

= Whitney Dean =

Whitney Dean is a fictional character from the BBC soap opera EastEnders , played by Shona McGarty . The character is the adoptive daughter of long @-@ running character Bianca Jackson (Patsy Palmer) , and was introduced in April 2008 when Palmer returned to the series after a six @-@ year absence . Whitney is described by executive producer Diederick Santer as both an equal to , and younger version of Bianca , and is the oldest of Bianca 's four children . Her storylines have revolved around her fractured family life , her sexual abuse by Bianca 's partner Tony King (Chris Coghill) , her sexual exploitation by Rob Grayson (Jody Latham) , her engagement to Lee Carter (Danny @-@ Boy Hatchard) and becoming pregnant with his baby . McGarty was temporarily written out of EastEnders for four weeks in July 2012 because of her repeated lateness to work .

The child sexual abuse storyline marks the first time the subject matter has been broached in a UK soap opera , and was researched and developed with advice and approval from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children . The inappropriate nature of Tony and Whitney 's relationship resulted in over 200 complaints being made to the BBC and television regulatory body Ofcom by members of the public , with the storyline deemed " horrifying " by the Daily Mail 's Lizzie Smith , and " one of the darkest and most disturbing storylines EastEnders has ever attempted " by the Daily Mirror 's Beth Neil . The NSPCC however have praised the storyline for " helping to raise awareness of the hidden nature of sexual abuse " . The storyline also gained EastEnders a Royal Television Society Programme Award in March 2009 in the Soap and Continuing Drama category .

= = Storylines = =

Whitney first appears when she and her family ? mother figure Bianca Jackson (Patsy Palmer) , half @-@ sister Tiffany Dean (Maisie Smith) , and Bianca 's sons Liam Butcher (James Forde) and Morgan Jackson @-@ King (Devon Higgs) are evicted by their landlord . The children spend a week in care after Bianca is arrested for assaulting a police officer , returning to her custody a week later and moving into Pat Evans ' (Pam St. Clement) house . Over the next few months , Bianca becomes the beneficiary of a mystery " guardian angel " , who is revealed to be Whitney . Whitney tells Bianca she found a winning lottery ticket , but kept it secret as she knew that Bianca would spend the money . Bianca reluctantly agrees to deposit the money ; however Whitney hides some to be used in emergencies . It is revealed that Bianca 's imprisoned boyfriend Tony King (Chris Coghill) has been grooming Whitney since she was 12 and that they 've had a sexual relationship . Having served a year @-@ long sentence for assaulting a boy who apparently harassed Whitney , Tony is released on 12 September 2008 . He makes it clear to Whitney that they will resume their sexual relationship , and Whitney reveals that she has kept some of the lottery winnings so they can run away together . But when Bianca harangues him about the prospect of marriage , he gives her Whitney 's money to put a down @-@ payment on a flat . When Whitney and classmate Peter Beale (Thomas Law) are cast in a school play , Tony is jealous of them rehearsing in private and punches Peter . Whitney convinces Peter and his sister Lucy Beale (Melissa Suffield) not to report the attack to the police , but Tony blames her for the incident and ends their affair . Devastated when Tony accepts Bianca 's marriage proposal , Whitney locks herself in her bedroom . Not knowing what to do , Bianca accepts Dr Poppy Merritt 's (Amy Darcy) help and she refers Whitney to a psychiatrist . Bianca takes her away on holiday , attempting to mend their relationship . When they return on Halloween , Tony and Whitney share a passionate kiss , and Tony informs Whitney that their relationship is back on .

Whitney becomes jealous when Tony begins showing an interest in Lauren Branning (Madeline Duggan) . As her sixteenth birthday approaches , she buys tickets for them to travel abroad . Tony has lost interest in Whitney and hides her passport , but it is found and returned to her . On the day she turns sixteen , Whitney confesses everything to Bianca . Horrified , Bianca calls the police , and Tony is arrested . He is released on bail but Whitney decides to make a statement to the police . Whitney contacts her biological mother Debra Dean (Ruth Gemmell) and tries to discuss the past , but Debra isn 't interested and rejects her . She meets Todd Taylor (Ashley Kumar) and agrees to

go on a date with him , which goes well until he asks about past relationships . Whitney runs away and Bianca 's ex @-@ husband Ricky Butcher (Sid Owen) finds her drunk . Todd returns and Whitney agrees to another date . When Whitney finds a condom in his wallet , she assumes he wants to have sex with her and runs away .

Debra turns up unexpectedly , claiming she is homeless , but reveals she is planning to move to Greece when she has enough money and says Whitney can come with her . Whitney accepts , but later realises that Debra is using her and she is only there to hide from someone . Debra later tells Whitney she has a half @-@ brother , Ryan Malloy (Neil McDermott) . Whitney then takes back her statement against Tony but after Whitney 's barrister sees her mobile phone containing the messages from Tony , he is sentenced to 13 years ' imprisonment . During the trial Whitney learns that Tiffany is Ricky 's daughter . She is initially distressed , but accepts that Tiffany is still her sister although they are not related . She repairs her friendship with Todd , and they kiss at Ricky and Bianca 's engagement party . Their reunion is short @-@ lived , and Whitney breaks up with him in favour of Bianca 's half @-@ brother Billie Jackson (Devon Anderson) . Whitney is attacked by Billie 's jealous friend Kylie (Elarica Gallacher) , and when his friends cause trouble at a grime night at The Queen Victoria pub (The Vic) , Whitney asks him to choose between her and his former gang . Billie chooses Whitney , and Kylie takes revenge by attempting to shoot him , shooting his uncle Jack Branning (Scott Maslen) instead . Jack is hospitalised with major injuries , and Whitney struggles to help Billie deal with his guilt and subsequent anger and rejection from the Branning and Jackson families . She is further deeply upset when Billie decides to join the army in an attempt to make Jack proud . At Billie 's birthday party , Whitney ends up kissing Peter . She spends the night with him and the next day is upset to learn that Billie has died in his sleep . She blames herself for leaving the party after she sees a text message from Billie saying he still loved her . She sends a reply and lays flowers and candles for him . However , she later goes back to Peter for comfort , and he comforts her again on the day of the funeral . The pair then begin a relationship . However Billie 's friend Connor Stanley (Arinze Kene) , starts flirting with her , and asks her why she 'd date someone like Peter after dating Billie . He also asks her to sell some stolen jewellery for him and she agrees .

Whitney falls for Connor , but after it is revealed that Connor has been sleeping with Bianca 's mother Carol Jackson (Lindsey Coulson) and Whitney , Bianca attacks him and turns herself in to the police . Whitney and Carol argue over Connor , and Whitney feels she is not wanted by her family so decides to move out , and stays with Ryan 's estranged wife Janine Malloy (Charlie Brooks) . Kat Moon (Jessie Wallace) offers Whitney a work trial at The Vic for a job , but catches her giving free drinks to Janine . Despite this , she lets Whitney off , telling her she is a natural , and works well at the till . When Kat catches her stealing again , she sacks Whitney , leaving Janine angry with Whitney . After Whitney sees Janine successfully pickpocket someone , she decides to try it herself , but ends up being hit in the face . A man called Rob Grayson (Jody Latham) helps her , buys her food and returns her to Albert Square , giving her his phone number . Whitney tries to kiss Max , causing her to fall out with Lauren . She also argues with Carol , rejects Ricky and is rejected by Liam , Tiffany and Morgan for ruining Ricky 's birthday cake days earlier . Upset , Whitney contacts Rob and asks to stay with him , which he accepts . She throws her phone away and tells nobody that she is going . Janine lies about Whitney 's whereabouts but when she admits she does not know where Whitney is , Lauren and Janine attempt to find her , and Lauren sees her in Dartford going into a club . Lauren goes back with her to her bedsit , but Whitney does not want to go , saying she and Rob are in love . Lauren is then thrown out by Rob . Whitney has sex with a man called Chris (Richard Simons) and it is revealed that Whitney has been having sex with Rob 's friends to pay off his debts to them . Janine tries to get Whitney to come home but she refuses , and Rob ejects Janine . Rob then drags Whitney out of the house and into his car , while Janine and Lauren see them driving off . They go to a house where Whitney meets another woman Chloe (Georgia Henshaw) who is being exploited . Whitney tells Rob she wants to leave , but he says to either be nice to his friends or he will hurt her . He locks her in a room so she breaks the window and escapes , stopping a car and asking for help , while Rob shouts after her .

The following month , she sends Lauren a message and meets her outside the police station ,

looking rough , as she has been arrested for shoplifting . Whitney opts to live with Dot Branning (June Brown) instead of her close family , but Dot convinces her to move back to Ricky 's . When Ryan returns from a holiday , he learns of Whitney 's ordeal and urges her to go to the police and get tested for sexually transmitted infections . She says she is not ready to go to the police but agrees to the test , which shows she has a chlamydia infection . When Whitney starts a relationship with a man named Lee (Mitchell Hunt) , it is revealed that he is a friend of Rob 's , and when Whitney agrees to meet Lee by text , Rob takes control of Lee 's mobile phone . She allows Rob to take her home but then tells him to wait outside while she escapes through the back door and hitches a lift to Southend @-@ on @-@ Sea with friends . She leaves him a voicemail message not knowing that he has followed her . He finds her in her hotel room and tells her how much he loves her , but when Fatboy (Ricky Norwood) comes in , Rob attacks him , so Whitney tells him to leave . Fatboy calls Ryan , who comes to Southend to look for Rob . When he finds him , they fight and fall over the edge of the pier . The next day , a body is recovered from the sea , and is later revealed to be Rob who has died . Whitney thinks Ryan may also be dead until he appears . She tells him she has told the police everything about Rob , including Ryan 's fight with him , and Ryan tells Whitney he has to leave . They say an emotional farewell .

Whitney takes an interest in Tyler Moon (Tony Discipline) but refuses to date him . Whitney applies for a new work experience at the local nursery which she later gets . When Michael Moon (Steve John Shepherd) tells his brother Tyler about Whitney 's recent ordeal , he rejects her but later gives her his special Moon pendant to make up for it . Whitney agrees to go on a date with Tyler and they agree to have sex but Whitney is unsure as she remembers her past and runs out , telling Tyler she never wants to see him again . Tyler is hurt . He later tells Fatboy she needs a shrink which Whitney overhears . She runs out and kisses Fatboy and starts a relationship with him . Fatboy publicly declares his love for Whitney , but when he is unable to give her a driving lesson , Lucy (now Hetti Bywater) suggests that Tyler do it , because she knows that Tyler likes Whitney . Whitney starts to feel smothered by Fatboy 's affections . Lucy teases Tyler by telling him that Fatboy plans to publicly propose to Whitney , so Tyler tells Whitney he likes her but Whitney says it is too late . Tyler then surprises Whitney by kissing her . Whitney , feeling guilty , refuses to go on holiday with Fatboy , and tells him to kiss her . He does , but she says it is like kissing her best friend . She then admits she wants Tyler , and Fatboy is heartbroken . Whitney then goes to see Tyler but finds him with Lucy , kissing . She then tells Tyler to leave her alone . However , Tyler later tells Whitney that he cannot , as he loves her . Whitney admits to feeling the same way , and they begin a relationship .

Whitney believes she is pregnant , and when she tells Tyler , he seems reluctant to take on a child . However he comes round to the idea , but Whitney discovers she is not pregnant after all . Bianca is caught stealing money and returns to prison , but this time located in Suffolk . The rest of Whitney 's family move to Suffolk to be near her , but Whitney stays and looks after the house , along with Bianca 's uncle Derek Branning (Jamie Foreman) . Soon after , Tyler moves in . Whitney is angry when Joey Branning (David Witts) kisses her . Several months later , after Bianca and the rest of the family move back , Whitney and Tyler plan to get their own home . Whitney tells Tyler about the kiss with Joey , so he breaks up with her . However , he regrets it and proposes to Whitney ; she accepts . Bianca disapproves when she finds out . When Lauren kisses Tyler to make her ex @-@ boyfriend Joey jealous , Whitney ends her friendship with Lauren . After several weeks Lauren and Whitney make up . She receives a letter from a stranger , which the letter is from Tony , asking Whitney to come and see him in prison . Whitney then goes to the prison to visit Tony but is told that he has committed suicide . Trying to come to terms from Tony 's death , she goes out for lunch with Tyler at Scarlett 's , but they later argue which leads to Whitney ending their engagement and storming out . She then goes for a drink at R & R and Joey tries to comfort her which leads them to start flirting with one another . They then share a kiss and go back to Joey 's house to have sex . She tells Tyler , and they both realise that they will not work out , and Tyler leaves Walford .

Whitney gets a job as a teaching assistant at Walford Primary School . During one breaktime , she warns Dennis Rickman Jnr (Harry Hickles) not to run in the playground . He ignores her and falls over , grazing his arm . Whitney does not react in the professional manner she is supposed to ,

causing Dennis 's injury to be ignored . When Dennis 's mother , Sharon Rickman (Letitia Dean) questions Dennis about his injury , he lies that Whitney assaulted him . Sharon complains and Whitney is suspended , but appeals for her job and is allowed to keep it . Whitney later sets her sights on newcomer Johnny Carter (Sam Strike) , unaware that he is gay . Johnny 's parents , Mick Carter (Danny Dyer) and Linda Carter (Kellie Bright) , hope that Johnny and Whitney will become an item , but his sister Nancy Carter (Maddy Hill) reveals to them that he is gay . A few weeks later , Johnny comes out to Whitney , which hurts her as she feels that Johnny has been using her . They later become good friends and Whitney forgives Johnny .

When Johnny 's elder brother Lee Carter (Danny @-@ Boy Hatchard) returns from serving in Afghanistan , Whitney takes an instant liking to him and they share a kiss . She discovers that Lee had sex with Lucy , which upsets her greatly and she spams Lucy 's Facebook page with horrible comments . The next day , Lucy is found dead . At her funeral , Tamwar Masood (Himesh Patel) discovers a condolences card with " Rot in Hell " written on it , and realises the handwriting matches Whitney 's . When he confronts her , she tells him that Lucy was sending her abusive texts about her looks , and that she completely despised her . Feeling sorry for Whitney , Tamwar rips up the card , but it is later recovered by his suspicious sister , Shabnam Masood (Rakhee Thakrar) .

Upon Lee 's return from the army , Whitney gives the relationship another chance . She struggles with the prospect of making their romance sexual , but eventually agrees to when he talks about his feelings for her . Ryan 's young daughter Lily Branning (Aine Garvey) comes to live in Walford when her mother Stacey Branning (Lacey Turner) is sent to prison , and Whitney babysits her . She puts a photo of herself and Lily online and is shocked when Ryan contacts her under the alias of ' Simon Parker ' . After speaking with Johnny and Lee , she decides to reply . Stacey is granted her appeal and freed but Whitney worries it will ruin her relationship with Lily . Whitney tells Lily about Ryan saying she could possibly meet him . When Stacey finds out , she argues with Whitney and says she will not be seeing Lily again . Whitney then messages Ryan saying she needs to see him urgently . Whitney then arranges to meet Ryan at the park . Stacey and Lily visit the park whilst Whitney is waiting for Ryan . Stacey apologises to Whitney and she accepts . Whitney thinks Ryan has stood her up , so leaves with Stacey and Lily . Ryan turns up late and hides on seeing Stacey , and remains unseen as a result .

Bianca tells Whitney she is moving to Milton Keynes with her partner Terry Spraggan (Terry Alderton) , and wants her to move with them and the children . Although originally agreeing , Lee persuades her to stay and she moves into the pub with the Carters . Lee develops depression , and when Whitney finds out , she struggles to support him at his lowest points . At Mick 's stag party before his wedding to Linda , Lee knocks himself unconscious and is carried upstairs by Mick and Whitney . Whitney confesses to Mick that she intends to break up with Lee after the wedding , unable to handle his depression . However , she is unaware that Lee has overheard her via the baby monitor . On the day of the wedding , Lee goes missing and Whitney and Mick find him drunk at the park . Lee tells Whitney that he blames himself for her wanting to break up with him , and she promises him that they will work things out . Whitney later thanks Mick for helping her with Lee , but accidentally kisses him on the lips in the process . While Mick and Linda are on their honeymoon , Whitney invites Ryan back to Walford to see Lily , but while at the pub , he steals the cash from the safe , causing Whitney and Nancy to fight , just as Mick and Linda walk in on them . The next morning , Whitney contacts Ryan and he asks to meet in the park . Mick accompanies Whitney and assures a scared Ryan that he can trust him . It then emerges that Whitney told Mick that Ryan killed Rob , so Whitney and Mick convince Ryan to return the money and hand himself to the police , and Whitney will back him up in the hope of him being charged with manslaughter instead of murder , to which Ryan agrees . Whitney shares an emotional goodbye with Ryan as he heads into the police station . On the ride home from the police station , an upset Whitney tells Mick that she has feelings for him and kisses him again . Mick tells Linda what happened , so Linda tells her to stay away from Mick and not to give up on Lee . Whitney later visits Ryan in prison , stating that she is worried about Lee . When she accidentally says Mick 's name , he guesses that she has feelings for Mick , which she denies . He then urges Whitney to help Lee , so she gets him a job interview at a local pub , however this causes major grievances between Lee and Nancy . Whitney is forced by

Babe to tell Lee about her kissing Mick , and although Nancy tells her to move out , Lee 's response is to propose marriage .

When discovers she is pregnant by Lee , but all her hints and attempts to tell him fail . Linda realises and is ecstatic when Whitney confirms it . Linda tells Mick , and when Whitney tells Lee , Mick and Linda rush into the room to celebrate before he has a chance to let the news sink in .

= = Creation = =

In October 2007 , it was announced that the character Bianca Jackson was returning to EastEnders after an absence of six years . Whitney was created as part of her new family ; the daughter of Bianca 's deceased partner Nathan Dean . She was described as " a teenage drama queen , unable to engage brain before mouth and constantly finding herself in and out of trouble " . Bianca sees Whitney as one of her own , and also as " a friend and confidante " . EastEnders ' executive producer Diederick Santer said that his vision for the character was someone " quite spiky , quite gobby , a bit of an equal to Bianca , and in a way a version of Bianca at that age " . Shona McGarty was cast in the role .

Considering the character 's role in the wider context of the show as a whole , it was decided that Whitney would be involved in a sexual relationship with Bianca 's partner Tony King . BBC News described the plot as an ongoing " predatory paedophile storyline " , noting that this was the first time this subject matter had been tackled by a UK soap opera . The storyline was conceived when EastEnders series consultant Simon Ashdown viewed a documentary about homelessness , featuring a mother and child at a bus stop with nowhere to go . Ashdown questioned what might happen if a paedophile were to befriend the mother in order to grow closer to the child , and related the scenario to Bianca 's return to the soap . BBC Head of Drama John Yorke explained that the idea when presented " drew a sharp intake of breath . Most EastEnders stories that have been good and successful have been the ones that caused the sharp intake of breath , so they 're always the kind of stories you look for . "

The idea that McGarty play a child groomed for sex was put to the actress on 9 January 2008 . Santer has stated that , had McGarty or her parents objected to the storyline , they would not have gone ahead with it . In the event , McGarty 's parents merely requested that their daughter not be asked to publicise the role , and the actress began filming her first scenes on 14 January 2008 .

= = Development = =

= = = Sexual abuse = = =

In order to develop Whitney 's sexual abuse storyline , by March 2008 EastEnders researchers Libby Duplock and Cleo Bicat were in contact with the NSPCC 's Tom Narducci , Jude Toasland , who deals with abused children , and Yvonne Traynor , CEO of the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre . Duplock has stated that : " One thing that was quite difficult for me to get right was the idea that she didn 't want sex . It 's Whitney 's way of keeping Tony happy . If she lets him do it , then he 's nicer to her and he makes her feel special . " Research highlighted the fact that 12 % of abused children go on to become abusers in turn , however Duplock explained : " We felt that to imply on TV that someone who has been abused is going to go on to abuse other people is not a message you want to give out . Those people have been through enough . " Narducci for the NSPCC stated that importance was placed on making children viewing the show " feel comfortable about asking for help if they felt they needed it [and] for the wider community - to recognise the signs and let them know that they can do something about it . [...] We 're not trying to cause a national panic . This is a responsible effort to try to get over an important story . "

It had initially been decided that , alongside Tony 's sexual abuse , Whitney would be seen to self @-@ harm . This aspect of the storyline was discarded , after the NSPCC suggested that it may distract from the main issue of her abuse . Final approval for the storyline was sought from BBC

Head of Fiction Jane Tranter on 2 June 2008 . Tranter explained :

" I thought it was a fantastically good idea . The big moments in EastEnders , those iconic pieces of television history , tend to be the things that are incredibly near the knuckle , and are actually quite difficult subjects to raise in the context of a family sitting room . [...] Soaps are meant to hold up a mirror to our lives , and sometimes that mirror will show ugly bits , difficult bits , taboo bits . But if a soap doesn 't hold up that mirror , then actually , what is it ? It will have no depth . "

Chris Coghill was cast as Whitney 's abuser Tony on 20 June 2008 . Upon accepting the role , he commented : " Shona doesn 't act , or look , like a little child . Which helps . " He has added of their off @-@ screen relationship : " Shona 's fantastic to work with . She 's very natural , very instinctive and a natural actress . There isn 't any uncomfortable feeling at all . " Having undergone a thorough characterisation session , Coghill began shooting on 30 June 2008 , and first appeared on @-@ screen on 12 September 2008 . Coghill has explained that Tony began grooming Whitney as soon as he met Bianca , ingratiating himself so as to become the family 's " hero figure " and " saviour " . Discussing his character 's relationship with Whitney , Coghill explained that : " The lie that Tony has spun to Whitney is that as soon as she 's 16 they 'll run away together and start a new life . But Tony 's the type of paedophile who preys on younger children . Whitney is beginning to pass her sell @-@ by date with him . [...] He feels like he 's losing his little girl but needs to keep Whitney under his control and not speak out . " Coghill stated that : " This is the most challenging role I have had to play . But I hope by EastEnders tackling the sensitive issue of child abuse it can raise awareness . " When asked how she felt about the abuse storyline , Palmer commented : " It would be brilliant if it helped somebody . If one person out there who 's been abused saw [the legal system] go out of their way to make it easier on the victim ? Whitney 's evidence is given by video link ? it will be worth it . "

= = = Sexual exploitation = = =

In January 2011 , it was announced that Whitney would be part of an upcoming storyline on sexual exploitation . Whitney is left alone and vulnerable , and falls for a man , Rob Grayson , played by Jody Latham , who exploits her for financial gain . EastEnders worked alongside charity Comic Relief on the storyline , which started planning in 2010 . The storyline culminated during Red Nose Day 2011 on 19 March 2011 , in a special ten @-@ minute episode . Gilly Green , Head of UK Grants at Comic Relief , said : " It is vital that we continue to alert young people to the dangers if we are to stop them being exploited and the opportunity to work with EastEnders will make a huge audience aware of this issue . We have been working with the EastEnders script writers and some of the young women from projects we support to ensure the story reflects the reality of young people caught up in sexual exploitation . " Kevin Cahill , Chief Executive of Comic Relief , added " We have worked over many years with EastEnders in all kinds of ways . It 's been a real pleasure this year to work together on a piece of serious drama , in the best traditions of public service , which will highlight an important issue and also , because it occurs on the night of Comic Relief , actually help raise crucial funds to help young women caught up in it . " The storyline begins when Bianca is sent to prison and Whitney rejects her family , moving in with Janine and attempting to make money by stealing from The Queen Victoria , causing her to get sacked , working for Max , whom she tries to kiss as she has a crush on him , and pickpocketing . When she is caught , Rob rescues her from the situation and offers her what McGarty called a " dream life " , which Whitney thinks is her chance to move up in the world as she feels lonely and has no friends .

McGarty told Inside Soap that she hoped the storyline would have a positive impact , saying that she had done some research herself before filming , meeting teenage girls who had been exploited and hearing their experiences . She said she felt honoured and privileged to be given the storyline .

= = Other appearances = =

Whitney makes a cameo appearance in episode eight of the second series of the Internet spin @-@ off series EastEnders : E20 , in which she buys some trainers from Asher Levi (Heshima

Thompson) but later returns them as they are of different sizes . Jane Beale (Laurie Brett) joins the argument and snatches Asher 's wallet when he says he does not give refunds , but he snatches it back . Jane tells two police officers he is a thief and they chase after him .

= = Reception = =

The BBC and television regulatory body Ofcom received 70 complaints after Whitney 's first scenes with Tony aired . A BBC spokesman responded : " This is a difficult and challenging storyline , but one which keeps with the tradition of the show for tackling difficult social issues such as domestic abuse and mental health in the past . All the content on screen adheres to the BBC 's editorial guidelines . " The Guardian 's Aida Edemariam said of the beginning of the storyline : " what is most disturbing , watching [Tony and Whitney 's] first scenes together , is not the sexuality of the situation per se , though that is uncomfortable - it 's the subtle blackmail with which he keeps her in line . As it 's combined with the emotional manipulation native to soaps , the viewer starts to feel a bit bullied , too . " Numbers of viewer complaints rose within days to over 200 . New Statesman journalist Jeremy Sare commented on the public outrage and defended EastEnders decision to air the storyline , writing :

" There may be some justification for the hundreds complaining about these distressing issues being presented in prime time : equally it is courageous for the Beeb to include a scenario which challenges the public 's perception of what is a ? typical paedophile ? . The repellent Tony 's grooming and seduction of his stepdaughter , Whitney , is a much more familiar pattern of abuse than the more commonly held image of predators lurking in parks . [...] The producers of Eastenders , labouring under a welter of tabloid protest and viewers ' complaints , are attempting to make people get past the initial revulsion of the act of abuse and accept the grim fact that ? paedophiles ? are very often members of the same family . "

Sare quoted a BBC spokeswoman as saying : " we appreciate that for some viewers this storyline will have particular resonance and significance . In running it , it 's certainly not our intention to cause distress or upset , either to those who 've suffered from sexual abuse or their families . Our aim is instead to raise awareness of this very sensitive issue " , concluding his article with the summation : " The producers ' dilemma is instructive to children 's charities and Ministers alike on how to confront the issue in a digestible manner which can stimulate an objective debate . "

The Daily Mirror 's Beth Neil branded the plot strand " one of the darkest and most disturbing storylines EastEnders has ever attempted " , with critic Jim Shelley deeming it a " new low " for EastEnders . Shelley wrote of Whitney 's abuse : " You 've really got to hand it to EastEnders . Just when you thought the show couldn 't get any more miserable , the writers come up trumps and produce a new way of making us depressed - a paedophile storyline . Thanks for that ! I realise now this is what the family meal has been missing three nights a week : gathering the telly to watch a grubby , greasyhaired thug drooling over a 15 @-@ year @-@ old girl who (as luck would have it) spends her entire life in her school uniform even when she 's not at school . And they say family entertainment 's dead . " Shelley refuted the BBC 's claims that the storyline had educational value as " totally bogus " , observing that " At 7 @. @ 30 or 8pm , the " action " has to be so coded as to be pointless " . Deborah Orr , writing for The Independent , similarly disagreed with the BBC 's statement that the storyline was part of EastEnders ' " rich heritage of tackling difficult social issues " , writing that :

" Actually , it 's part of its rich heritage of leaping in to some horrific subject without any background or build @-@ up at all . The implication is that Tony , the villain , had been grooming the child for some time before he went to prison , when she was only 12 . But such a thing really would be too real , and too controversial , so the viewer only gets to see the result of those hinted @-@ at dark machinations .

" It might be a public service to dramatise the manner in which a paedophile might worm his way into a vulnerable family . But such a storyline would have to be explored carefully and over a long period . All that this little adventure in broadcasting can possibly deliver is the message that a paedophile in the heart of the home is not a good thing . Who needs to be educated about this ? "

The Daily Mail 's Lizzie Smith deemed the storyline " horrifying " , while The Guardian 's Julie Raeside questioned : " Is this latest sexual abuse storyline a good thing to position in a pre @-@ watershed soap opera , or should the EastEnders storyliners stick to a less controversial brand of misery ? " However , in contrast to public and media dissent , the NSPCC 's director of communications , John Grounds , praised the storyline for " helping to raise awareness of the hidden nature of sexual abuse " , deeming it to be " vital in persuading people to take action to stop it and encouraging children to speak out . "

Episodes from Whitney 's storyline were submitted to the Royal Television Society Programme Awards 2008 for a panel to judge in the category Soap and Continuing Drama . EastEnders was presented with the award in March 2009 , beating Coronation Street and The Bill . Members of the judging panel described the submitted episodes as " the culmination of a particularly challenging and controversial storyline which the production team , writers and cast pulled off triumphantly . "