Gonsiorek, 1995, Stermac et al., 2004; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Therefore, male rape survivors are labelled as weak and responsible for not doing enough to protect themselves. This had an impact on how participants rationalised the abuse, questioning if they were real men:

Phil: What I was trying to achieve was me feeling like I was a proper man, a tough man and or whatever, because it's a case of, what's happened to me, in my head, that means I'm a weak man and I wanna be tough man, so I'm gonna be a tough man, I'll go out looking for fights. I'll go to the gym and beef up, it was kind of everything to kind of tell myself and the world that I'm not weak, I'm tough. And if you see me as tough, I'm not gonna get raped again.

Phil reflected that his immediate reaction after the abuse was to rationalise the event as him being 'a weak man'. The perception that victims should do all they can to protect themselves reflected traditional rape myths that blame and question victims for their lack of overt resistance (Grubb & Turner, 2012). However, Phil descriptions also reflected an underlying assumption that was specific to him as a man, expected to be both physically and mentally strong ('a tough man...looking for fights') (J. A. Smith et al., 2007). This was a common experience among participants, who used the real-men myth to undermine their character and shift the responsibility from the abuser to the abused. Indeed, by saying 'if you see me as tough, I'm not gonna get raped again', Phil seemed to be suggesting that only weak men are at risk of being raped.

The real-men-myth also affected participants' willingness to disclose their victimisation for fear of how others would react:

John: I get it at work, I work in an extremely misogynistic, racist, God, you name it, I work with them...and don't get me wrong, I get on with my colleagues. But God, would I not tell them this because I've heard their opinions of it because a lot of it is...some of the men I've worked with talking about when you see big cases in the newspaper or whatever, the initial comment at every time, you get the same comment 'Well, they should have just punched them'

In his descriptions of a hostile and misogynistic work environment, John highlighted that the real-men-myth stemmed from gender role scripts of men being responsible for their own safety and wellbeing (Mahalik, Good et al., 2003). Particularly, as 'real men' are expected to protect themselves, male survivors are seen (and see themselves) as failing to adhere to basic masculine behaviours such as reacting aggressively and forcefully against abuse (Chapleau et al., 2008). Crucially, the anecdotal experiences reported by John reflect a harmful perception that rape could be avoided by doing what should be "natural" for a man who 'should have just punched them'. John's experience of the real-men-myth was one where survivors failed to meet other men's standards of male resilience and invulnerability.

These connotations of survivors as *non-men* permeated experiences within criminal justice settings, where barristers actively used myths to object to claims of non-consensual offences and question the character of victims:

Nick: I don't think the court is set up to get to the truth when things aren't clear cut, you know? Look at stranger rapes...it's much easier to come to the right decision. But myths and false assumptions abound...most barristers - I assume? - have some understanding of male-rape-myths, assume the judge does, but it's as if they're almost colluding to allow the ultimate power to rest with the jury... and I think it's really, really problematic, actually, yeah. And I think, throw anything that's a bit unusual into the mix, any power dynamics, if it's high profile, if it's in the media, if it's men, who are the victims...all these things serve to just further confuse the jury, you know? And in a weird way, I think they used the heterosexual guys' lesser offences, the defence cleverly used that as a way of saying to the gay guys with more serious offences "Why didn't you just push him off, you know?"

In his experiences with the court, Nick observed how the jury's attention was shifted from the perpetrator to the victims' behaviours and character. Nick's account emphasised expectations of men being sexually independent and accountable (Bridges, 1991) which were used to shape the incidents as consensual. Nick also noted that the severity of the offences was used by the prosecution to object to the legitimacy of victims' experiences. Nick's account highlights the unforgiving scrutiny experienced by male survivors, whose actions are judged against how a 'real, conforming man' is expected to behave. Furthermore, he also seemed to be suggesting that this scrutiny was exacerbated by the sexual orientation of the victims, which was used to excuse the actions of the perpetrator. Indeed, Nick's experience with the real-men-myth was one of discrimination against gay men, who are blamed and questioned more than heterosexual men (Davies et al., 2008). This prejudice and stigma around homosexuality emerged in participants' account as a related, yet distinct male-rape-myth.

5.3.1.3. The gay-rape-myth

The gay-rape-myth describes homophobic assumptions that are made towards survivors and about perpetrators following victimisation (Hine et al., 2021). Such assumptions include that male-on-male survivors are gay (Stermac et al., 2004), have acted in a 'gay manner' (Coxell & King, 2010), and that male rape only concerns gay men (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991). The gay-rape-myth is rooted in homophobia (Kassing et al., 2005), delegitimising male rape because gay men are seen as promiscuous, thus, by extension, consenting and less deserving of sympathy (Mezey & King, 1989).

William: I have in my mind one example which was, there was a fairly terrible soap, and there was a guy, and his character was raped over a car bonnet by a

group of apparently straight guys, so that's one stereotype that I have, um, I guess the society stereotype would be some sort of effeminate gay man getting jumped...

When asked about stereotypes, William referred to fictional portrayals of male rape involving a gay character being assaulted by other men. William believed that victims are generally described as effeminate. Sexuality is seemingly used therefore to rationalise male rape, as both male rape and gay lifestyles (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2019) defy the accepted norms. Thus, the gay-rape-myth is charged with characterological victim-blame (Janoff-Bulman, 1979), circumscribing male rape as only concerning a specific group of men. Interestingly, William specifically focused on the sexuality and character of the victim, with the fictional perpetrators being 'apparently straight'. Considering how William's own victim-experiences were with a gay perpetrator, his account highlighted how rape myths are traditionally directed towards victims, overlooking, or dismissing the abusers' character and behaviours. Additionally, other participants observed how stereotypes directed towards perpetrators are still used against victims, to further delegitimise their experiences:

Phil: Yeah, when I've shared my experience, of rape and sometimes when I was sexually exploited at 16, I find that people laughed. Not a lot, I would say, but some people laugh. People joke, they ask if my rapist was good looking. And they will, some will say 'oh, you don't really hear about it happening to men'

Phil's experience with stereotypes and beliefs was, at times, one of ridicule and incredulity. This extract further supported the notion that survivors are met with disbelief and scepticism. Importantly, when discussing his victimisations in public, Phil found that some people were amused by his experiences of sexual exploitation as an adolescent and rape in adulthood. It could be argued that by asking if the perpetrators

were good looking, observers might be minimising victims' experiences on the basis that being raped by someone attractive would be less traumatic. Therefore, the gay-rape-myth is used to reinforce a perception of gay men as promiscuous and consenting participants in the abuse (Mezey & King, 1989; Nagoshi et al., 2008). Moreover, it also reinforced the traditional victim-blaming strategy of victim-masochism, described by Ben-David and Schneider (2005) as false narratives that portray rape victims as seeking and experiencing pleasure in being abused. This harmful narrative was also reported in encounters with the police:

John: ...the sexual violence officer uhm, came in to have a, came in to take over uhm, the uniformed officer - I wasn't there much longer than 5-10 minutes - and the only part that I can remember is the sexual violence officer, after finding out that I was bisexual, turning around and asking me if I'd asked for it, as a quote 'Did you ask for it since you're bi[sexual]'

The basis of the officer's scepticism was John's sexual orientation. Whilst John identified as bisexual, the gay-rape-myth is still relevant in understanding why the specialised officer seemed sceptical about John's allegations as he was identified to belong to a queer community. John's experience with the police also reflected how easily male-rape-myths can be used to deny male survivors' victimisations, questioning their consent, and delegitimising their accounts. It also highlighted the stigma attached to non-conforming sexualities, with the gay-rape-myth shaping the prejudice encountered by John with an officer who supposedly was specialised in investigating sexual offence cases, raising questions around officers' familiarity with male-rape-myths and their impact on complainants. Additionally, participants' experiences of the gay-rape-myth were not limited to police interviews, but extended to the prosecution stage:

Nick...they played up to the usual stereotypes, it was very much “Oh, you know, he's [perpetrator] been in the closet all his life. He's like 60 years old now and it's been difficult for him. Maybe he just got a bit carried away”, on the other hand “Well, you're a gay man, so it's expected that you would say yes to anyone”. Gay men are just kind of promiscuous, so that was really an issue...some of the heterosexual guys who gave evidence were portrayed as unwilling witnesses. As in they didn't really want to talk about a man coming onto them or sexually assaulting them, but they were in the same political party and he was a senior guy, so they probably were thinking about, you know, careers and future.

Nick described some of the strategies employed by barristers who used rape myths to lessen the severity of the perpetrators' actions and generate doubt around the accounts of complainants. By describing the perpetrator as a 'hidden homosexual', the gay-rape-myth emerged as a justification of male rape as sex between gay men that got “a bit carried away”, where the sexuality of those involved delegitimised the seriousness of the offences (Hickson et al., 1994). Nick described the duplicity of the gay-rape myth, used to describe gay victims as expected to 'say yes to anyone' while simultaneously absolving the gay perpetrator as sexually motivated. Moreover, Nick seemed to believe that the description of heterosexual victims as unwilling witnesses was used to further delegitimise the experiences of gay victims as fame seekers. Nick's experience further demonstrated the ramifications of the gay-rape-myth, where gay victims are characterised as promiscuous men who make false allegations for their own personal gain.

5.3.2. Theme 2: Coping with the abuse: unhealthy levels of self-blame and “reckless” behaviours

Participants discussed at length the psychological consequences of being a victim of sexual violence and their immediate emotional reactions were often complex and debilitating:

Sorel: ...I rolled over into a foetal position and eventually just went to sleep. I don't know whether I cried myself to sleep, I don't know. The next morning, I got up, nothing was said, didn't say anything. Uhm, I went to have a bath and I remember lying in the bath just um, and I just cried. I felt, I felt, I felt ashamed. I felt dirty. I felt embarrassed. I felt violated. I felt guilty. I felt frightened...

Participants' accounts were charged with sexual language, where a sense of violation and contamination ('I felt dirty') revealed the traumatic impact of acquaintance sexual violence, where victims' psychological and physical being were invaded and attacked by someone close who took advantage of them. In this extract, Sorel reported self-evaluative emotions (shame, embarrassment, guilt) suggesting the dilemma experienced by survivors who felt the need to shoulder some responsibility for their victimisation by evaluating their actions and behaviours. From these initial reactions, participants described a progression of negative emotions, which led to a sense of isolation:

Leyton ...if you're not talking to anybody, you're by definition isolated. You withdraw. You stop speaking to people, you stop engaging with things you remove yourselves pretty much from the world. You wander around, it's like you're in a bubble, the world's there but it's just outside this little sphere, you can see it, you can hear it, but you're not really in it.

The sense of anomaly described by Leyton emphasises the challenges of rationalising and coming to terms with the abuse, as survivors feel alienated ('in a bubble') and struggle to reconcile the consequences of their abuse with external realities 'just

outside' their psychological being. Retrospectively, Leyton, and most of the participants in this study, recognised that this process of isolation led to other coping strategies designed to mitigate their psychological distress. These included unhealthy self-blame and compensatory behaviours.

5.3.2.1. Unhealthy self-blame

Self-evaluative emotions are common in victims of intimate violence, who try to make sense of their victimisation by scrutinising their actions and behaviours (Filipas & Ullman, 2006; Frieze, 1979; Janoff-Bulman, 1979; O'Neill & Kerig, 2000). Rationalising the abuse appeared to be a key psychological need, designed to re-establish a sense of agency over survivors' lives. Participants reported a need to take on excessive responsibility for what had happened, questioning the severity of the incident, and scrutinising their own behaviours and character. For example, Nick said:

Nick: ...you could always recount the steps that led to the incident and say, 'Well if I hadn't done that', but obviously, that doesn't mean you're to blame...In the first one I was naïve, I was probably desperate to be noticed, because I was in a space as a gay man, I've not really experienced... I probably drank way too much. When I spoke to people, friends, and family, it was such a clear-cut scenario, that it was obviously a rape...no issues over mixed messages...I probably was drugged. Uhm, but still afterwards, at times, like...you know, I was...I was wondering whether, whether it was like partly me that contributed to it...

In this extract, Nick attempted to identify behaviours ('I drank way too much) or character flaws ('I was naïve...desperate') that caused or could have prevented the incident. These self-blame processes support the notion of individuals' biases in self-attributing causality and self-implicating perceptions of avoidability (C.G. Davis et al., 1996). Interestingly, Nick seemed to be aware of his self-blaming tendencies.

However, even after reassurances from family and friends, he continued to blame and criticise himself, which reflected the extent to which he had internalised these self-blame processes. Nick's experiences of continued, unforgiving, scrutiny was one shared by all participants in this study. Another emotion participants seemed to find problematic was a feeling that their actions during the incidents could have been considered as consensual:

Sorel: So, I didn't tell anyone, my parents or anybody. And it remained that way for 32 years...something which had just got locked away in the back of my head in a box. I felt I dealt with it, I didn't feel that I was a victim, I thought it was a situation that I got myself into, I'd probably felt I consented...certainly, you know, acquiesced, I'd kind of gone along with it. I haven't stopped him. I participated by, by not saying anything, by masturbating him, by putting my, helping him put my underwear on. So, I think I felt guilty, and I felt ashamed, and I wasn't, I suppose at the time, I wasn't sure what it meant about my sexuality.

In this extract, Sorel examined why he struggled to recognise his victimisation for more than thirty years, observing that feelings of responsibility stopped him from seeing himself as a victim. Sorel reported that he failed to understand that he was coerced, mistaking his actions as indications of consent. The conflicting emotions experienced by Sorel highlight the challenges around self-recognition when non-penetrative sexual activities are involved (Hickson et al., 1994). Moreover, memories of physiological arousal are associated with a variety of psychological disturbances (Bullock & Benson, 2011), such as internalisation and suppression, as in Sorel's case. His confusion not only confirms survivors' tendency to engage themselves in characterological self-blame (Janoff-Bulman, 1979), but also the guilt associated with experiences of arousal

from non-consensual sexual activities, with harmful consequences in terms of recognition and disclosure.

The extracts presented suggest a conflict between survivors' awareness that responsibility should lay only on the perpetrators and their need to hold themselves in part accountable for their victimisation:

Phil: How do you overcome and how do you interpret what happened to you? I interpreted it as what happened to me as, well, I'm weak. But actually, when I look back now...I wasn't weak...and if it had been another young 20-year-old guy who was drunk and tried to get in, that bouncer might have done exactly the same to him. But it was a struggle when I was 20. If someone would have said to me at 20 years "you were unlucky, you were in the wrong place at the wrong time, it says nothing about you at all, it says more about this guy" ...I probably wouldn't have believed it. It wouldn't have helped...I was all over the place in my head.

The process of accepting the role of circumstances and opportunity seemed to be particularly difficult for Phil. Following the incident, Phil's need to characterologically blame himself ('I'm weak') could not be addressed by recognising he was 'at the wrong place at the wrong time'. He needed to understand what the abuse said about him and knowing he could not have prevented it would not have helped him. Phil's experience with self-blame supports the notion that survivors have a need to re-establish a sense of agency over their lives. It could also be argued that accepting that only perpetrators should be responsible for the abuse would not satisfy victims' psychological need to identify ways in which they could prevent future abuse to occur. Self-blame emerged as a strategy designed to rationalise incidents, with survivors in this study trying to take back some of the power and agency lost during the abuse. The alternative was

considered to be harmful for fear of the psychological consequences of recognising that the abuse was unavoidable. The conflict that emerged between accountability for being raped and accepting that the abuse was inevitable was a psychological challenge that affected participants' ability to recognise their victimisation, disclose to support networks, and access therapeutic care. Importantly, this psychological conflict resulted in participants engaging in compensatory behaviours retrospectively recognised as unhealthy and harmful.

5.3.2.2. Compensatory behaviours: recapturing control, agency, and safety

Evidence from veterans with histories of sexual trauma highlight survivors tendencies to engage in compensatory behaviours to recapture a sense of self following the abuse (Elder et al., 2017; Gilbar et al., 2019; Monteith et al., 2019; Voller et al., 2015). In this study, participants often reported using coping strategies designed to alleviate the symptoms and distressing emotions they were experiencing as the result of the abuse:

Michael: I needed to be in control. And because I was used to violence, I became violent. I became a monster, yeah? Yeah, I became, I become a monster [voice breaks] ...it was just to protect myself. I was just the tough guy; you know robbing people and robbing drug dealers and just being the tough guy...'cause I'm not a tough guy. D'you know what I mean, I'm not?

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Michael: I'm not a tough guy [voice breaks] I was just, I was just scared...I was still out there on the street, I'm drug dealing and making lots of money and stuff from there...I've always used some kind of substance maybe, I don't know...you're 16-17, use alcohol...and then it just progressed...people say this progress to crack cocaine and heroin...stuff was happening, which I didn't know

how to deal with because of the way I felt inside I didn't want to be that person.

Do you understand what I'm saying?

Similarly, to other participants, fear, and anger characterised Michael's victimisation. He recognised that after the abuse, he needed to recapture a sense of self and control in his life. This was achieved through engaging in antisocial behaviours ('robbing people', 'drug dealing') which helped him to temporarily mitigate the fear he felt. He also identified a progression in his misuse of substances, from alcohol to crack cocaine and heroin. By mentioning that 'people say' there usually is a progression to the use of substances, Michael seemed unsure about the circumstances and details of his drug use. Importantly, he also described an inability to deal with the 'stuff that was happening'. The language he used was significant in highlighting his confusion at the time. His difficulties in comprehending his trauma and the associated emotions seemed to be so unbearable that drugs providing the only escape from 'that person'. The image portrayed by Michael captured the psychological demands that arise from traumatic sexual experiences (Voller et al., 2015), where rape survivors struggle to rationalise and comprehend their internal psychological state ('the way I felt inside'). Despite being 'clean' for 17 years, Michael's account still resonated with the pain and suffering of years of drug abuse and antisocial behaviours that were intended to alleviate his fears but left him with a sense that he had to be 'a monster' in order to survive.

The sexual aspect of the experiences discussed in this study had specific repercussion in terms of symptoms and emotions reported by participants, who often dealt with their victimisation by being destructive and harmful towards themselves:

Interviewer. You said that after the first month something changed?

Chris: Yeah, then I just didn't give a shit. Yeah. By saying that, I mean I was like 'Ok, take what you want from me. If you want to have sex with me, have sex with me. I don't care who you are, what you want, what you want me to do. Do it, it's fine.'. I lost agency over myself, I lost agency over my own body uhm, and so, therefore, if you want it, have it. That was simply what it was. I didn't realise that until the second event, uhm, that that was how I was feeling back then at that time, but it was a case of, in a way, I have no control of myself. I have no control over my body, I have no control over how anyone uses my body, so fuck it. Do what you want, you know. I was reckless, very reckless. I was very lucky to get out of it, yeah.

In the interview, Chris detailed how, after being drugged and raped by a police officer at a party, he lost agency over his own body. Chris's understanding of agency differed from what other participants described as their ability to hold themselves accountable for the decisions that led to the abuse. Chris described a form of agency that was intrinsic to his physical and sexual being, free to make decisions as to who he wished to have sex with. Chris felt he lost that ability and, therefore, felt the need to give up completely his agency and control by engaging in what he described as reckless sexual behaviours. It appeared that by giving up his body, Chris re-established a sense of agency as he freely decided who could sexually use him ('if you want it, have it'). This paradoxical thought process behind Chris's risky and promiscuous sexual behaviours after the abuse (giving up his body to take back control over it) was significant, in light of the evidence which suggests that gay victims are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours, such as unprotected sex under the influence of drugs and alcohol and "one-night-stands" (Paul, et al., 2001). Whilst Paul et al.'s study focused on childhood experiences, the prevalence of high-risk sexual behaviours

within adolescent sexual assault victims (Homma et al., 2012) and gay/bisexual men (Groves et al., 2010), suggested that adult male survivors' sexual behaviours could also be motivated by similar needs and thought processes.

Among the emotions described in this section, a sense of vulnerability emerged as a prominent psychological experience in the male survivors in this sample. Whilst some used substances to mitigate the anger and fear experienced, others felt the need to demonstrate their toughness in order to reject the vulnerabilities associated with being a victim of sexual violence:

Phil: How I dealt with it was, was kind of going out looking for fights with people.

I thought 'No one will take the mick out of me, *that* [being raped] will never happen to me again. No one's gonna walk all over me. I will show the world that I'm still a tough guy and that no one is going to take the mic out on me'. And so, I went looking for fights in the city centre after had a few drinks and you know most, most, I mean again I don't know if it's true I can't remember all of them but most of the I think big guys looked at me and just laughed and said 'Nah go'... And so, I started having lots of sex with lots of different people.

Similarly, to Chris, Phil engaged in unhealthy sexual behaviours. However, his motivation appeared to be substantially different. After being raped, Phil felt the need to re-establish a sense of invulnerability by displaying aggressiveness. Safety from future victimisation seemed to be the main motivation behind these behaviours. As with other participants, the sense of vulnerability felt after the incident left Phil with needs that could only be addressed by confronting others to prove his worth and to not be defined by his victimisation. As those needs were not satisfied by physical toughness, Phil used his sexual freedom to demonstrate his invulnerability, re-establishing temporarily a sense of safety.

The coping strategies described by participants highlight survivors' struggle with understanding their victimisation, with attempts to self-blame suggesting a need to re-establish a sense of agency over their lives. These attempts to recapture a sense of self led to a number of behaviours retrospectively recognised as damaging and even "reckless" on their physical and mental health. Underlying these coping strategies, participants' perceptions of how men should behave and react played an important part in their post-incident experiences.

5.3.3. Theme 3: The role of masculinity in survivors' post-incident experiences

All participants recognised and emphasised how "being a man" had a substantial impact on their lives after the incident. Indeed, the phrases and language used to describe their journeys as survivors were intrinsically related to expectations associated with men and masculinity. Interestingly, the discussions of male expectations and behaviours suggested that participants perceived and understood masculinity as a singular construct that governs how *all* men should or should not behave in society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Levant & Richmond, 2008). Participants' understanding of masculinity was exemplified by Nick, who described a two-fold effect on male rape survivors who feel emasculated and helpless after the abuse:

Nick: I think there is a sense that, I think it's probably two-fold in that rape is about power and it's emasculating for a man to be raped...you know, it's like that, it's like it's emasculating for a man to be helpless in a situation, to have no power in a situation. So, I think that's a whole thing. But I think also because of the way that we're socialized to view men and women, I think men uhm, aren't easily seen as victims or don't even see themselves as victims of that kind of thing, for sure.

But also, there's like this expectation that men can physically stand up for themselves.

For Nick, masculinity and rape were both inter-related as expressions of power. A man is expected to have power by adhering to ideals of invulnerability, resilience, and sexual independence (Levant et al., 2010; Mahalik, Locke et al., 2003; Pirkis et al., 2017). Therefore, Nick's experience of rape was one where he felt he lost the power to consent and make his own decisions. This reflection supports the existence of narratives that view sex as a transaction of power (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010), where rape survivors are seen as "conquered" and submissive. Furthermore, Nick highlighted the importance of socialisation for men's self-perceptions in relation to sexual violence (Addis & Mahalik, 2003), with masculinity playing a part in shaping a man's willingness to recognise himself as a victim of rape. Participants' reluctance to accept their victimisation was salient, as it appeared to be the result of socio-cultural expectations on appropriate behaviours and stereotypes such as the real-men-myth (Javaid, 2015b). Whilst participants experienced similar expectations around what it meant to be a man and discussed at length how it negatively affected their lives, it became apparent that masculinity played different roles, unique to their experiences of abuse. In some cases, masculinity defined participants' wish to be ordinary in the eyes of others:

James: ...what I never did was to really own up to any other stuff, because... just a wish to be ordinary. I don't want to be a circus animal in front of a crowd. I wanted to just be like the person next to me and I think a lot of my life has been like this, hiding, hiding, just to blend in... I don't want people to know about this stuff and I think that that's a childhood pattern of internalizing it, trying to look like respectable people are and actually, uhm, trying to forget it. Try and ignore it,

always play it down ways, minimize it...it allows you to actually not deny it, you know, you haven't told truth, you just denied "Oh, it only happened once or twice"

During the interview, James recognised that, despite overcoming many of the challenges related to the sexual abuse he experienced as a 13-year-old, he struggled with 'owning up' his victimisation. The language used by James indicated a view of accountability and ownership towards the abuse. Whilst this psychological challenge was reported by most participants in the study, James's reflection captures how masculinity contributes to defining what makes a man 'ordinary'. The metaphor of the circus animal clearly portrayed James's fears of being seen by others as an anomaly. The need to be seen 'like the person next to me' drove an internalisation of the abuse that was motivated by masculine norms of respectability (Kong, 2019; McDowell, 2002, 2007). By recognising this pattern of internalisation and minimisation, James highlighted the role of masculinity in defining what was desirable and acceptable for him as a man. The final reflection on minimisation was significant, considering that survivors of CSA are more likely to diminish and deny the extent of their victimisation (Mert et al, 2016). James's need to minimise his victimisation also aligned with the literature on male victims' reluctance to expose their vulnerabilities and disclose their victimisation (Stanko & Hodbell, 1993). Survivors' adherence to certain masculinity norms emerged as a compromise between self-perceptions and external judgements. Consequently, some participants did not want to be labelled as victims or survivors:

Chris: I don't want to be viewed that way if that makes sense, when we talk about sexual abuse surv-survivors - I don't like that word - being a gay man as well and already trying to stay more masculine as opposed to feminine, uhm, it's not something I wanted to experience, yeah.

Interviewer: What did you not want to experience?

Chris: Being looked at as weak, I suppose, being looked at, and certainly being looked at as a victim, I can't stand that, uhm, yeah, that would really piss me off. I think it's because, I don't know how to explain it, uhm, I don't want people's help, I don't want people to look at me with pity, I don't need people's help, I don't need people to feel sorry for me, I don't need people to, uhm, feel they need to look after me, or anything along those lines. I don't want that; I don't need that.

Chris' feelings around being 'looked at as a victim' were strongly affected by his need to maintain a sense of masculinity in his life. Indeed, the extract highlighted the role of masculinity in defining specific psychological needs. Chris's sexual orientation seemed to be playing an important part in his reluctance 'to be viewed that way'. Specific masculine-needs emerged in terms of Chris's self-image as a gay man, adhering to traditional anti-femininity norms of masculinity (Levant et al., 2013; Sánchez & Vilain, 2012), who tried to distance himself from femininity. Besides emphasising narratives that view homosexuality as more feminine and less masculine (Connell, 2005; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Iacoviello et al., 2020) and their effect on some gay men's self-image (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2019), Chris's reflection underscored a perception of victimisation that conflicted with *his* masculine-needs. The characteristics outlined by Chris were heavily affected by how *others* would change their behaviours if he embraced the label of survivor. His dread of others' pity, compassion and care was motivated by a fear that his self-image as a functioning, masculine man would be undermined. In a similar way to other participants, masculinity played a part in shaping Chris's rejection of his victimisation to preserve and protect himself from others. Put simply, Chris refused to be treated differently because it would represent a failure to be a man. In contrast, whilst some participants

feared support motivated by changes in perception, others were afraid of being ridiculed by other men if they disclosed:

Sorel: I guess I have minimised it...it comes back to the question of how men view themselves, whether they've somehow become less masculine, even now I would say there's still the impact of, not only how men view their own sexuality if they have been the victim of sexual assault by another man, but also, I think you are worried about how others would see your sexuality so, you, would others question that? And I think it's very relevant.

Interviewer: Do you feel that was relevant, those questions were relevant for yourself?

Sorel: Oh definitely, without a shadow of a doubt. I think, you know, if I'd gone, just imagining going back into school the following week and friends knowing, you know what would they have thought would have said, you know? What would this, the state of mockery have been? Yeah, contributed to 32 years of silence.

Sorel's account supported the significance of perceived gender constructs on how male survivors see themselves. The use of the word 'become' emphasised his perception of victimisation as a process of internal change and loss. By *becoming* a male survivor, Sorel seemed to experience a discrepancy between his own perceptions of how to perform masculinity before and after the abuse. The psychological transition from non-victim to victim stressed the confusion experienced by Sorel, who struggled to make sense of his victimisation because of an unspoken adherence to the real-men-myth. In other words, male rape was seen as damaging to his masculinity, which resulted in attempts to minimise the abuse to avoid further losses. The nature of the offence was also significant, both internally, as Sorel questioned his own sexuality, and externally, as he worried about how others would

see him. Again, the idea of being overpowered by another man conflicted with male invulnerability, resistance, and sexual independence (Levant et al., 2013; Mahalik, Good et al., 2003; Pirkis et al., 2017). Consequently, Sorel was certain that by disclosing his victimisation he would be ridiculed by his peers. Thus, minimisation and avoidance emerged as functions of masculinity whereby Sorel, and other participants, felt unable to disclose their victimisation for fear of others' judgement. It could be argued that participants' psychological needs were mainly motivated by how other men would see them. It highlighted how participants' view of masculinity was policed by other men, who set and upheld the standards and expectations encountered by male survivors (Javaid, 2015b). Indeed, recognition and respect of other men appeared to be non-negotiable for some participants:

Phil: You know, the fact of me looking for fights...if I had picked the wrong guy, that guy could have knocked me out. He could have broken my skull. It could've hurt...so actually I was doing something that also brought a risk of harm to me. Why? Because I wanted to prove that I was tough... the function it served was to show the world and myself that I'm not weak. I want people to see me as strong. And if you try, I will square up to you even if you might knock me out, you will know that I've still tried to square up to you and that shows you and the world that you're tough and I am tough...

In this extract, Phil described being a man as an expression of aggressiveness and physical toughness. He recognised that his actions were unhealthy and carried a risk of physical harm to himself if other men responded to his confrontational and aggressive behaviours. In describing these behaviours, Phil's acceptance of the risk of harm seemed to be motivated by a desire to demonstrate to others and himself that he was not a weak man. Recognition from stereotypically strong men was worth the

danger of physical injuries. Phil could not accept the sense of weakness and vulnerability that arose after the rape, also because it implied that he could be at risk of future victimisation. Safety appeared to be a key function of masculinity, which resulted in hyper-masculine behaviours that may have helped Phil to improve his self-perception as functioning man by concealing self-perceived vulnerabilities. Importantly the need to show his toughness 'to the world' highlighted Phil's sense of inferiority towards dominant men who were seen as more successful (Fields et al., 2015) and meeting the standards of physical and psychological strength. Phil's need to display hypermasculine traits supports the work by Fields et al. on oppressed groups of men (ethnic minorities and non-conforming sexual orientation) who behave aggressively to compensate the sense of inferiority towards idealised hegemonic men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Whitehead et al., 1994). Phil's need for safety, invulnerability and recognition emphasised the role of masculinity in creating standards and barriers encountered by survivors after the abuse, who engage in toxic and hyperaggressive behaviours designed to mitigate emotions non-conforming to masculine norms (Jakupcak et al., 2005) such as feelings of helplessness inferiority and anomaly.

5.3.4. Theme 4: Reporting to the police as a negative and retraumatising process

The majority of the participants in this study had experiences of reporting to the police. Despite the differences in delay (from just a few hours after the incident to more than 40 years), the encounters were overwhelmingly described as negative, psychologically harmful, and re-traumatising. Participants felt that they were met with attitudes that mirrored the stigma and scepticism encountered in the general public (Javaid, 2015a, 2015b). Despite these negative experiences, participants shared similar motivations behind reporting to the police, such as a sense of civic duty and

responsibility. Moreover, reporting to the police was seen as part of a more personal therapeutic process of recognition of their victimisation, control, and closure.

James: So I interacted with the police but it was quite hard because this happened...over 40 years ago, and I did know that the person was still alive...I thought I should really do something about it because...Just sort of feels like a civic responsibility, feels I should, should do something about it for my own conscience, it doesn't need to result in anything but... if my own children were abused...without a doubt, the law will be involved...the need to actually report was actually, I was looking after, after me in a way...that no one else had done for me and that also there was a prospect that the law had been broken. And something should be done...this isn't about sort of vengeance is just about, if we actually do believe in the rule of law and say, why is it that suddenly you make an exception for yourself ...but my own therapy in it is sort of, as part, is wrapped up in this process.

Reporting was an important psychological step for James who saw the criminal justice process as an opportunity to give meaning to the historic abuse he was subjected to at 13 years of age. As he stressed the length of time between the incidents and the decision to report, James seemed to be aware of the investigative challenges that came with historic cases (Shead, 2014). However, the knowledge that the perpetrator was still alive, and the possibility of others suffering from him, made James feel responsible as a law-abiding citizen to come forward. Interestingly, the reflection on his children, and how he would undoubtedly involve the authorities if they were abused, indicated that moral responsibility was only one of the factors behind reporting to the police. Indeed, he recognised that reporting was part of a more personal therapeutic process of looking after himself, which meant accepting the severity of the

adolescent sexual abuse he experienced. Throughout his accounts of the police, James strongly and repeatedly emphasised that he was not motivated by retribution. Morality and recognition seemed to be more important and intrinsically related, as James questioned why he had to exonerate the sexual offences against him when he believed in institutions and due process of the law. James and others in this study saw in the police an opportunity to have a legal and institutional validation of their experiences (Jamel et al., 2008). Therefore, it was not surprising that survivors were concerned about having their complaints taken seriously:

Leyton: My view of the police was I didn't want them to believe me, I wanted them to investigate what I was saying because I knew if they investigated, they would find out it was true, whether they believe me or not was irrelevant. If they've done an investigation and they did, they would find out it was true, and they did. What I want is for it to be taken seriously and investigated, and belief and disbelief have no part of that.

Leyton's attitude towards reporting emphasised how being believed was more than just about institutional recognition. Recognition and belief were secondary to having officers initiating the investigative processes. In this extract the subtleties of what survivors seek from the CJS emerged, whereby recognition without action were not sufficient in isolation. The prevalence of this attitude towards reporting among survivors of historic abuse was indicative of the impact of years of internalisation and how reporting could be considered as a process of externalisation that sought concrete responses from police officers (Jamel, 2010; Jamel et al., 2008). However, participants were frequently met with negative and unsatisfactory responses by officers, with important and often long-term psychological consequences:

James: They were bludgeoning, being asked on my first interview “So did this person anally penetrate you?” was bizarre. It’s really an upsetting question to be asked... you’ve never met the person, you never talked about this stuff, and he wanted to get quite so graphic. And it’s very inappropriate...the concept of rape is actually an upsetting one for me, because I wasn’t anally abused. However, he basically put his penis *on* mine, ok? That’s getting into a level of upsetting detail for me, because actually there is stuff around that which the law doesn’t quite work with...in my own experience, I feel I was penetrated and yet I know, legally, that doesn’t count as rape...seen as penetration...The laws are blunt, instrument, and I accept that. But the people working with the law actually need to be maybe a bit more mindful of the fact that, you know, the law might be a blunt instrument, but that doesn’t mean they need to be blunt instruments.

James described his first encounter with the police as ‘bludgeoning’, emphasising how the officer’s attempt to gather information on his case had an impact on James’s emotional and psychological wellbeing. Prior to the police interview, James had rarely discussed his victimisation with others and was not prepared to examine with the officer the “graphic” details of his abuse. Moreover, James himself identified as a rape victim, which is in contradiction to the current legal definition of rape under the Sexual Offences Act (2003). James’s feelings around legal definitions of rape highlighted the problems around gendered classifications on men’s willingness to engage with the CJS (see Weare, 2018, 2020, 2021). As a consequence, he felt that, by asking if penetrative acts had occurred, the officer was potentially diminishing his victimisation as secondary to the maximum sexual offence that could be prosecuted by the law. Importantly, officers need to identify where complainants’ cases fall within the legal framework, and although James felt invalidated by these questions, it is not clear

whether that was the officer's intention. Evidently, issues surrounding survivors' preparedness and understanding of legal definitions emphasise the challenges around investigating historic sexual offences, with officers having to balance survivors' emotional needs against the necessary investigative processes. In this particular extract, James felt that the officer's inquiries minimised the severity of his experiences, and the fact that he internalised his victimisation for many years. The internalisation of the abuse is common among male survivors (Bullock & Benson, 2011), with many participants in this sample using reporting as an opportunity to disclose their victimisation for the very first time. Participants' psychological problems and confusion over reporting highlight the importance of training for first responders (Angiolini, 2015) in providing care and guidance to survivors upon reporting. In fact, participants often believed that officers were not equipped to investigate their cases:

Michael: A girl came to my house. It was more harrowing than anything else because she asked me to tell her what happened with the sexual abuse...when I did, she was horrified...she had no experience...the lack of care of you know, the way I might feel...just no consideration, no empathy, no, nothing. I don't know if she had any training, if she did, the training just ain't good enough...It made the situation even worse for myself. Anyway, you know that the anger, the disgust and all the rest of it comes. They didn't even tell me that she was coming. She just gonna come and knock on my door...make an appointment, you know this is a sensitive situation. You just gonna come and knock on my door and I will come to you about my childhood sex abuse? Come on man. But you know, prepare someone for that shit...

Michael seemed frustrated when describing how the officer arrived unannounced at his house to interview him. He went on to describe how he felt that the police officer

underestimated how challenging it could be for him to discuss his experiences. Indeed, throughout the interview, Michael emphasised his trust issues with authorities, borne out of years of sexual and physical abuse by teachers at his school. Given these trust issues and Michael's past experiences with the police (he had been arrested and convicted for drug related offences), his initial attitude and opinion of the police were already negative as he was concerned about how engaging with the CJS could affect his mental health. Moreover, by not asking for prior permission to arrange the interview, Michael felt that the police were not taking in consideration his emotional needs and his hesitancy towards discussing in detail his experiences of prolonged abuse. Michael's perception of the police was worsened when he felt that the interviewing officer seemed to be unprepared to deal with the sensitivity of the topic. Naturally, seeing an officer 'horrified' upon hearing his story significantly affected Michael. He seemed to believe that being interviewed by an unexperienced officer indicated a lack of consideration towards him and his anxieties around openly discussing the abuse. From this interview, Michael was left with anger and 'disgust', as he felt that once again the seriousness of his allegations was overlooked and disregarded by a figure of authority. Michael's experience was not unique, with several participants stating that they believed that officers' lack of preparedness and familiarity were an indication of the extent to which male rape was disregarded by the CJS.

A minority of participants immediately reported their victimisation to the police. It is important to acknowledge that from an investigative perspective, recent cases present significantly fewer challenges in terms of gathering evidence, witnesses' testimonies and identifying suspects (Maslen & Paine, 2019; Shead, 2014; Walsh et al., 2010). Therefore, participants' accounts emphasised the importance of being met by supportive and non-judgemental responses to best support their attempts to access

institutional support and recognition. However, participants' account told a story of re-traumatisation, with some officers acting in a dismissive and unhelpful manner:

Phil: The second experience, because I knew it was bad, I told the police straight away, they didn't respond in a helpful way at all, they were very dismissive...I went in there crying. I was covered in some bits of dirt and mud from the bushes and things, and I said I said 'some guy has just raped me. I don't know what to do'. These two police officers, – well one of them just said "Oh, just go home and sober up" ...They then turned up after my friend had a go at them and I just, they just asked what happened and I told them and the one thing I remember them saying was "Sorry, hang on so after it was over you got up and walked off with him...willingly?" And I was like 'yeah' and they said "Well, that's not gonna look very good in court, is it?" And I just...I just wanted them to leave, and I just said to get out of my house...

Phil's experience of reporting exemplified how negative encounters with the police can accelerate the process of victim withdrawal. Phil thought that, despite being visibly distressed, the officers suggested he was intoxicated and dismissed him. Phil's experiences support findings on first responders using the drunkenness of victims as evidence for false allegations (Angiolini, 2015). Phil went on to describe how the same officers came to his house to follow up on his complaints (only after Phil's friends 'had a go at them'). However, on this second instance, Phil felt that the two officers were still sceptical about his actions after the incident. The fact that Phil 'willingly walked off' with the perpetrator was used by officers to question the credibility of his accounts, suggesting that it would not look 'very good in court'. This questioning of victims' actions after the abuse could suggest an adherence to 'authentic' rape beliefs (Du Mont et al., 2003), whereby victims' actions are questioned for not conforming to

stereotypical stranger rape scenarios (Stewart et al., 1996). Furthermore, upon hearing that his case would not be seen favourably in court, Phil felt that the officers were invalidating his victimisation, and felt the need to withdraw his complaint. As victim withdrawal is an important factor behind the high levels of attrition and low levels of prosecution of rape cases in the UK (Hohl & Stanko, 2015; Murphy et al., 2021), Phil's account of reporting emphasised how officers' behaviours could be instrumental in victims' hesitancy around progressing their cases through the CJS, for fear of the psychological repercussion that could arise. Indeed, case withdrawals were not uncommon in this sample, with several participants clearly indicating that their experience with the police made them incapable to progress with the CJS if it meant burdening an investigative process participants felt as an attack to their credibility:

John: I didn't feel capable of pursuing it, because if me pursuing was gonna cause detriment to me in the process, I couldn't bear going through that with everything else I was already trying to deal with. They [the police] don't, they don't give you the impression that they're on your side. They give you the impression that they are going to argue and question you as if you are the one doing the wrong...You feel like you're guilty until proven innocent rather than innocent until proven guilty...It makes you doubt your own decision...for quite a while it made me feel like me speaking to the police was the wrong thing to do and I potentially ruin someone else's life by reporting them, rather than they'd ruined my life and I was trying to get that dealt with properly.

John's inability to progress with his case stemmed from a need to prioritise his emotional wellbeing. He thought that officers were intentionally questioning his credibility and that he had to prove his innocence. These experiences with reporting highlight how investigative procedures can be demanding for rape survivors, who feel

blamed and judged by officers (Mcglynn et al., 2016). John went on to say that reporting caused in him to question his victimisation and even feeling guilty for reporting and causing potential harm to the perpetrator. Guilt is a prominent emotion that arises after reporting (Weiss, 2010). In this study, participants described how, after overcoming significant psychological barriers, the responses from the police reinforced the belief that they were not deserving of justice and that their cases were not serious enough to be investigated. Therefore, withdrawing was often seen as the only solution to protect themselves from the harm participants perceived could come from the CJS. All the participants who reported in this study, were left with a sense that the CJS was designed to question and minimise their victimisation, leaving them with a long-lasting negative impression of the police.

5.4. Summary of findings

The aim of this study was to generate greater understanding of the experiences of male victims of rape, by providing detailed insight into the personal accounts of men directly affected by sexual violence. Four superordinate themes emerged from the IPA analysis of male survivors' accounts, which describe their experiences around i) gendered narratives, ii) coping with the abuse, iv) masculinity, and v) reporting to the police. The themes described in the previous section provided a detailed and powerful insight into the meaning that men attach to their experiences of sexual violence and highlighted the many barriers that exist for men who try to make sense of a type of victimisation that is largely denied and overlooked by society (Javaid, 2016a, b). The accounts presented in this study varied in terms of age at the time of the incident, type of abuse (prolonged or one-off incidents), relationship to the offender, delay in disclosure, and reporting to CJS. However, despite the uniqueness of each participant, the similarities identified in this study suggest that the phenomenon of male rape

commands specific attention as a distinct form of sexual violence (Hine et al., 2020; Hine et al., 2021). This is the first study to do so, by providing an in-depth examination of the lived experiences of male rape and sexual abuse survivors in the UK.

Gendered narratives (Theme 1) were described by participants in encounters of disbelief and hostility towards their victimisation. Underlying these narratives were beliefs of men being only perpetrators (Cohen, 2014; Fisher & Pina, 2013; Graham, 2006; Javaid, 2016), which participants saw as barriers to open and public discussions of their victimisations. This socio-cultural context perpetuates the denial of experiences that do not meet traditional rape and gender paradigms (Abrams et al., 2003) and facilitates the unawareness and hesitations described in this study as the *invisibility of male rape*. Participants' perception that their victimisation was secondary to female victims was often reinforced by the inability of close networks to provide support (Sorsoli et al., 2008), as well as the unavailability of specialised-services providing male-informed therapeutic care (Lowe, 2018). Gendered narratives were also the foundations of the real-men-myth and the gay-rape-myth. The real-men-myth emerged in participants' experiences of scepticism and disbelief, supporting the notion that male victims are often blamed for not acting like 'real man' (Gonsiorek, 1994; Hillman et al., 1991; Stermac et al., 2004; Turchik & Edwards, 2012), by failing, for example, to protect themselves (McMullen, 1990; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Similarly, experiences of the gay-rape-myth reflected narratives that describe male rape as only concerning men who do not conform to established gender expectations (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2019), and are masochistic (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005), promiscuous, and hedonistic gay men, undeserving of sympathy (Mezey & King, 1989; Nagoshi et al., 2008). Whilst presented as discrete and separate, participants' accounts often revealed the inter-relatedness of the real-men

and gay-rape myths (Hine et al., 2021), used in conjunction to delegitimise their victimisation, exonerate perpetrators, and accuse male survivors of making false allegations or exaggerating the severity of their experiences.

Mirroring evidence from male victims of childhood-sexual-abuse (Sorsoli et al., 2008), participants in this study reported feeling overwhelmed by a sense of violation and contamination that refrained them from disclosing and seeking help. Moreover, participants' accounts confirmed issues with fear, anger, negative self-evaluative emotions, and isolation among male rape survivors (Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Mgozeli & Duma, 2020; Walker, 2004; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005). Theme 2 also described survivors' attempts to resolve these emotional issues through coping strategies that participants recognised to be unhealthy. All participants reported engaging in unhealthy self-blame, a strategy designed to rationalise the events in one's life by questioning their severity and scrutinising behaviours and characters (C. G. Davis et al., 1996; Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Despite being able to identify the downfalls of taking excessive responsibility, and knowing that the perpetrator was at fault, participants still needed to have agency over their victimisation. Indeed, the analysis of their self-descriptions emphasised the extent to which men internalise and struggle with negative self-evaluative thoughts (Jakupcak et al., 2005, 2006). In an attempt to resolve and mitigate their psychological distress, participants reported a number of compensatory behaviours, which were retrospectively described and recognised as harmful. Among the behaviours, aggressiveness and risky sexual behaviours were prominent. Whilst these behaviours are commonly found in victims of sexual violence (Javaid, 2015b; Sumner et al., 2015; Turchik et al., 2012; Turchik & Hassija, 2014), the accounts in this study emphasised how male survivors' compensatory coping strategies closely resemble gender-appropriate behaviours

found in veterans studies (Elder et al., 2017; Gilbar et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2005; Neilson et al., 2020).

Further to the above, participants' understanding and relationship with masculinity (Theme 3) was instrumental for the analysis of their lived experiences as men coping with abuse. Participants' accounts reflected the importance of masculine norms, standards, and expectations on *how men should be*, which also indicated their concerns around how other men would perceive their experiences of sexual violence. Masculinity emerged as an internalised belief system, encompassing a set of desirable traits and dispositions that distinguish men in the extent to which they exemplify the ideals of masculinity (Levant et al., 2013; Thompson & Beckett, 2015). Participants described expectations of invulnerability, resilience, and sexual independence (Mahalik, Good et al., 2003), all of which highlighted survivors' internalisation of ideologies that value power and authority (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Consequently, participants experienced rape through heteronormative narratives that described sex as conquests and surrenders (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010): sexual victimisation was understood as a loss of power and resulted in feelings of helplessness and emasculation. Importantly, survivors' frustration and distress were intensified by a sense of failure to meet masculine expectations of accountability and ownership of their victimisation. The inability to do so, and the fear of how others would see them, drove an internalisation that was motivated by a need to meet the masculine norms on respectability (Kong, 2019; McDowell, 2002, 2007, Rhodes, 2011). Moreover, participants often rejected labels such as *victim* and *survivor* for fear of the connotations attached to these terms. Male rape emerged as a damage to survivors' masculinity, which, as a construct, is in direct opposition to victim-characteristics (Javaid, 2015b; Rock, 2002; Weiss, 2010). Unsurprisingly, men reported concealing

their vulnerabilities suggesting a sense of inferiority towards stereotypically masculine men (Fields et al., 2015) seen as functioning, dominant, thus hegemonic, members of society (Whitehead et al., 1994). Indeed, participants' relationship with masculinity emphasised the duality of this construct, as an internal belief system that adheres to an external, socio-cultural masculinity ideology that is policed by other men who set and upheld its values.

The decision of involving the police (Theme 4) was not taken lightly by the participants in this study, who, despite differences in delay, shared similar motivations to report. They described a sense of moral and civic responsibility to bring their abusers to justice; they also saw in reporting a way to acknowledge and accept the gravity of their experiences. Given how men find challenging recognising the seriousness of their victimisations (Stanko & Hodbell, 1993), involving the police meant seeking institutional validation, and carried therapeutic value. Therefore, after overcoming several barriers, participants expected concrete responses and thorough investigations. However, their experiences with reporting left them dissatisfied with officers' responses, describing them as dismissive, unhelpful, inconsiderate, inappropriate, and hurtful. The accounts in this study confirmed the existence, within the CJS, of scepticism towards male rape (Jamel et al., 2008), gendered narratives (Javaid, 2015a), over-estimation of false allegations (Angiolini, 2015), and authentic rape beliefs (Du Mont et al., 2003; Stewart et al., 1996). Whilst it is recognised that investigating sexual offences is extremely challenging, the recurrence of negative experiences in this study suggests that closer attention must be paid to the emotional needs of male survivors throughout the investigative process. Indeed, participants described feeling retraumatised after reporting, as officers' investigative decisions/actions were interpreted as an attack to their credibility as legitimate rape

victims. These descriptions closely resembled the notion of secondary victimisation (Campbell & Raja, 1999), with participants feeling unable to “burden” the investigation and deciding to withdraw their case. Given the prevalence of case retractions in the UK (Hine et al., 2020; Hohl & Stanko, 2015; Murphy et al., 2021), victim withdrawal emerged as a safeguarding decision taken by male survivors to avoid further psychological repercussions that could arise from officers’ antagonistic and stigmatising attitudes.

5.4.1. Implications and Recommendations

This study supports the argument that male rape survivors have unique psychological needs (Chapter 2, section 2.4.), resulting in important therapeutic implications. Firstly, the complex emotional issues identified, and downward trajectories described by participants, emphasise the usefulness of understanding the effects of male rape within parameters of PTSD diagnosis (Walker et al., 2005), as well as the importance of rapid introduction of therapeutic support that recognises the role of trauma in the development of symptoms and coping strategies. Secondly, given the extent to which participants internalised and minimised their victimisation, rehabilitative processes should focus on providing male survivors with the tools to be in control of their therapeutic journeys. Participants in this sample relayed a desire to be in control and active agents in their rehabilitation process. As men typically struggle with recognising and labelling non-specific feelings of distress as emotional problems (Addis & Mahalik, 2003), acknowledging survivors’ gender-specific needs can improve help-seeking and engagement with support (A. E. Ellis et al., 2020; Sorsoli et al., 2008). Indeed, service providers’ accounts (in Chapter 4) also emphasised the need for safe therapeutic environments where their clients could feel empowered and invested in their rehabilitation, and how survivors could benefit from trauma-informed interventions that

are sensitive to their specific and unique needs (Reeves, 2015). Therefore, it is proposed that services adhere and implement the five principles of safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, choice, and empowerment (Fallott & Harris, 2008), recommended by Butler et al., (2011) as best practice to acknowledge the impact of violence and victimisation in the lives of service users. Whilst service providers (Study 1) often highlighted their adherence to trauma-informed approaches and principles, the need for wider availability and more specialised training across non-specialised services was apparent across the accounts of both service providers and male survivors in this study.

Therefore, the findings of Study 2 reflect arguments from third sector service providers (Chapter 4) of the need for more male-informed training across voluntary agencies, and not only specialised services. Importantly, helping male survivors recognise how their conceptualisations of masculinity are impacting their journeys does not mean rejecting masculinity, but rather making masculinity less salient in the long term (Wolfe & Levant, 2020). This means acknowledging that men might be attached to their masculine ideals, as consistently demonstrated in the masculinity ideologies literature (Chapter 2, section 2.3.2.), and that therapeutic support should facilitate the exploration of a broader range of emotions and attributes and not be limited to “one social identity and the restrictions and roles that accompany masculinity” (Wolfe & Levant, 2020, p.323). A male informed approach should tailor to the unique needs of each male survivors, providing alternative tools to process their victimisation, beyond traditional masculinity norms (e.g., invulnerability, independence, resilience). The aim is to help male survivors understand and accept negative emotions as natural symptoms and identify constructive coping strategies.

Participants' negative experiences with non-specialised services further reflected the lack of awareness on male rape within some voluntary agencies in the third-sector (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Javaid, 2016a; Lowe, 2018). Given the psychological barriers that survivors had to overcome to even recognise their victimisation, effective and empathic support is essential for meaningful recovery (A. E. Ellis et al., 2020). The participants in this study had to work their way through a number of non-specialised services before finding organisations that were equipped to manage and address their specific male needs. These lived experiences of re-traumatisation and dismissals speak to the fact that more specialised organisations in the UK are desperately needed (Lowe, 2018). Indeed, whilst increased attention and funding to male support services are routinely called for within the literature (Lowe & Balfour, 2015; Lowe & Rogers, 2017), this study emphasised how other entry points could still be much better equipped to recognise and support male rape and sexual abuse survivors. This was also reported by service providers (in Chapter 4), who emphasised how their clients often struggled to find appropriate therapeutic care and engaged with a number of non-specialised services before accessing their organisation. Indeed, female rape services often represent the only therapeutic support that is available and accessible for male survivors (Javaid, 2017). By refusing or providing inadequate support (i.e., that is not catered to male-specific needs and vulnerabilities), the risk of further psychological harm cannot be underestimated, as evidenced by both survivors and providers' accounts. Therefore, it is essential that rape services recognise the crucial role they can play in providing initial therapeutic treatment. Moreover, by improving communication with male specific support organisations, non-specialised services can facilitate signposting and referrals, which could significantly reduce the delay between victimisation and appropriate therapeutic

care. By being better equipped to cater for male specific needs, expanding their knowledge and training, non-specialised services can make a difference between life and death (Walker et al., 2005b).

Finally, this study provided an insight into how police responses significantly affect survivors' psychological wellbeing and their willingness to progress their cases with the CJS. The accounts reported in this study strongly emphasised the likelihood of secondary victimisation during the investigative stages (Campbell & Raja, 1999), which seemed to be largely explained by adherence to 'authentic' rape beliefs and male-rape-myths. Whilst further research is required to investigate officers' own experiences of investigating male rape offences and to determine the extent to which they are aware of gendered narratives and male-rape-myths, the findings of this study indicate a number of areas that require improvement. For example, participants felt that their psychological and emotional needs were overlooked during their experiences with the CJS. The recent End-to-end Rape Review (MoJ, 2021) supports the findings of this study and the need for better access to "quality support" by ensuring access to therapeutic support, including ISVA services, for all victims of rape. Indeed, the presence of rape victim advocates can significantly improve how officers treat victims during interviews (Campbell, 2006). Importantly, as previously argued by Angiolini (2015), improving victims' experiences of reporting would require specific focus on first responders, who need to be equipped with the tools to manage the challenges associated with complex male rape and sexual abuse cases. Indeed, the prevalence of historic sexual abuse and the associated investigative challenges necessitate a trauma-informed understanding of complainants of sexual offences and the safeguarding role played by the police (Jamel et al., 2008). Evidence from the female rape literature supports the benefits of a trauma-informed approach to victims'

reporting (see Franklin et al., 2020; Gillespie-Smith et al., 2020; Lathan et al., 2019), including a reduction of re-victimisation, improvement of quality of witness testimonies, and willingness to engage and cooperate with the investigation (Rich, 2019). For example, trauma-informed training, besides increasing officers' knowledge of trauma, focuses on effective interviewing skills (Rich, 2019), with the aim of enhancing victims' comfort and safety, and in turn improve their working memory of the assault in a non-judgemental and empathic approach. Considering how participants criticised the lack of preparedness, familiarity and empathy, officers also need to be supported and trained to identify safety concerns, vulnerabilities, and male-specific psychological needs. A male, trauma-informed approach would facilitate not only signposting to appropriate therapeutic support, but also the investigation of offences that, historically, have repeatedly failed to reach threshold for prosecution (Hine et al., 2020; Hohl & Stanko, 2015, Murphy et al., 2021).

5.4.2. Limitations of this study

The commitment to providing a detailed and truthful representation of the lived experiences of the participants who took part in this study required strict recruitment strategies and methodological decisions. It allowed the researcher to richly describe the data, place participants' accounts at the centre of the phenomenological inquiry, and uncover profound psychological processes, which were the foundations of practical recommendations for future research, service provision, and policy. Therefore, in the spirit of IPA frameworks, this research embraced the idiographic commitment described by many qualitative authors (e.g., Noon, 2018; J. A. Smith et al., 2009) as necessary for a meaningful examination of the accounts of the male survivors recruited in this project. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that the eligibility criteria imposed on this sample meant that some important aspects of the

phenomenon studied could not be further explored. Below, the limitations of this study, together with suggestions for future research, are discussed.

The data reflect a level of heterogeneity of the sample, with participants reporting historic or recent sexual victimisations, multiple or single incidents, and varying degrees of delay between the abuse and disclosing, accessing services, and reporting to the police. Whilst this diversity was welcomed and sought after, some demographic characteristics were critically underrepresented. Notably, the majority of the sample identified as gay, with only two participants identifying as heterosexual. However, earlier work by Scarce (1997) suggests that heterosexual men are equally vulnerable to sexual victimisation, which indicates the need for more qualitative research on heterosexual male survivors to examine their unique needs and vulnerabilities (Javaid, 2018). Future research should aim to equally represent different sexual orientations, particularly as the emerging role of masculinity discussed in this study could play different functions in terms of the internal and external barriers encountered by survivors for disclosure and self-recognition.

Similarly, only two participants did not identify as White, and the lack of evidence on sexual victimisation within ethnic minorities is not only a limitation of this study but also of the wider sexual violence literature. Some have argued that ethnic minorities experience increased cultural pressures to hide their sexual victimisation, in order to avoid 'bringing' shame and dishonour on their families (Gilbert et al., 2004; Gilligan & Atkar, 2006). Moreover, ethnic minorities are far less likely to seek therapeutic help (Grey et al., 2013) and refrain due to perceived barriers such as stigma and discrimination from their communities, shame and denial, cultural mistrust, and fear of discrimination towards health services, and unfamiliarity on mental health issues (Kolvenbach et al., 2018). As the current study did not impose restrictions in

terms of the ethnicity of participants, the underrepresentation of non-White ethnic backgrounds in this sample is indicative of the added challenge of recruiting for academic purposes male survivors, historically known to be reluctant to openly discuss their victimisation (Stanko & Hodbell, 1993), from ethnic minorities. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that future research explores the phenomenon of male rape across different ethnic backgrounds that exist in the UK.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of participants in this study reported to the police. This was particularly useful in the context of a wider literature that routinely examines police responses to rape victims (Hine & Murphy, 2017, 2019; Hohl & Stanko, 2015; McMillan, 2018; Parratt & Pina, 2017; J. Shaw et al., 2017), which was unequivocally supported by the findings discussed in this study. However, despite providing crucial insight into the factors behind male survivors' reluctance to involve the police, the study is not able to portray in depth the lived experiences of men who are refrained from reporting their victimisation. Again, this limitation is more indicative of the type of male survivors who are more likely to engage in academic research. In fact, the men in this study had all accessed and completed their therapeutic support programmes and were arguably more willing and capable to engage in a psychologically demanding research interview. This was also demonstrated by the fact that the participants recruited were interviewed on average almost 24 years after the incidents. Therefore, the study's lack of participants who did not report reflects broader research challenges to recruit recent male rape survivors, who appear to be a particularly difficult cohort to engage with. Future research is vital to address this crucial gap, by working closely with male support organisations to develop the necessary safeguarding measures to recruit and safely interview this important group of men. Moreover, given the detailed accounts of negative

experiences with the CJS presented in this study, more research is needed with police officers, examining their experiences of investigating and engaging with male survivors of rape. This is crucial to better understand the investigative challenges around male rape, and the challenges of attending to the male-specific needs highlighted in this study.

5.5. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a detailed and powerful insight into the lived experiences of men affected by rape and sexual abuse. Particular attention was given to explore male survivors' experiences of recognising and disclosing their victimisation, the psychological consequences of male rape, and barriers to access support and report to the police. The themes identified highlight the existence of socio-cultural reality that perpetuates gendered narratives and male-rape-myths. Male survivors internalise the resulting beliefs, as demonstrated by the development of unhealthy and compensatory coping strategies, designed to temporarily mitigate the psychological consequences of the abuse. The common denominator of participants' experiences was the adherence to traditional masculinity ideologies and norms. Masculinity emerged as a dual construct, an internal belief system and a culturally reinforced ideology underscored the psychological conflict often reported by the participants in this sample. Finally, survivors raised concerns around the prevalence of false beliefs and negative attitudes within non-specialised services and the CJS. In particular, the findings emphasised the inadequacy and unpreparedness of police officers to manage the emotional needs of complainants and to effectively investigate male allegations of sexual offences. In conclusion, the accounts described in this study clearly indicate the need for increased awareness on male specific needs and for trauma-informed interventions across the different entry points male survivors

routinely attempt to access. Importantly, this research provides a framework for future research on different aspects of male rape, as well as providing information on how to improve support across the third sector and CJS.

Chapter 6

Discussion of findings, reflexive account, and final conclusions

The overall aim of this thesis was to generate increased knowledge and renewed understanding of the phenomenon of male-on-male rape and sexual abuse and the experiences of male survivors across three key areas of interest (see Chapter 1, section 1.2. for a detailed overview of the aims and rationale for the thesis):

- i. Male survivors' recognition and disclosure of their victimisation
- ii. Internal and external barriers to access and successful therapeutic care
- iii. Involvement of the police and the Criminal Justice System

To address these aims, two qualitative studies were conducted. Study 1 presented the findings from interviews with service providers who offered an account of their lived experiences of supporting men affected by sexual violence, with a focus on therapeutic challenges encountered and the current landscape of service provision in the UK. The findings of this study provided a unique and expert perspective into how male survivors seem to rationalise their victimisation and the associated coping strategies, as observed by providers. Study 2 presented the findings from interviews with male-on-male survivors of rape and sexual abuse. The study focused on examining how survivors understand male rape, exploring the meaning they attach to their experience, how they "made sense" of their victimisation, and the internal and external

barriers encountered post-abuse. Having discussed these studies in isolation in chapters 4 and 5, the aim of this chapter is to: i) provide a summary of the findings across the three key areas of interest of this thesis: ii) discuss theoretical implications and evaluate the contribution of this research programme in furthering the current knowledge on male rape; iii) discuss limitations of the thesis and make recommendations for future research iv) provide a reflexive account of the researcher of this thesis, outlining the challenges encountered during this programme of studies, as well as the researcher's critical development; and v) present general conclusions.

6.1. Summary of findings across the three key areas of interest

6.1.1. Survivors' recognition and disclosure of their victimisation

Recognising experiences of victimisation emerged as a substantial challenge for men across both studies. Recognition often involved understanding the severity of the abuse, rationalising the circumstances around the incident(s), and estimating and allocating responsibilities. These internal processes appear to be not too dissimilar to other victim populations (Bagwell-Gray, 2019; Logie et al., 2016), which highlights the fact that sexual offences share the same traumatic effect regardless of age, gender, and sexual orientation of victims. However, the studies in this thesis highlight the value of paying closer attention to male survivors, who appear to experience gender-specific difficulties around accepting the sexual nature of their victimisation. The challenges reported in this thesis were often underpinned by conflicts between self-perceptions of masculinity, reminiscent of gender role strain paradigms (see Levant & Powell, 2017), with male survivors reporting uncertainties and anxieties around their ability to be 'functioning' men.

Across both studies, male survivors' tendency to adhere to traditional masculinity ideologies and rape mythology affected their willingness to believe in the

legitimacy and severity of their victimisation. Service providers, for example, were concerned about their clients' propensity to explain and discuss their victimisation using rape myths, resulting in substantial therapeutic challenges. Providers emphasised the saliency of the real-men-myth, used not only by external observers to stigmatise male rape experiences (Turchik & Edwards, 2012), but also by survivors themselves. Beliefs about "real men" not needing assistance in handling their emotional distress reflect broader issues with men and their ability to recognise non-conforming emotions (Berke et al., 2018; Jakupcak et al., 2005). These beliefs provide an additional barrier for male survivors who question their right for sympathy and care from others, including professionals such as the providers in Study 1.

Providers' concerns were mirrored by survivors in Study 2, who provided examples of the psychological journeys (with some spanning over 30 years from the incident) undertaken by male survivors in recognising and accepting their victimisation. Survivors also described, in detail, the conflict experienced when examining the circumstances around their victimisation. Their uncertainties were closely related to traditional rape myths (Grubb & Turner, 2012): for example, some participants questioned their involvement if they engaged in prior consensual activities, did not overtly resist the perpetrator, and/or consumed alcohol. Importantly, rape myths dictate how survivors themselves rationalise and (fail to) recognise their victimisation. Providers' and survivors' accounts show that men struggle with recognising sexual victimisation because of traditional gendered narratives that require men to "be normal" (Kong, 2019) and to "move on" (Berke et al., 2018), which leads to survivors questioning the legitimacy of their experiences.

Besides struggling with self-recognition, additional barriers exist for men disclosing sexual trauma because of inclinations to suppress, minimise, reject, and

internalise psychological distress (Bullock & Benson, 2011; John & Gross, 2004; Mert et al., 2016; Stanko & Hodbell, 1993). Study 1 highlighted how survivors' tendencies to internalise result in layers of denial and avoidance, which present significant therapeutic challenges for service providers. Again, findings point towards specific socio-cultural expectations on restricted emotionality (Berke et al., 2018; Wagstaff & Rowledge, 1995) being a cause for men hiding their victimisation from others.

Additionally, findings from Study 2 emphasised the interrelatedness of the internal and external barriers refraining men from freely and openly talking about their victimisation (Easton et al., 2014; Sorsoli et al., 2008). Externally, barriers to disclosure were observed within close-support networks, often ill-equipped to provide emotional support. These observations reflected evidence of victims' fearing negative outcomes and repercussions when/if disclosing to family and friends (see Mennicke et al., 2020). Internally, disclosure was experienced by survivors as uncovering an embarrassing secret and exposing their vulnerability to loved ones. All of these factors inevitably exacerbated the psychological struggle with their internalised need to maintain and uphold values of masculinity. Crucially, the findings of this thesis highlighted the importance of addressing these multi-layered barriers because recognition is a necessary process for survivors to break the silence around their victimisation and engage successfully with their rehabilitation (Addis & Cohane, 2005; Easton et al., 2014, Sorsoli et al., 2008).

6.1.2. Internal and external barriers to access and successful therapeutic care

The challenges that men typically encounter around recognising and disclosing their emotional distress significantly affect their willingness to access professional help (Vogel et al., 2014). Indeed, the same barriers to recognition and disclosure described above were also observed by service providers in Study 1 in their clients' ability to

successfully engage with their therapeutic rehabilitation. Unsurprisingly, as masculinity permeates men's experiences around help-seeking (Addis & Mahalik, 2003), providers emphasised how working on their clients' beliefs on "what it means to be a man" represented a significant part of their therapeutic interventions. Similarly, survivors themselves discussed having to negotiate between self-representations of masculinity and the need for therapeutic support. The conflict between these two opposing forces (masculine norms and need for support) leads to the compensatory behaviours observed across both studies, mirroring evidence from veterans with histories of sexual trauma (Neilson et al., 2020). The accounts in this thesis also emphasise how the decision to access care is dependent on the success of the processes of realisation, recognition, and disclosure outlined in section 6.1.1. Internally, male survivors have to negotiate between masculine norms on resilience, invulnerability, and stoicism (Mahalik, Good et al., 2003) and their unresolved psychological trauma. Often, the results of this conflict were feelings of isolation, unworthiness, and hopelessness, which affected and delayed survivors' decisions around beginning and/or continuously engage in targeted recovery programmes.

A critical external barrier identified in Study 2 was the *invisibility of male rape* (Chapter 5, p 5.3.1.1.), which described survivors' perceptions and experiences of broad and widespread unawareness, ignorance, scepticism, and dismissal of male rape in the general public, close support networks, and institutions (Davies & Rogers, 2006; Mezey & King, 1989). Survivors' reactions to public encounters of hostility reflect barriers in the interpersonal domain around safety and protection issues (Easton et al., 2014, p. 465), affecting not only their ability to come to terms with their victimisation but also their willingness to access the necessary therapeutic support. Interestingly, survivors also observed how, prior to the incident, they often lacked knowledge about

male sexual victimisation and the associated vulnerabilities. Upon victimisation, men find themselves with limited awareness of what support exists for them (Lowe, 2018), which significantly delays their access to appropriate support, thus further exacerbating their psychological distress. Moreover, given the limited availability of specialised support, survivors often engage with non-specialised services (Javaid, 2016a). Reports from both studies indicated and confirmed the likelihood of further psychological damage and highlighted how the lack of familiarity with male sexual violence displayed by these services not only causes significant delays in accessing appropriate therapeutic care, but also reinforces survivors' internalised beliefs of unworthiness and illegitimacy of their victimisation. Put simply, the invisibility of male rape, as experienced by male survivors, is the backdrop of the internal and external barriers to access and successful engagement in therapeutic care observed by service providers.

6.1.3. Involvement of the police and the Criminal Justice System

The analysis of participants' experiences with the CJS confirmed arguments supporting the therapeutic value that reporting has for victims of interpersonal violence (Jamel, 2010; Jamel et al., 2008). It also became apparent across both studies that the decision to involve the police often requires survivors to negotiate with instincts surrounding mistrust of authorities and unresolved feelings of guilt and shame developing after the abuse (Easton, 2012). The overall responses reported in this thesis supported the existence of a police subculture (Javaid, 2015a, 2016b; Silvestri, 2017) embodied by some offices (e.g., first responders) who accept and reinforce biases and rape myths in their handling of male rape cases (Abdullah-Khan, 2008) in both historic and recent rape cases. Importantly, service providers explained that officers' behaviours were likely resultant from a lack of attention and familiarity with

male rape cases across all levels of this important institution. Importantly, both studies highlighted how male survivors approach reporting with positive expectations of receiving justice and institutional recognition and leave the CJS feeling failed and retraumatised. In this sense, providers specifically highlighted how the involvement of the CJS could represent an important barrier to effective therapeutic support, with providers emphasising how a considerable part of their work was around educating survivors about the CJS processes, managing their clients' expectations of successful prosecutions of their cases, and providing psychological support in the highly likely event that their case received a no-crime or NFA outcome.

Further to the above, findings from Study 2 indicated how male survivors' lack of familiarity with the CJS substantially shapes their perceptions of investigative processes, particularly around questions regarding the circumstances of their victimisation. Importantly, participants' accounts of their experiences with police interviews highlighted the importance of policy recommendations on the involvement of services in every step of the reporting process (Campbell, 2006), and supporting officers around issues of care with vulnerable witnesses (Rich, 2019). Indeed, the accounts of Study 2 strongly emphasised survivors' concerns around police officers and their ability to successfully support and investigate male rape allegations. Among the issues emerging from this thesis, the prevalence of attitudes resembling authentic rape beliefs (e.g., Du Mont et al., 2003; Stewart et al., 1996) was particularly concerning, given how recent institutional reforms have attempted to address and educate officers around rape myths (Angiolini, 2015; Stern, 2010). Importantly, the disbelief reported by both historic and recent male rape survivors, thus supporting the idea that extra-legal factors affect police officers' investigative decisions (Hine et al., 2020; Hohl & Stanko, 2015), which include lack of resistance and sexual orientation

of the victims. Moreover, secondary victimisation (e.g., Campbell & Raja, 1999; Clevenger & Navarro, 2021) appears to maintain relevance as an experience for male rape survivors reporting to the police. In particular, Study 2 provided direct accounts of the processes of victims' withdrawal, with a number of participants in this study feeling incapable of progressing their case further after experiencing repeated scepticism, doubt, and judgement from the police. Therefore, victim withdrawal emerged as a process of safeguarding from police traumatisation. In conjunction with providers' accounts, the narratives collected in this thesis portrayed the police and the CJS as ill-equipped to handle male rape cases, unaware of the impact of officers' behaviour, and underestimating their therapeutic and safeguarding role for this particularly vulnerable population.

6.2. Implications and contributions to methods, theory, policy, and practice

Before discussing the theoretical implications and contributions of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge the role of IPA in shaping how participants' accounts were collected, analysed, and presented. Indeed, a key contribution of this thesis is the use of a phenomenological framework to explore participants' experiences across the two studies. As previously discussed, whilst IPA has been previously used in male rape research (see Das et al., 2020 and Mgozeli & Duma, 2020), often researchers do not fully exploit the "tools" provided by this methodology. Jonathan Smith often highlights how researchers avoid discussing *how* IPA's philosophy guided their analytical process (J.A. Smith, 2011; J. A. Smith et al., 2009, 2022), or overlook the importance of developing vigorous experiential accounts of the phenomenon through unfolding and compelling narratives (Nizza et al., 2021). More broadly, the hesitancy around using IPA in sexual violence research speaks to questions of transferability in gathering and discussing complex phenomenon based on relatively contained

samples (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The reluctance is further exacerbated by challenges associated with recruitment strategies typically associated with IPA (purposive sampling, section 3.5.1.), whereby researchers seek to gather accounts from participants who are representative of the group of interest, have in-depth experience of the phenomenon, and have the ability to fully articulate their experience (this is further discussed in the *Limitations of the thesis*, section 6.3). Furthermore, the detail and depth required in the analysis of often complex and lengthy interviews represent additional challenges for researchers, who have to present rigorous and transparent analytical procedures to justify the employment of what is seen to be as a complex and specific methodology (Pringle et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, IPA proved to be the most suitable methodology to address the aims of this thesis and investigate its research questions. With its focus on “giving voice”, “making sense”, and strong philosophical traditions (see Chapter 3), IPA provided the tools to rigorously explore the accounts of providers and survivors. Specifically, by focusing on experiences in their own right (J. A. Smith et al, 2022) and deconstructing individual interpretations to identify convergences and divergences, the thesis contributes to male rape research in detailing how gender constructs and socio-cultural narratives uniquely contributed to participants lived experiences of male sexual victimisation.

As discussed in Chapter 3, to mitigate the challenges associated with this methodology, guidelines for IPA (Nizza et al., 2021; J. A. Smith, 2011) were used to inform both the design and execution of the empirical components in this thesis. Indeed the findings of this thesis give scope to discuss important implications for the benefits of using IPA within the realm of Sexual and Interpersonal Violence Research. Firstly, IPA’s commitment to idiography and the treatment of each individual account

as a stand-alone case study is reflective of best practice in trauma-informed research (Campbell et al., 2019) whereby researchers recognise that research participants have specific needs associated with their group (in this thesis being a male and having experiences of sexual violence) and, as such, encounter additional, substantial challenges in their day-to-day lives. In the context of this thesis, the idiographic commitment across both studies placed each account at the centre of the research process, through the materials used (see Appendices I, II) and the focus on identifying the ways in which having (or working with) sexual trauma uniquely shaped participants' experiences. Secondly, by providing unfolding experiential narratives, IPA allowed for an inductive, participant-led representation of how sexual violence affects men. This required an interrogation of how participants' made sense of their experiences across cognitive, behavioural, and emotional domains, which gave transferability to broader issues routinely discussed in the wider male rape literature (i.e., recognition, disclosure, help seeking, and reporting). Finally, by viewing male rape as a major life event, IPA put emphasis on the significance that victimisation had for participants, both personally and professionally, and recognised the considerable amount of reflecting, thinking, and feeling survivors and providers went through to understand what sexual victimisation *means* for a man.

Further to the above, the use of IPA to combine the perspectives of survivors and service providers is another unique contribution of this thesis. By bringing together the lived experiences of men personally affected by sexual violence and contextualising such experiences with the perspective of specialised professionals, the thesis reflects IPA's flexibility and transferability. For instance, by exploring the challenges encountered by providers in Study 1 around supporting male survivors therapeutically and with the CJS, it was possible to give more context to the coping

strategies and thought processes presented by survivors in Study 2. Specifically, by treating each study as a stand-alone output, whereby each account represented a true and valid representation of participants' lived experiences, it was possible to provide a dual insight into the phenomenon of male rape. Whilst independent, both studies gave a phenomenological account of the three key areas of interest in this thesis (Chapter 1, section 1.2.) and facilitated Yardley's (2000) "vertical generalisation", a key guideline for quality and rigour for qualitative research (Chapter 3, section XYZ). It is with this dual phenomenological perspective that the thesis contributes methodologically to male rape research and advances theory and practice by presenting the lived consequences of masculinity ideologies, rape mythology, and feminist discourse, as discussed in the following sections.

6.2.1. Male-on-male rape, masculinity, and therapeutic implications

In constructing this thesis and analysing and discussing the findings of Study 1 and Study 2, the importance of masculinity when exploring male survivors' experiences of sexual violence was indisputable. Masculinity emerged as a necessary construct for a truthful and honest examination of the phenomenon of male rape. In this thesis, masculinity defined the following: how survivors (often fail to) rationalise, recognise, and accept their abuse; the maladaptive coping strategies outlined by both survivors and service providers; the internal and external barriers to access therapeutic support; and even the perceptions of and responses from institutions such as the police, which are commonly associated with *the cult of masculinity* (Cockcroft, 2012; Fielding, 1994; Silvestri, 2017). Indeed, survivors' experiences across virtually every aspect of their victimisation was far more dependent on how successfully they performed gender appropriate behaviours than previously predicted (see Javaid, 2015b).

The findings of this thesis call for a re-evaluation of the saliency of masculinity in examining male rape. Before this is discussed fully, it should be noted that in this thesis masculinity has been discussed in its singular form, perhaps overlooking the usefulness of examining this construct in its pluralities. The motivation behind discussing *masculinity* rather than *masculinities* was mainly dictated by the language and terminology used by participants across both studies. Indeed, masculinity was described and understood as a singular, yet multi-faceted, standard that is imposed on men by societies, gender expectations, and, crucially, by other men. All of which create a system of power dynamics that govern and judge non-conforming men as inferior. However, given the specificity of the circumstances of the samples in this research, the question of universality remains to be answered. Superficially, one might argue that there cannot be a universal masculinity, given the importance of culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation on individuals' constructions of what it means to be a man (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Segal, 2006). However, the findings of this thesis further advance the notion that, at least within a British socio-cultural context, there are fundamental functions and characteristics that constitute a singular, traditional masculinity ideology, which oversees and governs how men are expected to be and behave (Levant & Richmond, 2008).

6.2.1.1. Male-on-male survivors and the “struggle” for hegemony.

Among the functions and characteristics proposed by participants to describe this singular version of masculinity, power and authority emerged as important features which supported the relevance of hegemonic paradigms in discussing masculinity and male rape (Arxer, 2011; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity applies to male rape because it is posited that male social actors perpetuate and maintain their position of power by justifying the differentiation and

marginalisation of women and alternative, non-normative forms of masculinity (Kimmel, 1994), such as male rape survivors. Therefore, this thesis builds on Javaid's (2015) examination of male rape through the lenses of hegemonic masculinity by providing experiential accounts of survivors' acceptance of hegemonic structures and their status as marginalised men. Crucially, this thesis emphasises how survivors' self-perceptions and experiences of distress are shaped by hegemonic masculinity ideology, thus highlighting its dogmatic and prescriptive nature (Cockcroft, 2012; Silvestri, 2017). Survivors' initial acceptance and recognition of these masculine hierarchies may have given rise to the feelings and beliefs of inadequacy that were described as emasculating in Study 2. Most importantly, the role of masculinity in broadly defining survivors' distress in this thesis, as well as the hostility encountered in the public by both survivors and providers (in Study 1), further advance the argument that men have gendered experiences of rape and sexual violence.

The specificity of the masculinity norms reported by participants, and their recurrence across both studies, are key contributions of this thesis. Indeed, these findings advance arguments for viewing masculinity as an internalised belief system, that represents a set of desirable traits and dispositions, and that distinguish men in the extent to which they exemplify these ideals (Thompson & Beckett, 2015). Participants across both studies reported norms of male invulnerability, resilience, and assertiveness (Mahalik, Good et al., 2003), which have been associated with a number of negative psychological outcomes (see Chapter 2, section 2.3.2.). However, norms around sexual independence and readiness provided the key perspective to understand the relationship between masculinity and male rape. Traditional masculinity portrays men as seeking sexual relationships to fulfil their "right" as dominant and functioning men (Stermac et al., 2004) in what many feminist authors

have described as a patriarchal society (see Posadas, 2017). Furthermore, sexual aggression is often explained in terms of power imbalances, with perpetrators submitting victims by removing their sexual power (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010; S. G. Smith et al., 2015). Consequently, as male survivors may be perceived to fail to assert their sexual independence and dominance, rape is understood by men as damaging to their power, authority, and respectability, thus representing a loss of masculinity that needs to be addressed and re-established. In proposing male rape as a (perceived) 'loss of masculinity', the thesis contributes to the wider literature on marginalised masculinities (e.g., Fields et al., 2015) by presenting male sexual victimisation as a 'struggle' for hegemony, where men in the lower of the hierarchy attempt to recapture a sense of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) through compensatory behaviours described by providers in Study 1 in terms of agency, safety, and control.

6.2.1.2. Therapeutic implications: male needs and male-informed interventions

The thesis calls for a reconsideration of the causal link between internalised beliefs and behaviours. Indeed, rather than viewing behaviours as a linear outcome of internalised beliefs, the experiential accounts presented across both studies emphasise how internal systems create psychological needs to be fulfilled, which *then* give space to maladaptive coping behaviours designed to address these demands. As such, the analysis of male rape as a loss of masculinity revealed important aspects of how survivors "operated" in their social world. In particular, the emergence of agency, safety, and control as needs and functions of masculinity is an important contribution of this thesis that brings together the male rape and masculinity literature. The need for agency reflected how men seek to deliberately influence their functioning and life circumstances (Bandura, 2006; p. 164); however, if sexual victimisation is viewed as a loss of masculinity, the psychological distress experienced forces men to find

alternative ways to exercise power over their lives, with male survivors entering a vicious cycle of self-blame and shame. Similarly, the loss of power as emasculating exposed vulnerabilities that men are expected to conceal and reject (Kia-Keating et al., 2005): male survivors' sense of unsafety leads them to seek solutions *within* the accepted parameters of masculinity, as demonstrated by the emergence of compensatory and aggressive behaviours across both studies. Finally, survivors' need to exercise control over their emotional turmoil reflected the prevalence of stoicism and emphasised norms of masculinity that dictate the simultaneous rejection and internalisation of non-conforming emotions (Moon, 2019; Jakupcak et al., 2005). Importantly, the psychological needs outlined in this thesis confirmed the relevance of examining the multi-layered impact of masculinity ideologies, which are: internalised by men *prior* to their victimisation; strengthened by the conflict between making sense of their victimisation and maintaining a sense of masculinity; and externally reinforced by encounters with other men that confirm and reinforce expectations and the appropriateness of the psychological demands experienced after the incidents.

From these theoretical considerations, important questions emerge around how to support male survivors in their post-abuse experiences. Given the saliency of masculinity in this thesis in key aspects of survivors' victimisation, it could be argued that the focus should be on developing male-informed interventions designed to address survivors' needs for agency, safety, and control. Early examples from the clinical literature suggest that men benefit from group therapies (Rabinowitz, 2005; Sharpe et al., 2001), particularly when focusing specifically on relational issues (Chouliara et al., 2020). Given the interpersonal nature of their traumatic experiences and the prevalence of issues with trust and isolation in this thesis and other studies (e.g. Easton, 2012), men can benefit from working with other male survivors to

normalise not only their victimisation, but also experiences of non-conforming emotions by developing a sense of camaraderie and shared experiences within these group settings (Scheinfeld et al., 2011). Additionally, individual interventions can focus on buffering and mitigating the harmful effects of specific masculine norms. Evidence suggest that, in individual settings, men benefit from one-to-one education on norms as they learn new ways to relate to others, leading to substantial improvements on their mental health (Beel et al., 2018). In the context of male survivors, individual therapy targeted at evaluating masculine norms not only could help to reduce specific symptoms (Wong et al., 2017), but also to engage survivors in reconsidering and re-evaluating how they understand their victimisation. Given how prominent the processes of rationalising and making sense were in the accounts across both studies, the findings of this thesis provide the foundation to explore male-informed interventions designed to support men with the necessary tools to view their victimisation outside of the rigid parameters of traditional masculinity. Indeed, both survivors and services providers emphasised how tailored support could significantly improve engagement in and success of therapeutic programme.

It is important to acknowledge that the therapeutic recommendations presented above were substantially informed by discussions with service providers in Study 1, who, whilst discussing the benefits of implementing strategies tailored to meet survivors' individual and male-specific needs, were often concerned with the rising number of men entering their agencies. These concerns were motivated by the limited resources currently provided to male-oriented organisations. Clearly, underfunded services struggle to meet the needs of their clients, particularly if they require structured therapeutic plans. Therefore, it is recognised that the recommendations provided in this section, and indeed throughout this thesis, are to be seen in the

context of a depleted sector, which desperately needs more resources to fund their services. Additionally, given how presently only few services are equipped and trained to effectively support male survivors in the UK, funding streams must also be directed towards training other mental health services, as well as creating new organisations and entry points capable of responding to the welcomed, yet demanding, renewed social awareness that encourages men to seek help for sexual trauma.

6.2.2. Recognising male rape mythology

A related yet distinct component of the analysis on male rape within this thesis was rape mythology. The findings largely confirmed the established notion that rape myths serve the function of delegitimising the experiences of victims, casting doubt over their experiences, and exonerating the actions of the perpetrators by scrutinising the behaviours of victims during the incident (Gerger et al., 2007). However, the consistent reference to traditional rape myths in this thesis emphasised the distinct ways in which myths are applied to male and female rape survivors and implied a transition from traditional to male rape mythology (Hine et al., 2021), as evidenced here by the use of gender norms, narratives, and expectations. For example, traditional narratives on prior consensual activities or lack of overt resistance used against women (Grubb & Turner, 2012) are used against male survivors to blame their failure to meet masculine norms around assumptions of, or beliefs about, invulnerability (Mahalik, Good et al., 2003). Notably, the experiences reported in this thesis raise questions around the prevalence of these blame-allocation processes not only within the public, but also across mental health services and the CJS (Abdullah-Khan, 2008). However, it is important to acknowledge the need for future research that empirically assesses whether myths and stereotypes on male rape are as prevalent in voluntary and criminal justice agencies as suggested by the accounts in this thesis. Nevertheless,

the predominance of male rape mythology in the accounts of Studies 1 and 2 call for a closer examination of the aetiology of male-specific myths, and the resulting therapeutic and societal implications.

6.2.2.1. Understanding the aetiology of male-rape-myths

Among the traditional rape narratives examined, the triadic conceptualisation of victim blaming discussed by Ben-David and Schneider (2005) was supported. Namely that, similarly to female victims, participants' accounts echoed findings which portrayed male survivors as masochists who want to be abused (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996), and who precipitate and lie about the incident (Turchik & Edwards, 2012) (as discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.3.1.3, pp 216-217). Taken together, the experiences that emerged in this thesis support the existence of what has been called the "authentic rape" belief (Du Mont et al., 2003), where sexual offences are questioned when not fitting the established stranger rape scenario. Importantly, participants encountered authenticity narratives across a variety of settings, with damaging implications in terms of recognition, disclosure, and engagement with the CJS. However, traditional authentic rape narratives appeared to be used differently in explaining female and male sexual violence. For female victims, authentic rape beliefs incorporate traditional rape mythology (masochism, precipitation, and fabrication) to rationalise and justify female rape. Contrastingly, while rationalising and governing what is considered legitimate and realistic, authenticity narratives were used to dismiss and ignore the existence of male rape. This is a crucial difference between female and male rape mythology, in which one justifies sexual aggression against women while the other denies the existence of violence against men or portrays it as unnatural and limited to a small subsection of the male population. Underpinning the difference between female and male-rape-myths are feminist paradigms that shape the gendered

narratives presented in this thesis, which suggest the existence of a *feminist “authentic rape” belief*, dictating how and why rape exclusively concerns women (Cohen, 2014; Fisher & Pina, 2013), is only perpetrated by men (Graham, 2006; Mezey & King, 1992), and causes the invisibility of male rape discussed by survivors in Study 2.

By understanding how traditional rape mythology may have contributed to the development and existence of male-rape-myths, it was possible to conduct an informed examination of the specific narratives that exist for male survivors. Crucially, whilst the functions of male-rape-myths observed in this thesis are largely in line with the existing literature (Chapleau et al., 2008; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Turchik & Edwards, 2012), the evidence and accounts presented suggest the need to re-examine and re-evaluate what the most salient male rape narratives are. Reconsidering the origins of male-rape-myths is essential to understand the underlying narratives shaping the stigma and disbelief that surrounded participants’ experiences. Specifically, findings from both studies suggested the predominance of two narratives: the real-men-myth and the gay-rape-myth. These myths have been previously associated with denial (‘real men cannot be raped’, ‘male survivors are not real men’) and sexualisation (‘male victims must be gay’, ‘male rapists are homosexually motivated’) of male rape (Gonsoriek, 1994; Mezey & King, 1989; Stermac et al., 2004). The present research strengthens the notion that, similarly to female stereotypes, male-rape-myths serve the function of minimising and delegitimising the experiences of men (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Interestingly, other commonly reported myths described in Chapter 2 (section 2.6.3) were not explicitly discussed by the participants in this research, including minimisation of trauma and victim-masochism. Instead, these narratives were often explained by participants in relation to the two predominant narratives of masculinity and sexuality. For example,

participants described the minimisation of trauma as a function of the real-men-myth, by which functioning men are expected to be less affected by the consequences of being sexually assaulted. Similarly, the gay-rape-myth was experienced by participants in encounters with the public who linked homosexuality with hedonism, leading to examples of victim-masochism beliefs.

Therefore, the findings of this thesis call for reframing the aetiology of male-rape-myths by reconsidering the influence of some essentialist feminist narratives which circumscribe rape as a female-only problem and all men as rapists (Bryden & Madore, 2015). These narratives, in conjunction with traditional masculinity and homophobia, lead to what could be described as two superordinate myths of real-men and gay-rape myths. Parallels can be drawn with recent quantitative findings from Hine and colleagues (2021), where an exploratory factor analysis of the items of their male-rape-myth scale MRMAS revealed a two-factor structure on blame (“real men cannot be raped”) and minimisation/exoneration (e.g., “male rape is a homosexual act”). Based on this similarity, it could be cautiously argued that the saliency of these two narratives in survivors’ and providers’ accounts reflects broader social attitudes, whereby stereotypes on male rape cluster around judgements on masculinity and sexuality. The identification of these narratives is an important contribution of this thesis to the literature on rape mythology, whereby male rape authenticity is routinely discussed according to how ‘well’ survivors meet masculinity norms and standards (Ellis et al., 2020; Kia-Keating et al., 2005; Sorsoli et al., 2008; Walker, Archer, & Lowe, 2005), and maintain a stereotypically heterosexual persona (King et al., 2020). Indeed, by contextualising the qualitative findings from “expert” voices (victims and practitioners) as indicative of widely held beliefs (as found in Hine et al., 2021), the theoretical implications discussed in this thesis provide a basis to expand on

established constructs in the sexual violence literature (rape myths) and inform therapeutic interventions, as discussed below.

6.2.2.2. Challenging the culture of male rape: therapeutic and societal implications

These research findings on rape myths are not only of interest academically, but also in terms of therapeutic interventions. Indeed, given the close relationship between male norms and rape mythology in questioning victims for not adhering to their gender roles and standards (Turchik & Edwards, 2012), participants' experiences were far more internalised than previously anticipated. In other words, whilst survivors encountered male-rape-myths in the public, services, and the police, the recurring theme across both studies was that men self-perpetuate and inflict traditional and male-rape myths, causing them significant psychological confusion and distress. As discussed in the previous section, masculinity and sexuality norms are deeply engrained in the psychology of men, as demonstrated in the accounts of both heterosexual and gay male survivors. Additionally, these narratives and beliefs proved to be key therapeutic challenges for the service providers in Study 1. Crucially, the findings of this thesis emphasise that education on rape mythology should be an important component of any therapeutic interventions for male survivors. By focusing on enhancing survivors' own understanding of both traditional and male-rape-myths, it is possible to help survivors understand why such narratives exist, how these myths often relate to internalised beliefs on invulnerability and heteronormativity (e.g., Mahalik, Locke et al., 2003; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), and the psychological consequences of using stereotypes to rationalise their experiences of violence. Importantly, as mentioned in the previous section (6.2.2.), a targeted intervention on male specific needs, such as education on rape mythology, in both group and/or one-

to-one settings is the type of male-informed intervention that can challenge survivors' pre-conceptions and assumptions through therapy that is customised and adapted to their masculine needs (Beel et al., 2018).

Addressing how men view themselves is clearly an important step towards helping them in their journeys to recognition and acceptance of their victimisation. Indeed, survivors often seemed to feel empowered from challenging and questioning how society viewed them. However, both survivors and providers were certain that, to bring "male rape out of the closet" (Javaid, 2016a), it is necessary to break down the social stigma that currently surrounds male rape. Breaking down stigma that is deeply rooted in gender norms and homophobia is evidently a challenging and long-term objective. However, recent evidence on the decline of traditional rape myth acceptance (Byrne et al., 2021; Thelan & Meadows, 2021), and the progress made in engaging younger generations in discussing and applying gender and sexuality inclusivity in educational settings (McCormack 2011, 2013), provides a reason to look to the future with optimism. It is therefore essential to learn from the progress made in these other related areas and implement the same targeted strategies for male rape. For example, by raising awareness on male rape, male-rape-myths, and male mental health within schools, colleges, and universities, it would be possible to teach younger generations to challenge and dispel myths related to sexuality and masculinity. These efforts would be directed towards educating future generations about the seriousness of sexual violence, regardless of the gender and sexuality of those involved. It would encourage the consideration of interpersonal violence outside of societal scripts and norms and shift the focus to meaningful issues around consent and inclusivity. Additionally, education on male-rape-myths would be especially beneficial for male survivors if it meant that they were in a more accepting society. Crucially, such focus

on male rape should not come at the detriment of the resourcing and financing of female services. On the contrary, it is recommended, and hoped, that support and incentives to educate the public is proportional to the increasing number of victims of sexual violence coming forward in the UK.

Underpinning the theoretical and therapeutic considerations discussed so far (6.2.1., 6.2.2.) is the uneasy relationship between male rape research and feminism (Cohen, 2014; Javaid, 2016a; Pretorius, 2009). Indeed the analyses of masculinity ideologies, hegemonic masculinities, and rape mythology are founded in key feminist concepts of gender relations (e.g. Cockburn, 2010), power inequalities (e.g. Kerner, 2017), and social hierarchies (e.g. Hearn, 2004). Given the extent to which feminist concepts and paradigms have proved to be instrumental in the analyses of this thesis, the relationship between male rape, masculinity theories, and feminism must be examined in further detail.

6.2.3. Male-on-male Rape, Masculinity and Feminism

Clearly, trying to make sense of the relationship between male rape, masculinity, and feminism is a complex task. Masculinity theorists have accused feminist authors of essentialism when describing that all men actively contribute to the gender inequalities in society (e.g., Dawson, 2013; Roper & Tosh, 1991); feminist authors have accused masculinity theorists of overlooking and generalising all feminist discourse, wilfully ignoring the different schools of thoughts within, to serve their own narratives (e.g., Robinson, 2003). In bringing together the findings of this thesis, questions arise on how feminism and masculinity theories have contributed to the phenomenological analyses presented in Chapters 4 and 5. For example, the claim that the stigma and dismissal of male rape is in part due to the feminist characterisation of rape as a solely female issue (Fisher & Pina, 2013), where rape is understood as the consequence of

the existence of a patriarchal society that sees men hating women and exercising power over them through sexual violence (Brownmiller, 1975; Lisak, 1991; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Posadas, 2017) has been often used in this thesis. As noted by Cohen (2014), feminism, in the male rape literature, has become a convenient culprit for the question of who is to blame for the injustices suffered by male victims. In his work, Cohen went on to remove these preconceptions and attempted to present male rape as a feminist issue. However, in the accounts presented in this thesis, the existence of a conflict between feminism and male rape survivors, and its advocates, was in part confirmed and observed. Indeed, male survivors often reported a distaste and rejection of feminist narratives: yet participants never provided detailed explanations for their resentment towards feminism, other than the ‘female-only issue’ and ‘all men are rapists’ narratives encountered with the public and within feminist sexual violence support services. Similarly, service providers’ accounts emphasised what appeared to be an on-going conflict between services in terms of funding, though no participant in Study 1 wanted to defund female services or redirect sources to male agencies. On the contrary, they seemed to suggest that there is a one-way conflict, with male services at the receiving end of female services’ hostility, as if they were taking away resources from female victims. Participants in this study repeatedly asked only for equal access to resources compared to female services, in order to cater to the rapidly increasing number of service users accessing their organisations. Importantly, these challenges reflect broader issues with supporting men, with arguments from the domestic violence sector calling for more tailored provision, separate support for men and women, and proportionate funding (Hine et al., 2019).

In examining and reviewing the findings of the thesis and the theoretical implications discussed in this chapter, the push for rejecting feminism’s contribution is

evidently counterproductive, given the influence it had on shaping the analysis and discussions of theories of masculinities and rape mythology, not only in this research, but across the male rape literature. For example, accepting the existence of an internalised masculinity belief system that is externally reinforced by other men, who dictate social hierarchies that distinguish between dominant and subordinate men, is precisely the discourse of feminism, in which hostility is explained and presented as socially constructed in the form of a masculine patriarchy (Manne, 2017; Richardson-Self, 2018). Moreover, the importance of traditional rape mythology in examining the experiences of male survivors further demonstrated that by engaging with feminist paradigms in the analysis of male rape, it is possible to critically examine the structures behind the hostility and stigma experienced by male survivors. As such, there is an opportunity to carefully examine how to bring together theoretical discourse on male rape, grounded in feminist traditions on power and inequalities (Kerner, 2017), and the real-life experiences from survivors and providers, who are at odds with certain essentialist narratives.

One possible solution would be to move away from Cohen's (2014) argument that male rape is a feminist issue. Whilst being concerned about sexual violence and sexual victimisation regardless of the gender of the victim should be the overall objective of research and policy, the evidence presented in this thesis suggests that gender is still a pervasive and valid construct through which we see the world (Addis & Cohane, 2005). Indeed, the findings clearly revealed the need to specifically focus on further examining the uniqueness of male rape because of the critical barriers to access reinforced by stigma and hostility discussed throughout this thesis. In turn, male rape authors and advocates have a responsibility and need to play their part in resolving this conflict between male rape and feminism, especially when the literature

has historically created this divide. This is not to accept essentialist feminist positions where all men are viewed as potential rapists, as it creates connotations to men which are detrimental to male survivors' ability to be recognised as legitimate victims, as well as rationalising their own abuse. On the contrary, this thesis demonstrated that only by acknowledging the influence of feminism in its entirety, male rape research can truly address the injustices experienced by male survivors.

This thesis is an invitation to male rape researchers to follow a nuanced approach to feminism, which can be found in the philosophical tradition of *Feminist Pragmatism*. Drawing from both feminist and pragmatist theories, this position is mainly concerned with expanding philosophical thought through social action and lived experiences (Whipps, 2004). Importantly, feminist-pragmatism emphasises the need to reject and reframe dualisms as it results in the denigration of one position by the other. Indeed, feminist-pragmatism stresses how dualisms and false distinctions are at the root of philosophical approaches that are incapable of comprehensively explaining and discussing the gendered experiences that distinguish existence in the social world (Fisher, 2016; Massumi, 2002). Dewey (1929) defines dualisms as false axiological bifurcation which erroneously create oppositional constructs, with one valued over the other. As such, it could be argued that, historically, rape discourse has created gendered implications, with false narratives in which all men are perpetrators and only women are victims. Thus, by taking a pragmatist understanding of dualisms, it is possible to critically examine this traditional juxtaposition. In practical terms, by reframing male rape research to holistically investigate the phenomenon through discussions of masculinity, homophobia, and feminism, it is possible to move closer to the lived experiences of survivors of rape and provide more truthful analyses and representation of the accounts of men.

6.3. Limitations of the thesis and future research directions

The long-standing critique of the lack of transferability of qualitative research methods (Ballinger, 2004) inevitably applies to the findings presented in this thesis. Despite the detailed and meticulous methodological considerations that were implemented throughout designing the studies, recruiting participants, analysing their accounts, and discussing emerging themes, it is acknowledged that, as with most humanistic research, the findings of this thesis should be treated with caution and considered within the parameters of the unique samples recruited. However, given the purposive approach to sampling (H. R. Bernard, 2006) and the desire to provide a truthful and meaningful account of participants' interpretations, the inherent value of addressing the topic through qualitative methods should not be underestimated. Indeed, thanks to its phenomenological design, it was possible to provide and present an experiential account of the phenomenon of male rape from the perspectives of the participants who, directly and indirectly, gave a personal, idiographic answer to the research questions of interest in the current scope of the male rape literature. Nevertheless, despite the invaluable accounts gathered and the significant contributions of this thesis, a number of limitations will be explored below with future research directions discussed.

6.3.1. Use of IPA in this thesis

Firstly, it is important to consider the inherent limitations of IPA as a method of qualitative analysis. Critics of IPA have routinely pointed at its insufficient recognition of the role of language, the extent to which the methodology only captures opinions of the subject of interest, and its failure to account for causality of participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon (Tuffour, 2017; Willig, 2013). Whilst the methodology

was constructed on robust philosophical, ontological, and epistemological foundations, questions on language, validity, and causality have to be considered.

IPA methods are not specifically concerned with the analysis of language as much as other methodologies (e.g., discourse or conversational analysis) because it is recognised that the construction of meaning occurs within the context of the narratives, accounts and metaphors used by participants, whereby language is a vehicle for this process. For example, in this thesis, issues with labelling (e.g., victim versus survivor) and terminology (e.g., legal definitions of rape) were explored by following hermeneutic principles on circularity (Chapter 3, section 3.4.2.), where each element of the text was understood in the context in which it was retrieved. In this sense, participants' language was not the object of study, but rather the means to which experiences with the topic were accessed.

IPA, like most qualitative methods (Tacq, 2010), is not immune to criticism on its ability to interpret causality (Tuffour, 2017). Namely, that qualitative methods are subjective assertions that are not supported by scientific methods (Ballinger, 2006), and as such are incapable of identifying patterns and relationships between phenomena in the world. These criticisms have been carefully examined throughout the thesis, as detailed in the methodology chapter (3). Moreover, issues around causality were addressed in part with the sampling strategy and the research questions formulated prior to data collection. By building knowledge from robust theoretical foundations, purposive sampling, and interrogating participants on key areas of interest, the hermeneutic and idiographic process of interpreting meaning and opinions allowed for causal explanations that closely and truthfully followed the individual accounts and subsequently placed them within the contexts in which experiences occurred. Simply put, causality is not an expected outcome of IPA, yet

the findings of the present thesis provide a comprehensive and detailed explanation as to how participants understood the phenomenon of male rape. Furthermore, if the phenomenon is understood as the cause of the lived experiences, the decision of following an IPA framework reflects the research interest of investigating the real-life consequences of being a male survivor of rape. Nevertheless, given the dearth of research on male rape, it is vital that the findings of this thesis are replicated or challenged by future studies to further knowledge and address the many unanswered questions in this area. This is an invitation to expand on the research questions of this thesis by conducting studies with other valid and reliable methods of qualitative analysis (e.g., grounded theory, (auto)ethnography, focus groups).

6.3.2. Lack of racial and ethnic diversity

Across both samples in Study 1 and 2, only one out of seven participants in the research identified as not being from a White ethnic background (either British or Irish). As the thesis's objective was to provide an experiential account of the phenomenon, it is acknowledged that the lived experiences presented in this thesis will be limited to a specific ethnicity. This is an important consideration in the context of appreciating that ethnic/cultural background will affect how sexual violence is experienced, both for service providers, who may view therapeutic interventions and challenges differently, and survivors, who may experience specific psychological needs related to their culture of origin. Despite recent academic efforts to reconsider and explicitly discuss diversity within original interpersonal violence research (Bent-Goodley, 2021), the focus of the literature on sexual violence, especially in relation to male victims, appears to be predominantly focused on White participants: a gap in the literature that this thesis was not able to address. However, it should be noted that homogeneity of the samples was not sought after. Indeed, the parameters and criteria set out for the

studies did not limit participation on the basis of race or ethnicity, but rather focused on their level and type of expertise (Study 1) and other demographic (i.e., age at the time of the incident) and contextual (access to services and reporting) information (Study 2). A possible explanation for the predominance of white participants in the sample of both studies could be that white individuals represent the majority of healthcare providers in the UK (Home Office, 2021) and that male survivors from non-white ethnic backgrounds encounter additional barriers to access therapeutic support services (Memon et al., 2016), where most of the participants for Study 2 were recruited. Therefore, the themes that emerged in this research, particularly around masculinity, homophobia, and rape mythology, must be used as the starting point to investigate how diversity affects the experiences of male survivors and service providers. Put simply, re-examining male rape through the lenses of diversity would be a further step towards inclusivity and acceptance of this widely misunderstood and overlooked phenomenon.

6.3.3. Childhood and adult male rape experiences

The findings presented in this thesis at times contained overlap between childhood and adult male rape experiences. This is an important methodological limitation, given the substantial differences in terms of psychological and developmental trauma that emerged from the studies. For example, the recruitment criteria in Study 1 did not account for the fact that service providers would have overlapping experiences with a vast, heterogenous male clientele. Moreover, by recruiting male survivors of rape and sexual abuse from the age of 13 in Study 2, whilst being at the legal age for consent at the time of the abuse (Sexual Offences Act, 2003), the findings of this study incorporated experiences of adolescent and adult male survivors, which, to an extent, affect the robustness of the psychological journeys described in this study. Originally,

this thesis was primarily interested in the experiences of male survivors of adult rape and sexual abuse, a group that is critically underrepresented in sexual violence research (Easton et al., 2014). However, service providers in Study 1 clearly stated that, despite the growing number of adult victims requiring support, the majority of men who accessed their organisations were victims of childhood sexual abuse. Moreover, it should also be acknowledged that the experiences of gendered narratives, myths, and encounters with services and the police did not significantly differ, suggesting that male survivors' experiences were situated within the same culture of denial and stigma, regardless of age differences. This shared social environment was also described by participants in terms of male rape invisibility, indicating that the findings of these studies still provide a truthful reflection of participants' lived experiences. Nevertheless, given the importance of understanding the experiences of adult male survivors in more detail, future research should specifically focus not only on developing recruitment criteria that distinguish samples per age of the incident to verify the shared social environment explored in this thesis, but also to investigate whether age-differences significantly influence cognitive, behavioural, and emotional domains of the male rape phenomenon. This thesis provides a first step towards understanding such differences, but further research is clearly needed.

6.4. Reflexivity and personal development

When bringing forward the findings and conclusions of this thesis, it is once again important to provide the reader with a reflexive account, "a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself" (Macbeth, 2001: p.35). Grounded in feminist paradigms and traditions, reflexivity rejects positivist canons on impartiality and objectivity, and favours an intersubjective view of the world (England, 1994). For the

aims and objectives of this thesis, intersubjectivity applies to how we treat participants, not just as “mines of information” (England, 1994: p. 243), but as people. Similarly, in accepting the subjective reality of the subjects of this thesis, it is useful to provide insight into the person who brought together the literature, the methods, and empirical components of this thesis. Earlier in this thesis, I presented a reflexive account of my positionality in relation to the topic and to the participants I have interviewed during this programme of studies (Chapter 3, section 3.5.5). In this, I spoke about acknowledging my insider-outsider position (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) and how it was an important step towards understanding my space and role in this thesis. Naively, perhaps, I took for granted that as the principal researcher and author of this thesis, I would *own* the data collected and analysed. I instead came to realise that these unconscious attitudes hindered my ability to truly understand the meaning of conducting phenomenological research, as I was not actively reflecting on how my preconceptions would influence and impact the analysis. However, when reading about *bracketing out* in phenomenology (Gearing, 2004) and the importance of acknowledging or withholding pre-conceptions, I realised that as a researcher I could only occupy the space between participants and their experiences. My role was to give form to, and make sense of, how others made sense of their experiences and present these accounts in a coherent and accessible manner. In other words, the moment I appreciated that meaning is made rather than found (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), I was able to truly understand how the process of deconstruction in J. A. Smith et al.’s (2009) double-hermeneutics meant that this thesis would also be a reflection of my personal development. As I tried to deconstruct how participants’ knowledge was contaminated by their preconceptions, I was also exploring and making sense of how my own beliefs and attitudes were involved in the analysis. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to

reflect on the last three years of my journey as a doctoral researcher, interested in accessing the lived experiences of men affected by rape and sexual abuse. By providing a reflexive account, I wish to invite the reader to consider how my emotional state throughout this journey might have shaped this thesis, in an attempt to provide a more honest and transparent account of the data collection, analysis, and discussion.

Describing my initial approach to conducting research at doctoral level as naïve would be a fair assessment. As previously discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.5.3.), I did not fully understand the magnitude and scope of the task ahead, I was overly confident in my abilities, and I underestimated how challenging conducting qualitative research would be. In my undergraduate and post-graduate studies, I had exclusively focused on quantitative research, favouring generalisability as the only desirable scientific outcome, thus overlooking, and dismissing the utility of in-depth qualitative research. However, after developing the research aims, objectives, and questions, I started examining alternatives to large scale quantitative examinations and was soon convinced that qualitative methods would suit the objectives of this programme. I remember feeling equipped and skilled enough to interview vulnerable individuals on sensitive topics. Unsurprisingly, my research weaknesses became immediately apparent after my first data collection day in Brighton (April 2019). I had the opportunity to watch one of the supervisors in this project interview two participants and take notes on how to maintain the participants' focus on the questions of interest, whilst allowing them to explore other areas they found of interest. Following this and having taken learning from these opportunities, I felt prepared going into the following interviews as the lead researcher. However, my first two experiences of interviewing service providers left me feeling embarrassed and mortified. All the confidence and certainties

around my abilities to conduct qualitative research were crushed by an overwhelming sense of incompetence and inadequacy. I clearly remember even feeling something close to resentment towards those two participants, asking myself why they would not give me the exhaustive and detailed answers I was looking for. In truth, the frustration I felt following the interviews were less about the quality of the interviews and more indicative of how much I felt as an impostor. Retrospectively, I sincerely believe that the evening following these interviews was one of the lowest points in my doctoral journey. I felt as if I had failed myself, the participants, and the supervisors of this project.

Immediately after the interviews I had in-depth discussions with the supervisory team about how I could build on these first interviews. Importantly, these first interviews represented some of the most important and humbling learning experiences of the last three years. I also realised how invested I was in the success of this project, for my concerns and anxieties were motivated by a desire to gather data of sufficient quality and to make a meaningful contribution to the field. These motivations pushed me to immediately develop an understanding of important qualitative techniques that served me well in later interviews with service providers, as well as in the subsequent phases of the overall project. The next day, I forced myself to listen back to the interviews, a painful process of re-living my mistakes (e.g., interrupting participants, narrow and close-ended questions, not following up on key points), which helped me identify weaknesses and solutions. This immediate assessment was also important in understanding how I could really place participants at the centre of the research process. I realised that, besides considering methodological and ethical practices to be implemented before undertaking sensitive research (McCocker et al., 2001), I had to give specific attention to the ways in which

participants spoke about their experiences, in a process of actively listening to their silence (Poland & Pederson, 1998) and empathically facilitating their story telling.

By the end of the first year of my doctorate (September 2019), I had conducted twelve qualitative interviews. I had gained invaluable experience and knowledge that would substantially inform and facilitate the second phase of the thesis as I started planning for the recruitment of male rape survivors. However, my confidence as a qualitative researcher was further tested by the daunting task of transcribing verbatim over 12 hours of interviews, which resulted in over 425 pages of information to be analysed. The process of transcription was extremely laborious and, I must admit, at times tedious. However, transcribing also helped me to get “closer” to participants’ experiences and constituted the very first step in the phenomenological analysis, which took over three months. Indeed, transcribing and analysing were not just a research procedure of my study, but also a crucial moment of personal reflection as I attempted to further understand how I was contributing to the generation of knowledge. By listening and transforming service providers’ accounts into annotations, codes, and preliminary themes, I was developing an intimate relationship with the data, finally understanding what “making sense”, finding meaning, and interpreting others’ interpretation really meant. Indeed, whilst I endeavoured to remove myself from the interpretative processes, I had to acknowledge the extent to which my personal circumstances, experiences, and individual differences were shaping how I understood the data. Indeed, how I viewed and understood masculinity would inevitably influence the recurrent discussions of this construct that took place in this study. By reflexively acknowledging how my values were shaping the analysis, I was able to estimate how much I was contributing to the annotations (Howitt, 2016) in an

iterative process designed to provide a more honest and transparent account of participants' experiences.

A major theme of feminist research is that power dynamics shape the interactions between individuals (Kerner, 2017). As such researchers must acknowledge these dynamics between researcher and researched, with some implicitly demanding that researchers address and equalise power differentials (Wolf, 1996). I found myself in a very peculiar position in Study 1 as during the research processes, despite being the lead investigator, posing questions and interrogating the accounts collected, I felt at an inferior level in relation to the participants. Such feelings reflected the notions of being an outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) as my lack of personal experiences of trauma and service provision constituted (for me) a barrier between myself and the participant. I did not feel as if I knew more about the topic and was quick to acknowledge that service providers were the experts of the research and that I had the role of presenting their expertise coherently and effectively to a wider audience. Acknowledging these power dynamics facilitated the process of analysing the data, as I endeavoured to make sense of my preconceptions on male rape through the accounts of the participants, who helped me to concretely understand what masculinity, stigma, and stereotypes mean in the lives of their clients. This pushed me to consider how these macro-themes affected me personally, which ultimately brought me closer to providers' lived experiences and prepared me to interview male survivors by considering how I could withhold my preconceptions and assumptions on the phenomenon. Put simply, I understood the part played by both myself and participants in generating knowledge and how to best manage and negotiate between these power dynamics.

The conclusion of Study 1 coincided with the introduction of social distancing restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. As discussed in previous chapters (see sections 3.6.2, 5.2.1.), these restrictions significantly changed important elements of my thesis, including ethical and methodological considerations. Most importantly, it meant that all interviews discussed in Study 2 were conducted on video-based platforms. This meant that the rapport building process was significantly different compared to Study 1. Each organisation would put me in contact with the clients who showed interest, leaving me to engage in brief conversation via email on the nature of the study. This was a crucial aspect of building rapport with participants, as I presented my project and objective and made sure they would come into the study feeling as safe as possible. The experience of “meeting” participants online was peculiar, as the online setting created a unique dynamic in which both the participant and I were physically separated. On the other hand, the fact that we were in the comfort of our own homes meant that the interviews took place in a more private and confidential setting, something that could never be achieved if we were to meet face-to-face. My initial concerns on the quality of the interviews and data collected via online platforms turned out to be unfounded, with participants feeling at ease and engaging proactively in the discussion. For example, I would try to build rapport by acknowledging that video interviews were not the norm in research and asking their opinion on this new format. Participants often reported how much easier it was for them to take part in these projects remotely, with digital platforms giving them power and control over the process. Retrospectively, I think that the possibility of conducting this study remotely positively affected survivors’ willingness to participate and to provide exhaustive accounts of their experiences. As I am developing new studies to expand on the findings of this thesis, I am committed to provide participants with the

opportunity to be interviewed remotely as it provides a safer, more confidential, and private environment to discuss and explore the traumatic experiences of victims of sexual violence.

Despite benefitting from conducting the interviews remotely for Study 2, meeting male survivors, even in remote ways, was one of the most challenging aspects of this research programme. Whilst counting myself lucky to meet and talk with male survivors who were very talkative and saw taking part in this research as an important opportunity to raise awareness and break their silence, some of the stories I heard in this Study were tragic and extremely distressing. Participants often went into great detail in reporting the exact event of their abuse, specifically describing the incident, as if to make sure I would understand the gravity of their victimisation. I soon realised, therefore, that my role in the interview process was not just of the researcher investigating the participant's experiences. On the contrary, I often had the impression that I was seen almost as a gateway to disclosure, and I felt responsible to provide a sympathetic and empathic ear to their sorrow. Indeed, participants were often frustrated, scared, angry, and distressed. Undeniably and unsurprisingly, I was emotionally affected by the accounts of participants. I almost felt scared when Michael talked about how his abusers used dogs against him to scare him into engaging in sexual activities with them; I felt guilt when Sorel started crying after disclosing how he only realised his victimisation when his daughter was raped in college. I remember how after a particularly tough interview with John, who was around my age at the time of the interview, I wrote down in my diary *'I met so many men who had the same experiences as John and that 30 years later are still struggling with the same problems he is facing now'*. That realisation was difficult to digest as I found myself asking *'Is there any hope for these men? Are they ever going to recover? Did anything good*

come from talking to me?'. I wanted to give them answers when they asked me "Why did they do this to me, why did this happen?", but I knew I had no answers, and I realised that even if I did, it was not my place to provide them. The central challenge identified here was maintaining the boundaries between myself and the participants: as much as I wanted to understand and be an insider, I needed to keep the necessary distance and make sure that I was not seen as more than an interested and sympathetic listener for the success and quality of the project, the wellbeing of participants, and my own safety.

My resolve to maintain these boundaries was tested towards the end of the data collection of Study 2. As mentioned in Chapter 5 (section 5.2.1.) one male survivor did not complete his interview and was not included in the subsequent analysis. Angel (an alias) discussed his recent suicidal ideations and disclosed fears around acting on these thoughts. I terminated the interview (with his consent) and dedicated the debriefing time to discuss possible avenues and/or resources he could access. The ten minutes that followed were extremely challenging. I was seriously concerned about his safety and was worried about saying something that could trigger further emotional distress. I then had to make a decision around breaking confidentiality. I followed the established protocol and discussed my options with the supervisors and a representative of the university¹¹. For confidentiality reasons my only form of contact was an email address, and nothing more. Therefore, I got in touch with Angel to communicate my concerns around his wellbeing, stressing that I would be happy to contact support organisations on his behalf if he wanted. I followed the

¹¹ As detailed in the University of West London *Research Integrity Code of Practice* 2018, section 4.5. "Research involving human participants, human material, or personal data", p. 7: "Researchers must report to their line-manager any concern they might have regarding unreasonable risk or harm to human participants in a study". <https://www.uwl.ac.uk/sites/uwl/files/2021-03/Research%20Integrity%20Code%20of%20Practice%20January%202021%20reviewed.pdf>

protocol, and yet, I felt extremely powerless and distressed. For the next few days (and even weeks) I was worried about Angel, that he had acted upon those feelings, and hurt himself. Angel never replied, and at the time of writing, I have not heard back from him since our interview. I still wonder if I should have done more, but I know that with the information available there is nothing else I can do. I have to accept my role as a researcher and not as a counsellor, or a service provider, and that in this role I am not trained to provide therapeutic guidance but can only inform and signpost participants to appropriate resources. Unsurprisingly, knowing this does not help with the feelings of guilt: something that, ironically, I noticed when analysing masculinity and self-blame in male survivors. I can only learn from these experiences and work harder to ensure that future participants are always informed when taking part in my research and that they have a support network available in case they need it.

I conclude this section by emphasising how Study 2 is undoubtedly the most important and rewarding work I have ever done in my life. Meeting such brave men, who laid their vulnerabilities plainly in front of me was simultaneously humbling and inspiring. The men presented in this thesis told stories of suffering and redemption, as they tried to make sense of the tragedies of their lives and managed to find new ways to break their silence and help other men in their journey to recovery. I am surprised at how much I learned about myself through the processes of interviewing and analysing participants' accounts, as I engaged in the well-known practice of bracketing out that is characteristic of phenomenological research. I believe that by taking part in my research, providers and survivors gave me the opportunity to gain an insider perspective into their lives, something that I learned to value and cherish. Therefore, it is my sincere hope that this thesis will do justice to the strength and courage of the participants who took part in this project and lay the foundations for future research

that goes beyond academic circles and provides concrete solutions to the many questions and challenges that are still left to be addressed. As I end this doctoral journey, I take responsibility and embrace the questions that emerged in this thesis as an opportunity to embark in a new journey that gives space to those who have been voiceless and need to be heard.

6.5. Final Conclusions

The present thesis provided an in-depth, detailed, and contemporary account of the lived experiences of male rape survivors in the UK. Through a comprehensive analysis of the available literature, three key areas of interest were identified around i) the challenges experienced by men in recognising and disclosing their victimisation, ii) the internal and external barriers to access and for successful therapeutic care and iii) the involvement of the police and the Criminal Justice System. To investigate these areas, a series of qualitative studies were conducted with service providers from specialist organisations and male victims of rape and sexual abuse after the age of 13. Taking a phenomenological approach, the thesis endeavoured to make sense of how participants understood male rape, by examining and interrogating their experiences across cognitive, behavioural, and emotional domains. In doing so, the findings and themes that were identified in this body of research reflect the extent to which male rape is still a largely misunderstood and overlooked social issue, where stigma towards male mental health, homophobia, and essentialist feminist narratives have perpetuated the socio-cultural denial of the existence and gravity of the experiences of sexual violence reported by the practitioners and the victims in this research.

Male survivors struggle with recognition and disclosure because of pressures around meeting masculine norms and expectations around resilience, invulnerability, and respectability (Mahalik, Good et al., 2003). Men have to negotiate between

external barriers related to restrictions on male emotionality (Moon, 2019, Jakupcak et al., 2005), and internal barriers related to negative self-evaluative emotions and exposing vulnerabilities (Kia-Keating et al., 2005). Clearly, a part of the challenges experienced by male survivors reflect broader cultural barriers on men's help-seeking (Addis & Mahalik, 2003), male mental health (Vogel et al., 2014), and homophobia (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016). The lived experiences of survivors also highlight the importance of therapeutic interventions that examine and acknowledge the multi-layered and interconnected barriers encountered by survivors. These efforts should be targeted towards survivors' understanding of masculine norms and stereotypes, as findings from this project emphasised the self-inflicting nature of male-rape-myths, and their negative impact on therapeutic progress, as observed by both providers and survivors. Underpinning these internal challenges were encounters of hostility, disbelief, and unawareness in the public, health services, and the police, which captured the essence of male rape as a hidden, invisible phenomenon (Das et al., 2020; Javaid, 2016b, 2018). Finally, participants across both studies confirmed the pervasiveness of traditional and male-specific rape mythology in the CJS (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Hine & Murphy, 2019; J. Shaw et al., 2017), with findings suggesting that men often experienced reporting as a secondary victimisation (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Clevenger & Navarro, 2021). Importantly, this thesis provides unique insight into survivors' case withdrawal, a process of safeguarding from further traumatisation caused by officers' behaviours. Given the critical levels of case retractions in the UK (Hohl & Stanko, 2015; Murphy et al., 2021), this thesis emphasise the role of officers in providing care and guidance to male victims, the need for trauma-informed interventions (Rich, 2019), and the need to support officers in fostering a supportive

and understanding environment that facilitates victim cooperation during investigative processes.

Drawing from the findings from Chapters 4 and 5, the thesis advances the knowledge on male-on-male rape by using theoretical consideration to develop specific therapeutic interventions. By examining the implications of reconsidering masculinity as a singular construct and tracing the aetiology of male rape mythology in essentialist feminist paradigms it was possible to understand the lived experiences presented in this research. Besides supporting previous arguments for the need for trauma-informed approaches across voluntary agencies (Reeves, 2015) and the CJS (Rich, 2019), the findings of the thesis point towards the need to re-examine, with male rape survivors, the psychological needs that are known to arise from men's adherence to traditional masculinity ideologies (Wong et al., 2017). Needs related to agency, safety, and control were linked to a series of unhealthy and compensatory behaviours designed to mitigate survivors' sense of loss and powerlessness following the abuse. Additionally, across both studies, male survivors' inclinations towards self-inflicting male-rape-myths to rationalise their victimisation emerged as causing further confusion and distress. As such, the close relationship between masculine needs, self-inflicted narratives, and coping mechanisms indicate that male survivors would benefit from targeted interventions that are: designed to make masculinity less salient (Wolfe & Levant, 2020), customised and adapted to their masculine needs (Beel et al., 2018), and focused on educating male survivors on the aetiology and consequences of ideologies, hegemonies, mythology, and non-conforming emotions. Importantly, these therapeutic implications, whilst applicable to other male populations, have not been tested specifically with male survivors. Clearly, further clinical research is urgently needed.

This thesis also considered the traditional assertion that feminism is inadvertently responsible for some of the stigma and disbelief around male rape (Cohen, 2014; Fisher & Pina, 2013; Graham, 2006; Mezey & King, 1992). The conflict between feminism and male rape is clearly relevant, particularly as male survivors in this study were exposed to essentialist narratives that viewed men as only perpetrators and denied their victimisation (Javaid, 2016a). Similarly, service providers specifically mentioned challenges and even hostility around funding male services that appeared to be caused by a public and political preference towards female-focused services. However, the usefulness and contribution of feminist paradigms in examining key themes such as masculinity and rape mythology within this thesis calls for the re-evaluation of the role of feminism by researchers and advocates who should strive to bridge this crucial divide. Therefore, it is proposed that a more constructive approach must be taken by viewing male rape through the lenses of feminist pragmatism, a philosophical tradition that rejects dualisms that create false ideological and philosophical positions (Whipps, 2004; Fischer, 2016; Massumi, 2002).

In conclusion, the present thesis emphasise how much research is still needed in the area of male sexual victimisation. The findings in this thesis represent a crucial step towards understanding the male experience of rape in terms of masculinity, trauma, and stereotypical and prejudicial narratives. By detailing and outlining how specific norms affect male survivors' psychological wellbeing, it is possible to develop appropriate and targeted therapeutic interventions. Moreover, by examining the victim experience with key entry points such as voluntary agencies and the CJS, this thesis gave insight into important areas that desperately need to be improved, to better cater for the specific needs of male victims. Importantly, the use of a phenomenological framework has allowed to "give voice" to a group that has been largely misunderstood

and belittled in our society. In fact, the underlying finding of this thesis is that men want their stories to be heard and are looking for new avenues to break their silence. This is reflective of broader societal issues with male mental health, homophobia, and the need to provide men with more avenues to express and disclose feeling and emotions of distress. In this sense, the findings of this thesis are aimed to help future research on male rape to explore and access the different voices within the male rape population. Indeed, it is only by taking responsibility and giving new spaces for men to tell their stories that we can really raise awareness on this modern social injustice.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Service Provider Interview Script – Study 1

NOTE: tissues, drinks, refreshments should be present

Introduction

Thank you so much for taking the time to be involved in this research. This area is one that has been largely neglected by the research community, so we are really grateful for you taking the time to take part and discuss your experiences in working with male victim-survivors. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we can take a break, and if there are any aspects of your work or experiences you don't wish to talk about, we don't have to. I would also like to remind you that you are completely entitled to close down the interview and remove yourself from the study at any point, without giving a reason why. None of what you discuss with us will be connected to [organisation name] unless you explicitly state you'd like that to be the case, and all data will remain confidential and anonymous.

Does all of this make sense?

We are really interested in placing you as the expert in this research... I have some questions to keep us headed in the right direction, but I hope you will feel able to do as much of the talking as you are happy to.

If you are ready, we will begin with some more general questions, then move on to some more specific questions thereafter, is that ok?

Initial rapport building

- So, we will start off by getting to know a bit about yourself, obviously the interviews will be completely anonymous and confidential, let's start with your name. Think of any old name you like, that isn't yours, that's what we will refer to you as.
- So (name), how old are you? What are your current circumstances (e.g., job, family as appropriate – survivors to advise).

Free Recall about Experiences (optional)

- Thank you for telling me a bit about yourself. Now I would like to ask whether you can tell me anything the experiences you have with working with male victim-survivors. This can be talking about the general nature of this work, or about specific experiences with clients. If you'd prefer not to take this approach, don't worry, I have questions we can start with instead

Beliefs, myths, and stereotypes

- Moving on, I'd like to hear any thoughts or stereotypes you might have, or that you think male victim-survivors and/or society have about the idea of a male victim-survivors. For example, what you believe or feel others believe, or have heard, about male-on-male rape or sexual violence and those involved. (Use this as a probe if needed: If you find this difficult it may be useful to think about what stereotypes you think "people" have). If there is anything you don't want to talk about, or if you want to take a break, move on, or come back to anything, please just let me know.

- Are there any other preconceptions, ideas, thoughts, or beliefs you think exist about male-on-male sexual violence/rape?
- How do you think most men would respond to a sexual attack?
(probe with: What do you think the most immediate priorities might be in these circumstances?)
- Some people think ABC and others think XYZ (opposites). You may think something completely different – can you share what that is.
 - How common did you think it was, prior to your experiences of working in this area?
 - Did you have any thoughts on what male-on-male sexual attacks would have been “like” prior to your experiences of working in this area... and how has your experience within this area changed your understanding of the nature of male-on-male sexual attacks?
(Probe with: any beliefs about where, how, it would have happened and between whom?)
 - Any thoughts on the “type” of person it may happen to?
 - Any thoughts on the type of people who may commit this type of crime?

Break

Experiences of, and challenges/barriers to, reporting

- So, we are now going to move onto male victim-survivors experiences of reporting/not reporting, if that’s ok? If you wish to skip any of the questions, take a break, move on, or come back to anything please just let me know.
 - So, after the incident, what do you think goes through victim-survivors minds in relation to who you tell and how?
 - What internal challenges did you think they have to negotiate (e.g., how do they decide to disclose and what, if any, feelings do you think they have about it)
 - If needed, probe with: did you have any fears about reporting the incident?
 - Do you identify any external challenges to disclosing the incident to any persons (e.g., friends) and any particular groups (e.g., the police) (probe with how you think the challenges make victim-survivors feel, how do they impact on what they do next?).

Break

- So, given your experiences, in what ways, if any, have your views changed about how men would or indeed should respond?
- What, if anything, do you think needs to change in this respect?
- What advice would you give to a man who experiences this type of crime?

Appendix II: Survivors Interview Script – Study 2

NOTE: tissues, drinks, refreshments should be present

Introduction

Thank you so much for taking the time to be involved in this research. This area is one that has been largely neglected by the research community, so we are really grateful for you taking the time to take part and discuss the issues around your experience. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we can take a break, and if there are any aspects of your experience you don't wish to talk about, we don't have to. I would also like to remind you that you are completely entitled to close down the interview and remove yourself from the study at any point, without giving a reason why. This includes the time after this interview has concluded, as you have the right to ask for your data to be removed from analysis also. I would also like to remind you that everything you discuss here is completely anonymous and confidential. The only circumstances in which confidentiality can be compromised, is if you disclose information which suggests that you pose an immediate risk of harm to yourself or to others. In such circumstances, I am obliged to report this information to your associated supporting organisation. Importantly, this does not include information relating to risk of harm which originates from another individual (e.g., if a participant discloses that they are still in a relationship within which they are still at risk). None of what you discuss with us will be connected to [organisation name] unless you explicitly state you'd like that to be the case, and all data will remain confidential and anonymous. Does all of this make sense?

We are really interested in placing you as the expert in this research... I have some questions to keep us headed in the right direction, but I hope you will feel able to do as much of the talking as you are happy to.

If you are ready, we will begin with some more general questions, then move on to some more specific questions thereafter, is that ok?

Initial rapport building

- So, we will start off by getting to know a bit about yourself, obviously the interviews will be completely anonymous and confidential, let's start with your name. Think of any old name you like, that isn't yours, that's what we will refer to you as.
- So (name), how old are you? What are your current circumstances (e.g., job, family as appropriate – survivors to advise).

Free Recall about Experiences (optional)

- Thank you for telling me a bit about yourself. Now I would like to ask whether you can tell me anything you'd like to about your experience. If you'd prefer not to take this approach, don't worry, I have questions we can start with instead

Beliefs, myths, and stereotypes

- Moving on, if you can cast your mind back, I'd like to hear any thoughts or stereotypes you might have had about the idea of a victim of a male-on-male sexual attack prior to your incident. For example, what you believed, thought, or had heard about male-on-male rape or sexual violence before. (Use this as a probe if needed: If you find this difficult it may be useful to think about what stereotypes you think "people" have). If there is anything you don't want to talk

about, or if you want to take a break, move on, or come back to anything, please just let me know.

- Are there any other preconceptions, ideas, thoughts, or beliefs you think exist about male-on-male sexual violence/rape?
- How did you think most men would respond to a sexual attack? (probe with: What do you think the most immediate priorities might be in these circumstances?)
- Some people think ABC and others think XYZ (opposites). You may think something completely different – can you share what that is.
 - o How common did you think it was, prior to your experience?
 - o Did you have any thoughts on what male-on-male sexual attacks would have been “like” (Probe with: any beliefs about where, how, it would have happened and between whom?)
 - o Any thoughts on the “type” of person it may happen to?
 - o Any thoughts on the type of people who may commit this type of crime?

Break

Experiences of, and challenges/barriers to, reporting

- So, we are now going to move onto your experience of reporting/not reporting, if that's ok? If you wish to skip any of the questions, take a break, move on, or come back to anything please just let me know.
 - So, after the incident, what went through your mind in relation to who you tell and how?
 - What internal challenges did you have to negotiate (e.g., how did you decide to disclose and what, if any, feelings did you have about it)
 - Did you identify any external challenges to disclosing the incident to any persons (e.g., friends) and any particular groups (e.g., the police) (probe with how the challenges made you feel, how did they impact on what you did next?).

Break

- So, given your experience, in what ways, if any, have your views changed about how men would or indeed should respond?
- What advice would you give to a man who experiences this type of crime?

Appendix III: Information and Consent Form Study 1



UNIVERSITY OF
WEST LONDON

Department of Psychology

University of West London

Boston Manor Road, Brentford, TW8 9GA, UK

Information Sheet

This study aims to understand the experiences and perspectives of those individuals who work closely with male victim-survivors of sexual crimes (outside of the criminal justice system). It is being conducted by Bimsara Widanaralalage Don, PhD student at the University of West London, alongside supervisors Prof Karim Murji, Dr Ben Hine and Dr Anthony Murphy. If you would like to discuss any aspect of the research with the principal investigator you can contact him by email at k.widanaralalage@uwl.ac.uk.

We would greatly appreciate your participation, as this study will hopefully provide important and much needed research on adult male victims of rape and serious sexual assault, specifically in understanding the challenges in working with such victims, as well as the challenges the victim-survivors themselves face upon victimisation. This may help researchers to understand the barriers victims face in reporting their victimisation, as well as helping to inform future policy formation by the police and other branches of the criminal justice system. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview lasting around 75 minutes. Across this time, you will be asked to discuss your experiences, both in an open discussion format, and in response to specific questions. These interviews will be tape recorded and later transcribed. Nobody except the researchers named above will be allowed access to the recordings, and during the recording, no participant will be mentioned by name. The information is therefore completely confidential and anonymous.

You do not have to take part in this study if you don't want to. Many of the topics in this study **will be sensitive in nature**, and if you do decide to take part you **may withdraw at any time without having to give a reason**. Importantly, this includes both before and during the interview itself, and you can ask for your data to be removed for up to one month after the interview has taken place.

Please keep this sheet for future reference, and please feel free to ask any questions before you complete a consent form. It will be stored separately from the anonymous information you provide for this research project.



ID number.....

Department of Psychology

University of West London

Boston Manor Road, Brentford, TW8 9GA, UK

Consent Form

You have been asked to participate in a study about victims of male rape and serious sexual assault, carried out by Bimsara Widanaralalage Don. Have you (please circle yes or no):

- Read the information sheet about the study? yes no

- Had an opportunity to ask questions? yes no

- Got satisfactory answers to your questions? yes no

- Understand that full debriefing details will be provided, along with contact details for any ongoing support that may be needed as a result of participating? yes no

- Understood that you're free to withdraw from the study at **any time**, without giving a reason yes no

Do you agree to take part in the study? yes no

Signature _____ Name in block letters _____ Date -

NB: This consent form will be stored separately from the anonymous information you provide.

Appendix IV: Debrief form, Study 1



Department of Psychology

University of West London

Boston Manor Road, Brentford, TW8 9GA, UK

Thank you for participating in the study today. The interview you took part in will be part of the doctoral thesis of Bimsara Widanaralalage Don, PhD student at the University of West London, and will inform both academic and non-academic publications. This sheet will give a brief summary of the aims and provide a rationale for the study. If you have any questions, then please do not hesitate to contact us.

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges and barriers faced by those who work directly with male victim-survivors of rape and serious sexual assault, as well as the challenges that victims themselves face in dealing with and reporting their victimisation. We are paying particular attention to the impact of rape myths (i.e., the commonly held beliefs about the victims and perpetrators of male rape, as well as the crime itself, that serve to blame the victim, exonerate the perpetrator, and downplay the seriousness of the crime). Key beliefs that we expect to come across are that men cannot be raped, that men are not affected by rape and sexual assault, that rape and sexual assault of men only happens in prison, and that victims and perpetrators of male rape are exclusively homosexual. Speaking to individuals who work with male victim-survivors firsthand is expected to provide a unique and powerful insight into the challenges of working with this group, as well as the experiences of the survivors themselves.

Thank you again for your participation in this study, your contribution is extremely valuable to this research topic and it would not be possible without your commitment and participation. We hope to make a real difference to the lives of male victim-survivors, and this research will be central to that goal.

Principal Investigator:

Bimsara Widanaralalage Don
k.widanaralalage@uwl.ac.uk

Supervisors:

Prof. Karim Murji
karim.murji@uwl.ac.uk

Dr Ben Hine

Ben.Hine@uwl.ac.uk

Dr Anthony Murphy

Anthony.Murphy@uwl.ac.uk

If you have been affected by any of the issues in this study, please find information below on services which can provide support

Survivors UK

SurvivorsUK was established as a service for male survivors, to cater for people not provided for by other services. We are an inclusive service and welcome anyone who identifies as male, trans, non-binary, has identified as male in the past, or anyone who feels that we are the right fit for them

Website: <https://www.survivorsuk.org/>

Telephone Number: 02035983898

Email: help@survivorsuk.org

Appendix V: Information and Consent Form Study 2



Department of Psychology

University of West London
Boston Manor Road, Brentford, TW8 9GA, UK

This study aims to understand the experiences and perspectives of male victim-survivors of sexual crime. It is being conducted by Bimsara Widanaralalage Don, PhD student at the University of West London, alongside supervisors Prof Karim Murji, Dr Ben Hine and Dr Anthony Murphy. It has been reviewed and approved by the University ethics procedure at the University of West London, and if you would like to discuss any aspect of the research with the principal investigator, you may contact him via email (k.widanaralalage@uwl.ac.uk)

We would greatly appreciate your participation, as this study will hopefully provide important and much needed research on male victims of rape and serious sexual assault, specifically the challenges victim-survivors face upon victimisation. This may help researchers to understand the barriers victim-survivors face in reporting their victimisation, as well as helping to inform future policy formation by the police and other branches of the criminal justice system.

If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured **video-interview** lasting around 60 minutes. Across this time, you will be asked to discuss your experiences, both in an open discussion format, and in response to specific questions. These interviews will be recorded and later transcribed. Nobody except the researchers named above will be allowed access to the recordings, and during the recording, no participant will be mentioned by name. The information is therefore completely confidential and anonymous. Findings from this study will be published in collaboration with the Male Survivors Partnership as policy reports, as well as in academic, peer-reviewed journals; both of which will be made available to participants through their supporting organisation.

You do not have to take part in this study if you don't want to. Many of the topics in this study **will be sensitive in nature**, and if you do decide to take part you **may withdraw at any time without having to give a reason**. Importantly, this includes both before and during the interview itself, and you can ask for your data to be removed for up to one month after the interview has taken place.

The only circumstances in which confidentiality can be compromised, is if a participant discloses information which suggests that they pose an immediate risk of harm to themselves or to others. In such circumstances, the interviewer is obliged to report this information to their associated supporting organisation. Importantly, this does not include information relating to risk of harm which originates from another individual (e.g., if a participant discloses that they are still in a relationship within which they are still at risk).

The following participation criteria apply for this study:

- All participants must be over 18 years of age at the time of the interview.
- Over 13 years of age at the time of the incident.
- No self-reported learning or intellectual difficulties
- Accessed support services (e.g., Survivors UK)
- If reported to criminal justice system, have reached a definitive conclusion within the criminal justice process (i.e., their case has been classified as 'No Crime' or 'No Further Action' by police officers, Withdrawn by the survivor, or has received an outcome in court).

If you are interested in taking part – please speak to the person within your chosen organisation who is providing you with therapeutic support to express your interest, and to receive further advice on participation.

Please keep this sheet for future reference, and please feel free to ask any questions before you complete a consent form. It will be stored separately from the anonymous information you provide for this research project.



Department of Psychology

University of West London

Boston Manor Road, Brentford, TW8 9GA, UK

Consent Form

ID number.....

You have been asked to participate in a study about victims of male rape and serious sexual assault, carried out by. Bimsara Widanaralalage Don. Before you agree to take part, please answer the following questions.

- Are you over 18 years of age? yes no
- Were you at least **over 13 years of age** at the time of the incident? yes no
- To the best of your knowledge, do you have any learning or intellectual difficulties? yes no
- Have you reported the incident(s) you will be discussing in this interview to the criminal justice system? yes no
- If yes, please indicate the current status of your case

Have you (please circle yes or no):

- Read the information sheet about the study? yes no
- Had an opportunity to ask questions? yes no
- Got satisfactory answers to your questions? yes no
- Understood the disclosure procedures relating to risk of harm associated with this study? yes no
- Spoken with the person providing you with therapeutic support and received their advice on participating? yes no
- Understood that the video interview will be **recorded** and **stored** by the interviewer, to be used for academic purposes? yes no
- Understood that full debriefing details will be provided, along with contact details for any ongoing support that may be needed as a result of participating? yes no
- Understood that you're free to withdraw from the study at **any time**, even after the interview has been completed, without giving a reason yes no

Do you agree to take part in the study? yes no

Signature _____ Name in block letters _____ Date _____

NB: This consent form will be stored separately from the anonymous information you provide.

Appendix VI: Debrief form, Study 2



UNIVERSITY OF
WEST LONDON

Department of Psychology

University of West London

Boston Manor Road, Brentford, TW8 9GA, UK

Thank you for in the study today. The interview you took part in will be part of the doctoral thesis of Bimsara Widanaralalage Don, PhD student at the University of West London, and will inform both academic and non-academic publications. This sheet will give a brief summary of the aims and provide a rationale for the study. If you have any questions, then please do not hesitate to contact us.

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges and barriers faced by male victim-survivors of rape and serious sexual assault, specifically in dealing with and reporting their victimisation. We are paying particular attention to the impact of rape myths (i.e., the commonly held beliefs about the victims and perpetrators of male rape, as well as the crime itself, that serve to blame the victim, exonerate the perpetrator, and downplay the seriousness of the crime). Key beliefs that we expect to come across are that men cannot be raped, that men are not affected by rape and sexual assault, that rape and sexual assault of men only happens in prison, and that victims and perpetrators of male rape are exclusively homosexual. Speaking to male victim-survivors firsthand is expected to provide a unique and powerful insight into the challenges faced by this group, providing a vital contribution to future policy and practice across the charity and criminal justice sectors.

Thank you again for your participation in this study, your contribution is extremely valuable to this research topic and it would not be possible without your commitment and participation. We hope to make a real difference to the lives of male victim-survivors, and this research will be central to that goal.

Principal Investigator:

Bimsara Widanaralalage Don
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Supervisors:

Prof. Karim Murji
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Dr Ben Hine

Ben.Hine@uwl.ac.uk

Dr Anthony Murphy

Anthony.Murphy@uwl.ac.uk

If you have been affected by any of the issues in this study, please find information below on services which can provide support

Survivors UK

SurvivorsUK was established as a service for male survivors, to cater for people not provided for by other services. We are an inclusive service and welcome anyone who identifies as male, trans, non-binary, has identified as male in the past, or anyone who feels that we are the right fit for them

Website: <https://www.survivorsuk.org/>

Telephone Number: 02035983898

Email: help@survivorsuk.org

Samaritans

Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland

Website: <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Telephone Number: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Appendix VII URDSC registration and proposal approval

Copy of email confirming Research Degree Registration: received on Friday, 8 February 2019

Dear Bimsara,

I am pleased to inform you that the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee has registered you as a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy with transfer possibility to Doctor of Philosophy, subject to approval of ethics (please let me know when you have received ethical clearance).

Title of programme of research: Male-On-Male Rape and the Criminal Justice System: Investigating attitudes surrounding male rape, survivors' experience with the police and the attrition problem in male rape cases

Supervisors: Professor Karim Murji and Dr Ben Hine

The registration period for a full-time MPhil/PhD is a minimum of 33 months and a maximum of 48 months. Your registration period will take effect from September 2018 (date of enrolment).

The Committee discussed your proposal in detail and agreed that it was well written and clearly explained the planned research and intended contribution to knowledge. It was suggested that it may be beneficial to include information on how the cultural perception and media reaction to male rape has changed in recent years.

As mentioned at the meeting, members were very impressed with your research proposal and we will therefore use it as an exemplar to give to other students. Thank you for giving us permission for this.

Good luck with your research!

Kind regards,

Maria

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Ealing
London
W5 5RF

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Appendix VIII: UWL SHSS Ethics Panel Approval



School of Human and Social Sciences
University of West London
Paragon House
Boston Manor Road
Brentford TW8 9GA

To whom it may concern:

I confirm that the research studies, current as of January 12, 2021, for PhD student **B. Kennath Widanaralalage**

For PhD entitled: 'Exploring the experiences of male victim-survivors and third sector service providers'

have been granted full ethical approval by the UWL SHSS Ethics Panel.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Henry Lee Johnson

Chair of the UWL SHSS Ethics Panel

Lecturer in Psychology

School of Human and Social Sciences
University of West London
Paragon House, Boston Manor Road
Brentford, Middlesex
TW8 9GA

Office PR310

Tel 02082094178

Appendix IX: data sharing and storage agreement

Storage agreement

Upon interview completion, video-recordings will be transferred from Microsoft Teams to a secure digital location within 24 hours. Original recordings will then be erased. Recordings will be stored as audio .mp4 files in a folder titled 'Study 2 Data' and will be individually labelled with date of completion and participant unique ID number. Recordings will be approximately 300 to 1000MB in size and will thus be stored on devices and cloud services large enough to accommodate files of this size (such as OneDrive). Transcripts of interviews will be kept in the same digital location.

The folders described will be password protected and encrypted. Files will be kept both on physical hard-drives (e.g., hard-drive of principal investigator) and on cloud services licensed by the University of West London (e.g., Microsoft OneDrive). This will provide both sufficient storages, as well as regular IT Services-managed backing up of the data. The password will be created by the researcher and sent securely to the co-applicants. Strict and clear file naming (e.g., using dates) will ensure that versions in all locations are up to date and consistent. Personal data relating to participants (e.g., demographic information) will also be collected as part of the interview process and will be labelled using the same unique reference number. This data will be stored digitally as outlined above but in a separate folder to the digital interview data.

Data Sharing

For interviews conducted by the principal researchers, files will be transferred to the supervisory team through secure services (such as OneDrive links), and then deleted from the co-applicant's device once receipt is confirmed. Final versions of transcript files will be sent from the principal researcher to the supervisory team via OneDrive Link and will be downloaded and saved in similarly secure folders on the research teams University accounts.

Long-Term Data Storage and Disposal

The data from this project will also be deposited on a University approved online data repository system at the end of the project timeline, to allow for ongoing access. Due to the sensitive nature of the data and topics discussed, data will be made available subject to request and approval from the lead applicant, to ensure that it is used appropriately. The data will be held on this repository for a period of 10 years, in line with recommendations provided by the British Psychological Society, leading UK research councils (e.g., the ESRC), University of West London policy, and international law (i.e., GDPR)

Appendix X: Social media advertisements



Call for Participants

Investigating the experiences of male victim-survivors of rape

We are looking for men who have been affected by rape and sexual abuse **after the age of 13** to be interviewed on their experiences post-incident.

Male rape is an area that has been historically neglected by research and the wider public. The aim of this qualitative study is to give voice to men who have personally experienced rape and sexual abuse.

By taking part in this study, survivors will be able to share their experiences and provide a powerful insight into the challenges faced by this group, contributing to future policies and improving practices across the charity and criminal justice sectors.

If you are interested in taking part, please follow the link in the description or contact Kenneth Widanaralalage, the principal researcher at k.widanaralalage@uwl.ac.uk



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YOUR EXPERIENCE MATTERS

If you are a male survivor of rape and sexual abuse, your story matters and needs to be heard. Please consider taking part in this study, by following the link in the description.

For more information please contact Ken:
k.widanaralalage@uwl.ac.uk



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