



All the press does is echoes offenders comfortable stories

I used to work with offenders, which meant I also used to have to listen to and challenge gargantuan amounts of bullshit. There was minimising, deflecting, victim blaming, outright denial and attempts at grooming and manipulating staff.

Sometimes it was mind blowingly obvious “my daughter was very well developed from a young age”, at other times it was much more subtle; a mug quoting the serenity prayer (“so are you trying to suggest that you’re offences fall into the “cannot change” camp?) Either way, most of our time was spent listening out for, challenging, and reporting up this endless trail of bullshit. I don’t do that work anymore, but I still regularly, daily, come across the bullshit lines. Why? Because all those things, the deflections, the minimisations, the victim blaming are in the papers- day in, day out. Their bullshit lines, they’re lifting them straight out of what’s supposed to be news.

When the Daily Mail print an article about a 14 year old child “showing off her curves”, I remember the offender(s) who said “she was very well developed at a young age”. When I read an article citing the police reminding women not to get too drunk for their own safety, I remember the man who said “but she let me buy her all those drinks, that means you just want it”.

When BBC online make a reference to “sex charges” instead of sexual assault, I think of the endless offenders who said to me “but I was never charged with rape, I wouldn’t do that, I’m not one of them”. That minimising use of “sex trial” also reminds me of coppers at planning meetings, who would say things like “so are we just talking a bit of fondling with this case?” When the papers use the phrase “relationship” where an adult has abused a child I remember all those offenders who tried the lines “but I loved her too much” and “I loved her so much I didn’t know what to do with that”.

When Victoria Coren says “but what if it was like this” and re-writes someone’s history so that she can be comfortable I remember so, so many offenders (convicted offenders): “her Mum made her believe I did those things”, “She was angry with me for leaving”, or “I think she truly believes I did those things”.

As the probation service is dismantled and privatised (and it’s happening now), the roles that put victims first by challenging that bollocks will be lost. All we’ll be left with is the offenders and the press, the press giving them their “look at me I’m no risk” lines. The only people who’ll be left to hear the bullshit will be the coppers, the coppers who said to me “I know she was underage, but was she sexually active at the time?” or “it’s tricky though isn’t it, she was underage at the start, but she stayed there with him long after she was 16, or even 18”. The mainstream press just has to do something about this- reading the papers shouldn’t feel the same as working with high risk offenders, yet it does, every day.