In this article, I study how an adolescent girl with an institutional background voices her previous experiences of a statutory sex crime relationship. The data were generated during 2013–2017 and analysed using the Listening Guide method in order to find different contrapuntal and situated voices and contextual layers from the girl’s story.

The results indicate that different temporal, situational and contextual aspects can be part of the perceptions of sexual consent and abuse. Furthermore, the impression and experiences of being cared for in an abusive relationship interrelate in how the abusive sexual experiences are voiced even after a long period of time. A concept of abusive illusion of care was introduced to describe one of the aspects related to this phenomenon and it was suggested that it should be included in Jenny Pearce’s social model of abused consent.

It is proposed that sexual consent could be approached as a situated and contextualised issue and from the perspective and recovery process of the victim; and, as such, an ongoing and proceeding negotiation on consent should also be allowed afterwards. In addition, new and caring ways of creating safe connections in order to confront sexual violence without silencing any voices are needed.

Key words adolescent girl • Carol Gilligan • gendered violence • sexual violence • relationality

Key messages
• More nuanced knowledge is needed about especially vulnerable adolescent girls polyphonic voices about sexual consent and its connection to temporal experiences of caring.
• Sexual consent could be considered as an ongoing and proceeding negotiation which takes into account situational and contextual aspects.

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Introduction

In this article, the focus is on sexual violence, which has a long history of being identified as one form of violence against women and girls (WHO, 2017). This study is from the perspective of one adolescent girl. Over the last two years, sexual violence among women has been widely discussed in the media, and this was furthered as a
consequence of the recent viral #MeToo campaign. This campaign increased people’s possibilities to voice their experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence instead of being silenced (Zarkov and Davis, 2018) and sparked a wide public discussion on sexual violence and its elimination in Finland. At the same time, it has in part strengthened the discussion on the attempt to change Finnish criminal legislation so that in the future the definition of one extreme form of sexual violence, such as rape, would be based on lack of consent for sexual intercourse. Currently, it is built on the assumption that the use of violence or threats are distinctive signs of rape.

Matters related to sexual consent are of special concern in regard to adolescent girls, who are vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence (Näsi, 2017). However, there are groups of girls who can be identified as even more vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence. Girls with fragile experiences of being in care and who are in residential care institutions face sexual violence both before entering institutional care (Parkkila and Heikkinen, 2018) as well as during their stay in institutions and while in custody (Ikonen et al, 2017), and they are often vulnerable to sexual violence after their period in care, too (Allroggen et al, 2017).

This is the reason why I study how a young woman from a residential care institution background voices her previous experience of a statutory sex crime relationship with an adult man. I conducted four interviews with her over the years 2013–2017. This longitudinal aspect will bring new understanding on how an adolescent girl, with multiple vulnerabilities in her life, may voice her violent experiences over time. In the next section, I present the previous research on sexual consent, sexual violence and sexual exploitation among adolescent girls to which my research aims to contribute.

Literature on sexual consent among adolescent girls

Criminal law sets the guidelines and certain norms on how to approach sexual consent. The law is unambiguous with its age limits for consensual sex, which in Finland is 16 years. Furthermore, the idea that rape should be defined in legislation as a lack of consent is primarily good as this would destroy the myth that rape is always executed by using violence. However, this is not solely adequate when speaking of sexual violence from the perspectives of the victims. I agree with Coy et al (2016), who have suggested that instead of thinking of consent as an absence of resistance, it should rather be considered as an enthusiastic and embodied yes. I am also in agreement that overall consent could be more about getting consent rather than giving consent (see also Pearce and Coy, 2018). This means that the responsibility would be to ensure a partner’s willingness and consent to have sex rather than merely assuming their consent. However, this becomes a bit problematic when speaking about an adult having sexual relations with a minor. The young person may not necessarily know exactly what sexual consent means and on what grounds the other person has the right to assume that consent has been given. This challenge may be especially evident among vulnerable young women.

In addition, the victim-blaming attitude is also targeted at and present among adolescents. Pearce and Coy (2018) have suggested that this victim-blaming attitude may be due to a poor understanding of the psychosocial pressures facing children who are being exploited and manipulated into appearing to consent to their own exploitation. Young people in their late adolescence in particular are considered to be responsible for their abuse, and the attention given to their sexual abuse has been
focused on their ‘delinquent’ behaviour, their way of dressing, their demeanour or their maturity (Pearce and Coy, 2018). Some young people themselves believe that in certain contexts, such as being drunk, being in a sexual relationship with somebody or being considered ‘easy’, the pressure or coercion of young women to have sex is justified (Coy et al, 2010).

Pearce (2013) has developed a social model of abused consent containing four different forms, which can operate separately or in conjunction with each other. By coerced consent, she means that the child is subtly and/or violently manipulated into consenting to sexual activity. Normalised consent contains the distorted societal attitudes that may consider sexual exploitation and violence as inherent and normal. In survival consent, Pearce has considered that poverty can be the unfortunate motivator for adolescents consenting to sex in exchange for money or other gifts. The fourth one, however, is slightly different: condoned consent according to Pearce refers to situations where practitioners fail to recognise sexual exploitation and therefore end up condoning it. Yet, Pearce separates condoned consent into two forms – unconscious, which means, for example, poorly trained professionals, and professional negligence. I consider Pearce’s model to be important as it enables the consent to be contextualised and reveals information about potential abusive and exploitative relationships and the contexts that lie behind the ‘consent’ (Pearce, 2013).

I will now go on to explain how my data were generated and analysed.

**Data and methods: listening to the voices and silences in sexual violence**

The data used in this article are based on an EU-funded research project (2013–2014). The adolescent girls who identified themselves as having had violent experiences and who were at that time living in residential care institutions participated in the data generation. In this article, my focus is on only one girl, called Mari.6

Multiple case studies would have enabled the analysis of the similarities and differences between different cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008). However, this was not my purpose, and I chose to use this one case with a longitudinal approach as it furthered the deeper and diverse understanding of the researched matter and its potential changes over time. It also helped me to search for potential gaps in the existing research (Siggelkow, 2007) on sexual violence among adolescent girls. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal research with one case was also economical and time-saving (Thomson and Holland, 2003; Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Mari is Finnish in origin, an adolescent girl from a big city in southern Finland. Mari was taken into custody due to her self-destructive actions, which included sexually risky behaviour, substance abuse and non-attendance at school. I interviewed her four times during the years 2013–2017 and the interviews were recorded (altogether 300 minutes) and transcribed.7 Transcriptions of the interviews are in Finnish, and the analysis is based on these. The analysed sections that are presented in this article are translated from Finnish into English by me. The translations were, however, also language-proofed by a bilingual (Finnish and English) person.

The Research Ethical Instructions of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) were followed, and due to the sensitivity of the research topic, the ethical statement was requested beforehand from the research ethics committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Oulu. Ethical considerations were also carefully
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undertaken from the aspects of procedural ethics and ethics in practice (Graham et al., 2015). The interviews took place either in the residential care institution or in a private public space. I made contact with the girl at first through the institution and then directly with her when she was 18 years old.

During the interviews, it was necessary to evaluate whether there was any immediate danger that the girl could be exposed to violence again and whether the issue had been known by the residential care staff when Mari was under-aged. While in the institution, Mari’s psychological health was monitored by the staff. When living outside the institution, I observed her psychological health during and after the interviews by email and phone. She also attended regular professional counselling. The girl was not part of the interpretation process; however, she knew what the topic of this article was. Mari received our interviews positively. She also brought up that by sharing her experiences, she might be able to help others. The anonymity of her identity is carefully protected, including for safety reasons.

All the interviews were semi-structured, but Mari still spoke freely throughout. The first interview was in 2013, and the then 15-year-old Mari told her life story, concentrating on her experiences of violence and residential care institutions. Before we started the interview and in order to create trust between us, I mentioned to Mari my own personal background of having been taken into custody and being in a reform school as an adolescent girl. Besides being just a researcher, I was somebody who had had a similar personal experience. The second interview was in 2014, when Mari was 16 years old. In this second interview, I asked questions broadly relating to the first interview.

When working with the data, one particular relationship, which had already ended before the first interview, stood out from Mari’s story. This relationship gives an important viewpoint as to how an adolescent girl voices over time her experiences about a relationship that has been classed as a statutory sex crime relationship with an adult man. This relationship also exemplifies the vulnerabilities of human relationality in violent experiences. In the final two interviews, my questions guided the girl back specifically to this relationship and her experiences based on her then-current knowledge and experience. The third interview took place in 2016, when Mari was 18 years old and legally an adult, and the fourth interview was a year later.

I chose to use an analysis method inspired by the Listening Guide by Carol Gilligan (2002; 2017) in order to find different contextual layers and situated voices from the girl’s story. Gilligan used the ontological premise of human relationality and human vulnerability and neediness when developing this method (Gilligan, 2002).

The Listening Guide is a psychological research method that not only focuses on the psychological processes by indicating ‘the mind’s ability to dissociate or push knowledge and experience out of conscious awareness’ but also focuses on the social and cultural contexts that affect what can and cannot be said or heard (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017: 79).

This method contains three listening rounds, and I followed the guidelines of the original method in these. In the first round of listening, I focused on the girl’s stories and wrote them as chronological descriptions to present what the actual events were according to Mari. I focused on the plot and the terrain of the stories and on being particularly careful to preserve the girl’s own words and meanings without adding any theoretical interpretation. I was also looking to see whether there were any emotional
‘hotspots’ (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017) in Mari’s story, which I understand as revealing something emotional and therefore crucial regarding her perceptions.

During the second round, I listened to ‘I’-words’ by tracking down sentences where Mari used the first-person voice. I asked myself how the ‘I’ voice was acting and being in this particular terrain of a violent relationship (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017). Diverging from the original method, I separated the different forms of ‘I’, such as me and mine and speaking of herself in a passive form in the story. This way I was able to capture the parts, and their variations, in which the girl was speaking of herself as an object or as a bystander in her experiences.

In the third round, I focused on searching for contrapuntal voices that can be identified as different voices and their interaction. ‘I’-voices are the paths to contrapuntal voices, and they can indicate struggles between knowing and not knowing, between having and not having, and a possible hidden desire and confusion between herself and her surrounding relations (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017). It was also important to listen to what was said, and likewise to what was left unspoken and being silenced. The contradictions in the voice that are interrupting or silencing one another can reveal contrapuntal voices which have underlying meanings (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017).

I aimed to keep the interpretation as transparent as possible by presenting the data clearly to the readers. In addition, my supervisor was part of the interpretation process, especially in those parts that were open to various interpretations. In the following chapter, I introduce Mari’s thoughts about the relationships in chronological order of the interviews, and these are embellished with quotations directly from the data. The I-voices are marked in italics for these quotations. The I-voices and potential contrapuntal voices are interpreted in the analysis text; however, to make it readable, they are not separately marked.

**Findings: the dream boyfriend and/or the perpetrator?**

According to Mari, she had experienced mental violence from her peers throughout her time at preschool and primary school. She explains that she was “‘the boy-girl (tomboy)’, and others did not tolerate that”. Mari’s parents got divorced when she was 10 years old, and after that Mari stayed with her father, who further occasionally insulted Mari.

When Mari was 13, she went to activities organised by social services with her friend, who was also ‘unpopular’ like she was. There, Mari got to know a girl called Nelli who was two years older than she was. Mari quickly learned the very risky behaviour of going along with any ‘random guy’ from the streets of a big southern city in order to get free alcohol, which Nelli ‘paid for’ by doing sexual favours for these adult men (Parkkila and Heikkinen, 2018: 7).

In the first interview, when I asked separately about her experiences of sexual violence, Mari spoke about how she had been raped by Nelli’s male acquaintance at the age of 13 when she drank alcohol for the first time in her life with Nelli and Nelli’s male friends. When going back to this in the third interview, Mari still considers herself as having been raped; however, she does not want to voice it as rape, because she doesn’t ‘like that word’ (rape).

Social services intervened in Mari’s search for these unsafe relations, and she was taken into custody and eventually placed in a very restrictive residential care
institution. At first it did not stop Mari’s self-destructive behaviour as she ran away several times, always finding her way back to her home city. During her periods of escape from the institution, she did not necessarily always have money or a place to go. On one such escape, at the age of 14, Mari stayed two weeks in a non-Finnish 30-year-old man’s apartment (see also Parkkila and Heikkinen, 2018: 7–8). This adult man has since been convicted of child sexual abuse and physical assault as a result of the events that took place during those two weeks. Next, I present how Mari voices these experiences and her perceptions about the Perpetrator.

Safe surroundings: recognising the mistreatment (15-year-old)

Mari was a 15-year-old when I met her for the first time. At that time, she had been in the residential care institution for well into one year. Mari spoke spontaneously about her relationship with the Perpetrator. In the following quotation, Mari describes a situation in which she wakes up in the Perpetrator’s and his friend’s apartment and realises that she had been physically assaulted the night before.

‘I was like Whaaaat? I don’t understand anything. I like woke up at their place the following morning, I look in the mirror – BLACK, my back is BLACK all the way down to here [Mari shows her back by her hand]! I’m thinking like: “What had I done again last night?” (laughter) I looked really terrible. And this guy just comes in and says: “Good morning, Darling.” I’m like WHAT! He always called me darling, but I don’t understand why. He always brought coffee to me in the morning and wished me good morning.’

Mari describes her shock upon waking up and not remembering what had happened the previous night. But she clearly recognises that she has been physically assaulted based on her bruises. Alternatively, she is still overwhelmed about the care and positive attention she received from the Perpetrator. The contradiction between the physical violence and then the kindness in bringing coffee in the morning seems to be overwhelming in Mari’s voice. In addition, the amazement also about being addressed as ‘Darling’ is still present and very tangible in Mari’s voice. When she asks herself what she had done again, this indicates that this was not the first experience of this kind of ‘partying’ in her life. But it is also taking the blame upon herself for the previous night.

When asked separately whether she considers that she was physically assaulted by the Perpetrator that previous night, Mari replies, somewhat agreeing: “I guess so.” However, Mari goes directly on to talk about the events that took place at the court session by simply saying in a passive form that it ‘went to the court’:

‘It went to court, and then I saw him in the courtroom, and he was just smiling at me, he waved at me and smiled like… hoh hoh hooo, I was like, aaahh… help!
Researcher: So it went to… (court)?
Mari: He didn’t necessarily, either he didn’t understand or he didn’t think that anything that he did was wrong. Because he seemed like he was ok with everything he had done.’
At the age of 15, and almost one year after the abuse, Mari voices the physical abuse against her as an actual event. She voices how the Perpetrator may not have understood that any mistreatment against her had taken place because he seemed to be ok with it. This clear understanding of the mistreatment may be due to the fact that it was the institution which had enabled her to plead the case against the Perpetrator and that this court session had been in Mari's recent experience. Yet she, however, speaks of him in a fairly kind way. You can hear how strong an impact, and yet also how surprising, it is to Mari to be confronted in a nice and caring manner by the Perpetrator. This perhaps overshadows even the most severe mistreatment and violence in Mari's voice, and this may have been his intention.

When I ask whether she was also sexually abused that night when she was physically assaulted by the Perpetrator, Mari answers as follows:

‘I don’t really remember squat about that night after I took the hit. There was like a long, black break, then I wake up, and then I pass out again, and then I wake up in the morning.’

Mari then explains in more detail why she does not consider she had been sexually abused (without her consent). She talks about how very difficult it is to consider the Perpetrator to be a bad person, and she explains that he behaved like a caring ‘dream boyfriend’ during the two-week period:

‘I don’t have any recollection at all about that night, but I don’t know anything because he… somehow that guy was so sweet and kind in certain situations. Like in the mornings he brought me coffee and wished me “Good morning, Darling! Did you sleep well?” And like offered me a cigarette without asking and like hugged me and gave me a kiss and acted like a dream boyfriend. So you would think, that kind of person can’t be so bad, as he is still so kind. And he also smiled at me in court.’

There are clear contrapuntal voices in how Mari refers to the Perpetrator. Mari evidently acknowledges that the Perpetrator was caring ‘in certain situations’, but not generally speaking. Still the difference between the caring and kind versus the bad and evil in the same person is difficult for Mari as she sways between knowing and not knowing whether or not the incident constituted mistreatment against her. One emotional hotspot seems to boil down to how Mari voices being brought the ‘cup of coffee’ and being called ‘Darling’, which seem to recur in her voice and are clearly indicators to Mari that she was cared for by somebody.

**Liminal space: disagreeing about the mistreatment (16-year-old)**

When 16 years old, Mari was still in the residential care institution in a liminal space where the starting and ending points of the custody period were equally distant. Mari’s contacts and the people she spent time with had widened as she had started to have holidays outside the institution. In this interview, Mari relates that between the first and the second interview she had had a relationship which had contained physical violence, which she refers to as ‘fights’. Mari talks about her physical attacks with men as fights and not as abuse towards herself and explains that she has learnt the male
way to fight and that she is on a level with men with regard to her physical size as she is fairly tall. You can hear this context also when she talks about the Perpetrator.

For example, at this time, Mari speaks differently about the physical abuse (referred to earlier) by referring to how they had had a sexual relationship and how they had had a fight, in which she only got a black eye. She also talks about the sexual and physical abuse by referring to writings on the internet concerning the incident and the voices of people in the court session.

‘Well it was described in a very interesting way on the internet and also in court. It was like, that everything is his fault because he is a foreigner. Like, well... it is kind of interesting (laughs), but we had a so-called “relationship”, at which term I laugh my head off every time I read it. Yes, we had that one fight, and I got a black eye, and we had like a sexual relationship that others did not look kindly on.’

Mari’s answer is now different from the year before, and this time Mari strongly emphasises that she was ‘fully consenting’ in the sexual relationship with the Perpetrator and that she was not forced into it. You could also say that she had a sexual relationship, therefore she had given her consent to sexual intercourse with the Perpetrator. You can hear the voices of other people as well when Mari tries to convince the listener that she had sex willingly, and this voice also includes the voices of the Perpetrator and his friends. When asked directly whether she considers herself to have been raped, she answers:

‘Well no (wasn’t raped), in my opinion. I was told by the judge that according to Finnish Law yes it is, because I was under 16 and he is like (laughter) 30. But according to me and according to him and according to his friends it wasn’t, because I was fully consenting to his proposal like. I was not like forced, or he didn’t threaten me like “You’ll get beaten, if you don’t...” [Mari did not finish the phrase. The researcher’s interpretation is that the missing words are: “agree to have sex”]. It wasn’t anything like that if I was consenting.’

Unsafe living environment: ignoring people’s opinions (18-year-old)

When Mari was 18 years old and legally grown-up, she lived independently but under legal aftercare. I found out later that during this time she had been dating a person whose apartment was used by drug addicts and that Mari occasionally took the drugs as well. Nevertheless, she had attended school regularly, and her contact person from the aftercare programme did not know about the drugs in her life.

At this time, Mari talks about this incident in a different way by referring to the physical ‘fight’ they had had and in her words, the big bruises on her back are still voiced as just a black eye:

‘I don’t remember what started the fight. It might be that he was jealous because I had talked with some black guy earlier that day. I only remember that I was drunk and I yelled at him “Hit me, I know you want to – go on just hit me! Hit me, are you such a wimp, you don’t have the guts to, just hit me!” Then in the end, he punched me in my face with his fist, and I blacked out
(laughing). But we only fought that one time. Then, anyway, when I woke up, he almost carried me home.

However, Mari again describes her feelings towards the Perpetrator, on this occasion in an even more positive light by saying that she still likes the Perpetrator, and at this point in time she expresses that she does not even care what other people think about her opinion.

‘We still smiled at each other in the courtroom; as soon as we saw each other, we smiled. Then in the end, people noticed that I’m not bitter. I didn’t even want to press charges. I didn’t see anything wrong with anything, full stop. I like this person. I don’t care what other people think about him. We happened to have a fight – oops. This isn’t the end of the world. Everybody has misunderstood my way of thinking, that how can I like that kind of person – WELL I DO LIKE HIM! That’s just too bad.’

Mari previously said that the man smiled at her in the courtroom, but now she says that they smiled at each other. When looking at the first interview, you get the impression that she was initially surprised at the Perpetrator’s smile. But now Mari wants to voice and convince the listener, on the basis of the smiling incident, how she had been consenting and not mistreated by the Perpetrator. Perhaps because of this act of smiling, she wants to voice that she was not bitter about what had happened to her, and it seems to be important to her now that everybody in the court session has witnessed that there is a feeling of mutual caring between them. Mari gives credence to this lack of bitterness by saying that she did not even want to press charges.

**Stable relationship: contrapuntal voices but still a positive attitude towards the Perpetrator (19-year-old)**

As a 19-year-old, Mari lives with a boyfriend that she seems to consider safe and good for her. She has started to take care of herself by exercising, and she is putting in lots of effort at her school.

Mari still speaks about the Perpetrator with kindness, but there are some different aspects in her voice.

‘Like in my eyes, all those accusations, that were presented in court, were a bit contradictory, because I still don’t see this matter in the same way as the others. Like yes, maybe it is named as a certain crime according to the law, but I don’t think that. Because, I don’t know, I somehow remember only how nice that person could be. Like he really knew how to be polite, like “Morning, cup of coffee, how are you.” Like he really knew how to be a nice person. Like I just can’t (laughing) think about him as such a bad person because he was so nice to me. It may be really wrong, when you think what happened then, when I was… young, really young.’

Now there are legal aspects to be heard in Mari’s voice as she says that it may be really wrong that she does not consider the Perpetrator to be a bad person even though she
partly realises what he has done to her. When asked whether she considers now that she was mistreated in any way by the Perpetrator, she says she was not. Mari explains how she remembers how nice and caring the Perpetrator was able to be to her. Yet, she still repeats that she was a young girl. There is again this emotional hotspot when Mari yet again repeats the phrase “I was fully consenting to everything.”

‘Researcher: Was there any mistreatment against you? Any kind at all?  
Mari: Well, if I consider that from my point of view, like what I wanted then, then NO. Because I was fully consenting to everything that happened at that time, even though I surely shouldn’t have been. Like nobody forced me to have alcohol and drugs and sex or anything. Like I was fully consenting to everything. For that reason, I am a bit annoyed by those sections of the law and the accusations because there was my consent. Even though the adults didn’t care what I thought about it all, I was a child and it [researcher’s interpretation that ‘it’ means sexual relationship] was wrong. Like I myself was fully consenting, like I didn’t even want any compensation, I told the lawyer that I don’t want anything because, in my opinion, we shouldn’t even have to be there. Like I don’t think that there is any need, because I was fully consenting to everything, and I said that in front of everybody.’

Mari still repeats many times that she had consented to everything that happened at that time. This is of course contradictory as Mari no longer remembers in detail the physical abuse carried out by the Perpetrator. However, Mari strongly indicates that the intimate relationship with the man was consensual but that her own opinion was overtaken in the court process. She now says that she did not want any compensation, which may mean that she wanted to indicate that nothing wrong had happened to her. There is a strong contradiction in how Mari sees the relation between her age and her own consent. Additionally, she is struggling with the fact that she was a child, but that she was consenting.

Mari again mentions that she is now old enough to know that it was wrong, but according to her, nothing really bad had happened because she considers herself to have been consenting.

‘Somehow I know better; I am at that age that I know it was wrong. But still I can’t think about it as so shocking because I had been consenting in that situation [The researcher’s interpretation is that she means the period of two weeks of time with the Perpetrator].’

She explains her consent by claiming she got love and acceptance and kindness from the adult man, which she lacked at home.

‘It was kind of like a substitute for attention and for love. Because there was a person – particularly a male one – who was polite to me. He was nice to me. He showed like interest in me, gave me attention, said he loved me. And I think I didn’t get that at home. Because Dad was what he was (laughter).’

Mari goes on to explain in more detail why she still understands her motives in that situation as being that somebody cared about her.
‘So (laughter), I do understand myself for seeking male company to get attention and to feel that somebody cared about me.’

Summary of the findings

Overall, Mari’s voice regarding the Perpetrator remains somewhat persistently positive over this fairly long period of time. What differs, though, is how she contextually and situationally applies more clearly other people’s voices to when she herself is voicing about the Perpetrator, and these contextual and situational aspects are summarised and presented in this section.

As a 15-year-old, she recognises and voices the mistreatment when the court session had been quite recent, and she has clearly been discussing the abuse with the safe adults in her life. Yet, she describes how nice and caring the Perpetrator was to her at certain points. As a 16-year-old, in that liminal time-space, Mari strongly disagrees with the notion of mistreatment by saying that she was ‘fully consenting’ in the sexual relationship with the Perpetrator. She also accuses the court and the media of misleadingly speaking about the event. Most probably, the abuse has not been a topic of discussion with the safe adults as often as it was just after the event. This might have led to Mari starting to work out this matter by herself, and her current living context and experiences influence her words. She also seems to be accepting of or to at least belittle the physical violence as if it were a consequence of jealousy.

When she is 18 years old, Mari totally ignores the safe adults’ opinions and states powerfully that she simply likes that kind of person (referring to the Perpetrator) and she belittles the physical abuse by referring to it merely as a fight. Mari speaks about the incident mostly with reference to the court session. Her consent can also be considered to have been given in this situation when returning the Perpetrator’s smile. Moreover, when talking about the smile, she continues to talk about being consenting and not mistreated by the Perpetrator.

As a 19-year-old, she is able to apply all these above-mentioned contrapuntal voices to her ponderings but still clings to the positive attitude towards the Perpetrator. For example, she acknowledges that according to law she has been mistreated, but she still does not consider herself as having been mistreated, nor that anything ‘shocking’ has occurred, because she ‘had been consenting’ in that situation. This is a crucial finding when attempting to understand the adolescent girl’s own perspectives on experiences of sexual violence. This reluctance to acknowledge the mistreatment is clearly linked with the impression of being cared for, and it can even be considered as an illusional form of care. Being noticed by somebody clearly influences how the consent is understood and voiced. There are three emotional and situational hotspots and situations that Mari repeats in her story. These are when the adult man brings coffee to her in the mornings, which illustrates the good and caring aspect of the Perpetrator. Second, Mari and the Perpetrator smile at each other in court. By doing this, the Perpetrator is able to maintain the good and caring image in Mari’s mind. Third, apart from the first interview, Mari repeats the phrase: “I was fully consenting.” This may be linked to the fact that Mari had not actually voiced ‘no’, so she feels she has given her consent (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012: 821). As mentioned earlier, Mari had also experienced sexual violence at the age of 13 inflicted by Nelli’s adult male
acquaintance. The rape was clearer to her when she was not in a relationship with the abuser and had not given her consent to the man, and her lack of consent was voiced afterwards (see also Cook and Messman-Moore, 2018). Yet, Mari still shuns the term ‘rape’ in this clear incident of rape.

**Conclusion**

This study provides some evidence of the vulnerabilities and variabilities in how an adolescent girl with an institutional background voices her previous experiences of a statutory sex crime relationship with an adult man. It was important to hear the stories of violence as the girl herself had experienced and felt them to be able to break the girl’s self-silencing (see also Gilligan, 1982; 2017) even if the girl’s stories were contradictory with the current law and moral codes of society, such as the #MeToo campaign.

The Listening Guide method (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017) used in a single case study enabled me to discover in depth what the girl possibly left unspoken – kept from me and perhaps even from herself. This method was able to reveal the contrapuntal voices and contradictions in the girl’s voicing and also the different temporal, situational and contextual aspects in the girl’s voices and silences concerning her experiences. However, a case study provides little basis for the generalisation of the findings for the wider population. Therefore, it is suggested that this matter be researched within a wider scope and more data.

One theme that consistently arises from the girl’s voicing is the impression of being cared for by the Perpetrator, and, in light of this knowledge, I suggest one additional part to Pearce’s (2013) ‘social model of abused consent’ (marked in grey italics in Figure 1), which is the ‘abusive illusion of care’. This arises from the notion that the impression and feelings of being cared for clearly interrelate with the interpretation of what is named and/or recognised as violence, but also with how severe the experienced violence is voiced – even a long time after the violence has occurred.

This model suggests that it might be useful from the perspective and recovery process of the adolescent who has experienced sexual violence to consider sexual consent as an ongoing and proceeding negotiation which takes into account the situational and contextual aspects. This could enhance the process of finding one’s own voice, enabling the adolescent to verbalise the experience; this voicing would potentially be different depending on the current knowledge, situation and living context of the adolescent.

There is indeed a circle of connection and disconnection, knowing and not knowing, in the adolescent girl’s voice, and it can be described as vulnerable and paradoxical in nature. These controversial aspects need to be considered in violence prevention as a stepping-stone for new and caring ways to confront the violence in order to avoid silencing any voices. In practice, this would mean furthering adolescents’ self-understanding that they have been sexually mistreated and would entail the knowledge of how consent can be abused, and this would also facilitate an understanding of the difference between a ‘good’ attachment and an abusive experience (Pearce, 2013).
Figure 1: Situated, temporal and contextual ongoing and proceeding negotiation on consent.

Source: Inspired by Pearce’s (2013) social model of abused consent. 
Note: The author’s contribution is marked in grey italics.

Notes
1 Originally the Me Too campaign was started by Tarana Burke in 2007. The recent campaign began in the United States in the autumn of 2017 as a resistance to sexual harassment (Zarkov and Davis, 2018).
3 Finnish Criminal Law, Chapter 20, § 1(1).
4 Statutory sex crime relationships with an adult man are defined as non-forcible, voluntary sexual relationships between adults and juveniles (Hines and Finkelhor, 2007).
5 Finnish Criminal Law, Chapter 20, § 6.
6 This is a pseudonym.
7 These research data were produced partly within an EU-funded project (2013–2014).
8 I use the term ‘Perpetrator’ with a capital letter when referring to him.
9 In aftercare, the young person is legally guaranteed a basic income and necessary social support until the age of 21.
10 Pearce’s ‘abusive condoned consent’ is not presented here as the perspective of the professionals is not my research focus.

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Conflict of interest
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