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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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The panopticon looms: A gendered narrative of the interlocking powers of welfare intervention and criminalization

Becky Clarke | Leah

Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

Correspondence
Becky Clarke, Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK.
Email: r.clarke@mmu.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper presents a case study narrative of one woman. Drawing on her storied recollections, from infancy into childhood through young motherhood into adulthood, we trace the interlocking relationship between policies and practices intended to offer welfare support facilitating her criminalization. A collaborative approach to producing knowledge, representing 8 years of narrative, dialogue and reflection surfaces a looming panopticon. The gendered power of the state to intervene across the life course is revealed, as is the failed and harmful nature of this panopticon. Three distinct themes emerge from the analysis: the power to define and the fixing nature of gendered policy and practice narratives; the gendered control strategies that reproduce harms in women's lives; and the lifelong nature of the panopticon for some girls and women. Cutting across these experiences are processes of silencing and ultimately resistance, strategies for surviving the enduring forms of institutional surveillance and intervention. The paper closes with clear implications for the hegemonic trio of social science research and social work and criminal justice policy and practice. We must confront and dismantle our complicity in the silent silencing and gendered harms of the panopticon.

KEYWORDS
criminalization, gender, institutional power, narrative method, panopticon, silencing

1 | INTRODUCTION

It's different for girls, yeah it is. With lads, they kick off and then everyone moves on. I feel like with a lad they get given time to calm down, the staff would step back and leave them. With us [girls] it's like they're constantly asking you all the time what you're doing, who you're with, or they're telling you what to do and where you can go. They say for your safety, but they keep controlling you and trying to stop you from doing things.

(Session 5)

Gendered risks of violence and harm are recognized as being pervasive, with the responsibility for safety often placed on girls and women (Kelly, 1987). Yet, for girls who are out of their family home and in care as a looked after child, these gendered expectations for 'your safety' are distinct (Ellis, 2018). For centuries, girls in care have been subject to a 'disciplinary project' that sees the blurring of welfare with control and punishment (Barton, 2000; Carlen, 1988; O'Neill, 2001). Examining the continuities and patterns in a failure to provide protection and support to girls in care, alongside their excessive surveillance (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022), can surface an understanding of how social

work may be weaponized to advance gendered form of control and punishment.

The paper seeks to explore the role of children and family social work in England and Wales and its relationship to the disproportionate policing and punishment for some girls and young women. Drawing upon the storied recollections of one young woman's life, institutional interventions are contextualized and historicized (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012), revealing how the omnipresent power of the panopticon is experienced, silenced and resisted over the life course. The paper represents an approach to critical social research that can surface the mutuality and harms of social work and criminal justice policies and practice that are often concealed (Clarke et al., 2017; Mathiesen, 2004).

2 | A NARRATIVE APPROACH

2.1 | The process: How

A national evaluation project for the charity 'Women in Prison' provided an opportunity to begin narrative work with women who had experienced imprisonment (Chadwick et al., 2015). The narrative account shared here began as part of this evaluation. From an initial meeting in 2014, our collaborative work, mapping and reflecting on experiences of care and criminal justice systems, using this as a source for campaigning and interventionist research, has been sustained for 8 years and remains unfinished.

In the early narrative sessions, we developed a timeline of Leah's life, with her identifying key moments on the timeline and reflecting on these 'turning points'. We also discussed the practitioner language and labels, such as 'vulnerable' and 'risky', Leah had repeatedly referred to. Our ongoing dialogue together continues to build on this timeline, both in terms of our depth of reflection of past events and extending the narrative, as new events unfold. Feedback on the paper highlighted readers might benefit from a section reflecting 'what happened at key moments in her life', referred to as a 'pen picture paragraph' or 'a pen portrait'. Given the central commitment in the method and writing to actively avoiding objectification, this has presented a challenge. In developing the following diagram and text, the turning points Leah identified in the narrative sessions are centred, as
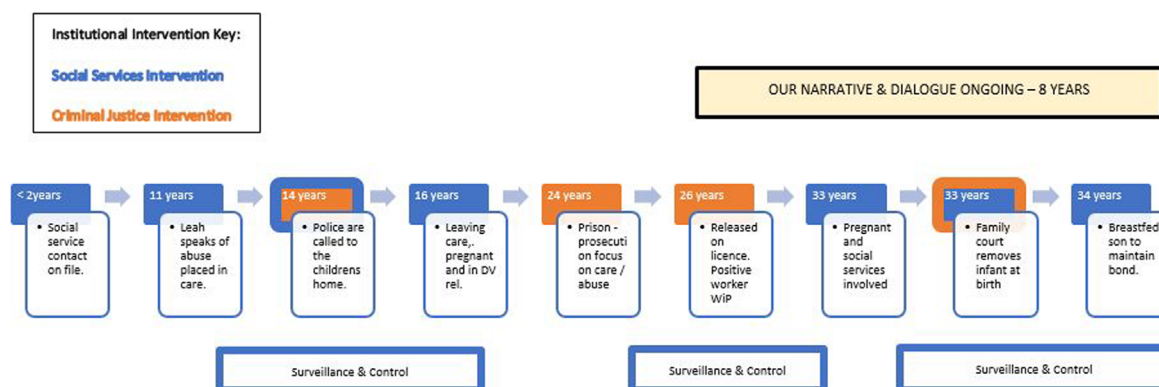
is a focus on tracing institutional decisions and failure. Together, they reflect the interlocking nature of social work practice and Leah's criminalization, as well as how our recorded narrative work has overlapped with the ongoing nature of these experiences.

Leah's first experience of social services intervention was at 2 years old. However, this is something she learned of in her mid-twenties when requesting her care files. She had thought her initial contact was at 11 years old, when she had spoken to a teacher at school about the sexual abuse she was experiencing at home. After some foster placements, including a very positive one that was cut short without explanation, Leah was placed in residential children's homes at 13. These were out of her home area and increasingly experienced as a way of controlling her. Leah speaks of running away from these homes. At 14 years old, when challenged about this behaviour by staff, she damaged property in the children's home. The police were called, and she is chased and arrested. Spending a night in the police cells and cautioned, this is her first experience of being criminalized.

At 16, leaving local authority care, Leah is pregnant with the father another young person from the children's home. She experiences domestic abuse from him. In the following 7 years, she navigates motherhood and relationships in isolation, with little to no support. At 24, her then partner is convicted of the murder of her fourth child, her youngest infant daughter. Leah is convicted of a 'failure to protect' and sentenced to 4 years in prison. Her experiences of childhood abuse and her care history are central to the prosecution's narrative of her as 'damaged' and a 'failed' mother. Prior to the death of her daughter, Leah was not told that the man responsible was known to social services and unable to see his own children.

Almost 9 years later, Leah has rebuilt her life following her release from prison, is working, and having contact with her other two children. She falls pregnant; part way through this pregnancy, the relationship with the father ends and social services become involved. Whilst Leah is encouraged to prepare for bringing the child home, social services and a family court judge make the decision to remove her son immediately after the birth. She is told that the remarks of the criminal court judge, judgements about Leah as a child and mother, are 'binding in nature' and key to the removal decision.

Over the last 8 years, we have been in touch regularly, with moments where we have directly collaborated on work and at other times met socially to catch up on our lives, our children, our work, and

Institutional Intervention Key:
Social Services Intervention
Criminal Justice Intervention

OUR NARRATIVE & DIALOGUE ONGOING – 8 YEARS

< 2years	11 years	14 years	16 years	24 years	26 years	33 years	33 years	34 years
• Social service contact on file.	• Leah speaks of abuse placed in care.	• Police are called to the childrens home.	• Leaving care,. pregnant and in DV rel.	• Prison - prosecuti on focus on care / abuse	• Released on licence. Positive worker WiP	• Pregnant and social services involved	• Family court removes infant at birth	• Breastfed son to maintain bond.

Surveillance & Control   Surveillance & Control   Surveillance & Control

so forth. In total, we have recorded six narrative sessions, using a voice-note recorder to capture discussion and then full verbatim transcription to enable further reflection and dialogue. These vary in length from 90 min to 3 h, and following the initial two for the evaluation, the decision to capture Leah's account in this way has been determined through discussion and a desire to inform policy and practice, initiated by Leah's involvement in policy and campaign work.

Our approach can therefore be understood to represent what Sinha and Back (2014) term 'sociable methods', characterized by an organic and negotiated relationship at a 'radically slow' pace (Mason, 2021). Questions of if or how any materials will be used become part of an ongoing discussion and negotiation. This special issue is the first time we have chosen to publish this collaborative work in an academic publication. It presented an opportunity for us to communicate Leah's account, layered with my analysis, on her terms, to an audience of social work practitioners and policy-makers.

With the explicit goal of writing against Othering, the analysis of the materials has also involved dialogue, narrative and reflection (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). In the construction of this paper, Leah and I met four times: to discuss the initial idea; for me to share a full draft of the written article, reading aloud sections and discussing their meaning; to consider her direct affiliation to the work and in particular issues of anonymity and named authorship; and finally to discuss the reviewers' comments and how they might be addressed, in particular concerns of ethics and the request for a 'pen portrait'. The collaboration is an ongoing negation about the kind of knowledge we are creating (Back, 2014; Clarke et al., 2017).

The process of determining the data and quotes for inclusion in this paper has centred around two aspects of Leah's narrative: 'it's different for girls'—the gendered nature of social work and criminal justice interventions; and 'I had no power. I was a ball they threw about'—the ongoing experience of power and control. Together, these reveal the experiences of the panopticon of social work and criminal justice intervention. Our intention in analysing and making sense of Leah's life story narrative is to surface insights and shape ideas (Plummer, 2001) and to bear witness to the experiences of those who survive and resist oppression and harm, including that dispensed by ideological and political forces in society (Denzin, 1994; Scraton, 2016).

2.2 | The principles: Why

This single case narrative is illustrative of the political and radical potential of collaborative and qualitative methods. A narrative method can 'take seriously' the need to contextualize and historicize the life story of the individual who is out of power in their interactions with state institutions, enabling us to trace the structural relations of institutional harms through the life course.

> It reminds us that [life stories] have work to perform: they are never just stories. And we need to always look to the contrasting political roles they can play.
>
> (Plummer, 2001; p. 221)

Selecting and presenting a single story can inevitably risk reasserting the Othering and pathologizing of individuals and communities centred in policy and media narratives (Williams & Clarke, 2018). Yet, there is also the potential for case study analysis to falsify 'knowns' (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and to expose the contradictions that must be reckoned with and thus disrupt dominant language and assumptions that circulate in policy, research and practice discourses.

Undertaking to engage in a collaborative approach to critical social research, where power is negotiated rather than uni-directional and where we are 'playing with another person's life' (Plummer, 2001, p. 224), requires that the relationships, power and positionality be continually reflected upon and examined (Clarke et al., 2017; Harding, 2020; Thapar-Bjorkert & Henry, 2004). One central aspect of this negotiation for Leah, as the owner of the life story, has been the question of visibility versus anonymity. We have returned to discuss this multiple times over the 8 years, in particular when sharing (through presentation or in written form) aspects of her account. For this paper, rather than assume the default position of a pseudonym, following lengthy discussion, Leah expressed that she wanted her own first name: 'so the piece is really me, my story'. Such decisions present questions about the current limitations of ethics, anonymity and authorship in research that others have sought to open up (Sinha & Back, 2014). Our work has demanded an ongoing investment in reflexivity, exhibiting how 'ethical research is produced through negotiated spaces and practices of reflexivity that are critical about issues of positionality and power relations at multiple scales' (Sultana, 2015, p. 375).

Prompted by the peer review process and in coming together to review the feedback comments on the initial submission, it was apparent that Leah had not accessed an online journal. We did this together, exploring how once published (although a paywall), anyone could access. Once again, we had a detailed discussion of possible scenarios and explored the option of using a pseudonym. Ultimately, Leah rejected this possibility.

> Why can I not have it named as me. It's me, it's my story and my work. They [a reader] can't identify me without a last name or my picture. If someone knows my story, like a social worker and can see me that way, well they already know. They're the ones I want to read this. Anyway, yeh, I just, I need it to feel like mine when I look at it. To own it, you know, so when I look at it, I see me. It's the only thing written down with my words.
>
> (Session to Discuss Reviewers Comments)

Our work together reflects meeting each other at a distinct moment in our individual journeys. For Leah, she had experienced a very positive relationship with a support worker from the Women in Prison charity, perhaps, for the first time, feeling that this person advocated for her and connected with her personally rather than as a professional. Similarly, this paper represents me, Becky, an experienced applied researcher meeting Leah at a point when I was

increasingly asking myself 'who am I to do this?' (Plummer, 2001). I have been pushed to consider my positionality more than any other in my career thus far (Holmes, 2020).

My personal experiences, as a woman and mother, and community impacted by or involved in these institutional processes, have shaped my own attempts to make sense of Leah's experiences. As an experienced applied researcher, this collaboration with Leah has challenged and shaped me. It has been painful, sensing the hurt and weight of the power to which Leah is subjected. More often, it has been profoundly inspiring, to bear witness to a woman surviving and resisting this ceaseless institutional power. A sustained commitment to thinking critically about the dynamics of power in our research process has been central to building sisterhood and solidarity in this collaborative endeavour (Hooks, 2000).

3 | NARRATIVE FINDINGS: SURFACING THE PANOPTICON

> They watch me, I know it, and I can't find anywhere anymore – where they can't see.
>
> (Fagan, 2013)[1]

Leah's narrative surfaces the interlocking power of the omnipresent panopticon, mobilized and intensifying in particular moments of her life. This web of surveillance, intermittent, yet enduring, looms. Foucault (1975) developed 'the panopticon' as a metaphor to symbolize wider disciplinary effects of punishment and social control. Our analysis here presents a gendered analysis of this panopticon power of the state, taking three forms in Leah's life: the power to define her; the surveillance and control strategies she is subject to that reproduce interpersonal harms; and the lifelong power to intervene. As such, it makes an important empirical contribution to ongoing work conceptualizing gendered processes of criminalization (Clarke & Chadwick, 2023).

3.1 | Power to define—Feeling and resisting judgement

> I was a little bugger, yeah [laughs], but no, I wasn't bad. Obviously it weren't my fault I was put in care. I don't know, I hold my hands up. I've, well, I've been in the wrong place and hmm, I can't get the words out, I put myself in you know, like, what they call risky situations, where I was maybe at risk. I was messing with the wrong crowd and not caring about myself so much at the time. And there are times where, you know when I look back at younger days and think, oh, I don't know. There's that one, 'vulnerable'. I hate that word, vulnerable [laughs], yes, I really do hate that word. Yeah, because when I'm back all the way down here [points on a paper timeline we have created to her childhood]

> obviously with what has happened to me in my life, I was vulnerable. [long pause]
>
> Then, later, between being in care and having my own child, I don't know. I don't see myself as vulnerable … no, I try and say no. Other people might say yeah but I don't want it. I don't like that word. When I was in care, they said I was putting myself in danger going places and with people, maybe I was, but they were trying to control me. That's another word 'controlling'!!
>
> (Session 2)

This quote disrupts, surfacing a disconnect between what 'they', a general reference to practitioners, say about Leah and her reality. Leah repeatedly distinguishes 'what they call', what 'they said' or 'other people might say' from her own understanding and experience. When attempting to consider these concepts of 'risk' or 'vulnerability' in relation to herself, particularly as a child, for her, there is an ambiguity. Rather than being something within her, the potential for harm, the vulnerability relates to events, moments in her life and even the decisions, failures and actions of professionals.

Later, in the same recorded session, Leah is recalling her interactions with probation and hostel staff, those with the power to recall her to prison following her release. Vulnerability is constructed as something she is in control of, a feature of her individual actions (Brown et al., 2017).

> Yeah, they all started thinking about me and making sure I am safe, making sure I am not vulnerable, making sure I am going through the right steps and the right things.
>
> (Session 2)

In ascribing labels, social work and criminal justice practitioners share a power to define young people and shape discourses about them (Scraton, 1997). How 'they' apply such judgements reveals the structural relations of gender, class and racialization, determining which girls are defined as 'difficult', 'nasty', 'manipulative', 'dirty' or 'dangerous' (O'Neill, 2001, p. 280). In Ellis's work, girls in residential care reject this label, as a denial of their agency, their survival.

> People say I'm vulnerable because I do let people take advantage of me but I'm not vulnerable because if I were vulnerable, I wouldn't even be alive now, never mind alive and looking well.
>
> (Quote taken from Ellis, 2018, p. 161)

The language of 'vulnerable' or 'troubled' has the power to fix girls and young women as the problem, erasing the context and the personal and institutional history of events (Ellis, 2018; O'Neill, 2001). Terms such as 'troubled families' and 'vulnerable women' are further established within both criminal justice and welfare policy and public discourse (Corston, 2007; Crossley, 2015). They serve to silence institutional failure through a focus on pathologizing individuals and

groups experiencing marginalization as *the* social problem (Clarke & Chadwick, 2018). A shared practice and policy discourse generates 'the hegemonic narrative which reflects and creates stigmatised and punitive representations' (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010, p. 693). This stigma, in turn, feeds the panopticon, with such scrutiny and judgement framing policy and practice responses to 'wayward girls' (Barton, 2000).

When we create space, an ethics of care and support for the individual, a different narrative can surface. Here, in our fourth session, Leah speaks explicitly for the first time about what her life at home had been like; at previous points in our conversations together, this had been alluded to but never described in this way.

> Well, she [her mum] was an alcoholic and she was letting different men in to the house, who I was calling dad. Obviously, I've got siblings, but they went living with their dad. I was the only one that stayed at home. So, yeh, I was getting ... I'm not going to say it because obviously I don't like the word, but you probably know what I'm on about ... and I've got mascara so I don't want to cry, and yeh, as you can get the picture what happened to me and with all these men coming in the house and I was calling them dad and they did stuff to me. Basically, I will just say that. And I thought it was right because I didn't know the difference and with my mum being an alcoholic and basically beating me up and having the men doing stuff to me and making me watch all ... doing naughty stuff and stuff like that, and me watching them.
>
> (Session 4)

It was clear how painful this was to disclose, to speak aloud, and how these experiences had been silenced. In the intervening few years, between those early sessions and this one, Leah had talked about wanting to access her care files. In her mid-twenties, part way through our work together, she applied for her care files. In these, albeit partial and redacted, Leah discovered that she was in care briefly as an infant and returned home to her mum. Learning that social services involvement preceded the harms she experienced at home was significant in her own sense of being failed. Until then, she had believed that her first time in care was at 11 years old, when she had disclosed to a teacher at school what was happening at home and had been placed in care.

This knowledge, Leah's account, and her care history, disrupts the construction of vulnerability as being within her. It surfaces the vulnerability as being a feature of policy and presents this as something that requires analyses and explanation (Clarke & Chadwick, 2018). The 'individualising logic of vulnerability' represents a power-laden strategy for framing wider social problems and thus serves to silence institutional vulnerabilities and failures, whilst simultaneously constructing girls and women as the object for control (Stanley & De Froideville, 2020, p. 526).

Reading care files can empower the individual to know things that have been actively hidden, or silenced, yet like others, Leah also had to read hurtful representations (Clarke & Kent, 2017). The further engagement with a version of you in official files and documents, the 'paper self', can be devastating (Coyne, 2015). Without any recourse to challenge, these narratives have the power to continue circulating and defining Leah, 'talk bad of me' or 'putting that negative thing on me' and silencing her account.

Leah reflects repeatedly on being silenced, who is silencing her and for what purpose. She also silences herself to avoid judgement.

> No one knew about me being in care because it was like I didn't want anyone to know, except for the teachers, social workers, and stuff like that, no it was like I was living at home. I just lied to everyone, I lied all my life saying I loved it at home, 'my big sister did this' and 'my mum did that' and 'my dad said this', you know hiding it.
>
> (Session 3)

Yet, at other times, she is pressured to lie and 'make up stories'.

> As a kid well, I didn't have my dad around. My mum made me lie, put me through situations and made me lie. It feels like I've always been told to make up stories, about who I am, my family, who I'm in relationships with, why I was in prison.
>
> (Session 4)

These experiences, the feelings of frustration and anger she expresses when discussing her life with others, give further weight to the importance of our collaborative work, the careful creation of a negotiated space, where the individual can speak their truth, an opportunity to tell their story on their terms. For Leah, this remains something she struggles to do outside of the narrative work we have done together.

Upon release from prison, Leah arranged for herself to have a legal name change, she speaks of this as a strategy to 'keep safe' and because of the stigma related to the offence she had been convicted of, failure to protect her child. In the early sessions together, Leah reflected on this new identity as being positive, as a way of being less visible and avoid the pain of judgements by others. As time goes on, however, this becomes a further strategy for silencing her; she is unable to speak about what has happened, impacting on how she forms new relationships and rebuilds existing ones from before prison.

This sense of judgement and silencing endures, with Leah expressing multiple times across the sessions that she wants to defend herself and wants to be visible on social media or in public but feels unable. There is a desire to shout out, to be heard and stand up for herself, yet the weight of these pressures to remain silent prevails.

Same now, in and after prison. I want to defend myself, but I don't, I keep it hidden. People judge kids in care, mums with kids in care, what I feel and know on the inside no one knows that. You put your barriers up. I want to tell people I do; I want to stand in the middle of [where she lives] and do it but I can't. People judge you before they know.

(Session 3)

I'm in a battle. I want to say it, speak out, defend myself, you know. But I can't.

(Session 5)

This power to define the individual is held in the labels and language of the narrative, captured in files and official documents which serve to fix and silence the individual. The power to define Leah in these terms 'becomes a mode of subduing her in a network of interpretations and representations' (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, p. 299).

Constructions of vulnerability are not only deeply gendered but also classed and racialized, meaning that the children most likely to experience a range of structural, institutional and social harms are least likely to be provided with support, instead categorized as risky and responded to through pre-emptive intervention (Brown, 2019; Stanley & De Froideville, 2020). Whilst clearly resisted by Leah, this opposition is silenced at times through ambiguity, feeling vulnerable and seeing this as a feature of being simultaneously failed and held responsible. These judgements are acutely felt by Leah and become central to justifications for her surveillance and for the mobilization of the panopticon of surveillance and control.

3.2 | Power to control—Surveillance and regulation of girls and young women

I was in Buxton far out and I'd gone missing, cos I wanted to see my boyfriend … I ended up going back [to the children's home] and they're like 'You're not going out. Where've you been?' blah blah blah 'We're ringing the police' I said you're not I'm getting my stuff and going. There's this one woman [residential worker] she comes upstairs shouting, I said 'get out of my face', she said 'you're not going anywhere'. I could hear the sirens coming, I was scared. I started throwing things … I just ran and this copper like was chasing me … so, they've caught me, and I've tried to, and yeah, I'm crying now saying I'm sorry, I'm sorry … I'm sat in the police cell thinking what's going on - 'we're charging you with criminal damage' says the copper and I laughed because I thought you're having me on. He said, 'think it's funny I was going to let you out for some air, but you can stay there for punishment, we'll release you in the morning', and that's what they did.

(Session 1)

This is the context for her first encounter with the police, related to her being repeatedly missing from a care home out of area and in the context of being removed from what she had experienced as a positive foster care placement without explanation. Feeling trapped in the home, she is criminalized for running away from the care home. The unnecessary criminalization of young people in care, related to police call outs for being 'missing from home' and criminal damage, has been the focus of recent academic and policy work in England and Wales (Howard League Penal Reform, 2022; Prison Reform Trust, 2016).

Leah's criminalization relates to perceptions of her vulnerability, of risks to her that exist outside the children's home. The potential for 'significant harm' whilst missing or absconding is central to the use of legislation that has seen girls placed in secure settings through 'welfare routes'. In O'Neill's study, this was case for 71% of girls in secure care, compared with just 21% of boys (Department of Health, 1997, cited in O'Neill, 2001).

Whilst there are clear tensions for practitioners seeking to respond to risks, understanding the relationship between these judgements of vulnerability *in* girls and the subsequent strategies for the control *of* them is key for surfacing the 'ideological confusion' in welfare policy enshrined in legislation such as the Children's Act 1989, which whilst seeking to keep girls safe ultimately facilitates their criminalization (O'Neill, 2001, p. 287). Through Leah's narrative, we begin to understand how these contradictions drive the harms of a deeply gendered panopticon.

'It's different for girls' is a judgement Leah makes from her own experiences of being in mixed-gender care settings. Research has demonstrated that once in these spaces, girls report being subject to control more than boys, feeling 'oppressed and even persecuted by the high levels of surveillance' (O'Neill, 2001, p. 218), with 'higher standards of behaviour expected of adolescent girls than of adolescent boys' (Carlen, 1988). This sense of tightening control over her life is expressed clearly by Leah here:

I had no power. I was a ball they threw about. You know different people all making decisions and telling me what to do. Same really in care, being controlled like, I was always running off to places. I wanted to leave. So yeh, when you get older and in criminal justice it's the same, you know you're in a hostel or on licence I felt that it was the same, but you're not a kid anymore.

(Session 4)

Interactions with social workers and criminal justice practitioners are often experienced as the panopticon—being watched or moved, a lack of voice in key decisions in childhood and through into adulthood.

So, I am deleting all my messages just in case she wants to look at the phone, now this was me.

(Session 1)

When I moved I had three properties to look at. One of them I actually really wanted to go to, not the one I'm in now ... my Probation Officer like went 'No, I think the other one is better. It's out of the way' and she had the say in it so basically I ended up going there. Yeah, I wanted to be somewhere different.

(Session 2)

The monitoring of social interactions on phones or social media is a signal, a new form of panopticon surveillance. With threats, of the police in residential care as a child and of recall to custody from probation hostel as an adult, experienced as the same. So much of this activity by practitioners is articulated as in Leah's best interests—'they said that they are thinking about me'. In response, repeatedly dotted through the transcripts, Leah indicates she complies with whatever the practitioners ask, 'do what they tell me', 'done all their courses' and 'did what I need to do for them'. In trying to navigate the ongoing and increasingly layered array of practitioner judgements, surveillance and intervention, Leah is both desperate to impress on them and on her compliance yet also increasingly aware that she is 'playing a rigged game' (Harding, 2022, p. 2).

What Leah's account reveals is that whilst the challenges in managing risk to young people are real, the strategies being used are repeatedly failing to keep young people safe. Instead, the panopticon responsibilizes Leah and reproduces interpersonal harms.

There was a lot of violence with him. It started well before I was pregnant. Yeah but I didn't like show anything. He never laid a finger on me to then [when we were in the home]. It was just like the mental abuse, the shouting and swearing. There was a lot of control. He used to tell me off, what I could do, you know drum stuff into my head.

And again after [the birth], no violence like for the first couple of weeks of her being born. We moved in together he said alright he'll change. But he carried on and carried on and obviously, I say 'if you lay your hands on me again I'm going'. He's like again 'oh don't do this, don't do that'. I was like look I can't take it anymore. The baby's six month old. I can't do it anymore.

(Session 2)

These recollections show how services were unable to intervene to prevent violence, whether at family home in childhood, care home as a teenager or sexual violence in public spheres. In fact, what is revealed is how welfare support and punishment can mirror controlling behaviours and abuse of power girls and young women experience in interpersonal relationships. In early childhood at home, 'mum made me lie', practitioners in her life as 'different people all making decisions and telling me what to do' and here in a relationship as a young parent where 'he used to tell me off, what I could do, you know drum stuff into my head'.

When we speak to girls and women, over time, in detail and on their terms (Carlen et al., 1985; Levi & Waldman, 2016), the accounts produced reveal the messy and complicated relationships between personal trauma and inadequate support, unending and failed institutional intervention and processes of criminalization (Chadwick & Little, 1987; Smart, 1977).

Institutional intervention featured in women's lives from a young age, along with the constant presence and intervention of welfare and criminal justice agencies ... Yet while state intervention was a constant in the women's lives from an early age, this was never experienced nor intended as a positive or supportive attempt to assist young women to address traumatic experiences.

(Seagrave & Carlton, 2010, p. 291)

Strategies of surveillance and intervention inherent in the panopticon fail on their own terms, unable to prevent the harms and violence girls and women are subjected to in public and private contexts.

3.3 | Power to intervene—Inescapable and the limits of resistance

I'd say that I am getting judged from being in the care system, then being in the criminal justice so it's like oh, she's never gonna change.

I feel like I can't escape from them. Because I know as soon as like I say I'm in a relationship they will be there they will be checking you know what I mean, like other people get to move on. Why is it I can't be happy as well? They say don't look back, and try not to look back, but everyone is constantly looking back. They want me to do all this, and I do. I'm trying and I'm always trying.

(Session 6)

Fixed and historic judgements about Leah travel with her; set out in care files, they are rehearsed in the sentencing remarks of a criminal court judge. In turn, these comments are viewed as 'binding in nature' in the family court, even though they are just that—judgements on her character.

Leah continues to feel the weight of the judgements. Being honest, doing all they ask and 'playing the game' in a belief that this meant keeping her child was a possibility, at the birth, she discovers the practitioners were not honest with her. These are the 'debilitating contradictions' of social control that women face (Carlen, 1983).

No, no, because they lie to me, they lied to me even at the birth. I still had hope that I could still care for [baby] because I was still doing the courses they were asking.

I thought like there could still be an opportunity. So, I carried on in giving into social services. That's how I felt, look back now, I was giving into social services. Basically, now I know, they'd already made that decision. ... they told me to keep buying stuff and prepare at home for baby coming home. I got his nursery ready, they visited to see it. They knew it, they knew he wasn't [coming home]. They just lie.

(Session 6)

This sense of giving in is connected to the pain of being deceived, ultimately having to accept the enduring power of practitioners to coerce her and control her life. It is important to be explicit; the perceived risk relates to 'failure to protect'—to keep yourself or others safe. Again, we see welfare policy enshrined in law—in this case the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004—which in attempts to coerce women to disclose the abuse they are subject to determining their criminalization and punishment (Singh, 2021).

Central to Leah surviving this moment, as a means of resisting oppression, is the choice to breastfeed her son, even following his removal from her care. This was fraught with challenge, with some social work practitioners involved seeking to put a stop to it. The active intervention of a health worker and an Independent Reviewing Officer who ultimately supported this decision by Leah enabled her to continue.

It felt so important it was that bond that I still had with him. It was showing that I wanted to give him that, the good stuff. I wanted to try. It was painful and it was hard.

When I did the breastfeeding, I felt like I've done well. And I fight to stick to my ground that I was going to carry on feeding him. And I stuck to that. So, I fight for what I want to, to feed my son. Yeah. To give him the good nutrients.

(Session 6)

Recent accounts from other women who must navigate child removal at birth recognize the rights of mothers to breastfeed infants who have been removed (Critchley et al., 2021). 'Annie' in her 'Surviving Safeguarding' Blog is a rare example of a mother speaking out about having a baby forcibly removed from the maternity ward: 'It was like a death every time I had to leave my baby after contact. ... It was like I was grieving, whilst my child was still alive, all the time having to keep fighting' (cited in Morriss, 2018, p. 821).

In this moment, Leah, like other mothers, is offered no support or care (Broadhurst & Mason, 2019; Morriss, 2018). She is left to make sense of this pain in isolation, haunted by past and future motherhood (Morriss, 2018). Leah feels failed, 'failing me then' and 'still failing me'. She has rebuilt her life multiple times, with limited resources, yet these 'cycles of excessive surveillance and inadequate support' endure (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022), intersecting with the wider structural determinants of the lives of those subject to these processes. For Leah, these include the gendered expectations, a class stigma, poverty and hardship; for others, they include the racism and other forms of marginalization.

Ghosts make the political, social, and economic operation of stigma visible: challenging the silencing that stigma brings and enabling the telling of alternative stories.

(Morriss, 2018, p. 819)

Through the mother's narratives, the 'cumulative and enduring collateral consequences' of policy and practice are surfaced, alongside the resistance and strategies for surviving the panopticon that not only fails to protect but also produces its own harms and stigma (Broadhurst & Mason, 2019).

Leah reflects here on her ultimate strategy for resistance, speaking out. A clear commitment, yet one which is always contingent. The potential for the panopticon continues to discipline and control her. Here, she reflects on speaking in a public forum for policy-makers and practitioners are listening. Her power to define her life experiences remains partial.

There's more stuff I would have wanted to say there I felt like I was holding back you know. There's this barrier, it's like I can't go over it. I stop myself from saying it and speaking.

(Session 5)

3.4 | Dismantling the hegemonic trio: Implications for research, policy and practice

The onus is on us, on those working across social science research, welfare and criminal justice policy and social work and criminal justice practice, to challenge and dismantle our own acquiescence and complicity in this silencing (Mathiesen, 2004). By acknowledging the structural power of the hegemonic trio of research, policy and practice to silence, it demands we move out of the way and make space for new strategies of critique and intervention to oppose institutional harms and failure. In this final section, the implications of the narrative for each of the hegemonic trio are considered in turn: What does Leah's narrative demand of approaches to research and knowledge, of policy setting and priorities and of how, where and who can deliver a practice of emancipatory support?

As researchers seeking to be interventionist, engaging in structural counternarratives in challenge to the dominant discourses, we must be 'more conscious and sophisticated players in the arena of the politics of representation' (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010). The slow and negotiated approach to narrative captured in this paper surfaces how it feels to be judged and the enduring nature of surveillance and control. Such practices disproportionately impact certain groups—such as those who have been in care as children or negatively racialized communities. It is these judgements, deeply gendered in this narrative,

that underpin the policy and practice leading to the 'weaponizing' of support for policing and social control function.

A key implication of this knowledge is to ask whether it is possible for statutory agencies to provide protection or support in the context of such longstanding and harmful state failings. By examining institutional intervention through personal narratives, we unmask vulnerability, rather than being a characteristic of the individual, as a feature of policy and practice: an inability (even where good intention may exist) to prevent interpersonal harms, to deliver support, protection and justice for those most at risk of violence and harm. Girls and women subject to the panopticon Leah's account has surfaced are instead attempting to survive and resist the harms inherent in the failure of the policy. The ultimate representation of this is the criminalization of a mother for a failure to protect her child, held responsible in a courtroom where misogynistic narratives of ideal motherhood become central to apportioning blame (Singh, 2021). Narrative work breaks the silence around such criminal justice and social work practices, exposing the 'profound inhumanity' of these policies and practice in the context of structural inequalities and institutional failure (Morriss, 2018). We must re-examine, and where necessary reject, existing assumptions about the virtues of multiagency work or statutory intervention.

It is within specific social conditions, legitimated by dominant policy discourse, that the instrumentalization of social work practice expands. The politics of policy concepts of 'vulnerability', of 'prevent (ion)' and of 'exploitation', as features of individuals and communities, has extended across policy of neo-liberal governments (Brown, 2019; Stanley & De Froideville, 2020), resulting in the children, families and communities failed by social policy being further marginalized and punished, even, or especially, by the politics and policies of left and labour governments (Coleman et al., 2009; McFarlane, 2010). In this current moment, where across the globe, we see Labour or Social Democratic parties falter, vote winning strategies that have played well at similar conjunctures in the past signal a deepening of responsibilizing policy discourses. The current policies instrumentalize practice as a means of legitimizing flawed functions of the state—silencing the failures to protect and provide support. The critique and opposition must be direct. In falsifying the 'knowns' of policy, the findings in this narrative establish the political work at hand.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. All co-authors have seen and agreed with the contents of the manuscript, and there is no financial interest to report.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ENDNOTE

[1] *The Panopticon*, as experienced by Anais Hendricks, the 15 year old protagonist in Jenni Fagan's novel, informed the concept of panoptical power in Leah's narrative, as omnipresent and viscerally felt.

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