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More than “Potential Offenders”: Understanding Adults who are Sexually Attracted to Children who have not Offended

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MORE THAN “POTENTIAL OFFENDERS”
Abstract

There has been recent recognition that pedophilia has largely been studied and addressed in the context of child sex offending. Using a qualitative-dominant mixed method design, this study explores what it is like to live with an attraction to children for those who are non-offending, how such individuals manage their attraction, and what support needs they have. The experiences of nine minor-attracted men as captured in semi-structured interviews were analysed. Through an interpretive phenomenological analysis, five themes were identified: ‘A Sexual Attraction to Children’, ‘Stigma and Identity Distress’, ‘Disclosure’, ‘Strategies for Living Well’, and, ‘Vision for Change’. In addition to this, demographic and descriptive data collected in online surveys with 85 minor-attracted persons were computed. Overall, participants experienced their attraction to children as complex, with challenges that included making sense of their attraction as a sexual orientation, living with distress, and the public vilification of people with pedophilia. Drawing from individual strengths, behavioural strategies, and peer resources, participants described coping with distress and managing their sexual behaviour. In light of their abilities to regulate their sexual attractions, participants did not necessarily perceive themselves to be at risk of child sex offending. Participants expressed a need for greater support options for minor-attracted persons and approaches to support that are not founded on stereotypical understandings of minor-attraction. This would recognise that minor-attracted persons who have not offended are not simply “potential offenders” but are human beings who can be prosocial and wish to be accepted in society.
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Chapter Outline

This research is about what it is like to live with an attraction to children in those who do not offend. It explores how such individuals manage their attractions and what support needs they have.

Chapters 1 through 5 set the research context by reviewing relevant and current literature. This encompasses the domains of pedophilia; how some people with pedophilia refrain from offending; stigma; managing distress; and new approaches to addressing pedophilia.

Chapter 6 details the methodology of this research. This includes a discussion of the research design, the philosophical foundations of the research, and the method.

Research findings are presented and discussed in two phases. Phase I is an analysis of the interview findings and constitutes the focus of the research. The findings are presented and discussed in Chapters 7 through 11. Each of the five chapters constitute one theme. A brief summary of themes precedes Chapter 7.

Chapters 12 and 13 present and discuss the demographic and descriptive statistics from Phase II (the surveys). These results are presented in a supplemental role to Phase I. They are arranged across four main domains which are outlined in a summary preceding Chapter 12.
Finally, Chapter 14 provides the conclusions and implications of this research based on an integration of the interview and survey findings. This chapter also presents the limitations of this research study and directions for future research.