

**EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN SEXUAL THOUGHTS OF CHILDREN AND SEXUAL
OFFENDING AGAINST CHILDREN**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the link between sexual thoughts of children and child sexual abuse perpetration. There is a growing recognition of the importance of perpetration-focused primary prevention of child sexual abuse (CSA), although few such programs exist. Rather, primary prevention of CSA efforts are primarily victim-focused universal school-based interventions. While perpetration-focused prevention efforts are primarily focused on recidivism reduction. Assessing the perspectives of people with sexual thoughts of children may help in identifying intervention targets for perpetration-focused primary prevention of CSA. This dissertation seeks to expand knowledge on the link between sexual thoughts of children and CSA perpetration through three aims:

1. Identify demographic correlates of having a sexual thought of a child and explore the circumstances in which the participant would act on their sexual thoughts of a child, what excites them about the sexual thought, and how they feel after the sexual thought (Chapter 2).
2. Assess the relationship between specific risk factors for CSA perpetration and the circumstances under which they would act on the sexual thought, and their risk of CSA perpetration (Chapter 3).
3. Identify a subgroup of people whose sexual thoughts of children are characterized as unwanted (Chapter 4).

I address these aims using data from the Sexual Thoughts Project, which collected data from community-based men recruited primarily from the UK, Ireland, Italy and the US between 2005 and 2007. I show that:

1. Men with and without sexual thoughts of children did not differ on most basic demographic characteristics. However, participants who acknowledged sexual thoughts

of children were more likely to also acknowledge sexual experiences with adult male sexual partners, or the complete absence of sexual activity as an adult.

2. A primary protective factor against CSA perpetration is concern for the child's well-being.
3. A primary risk factor for CSA perpetration among people with relatively stronger sexual interest in children is the belief that children can consent to sex with adults.

The findings from this study are preliminary; however, leveraging protective concern for children and addressing why children cannot consent to sex with adults may be important strategies for perpetration-focused prevention efforts.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Child Sexual Abuse Victimization Rates

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is among the 24 leading contributors to global disease. Between 2010 to 2019, the global burdens attributed to CSA has increased annually by 0.87% (Murray et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2009). Child sexual abuse affects approximately 10-17% of girls and 4-5% of boys in the US (Finkelhor et al., 2014, 2015; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). A review of meta-analyses estimated a global rate of CSA of 7.6-7.9% for boys and 18.0-19.7% for girls (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). Since 1990, the rate of CSA in the US has declined about 62%, from approximately 70 children per 10,000 to 25 children per 10,000 per year, with the steepest declines occurring between 1990 and 2000. Rates remained relatively flat between 2012 and 2018 (Finkelhor et al., 2020). Nevertheless, even at historic lows, the prevalence of CSA is still far too high, indicating a need for more effective prevention efforts.

1.2 CSA Victimization Outcomes

Experiencing CSA increases the numerous problems throughout the course of an individual's life. Sexual abuse can increase the risk of pregnancy for girls, as well as sexually transmitted infections (Sommarin et al., 2014). Furthermore, CSA victimization increases the risk of future victimization and being in abusive future relationships, and increases the risk of future perpetration of violent and sexual crimes, future sexual dysfunction, and various mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorders, self-injury and suicide (Gewirtz-Meydan & Opuda, 2020; Logan-Greene et al., 2015; Maniglio, 2011; Noll et al., 2007; Sommarin et al., 2014). Each of these outcomes also contributes to the lifetime economic burden of CSA, which is estimated to be \$9.3 billion annually in the US (Letourneau et al., 2018). The pervasiveness, harmfulness, and cost of CSA point to the importance of primary prevention of CSA perpetration.

1.3 Conceptualizing the causes of CSA

There are multiple ways of conceptualizing the causes of child sexual abuse perpetration (CSA). Ward and Siegert (2002) described various pathways to the perpetration of CSA that stem from four core deficits: intimacy deficits, deviant sexual scripts, emotional dysregulation, and cognitive distortions. Ward and Beech (2006) then expanded on Ward and Siegert's (2002) pathways model to create the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending model. This model expands on the pathways model to also include factors related to biological factors, such as brain development, and ecological factors, such as the social and cultural environment and the individual's personal circumstances. This new Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending suggests four sets of factors cause sexual offending: (1) biological factors, (2) ecological factors, (3) neuropsychological factors, and (4) personal agency (Ward & Beech, 2016). Specific clinical symptoms related to sexual offending in the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending are: (1) problems with emotional and behavioral regulation, such as having high impulsivity, (2) need for intimacy and control, primarily driven by social difficulties, loneliness, or low self-esteem, (3) offense supportive beliefs, such as permissive attitudes towards adult-child sex, and (4) sexual interest in children (Ward & Beech, 2016).

Seto (2017) developed the Motivation-Facilitation Model of sexual offending, which describes sexual offending as the result of the interplay between motivational factors, facilitation factors, and situational factors. Motivational factors include paraphilias, primarily focusing on (1) pedophilia, a sexual interest in prepubescent children, (2) hebephilia, a sexual interest in early pubescent children, (3) biastophilia, a sexual interest in coercive sex, (4) sexual sadism, a sexual interest in causing pain, (5) exhibitionism, a sexual interest in exposing one's genitals without consent, and (5) voyeurism, a sexual interest in viewing others' undressing or engaged in sexual activity without the other's knowledge. Additional motivational factors are a heightened sex drive and an intense mating effort, which is a drive towards sex with novel partners (Seto,

2017). Facilitation factors are not inherently related to a motivation to sexually offend but may increase the risk of acting upon motivational factors. Facilitation factors can either be traits or states. A trait is a stable personal factor that does not readily change, such as an antisocial personality or poor self-regulation skills. State factors are dynamic and can change frequently, such as feeling angry, or intoxicated. Finally, situational factors are related to factors that are external to the individual, such as having easy access to a child. Individuals who have multiple motivational factors for CSA perpetration may still avoid offending if there are no, or few, facilitating or situational factors present (Seto, 2017).

Finally, Sullivan & Sheehan (2016) sought to identify the explicit motivations of people who have sexually abused a child through interviews with 63 men who had sexually offended against a child. Sullivan & Sheehan identified three primary motivators for perpetrating CSA: sexual interest in children, personal affirmation (that is, wanting to be loved), and to gain a sense of power and control. They also noted that many participants attributed motivations to abuse to their own formative experiences. These models are not necessarily incompatible with one another; rather, they examine the causes of CSA from different perspectives.

Between the Pathways model, Motivation-Facilitation-Model and the descriptions of specific motivational factors, there are a number of similarities in specific risk factors. For example, Ward and Siegert (2002) describe deviant sexual scripts, including a sexual interest in children, which is also implicated as a motivational factor by Seto's Motivation-Facilitation-Model as well as a strong motivational risk factor identified by people who have sexually abused a child (Sullivan & Sheehan, 2016). However, it is important to note that not all people with a sexual interest in children will perpetrate CSA, and approximately 50% of all CSA perpetration is committed by people who are not sexually interested in children (Seto, 2009). People without a sexual interest in children may still perpetrate CSA due to a lack of opportunities with preferred sexual partners, hypersexuality, indiscriminate sexual interests, or disinhibition (Seto, 2018). Sexual interest in children is therefore not necessary or sufficient for CSA perpetration, and so it

is important to identify the additional pathways to CSA perpetration even among people who appear to have such interest.

The present project takes a similar approach to Sullivan and Sheehan (2016), who interviewed 63 men incarcerated for CSA about their motivations for perpetrating CSA. However, this project focuses on community-based men with sexual thoughts of children and explores the hypothetical circumstances under which they would act on the sexual thought of a child. I seek to better understand the potential pathways from sexual thoughts of children to CSA perpetration to inform primary prevention efforts targeted towards people with a sexual interest in children. First, I summarize the CSA perpetration prevention literature.

1.4 Perpetration-Focused Primary Prevention of CSA

Violence prevention efforts are often classified based on the intended target and the timing of the prevention effort. With regards to the intended target of prevention efforts, universal prevention efforts focus on everyone in a defined population regardless of individual risk-factors. Selective prevention efforts focus on a narrower subset of individuals who exhibit some risk factors. Indicated prevention efforts focus on individuals with signs of problematic sexual behavior (Shields, Rothman, et al., 2020).

With regards to the timing, primary prevention refers to efforts focused on preventing any offending behavior. Secondary prevention has been inconsistently defined with regards to CSA perpetration prevention. Some researchers have used secondary prevention to refer to after risk factors for CSA perpetration appear, but before CSA occurs (e.g., (Shields, Rothman, et al., 2020), while others have used secondary prevention to refer to the immediate response after CSA perpetration occurs (e.g., (Wilpert & Janssen, 2020). Tertiary prevention of CSA prevention refers to the long-term response after sexual violence has occurred, for perpetration-focused prevention this is commonly treatments to reduce sexual recidivism risk.

The inconsistency in the definition of secondary prevention creates confusion in the prevention of CSA literature, as prevention programs focused on people with a sexual interest in children with the goal of preventing a first-time offense have been referred to as either primary prevention or secondary prevention. For example, Wilpert and Janssen (2020) places helping people with a sexual interest in children to not offend as primary prevention. Additionally, Shields and colleagues (2020) discusses the Help Wanted intervention as primary prevention, which seeks to help adolescents and young adults with a sexual interest in children to lead a happy, healthy and non-abusing life. However, numerous researchers have defined targeting people with a sexual interest in children as secondary prevention, regardless of if they have offended or shown any problematic sexual behavior (Knack et al., 2019; Levenson & Grady, 2019; McCartan et al., 2018; McKibbin & Humphreys, 2020).

People with a sexual interest in children are a potential target of prevention efforts, so the terminology of universal, selected, and indicated should be applied, rather than the terminology of primary, secondary, and tertiary. Since a sexual interest in children is a risk factor, but not a sign of CSA perpetration or otherwise problematic behavior, prevention targeting people with a sexual interest in children should be considered a selected prevention effort. When the goal is to prevent a first-time offense, the prevention effort should be considered primary prevention. The current project explores the perspectives of people with sexual thoughts of children to understand under which circumstances they would act on the sexual thoughts of children, with the goal of informing efforts to prevent first-time CSA perpetration. Therefore, the goal of this project is to inform selected primary prevention efforts.

The pervasiveness, harmfulness, and cost of CSA point to the importance of prevention, yet prevention efforts are relatively sparse and suffer from three substantial limitations (Letourneau et al., 2014). First, most efforts focus on preventing victimization rather than preventing perpetration (Letourneau et al., 2014). High quality school-based victimization prevention programs (e.g., those with multiple sessions and varied teaching techniques) have

been found to increase a child's self-protective skills and knowledge of CSA. However, it is unclear whether these programs actually reduce the likelihood of victimization, or even increase the likelihood of disclosure of ongoing or past abuse (K. Walsh et al., 2018). In contrast to typical school-based victimization prevention efforts, some programs target both victimization and perpetration, and these have enjoyed more success. For example, shifting boundaries is a dating violence prevention intervention targeting middle school children (Taylor et al., 2013). Shifting boundaries includes a classroom intervention and a building-based intervention. The classroom intervention consists of a six-session curriculum, which focuses on the consequences of dating violence perpetration, the social construction of gender, healthy relationships, and setting personal boundaries. Shifting boundaries has been found to reduce both perpetration and victimization of sexual harassment and sexual violence, which shows the value of perpetration-focused prevention (Taylor et al., 2013).

Second, most perpetration-focused prevention efforts that do exist are limited to the prevention of sexual recidivism by convicted CSA perpetrators (McCartan et al., 2018). However, the sexual recidivism rate of convicted adult offenders is just 18% and those recidivistic offenses account for just 5% of all new sex crimes (de Vries Robbé et al., 2015; Hanson et al., 2014; Lasher & McGrath, 2017). Thus, even the most effective tertiary interventions address only a fraction of the problem. Additionally, preventing recidivism requires that a child is first victimized, then the CSA is reported, the perpetrator is arrested and found guilty, then placed into sex offender treatment programs. In a large nationally representative sample of children and adolescents in the US, approximately 19% of all cases of CSA were reported to the police (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020). An investigation of a statewide database of medical records examining victims 15 years old or younger (n = 99) found approximately 47% of CSA cases reported to the police then lead to an arrest (Cross & Schmitt, 2019). Finally, a study using criminal justice data of 329 CSA cases from the Dallas Children's Advocacy Center in Texas found that 80% of people charged with a CSA offense were

convicted, and 70% of people convicted were then incarcerated (W. A. Walsh et al., 2010). These findings together show that approximately 7% of SA cases lead to conviction and 5% lead to incarceration, so most people who have sexually abused will likely never interact with a sex offender treatment program. Due to these issues, there is growing recognition of the need to prevent abuse from occurring in the first place (Knack et al., 2019; Letourneau et al., 2014).

Third, primary and secondary prevention efforts very rarely target people with a sexual interest in children (Letourneau et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2010). This is in large part related to stigmatizing attitudes towards people with a sexual interest in children. Sexual interest in children is typically, yet incorrectly, viewed as synonymous with sexual abuse perpetration against children (Jahnke & Hoyer, 2013). Thus, these individuals are overlooked as lost causes for whom nothing can be done (Jahnke, 2018).

One prevention intervention that does focus on helping adults with a sexual interest in children to refrain from perpetrating CSA is Germany's Prevention Project Dunkelfeld. Prevention. Prevention Project Dunkelfeld includes adults with a sexual interest in children regardless of if they have offended, and regardless of if their offense has been caught by authorities, which is possible because Germany has not implemented mandatory reporting laws that would require professionals to report perpetrators of CSA to the authorities (Beier et al., 2009). The Prevention Project Dunkelfeld accepts people into two programs depending on if they have perpetrated CSA or not. The treatment targets for both groups include: (1) strengthening motivations to control one's own behavior, (2) strengthening available resources, (3) lowering risk factors associated with CSA perpetration, (4) personal accountability for one's own actions, (5) improving self-worth, (6) improving coping mechanisms, (7) use of medication to reduce sexual urges, (7) recognition of risky situations, (8) improve social and cognitive capacities, (8) improve relationship skills, and (9) develop a future-focused mindset (Beier, 2018)

Results from Prevention Project Dunkelfeld treatment sites in Hanover, Regensburg, and Berlin found that treatment resulted in improvements on risk factors for CSA offending, such as self-esteem and empathy deficits (Beier et al., 2015; Engel et al., 2018). However, a recent reanalysis of the data used by Beier and colleagues (Beier et al., 2015) found that the treatment effects are small and not statistically significant (Mokros & Banse, 2019). Due to sample size limitations, these results should not be considered conclusive. Furthermore, most of the individuals receiving treatment from Prevention Project Dunkelfeld have perpetrated CSA, either through a contact offense and/or use of child sexual abuse materials (CSAM). A sub-analysis from Beier (Beier et al., 2015) of 12 men who had not perpetrated CSA showed no changes in risk factors for CSA after treatment, though the lack of statistical significance may be due to the low sample size. Therefore, it is presently unknown if the Prevention Project Dunkelfeld is effective for preventing a first-time CSA offense.

1.5 The Present Study

To better understand the relationship between sexual thoughts of children and CSA perpetration, this study uses three primary aims to explore the circumstances under which men would act on their sexual thoughts of children, proclivity to perpetrate CSA, and use CSAM. The primary objective of Aim 1 is to compare participants' experiences of sexual thoughts of children to sexual thoughts of adults by the circumstances under which the thought would be acted out, the reason the sexual thought is exciting, and how the participants usually feel after the sexual thought. Aim 2 explores the relationship between specific risk factors for sexual offending against children and the circumstances under which participants would act on their sexual thoughts of children, proclivity to perpetrate CSA, and use CSAM. Finally, Aim 3 seeks to identify a subgroup of men characterized by unwanted sexual thoughts of children, and determine how the presence of unwanted sexual thoughts of children is associated with self-

reported proclivity to perpetrate CSAM. Through these three Aims I seek to uncover potential targets for perpetration-focused primary prevention efforts.

1.6 The Sexual Thoughts Project

The data for my dissertation comes from the Sexual Thoughts Project (STP) cohort.

1.6.1 Data Source

The Sexual Thoughts Project (STP) was originally collected between 2005 and 2007 by Drs Turner-Moore and Waterman as part of Turner-Moore's doctoral dissertation. The STP cohort contains a sample of community-based adult men ($N = 4,079$) recruited primarily from the UK, Ireland, Italy, and the US between 2005 and 2007, as well as a smaller sample of men recruited from a British prison who were convicted and incarcerated for either a sexual or non-sexual offense ($N = 279$). The current project will make use of the community sample.

Men aged 18 to 90 who demonstrated sufficient proficiency in English to understand and respond to the questions were recruited using non-probability sampling. The original intention was to recruit men solely from the UK, and recruitment was conducted by placing posters and advertisements in public buildings, such as libraries, shops, and businesses around Leeds in the UK. Turner-Moore and Waterman also distributed a press release, which generated regional articles as well as an article on *BBC News Online* ("*BBC NEWS*," *n.d.*). As awareness of the study spread, a range of international articles were published, and participants began to post the study on other websites and forums. Notably for the present study, a link to the study was posted to at least one forum for people with an attraction to children.

The STP dataset consists of three self-report measures specifically designed to improve understanding of the connection between sexual thoughts and sexual behavior. The Computerised Interview for Sexual Thoughts (CIST) and the Computerized Inventory of Sexual Experiences (CISE) were designed for the STP. The third measure is a well-validated standardized questionnaire - the Wilson Sex Fantasy Questionnaire (Wilson, 1978). This project

will use data from the CIST and the CISE. The CIST items are designed to assess the participants' sexual thoughts, including the content, purpose, vividness, and frequency, as well as whether participants have enacted specific sexual thoughts and, if not, under what circumstances they would act on the sexual thought. The CISE items are designed to assess participants' sexual experiences, including items about partners, sexual dysfunctions, sexual abuse victimization or perpetration, and participants' self-reported proclivity to rape an adult or a child. Many items from the CIST and the CISE were designed as open-ended questions. For these open-ended items, a deductive content analysis methodology was used to quantify the data so that it may be used in statistical analyses. The coders were John Thorne and Maggie Ingram, both doctoral candidates who received extensive training in coding from Dr. Mitch Waterman and Dr. Tamara Turner-Moore, who originally collected the data. For the present project, Aim 1a used demographic information from all available individuals ($N = 4,079$). Aim 1b and Aim 3 used a subsample of men with sexual thoughts of children, as well as a matched sample of men who do not have sexual thoughts of children ($n = 238$). Aim 2 made use of the same subsample of men with sexual thoughts of children as Aims 1b and 3 but did not use the matched dyads ($n = 119$).

1.6.2 Data Preparation

Prior to working on the aims, the dataset will be prepared using the following methods:

1.6.2.1 Qualitative Analyses

All open-ended questions were coded using deductive content analysis. Content analysis emphasizes the frequency at which certain themes appear in the text. The codes that are derived from content analysis are able to be used in quantitative statistical analyses. One primary weakness of content analysis is that it is reductive, in that much of the nuance and richness of the qualitative data is lost (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The coding framework was developed by Turner-Moore & Waterman (2017), who developed a priori theoretically relevant

codes based upon prior research, and then modified those codes based on emergent themes from a subsample of the data until no new codes were identified. Once saturation had been hit, the coding framework was formalized into a coding manual. Coding was completed by DMH doctoral graduate students John Thorne and Maggie Ingram, who were trained by Drs. Turner-Moore & Waterman. Throughout the coding process, randomly selected cases were checked by Ms. Amanda Ruzicka, Moore Center Director of Research Operations, who was also trained by Drs. Turner-Moore and Waterman to ensure that the coders remained faithful to the codebook.

1.6.2.2 Qualitative Variables

The relevant information derived from the qualitative data are:

1. **Reasons why the sexual thought has never been acted out.** Participants who responded that they did not act on their sexual thought were asked the open-ended questions, "Why have you never acted out this sexual thought?" The responses were then coded using deductive thematic analysis into 13 possible variables: 1) Lack of opportunity, 2) Unattainable, 3) Unconfident, 4) Potential disappointment, 5) Negative repercussions for self, 6) Negative repercussions for others, 7) Personally unacceptable, 8) Socially unacceptable, 9) Unacceptable: Unclear, 10) Illegal, 11) Not applicable, 12) Other reason, 13) Unable to determine
2. **Circumstances in which the respondent would act on the sexual thought.** After answering the reasons why the sexual thought has never been acted out, participants were asked the open-ended question, "In what circumstances would you act out this sexual thought?" The responses were then coded using deductive thematic analysis into 12 possible variables: 1) Under no circumstances, 2) Given the opportunity, 3) Persuasion, 4) Intimacy, 5) Pretense, 6) Disinhibition, 7) Reduced negative repercussions for self, 8) Reduced negative repercussions for others, 9) Socially or

legally acceptable, 10) Not applicable, 11) Other circumstances, 12) Unable to determine

3. **What it is about the sexual thought that is exciting.** All participants were asked the open-ended question, “What is it about this sexual thought that excites you?” The responses were then coded using deductive thematic analysis into 20 possible variables: (1) physicality: attraction or sensory input, (2) physicality: energy exertion, sexual desire and gratification, (3) intimacy, (4) power: age, (5) power: status, (6) power: knowledge or experience, (7) power: general, (8) non-consent, (9) psychological or physical restraint, (10) suffering or pain, (11) irresistibility, (12) others’ sexual satisfaction, (13) sensation-seeking: novelty and variation, (14) sensation-seeking: risk-taking and rule-breaking, (15) nostalgia, (16) anticipation, (17) unobtainable, (18) sexual thought is not interesting, (19) other reason, 20) unable to determine.
4. **How the respondent usually feels after experiencing the sexual thought.** All participants were asked the open-ended question, “How do you usually feel after experiencing this sexual thought?” The responses were then coded using deductive thematic analysis into 24 possible variables: (1) sexual desire, pleasure and satisfaction, (2) sexual frustration, (3) happiness, (4) affiliation, (5) sensation-seeking: novelty or variation, (6) sensation-seeking: risk-taking or rule-breaking, (7) self-affirmation, (8) sadness, (9) loneliness, (10) wistfulness, (11) anger, (12) fear or anxiety, (13) oppressive state, (14) dissociation, (15) inadequacy / low self-esteem, (16) disgust, (17) self-reproach, (18) energetic, (19) calm, (20) tired, (21) empty, (22) No dominant or consistent affect, (23) other feeling, (24) unable to determine.

1.6.2.3 Quantitative Variables

The relevant information to be derived from the quantitative variables includes:

1. **Demographic information**, which includes the participant's age, nationality, race/ethnicity, education level, relationship status, sexual orientation, religiosity, and whether they are in mental health treatment.
2. **Any sexual thoughts of children** was determined by a single question, "Out of 10 occasions when you have sexual thoughts, on how many occasions do you find yourself thinking about children?" For the purposes of Aims 1 and 2, this item was dichotomized into either "at least 1 sexual thought of children" and "no sexual thoughts of children." For Aim 3, this item was treated as categorical, with values of 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 corresponding with the participant's selected responses, and 5 coded as "5 or more."
3. **Frequency of the sexual thought** was determined by responses to the question "How often do you have this sexual thought?" which contained the following response options: "several times a day", "several times a week", "several times a month", and "less than several times a month."
4. **Appraisal of the sexual thought** was assessed by taking the mean of three items: "how personally acceptable do you find this sexual thought?", "how pleasant do you find this sexual thought?" and "how often during this sexual thought do you try to divert your mind to think of something else?" For each of these items, appraisal was scored with a range of 1-5 which a higher value meaning the sexual thought had a higher appraisal.
5. **Sense of control over the sexual thought** was assessed by the mean of three items: "how much control do you have over when this sexual thought starts?", "how much control do you have over what happens during this sexual thought?", and "how much control do you have over stopping this sexual thought?" Control was scored with a range of 1-5, and a higher value means higher control over the sexual thought
6. **Potency of the sexual thought** was assessed by taking the mean of three items: "When you experience this sexual thought, how absorbed or wrapped up in it are you", "how much does this sexual thought interfere with your daily activities?", and "how much

does this sexual thought interfere with your daily activities?" Potency was scored with a range of 1-5 which a higher value meaning the sexual thought was more potent

7. **Frequency of sex with adults** was assessed by the question "How often do you have sex with adults?" Frequency of sex with adults was scored from 1 - 8 with 1 indicating "less than once every 6 months" and 8 indicating "once a day or more"
8. **Frequency of masturbation** was assessed by the question "How often do you masturbate?" Frequency of masturbation was scored from 1 - 6 with 1 indicating "less than once a month" and 6 indicating "once a day or more"
9. **Age first began masturbating** was assessed by the question "Roughly how old were you when you masturbated for the first time?" which allowed participants to type their exact age.
10. **Age first viewed pornography** was assessed by the question "Roughly how old were you when you saw pornography for the first time?" which allowed participants to type their exact age.
11. **Sexual assault perpetration** was indicated by an affirmative response to one or more of the following questions: "Have you ever forced/made an adult have intercourse against their will?", "Have you ever touched someone in a sexual way against their will?", "Have you ever made someone touch you in a sexual way against their will?", or by answering 3 or below to the question, "How often do you touch a child in a sexual way?" which was scored from 1 = Often to 4 = Never.
12. **Proclivity for sexual offending against a child** was assessed by a single question, "how likely is it that you would force a person to have sex with you/have sex with a child if you could be assured that you would not be caught or punished?" which was scored on a scale of 1 (no chance) to 5 (highly likely).
13. **Use of child sexually abusive materials** was assessed with a single question, "Do you use pornography that involves people under 16 years of age?"

1.6.3 Sexual Fantasies vs. Sexual Thoughts

The Sexual Thoughts Project focuses on adult men's sexual thoughts rather than their sexual fantasies (Turner-Moore & Waterman, 2017). Sexual thoughts are a broad construct, which encompasses any thought with either sexual content, or is sexually arousing to the individual. Sexual thoughts may be wanted, unwanted, pleasant, unpleasant, fleeting, elaborate, spontaneous, or deliberate. Sexual fantasies are specific types of sexual thoughts that are deliberately and internally generated, used for a specific goal, such as sexual arousal, and are most often elaborate, engaging, and pleasant (R. Bartels & Beech, 2016; R. M. Bartels, 2020). This project focuses on the broader construct of sexual thoughts of children, to gain a more complete understanding of the potential links between sexual thoughts and sexual offending.

1.7 Summary and Motivation for Research

Child sexual abuse is a major contributor to the burden of global disease, and victimization has significant negative impacts on victims, their families, and on society at large. Sexual interest in children is a primary risk factor perpetrating CSA. Nevertheless, many people with sexual interest in children will never offend, yet they are viewed with contempt and fear by society. The stigmatization that people with an attraction to children face may actually increase the risk of perpetration, and it demonstrably interferes with treatment seeking. The pervasiveness, harmfulness, and cost of CSA emphasize the importance of prevention, yet prevention efforts are relatively sparse and suffer from three substantial limitations (Letourneau et al., 2014). Not only do most programs focus on victimization prevention rather than perpetration prevention, but the few existing perpetration-focused prevention efforts that do exist very rarely target people with a sexual interest in children and are typically limited to the prevention of sexual recidivism by convicted offenders.

To be able to appropriately address the needs of people with a sexual interest in children, we must have a deeper understanding of the connection between sexual thoughts of

children and sexual behaviors involving children. This dissertation focuses on deepening our knowledge of that link through three aims. Aim 1 identifies demographic correlates of having a sexual thought of a child, then explores the circumstances in which the participant would act on their sexual thoughts of a child, what excites them about the sexual thought, and how they feel after the sexual thought. Aim 2 examines the association between specific risk factors for sexual offending against a child (e.g., if their favorite sexual thought involves a child) and the circumstances under which they would act on the sexual thought, their self-reported proclivity to sexually offend against a child, and their use of child sexual abuse materials. Aim 3 explores if there is a group of people characterized by unwanted sexual thoughts of children, largely characterized by low control over the sexual thought and low appraisal of the sexual thought.

This research project is primarily exploratory in nature. Due to low sample sizes combined with the high number of statistical analyses run, these findings should not be used directly to inform prevention programs. Instead, the findings provide important information regarding potential links between peoples sexual thoughts of children and the reasons for a subsequent sexual offense against children that should be expanded upon in future research, which can then be used by therapists or other people who interact with individuals who are worried about their risk of sexual offending against children.

1.8 References

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Chapter 2. Why Men Would Act on Sexual Thoughts of Children

2.0 Abstract

There is currently a lack of perpetration focused primary prevention of child sexual abuse (CSA). A frequently ignored group of people to reach out to for primary prevention efforts are people with thoughts of children. Assessing the perspectives of people with sexual thoughts of children about factors that might prohibit or permit acting on those sexual thoughts may uncover avenues for primary prevention efforts. I use a series of logistic regression analyses to explore how sexual thoughts of children differ from sexual thoughts of adults in terms of the circumstances under which they would act on their sexual thoughts, as well as by characteristics of the sexual thought. About half of the participants with sexual thoughts of children acknowledge some proclivity to perpetrate CSA. When participants were asked under what circumstances they would act on their sexual thoughts of children, the most common responses were under no circumstances, if it were socially or legally acceptable, if there were reduced negative repercussions to the child, and with the child's consent. Sexual thoughts of children were more likely to be associated with feeling a sense of power as compared to sexual thoughts of adults. Approximately 40% of participants with sexual thoughts of children usually feel negatively after experiencing their sexual thought of a child, indicating that sexual thoughts of children are often ego-dystonic. The primary protective factor against acting on sexual thoughts of children was a desire to avoid harming children. Participants' endorsement that they would act on sexual thoughts of children with the child's consent implies that these participants believe that children are able to give consent. These findings suggest a need to ensure that there is a shared understanding that children are developmentally unable to consent to sex with adults.

2.1 Introduction

There is currently a lack of child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention effort focused on the potential perpetrator. Instead, the main focus of CSA prevention programs has been on preventing victimization, typically through school-based interventions (Finkelhor, 2009; Letourneau et al., 2014; Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018). School-based prevention programs have been attractive for a number of reasons. School-based prevention programs are inexpensive (Barron & Topping, 2013). Second, parents are often uncomfortable with talking about CSA to their children, and school-based interventions provide parents with the sense that they are relieved from doing so as the school addresses the problem (Daro, 1994; Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018). Third, school-based interventions are able to reach a large number of children and are easily replicated and administered (Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018). Fourth, there are doubts that perpetration-based prevention efforts are viable (Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018). Yet, the evidence for the effectiveness of school-based interventions is limited (Zeuthen & Hagelskjær, 2013). School-based prevention programs have been found to increase a child's self-protective skills and knowledge of CSA, but results are far from clear as to whether victim-focused prevention efforts actually reduce the risk of abuse (Walsh et al., 2018). Improving children's self-protective skills and knowledge of CSA may be important goals, but they do not seem to keep children safe. Instead, focusing on identifying people who may sexually offend against children and developing prevention strategies for them may be a more fruitful focus.

While school-based victimization focused interventions are the most common prevention programs, there are some efforts that do focus on prevention of sexually abusive behaviors. However, perpetration focused prevention has nearly exclusively focused on preventing recidivism amongst known offenders. Recidivism-focused, or tertiary prevention, is a key component to a comprehensive approach to preventing child sexual abuse; preventing

recidivism does prevent harm. However, recidivism focused prevention is also reactionary and relies on waiting for a child to be victimized and a person to be held accountable for that victimization. Furthermore, the sexual recidivism rate of convicted adult offenders is just 18% and those recidivistic offenses account for just 5% of all new sex crimes (de Vries Robbé et al., 2015; Hanson et al., 2014; Lasher & McGrath, 2017). Thus, even the most effective interventions address only a small fraction of the problem.

The general public greatly overestimates the recidivism risk of prior offenders. For example, in a survey of 193 members of the general public, participants were asked, “What percentage of child molesters reoffend?” They returned a mean estimated recidivism rate of 76% (SD = 20.6), higher than the actual risk of 18%. This overestimation of risk heightens the perceived need for focusing resources on after-the-fact interventions, including intensive treatment, extensive prison sentences, and exhaustive post-prison surveillance (Harper & Hogue, 2015; Levenson et al., 2007; Socia & Harris, 2016). Additionally, recidivism-focused efforts are intuitive, as it provides a clear population to target for perpetration focused prevention.

A commonly perceived barrier against perpetration-focused primary prevention is that people at risk of sexual aggression will not avail themselves of or benefit from prevention programs. However, voluntary programs, such as the US- and UK-based Stop It Now! programs and the German Prevention Project Dunkelfeld, have demonstrated that people who perceive themselves to be at risk for sexual offending due to their sexual thoughts or interests are willing to seek help when it is available and safe to access (Beier et al., 2009; Van Horn et al., 2015). Between 2012 and 2018, over 800 individuals contacted the US Stop It Now! Helpline due to a concern about their own sexual thoughts or behaviors towards children, with over half of these calls occurring prior to abuse taking place (Grant et al., 2019). Throughout the entire Prevention Project Dunkelfeld network, between 2005 and 2017, they received nearly 8,500 applications

and provided over 1400 treatment offers to individuals concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviors towards children (Beier, 2018).

Sexual interest in children is frequently cited as one of the strongest predictors of recidivism risk among men convicted of a sexual offense against children. In community samples of adult men, sexual interest in children has been significantly associated with higher levels of psychopathy, hypersexuality, and sexual offending against children, including both contact offenses and CSAM (Dombert et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2015; Seto et al., 2020).

Assessing the perspectives of people with a sexual interest in children may uncover useful prevention targets. For example, one recent qualitative study on 30 young adults with a sexual interest in children found that participants frequently agreed that the secrecy surrounding a sexual interest in children, the lack of support available to those who need it, and the lack of understanding about consent are factors that heighten the risk of sexual offending against children (Shields et al., 2020). One potential area of research in terms of primary prevention may be investigating why non-offending people who have sexual thoughts of children have not acted on their sexual thoughts. Knowing which reasons for not sexually abusing a child are most salient to an individual may help inform treatment goals.

This paper uses data from the Sexual Thoughts Project, an international survey asking adults about their sexual thoughts and sexual experiences to explore the reasons why people who have sexual thoughts of children do not act on these sexual thoughts. For the purposes of this study, “child” is defined as anyone at or under the age of 15. This paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What proportion of men have sexual thoughts of children? What are the demographic characteristics of this population?
2. What is exciting about sexual thoughts of children to the men who have such thoughts?
How do men feel after having a sexual thought of a child?

3. What are the circumstances under which men with sexual thoughts on children would act out the sexual thought?

In all cases, these characteristics are compared to adult men without sexual thoughts of children to better understand the unique characteristics of sexual thoughts of children

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 Study Population and Data

This study will be informed by the Sexual Thoughts Project (STP) dataset (Turner-Moore & Waterman, 2017), to which the study team has exclusive access. The STP cohort is a sample of community-based adult men (N=4,079) recruited primarily from the UK, Ireland, Italy, and the US between 2005 and 2007. The STP dataset consists of three self-report measures specifically designed to improve our understanding of the connection between sexual thoughts and sexual behavior. The Computerised Interview for Sexual Thoughts (CIST) and the Computerized Inventory of Sexual Experiences (CISE) were designed for the STP. The third measure is the well-validated standardized questionnaire - the Wilson Sex Fantasy Questionnaire (WSFQ; (Wilson, 1978)). The CIST asks the participants about their sexual thoughts, including the content, purpose, vividness, and frequency of sexual thoughts, whether the participant has enacted specific sexual thoughts and under what circumstances they would enact specific sexual thoughts. The CISE asks participants about their sexual experiences, including who they have sex with, whether they have any sexual dysfunctions, whether they have been a victim or perpetrator of a sexual crime, and their proclivity to rape an adult or a child.

Two samples of data informed the current study. The first sample contains demographic data of 2,066 men aged 18 to 82 (mean = 37.79, SD = 13.19) who provided an answer to the question, "Out of 10 occasions when you have sexual thoughts, on how many occasions do you find yourself thinking about children?" The sample consisted of 1913 (92.77%) white men, 65

(3.15%) Asian men, 12 (0.58%) Black men, 40 (1.93%) men of mixed race/ethnicity, and 32 (1.55%) men of another ethnicity, though there was no indication which ethnicities are included here. By country, 1109 (68.71%) were from the UK, 143 (8.86%) were from Ireland, 167 (10.35%) were from Italy, 83 (5.14%) were from the USA, and 112 (6.39%) were from one of 48 other countries, including Canada, Belgium, India, and Bulgaria. Data from this sample was used to assess the association between demographic characteristics and the presence of a sexual thought of a child.

The second sample is a matched sample that consisted of all participants who endorsed one or more sexual thoughts of a child who had data from both the CIST and CISE available ($n = 171$). These participants were matched 1:1 with participants who reported no sexual thoughts of children ($n = 171$, Total $N = 342$). Matching criteria included being from the same country, within 5 years of age, within 2 years of education attainment, and the gender of people they have had sex with. If there were multiple matches, optional criteria were used, such as relationship status, and religiosity. Subsequent coding revealed that some people who indicated sexual thoughts of children were referring to children 16 years or older; these participants ($n = 52$) were removed from the sample, along with the participants with whom they were matched. The final sample size was 238, including 119 matched dyads. This sample was used to explore the circumstances under which adult men with sexual thoughts of children would act on their sexual thought, the reason the sexual thought of a child is exciting, how participants feel after the sexual thought of a child, and their appraisal, sense of control, and potency of the sexual thought of a child, and how each of these compare to sexual thoughts of adults.

2.2.2 Measures

Demographics. Demographic variables examined include age, nationality, race/ethnicity, education level, relationship status, gender of sexual partners, and religiosity. Participants were also asked whether they were currently in mental health treatment.

Independent variables. There were seven independent variables of interest in the present study. All independent variables used in this study are about the specific sexual thought that the participant described, rather than their sexual thoughts in general. Participants were asked to describe up to 3 sexual thoughts, including (1) their favorite sexual thought, (2) a sexual thought involving a child, and (3) a sexual thought involving force or rape. For participants who described a sexual thought of a child, the data related to that specific sexual thought was used. For participants who said they do not have a sexual thought of a child, the data related to their favorite sexual thought was used. The seven independent variables of interest are listed below:

1. **Proclivity for CSA perpetration.** The proclivity to sexually offend against a child comes from the question “On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely is it that you would force a person to have sex with you/have sex with a child if you could be assured that you would not be caught or punished? 1 means not at all likely. 5 means very likely”
2. **Circumstances.** The data for the circumstances in which the participant would act out their sexual thought comes from the responses of the open-ended questions “Why have you never acted out this sexual thought?” and “In what circumstances would you act out this sexual thought?” The typed responses were coded using deductive content analysis into the variables described in Chapter 1. The coded responses from these two questions were grouped where possible. For example, people who endorsed either “negative repercussions to others” for the reason they have not acted on the sexual thought, or “reduced negative repercussions to others” for circumstances in which they would act on the sexual thought were coded as “reduced negative repercussions to others.”
3. **Exciting.** The reason why the sexual thought is exciting was determined by the coded responses to the open-ended question “what is it about this sexual thought that excites

you?” The typed responses were coded using deductive content analysis into the variables described in Chapter 1.

4. **Feel after.** How the participant feels after experiencing the sexual thought was determined by the coded responses to the open-ended question “How do you usually feel after you experience this sexual thought?” The typed responses were coded using deductive content analysis into the variables described in Chapter 1.
5. **Appraisal.** The sense of personal acceptability, or appraisal, of the sexual thought was calculated by the mean of three close-ended questions: (1) “on a scale of 1 to 5, how personally acceptable do you find this sexual thought? 1 means completely unacceptable to you. 5 means completely acceptable to you,” (2) “on a scale of 1 to 5, how pleasant do you find this sexual thought? 1 means completely unpleasant. 5 means completely pleasant,” and (3) “How often during this sexual thought do you try to divert your mind to think of something else” which was scored from 1 = always to 5 = never. Appraisal had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.74.
6. **Control.** The degree of control the participant has over the sexual thought was calculated by the mean of three items: (1) “On a scale of 1 to 5, how much control do you have over when this sexual thought starts? 1 means no control. 5 means complete control.” (2) “On a scale of 1 to 5, how much control do you have over what happens during this sexual thought? 1 means no control. 5 means complete control,” and (3) “On a scale of 1 to 5, how much control do you have over stopping this sexual thought? 1 means no control. 5 means complete control.” Control had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.69.
7. **Potency.** The potency of the sexual thought was calculated by the mean of three close-ended questions: (1) “how sexually excited or aroused do you get by this sexual thought on a scale of 1 to 5? 1 means you do not get aroused at all. 5 means you get extremely aroused”, (2) “When you experience this sexual thought, how absorbed or wrapped up in it are you on a scale of 1 to 5? 1 means you are not absorbed at all. 5 means you get

extremely absorbed in the sexual thought.” and (3) “How much does this sexual thought interfere with your daily activities? 1 means not at all. 5 means it interferes to a great extent.” Potency had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.64.

Dependent variable. The dependent variable of interest in the present study is the presence of at least one sexual thought of a child. Presence of sexual thoughts of a child was determined by answering at least 1 to “Out of 10 occasions when you have sexual thoughts, on how many occasions do you find yourself thinking about children?”

2.2.3 Missing Data

There were three primary sources of missing data in this project. The first was when the participant did not see the question due to skip patterns. For example, any participant who indicated that they have acted on the sexual thought in question would not have been shown the question “why have you not acted on this sexual thought?” so their response would be missing. Second, questions related to the circumstances participants would act on the sexual thoughts, the reason the sexual thought is exciting, and how they feel after the sexual thought were all free-response, and missing data was introduced through ambiguity in the participants responses. When there was uncertainty which of two or more codes the participants' response would fit into, it was coded as “Unable to Determine” which was then considered missing. The third source of missing data was from participants who skipped a question. Missing data was handled with pairwise deletion.

Proclivity to have sex with a child contained 8 (3.36%) missing cases. The circumstances under which a participant would act on sexual thoughts of children contained 101 (42.43%) missing cases, primarily driven by 61 participants with no sexual thoughts of children who had acted out their favorite sexual thought of an adult. The reason the sexual thought was exciting contained 16 (6.72%) missing cases. How the participant felt after experiencing the sexual thought contained 18 (7.56%) missing cases. Appraisal of the sexual thought contained

14 (5.88%) missing cases. Sense of control over the sexual thought contained 12 (5.04%) missing cases. Potency of the sexual thought contained 11 (4.62%) missing cases.

2.2.4 Analytic Approach

The first stage of the analysis used the demographics sample to estimate the relationship between having sexual thoughts about children and basic demographic characteristics. I first estimated unadjusted logistic regression models to determine the relationship between the demographic variables and the presence of a sexual thought of children. Next, I used a single logistic regression model using age, nationality, race/ethnicity, relationship status, gender of sexual partners, and mental health treatment as the covariates, and any sexual thought of a child as the dependent variable.

The second analytic stage used the matched sample to explore differences in characteristics of sexual thoughts of children and adults. First, I estimated unadjusted odds ratios using matched logistic regression, then I adjusted each model for social desirability bias. Since the matching was done based on the demographic variables, there was no additional adjustment for demographic variables. There was no or low endorsement of three of the variables in the “No sexual thoughts of children” group, which prevented the estimation of an odds ratio in these variables. All data cleaning and analyses were performed in R Studio v1.31056.

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Demographic Sample

In the demographics sample, 17.86% of participants (N = 394) acknowledged sexual thoughts of children. As described in Chapter 1, the recruitment link was placed on a website for minor-attracted people at one point during study recruitment, so men with sexual thoughts of children are likely overrepresented in this study as compared to the general public. Relative to participants between the ages of 24 to 39, younger participants between the ages of 18 to 20,

were more likely to acknowledge sexual thoughts of children; however, this finding became non-significant after adjustment (aOR = 1.05, 95% CI = 0.52 - 2.08). Men who have sex with men (aOR = 2.09, 95% CI = 1.28 - 3.34) and men who have not had sex as an adult (aOR = 2.21, 95% CI = 1.09 - 4.46) were more likely to have sexual thoughts of children than men who have sex with women exclusively. People from the USA (aOR = 2.31, 95% CI = 1.19 - 4.40) or 'Other' (aOR = 1.84, 95% CI = 1.01 - 3.28) were more likely to have a sexual thought of a child compared to people from the UK. After adjustment, there was no difference by level of education, religiosity, or mental health treatment status. Detailed demographics are shown in Table 1.

2.3.2 Matched Sample

The matched sample consisted of men with sexual thoughts of children (n = 119), and matched dyads without sexual thoughts of children (n = 119). This sample was used to explore differences in characteristics of sexual thoughts of children and adults.

Proclivity for CSA perpetration. Approximately 50% of people who have sexual thoughts of a child indicated that they have some level of proclivity of sexually offending against a child if they could be assured that they would get away with it. In contrast, only 1 (0.84%) individual in the matched sample reported any proclivity of sexually offending against a child. These results indicate that having sexual thoughts of children is associated with increased risk for sexual offending against children. See Figure 2.1 for the full details.

Circumstances. When asked under what circumstances they would act on their sexual thoughts of a child, a plurality of participants (41.77%) indicated that they would not act on the sexual thought of a child under any circumstance. Among those who would, the two most salient circumstances under which participants reported they would act on a sexual thought of a child was if the behavior depicted in the sexual thought was either socially or legally acceptable (39.51%), or if there were reduced negative repercussions to others (37.04%). Additional

circumstances included if they had the opportunity (22.22%), if they had the other person's consent (18.99%), and if there were reduced negative repercussions to themselves (17.28%).

Exciting. When asked what is exciting about sexual thoughts of children, the most common reasons were similar to the reasons given for having sexual thoughts of adults. The main reasons included excitement due to physicality (38.27% vs 41.89% for sexual thought of children and sexual thoughts of adults respectively; aOR = 0.77, 95% CI = 0.77 - 1.91), which includes the attraction to the people in the sexual thought, or excitement or sexual gratification from the actions in the sexual thought. The only significant difference between sexual thoughts of children and sexual thoughts of adults is that there is a greater focus on power within sexual thoughts of children (32.1% vs 18.92% respectively, aOR = 3.70, 95% CI = 1.08 - 12.67).

Feel After. When asked how they feel after having sexual thoughts about children, the most common response was feeling negatively (38.89% vs 13.99%, aOR = 2.99, 95% CI = 0.94 - 9.5). After adjusting for social desirability bias, the only significant difference between sexual thoughts of children and sexual thoughts of adults was that participants with sexual thoughts of children endorsed feelings of physicality less frequently, which included sexual arousal, sexual frustration, or sexual satisfaction (27.78% vs 42.66%, OR = 0.39, 95% CI = 0.16 - 0.96).

Appraisal, control, and potency. Participants were asked about their appraisal, which is the sense of personal acceptability, of the sexual thought, degree of control over the sexual thought, and potency of the sexual thought. Based on the results of the matched logistic regression, there is no statistically significant difference in the level of control or the level of potency between sexual thoughts of children and sexual thoughts of adults. However, participants with sexual thoughts of children do have a significantly lower level of appraisal (mean = 3.39, sd = 1.16) than participants with sexual thoughts only of adults (mean = 4.21, sd = 0.66, $p = 0.004$).

Nationality. When asked about which country they reside in, participants from the USA and "Other" countries were disproportionately more likely to be recruited from another source

besides the news or media as compared to people from the UK, Ireland, and Italy (68.25% vs 18.05% respectively, $p < 0.001$). These non-news or media sources consist of finding the study through a search engine (33.82%), 'other' (27.94%), a friend (25.00%), and a website for minor attracted people (13.23%). However, as participants were matched by nationality, we were unable to determine if the recruitment method fully accounts for the difference in frequency of sexual thoughts of children by nationality.

2.4 Discussion

Using a non-forensic sample of men from the general community, this study aimed to examine demographic information on men who have sexual thoughts of children and identify the reasons why they have not acted on their sexual thoughts of children. Nearly 18% of the participants endorsed having a sexual thought of a child. This is likely an overestimate of the true rate due to sampling bias, as the study was placed on a website for people with an attraction to children.

2.4.1 Demographic Sample

Most demographic characteristics did not vary by whether or not participants had sexual thoughts of children. In the adjusted model, only nationality and sexual behavior were associated with increased sexual thoughts of children. With respect to nationality, participants from the USA and from Other countries were more likely to acknowledge sexual thoughts of children than participants from the UK, Italy, and Ireland. The differences may be due to recruitment strategies. Specifically, it appears that individuals recruited from countries other than the UK, Ireland, and Italy were more likely to have discovered the study from a non-news or media source, such as a friend or through a search engine. It is possible that men with a sexual interest in children shared the study link with friends who they know share the attraction at a higher rate than men without a sexual interest in children. While the difference is likely accounted for by this recruitment bias, it is also possible that sexual thought of children varies

by country of residence. It is possible that norms emphasizing youth as sexually desirable may potentially drive sexual interest in children, similar to how social norms emphasizing aggressive masculinity is associated with intimate partner violence (Willie et al., 2018). Pornhub, a pornography website, publishes a “year in review” detailing peoples pornography habits through their website. In 2012, the closest available year to the STP recruitment, the most common porn search term in the US was “teen,” while the UK and Italy did not have “teen” in the top three categories (PornHub, 2014). While the “teen” category in pornography does refer to 18-and-19-year-olds, sexual fantasies of adults that emphasize youthfulness is associated with sexual interest in children (Henek & Bartels, 2020).

With respect to behavior, men who have sex with men, and men who have never had sex as an adult, were both more likely to acknowledge sexual thoughts of children than men who have sex with women exclusively. When understanding this finding, it is important to note that sexual behavior and sexual orientation are two separate constructs. This finding does not imply that gay or bisexual men are more likely to be sexually interested in children. Recent research by Bailey and colleagues (2020) found that men’s sexual interest in adult men did not predict a sexual interest in either prepubescent boys or girls any more than men’s sexual interest in adult women did. Instead, men who have sex with men are often stigmatized (Altman et al., 2012), this finding may reflect that a greater willingness to engage in or acknowledge one stigmatized behavior (sex with men) is related to a greater willingness to acknowledge a stigmatized thought (sexual thoughts about children). The association between never having had sex as an adult and sexual thoughts of children may be due to a lack of sexual interest in adults.

I found that educational attainment was not related to sexual thoughts of children. Among men incarcerated for sex crimes, pedophilia has been associated with a lower IQ compared to teleiophilia, the attraction to adults (Blanchard et al., 2007; Cantor et al., 2004). However, these findings may not generalize to non-forensic populations. While educational

attainment is not a direct measure of IQ, results from my study imply that there was no additional barrier in educational attainment for participants with sexual thoughts of children as compared to people with no sexual thoughts of children. My finding aligns with Lett and colleagues (2018) finding that pedophilic men who have not sexually offended against a child have similar full scale IQ performance as non-pedophilic controls.

Prior findings have found that among men who are incarcerated for a sexual offense, white men have a higher rate of pedophilia diagnosis than Black men (Lee et al., 2019). I found no evidence that this racial difference exists in a community-based sample. It seems likely that Lee and colleagues' findings were related to a difference in sentencing by race rather than a true difference in the prevalence of pedophilia by race (Lee et al., 2019; Stacey et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Matched Sample

The matched sample consisted of men with sexual thoughts of children ($n = 119$), and matched dyads without sexual thoughts of children ($n = 119$). This sample was used to compare men with and without sexual thoughts of children across characteristics of sexual thoughts of children (for those with sexual thoughts of children) or adults (for those without sexual thoughts of children).

Proclivity for CSA perpetration. Approximately 50% of men with a sexual thought of a child responded that there was some proclivity for CSA perpetration, in contrast only 1 man with no sexual thoughts of children indicated any proclivity for CSA perpetration. As approximately 50% of CSA cases are perpetrated by people with no sexual interest in children, we would expect some proclivity among adults with no sexual thoughts of children (Seto 2009). This finding may have a couple implications. First, men with no sexual interest in children may have sexual thoughts of children which is related to their risk of perpetrating CSA. Second, men with sexual thoughts of children may be more aware of their risk of sexually offending against a child, while men with no sexual thoughts of children may believe that there is no possibility that they would offend and yet would offend under certain situations.

Circumstances. There were multiple interesting findings surrounding the circumstances in which a person with a sexual thought of a child would act on it. First, over 40% of participants stated that they would never act on their sexual thoughts of children. Additionally, over 33% of participants said they only would act on their sexual thought if there was decreased harm to the child, both findings indicate that concern for the child's well-being is a primary reason for not acting on their sexual thought. Therefore, perpetration-focused primary prevention of CSA interventions may benefit from emphasizing the harm that sexual activity between an adult and a child causes to the child.

Nearly 19% of participants stated that they would act on their sexual thought of a child if they had the child's consent. While caring about consent is generally a positive characteristic, this also indicates that some participants might believe that children are able to provide consent for sex with an adult, which could lead them to sexually abusing a child while believing that they are doing nothing wrong. This finding falls in line with Bailey and colleagues (2016) findings that 64.4% of men with an attraction to children hold some degree of permissive attitude towards adult-child sex. In a qualitative study amongst people with a sexual interest in children, 155 out of 267 participants (58.05%) endorsed some circumstances in which adult-child sex is not harmful, including absence of physical force, perceived maturity of the child, and child's consent (Spriggs et al., 2018). A goal for perpetration focused-primary prevention of CSA may be in reducing the belief that children are able to consent to sex with adults.

Unsurprisingly, legal and social consequences against child sexual abuse, as well as a general fear of harm to themselves, were particularly salient reasons endorsed by participants for not acting on their sexual thoughts of children. Clear legal and social prohibitions against adults having sex with children may provide a preventative effect against CSA perpetration.

The range of potential circumstances in which the participants would act on their sexual thought of a child shows a concern for the well-being of the child, endorsement of a belief that children can consent, and a concern for participants' own well-being. This diverse range of

potential circumstances indicates that no single prevention focus may adequately address the needs of all men who have sexual thoughts of children and are at risk of perpetrating CSA, but instead implies the need for multiple prevention focuses.

Exciting. There were no statistically significant differences in why the sexual thought was exciting between sexual thoughts of children and sexual thoughts of adults. However, a greater sense of power had a high odds ratio (OR = 3.35, 95% CI = 0.96 - 11.62) and was approaching significance. Responses that focused on the child's innocence or inexperience were coded as power. There has been prior evidence that sexual fantasies related to innocence are associated with a sexual interest in youthful adults, such as adult as schoolgirl fantasies (Henek & Bartels, 2020). The lack of any additional finding is also meaningful. In all other ways, sexual thoughts of a child were exciting for the same reasons as sexual thoughts of an adult, indicating that sexual interest in children and sexual interest in adults may be based on similar reasons. Primarily, participants focused on sexual enjoyment and attraction. Neither group had a high percentage of people who enjoyed focusing on their partner's sexual satisfaction.

Feel After. Participants with sexual thoughts of children were less likely to say that they feel sexually aroused, frustrated, or satisfied after their sexual thought of a child compared to people with only sexual thoughts of adults. While the difference between groups was non-significant, participants with sexual thoughts of children frequently reported feeling negatively after experiencing a sexual thought of a child. This finding may indicate that sexual thoughts of children are ego-dystonic for some participants, which is further suggested by the finding that there is a lower appraisal for sexual thoughts of children. The feeling of negativity may be due to a sense of internalized "pedonegativity" (Freimond, 2013). While feeling negatively about a sexual thought that would be abusive if enacted could be seen as a positive, the underlying internalized stigma that may cause these feelings may increase risk of sexually offending against a child (Cantor & McPhail, 2016)

2.4.3 Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. First, data from 2005 to 2007 may not be representative of the current state of people's sexual thoughts, as well as the current barriers and facilitators that may have changed. In particular, internet usage has drastically increased, and the much freer access to virtually unlimited amounts of pornography may impact the nature of people's sexual thoughts.

Second, this study used a convenience sample, so the findings may not generalize to the general population. In particular, the study link was posted to a website for people who are attracted to children. We were unable to account for everyone who may have been recruited through this or similar websites. Therefore, the estimated rate of sexual thoughts of children is likely higher than the true rate in the general population.

Third, the sample sizes were low and there were many models run without any correction for attenuation. This was done as the study was exploratory rather than hypothesis testing and greater risk of Type I error is reasonable; nevertheless, any individual finding may be due to statistical anomaly rather than a true association.

Fourth, it is important to acknowledge that the circumstances in which the participant would act on their sexual thought is limited to the specific sexual thought. Simply because a participant would not act on a specific sexual thought of a child for any reason does not mean that he would not act on a separate sexual thought of a child if given the opportunity. Furthermore, participants were asked to provide a hypothetical situation, which may not reflect the reality of the circumstances under which they would act on their sexual fantasies. This study was exploratory in nature, so the findings presented here should not be used to guide clinical treatment.

2.5 Conclusion

This study explored demographics associated with sexual thoughts of children in a community sample. To our knowledge, it is the first study to focus on the circumstances under which a non-forensic sample of participants with sexual thoughts of children would act on those sexual thoughts. Having sexual thoughts of children was not associated with age, race, relationship status, educational attainment, or religiosity in this sample. We were unable to determine a link to nationality due to a difference in recruitment strategies between countries. Men who have sex with men, as well as men who have not had sex at all, were more likely to acknowledge sexual thoughts of children, though this does not imply that a sexual interest in men is associated with a sexual interest in children. The high rate among participants of endorsing that they would never act on a sexual thought of a child, as well as the number who said they would act on only if doing so would not harm the child, indicates a desire to avoid harming children. These findings run counter to widespread views of people with sexual interest in children as amoral sex fiends destined to perpetrate child sexual abuse. Fear of harm to self also presented a major barrier against perpetrating child sexual abuse. This finding indicates the importance of clear legal and social prohibitions against adults having sex with children. Nearly one fifth of participants indicated that their primary barrier is that they would need consent from the child, implying that they believe that children are capable of giving consent. If replicated, this finding suggests a need to ensure that the general public understands children as being developmentally unable to consent to sex with adults.

2.6 References

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2.7 Tables and Figures

Table 2.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Demographics Sample

	No sexual thought of children (n = 1697)	Sexual thoughts of children (n = 369)	OR (95% CI)	aOR (95% CI)
Age				
Younger Adult	64 (7.26%)	27 (12.56%)	1.71 (1.02, 2.8)	1.05 (0.52, 2.08)
Young Adult	74 (8.39%)	16 (7.44%)	0.88 (0.47, 1.54)	0.73 (0.33, 1.53)
Adult	389 (44.1%)	96 (44.65%)	Ref	Ref
Older Adult	327 (37.07%)	70 (32.56%)	0.87 (0.62, 1.22)	0.97 (0.61, 1.54)
Elderly	28 (3.17%)	6 (2.79%)	0.87 (0.32, 2.02)	1.05 (0.23, 3.42)
Gender of Sexual Partners				
Exclusively Women	581 (81.6%)	110 (63.22%)	Ref	
Male Sexual Partners	84 (11.8%)	42 (24.14%)	2.64 (1.72, 4.01)	2.09 (1.28, 3.34)
Never had sex	47 (6.6%)	22 (12.64%)	2.47 (1.41, 4.22)	2.21 (1.09, 4.46)
Nationality				
UK	909 (70.19%)	200 (62.7%)	Ref	
Ireland	123 (9.5%)	20 (6.27%)	0.74 (0.44, 1.19)	0.63 (0.29, 1.26)
Italy	144 (11.12%)	23 (7.21%)	0.73 (0.45, 1.14)	0.68 (0.34, 1.28)
Other	70 (5.41%)	42 (13.17%)	2.73 (1.8, 4.1)	1.84 (1.01, 3.28)
USA	49 (3.78%)	34 (10.66%)	3.15 (1.97, 5)	2.31 (1.19, 4.4)
Race				
White	1580 (93.27%)	333 (90.49%)	Ref	
Asian	53 (3.13%)	12 (3.26%)	1.07 (0.54, 1.96)	0.58 (0.18, 1.53)
Black	8 (0.47%)	4 (1.09%)	2.37 (0.63, 7.58)	2.29 (0.08, 65.47)
Mixed	26 (1.53%)	14 (3.8%)	2.55 (1.29, 4.87)	2.57 (0.72, 9.16)
Other	27 (1.59%)	5 (1.36%)	0.88 (0.3, 2.11)	1.25 (0.05, 12.09)
Relationship Status				
Long Term / Married	505 (57%)	102 (47.44%)	Ref	
Dating	128 (14.45%)	27 (12.56%)	1.04 (0.64, 1.64)	1.24 (0.65, 2.28)
Separated / Divorced	45 (5.08%)	12 (5.58%)	1.32 (0.65, 2.51)	1.32 (0.58, 2.78)
Single	202 (22.8%)	72 (33.49%)	1.76 (1.25, 2.48)	1.41 (0.81, 2.42)
Widowed	6 (0.68%)	2 (0.93%)	1.65 (0.24, 7.28)	NA
Mental Health Treatment	38 (2.33%)	15 (4.81%)	2.12 (1.12, 3.82)	1.9 (0.74, 4.5)
Continuous Variables				
	Mean (sd)	Mean (sd)	Mean (sd)	
Sexual interest in children.	1.06 (1.26)	2.33 (1.26)	11.17 (7.42, 17.39)	-
Educational Attainment	16.52 (3.00)	16.31 (2.85)	0.98 (0.94, 1.01)	-
Religiosity	2.14 (1.22)	2.04 (1.17)	0.94 (0.85, 1.03)	-

Abbreviations: OR = Odds Ratio; aOR = Adjusted Odds Ratio.

Note. Models were adjusted for age, gender of sexual partners, nationality, race, relationship status, and mental health treatment status

Table 2.2. Demographic Characteristics of the Matched Sample

	No Sexual Thoughts of Children (n = 119) Mean (sd)	Sexual Thoughts of Children (n = 119) Mean (sd)
Age	37.05 (11.74)	35.97 (12.4)
Educational Attainment	16.33 (2.62)	16.31 (2.97)
Religiosity	2.09 (1.3)	1.94 (1.12)
	n (%)	n (%)
Gender of Sexual Partners		
Exclusively Women	91 (76.47%)	71 (59.66%)
Men	20 (16.81%)	31 (26.05%)
Never had sex	8 (6.72%)	17 (14.29%)
Nationality		
UK	65 (58.04%)	63 (56.25%)
Ireland	5 (4.46%)	4 (3.57%)
Italy	8 (7.14%)	8 (7.14%)
Other	13 (11.61%)	17 (15.18%)
USA	21 (18.75%)	20 (17.86%)
Race		
White	109 (91.6%)	110 (92.44%)
Asian	4 (3.36%)	4 (3.36%)
Black	0 (0%)	2 (1.68%)
Mixed	6 (5.04%)	3 (2.52%)
Relationship Status		
Dating	69 (57.98%)	56 (47.06%)
Long Term / Married	14 (11.76%)	14 (11.76%)
Separated / Divorced	5 (4.2%)	9 (7.56%)
Single	31 (26.05%)	40 (33.61%)

Table 2.3. Matched Logistic Regression of Sexual Thought Characteristics Between Men With No Sexual Thoughts of Children (n = 119) and Men With Sexual Thoughts of Children (n = 119)

	No Sexual Thoughts of Children (n = 119)	Sexual Thoughts of Children (n = 119)	OR (95% CI)	aOR
Circumstance Would act on ST				
Legal	0 (0%)	32 (39.51%)	NA	NA
None	3 (3.8%)	33 (41.77%)	NA	NA
Reduced Negative Repercussions to Others	11 (13.58%)	30 (37.04%)	11 (1.42, 85.2)	7.36 (0.82, 66.18)
Reduced Negative Repercussions to Self	19 (23.46%)	14 (17.28%)	0.75 (0.17, 3.35)	1.03 (0.14, 7.34)
With Others Consent	27 (34.18%)	15 (18.99%)	0.45 (0.16, 1.31)	0.63 (0.18, 2.23)
Opportunity	51 (62.96%)	18 (22.22%)	0.2 (0.07, 0.59)	0.27 (0.08, 0.85)
Reason Sexual Thought is Exciting				
Feelings of intimacy	27 (18.24%)	13 (16.05%)	1.22 (0.51, 2.95)	1.38 (0.43, 4.44)
Feelings of irresistibility	8 (4.42%)	1 (0.98%)	0.5 (0.05, 5.51)	1.3 (0.08, 22.07)
ST is not exciting	0 (0%)	6 (5.88%)	NA	NA
Others sexual satisfaction	14 (7.73%)	5 (4.9%)	0.71 (0.23, 2.25)	0.55 (0.11, 2.68)
Physicality	62 (41.89%)	31 (38.27%)	0.8 (0.37, 1.71)	0.77 (0.31, 1.91)
Sense of power	28 (18.92%)	26 (32.1%)	2.14 (0.87, 5.26)	3.35 (0.96, 11.62)
Sensation Seeking	42 (28.38%)	21 (25.93%)	0.88 (0.44, 1.77)	0.76 (0.29, 1.99)
Feel After ST				
Negative	23 (14.37%)	34 (40.96%)	6.5 (2.27, 18.62)	2.99 (0.94, 9.5)
No dominant affect	18 (9.89%)	11 (11.11%)	1.43 (0.54, 3.75)	1.47 (0.45, 4.78)
Physicality	71 (44.38%)	23 (27.71%)	0.38 (0.19, 0.8)	0.39 (0.16, 0.96)
Positive	70 (43.75%)	24 (28.92%)	0.58 (0.31, 1.09)	0.98 (0.42, 2.31)
Appraisal	4.21 (0.66)	3.39 (1.16)	0.31 (0.18, 0.54)	0.37 (0.19, 0.73)
Control	3.79 (0.85)	3.90 (1.05)	1.35 (0.88, 2.07)	1.16 (0.72, 1.86)
Potency	3.27 (0.64)	2.77 (0.98)	0.78 (0.50, 1.24)	0.76 (0.45, 1.29)

Note. Results are from matched logistic regression analysis. Models were adjusted for social desirability.

NA indicates that the model was unable to be run due to low endorsement in one group.

Acronyms: OR = Odds Ratio; aOR = Adjusted Odds Ratio

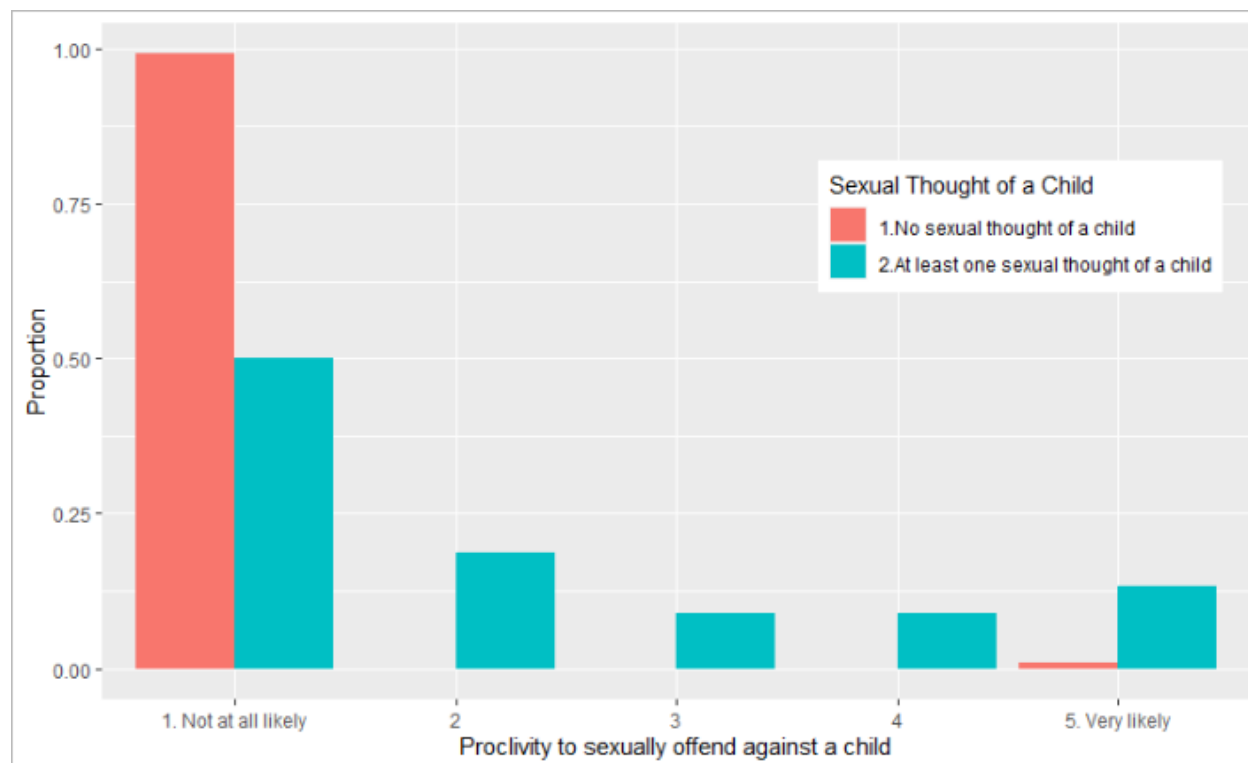


Figure 2.1. Proclivity to Sexually Offend Against a Child

Chapter 3. Assessing the Impact of Sexual Thought Characteristics, Childhood Sexual Experiences, and Sexual Behavior on Why Men Would Act on Sexual Thoughts of Children

3.0 Abstract

Primary prevention of child sexual abuse (CSA) has focused primarily on potential victims rather than potential perpetrators, yet there is a growing recognition of the importance of perpetration-focused primary prevention. Assessing the perspectives of people with a sexual interest in children may uncover useful links between risk factors for CSA. I use a series of logistic regression analyses to explore the impact that characteristics of participants' sexual thoughts, childhood sexual experiences, and sexual behaviors has on the self-reported circumstances under which participants would act on their sexual thoughts of a child, proclivity to perpetrate CSA, and use of child sexual abuse materials (CSAM). The sample used contains 119 adult men with sexual thoughts of children recruited through the Sexual Thoughts Project. The presence of a child in participants' favorite sexual thought was associated with endorsing that they would act on their sexual thought of a child with the child's consent, higher proclivity to perpetrate CSA, and use of CSAM. The age of the child in the sexual thought was negatively associated with proclivity to perpetrate CSA and CSAM. Participants who acknowledged prior sexual assault perpetration were less likely to indicate that they would only act on their sexual thought of a child if the child was not harmed, indicating a lack of concern about the child's well-being. Most early sexual experiences were not associated with any of the outcomes, with the exception that an older age of first masturbation was protective against CSAM use. Finally, higher frequency of sex with adults was protective in several ways by being associated with (1) greater endorsement that they would never act on their sexual thought of a child; (2) lower endorsement that they would act if assured that no harm would come to them (the respondent); and (3) lower endorsement of CSAM use. The combined findings frequency that sex with adults is protective against CSAM use, and that the presence of a child in participants' favorite sexual thought was a risk factor for self-reported proclivity of CSA perpetration, use of CSAM indicates that a preferential interest in children may be associated with CSA perpetration and CSAM

offending. Importantly, the heightened frequency of participants reporting that they would act on a favorite, as opposed to non-favorite, sexual thought of a child with the child's consent, indicates that a preferential interest in children may be associated with CSA perpetration and CSAM offending is due to a heightened belief that children are able to consent to sex. Future research should explore the link between permissive attitudes of adult-child sex and CSA perpetration.

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter established the reasons why someone with a sexual thought of a child may not act on that sexual thought. This chapter will focus on the specific risk factors for sexual offending against a child amongst people with sexual thoughts of children.

As described further in Chapter 1, there is a growing acknowledgement of the importance of primary prevention of CSA. Child sexual abuse affects approximately 10-17% of girls and 4-5% of boys in the US (Finkelhor et al., 2014, 2015; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). Child sexual abuse victimization causes numerous problems throughout the individual's life, including: risk of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and being in an abusive relationship (Gewirtz-Meydan & Opuda, 2020; Logan-Greene et al., 2015; Maniglio, 2011; Noll et al., 2007; Sommarin et al., 2014). The lifetime economic burden of CSA in the US is estimated to be \$9.3 billion annually (Letourneau et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to focus on primary prevention of CSA.

Primary prevention of CSA efforts have primarily focused on targeting potential victims, rather than potential perpetrators. However, there are prevention programs that include a perpetration focus which have been shown to be effective in reducing perpetration. For example, Shifting boundaries is a school-based dating violence prevention program which targets middle school students. Shifting boundaries includes a six-session curriculum which focuses on the laws and consequences of dating violence perpetration, the social construction

of gender roles, and healthy relationships. Shifting boundaries also included a building-based intervention where students and teachers map out safe/unsafe “hotspots” where sexual violence and harassment are more likely to occur, and increase adult supervision in these areas. A multi-level, longitudinal trial randomized 30 public middle schools with a total of 2,655 students in New York City to receive either the building-only intervention, the classroom-only intervention, combined intervention, or neither intervention (Taylor et al., 2013). Compared to receiving no intervention, the building-only intervention, and combined intervention found a reduction in sexual harassment and sexual violence victimization and perpetration, but there was no effect for the classroom-only intervention (Taylor et al., 2013). Shifting boundaries demonstrates that the value of perpetration-focused prevention.

One vital step in developing prevention programs is a proper understanding of the relevant risk factors. Perhaps the most obvious and strongest risk factor for perpetrating CSA is a sexual interest in children (Seto et al., 2020). However, there is growing research recognizing that there are many people with a sexual interest in children who do not go on to perpetrate CSA (Seto, 2017). Therefore, there is a need to appropriately understand the link between a sexual interest in children and perpetrating CSA. Assessing the perspectives of people with a sexual interest in children may uncover useful prevention targets.

Recent research has had an increased focus on exploring the perspectives of people with a sexual interest in children. For example, research exploring permissive attitudes towards adult-child sex has revealed that some adult men with a sexual interest in children report that a close and loving relationship between an adult and child is beneficial to both parties (Jahnke et al., 2018; Spriggs et al., 2018). Additionally, in an online study of 212 German men, 73% of men with a sexual interest in children indicated that if children are given the necessary information they are able to consent to sexual activity, while only 20% of men without a sexual interest in children endorsed that same item (Jahnke et al., 2018). Spriggs and colleagues (2018) argue that the tenacity to which people with a sexual interest in children hold these permissive

attitudes towards adult-child sex is because such attitudes are used as a self-defense mechanism to protect their self-esteem. These findings indicate that one link between a sexual interest in children and perpetrating CSA is due to permissive attitudes of adult-child sex.

While the link between permissive attitudes and perpetrating CSA is intuitive, the evidence has been mixed. Some studies have found no link (Bailey et al., 2016; Gannon & Polaschek, 2005), while other studies, including a 2013 meta-analysis have shown a significant, though small, association (Helmus et al., 2013). One reason for the inconsistency may be because people with high permissive attitudes still believe that if an adult has sex with a child, the child may be stigmatized by others and suffer harm due to society's stigma against adult-child sex (Jahnke et al., 2018). The belief that children may still suffer harm from sex despite the belief that children are able to consent to sex with adults may attenuate the relationship between permissive attitudes of adult-child sex and CSA perpetration.

Sullivan and Sheehan (2016) are another example of incorporating the perspectives of people with a sexual interest in children to inform prevention. Sullivan and Sheehan (2016) interviewed incarcerated men about their motivations for perpetrating CSA, and found three primary reasons: sexual interest in children, personal affirmation (that is, wanting to be loved), and to gain a sense of power and control. They also noted that many participants attributed motivations to abuse to their own formative sexual experiences, including both CSA victimization and sexual experimentation with similar-aged children.

Early childhood sexual experiences have long been considered a large risk factor for CSA. This can include both childhood sexual abuse, early exposure to pornography, early onset of masturbation, and early sexual debut (Houtepen et al., 2016; Kjellgren et al., 2010; Levenson et al., 2017; Seto & Lalumière, 2010; Simons et al., 2008; Wurtele et al., 2018). Examinations of the abused-abuser hypothesis, the idea that experiencing abuse victimization is a causal factor for CSA perpetration, has generally found higher rates of child abuse victimization amongst sexual abusers of children than adults (Jespersen et al., 2009; Långström et al., 2015). A large

Finnish twin study of adult men and women (n = 6,255) found that sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect victimization during childhood was causally related to subsequent sexual offending as an adult (Forsman et al., 2015). In a sample of adults incarcerated for a sexual offense, the link from CSA victimization to sexually coercive behavior was fully explained by CSA victimization leading to increased sexual preoccupation and compulsivity (Knight & Sims-Knight, 2003). However, CSA victimization has not been found to be a significant predictor of sexual recidivism, suggesting that CSA victimization may only be related to the onset of sexual offending (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004, 2005). CSA victimization being related to the onset, yet not persistence, of sexual offending indicates that the pathway from victimization to perpetration may not be related to increased sexual preoccupation, but rather due to modeling of CSA behavior as a norm, which may be more amenable to change than sexual preoccupation.

Early onset of masturbation as well early exposure to pornography is more common amongst men with a sexual interest in children than men without a sexual interest in children (Levenson et al., 2017). However, Wurtele and colleagues (2018) found that after adjusting for all sexual experiences as a child, only early onset of masturbation was significantly related to sexual interest in children. One way in which the pathway from early childhood experiences to CSA is explained is through the development of maladaptive sexual scripts and cognitive distortions. Specifically, both positive and negative sexual experiences as a child can normalize the view of children as sexual beings (Lambie & Reil, 2020).

Present Study. The present study will examine the relationship between risk factors for CSA perpetration and the circumstances under which participants report they would act on their sexual thoughts of a child, their proclivity to offend against a child, and their use of CSAM. The risk factors I will examine include details specific to participants' sexual thoughts, early childhood experiences, and sexual behavior as an adult. Factors specific to the sexual thought include the presence of a child in their favorite sexual thought, the age of the youngest child, the

reason the sexual thought is exciting, and whether they feel negatively after. The childhood sexual experiences include sexual abuse by an adult, sexual experiences with peers, age they first saw pornography, and age they first masturbated. Finally, the adult sexual behaviors include the frequency of sexual behavior with adults, gender of adult sexual partners, frequency of masturbation, and perpetration of a sexual offense.

3.2 Methods

The present analysis used a subsample from the matched sample described in Chapter 2. This subsample contains only the 119 participants who indicated that they have a sexual thought of a child, as defined by an answer of 1 or more to the following question “Out of 10 occasions when you have sexual thoughts, on how many occasions do you find yourself thinking about children?” The matched-dyads were not included in this sample, as the primary focus of this study was to examine the link between specific risk factors for CSA and the circumstances in which participants with sexual thoughts of children would act on those thoughts.

3.2.1 Measures

Risk factors. There are 13 risk factors examined for this study aim. The risk factors are described below. Risk factors 1 to 5 are related to the specific sexual thought of a child the participant described. Risk factors 6 to 9 are related to participants’ sexual experiences as a child. Risk factors 10 to 13 are related to participants’ sexual experiences as an adult.

1. **Favorite sexual thought is of a child.** Whether a favorite sexual thought is of a child is defined through a combination of indicating that they have at least one sexual thought of a child, and responding “Yes” to the follow-up question, “Have you already told me about this sexual thought?” These questions were asked following the questions describing

their favorite sexual thought, so specifying that they have already discussed their sexual thought of a child would indicate that their favorite sexual thought was of a child.

2. **Age of child in the sexual thought.** Participants were asked to describe up to 4 people in their sexual thought, and the age of the youngest person in the sexual thought was used.
3. **Exciting: power.** Whether the participant finds the sexual thought exciting due to a sense of power was defined by their response to the open-ended question, “What is it about this sexual thought that excites you?” The responses were then coded into quantitative variables using deductive thematic analysis. Excitement due to a sense of power was coded if the participant described being excited by a large difference in age, status, or knowledge/experience, or if the participant gave a general description of ‘power.’
4. **Exciting: sensation seeking** Whether the participant finds the sexual thought exciting due to a sense of sensation-seeking was defined using the same question and method as “Exciting: power.” A sense of sensation-seeking was coded if the participant described that they were excited by the novelty, variation, risk-taking, or rule-breaking aspects of the sexual thought.
5. **Feel after: Negative.** How the participant feels after the sexual thought was defined by the participants’ response to the open-ended question, “How do you usually feel after experiencing this sexual thought?” The responses were then coded into quantitative variables using deductive thematic analysis. Feeling negatively after was defined by the participant indicating feelings of sadness, loneliness, anger, fear or anxiety, an oppressive state, dissociation, inadequacy or low self-esteem, disgust, or self-reproach.
6. **Age first viewed pornography.** The age they first viewed pornography was determined by the question, “Roughly how old were you when you saw pornography for the first time?” When multiple ages were provided, the youngest age was used

7. **Age first masturbated.** Age they first masturbated was determined by the question, “Roughly how old were you when you masturbated for the first time?” When multiple ages were provided to either of these questions, the youngest age was used.
8. **CSA victimization.** Sexual experience as a child was defined as answering yes to any of the questions: “When you were a child, did anyone touch you in a sexual way?”; “When you were a child, did anyone ask/force you to touch them in a sexual way?”; or “When you were a child, did anyone ask/force you to watch others during sexual activity?” Participants were then asked to describe up to 5 events for each question, including how old they were and who was involved. CSA victimization was defined as a difference of over 5 years in age between the participant and at least one of the people the participant described.
9. **Sexual experiences with peers.** Sexual experiences with peers was defined using the same questions as CSA victimization. However, if the difference in age was within 5 years, this was defined as a “sexual experience with a peer.” This would combine wanted sexual experiences with other children as well as CSA victimization by another child.
10. **Sexual Assault Perpetration.** Sexual assault perpetration was defined as answering “Yes” to any of the following questions: “Have you ever touched someone in a sexual way against their will?”; “Have you ever made someone touch you in a sexual way against their will?”; and “Have you ever forced/made an adult have intercourse against their will?” or by answering 3 or below to the question, “How often do you touch a child in a sexual way?” which was scored from 1 = Often to 4 = Never.
11. **Frequency of masturbation.** Frequency of masturbation was defined by the question “How often do you masturbate?” which was recorded on a 6-point scale from “Less than once a month.” to “Once a day or more”

12. **Frequency of sex with adults.** Sex with adults was defined as “How often do you have sex with adults?” which was recorded on an 8-point scale ranging from “Less than once every 6 months.” to “Once a day or more”

13. **Gender of adult sexual partners.** The gender of their adult sexual partners was defined by the question “Do you tend to be sexual with adult males, adult females, or both?” participants who answered either “adult males” or “both” were grouped together.

Outcomes. The outcomes of interest in the present study are the circumstances that a participant with sexual thoughts about children would act out the sexual thought, their proclivity to have sex with a child, and use of child sexually abusive materials (CSAM). There are five potential circumstances that are examined as outcomes: (1) Under no circumstance, (2) with reduced negative repercussions to self, (3) with reduced negative repercussions to others, (4) with others consent, and (5) if given the opportunity. Chapter 2 used a sixth option, “legally or socially acceptable”, this has been incorporated into “with reduced negative repercussions to self” as legal or social consequences is a harm to self. Proclivity of sex with a child was defined as the response to the question, “On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely is it that you would force a person to have sex with you/have sex with a child if you could be assured that you would not be caught or punished? 1 means not at all likely. 5 means very likely.” Use of CSAM was defined as answering yes to the question, “Do you use pornography that involves people under 16 years of age?”

3.2.2 Analysis Plan

First, Pearson correlations were used to estimate the correlations between each of the outcome variables. Second, unadjusted logistic regression models were used to measure the relationship between each of the exposures and the outcomes, with the exception of proclivity. Since proclivity was measured as a continuous variable, linear regression was used to measure

the relationship between proclivity and the risk factors. Finally, each model was adjusted for by social desirability bias, age, and relationship status.

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Correlations Between Outcome Variables

Pearson correlations between each of the outcome variables are reported in Table 1. Among the 21 correlations, 8 were statistically significant. Reporting that they would never act on the sexual thought under any circumstances was negatively correlated to reporting that they would act on the sexual thought if there were reduced negative repercussions to self ($r = -0.29$, $p = 0.007$), if given the opportunity ($r = -0.22$, $p = 0.044$), and self-reported proclivity to have sex with a child ($r = -0.25$, $p = 0.024$). Reporting that they would act on the sexual thought with the child's consent was positively associated with increased proclivity of CSA perpetration ($r = 0.22$, $p = 0.049$). Reporting that they would act on the sexual thought if given the opportunity was negatively associated with reduced negative repercussions for others ($r = -0.25$, $p = 0.018$). Additionally, reporting that they would act on the sexual thought if there were reduced negative repercussions to self was associated with increased proclivity to perpetrate CSA ($r = 0.28$, $p = 0.008$), and use of CSAM ($r = 0.32$, $p = 0.004$). Increased use of CSAM was positively associated with proclivity to perpetrate CSA ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$).

3.3.2 Effect of Specific Sexual Thought

I used a series of logistic regression models to examine the relationship between risk factors related to the participants' sexual thoughts and the outcomes. The risk factors included in this section were: (1) participants' favorite sexual thought involves a child, (2) the age of the youngest child in participants' sexual thought of a child, (3) participants were excited by the sexual thought of a child due to a sense of power, (4) participants were excited by the sexual

thought of a child due to a sense of sensation-seeking, and (5) participants feel negatively after experiencing the sexual thought of a child.

Participants whose favorite sexual thought was of a child were less likely to state that they would never act on their sexual thought compared to participants whose sexual thought of a child was not their favorite (OR = 0.11, 95% CI = 0.02 - 0.49), and more likely to say that they would act on their sexual thought with the other person's consent (OR = 4.62, 95% CI = 1.06 - 22.64). Participants whose favorite sexual thought was of a child were also more likely to report use of CSAM (OR = 6.46, 95% CI = 1.94 - 24.2) and a higher proclivity to sexually offend against a child (1.17, 95% CI = 0.65 - 1.70)

Older age of the youngest child in participants' sexual thoughts of a child was associated with a decreased odds of participants endorsing that they would act on the sexual thought if there were reduced negative repercussions to the self (OR = 0.78, 95% CI = 0.59 - 0.94). Older age of the youngest child in participants' sexual thoughts of a child was also negatively associated with using CSAM (OR = 0.77, 95% CI = 0.61 - 0.92), and endorsing a lower proclivity of offending against children ($\beta = -0.05$, 95% CI = -0.10 - -0.01)

Participants who acknowledged being excited by feelings of power in a sexual thought about children were less likely to acknowledge using CSAM as compared to participants who did not acknowledge being excited by feelings of power (OR = 0.14, 95% CI = 0.01 - 0.84). Being excited by feelings of sensation-seeking had a statistically significant direct effect on endorsing that participants would act on the sexual thought with negative repercussions to others (OR = 4.57, 95% CI = 1.52 - 15.82), but the relationship became non-significant after adjusting for social desirability bias, age, and relationship status.

In the unadjusted models, feeling negatively after the sexual thought was associated with an increased endorsement of saying there are no circumstances under which they would act on the sexual thought (OR = 4.38, 95% CI = 1.69 - 11.99), and that they would act the sexual thought if there were reduced repercussions to others (OR = 2.60, 95% CI = 1.03 - 6.74).

However, the findings for both “under no circumstances” and “with reduced negative repercussions for others” became non-significant. Due to low endorsement rates, I was not able to run a logistic regression model between people who reported they would act on the sexual thought if they had the opportunity and feeling negative after the sexual thought. Out of 33 participants who reported that they feel negative after the sexual thought, 3 (9%) said they would act on their sexual thought given the opportunity, meanwhile, out of 43 participants who did not endorse feeling negative, 14 (33%) said they would act on the sexual thought if given the opportunity.

3.3.3 Childhood Sexual Experiences

I used a series of logistic regression models to examine the relationship between risk factors related to the participants’ childhood sexual experiences and the outcomes. The risk factors included in this section were: (1) age participants first viewed pornography, (2) age participants first masturbated, (3) CSAM victimization, and (4) sexual experiences with peers.

. Older age of first masturbation was associated with a decrease in use of CSAM (OR = 0.73, 95% CI = 0.57 - 0.92), and sexual behavior with peers was associated with an increase in use of CSAM after adjusting for social desirability, age, and relationship status (OR = 5.66, 95% CI = 1.44 - 24.88). However, neither age at first exposure to pornography nor CSA victimization was associated with any of the outcomes.

3.3.4 Sexual Behavior

I used a series of logistic regression models to examine the relationship between risk factors related to the participants’ sexual behaviors during adulthood and the outcomes. The risk factors included in this section were: (1) sexual assault perpetration, (2) frequency of masturbation, (3) frequency of sex with adults, and (4) the gender of participants’ adult sexual partners.

Participants who endorsed a sexual assault perpetration were less likely than participants who did not endorse a sexual assault perpetration to indicate that they would act on their sexual thought if there was reduced negative repercussions to others and were more likely to endorse a higher proclivity to have sex with a child ($\beta = 0.86$, 95% CI = (0.04, 1.68). Frequency of masturbation was not associated with any of the outcomes, while frequency of sex with adults was associated with a greater endorsement of reporting that they would not act on the sexual thought under any circumstance (OR = 1.48, 95% CI = 1.01 - 2.34), and lower endorsement of both reduced negative repercussions for self (OR = 0.5, 95% CI = 0.28 - 0.78), and use of CSAM (OR = 0.67, 95% CI = 0.44 - 0.96). Men who have sex with men were more likely to endorse that they would act on their sexual thought with the other person's consent (OR = 5.02, 95% CI = 1.02 - 28.22). Men who have not had sex as an adult were less likely to endorse that they would never act on their sexual thought (OR = 0.05, 95% CI = 0.002 - 0.58).

3.4 Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to identify how risk factors for sexual offending against children relates to the specific circumstances under which a person reports they would act on their sexual thought of a child.

3.4.1 Sexual thought characteristics.

The strongest predictor of proclivity to offend against a child and use of CSAM was whether the participant's favorite sexual thought involved a child, indicating a likely preferential sexual interest in children over adults. This is not surprising as a preferential attraction to children over adults is associated with higher risk of both CSAM use and sexual contact with a child (Bailey et al., 2016; Seto et al., 2003, 2017, 2020). The increased rate of endorsing that participants would act on their sexual thought of a child with the child's consent indicates the incorrect belief that children are able to consent. The increased rate of proclivity to offend as

well as use of CSAM may then be reflective of a belief that children are able to consent to sex with adults, and that viewing CSAM is not in itself abusive. Minimizing the harms of CSAM is common among people who use CSAM (Quayle & Taylor, 2002). Targeting the permissive-attitudes towards adult-child sex among people with a preferential sexual interest in children may then be an important target for the primary prevention of CSA perpetration. However, further research is needed to better understand the link between the degree of sexual interest in children and heightened permissive attitudes of adult-child sex.

Sprigg's and colleagues (2018) propose that permissive attitudes towards adult-child sex among people with a sexual interest in children is a defense mechanism to protect their self-esteem. The idea that permissive attitudes towards adult-child sex being protective of self-esteem corresponds to Steele's (1988) self-affirmation theory, which proposes that people tend to maintain positive self-integrity, and that people with lower self-esteem are more likely to engage in self-justification strategies (Holland et al., 2002). If this self-defense hypothesis is borne out in future research, then focusing on the self-esteem of people with a sexual interest in children may be a vital step in reducing their permissive attitudes of adult-child sex, which may then result in a decreased risk of CSA perpetration.

The age of the youngest child in the sexual thought was not related to any of the circumstances under which they would act on the sexual thought; however, the age of the youngest child in the sexual thought was negatively associated with viewing CSAM and self-reported proclivity to perpetrate CSA. These protective effects may be related to the smaller physical discrepancy between an adolescent and a young adult. However, there is a greater risk of CSA victimization during adolescence than prepubescence (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020; Kloppen et al., 2016). Therefore, my findings here indicate that the increased rate of CSA victimization during adolescence is not related to a greater proclivity to offend against adolescents than prepubescent children, but instead may be related to easier access to

adolescents, or due to an attraction towards adolescents being more common than an attraction towards prepubescent children.

Being excited by the feeling power was associated with a decrease in the use of CSAM. This is a surprising finding. Given Sullivan and Sheehan's (2016) finding that one of the stated reasons for sexually abusing a child is due to feelings of power and control, we would expect that being excited by feelings of power would be associated with higher proclivity to offend. Due to the heightened risk of type II error brought on by numerous models being run without any correction for attenuation, it is possible that this was a statistical artifact.

Enjoyment due to a sense of sensation-seeking was associated with an increased rate of endorsing that they would act on their sexual thought if doing so would not harm the child. This may be due to an acknowledgment of the difference between fantasy and reality. sensation-seeking was primarily driven by feelings of risk-taking and rule-breaking. They may find the taboo nature of the sexual fantasy to be arousing, but do not want to cause harm to the child.

3.4.2 Early Childhood Experiences.

Collectively, the findings related to early childhood experiences do not support the abused-abuser hypothesis, nor that early exposure to pornography is related to sexual offending. Neither sexual experiences with a peer nor sexual abuse by an adult was associated with any of the outcomes. While age that the participant was first exposed to pornography was not related to any of the outcomes, a higher age that the participant first masturbated was associated with a decreased use of CSAM. Wurtele and colleagues (2018) found that men who have sexually offended against a child as compared to an adult were more likely to report earlier exposure to pornography and earlier onset of masturbation. We found no evidence that exposure to pornography was related to reported proclivity to offend in this community sample, but our

findings do support that early onset of masturbation is related to the use of CSAM, if not for contact offending.

3.4.3 Sexual Behavior.

Frequency of sex with adults was a protective factor against viewing CSAM and increased likelihood that participants with sexual thoughts of children would never act out their sexual thought under any circumstance. Frequency of sex with adults may be a protective factor against contact CSA and CSAM due to heightened sexual interest to adults compared to children. However, frequency of masturbation was not related to any of the outcomes. Frequency of masturbation reflects sex drive but is not dependent on a sexual interest in either adults or children, as opposed to frequency of sex with adults which implies a sexual interest in adults. Prior findings indicate that high sex drive among people with a paraphilia has been found to increase the likelihood of engaging in paraphilic behavior (Bouchard et al., 2017). Our findings indicate that this effect may be dependent on the relative degree of paraphilic sexual interest to nonparaphilic sexual interest. Sexual behavior with another man and never having sex as an adult were not associated with any of the outcomes.

Sexual assault perpetration was related to an increased reported proclivity to sexually offend against a child, and a decreased likelihood of endorsing “negative repercussions for others” indicating less of a concern about the well-being of the child. This finding supports the view that adult men who have engaged in a sexual offense against adults may be generalists, in that they are also more likely to sexually offend against a child (Cann et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2009).

3.4.4 Limitations

This study shares many of the same limitations as described in Chapter 2. That is, the data were collected in 2005 to 2007 and may not be representative of the current state of

people's sexual thoughts; many of the outcomes and exposures were specific to a particular sexual thought, though this study did use a greater range of sexual experience questions, which was not specific to a sexual thought; finally, the circumstances they would act on their sexual thought were hypothetical situations and may not reflect the reality of the circumstances under which they would act on their sexual thoughts. In addition to the limitations that were similar to Chapter 2, the sample size used in this study was lower than the study described in Chapter 2, furthering the potential of type II errors

3.5 Conclusions

This study explored how risk factors associated with CSA perpetration are also associated with specific circumstances under which someone would perpetrate CSA, as well as proclivity to offend against a child and use of CSAM. The heightened risk of offending among participants whose favorite sexual thought was of a child, as well as the protective effect of sex with adults against CSAM usage indicates that a preferential attraction to children is an important risk factor for offending. Importantly, the heightened endorsement of "with others' consent" indicates a belief that children can give consent. Rather than a callous attitude of not caring about harming a child, participants' increased risk of offending may be related to a belief that children can consent. Therefore, a primary target for primary prevention of CSA perpetration may be in reducing the belief that children are able to consent to sex with adults among people with a preferential sexual interest in children. This belief may be due to a defense mechanism to protect the individual's own self-esteem (Spriggs et al., 2018). Future research is needed to determine if self-esteem does moderate the link between a preferential sexual interest in children and the belief that children are able to consent to sex with adults.

3.6 References

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3.7 Tables

Table 3.1. Pearson correlations Between Study Outcomes

	Circ: None	Circ: OC	Circ: Opp	Circ: NRS	Circ: NRO	Use of CSAM
Circ: None	—					
Circ: OC	-0.43	—				
Circ: Opp	-0.22*	0.00	—			
Circ: NRS	-0.29**	0.21	-0.06	—		
Circ: NRO	0.11	0.00	-0.25*	0.02	—	
Use of CSAM	-0.13	0.13	-0.11	0.32**	-0.07	—
Proclivity to perpetrate CSA	-0.25*	0.22*	0.11	0.28**	-0.20	0.39***

Note: Circ = Circumstances under which they would act on their sexual thought. OC = With others consent.

Opp = Opportunity. NRS = Reduced negative repercussions for self. NRO = Reduced negative

repercussions for self. CSAM = Child sexual abuse materials; * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

Table 3.2. Unadjusted Odds Ratios Between Risk Factors and Study Outcomes

	Circumstances Participants Would act on the sexual thought of a child					Use of CSAM	Proclivity to Perpetrate CSA
	None OR (95% CI)	Others Consent OR (95% CI)	Opportunity OR (95% CI)	NRS OR (95% CI)	NRO OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	Beta (95% CI)
Favorite sexual thought is of a child	0.21 (0.07, 0.56)	5.05 (1.71, 16.39)	1.42 (0.49, 4.02)	3.26 (1.31, 8.66)	0.68 (0.27, 1.64)	5.28 (2.11, 13.91)	1.17 (0.65, 1.7)
Age of child	1.03 (0.98, 1.1)	0.91 (0.79, 1.01)	1.03 (0.97, 1.1)	0.84 (0.72, 0.94)	1.03 (0.98, 1.11)	0.8 (0.68, 0.91)	-0.05 (-0.08, -0.02)
Exciting: Power	0.79 (0.29, 2.12)	1.14 (0.34, 3.56)	0.72 (0.18, 2.46)	1.27 (0.48, 3.45)	1.5 (0.57, 4.04)	0.29 (0.06, 0.97)	-0.19 (-0.87, 0.5)
Exciting: Sensation seeking	1.23 (0.42, 3.55)	1.33 (0.37, 4.38)	0.38 (0.06, 1.58)	0.94 (0.33, 2.68)	4.57 (1.52, 15.82)	2.23 (0.74, 6.52)	-0.19 (-0.93, 0.55)
Feel After: Negative	4.38 (1.69, 11.99)	0.39 (0.1, 1.28)	0.21 (0.04, 0.71)	0.56 (0.22, 1.4)	2.6 (1.03, 6.74)	1.61 (0.6, 4.35)	-0.15 (-0.8, 0.5)
Age first began masturbating	1.01 (0.85, 1.2)	0.9 (0.74, 1.09)	1.03 (0.84, 1.26)	0.99 (0.84, 1.17)	1.03 (0.87, 1.23)	0.8 (0.66, 0.97)	-0.08 (-0.19, 0.03)
Age first viewed pornography	1.4 (0.19, 10.71)	0.21 (0.01, 1.97)	0.33 (0.01, 3.37)	0.6 (0.08, 3.94)	0.6 (0.08, 3.94)	0.57 (0.02, 7.29)	0.08 (-1.21, 1.38)
CSA victimization	0.84 (0.11, 4.75)	1.62 (0.21, 9.46)	NA	0.77 (0.13, 4.48)	0.7 (0.09, 3.95)	1.29 (0.26, 5.15)	0.63 (-0.33, 1.59)
Childhood sexual experiences with peers	1.07 (0.34, 3.21)	0.65 (0.13, 2.4)	0.88 (0.22, 2.98)	0.77 (0.26, 2.26)	1.76 (0.6, 5.31)	1.83 (0.63, 5.17)	0.21 (-0.51, 0.93)
Sexual assault perpetration	0.57 (0.14, 1.94)	0.26 (0.01, 1.5)	1.72 (0.42, 6.1)	2.31 (0.69, 9.16)	0.19 (0.03, 0.76)	0.44 (0.1, 1.48)	0.62 (-0.09, 1.32)
Frequency of masturbation	0.84 (0.52, 1.33)	1.45 (0.82, 2.78)	1.01 (0.59, 1.78)	1.53 (0.97, 2.49)	0.77 (0.49, 1.22)	1.39 (0.91, 2.28)	0.25 (0.01, 0.49)
Frequency of sex with adults	1.05 (0.83, 1.34)	0.84 (0.63, 1.13)	0.89 (0.67, 1.18)	0.69 (0.51, 0.89)	1.17 (0.92, 1.51)	0.86 (0.67, 1.12)	-0.07 (-0.22, 0.07)
Male sexual partners	0.69 (0.22, 2.01)	2.88 (0.81, 9.96)	1.02 (0.25, 3.50)	0.57 (0.19, 1.67)	0.82 (0.27, 2.41)	0.62 (0.16, 1.96)	0.14 (-0.51, 0.78)
Not had sex as an adult	0.20 (0.03, 0.82)	2.56 (0.58, 10.15)	0.98 (0.20, 3.76)	2.24 (0.66, 8.97)	1.72 (0.53, 5.87)	2.73 (0.84, 8.84)	0.69 (-0.12, 1.50)

Note. Results significant at a level of $p < 0.05$ indicated in bold

Table 3.3. Adjusted Odds Ratios Between Risk Factors and Study Outcomes

	Circumstances Participants Would act on the sexual thought of a child					Use of CSAM	Proclivity to Perpetrate CSA
	None OR (95% CI)	Others Consent OR (95% CI)	Opportunity OR (95% CI)	NRS OR (95% CI)	NRO OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	Beta (95% CI)
Favorite sexual thought is of a child	0.11 (0.02, 0.49)	4.62 (1.06, 22.64)	2.7 (0.71, 10.79)	2.23 (0.69, 7.76)	0.98 (0.31, 3.06)	6.46 (1.94, 24.2)	1.13 (0.47, 1.79)
Age of child	1.01 (0.94, 1.11)	1.02 (0.91, 1.11)	1.03 (0.94, 1.12)	0.78 (0.59, 0.94)	1 (0.93, 1.09)	0.77 (0.61, 0.92)	-0.05 (-0.1, -0.01)
Exciting: Power	1.08 (0.3, 3.8)	1.05 (0.25, 4.15)	0.72 (0.13, 3.14)	0.87 (0.26, 2.97)	2.44 (0.76, 8.3)	0.14 (0.01, 0.84)	-0.23 (-1.03, 0.57)
Exciting: Sensation seeking	1.37 (0.35, 5.33)	1.64 (0.34, 7.44)	0.26 (0.01, 1.68)	1.43 (0.4, 5.51)	3.24 (0.93, 12.6)	2.4 (0.58, 9.56)	-0.46 (-1.31, 0.39)
Feel After: Negative	3.38 (0.97, 13.3)	0.9 (0.15, 5.09)	NA	1.02 (0.3, 3.69)	2.92 (0.89, 10.45)	1.69 (0.45, 6.5)	-0.43 (-1.24, 0.39)
Age first began masturbating	1.06 (0.84, 1.38)	0.85 (0.65, 1.08)	0.91 (0.71, 1.17)	0.92 (0.72, 1.15)	1 (0.8, 1.24)	0.73 (0.57, 0.92)	-0.1 (-0.23, 0.04)
Age first viewed pornography	3.37 (0.22, 96.47)	0.27 (0.01, 4)	NA	1.21 (0.11, 14.2)	0.78 (0.07, 8.36)	1.53 (0.05, 49.75)	0.3 (-1.37, 1.97)
CSA victimization	0.42 (0.02, 4.13)	4.63 (0.41, 52.99)	NA	2.03 (0.26, 19.97)	0.25 (0.01, 2.17)	4.25 (0.66, 26.98)	0.87 (-0.22, 1.95)
Childhood sexual experiences with peers	1.06 (0.25, 4.36)	0.76 (0.1, 4.32)	0.77 (0.14, 3.44)	1.19 (0.31, 4.79)	1.52 (0.4, 5.96)	5.66 (1.44, 24.88)	0.24 (-0.63, 1.11)
Sexual assault perpetration	0.34 (0.05, 1.61)	0.2 (0.01, 1.4)	2.57 (0.56, 11.25)	1.51 (0.38, 6.68)	0.1 (0.01, 0.61)	0.35 (0.05, 1.54)	0.86 (0.04, 1.68)
Frequency of masturbation	1.28 (0.69, 2.48)	1.39 (0.66, 3.32)	0.75 (0.38, 1.48)	1.64 (0.9, 3.14)	0.87 (0.48, 1.56)	1.45 (0.81, 2.89)	0.13 (-0.2, 0.47)
Frequency of sex with adults	1.48 (1.01, 2.34)	0.94 (0.6, 1.51)	0.72 (0.47, 1.07)	0.5 (0.28, 0.78)	1.1 (0.77, 1.6)	0.67 (0.44, 0.96)	-0.09 (-0.29, 0.11)
Male sexual partners	0.57 (0.12, 2.27)	5.02 (1.02, 28.22)	0.95 (0.18, 4.11)	0.41 (0.1, 1.54)	0.65 (0.15, 2.51)	1.39 (0.32, 5.25)	0.07 (-0.76, 0.91)
Not had sex as an adult	0.06 (0, 0.58)	1.55 (0.12, 21.65)	0.88 (0.08, 8.13)	0.4 (0.05, 2.86)	5.52 (0.81, 48.08)	2.34 (0.26, 24.81)	0.02 (-1.29, 1.35)

Note. Results significant at a level of $p < 0.05$ indicated in bold. Models adjusted for social desirability, age, and relationship status

Chapter 4. Subgroups of Men with a Sexual Interest in Children

4.0 Abstract

Experiencing sexual thoughts of children can cause significant distress even amongst people with a sexual interest in children. Distress about one's own sexual thoughts may come from the societal stigma against people with a sexual interest in children, even if those people never offend. This stigma is also associated with increased mental health problems and difficulty finding help with mental health, which leads to developing poor coping mechanisms such as thought suppression. Thought suppression as a long-term strategy can cause a 'rebound effect' wherein the thought becomes more frequent and preoccupying, which may lead to increased risk of acting on the thought. The present study uses data from 238 men with and without sexual thoughts of children from the Sexual Thoughts Project cohort to explore, using latent profile analysis, if there is a subgroup of men with sexual thoughts of children who are characterized by unwanted sexual thoughts, which would be indicated by low appraisal and low control over the sexual thought of a child. I did not find evidence of any class characterized by unwanted sexual thoughts of children. Instead, I found three classes characterized by either high, low, or no sexual interest in children. Participants in the high, low, and no sexual interest in children classes were also characterized by high, low, and no self-reported proclivity to perpetrate child sexual abuse, respectively. Furthermore, participants in the high sexual interest in children class had sexual thoughts of prepubescent children, while participants in the low sexual interest in children class had sexual thoughts of adolescents. These results indicate that sexual interest in children may have a dimensional latent structure.

4.1 Introduction

The present study explores if there is a subgroup of people with sexual thoughts of children who experience intrusive or unwanted sexual thoughts of children.

Intrusive thoughts are sudden, unwanted thoughts that may be disturbing or cause distress to the individual. Among all intrusive thoughts, those involving sexual behaviors are considered among the most distressing (Williams et al., 2015; Williams & Farris, 2011). Intrusive sexual thoughts are also common, with 84% of the population experiencing at least one unwanted or intrusive sexual thought in their lifetime (Byers et al., 1998). Most of the literature focusing on intrusive sexual thoughts of children has specifically been with clinical samples of people with Pedophilic Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (P-OCD). People with P-OCD have recurring unwanted sexual thoughts about children, which leads to worries about sexually offending against a child (O'Neil et al., 2005). Sexual thoughts of children amongst people with P-OCD are highly distressing and cause feelings of shame, disgust, anxiety, and lead to impairments in both professional and social contexts due to the mental resources devoted to these worries (Gordon, 2002; Moulding et al., 2014).

Core differences between P-OCD and pedophilia include that P-OCD is characterized by sexual thoughts of children that are not arousing and that are distressing, while pedophilia is characterized by arousing and enjoyable sexual thoughts of children (Bruce et al., 2018). However, focusing on the distress caused by the sexual thoughts of children as a way to differentiate between pedophilia and P-OCD may be insufficient to distinguish these disorders. While people with an attraction to children are likely to be sexually aroused by sexual thoughts of children, these same thoughts and feelings are often a source of distress (Cohen et al., 2018). In an online survey of people with an attraction to children, reducing their sexual interest in children was one of the most prominent treatment priorities, followed by learning to have a

healthy and satisfying life as well as how to have a close relationship (Levenson & Grady, 2018).

Perpetration of CSA is stigmatized harsher than even murder. CSA victimization is remarkably harmful, and so *perpetration* is rightfully stigmatized by society. However, the stigma extends beyond the act of perpetrating CSA and anyone with a sexual interest in children are viewed as dangerous who either have or will sexually abuse a child. The extension of stigma against the act of CSA perpetration to anyone with a sexual interest in children is emphasized by how popular media frequently conflates the terms “pedophilia” and “child sexual abuse” (Stelzmann et al., 2020).

Pedophilia refers specifically to a sexual interest in prepubescent children, while child sexual abuse refers to sexual contact between an adult and child or unwanted sexual contact between children. While the term ‘pedophile’ is used, it is frequently applied to people with a sexual interest in children of any age. For example, the Daily Mail, a British newspaper, recently published an article titled “Outrage as paedophiles rebrand themselves as 'minor-attracted persons' in chilling online propaganda drive.” (Denkinson, 2020). Minor-attracted person is a frequently used term to refer to people with a sexual interest in children, but it is an umbrella term to encompass a sexual interest in prepubescent, pubescent, and adolescent children. The argument that minor-attracted person is a ‘rebranding’ of ‘pedophilia’ is based on the false belief that ‘pedophile’ refers to the sexual interest in children of any age, or the people who perpetrate CSA.

The stigma against people with a sexual interest in children is rooted in an assumption that people with sexual interest in children are dangerous and either have or inevitably will sexually abuse a child. In particular, there are strong emotions of anger and disgust directed towards people with an attraction to children, and the general public harbors strong punitive or avoidance attitudes towards people with an attraction to children (Jahnke, 2018a). Negative

attitudes towards people with a sexual interest in children persist even when it is emphasized that an individual has not and will not sexually abuse a child.

Stigma may have negative effects on many dynamic risk factors for sexual offending, such as a low self-esteem, heightened mental disorders, social isolation, and lack of social support (Beier, 2016; Jahnke & Hoyer, 2013; Lasher & Stinson, 2017; Mann et al., 2010). Forensic samples have shown that pedophilic men have high rates of mental disorders, with a lifetime prevalence of 30-67% for mood disorders, 39-60% for substance disorders, and 38-53% for social phobia (Adiele et al., 2011; Leue et al., 2004; Raymond et al., 1999). Furthermore, stigmatization makes it difficult for people with an attraction to children to seek treatment.

Approximately 12% of men with a sexual interest in children consider seeking professional help, though that rises to 50% amongst those whose sexual interest in children is stronger than their sexual interest in adults (Dombert et al., 2016). Treatment goals for people with an attraction to children often center around understanding or reducing the attraction, but the client's general mental health is also a major priority. Particularly, they want help dealing with depression, anxiety, loneliness, and low self-esteem (Levenson & Grady, 2018). However, seeking help is difficult due to a common fear that simply admitting to a sexual interest in children will trigger mandatory reporting, fear of judgment, difficulties finding a knowledgeable therapist, and financial constraints (Levenson & Grady, 2018).

In the absence of professional help, people with an attraction to children may be at risk of developing maladaptive coping mechanisms. A thematic analysis of coping mechanisms discussed on a web forum for people with an attraction to children found that thought suppression was a common technique used to cope with their attraction to children, and such techniques were implicated as a cause for poor mental health (Stevens & Wood, 2019). Thought suppression is a common emotional regulation strategy that seeks to inhibit unwanted emotional responses to stimuli (Gross, 2002). While thought suppression may be successful in reducing the thought and negative emotional effects from the thought in the short term, it is

considered maladaptive as a long-term strategy, and may increase preoccupation with the unwanted thought, a phenomenon known as the 'Rebound Effect' (Purdon & Clark, 2001; Wang et al., 2020).

One factor that contributes to the distress people with pedophilia may experience in regards to their sexual thoughts is the stigma towards people with an attraction to children (Jahnke, Imhoff, et al., 2015). There is a common perception that people with an attraction to children are dangerous, abnormal, and able to control their attractions (Imhoff, 2015; Imhoff & Jahnke, 2018; Jahnke, 2018b; Jahnke, Imhoff, et al., 2015). The public overestimates the relationship between a sexual interest in children and sexual offending against children, and frequently believe that people with a sexual interest in children are unwilling or unable to avoid sexually abusing a child (Dombert et al., 2016; Jahnke, Imhoff, et al., 2015). These beliefs are used to justify harsh punitive attitudes even towards people who have not harmed a child (Jahnke, 2018a).

Stigmatized responses to people who are attraction to children, while they might be rooted in a desire to protect children, may actually be counterproductive, as experiencing stigma is associated with increased rates of risk factors for child sexual abuse, such as social isolation, depression, and anxiety (Jahnke, 2018b). While many people with an attraction to children want professional help, there is frequently an unwillingness to work with this group amongst therapists. In one study among German psychotherapists, 95% reported that they would refuse to work with pedophiles (Stiels-Glenn, 2010). Approximately 65% of therapists do not believe they have sufficient knowledge about an attraction to children, and so cannot provide adequate treatment, while 38% endorsed stigmatizing beliefs against people with an attraction to children (Jahnke, Philipp, et al., 2015). Brief training related to knowledge and attitudes towards clients may improve mental health professionals willingness to work with people with an attraction to children (Levenson & Grady, 2019). However, people with an attraction to children often fear reaching out to mental health professionals due to uncertainty of confidentiality, fear of negative

reactions and judgment, difficulty finding a knowledgeable therapist, and financial constraints (Levenson & Grady, 2018).

In the absence of professional help, people with an attraction to children may be at risk of developing maladaptive coping mechanisms. A thematic analysis of coping mechanisms discussed on a web forum for people with an attraction to children found that thought suppression was a common technique used to cope with their attraction to children, and such techniques were implicated as a cause for poor mental health (Stevens & Wood, 2019). Thought suppression, a common emotional regulation strategy which seeks to inhibit unwanted emotional responses to stimuli, may be successful in reducing the thought and negative emotional effects from the thought in the short term (Gross, 2002; Wang et al., 2020). However, as a long-term strategy, thought suppression is considered maladaptive, and may increase preoccupation with the unwanted thought, a phenomenon known as the 'Rebound Effect' (Purdon & Clark, 2001; Wang et al., 2020). Thought suppression has also been found to be common in depression and anxiety (Yapan et al., 2020).

The use of suppression techniques as a coping mechanism indicates that many people with an attraction to children feel negatively about these attractions and consider their sexual thoughts of children to be unwanted. However, there are also people with an attraction to children who consider these attractions to be positive (Spriggs et al., 2018). The acceptability of adult-child sex is heightened amongst those with an attraction to children, and there is a prevalent view that the only reason sex with children is harmful is due to the societal belief that sex with children is wrong (Spriggs et al., 2018). Amongst this group who believe that sex with children is acceptable, it is unlikely that they consider their sexual fantasies of children to be unwanted. Therefore, there may be a subgroup of people with an attraction to children that is differentiated by how they feel towards their sexual thoughts. As there are unique risk factors for sexual offending amongst both groups, there is clinical relevance in being able to identify these groups.

The present study explores the possibility of there being a subclass of people with sexual thoughts of children that is characterized by experiencing unwanted sexual thoughts of children. I hypothesize that a class characterized by unwanted sexual thoughts of children would have a low appraisal, low control, and high frequency of the sexual thought. Low appraisal of the sexual thought may trigger suppression attempts, which could cause a rebound effect, making the sexual thought of a child more difficult to control and more frequent. After identifying the classes, a post-hoc analysis was added to examine the association between class membership and the age of the person within the sexual fantasy.

4.2 Methods

The sample of interest in the present study is the same as the matched sample used in Chapter 2. That is, 238 adult men from the Sexual Thoughts Project, half of whom have either a sexual interest in children or sexual thoughts of children and half of whom were matched to them using demographic variables (See Table 2.2)

4.2.1 Measures

4.2.1.1 Latent Profile Analysis

LPA is a person-centered statistical approach which identifies subgroups of people based upon item-response patterns. The optimal number of classes was determined by using the Lo-Mendell-Rubin Adjusted Likelihood Ratio Test (LMRT; (Lo et al., 2001)), the Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test (VLMRT; (Vuong, 1989)), the Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT; (Arminger et al., 1999)), the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and the sample-size adjusted BIC (aBIC). The LMRT, VLMRT, and BLRT are all comparative fit statistics, in that they compare the current model to a model with one fewer class. A significant p-value indicates that the current model fits the data better than a model with one fewer class. The BIC and aBIC are descriptive fit statistics where a lower value indicates a better model fit.

In addition to these fit statistics, the models were evaluated based on their interpretability and utility to determine the appropriate number of classes to extract. Four latent profile analyses were initially examined to determine the appropriate number of classes, based off of the fit statistics. The age of the youngest participant was assessed as a correlate using the DU3STEP command in MPlus. DU3STEP is recommended when the correlate is expected to have an unequal mean and variance across classes (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014).

4.2.1.2 Latent Profile Indicators

The latent profile indicators were selected primarily to determine the potential for a class of participants who experience unwanted sexual thoughts of children. There were a total of six latent class indicators, including:

1. **Number of sexual thoughts involving children.** The number of sexual thoughts involving a child was determined by a single question, “Out of 10 occasions when you have sexual thoughts, on how many occasions do you find yourself thinking about children.” To keep the lowest value identical to the other latent profile indicators, a value of 1 refers to no sexual thoughts of children out of 10, and a value of 6 refers to five or more sexual thoughts of children.
2. **Sexual interest in children.** The degree of sexual interest in children was determined by a single question, “How often do you have a desire to be sexually close or intimate with a child” which was scored on a scale of 1 = Never to 5 = Always.
3. **Proclivity for CSA perpetration.** The proclivity to sexually offend against a child was determined a single question, “On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely is it that you would force a person to have sex with you/have sex with a child if you could be assured that you would not be caught or punished? 1 means not at all likely. 5 means very likely”

4. **Frequency of their sexual thought.** Frequency of the sexual thought was determined by a single question, "How often do you have this sexual thought?" Which was on a 4-point scale ranging from "Several times a day" to "less than several times a month."
5. **Appraisal.** The sense of personal acceptability, or appraisal, of the sexual thought was calculated by the mean of three close-ended questions: (1) "on a scale of 1 to 5, how personally acceptable do you find this sexual thought? 1 means completely unacceptable to you. 5 means completely acceptable to you," (2) "on a scale of 1 to 5, how pleasant do you find this sexual thought? 1 means completely unpleasant. 5 means completely pleasant," and (3) "How often during this sexual thought do you try to divert your mind to think of something else" which had 5 response options: never, occasionally, sometimes, often, and always. Appraisal had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74.
6. **Control.** The degree of control the participant has over the sexual thought was calculated by the mean of three items: (1) "On a scale of 1 to 5, how much control do you have over when this sexual thought starts? 1 means no control. 5 means complete control." (2) "On a scale of 1 to 5, how much control do you have over what happens during this sexual thought? 1 means no control. 5 means complete control," and (3) "On a scale of 1 to 5, how much control do you have over stopping this sexual thought? 1 means no control. 5 means complete control." Control had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.69.
7. **Potency.** The potency of the sexual thought was calculated by the mean of three close-ended questions: (1) "how sexually excited or aroused do you get by this sexual thought on a scale of 1 to 5? 1 means you do not get aroused at all. 5 means you get extremely aroused", (2) "When you experience this sexual thought, how absorbed or wrapped up in it are you on a scale of 1 to 5? 1 means you are not absorbed at all. 5 means you get extremely absorbed in the sexual thought." and (3) "How much does this sexual thought interfere with your daily activities? 1 means not at all. 5 means it interferes to a great extent." Potency had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.64.

Frequency, appraisal, control, and potency are all related to a specific sexual thought, rather than their sexual thoughts in general. For individuals with at least one sexual thought of a child, these variables all relate to their sexual thought of a child. For individuals with no sexual thought of a child, these variables all relate to their favorite sexual thought.

The age of the youngest person in their sexual thought was added post-hoc as a correlate. Participants were asked to describe up to four people in their sexual thoughts and the youngest of those four was used.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Model Selection

The number of classes that should be extracted was identified by a comparison of goodness-of-fit indices, shown in Table 1. There was a discrepancy in the best fitting model based upon each fit statistic. The BIC and aBIC continued to decrease up to the 5-class model, though the difference in value became smaller after the 3-class model, and the BLRT was still <0.05 at the 5-class model. However, the VLMR and the LMR had a p -value > 0.05 at the 4-class model, indicating that a 3-class model provides the best fit. Therefore, a 3 class model was determined to be most appropriate.

4.3.2 Model Fit

Three distinct classes were characterized by participants' degree of sexual interest in children. Participants in Class 1 shows high sexual interest in children, participants in Class 2 shows some sexual interest in children, participants in Class 3 shows no sexual interest in children. Table 2 presents the indicator score distribution by most probable class membership, while Figure 1 graphically displays the indicator means by class membership.

Participants in the high sexual interest in children (Class 1) class exhibited more sexual thoughts of children than of adults, high sexual interest in children, and high proclivity to offend. The frequency, control, and potency of their sexual thought was similar to the no sexual interest in children class (Class 3) while appraisal was slightly lower. Participants in Class 2 were characterized by a low sexual interest in children, low proclivity to offend, and low frequency of sexual thoughts of a child, moderate appraisal of the thought, high control, and low-moderate potency. Participants in Class 3 were characterized by no sexual thoughts of children, no sexual interest in children, and very low proclivity of offending against children; the frequency, control, appraisal and potency of their favorite sexual thoughts (which were to adults) were high.

The frequency, appraisal, control, and potency indicators were related to participants' specific sexual thoughts. For participants in classes 1 and 2, these would relate to their sexual thoughts of a child, while for individuals in class 3, who had no sexual thoughts of children, these indicators related to their favorite sexual thoughts of adults.

The post hoc analysis revealed that the mean age of the youngest person in the sexual thought varied by class: for the high sexual interest in children class (Class 1) the mean age of the youngest person in their sexual thought was 10.99 (se = 0.46); for the some sexual interest in children (Class 2), it was 13.71 (se = 0.26); and for no sexual interest in children, it was 28.14 (se = 0.74). These differences were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ for each combination.

4.4 Discussion

The purpose of examining the latent structure of individuals with sexual thoughts of children was to determine if there was a class categorized by having unwanted sexual thoughts of children. This was expected to be characterized primarily through low appraisal and low control regarding a sexual thought of a child. No such class was found. Class 2, the low sexual interest in children class had the lowest appraisal of the sexual thought, yet the mean appraisal was 2.94, which is a neutral score on the Likert-scale. Additionally, this class exhibited the

greatest degree of control over their sexual thought, further emphasizing that it is unlikely that the men in this class are experiencing intrusive sexual thoughts.

When interpreting class membership, it is important to remember that the frequency, appraisal, control, and potency variables are specific to a particular sexual thought. When a participant has a sexual thought of a child, their sexual thought of a child was used. For participants without a sexual thought of a child, their favorite sexual thought was used. Therefore, the results in both the high and low sexual interest in children classes refers specifically to a sexual thought of a child, which may or may not be their favorite sexual thought, while the no sexual interest in children class refers to their favorite sexual thought of an adult.

Participants in the high sexual interest in children class reported the highest proclivity for CSA perpetration, while participants in the no sexual interest in children class reported the lowest proclivity for CSA perpetration. While participants in the low sexual interest in proclivity class did indicate some proclivity for CSA perpetration, their proclivity was substantially lower than participants in the high sexual interest in children class. The large difference in the proclivity to perpetrate CSA between the high and low sexual interest in children classes supports the findings that preferential attraction to children is a risk factor for CSA. The low sexual interest in children class had both the lowest appraisal of the sexual thought, as well as the lowest frequency, indicating that there are no concerns with a rebound effect from thought suppression. It is worth noting that the mean appraisal of the sexual thought in this class was neutral, rather than negative, so these thoughts were not considered to be morally unacceptable. These findings indicate that the degree of sexual interest in children is a primary distinguisher between each class, and that a higher sexual interest in children is associated with a higher self-reported proclivity to sexually offend against a child.

The high sexual interest in children and no sexual interest in children groups had near identical frequency, control, and potency of their sexual thought. Frequency of sexual fantasies is one domain examined when determining sex drive, so these findings imply that sexual

interest in children may not be related to sex drive, as has previously been found (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1979; Klein et al., 2015). While appraisal is high in those who have a high sexual interest in children, it is slightly lower as compared to sexual thoughts of adults.

The difference in appraisal between those who have some sexual interest in children and those with high sexual interest in children indicates that the degree of sexual interest may impact the appraisal of the thought itself. That is, those with a primary sexual interest in children may actively justify the acceptability of their own sexual thoughts, while those who are primarily sexually attracted to adults but have some degree of interest in children may not view such thoughts as integral to their identity, and so are less prone to justifying the acceptability of the thought in general.

Identifying both a high sexual interest in children and low sexual interest in children class places the results of this research within the body of literature focusing on whether sexual interest in children is categorical or dimensional. The structure of latent constructs has important implications in quantitative research. Arbitrary dichotomization of dimensional constructs leads to lower measurement precision, loss of statistical power, and increased probability of Type I statistical errors (Cohen, 1983; MacCallum et al., 2002; Maxwell & Delaney, 1993; Ruscio & Ruscio, 2002). Due to the statistical rarity of experiencing a sexual interest in children, particularly towards prepubescent children, these drawbacks may be particularly harmful within research involving people with a sexual interest in children. Loss of statistical power may result in overlooking useful prevention targets, while false-positive findings may result in inappropriate interventions. Meanwhile, the relative scarcity of research involving people with a sexual interest in children may then prevent these errors from being quickly and easily caught. Therefore, properly understanding the structure of sexual interest in children is vital.

Generally, research onto the latent structure of pedophilia has found evidence that pedophilic interest is categorical, meaning men are either pedophilic or non-pedophilic, rather than the attraction being a matter of degree. Using a sample of 304 adult males who had been

incarcerated for a sexual offense, Schmidt and colleagues (2013) found evidence that pedophilia is a dichotomous construct, qualitatively different from non-pedophilia. Other studies have found a trichotomous structure, where there are distinct high, low, and no sexual interest in prepubescent children (Cohen & Galyunker, 2002; Hall & Hall, 2007; McPhail et al., 2018).

Gradient models, on the other hand, view sexual interest in various age groups as a dimensional construct, meaning people differ in the ages they are attracted to by a matter of degree. One large scale study combining phallometric, self-report, and behavioral measures among 900 men incarcerated for a sexual offense found a dimensional structure for pedophilic interest (Stephens et al., 2017). Recently, Bailey and colleagues (2020) found that the sexual interest in one age category is most strongly correlated with adjacent age categories, and the correlation decreases for non-adjacent age categories. For example, individuals with a primary sexual interest in adolescents are also likely to have a secondary attraction to adults and pubescent children, but significantly weaker correlated to prepubescent children or older adults.

Of particular note is that findings implicating a categorical understanding of sexual interest in children have focused on comparing sexual interest in prepubescent children to sexual interest in postpubescent adults, while findings showing a dimensional understanding take into account the full range of pubertal status. For example, Stephens and colleagues (2017) examined sexual interest in six age categories ranging from under 6 years old to over 17 years old, and found support that attraction to children is dimensional. Conversely, Schmidt and colleagues (2013) only examined two age categories, prepubescent children and postpubescent adults, and found pedophilia to be a dichotomous construct.

While the present findings appear to mimic the findings of a trichotomous latent structure—that is having separate high, low, and no sexual interest in children classes—the specific age of the child being fantasized about is a key difference. Participants in the high, low, and no sexual interest in children class had sexual thoughts about children aged 10.99 ($se = 0.46$), 13.71 ($se = 0.26$), and 28.14 ($se = 0.74$), respectively. Given a dimensional

understanding of sexual interest in children, we would expect that a sexual interest to adolescents around the age of 14 is associated with a lower sexual interest in children on average, as this group would include people who have a primary attraction to adults with a secondary attraction to adolescents. The post-hoc analysis of examining the age of the person in the sexual thought as a covariate to class membership revealed that people in the high sexual interest in children class fantasize about younger children than the people in the low sexual interest in children class.

4.4.1 Limitations

These findings should be interpreted taking into account some key limitations. First, the sample size was small for a latent profile analysis, which may result in an inability to detect the correct number of classes (Collier & Leite, 2017; Tein et al., 2013). Second, the purpose of the study was to determine unwanted sexual thoughts of children, but the measures of frequency, appraisal, control, and potency are related to a specific sexual thought that the participant chose to describe. It is possible that individuals with frequent unwanted sexual thoughts of children also have some wanted sexual thoughts that they enjoy and are in control over. If participants were more likely to describe wanted rather than unwanted sexual thoughts children, there would be no indication of them also having unwanted sexual thoughts of children. Third, the low sexual interest in children class (Class 2) was comprised largely of people with a non-favorite sexual thought of children. Therefore, the results related to decreased frequency, appraisal, and potency may simply be related to non-favorite sexual thoughts in general, rather than reflecting any effect from the sexual thought being of a child.

4.5 Conclusion

Due to the high levels of distress and desire to reduce sexual interest in children amongst people with a sexual interest in children, I sought to identify if there is an identifiable

class of people with a sexual interest in children that is categorized by unwanted sexual thoughts of children. I did not find such a class. It may be that among this community sample of men, control over sexual thoughts of children was high (at least relative to forensic samples of men who offended, were caught, and prosecuted) and this control reduced distress about the thoughts. I did identify three distinct classes, distinguished by a high, low, or no sexual interest in children. The high sexual interest in children class (Class 1) was categorized by sexual fantasies of young children, high proclivity to sexually offend against children, high frequency of sexual thoughts of children, and high appraisal, control, and potency of those thoughts. The frequency, appraisal, control, and potency were all similar to the no sexual interest in children class (Class 3), indicating that the primary difference between sexual fantasies of children and sexual fantasies of adults is simply the age of the person in the fantasy. The low sexual interest in children class (Class 2) was categorized by sexual fantasies of older children, low proclivity to sexually offend against children, low frequency of the sexual thought, moderate appraisal, high control, and low potency of the sexual thought. These results also support a dimensional understanding of sexual interest in children.

4.6 References

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4.7 Tables and Figures

Table 4.1. Fit indices for latent two to five class models

Class #	BIC	aBIC	LMR p-value	VLMR p-value	BLRT p-value	Entropy	Smallest class size
2	4503.366	4433.633	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.972	63
3	4202.609	4107.519	0.0136	0.0125	<0.001	0.976	57
4	4046.147	3925.699	0.8047	0.8027	<0.001	0.976	32
5	3927.207	3781.401	0.0709	0.0697	<0.001	0.991	24

Note. Chosen model shown in bold

Abbreviations: BIC = Bayesian Information Criteria; aBIC = sample size adjusted Bayesian Information Criteria; LMR = Lo-Mendel-Rubin likelihood ratio test; VLMR = Vuong-Lo-Mendel-Rubin likelihood ratio test; BLRT = Bootstrap likelihood ratio test.

Table 4.2. Estimated indicator means for three-class solution

	Class 1. High sexual interest in children (n = 56) Mean (95% CI)	Class 2. Low sexual interest in children (n = 59) Mean (95% CI)	Class 3. No sexual interest in children (n = 123) Mean (95% CI)
# Sexual Thoughts of Children	5.67 (5.45, 5.88)	2.45 (2.25, 2.66)	1.05 (1, 1.1)
Sexual interest in children	3.47 (3.12, 3.81)	1.62 (1.46, 1.79)	1.01 (0.99, 1.02)
Proclivity to perpetrate CSA	2.96 (2.5, 3.42)	1.5 (1.26, 1.75)	1.06 (0.98, 1.14)
Frequency of sexual thought	3.25 (3.04, 3.45)	1.17 (1.02, 1.33)	3.34 (3.2, 3.49)
Appraisal of the sexual thought	3.93 (3.71, 4.15)	2.92 (2.56, 3.28)	4.24 (4.13, 4.35)
Control over the sexual thought	3.79 (3.49, 4.09)	4.06 (3.78, 4.34)	3.73 (3.57, 3.89)
Potency of sexual thought	3.28 (3.09, 3.48)	2.31 (2.03, 2.59)	3.31 (3.19, 3.42)

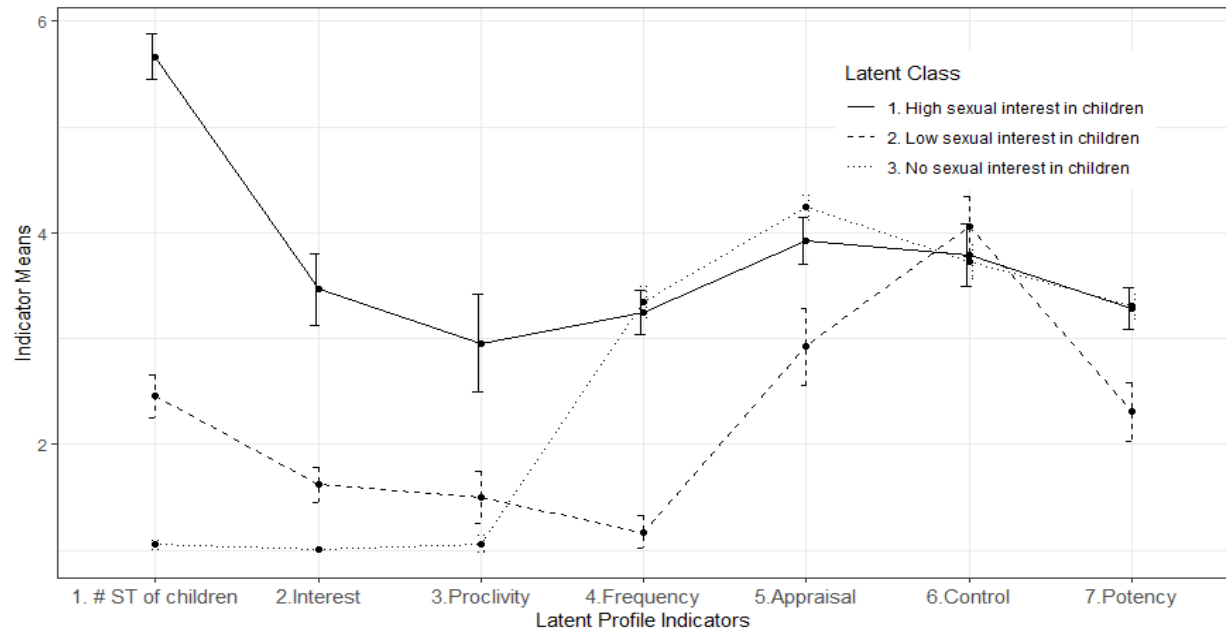


Figure 4.1. Estimated indicator means for three-class solution.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This dissertation examined the link between sexual thoughts of children and sexual offending against children. This dissertation explored the circumstances under which men with sexual thoughts of children would act on those sexual thoughts of children. The primary purpose of this project was to inform potential avenues for primary prevention of child sexual abuse programs that target people with a sexual interest in children. This focus is in contrast to much of the research on the perpetration-focused prevention of child sexual abuse, which has often focused on recidivism prevention. While recidivism reduction programs are vital to reduce reoffense risk, recidivism reduction is inherently limited by the infrequency with which CSA perpetration results in a criminal charge (Cross & Schmitt, 2019; Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020; Walsh et al., 2010). Therefore, there is an urgent need to prevent child sexual abuse (CSA) before it occurs. Through three aims, this dissertation explored the link between sexual thoughts of children and sexual offending against children with the goal of uncovering potential targets for the primary prevention of CSA.

5.1 Aim 1: Why Men Would Act on Sexual Thoughts about Children

Goal. Examine the demographic differences between those who do and do not have sexual thoughts of children. Examine the reasons why people have not acted on their sexual thought of a child, and compare them with the reasons people have not acted on their sexual thought of an adult. Examine the reasons why sexual thoughts of children are exciting, how the participant feels after experiencing a sexual thought of a child, and how this compares to sexual thoughts of an adult

Findings. Nearly 18% of the sample had at least one sexual thought of a child. The only demographic findings associated with having increased sexual thoughts of children were sexual behavior with another man, never having had sex, and being from the US or 'Other' country, though the association with nationality was likely due to a sampling bias. Participants were more likely to endorse that sexual thoughts of children were exciting due to a sense of power than

sexual thoughts of adults. Participants who had sexual thoughts of children reported lower appraisal of their thoughts than participants with sexual thoughts of only adults, but both groups reported equal control and potency.

Conclusion. To our knowledge, this study is the first to focus on the circumstances under which people with sexual thoughts of children would act on those sexual thoughts. Age, race, relationship status, educational attainment, and religiosity were not associated with a difference in having sexual thoughts of children in this sample. We were unable to determine a link to nationality due to a difference in recruitment location between countries. Men who have sex with men, as well as men who have not had sex as an adult, were more likely to have sexual thoughts of children. The high rate of participants with sexual thoughts of children endorsing that they would never act on the sexual thought of a child (42%), combined with the frequency of participants who said they would act on it if it would not harm the child (37%), indicates a desire to not cause harm to the child. Fear of harm to themselves also presented a major barrier against child sexual abuse (17%). Nearly a fifth of participants indicated that their primary barrier is that they would need consent from the child, implying that they believe that children are capable of giving consent. This finding suggests that it may be important for clinicians to ensure their clients understand why children are not able to give consent to sexual activities.

5.2 Aim 2: Assessing the Impact of Sexual Thought Characteristics, Childhood Sexual Experiences, and Sexual Behavior on Why Men Would Act on Sexual Thoughts of Children

Goal. The goal of Aim 2 was to examine the relationships between common risk factors for CSA and how they relate to specific circumstances under which participants would act on their sexual thoughts of children.

Findings. Preferential sexual interest in children was the strongest predictor for increased use of CSAM and self-reported proclivity to have sex with a child. Participants who indicated that their favorite sexual thought involved a child rather than an adult were less likely to endorse that they would never act on the sexual thought, and more likely to say that they would if they had the consent of the child. Older age of the child in participants' sexual thoughts was related to lower self-reported proclivity to have sex with a child, as well as protective against ever using CSAM. Older age of first masturbation was protective against CSAM use. Other child sexual experiences were not associated with any of the outcomes. Frequency of sex with adults was protective against CSAM use.

Conclusion. The primary outcome found in Aim 2 was that a primary sexual interest in children increases self-reported proclivity for perpetrating CSA. Preferential sexual interest in children is a common risk-factor identified in the literature (Bailey et al., 2016; Seto et al., 2003, 2017, 2020). An important contributor from this study is that the presence of a child in participants' favorite sexual thought was associated with an increased endorsement that they would act on their sexual thought with the child's consent, but a favorite sexual thought of a child was not associated with any of the other possible circumstances. The belief that children are able to consent to engaging in sexual behavior may be a contributing factor for perpetrating CSA.

5.3 Aim 3: Subgroups of Men with a Sexual Interest in Children

Goal. Explore whether there is a subgroup of men with sexual thoughts of children that is characterized by unwanted sexual thoughts of children.

Findings. There were no subgroups characterized by having unwanted sexual thoughts of children. Instead, I identified three subgroups, which were characterized either by having a high, low, or no sexual interest in children. Participants in the high sexual interest in children class (Class 1) were characterized by sexual fantasies of young children, high self-reported

proclivity to sexually offend against children, high frequency of sexual thoughts of children, and high appraisal, control, and potency of those thoughts. Participants in the low sexual interest in children class (Class 2) were characterized by low proclivity to sexually offend against children, infrequent sexual thoughts of children, moderate appraisal and potency, and high control of the sexual thoughts. Participants in the no sexual interest in children class (Class 3) were associated with no sexual thoughts of children, no proclivity for CSA offending, their sexual thoughts of adults had a higher appraisal, and equal frequency, control, and potency as the sexual thoughts of children of participants in Class 1.

Conclusion. High sexual interest in children was associated with increased self-reported proclivity to sexually offend against a child. The high sexual interest in children class had the same frequency of sexual thoughts as the no sexual interest in children class, indicating that there was no difference in hypersexuality between people with and without sexual thoughts of children in this sample. A primary distinguisher of the classes was the degree of sexual interest in children; which supports that sexual interest in children may be a dimensional construct, rather than categorical.

5.4 Implications & Recommendations

Perpetration-focused prevention programs that focus on people with a sexual interest in children should reinforce beliefs that children are not capable of consenting to sex with adults. This dissertation found that a plurality of men with sexual thoughts of children would not act on those thoughts under any conditions. However, among men with any proclivity to act, there were some situations that were endorsed more than others. In particular, some participants indicated a willingness to perpetrate CSA if it were legal, if harm to the child or to themselves could be avoided. Specifically, over 40% of participants with a sexual thought of a child indicated that they would never act on the sexual thought under any circumstance, and 37% indicated they would act on the sexual thought of a child if it did not harm the child, which

implies a general acceptance that sex with children is harmful. However, participants with a primary sexual interest in children, indicated by their favorite sexual thought being of a child, were more likely than participants without a primary sexual interest in children to endorse that they would act on the sexual thought of a child if they had the child's consent, indicating a belief that children are able to provide consent. Given that a primary sexual interest in children was a particularly strong risk factor for self-reported proclivity of CSA perpetration and use of CSAM, permissive attitudes towards adult-child sex may help to explain the link between sexual interest in children and sexual offending against a child. Thus, one prevention strategy might be to engender or increase an understanding of children as developmentally incapable of consenting to sex with adults.

In addition, future research should focus on whether and how self-esteem moderates the relationship between a primary sexual attraction to children and acceptance of adult-child sex. The belief that children are able to consent to sex may be a self-justification strategy. People with a primary sexual interest in children are more likely to consider their attraction to be a core part of their identity than people with a non-primary sexual interest in children. The stigma related to an attraction to children may then be considered a personal attack to people with a primary attraction to children. Self-justification strategies are used by people when they feel discomfort after a threat. People with high self-esteem experience less discomfort from self-threats, and so are less likely to engage in self-justification strategies (Holland et al., 2002).

The findings from this study imply that addressing why children cannot consent may be a vital part of a perpetration-focused prevention strategy. However, if self-esteem does moderate the relationship between a primary sexual attraction to children and permissive attitudes towards adult-child sex, then people with a primary sexual interest in children may be receptive to changing their permissive attitudes of adult-child sex only after improving their own self-esteem.

Another implication of this study is that the latent structure of sexual interest in children may be dimensional rather than categorical when it comes to age. Future research examining this latent structure should consider all child age ranges, rather than focusing solely on prepubescent children. Properly understanding the latent structure of sexual interest in children is vitally important as it has consequences for research design, statistical analysis, and treatment decisions. While most psychological constructs are dimensional in structure, attraction to children has had mixed evidence for whether it is dimensional or categorical (Haslam et al., 2020). Given that much of the research focuses on examining sexual interest in prepubescent children versus sexual interest in adults, it is no surprise that many studies have found a categorical structure that is either dichotomous or trichotomous (Cohen & Galynker, 2002; Hall & Hall, 2007; McPhail et al., 2018). Between prepubescent children and adults, there are also pubescent children and adolescents, and not accounting for these age groups would severely hamper the ability to determine the correct latent structure.

Latent class indicators were used to explore the possibility of a distinct subgroup of men characterized by experiencing unwanted sexual thoughts of children; however, the sample size of this study was lower than is recommended for latent profile analysis. Therefore, the results are not robust to conclusively determine that sexual interest in children is a dimensional construct. To more accurately determine the latent structure of sexual interest in children, it would be necessary to account for a person's full age range of attraction. Therefore, future studies examining the latent structure of sexual interest in children should account for all age categories.

The findings presented in this dissertation show that the circumstances under which a person would act on their sexual thoughts of children are correlated with the person's self-reported proclivity of sexually offending against a child, as well as their use of CSAM. This provides insight into areas that should be explored further as potential prevention targets. Future research should examine the predictive validity of men's self-reported reasons for not

sexually offending against a child and future offending behavior. As the descriptions presented by the participants in the present study were simply the most salient circumstances that they thought of at the time, they may not reflect the real world conditions.

Finally, future research should explore the circumstances under which people with a sexual attraction to children would have sex with a child in general. It is possible that many of the circumstances described by the participants were only related to the specific sexual thought they described, rather than the general circumstances under which they would have sex with any child. For example, a participant may have endorsed that he would only act on his sexual thought of a child if there were reduced negative repercussions for the child, but only because he cares about the well-being of the specific child in his sexual thought, and he would sexually abuse a different child if given the opportunity. Exploring the circumstances that men with a sexual interest in children would have sex with a child more generally may better capture the link between sexual interest in children and sexual offending against a child.

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Education

PhD, Mental Health (Expected) Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Dissertation: Exploring the Link Between Sexual Thoughts of Children and Sexual Offending Against Children Advisor: Elizabeth Letourneau, PhD	2016-Present
MHS, Mental Health Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Thesis: Preliminary results from Help Wanted: Coping with an attraction to children during adolescence Advisor: Elizabeth Letourneau, PhD	2015-2016
BS, Psychology, minor in Statistics University of Georgia, Athens, GA Magna cum laude Dean's List (2012-2014)	2012-2014
AS, Psychology Georgia Perimeter College, Dunwoody, GA Honors: Dean's List (2010-2012)	2010-2012

Teaching Assistant Experience

Childhood Victimization: A Public Health Perspective Department of Mental Health Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Professor: Elizabeth Letourneau, PhD Assisted in the revision of the course syllabus and materials	2018-2019
Statistics for Psychosocial Research: Measurement Department of Mental Health Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Professor: Jeannie Leoutsakos, PhD	2017-2019
Current Issues in Public Health Department of Mental Health Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Professor: Meghan McGinty, PhD	2017- 2018

Student Researcher

Project: Help Wanted

2016-2018

Principal Investigator: Ryan Shields, PhD

- Qualitative Data Analysis of 30 in-depth interviews of community based young adults who are attracted to children

Project: Responsible Behaviors with Younger Children

2018-2019

Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Letourneau, PhD

- Planned and revised scripts to guide focus groups
- Recorded notes from focus groups
- Revised the curriculum of a school-based intervention based on the aforementioned notes
- Data collection & entry with middle school students

Youth Survey Study: The Collateral Consequences of Sex Crime Policies

2016

Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Letourneau, PhD

- Identified and contacted practitioners who provide counseling to youths who have sexually offended
- Recruited youths who are in counseling for having sexually offended, and their caregivers
- Obtained consent from the youth and their caregiver
- Proctored a quantitative survey to the youths and caregivers
- Verbally administered the survey over the phone, and for youths who had difficult reading
- Helped conduct an internal audit of the project

Scholarships

Dean's PhD Tuition Scholarship

2020

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Tuition support for two terms (\$28,728)

Presentations

Ingram, M., & **Thorne, J. R.** (October, 2018). Mental health and coping among adolescents with attraction to children. Presented at the 37th Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) Conference, Vancouver, BC.

Thorne, J. R., & Fix, R. (April, 2018). Factor Structure of the J-SOAP-II. Poster presented at the Child Sexual Abuse Symposium, Baltimore, MD.

Thorne, J. R. (April, 2017). Interpersonal Relationships of People with an Attraction to Prepubescent Children. Poster presented at the Child Sexual Abuse Symposium, Baltimore, MD.

Thorne, J. R. (April, 2016). Understanding adolescents with an attraction to children: Preliminary results from the Help Wanted study. Poster presented at the Child Sexual Abuse Symposium, Baltimore, MD.

Peer Reviewed Manuscripts

Thorne, J. R., & Fix, R. L. (2020). Factor structure of the J-SOAP-II among black and white male youth: A confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis. *Sexual Offending: Theory, Research, and Prevention*, 15(1), e3127

Peer Review Activities

Sexual Abuse 2018-Present

Clinical Child and Family Psychology 2018