

The blog of Ethan Edwards: a case study on anti-contact non-offending paedophilia. How an individual identifies as a “celibate paedophile” and lives with his sexual attraction?

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Non-forensic and non-clinical samples of people with paedophilia living in the community have been the focus of academic studies only recently, as most of the current and previous research on paedophilia has been conducted on convicted individuals. Qualitative studies of self-identified paedophilic individuals living in the community are rare and do not make a clear distinction between offending and non-offending individuals. The aim of this study is to contribute to the understanding of paedophilia by exploring how an individual that strictly identifies as anti-contact and non-offending experiences and lives with his paedophilic sexual attraction. Data was collected using an online blog, on which the participant reports his experience as an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual. Thematic analysis identified five themes: “Repulsion of child-adult sex”, “Paedophilic attraction”, “Sexual fantasies as harmless and necessary”, “Being in control of sexual urges” and “The burden of being a person with paedophilia”. The analysis suggests some elements that might be able to contribute further to the understanding of non-offending paedophilia.

Keywords: blog psychology; paedophilia; paedophilic individual; self-identity; sexual attraction

Paedophilia is defined as a recurrent intense sexual attraction to prepubescent children (Seto, 2018). Hence, an individual is considered to have paedophilia if their sexual attraction to children is equal or greater than his sexual attraction to adults (i.e., a normophilic sexual interest). People with paedophilia are generally and erroneously thought to be child sexual abusers and vice versa (Neutze et al., 2010; Seto, 2018; 2013), however, a child sexual abuser might commit the act without having a preferred sexual interest in children (Houtepen et al., 2015) – as the perpetrator can be severely intoxicated, demented or try to psychologically injure the child (Marshall, 1997); whereas some people with paedophilia have interests and urges directed towards children but they may or may not abuse a child (O'Donohue et al., 2000). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) considers paedophilia as a paraphilia e.g. a preferred sexual interest in children denoted by recurrent intense sexually arousing fantasies or sexual urges, however, if the sexual urges or fantasies cause marked distress in the individual, or the person has acted on these sexual urges, then the person is considered to be suffering from a paedophilic disorder. This means that people who experience paedophilic attraction but don't act upon it, are not distressed by it, and don't have any interpersonal difficulty have a paraphilia but not a paedophilic disorder. At the same time, experiencing significant distress because of intense sexual fantasies involving children, without having committed any offence, can be considered having a paedophilic disorder. (Houtepen et al., 2015). In this study, the term paedophilia will be used to indicate a paraphilia rather than the disorder.

The primary motivation to study men attracted to children has generally been to reduce the likelihood of childhood sexual abuse from happening. Hence, it's not surprising that for the past 50 years the academia has focused on individuals recruited within the criminal justice system (Cantor & McPhail, 2016; Capra et al., 2014; Houtepen et al., 2015; Schaefer et al., 2010). Sexual offending against children has undergone some transformations over the last couple of decades (Seto, 2013), and along the most obvious forms such as actual physical contact, grooming etc., there has been a substantial increase in online pornography offending behaviours due to the internet becoming more accessible to the wider population (Goode, 2010; Seto, 2010; 2013; Holt et al., 2010). With an increasing number of people accessing online child pornography, and with the development of more sophisticated ways to gather data on people with paedophilia who live in the community, a more heterogenous non-forensic and non-clinical picture of self-identified paedophilic individuals has started to emerge (Goode, 2010; Jahnke, 2018; Malesky & Ennis, 2004; O'Halloran & Quayle, 2010). For instance, a report produced by the German Prevention Project Dunkelfeld, aiming at reaching self-identified paedophilic individuals in the community to provide treatment prior to them offending (Beier et al., 2015; Neutze et al., 2010; Schaefer et al., 2010), has highlighted that 34 out of the 291 men recruited had no registered offences, yet they reported paedophilic attraction; while 106 had solely child pornography offences; 48 had solely contact offences; and 103 had both (Beier et al., 2015). Similarly, Dombert et al. (2015) recruited 8,718 German men to test how commonly males experience sexual interest in prepubescent children; and found that 4.1% of their sample had sexual fantasies about prepubescent children; 1.7% of all participants used solely child pornography; 0.8% had exclusively committed sexual contact offences against prepubescent children and 0.7% committed both.

Studying self-identified paedophilic individuals has also provided useful information about individuals who have not offended at all. In fact, a distinct category of people with paedophilia has recently started to gain more attention within Academia (Cantor & McPhail, 2016), the so-called "non-offending paedophiles": a unique population of individuals who feel a sexual urge towards children but have never acted upon it, neither through child exploitation material, and have a strong desire never to do so. Cantor and McPhail (2016) highlight a small but important body of empirical evidence around the prevalence of paedophilic sexual interest in the population and how many of these individuals have not acted on such interest. For instance, Joyal et al. (2015) recruited a self-selected sample of people through online, radio and newspaper advertisements (n =1516; 52.7 % female) and asked them to complete an online revised version of the Wilson Sex Fantasy Questionnaire. 1.8 % of males and 0.8 % of females in their sample reported having fantasies involving sex with a child under the age of 12 years. Dombert et al. (2015) found that 2.4% of their sample had experienced sexual fantasies involving children during adulthood, but had no sexual contact with a child in the past. This compares to Ahlers et al. (2011), who found that 15.5% of a

sample of 367 German males reported sexual fantasies (e.g., daydreams and masturbation fantasies) involving prepubescent children – of these, 26.3 % found children to be intensely arousing while 5.3 % reported experiencing distress due to paedophilic fantasies and sexual arousal.

Additional data on non-offending paedophilia has also been collected through specific websites devoted to paedophilic individuals living in the community (Virtuous Pedophiles, 2019; B4U-ACT, 2019). These websites can be described as legal internet-based mutual support groups where paedophilic individuals discuss issues related to their condition (Goode 2010; Bailey et al., 2016a; Bailey et al., 2016b). An important aspect of these online forums is anonymity and high level of activity. Most importantly they do not support illegal acts or sexual activities with children. Bailey et al (2016a) and Bailey et al (2016b), as well Cohen et al. (2017), collected quantitative data on non-offending paedophilic individuals by using some of the above websites. Cohen et al. (2017) found that out of the 565 participants who took part in their study, 223 successfully refrained from committing sexually offence against children and showed less antisocial traits; less difficulty controlling their attraction; and less positive attitudes towards adult-child sexual interactions. In addition to this, in order to predict offending behaviours among community samples and understand the motivation around sexual offending, Bailey et al (2016a) surveyed 1,102 paedophilic men with regards to their history of adjudicated child pornography offences and sexual contact with children: nearly 85% of men recruited had not been arrested or convicted for sexual offences against children, including child pornography. Admittedly, some of Bailey et al (2016a) participants might have committed sexual offences without being detected and might offend in the future, however, their study indicates that a large proportion of child attracted men do not necessarily commit sexual offences. (While there is no reason to suspect that these people have provided misleading responses, our understanding of non-offending rates in the above samples is based entirely on self-report, which might weaken the confidence we have in these results).

Online communities of paedophilic individuals represent an important source of data for qualitative studies as well, as they offer an inner perspective of what it means to have paedophilia and how people who experience this condition may feel, think, or behave (Goode, 2010). To date, very few authors had focused on the experience of paedophilic individuals living in the community (Freimond, 2013; Goode, 2010; Houtepen et al., 2015; Wilson & Cox, 1983). For instance, Wilson and Cox (1983) collected data on 77 adults males and their experience of paedophilic sexual attraction, by administering two personality questionnaires and conducting face to face interviews. Their results indicated that 71% of the respondents were attracted exclusively to boys; with 12% preferring girls and 17% being attracted to both genders. Wilson and Cox's (1983) respondents reported that they weren't distressed by their paedophilic attraction and some of them reported that their attraction to children was not only sexual. In fact, 22 participants reported having romantic or caring fantasies.

This study is claimed to be the first empirical research on paedophilic individuals living in the community, however, nearly half of the participants in Wilson and Cox (1983) had committed sexual offences and therefore didn't belong to the category of 'non-offending paedophiles. In addition to this, the construct of non-offending paedophilia had yet to be theorised at that point, hence, it's unlikely that Wilson and Cox (1983) were considering this phenomenon per se. Twenty years later, Goode (2010) conducted a qualitative study on paedophilic individuals living in the community, by distributing an online questionnaire adapted from the one used by Wilson and Cox (1983) to 57 participants, and interviewed 2 of them.

Participants were recruited via several forums dedicated to people with paedophilia living in the community. Specifically, Goode (2010) explored numerous topics related to the concept of self-identity in paedophilic individuals and their choice of not to act on their sexual urges. Although Goode's (2010) primary aim was to enhance child protection by understanding paedophilic attraction, her findings systematically demystified the public portrayal of paedophilia. In her conclusion, Goode (2010) suggests that paedophilic attraction is more common than what professionals believe, and that demonization of people with paedophilia as well as current punitive interventions are not effective strategies to protect children. Of note is that, Goode (2010) recruited her participants on various online communities including those supporting adult-children sex, and some of her

participants had committed sexual offences against children, hence, we can assume that Goode's (2010) study did not focus on the construct of non-offending paedophilia as defined above. A similar study was conducted by Freimond (2013); her focus was on the experience of nine pedophilic individuals in relation to the stigma associated with their sexual attraction. Freimond (2013) advocates that new strategies are urgently needed to reduce the suffering of people with paedophilia, however, Freimond (2013) does not seem to report specific information around the history of sexual offending of her participants; and similarly to Goode (2010) the construct of non-offending paedophilia wasn't crucial to her research. Finally, Houtepen et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study on 15 paedophilic individuals living in the community, to provide insight into their attraction and explore the risks as well as protective factors for sexual abuse towards children.

The majority of these participants recognised the onset of their sexual attraction in puberty and reported having difficulties acknowledging their paedophilic attraction. Most of the participants in this study had not been convicted, however, 11 had been involved with child pornography at some point, while 5 admitted that they had engaged in sexual behaviour with minors and one had been convicted of contact sexual offending. Much of this offending typically happened in adolescence, and a number of participants highlighted that they no longer offended and that their sexual attraction was less important as they grew older. Of note is that, Houtepen et al.'s (2015) participants were made aware that any disclosed information about unknown offences was going to be reported, hence it's likely that some of them were not in a position to be completely forthcoming about their stories. In one case, a participant was suspected of constituting a threat for engaging in sexual contact with minors, while another admitted that he received some child pornographic material from other paedophilic individuals. In line with Wilson and Cox (1983), 10 out of the 15 respondents specified that their attraction to children was not purely sexual in nature, and that they also had romantic feelings.

The majority emphasized the importance of being able to engage in social contact with minors and how this might help to reduce child sexual offending. Overall, Houtepen et al. (2015) suggest that the risk for offending can be diminished by creating more openness about paedophilia and by providing paedophilic individuals with social support and control. Last but not least, studies from Holt et al. (2010), Malesky and Ennis (2004), and O'Halloran and Quayle (2010) provide qualitative data on trends and posts from paedophilia forums. A sense of marginalisation, stigma, and feeling ostracized by society was identified as a general theme. The majority of the participants across this set of studies believed that children can be interested in sex and can benefit from the sexual attention of loving, caring adults – most of the data came from individuals who were pro-contact and were likely to be offenders.

The current study

The aim of this study is to contribute to the understanding of paedophilia by exploring how an individual that strictly identifies as anti-contact and non-offending experiences and lives with his paedophilic sexual attraction. In contrast to previous studies (Freimond, 2013; Goode, 2010; Holt et al., 2010; Houtepen et al., 2015; Malesky & Ennis, 2004; O'Halloran & Quayle, 2010; Wilson & Cox, 1983;), data has been collected only via a blog associated with the following internet-based mutual support group named: "Virtuous Pedophiles" (Virtuous Pedophiles, 2019), as its main ethos is the absolute rejection of child-adult sex and presents no sign of advocating for a change in the legislation regulating adult-child sexual interactions. By collecting data solely from this website, the current study will strictly focus on anti-contact non-offending paedophilia. Also, this research is conducted as a single case study and uses a blog as main data to enhance the quality of its findings and to provide a richer narrative on the participant's perspective. As it stands, the only two samples that can produce this type of data are two internet blogs named "Not a monster" by Todd Nickerson (Nickerson, 2018) and "Celibate Pedophiles" by Ethan Edwards (Edwards, 2014). This study will focus on the blog of Ethan Edwards as he is also the co-founder of Virtuous Paedophiles and therefore he strictly represents an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual.

In order to maintain a complete exploratory aim, and due to the fact that anti-contact non-offending paedophilia has been rarely explored within previous research, Thematic Analysis (TA) will be

adopted as a qualitative method. Also, the topic of non-offending paedophilia will be analysed by using a non-clinical and non-forensic sample, thus contributing further to the understanding of this multi-faceted phenomenon. In fact, not every non-offending paedophilic individual identifies as such because of their rejection of adult-child sex and their belief that is harmful for the child. Some people with paedophilia are likely to identify as non-offending because of other factors such as social control; domestic legislation; lack of opportunity; fear of detection or a combination of those (Seto, 2018). In fact, some participants in previous studies (Freimond, 2013; Goode, 2010; Holt et al., 2010; Houtepen et al., 2015; Malesky & Ennis, 2004; O'Halloran & Quayle, 2010) were recruited via websites that advocated for a change in the regulation surrounding adult-child sex, and therefore, provided data on pro-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals, or pro contact offending paedophilic individuals. This study, on the other hand, aims at providing qualitative data that is specifically from someone who is anti-contact and non-offending. To my knowledge, this is the only study that takes into account both distinction when examining paedophilia and that explores the topic of anti-contact non-offending paedophilia from the point of view of an individual who strictly identifies as such.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The design adopted by this research is of an instrumental, single, descriptive case study, whereby thematic analysis is applied to the data corpus. The decision to use an online blog instead of conducting interviews has several advantages, these include having a large amount of data immediately available (the total number of articles posted on "Celibate Paedophiles" is currently 212) as well as maintaining Ethan's full anonymity. A blog as such allows access to broader data, which can be extremely helpful considering the exploratory aim of this study (Relajo, 2017). Also, the researcher's reflexivity does not have a significant impact on collecting data for the analysis. Reflexivity affects every stage of the research, meaning that the researcher is likely to conduct interviews and ask questions that might produce a biased view of the topic. The data in this study has not been produced by the interaction between the researcher and the participant, hence, the quality of Ethan's reports about his condition of anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual has been enhanced. In fact, an online blog allows the participant to freely express themselves and therefore improves the richness and quality of the topics discussed – it also facilitates access to very personal or intimate information that may not emerge in interviews (Willig, 2014). In line with this, it should be noted that previous research conducted on paedophilic individuals living in the community had collected data through the use of self-reports as well as interviews (Freimond, 2013; Goode, 2010; Houtepen et al., 2015; Wilson & Cox, 1983). However, several studies have found that community respondents may still not be completely forthcoming in their self-reports because paedophilia is perceived as an unacceptable social phenomenon (Becker-Blease et al., 2006; Briere & Runtz, 1989; Smiljanich & Briere, 1996). As Goode (2010) advocates, it's likely that a proportion of participants that are asked questions about their sexual attraction to children would feel uncomfortable and will choose not to disclose any information. A limitation of this method of data collection is that the entire blog might be fictional. However, it is unlikely that someone might identify as sexually attracted to children in a fictional way, as the majority of non-paedophilic individuals would reluctantly engage in this type of behaviour (Goode, 2010) – see stigma, internet bullying etc. Also, it is quite unlikely that a non-paedophilic individual would be able to produce an exhaustive and extensive account of what it means to live with this kind of sexual attraction.

Participants

This study focuses on the view of an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual who uses the pseudonym of Ethan Edwards. Ethan discusses a broad range of topics related to paedophilia and he is also one of the founders of *Virtuous Paedophiles* (Virtuous Paedophiles, 2019). Specifically, Ethan is in his early 60's, he has been married for many years and has raised three daughters. He reports that his strongest attractions are towards girls as young as 4 years of age; yet has never felt any romantic or sexual attraction towards his daughters. He has no attraction to boys. He is also attracted to older

females, although the attraction decreases sharply once they reach the age of 30 onwards. He was able to form loving relationships with adult women, which in turn caused the denial of his paedophilic attraction until he was 50. Nonetheless, he reports that there were many signs of his paedophilic attraction for young girls throughout his life. He is deeply convinced that children are harmed because of sexual contact with adults and that such conduct is wrong and does not advocate for a change in the legislation regulating adult-child sex. He has support from a therapist who he can discuss his paedophilia with, but nobody in his life knows of his attraction.

Data

The data's raw transcript can be found in the form of an online blog (Edwards, 2014). The name of the blog is "Celibate Paedophile" and presents Ethan's perspectives via small, medium or long articles, which have been posted since July 2014. Ethan's articles touch on various topics related to paedophilia and have been grouped, by Ethan himself, into 9 categories: "The core argument for acceptance of celibate paedophiles", "Meta-Comments"; "Seeking more clarity on sticky issues", "Appropriate limits on paedophile behaviour", "Child pornography", "The victim side", "Impression from talking with other paedophiles online", "Paedophilia hysteria and normal people" and "Reflecting on activism on issues related to paedophilia. The topics discussed in his blog relate to either his personal experience as an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual (although Ethan prefers the term "Celibate paedophile") or represent a broader discussion of paedophilia as a condition/disorder. The link to his blog can be found on Virtuous Pedophiles (Virtuous Pedophiles, 2019).

Method of data collection

To have a well-defined amount of data, it was decided to use only material posted between July 2014 and December 2014. The decision to analyse data coming from this year in particular was also influenced by the fact that Ethan seemed to be more active during that period: 60 articles were published in 2014 compared to an average of 20 articles in the remaining years. In this way, a considerable amount of data was secured. In addition, by focusing on this earlier period, there is potential for future longitudinal qualitative studies. Due to the nature of the analytic technique adopted, and in order to have sufficient material to gain insight into the process of the participants' deep thoughts and understanding of the topic, only medium and long articles have been selected (an avg. of 60 lns.). This means that according to these criteria 50 articles were selected out of the 60 published in 2014.

Methodological theory and analytical strategy

Thematic Analysis (TA) was used to investigate the data corpus – TA consists of examining the data to find themes which describe significant features of it (Howitt, 2013). TA has been chosen because of the following advantages: it allows flexibility in the analysis and reporting of the themes, but also allows identification and organization of themes in a structured and concise form (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These characteristics make TA more adaptable to a data corpus such as an online blog and to the explorative nature of this study. Also, TA can be applied when there are no strong theoretical perspectives to drive the analysis (Howitt, 2013). Indeed, there is a lack of qualitative research on anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals, which academically speaking is a fairly new construct, therefore, no priori hypothesis has been adopted. The data-set was inductively analysed (i.e. bottom-up process), meaning that themes emerged from the data itself. The articles within the blog are presented in chronological order, however, it was decided to analyse the data following the categories on which Ethan describes the content of his blog. All the articles related to a specific category have been read as a block, thus helping the identification of codes. Articles were initially read and re-read, and all the material was coded. An essentialist approach was adopted to code the data, meaning that the analysis will report experiences, meaning and the reality of the participant; this allowed to theorise potential experience and meaning in a straightforward way, because a

relationship between meaning, experience and language was assumed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some codes coming from categories that fell outside the research question, for example, “the victim’s side”, were discarded and not analysed further. TA was conducted on the remaining codes at a semantic and/or latent level, implying that some of the resulting themes based on the initial coding were open to a more in-depth interpretation than others. In fact, semantic themes are based on the simple meaning of the text, which implies that they explicitly come from what has been written and the analysis does not go beyond this level. On the other hand, latent themes are based on the examination of the underlying ideas and assumptions which are considered as shaping factors impacting on the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process has led to the identification of several themes, for example, “The need of distinction”, “The need of acceptance”, “Changes of society’s attitude”, “The total refuse of sex” etc. Themes were further reviewed and finally labelled (see Analysis section below).

Reflexivity

Regarding reflexivity, which represents the way that the researcher’s background and theoretical position impacts on the collection of data, analysis, and communication of findings (Finlay, 2002). It must be acknowledged that I tend to consider paedophilia as a rare sexual orientation rather than a mental disorder (Seto, 2012). However, I recognize that some instances might be explained by experiencing sexual abuse during childhood (Burton, 2003; Jespersen et al., 2009; Salter et al., 2003), and that similarities between neurodevelopmental disorders and paedophilia have been highlighted, especially the one involving contact sexual offending – See Seto (2018) for more information about prenatal and perinatal risk factors, as well as differences in brain structure and function. I also believe that social norms, especially in the past, had played a major role in labelling specific sexual orientations as mental disorders (e.g. homosexuality); and that mental illness labelling has been sometimes used as an instrument to distinguish what was ethically acceptable from what was not – to a certain extent this might have happened with paedophilia as well. I do not support any kind of sexual interaction between a child and an adult, including childhood pornography (as it ultimately involves the exploitation of a child), and I believe that any instance of sexual interaction between a child and an adult should remain illegal because of its devastating implications. However, I think that sexual behaviours between children and adults should be considered ‘wrong’ exactly as stealing, torturing, or killing are considered ‘wrong’ in principle – none of these behaviours has ever needed a clinical rationale to be classified as ethically unacceptable. I think that paedophilic individuals are in need of our understanding rather than disdain, and that society should undertake challenging and complex discussion about paedophilia. I believe that by doing this we can be more effective in protecting children and we can help paedophilic individuals to live a better life.

Analysis

Due to the explorative aim of this study, attention was placed on the experience of the subject as an anti- contact non-offending paedophilic individual, and on those mental processes related to him experiencing and living with his sexual attraction. Key themes identified in the data corpus are discussed as follow:

Repulsion of child–adult sex

Ethan reports his absolute refusal of sexual activity between a child and an adult throughout the data. This refusal is stated not only as a personal point of view, but it’s also generalized to all the other anti-contact non-offending people with paedophilia, who are in contact with him via his blog (this generalization can be found across all the other themes identified). Sexual activity is never recognized as something positive.

Contrastingly, it is considered totally nasty and abhorrent. The rejection is absolute and it takes the form of a dogma. This first extract highlights the repulsion for sexual abuse committed upon a child:

Child sexual abuse is wrong. Just plain wrong. Dead wrong. When I read about it, my stomach turns. It is especially horrible when a child is brutalized, or when a stepfather coerces his stepdaughter into sex for years at a time. (pp. 70 lns 3284–3286)

Ethan is completely against the idea of a child sexually abused by an adult. The repetition of “wrong” indicates a categorical ethical disapproval of the act. Sexual intercourse with minors is considered as “coerced” and a “brutal” act, in which the child has no freedom to step or fight back. The idea of a child subjected to such an abusive power causes Ethan a strong negative physical reaction, as his “stomach turns” when he thinks about these types of stories. This implies that not only his mind does not accept the abuse, but also his body – The act is repulsive as a whole; not only because the child is harmed but also because the form of the power used in that kind of act is ethically wrong.

The repulsion of sexual acts is also declared for minor cases such as forms of touching or playing; again causing a physical rejection. The following extract represents this concept:

Less extreme cases are also highly repulsive [...] He then introduces sexual touching into their relationship, and maybe she doesn't object, or says it is OK or even enjoys it. Those make my stomach turn too. She is likely to be harmed when she later learns the broader context for what happened (pp. 70 lns 3286–3290).

Here, Ethan refers to those practices that do not involve coercive power or brutal acts. The child is represented as consenting, since she does not object or she even “enjoys” the experience. Nonetheless, the repulsion is strongly felt because the child is considered as misled; she doesn't understand what is actually going on or the impact that this may have on her in future, which may take the form of personal shame or victimization by society. The rejection is expressed at an ethical level, because there is an imbalance of power between the adult and the child which leads to a deceit. Again, the repulsion is expressed through a physical negative reaction by the “turning of his stomach”, suggesting that Ethan considers the act as totally unbearable, as the refusal is expressed both through his mind and consequently from his body.

The last instance of refusal and repulsion of child-adult sex is expressed via other anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals that usually write to Ethan; the refusal assumes a more extreme physical form in the following extract:

A remarkably common view men express in their first email is that if they thought they would abuse a child, they would kill themselves first. That's a pretty firm ethical footing for avoiding abuse. (pp. 63 lns 2918–2919).

Here, Ethan and other anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals share the view that child abuse is morally wrong; the disapproval for the act is expressed through a hypothetical suicide. The thought of a possible abusive behaviour towards a child is, in Ethan's words, enough to lead non-offenders to “kill themselves first”. In fact, the actual behaviour is not even considered and rejection is expressed firstly as a form of thought, indicating an initial automatic and natural rejection. The idea of suicide demonstrates a stronger physical refusal than, for example, a more simplistic psychosomatic reaction (e.g. stomach turning). In fact, suicide can be considered as a statement of absolute rejection, for example, killing oneself avoids life suffering; but it can also be interpreted as an act of courage that underlines non-acceptance of external powers or influences (e.g. Socrates' suicide, kamikazes etc.). Resulting to suicide generally expresses a total veto; and killing oneself because of a hypothetical abuse implies that the sexual act is rejected at multiple levels. The refusal is absolute because it comes from the mind and it is expressed through a physical action. “Repulsion of child-adult sex” represents the strongest statement that describes Ethan as an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual. This theme was hardly evident in previous research. In fact, despite Goode's (2010) intention to study people with paedophilia living in the community and their choice not to act on their sexual desires, themes emerged from her study were mainly related to the maintenance of positive self-image; the experience of sexual attraction/ sexual fantasies/ romantic

desires; and the experience of receiving support from others. Similarly, when Freimond (2013) focused on the experience of nine community paedophilic individuals, but in relation to the stigma associated with being a person with paedophilia, the main themes emerged were the formation of self-identity in people with paedophilia living in the community; the disclosure of their attraction; and coping with the stigma. Both Goode (2010) and Freimond (2013) did not focus on anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals, and therefore it is interesting to observe that the theme of “Repulsion of child-adult sex” emerges so vividly when a construct as such is used to guide the analysis.

Ultimately Houtepen et al. (2015) found that non-offending paedophilic individuals displayed less supportive attitudes toward sex with children, compared with incarcerated people with paedophilia, which might draw some parallels with the content of this theme.

Being in control of sexual urges

Another important theme that emerged from the analysis is characterised by the idea that paedophilic individuals can freely control their sexual urges and behave consequently.

The most conservative strands of modern Islam, for instance in Saudi Arabia, have an attitude towards women’s sexuality that I find highly repugnant. Whenever they are in public, women must cover their bodies and faces lest they inflame the passions of men. While it is true that men’s sexual attraction system is visually oriented [...] The men don’t own it as their own problem. It’s not about the women’s sexuality at all, it’s about the men’s [...] Women, men, children – all should be free to wear as little as they want. If ordinary men find naked women arousing, it’s their problem to keep that reaction private. If paedophiles find naked children arousing, they have the same responsibility. It is well within the powers of both kinds of men to handle this. (pp. 38 lns 1572–1586)

This first extract highlights that, according to Ethan, people with paedophilia are responsible for controlling their sexual urges and they have the power to do so. It is a matter of choice, not of instincts. Being in control of one’s sexuality or attraction is a problem of the person who feels the attraction, implying that it relies completely on their choice. The comparison that Ethan makes with Islamic men can be considered as an attempt of normalizing the attraction that paedophilic individuals experience, implying that the paedophilic attraction and the heterosexual men’s attraction do not differ. In doing so, Ethan suggests that people with paedophilia are simply humans, and like every human, they have free choice on their behaviours. Controlling their sexual urges is no exception and every non-offending paedophilic individual can do that. Also, the restriction must be applied to the person who has the urge, not to the object of the attraction. Babies are not the problem, so hiding them would make no sense. This suggests that the responsibility of controlling the urge is on paedophilic individuals, and therefore, when it is freely chosen, it is possible to adhere to it. In addition to this, the cross-cultural comparison reported in this passage implies that the way sexual urges are expressed and controlled is something embedded in a cultural context and is not simply the expression of libido instincts. Culture can be changed, so the control of these urges may come from an educational platform. This concept is also shown in the following extract where both offending and non-offending paedophilic individuals can be thought to control their urges:

The German Dunkelfeld programme (while dealing with undetected offenders) focuses on getting the man to recognize dangerous situations where one thing might lead to another and to interrupt those patterns – not to avoid children completely. (pp. 42-43 lns 1844-1847) Ethan thinks that people with paedophilia can be trained to recognise possible critical scenarios which may lead to abuse; paedophilic individuals can recognise, analyse and freely/actively decide to stop their sexual thought patterns. It is something that is within their power. In fact, control of sexual urges is expressed, not by avoiding children completely, but by being in contact with them and freely deciding to stop particular trains of thoughts and consequent behaviours. Hence, people with paedophilia have decisional power which reinforces the idea that they are humans, not animals, so can simply /consciously stop their instincts.

The belief that non-offending paedophilic individuals are not at the mercy of their abnormal instincts, is clearly stressed in this following quotation:

Can paedophiles be entirely abstinent, eschewing even their preferred child pornography? My reaction is: Why on earth is that even a question? Does anyone doubt the existence of men who rarely look at ordinary pornography? Even though it is legal? There are still a great many men even in the developed world who don't even have private internet access. [...] a pedohebephilic individual who is high in self-control, low in sex drive, and living a life with strong family, social, and community ties may not act illegally at all. (pp. 41 lns 1772–1781)

Ethan is peeved by the fact that non-offending paedophilic individuals are thought to be humans with no control of their sexual urges (the general idea that people have of them is that they are destined to follow and fulfil their instincts) this degrades them as sub-humans and of course it triggers anger in Ethan. Ethan does not consider that as a question at all, because he views himself and all other anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals as instinctually the same as every other human. For example; there are many men who never watch ordinary pornography, just like there are many anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals who will never watch child pornography. In this case, being in control of sexual urges is not even expressed as a possibility, but it's a given fact. According to Ethan, there is no need to question that people with paedophilia can be completely abstinent because they have as much decisional power over their instincts as any other man.

“Being in control of sexual urges” represents the second strongest statement that describes Ethan as an anti-contact non-offending person with paedophilia. As per “Repulsion of child-adult sex”, this theme has rarely emerged in previous research which has focused on the experience of non-offending paedophilic individuals (Goode, 2010; Freimond, 2013). Again, this is probably because anti-contact non-offending paedophilia wasn't a central aspect of the investigation. Ethan's view of “Being in control of sexual urges” might also be considered in agreement with the quantitative study conducted by Jahnke et al. (2015), which found that non-offending paedophilic individuals display higher levels of self-efficacy; however, Ethan's account expands and enriches the narrative of why and how an anti-contact non-offending person with paedophilia is capable of being in control of his sexual urges.

Paedophilic attraction

The theme of attraction towards children predominantly recurs and is debated along with “Repulsion of child-adult sex” (theme1). Also, it is a central theme which defines paedophilic individuals in general, both non-offending and offending. “Paedophilic attraction” is essentially expressed in two main forms. First, as an identification of something natural (i.e. not abnormal) and second, differentiated by sexual instincts.

Attraction as natural and non-deviant

The sexual attraction towards a child is probably the core definition for every offending and non-offending paedophilic individual. In the following passage, attraction towards children not only is used as a term of self-identification but it is also considered as non-deviant:

What the mainstream in the West has come to accept is that the attraction to other men is a fundamental part of who these men are [...] They can choose to be celibate or they can choose to have sex with men, but they will always find men sexually attractive. That is what defines a homosexual orientation, and it's exactly the same with paedophilia [...] Celibate pedophiles know not to act sexually with children (and all paedophiles can learn to be celibate) but they will always find children sexually attractive. (pp. 68 lns 3172–3178).

According to Ethan, Sexual attraction to children is what defines anti-contact non-offending people with paedophilia. The expression of it by means of a sexual act is wrong, but what they feel and are attracted to is a natural response that they cannot change. The comparison with gay people here

refers to the fact that homosexuality was considered abnormal once, but now is no longer considered deviant. In other words, the attraction per se cannot be considered abnormal or improper, because it's not chosen, it is simply felt. The attraction naturally belongs to Ethan and it is what defines his inner self. Sexual attraction to children is a central core value for Ethan and shapes his person, what he does and how he behaves; in every aspect of his life. Sexual orientation does not imply the free expression of it through a sexual act, but simply the fact that it should be accepted how it is, without incurring negative judgments or exaggerated reactions, because it is natural and people with paedophilia were born with it.

By the same token, the following extract emphasises the idea that attraction towards children is natural and cannot be denied:

Thinking about consummating that attraction sexually is a later step -- a place where celibate paedophiles come to a screeching halt. But this conclusion doesn't work backward and nullify the attraction. Consider cultures where sex before marriage is prohibited, and then focus specifically on ordinary boys and girls who earnestly accept that teaching. They are still fully aware of the girls and boys they find attractive. It's not a switch they suddenly turn on when it's time to choose a marriage partner. A man might be completely clear on not trying to seduce his boss's wife, but it won't stop him from finding her hot. A determination not to act sexually doesn't make the attraction disappear. (pp. 68 lns 3193-3198).

Attraction here is depicted as a force that comes before the sexual urge, separating the concept of sex and attraction. Ethan clarifies that sexual urges develop after, clearly suggesting that attraction can take various forms and that sex is one of many. In this passage, the concept of total refusal of sex is re-stated, since attraction and sexual urges are inevitably tied together. However, Ethan also re-affirms that attraction is something more than a sexual urge and although it can be expressed via sex, it cannot be reduced simply to it. Again, there is an attempt to normalize paedophilic attraction through a comparison with less abnormal cases. The fact that Ethan chose the term "boys and girls" and not men and women, implies that people with paedophilia start to be aware of their attraction during their adolescence, like any other human being. Hence, the attraction is not chosen, but comes naturally in period in which sexual urges are not even completely understood or expressed. Ethan reinforces the concept of natural in regards to his attraction, stating that it is not something that can be "switched on" when it's time to find a partner. Attraction occurs before sexual urges, and these feelings towards children are not voluntarily selected. Also, attraction is theoretically separated by sexual acts, as Ethan states that even if the behaviour can be "controlled", the attraction cannot be "denied". It is something innate that is always there and cannot be eradicated.

It is interesting to observe how the view of paedophilic attraction as 'natural and non-deviant' also resonates in many other themes emerged in other studies. For example, through the theme named "Onset of Pedophilic Feelings", Houtepen et al. (2015) reported that most of their participants started to acknowledge their sexual attraction during their puberty, and this remained rather stable over time. Similarly, through the theme of 'Self-realization', Freimond (2013) reports that all of her participants began to consciously question their sexuality around their teenage years earlier. Similar processes were described by Goode (2010). However, in contrast to other community paedophilic individual, it appears that Ethan accentuates the importance of considering the attraction as "natural and non-deviant", which is rarely observed in other participant's descriptions (Goode, 2010; Freimond, 2013; Houtepen et al., 2015). In other words, Ethan considers the attraction towards children, and not being ashamed by it, as an essential part of his self-identity as an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual.

Asexualised view of attraction

Although attraction is certainly bound to sexuality and libido urges, it is also depicted as separate and it is directed to the whole object of attraction. Being attracted implies being interested in the whole person, sexuality comes after.

Sexual orientation has sex in its name, but typically the attraction is far broader than that – it is an attraction to an entire person. Consider ordinary boys and girls at puberty. Their feelings towards the other gender change markedly. Some might notice a direct physical desire to have sex. But just about everyone feels an attraction to the entire person. Everything about the other is fascinating -- voice, hair, face, laugh, sense of humour, how they move. To see the distinction unmistakably, consider the sizable numbers of boys and girls in the not so distant past who reached puberty without having any idea what sex was. They were still strongly attracted to the other gender. (pp. 68 lns 3183–3191)

Paedophilic attraction is not sexual per se, and although the term implies sexuality, what is considered attractive is the child as a whole. The differentiation between attraction and sexual instincts can also be identified through the term “fascinating”. Being fascinated does not mean being sexually attracted. In fact, Ethan not only uses physical characteristics to describe the attraction, but also personality traits.

Distancing attraction from sexual behaviours is also stressed by the fact that Ethan refers to the lack of knowledge surrounding sex when, in the past, people used to reach puberty. By definition, puberty is the age in which sexual urges start to be experienced. If someone who reaches puberty does not have sexual knowledge, the natural attraction perceived at that point cannot be directly associated with sexual activities, because they are unknown. Therefore, the nature of the attraction is unlikely to be shaped by personal knowledge since it is instinctual. Adolescents and adults still experience attraction as something directed to the whole person and therefore it does not revolve only around sex. The nature of attraction here is described as “universal”, since the example used by Ethan makes no distinction between anti-contact non-offending people with paedophilia and people with different sexual inclination, but simply refers to ‘boys and girls’. Paedophilic individuals belong to either one of these categories and are subject to experience an attraction towards children, in the same way that any other person starts to feel attracted to another person – meaning it is not completely sexual in nature.

Not only is attraction reported as non-sexual in nature, it is also expressed as a strong interest that takes the form of friendship, as this script highlights:

But based on the reports of celibate paedophiles online, what is far more common is that the sexual interest is in addition to the protective instinct. Paedophiles tend to genuinely like children, children frequently sense this genuine affection, and mutually rewarding friendships often result. (pp. 43 lns 1865–1868).

The attraction that anti-contact non-offending people with paedophilia feel is initially expressed through a “protective instinct”, and generally the sexual interest is something that begins to be experienced afterwards.

Consequently, the attraction is revealed by a strong attachment to the child which usually develops from friendships and affection. Ethan implies that the natural course of attraction does not start from an interest in sex and indeed it can assume many more different forms other than sex. He also suggests that most anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals understand that attraction can be asexualised and therefore experienced as something other than sex. This suggests that anti-contact non-offending people with paedophilia are able to build affective and normal relationships with children, while refraining themselves or being repulsed by the sexual behaviours involved.

“Asexualised view of attraction” underlines the idea that paedophilic attraction does not evolve only around erotic instincts and indeed can take other forms (i.e. friendship). This is not in contrast with previous research. Houtepen et al (2015), as well as Freimond (2013), described their participants’ attraction in terms of experiencing romantic feelings towards children, rather than being strictly sexual in nature; this also included falling in love with a child. In addition, some of their participants reported that being able to engage in social contact with minors, establishing friendship and having an emotional connection, were more satisfying than having a sexual relationship with a child. Ethan’s “Asexualised view of attraction” seems to align with the experience of these participants.

Sexual Fantasies as harmless and necessary

The theme of sexual fantasies is one of the most recurring throughout the data. Sexual fantasies characterise any sexual human being, including people with paedophilia. However, even though they feel the attraction, anti-contact non-offending people with paedophilia have chosen sexual abstinence. Thus, sexual fantasies are not only seen as harmless but also as necessary. The following extract highlights this idea:

The same results apply when child pornography is part of the mix and we track child sex abuse. In the three countries where child porn was legal for a time – Denmark, the Czech Republic and Japan – child sex abuse went down. There may be other possible explanations for the decline in any one country, but what is clear is that it didn't go up [...] A satisfying fantasy relieved the tension rather than encouraging activity with children. Child porn is what was actually involved in these cases. [...] free availability of child porn does not increase child sex abuse. The less clear result is that it decreases it. If that is true, our paedophile masturbating to fantasies of children might be keeping the real ones safer (pp. 62 lns 2840–2863).

Sexual fantasies are described as a way to relieve sexual tension. Once the tension is eliminated, this decreases the sexual craving and in turn decreases the possibility of physically abusing. Sexual fantasies assume a positive value for Ethan. If anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals want to keep avoiding any sexual behaviour with a child, they need to fantasize. In the above passage, sexual fantasies are also compared to child pornography. Specifically, Ethan mentions a study conducted by Diamond (2009), whereby child pornography was legal for a time and this reduced sexual abuse, as an example that sexual fantasies can decrease the rate of sexual abuse in people with paedophilia. The emphasis here is not on making child pornography legal, as Ethan repeatedly expresses disapproval throughout his blog towards legalization of child pornography depicting real children. Rather, Ethan describes child pornography as a sexual fantasy in vivo and nothing more. This view resonates with Goode (2010), who argues that paedophilic individuals might benefit from having access to erotic fiction and anime, or cartoon pornography, as a way to achieve sexual satisfaction and explore their sexuality without the involvement of actual minors. As stated by Diamond and Uchiyama (1999), Endrass et al. (2009), as well as Goode (2010) fantasies about children might keep the real ones safe and consuming child pornography (depicting non-real children) might cause a person not to act out these fantasies in the real world. From the perspective of an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual, fantasies are the only and necessary way to have a sexual satisfaction without physically harming anyone, which is what is ultimately stated by Ethan.

In this second passage, different types of fantasies are explored and the idea of these being harmless is also present:

I have an online friend. He found many of the pictures quite erotic. Quite possibly he masturbated while looking at them. But I know his fantasies would not have included the likely actual reactions of this girl to sexual activity – anxiety, confusion, fear, pain. He was perhaps imagining a different, imaginary girl who would be content with the activity. One who looks like Stella but is most definitely not Stella herself. [...] A few might fantasize about hurting the girl and getting pleasure from it. A few might boast online about how much they'd like to do that. [...] But I can't find any harm in the private fantasies of paedophiles, even in the rare case that they were sadistic fantasies. (pp. 37 lns. 1545–1557)

The kind of sexual fantasies which Ethan is talking about involves a hypothetical non-existent girl. In those fantasies, the little girl is idealized as a child in the way she looks like, but as an adult in terms of her knowledge surrounding sex. The girl has no negative feelings or reactions in the fantasy; on the contrary she's enjoying the activity. The imaginary little girl is a complete invention and her characteristics are non-existent.

Thus, the sexual activity fantasies in the script are not consistent with a possible reality. The power of the fantasies remains in the fantasy itself. Expressing them through a sexual behaviour would not be the same, because those fantasies would not be reproduced in the same way and therefore would not give the same relief.

These fantasies have more power than the sexual act to release the sexual constrictions and so are necessary for Ethan. In addition to this, the “non-harmful” quality of sexual fantasies is also stated. Even the most sadistic fantasies remain simply fantasies, and as long as the fantasies are privately expressed in the mind of the person, this cannot cause any harm to society.

The theme of “Sexual fantasies as harmless and necessary” is also evident in the study conducted by Houtepen et al. (2015), as their participants did not report the need of engaging in child pornography offences, because of their sexual fantasies being sufficient to relieve their sexual arousal. Similarly, Goode (2010) describes her participant’s fantasies as being harmless and necessary, both in their content and function, as most of these fantasies involved engaging in sexual activities with consensual unfamiliar children, who were depicted as adults in terms of their understanding and knowledge around sex. This is very similar to what Ethan reports about his sexual fantasies. Fantasising is also experienced by Goode’s (2010) participants as a healthy necessary outlet, since it does not involve actual children in any direct way.

The burden of being a person with paedophilia

“The burden of being a person with paedophilia” was identified as one of the most important themes characterising the experience of Ethan as an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual. While being a person with paedophilia is not chosen and cannot be changed, paedophilia is generally considered as one of the vilest attractions. It is clear that living with this condition is easily experienced as heavy and troublesome. “The burden of being a person with paedophilia” can assume many facets, however, the following two were identified: 1) ‘The need and difficulty of disclosing the secret of being a person with paedophilia’, and 2) ‘The suicidal instincts’; both of which are going to be discussed below.

The need and difficulty of disclosing the secret of being a person with paedophilia

Being a paedophilic individual is principally a secret. The term paedophilia here simply implies the attraction, thus, the idea of having a secret relates to the impossibility to freely talk about one’s own attraction; not about abusive behaviours. The following transcript shows the impossibility of revealing their secret even within the closest relationships:

In a dating situation, it’s a fair bet that the common response to, Uh, you ought to know, “I’m a paedophile” is an abrupt end to a budding relationship. An enlightened partner would be quite the rarity. The alternative is to keep it a secret. (pp. 39 lns 1680-1682)

Ethan reports a case of meeting a new person to build a simple friendship. Although being an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual is something that defines him as a person, revealing his secret would cause the immediate end of the rapport. The secret is so dangerous and unaccepted that people don’t even want to listen further or try to understand, and that’s why he uses the term “abrupt”. There is no chance for him to be listened to, because someone who is honestly interested is almost impossible to find. Hence, there is no alternative but to keep the secret; lying is the only way to build a relationship. Any person with paedophilia understands that each relationship they have might not be completely genuine.

The complex interaction between the secret of being a person with paedophilia, disclosure and relationships is also present in the following extract:

Some pedophiles might think that it’s morally OK to enter a relationship with this secret, but that keeping the secret would limit their own satisfaction and trust too much. Others might think it’s

morally OK if they really could keep the secret but have doubts about whether they could keep their attraction hidden for decades. (pp. 40 lns 1692-1695).

Carrying the secret of being a person with paedophilia is always difficult and there is no right or wrong way to deal with it. Keeping the secret may lead to living an incomplete relationship, because it forces paedophilic individuals to not entirely disclose. At the same time, carrying the secret might impact on starting any potential relationship as some individuals may get into one only if they are completely sure that they can keep the secret, however, many don't have this self-assurance and therefore would avoid it entirely. Ethan reports that paedophilic individuals have a constant need for disclosure, but they know that revealing their secret may have more negative effects than experiencing the pleasure of disclosure; they live between a rock and a hard place.

'The need and difficulty of disclosing the secret of being a person with paedophilia' is a theme that is reflected in many other studies (Goode, 2010; Freimond 2013; Houtepen et al., 2015). However, the participants in these studies reported different experiences overall. For instance, some of them did not feel the urge to disclose their identity to anyone, as they perceived themselves as being quite self-sufficient (Goode, 2010). On the other hand, other respondents reported their need to disclose their identity, but emphasized the positive outcome of engaging in this process, as some of their partners, family members and friends were understanding and supportive of their condition. Nonetheless, accounts that resemble Ethan's view also emerged in previous studies, and some respondents disclosed that their secret received mixed or negative reactions from family and friends - this has sometimes led to the ending of the relationships (Goode, 2010).

Similarly, Ethan, respondents that wanted to disclose their sexual identities, but couldn't, felt that they were not being authentic with their friends or felt excluded from aspects of their social relationships (e.g., sharing love interests, having intimate discussions with friends).

Suicidal tendencies

Another burden of being a paedophilic individual involves suicidal feelings. This ties to the disclosure of being a person with paedophilia because what usually leads them to commit suicide are the anxieties and negative consequences of revealing the secret. The following extracts highlight this concept:

Some paedophiles hate themselves intensely even if they have done nothing wrong, and it's easy to imagine that exposure of their secret would be enough to drive them to suicide. (pp. 12 lns 427-428)
Ethan notes that self-loathing is an adamant negative aspect in people with paedophilia. In other words, the burden does not stem from abusive behaviours they may have engaged in, but simply from the self-hatred they feel because of their attractions. Negative thoughts and non-acceptance of their attraction contribute to suicide, while a lack of self-worth underlines that they cannot accept themselves. The revelation of their secret, whether it happens intentionally or by chance, ultimately leads to the final decision. So the burden of suicidal thoughts may be exacerbated by the need for disclosure.

In the following extract, Ethan extends his thoughts on suicide by focusing on adolescence:

What interests me even more is the number of teen boys and men who kill themselves when there is no imminent threat of disclosure. A remarkable number of the men who write to Virtuous Pedophiles have had significant suicidal thoughts. Some have attempted suicide. Those who succeeded obviously cannot write to us. If we think about the situation of a teen pedophile, we can easily see the level of distress that might lead to suicide. The teen years are already a time of uncertain self-esteem and self-image, combined with relatively poor self-control. Imagine you have just discovered that the only people who you are attracted to are children.

You suspect you will never be able to have sex or know love. You know the society has you pegged as one of the most despicable people on the planet. You are told that you are doomed to molest a child

sooner or later, and the intensity of your teen sex drive will make that seem plausible. You may have strong reason to doubt that your family or friends would accept you if you revealed your secret. If you found the courage to talk to a school counsellor or see a psychotherapist, you would fear that she or he might report you to the police simply for your attractions. In any case they are likely to treat you not with the compassion they would find for just about any other life difficulty, but with revulsion. (pp. 12 lns 429– 443).

In this passage, the suicidal thoughts are not triggered by an “imminent” disclosure, meaning that is the lack of inner acceptance and shame that pushes people to commit the act. This also causes Ethan to experience feelings of despair about what it means to be a person with paedophilia. He suggests that adolescence might be the worst time of paedophilic individuals’ life and that the risk of killing themselves during this period is at its highest. Ethan also implies that adolescence is already a fragile, complicated and multifaceted period, thus, all the problems that a normal person experiences are magnified for a person with paedophilia in that particular stage. The general idea is that a paedophilic individual is a “lost cause”, who has no chance to love, or have a relationship, and is destined to be abused in society. The idea of what society thinks about paedophilic individuals impacts even more on paedophilic adolescents and their self-esteem.

There is also a lack of disclosure with their closest relatives due to the fear of total rejection; even psychological support is limited because the adolescent is scared of the consequences of a mandate report, making it impossible to disclose completely during therapy. In addition, the therapist may not react with acceptance, but with negative preconceptions and disgusts. Wherever a paedophilic individual turns to, there is a fear of rejection and therefore it is impossible to freely express themselves and deal with their low self-esteem. Both society and personal non-acceptance impact on the risk of suicide; whereas the burden of being a person with paedophilia means it is impossible to find an outlet of relief.

Surprisingly, the only study in which elements resembling this theme have emerged is the one conducted by Goode (2010). In fact, her participants often mentioned that they thought about committing suicide during their adolescence, as a way to deal with feelings of guilt and self-judgments when discovering being attracted to children. However, these elements have never been recognised as a theme on its own. As a matter of fact, one of Goode’s (2010) participants suggested to include more interview questions on how frequently people with paedophilia consider suicide, as this aspect was not initially explored.

DISCUSSION

In this study, I aimed to contribute to the understanding of paedophilia by exploring how a paedophilic individual that strictly identifies as anti-contact non-offending lives with his sexual inclination. Themes resulting from the analysis are: “Repulsion of child-adult sex”, which expresses a categorical refusal of any sexual activities between a child and an adult; “Being in control of sexual urges”, which represents Ethan’s refusal to be at the mercy of his instincts; “Paedophilic attraction”, which is part of Ethan’s self-identity (the attraction is felt as natural and also described as primarily non-sexual); “Sexual fantasies as harmless and necessary”, which describe the only way for Ethan to release sexual urges without committing any crime; and “The burden of being a person with paedophilia”, which is expressed through a “need of disclosure” and “suicidal tendencies”. Disclosure is seen as a necessity, because it is the only way to build true relationships. Yet, it is also seen as risky, because of the possible rejection that could originate from others. Suicidal tendencies derive from non-acceptance of personal sexual inclination as well as society’s disdain.

The themes that are more likely to contribute to the understanding of anti-contact non-offending paedophilia are “Repulsion of child-adult sex” and “Being in control of sexual urges”. However, while Ethan sometimes speaks for a whole category, data has been collected only from one subject and therefore a generalization of the findings should be discouraged. In fact, to what extent “Repulsion of child-adult sex” is representative of anti-contact non-offending paedophilia as a

whole? Unfortunately, this question cannot be answered based on a single case study, however, it's interesting to observe that "Repulsion of child-adult sex" seem to be the basis of what means for Ethan to be an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual. "Being in control of sexual urges", as experienced by Ethan, is also another theme that seems to resemble the very definition of non-offending paedophilia. As anti-contact and non-offending means non-acting and therefore being in control of dangerous behaviours. As a matter of fact, Beier (2016) and Berlin (2015) argue that people with paedophilia at risk of offending can be taught to control their paedophilic sexual expressions and can comply with societal norms. Also, findings from studies such as Jahnke et al. (2015) and Mitchell and Galupo (2015), suggest that compared to paedophilic individuals who act on their sexual urges, non-offending paedophilic individuals are more able to manage their responses to sexual stimuli; more able to control their sexual arousal/behaviours and less likely to consider sexual activity with children as acceptable behaviour. Generally, it seems that several elements of non-offending paedophilia, as defined by the Academia (Cantor & McPhail, 2016), are resembled in both themes of "Repulsion of adult-child sex" and "Being in control of sexual urges"; which emerged by the analysis of Ethan's experience. Vice versa, "Repulsion of adult-child sex" and "Being in control of sexual urges" seems to reinforce the definition of non-offending paedophilia as defined by the Academia (Cantor & McPhail, 2016) and provides additional elements that might help understand anti-contact non-offending paedophilia. The relevance of these themes is ascribable to the fact that they directly emerged from the experience of an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual. In fact, as Goode (2010) states, only self-identified people with paedophilia can begin to tell us what it is like to experience sexual attraction to children and how it feels having such a sexual attraction. Similarly, I would argue that only anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual can tell us what it means to be one.

On the other hand, the themes of "Paedophilic attraction", "Sexual fantasies as harmless and necessary" and "The burden of being a person with paedophilia" are the most representative of Ethan's experience in relation to his paedophilic sexual attraction. However, they frequently emerge in previous studies that also include paedophilic individuals who have offended (Goode, 2010; Freimond 2013; Houtepen et al., 2015), therefore, they cannot represent exclusive aspects of how an anti-contact non-offending person with paedophilia experiences his condition. Nonetheless, the way they are described and experienced by Ethan adds a new element that might be helpful in understanding anti-contact non-offending paedophilia. For example, some aspects mentioned by Ethan about his paedophilic attraction, such as its natural and asexualised nature, are generally explained in forensic samples as cognitive distortions (Navathe et al., 2008). By definition, cognitive distortions in offending people with paedophilia are beliefs which tend to justify the commitment of an unlawful sexual act against a child (Blumenthal et al., 1999). Ethan declares that he never acted upon his urges, so his views of attraction as asexual and natural should not be considered a cognitive distortion per se. Additionally, as reported by Jahnke et al. (2015), non-offending paedophilic individuals have been found to display less supportive attitudes towards sex compared to incarcerated people with paedophilia, which might suggest that they might not have strong cognitive distortions in relation to adult-child sex.

Considering that the theme of asexualised paedophilic attraction has been found in several non-forensic and non-clinical samples of people with paedophilia living in the community (Cantor & McPhail, 2016), and that many professionals and academics are suggesting that paedophilic sexual attraction should be considered as separate from sexual behaviours (Cantor & McPhail, 2016), the asexualised nature of their attraction, including Ethan's, has the potential to be considered at face value.

On the other hand, the theme "Sexual fantasies as harmless and necessary" might be quite controversial. Some therapists consider fantasy as the first step of an escalating offending cycle (Wyre, 1990). However, Howitt (1995) reports some cases where offenders' fantasies do not match their description of offending.

That is, an offender may fantasise about an extreme scenario of sexual intercourse with a child, but in real life may limit his overt physical contact to fondling children through their clothing. This

'imperfect' match is also found in non-paedophilic samples of non-offenders, as many people report sexual fantasies largely unrelated to their sexual practices or even desires in real life (Howitt, 1995). In other words, the fantasy exists in a separate domain from overt actions and does not require to be acted out to be satisfactory – it functions effectively as an accompaniment to masturbation to maximise pleasure (Howitt, 1995). As an anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual, Ethan seems to engage in these latter types of fantasies, however, fantasies experienced as harmless and necessary might be an idiosyncratic element of Ethan's sexual attraction. In fact, as indicated by Klein et al. (2015) as well as Santtila et al. (2015) people with paedophilia living in the community might struggle to deal with the high frequency of paedophilic sexual fantasies they have.

Ultimately, the theme "The burden of being a person with paedophilia" is undoubtedly connected to the concepts of stigma. In fact, as reported by Cantor and McPhail (2016), individuals who have a sexual interest in children are likely to be affected by stigma simply because of their paedophilic attraction, rather than their actions. Both public stigma towards people with paedophilia and stigma-related stress experienced by people with paedophilia (isolation, loneliness, social and interpersonal problems, emotional dysregulation etc.) are key factors for the initiation of sexual offending behaviours and might also negatively impact on the mental health of the subjects with paedophilic sexual attraction (Cantor & McPhail, 2016). Both Goode (2010) and Freimond (2013) reported high levels of perceived social distance and fear of discovery in their sample. All these elements taken together not only resemble the content of the theme "The burden of being a person with paedophilia" as experienced by Ethan, but might also explain its aetiology. However, as previously reported, the suicidal element of this theme has been rarely discussed in previous research. Interestingly, Walter and Pridmore (2012) reported 20 cases from 1922 until 2012 of men with no apparent mental disorder, who committed suicide after their child sex offences have been threatened to be (or have been) publicly exposed.

Considering the very few numbers of cases reported in almost a century, this might indicate not only that the actual number of suicides committed for similar reasons is higher, but it also shows the lack of interest in studying the experience of people with paedophilia around suicidal ideation. This is probably due to the fact paedophilia is mainly researched to enhance children protection, while aspects impacting the mental health of people with paedophilia are addressed more rarely.

Limitation and future directions

Firstly, the generalisation of the current findings to the entire population of anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individuals is the main limitation of this study. Also, it should be noted that Ethan is a non-exclusive person with paedophilia as he is also attracted to older women, hence, he might represent a more specific type of anti-contact non-offending paedophilic individual – this would limit the findings of this study even further. However, as Goode (2010) explains, exclusive and non-exclusive people with paedophilia remain committed to the same self-identity and experience very similar issues, therefore, the attraction to adults in non-exclusive people with paedophilia might simply represent a part of their total sexuality. This does not minimise their paedophilic attraction or makes it more bearable, thus, the experiences of exclusive and non-exclusive paedophilic individuals should be comparable.

In addition to this, the themes emerged in this study reflect several findings that are partially in line with and partially new to the current and previous research on self-identified paedophilic individuals (i.e. non-forensic and non-clinical samples of offenders and non-offenders) and might help define anti-contact non-offending paedophilia as a construct. This indicates that, taking into account the above themes, future research has the potential to expand on aspects of anti-contact non-offending paedophilia that have not been addressed yet.

Additional studies should explore whether similar themes emerge in those articles published by Ethan following 2014 (Edwards, 2014), or whether they have somehow evolved. A similar study should also be conducted by using the blog "Not a monster" by Todd Nickerson (Nickerson, 2018),

and evaluate whether similar themes emerge. Conducting interviews with a higher number of participants that identify as anti- contact and non-offending might also be valuable. Further research should address when paedophilic sexual fantasies experiences are truly harmless and why certain subjects might struggle to cope with these. Could it be that experiencing no distress about sexual fantasies is another key element that contributes to the definition of anti-contact non-offending paedophilia? Ultimately, I hope that my study will be beneficial in reducing the public stigma that affects people with paedophilia, and help professionals understand what it means for people experiencing this condition. Both children and paedophilic individuals can be helped if we start discussing important questions and aspects coming from recent studies on self-identified people with paedophilia and by shifting our focus from forensic to community samples.

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