

The psychological life of paedophiles: a phenomenological study

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Quantitative research on paedophiles does not capture the psychological meaning of child sexual molestation for the perpetrators. This qualitative study attempted to address this aspect by exploring the subjective meaning of paedophilic experience for identified child molesters. Data derived from transcribed open-ended interviews with six identified paedophiles were analysed using an empirical phenomenological methodology. The results challenge traditional stereotypes of child molesters, and show this sample of paedophilic behaviour to originate from a range of non-sexual motives primarily related to unmet childhood needs for parental affection and affirmation. In this group, pervasive feelings of inadequacy and rejection, stemming from motionally neglectful or abusive parenting, results in the paedophile-to-be renouncing the dangerous world of adult sexuality, and turning to children as substitute sources of emotional and physical intimacy. The paedophile misinterprets children's emotional responsiveness as erotic interest, and takes great risks in his compulsive sexual pursuit of children. The child's gender is unimportant as the paedophile is driven primarily by the need for affirmation and affection. Although he avoids physically hurting his victims, the paedophile is unable to acknowledge that they might be psychologically harmed by his actions.

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Most sexual offences elicit social opprobrium, but child sexual abuse is typically considered to be the most reprehensible. The paedophile is regarded as a social pariah, the extreme embodiment of deviant sexuality. Laws consequently exist which prohibit adult sexual contact with children, and identify child sex offenders as a particular group from which the community needs to be protected. Only in the last decade has there been a proliferation of literature focused on the perpetrators of child sexual abuse, but our psychological knowledge of these individuals is still very limited. An agreed upon psychological profile of the 'typical' paedophile has yet to be developed, and perpetrators appear to constitute a heterogeneous group (Greenberg, 1990). Indeed, it has been argued that, except for the fact that they engage children in sexual activities for their own gratification, paedophiles are indistinguishable from other individuals (La Fontaine, 1990; Langevin, 1985; Quinsey, 1977). Most lay persons, however, do not believe that 'normal' adults want to have sex with children, or worse, that they actually do, and the stereotype of child molesters as 'depraved monsters' and 'filthy perverts' is a strongly held one (Kempe & Kempe, 1984). It is thus important to question the stereotypes and myths of child sexual abuse offenders that have flourished in the absence of systematic enquiry. Although some causal factors implicated in paedophilia have been identified by quantitative studies (Finkelhor, 1986), the psychological meaning of adult-child sexuality for paedophiles has largely been neglected. The aim of this research was to address this gap by accessing the subjective meaning of child abuse from the perpetrators' perspective, thereby exploring their personal experience of sexual responsiveness toward children. In other words, the subjectively lived experience of sexual abuse behaviour was explored in an endeavour to explicate the essential meanings that sexual contact with children has for this group of child molesters. For the purposes of this research, the term 'sexual contact' describes activity in which adults have physically touched children or had children touch them for the purpose of sexual arousal (Finkelhor, 1986).

Method

A form of qualitative analysis, the empirical phenomenological method (de Koning, 1979; Giorgi, 1975; Stones, 1988) was employed. The aim of this approach is to suspend one's assump-

tions and theoretical presuppositions in order to obtain comprehensive subjective descriptions that provide the basis for 'a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience' (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Essences refer to those constituent meanings which define the experience, and which cannot be sacrificed without compromising the integrity of the experience. The objective of phenomenological research is to uncover and accurately describe the essential meanings implicit in the subjects' naive descriptions of their experience. Such explication yields a condensed specific description or situated structure which illuminates the essence of each individual's unique experience. By identifying essential themes common to all or most subjects, a general description or structure of the experience in question is derived. This general description expresses the essential commonalities that unite different individuals' experience of the same phenomena, thereby allowing general statements to be made about the research phenomenon, without violating the meaning of each individual subject's idiosyncratic experience.

Subjects

Six white male volunteer subjects from the Durban Child and Family Treatment Unit child molester psychotherapy groups, which aim at the rehabilitation of identified child abuse offenders, comprised the sample. Only male subjects were included as there were no available female subjects. The criteria the subjects had to satisfy were, firstly, that their sexual interests and responses were directed toward children and adolescents under the age of 16 years; and secondly, that subjects were willing and able to provide a detailed, coherent, and relatively articulate account of their sexual interest in children.

Data collection

Each subject, after having been informed of the method and objectives of the research, was requested to verbally relate his subjective experience of his sexual interest in, and sexual contact with, children. Subjects were encouraged to provide as much detail as possible and to avoid censoring their narratives. The interviews were unstructured, open-ended, and conducted privately in an informal manner. Other than the initial request for comprehensive, uncensored personal accounts of their sexual attraction

to, and involvement with, children, no direct questions were asked. The rationale for this was to avoid imposing any moral, ideological, or theoretical frame of reference onto the subjects' experience, thereby compromising its uniqueness or inclining it towards any explicit or implicit researcher hypotheses (Giorgi, 1975, 1995). Interview interventions were consequently restricted to requests for clarification or fuller descriptions of experiences, rather than eliciting particular information. The interviews were recorded on audio tape and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

The analysis of the data involved making explicit the subjectively lived meanings of sexual contact with children. This involved the following four steps:

1. The transcribed interviews (protocols) were broken down into spontaneously emerging natural meaning units (NMUs): statements expressing single, delimited aspects of the subjects' experiences (Stones, 1988), without altering the subjects' wording. For example, the following text segment, although comprising two sentences, constitutes a single natural meaning unit: 'While I accept that the blame was all mine, the boy did not move away and seemed to be enjoying it because he got an erection. Obviously it was okay for him, so it was okay for me to have done that.' The central meaning here is that the subject does not in fact take responsibility, but instead absolves himself of blame by alleging that the child in question was sexually aroused, thereby rationalising his sexual contact with the child.
2. The central theme of each natural meaning unit was extracted and transformed into a revelatory psychological statement which accurately and concisely expressed the subjects' intended meanings. The NMU example above is thus transformed into the following revelatory psychological statement at this point: 'The subject denies responsibility for the sexual contact and justifies his behaviour through his belief that the child was a willing participant in the sexual interaction.' This statement goes beyond the subject's own immediate self-understanding by disclosing meaning reflectively evident upon a closer reading of the NMU. Redundant and repetitive themes were excluded in this stage.
3. The remaining essential themes were integrated into a condensed specific description (Stones, 1988) expressing each subject's lived experience of sexual attraction to children.
4. The themes common to the specific descriptions were identified, abstracted from their specific contexts, and integrated into a single general description of the psychological meaning that paedophilia has for the subjects. No claims of universality are made, the objective being to attain a 'level of description that is neither universal nor particular but general' (Svensson, 1986, p. 32). The result is a level of psychological description which captures the essential meaning of paedophilia for all the subjects interviewed, without violating the idiosyncratic quality of the experience for any of them. For example, although all of the subjects were aware at some level that their behaviour was morally wrong and exploitative, they nevertheless persisted in their sexual contact with children. They sought to relieve the dissonance between their moral awareness and their actions by attributing their sexual desires to their child victims, thereby justifying their own conduct. This general theme is conveyed in the following general description: 'The paedophile seeks to minimise the discomfort of these conflicting feelings and justify his actions through the belief that children desire sexual contact with him and, in some cases, initiate this contact. Children are consequently perceived to be consenting participants rather than victims, and the paedophile shows no conscious awareness of any harmful consequences of his behaviour for the children involved.' For the purposes of this article only the results of the last stage will be described, followed by a discussion of the findings.

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General description of the essential meaning of paedophilia

The male paedophile is a 'child-man', psychologically arrested at the childhood point that he failed to elicit love, recognition, and affirmation from parental figures. Subject one stated, 'I'm a 29-year-old male, but all the time I feel like a seven-year-old ... always scared. I've always been just a child who has never grown up.' A general lack of selfworth, dating back to this point, is manifest in a pervasive sense of powerlessness, inferiority, and inadequacy. He typically describes himself as having been a 'loner' who never felt accepted by his biological or adoptive parents. An aura of failure and selfdisappointment colours his interactions with others, alienates him from the comfortable give-and-take of social intercourse, and saturates each potential erotic adult encounter with anticipated rejection and humiliation.

His childhood history of physical abuse, emotional neglect, and experience of parental rejection predestines him to experience each new adult relationship as a repetition of his original parental interactions. His mother, perceived to be strict and unresponsive to his needs for affection and physical contact, informs his later perceptions of adult women as critical and rejecting, and his related self-perception of being inadequate and disappointing. Subject two conveyed this as follows: 'I feel that I disappointed my mother so much that she rejected me ... I guess I'm afraid that other women will do the same to me.' In addition, a cold, distant, and harshly authoritarian father prevents identification with adult masculinity, which seems remote and inaccessible to him. Exploratory sexual play in the paedophile's childhood years, frequently culminating in intimate sexual activities with same-sex peers during early adolescence, is consequently invested with the significance of substitute intimacy and acknowledgement.

In this context the transition from boyhood to adult emotional potency is impossible, and adult sexuality is fraught with the immanent threat of being recast in the humiliating role of inadequate, unlovable child. Early adult heterosexual contacts are imbued with varying degrees of sexual anxiety, fear of loss, or actual experiences of rejection. Those who risk entering the world of adult sexual relating experience their partners as sexually unresponsive, disinterested, or unsatisfied, thereby confirming feelings of inadequacy, rejection, and alienation. Subject three expressed this as follows: 'Right from the beginning I felt that I couldn't satisfy my wife sexually, and I always had that thrown in my face, so that turned me off.' For others, the possibility of adult sexual attachments appears too perilous and threatening, and is consequently never explored.

Two styles of paedophilic sexuality are evident, based on the onset of sexual interest in children. Two of the subjects reported adolescent onset of sexual interest in children, and the remaining four displayed adult onset. Adolescent onset of sexual contact with children occurs in those molesters who, from a young age, consciously experience themselves as being emotionally and sexually drawn to young children, while adult onset molester behaviour is associated with moralistic sexual attitudes, and suppression of general sexual interest and activity during adolescence. Adult onset molesters report having no sexual interest in children prior to sexual contact, believing this interest to have been activated by their initial sexual contact with children. Both

adult and adolescent onset molesters are obsessed by sexual fantasies about children, and feel compelled to engage in opportunity-seeking and risk-taking behaviour in order to fulfil their compulsive desire for sexual contact with children. One subject stated, 'I was hooked on something and I had to have it. If I couldn't get it I was like a mad person.'

The paedophile's childhood discovery of sexual meaning is suffused by explicit parental moral/religious antipathy toward sexual matters. In this prohibitive family ethos sexuality is a forbidden zone, charged with anxiety and guilt. Thus, despite his deviant sexual conduct, the paedophile has high ethical standards and moralistic attitudes toward sexual behaviour. Subject six, who began molesting his stepdaughter after having felt sexually rejected by his wife remarked, oblivious to the irony, 'I guess I should have had an affair, but I thought that would be wrong.'

His self-perceptions tainted by the experience of parental rejection, his psychological maturation retarded by unmet needs for love and affirmation, his sexual curiosity repudiated by a moralistic family environment, his access to masculinity and emotional potency barred by a father with whom he cannot identify, the paedophile-to-be forsakes the critical, depriving, and rejecting world of adult erotic relating. Experiencing himself as a child exiled from the possibilities of adult loving, the paedophile turns to 'other' children for the affection, love, and affirmation denied to him as a child. The close association of physical affection and sexual intimacy, together with a history of conflicted sexual feelings, colours his emotional attraction to children with compelling erotic meaning. His inability to discriminate between sex and affection, and his tendency to relate to children as extensions of himself, allows him to misperceive children's responsiveness to him as a sexual invitation. Subject five could not see himself as a child molester because, 'I never started it with these girls, they started it with me.'

The obsessive and compelling attraction to children is powered by three interrelated motive forces:

- (1) by projecting his own unmet needs on to children, and then 'loving' them physically, he loves himself and remediates his own childhood lack of affection. Although intensely attracted to children's youthful appearance and physical beauty, the primary significance of the paedophile's behaviour lies in his attempt to fulfil unmet childhood and adult needs for emotional and physical intimacy through sexual contact with children;
- (2) his adult status in the eyes of a child gives him a sense of power and influence notably absent in his encounters with other adults. The paedophile feels temporarily strong, dominant, important and sexually adequate through his contact with children, frequently as a result of his self-perceived ability to arouse sexual desire and pleasure in them. Subject three stated, 'I had a very powerful feeling ... I could do something to a child sexually and he would actually enjoy it like I did'; and
- (3) children's naive emotional responsiveness, warmth, and uncritical acceptance contrasts with his experience of adults as judgmental, punitive, and rejecting. Children are consequently perceived to be less emotionally 'dangerous' than adults.

The sex of the children seems to hold no importance for the paedophile. Rather, it is their positive responsiveness to him that magnetises them as sexual targets. The paedophile interprets his sexual overtures as being an expression of his love for children, and is aggrieved that his actions are considered destructive by others. Most subjects expressed feelings of affection toward their

victims, and one subject elaborated on his 'gentle' handling of children as follows: I like responsiveness and closeness, and rape and penetration doesn't have that for a little girl because of the pain. That interferes with the fantasy and doesn't turn me on.'

Concurrently, however, the paedophile frequently experiences guilt and shame, an indication that that he judges his own sexual conduct as immoral. He seeks to minimise the discomfort of these conflicting feelings and justify his actions through the belief that children desire sexual contact with him and, in some cases, initiate this contact. One subject, after acknowledging that he had abused his position of authority and power to make sexual contact with children added, 'but I never once forced a child to do anything he wasn't willing to do'. Children are consequently perceived to be consenting participants rather than victims, and the paedophile shows no conscious awareness of any harmful consequences of his behaviour for the children involved. Orgasm, frequently produced by masturbation, may occur during sexual contact with children, or later through masturbatory fantasies related to this sexual contact. Suffering self-recrimination, however, the paedophile episodically attempts to curb his sexual behaviour by suppressing his fantasies of children, and refraining from masturbatory activities incorporating these fantasies. Despite his conscious efforts, the compelling attraction of children cannot be completely suppressed, and he exists painfully suspended between a fearful adult sexual world and the forbidden realm of regressive childish fulfilment.

Discussion

Symptomatic sexuality, like other psychological symptoms, can be regarded as an attempt at self-cure, i.e., it is a meaningful attempt to avoid psychic suffering (McDougall, 1995). By bringing this perspective to bear on the phenomenon of paedophilia, a different picture of the child molester emerges, one that contrasts sharply with the popular portrayal of him as a depraved, sadistic monster. Some points emerging from the general description are of special interest.

Most striking, perhaps, is the recurrent theme of deficient parenting, and the resulting unmet needs for emotional intimacy and physical affection during the paedophile's childhood years. This does not provide an explanation for all molester behaviour, but should rather be viewed as an indication of the nonsexual motives and meanings embedded in ostensibly sexual behaviour. The paedophile experiences his sexual contact with children as emotionally satisfying, thereby suggesting that sexual contact is a vehicle for childhood emotional needs that were inadequately met by parental figures. These apparently nonsexual motives for paedophile behaviour are consistent with those documented by Sgroi (1982).

Groth, Hobson, and Grant (1982) note that molesters, as a result of childhood emotional deprivation, or even overprotection, remain emotionally arrested at this childhood level, and attempt to give the love they missed or wished they had to children who resemble themselves. This narcissistic mode of relating to children as extensions of themselves was evident in three subjects, and partially accounts for molesters' perceptions of their behaviour as expressions of love rather than sexual exploitation.

All of the subjects expressed a pervasive sense of powerlessness, inferiority, and inadequacy dating back to childhood. This supports similar findings by other researchers (Groth 1982; Panton, 1978). The molester experiences himself to be a vulnerable and inadequate child, rather than an adult. Relating sexually to children enables the paedophile to feel a sense of power, dominance, importance and control, which temporarily compensates for

a long-standing experience of inadequacy and impotence arising from perceived parental emotional neglect or mistreatment.

A common theme, supporting Howells' (1979) findings, was that of the molester demonstrating little efficacy in his social relationships, and as being blocked in his ability to meet his sexual and emotional needs in adult relationships. The molester relates to adult sexual partners in a way that echoes his experience of parental figures – they reject, criticise, and make him feel inadequate.

Pervasive feelings of inadequacy may also be related to explicitly sexual humiliation. One subject recalls how his step-mother, observing him in the bath, would say: 'You've got such a small willy. You have nothing to hide, you're never going to be a man.'

Gillespie (1965) describes child molesters as having a history of conflictual maternal relationships, making it difficult or impossible to relate normally to adult women. This pattern of maternal relating was evident in five of the six subjects. The critical, rejecting and humiliating maternal image does not hold in all cases, however. One subject observed: 'I never came out of the cocoon my mother had spun for me, she was too overprotective. Whenever I liked a girl, I would always see my mother in her and it would feel like a mother-child relationship. In this case the subject's perception that his mother refused to allow her son to separate from her meant that he could not successfully manage his Oedipal anxiety. In his fantasies, sex with an adult woman was therefore equated with incest. Paedophilia, in this instance, represents a solution to an unresolved Oedipal dilemma.

While the general importance of Oedipal dynamics in the origin of paedophilia is debatable, varying degrees of sexual anxiety, and fear of loss or rejection in early adult relationships are characteristic of the molester's heterosexual history. Greenberg (1990) suggests that early traumatic forays into sexual behaviour may lead to the molester associating adult sexuality with anxiety and emotional distress, resulting in him seeking substitute sexual gratification from children. Our research, however, suggests that a history of perceived childhood failure to elicit parental love predisposes the molester to experience adult heterosexual contact in terms of rejection and inadequacy. Even for adult onset molesters, the origin of the disorder appears to lie in the childhood experience of emotionally deficient parental provision.

An interesting finding to emerge was that the sex of the child seems to have little importance for the paedophile. All of the subjects had either had sexual contact with, or fantasised about, children of both sexes. This fact may be interpreted in a number of ways. It could be argued that owing to a bisexual predisposition the paedophile, simply craving sexual stimulation and gratification, is indiscriminate as to the sex of his victims. However, given the prominent role played by apparently non-sexual motives in paedophilic behaviour, another interpretation suggests itself. If the primary motive force driving the paedophile's actions stems from the craving of unmet needs for emotional intimacy, recognition, and affection, then the sex of the child is understandably not important. Any child who responds to the paedophile's emotional needs will be perceived as desirable. From this perspective, sexual contact is a realadaptive vehicle for emotional connectedness, rather than *vice versa*. One subject initiated sexual contact with two children who were siblings. He perceived the male child to be a willing participant, but upon initiating sexual contact with the female child recalls, 'it was like doing something to a dead fish, she was all taut and stiff... that's why I didn't carry on'. This indicates that it is children's perceived emotional receptiveness to the paedophile, rather than their sex, which feeds the paedophile's sexual attraction.

A popular perception of paedophiles is that they lack moral conscience, and coldly pursue their selfish pleasure without guilt or concern for the moral standards of society. In fact, Gebhard *et al.* (1965) note that sexual abuse behaviour may be positively correlated with *moralistic* sexual attitudes, and Goldstein, Kant, and Hartman (1973) found that child molesters were the most sexually repressed of all sex offenders. These findings are supported by this study, which reveals all of the subjects to be moralistic individuals whose strict sexual mores contributed to sexual conflict and their inability to seek sexual gratification from appropriate adult partners. In most cases the subjects' moralistic attitudes toward sexuality reflected the reported negative attitudes towards sexuality held by their parents.

Sexual abuse of the molester, with this contact being experienced as either emotionally fulfilling or traumatic, was evident in the childhood histories of two subjects. Groth *et al.* (1982) note that such sexual abuse promotes an imprinting or conditioning process, while Howells (1981) suggests that what may be important about the experience of molestation is not the conditioning, but having a model who finds children stimulating. Furthermore, in cases where they have been molested themselves, paedophiles may be attempting to master their own experience of being abused by reversing roles in the victimisation they suffered. In other words, the molester might need a sexual relationship with children in order to overcome the sense of humiliation and powerlessness experienced as a child at the hands of an adult.

While childhood sexual abuse is not common to most of the subjects, physical abuse by maternal and/or paternal figures is, along with emotional deprivation and feelings of powerlessness experienced in parent-child relationships. It is possible that childhood trauma need not be as extreme as sexual abuse in order to activate a need in the molester to combat his childhood feelings of powerlessness through 'identification with the aggressor' (Freud, 1936).

Perceived sexual accessibility of children in the context of a caretaking role, and reduced sexual inhibition to sexual contact with non-biological children, were prominent themes in this study. Disinhibition also clearly results from the molesters' perception of children as willing participants. A lowering of inhibitions through the use of alcohol at the time of sexual contact with the child was evident in only one subject, and generally poor impulse control was manifest in another. Both these factors have been cited in the literature (Gebhard *et al.*, 1965; Kempe & Kempe, 1984) as reasons for the absence or weakness of conventional moral inhibitions against sex with children. It is noteworthy, however, that these factors did not feature in most of the subjects in this study.

All of the subjects acknowledged that they had taken advantage of their dominance and the trust invested in them to pursue sexual relations with children. Despite the resulting guilt and shame, indications of their awareness of the moral unacceptability of their actions, molesters do not take into account the status and power differentials between themselves and children. They therefore do not consider the implications of these differentials for children's freedom of choice, autonomy, and thus mutuality. The children are viewed as being willing and responsive participants, who desire and enjoy sexual contact with adults.

Howells (1981) has speculated that a process of attributional error may play a role in inducing sexual responsiveness to children. Children elicit strong emotional reactions in many people, reactions usually labelled 'parental' or 'affectionate', but the molester misreads these reactions as sexual, and acts accordingly toward children. In addition, children's desire for emotionally

intimate relationships with adults is assumed by molesters to be an indication that children desire sexual contact, further reinforcing molesters' sexual responses.

Finkelhor (1986) suggests that certain socialisation experiences, or subjectively felt sexual deprivation, may prompt an individual to label any emotional arousal as sexual in nature. It is possible that, as a result of emotional deprivation during childhood, and the lack of fulfilment of emotional and sexual needs in adult relationships, paedophiles mistakenly label their emotional arousal to children seeking closeness as sexual interest. They then respond accordingly, viewing the children as willing participants. Once having labelled their responses as sexual, molesters may reinforce this through repetition and fantasy, and thereby acquire a more specifically sexual arousal to a particular child, or children in general. In this study, it was evident that the adult onset molesters' sexual behaviour towards children was activated by their initial sexual contact with children, and subsequent sexual fantasies about this contact, having previously experienced no conscious sexual interest in children. The same process may be seen to occur in the adolescent onset molesters' sexual responsiveness to children, activated at an earlier age.

The paedophile clearly experiences his sexual pursuit of children as compulsive, and compulsively masturbates to images retained from sexual contact with children. Finkelhor (1986) notes that masturbation is highly reinforcing, increasing the molester's interest in, and sexual arousal to, children, resulting in the development of a fixation. It is possible that the activity of masturbation increases the compelling quality of the abusive behaviour, a theme evident in all of the subjects. Feelings of sexual arousal, enjoyment, adequacy, emotional intimacy, and dominance in adult-child sexual contact, evident in varying degrees in all of the subjects, may also be strongly reinforcing to paedophilic behaviour, giving such behaviour the addictive quality experienced by the molester.

Despite subjects' reported attempts to curb their paedophilic behaviour, there was little evidence of insight into the possible harmful consequences of such behaviour for the children concerned. In view of this, together with subjects' belief that sexual contact was facilitated by the children's desire for sexual intimacy, it is evident that denial is a frequently employed defensive strategy against the guilt and shame underlying paedophilic justification.

There are, however, a number of additional factors preventing the paedophile from acknowledging the potentially damaging impact of his behaviour. The first is the general absence of aggressive intent, and his investment in maintaining affectionate ties to his victims. A number of subjects mentioned that they avoided sexual intercourse with children because this may be painful or harmful to the victims, thereby disrupting the children's emotional responsiveness. The absence of aggressive intent, together with the concern about not physically harming his victims, appears to make it more difficult for the paedophile to acknowledge the possibility of psychologically harming children. Another factor which prevents paedophiles from appreciating the adult-child power differential, and the harmful effects of their behaviour, is the underlying feeling that they themselves are not really adults. One subject conveyed this very clearly: 'I feel like I'm not threatening to kids because I see myself as a kid – a man with a small willy.' If the paedophile experiences himself psychologically as a child, it is hardly surprising that he struggles to appreciate how others may perceive him to be an abusive adult.

Conclusion

The psychological profile of the paedophile which emerges from this research differs radically from popular portrayals of a sadistic, ruthless, and deranged child rapist. The paedophile, rather, is himself an emotional child, psychologically small, inadequate, and ill-equipped to negotiate a world of adult social and sexual relating. His deviant behaviour, although sexualised, expresses the regressive longing for emotional warmth, recognition, and affirmation absent from his own childhood. The meaning of this involvement with children is not sadistic or aggressive, but primarily concerns the experience of feeling sexually and emotionally adequate, accepted, and in control, all of which temporarily compensates him for an underlying sense of inadequacy and rejection in relation to actual or potential adult partners. In addition to supporting much of the existing literature on child molesters this research, it is argued, illuminates the subjective meaning of the paedophile's behaviour, and hopefully presents a fresh perspective on the deviant sexual strategies that some individuals employ to avoid psychic pain.

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