Navigating the Stigma of Pedophilia:
The Experiences of
Nine Minor-Attracted Men in Canada

by

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Abstract

This thesis presents findings and analysis arising from semi-structured qualitative interviews with nine minor-attracted men (i.e. men who are primarily attracted to children and/or adolescents) in Canada. The central research question is "how do minor-attracted people understand and manage their stigmatized identities?" I situated the participants' experiences within a broader social context by reviewing relevant academic literature, laws, and dominant cultural attitudes. Utilizing a symbolic-interactionist approach, and drawing on Goffman's concept of "stigma," this thesis illustrates the unique challenges facing minor-attracted people. The study reveals that minor-attracted people become aware of their sexuality at an early age, experience stress caused by real or perceived societal rejection, and encounter both positive and negative reactions upon disclosing their identities. The conclusion underscores the need for a new approach to dealing with minor-attraction in contemporary Western society. I offer eight recommendations for instituting a strategy which incorporates empathy, education, and anti-discrimination measures.

Keywords: pedophilia; minor-attracted adults; sexual identity; moral panic; queer studies; stigma

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Introduction

The condition known as "pedophilia" is a part of the fabric of everyday life. Attraction to prepubescent children is common among men, as is attraction to pubescent adolescents (Briere & Runtz, 1989; Fedora et al., 1992; Goode, 2010; Hall, Hirschman, & Oliver, 1995; Quinsey, Steinman, Bergersen, & Holmes, 1975). With or without our knowing, people who experience these desires are present in our lives as co-workers, spouses, family members, and friends (Goode, 2010). Unfortunately, the percentage of adult women who may be attracted to young people is unknown, as these women have received very little attention from researchers (Goode, 2010).

This thesis examines the experiences of adults who are primarily sexually attracted to children and/or adolescents. In order to learn more about who they are and what their lives are like, I interviewed nine men who self-identify as being primarily attracted to minors (i.e., youth who fall below the age of consent).[1] My interview participants and I discussed the nature of their sexual attractions, how they came to identify as minor-attracted, their experiences with disclosing their identities to others, and their attempts to cope with widespread condemnation. The stories of these men are vitally important - their insights highlight the need to critically examine social norms and customs surrounding sexuality. It is crucial to engage in these discussions because decisions that determine which sexual desires and behaviours are socially acceptable and which are not have an enormous impact on the way people are treated in our society.

Many adults who are attracted to minors experience intense suffering as a result of contemporary attitudes about them and current methods of relating to them. Even when no crimes have taken place and no sexual interaction with people below the age of consent has occurred, people who are sexually interested in children and adolescents

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[1]   I had hoped to interview women as well, but did not succeed in persuading any to take part in the study.

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encounter incredible stigma. They experience fear about the possibility of their desires becoming known to others, and they cope with depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. These individuals are often completely alone in dealing with their feelings, as they may be too worried about the negative consequences that could arise from talking to loved ones. Further, they may feel restricted in seeking help from therapists, as mandatory reporting laws in many jurisdictions require counsellors to report their clients to the police if they express sexual interest in children. If the nature of their sexuality is revealed, these people are at risk of experiencing physical violence, losing relationships with their friends and families, being fired from their jobs, and encountering financial destitution. The situation facing this population is troubling, and researchers argue that a new, more compassionate approach is needed in order to help people who are attracted to children lead more positive lives (see Cantor, 2012; Goode, 2010).

Our culture's relationship with pedophilia is highly problematic. Sex researcher Steven Angelides argues that:

> Within the last two decades in Australia, Britain, and the United States, we have seen a veritable explosion of cultural panic regarding the problem of pedophilia. Scarcely a day passes without some mention in the media of predatory pedophiles or organized pedophile networks. Many social constructionist historians and sociologists have described this incitement to discourse as indicative of a moral panic. [Angelides, 2003, p. 79]

Pedophiles figure prominently on the cultural landscape. They are thought to be everywhere. Children are deemed to be at high risk of being molested or abducted, and adults feel compelled to take on the responsibility of managing this risk. The stereotypical pedophile is a familiar character in Western culture. He – and he most certainly is a he, not a she, according to the mainstream narrative – is an evil monster. Completely different from "normal" people, his desires are alien. This perspective imagines the pedophile as someone who lurks near elementary schools, waiting for an opportunity to snatch children up and take them away to be used for his sexual pleasure. Alternatively, he is depicted as a Catholic priest, a Boy Scout leader, or a minor-league hockey coach - a trusted authority figure who abuses his position to sexually molest young boys. Michael Jackson may come to mind; emotionally troubled, and with a suspected history of having been sexually abused himself as a child, he allegedly used his fame and fortune to get away with the sexual abuse of children.

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Sociologist Sarah Goode argues that these characterizations do not accurately reflect the reality; traditional media portrayals of so-called pedophiles "appear simplistic and psychologically naive" (Goode, 2010, p. 1), and ask the public "to believe in what amounts to almost two-dimensional cardboard cut-outs, evil monsters utterly unrelated to everyday life" (Ibid.). According to clinical studies, the reality is that a significant percentage of men experience a high degree of sexual interest in children. In their study of a community sample of 80 men, Hall et al. discovered that over 25 per cent of the respondents "self-reported pedophilic interest or exhibited penile arousal to pedophilic stimuli that equalled or exceeded arousal to adult stimuli" (Hall et al., 1995, p. 681). Fedora et al. (1992) recruited 60 men from hospital staff and the community at large, and found that 17 per cent of them exhibited pedophilic interest that was as great as or greater than their interest in adults. When another group of researchers compared "homicidal child molesters, nonhomicidal child molesters, and a comparison group of nonoffenders" (Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, & Nunes, 2000, p.1847), they learned that 28 per cent of the control group (consisting of 47 adult men) were equally or more sexually aroused by prepubescent children than by adults. Briere and Runtz (1989) also conducted a study to determine the frequency of pedophilic desires, and found that in a community sample of 193 male college students, 21 per cent report experiencing sexual attraction to children, 5 per cent claim to have masturbated to sexual fantasies involving children, and 7 per cent admit that they would consider having sex with a child if they thought they could avoid detection. Given the social taboo of revealing sexual interest in children, Briere and Runtz argue that participants should not necessarily be trusted to be completely forthcoming in their self-reports. The researchers believe that the true percentage of male sexual interest in children is probably higher than what their findings suggest.

Even men who do not necessarily have a preferential or equal attraction to minors exhibit a surprisingly high degree of arousal to children and young adolescents; Quinsey et al. (1975) found that a sample of "normal" men had an average arousal response to pictures of young adolescents that was 70 per cent as strong as their response to adults. Most of the men in their study appear to have a preferential interest in adults, yet their response to young adolescents is significant, and indicates that attraction to minors is a major component of human male sexuality. The Firestone et al. (2000) study mentioned above also reveals that men who are primarily attracted to

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adults may also experience a strong sexual interest in prepubescent children. In their sample of "normal" men, they found that the ratio of penile response to auditory material describing sexual activity with children was .71 of their response to similar material describing sex with adult partners.

These figures seem staggeringly high when considering the fact that sexual attraction to children is portrayed as a deviant desire unique to strange, bad people. The evidence seems to suggest that attraction to children that equals or exceeds attraction to adults is part of the "normal" spectrum of male sexuality; and given that even "normal" men who are preferentially attracted to adults also display a significant attraction to children and adolescents, it is likely that attraction to minors falls on an uninterrupted continuum of age orientation. These clinical studies indicate that a great number of men experience some attraction to minors, and suggest that millions of men around the world may possess a *primary* sexual attraction to minors, or what may be called a "minor-attracted" sexuality.

Throughout this thesis, I utilize the terms "minor-attraction" and "minor-attracted" because it is not only sexual arousal to prepubescent children that is suspect in our culture, but attraction to adolescents as well. For example, a person who is primarily interested in pubescent twelve-year-old girls and has no sexual desire for adult women would be regarded as deviant, just as would an individual who has a primary attraction to prepubescent ten-year-old girls. Furthermore, some people are interested in youth who fall across a broad age spectrum. Consider a man who is primarily aroused by youth between the ages of ten and fifteen – he is not technically a pedophile, nor would he be considered "normal." Referring to the population of people who are primarily attracted to children and/or adolescents as "minor-attracted" allows me to consider the experiences of all those who do not fit the status quo of being attracted to adults.

Contrary to widely accepted stereotypes, preferential interest in children is not caused by childhood sexual abuse or fear of relationships with adults (Cantor, 2012). Rather, primary attraction to children appears to be rooted in biology (Ibid.). In other words, researchers believe that some people are born with the predisposition to be primarily attracted to children. Unfortunately, very little is known about this sizeable minority of men. Scientists have not been able to study this group very easily, as they

are a hidden population (meaning that they are not identifiable on sight, as is the case with visible minorities). Most research subjects are drawn from groups who have come into contact with the criminal justice system or mental health institutions, and as such there is a dearth of information about people who are primarily attracted to children and living in the general population. Due to widespread condemnation of pedophiles, individuals who experience sexual desire for children are highly unlikely to identify themselves, even though their interests are not rare.

Despite how common these desires are, the dominating narrative about primary sexual interest in minors is that it is a mental illness. Psychiatrists classify pedophilia as a "paraphilic disorder" and list it in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, psychiatry's leading authority on mental disorders. The characterization of pedophilia as a mental problem is not the only perspective, however. Some scholars regard primary attraction to children and young adolescents as a normal component of human sexuality, and even compare pedophilia's inclusion in the DSM with that of homosexuality (which too, was considered a mental illness and listed in the DSM until 1973). Psychiatrist and sexologist Richard Green insists that while "a society can set rules on sexual conduct and proscribe child–adult sex and invoke sanctions for transgressors" (Green, 2002, p. 470), these discussions belong in the realm of the law, not psychiatry.

The competing perspectives on the "normalcy" of pedophilia and its place in the law raise important questions about sexuality and social acceptability in contemporary Western society. Sexuality researchers Charles Moser and Peggy Kleinplatz argue that:

> The confusion of variant sexual interests with psychopathology has led to discrimination against all "paraphiliacs." Individuals have lost jobs, custody of their children, security clearances, become victims of assault, etc., at least partially due to the association of their sexual behavior with psychopathology. This is not a new problem for psychiatry. Within the last 100 years, the labeling of other sexual behaviors as pathological (e.g., masturbation, "nymphomania," homosexuality) has caused untold misery. Judgments should be made on the basis of science, rather than the morality that is popular at the time of a given edition. [Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006, p. 107]

This criticism of pathologizing certain sexualities is echoed in the work of anthropologist Gayle Rubin, who maintains that sexuality is "organized into systems of power, which

reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others" (Rubin, 1999, p. 171).

In contemporary Western societies, sex is considered a "dangerous, destructive, negative force" (Rubin, 1999, p. 150). From this perspective, sexual activities have the potential to cause significant social harm, and as such, sexual expression ought to be highly regulated. Clear boundaries defining acceptable and unacceptable sexual practice ought to be established in order to minimize risk of harm. Rubin goes on to explain that not only is there a line dividing the tolerable from the intolerable, there is a sexual hierarchy. She argues that married heterosexual couples sit at the top of this hierarchy, followed by monogamous, straight, unmarried couples, who are then followed by all other heterosexuals. Even though sexuality is a "dangerous" force, the sexual interests and behaviours of these groups are granted social approval as long as they express their sexuality for justifiable reasons. Such reasons may include a desire to demonstrate love, or an attempt to reproduce. Sexual practices engaged in for the "right" reasons may redeem the individuals who partake in them.

Below heterosexuals, other groups have managed to establish a foothold on the acceptable levels of the sexual hierarchy. Such groups include monogamous lesbian and gay couples. The bottom of the pyramid consists of all the people and sexual practices considered deviant and socially unacceptable. They too, fall into an order ranging from least bad to worst. Sex workers, sexually promiscuous people (especially women), and "fetishists" embody examples of these unacceptable sexualities, yet their social position is far above that of pedophiles, who sit at the very bottom.

Scholars offer various explanations as to why pedophiles are regarded as the lowest of the low. According to historian Elise Chenier, the category of the pedophile exists and persists because "it plays an important ideological function in modern society: it affirms the white, middle-class, 'traditional' heterosexual family as the ideal site for the production and reproduction of social and political norms" (Chenier, 2012, p. 172). Externalizing threats to children's safety allows the family to be viewed as a safe institution, which is important because the family is viewed as the basic, fundamental unit of society. Employing the narrative of the "dangerous stranger" (Ibid.) creates a

space for social norms to be reproduced and social stability to be maintained (Chenier, 2012).

The image of the pedophile as a dangerous figure is likewise engaged to enforce norms around the regulation of children's sexuality and behaviour. Children are generally conceptualized as sex-less beings - their sexual activities with other children are interpreted as "play" and they are considered incapable of providing meaningful sexual consent, initiating purposeful seduction, or expressing legitimate sexual desire. Any sexual activity between children and adults is, therefore, characterized as abusive.

The prevailing attitude about children's sexuality protects the stability of the family unit. By enforcing the views that children ought to be protected from sex and that all adults with sexual interest in children are monsters, the opportunities for children and adults to form sexual relationships are severely restricted. It is not only sexual relationships that are affected in this way; the moral panic around pedophilia allows even non-sexual relationships with adults to be proscribed under the guise of protecting children from the sexual advances of adults. The child is, therefore, kept close to the family, and exposure to outside adult influence is limited. Because children and adolescents are economically dependent on their families until the state permits them to engage in paid employment, a relationship with an adult is one of the only ways for children to escape an unhappy home life, or explore alternative ideas or activities. Youth who are dependent on their parents or legal guardians for basic necessities like food, shelter, and clothing may feel pressured to remain in a problematic situation at home rather than try to fend for themselves or seek help from an adult outside the family.

According to Rubin, socially acceptable forms of sexual expression are the only sexual behaviours which are deemed to contain any nuance. For example, a monogamous heterosexual relationship between adults can be positive or negative, enjoyable or unpleasant, abusive or healthy. When it comes to socially unacceptable sexual behaviour, there is no room for any interpretation other than that the act is bad, wrong, and harmful. When people like sex workers, BDSM practitioners, or cross-dressers maintain that their activities are enjoyable, healthy, and positive, they are routinely dismissed as troubled, or unable to rationally assess their own activities due to

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some form of psychological problem. Such judgments do not apply to those engaging in acts which are accepted at the top of the sexual hierarchy.

Even though evidence suggests that child-adult sexual interactions can be nuanced, and may not necessarily be negative experiences (see Baker & Duncan, 1985; Ingram, 1981; Kilpatrick, 1992; Okami, 1991; Riegel, 2009; Rind et al., 1998; Sandfort, 1987; Tindall, 1978; Ulrich, Randolph, & Acheson, 2006), the pedophile threat impedes young people from exploring the possibility of a relationship with an adult. The strict regulation of children's behaviour protects the stability of the family and facilitates the reproduction of social norms, by enforcing the family unit as the only source of meaningful relationships with adults in a child's life.

The pedophile threat also serves as a form of social control in circumstances that do not involve children at all. In the name of protecting children, a society can justify interfering with the rights and freedoms of its citizens. For example, in 2012, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper proposed an amendment to the Criminal Code of Canada, officially titled Bill C-30. Had it passed into law, the bill - known as the "Protecting Children from Internet Predators Act" - would have granted law enforcement the ability to track and monitor the online activities of Canadians, and required telecommunications service providers to hand over their customers' private information at the request of police and intelligence agencies without a warrant. Vic Toews, the Public Safety Minister of Canada, criticized opponents of the bill, saying that they could "either stand with us or with the child pornographers" ("Online Surveillance Critics," 2012). Intriguingly, the bill did not contain any mention of children or predators other than in the title ("Online Surveillance Bill," 2012). This case demonstrates that highlighting the danger of the pedophile can potentially be a very effective way to regulate and monitor the lives of the general public.

Moral panic theorists offer an additional explanation for the condemnation of pedophiles. They suggest that moral panics arise during times of social unrest, such as during widespread economic trouble, or war (Chenier, 2012). The "bogeyman" at the centre of any panic – whether it is a communist, a Jew, a homosexual, or a pedophile – is a scapegoat for all of society's larger problems. Focusing hatred onto a deviant group allows the general public to blame their problems on a tangible, accessible population

that can be rooted out and punished. Targeting these scapegoats contributes to a feeling that something is being done to combat society's ills, that productive steps are being taken, and that everyday citizens are not helpless victims.

Whatever the cause of the panic, one thing is certain – it is getting worse. The pedophile hysteria has become so intense over the past two decades that it has even interfered with the ability of scholars to conduct scientific inquiry on the subject of pedophilia. We know that people who are attracted to children live amongst us as members of mainstream society, and that many, if not most, do not engage in sexual encounters with minors (Goode, 2010). Still, deviating from the narrative that all pedophiles are bad, dangerous people has been accompanied by negative consequences for academics. In 2002, a political scientist named Harris Mirkin encountered condemnation for an academic paper he had published in 1999. In the article, the University of Missouri professor compared the pedophile rights movement to the feminist and gay rights movements. His paper states that "attitudes towards child sexuality and representations of it resemble historical attitudes towards women and homosexuals" (Mirkin, 1999, p. 1). The primary purpose of the paper is to argue that:

> [T]here is a two-phase pattern of sexual politics. The first is a battle to prevent the battle, to keep the issue from being seen as political and negotiable. Psychological and moral categories are used to justify ridicule and preclude any discussions of the issue, and standard Constitutional guarantees are seen as irrelevant. The second phase more closely resembles traditional politics as different groups argue over rights and privileges. Feminist and gay/lesbian politics have recently entered the second phase, while pedophilia is in the first. [Ibid.]

Mirkin's exploration of the topic – which contained no endorsement of child-adult sex, and no advocacy for any change in laws – created considerable controversy for him and the University of Missouri. Upon finding out about the article, the Missouri House of Representatives voted to cut the university's funding by $100,000 (which was the amount they estimated to be Mirkin's salary). Senator Loudon claimed the paper legitimized molestation and protested that Missouri taxpayers should not be made to "subsidize this guy's attempt to legitimize a despicable behavior and a dangerous behavior" (Wilgoren, 2002).

Bruce Rind and the co-authors of a 1998 study titled "A Meta-Analytic Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse Using College Samples" also encountered difficulties as a result of their academic work. In their analysis, Rind, Tromovitch, and Bauserman (1998) conclude that sexual activity between children and adults is not always harmful, and that for some children, such interactions can be positive experiences. The United States Congress criticized the authors' conclusions, claiming that the study was "severely flawed" (H. Con. Res. 107, 1999). The Congress passed a resolution urging the President of the United States "to reject and condemn, in the strongest possible terms, any suggestion that sexual relations between children and adults – regardless of the child's frame of mind – are anything but abusive, destructive, exploitative, reprehensible, and punishable by law" (Ibid.). According to the resolution, the only "credible" studies on child-adult sexual relations are those which conclude that such interactions are always harmful to children.

Prior to studying this subject, I often wondered what a person would do upon realizing that he or she is primarily aroused by children. Hysteria is widespread, and hatred of pedophiles is the norm. How does a person deal with the revelation that he or she is attracted to children in the midst of all this upset? What are the options? How should one live one's life?

Conservative writer Judith Reisman believes that people who are attracted to children should "isolate themselves" (Bleyer, 2012). She claims that if she found herself in this position, she would remove herself from society and live "on a mountain somewhere and never go anywhere, like people who cannot go outside because they're allergic to everywhere outside their home" (Ibid.). Sex researcher James Cantor offers men who are primarily interested in children an alternative to Reisman's advice - he encourages them to consider undergoing chemical castration to eliminate their sex drives (Savage, 2010). These two options seem unappealing at best. What should people who are attracted to children do, then? Break the law by pursuing sexual interactions with minors? Remain celibate? Live in secrecy, never telling anyone about their desires? Seek help – if so, from whom? I do not know how I would begin tackling these questions if I were facing this dilemma. As such, I have a great deal of sympathy for people who are primarily sexually interested in children – they face an extremely challenging situation with very little support from others (Cantor, 2012; Goode, 2010).

The number of unanswered questions on this incredibly charged subject is what drew me to investigate the matter in greater detail. I wanted to know more about who these people are, what their lives are like, and how they fit into society at large. I was eager to explore our culture's relationship with pedophilia. Why are minor-attracted people reviled? How would someone react if they found out they knew a minor-attracted person? This thesis attempts to answer some of these questions.

In order to gain some understanding of what their lives are like, I conducted an interview study with nine minor-attracted men. Between July 2011 and April 2012, I interviewed these men about their identities, their experiences with telling other people about their desires, and their attempts to cope with stigma.

In this thesis, I present findings and analysis arising from the nine interviews I conducted. While each man's story is personal and unique, I strive to situate their stories within a larger social context, demonstrating how their experiences are relevant to our society as a whole. By critically engaging with broad concepts relating to sexuality, identity, stigma, mental illness, deviance, moral panic, and social justice, I am positioned to offer a nuanced perspective on the complex issue of adult sexual attraction to children in contemporary Western society.

Continuing to relate to this population from a place of panic and hysteria is not helpful to anybody (Goode, 2010), and in fact, causes significant harm to minor-attracted people themselves, to children, and to society as a whole. This thesis is intended to contribute to the emerging position among researchers that there is a need to approach the issue of minor-attraction in a new, more productive way (see Cantor, 2012; Goode, 2010). After careful review of this topic, suggestions for alleviating the suffering of minor-attracted people are presented in the conclusion of this work.

Thesis Overview

In Chapter 1, I explain that a moral panic about pedophilia exists in contemporary Western societies, and I call attention to the fact that most research on minor-attracted people portrays them as mentally ill, criminal, or potentially criminal. I challenge these assumptions by critically engaging with the research literature. I also introduce and

explain the terms "disclosure" and "coming out." I insist that a participant-centred, qualitative approach to the study of this topic is needed, and I situate the thesis within a long-standing tradition of social theorizing about identity.

Chapter 2 of this thesis outlines the context of my project, explains the methodology I utilized, and introduces the participants. I also present the research questions which guided this project, provide an overview of the interview guide I used, and explain how I analyzed the data. As well, Chapter 2 outlines the recruitment strategy I employed, and highlights the integral role played by an American organization called B4U-Act. I also discuss the process of gaining ethics approval for this project, and draw attention to the challenges I encountered during the eight months I waited to receive official approval to conduct this study.

Chapter 3 is the first of three chapters which present and analyze findings arising from the interview data I collected. In this chapter, I explore the participants' experiences of coming to identify as minor-attracted. Further, I discuss the experience of identifying as minor-attracted, revealing that some of my participants found it liberating to take on this identity, while others found it stressful.

In Chapter 4, I investigate the experience of disclosing a minor-attracted identity to others. This chapter uncovers why my participants revealed their identities, who they talked to about their sexuality, and under what circumstances. I also canvass the reactions they received and what consequences they faced, both positive and negative.

Chapter 5 explores how minor-attracted people cope with stigma, and how they find a place for themselves in a society that does not readily accept them. This chapter highlights the extent to which minor-attracted people experience discrimination as a result of their alternative sexual identities. The interview data reveal that my participants are adept at managing stigma, and are able to find meaning and hope in their lives despite facing incredible challenges.

The conclusion of this thesis summarizes the main themes of this project, and focuses on solutions to the problems caused by current methods of dealing with minor-attraction. I argue that a new strategy is necessary, and that it should incorporate empathy, education, and anti-discrimination policies.

Chapter 1.

Toward a Conceptual Framework for Studying Minor-Attraction

Overview

This thesis examines the troubling situation facing minor-attracted people in contemporary Western society. Minor-attracted people are regularly met with fear, suspicion, disrespect, and even physical aggression from others, regardless of whether or not they have participated in sexual activity with a minor below the age of consent (Goode, 2010). Many minor-attracted individuals keep their sexual identity hidden from others out of fear of losing their jobs, losing their friends, or experiencing harassment should their desires become known to others (Ibid.). Because minor-attracted people are by necessity so secretive, they do not have easily accessible communities to turn to for guidance and support. In many cases, they are completely alone in dealing with their thoughts, feelings, and concerns (Goode, 2010, p. 118).

The overarching aims of this thesis are to shed light on the experiences of minor-attracted people living in our communities, and to contribute to the development of strategies that will alleviate their suffering and put an end to discrimination against them. I accomplish these aims by presenting a critical analysis of my own original research on the experiences of minor-attracted adults, and by radically engaging with contemporary discourse on minor-attraction.

Like any other members of society, minor-attracted people should be able to feel secure in their jobs, friendships, and personal safety. They should certainly be free from harassment and physical assault, and if they so desire, minor-attracted people should be able to access compassionate, non-judgemental counselling services. By investigating the experiences of minor-attracted people, I have been able to learn what their

interactions with other members of society have been like. Examining the successes and challenges of their lives provides a solid foundation upon which to devise strategies that will tackle discrimination and help minor-attracted people and other members of society learn how to relate to each other in more positive and productive ways.

Prior to embarking upon this research, I consulted a variety of sources in order to prepare myself for the interviews. In this chapter, I present and critically engage with these sources, providing an overview of several key themes and concepts which lay the necessary framework for understanding the challenges facing minor-attracted people in Western societies. These concepts include the psychiatric condition known as pedophilic disorder, the practice of disclosing an alternative sexual identity, and the meaning of the term "minor-attracted." Furthermore, I situate the topic of minor-attraction within a broad sociological tradition of explorations of identity, and I explain and underscore the importance of taking a qualitative approach to the study of minor-attraction.

Barriers to Achieving Social Acceptance

In the Introduction, I explored the concept of nuance as it applies to sexual behaviour. Socially acceptable sexual acts are perceived as falling into a range of possibilities – they can be fun, boring, exciting, or unpleasant – whereas socially unacceptable acts are always viewed as inherently negative and bad (Rubin, 1999). The dominant attitude about child-adult sexual encounters is that they are inappropriate and should remain illegal.

The complete rejection of the possibility of socially acceptable, legal relationships between adults and children creates a dilemma for minor-attracted people. Should they advocate for changes to the laws? Should they accept the laws as they are, and attempt to make the best life possible within those boundaries? Several minor-attracted people I have met told me that they have chosen the latter option. They wish to remain law-abiding, and hope to find a way to be happy without engaging in sexual relationships with minors. Many members of the general (non minor-attracted) public may have serious doubts about the likelihood that minor-attracted people can refrain from acting on their desires. People who are attracted to children are viewed as inherently dangerous – many would argue that even if minor-attracted people genuinely want to avoid sexual

encounters with children, they would not be able to help themselves. This perspective places individuals who are attracted to minors in a very difficult position. How can they convince others that they are not a threat to children? Is it possible to gain the trust of, for example, parents who do not want to expose their children to any adult who may desire sexual activity with minors?

Goode (2010) argues that many minor-attracted people are fully capable of refraining from pursuing sexual encounters with children. Still, the general public is likely to fear minor-attracted people. Children are viewed as vulnerable, and sex is viewed as dangerous and potentially harmful – it is, of course, perfectly understandable that parents would want to protect their children from the perceived risks of sexual interactions with adults.

Minor-attracted people can react in a variety of ways in the face of this challenging situation. They can try to raise awareness about the possibility of positive child-adult sexual interactions, and advocate for changes in laws; or they can try to convince society that they will not engage in sexual relationships with minors, and that they are not dangerous or bad people. Either strategy would encounter resistance. The first would be viewed as monstrous, while the second would be viewed with suspicion.

I argue that raising awareness about the sexuality of minor-attracted people will eventually result in members of the general public feeling less suspicious, confused, and uncomfortable. Education is the first step to ending discrimination against people who are primarily attracted to minors. The Introduction of this work summarizes research demonstrating that attraction to minors is common, and describes the hardships that minor-attracted people face. The rest of this work is committed to exploring the experiences of minor-attracted people and trying to determine what problems they face and what their needs are. In the interest of social justice and with the goal of alleviating human suffering, it is essential that ignorance and aggression be abandoned in favour of informed, productive responses.

A New Perspective on Minor-Attraction

According to Chenier, examining pedophilia "is no easy task" (Chenier, 2012, p. 173). She argues that "for most people, the whole topic is either best avoided, or it arouses such a strong emotional reaction that careful contemplation is quite simply not possible" (Ibid.). Critical engagement with this topic can be a very challenging pursuit.

Influential people such as politicians, television talk show hosts, and authors continue to fuel the pedophile panic (Angelides, 2003; Goode, 2010). However, several respected researchers and social scientists are calling for improvements to the way our society treats minor-attracted people. Dr. James Cantor, a researcher and professor at the University of Toronto, and editorial board member of several esteemed sexology journals including The Journal of Sex Research, and Archives of Sexual Behavior, argues that minor-attracted people ought to be treated with compassion. Cantor remarks that "it is hard to imagine someone who would feel more isolated than someone who recognizes he is sexually interested in children" (Clark-Flory, 2012). Goode (2010) asserts that minor-attracted people are here to stay and that we should face this fact head on and deal with it. She maintains that our society needs to learn more about them in order to figure out how best to approach their situation. Goode (2010) laments that researchers face difficulties producing research in this field, arguing that:

> The lack of help for adults sexually attracted to children is further exacerbated by the lack of knowledge about this area. There is a reluctance to support research to learn more about the experiences of paedophiles or the incidence of sexual attraction to children in the general adult population. [p. 169]

According to Goode (2010), we should neither ignore nor demonize minor-attracted people. Instead, our society should develop new strategies for engaging with them more productively than we have to date (Goode, 2010), and this includes conducting more research on the topic.

Conventional Research on Pedophilia

Most researchers refer to people who are primarily attracted to children as "pedophiles." Pedophilic disorder is a psychiatric condition listed in the DSM 5, which is the current edition of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. In North America, the DSM is regarded as the authoritative source on mental illness (Kutchins & Kirk, 1997); however, it should be noted that conditions are added and deleted with each new edition of the manual. Occasionally, conditions which were once thought to constitute mental illnesses are removed when social norms change (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006). For example, homosexuality was once listed as a mental illness in the DSM, but was eliminated in the 1970s when the APA membership voted to eliminate the disorder from the manual (Bayer, 1987). Active lobbying from the gay liberation movement and changing cultural attitudes toward homosexuality resulted in a social environment that made it infeasible for the psychiatric community to continue labelling homosexuality a mental illness as unabashedly as before.[2]

What is considered mentally sound or mentally ill can change drastically over the course of a few decades, especially when it comes to matters of sexuality (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006). Currently, the medical community considers pedophilia a mental illness, and this perspective contributes to mainstream ideas about who minor-attracted people are and what they are like. The dominant body of research on so-called pedophiles informs cultural perceptions of what minor-attraction is, and these understandings in turn affect the way the general public relates to minor-attracted people. This information may also influence how minor-attracted people view themselves. It is crucial to have an understanding of this literature in order to contextualize the experiences of my participants - they are coming to understand their sexual identities in a society which regards them as deviant.

Most of the studies conducted on pedophilia in the past 50 years have been carried out in the fields of criminology and psychology, and these are the studies which

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[2]   It should be noted that although homosexuality was withdrawn from the DSM in 1973, a condition called "ego-dystonic homosexuality" remained in the manual until 1987 (Haldeman, 2003).

have contributed most significantly to scientific and mainstream understandings of pedophilia. Researchers typically adopt a theoretical position which frames minor-attracted people as mentally ill, criminals, potential criminals, or some combination thereof. The majority of studies focus almost exclusively on adult males, and draw research subjects from both criminal and non-criminal populations.

The dominant body of literature on pedophilia does not advance the position that a primary attraction to minors should be socially acceptable or that it is biologically healthy. So-called pedophiles are described as being riddled with deficiencies. According to Cantor et al. (2008):

> pedophilic men show lower IQs (Cantor et al., 2004, 2005a), poorer visuospatial and verbal memory scores (Cantor et al., 2004), higher rates of non-right-handedness (Cantor et al., 2004, 2005b), elevated rates of having suffered childhood head injuries resulting in unconsciousness (Blanchard et al., 2002, 2003), and elevated rates of having failed school grades or having required placement in special education programs (Cantor et al., 2006). [p. 167]

The studies Cantor et al. (2008) cite draw research subjects from problematic sources. For example, the 2002 study by Blanchard et al. presents conclusions about the relationship between pedophilic desires and childhood head injuries based on findings drawn from research subjects who were referred to a clinical sexology clinic because they had exhibited "illegal or disturbing sexual behavior" (Blanchard et al., 2002, p. 513). It is curious that claims about the deficiencies of a particular sub-set of men with pedophilic tendencies are presented as truths about "pedophilic men" (Cantor et al., 2008, p. 167) overall. It is impossible to know how many minor-attracted people actually have a history of childhood head injuries because a large-scale study has never been conducted on a representative sample. Despite methodological concerns present in these studies, "pedophilic men" (Ibid.) - as a group - are subject to unflattering claims about their intelligence levels and academic performance.

I prefer to use the term "minor-attracted person" rather than the widely accepted "pedophile" because the former is the label that many of my interview participants use to refer to themselves, and because it does not contain any connotations of mental illness or criminality. My aim is to adopt a neutral, non-judgemental term in order to avoid contributing to the marginalization already experienced by this group.

Most researchers in this field view minor-attracted people as mentally ill, assuming that a primary attraction to minors is an expression of a dysfunctional sexuality. However, arguments about why this sexual arousal pattern should be considered disordered are weak - or even absent – in major studies published on pedophilia. Green (2002) argues that pedophilia does not meet the DSM's own criteria for mental illness. Moser and Kleinplatz (2006) go even further, arguing that none of the paraphilias have a sufficient scientific basis for being included in the DSM.

Understanding the nature of the dominant discourse on pedophilia helps to situate the issues explored in this thesis in their socio-political context. Minor-attracted people are regarded as deviant, mentally ill, and criminal or potentially criminal. Studies about them have primarily been conducted on clinical and forensic populations which are not likely representative of minor-attracted people as a whole (Green, 2002). Research on minor-attracted people living in the general (i.e., non-clinical, non-forensic) population is almost non-existent, yet sorely needed in order to understand the minor-attracted people living in our communities.

"Everyday" Minor-Attracted People and the Importance of a Qualitative Approach

Although there is a dearth of published research on minor-attracted people drawn from the general population, I have managed to locate two such studies. The first, published in 1983, is titled "The Child-Lovers: A Study of Paedophiles in Society." The authors examine the experiences of a non-clinical, non-forensic sample of 77 adult male participants who were recruited through a British "self-help group for paedophiles" (Wilson & Cox, 1983, p. 8). Two personality questionnaires were administered, and ten face-to-face interviews were conducted. The authors found that while their participants were more introverted on average than the control group, "the most striking thing about these results is how normal the paedophiles appear to be" (Wilson & Cox, 1983, p. 57). The participants were interviewed about a variety of topics relating to their sexuality, and the findings reveal that some of them enjoy the act or idea of sexual interaction with other adults (18 per cent), some are indifferent to it (43 per cent), and still others are disgusted by it (18 per cent). When asked about their attitudes toward their sexuality, the

participants' descriptions included feelings of being proud (35 per cent), disturbed (27 per cent), puzzled (14 per cent), and frustrated (17 per cent).

Wilson and Cox (1983) paved the way for future research into "everyday" minor-attracted people, but it would be more than 20 years before another such study would be produced. In 2010, Goode published her work, titled "Understanding and Addressing Adult Sexual Attraction to Children: A Study of Paedophiles in Contemporary Society." To gather information for her study, she distributed questionnaires to 56 participants and conducted two interviews over E-mail exchanges. Her participants were drawn from a convenience sample of people who responded to her call for participants, which was posted on several minor-attracted community Internet message boards.

I relied on the aforementioned studies to provide a rough template for my thesis research. Both Wilson and Cox (1983) and Goode (2010) draw from non-clinical, non-forensic samples to learn more about minor-attracted people. Taking a qualitative approach, they endeavour to truly understand the experiences of their participants, treating them as people, not "subjects." While it is important to examine the biological, psychological, and criminological dimensions of minor-attraction, these explorations are not able to canvass the entirety of the issue. A qualitative approach is necessary in order to provide a deeper understanding of the minor-attracted individuals in our communities.

Goode's (2010) work was particularly inspirational for me, given that she had so recently conducted an examination of non-offender minor-attracted people. Her book was published just months before I was to embark upon my own research for this thesis. I admired her for taking a sympathetic, problem-solving approach to the subject. However, I developed concerns about the manner in which she treated her participants once I was given the opportunity to speak with some of them myself. I talked to several minor-attracted people in 2010,[3] and according to a few of them, Goode (2010) had misled her research participants about the nature of her research. They claim that she had initially approached members of the minor-attracted community with the intention of publishing a study about their daily lives and their support networks. Upon release of her

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[3]   In 2010 I attended a conference organized by a group called B4U-Act. This group is a US-based organization that provides support to minor-attracted people. My involvement with the organization is discussed in greater detail in the second chapter of this thesis.

book, some of her participants were dismayed to learn that her work focused primarily on the prevention of child sexual abuse. Goode (2010) summarizes the primary objective of her book as follows:

> The fundamental aim of this book is child protection, to understand and address adult sexual attraction to children in order to make the world a safer place for children, but I believe this book will also be of value and benefit in other ways as well. [p. 1]

Goode's (2010) focus on protecting children from child abuse seems to imply that minor-attracted adults pose an inherent risk to minors, an attitude which is widespread in contemporary Western societies. This perspective was perceived as highly offensive by some of the people with whom I spoke.

Still, Goode (2010) did uncover new and important information about the experiences of minor-attracted people. For example, she learned that some of her participants were married, and that some were also parents. Many of her respondents reported that they were open about their sexual orientation with people in their lives, while others did not tell anyone at all. The experience of disclosing a minor-attracted identity to others was sometimes positive (e.g., when minor-attracted people are accepted for who they are), and sometimes negative (e.g., when minor-attracted people are rejected by loved ones, or fired from their jobs). Goode (2010) found that many of her participants experienced feelings of anxiety, stigmatization and isolation. While there were members of the minor-attracted community who took offense to Goode's (2010) final product, many conceded that they were grateful to see a body of work that presented them in a more humane light than is typical for research on this subject. One person I spoke with referred to Goode's (2010) work as "the first step" in what he hopes will become a pattern of researchers approaching the topic of minor-attraction in a more compassionate, thoughtful manner.

Disclosure

In this thesis, one of the major areas I explore is the experience of disclosing a minor-attracted sexual identity to others. What assumptions do people make upon finding out that someone they know is primarily attracted to minors? Do they treat the

minor-attracted person differently? What are the consequences of revealing an attraction to minors? I examine these disclosure experiences as a way to learn more about how minor-attracted people interact with others, and how they attempt to find a place for themselves in a society that does not readily accept them.

Some of my participants actively use the phrase "coming out" to refer to their disclosure experiences. It is important to acknowledge that the term "coming out" originates in the LGB community. I respect the fact that the concept of coming out is deeply embedded in the history of the LGB population (Ridge & Ziebland, 2012) even though the phrase is being used more and more frequently in other contexts, from mental health to sex work to polyamory. Still, the term originates in the gay community and has historically been used to document and highlight the unique experiences of LGB people. To directly employ the term "coming out" to describe the experiences of the minor-attracted people with whom I spoke could be viewed as an appropriation of the term on my part. Instead, I rely on neutral and strictly descriptive words when discussing my participants' stories of revealing their identities to others. For example, I use the term "disclosure" to discuss these experiences.

The minor-attracted population and the LGB community are groups that appear to share some similar experiences of marginalization. The communities even share some direct connection and overlap. For example, one of the men I interviewed identifies as queer. As well, some men who are attracted to boys identify as gay, and have participated in the gay rights movement (Gamson, 1997). Because of the overlap in these communities, there are some sections in this thesis where I find it both relevant and useful to draw upon research on the LGB population as a means of exploring the disclosure experiences of minor-attracted people. For example, in Chapter 4 I consider the psychological effects of disclosing a minor-attracted identity, and I compare my findings to other research which examines the consequences of revealing an alternative sexual identity (see Vaughan & Waehler, 2010).

It is important to note that there are distinct differences between a group that is attracted to the same sex, and one that is attracted to minors (regardless of sex). Whenever I draw upon research examining the LGB population, I am not attempting to equate these two marginalized groups, but rather, my aim is to deepen my own exploration of the experiences of minor-attracted people.

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Disclosing an alternative sexuality has typically been characterized as a stage in the process of developing an LGB identity (Orne, 2011). Many LGB people, however, do not experience coming out as a one-time event, or a stage in the journey of identity development – rather, they view their identity development as fluid, ongoing, and subject to change (Hill, 2009; Riley, 2010). Orne's (2011) qualitative research study - aptly titled "You will always have to 'out' yourself" - reveals that even if an individual is openly gay, she will always have to come out to new people whom she encounters as she goes about her life. Minor-attracted people, too, encounter the ongoing nature of disclosing an alternative sexual identity (Goode, 2010).

These nuanced and flexible perspectives on disclosing an alternative sexual identity are theoretically supported by Goffman's (1963) work on identity management, Butler's (1990) writing on the performative nature of sexuality (Butler, 1990), and the concept of "face" in Cupach and Imahori's (1993) Identity Management Theory. All of these social theorists argue that the development of identity occurs in relation to both the dominant cultural paradigm and other individuals.

The Sociological Heritage of this Thesis

This thesis draws on both pedophilia and sexuality research; however, it is firmly situated within a much broader body of work relating to identity. The concept of identity is deeply embedded in the history of sociological thought. The underlying theoretical framework for this study is thus informed by sociological theories of identity, specifically with respect to the methods employed in the Symbolic Interactionist tradition. Symbolic Interactionism is a perspective which maintains that interactions between individuals are best understood when examined in the context of their specific social realities (Blumer, 1969). In addition to bringing context to the forefront, symbolic interactionism is useful as a theoretical framework because it conceptualizes all meanings as socially constructed, and highlights the subjective nature of human experience (Ibid.).

Sociologists maintain that we cannot isolate society from the individual, nor the individual from society (Charon, 2004). People are always acting within - and interacting with - their social environment. Thus, a person develops her identity as a result of interaction and negotiation with others in the social world around her (Goffman, 1963).

Not only do social interactions shape the self, but, according to George Herbert Mead, the concept of the self is actually best viewed *as* a social process (Mead, 1934). The self is never complete, nor concrete; it is constantly developing as a result of social interaction with others (Ibid.). The development of identity, then, is not, and cannot be an individual pursuit, because adopting or forming an identity necessarily occurs in relation to others.

I draw heavily on Goffman's concept of "spoiled identity" as a means of framing the experiences of my interview participants. Goffman argues that stigma impacts the ability of individuals to fully integrate into society, and may prevent them from achieving social acceptance. All kinds of people can possess a stigma, and this condition may be visible or invisible. Minor-attracted people are not stigmatized on sight, because their sexuality is not an observable feature of their persons. Upon disclosing their sexual identities or having them exposed by others, minor-attracted people experience stigmatization, and may encounter the experience of living with a spoiled identity.

Explorations of identity – what it is, how it is formed, how it changes, what influences it – are deeply rooted in sociological thinking, and current studies of identity and coming out continue to draw upon these lines of thought. This thesis is located within a longstanding sociological tradition of theorizing about identity.

Summary

Sociological theories of identity, research on alternative sexuality disclosure experiences, and dominant discourse on attraction to minors (including moral panic) are three major areas of thought which inform the work undertaken in this thesis. Drawing on Mills' concept of the sociological imagination, I strive to situate the experiences of minor-attracted people in their cultural context. The relationship between "personal troubles" and "public issues" (Mills, 2000, p. 8) is highly relevant to this investigation. All minor-attracted people experience stigmatization, and it is essential to acknowledge this cultural backdrop in order to understand their experiences. The concepts covered in this chapter provide the background information that is necessary to fully grasp the material presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this thesis.

Chapter 2.

Context, Methods, and Participants

Research Questions

This thesis is structured around the following central question: *How do minor-attracted people understand and manage their stigmatized sexual identities?*

Because very little is known about minor-attracted people and their experiences, it is important that the research design be flexible enough to allow for a wide range of possible answers to emerge and that it avoid omitting valuable responses prematurely as a result of rigid or assumptive research questions.

In addition to the central question, the research for this thesis is guided by the following eight sub-questions:

1. How do minor-attracted people establish their identities?
2. Why do minor-attracted people choose to disclose their sexual identities to other people?
3. To whom do minor-attracted people choose to disclose their sexual identities?
4. What terminology and language do minor-attracted people use when they disclose their sexual identities?
5. How do others react to minor-attracted people disclosing their sexual identities?
6. What are the ramifications of disclosure?
7. How do minor-attracted people cope with stigma?
8. What are the consequences of keeping a minor-attracted identity a secret?

Instrument of Data Collection

I employed semi-structured qualitative interviewing for the nine interviews I was able to secure. I initially considered developing a structured interview guide, and I also considered utilizing a completely open-ended interview technique; but both ideas were ultimately discarded. These methods have been successfully utilized in previous research, but the circumstances of this project make them unsuitable. Structured interviews ensure that the same questions are explored with every participant, thereby lending uniformity to the data generation process. However, structured interviews do not allow opportunities for other data to emerge should a participant have something to contribute that is not addressed in the interview guide. Not only are structured interviews problematic in their impersonality and potential to make participants feel undervalued, but they are unable to capture information that falls outside of the expected answers, which may cause researchers to miss out on recording potentially important data. The drawbacks of structured interviews are often acceptable to researchers undertaking large-scale studies in which huge numbers of responses need to be gathered and analyzed, and time is limited. However, since I planned to conduct intensive interviews with a small number of participants, I determined that a structured interview guide would be unnecessary. Because this is an exploratory study, my principal aim was to generate as many novel insights as possible. As such, there was no need for uniformity of responses for coding and analysis.

Since I knew I would be conducting research with a relatively small number of participants, I considered utilizing a completely open-ended interview approach. Although I was intrigued by this method, I was not confident that this approach was capable of uncovering the sort of data I suspected were available, since I would have no control over what participants talked about. Because very little research has been conducted on minor-attracted people, I thought it was important to cover as much ground as possible. I decided to combine the benefits of both structured and open-ended approaches by generating an interview guide with specific questions, but without a firm plan to ask every single question, or to ask questions in a set order. I also planned to allow opportunities for participants to direct the flow of the conversation and raise their own discussion topics during the interviews.

I prepared an interview guide containing 31 questions. The list of questions was used only as a guide, and was not strictly adhered to in all interviews. Sometimes questions were asked in a different order, and sometimes new, unplanned questions emerged during the interviews. I wanted to allow room for conversations to flow naturally, and for participants to actively participate in the data generation process.

The questions in the interview guide were organized into the following six sections:

1. Sexual identity
2. Disclosure
3. Keeping a minor-attracted identity hidden
4. Homosexuality and gay rights
5. Advice for other minor-attracted people
6. Participant input

The first three sections were directly influenced by research on LGB disclosure experiences. I drew on Rossi (2010) and Rothman, Sullivan, Keyes, and Boehmer (2012) to develop questions for minor-attracted participants, and in some cases I used the same questions that they had asked their participants. The last three sections were developed independently. With regard to the fourth set of questions, I wanted to learn how minor-attracted people view LGB individuals because I suspected that this knowledge would lead to important discussions about rights, feelings, identity, politics, and coping strategies that would all be connected to the experience of managing a stigmatized sexual identity. Regarding the fifth set, I wanted to find out whether participants had any advice for other minor-attracted people because I suspect that such information may be useful for that audience once this project is made publicly available. Finally, I kept time available in the sixth section to ask participants whether they had any final contributions or questions that they wanted to raise before ending the interviews. Providing an opportunity for participants to introduce their own points at the end of the interview is common in qualitative research, and I thought it was both applicable and important for this project.

My preference was to conduct face-to-face interviews in order to be able to pick up on body language, and develop rapport more easily with participants. However, since

I expected that participants would contact me from cities all across Canada, I decided that I would also conduct interviews over the phone or via Skype audio calls. In the end, four interviews were conducted in person while the remaining five were held over Skype. Seven of the interviews were audio-recorded[4] and the other two were recorded solely by taking notes during the interviews. The interviews all took between 45 minutes and two hours to complete.

Recruitment

Because attraction to minors is taboo, I predicted that very few minor-attracted people would be comfortable enough to come forward and participate in an interview with me. Furthermore, the Research Ethics Board at Simon Fraser University restricted my potential participants to minor-attracted people physically located in Canada at the time of the interview.[5] Given these limitations, I set a goal to recruit six to ten participants, although I was prepared to talk to more.

In order to reach out to this population, I sought the help of a US-based organization called B4U-Act. This Maryland organization, which has received government funding from Baltimore Mental Health Systems, was established in 2003 for the following purposes:

- To publicly promote services and resources for self-identified individuals (adults and adolescents) who are sexually attracted to children and seek such assistance,
- To educate mental health providers regarding the approaches helpful for such individuals,
- To develop a pool of providers in Maryland who agree to serve these individuals and abide by B4U-ACT's Principles and Perspectives of Practice,[6] and

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[4] All audio-recordings were destroyed after I had transcribed the interviews.

[5] This restriction was purportedly due to their concern that research information could be intercepted by law enforcement officials in other countries. I had originally planned to seek out interview participants living in the United States but I did not receive the Board's permission to do so. These restrictions and my experiences with the ethics approval process are discussed in further detail below (see the subheading "Ethics Approval Process").

[6] B4U-Act developed a guide for mental health professionals working with minor-attracted people. This document is called "Principles and Perspectives of Practice" and can be found on their website at the following website URL: http://b4uact.org/principles.htm

- To educate the citizens of Maryland regarding issues faced by these individuals. [B4U-Act, 2013]

B4U-Act was established by a minor-attracted man named Michael Melsheimer. Melsheimer developed the idea for the organization after he personally experienced barriers to accessing mental health services. Many therapists were unwilling to take him on as a patient, and others did not know how to work with him. Some tried to offer the same treatment options that they would offer to criminals convicted of child abuse crimes, but this type of treatment is totally irrelevant for the many minor-attracted people who do not commit crimes against children (Goode, 2010). There are a variety of reasons why a minor-attracted person may want to talk to a therapist; some may desire assistance dealing with stress, anxiety, or depression that is directly related to their sexuality, while others may be experiencing unrelated issues and still wish to confide in someone with whom they can be completely honest.

Upon realizing that health care options available to him and other minor-attracted people were extremely limited, Melsheimer decided to create an organization dedicated to helping minor-attracted people gain access to mental health services. Since 2003, B4U-Act has been networking with minor-attracted people, academics, students, mental health professionals, researchers, social workers, politicians, journalists, and others in order to provide assistance to minor-attracted people. B4U-Act is overseen by a Board of Directors consisting of one social worker, one secretary, one minor-attracted person, and one member of the general community. The Board of Directors meet once or twice a year in order to determine the general direction taken by the organization, while the Director of Operations is in charge of the day-to-day functioning of the organization. Melsheimer was the Director of Operations until he passed away in 2010. The position is now held by Richard Kramer.

There is no equivalent organization in Canada, but because B4U-Act has international connections with minor-attracted people and professionals working in this field of study, I was confident that they would be able to assist me with recruiting participants located in Canada. In 2010 I established contact with Richard Kramer. I explained that I was hoping to conduct research on minor-attracted people for my Master's project, and asked whether I would be welcome at one of their annual workshops. Every year, B4U-Act hosts educational workshops in which minor-attracted

people, mental health professionals, researchers, students, and academics learn about minor-attraction and strategize about how best to assist members of this community. After a series of emails, Kramer and I developed a friendly relationship, and I was invited to participate in a workshop held in Baltimore, Maryland, in October 2010. After attending the workshop and meeting several minor-attracted people in person, I was able to gain trust and respect from several members of that community and from the volunteers who run B4U-Act. When it came time to embark upon my research in 2011, I contacted Kramer and asked whether he would be able to assist me in the search for participants.

I could have announced the plans for my research project on some of the popular public minor-attracted community Internet message boards, as Goode (2010) had done, but I chose not to recruit participants via a public announcement. I had some concerns that announcing a study on minor-attracted people to the general public might attract people who would try to sabotage the research. I concluded that it was important that I talk to participants who were part of the B4U-Act network of contacts, and that these conversations take place in person or over Skype. My concerns stem from claims that Goode's (2010) work had been infiltrated by people who participated in her study in order to intentionally botch her results.[7] While this speculation is unconfirmed, I wanted to be as sure as possible that the individuals I was interviewing were actually minor-attracted people, and that they had good-faith reasons for choosing to participate in the research. As such, it was my hope to recruit participants directly through the private channels available to B4U-Act. Because the organization has an extensive network, Richard was able to send out my call for participants to email lists that would reach minor-attracted people. I wrote a one page document explaining the purpose of my research and requesting that participants get in touch with me. Kramer sent this document out to his channels via the Internet three times over the course of eight months - the calls went out in June 2011, September 2011, and January 2012.

As anticipated, my request generated very little response. Still, I was able to arrange for nine interviews, which were conducted over a ten month period, beginning in

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[7] The speculation is discussed in the public comments section in the Times Higher Education news story, which can be found at this URL:
http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=408084

July 2011 and concluding in April 2012. Since I had aimed to undertake between six and ten interviews, I considered the completion of nine interviews a success. Participants were invited to contact me by phone, although all of them chose to use email. Interviews were arranged to take place either in person or through an audio conversation using Skype.

Ethics Approval Process

Because this study involves human participants, I was required to submit an ethics application to the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics. That office assessed my application as a non-minimal risk study, which means that it needed to be considered by the Research Ethics Board in order to determine whether the benefits of the study outweighed the risks, and whether the project would thus gain approval. My application received official approval from the Office of Research Ethics on June 1, 2011. However, the entire process leading up to this approval took eight months. This amount of time is considered an unusually lengthy delay for a Master's level study at Simon Fraser University. To put the matter in perspective, some of my colleagues whose applications were also assessed as non-minimal risk faced delays of approximately one month before being granted approval to proceed with their projects. During the eight months that the ORE was considering my application, I was required to make several revisions to my application, and attend two meetings of the Research Ethics Board, which were held on March 16, 2011 and May 11, 2011, respectively.

The Research Ethics Board cited several concerns about my application and raised a number of questions, all of which took time to address and eventually resolve to their satisfaction. Two of the primary reasons for their concern revolved around the possible revelation of criminal activity involving harm to children engaged in by participants, and the risk of a participant confidentiality breach. I emphasized that my study would be concerned with the identity disclosure experiences of minor-attracted people, and as such, my interview guide did not contain any questions asking about sexual or criminal activities with minors below the age of consent. Further, all participants would be explicitly informed of my legal responsibility to report any illegal

sexual activity with minors, and that if they should bring up such information in the interview, I would not protect their confidentiality.

Despite these assurances, several members of the REB expressed concern that I would uncover criminal activity involving minors during the course of the interviews, even indicating that such a scenario was likely, given that I was researching a population that experiences sexual attraction to minors. They raised concerns about how I would handle the situation, and they questioned me on my knowledge of the laws and my legal responsibilities, even though this information was explicitly outlined in my written application, which they had been given time to review in advance of meeting with me in person.

Upon hearing my assurances that I was fully aware of my responsibilities and would not hesitate to report criminal activity, the REB members seemed satisfied. The other major concern for the Board, however, remained the possibility of a confidentiality breach, and their apprehension that such a breach would result in drastically negative consequences for both the participants and Simon Fraser University. Specifically, they argued that if identifying participant information was inadvertently divulged to third parties, then the lives of the participants could potentially be ruined as a result of being "outed" and the university would accordingly be subject to a lawsuit.

In particular, the REB conveyed skepticism that I would be able to sufficiently protect confidentiality if I were to conduct interviews in person or over the phone with participants living in the United States, due to the existence of the Patriot Act in that country. They argued that my data could be seized if I crossed the Canadian/US border with notes or audio recordings of my interviews. They pointed out that my phone conversations could be accessed by law enforcement agencies in the United States. As such, in the view of the REB, my participant pool needed to be limited to participants physically located in Canada so that the Patriot Act would not come into play during the data collection process. In addition, the Board required that participant recruitment occur through the auspices of B4U-Act, and that my call for participants not be announced publicly. This stipulation was presumably due to their previously raised concerns that my study would attract too much public attention, possibly resulting in a visit from the police or other authorities who might require me to hand over my data.

Ultimately, I was able to assuage the REB's concerns without having to make any significant adjustments to my original application other than limiting my pool of participants to those physically located in Canada at the time of their interviews.

The Participants

I interviewed nine participants, all of whom were located in Canada at the time of their respective interviews. All were men who ranged in age from 20 to 70. In order to protect anonymity, I did not ask specific questions about age, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, city of residence, level of education, or anything else that could be considered identifying information. Some participants, however, did choose to share such details with me. All information that could be used to identify a specific participant was deleted and is not included in this thesis. Participants were located in at least three major Canadian cities, including Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. Eight participants identified as minor-attracted, and one participant identified as queer. One of the participants who identified as minor-attracted maintained that the attraction was purely emotional, and that his identity as a minor-attracted person did not contain a sexual component. Some of the participants told me that their attractions were exclusive to minors, while others explained that they also had attractions to adults, or to minors and/or adults outside their preferred sex. Participants were living in a variety of situations, including at home with their parents, with an adult partner, with roommates, or alone. Some of the participants were living with or dating adult partners, others were seeking out adult partners to date, and still others were single. Participants were living in varying stages of openness. Some had disclosed their sexual identities to almost all of their friends and family, others had told only one or two other individuals, and one participant had never formally revealed his sexual identity to anyone in person until talking to me in a face-to-face interview. With the exception of one participant, all of the participants had disclosed their sexual identities to other people in person prior to participating in an interview with me.

The Research Experience

I conducted four interviews in person, and five interviews using Skype audio calls. Interviewing over Skype and interviewing in person were very different experiences. When talking to participants using Skype, I worried about my ability to establish rapport a lot more than I did with the in-person interviews.

Upon establishing the Skype connection with participants, I introduced myself by my first name, and then informed them that I would need to read aloud some information regarding their rights as a participant and my responsibilities as a researcher. The information sheet that I read from assured participants of their rights to confidentiality, but most of the information consisted of explaining my legal responsibility to report instances of criminal activity with children, possession of child pornography, and other laws regarding harm to minors.

I cringed inwardly every time I had to read out this list of information. I worried that it would make me appear suspicious of my participants' behaviour or intentions. I worried that I would come across as an agent of law enforcement. Admittedly, I tried to hurry through this procedure so that I could move forward with trying to establish a friendly and safe interview environment. It was important to me that my participants feel comfortable, because I sensed how difficult it was for many of them to come forward and speak to me about such a personal aspect of their lives. Throughout this project, I often wondered whether I would have volunteered to talk to a student researcher were I a minor-attracted person. Most of the time, I concluded that I would not. Therefore, I felt an enormous sense of responsibility to express my respect and gratitude as quickly as possible, given that I was essentially asking my participants to do something I would not even be willing to do myself.

After initial introductions and running through the information sheet, I did my best to sound friendly and casual. I regretted not being able to convey any sort of friendliness with body language. This concern was rooted in my own insecurity regarding my interviewing skills. As it turned out, several participants told me that they felt *more* comfortable talking to me using Skype because they did not need to worry about a police officer waiting around the corner. Because I could not identify them by appearance, or even know which city they lived in, they felt more assured of their confidentiality.

Interviewing in person felt a lot more comfortable for me. In person, I was able to see whether my participants were smiling, crying, fidgeting, or presenting some other kind of body language which allowed me to assess the best course of action for further discussion and questioning. I found myself much more at ease during pauses and silences because I was able to interpret a participant's body language to ascertain whether he was thinking about what to say, or whether he was waiting for the next question.

Meeting participants in person was a fascinating experience. Three of the interviews were conducted in an airport hotel room in a large Canadian city. Unfortunately, the hotel I had selected was not very convenient to access by public transportation – something I had not considered. One participant was over an hour late, and extremely irritable upon arrival due to the difficult journey. In fact, he scolded me for choosing such an inconvenient interview location. I apologized profusely, offered food and water, and tried to be as friendly as possible. After a few minutes he seemed to relax, and once our interview began, we both became very caught up in the conversation. To my enormous relief, he seemed happy and glad to have participated when he left a few hours later. The other two participants whom I met in that hotel room were not irritable, but both fidgeted and frequently searched the room with their eyes. I interpreted these behaviours as signs of nervousness. In an attempt to calm them, I focused on trying to speak in a cheerful manner while presenting friendly, relaxed body language. Whether interviewing over Skype or interviewing in person, I noticed that almost all of the participants seemed relaxed once we were 15 minutes or so into the conversation, which was also the case for me.

Data Analysis

Because this project is exploratory in nature and revolves around a subject that has been explored very little in academia, my plan was to take a flexible approach to the gathering and analysis of data. I did not develop a hypothesis that I was seeking to prove or disprove. My intentions were to keep an open mind, make as few assumptions as possible, and learn whatever I could about the experiences of minor-attracted people. Throughout this project, I relied on what Mason (2002) refers to as the "interpretivist

approach" to social research. She describes the interpretivist approach as aiming to "explore people's individual and collective understandings, reasoning processes, social norms, and so on" (Mason, 2002, p. 56). This approach was a good fit for this project because I specifically wanted to encourage participants to tell their own stories and prioritize which experiences they wanted to share.

I analyzed the data using the open-coding method outlined by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2005). I printed out all of the interview transcripts and highlighted words and phrases that stood out to me. Upon a second read-through, I highlighted words and phrases that arose in multiple transcripts, as well as those that were unique to an individual participant. Initially, I searched for patterns and recurring themes, and these began to emerge fairly quickly. Still, I was cognisant to look for differences as well as similarities between the experiences of my participants.

Chapter 3.

Establishing a Minor-Attracted Identity

Overview

In this chapter I begin to present and discuss the findings that emerged from the interview data I collected from nine participants between July, 2011 and April, 2012. As noted at the end of Chapter 2, I searched for patterns and themes in the interview transcripts, and these became apparent immediately. I will present the findings in a chronological structure which is divided into three chapters. Here in Chapter 3, I explore my participants' experiences of coming to identify as minor-attracted. Why do they identify this way? What is the experience like? In Chapter 4, I examine their disclosure stories. Whom do they tell about their identities? Why do they disclose, and what is the experience like? Finally in Chapter 5, I analyze the ways my participants cope with their marginalized social status. I also consider the possibilities for living as a minor-attracted person in contemporary Western societies. What happens after disclosing a minor-attracted identity? What are their options?

I hope to guide readers through a process of understanding how my participants establish their identities, what they do with this new-found understanding, and what lies ahead for them. Learning more about the lives and experiences of minor-attracted people will allow our society to develop more effective strategies for interacting with them. Throughout this and the next two chapters, I draw on the key themes and concepts that were introduced in Chapter 1 to explain and contextualize the experiences of these nine men.

The Nature of the Attraction

> I can find older teenagers – age 18 – attractive, if they look exceptionally young. Even then it's rare and not as appealing. Sometimes as young as six can be appealing, but not as much as the older boys. [Ben]

In order to understand how and why my participants adopt a minor-attracted identity, it is necessary to understand the nature of their attractions. Where do their interests lie, and how do these interests affect the way they choose to identify? Every interview begins with a discussion of the kind of people my participants are most attracted to. The first question is "Are you attracted to boys, girls, or both?" followed by "What is the general age range of the people you are attracted to?" I also inquire about whether my participants' attractions to minors are exclusive, or whether they ever experience attraction to older people, or people outside their preferred sex.

Five participants are primarily attracted to boys. One participant identifies as bisexual, and the remaining three are attracted to girls. When I ask what age group they are most often aroused by, I receive a wide array of answers, ranging from two to twenty-two. Most of the men report that the people they are primarily interested in fall into a fairly specific age group, usually comprising a four- to seven-year age span. Only one participant, Thomas,[8] provides a fairly wide spectrum of interest, informing me that he is equally attracted to girls and women between the ages of two and twenty-two.

Table 1.   Participants' Primary Interests

Thomas	girls and women aged 2 to 22 (20 year range)
Nathan	girls aged 7 to 14 (7 year range)
Liam	girls aged 8 to 15 (7 year range)
Jacob	girls and boys aged 4 to 9 (5 year range)
Lucas	boys aged 10 to 16 (6 year range)
James	boys aged 11 to 14 (3 year range)
Zachary	boys aged 13 to 18 (5 year range)
Ben	boys aged 10 to 14 (4 year range)
Jack	boys aged 10 to 14 (4 year range)

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[8]   All participant names used in this thesis are pseudonyms of my own choosing.

All of my participants inform me that they experience some attraction to people outside their usual category of interest. Five have some attraction to adults, while the remaining four experience some attraction to older teenagers. Their experiences of attraction to adults and older teenagers are quite varied. One participant, Zachary, reports that he is frequently attracted to men in their twenties and thirties, and can have fulfilling romantic relationships with them, while Nathan explains that he is "rarely attracted to anyone younger or older" (than age seven to fourteen). Two of the participants who are primarily attracted to boys tell me that they also have some interest in teenage and adult women, but not adult men.

Most of my participants do not offer descriptions of the young people they find attractive, nor do they provide details about what physical features they prefer, or what they consider beautiful. Zachary, however, is forthcoming. He conveys his thoughts on beauty, telling me:

> The slim proportionality of a youthful body - there's something achingly beautiful about that. But we live in a culture, unfortunately, where it seems like bigger is better [...] So there's this fetish with size. And uber-masculinities, when it comes to an ocean of beauty, which I think is really ugly.

Ben agrees with Zachary, arguing that "gay culture today downplays any hint of pedo-eroticism and has created a culture of the muscle man." Both claim that in reality, many gay men are attracted to teenage boys from time to time. They maintain that the fear of being accused of pedophilia or of attempting to recruit young people into homosexuality prevents gay culture from embracing this aspect of homosexual desire.

In addition to reflecting on standards of beauty in both gay and straight culture, Zachary discusses his personal desires. He describes the "arresting moment" he experiences when he sees an especially attractive adolescent boy:

> So I was sitting in a cafe doing some work, and this beautiful boy walks in. And he must have been maybe fourteen, fifteen. And I tend to like darker haired boys. And this beautiful face, just everything. He was just stunning. So I'm sitting there, and literally, I'm just looking at him. And the whole world gets shut out.

I speculate that Zachary feels more comfortable opening up about his desires because they are not completely out of step with the status quo. He tends to be attracted to boys who are between thirteen and eighteen, and he is also regularly attracted to adult men as well. He implies that his sexuality is easier to cope with than it would be if he were attracted to pre-pubescent children, exclaiming, "I can't even imagine living with that desire. You know, for someone who's eight. Six, seven, eight, nine, ten. I'd be a mess." He expresses sympathy for his friends who are attracted to children, suggesting that it must be much more difficult for them to cope with stigma and discrimination than it is for him.

Self-Realization

Before one can adopt an alternative sexual identity, one must first realize that one's attractions are not consistent with mainstream heterosexuality (Evans & Broido, 1999). I ask my participants to tell me about the first time they realized they were attracted to minors. All of them report that they first began to consciously question their sexuality in their teenage years, or even earlier. Their experiences of coming to understand their sexuality generally occurred over a period of many years. Some of the participants can identify the exact moment or age when they first noticed they had a primary attraction to minors, while others describe several events in their lifetimes that eventually led them to the realization.

Thomas knew he was attracted to girls when he was thirteen. I ask what the experience was like for him, and he reflects, "I remember aging with my cohort and realizing that I felt a lack of fulfilment." Liam remembers being thirteen and having a crush on a ten-year-old girl. He describes this experience as his earliest memory of finding someone else attractive, and it was this crush that led him to understand that he was different from his peers. He knew that it would not be socially acceptable to ask this younger girl out on a date, whereas his peers could invite their same-age crushes to go on dates. Nathan's experience is similar to Liam's. He recalls realizing he was different from his peers when they all entered high school together and he was still attracted to twelve-year-old girls, and had little to no interest in high school age girls.

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Lucas recalls thinking he was gay when he was a young teenager, and not consciously realizing that he was attracted to boys in particular - rather than men - until he was older. He remembers being attracted to boys his age when he was twelve, thirteen, and fourteen, explaining, "As I got older, my age of interest stayed at the same level. It didn't go up, basically. And that's when I realized." Jack cannot define a specific moment of noticing his attraction to boys – he believes he was repressing his sexuality to some extent throughout his teenage years. Jack explains, "Most of the time that I was a teenager I was not fully in tune with what my primary sexual attraction was. Uh, so it was probably late teens before I would have realized."

Research indicates that in order to take on an alternative sexual identity, someone must first become aware that the identity is available to be adopted (Troiden, 1989). There is a realization that one is not alone, and that there are others who do not fit the status quo. For Ben, this experience occurred when he was a young man. He recalls:

> I read Lolita when I was 20. It felt so like me. It gave me a conceptual
> framework. It gave this a name. Reading it helped me to understand that
> I was attracted to boys, and not men.

Even though Nabokov's Lolita tells the story of an adult man who is infatuated with a 12-year-old girl, the fact that the protagonist is captivated by this adolescent and has no interest in adult women afforded Ben an opportunity to see himself as somewhat similar. He is most often attracted to boys aged 10 to 14, and reading Lolita as a young man helped him to see that there were other people like him – people who were also attracted to children and adolescents rather than adults.

Most of my participants are able to reflect on their early experiences of finding out about a category of people known as pedophiles. Some of them remember hearing news stories about Catholic priests abusing boys, and feeling anxious that other people would associate these stories with them if their attraction to minors should ever be discovered. Others recall searching for information about pedophilia in the library, or on the Internet, and only encountering information that they perceived as negative, such as facts and statistics about mental illness, or child abuse. None of them report finding positive stories or messages about minor-attracted people in the present day. Some,

however, came across historical information that presented sexual interest in minors as acceptable and normal – namely, the culture of pederasty in ancient Greece. James takes comfort in knowing that his desires have been acceptable in other time periods, and Zachary takes pride in his connection to ancient Greek culture. He argues that appreciation of the beauty of boys is something special, claiming that "people who like youth, who like teenagers, who like boys, can offer a different kind of aesthetic to the world."

Boy-lovers, Girl-lovers, and Other Terms

By the way, I use the expression 'BL'. I don't know if you've heard that, 'BL', to refer to people like me? [Lucas]

Upon finding out that they were not alone - that other people like them exist - some of my participants began to wonder how they should refer to themselves. What terms and labels are available, and which ones should they use?

Eight of my participants employ the terms "boy-lover" (or BL) and "girl-lover" (or GL). Some of them use these terms to describe themselves personally, while others talk about what they refer to as the "boy-love" and "girl-love" communities more generally.[9] Jacob proclaims that he is "mostly a girl-lover, then a boy-lover" and Liam says he does not mind what people call him. The acronym "MAP" (minor-attracted person), the acronym "GL", and the term "pedophile" are all acceptable to him. Thomas explains that he sometimes uses the label girl-lover, but with reservations. He believes the term implies a *sexual* attraction to girls, and because he maintains that he only experiences an *emotional* attraction to girls, the word does not feel like a good fit. Although Thomas would prefer to use another term to describe his identity, he does not know of any adequate labels that currently exist. Zachary explains that whenever he uses the word boy-lover to describe himself, "it's sort of been in quotation marks." He says he uses the label to refer to himself in certain contexts, but that he does not think of himself as a boy-

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[9] There are two main websites that comprise the online girl-love and boy-love communities. They are called Girl Chat and Boy Chat, respectively. These communities also exist offline, with some minor-attracted people getting together in person for both social and political reasons.

lover, since this description does not encompass the totality of his identity. He prefers to identify as queer.

I asked all of my participants to tell me more about what terms they enlist to describe themselves, and which terms they prefer to use. Not surprisingly, everybody has an opinion about what Thomas calls "the P word." Some of my participants do not like to refer to themselves as pedophiles due to the negative connotations associated with the word. Liam does not have a problem with the term per se, and says it was the first word he ever used to describe himself. However, he thinks that using it might not be a good idea, since it regularly conjures up negative associations, such as the scandals surrounding child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. Jack does not employ the word "pedophile" to describe himself, although he clarifies that he does not find the word offensive. Rather, he thinks it is "a very limited, clinical definition that doesn't really very well reflect the reality."

James responds with many questions about identity and attraction when I ask him whether he thinks of himself as a pedophile:

> If someone likes a 16-year-old boy, is he a pederast or is he gay? What is the difference? If a boy is 15 and he likes a 13-year-old boy, is he a pedophile, a pederast or is he gay? How do you know? How can he know? And he's 15, and he grows up to be 18 and he likes boys who are 15. Is he gay, or is he a pederast? In the gay community, if a man is 30 and he likes young men, let's say 20 years old, people around them call them pedophiles. You know, the inter-generational relationships in the gay community are taboo. So everybody who looks at someone who is a little bit younger than him is a pedophile. So that word means nothing.

James grapples with the complex relationships between desire, identity, and politics. He claims that a thirty-year-old man will be called a "pedophile" for expressing interest in a twenty-year-old man. While a relationship between the two would be legal in Canada, the taboo surrounding cross-generational relationships may affect the decisions people make about whom they should consider as potential partners. According to James, referring to someone who is attracted to twenty-year-old men as a pedophile undermines the entire meaning of the term. If it can be applied in this way, what does the word really mean? Figuring out how to apply this term accurately becomes even more complicated when examining the sexuality of young people. For example, it is common

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for fifteen-year-olds to be attracted to thirteen-year-olds. Upon growing up, however, most people will shift their desire toward adults. If an adult in his thirties is attracted to a thirteen-year-old girl, many people would label him a pedophile, even though they would not likely label a fifteen-year-old a pedophile for the same desire. Dominant social norms impact the way we perceive sexuality – what is considered a socially acceptable desire for a teenager may not be considered such for an adult. James critiques these distinctions and taboos to the point where he finds them meaningless.

When I ask for his thoughts on using the term "pedophile," Nathan draws a very powerful comparison to the use of the word "nigger." He explains:

> I like the term pedophile because it's a re-claiming of a term, in the same way black people may like to use the word nigger to refer to themselves. It's a word with lots of negative connotations, but I like to use it in a proud way.

Clearly, there is a lot of negativity surrounding "the P-word", and several of the men I interviewed seem unsure of what labels they should use to describe themselves. Should they "re-claim" pedophile, as Nathan suggests? Should they strive to extend the reach of the newly created term "minor-attracted person"? Thomas wishes he knew the right word to use, and wonders if he should invent one. We discuss several possibilities, but neither of us can come up with a satisfactory answer.

Identifying as Minor-Attracted

Thomas finds it extremely stressful to identify as a minor-attracted person. He is frequently lonely and frustrated, in large part due to feeling unwelcome in mainstream society. Unlike Thomas, James finds the experience of adopting a minor-attracted identity incredibly liberating. He remembers searching online for others like him, and recalls the excitement he felt when he discovered the Boy Chat website. While James prefers to socialize with other minor-attracted people in person, he finds solace in chatting with other boy-lovers and girl-lovers online. He says providing support and advice to other people like himself has become a very important part of his life.

Nathan reports that the process of identifying as minor-attracted was incredibly difficult for him when he was first coming to terms with his sexual desires. He has been involved in long-term romantic relationships with adult women, and these relationships have been somewhat satisfying. However, these relationships never feel "quite right" - he describes sensing that something is missing. Even though he dates adult women, Nathan explains that he cannot identify as straight, because he is not attracted to women in the same way that he is attracted to girls. He is constantly reminded of how different he is from others. He cannot relate to mainstream television programs about men and women striving for each other's affections. He does not join in conversations about which celebrity his friends think is most attractive. It is not acceptable for him to ask the cute eleven-year-old girl living down the street from him out on a date. He cannot avoid being bombarded with news reports about pedophiles. These frequent reminders create a feeling of difference that is so strong that Nathan does not feel comfortable identifying as straight, even though he regularly engages in relationships with adult women. In spite of all the pain and stress it causes him, Nathan believes that his attraction to girls is an integral part of who he is, and that he needs to figure out how to be happy with a minor-attracted identity.

Summary

Some of my participants report feeling confused about their sexual attractions. Sexual interest in children is not depicted as an acceptable or healthy type of desire in mainstream culture. Upon realizing that their sexuality is different from the status quo, some of the men I interviewed try to make sense of their desires by reading about child-adult relationships in other historical periods, or by reaching out to online communities of minor-attracted people. My participants use a variety of terms to describe themselves, and most feel conflicted about which labels to use. This chapter reveals that coming to adopt a minor-attracted identity is a complex, highly emotional experience. In Chapter 4, I explore my participants' experiences with disclosing their identities to other people.

Chapter 4.

Disclosing a Minor-Attracted Identity

Overview

In 1977, Harvey Milk became the first openly gay politician to be elected to public office in the United States. He urged LGB individuals to come out of the closet. Milk's logic was this: If everybody realized how many LGB people there actually were, it would be incredibly difficult to continue discriminating against them. The subsequent victories achieved by the LGB rights movement were strongly correlated with this strength-in-numbers approach.

I speculate that if minor-attracted people are to have any hope of receiving better treatment at a societal level, they will need to emulate the tactics of the LGB community and reveal their identities in great numbers. This speculation is one of the primary reasons why I was drawn to the subject of this thesis – I wanted to know how people would respond to a person who shares the fact that he or she is sexually attracted to children and/or adolescents. I theorize that their reactions might give some indication of what the future will hold if minor-attracted people do decide to identify themselves en masse.

While Milk's logic is sound, the decision to publicly reveal oneself as minor-attracted is akin to a prisoner's dilemma. If only one minor-attracted discloses this identity, there is a strong possibility that his or her life will be ruined. Consider the following case: In 2005, an American man named Kevin Brown publicly identified himself as a "pedophile" (Goode, 2011). He phoned a conservative radio station's call-in show to take them up on their offer of a $1,000 bounty to anyone able to provide information about pedophiles and/or members of the North American Man-Boy Love Association. During his conversation with radio host Rick Roberts, Brown claimed that he was

attracted to children, and that he belonged to NAMBLA. Brown requested that he receive the $1,000 bounty in exchange for this information. Rather than provide the bounty as advertised, the radio station informed the local authorities about Brown's sexuality. Goode (2011) writes that as a result of the investigation that followed, his son was taken away from him by "child protection services" (p. 14). His wife also filed for divorce, and he became "embroiled in a lawsuit which cost him his job, his home and his financial security" (Ibid.). Brown neither stated nor implied that he had engaged in criminal sexual activity with a child, nor was there evidence to suggest that he had. Nevertheless, identifying himself as a pedophile resulted in a dire set of circumstances for Brown – many would say that his life had been destroyed.

Brown's story is a tragedy in isolation – however, if all minor-attracted people disclosed their identities at once, the outcome might be less grim. By even the most conservative estimates, millions of people around the world are minor-attracted. How would our society treat such a profusion of minor-attracted people should they all reveal their identities at once?

The accounts of the minor-attracted people with whom I spoke provide some evidence as to how members of mainstream society would react if minor-attracted people identified themselves on a large scale. This chapter explores these accounts. I examine my participants' motivations for disclosing their identities, who they chose to talk to about their desires, what reactions they received, and whether they have any reflections on their disclosure experiences.

Why Minor-Attracted People Disclose their Identities

As long as we stay hiding, it allows other people to define us. [Liam]

I don't want to live my life with kind of like, that double life syndrome. It's not healthy. It's just not the way I want to live. There's no point to it. [Zachary]

The men with whom I spoke provide a variety of explanations for why they reveal their sexual interests to others. One of the most common reasons is a desire to feel completely accepted by loved ones. Both Liam and Nathan describe having an

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underlying fear that their friends would abandon them should their attraction to minors become known. They question whether these friendships are authentic under such conditions. Liam did lose a friend shortly after disclosing his identity to her, and he wonders whether they would have been friends for so many of the preceding years had she known about his sexual identity earlier on in the friendship. Liam claims this experience led him to decide that he would want to tell any future close friends about his sexual identity as soon as possible, since losing a friendship of eight years in this manner was extremely painful. Lucas maintains a similar line of reasoning, explaining that he would not want to "invest in a friendship" or "devote time to a relationship" if he could not be himself, or if he suspects that he would not be able to talk about his sexuality with that friend at some point. He asserts that as a result of this conviction, he does not have many friends.

Nathan discusses at length his uncertainty about whether people would want to be friends with him "if they knew," and explains how this fear has led him to withdraw from many social interactions. He often thinks other people would view him as a "sicko" if they knew about his attractions, and this belief prompts him to isolate himself. Nathan says he wants to be friends only with people who know about his identity and who accept him for who he is.

I am struck by the similarity in what Nathan, Liam, and Lucas have to say. All of them express a strong desire to build friendships based on truth and acceptance, and all of them shy away from exploring new interactions due to a sincere belief that the chances of meeting people who will accept them are slim. Their social isolation is therefore not due to any form of social awkwardness or lack of social graces. In fact, these three men – all of whom I met in person – come across as socially adept people. I imagine that if they did not choose to isolate themselves from others, they might have rich social lives.

This point of analysis is supported theoretically by Goffman's (1963) work on identity development and management. In his book *Stigma*, Goffman explains that "the stigmatized individual may find that he feels unsure of how we normals will identify him and receive him" (Ibid., p. 13). He argues that the stigmatized person is therefore plagued by a constant underlying "sense of not knowing what the others present are 'really' thinking about him" (Ibid., p. 14). Furthermore, Goffman maintains that the

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anticipation of contact with so-called normals can lead stigmatized individuals to go out of their way to avoid others. As a result of this self-imposed isolation, the individual "can become suspicious, depressed, hostile, anxious, and bewildered" (Goffman, 1963, p. 13). This description accurately characterizes some of my participants; they express feelings of anxiety and suspicion regarding the possibility of forming relationships with new people, and they cite depression as an outcome of their social isolation.

In addition to the sociological analysis offered by Goffman, the fear stigmatized minorities hold regarding how they will be treated by others is well documented in the field of social psychology. In the 1990s, the concept of "stereotype threat" was developed as a means of understanding how minorities cope with discrimination. Some studies show that individuals who belong to a stigmatized minority group may sometimes behave differently than they otherwise would due to their anticipation of being discriminated against. For example, African-American students have been shown to sometimes perform poorly on intellectual reasoning tests in part because they are cognisant of the widely held stereotype that African-Americans are less intelligent than people of other ethnic origins (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Likewise, members of non-visible minorities may also behave differently if they fear they will be discriminated against upon making their identities known. For example, a gay man who can easily pass as straight may choose to do so if he suspects he will be treated poorly upon revealing his sexual identity. My participants' decisions to engage in self-isolation may also be explained by stereotype threat. Because they do not know how they will be treated if their sexual identities became known, they may choose to remain secretive and isolated from others.

Like Nathan, Zachary regards disclosure as both a method of discovering what others "really" think about him, and an opportunity to determine which of his friends and loved ones truly accept him. However, he refers to another reason for telling others about his sexuality – namely, a desire to be himself. Zachary does not want to be in a position of having to constantly censor his words. For example, all of his friends can freely point out an attractive man or woman passing by on the street. Zachary explains that he wants to feel that he can do the same if he passes by "a cute 15-year-old boy." Holding these thoughts inside when everybody else can express them feels like self-censorship – a practice in which he has no desire to engage. James, too, discusses the

importance of being able to speak freely. In fact, he cites this factor as one of the primary reasons he revealed his identity, maintaining that it was very difficult for him to hear about his friends' experiences with love and sexuality and not be able to talk about his own. He explains:

> It's difficult not to be able to share something that is so important as to be in love, or even sexual attraction. I mean, we are in a society where there is hyper-sexualization. It's like, over focused on sex, you know. So everyone's talking, talking, talking, and acting. But then we cannot. So this is difficult, like you're excluded.

James told me there was a time in his life when nobody knew about his attraction to boys, and he eventually reached a point where he needed to talk about his feelings of attraction and of being in love. He said that he could not keep his "emotional life" a secret anymore.

Feelings of exclusion and isolation have been documented among sexual minorities who keep their identities hidden (Bond, Hefner, & Drogos, 2009). Keeping an alternative sexual identity a secret is associated with high levels of stress (Cox, Dewaele, Van Houtte, & Vincke, 2011; Vaughan & Waehler, 2010), and this seems to be the case for several of my participants as well. Eventually, disclosing one's identity in spite of not knowing what the reaction will be is regarded as a better option than continuing to hide.

While the desire for acceptance and the ability to have intimate conversations with others are two of the primary motivators for disclosure, Nathan cites another reason, one which revolves around changing the opinions of others. He argues:

> Those people that I come out to, now they know someone like me. And they know I'm a good person, and they know I don't hurt anyone. And then they can't think about people like me in a stereotypical bad way, and they can't be ignorant anymore. And then they pass that on to other people, hopefully, by speaking up when people say ignorant, stupid things.

Disclosure has the potential to change public perceptions of who minor-attracted people are, and what they are like. As Thomas points out, the mainstream belief about minor-attracted people is that they are "all at high likelihood of offending against children."

Jack, too, argues that minor-attracted people have been "vilified" in the media, and that openly talking about his sexuality gives him an opportunity to be "identified as a person of worth." He has discussed his sexual desires with approximately a dozen individuals, and each one has reacted positively. Jack says that while some of the people were surprised or shocked, none acted in a "dramatic" fashion or changed their overall feelings toward him.

According to Goffman (1963), becoming familiarized with the difference present in a stigmatized individual might eventually lead to acceptance of that person. Over time, the issue or condition that was initially considered troublesome may become normalized due to the frequency of contact. Essentially, the so-called normal person becomes accustomed to the "abnormal" condition present in the stigmatized person, and as familiarity develops, the individual with the abnormal condition is viewed simply as another human being not entirely dissimilar from the normal person. Thus, it could reasonably be anticipated that the problem of encountering negative reactions after disclosure is one which will occur most often between strangers. Presumably, once a minor-attracted person gets to know someone, the risk of rejection is reduced. However, Goffman cautions that an improved response due to familiarity should not necessarily be expected. In fact, so-called normals "often manage quite handily to sustain their prejudices" (Goffman, 1963, p. 53). I found evidence of both an openness to changing one's existing opinion, and a refusal to consider an alternate viewpoint among those people with whom my participants chose to talk about their sexual identities. Goffman (1963) notes that either reaction should be expected when "normals" engage with the stigmatized.

A fourth reason for disclosure is to establish connections with other minor-attracted people. Ben articulates a desire to be around people who "understand and get it." He explains that even the most sympathetic and well-intentioned "non-BL" friend could not provide the same level of support as could a minor-attracted friend. James says that by knowing other boy-lovers and girl-lovers, he is "not alone in my dreams, or alone in my loves, or my frustration, or my sorrow."

Goffman emphasizes the importance of "sympathetic others" (Goffman, 1963, p. 19) in the lives of stigmatized individuals. He explains that one type of sympathetic other is the "own" - those who are also members of the stigmatized group. In this case, the

"own" are other minor-attracted people. Reaching out to similar others can provide the stigmatized person with opportunities to receive "instruction in the tricks of the trade and with a circle of lament to which he can withdraw for moral support and for the comfort of feeling at home, at ease" (Goffman, 1963, p. 20). James and Ben appear to experience these benefits.

Although most of my participants were able to raise the topic of their sexual desires on their own terms, three of them did not do so of their own volition. Liam, Jacob, and Jack all encountered the experience of being exposed. Jack told me that his sexual identity was revealed when he was living with a co-worker whom he described as "incredibly perceptive." One evening she flat out asked him if he was attracted to boys, and he answered in the affirmative. While Jack maintains that the conversation which followed deepened their relationship, he explains that the nature of their work situation was such that his co-worker felt it necessary to tell their mutual employer about his sexuality. She declared that she wanted him to come forward with the information, but that if he did not, she would feel compelled to do so on his behalf. Shortly after this conversation, Jack made the decision to tell his parents about his attraction to boys. He knew that if he was going to be telling his employer about his sexuality, there was a possibility that the information could spread. He wanted to ensure that his parents found out from him, and not from someone else.

Jacob recalls going to see a therapist when he was a teenager in order to address what he describes as "anger issues." He says that his mother would accompany him on occasion, and it was during one of the sessions where she was in attendance that Jacob revealed he was attracted to children. Afterwards, Jacob's mother shared the information with her boyfriend, and eventually Jacob's entire immediate family came to know about his sexuality.

Liam's situation is similar to Jack's in that he was directly confronted about his sexual interests. Liam was in his early 20s and living at home. He recalls that one day his parents found a book in his bedroom entitled "Harmful to Minors," authored by Judith Levine. This book explores issues relating to pedophilia and youth sexuality, and Liam's possession of this book led his parents to investigate further by looking at the Internet browsing history on his computer. He recounts the moment they asked him about what they had found:

> Of course normally I delete the browsing history, but that day I didn't. And so I think what they found is probably Girl Chat, and I had been out on a walk somewhere, and I got home. I guess they kind of politely and calmly confronted me about it, and I think when I saw the book I thought maybe I could come up with some sort of excuse, or a clever lie, but I think once they told me that they had found the Girl Chat site, and that I was going to that online, I figured I would tell them.

Although Liam had been keeping his sexual identity hidden from his parents, once he was directly confronted about it, he decided to be honest.

My participants' decisions to disclose are associated with strong feelings of desire to share the true nature of their sexual identities with others. In fact, this desire is even referred to as a need. James argues that he feels a "need" to talk about the boys he is in love with, and that he "needs" to share his emotional life with other people. Similarly, Nathan describes being alone as "almost more intolerable" than the fear of what might happen after revealing a sexual interest in children.

Over the course of the interviews, I found that the decision to disclose was motivated by a variety of factors, including a desire to be truthful or authentic with others, a desire to know if one's relationships are genuine, a desire to feel completely accepted, a desire to talk about one's innermost thoughts and feelings, a desire to be oneself without self-imposed censorship, and a desire to change the opinions that other people have about minor-attracted people.

Recipients of Disclosure

Deciding who to tell was frequently described as a difficult task, and most of my participants spent months or even years going over the pros and cons before reaching a decision. Friends were the most frequently cited category of people that my participants disclosed to, but other choices included spouses, therapists, researchers, other minor-attracted people, and members of sexuality discussion groups to which they belonged.

Seven of the nine participants I talked to specifically chose to confide in friends but not family members.[10] The decision to keep their sexual identities hidden from their families was usually based on a weighing of pros and cons. Nathan explains that he does not want to tell his family about his sexuality because "the risk of them hating me if they knew is too great." He is not willing to lose the bond he has with his family, even if the bond is based on ignorance. In addition to the risk of losing relationships with family members, Lucas points out that revealing his sexual identity is a big risk because the news could potentially result in lifelong conflicts that spread throughout the family, whereas disclosing to a friend – especially one who is not connected to other friends in one's social circle – might only mean the loss of a single friendship. While still a significant concern, losing one friend may be less of a hardship than disrupting an entire family dynamic.

Despite his concerns about causing a rift in his family, Lucas did consider telling his older sister about his sexuality. He eventually decided not to because she has young daughters, and he worries that his sister would want to keep his nieces away from him if she knew about his attraction to minors. He explains that even though he is not attracted to girls and could not imagine being attracted to any members of his own family, he suspects his sister would "irrationally" conclude that he would be a danger to them. Lucas asked himself whether he had more to gain or to lose by telling his sister, and in the end he decided that it was too risky. He would simply have to keep his sexual identity hidden from his entire family.

Although most of my participants have chosen not to disclose a minor-attracted identity to their families, I was fascinated to learn that Lucas came out to his family as gay. He felt that he could not be honest about his interest in minors due to the possibility of a negative reaction from his sister; however, he determined that he could at least be partly truthful about his sexuality. In telling his family he is gay, Lucas was able to convey that he has no interest in women. He describes having mixed feelings about coming out as gay. His parents were both incredibly supportive, and his mother even cried tears of happiness, telling him, "I'm so happy for you now that you don't have to

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[10] One participant, Thomas, has not disclosed his identity to either friends or family members. The other participant, Jacob, has told his mother.

pretend anything, that you can be yourself!" Hearing these words was extremely difficult for Lucas, since he is, of course, still hiding his true sexual identity.

While I was not surprised to learn that my participants overwhelmingly chose to confide in friends rather than family, I was surprised to discover that four of my participants – Ben, Zachary, Jacob, and Jack – have disclosed to therapists. My reaction was likely influenced by my interview with Nathan, who was one of the first men I spoke with. I had asked Nathan whether he would recommend that other minor-attracted people reveal their sexual identities, and he responded with a specific recommendation against telling a mental health professional, claiming that "there's a lot of hysteria" and suggesting that therapists would be inclined to call the police even if no criminal act or intention had been discussed in therapy.

In addition to friends, family, and therapists, three of the men I interviewed told me that they have discussed their sexual desires with their romantic partners. Ben, who is a boy-lover, has some attraction to adult women. He explains that "women with a certain body type can appear more like boys than adult men, who have no appeal to me." As such, he said that he is able to "make do" with women as partners. When he was first dating the woman to whom he would later disclose his identity, Ben kept his true sexual desires a secret. Their relationship ended, but they remained friends. It was while they were friends that he told her about his sexuality. Later on, they started dating again, and were eventually wed. Ben believes that he thought their relationship could work because her initial reaction to his disclosure was so positive. However, his sexuality eventually became a source of tension in their relationship, and after seven years together, they split up.

Nathan told me about his experience with disclosing his identity to two of his romantic partners. The first was his first girlfriend. He recalls that she accepted the information, and was "pretty easy going" about it. He speculates that because she was fifteen and he was twenty-two,[11] it must not have been very surprising to her to hear that he had a preferential interest in minors. Nathan looks back on this conversation as a very positive experience. He also told me about disclosing his identity to his present

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[11]   At the time of their relationship, the age of consent in Canada was fourteen. Regardless, Nathan clarified that they did not have sex until she was sixteen.

partner, whom he had been with for seven years at the time of the interview. He explains that he told her about his sexual desires when they were friends, prior to the start of their romantic relationship. She, too, was accepting.

Jack is also upfront with his present partner, although his situation is quite different from either Nathan's or Ben's, because his partner is a fellow boy-lover. He explains that they met through an online community for minor-attracted people. Most of their friends assume they are a gay couple, and Jack says they "struggle with this gay face" because it feels like a deception. However, despite the frustration they experience, they generally have no desire to clarify the nature of their relationship to others due to the risks involved.

Six of my participants have disclosed their identities to other minor-attracted people. In most cases, they initially met these individuals in online communities, which then led to meeting in person. Thomas came to know other minor-attracted people more by chance than by intention. He explains that in the year prior to our interview, he attended a queer rights conference, and while there, encountered another attendee whom he overheard talking about sexual attraction to minors. Thomas went out of his way to strike up a conversation with this person, and as a result, was introduced to a group of other minor-attracted people. Although Thomas notes it was implied that they were all minor-attracted people upon meeting each other, he did not specifically identify himself as such. In fact, I am the first person with whom he has directly discussed his sexuality.

Although I did not realize it when I was creating my research plan, talking to me represents a form of disclosure. After all, Thomas and I met in person, and he identified himself to me as a minor-attracted person – something he had never done before. My preconceived notion that I would primarily be hearing stories about conversations with friends and family left me somewhat ill-prepared to consider the possibilities of other types of disclosure, and as such, I was frequently surprised by my findings. For example, I discovered that Liam had talked about his sexual desires with a researcher prior to me. He told me that he had been interviewed by a university student who was interested in learning more about minor-attracted people. They stayed in touch after the interview, and he said that she has been very supportive and positive about his sexual identity.

The final type of disclosure I learned about involved participation in discussion groups. Two of my participants, James and Lucas, attended group meetings where a variety of people would get together to talk about sexuality. The topics ranged from trans to gay issues, to pornography, to any number of issues relating to sexuality. During these discussions, both James and Lucas revealed themselves as minor-attracted people.[12]

Reactions to Revealing a Minor-Attracted Identity

> I would say that they're not totally accepting, but they haven't disowned me, thankfully, like other people I know about. [Jacob]

> When it goes well, one of the main reasons is because they say, ok, you know, it's a big thing, but you cannot be different now than you were five minutes ago. You're still the guy I know. You're still the man I love. You're still the friend I like. You're still my brother, you're still my cousin, you're still my best friend. [James]

The men I interviewed have discussed their sexual identities with a variety of people in their lives. Some have talked to only one or two individuals, while others have disclosed to over a dozen. Reactions to their disclosure have been mixed. Some people have been very supportive, to the point of encouraging their minor-attracted friends to point out cute girls or boys they see, or prompting them to talk about their feelings and desires freely. Others have responded very differently – by cutting off the friendship, for example, or by telling the minor-attracted person that he needs to change. In some cases, one person might display a few different reactions that change over time, or that vacillate between being supportive and unsupportive.

Ben and Nathan describe receiving mixed reactions from loved ones. Ben says that at first, his girlfriend was very accepting of his interest in boys. However, he claims that she "didn't really seem to get what it meant." Although his girlfriend thought his

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[12] It is unknown to me whether James and Lucas were participants in the same group or different groups. In order to protect confidentiality, I did not ask questions about where or when these discussion groups took place.

attraction was "natural," Ben believes his interest in boys eventually became too great a source of tension in their relationship.

One of Nathan's partners displayed a similar pattern of being alternatively accepting and non-accepting over the course of their relationship. While she was very encouraging of his sexuality for the most part, he described an incident that left him feeling very uncertain about the future of their relationship. One night they had been sitting around drinking with a couple of friends, and everyone present was talking about which celebrities they found most attractive. Nathan mentioned that he had a crush on a 12-year-old girl actor. Shortly after this conversation, he and his partner left the social gathering. At this time, she fell into a "drunken jealous fit" over his interest in the girl. He described the situation to me in great detail:

> She didn't look like the girl of course, and she knew that I was a lot more attracted to the girl than I was to her. And she spent the next two hours screaming at me and kind of tormenting me and calling me a pervert and saying she couldn't believe I was attracted to such a young girl, even though she really had known I was attracted to girls like that before. And saying, kind of cruelly threatening to tell people about it. And talking about what a freak they would think I was if they knew that I liked this girl. So this was one of the most traumatic experiences I've ever had. And it came from someone who I know doesn't really have negative feelings towards minor-attracted people and thinks it's perfectly fine. But it was just an irrational jealous moment fueled by alcohol that lasted for like two or three hours. And it was, it was really horrible.

Jacob has also been called names by someone close to him. When his mother told everyone in the family about Jacob's attraction to children, his sister told him that he was "sick" and "a pervert." I asked Jacob if she still said these things to him, and he replied that she does not accept his sexuality, but that she still loves him. He says he is grateful that he has not been disowned by his family, noting that other minor-attracted people he knows have been.

Liam struggles with the reaction he has received from his family as well. Only his parents know about his attraction to minors, and they place pressure on him not to tell anyone else about it, even though he would like to. They fear that he will be treated poorly and that they themselves will suffer as a result of their association with him. In addition to insisting that he keep his sexual identity a secret, they regularly remind him of

the consequences of being caught with child pornography, or of engaging in illegal sexual activity with a minor. They tend to bring up this topic after seeing a news report about child sexual abuse. Liam told me that "when they bring up all these horrible abuse stories about priests and stuff, I kind of feel offended that they think of me when they hear that stuff." Furthermore, his mother will occasionally tell Liam that she wishes he were different, or that she would prefer not to know about his attraction to girls.

Goffman asserts that to a certain extent, the loved ones of a stigmatized person "are obliged to share some of the discredit" that person receives from the rest of society, because there is "a tendency for a stigma to spread from the stigmatized individual to his close connections" (Goffman, 1963, p. 30). As such, relationships with stigmatized people tend to be avoided if possible, or terminated where already existing (Ibid.). Liam's loved ones found themselves in a very awkward social position when he disclosed his sexual desires to them. Upon review of the matter at hand, his friend of eight years apparently decided that terminating the relationship would be preferable to maintaining a bond with a person deemed utterly abnormal and unacceptable by mainstream society. Liam's parents, however, would presumably have a harder time breaking the parent-child bond, given the importance our culture lends to notions of unconditional love, support, and loyalty from one's immediate family. Instead of disowning Liam as their son, they attempt to cope with the stigma that extends to them as a result of their association.

When I initially embarked upon this research, I anticipated finding out about a wide variety of reactions to a person disclosing a minor-attracted identity. I expected to hear about both positive and negative experiences. Still, I was surprised by the extent of the positive reactions. Many of my participants have extremely supportive people in their lives. Even the negative outcomes – while still upsetting to my participants – were not as drastic as I had expected. In fact, I had envisioned that some people would have called the police upon finding out that someone they know is attracted to minors. Ultimately, I was taken aback by the extent to which people were supportive of the minor-attracted people in their lives.

Consequences of Disclosure

I asked the men I interviewed to reflect on their disclosure experiences. I wanted to know whether they would make the same decisions if they could do everything all over again, or whether they would do anything differently. My participants talked about the significant benefits of revealing their sexual desires as opposed to keeping them a secret, but they also reported major drawbacks and elaborated on the potential for unwanted consequences. Eight of my participants report experiencing positive outcomes after disclosing, and six report experiencing negative outcomes.[13] The benefits of revealing a minor-attracted identity include lowered stress levels, developing a sense of community and belonging, receiving compassion and sympathy from others, experiencing more meaningful friendships, increased self-esteem and pride, and gaining the ability to participate more freely in everyday conversations about topics such as love, attraction, and celebrity crushes. Drawbacks of disclosure include the loss of relationships, strained relationships, increased vulnerability, increased stress levels, frustration over having to explain the nature of the attraction, being on the receiving end of threats and insults, and fear of being outed to others without prior consultation or consent.

After disclosing his sexual identity, Nathan came to believe that telling other people about his desires was like giving them "a weapon" that can be used against him. He explains:

> When you come out, people have power over you. Not only because they can tell people and ruin your life, even if you haven't done anything illegal. But they have power over you because they can call you names, or they can tell you that you're sick or wrong. And there's nothing you can do about it. You can't complain to other people about it, because they'll just side with the person who's calling you sick, because of course you're sick. Or they can use it as ammunition in a fight. Like, well why don't I just tell people that you're a pedophile and then see what they think of you, etcetera, etcetera. So it makes you very vulnerable, and it can change the power dynamic of your relationships or friendships quite a lot. And it can be very frustrating and intimidating if people don't agree with you, because they have the weight of society and social norms behind them.

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[13] One participant, Thomas, had not disclosed his sexual desires to anyone prior to me, so we were not able to discuss what kind of experiences he has had post-disclosure.

It is illuminating to consider Nathan's point about the change to power dynamics within existing relationships after disclosure. Even an otherwise completely supportive individual can still choose to use this knowledge against their friend at any point. Thus, a minor-attracted person may always be afraid that if the friendship falls apart at some point in the future, their private information could be revealed in a retaliatory fashion. According to Goffman (1963), this type of fear is present among many stigmatized individuals. He explains that the relationship between the individual with a stigma and those who form his close social circle can be "an uneasy one" (Goffman, 1963, p. 31). A "reversion" to mainstream values "may occur at any moment, and at a time when defenses are down and dependency is up" (Ibid.). This observation certainly holds true for Nathan.

Jack elaborates on his own experience with this sense of uneasiness. As recounted earlier, when Jack first disclosed his identity to his co-worker and roommate, she insisted that the information be made known to their employer. The information was also spread to other people with whom he worked, with the result that several people in addition to his co-worker and their boss came to know about his sexuality. While the spread of information was controlled and purposely decided upon by those who were given this knowledge (as opposed to general gossip), Jack says he experiences an underlying anxiety that someone will divulge his sexual attractions without his knowledge or consent. He has attempted to mitigate that risk by asking people who know about his sexuality to inform him if they are going to tell someone else about it so that he is "in the loop" regarding who knows and who does not.

In addition to feeling vulnerable about what someone could do with their personal information, some of my participants endured threats and insults from their loved ones after disclosure. Liam, Jacob, and Nathan received direct insults, with both Nathan and Jacob being called "perverts," and Liam's mother telling him that she wishes he "weren't that way." Lucas has received threats, with one friend warning him not to do anything about his attraction, or else the police would be called.

Ben, Nathan, and Liam sometimes experience stress as a result of other people knowing about their minor-attracted identities. Nathan, in particular, finds it very frustrating to have to explain the nature of his attraction to others, claiming that it causes him a great deal of stress. In fact, he describes it as "an excruciating process" made

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worse by the fact that he is required to provide intimate details about his sexual attractions every time he discloses to a new person. This phenomenon has been well documented in the LGB population; Orne (2011) notes that revealing one's sexual identity is not a single event, but a lifelong endeavour. If a person wants those close to him to know about his sexuality, then he must engage in a process of disclosure every time he becomes sufficiently close with a new person.

Even after he has clearly described the type of people he is attracted to, though, Nathan's friends regularly ask him why he does not like slim, boyish-figured adult women. They do not seem able to grasp what qualities he finds sexually appealing in other people. Because he wants to be understood by his friends, Nathan feels compelled to explain over and over again that there are differences between an eleven-year-old girl and a flat-chested, slim-hipped nineteen-year-old woman, and that while he may seek out relationships with adult women who are slender and young-looking, they are "not really" the type of people he is attracted to.

During our conversation, Nathan made the incisive observation that most people go about their daily lives assuming that others around them are straight. This point is well established in the LGB literature – Cox et al. (2011) note that everybody in our culture grows up with an assumption of heterosexuality, and Riley (2010) explains that there is nothing comparable to coming out for straight people, because straightness is viewed as the default orientation unless otherwise specified. While heterosexuality is still the assumed orientation in mainstream society, there is growing awareness about the prevalence of same-sex attraction, and straight people continue to become more educated about LGB issues. According to Nathan, if people happen to find out that someone is gay, they simply "switch over to a new way of thinking." Everybody "knows what 'gay' means," and all that is required to relate to this new information is a simple "mental shift." However, many people, if not most, do not understand what it means when they discover that someone they know is attracted to children and/or young adolescents. The attraction thus has to be clarified and explained in great detail. Nathan finds that he constantly has to assert that no, he is not attracted to children because they are "innocent," and no, he is not attracted to children because it is "forbidden" and no, he does not have a fetish. He laments that elucidating the nature of his attractions over and over again makes him feel "freakish" because nobody asks straight men why they like

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women, nor do they as often ask gay men why they are attracted to men. The absence of a schema through which to understand minor-attraction in our society seems a very important factor in accounting for the widespread discrimination faced by minor-attracted people.

Although my participants report multiple liabilities associated with disclosure, eight experience positive consequences that they associate with the decision. James told me that he has "never regretted" telling the fifteen people who now know that he is minor-attracted. Some of the positive consequences of disclosure have been discussed in the earlier section of this chapter which examines motivations for revealing a minor-attracted identity. These reasons included wanting to feel accepted, wanting to talk about one's feelings, and the desire to form connections with other minor-attracted people. Many of these hopes become reality after disclosure. For example, Zachary, Ben, James, Lucas, and Jack have all formed in-person friendships with other minor-attracted people. Revealing their identities allowed them to meet others like them, and gave them the opportunity to participate in supportive, welcoming communities.

Some of my participants found it very helpful to be able to talk about their feelings and sexual desires with other people. As mentioned earlier, Liam is still in touch with the university student who had previously interviewed him for her research project. Liam informed me that she urges him to talk about his feeling for girls, and even encourages him to talk to girls when he encounters them at work. In his work environment, Liam deals with customers who routinely come and go, some of whom are children. He elaborates:

> I was telling Jessica[14] that I was too shy [to talk to girls at work], and she was like "oh, you should talk to them, don't be shy!" And I had to laugh at how open-minded she was about it, because not very many people would encourage pedophiles to talk to children, even in that appropriate context [of being in a public place].

Receiving encouragement and support from one's friends was a very welcome consequence of disclosure, and one of the ways which my participants were able to feel accepted for who they are. Lucas talked about how much it meant to him to receive

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[14]   The name "Jessica" is a pseudonym.

support from a friend who is not minor-attracted. One of his friends was initially unsupportive of his sexuality, but has since changed his perspective to the point that he will send Lucas a text message if he is out a party where boys are present. According to Lucas, the message will read something like: "oh, you would be happy. There are beautiful boys here!"

Even though disclosure can lead to feelings of increased vulnerability, it can also result in a decrease in stress. Nathan, Jacob, and Jack all told me about the feeling of relief they experienced when they talked to other people about their sexual desires. Nathan explains that disclosure has made life "a lot more bearable." He is also comforted by the fact that when he tells someone about his sexuality and they remain friends with him, the stress of "wondering if they would hate me if they knew" completely evaporates. Similar findings have been recorded in the LGB coming out literature – those who identify themselves to others as LGB report less stress, less depression, and less anxiety, with many directly attributing these perceived psychological improvements to disclosing (Vaughan & Waehler, 2010).

Another positive effect of disclosure is being able to receive compassion, sympathy and support from people who otherwise would not have been in a position to provide it (since they would not have known such support was required). Jacob, Jack, Ben, and Zachary feel comfortable talking with counsellors about their attraction to minors. Jack finds it helpful to be told by a therapist that he is not "crazy," and to hear from a mental health professional with expertise in the field of human sexuality that "there's a range in sexual attraction, there's a range in how people express themselves".

In addition to talking with therapists, some of my participants, including Nathan, Lucas, and Jack, report being able to confide in their friends on a more intimate level than was the case prior to disclosure, resulting in closer relationships with them. This finding also mirrors the evidence documented in LGB research, which suggests that revealing one's sexual identity is associated with the development of more meaningful interpersonal relationships (Cox et al., 2011; Vaughan & Waehler, 2010).

The final advantage of disclosure I observed in some of my participants was an increase in self-esteem, and a newfound sense of pride. Nathan reports feeling "more comfortable" with his sexual identity after telling other people about it. He also believes

that he is "making a difference" for other minor-attracted people by revealing his desires, because he thinks this act contributes to changing mainstream perceptions of what minor-attracted people are like. Zachary also exhibits a sense of pride now that he has disclosed his identity to a few people in his life. He argues that adults who are primarily attracted to minors possess the potential to be "pioneers" in sexuality rights activism. He regards himself as "one of the few people in my city that try to push for a more critical perspective" on sexuality issues. Ben, too, has experienced a boost in self-esteem since telling others about his identity. By re-examining his attitudes about sexuality, he claims to fight against the widely held belief that minor-attracted people must either gain sexual fulfilment by molesting children, or remain "miserable" in a state of celibacy. Through an exploration of Dao-ism, he explains that he is "starting to get to a satisfying way to be in touch with my sexual energy in a positive way."

Summary

Gathering information about the disclosure experiences of these nine men has allowed me to better understand how they cope in a society that does not view minor-attraction as an acceptable, nor legitimate sexual identity. As a result of analyzing these interview data, I feel more confident about my ability to assess the options minor-attracted people may have available to them with regard to receiving support, building friendships, participating in their communities, maintaining romantic relationships, and finding ways to be happy in a society that does not readily support them. In Chapter 5, I will explore the next steps that both minor-attracted people and other members of society can take into order to better tackle the issues surrounding attraction to minors.

Chapter 5.

Coping with Stigma and Finding a Place in Society

Overview

The findings and analysis presented in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis shed light on the identity formation and disclosure experiences of my participants. In this current chapter, I build on the knowledge I have generated, examining how my participants cope with stigma, and what role they see themselves playing in our society. What is their place, and what are their options?

Coping with Stigma

> Usually you just hear about, you know, crime, and abuse and molestation. [Zachary]

> I started to read about pedophiles, and about how everyone said they were bad. [Nathan]

> Some people would only see some sort of child molester if they knew this about me. [Liam]

Widespread prejudice against minor-attracted people makes them vulnerable to a variety of undesirable consequences should their sexual desires become known. These consequences include losing relationships, being fired, and experiencing physical and verbal abuse (Goode, 2010). In addition to facing discrimination from others, they may be at risk of denigrating themselves through a process of "internalized pedonegativity." This phenomenon is akin to "internalized homonegativity," a construct frequently cited in the LGB identity development literature (see Cox et al., 2011; Hill, 2009). Internalized homonegativity describes the psychological state of LGB people who

absorb, and to some extent believe, the negative messages our culture disseminates about homosexuality. These individuals internalize the message that they are strange, bad, immoral, and/or unnatural (Hill, 2009). Judging from the observations of my participants, it appears that a similar obstacle exists for minor-attracted people. Zachary argues that, as a culture, we "completely pathologize and dismiss" people who are attracted to minors. As recounted in Chapter 4, Nathan struggles to overcome the feeling that he is "a freak." Anti-pedophile sentiments are heavily embedded in our culture, and developing a positive self-image can be a challenging endeavour for minor-attracted people.

Social Identity theorists Tajfel and Turner (1979) propose several identity management strategies individuals may pursue when attempting to cope with a negative self-concept.[15] The purpose of these strategies is to develop a positive self-image despite membership in a marginalized social group. My participants adopt some of the strategies proposed in social identity theory, including: 1) revaluing aspects of their own group that are typically seen as negative as positive instead, 2) comparing themselves to other groups in ways that make their own group appear superior, and 3) attempting to initiate social change that will improve their social status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 43-46). These strategies fit within Goffman's analysis of the ways that stigmatized individuals may cope with their situation. Goffman argues that as a means of managing stigma, individuals may attempt to "re-assess the limitations of normals" (Goffman, 1963, p. 11), or interpret the suffering they experience as a "blessing in disguise" (Ibid.).

Thomas appears to utilize the coping strategies outlined by both Goffman and social identity theorists when he introduces the possibility that some minor-attracted people can be "child whisperers." He argues that minor-attracted people are inclined to pay more attention to children, treating their feelings and concerns as valid and interesting whereas other adults might overlook the pursuits of children as silly or boring. From Goffman's perspective, Thomas is re-assessing the limitations of other adults by pointing out that their lack of sexual interest in children reduces the likelihood that they will take an interest in young people, and therefore, limits their ability to form meaningful

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[15]   A negative social identity can include any identity which is devalued in mainstream society.
       For example, "African-American" may be viewed as a negative social identity because
       Caucasian people are idealized and normalized in our culture (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 43).

connections with them. Viewed from the perspective of social identity theory, Thomas's arguments represent an attempt to elevate minor-attracted people to a superior position by comparing them to the dominant group on a "new dimension" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 43) that shifts the focus of attention away from an area in which minor-attracted people fail (i.e., fitting into social norms regarding sexual identity), and toward one in which they succeed (i.e., perceived ability to connect with children). His point is contentious – many would take offense at the position that sexual interest in children aids adults in developing meaningful relationships with them. Still, Thomas appears to believe that in comparison to "normals," minor-attracted people are better situated to take a strong interest in children and their needs.

By regarding attraction to minors in a positive light, Thomas is also utilizing another coping strategy proposed in social identity theory – he revalues the trait of minor-attraction from a negative characteristic into a positive one. Nathan, too, believes that being minor-attracted is a positive attribute. As an "outsider" (i.e., someone who is attracted to minors rather than adults), he has a different perspective on young people compared with most other adults – one which he implies makes him more caring and attentive to their needs. He argues:

> You start to think about them [minors] more and more, and that gives you more insight into them, and makes you care about them more, and not just sexually. So I think I have a special insight and compatibility with children of either sex, even ones I'm not sexually attracted to, because I think about them so much more than other people.

Zachary echoes Nathan's sentiment about caring for minors in a non-sexual capacity as well as a sexual one, explaining:

> My erotic desire for young people is co-mingled with my interest in their oppression. In child and youth oppression. And I constantly think about the relationship of power between young people and adults.

Zachary's sexual interest in minors motivates him to question his "adult status" and the privileged place it gives him in our society. He believes this critical examination allows him to treat young people with more dignity and respect than someone who does not question these social categories.

Nathan and Zachary view their sexuality as a conduit for insight into the lives of children, as well as a catalyst for perceiving under-examined patterns of societal oppression. Focusing on how their sexuality sets them apart in a positive way allows them to view their sexuality as a "blessing in disguise" (Goffman, 1963, p. 11). Despite the hardships they undergo as a result of their own oppressed status, Zachary and Nathan flourish in their ability to offer valuable social critique.

Feminist standpoint theory (see Collins, 2000; Haraway, 1988; Hartsock, 1998) offers an explanation for Nathan and Zachary's heightened capacity to critically examine the status quo. This theory is grounded in the assumption that every individual's perspective is shaped by her social location. A slave's perspective, for example, will be different from a slave-master's. Proponents of feminist standpoint theory argue that marginalized people are highly motivated to try to understand the perspectives of the dominant group, since they are marginalized by the social structures maintained by those in power. As outsiders, marginalized people find it easier to challenge status quo assumptions about all kinds of socially relevant issues, including gender, sex, sexuality, race, class, and so on. Drawing on this theory, I argue that minor-attracted people are uniquely situated to critically examine the roles and values ascribed to adults and children, as well as our cultural customs surrounding sexual identity and sexual practice. Zachary offers a compelling anecdote to support my argument:

> You know how people talk about anti-oppression, racism, sexism, homophobia? I think very few people think about their adult status. It's a bit of a micro revolution. It's really hard to really think about how much we construct ourselves as adults by denigrating what it means to be a youth or a child.

Zachary draws a direct connection between his sexual identity and his ability to step back from mainstream society and offer a critical examination of assumptions about what it means to be an adult or a child, and how these two categories of people are supposed to interact.

Ben also questions our society's customs regarding adult-child interactions, asking "how many adults are there who truly care for children that they are not related to?" He implies that most adults ignore the wellbeing of children other than their own, pointing out that many children suffer from neglect, or the effects of poverty, with little

intervention from adults outside those children's families. Ben argues that treating minor-attracted people as a threat is a "waste of a precious resource," explaining that boy-lovers and girl-lovers could become active participants in the lives of children who do not have adequate access to care and attention. Contrary to popular opinion about the intentions of minor-attracted people, Ben says he wants to support children, not abuse them. Zachary elaborates on this same point:

> I feel extreme empathy with young people. It is so far away from any kind of harm, that to impute a dangerous subject onto the desire, to me, is extreme obscenity.

Zachary, Nathan, and Ben appear to share Thomas's opinion that "there is a great capacity for adults who are not related to children to care for them and form attachments with them." They do not view their sexual attraction to children as dangerous, but rather, as potentially useful.

Finally, my participants cope with their negative social identity, or stigma, by attempting to enact social change to improve the social status of their group. Liam, for example, participated in an interview with Jessica (the student researcher) in order to educate her about what kind of person he is. He hoped to convey that minor-attracted people are not "monsters." In the same vein, Thomas claims the reason he chose to speak with me is "political," arguing that he wants to "get this discussion on the table." If members of the general public are more informed about minor-attraction, he suspects they might view it differently. Nathan also attempts to change the image of minor-attracted people by disclosing his sexual desires to those he knows, hoping they will have "more of an understanding" about minor-attracted individuals after talking to him.

In addition to observing my participants employing this strategy, I am aware of two organizations – comprised in part of minor-attracted members – who adopt the same approach. Both B4U-Act and Virtuous Pedophiles are groups which attempt to improve the social image of minor-attracted people. Virtuous Pedophiles was formed in 2012, nine years after the inception of B4U-Act (whose history and goals I outlined in Chapter 2). Unlike B4U-Act, the Virtuous Pedophiles members consist solely of minor-attracted people (though they describe themselves as "pedophiles" on their website). Their objectives appear similar to those of B4U-Act:

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The goals of our organization are to reduce the stigma attached to pedophilia by letting people know that a substantial number of pedophiles do not molest children, and to provide peer support and information about available resources to help pedophiles lead happy, productive lives. [Virtuous Pedophiles, 2012]

The members of Virtuous Pedophiles attempt to achieve their aims by providing informational resources on their website. They also direct people who are attracted to children to an email support group, and are currently creating a database of the names of mental health professionals who are willing to provide treatment to minor-attracted people in a compassionate, non-judgemental manner. B4U-Act also provides online resources; however, they conduct in-person seminars and workshops as well. By offering educational resources and opportunities for members of mainstream society to interact with minor-attracted people, both organizations are actively working to improve the public perception of minor-attraction.

The Role of Minor-Attracted People in Contemporary Western Societies

If a person is attracted to children, what is he or she to do? What are the options? Where can a minor-attracted person turn for advice or support? In 2010, a man grappling with these questions sought advice from popular sex advice columnist Dan Savage. In his letter, the advice-seeker explained that he is sexually attracted to children, has no trouble refraining from sexual contact with children or watching child pornography, but is unsure of how to achieve sexual fulfilment in his life. Savage calls upon pedophilia expert James Cantor, who suggests chemical castration may be the best option for someone with a primary sexual attraction to children. Savage quotes Cantor as arguing that allowing a pedophile to be around children unsupervised is like letting a cat "be in charge of the canary" (Savage, 2010). Savage agrees with Cantor, instructing the advice-seeker to refrain from being around children unsupervised, in order to "protect the kids" (Ibid.). Thomas read this letter, and was disappointed with the advice. He explains:

The entire tone of the article implied that a pedophile who doesn't act on his feelings is extremely rare. It implied that they are all at high likelihood of offending against children, and I found this implication insulting.

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Thomas disagrees with Savage and Cantor, arguing that most minor-attracted people do not have difficulty preventing themselves from interacting with children sexually. Like Thomas, James finds the opinions of Cantor and Savage offensive. He maintains that a person rapes "because he is a rapist," not because of his sexual desires. James argues that people from all sexual orientations commit rape, but only minor-attracted people have their sexual identities linked to the offense. He finds this judgement unfair.

Ben is not so much insulted by Savage's response as he is critical of its conclusion. He does not think that minor-attracted people need to undergo chemical castration, or isolate themselves from children. He claims there are options for minor-attracted people aside from choosing to be either "miserable or criminal." However, Ben notes it is extremely difficult to explore the alternatives and find a satisfactory place for oneself as a minor-attracted person, given that "the dominant social narrative about sexual identity is that you have to fulfill your sexual desires." He says this attitude leaves no conceptual room for there to be a "happy pedophile" unless said pedophile breaks the law by engaging in sexual activity with a minor.

In our culture, pursuing a sexual relationship with a consenting young partner is neither a socially acceptable nor legally permitted option. According to the dominant perspective in our society, the only legitimate options for minor-attracted people are chemical castration or self-imposed isolation. At the very least, they are instructed to stay away from children at all times, and should certainly never become parents (Savage, 2012).

The dearth of positive role models, scripts, and possibilities for minor-attracted people is very troubling for some of my participants. Still, they resist the dominant narrative by seeking out other options and trying to formulate new possibilities. Assuming that sexual interaction with children or viewing child pornography involving actual children are not viable options, what should minor-attracted people do? Can they achieve sexual satisfaction? If so, how? What is their role in society? Should they strive for the same goals as others – marriage, children, a white picket fence? Or do they need to take a more radical approach, creating a new ideal rather than trying to fit into an existing one?

Some of my participants explore scripts that differ from the negative mainstream conceptualizations of minor-attraction. James recalls reading about ancient Greece and the culture of pederasty when he was a teenager. He remembers thinking, "okay, there are other people like me, and this is something natural. It's been in history for centuries." In addition to drawing on the past for inspiration, James considers the situation in other countries. He claims that "if you go outside of North America, you will see boys with men everywhere." Liam also looks to other cultures for guidance, citing twelve as the age of consent in Mexico.[16]

Reflecting on youth-adult sexual interactions in previous eras may provide some measure of comfort to James, and may reassure him that there is nothing inherently wrong with his sexuality. This reflection, however, does not provide any models for an alternative way to live in our present culture. What may provide this option is leaving North America in search of a place whose inhabitants are friendlier toward minor-attracted people. None of my participants spoke of wanting to leave their homes, but some minor-attracted people do explore this possibility. When I attended the B4U-Act conference held on November 19, 2010, one minor-attracted person told the group that he was getting tired of living in a society which views minor-attraction as inherently bad. He also explained that he was tired of living in fear of discovery. He went on to inform us that he was exploring the possibility of making a fresh start in another country, one where the pedophile moral panic does not exist.[17]

Leaving one's own home and culture for another may be an option for minor-attracted people. Such a decision could be accompanied by many drawbacks, however, including leaving one's friends and family behind, searching for a new job, learning a new language, and/or building a new social network. Moving to another country with a different culture may provide a haven from the moral panic, but there can be no guarantee of newfound happiness. Practical considerations aside, this recourse is a luxury - many minor-attracted people would not be able to afford moving to another country, and some have commitments in their own countries that may prevent them from

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[16]   In Mexico, the federal law sets the minimum age of consent at 12-years-old. At the state
       level, the age of consent is set between 12 and 15, varying by jurisdiction.

[17]   He clarified that if he did move to another country, it would not be for the purpose of seeking
       out sex with minors, but rather, to "find peace."

leaving. What then, are the options for those who do remain in this society? Traditional models of success and happiness tend to revolve around romantic relationships, sexual fulfilment, meaningful friendships, and rewarding careers. For minor-attracted people, engaging in some of these pursuits can be challenging.

Minor-attracted people who want to pursue romantic relationships and remain law-abiding must necessarily seek out adult partners, since relationships between adults and minors who fall below the age of consent are neither legally nor socially permitted. Some individuals with a primary attraction to minors are also attracted to adults, and do not experience great difficulty forming relationships with the latter. Zachary, for example, explains he is most attracted to boys in late adolescence, but that he is also very attracted to adult men and can have fulfilling relationships with them. Ben and Nathan, on the other hand, have very little interest in adults, and must always consider the effect their sexuality will have on potential relationships. Disclosing a sexual interest in children to a partner can be risky – the consequences of this act were explored in Chapter 4. Alternatively, a minor-attracted person may choose to conceal his attraction to minors from his partner rather than revealing it. Hiding in this fashion would bring its own set of challenges, such as an underlying fear of discovery, or a sense that the relationship is lacking depth and honesty. Forming romantic relationships with adults may be much more challenging for minor-attracted people than for people with other sexual identities, requiring consideration of risks and consequences that do not apply to others.

Goode (2010) recommends that minor-attracted people be allowed to explore their sexuality through fantasy and pornographic material that does not involve actual children. She argues that erotic fiction and anime[18] or cartoon pornography should be made accessible to minor-attracted people so that they can achieve sexual satisfaction without the involvement of actual minors. Contrary to popular belief, consuming child pornography does not cause a person to act out these fantasies in the real world (see Diamond & Uchiyama, 1999; Endrass et al., 2009).

There is a problem, however, with advising minor-attracted people to consume pornography that portrays fictional minors – namely that in Canada, and in some

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[18] "Anime" is a particular style of cartoon drawing. This style of animation originates in Japan.

American states, pornographic material of this nature is prohibited. In Canada, it is illegal to create or possess pornography that involves actual people below the age of eighteen, and it is also against the law to create, possess, or access expressive material that depicts sexual activity involving minors, whether that material be written, visual, or an audio recording (see the Appendix for the full legal definition of child pornography in Canada). Minor-attracted people living in Canada are left with very few legal options to pursue sexual satisfaction, given that they are not permitted to form sexual relationships with minors below the age of sixteen (or in some circumstances, below the age of eighteen) or consume pornography involving actual or fictional people below the age of eighteen.

Finding a way to achieve sexual fulfilment under these legal restraints seems nothing short of incredibly challenging, and the options appear to be limited. Pursuing relationships with adults may be one way for minor-attracted adults to explore their sexuality. An open-minded partner may be interested in engaging in sexual role-play scenarios, or encouraging the minor-attracted partner to pursue fantasies in his imagination during their sexual activity. Aside from engaging in sexual activity with adults, masturbating with the assistance of one's own fantasies, and accessing material which would not be considered child pornography according to the laws of one's country, I can see no other avenues for sexual fulfilment available to minor-attracted people who wish to remain law-abiding. As Ben concedes, people like him may simply need to "make do" with the available options.

Focusing on their roles as romantic partners, friends, or participants in whatever hobbies or careers they pursue could be beneficial to minor-attracted people trying to find their place in society. Another possible option is more radical, revolving around the idea of trying to change social norms and attitudes surrounding minor-attraction and sexual identity, or even current social customs regarding youth-adult sexual interaction. The organizations B4U-Act and Virtuous Pedophiles attempt to transform social attitudes about adult attraction to minors by educating the public about the nature of this sexual identity, and trying to explain that they do not view themselves as a risk to children. By sharing their experiences and perspectives, these groups attempt to alter society in order to make it a more hospitable place for themselves and other minor-attracted people.

Summary

Many aspects of life are much more challenging for minor-attracted people than for those who possess socially acceptable sexual identities. My participants endeavour to cope with these challenges in the face of limited options. Minor-attracted people appear to be restricted to the following choices: a) trying to fit into this society by adapting to dominant social practices, b) attempting to change our society's ideas about minor-attraction and/or sexual interaction between minors and adults, or c) abandoning this society for one which may be preferable in its current form. My participants demonstrate courage and resilience in coping with their stigmatized identities. Their efforts would benefit from assistance from society at large. In the conclusion of this thesis, I offer practical suggestions for helping minor-attracted people live happier and more productive lives.

Conclusion

Overview

In this thesis, I examined the experiences of nine adult men who are primarily attracted to minors. Specifically, I explored identity formation, disclosure, and methods of coping with stigma. I also considered what role minor-attracted people may play in our society, and how they might achieve success and happiness. I situated the experiences of my participants within a broader social context by examining relevant academic literature, Canadian laws, the pedophile panic, and dominant cultural attitudes. Informed by the sociological tradition of identity studies, and utilizing a qualitative research approach, I uncovered important information about minor-attracted people and offered insight into their situation. This Conclusion reviews the main themes of this thesis, presents suggestions for future research, and offers guidance to policy-makers who may wish to make informed decisions about future policy initiatives concerning adult sexual attraction to minors.

Spoiled Identity and the Resilience of Minor-Attracted People

At its heart, this thesis is an investigation of spoiled identity - the condition of possessing a stigma so great that should it become known to others, the bearer is discredited by the rest of society (Goffman, 1963). Minor-attracted people bear such a stigma. Even if they never act upon their sexual desires, minor-attracted people are at risk of experiencing verbal and physical abuse, being fired, and losing their relationships with friends and family (Goode, 2010). We, as a culture, want minor-attracted people to go away. However, they cannot simply vanish from existence. There is no cure for primary attraction to minors (see Camilleri & Quinsey, 2008; Howitt, 1995), and it is unrealistic to expect minor-attracted people to engage in self-imposed isolation.

Furthermore, attraction to minors is present to a great extent even in men who are preferentially attracted to adults, indicating that minor-attraction among adult men exists on a continuum, rather than as a dichotomy.

Ignoring minor-attracted people or wishing them away is not an effective response – there are simply too many of them (Goode, 2010). Not only is this approach ineffective, it is unjust. Why should they be shunned simply for possessing a sexuality that differs from the status quo? Members of our society regularly pride themselves on their respect of diversity, yet do little to offer support to minor-attracted people.

In this thesis, I highlighted the effect that social customs regarding sexuality have on minor-attracted people. I demonstrated that these norms leave them with few avenues for achieving acceptance from society at large, and limited options for experiencing sexual fulfilment. The stigma placed upon them by mainstream society results in many minor-attracted people feeling unwelcome and uncertain about how to form meaningful social connections with others. My interview data also illuminate the degree to which my participants are aware of their difference from other people, as well as the degree to which they experience alienation and frustration. They struggle with stress, anxiety, depression, and isolation, all of which have significant implications for their overall well-being and mental health. Many of them are suffering in silence, afraid to seek out counselling due to fears of being reported to the police for admitting to deviant sexual desires. My participants are afraid of disclosing their identities to many of their friends and family members; and they feel angry, sad, and frustrated about stereotypes portraying them as dangerous, perverted, or criminal.

Despite the incredible hardships they face, my interviews revealed that minor-attracted people adapt and cope with stigma in a variety of ways which help them to develop a positive self-image and live a happy life. These strategies include talking to other people about their identities, seeking positive messages about their sexual desires, focusing on the special skills and traits their sexual identity affords them, forming supportive communities, sharing their experiences with researchers, and employing the assistance of mental health professionals.

Though much of what I reported in this thesis is disheartening, I also uncovered data that speak to the promise of a more hospitable future for minor-attracted people.

Only one of my participants lost a friendship after disclosing his sexuality. The men I interviewed were able to maintain positive relationships with other people after disclosure. Furthermore, it appears that minor-attracted people are capable of employing effective coping strategies without the assistance of mainstream society. Specifically, they seek out others like them and form supportive communities both on the Internet and in person. Drawing on support and guidance from a larger group affords them opportunities to combat the isolation and frustration they experience in everyday life.

Recommendations for Improving the Situation Facing Minor-Attracted People

As Goode (2010) stresses, minor-attracted people exist in all sectors of our society, and we need to try harder to develop realistic, practical strategies for fostering positive relationships between those who are primarily attracted to minors and those who are not. My interview data point to the successes my participants achieve as well as the challenges they face. These findings can be used to formulate suggestions for changes to public policy that could result in more effective ways of relating to minor-attracted people and providing them with support. In addition to changes at the level of government, members of the general public can easily contribute to positive social change without a great deal of effort. Keeping an open mind and treating others with dignity, empathy, and compassion are necessary for the kind of social justice I envision.

Drawing on the findings of this thesis, I have formulated eight recommendations that will result in improved quality of life for minor-attracted people, and more productive interactions between minor-attracted people and other members of society. My recommendations are as follows:

1. Empathize with Minor-Attracted People

In order to offer support to minor-attracted people, we must endeavour to understand their situation. This process of understanding requires further research into what their needs are, but it also demands empathy. Unfortunately, many people struggle to empathize with those who are minor-attracted. On several occasions, I have asked my peers to imagine what it would be like to be a minor-attracted person. When

confronted with this hypothetical scenario, many reflect on how they might feel if they could not pursue relationships with their preferred sexual partners. The straight men I talk to envision living as a conventionally unattractive heterosexual man who is unable to attract a woman partner. This attempt at empathy is sincere, but it will not suffice, as there are very important differences between someone who cannot attract a partner and a minor-attracted person. First, the desires of minor-attracted people are widely regarded as strange, sick, and disgusting, whereas a straight man's interest in women is perceived as normal. Even though he is unable to attract a partner, the conventionally unappealing straight man's desires are, at least, socially acceptable in and of themselves. Such a man would likely elicit sympathy and understanding from others. This hypothetical person could complain to his friends about his life of celibacy. He could talk about his celebrity crushes openly, or point out a pretty woman walking down the street. He can legally access pornography that suits his tastes. Most importantly, he would not be negatively judged for any of these actions. In stark contrast, were a minor-attracted person to participate in any of these activities, he may be jailed, institutionalized, or urged to seek medical treatment.

It is critical to bear in mind that not only are minor-attracted people restricted from pursuing relationships with their preferred choice of partner, but they are demonized for their very desires. Living as a minor-attracted person often means living with fear, anxiety, and depression. Embodying this marginalized sexual identity may result in discrimination, isolation, and emotional and physical abuse. Imagining what life must be like for minor-attracted people may be a useful tool for both understanding them and figuring out how to assist them.

2. Distribute a Help Guide for Minor-Attracted People

Mental health professionals and sex researchers should collaborate to create a help guide for minor-attracted people. Many minor-attracted people do not know what to do when they begin to recognize the nature of their sexuality. A help guide that focuses on what to do, how to cope, and where to turn for support could be extremely beneficial for minor-attracted people. This help guide should be published on the Internet, and made available in sexual health clinics and institutions that provide mental health services.

3. Create Access to Mental Health Services

Like Goode (2010), I argue that improved access to mental health services should be provided to people who are primarily attracted to minors. Goode maintains that providing this resource could lead to a reduction in cases of child abuse. While I acknowledge that some minor-attracted people may be at risk of abusing children, and that therapy could certainly be beneficial for such individuals, it is extremely important to emphasize that minor-attracted people should not be considered a risk to children simply because they are attracted to them. I argue that access to mental health services should be available for a variety of reasons, including the prevention of suicide, and the treatment of depression and anxiety. Minor-attracted people face enormous social challenges which may negatively impact their mental health, and providing counselling could offer them much-needed support.

4. Provide Specialized Training for Mental Health Professionals

Minor-attracted people face unique challenges, and mental health professionals require specialized training for helping their minor-attracted clients in a compassionate, non-judgmental manner. It is important that mental health professionals receive adequate education about minor-attraction, and the social implications of living with these desires. In particular, mental health professionals should understand that minor-attraction is not a fetish. Attraction to minors is not caused by childhood sexual abuse, nor does it result from a fear of forming relationships with adults (Cantor, 2012). Minor-attraction does not arise out of nostalgia for one's first relationship as an adolescent, nor is it about trying to capture a feeling of being innocent or care-free. Mental health professionals may be the first avenue that minor-attracted people turn to for support, and therefore it is essential that these professionals be properly equipped to provide help.

5. Support Opportunities for Minor-Attracted People to Experience Sexual Fulfillment

Again, like Goode (2010), I recommend that minor-attracted people be encouraged to pursue sexual gratification in ways that do not involve actual children, because I do not encourage minor-attracted people to break the law. If they wish to see the laws changed, I argue that they should advocate for such changes in a legal manner

rather than ignore or defy them. As such, I urge minor-attracted people to consider the ways that they can achieve some measure of sexual fulfillment without a minor partner.

Pursuing relationships with adults could be an option for those minor-attracted people who are able to derive pleasure from sexual interactions with adults. Pornographic material that does not involve actual minors should also be available as a sexual outlet, which means that some laws may need to be re-examined. Current Canadian laws are highly restrictive in the sense that all material depicting sexual scenarios involving minors below the age of eighteen are illegal, even if those depictions are mere writings (i.e. erotic stories) or drawings (i.e. anime cartoon pornography). The rationale behind such legislation is that depictions of sexual activity involving minors (even fictional ones) encourage the viewers of such material to pursue actual interactions with minors. As noted in Chapter 5, several studies provide evidence to the contrary, their authors reporting that viewing child pornography does not result in seeking out sexual encounters with minors (see Diamond & Uchiyama, 1999; Endrass et al., 2009).

6. Improve Sexual Health Education in Primary and Secondary Schools

Both Goode (2010) and I found that minor-attracted people start to become aware of their sexuality in their teenage years, or even earlier. Reaching out to young people during this period of self-discovery could potentially avert mental health problems later in life. Minor-attracted youth should be reassured that they are not bad people for having sexual desires that fall outside the norm, and they should be encouraged to seek whatever support they might need.

7. Provide Resources to Loved Ones of Minor-Attracted People

Resources should be made available to the loved ones of minor-attracted people. These resources could take the form of educational websites and pamphlets. A guide created specifically for those who know minor-attracted people could help teach them how to support the minor-attracted person in their lives. This guide could also offer support for how to cope with their own feelings of surprise, confusion, or anxiety. In addition to a help guide being published on a website and in pamphlets, loved ones of

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minor-attracted people should be encouraged to discuss their situation with trained mental health professionals. Doctors, counsellors, and crisis line volunteers should be sources of support for those seeking more information, or assistance in coping with their feelings.

8. Protect the Rights of Minor-Attracted People

Everybody should enjoy the same rights with respect to employment, freedom from harm, and the right to freedom of speech. Minor-attracted people should not experience discrimination as a result of their sexual identities. People who are attracted to minors should feel comfortable turning to the police if they have been victims of violence, threats, or blackmail. They should also be supported by anti-discrimination bodies, such as the Human Rights Tribunal, to ensure that they are not fired from their jobs as a result of their sexual identities. Minor-attracted people should expect and be entitled to receive the same treatment as any other person with any other sexual identity.

Suggestions for Future Research

As chronicled in Chapter 1 of this thesis, there is a large body of research on minor-attraction or "pedophilia." Unfortunately, most of this research draws on criminal or clinical populations, despite the fact that there are many minor-attracted people living within the general population who are not criminals and who are not involved in the mental health system (Goode, 2010; Wilson & Cox, 1983). Researchers should endeavour to reach the population of non-criminal, non-clinical minor-attracted people in order to better understand the lives and experiences of these people. Both large-scale quantitative investigations and participant-centred qualitative studies are necessary in order to produce a balanced picture of this population. In particular, future researchers should attempt to recruit large samples for their studies in order to gather data which can be generalized to the minor-attracted population as a whole.

In addition to the dearth of research on non-clinical, non-forensic populations of minor-attracted people, the lack of women's perspectives is a major gap in the research on minor-attracted adults. We know that there are women who are primarily attracted to minors (see Kanalratten, 1992); however, little is known about them. My study is a case

in point; while it was open to women participants, I only received responses from men. Researchers on minor-attraction should therefore make a determined effort to include female research participants in order to capture a wider scope of information about this population and their experiences. A more innovative approach may be necessary – simply being "open" to women participants does not appear to be an adequate means of recruiting them for research studies of this kind.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I pondered what I would do if I found myself primarily attracted to children, and I expressed pity for anybody in this situation. Over the course of this work, I have come to realize that minor-attracted people do not need pity – they require compassionate understanding of their many positive attributes, as well as acknowledgement of their essential humanity. My participants demonstrate incredible strength of character as they grapple with their stigmatized identities. The ingenuity and courage they deploy in the face of remarkable challenges highlight the resilience of minor-attracted people.

This thesis has emphasized that minor-attracted people are found in all sectors of our society – they could be anybody. They are our friends, spouses, family members, and co-workers. Imagining that minor-attracted people are evil monsters lurking in the bushes, waiting to snatch little children walking home from school, is a stark departure from the reality, which is that minor-attracted people live amongst us in great numbers as members of our communities. We urgently need to implement strategies that will alleviate the suffering of minor-attracted people and end discrimination against them.

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Appendix.

Definition of "Child Pornography" in the *Criminal Code of Canada*

163.1 (1) In this section, "child pornography" means

(a) a photographic, film, video or other visual representation, whether or not it was made by electronic or mechanical means,

> (i) that shows a person who is or is depicted as being under the age of eighteen years and is engaged in or is depicted as engaged in explicit sexual activity, or

> (ii) the dominant characteristic of which is the depiction, for a sexual purpose, of a sexual organ or the anal region of a person under the age of eighteen years;

(b) any written material, visual representation or audio recording that advocates or counsels sexual activity with a person under the age of eighteen years that would be an offence under this Act;

(c) any written material whose dominant characteristic is the description, for a sexual purpose, of sexual activity with a person under the age of eighteen years that would be an offence under this Act; or

(d) any audio recording that has as its dominant characteristic the description, presentation or representation, for a sexual purpose, of sexual activity with a person under the age of eighteen years that would be an offence under this Act. [Criminal Code, 1985, s. 163.1]