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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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MORE THAN “POTENTIAL OFFENDERS”

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Appendices.....	x
Chapter Outline	1
Chapter 1: Pedophilia.....	3
What is Pedophilia?.....	3
Prevalence of Pedophilia	5
Pedophilia as a Sexual Orientation.....	6
Etiology of Pedophilia.....	8
The Relationship Between Pedophilia and Sexual Offending	9
People with Pedophilia who are Non-offending.....	10
Identifying labels.....	11
Chapter 2: How some People with Pedophilia Refrain from Offending.....	13
Theories of Sexual Offending.....	13
Sexual Fantasies and Masturbation.....	17
Chapter 3: Stigma.....	20
The Origin of Stigma.....	20
The Nature of Stigma Towards People with Pedophilia.....	21
Living with Stigma.....	23
Concealable stigmas and wellbeing.....	24
Disclosures of pedophilia.....	26
Chapter 4: Managing Distress.....	29
Stress and Coping Theory.....	29
Coping with Pedophilia.....	31
Chapter 5: Support for People with Pedophilia.....	34
Limitations with Current Support.....	34
New Support Services.....	36
Research Problem and Research Question.....	39
Chapter 6: Methodology.....	40
Design.....	40
Theoretical Underpinning.....	41

The role of the researcher.....	42
Reflexivity.....	43
Research Materials.....	47
The interview.....	47
The survey.....	48
Ethical Considerations.....	49
Who could participate?	50
Terminology.....	52
Privacy and confidentiality.....	53
Psychological support.....	54
Disclosures of risk during interview.....	55
Cultural sensitivity.....	57
Benefits of participation.....	57
Recruitment Procedure and Participants.....	58
Interviews.....	59
Surveys.....	62
Data Analysis.....	59
Interview analysis.....	59
Survey analysis.....	62
Phase I: The Interviews.....	65
Chapter 7: Theme 1: A Sexual Attraction to Children.....	67
Subtheme 1: The Nature of Attraction.....	67
Sexual attraction (not action)	67
Emotional and social attraction.....	71
Exclusivity.....	72
Sexual orientation.....	74
Subtheme 2: The Acknowledgement Process.....	77
First awareness.....	77
Making sense: naivety and negotiation.....	78
Acknowledgement	83
Summary.....	88
Chapter 8: Theme 2: Stigma and Identity Distress.....	89
Subtheme 1: Stigma.....	89
Vilification.....	90
Within-group stigma.....	96

Subtheme 2: Identity Distress.....	99
Anticipated stigma.....	102
Internalised stigma.....	103
Sense of loss.....	105
Summary	107
Chapter 9: Theme 3: Disclosure.....	109
Subtheme 1: The Decision Process.....	109
Mental struggle.....	109
Desperation point.....	113
Concealment.....	115
Subtheme 2: Personal Coming Outs.....	118
A systematic process.....	118
The response.....	121
Subtheme 3: Online Peer Forum Disclosure.....	126
Belonging.....	126
Subtheme 4: Disclosures to Professionals.....	128
The gap.....	128
Misunderstood and judged.....	132
Beacons of hope.....	135
Summary.....	137
Chapter 10: Theme 4: Strategies for Living Well.....	139
Subtheme 1: Coping with Emotions.....	139
Maladaptive coping.....	140
Cognitive Strategies.....	143
Redefinition.....	143
Acceptance.....	146
Hope.....	148
Social Support.....	149
Subtheme 2: Managing the attraction.....	153
Internal qualities.....	154
Outlets.....	159
Contact with children.....	163
Summary.....	169
Chapter 11: Theme 5: Vision for Change.....	170
Subtheme 1: Support Options.....	170

MORE THAN “POTENTIAL OFFENDERS”

In-person peer support groups.....	170
Specialised therapists.....	174
Subtheme 2: De-stigmatisation.....	182
Subtheme 3: Education.....	186
Summary.....	189
Phase II: The Survey.....	191
Chapter 12: Survey Results	192
Demographics.....	192
The Attraction to Children.....	194
Mental Health.....	195
Help and Support Seeking.....	196
Chapter 13: Survey Discussion.....	198
Demographics.....	198
The Attraction to Children.....	201
Mental Health.....	204
Help and Support Seeking.....	207
Summary.....	211
Chapter 14: Conclusion	212
Limitations.....	218
Direction for Future Research.....	222
References.....	225
Appendices.....	253

List of Tables

Table 1: Subcategories of Pedophilia.....	4
Table 2: Structure of Interview Themes.....	65

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of Studies Examining the Experience of Minor-Attraction in Non-forensic Samples.....	253
Appendix B: Survey	255
Appendix C: Interview Schedule.....	263
Appendix D: Pre Interview Statement.....	264
Appendix E: Disclosure of Risk Statement.....	266
Appendix F: Survey Information Sheet	267
Appendix G: Interview Information Sheet	269
Appendix H: Project Advertisement	272
Appendix I: Interview Participant Demographics and Key Attraction Features.....	274
Appendix J: Demographic Results of Survey Participants.....	275
Appendix K: Features of Survey Participants’ Attraction to Children.....	277
Appendix L: Mental Health of Survey Participants.....	279
Appendix M: Impact of Attraction to Children on Survey Participants’ Wellbeing	280
Appendix N: Participants’ Help Seeking for their Attraction to Children.....	281

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.

MORE THAN “POTENTIAL OFFENDERS”

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.