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College of Psychology and Community Services

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Abstract

Causal Attributions, Implicit Beliefs, and Immutability from the Perceptions of

Pedophiles

by

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BA, University of Texas – El Paso, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Pedophilic immutability is a complex phenomenon that has been challenging to understand. Perceptions of pedophiles have largely been ignored in understanding how pedophilic immutability develops. However, relationships between causal attributions and implicit beliefs may provide evidence for new conceptualizations related to pedophilic immutability. The purpose of this study was to explore pedophiles' perceptions directly with attribution and implicit theory as key foundational principles of pedophilic immutability. Research questions were developed to allow for rich description from participants regarding their causal attributions and implicit beliefs associated with pedophilic immutability. Qualitative exploration was necessary to address the dearth of research related to pedophilic immutability focusing on pedophiles' perceptions. Four male individuals volunteered and participated in the research study interviews. Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes among causal attribution and implicit beliefs that are associated with pedophilic immutability. Major themes identified during thematic analysis included that pedophilia development is complex, nature then nurture, nothing I can do about it, never believed but tried and failed, reality for pedophiles, and change is ambiguous. External causal attributions led to entity implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability, which was likely a main factor behind that particular mindset. A more diverse population with a deeper sample size would provide stronger evidence for some of the resulting interpretations. The findings from this study can be used to facilitate positive social change through development of a conceptual framework and a more comprehensive societal view of pedophilic immutability.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Pedophilia is generally defined as a sexual attraction or interest in minors by adults who are typically at least 5 years older than the victim (Gannon, 2021). Pedophilia is a significant problem as it can cause substantial physical harm, severe mental anguish, and other long-term health issues to the child victims involved (Zagrodney & Cummings, 2021). The increased risk of future offending associated with victims of child sexual abuse is an additional concern (Kahn et al., 2021). Recidivism and reoffending are also major concerns due to an increased likelihood amongst the pedophile population (Zagrodney & Cummings, 2021). Alternative views of pedophilia are less concerned with any suggested negative impact and typically illustrate pedophilic behavior as a sexual orientation that has beneficial aspects (Fedoroff, 2020). The ambiguity surrounding pedophilia influences how treatment interventions are conceptualized and developed, which affects outcomes (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan & Briken, 2019; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Pedophiles have an untapped cornucopia of knowledge and experience that should be explored to determine how perceptions associated with pedophilic immutability are developed.

A crucial principle of multiple treatment interventions related to pedophilia involves pedophilic immutability (Fedoroff, 2020; Lampalzer et al., 2021; Levenson et al., 2020). Acceptance and management of pedophilia is one major framework associated with some current treatment interventions (Lampalzer et al., 2021; Levenson et al., 2020). Other treatment interventions are more flexible in conceptualization and support

malleability of pedophilia (Lampalzer et al., 2021; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018).

Thus, a more comprehensive understanding is needed regarding the development of pedophilic immutability and its influence on perception. Direct insight from pedophiles is critical to establishing patterns that represent how these perceptions are developed.

The exploratory nature of this study limits direct social change for pedophiles and is mostly relegated to potential implications. Identification of pedophiles' perceptions related to pedophilic immutability is essential for providing improved comprehension regarding how these offenders view and understand themselves. Direct social change for pedophiles resulting from this study can involve increased public awareness regarding pedophilia development and potential for change. Increased awareness related to pedophiles' perceptions could also have far-reaching indirect social implications related to suggestions for future research outside the scope of this study. The influence certain perceptions hold over behavior and how that potentially affects treatment interventions could be a preliminary direction to explore. Causal attribution and implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability may be of interest to future research involving the dynamic links between these factors.

Major sections of Chapter 1 including current circumstances, previous research, and conceptualizations related to pedophilic immutability are discussed within the background. A significant problem in the literature is an absence of pedophiles' thoughts, feelings, experiences, and beliefs related to pedophilic immutability. Hence, knowledge of how pedophiles perceive their ability to change sexual interests and behavior could be a crucial missing link in understanding pedophilic immutability. Causal attributions and

implicit beliefs are used to illustrate how pedophilic immutability could potentially be developed. Additional factors such as key concepts, methodology, and rationale are then detailed in the purpose of study. Finally, potential contributions include increased awareness of pedophilic immutability that could fuel future research.

Background

Opinions and conceptualizations vary regarding the topic of whether pedophilia is stable or malleable. Certain members of the scientific community support an immutable approach, which suggests pedophilia is a stable trait (Fedoroff, 2020). Pedophilia has been touted as a sexual orientation similar to homosexuality, which justifies the implication suggesting that pedophilic interests are immutable (Fedoroff, 2020). The conceptualization of pedophilic immutability as stable also provides support that pedophilia is an untreatable condition and should therefore be recognized as a naturally occurring phenomenon (Fedoroff, 2020). Core treatment principles associated with the immutable approach typically involve acceptance and management (Levenson et al., 2020).

The opposing argument concerning pedophilic immutability suggests that pedophilia is a malleable trait that has potential for change (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Pedophilia is considered a flexible sexual interest instead of an unremitting life-long condition (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). The position that suggests pedophilia is malleable tends to view pedophilic interests and behavior more a result of circumstances than genetics (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). A main focus of treatment predominantly revolves around

shaping those sexual interests and behaviors to more appropriate expressions (Levenson et al., 2020). Malleability related to pedophilia is suggestive of personal control, which can be a significant motivating factor (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018).

The type of information being presented can have significant potential influence on how pedophiles engage in treatment participation and adherence (Levenson et al., 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Both the immutable and mutable approaches have distinct drawbacks, which can possibly make them unappealing options for treatment. One major possible consequence of the immutable approach involves potential impact on pedophiles' expectations related to change (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Treatment strategies that promote pedophilia as an immutable trait may potentially impair and diminish pedophiles' perceptions of their own ability to change sexual interests (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). However, the mutable approach is not without its own flaws, which can make pedophiles feel more stigmatized due to feelings of culpability and guilt (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Thus, interventions that suggest pedophilia can be changed may cause substantial stress if the approach is misguided or objectives are unreachable (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018).

Research that is focused on pedophilic immutability has predominantly been overlooked, resulting in a dearth of current literature. The minimal research directly associated with perceptions of pedophilic immutability has typically focused on external observers and has largely ignored pedophiles' perspectives (Heron et al., 2023). The general public tends to believe that pedophilia is either innate, uncontrollable and therefore hopeless, or that pedophiles can be helped but are undeserving (Heron et al.,

2023). Perceptions of pedophiles have been assessed with the majority indirectly agreeing that pedophilia is not chosen and unlikely to discontinue (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). As a result, direct exploration of pedophiles' perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability along with its association to causal attributions and implicit beliefs has not been extensively considered.

Clarity has been elusive in the argument concerning pedophilic immutability and underscores a primary reason for more rigorous evaluation. One critical factor obstructing clarity is the absence of an accepted overarching conceptual framework related to pedophilic immutability. The association between causal attributions and implicit beliefs may illustrate how perceptions associated with pedophilic immutability are developed. An essential component potentially limiting current conceptual frameworks is the exclusion of pedophiles' perceptions. Therefore, insight from pedophiles related to pedophilic immutability could potentially produce new conceptualizations for understanding pedophilia.

Problem Statement

Ambiguity regarding how pedophilic immutability is conceptualized and subsequently treated continues to be a major area of concern within the scientific community (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). The absence of a guiding conceptual framework leaves pedophilic immutability in disputation, which needs further exploration and more comprehensive understanding (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Furthermore, contradictory conceptualizations of pedophilic immutability have been adopted in the scientific community with unconvincing supporting evidence (Fedoroff,

2020). However, pedophiles might be able to contribute insight that has been predominantly overlooked within current research (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Thus, qualitative exploration of pedophiles' perceptions could capture experiences and feelings that are directly related to pedophilic immutability development.

The current climate surrounding pedophilia has been wavering with respect to how pedophilic immutability is perceived. Pedophilia has currently been endorsed as an orientation rather than the former conceptualization of sexual interest (Mundy, 2022). As a result, misidentification, misappropriation, or miscommunication related to pedophilic immutability are significant barriers for appropriate treatment (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). In addition, the lack of a guiding conceptual framework has had a significant effect on how treatment interventions have conceptualized and approached pedophilic immutability (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Therefore, direct insight from pedophiles is necessary to bring clarification of the widespread ambiguity regarding pedophilic immutability and should limit confusion among the general public.

Sexual orientation is described as an enduring tendency characterized by orienting specifically towards preferred types or conditions related to sexually related stimuli in terms of attraction, interest, and attention (Mundy, 2022). Current arguments have centered on the sexual orientation debate to illustrate immutability of pedophilic interests (Fedoroff, 2020). The opposing debate recommends conceptualizing pedophilia as a mutable trait that is developed and can potentially be altered (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). However, conceptualizations related to pedophilic immutability have predominantly relied on opinions from individuals who have no direct experience with

pedophilia (Fedoroff, 2020). Early indications from previous conceptual models have demonstrated the importance associated with perception (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Perception is predominantly learned and then developed, which could illustrate how causal attributions and implicit beliefs play a role in pedophilic immutability.

Research studies related to pedophilic immutability have been lacking an overarching conceptual framework with developmental efforts being few and far between (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Self-beliefs have preliminarily been identified as having significant relevance to pedophiles' perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Moreover, investigations involving pedophiles' perceptions have been limited to narrow scopes that only scratched the surface of what pedophiles can offer for research purposes (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). However, a qualitative approach exploring pedophiles' perceptions related to causal attributions and implicit beliefs may broaden our understanding of pedophilic immutability. Potential ramifications related to this increasingly significant controversy highlight the importance for further investigation from an alternative approach.

Purpose of the Study

Immutability of pedophilia continues to be an ongoing challenge considering the noticeable disagreement within scientific communities. The purpose of this basic qualitative inquiry was to explore pedophiles' perceptions to better understand how pedophilic immutability is developed. Basic qualitative inquiry approaches allow participants to express meaning of a particular phenomenon through their own views or

experiences (Gomes & Duarte, 2020). The perceptions of pedophiles have predominantly been overlooked, but their inclusion is necessary to appropriately address pedophilic immutability (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). In this study, I aimed to gather rich, descriptive data about how pedophiles develop their perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability.

A qualitative approach was uniquely suitable for allowing the exploration of pedophiles' perceptions related to pedophilic immutability. Pedophiles' perspectives are critical because the understanding of pedophilic immutability might pose too difficult of a challenge for external observers to explicate. Pedophiles can offer valuable insight regarding pedophilic immutability due to their lived experiences. Additionally, focused attention towards pedophiles' perceptions should facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the unique cognitive schemata employed by these individuals related to pedophilic immutability. Hence, an examination of causal attributions and implicit beliefs might provide a foundation for how pedophilic immutability is developed.

A need for a better understanding of this complex phenomenon is underscored by the uncertainty that is currently headlining pedophilic immutability. In addition, a deep exploration of pedophiles' perceptions related to pedophilic immutability could provide a dramatic shift in the way this phenomenon could potentially be conceptualized and addressed. Thus, causal attributions and implicit beliefs were included in this study to identify any possible links with pedophilic immutability or its development. Causal attributions have been suggested to shape implicit beliefs and potentially affect the method in which individuals perceive pedophilic immutability (Kimber et al., 2021; Tao

et al., 2021). Therefore, the method in which experiences are interpreted was an important initial point of investigation.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do pedophiles attribute the cause of pedophilic attractions?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do pedophiles perceive pedophilic immutability?

Conceptual Framework

The guiding conceptual framework in this study involved elements of attribution and implicit theories. A primary component associated with attribution theory is causal attributions that include internal and external dimensions of responsibility (Weiner, 1985). One crucial premise of attribution theory suggests that behavior can be significantly influenced by how individuals interpret past events (Weiner, 1985). Attribution theory was largely a product of motive x expectancy x value (Atkinson, 1957) along with the can x try approach (Heider, 1958), which underscores an association between expectations and results. The most relevant dimension associated with attribution theory in regard to this study was the locus of causality. Locus of causality indicates if an individual perceives a cause internally or externally (Weiner, 1985). When an individual feels the source of a problem is internal, then this person is more likely to increase effort that could potentially result in positive outcomes. When an individual feels the source of a problem is external, then this person seems unlikely to increase effort, which then makes positive outcomes less likely.

A principal component of implicit theory includes perceptions that individuals have regarding personal traits, including areas such as intelligence, personality, and athleticism (Dweck et al., 1995). Perception and the corresponding capacity for change that an individual believes they have been highlighted within implicit theory are crucial elements. Meaning systems have been compared with and deemed similarly important as logical thinking in addition to being a critical component for shaping behavior (Stevenson, 1962). A major component of implicit theory is malleability, which refers to whether characteristics are fixed or not. Trait malleability includes two dimensions, with incremental indicating perceived flexibility and entity expressing a perception of stability (Dweck et al., 1995). Individuals who perceive that pedophilic interests are caused by an external source will likely feel their behavior is not controllable. Individuals who do not feel in control likely doubt that they have the ability to change a particular behavior. Thus, the causal attributions pedophiles engage in are likely to have a significant effect on how these individuals perceive pedophilic immutability.

Social behavior is significantly influenced by how individuals interpret past events or experiences (Weiner, 1985). Thus, I used the conceptual framework as an attempt to highlight how causal attributions associated with pedophilia influence perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability. External causal attributions of pedophilia are assumed to associate more strongly with perceptions that regard pedophilia as immutable. Internal causal attributions of pedophilia are assumed to associate more strongly with perceptions that regard pedophilia as mutable. I elaborate on the conceptual framework and its underpinnings in Chapter 2.

Causal attributions shape implicit beliefs, subsequently affecting the method in which pedophiles perceive pedophilic immutability (Kimber et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2021). Therefore, the primary focus of this study revolved around directly examining pedophiles' perceptions. A basic qualitative inquiry approach was best suited to explore personal experiences, which was a primary objective of the study. The first RQ allowed me to explore whether pedophiles perceive their pedophilia as externally or internally caused. The second RQ focused on exploring whether pedophiles perceive their pedophilia as fixed or malleable. Links between causal attributions, implicit beliefs, and pedophilic immutability could provide clarity for development of a conceptual framework.

Nature of the Study

Exploration of individual perception was the primary focus associated with this research study. Identification of how pedophiles interpret past events and causal attributions associated with those experiences was critical to establishing the conceptual framework. Hence, I selected and applied a basic qualitative inquiry due to its propensity for obtaining comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena. An added benefit of using a basic qualitative inquiry was its ability in uncovering certain processes, strategies, or techniques that may not be noticeable without focused exploration (see Gomes & Duarte, 2020). Rich, descriptive data are critical in highlighting key themes related to the processes involved with pedophilic immutability perceptions.

Processes involved in developing perceptions concerning pedophilic immutability were a primary focus as the phenomenon of interest. Key constructs investigated included

causal attributions, implicit beliefs, and their relationship with pedophilic immutability. I conducted a qualitative exploration of pedophiles' experiences to potentially highlight the processes influencing perception development regarding pedophilic immutability.

Associations between causal attributions and implicit beliefs might contribute significantly to how pedophiles perceive pedophilic immutability. Furthermore, identification of these associations could provide the foundation for novel directions for future research to consider.

The participant pool consisted of individuals who were active in an online forum which caters to the pedophile community. Males aged 18 or older who were sexually attracted to children were the main population of interest for this study. Inclusion criteria included a self-reported sexual attraction to children without having acted on those interests. An additional key characteristic was that participants were 18+ years of age and had sexual interests in children 13 or younger. Participants needed to have been active in the forum for at least 6 months and were currently in therapy or counseling. Selected participants also needed to read and understand English.

Primary data collection method was the use of qualitative semistructured interviews. Qualitative semistructured interviews feature open-ended questions designed to obtain rich, descriptive data. Additional forms of data collection included observations and fieldnotes, which allowed me the opportunity for firsthand context to be contributed. The purpose of this study was to explore pedophiles' perceptions regarding immutability, which would indicate thematic analysis as a potentially suitable qualitative data analytic method. The purpose of thematic analysis was to identify themes or patterns that can be

used to represent meaning from qualitative data. Meaningful expressions derived from thematic data analysis should represent core concepts being highlighted within the conceptual framework.

Definitions

Causal attributions: Perceptions of causality that individuals assign to a given situation, problem, event, or experience (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). Causal attributions associated with pedophilia was one of the key constructs investigated. Internal, external, stable, and unstable causal attributions were the primary dimensions of interest.

Cognitive distortion: Refers to poor reasoning and maladaptive forms of thinking (Sahin et al., 2020). Cognitive distortions have been linked to causal attributions and implicit beliefs.

Cognitive restructuring: Refers to interventions that encourage exploration, reflection, and modification of maladaptive thinking (van Teffelen et al., 2021). Cognitive restructuring is a technique that can be applied to cognitive distortions.

Emotional congruence: Refers to the perceived emotional and cognitive association with a specific type of person or group childhood (Ildeniz & Ó Ciardha, 2021). Many pedophiles have feelings of compatibility with children.

Entity: Refers to a dimension of implicit theory indicating that certain traits, characteristics, or attributes are fixed (Karwowski et al., 2020). Entity beliefs feel pedophilia cannot be changed.

Furries: Refers to an expression of interests related to animalistic identities or characteristics (Heinz, 2020). The use of costumes to represent chosen animalistic identities is practiced by some furries.

Implicit beliefs: Perceptions associated with whether individuals believe that certain traits, characteristics, or attributes are changeable (Hernandez-Andreo et al., 2020). Implicit beliefs associated with pedophilia was one of the key constructs investigated in this study. Fixed and malleable implicit beliefs were the primary dimensions of interest.

Incremental: Refers to a dimension of implicit theory indicating that certain traits, characteristics, or attributes can be changed (Karwowski et al., 2020). Incremental beliefs feel pedophilia can be changed.

Locus of control: Refers to whether individuals believe certain situations, problems, events, or experiences in their lives are controlled by internal or external sources (Eriksson et al., 2021). Locus of control is a principal dimension included within the attribution theory framework.

Pedophilic immutability: The position suggesting that sexual interests in children are unchangeable and should therefore be viewed as orientations similar to hetero- or homosexuality (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Pedophilic immutability is used when referring to whether sexual interests in children are changeable.

Trait malleability: Defined as an ability to change personal traits, characteristics, or attributes (Karwowski et al., 2020). Perceptions of trait malleability were a critical factor investigated.

Assumptions

A critical assumption paramount to the direction of this study involved developmental aspects associated with pedophilia. Arguments have been proposed that pedophilia is innate whereas the opposition has suggested that pedophilic behavior can be modified (Mundy, 2022; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Correlations between victimization and how those types of experiences tend to result in a corresponding criminal offense have been illustrated by the victim-offender overlap (Berg & Mulford, 2020). A history of sexual abuse victimization has also been shown to have specific correlations with future sex offending (Miley et al., 2020). Individuals who experience sexual abuse during childhood are at an increased risk of committing sexual offenses in adulthood (Miley et al., 2020). Moreover, victims of child sexual abuse may normalize the experience, which potentially increases future behavior imitation possibilities (Miley et al., 2020). Thus, victim-offender overlap seemingly provides substantial support to suggest that pedophilia may be a learned behavior (Miley et al., 2020).

The assumption that pedophilia should be considered a developed behavior does not imply it is consciously chosen. Sexual abuse experience provides an opportunity for behavior to be modeled, learned, and subsequently normalized as indicated by the victim-offender overlap (Miley et al., 2020). Sexual abuse experiences may lead to distorted perceptions about what is socially and morally acceptable, which can clearly influence behavioral outcomes. The assumption that developed behavior and conscious choice are identical would be a major misinterpretation. A conditioned behavior is generally an unconscious response to a specific type of stimuli (Furuyama et al., 2023). Hence,

pedophilia is seemingly a conditioned response towards pubescent or prepubescent sexual stimuli developed through life experiences.

A developed behavior has the potential for change whereas an innate trait or characteristic is more likely to be fixed. The significance of identifying pedophilia as a developed behavior illustrates potential for change and allows pedophiles an opportunity to combat previous conditioning. The belief that pedophilia is developed and not consciously chosen, seemingly implies that the development of this particular sexual interest should be considered maladaptive rather than monstrous. The assumptions presented are necessary to highlight associations between causal attributions and implicit beliefs in the conceptual framework being applied. Alternative views concerning pedophilia that suggest it is unchangeable likely perpetuate self-fulfilling prophecies, decrease motivation to change, and hinder potential improvement (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018).

Scope and Delimitations

Pedophilic immutability and how pedophiles develop perceptions associated with this phenomenon highlighted principal aspects related to the study scope. A dearth of research is currently available regarding pedophilic immutability, and arguments supported within the research have predominantly been incongruous in addition to being potentially damaging (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Researchers who have investigated pedophilic immutability have typically focused on external observers and whether those individuals perceive pedophilia as immutable (Heron et al., 2023). Pedophiles' perspectives are infrequently included in the majority of studies, and those

that found inclusion have generally focused on indirect perceptions related to pedophilic immutability (Heron et al., 2023). The little research conducted that has focused on pedophiles' perspectives essentially manipulated information to evaluate how these individuals would perceive pedophilia under those circumstances (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Thus, comprehension of pedophilic immutability might become clearer if pedophiles' perceptions were directly investigated. As such, this study's direct exploration of pedophiles' perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability could provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and potentially highlight processes related to its development.

The main population of interest included adult males with a sexual interest in children who were 13 years or younger. The distinction between children younger than 13 and their teenage peers was to avoid issues of puberty. Adult females with a sexual interest in children were not included due to assumed differences associated with functions of relationship. The focus of other conceptual frameworks has centered on social cognitive theory (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). The social cognitive theory framework specifically highlights self-efficacy as a major contributing factor in facilitating development related to perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Alternatively, the trans-theoretical model of behavior change focuses on motivation and highlights its ability to impact multiple processes (Choden et al., 2021). However, the trans-theoretical model of behavior change overlooks possibilities of how motivation is manifested, which might illustrate why perception could potentially be a

more appropriate indicator. A combination of attribution theory and implicit theory was selected to provide an alternative perspective to the current conceptualization.

Transferability is commonly mistaken for generalizability due to misinterpretation of its primary function, which hinges on whether qualitative research applies in other settings or contexts (Maxwell, 2021). Transferability refers to how qualitative study results can be interpreted and generalized (Maxwell, 2021). The expectation is that transferability will facilitate application of those findings in other contexts or settings (Maxwell, 2021). The purpose of transferability is to enhance rigor and trustworthiness by presenting a thorough, detailed account (Maxwell, 2021). Therefore, research methods, assumptions, analyses, or other factors that may facilitate application in different settings should be described meticulously to demonstrate transferability (Maxwell, 2021). I clearly present factors necessary to achieve transferability within this study, so potential for application in other settings or contexts is possible. Qualitative researchers tend to recruit small numbers of participants or small sample sizes, which can present significant challenges for potential transferability applications. Thus, careful consideration must be taken in ensuring transferability is not misinterpreted for generalizability, which would suggest results can generalize to the population as a whole.

Limitations

A major goal concerning transferability is to develop contextually relevant data that can be applied in broader settings while still being representative of the original context (Adler, 2022). The research findings can be transferable if careful consideration is taken in applying these detailed descriptions regarding context, data, and methods to

similar settings (Maxwell, 2021). The challenge is finding applicable contexts in which these results can be applied appropriately. Transferability involving these research findings would likely predominantly apply to pedophilic males who have committed and been convicted of sexual offenses against minors. Application of the conceptual framework could have relevance in other settings as well if contextual factors align.

Dependability is considered the qualitative counterpart associated with reliability and refers to overall data stability (Janis, 2022). Dependability within a study is typically demonstrated by illustrating alignment between various components of the research design (Janis, 2022). In this study, I provide reasonable arguments that address core concepts such as outlining data collection methods in addition to RQ development and use. An audit trail is designed to encapsulate critical decisions, operations, and even reflections incorporated as part of the research process (Adler, 2022). I took careful consideration performing thorough documentation concerning main components involved in the current study to provide complete transparency regarding research processes.

Small sample sizes are usually an inherent, albeit limiting, component of the qualitative method (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). Sample size may limit overall reliability and credibility of the study while illustrating that results should not be generalized (Adler, 2022). In this study, generalizations about these results should not be made as they are unrepresentative of the entire pedophilic community. Another limitation was only having one site from which to collect data. The sample only included male, nonoffending pedophiles. A more exhaustive exploration of this phenomenon is needed with different subsets among individuals having sexual interest in children. A third

limitation was the use of thematic analysis and coding methods. Preexisting knowledge of attribution and implicit theories perceptions could influence how researchers interpret and apply the framework.

Unidentified biases can alter the representation of authenticity typically afforded to participants by unconsciously influencing certain assumptions (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). One major potential bias that could have significantly affected the study outcome included any preexisting beliefs related to pedophilia or towards individuals who commit sexual offenses against children. Challenges associated with mitigating bias tend to involve the inclusion of reflexivity and how those practices are incorporated (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). Reflexivity aims to explicitly identify assumptions and beliefs that can directly or indirectly influence the interpretive research process (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). Member checks or participant validation strategies are incorporated to strengthen trustworthiness and ensure authentic representation of participant contributions (Adler, 2022).

Audit trails, reflexivity, and member checks were a few of the measures that were incorporated to address study limitations (see Adler, 2022). Additional strategic processes are available to address limitations and achieve validity within a qualitative research study. For example, memos are useful tools for qualitative research that capture, and express assumptions, ideas, or discoveries generated during each phase of the study (Adler, 2022). Thick description was another measure included in the study to increase trustworthiness by thoroughly describing study components, findings, interpretations, experiences, and contextual factors (Janis, 2022). Another essential factor includes a

clearly articulated rationale, which outlines justification for the use of the qualitative methods incorporated in the study (Janis, 2022).

Significance

The debate regarding pedophilic immutability is an ongoing issue attributed to a dearth of overall scientific knowledge concerning sexual interest in children (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). The scientific community is in disagreement, with some believing that pedophilia should be considered a sexual orientation, which supports its insusceptibility to change (Mundy, 2022). The opposing argument suggests that pedophilia is flexible and has potential for change under appropriate circumstances (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Previous research has looked at the perceptions of pedophiles in regard to pedophilic immutability, seemingly ignoring how pedophiles typically reach those conclusions (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Identification of thought processes that lead to perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability should aid in understanding the phenomenon.

The inability to determine and develop a commonly supported conceptual framework has limited treatment interventions from reaching maximum effectiveness. The inclusion of pedophiles' perceptions might provide more conclusive evidence regarding how pedophilic immutability is developed. Improved understanding regarding pedophilic immutability development could facilitate new conceptualization, which could guide future research. Potential contributions could even lead to a shift in how pedophilia is viewed and addressed legally. Legal considerations related to pedophilia include consequence, treatment, and most importantly whether it is criminal activity.

The potential impact of this research could be far-reaching and have a significant effect on positive social change. The public has a drastically negative view regarding any form of pedophilic or nonpedophilic child sexual abuse and tends to believe these individuals are untreatable (Heron et al., 2023). The perception of pedophiles being monsters or untreatable also carries substantial weight as public opinion can have significant influence on how sex offender policy is developed and applied (Heron et al., 2023). Education of the general public regarding pedophilia should be a priority as it can enhance and guide policy making concerning approaches to incorporate for rehabilitative or punitive actions. The issue of attrition that some pedophiles exhibit during treatment leading to more positive outcomes for these individuals would be another potential benefit. The implications associated with this research could lead to a better understanding of pedophilic immutability development and potential considerations for future research.

Summary

Disagreement regarding pedophilic immutability continues to be a significant controversy that has major implications for how the phenomenon is conceptualized. However, a deeper understanding related to how pedophiles develop perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability may result in novel conceptualizations. The potential impact of this research could alter how society views pedophilia and allows pedophiles an opportunity to modify their behavior. The primary purpose of this study involved exploration related to pedophiles' perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability and, therefore, a qualitative approach was selected. RQs predominantly revolved around

factors related to causal attributions and implicit beliefs. My aim was to reveal significant themes concerning pedophilic immutability that are associated with causal attributions and implicit beliefs. Comprehension of causal attributions could assist in highlighting pathways related to implicit belief development and subsequently perceptions associated with pedophilic immutability.

In Chapter 1, I identified a brief introduction related to core concepts and major constructs involved within the research study. I also explained the conceptual framework, which was associated with causal attributions and implicit beliefs. A thorough description of the conceptual framework in addition to highlighting foundations associated with attribution and implicit theories are provided within Chapter 2. The exhaustive literature review I conducted and any strategies I used are presented within Chapter 2. In addition, a comprehensive review of related content, reasonable justification for exploitation, and development related to the research gap is provided in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Contradictory conceptualizations regarding pedophilic immutability continue to cause significant discord within the scientific community (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). The opposing conceptualizations each support particular approaches that seemingly promote conflicting messages (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Moreover, the lack of an overarching conceptual framework allows pedophilic immutability to be interpreted broadly, leaving pedophiles and interventions in a precarious situation (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). The influence of causal attributions and implicit beliefs are considered critical elements related to perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability. Conceptualizations of pedophilic immutability have generally relied on external observers' perceptions overlooking first-hand experiences of pedophiles (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Thus, exploration of pedophiles' perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability is a critical component that could lead to new conceptualizations.

The existing research currently features two distinct views regarding pedophilic immutability (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan & Briken, 2019). Pedophilia is considered either mutable or immutable depending on associated perceptions and beliefs (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan & Briken, 2019). However, current research lacks a definitive position regarding how pedophilic immutability should be conceptualized, identified, and treated (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan & Briken, 2019). The immutable approach is supportive towards arguments that view pedophilia as a fixed characteristic incapable of change (Fedoroff,

2020). Mutable approach arguments are based on the belief that pedophilia should be treated as though it has a capacity for change (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Acceptance regarding personal conditions is a critical factor for treatment in the immutable approach (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Mutable interventions are predominantly focused on resiliency and resilient outlooks to offer positive outcomes (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018).

The remainder of Chapter 2 includes a literature search strategy in which I describe the iterative research process. Library databases, search engines, and keywords are outlined to illustrate how relevant research articles were collected. The scope in which search terms were used and applied is also detailed. Another critical component covered in Chapter 2 involves an exhaustive review of literature, including key variables and concepts related to the study scope. Strengths and weaknesses of previous approaches are outlined while also establishing why the chosen approach was more befitting. Major features of attribution and implicit theories are thoroughly explained along with the contributions each has made in previous related research. The rationale regarding the conceptual collaboration of these theories and their application to this study is also included.

Literature Search Strategy

Research articles and relevant supporting evidence were collected with the use of several online databases. The Walden Library was a primary resource involved in identifying and accessing databases, which provided an abundance of material related to

literature search. Databases used in the literature search included SAGE Journal, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PsycALERT, Pro Quest Central, SOCindex, and Academic Search Complete. A Thoreau multidatabase search was also conducted to explore additional archives that might have been overlooked. The Walden Library has an association with the informal search engine Google Scholar, which was also used. A gap in the current research regarding pedophilic immutability was identified due to these literature search efforts.

Relevant concepts related to pedophilic immutability and incorporated theories were fundamental elements of the literature search. I applied and searched keywords in multiple databases to ensure the most accurate representation of current literature. The keywords searched included *attribution theory*, *implicit theory*, *causal attributions*, *causal perceptions*, *implicit beliefs*, *implicit attitudes*, *pedophilia*, and *pedophilic immutability*. Additional keywords that arose during initial searches included *child sexual abuse*, *child molestation*, *sexual interest in children*, *child sex offender*, *sex offender*, *sex offending*, *adult-child sexual relationship*, *adult-child sex*, *child sexual exploitation*, *minor-attracted persons*, *sex offender treatment*, *sex offending desistance*, *sexuality*, *sexual orientation*, *cognitive distortions*, *cognitive restructuring*, *behavior change*, *motivation*, *resilience*, and *self-efficacy*. Certain words produced multiple variations that were mediated by incorporating search enhancers such as the (*) asterisk. Asterisks were used to conduct a more exhaustive search when locating words that began with similar roots, such as pedophile and pedophilia (pedophil*). Variation of word order was also used to capture a more expansive return regarding relevant articles.

Many research articles selected for inclusion in this study were restricted to publications within the last 5 years. The last 5 years ranged from 2017 to 2022. The literature search strategy was restricted within the past 5 years to demonstrate the significance and relevance associated with pedophilic immutability. Articles that originated beyond the last 5 years and were included in this study were associated with conceptual framework conceptualization. Additional parameters included in the search strategy were collecting and using only peer-reviewed, full text journal articles. Boolean operators and keyword specifiers were also used to achieve greater precision.

Pedophilic immutability has been debated intermittently for a lengthy period (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan & Briken, 2019). Moreover, renewed controversy regarding pedophilic immutability has been sparked due to diverse modern perspectives (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan & Briken, 2019). Renewed interested notwithstanding, there is a dearth of literature focusing on pedophilic immutability as its catalog lacks volume. The meagerness of research dedicated specifically towards pedophilic immutability was accounted for by conducting extensive research on associated constructs. Perceptions related to pedophilia or pedophiles were chief among the relevant associated constructs researched (see Heron et al., 2023). Additional relevant constructs explored included causal attributions and implicit beliefs related to sexuality (see Kranz, 2020; van der Linde et al., 2022). The development and maintenance of cognitive distortions were also a major construct considering their potential influential effects (see Paquette & Cortoni, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this conceptual framework was to illustrate how their combined association might explain pedophilic immutability. The basic concept of attribution theory is dependent on how individuals assign cause for a given experience, situation, or event (Weiner, 1985). Locus of causality, controllability, and stability are the major dimensions associated with attribution theory (Zimmerman & Papa, 2020). Implicit theory is intently focused on perceptions related to personal characteristics or abilities (Dweck et al., 1995). Whether individuals perceive change as possible is paramount within the implicit theory foundation (Dweck et al., 1995). The principal dimension associated with implicit theory is malleability related to personal characteristics, traits, or abilities (Thoman et al., 2020). The conceptual framework used in this research was a synthesis of attribution and implicit theories.

Attribution and Implicit Theories

Attribution theory has developed into a universally accepted framework that is applied in multiple contexts and settings (Couette et al., 2020; Janovsky et al., 2020). The basic underlying foundation for attribution theory is predominantly a product of motive x expectancy x value (Atkinson, 1957) combined with can x try (Heider, 1958). Attribution theory then became more prominent during the cognitive revolution in psychology (Zimmerman & Papa, 2020). The original composition of attribution theory was primarily comprised of two distinct branches (Zimmerman & Papa, 2020). Operations associated with reaching an attribution were essential to one branch while the other side viewed chain reactions following those conclusions of more value (Zimmerman & Papa,

2020). Bernard Weiner has been identified as a key figure in redirecting attention back towards motivation and reshaping conceptualizations of human functioning (as cited in Zimmerman & Papa, 2020). The original premise of attribution theory suggested that behavior is heavily influenced by how individuals perceive past experiences or events (Weiner, 1985).

Implicit theory is another framework that has been used with diverse research topics and in a variety of study designs (Richards, 2020; Schreiber et al., 2020). The nature of implicit theory has only allowed for discovery in its history rather than invention as these theories exist yet need to be unearthed (Sternberg, 1985). The earliest introductions associated with implicit theory date back to the mid-1950s where interest in this idea grew exponentially considering how much research was produced (Schneider, 1973). One prominent name associated with implicit theory includes Henry Kissinger although several contributions were made by multiple researchers (Swede & Tetlock, 1986). An initial focus of implicit theory primarily featured personality (Singer, 1990; Sternberg, 1985). Expansion of implicit theory then expanded to include intelligence, creativity, and leadership, among other constructs (Singer, 1990; Sternberg, 1985). The original concept of implicit theory has essentially withstood any major changes since its inception, with attention remaining on how individuals use everyday assumptions or beliefs to reach certain conclusions (Thoman et al., 2020).

Key Theoretical Aspects

A main underlying concept associated with attribution theory suggests that attitudes and beliefs influence feelings which in turn directs behavior (Weiner, 1985).

Attribution theory is made up of three separate dimensions: the locus of causality, stability, and controllability (Weiner, 1985). The locus of causality dimension is tasked with assigning cause to a location applicable either internally or externally for individuals involved (Weiner, 1985). The locus of stability dimension is intended to establish whether causes are perceived as constant over time or discontinuous (Weiner, 1985). The locus of controllability dimension is responsible for indicating whether causes are conditionally associated with volitional influence (Weiner, 1985). A principal concept related to attribution theory is depicted in the interpretation of past events or experiences as critical contributors for future behavioral outcomes (Weiner, 1985).

The essential premise of implicit theory involves individuals using unfounded assumptions when processing information, which leads to varying perceptions regarding actions and outcomes (Dweck et al., 1995). Trait malleability is the singular dimension associated with implicit theory, consisting of entity and incremental positions (Dweck et al., 1995). Entity theorists believe traits or characteristics are fixed (Dweck et al., 1995). Alternatively, incremental theorists believe traits or characteristics are malleable (Dweck et al., 1995). Entity theorists are hypothesized to react more helplessly than their incremental counterparts when facing challenging circumstances (Dweck et al., 1995). Implicit beliefs can potentially be manipulated, which presents opportunities for perception modification (Dweck et al., 1995). In addition, implicit beliefs are generally based on unsubstantiated information, which can likely be changed with the inclusion of supporting evidence (Dweck et al., 1995).

Previous Applications of Attribution and Implicit Theories

The applications for attribution and implicit theories seem practically limitless as these frameworks have been applied in an assortment of varying contexts. Applications of attribution or implicit theories have encompassed academic and social domains with topics ranging from achievement to zeal (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). Incorporation of attribution or implicit theories has predominantly been independent instead of collaborative. However, research involving both attribution and implicit theories in tandem has occurred infrequently (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020; Tao et al., 2021). More specifically, research featuring both attribution and implicit theories has typically only involved external observer perceptions (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020; Tao et al., 2021). I applied main concepts related to attribution and implicit theories in this study using first person perceptions of pedophiles.

Attribution and implicit theories have been used collaboratively in one approach to conduct research regarding wisdom development (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). The role causal attributions and implicit beliefs play in wisdom development has also been explored (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). Causal attributions, which imply a sense of control, are more likely to result in incremental implicit beliefs regarding wisdom development (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). In addition, causal attributions may provide significant insight related to pedophilic immutability, possibly highlighting a potential source of origin. However, the association between attribution and implicit theories, including its effects on motivation, underscores substantial relevancy to issues concerning pedophilic immutability. Therefore, a collaborative framework of attribution

and implicit theories was not formally introduced in this research study although the conceptual application is likely transferrable to other domains.

Attribution and implicit theories were applied simultaneously in another study concerning mental illness stigma (Lyndon et al., 2019). Lyndon et al. (2019) used perspectives from external observers to offer an alternative view of mental illness stigma. They investigated the role of causal attributions related to mental illness and their association with implicit personality beliefs and found that external causal attributions and incremental personality beliefs were both indirectly associated with increased stigma regarding mental illness (Lyndon et al., 2019). The stigma related to mental illness can possibly illustrate how pedophiles feel and subsequently explain their perception regarding potential change. Thus, while external observer perceptions can provide one viewpoint to consider, direct perspectives should allow for a more accurate representation of how pedophilic immutability is developed.

A linking framework between attribution and implicit theories has yet to be established by previous research and was a primary concern of this study. Despite the lack of collaborative efforts featuring attribution and implicit theories jointly, current research has provided relevant independent applications (Jahnke et al., 2022; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Relevant research that has implemented either attribution or implicit theories separately has included domains such as sexuality, sexual orientation, sexual desire, and child sex offending, among others (Soldino et al., 2020, Zagrodney & Cummings, 2021). Topics such as sexuality and child sex offending were directly related to the core constructs for this study. Moreover, nuances of pedophilic immutability are

potentially similar to the aforementioned constructs, which should indicate a suitable fit for an attribution and implicit theories conceptual framework.

Rationale

Perception is viewed as a major contributing factor involved with pedophilic immutability. Perception was particularly essential for this study due to its relationship with causal attributions and implicit beliefs. The purpose of this study was to explore pedophiles' perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability. Thus, comprehension regarding the manifestation of perceptions related to pedophilic immutability was critical for conceptual framework development. Pedophilic immutability has been elusive to understand with the current conceptual frameworks being used, failing to illustrate its unique properties. Attribution and implicit theories are two independent frameworks that have a substantial association with various domains of perception. The surprising amount of influence perception can have on multiple areas related to behavior are highlighted by attribution and implicit theories.

Experiences are interpreted and then developed into perceptions which typically have significant effect on resulting behavior (Weiner, 2010). The variability related to perception along with its impact on behavior can be demonstrated through collaboration between attribution and implicit theories. The proposed conceptual framework was intended to illustrate relationships between causal attributions and implicit beliefs. Identification of causal attributions and implicit beliefs as an underlying foundation should highlight processes responsible for how pedophilic immutability originates. Selection of attribution and implicit theories is directly linked to the capacity these

frameworks have in potentially explaining perceptions associated with pedophilic immutability.

Relationship to Present Study

Perception is a fundamental factor which contributes significantly to the development of causal attributions (Weiner, 1985). Each dimension of attribution theory is determined by how individuals perceive a specific situation, event, or experience. An example of a student taking a test can demonstrate the relationship between attribution theory and perception. A student failing an exam can attribute failure to either a lack of studying or teacher grading habits. Poor studying is indicative of internal causality, instability, and controllability. Blame directed at teacher grading habits is indicative of external causality, stability, and uncontrollability.

Perception is also an instrumental component in the development of implicit beliefs (Dweck et al., 1995). Malleability is entirely dependent on if individuals perceive variance in their traits or abilities. School graduation can be used as an example to demonstrate the relationship between implicit theory and perception. A student graduating from school can believe their intelligence was innate or developed. Intelligence being attributed to heritage or random luck is considered innateness. Intelligence being contingent on effort, and whether it can improve or deteriorate is considered development.

The difference in how individuals interpret experiences and subsequently apply their perceptions has a significant effect on resulting behavior. A student who attributes failure to internal, unstable, and controllable factors will likely apply more effort. A

student who attributes failure to external, stable, and uncontrollable factors is unlikely to apply more effort. Individuals who perceive intelligence as innate are unlikely to see the benefits of studying or practice. Individuals who perceive intelligence as developmental are more likely to believe studying and practice provide benefits. The same general principles are adapted and applied to pedophilic immutability. Results of this research should provide support for novel conceptualizations related to pedophilic immutability featuring attribution and implicit theories.

The RQs included are directly linked to attribution and implicit theories. The first RQ is focused on exploring causal attributions related to pedophilia. The second RQ is focused on exploring implicit beliefs related to pedophilia. Responses for the included RQs are used to identify relationships between causal attributions and subsequent implicit beliefs. Development of novel conceptualizations related to pedophilic immutability featuring attribution and implicit theories is dependent on results stemming from these RQs. The RQs involved in this study may be viewed as undermining and challenging some previous conceptualizations while concurrently building upon other supported conceptual frameworks related to pedophilia.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Cognitive Perceptions

Perception is a primary component of interest due to its influential capacity on attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. The influence perception has is significant and warrants further evaluation to illustrate its association with pedophilic immutability (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Causal attributions and implicit beliefs are considered types of

perception associated with experiences, circumstances, or knowledge (Selimbegovic et al., 2021; von dem Knesebeck et al., 2020). Attribution and implicit theories have been applied separately in research studies which highlight the influential capacity of perception (Knack et al., 2020). Perceptions related to social stigma, mental illness, or self-concepts are common themes which have been examined within studies featuring attribution and implicit theories (Ildeniz & Ó Ciardha, 2021; Tao et al., 2021). The associations between causal attributions, implicit beliefs, pedophilia, and distinct areas of perception are crucial to how pedophilic immutability should be conceptualized.

Causal attributions are considered highly impressionable due to the potential influence different narratives can contribute (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). Biological causal attributions are more stigmatizing and less beneficial due to perceived innateness of pedophilia (Bowers & Whitley, 2020). Causal attributions related to biology are typically indicative of perceiving conditions or characteristics are immutable (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). Manipulation of information regarding causal attributions can affect beliefs associated with helplessness and attitudes towards treatment (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). Causal attributions which do not limit or contradict the potential for change are more likely to result in positive outcomes (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). The notion that causal attributions can be manipulated highlights a natural flexibility and propensity to change, depending on available cognitive information.

Implicit beliefs and causal attributions are similar in susceptibility to manipulation which can impact how they are developed or formed. The introduction of information and how it is presented has significant influence on implicit beliefs (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et

al., 2018). The manner in which information is manipulated when presented has significant influence on pedophiles' perceptions regarding potential for change (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Information can be biased through indirect means such as incomplete information and context or directly via use of partisan support (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Information which is presented suggesting a characteristic or condition is immutable will likely decrease motivation to change, hinder potential treatment progress, and potentially dissuade participation (Schreiber et al., 2020). Opportunities for perception modification through the use of appropriate information are more likely when mindsets are not fixed (Schreiber et al., 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018).

Stigma is another prominent factor related to perception which can have an impact on multiple levels (Levenson et al., 2020). Stigma can impact perception both externally to observers and internally for individuals such as pedophiles (Heron et al., 2023; Levenson et al., 2020). Pedophilia is generally viewed as a sexually abusive and exploitative act inflicted upon defenseless child victims (Lawrence & Willis, 2022). Perceptions of abnormality, defectiveness, or perversion are usually associated with pedophiles due to current outlooks regarding pedophilia (Lawrence & Willis, 2022). The likelihood of self-identification and help-seeking among stigma carriers such as pedophiles lessens exponentially when perceived discrimination or other potential consequences are involved (Lawrence & Willis, 2022). Pedophiles who feel shame or guilt about their identity and behavior can experience increased levels of trauma which could potentially lead to future offending (Lievesley et al., 2020).

Perceptions of pedophiles regarding their ability to avoid sexual offending was explored previously through qualitative interviews (Molen et al., 2023). Participants were able to provide rich, descriptive accounts regarding motives for their behavior and factors of major influence (Molen et al., 2023). Thematic analysis was incorporated to evaluate and highlight prominent themes reported by pedophiles which potentially help explain the particular phenomenon (Molen et al., 2023). A clearer understanding of the perceptions some pedophiles endorse regarding their sexual offending avoidance behavior is represented within study results (Molen et al., 2023). Pedophiles' perceptions can be difficult to fully understand without the benefit of comprehensive exploration.

Cognitive processing deficits are a key contributor in how pedophiles develop certain attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions regarding their attractions and behavior (Knack et al., 2020). Perceptions related to age are other critical factors which highlight the altered perspective of pedophiles (Demidova et al., 2020). Pedophiles experience emotional congruence due to a perceived connection with childhood experiences (Ildeniz & Ó Ciardha, 2021). Pedophiles rationalize that their perceived relatability with children should be justification to carry out their sexual attractions and behavior (Ildeniz & Ó Ciardha, 2021). Potential victim age or maturity is generally considered nonconsequential for pedophiles due to their distorted perceptions of children as autonomous and capable sexual beings (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Development of cognitive distortions has been attributed to the method in which pedophiles interpret life experiences and how that knowledge is applied (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Cognitive distortions related to

pedophilia are alternative perspectives which provide fuel for pedophilic behavior (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020).

Causal Attributions

Causal attributions are a product of perception typically induced by interpretations of past events or experiences (Kimber et al., 2021). A poignant example of how interpretation is involved with causal attributions can be highlighted by the diverse opinions related to transgender identities (Bowers & Whitley, 2020). Little is known empirically regarding how transgender identities are developed or perceived (Bowers & Whitley, 2020). Perceptions regarding transgender identities range from biological attributions to personal choice (Bowers & Whitley, 2020). Mental health issues have also been identified as a possible contributing factor involved in perceptions related to transgender identities (Bowers & Whitley, 2020). Causal attributions related to biology typically correlate with more supportive views of transgender identities, lifestyles, and rights (Bowers & Whitley, 2020). Interpretations of experiences and subsequent causal attributions are subject to influential variables such as religious beliefs or political views (Bowers & Whitley, 2020).

Causal attributions associated with a lack of control are generally viewed less negatively than the alternatives (Bowers & Whitley, 2020; Jahnke et al., 2022). Biological causal attributions or similar perceptions can inadvertently be associated with having characteristics which are uncontrollable (Bowers & Whitley, 2020). Uncontrollability is considered an important factor which can potentially influence how certain conditions or behaviors are perceived (Bowers & Whitley, 2020). A major

concern with uncontrollability is its association with self-serving cognitions which may support continued behavior and related thinking (Fedoroff, 2020; Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Causal attributions associated with having control have typically been perceived more negatively due to beliefs that related behaviors or outcomes are faults of the individual (Tao et al., 2021). Causal attributions associated with having control are considered more likely to provide belief in the potential for change (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). The perception of control can have significant effects on how pedophiles react to treatment and manage their behavior (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018).

Implicit Beliefs

Implicit beliefs are a product of perception typically associated with unverifiable or unprovable presumptions regarding traits and characteristics (Zhu et al., 2020). Implicit beliefs related to body dissatisfaction provide another illustrative example of how perception is influenced (Bruchmann et al., 2022). The ideal body image does not have an empirical measurement due to its general instability as a formal construct (Bruchmann et al., 2022). The ideal body type has changed throughout history with larger bodies being highly regarded previously and slimmer sizes considered more appealing currently (Bruchmann et al., 2022). Repeated exposure to various social expectations may influence implicit beliefs even when individuals are not directly conscious of the underlying effects (Bruchmann et al., 2022). Ideal body images are dependent on multiple factors which include social expectations, illustrating a potential malleability (Bruchmann et al., 2022).

Incremental beliefs associated with implicit theory are generally considered more positive and beneficial, than entity counterparts (Thai et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2020). Incremental beliefs enhance adaptive coping strategies (Zhu et al., 2020). Entity beliefs are linked to more maladaptive coping strategies (Zhu et al., 2020). Uncontrollability is a common theme among child sex offenders with entity beliefs pertaining to their pedophilic behaviors (Thai et al., 2020). The sense of lacking control has a natural association with entity beliefs which can potentially result in erroneous or maladaptive cognitions (Thai et al., 2020). The sense of having control is more consistent with incremental beliefs and can significantly affect effort exertion (Thai et al., 2020). The advantage incremental beliefs have regarding potential for change in certain domains is underscored in comparisons between each dimension of implicit theory (Thai et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2020).

Cognitive Distortions

One major byproduct of perception which is associated with pedophilic immutability involves cognitive distortions. Cognitive distortions are considered manifestations of processing errors, fallacious reasoning, and inflexible or unrealistic thinking (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Cognitive distortions have been referred to as implicit beliefs due to shared similarities between their compositions (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Multiple facets of life such as critical thinking, social functioning, and personal relationships among others can be significantly impacted by cognitive distortions (Eberhaut et al., 2023). Cognitive distortions are considered to have a major role in the onset and maintenance of pedophilic behavior (Eberhaut et al., 2023).

Determination of how perception affects cognitive distortions is key in identifying pedophilic immutability development.

Pedophiles typically develop cognitive distortions which tend to focus on themselves, victims, and the world (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Pedophiles have generally endorsed cognitive distortions which support their behavior (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Offense-supportive cognitive distortions are considered significant contributors to the etiology of pedophilia (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Cognitive distortions are likely employed to lessen psychological burden associated with pedophilic behavior (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Common themes of offense-supportive cognitive distortions related to pedophilia include uncontrollability, entitlement, dangerous world, and children as sexual beings, among others (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Cognitive distortions are considered exceedingly likely to play a major role in diminishing the threshold of sexual abuse towards children among pedophiles (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020).

Themes such as uncontrollability and entitlement are underscored by different types of cognitive distortions (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Uncontrollability and entitlement are likely linked to pedophiles' perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Controllability is a primary dimension featured within attribution theory and related perceptions have significant influence on subsequent cognitive distortions (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Elements of controllability could be an initial link between attribution and implicit theories which is suggested in the proposed conceptual framework. A prominent reason child sex offenders are able to commit

offenses is because they do not consider their sexual preference or behavior controllable (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Pedophiles likely believe their behavior is an inherently natural characteristic and attempts to avoid or change are futile (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Early experiences and interpretations related to those events can provide insight regarding development of cognitive distortions associated with controllability (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020).

Cognitive distortions related to social perception deficits can provide further explanation regarding offender thought process (Eberhaut et al., 2023). Social perception deficits are considered a major deficiency of child sex offenders (Dillien et al., 2020). Social perception deficits hinder the ability of child sex offenders to appropriately process information (Dillien et al., 2020). Errors in information processing are directly related to misinterpretation of social cues which is likely caused by distorted beliefs (Dillien et al., 2020). The underlying importance attributed to cognitive distortions is highlighted by their relationship with origin and maintenance of externalized harmful behavior (Heppell et al., 2022). Links between cognition and externalized harmful behavior have been a primary focus associated with contemporary theories (Heppell et al., 2022).

Cognitive distortions are likely significant contributors to the development of pedophiles' implicit beliefs (Soldino et al., 2020). Information processing and social perception are critical in understanding how individuals develop cognitive distortions (Dillien et al., 2020). Cognitive distortions could lead to fallacious interpretations of events and experiences which produce flawed causal attributions (Dillien et al., 2020).

Self-reports, personal narratives, and qualitative interviews have previously been used to explore cognitive processes of pedophiles (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020). Identification of the relationship between cognitive distortions, causal attributions, and implicit beliefs is critical in understanding pedophilic immutability. Additional exploration pertaining to pedophiles' direct accounts regarding how cognitive distortions impact causal attributions and implicit beliefs is warranted.

Sexuality or Sexual Orientation

Another construct which has substantial importance and relevance to the study includes sexuality or sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is generally viewed as the state of being romantically, emotionally, and sexually attracted towards males, females or both sexes (McGeorge et al., 2023). Sexual orientation is predominantly considered to consist of three main categories which include homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual (McGeorge et al., 2023). Less-heralded views associated with sexual orientation are inclusive of characteristics such as age, body type, and even partner number (Tierney et al., 2021). Heterosexuality has an extensive history of being applied as the normative behavior with which nonheterosexuality was compared to in sexual orientation discourse (Tierney et al., 2021). Fluidity related to sexual orientation is a confounding factor which has significant impact on perceptions of pedophilic immutability.

Arguments related to the development of sexuality or sexual orientation have typically centered on nature versus nurture. Extensive evidence is available which highlights the significant contributions of biological factors on sexual orientation development (McGeorge et al., 2023). Alternative perspectives of sexual orientation are

more supportive of the idea that development is primarily contingent on socially constructed factors such as family, culture, or childhood experience (Xu, Norton, & Rahman, 2021). The polarity related to sexual orientation development has seemingly been mediated by contemporary approaches (Spock et al., 2022). Current views of sexual orientation are more likely to endorse biological potential being shaped through interpersonal, social, cultural, and historical context (Spock et al., 2022). Recent trends are indicative of substantial variation related to sexual orientation development markers across cohort samples (Bishop et al., 2020).

The sexual orientation spectrum has been undoubtedly broadened with recognition of alternative sexual lifestyles. Pansexuality, asexuality, and transgender may be more common alternatives compared to less reputable *furries* or pedophiles (Heinz, 2020). Atypical definitions related to sexual orientation are expected to indicate that age interests should potentially be considered as part of the overall spectrum (Tierney et al., 2021). Arguments that are based on inclusion of pedophilia as a sexual orientation have found little support within the scientific community although their efforts remain perseverant (Fedoroff, 2020). An important difference between pedophilia compared to other accepted sexual orientations involves the nature of harmfulness and implied potential for victimization (Harper et al., 2022). The symptoms of pedophilia should therefore be categorized as a psychological disorder related to sexual interest rather than sexual orientation (Fedoroff, 2020).

The malleability or potential for change of sexual orientation has been a historically controversial subject. Initial conceptualizations associated with sexual

orientation are indicative of immutable characteristics (Serafin, 2020). The immutability of sexual orientation has even been a crucial factor in legal actions for sexual minorities including same-sex marriage advocacy (Serafin, 2020). Contemporary conceptualizations have a more compromising approach which contradicts the idea that sexual orientation is stable throughout life (Spock et al., 2022). Sexual orientation fluidity is an indicator of change which can potentially affect attraction, identity, or behavior (Spock et al., 2022). Sexual orientation fluidity can occur over time although it is more likely to happen during early adolescence than adulthood (Spock et al., 2022).

Studies related to sexual orientation changeability have produced varying and conflicting results (Spock et al., 2022; Xu, Norton, & Rahman, 2021). Specific sexual orientation groups such as transgender or bisexual are identified for being associated with a higher likelihood of change according to previous research (Xu, Norton, & Rahman, 2021). Evidence has been outlined by opposing arguments which indicate relative overall stability of sexual orientation from early adolescence to young adulthood (Xu, Norton, & Rahman, 2021). An additional concerning factor involves the potential for harm associated with sexual orientation change efforts (Fish & Russell, 2020; Przeworski et al., 2021). Pedophilia may present unique circumstances due to its predominant recognition as a sexual attraction rather than of sexual orientation (Fedoroff, 2020).

Development of sexual orientation is a complicated issue which requires rigorous investigation to obtain comprehensive understanding. Sexual orientation is a personal subject which seems most appropriate for practices intended to understand the construct from direct perspectives (Bishop et al., 2020). Multiple factors which are depicted as

influential have been identified through exploration of perceptions related to sexual orientation development (Spock et al., 2022). Milestones involved in sexual orientation development have been documented in previous research whereas underlying mechanisms of change continue to be predominantly overlooked (Spock et al., 2022). Causal attributions have been identified as a key component in sexual orientation development which can indicate how individuals perceive change potential (Jahnke et al., 2022). Identification of underlying mechanisms associated with change such as causal attributions or implicit beliefs are more likely to be discovered through direct accounts from pedophiles.

Behavior Change

Behavior change components have been applied in multiple settings from smoking cessation to sexual practices (Faini et al., 2020; Minian et al., 2020). The appropriateness and effectiveness associated with behavior change interventions is typically dependent on the context of each application. One particular setting which is generally considered controversial involves behavior change related to traits or characteristics (Fish & Russell, 2020; Przeworski et al., 2021). A wealth of research concerning traits such as anxiety has been able to illustrate the overall capacity for trait malleability and potential behavior change (Chan et al., 2021). A positive mindset is considered a major factor for behavior change perception and efforts (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Sexual orientation and related sexual behavior have generally had less support regarding potential for behavior change from the scientific community (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018).

A major issue regarding sexual orientation and related behavior change involves utilization of confusing terminology. Orientation, sexuality, and sexual behavior have been applied interchangeably within various research contexts which has led to some uncertainty (Mundy, 2022). Sexual behavior and attractions are likely to show fluidity within some groups over time (Xu, Norton, & Rahman, 2021). Sexual orientation is distinct from behavior or attractions and has had more conflicting results regarding potential for change (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Sexual reorientation therapy and interventions are supported by some in the scientific community although endorsement can be associated to beneficence, preference, or religion (Rosik et al., 2021). A major concern related to sexual reorientation therapy and interventions is the questionable ethics involved (Rosik et al., 2021).

Cognitive distortions are not only a critical factor related to pedophilia but also play major roles in potential behavior change (McGinn et al., 2020). Cognitive distortions such as self-serving biases are used to justify subsequent pedophilic behavior (Eberhaut et al., 2023). Justification or rationalization related to self-serving biases are illustrative of the inherent harmfulness associated with pedophilia (Eberhaut et al., 2023). Reductions to cognitive distortions can produce changes in self-representation and associated attributions (McGinn et al., 2020). Sex offender treatment is designed to apply cognitive-behavioral principles which are focused on distorted thinking (Heppell et al., 2022). Research involving interventions aimed at manipulating cognitive distortions among pedophilic populations has seemingly been less prevalent (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018).

A daunting challenge associated with efforts of modifying or reducing cognitive distortions is the difficulty inherent in changing perceptions related to characteristics (Sayed Ismail & Dhaidan Al-Dhaidan, 2020). The restructuring of cognitive characteristics reduces violent or aggressive behavior among offender populations (van Teffelen et al., 2021). Cognitive restructuring has also been identified as playing a major role in reducing potential recidivism for offenders upon release (Harrison et al., 2020). Causal attributions and implicit beliefs are considered important components of cognitive restructuring related to offending behavior (Kurtek, 2020; Paquette & Fortin, 2021). Attributional biases have significant effect on cognitive processes which influence perception and subsequent behavior (Kurtek, 2020). Cognitive processing and perception are key to understanding how beliefs supporting pedophilic immutability can be modified.

The ability or process related to behavior change is considered multidimensional (Barclay et al., 2022). One particular dimension which has substantial impact on perceptions associated with behavior change is cognition (Barclay et al., 2022). Information and how it is interpreted has been shown to play a major role in the success or failure of behavior change intentions (Shiferaw Jada & van den Berg, 2022). Another factor related to behavior change potential includes motivation (Barclay et al., 2022). Mental illness has been identified as impacting motivation in addition to being a significant barrier for making lasting behavior change (Stefancic et al., 2021). Successful interventions of behavior change are tasked with targeting underlying beliefs to develop effective communication strategies (Shiferaw Jada & van den Berg, 2022).

Immutability

The definition and application of immutability has been a perpetual dilemma which continues to cause significant controversy. Criteria regarding immutability has generally been defined by traits which are related to fundamentality and unchangeability (Serafin, 2020). Biological characteristics such as sex and race have typically been the most traditionally acknowledged immutable traits (Serafin, 2020). The shift of focus towards highlighting social factors associated with identity as key indicators of immutability is a result associated with contemporary understanding (Serafin, 2020). A paradigmatic example of immutability related to socially significant factors would likely encompass controversial or concerning subjects such as religion and sexual orientation (Serafin, 2020). Religion has been shown to be a major influence in how some individuals perceive different characteristics or traits related to immutability (Serafin, 2020).

Immutability related to sexuality or sexual orientation is the product of conflicting perspectives from opposing positions. The immutability of sexual orientation has been firmly supported by legal findings associated with homosexuality (Serafin, 2020). Legal support regarding sexual orientation immutability was initially proposed for homosexuality whereas pedophilia is now being endorsed similarly (Serafin, 2020). A major concern regarding the position of immutability related to sexual orientation is if it also accounts for pedophilia (Fedoroff, 2020). Immutability related to sexual orientation is questionable however sexual attraction and behavior are considered more affected by

change (Spock et al., 2022). Immutability related to pedophilia is a complex subject which necessitates further exploration.

Immutability has been tested in various contexts and some findings suggest that traits or characteristics considered immutable are not completely fixed as previously assumed (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Xu, Norton, & Rahman, 2021). Sexual orientation or attraction in some specific groups has greater potential of being fluid and changing over time (Xu, Norton, & Rahman, 2021). Pedophilic behavior has been identified in recent study findings as having the potential for change (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Gender has historically been one of the most essentialized subjects, however recent trends support less fixed conceptualizations (Lee et al., 2020). Immutability generally depends on perception related to the trait or characteristic of interest (Serafin, 2020). Inherent genetics are one fundamental example of how perception can influence views related to sexual orientation immutability (Serafin, 2020).

Traits and characteristics which are considered immutable should face reasonable scrutiny due to the potential negative affect it could have for treatment (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). The perception that characteristics or traits are unchangeable tends to leave individuals with no possible recourse of action (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). The motivation to maintain uniformity between developed implicit attitudes and subsequent identities is considerable (Fritzlen et al., 2020). Perceived immutability of some traits or characteristics can decrease personal responsibility and potentially justify behavior (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Changes to perceptions and implicit attitudes typically only occur following the introduction of novel information

(Fritzlen et al., 2020). Immutability in certain contexts is possibly only a matter of perception and with the appropriate information can potentially change attitudes or behavior.

The context in which immutability is applied has significant relevance to how influential perception can be. Perceptions of immutability originating from distorted beliefs are likely more susceptible to change (Dillien et al., 2020). Implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability can be manipulated by a variety of factors (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Past personal experiences or types of information received are just two factors which have been identified as having significant influence implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). The development of implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability are potentially linked to causal attributions associated with pedophilia (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Qualitative exploration incorporating pedophiles' causal attributions and implicit beliefs related to pedophilia should provide clarification of how perceptions of pedophilic immutability are developed.

Motivation

Motivation is another featured variable of interest which has distinct complexity that may not be entirely apparent. Motivation is generally associated with desire related to a particular outcome (Barclay et al., 2022). The application of motivation has been employed in various settings such as exercise, unhealthy eating, sexual practices, and even domestic violence, among others (Stefancic et al., 2021). The significance of motivation lies in its distinct ability to conceivably initiate action which potentially

conflicts with habitual behavior (Stefancic et al., 2021). Individuals are more likely to engage in behavior and sustain effort when motivated (Stefancic et al., 2021). A major challenge associated with motivation is contingent on stability and how best to maintain behavior change (Sheeran et al., 2021).

The methods for triggering motivation are generally conceptualized as consisting of internal and external factors. Autonomous motivation is generally triggered internally and highlighted by personal importance, core value alignment, or inherent enjoyment (Barclay et al., 2022). Controlled motivation can be triggered internally or externally by imposed pressures (Barclay et al., 2022). Imposed pressures associated with controlled motivation can include avoidance of guilt, shame, or punishment in addition to reward attainment (Barclay et al., 2022). Behavior change is considered less likely when motivation is not stemming from autonomous origins (Sheeran et al., 2021). The pursuit of behavior change which is driven by controlled motivation has generally resulted in neutral or negative outcomes (Barclay et al., 2022).

The origin of motivation is an important component, equally valuable are factors which can influence or help determine motivational effort. Complications related to motivation can occur in multiple and sometimes unexpected methods. A strong predictor of intention is implicit beliefs related to perceived expectations or outcomes (Shiferaw Jada & van den Berg, 2022). Social motives such as belonging, understanding, or trust, among others, also play a significant role regarding motivation (Scott & Cohen, 2020). Affect and whether its positive or negative are additional factors which can indicate the potential direction of motivation (Chan et al., 2021). Motivation can alternate from active

to passive and a major challenge is in identifying strategies which bolster stability (Sheeran et al., 2021).

A primary contributor associated with behavior change involves motivation which is a significant factor due to its overall amenability. Motivation for change generally follows the perceived value applied to either new or old behaviors (Barclay et al., 2022). Individuals apply different values to certain behaviors which can then be influenced by expected outcomes (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Motivation is representative of a distinct focal point from which to develop various behavior change strategies or interventions. An emphasis on targeting misleading underlying beliefs is recommended to promote motivation for behavior change (Shiferaw Jada & van den Berg, 2022). The most effective interventions which are related to motivation have predominantly been grounded in theory (Sheeran et al., 2021).

Motivation is seemingly in a perpetual state of continuous fluctuation with resulting levels being contingent on associated circumstances. Motivation is typically tied to the cost and value an individual applies in a given situation or circumstance (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Expectations related to potential outcomes have substantial influence regarding whether motivation can be successful (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Positive expectations are more likely to enhance effort whereas negativity can result in giving up (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Causal attributions and implicit beliefs have been shown to have significant impact on perceptions of expected outcomes (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). Causal attributions indicating controllability and implicit beliefs associated with

trait malleability are more likely to result in positive outcomes (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020).

Resilience

Resilience is another variable of interest which potentially has connections with perceptions related to pedophilic immutability. Resiliency is generally defined as the ability to overcome adversity or adapt to change (Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Resilience development is a critical component in underscoring the importance of social support and the associated enriching properties (Powell et al., 2021). Capacity regarding resilience consists of multiple contributing factors including positive and negative perceptions, among others (Powell et al., 2021; Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). A strong correlation exists between autonomous motivation and resilient outcomes (Powell et al., 2021; Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Autonomous motivation represents a crucial component that could potentially facilitate development of novel intervention practices or strategies (Powell et al., 2021; Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020).

Stigma can have a substantial negative impact on resilience which creates significant challenges and potentially limits ability (Levenson et al., 2020). Perceived causal attributions regarding responsibility are believed to play a significant role in the experience of stigma (Bowers & Whitley, 2020; Tao et al., 2021). One common product associated with stigmatization is the avoidance of help-seeking (Calear et al., 2021). Perceptions related to stigma have generally been a principal reason affecting help-seeking from the pedophile population (Levenson et al., 2020). Stigma seems indicative of marginal social support which potentially leaves pedophiles at greater risk of engaging

in sexual offenses (Lawrence & Willis, 2022). Stigma tends to have a negative influence which makes reaching resilient outcomes less likely (Lawrence & Willis, 2022). The impact of stigma could possibly be countered by interventions which focus on providing education related to misperceptions (Levenson et al., 2020).

Protective factors related to resilience typically include dynamic support systems and stable home environments (Askeland et al., 2020; Powell et al., 2021). Perceptions and expectations are additional factors that contribute to resilience and can be highly influential under appropriate circumstances (Arampatzi et al., 2020; Gallagher et al., 2020). Resilience associated with sexual offending is suggested to be particularly dependent on levels of cognitive maturation (Levenson et al., 2020). Cognitive distortions have been identified as a significant contributing factor related to poor resiliency among sex offenders (Eberhaut et al., 2023). Cognitive bias modification is an intervention that was specifically designed to enhance resilience and has reported some preliminary success with certain populations (Bibi et al., 2020). The primary function of cognitive bias modification involves changing unhealthy perceptions which are viewed as causal links related to nonresilient outcomes (Bibi et al., 2020).

Resiliency is a process determined by the culmination of protective and risk factors involved in certain situations or experiences (Powell et al., 2021). Risk factors are believed to diminish resiliency whereas protective aspects enhance resilient efforts (Konaszewski et al., 2021, Xu, Liu et al., 2021). Individuals can therefore broaden or enhance resilience with the proper tutelage and a variety of practices (Konaszewski et al., 2021; Xu, Liu et al., 2021). Physical activity and coping strategies are a few of the

options which bolster resiliency (Konaszewski et al., 2021; Xu, Liu et al., 2021).

Resilient behavior can also be influenced by perception which includes causal attributions and implicit beliefs (van Doren et al., 2023). Perception and, subsequently, resilience have the potential to be transformed when provided with information which counters previous knowledge or beliefs (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018).

Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring is generally incorporated as a method of enhancing information processing (van Teffelen et al., 2021). Actively challenging existing maladaptive thinking and utilizing alternative logical thought processes is the natural objective of cognitive restructuring (Krause et al., 2021). Cognitive restructuring is a commonly used psychological intervention within offender populations (van Teffelen et al., 2021). Cognitive restructuring is considered a significant component of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) approaches (Krause et al., 2021). The purpose of cognitive restructuring is to offer new perspectives regarding origins, meanings, and consequences associated with experiences, behavior, feelings, or thoughts (Krause et al., 2021). The impact of cognitive restructuring is in how it alleviates mental distress and reduces maladaptive thought processes (van Teffelen et al., 2021).

Cognitive-based approaches are designed to indicate information processing is an influential component strongly linked with situational or experiential interpretation (Maksimenko et al., 2020). Interpretations of situations are defined by perceptions related to those events more than the actual experiences (Shanahan et al., 2020). The method in which individuals perceive failure or success is strongly associated with adaptive skill

proficiency (Shanahan et al., 2020). Cognitive restructuring can help promote views which highlight cognitions as assumptions rather than irrefutable facts (Krause et al., 2021). Continuously testing assumptions or perceptions against logic, experience, and evidence is a major function of cognitive restructuring (Krause et al., 2021). Replacement of distorted thinking with rational interpretations is expected to result in more positive outcomes (Eberhaut et al., 2023).

A primary focus for interventions of cognitive restructuring related to pedophilia involves cognitive distortions (Eberhaut et al., 2023). Cognitive distortions related to pedophilia are generally viewed as emerging from implicit beliefs which highlight the subjectivity of these thought processes (Harper et al., 2022). An additional issue associated with cognitive distortions is the lack of awareness pedophiles have regarding how their personal experiences impact their perceptions (Dillien et al., 2020). Social perception deficits are considered a root cause related to the cognitive distortions pedophiles endorse (Dillien et al., 2020). Social perceptions deficits should be a targeted focus in cognitive restructuring interventions (Dillien et al., 2020). Previous studies have provided evidence which illustrates some implicit beliefs of pedophiles are malleable and can be changed when introduced to novel information (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018).

Causal attributions and implicit beliefs are notable contributors in the etiology and maintenance of maladaptive behaviors (Janovsky et al., 2020; Olivera-La Rosa et al., 2021). Perceptions of causality are influential for implicit beliefs related to ability and impact how individuals approach challenging experiences (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020).

Cognitive restructuring has been used to facilitate fresh perspectives on origins or meanings associated with thoughts and behaviors (van Teffelen et al., 2021).

Interventions should focus on addressing cognitive distortions associated with causal attributions and implicit beliefs. The objective of the intervention is providing alternative information which challenges perceptions related to pedophilic immutability.

Summary and Conclusions

Pedophilic immutability remains a controversial subject due to the complex nature of its composition. The manner in which pedophilia is perceived seems to have a significant influence on potential immutability (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Sexual orientation is viewed as being less likely to change whereas sexual attractions and behavior are considered more fluid (Xu, Norton, & Rahman, 2021). Associations between pedophilia with homosexuality have been used by contemporary approaches to reinforce the perception of its immutability (Fedoroff, 2020; Margolin, 2021; Walker, 2020). Lack of consensus regarding applicable theoretical or conceptual frameworks has been a major reason behind the ambivalence (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Links between causal attributions, implicit beliefs, and perceptions which are associated with pedophilic immutability could be considered the foundation for future conceptualizations.

A clearer understanding of how perceptions are developed regarding pedophilic immutability remains unresolved. Conceptualizations of pedophilic immutability have predominantly originated from observer experiences or beliefs regarding pedophilia

(Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Endorsement of pedophilia as an immutable characteristic may leave pedophiles feeling helpless whereas mutability could result in feelings associated with guilt (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Belief in mindset flexibility is supportive of interventions that focus on perception modification (Schreiber et al., 2020; Thai et al., 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Preliminary connections between causal attributions and implicit beliefs are highlighted by the influence these relationships potentially have on perception (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020; Iwai & Carvalho, 2020).

Conceptual frameworks regarding pedophilic immutability have been ineffective likely due to the lack of incorporation concerning pedophiles' perceptions (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Insight directly gained from pedophiles regarding pedophilic immutability may be more valuable than those of external observers (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Pedophiles' perceptions should provide greater understanding regarding development of pedophilic immutability (Paquette & Cortoni, 2020; Soldino et al., 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). Incorporation of causal attributions and implicit beliefs may illustrate underlying concepts which could facilitate novel conceptualizations related to pedophilic immutability. Complexities related to pedophilic immutability may potentially be untangled with the exploration of perceptions gathered directly from pedophiles.

Research design, methods, procedures, and data analytic strategies employed within the study are detailed in Chapter 3. Causal attributions and implicit beliefs related

to pedophilic immutability are critical factors incorporated in the exploration. Thematic analysis is used to identify common themes which are potentially linked with causal attributions and implicit beliefs. The role of the researcher is to act as interviewer, data collector, and analyst. A more detailed description regarding research design, population of interest, researcher role, methodology, instrumentation, and issues related to ethics or trustworthiness is provided in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

I implemented a basic qualitative inquiry approach using in-depth interviews of pedophiles. Deeper understanding of pedophilic immutability has been elusive, which has been potentially attributed to misdirected research foci (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). I explored perceptions related to pedophilic immutability directly from the accounts of pedophiles. Causal attributions and implicit beliefs are crucial components that significantly influence pedophilic immutability development (Fedoroff, 2020; Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Thus, research that focuses on how pedophiles interpret experiences and then subsequently apply those interpretations could provide better understanding of pedophilic immutability. The conceptual framework guiding this qualitative exploration featured attribution and implicit theory.

The remainder of Chapter 3 is focused on research design, rationale, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. I applied a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of pedophiles regarding pedophilic immutability. The scope of pedophilic immutability has unjustifiably ignored perceptions of pedophiles, which could potentially capture more insightful information than external observers. Themes unearthed from pedophiles' perceptions could provide evidence for new conceptualizations related to pedophilic immutability. The primary roles of the researcher include duties such as a recruiter, interviewer, and data analyst. A major concern within those roles is

implementing strategies to limit potential biases or influences that might arise from personal or power relationships.

The target population for the study involved adult males with sexual attractions to children. Participants were recruited from an online forum that focuses on pedophilia. Semistructured interviews were conducted with participants regarding their perceptions of causal attributions and implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability. Data were audio recorded during the 1-hour interview sessions with informed consent from participants. In this chapter, I explicitly detail strategies used to illustrate credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Chapter 3 also addresses the ethical procedures related to institutional approvals, data collection, recruitment, and protections of confidentiality.

Research Design and Rationale

The RQs included in the interview protocol were exploratory in nature. The objective involved understanding aspects of attribution and implicit theories in relationship to pedophilic immutability. Little research has been focused on perceptions of pedophilic immutability directly from pedophiles (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). The RQs in this study were designed to allow for follow-up questions, which encouraged rich detailed responses. RQ1 explored causal attributions related to pedophilic immutability. RQ2 explored implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability. The RQs were as follows:

RQ1: How do pedophiles attribute the cause of pedophilic attractions?

RQ2: How do pedophiles perceive pedophilic immutability?

The main variables of interest included causal attributions and implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability. Understanding of pedophilic immutability is contingent on two primary factors. Causal attributions associated with pedophilia and implicit beliefs regarding ability to change pedophilic behavior are the primary factors that can enhance overall understanding. Interpretation of past events or experiences likely have a significant influence on how pedophiles perceive pedophilic immutability (Kimber et al., 2021). Causal attributions regarding pedophilia may potentially be a root source that then affects implicit beliefs related to pedophilic behavior. Direct accounts of pedophiles' perceptions can provide a clearer understanding regarding the potential relationship between causal attributions, implicit beliefs, and pedophilic immutability (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018).

The research design selected for this study was qualitative in tradition. Basic qualitative inquiry is a commonly used method within exploratory research (Gomes & Duarte, 2020). A basic qualitative inquiry is effective in extracting valuable insight from the personal accounts of peoples' lived experiences (Gomes & Duarte, 2020). Theories and assumptions related to pedophilic immutability have largely been reached without the inclusion of individuals with pedophilic experiences (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). However, a more comprehensive understanding of pedophilic immutability can be achieved through direct exploration of pedophiles' perceptions (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). The main function of the basic qualitative inquiry is to capture major themes within the narratives of those involved (Gomes & Duarte, 2020).

The study purpose was to explore pedophiles' perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability. Pedophilic immutability research has primarily used external observer perceptions rather than using the accounts of pedophiles (Heron et al., 2023). However, a qualitative study allowed pedophiles the opportunity to provide detailed reports of lived experiences (see Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). Pedophiles' perceptions of causal attributions and implicit beliefs can provide critical insight into pedophilic immutability development. The exploratory nature of a basic qualitative inquiry is adequately designed to capture common themes among pedophiles' perceptions (Gomes & Duarte, 2020). Common themes related to causal attributions and implicit beliefs can guide new potential conceptualizations of pedophilic immutability (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is a complex undertaking distinguished by its potential range and variation (Vega-Cordova et al., 2020). The researcher is considered an instrument of data collection and analysis, which can have a significant impact on qualitative research (Geddis-Regan et al., 2021). A central consideration of each researcher is to determine which roles can be navigated effectively without affecting reliability. Recruiter, interviewer, and data analyst were my primary roles in this study. I recruited individuals who fit inclusion criteria from a participant pool. Selected participants were qualitatively interviewed regarding their perceptions of pedophilic immutability. Thematic analysis was employed following data collection to determine if significant themes were present within results. Careful navigation of the boundaries

inherent in a multirole commitment is necessary for researchers to illustrate credibility (Carter et al., 2021).

The overall dynamics of power or personal relationships can be significantly impacted by positionality, which must be taken into consideration (Florczak, 2021). Participants were selected from a pool of potential candidates from an online forum community. Potential power relationships of online forum community moderators were mitigated by participant anonymity. Online forum community moderators were not involved in any part of the research study. I did not have any existing relationships with the participants. Appropriate boundaries were set prior to meetings since potential power or personal relationships between researcher and participants are more likely to develop during interview sessions (Siedlecki, 2022).

I thoroughly explained informed voluntary consent to neutralize potential power relationships within the treatment center (see Gesualdo et al., 2021). Information was also provided to inform candidates that there was no direct incentive for participation, thus limiting power relationships (see Carter et al., 2021). Participants only had contact with me during interview sessions for the study to prevent potential personal relationships. Pedophiles are a group who typically attract bias or discrimination due to their preferred lifestyles (Harper et al., 2022). Therefore, I incorporated introspection to decrease or limit potential researcher bias (see Carter et al., 2021). I tracked and reflected on thoughts, feelings, or experiences that occurred during the duration of the study to illustrate introspection (see Carter et al., 2021).

A relational approach requires a receptive sensibility that should allow for openness regarding personal opinions in addition to research processes (Harper et al., 2022). A special population such as pedophiles requires continued reflexivity to remain objective during data collection and analysis (Florczak, 2021). The inherent uniqueness of pedophiles made confidentiality and anonymity a challenging objective to reach. Thus, I implemented effective safeguarding procedures such as nonidentifying information to protect participant privacy. I also coordinated a debriefing to inform participants about the results and conclusions of the research. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any misperceptions regarding the research.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population of interest was adult males who have sexual attractions to minors. Pedophiles are considered a vulnerable and marginalized population, necessitating special considerations (Gabbidon & Chenneville, 2021). Pedophiles are considered vulnerable and marginalized due to their status as sexual orientation minorities along with the associated stigma (Gabbidon & Chenneville, 2021). The individuals recruited for the study were active members of the online forum community. Individuals had to meet certain inclusion criteria requirements before being allowed to participate.

One of the primary components of sampling strategies involves selecting a fieldwork site that offers access to the necessary population (Ding et al., 2021). The fieldwork site selected for this particular research study was an online forum community. The online forum is dedicated to providing support for all pedophile communities.

Qualitative approaches typically use purposive sampling to identify relevant participants who correspond with the objectives of the research (Campbell et al., 2020). A purposive sampling method was used to produce generalizable findings that could potentially inform changes regarding conceptualizations and practices associated with pedophilic immutability. The potential participant pool included all active forum members who met inclusion criteria.

Selection criteria include various characteristics or experiences that need to be established for participation. The additional components of consenting to being interviewed, recorded, and having data collected and analyzed were needed for participation. An initial criterion for potential participants included being able to understand and speak English. Another major inclusion criterion included a self-reported sexual attraction to children. Participants were male, at least 18 years of age, and had preferences towards children 13 or younger. Additional criteria included being an active member of the forum for at least 6 months and a current therapeutic relationship with a mental health professional. Individuals were only allowed to participate if they never acted on their attractions.

Selection criteria is a major factor that necessitates diligent evaluation and review to ensure credibility. Details and contingencies related to inclusion criteria were largely based on self-report. Concerns regarding whether potential participants may have misled or misrepresented themselves were minimal due to the stigma associated with pedophilia. Potential participants were only required to report whether they were over 18 instead of reporting a specific age. Sexual interest in children was determined through self-report.

Comprehension of the English language was established through self-report. Participants provided self-reports for forum membership, therapeutic relationship, and any offending history.

Sample size is an essential component in evaluating the overall validity related to qualitative research (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). Approaches regarding sample size range from theoretical assumptions to methodological considerations and include saturation principles (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). Recommended sample sizes for qualitative research have a wide range that can be as little as two or many as 60, which illustrates the complexity and significance of sampling (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021).

Qualitative research seeks saturation, not generalizability; however, logistical reasons may prompt unique sample size decisions (Cobern & Adams, 2020; Guest et al., 2020). The goal of qualitative interviewing is to capture and represent opinions of those being studied (Cobern & Adams, 2020). A range of five to 10 data collection events have been recommended to reach saturation and uncover themes of lived experiences (Guest et al., 2020).

Potential participants were identified through an online community membership in a forum supporting pedophiles. Potential participants were initially recruited by an invitation flyer distributed within the online forum. Recruitment of potential participants entailed being provided with information regarding the study purpose, estimated length, their role, and research benefits. Potential participants were informed that direct incentives were not included for participation. Voluntary participation was explained to potential participants before requesting and obtaining consent.

Sample size decisions are a critical factor in qualitative research due to the nuances of suitable recommendations (Cobern & Adams, 2020). Saturation is the most common narrative in qualitative research, which refers to reaching a point when new insights are no longer emerging (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). Fewer participants are needed when rich information is captured exhaustively from each individual involved (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). The scope of this study was to explore pedophilic immutability and identify related themes. The prevalence of certain themes was another method used to determine appropriate sample size determinations based on a given population (see Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). A sample size of five to 10 data collection events should provide exhaustive data concerning pedophilic immutability (Campbell et al., 2020; Guest et al., 2020). However, achievement of saturation must be clearly outlined to justify the sample size being employed in the study (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2021).

Instrumentation

I achieved data collection through the use of multiple instruments and sources. The interview protocol was a researcher-developed instrument consisting of questions involving causal attributions and implicit beliefs related to pedophilia. The interview protocol was semistructured and was a crucial element due to its influence on rich data gathering (see Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). The main data source was information obtained from participants during interviews. I used observation sheets to record analytical memos regarding thoughts, ideas, or questions that arose during the interview. Interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy with the voluntary consent of each participant.

I used observation sheets to document notes during interview sessions. Each audio recorded file was authored by a single interviewee and identified confidentially. The interview protocol was researcher-developed and produced. The development of the interview protocol was directly influenced by multiple attribution and implicit theory scales. Each participant was the data source for issues and concerns that were determined by self-report.

The sufficiency of data collection instruments is critical to overall validity and credibility. I used audio recordings to accurately capture interviewee responses, which facilitated thematic data analysis. Observation sheets were used to capture thoughts or ideas, which strengthened follow-up questions and complemented analytical expertise. The interview protocol was specifically focused on attribution and implicit theory principles that were related to pedophilic immutability. RQs included in the study were designed to provoke open communication and thoughtful responses regarding pedophilic immutability.

Researcher-Developed Instruments

With no established instrument available, a researcher-developed instrument was largely a consequence of necessity. The relative dearth of research which exists regarding pedophilic immutability limited available scales related attribution and implicit theory. The majority of research studies investigating causal attributions and implicit beliefs have implemented Likert scoring scales to capture data (Tao et al., 2021). The qualitative approach is better suited for exploring unrevealed elements related to pedophilic immutability (Molen et al., 2023). Semistructured open-ended questions allow

participants to provide rich, detailed information which highlights the most common themes regarding pedophilic immutability (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). As such, I developed an interview protocol to explore causal attributions and implicit beliefs associated with pedophilia.

The interview protocol was evaluated by a group of experts to determine content validity. Interview questions were reviewed to ensure their association with study purpose and ability to produce related responses. The interview protocol was developed with influence from previous research studies that investigated pedophilia from different perspectives (see Furnham & Haraldsen, 1998; Marziano et al., 2006). I designed the interview questions with the purpose of effectively exploring participant perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability. The interview protocol was used to allow follow-up questions which provided opportunities for rich description. Questions related to causal attributions of pedophilia were developed from critical factors involving etiology (Furnham & Haraldsen, 1998). Questions related to implicit beliefs regarding pedophilia were developed from identified themes of pedophilic attractions (Marziano et al., 2006). The content validity of the interview protocol was boosted by its ability to prompt opinions and attitudes regarding pedophilic immutability.

The use of interview questions and follow-up questions was implemented to ensure accurate information gathering for all research study necessities. The components needing demographic information and criminal history were satisfied through self-report. The open-ended questions allowed participants to provide thoughtful and purposeful feedback regarding lived experiences (see Siedlecki, 2022). Follow-up questions were

designed to provide flexibility and opportunity to collect sufficient data associated with the study purpose (Siedlecki, 2022). The audio recorded files were used to accurately capture participant responses and facilitate transcription. The structure of the interview protocol effectively and sufficiently captured data which answered questions related to study purpose.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Most of the data were collected during live semistructured interview sessions with participants. RQs were designed to elicit responses regarding causal attributions and implicit beliefs which are associated with pedophilic immutability. Responses were audio recorded for accuracy with voluntary participant consent. I collected ideas, notes, and reflections during sessions on observation sheets. Observation notes were used to enhance the interview protocol and complement data analysis. Self-reports were reviewed to determine whether inclusion criteria have been reached.

Participant responses to RQs were the primary source of data. Interview sessions occurred through private virtual rooms coordinated by the interviewee and me. Interviews, recordings, and observations were conducted, managed and documented manually. Data collection events occurred over the course of three to four months to offer ample opportunity for scheduling conflicts. I scheduled interview sessions in coordination with participant availability. Participants were informed that each interview session may require between thirty minutes to one hour of their time.

An audio recorder was operating during interview sessions to accurately capture participant responses. I used observation sheets to record notes, ideas, and reflections

regarding participant responses, behaviors, or interview protocol effectiveness. Initial recruitment was initiated by identifying a participant pool that fits inclusion criteria. All individuals of the initial participant pool were recruited by an invitation flyer distributed within the online forum community. Individuals were interviewed when inclusion criteria had been reached and consent given. The initial participant pool would be used for vacancy purposes if participants withdrew or were unable to complete.

Exit procedures following the study conclusion were predominantly used for debriefing sessions and concluding remarks. The acknowledgement of contributions and appreciation for participation was a primary focus for the debriefing sessions. The debriefing sessions offered an opportunity to hear participant concerns and provide supplemental information regarding the study. Best practices for debriefing were to provide clarification for participants regarding the study purpose and its objective. The debriefing session was used to re-emphasize potential benefits associated with participation. My personal contact information was provided to participants in case of unanticipated need for communication.

Study participants were asked to return for minor follow-up procedures after the completion of data analysis. The coordination of follow-up sessions was scheduled through email communication. Participants provided dates and times of availability to facilitate follow-up session coordination. A central focus of the follow-up sessions was to inform participants about study findings and potential implications. Questions and concerns which could not be addressed during follow-up sessions were redirected to

communicate through email for further discussion. The importance of the follow-up session was attributed mainly to its information dissemination.

Data Analysis Plan

Semistructured interviews were used as a primary data collection tool due to the associated opportunity for exploration (see Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The interview protocol was made up of primary research inquiries in addition to impromptu follow-up questions. After data was gathered from interviews, I conducted analysis with the purpose of recognizing and identifying patterns (see Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). The questions about perceived causal attributions associated with pedophilia were intended to elicit responses related to internal or external factors. The questions about perceived implicit beliefs associated with pedophilia were intended to elicit responses related to whether trait malleability is possible. I completed manual thematic analysis of all data and other related components.

I applied thematic analysis to identify common themes among participant responses (see Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). First, I transcribed the data from audio file to text, then, coded and analyzed the data. Components of the inductive approach were highlighted by transcript review and independent coding (see Ozone et al., 2020). The initial patterns produced from responses related to causal attributions and implicit beliefs were manually identified and established. The deductive approach was used to align identified themes that matched theoretical principles associated with attribution and implicit theory (see Ozone et al., 2020). Manual coding was used in lieu of data analysis software programs. Discrepant cases were also reported and analyzed.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues related to trustworthiness are commonplace in all research settings regardless of methodology (Stahl & King, 2020). Qualitative research has a unique approach compared to its quantitative counterpart. Qualitative research is typically focused on accurately capturing experiences instead of following a specific formula (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). Criteria associated with qualitative research includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). Each component has distinct measures which can be applied to demonstrate overall trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020).

Credibility

I applied multiple strategies to establish and illustrate credibility (see Adler, 2022). The incorporation of semistructured interviews in addition to observation notes were used to generate more robust triangulation (see Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). The inclusion of attribution and implicit theory principles helped in framing pedophilic immutability. Participants validated different aspects of the research study to verify accurate representation. Reflexivity was used to identify researcher role, influence, potential bias, and its subsequent contribution on interpretation within the research study (see Barrett et al., 2020; Florczak, 2021).

Transferability

Transferability is the method for which external validity gets expressed in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2021). The use of semistructured interviews in addition to follow-up questions allowed ample opportunity for thick description (see Stahl & King,

2020). The purpose of rich, descriptive data was to capture and represent participants' experiences (see Stahl & King, 2020). The detailed representation of participant experiences led to more accurate interpretations. Participants were provided an opportunity to verify whether interpretations were representative of their experiences (see Adler, 2022).

Dependability

Research validity was also contingent on consistency and reliability of the data (see Adler, 2022). Methodology was significantly related to overall dependability (see Adler, 2022). I applied triangulation recommendations to data collection methods and application of theoretical principles. Rationale for specific data collection methods and theory incorporation was provided to illustrate their association with core concepts of the study. I created an audit trail was created to describe processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a form of objectivity associated with qualitative research (Maxwell, 2021). Objectivity in qualitative research is focused more on obtaining data which can be confirmed (Adler, 2022). Acknowledgement and identification of biases which can potentially influence interpretations were mediated by using reflexivity practices (see Florczak, 2021). An audit trail can help in determining how, why, and when data were collected to make confirmation more convincing (Adler, 2022). Descriptions and explanations regarding conclusions related to study results enhance confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

Protection of participant identity and data is a crucial element in practicing ethical procedures. Committee members reviewed supporting documents before submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is responsible for oversight related to ethical procedures and research integrity (see Chou & Frazier, 2020). The IRB process carefully reviews research protocols to determine if requirements are achieved (see Chou & Frazier, 2020). Permission to gain access to participant identity and data was granted by IRB approval prior to research study commencement. The IRB approval number (#12-16-22-0731809) was also reflected in consent forms.

Ethical principles representative of the American Psychological Association (APA) includes beneficence, responsibility, integrity, and dignity, among others (Chou & Frazier, 2020). A major feature associated with ethical research involves the general avoidance of harm for research participants (Chou & Frazier, 2020). Privacy and confidentiality are also critical factors for ethical practices during research. Careful consideration is needed regarding privacy and confidentiality due to the vulnerable status of pedophiles. A primary function to achieve avoiding harm is by keeping research participants informed of their rights, expectations, and responsibilities (Chou & Frazier, 2020). Integrity and dignity also become more prominent due to the potential for bias or prejudice against pedophiles.

Vulnerable populations such as pedophiles are also considered more susceptible to exploitative relationships (see Langer et al., 2021). Permission from IRB is needed to recruit and study participants from vulnerable populations. Potential participant

identification was carefully reviewed due to the sensitive nature of the population. Clear boundaries were outlined to prevent confusion regarding roles of the researcher (see Vega-Cordova et al., 2020). Participants were informed regarding potential benefits of participation (see Vega-Cordova et al., 2020). Participants were also notified that favors or avoidance of punishment would not be offered to incentivize participation.

Informed consent is also strongly associated with data collection activities such as semistructured interviews. Potential participants were entitled to refuse participation or withdraw at any time and were notified of voluntary consent (see Chou & Frazier, 2020). Confidentiality and privacy are the most critical ethical concerns due to vulnerability of population (Chou & Frazier, 2020). Anonymous identifiers were used for recruitment and data collection purposes to prevent potential privacy conflicts. Data protection also included maintenance, access, and storage of confidential information. Data were password encrypted, stored electronically, and access was restricted.

Summary

Extensive information regarding research design, methodology, rationale, and issues of trustworthiness was provided in Chapter 3. A qualitative exploration regarding pedophilic immutability was conducted due to a dearth of associated research. Perceptions of pedophiles have been unjustifiably ignored from pedophilic immutability theoretical frameworks which highlighted a critical missing element. Incorporation of pedophiles' perceptions are a critical component in establishing new conceptualizations related to pedophilic immutability. My roles as the researcher included duties such as

recruiter, interviewer, and data analyst. Reflective practices were incorporated to prevent potential researcher subjectivity from influencing interpretations.

The selection of pedophiles as a focal point for exploring pedophilic immutability determined participant criteria. Purposive sampling was applied involving an accessible fieldwork site with the necessary population. Total amount of participants recruited for the study was four with eight data collection events. The interview protocol was the primary data collection tool. Procedures or expectations regarding interviews and debriefings related to the study were explained. Thematic analysis was applied to explore and identify common themes which could facilitate new conceptualizations of pedophilic immutability.

Qualitative research is focused on issues of trustworthiness rather than the more objective validity measure. Trustworthiness becomes less of a concern when research is clearly outlined and replicable. Credibility is established through triangulation whereas descriptive data capturing experiences accurately underscored transferability. Dependability was determined by applying rationale for incorporated methods whereas reflective practices strengthened confirmability. Avoidance of harm was a major factor considering the vulnerability associated with population. Informed consent was crucial to ensure participants were treated with dignity and respect.

Exhaustive detail regarding data collection and analysis is a major contribution of Chapter 4. Careful documentation of research procedures or associated notes are necessary to illustrate rigor and transparency. Description of the setting is crucial to establishing potential influences which might affect study results or interpretations.

Participant demographics are also included to provide detailed information for replication purposes. Data were collected through qualitative semistructured interviews and thematically analyzed. A discussion related to study results is also provided.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore pedophiles' perceptions and understand how those beliefs are developed. The immutability of pedophilia, or pedophilic attractions, is an unresolved issue that has not received appropriate attention. Experiences of individuals who are minor attracted have been predominantly overlooked in the search to uncover whether these attractions may be immutable (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018; Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018). Individuals with direct experiences related to pedophilic attractions can provide unique perspectives. External observers are unlikely to provide the same type of insight as someone with direct experience. The inclusion of pedophiles should be considered essential in forming a comprehensive understanding concerning how perceptions related to pedophilic immutability are developed. Pursuit of an unambiguous position regarding pedophilic immutability could be enhanced with collaboration from pedophile communities.

A qualitative approach was felicitous for the purpose of exploring pedophiles' perceptions. I used a basic qualitative inquiry due to its effectiveness in extracting rich, descriptive narratives of personal experiences. The RQs were developed based on principles related to attribution theory and implicit theory. One RQ was focused on pedophiles' perceptions of causal attributions associated with pedophilia. The other RQ was focused on pedophile's perceptions regarding changing sexual attractions. Data collection events occurred via virtual conferencing to protect anonymity. I explored

possible thematic links between causal attributions, implicit beliefs, and pedophilic immutability.

Chapter 4 is a comprehensive discussion outlining research study findings and the data analysis process employed. I described in detail the setting associated with this study to provide context for methodology, recruitment, and inclusion criteria. I also reported pertinent demographics of the participant population in addition to inclusionary criteria. The methods used for data collection such as interview protocols and number of participants are described in detail. Data analysis plans are summarized to illustrate how codes and themes were developed. I then presented appropriate evidence, demonstrating trustworthiness such as member checks and reflexivity. Finally, the results of thematic analysis such as major themes unearthed are reviewed and covered in-depth. The RQs were as follows:

RQ1: How do pedophiles attribute the cause of pedophilic attractions?

RQ2: How do pedophiles perceive pedophilic immutability?

Setting

Walden University has standards and policies regarding vulnerable populations, which had a strong influence on the potential participant pool. The Walden University IRB determined it would be more appropriate to only incorporate a population that would limit discussions associated with child sexual abuse activity. Thus, pedophiles who had committed child sexual abuse were prohibited from participation. The potential for legal ramifications associated with criminal disclosures were avoided by limiting the participant pool. In addition, child sexual abuse professionals suggested using an online

forum dedicated to providing a community for pedophiles. I submitted multiple IRB change requests proposals due to a lack of volunteers for participation. Contact from potential participants highlighted a pronounced disagreement with the approved inclusion criteria, which directly affected participation.

Demographics

Demographics of the participants were limited due to concerns regarding confidentiality for vulnerable populations. The demographics reported involved factors pertaining to age, gender, and ethnicity. Participants all self-reported to be White even though disclosure of race was not required. All participants reported being over 18 years old and were not required to report their exact age. A requirement of the study was that all individuals wanting to participate were male in gender. All participants also reported having a primary sexual attraction to children. Participants all reported being members of the online community forum.

The characteristics of the participant population predominantly involved issues associated with inclusionary criteria. A major criterion for inclusion was that potential participants were sexually interested in children. Another criterion was that participants could not have committed child sexual abuse of any form. Child sexual abuse included physical abuse or the use of abusive imagery. Participants were required to have therapeutic relationships with a mental health professional for acceptance in the research interview. Participants were also required to follow up with their counselor or therapist to discuss issues about the research interview. Another requirement was that participants had to be members of the online forum for at least 6 months.

Data Collection

I implemented a purposive sampling strategy to locate participants appropriate for the study. Participants were recruited from an online forum centered on supporting the pedophile community. I made contact with administrators from the online community forum to determine if and how recruitment should proceed. The administrative team from the online community forum agreed to allow recruitment after reviewing IRB approval, study expectations, and interview questions. The initial recruitment of potential participants started with an invitation flyer being posted on the online community forum. Participants were required to make contact through email correspondence. The invitation flyer post was removed from the online community forum after a recruitment period of 90 days.

I discussed proposal change requests regarding possible recruitment modifications throughout the recruitment period. Issues concerning recruitment limitations preceded suggestions related to potentially changing the inclusion criteria. The IRB committee reviewed the proposal change requests and decided against changing the inclusion criteria. Incentives were not proposed initially, then, after careful consideration, an offer of \$20 was made to increase the participant pool. Zero individuals volunteered to participate after the \$20 incentive was offered. The initial recruitment period was approximately 60 days. The subsequent recruitment period lasted approximately 30 days after the addition of an incentive.

A total of seven male individuals responded to the initial recruitment flyer and requested further information concerning potential participation. Three of the seven

individuals who initially responded were ineligible for participation due to not meeting inclusion criteria. The remaining individuals met inclusion criteria and were selected for participation. A total of four male individuals ($N = 4$) volunteered and participated in the research study interviews. Each participant engaged in two separate semistructured interviews which occurred approximately 4 to 6 weeks apart. Each interview session was estimated to last between 30 to 60 minutes. Extensions of interview sessions were offered when needed.

I scheduled interview sessions through email correspondence. Interview session invitations were sent out electronically. Before each session, participants were notified that participation in the research interview was considered consent. Semistructured interviews were conducted virtually to protect confidentiality and anonymity. The virtual conferencing application, ZOOM, was used because it has multiple features to ensure protection. Participants were instructed to only use audio and deactivate video so that anonymity was protected. ZOOM conferencing calls have recording capabilities that were used for audio documentation.

Audio recorded files were initially created on the ZOOM application. I then transferred the audio recorded files from the ZOOM application to a personal data drive. I also searched and located transcription services offering free trials, and I used two separate transcription services to transcribe the research interview audio recorded files, Trint and Transkriptor. Audio recordings were uploaded to the transcription service application, which then converted those files into text documents. I then reviewed the

transcribed documents against the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Transcription mistakes and audio distortions were corrected during manual review.

I initially stored audio recorded files on the ZOOM application then deleted them from their database following transfer. Audio recorded files and text transcriptions were stored electronically. All files were stored on a personal data drive with encrypted access. I labeled the stored files with ambiguous codes assigned to each participant. The stored files did not include any personal identifiers. The data drive was protected with security encryption and stored in a locked private office. I also stored analytic memos and other physical data in the locked private office.

The initial plan involved recruiting between seven to 10 volunteers who would be willing to participate in research interviews. However, the target sample population did not materialize, and adjustments were necessary. I consulted a qualitative data analysis expert to determine the best method for moving forward. Recommendations were made regarding alternative methods that could be used to reach thematic saturation. Thematic saturation can be reached retrospectively by increasing the number of data collection events (Guest et al., 2020). Individuals were initially asked to only participate in a single interview session. However, each individual was then asked to participate in a follow-up interview after concluding that one session would not achieve thematic saturation.

Data Analysis

An important function of thematic analysis involves identifying codes that represent valuable units of meaning (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). Frequency and remarkability were major considerations when identifying codes to represent each

participant. I employed both elemental and affective coding in order to capture a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The first review of participant transcripts mostly resulted in highlighting words and phrases that were directly linked to study RQs. Thoughts and beliefs related to causal attributions or implicit theories of pedophilia were considered significant in potentially explaining how pedophilic immutability is developed. The second review focused more on peripheral codes of meaning, which may not have been directly related to study RQs. A meaningful experience frequently recollected involved participants' feelings regarding societal stigma, personal acceptance, and alternative viewpoints.

The observations I made during the completion of semistructured interviews were recorded as analytic memos. The observations made during the interview sessions contributed significantly to how codes developed during thematic analysis. Reflexivity is a critical practice employed to mitigate or negate potential research bias (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). I captured the thoughts, feelings, and notes that arose during interview sessions to provide context or illustrate alternative viewpoints. Triangulation efforts were enhanced by the inclusion of analytic memos to facilitate thematic analysis (see Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). I also recorded analytic memos in a personal composition book, which I then transferred to Word documents. Memos were reviewed and incorporated during thematic analysis to provide depth for discovered themes.

Identification of codes is a principal task that is then supplemented by formulating categories to summarize those meaningful expressions (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). Initial codes were sorted into groups that seemed to indicate similar thoughts or ideas.

The groups of codes were reviewed, and then a category label that represented commonality was developed. The iterative process included switching codes from one category to another, attempting to identify which were most related. I reviewed transcripts, codes, and categories multiple times to capture a comprehensive representation. Themes were initially developed by searching for meaning that emerged from datasets. Another method for establishing themes was by including concepts derived from the conceptual framework.

The first interview question was developed to examine what these pedophiles believed causes sexual attractions to children. Participants were united in their belief that it was a complicated question that likely could not be answered definitively. Phrases such as “it’s an impossible question” or “there’s no scientific proof” were illustrative of the complexity concerning how these individuals understood pedophilia development. Perceived causes of sexual attraction to children centered on ideas involving biology, genetics, and experiences. Responses seemed heterogeneous because there was a wide range of answers that included some similarities. The broad scope of answers included “I don’t think it’s genetic,” “maybe genetic, maybe not,” “biological, I say,” “a combination of nature and nurture,” and “the nurture side works within biological parameters.” The uncertainty related to how pedophilia was noticeably apparent from participant responses.

Interview Question 2 concerned the perception pedophiles had regarding potential to change. One viewpoint arose that sought to underscore the significant difference between sexual interests and attractions. Participants were adamant that sexual interests and pedophilic attractions were distinctly separate constructs. The overriding attitude was

that these individuals believed interests may change whereas sexual attractions were unchangeable. Thoughts that were shared included, “I have had periods where my interests in adult men fluctuated” and “No, I don’t think your sexuality can change.” Participants also shared the reasons behind why they felt it could be possible to change or not. Beliefs regarding the factors affecting change included, “These are biological desires that are not going to be that easily suppressed” and “I do not think sexual attraction can change at all, like, it’s been tried, it’s failed.”

Question 3 was used to ask whether these individuals felt their beliefs or attitudes had changed over time. A number of opinions were offered, which ranged from changing their initial beliefs to not really ever thinking about it. The extent of viewpoints changing illustrated a different perspective of how change might have been interpreted. Participants seemed to understand change as swings or fluctuations of sexual interests, not necessarily a change of pedophilic attractions. One participant stated, “I think they weren’t profoundly different, but they were subtly different,” which showed there was little change. Another participant identified that they wanted to change but realized it was not likely: “A lot of us do hope that we can change but everybody, inevitably, most of us realize that we cannot change.” A few other answers such as, “Well, 10 years ago, I’m just totally ignorant and didn’t really think about it” and “I probably never thought that in the moment, because I suppose it’s a bit like the moment you think about that, you’re thinking about it,” conveyed that thinking about change was not an automatic idea.

The final interview question was used for exploring whether these individuals had ever wanted their attractions to children to stop. All participants had similar answers

which, as expected, acknowledged a want to stop being attracted to children: “I often do think it would be so much easier if I didn’t have all the baggage around sexual attractions to children” and “That is correct, I would have preferred to have been without it” were just some of the typical responses associated with not wanting to have sexual attractions to children. Participants were also keenly aware that the exercise of wanting to change usually resulted in futility. Responses such as “Yes, I think I did want that for many years but eventually came to terms with the fact that it wasn’t going away” and “Yeah probably but I’m pretty sort of ambivalent to it” highlight how ineffective these efforts felt. Participants were undoubtedly skeptical about the idea of changing their sexual attractions although the hope was evident. The hypothetical idea of change was exemplified by, “I probably would be content without it, if I could restart life but I would change a whole lot of things, I suppose,” which showed its complex properties.

Initial codes derived from interview questions resulted in multiple categories that captured the essence of participants’ responses. Some of the major categories applied directly to the RQs while others were highlighted for alternative noteworthiness. Development of pedophilia was a major discussion which consisted of categories such as “random,” “likely not hereditary,” and “complex” among others. Another category centered on how “sexuality does not change” and how that was perceived by participants. Participants also reported numerous replacement behaviors that were attempted such as aversion therapy which resulted in a category of “alternatives tried.” Many categories were unrelated to the RQs yet still offered valuable insight regarding pedophiles’

experiences. The “unfulfilling existence” category was indicative of how little has been uncovered regarding pedophiles’ personal experiences.

Categories were developed from the initial codes and overriding themes resulted from the categories. Some major themes had direct associations with the RQs while others emerged from unexpected narratives. Themes were developed to highlight the significance shared in relation to participants’ experiences. One theme which arose included “nature *then* nurture” which illustrated a position that both were needed although more weight seemed to be given towards nature. Another theme, “never believed but tried and failed,” presented stimulating discussion which involved subconscious beliefs and concerted behaviors. “Change is ambiguous” was a theme that was not directly linked to the RQs yet illustrated important perspectives regarding change. Codes, categories, and themes are discussed in further detail with supporting data.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research seeks meaning from life experiences which makes trustworthiness a challenging proposition. Trustworthiness is an imperative function of qualitative research, demonstrated by detailing methods and verifying accuracy related to findings (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). Chapter 3 initially outlined the major factors which typically support trustworthiness such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Chapter 4 reiterates the significance of trustworthiness while also detailing the methods incorporated to reach qualitative validity. Changes which occurred differing from the preliminary data collection and analysis plan were reported. Data

saturation was a critical point in developing the alternative data collection methods and analysis process. Different aspects of each component, such as member checks, were introduced to illustrate their significance towards overall validity (see Stahl & King, 2020).

Credibility

A comprehensive, logical, and reliable representation of the data was needed to highlight credibility in any research study (see Adler, 2022). Participants completed two separate interviews with each individual session lasting, on average, between 30 to 60 minutes. Original plans were modified to add follow-up interviews following the failure to reach initial participant goals. I developed follow-up interview questions to extract more description and explore additional thoughts regarding pedophilic attractions. Reflexivity to reflect on personal thought processes which arose during interviews or transcript reviews. I incorporated peer review to explore alternative viewpoints and dispel any potential bias within data interpretation. Discrepant cases regarding perceptions of change were acknowledged to illustrate disparities and highlight prospective explanations addressing those diverse opinions.

Transferability

Transferability is important in illustrating relevance from the findings and their potential application to other settings (Maxwell, 2021). One of the major considerations for transferability associated with this study included thick, rich description. I developed a semistructured interview protocol to allow for opportunities of exploration and elaboration of participant responses. Interview sessions were allowed to run as needed so

that participants had ample time for thoughtful responses. Follow-up interviews were designed to gather additional description regarding responses from the initial session and explore thoughts which emerged following completion of interviews. I reviewed interview transcripts with participants to ensure accuracy and enhance representativeness of participant responses. I employed purposive sampling to strengthen transferability with similar populations.

Dependability

Transparency of the research process is an essential component when attempting to demonstrate dependability (Maxwell, 2021). I created an audit trail to illustrate processes involved in data collection and analysis throughout the study. Rationale supporting the incorporation of follow-up interviews to achieve data saturation was noted in the audit trail. Data were collected from interview transcripts and observation notes which highlighted the multiple collection points. I included participants in reviewing interview transcripts to ensure accuracy of responses and guide interpretations. I used two separate theoretical foundations to develop interview questions and guide follow-up interviews. Themes which emerged during data analysis were considered through an attribution theory and implicit theory lens although not exclusively.

Confirmability

The representativeness of participants' views is a critical responsibility which underscores the significance related to confirmability (Florczak, 2021). Meticulous documentation, such as an audit trail and reflexive journaling, was also essential in establishing confirmability (see Maxwell, 2021). I used direct quotes from participants'

responses to illustrate authenticity and demonstrate objectivity. Member checks were used to collaborate with participants and ensure accuracy for direct quotes being incorporated in the research study. I used peer review to help explore personal thought processes and interpretations of data while discussing strategies which could minimize any potential bias. Debriefings were used to discuss study findings with participants and offer opportunities for amendments. Triangulation of data sources and theoretical foundations was another method which strengthened confirmability.

Results

Thematic analysis was an iterative process which required deep immersion into the collected data. The purpose of thematic analysis was to identify and highlight codes, categories, and themes associated with the study purpose (see Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). Codes and categories were organized into analogous groups to develop themes which expressed meaningful experiences or thoughts. The developed themes were then reviewed and matched with RQs which showed clear associations. Themes associated with RQ1 were selected for their relation to causal attributions concerning development of pedophilia (see Table 1 & Table 2). Themes associated with RQ2 were selected for their relation to implicit beliefs concerning pedophilic immutability (see Table 3 & Table 4). Developed themes not associated with RQs were separated to illustrate their alternative significance (see Table 5 & Table 6).

Table 1*Pedophilia Development Is Complex*

| Codes | Categories | Participants | Excerpts | Memos |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|--|---|
| Impossible question | Complex | 1 | “probably an impossible question” | Interesting in how these individuals perceived their own sexuality. Specifically, these individuals see pedophilia development just like other sexualities such hetero- or homosexuality. What’s really interesting is the perception of pedophilia being something biological but not genetic or hereditary. I wonder what other traits would match that same description? Additionally, since it’s also perceived as random selection, it gives an impression that their perception could be associated with a belief of being unlucky, possibly cursed, and that something did this to them. |
| Hard to answer | | 2 | “I think it’s hard to answer” | |
| No scientific proof | | 3 | “I know there’s no scientific proof of it yet” | |
| Not easily described | | 4 | “I can’t easily describe it because I don’t feel like I know the answer” | |
| Not passed down | Likely not hereditary | 1 | “there’s no evidence that that’s passed down” | |
| Not hereditary, just random | | 2 | “I personally don’t think it’s hereditary, just random” | |
| Not inherited | | 3 | “Obviously, there are siblings, if it were just inherited then the siblings would all be pedophiles” | |
| Genetic, maybe heritable | | 4 | “Probably is genetic but not necessarily heritable in the usual, in the predictable way” | |
| Random | Random | 1 | “it’s certainly random, my feeling anyway” | |
| Not hereditary, just random | | 2 | “I personally don’t think it’s hereditary, just random” | |
| Random selection | | 3 | “I think there may be a random selection, a certain number of people are always going to be born pedophiles no matter what you do” | |
| Like other sexualities | No different | 1 | “I think so, like homosexuality or anything” | |
| Like any other sexuality | | 2 | “For me, pedophilia, sexual attraction to minors is, it’s like any other sexuality, I don’t think it’s any different” | |

One significant theme which emerged from data analysis highlighted the complexity associated with how pedophilia is perceived to be developed. Responses such as “hard to answer” and “not easily described” illustrate the challenge participants had in identifying clear perceptions of development. The majority sentiment was that pedophilic attractions were unlikely to be a heritable trait. “Heterosexuality or homosexuality, there’s no evidence that that’s passed down” and “obviously, there are siblings, if it were just inherited then the siblings would all be pedophiles and that’s never true” are indicative of the belief that pedophilia is not hereditary. One perception that surfaced among the group involved the idea that pedophilia may not be heritable and more likely akin to random selection. “I personally don’t think it’s hereditary, just random” and “I think there may be a random selection, a certain number of people are always going to be born pedophiles no matter what you do” are representative of an unsystematic view of pedophilia development. An unforeseen opinion included the view that pedophilia development was similar to other sexualities such as heterosexuality and homosexuality, “for me, pedophilia, sexual attractions to minors is, it’s like any other sexuality, I don’t think it’s any different.”

Table 2*Nature Then Nurture*

| Codes | Categories | Participants | Excerpts | Memos |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------|---|---|
| Nature and nurture | Nature & nurture | 1 | “a combination of nature and nurture” | Pedophilia is perceived as almost strictly biological, something inherent in the individual. A triggering event is noted but does not have the overall impact as the “predisposition.” Experience alone, regardless of trauma, is not considered as a likely, or convincing, route of development for pedophilia. Interesting, since anecdotal public views see prior child sexual abuse experiences as strong indicators of future pedophilia. Is that because the majority of this specific population didn’t personally experience child sexual abuse? |
| Combination of nature and nurture | | 2 | “there’s something that happens during nature that gives you like the predisposition for this ... something else has to sort of like trigger it” | |
| Combination of nature and nurture | | 3 | “a combination of nature and nurture” | |
| Interaction between nature and nurture | | 4 | “I would say the nurture side works within biological parameters” | |
| Experience alone not enough | Predisposition is critical | 1 | “I think it’s incredibly rare for someone to go the other way, for it not to exist in them and then for events to then bring it about” | |
| Predisposition needed to become pedophile | | 2 | “I don’t think that they can become minor attracted people if they don’t have the predisposition for it” | |
| Predisposition actualized by experience | | 3 | “the evidence to me indicates that whatever inherited predisposition I may have had from my ancestors ... seems to have been initialized by sexual experiences I had” | |
| Biology may be more influential than experience | | 4 | “It’s possible that there was no conceivable set of experiences that would not have ended up with my having these attractions because of biological things” | |
| Child sexual abuse victims do not always become pedophiles | Child sexual abuse ≠ pedophilia | 2 | “If there’s child sexual abuse that happens to a person who is not susceptible or do not have a predisposition to become a minor attracted person then that person will not become a minor attracted person themselves” | |
| Child sexual abuse does not lead to pedophilia | | 3 | “not every person who is abused becomes a pedophile” | |

Another major theme that provided an account related to the development of pedophilia involved concepts such as *nature* and *nurture*. Participants were clear in their perceptions that pedophilia development must be a combination of both nature and nurture. “There’s something that happens during nature that gives you like the predisposition for this ... something else has to sort of like trigger it” and “I would say the nurture side works within biological parameters” are illustrative of how pedophiles have perceived pedophilia development. Another critical acknowledgement made by participants involved the inclusion of pedophilic predispositions that function as a foundation from which to develop. Responses such as “There’s no scientific proof of it yet but the evidence to me indicates that whatever inherited predisposition I may have ... seems to have been initialized by sexual experiences I had when I was going through puberty” and “I think it’s incredibly rare for someone to go the other way, for it not to exist in them and then for events to then bring it about” are able to highlight the importance participants assigned predispositions in pedophilia development. Disparities between perceptions of how much is contributed from nature or nurture was further emphasized by beliefs that child sexual abuse and pedophilia are not necessarily in alignment with one another. “If there’s child sexual abuse that happens to a person who is not susceptible or do not have a predisposition to become a minor attracted person then that person will not become a minor attracted person themselves” and “I think it really takes both because obviously there are children of people with pedophilia who are not pedophiles and vice versa ... not every person who is abused becomes a pedophile” are

responses which seemingly express that experiences are likely less influential than biological predispositions.

Table 3*Nothing I Can Do About It*

| Codes | Categories | Participants | Excerpts | Memos |
|--|---|--------------|--|---|
| Sexual attractions do not change | Sexuality does not change | 1 | “No (you can’t turn off or stop sexual attractions) ...so there are periods usually when I’m with another adult and...I engage much less in fantasies about children, but the attraction is still always there” | It was clear that the group didn’t believe their sexual attractions to children could or would ever stop although there was awareness of being able to control behavior. Although there is a clear perception that pedophilia is something internal, it is also noted that its by no fault of the individual. Is this, again, another subconscious perception that pedophilia was “done” to them? |
| Sexuality can not change | | 2 | “No, I don’t think you can change your sexuality ... the general experience is that you can’t change it” | |
| No turning it off | | 3 | “That’s probably a fair conclusion at this point, there’s no scientific evidence and in my experience,, there’s nothing that could turn off the attraction level” | |
| Behavior can change but not sexual attractions | | 4 | “It can’t be altered, it can only be responded to only and the response is the behavior but the attraction is not, you know, subject to the influences you bring” | |
| Something in brains | Something inside me | 1 | “Biological probably the correct term, because I think there is just something in brains that no one’s managed to work out yet, that is, what impacts our sexual interests” | |
| Always felt that way | | 2 | “I don’t think it can change, like nobody, nobody has ever just changed without it, you don’t hear that from someone who goes from straight to gay, that they just suddenly change” | |
| Biology not easily suppressed | | 4 | “These are biological desires that are not going to be that easily suppressed” | |
| No control | No control over sexual attraction mechanism | 2 | “I don’t think that you can choose what you’re attracted to,, you have no, you have no control of that, I did not wake up one day and said I wanted to be sexually attracted to young boys” | |
| No control over sexual attractions | | 3 | “You have control over what you do about it, over your actions, behavior, but I don’t think you control who you are attracted to” | |
| Attractions are involuntary | | 4 | “it’s literally subliminal, it’s you know, it’s very difficult to imagine mechanisms by which you could ... at the conscious level, at the metacognitive level, ... change that, it seems to be something that’s just happening deep in the programming” | |

A central theme associated with how pedophiles perceive their ability to change was uncovered and highlighted important thought processes. Each participant expressed a belief that there was nothing which could be done to change their pedophilic attractions. “No, I don’t think you can change your sexuality, the general experience is that you can’t change it” and “it can’t be altered, it can only be responded to only and the response is the behavior, but the attraction is not, you know, subject to the influences you bring” are indicative of the unfavorable opinions related to potential change. A connection emerged which seemed to link biological causal attributions and the perceptions of immutability. “Biological probably is the correct term, because I think there is just something in brains, that no one’s managed to work out yet, that is, what impacts our sexual interests” and “these are biological desires that are not going to be that easily suppressed” are responses which illustrate a perceived, although possibly subconscious, connection between biology and sexuality. One sentiment which seemed linked to the perception that pedophilia is immutable involved believing individuals do not have control over sexual attraction mechanisms. “I don’t think that you can choose what you’re attracted to, you have no, you have no control of that, I did not wake up one day and said I wanted to be attracted to young boys” and “it’s literally subliminal, it’s you know, it’s very difficult to imagine mechanisms by which you could ... at the conscious level, the metacognitive level ... change that, seems to be something that’s just happening deep in the programming” are prime examples representing the lack of control related to pedophilic immutability perceived by these individuals.

Table 4*Never Believed But Tried and Failed*

| Codes | Categories | Participants | Excerpts | Memos |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---|---|
| Exposure ineffective | Alternatives were tried | 2 | “Exposure ... so like I’ve exposed myself to adults, I’ve been in sexual adult relationships, I’ve been around, if you can say it that way, but just doesn’t work and at the end of the day, I still am attracted to minors” | The majority of the group reported trying different types of things in order to try to “change,” including religion, exposure, and aversion. From their perspective, all attempts were futile since these attempts always ended in failure. |
| My heart was never in it | | 3 | “I do not think I’ve really changed my opinions about it or the fact of it, when I first started, so probably to 2011 or 12, I took a class by Dr. Jane Abel, it was basically on aversion therapy and I’ll admit I didn’t really have the heart in it to make it work but it didn’t work for me” | Interestingly, the majority of the groups also reported that although they tried different things to “change,” they never really believed it was possible. Seems like a self-fulfilling prophecy which then begs the question, how does this type of thought process impact potential for change? |
| Loneliness could lead to alternatives | | 4 | “I was motivated initially by loneliness, I think, in seeking an adult relationship” | |
| Took my shot | Doesn’t go away | 2 | “I got like this female friend and she started developing feelings for me and I got together with her and like, sort of like figured, okay, this is my chance ... I tried but I just couldn’t” | |
| No praying it away | | 3 | “What I don’t think works is to try to make it change or to try to pray it away, I have a lot of religious friends who think I should just pray about it and it’ll go away, that has never worked for me” | |
| Just how a person is | | 4 | “when I was young and inexperienced, I would have just gone, well, these are my attractions, they, you know, they haven’t changed in the last two years, you know, they’re obviously completely immutable and I’m going to be the same for the rest of my life” | |
| Didn’t think it could change | Not really | 1 | “Once I was aware that it was an attraction rather than some sort of like kink or fantasy and I don’t think I ever thought it would stop. But in the past, I thought it was maybe caused by other things rather than an innate attraction” | |
| Hope | | 2 | “it was like it came off the thought of the thinking that I could change came from the hope of wanting to change, it wasn’t the other way around, it wasn’t, I think I change so let’s go for it, it was more, I hope so much I can | |

| Codes | Categories | Participants | Excerpts | Memos |
|--------------------------------------|------------|--------------|---|-------|
| | | | change so let's think that I can change but just didn't work" | |
| Never believed | | 3 | "I guess I just didn't believe in it hard enough intellectually" | |
| Never believed I could really change | | 4 | "I don't think I've ever really believed that it would change or that it would be, I think, really, I've only ever thought in terms of concealing or just sort of managing" | |

One theme that materialized involved the belief that attempting to change sexuality would be futile regardless of exercise or attitude. Participants expressed a disbelief regarding actual sexuality change, however, were not opposed to trying alternatives. Responses such as "exposure ... so like I've exposed myself to adults, I've been in sexual adult relationships, I've been around, if you can say it that way, but just doesn't work and at the end of the day, I still am attracted to minors" and "I do not think I've really changed my opinions about it or the fact of it, when I first started, so probably 2011 or 12, I took a class by Dr. Jane Abel, it was basically on aversion therapy" are able to demonstrate multiple different approaches taken by individuals in pursuit of change. A contrasting viewpoint which potentially undermined change attempts was the belief that pedophilic attractions were never going away. "What I don't think works is to try to make it change or to try to pray it away, I have a lot of religious friends who think I should just pray about it and it'll go away, that has never worked for me" and "when I was young and inexperienced, I would have just gone, well, these are my attractions, they, you know, they haven't changed in the last two years, you know, they're obviously completely immutable and I'm going to be the same for the rest of my life" are representative of the thoughts which could potentially be considered an inception point

for each participants' current perceptions. The overall belief that pedophilic attractions were never going to change was particularly noteworthy because of the implications associated with pedophilic immutability perceptions. "It was like it came off the thought or the thinking that I could change came from the hope of wanting to change it wasn't the other way around, it wasn't, I think I can change so let's for it, it was more, I hope so much I can change so lets' think that I can change but just didn't work" is a distinctly representative statement which emphasizes ideas of change and the supporting mentality.

Table 5*Reality for Pedophiles*

| Codes | Categories | Participants | Excerpts | Memos |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---|--|--|
| Pedophilia is viewed as harmful | Because of this | 1 | "I think it's sort of driven into the pedophilia is inherently harmful" | The views of others or society was very impactful in how pedophilia is viewed, even by the individual. Easy to see why somebody would want to not be that way. The participants could even see that life would likely have been easier without it. What's really commendable is their ability to refrain from acting on their desires; no small feat. Many people fall victim to their desires and most do nothing to mitigate, yet these individuals do everything to stay away from that behavior. |
| Pedophiles are monsters | | 2 | "When I started learning about pedophiles ... it was, you're a monster" | |
| Religion and others' sexual abuse | | 3 | "a couple of things, the religious influence of my mother was strong in that, but also the fact that five of my siblings were sexually abused as children, I was not, but I saw the impact that it had on their lives over the past seven years and so I certainly from the beginning knew that it was wrong to act on it" | |
| Social stigma | 4 | "society, and in this case, technology as well; which is the fact that people don't approve of me; I can't give like a complete 100% it's only the social stigma causing me upset but on the other hand, the social stigma is causing me significant upset" | | |
| Magicked away | Rather not | 1 | "Probably. It's quite a lonely existence. There's definitely an appeal to the thought of it all being magicked away" | |
| Let's start from scratch | | 2 | "Yeah, yes I would definitely ... if I could take away my pedophilia and start my life from scratch" | |
| I did want it gone | | 3 | "That is correct, I would have preferred to have been born without it" | |
| It would've been better | | 4 | "Have I thought that it would be convenient if I never had been? And have I sort of wishfully thought maybe if I hadn't been, I would have a better life? Yes; Not 100% but yes" | |
| Forever unfulfilled | Unfulfilling existence | 1 | "So I think the fear of that side is quite appealing, to wish it would all just go away ... but the other side is, is there is ultimately a part of me that is forever unfulfilled." | |
| Unfulfillment | | 2 | "The bottom line is that we're sad that we can't get the fulfillment, the full satisfaction that most people can have both romantically and sexually, that's what makes us sad, we can't have the ones we want" | |
| Sexually unfulfilled | | 4 | "in the world we're actually in the moment I can't completely fulfill my | |

| Codes | Categories | Participants | Excerpts | Memos |
|-------|------------|--------------|--|-------|
| | | | fantasies and that's a frustration and in the world that we're in at the and indeed in any world, I think there will never be a time when I could fulfill those" | |

Another theme that emerged focused on how reality for pedophiles is littered with challenges which can be personally or socially manufactured. A primary consideration for participants included the negative views society has of individuals with pedophilic attractions. "I think it's sort of driven into, that pedophilia is inherently harmful" and "when I started learning about pedophiles ... it was, you're a monster" are examples of the societal stigma pedophiles continually experience and attempt to manage. The aspiration to be rid of pedophilia was fairly straightforward and illustrated how these pedophiles viewed their pedophilic attractions. "Probably, it's quite a lonely existence. There's definitely an appeal to the thought of it all being magicked away" and "have I thought that it would be convenient if I never had been? And have I sort of wishfully thought maybe if I hadn't been, I would have had a better life? Yes, not 100% but yes" are responses which clearly reflect a desire of not wanting to be attracted to children. An unexpected admission involved feelings of unfulfillment related to having healthy personal and sexual relationships. "The bottom line is that we're sad that we can't get the fulfillment, the full satisfaction that most people can have both romantically and sexually, that's what makes us sad, we can't have the ones we want" and "in the world we're actually in the moment I can't completely fulfill my fantasies and that's a frustration and in the world that we're in at moment and indeed in any world, I think there will never be

a time when I could fulfill those” are representative of the hopelessness pedophiles feel regarding relationships.

Table 6

Change Is Ambiguous

| Codes | Categories | Themes | Participants | Excerpts | Memos |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|--|---|
| Unintentional shifts | Ebb & flow | Change is ambiguous | 1 | “I do think, ultimately, the attraction can shift and whether they can be intentionally shifted is another question” | It was really interesting hearing the ideas of “change.” |
| Natural changes to age attractions | | | 3 | “Any sexual attraction changes over time, over the course of life to some degree and especially age attraction, because obviously, you know, people in their twenties are more likely, to be attracted to 20 year olds, they’re not likely to be attracted to seven year olds but by the time you’re 78, you know, I’m pretty attracted to my wife, so there’s a natural change that occurs” | There was an idea that change was possible as far as finding other outlets but not fundamental change with all of the individuals saying the attraction to children, in their belief, would never go away. These individuals acknowledge they would be willing to change but they just don’t think it’s possible. |
| Fluctuations but not change | | | 4 | “in some ways you could say that there’s been a change ... it’s marginal, it’s not a fundamental change but the degree of emphasis on which I place on the child side versus the adult side has shifted in the last few years” | It’s like a personal realization that behavior might be able to be controlled but that inherent attraction is uncontrollable. |
| Willing but not possible | The body is willing | | 3 | “I always say I’m willing to change but I don’t think it’s possible so maybe if I don’t think it’s possible, it’s not going to happen” | |
| Only involuntary change happens | | | 4 | “The only way my views have changed is subtly to, from this is just how people are to people can change but it’s usually not, it’s certainly not a voluntary process” | |

A final theme which arose from data analysis involved how these individuals perceived change, the associated ambiguity, and its interpretations. Change could be interpreted as an unintentional shift, fluctuation or a naturally occurring phenomenon depending on the audience. Participants described a wide range of interpretations concerning different changes they believed occurred and others which they felt did not

occur. “Any sexual attraction changes over time, over the course of life to some degree and especially age attraction, because obviously, you know, people in their twenties are more likely to be attracted to 20 year olds, they’re not likely to be attracted to seven year olds but by the time you’re 78, you know, I’m pretty attracted to my wife, so there’s a natural change that occurs” and “in some ways you could say that there’s been a change ... it’s marginal, it’s not a fundamental change but the degree of emphasis on which I place on the child side versus the adult side has shifted in the last few years” are illustrative of the multiple styles in which change can be interpreted. The desire to change was expressed in various forms by multiple participants while these individuals also communicated its unlikelihood. Responses such as “I always say I’m willing to change but I don’t think it’s possible so maybe if I don’t think it’s possible, it’s not going to happen” and “the only way my views have changed is subtly to, from this is just how people are to people can change, but it’s usually not, it’s certainly not a voluntary process” are indicative of the complexity associated with the thought processes used by pedophiles. The disbelief towards changing sexual attractions was an important viewpoint that could have some effect on effort to change.

Summary

The RQs included in this study sought to uncover how causal attributions and implicit beliefs influenced perceptions associated with pedophilic immutability development. Major themes which emerged from thematic data analysis may potentially reveal the foundation of an underlying conceptual framework for pedophiles’ perceptions related to pedophilic immutability. Participants viewed pedophilia as a randomly

assigned, innate predisposition which is then triggered by personal experiences. The perceived random assignment and innateness in relation to pedophilia development would suggest that these individuals represent an external viewpoint associated with causal attributions. The participants in this study viewed pedophilia as a characteristic that is unchangeable and not directly in their control largely due to its biological origins. The perceived inflexible nature of pedophilia would indicate that participants support an entity viewpoint in relation to implicit beliefs. The belief that personal traits or characteristics which have biological origins are not within your control could be a precursor for perceptions of being unable to change.

A comprehensive summary regarding how pedophilic immutability was developed and perceived by participants is provided thoroughly in Chapter 5. An in-depth description concerning interpretations of the findings and the techniques employed are another major focus in Chapter 5. Reports related to how current literature was extended were also discussed extensively. External causal attributions and entity implicit beliefs were seemingly major contributors to pedophilic immutability which could potentially be viewed as foundational components for a conceptual framework. Limitations of the study, such as low participation, are scrutinized for future considerations. Recommendations which could potentially enhance future research, such as a more diverse participant pool, are offered. Potential implications for social change, such as better understanding of pedophilic immutability, are discussed thoroughly.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore pedophiles' perceptions regarding causal attributions and implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability. Pedophilia development and its immutability is an ongoing discussion that could be advanced with further understanding of the phenomenon. I employed a basic qualitative inquiry to allow participants the opportunity for an exhaustive description of their beliefs and perceptions. The continued disregard of pedophiles' accounts has likely resulted in a severely limited overall understanding related to pedophilic immutability. Therefore, the direct accounts and perspectives of pedophiles are essential due to the valuable insight offered by their lived experiences. External observers are unlikely to provide the same perspective regarding pedophilic immutability as pedophiles, which emphasizes the rationale for their inclusion. Potential links between causal attributions and implicit beliefs could potentially highlight foundational constructs for a conceptual framework.

Chapter 5 is a summary of the results, conclusions, and interpretations reached during the study. Six major themes emerged from thematic analysis that provide insight into how pedophiles view concepts such as pedophilia development and immutability. I analyzed interpretations of pedophiles' perceptions related to pedophilic innateness and pedophilic immutability to determine the significance of potential contributors. I also reported limitations of the study, such as inclusion criteria and recruitment strategies, to provide transparency regarding potential interpretations. The significance that a more diverse pedophile population could add is emphasized to provide direction for future

research. Causal attributions and implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability are major themes that could be employed to develop a conceptual framework. A conceptual framework could provide foundational components to establish therapeutic interventions for the pedophile population.

Interpretations of the Findings

Interpretations of the findings were reached, with an emphasis on relationships highlighting pedophilic immutability development. Some interpretations of the findings seemed unsurprising whereas others needed a more thorough investigation to be revealed. The resulting interpretations were compared with previous literature findings to determine and identify any possible connections. Interpretations of the findings occasionally disconfirmed, confirmed, or extended previous literature related to pedophilia. I thoroughly described disconfirmations, confirmations, and extensions of previous literature findings to provide context for each outcome. The seemingly more consequential interpretations involved causal attributions related to pedophilia development and implicit beliefs associated with pedophilic immutability. I identified links between causal attributions and implicit beliefs to determine whether there was any potential for the development of a conceptual framework.

Associations to Previous Literature

Interpretations that countered findings from previous literature were uncommon yet provided significant information to evaluate and scrutinize. Beliefs associated with children being capable sexual beings were not shared by these participants as opposed to other pedophile groups similar to the findings of Paquette & Cortoni, (2020). Sexual

relationships may not be a primary concern for all pedophiles, as indicated by the interpretations resulting from this study. Moreover, uncontrollability related to pedophilic attractions associated with self-serving attitudes were not representative of this particular pedophile group. The participants of this group were more tolerant rather than supportive of their pedophilic behavior, which was a unique perspective from the pedophile population. Previous research findings had provided support for the idea of pedophilic behavior being able to change (Tozdan, Kalt, Dekker, et al., 2018). However, the group of pedophiles in this study did not feel pedophilia was something that has the potential for change.

Multiple interpretations from the study corresponded with previous literature findings and seemed representative of the pedophile population. For instance, previous literature findings have viewed biological causal attributions of pedophilia as having a correlation with immutable properties (Alhosseini & Ferrari, 2020). The findings in this study resulted in similar interpretations regarding participants' biological causal attributions and the relation it has with immutability. Participants acknowledged the underlying biology of pedophilia while also adding that environmental and experiential factors were major contributors as well, which was supported by previous literature, such as Spock et al. (2022). The underlying biology of sexual orientation also played a major role in how potential for change was viewed. Sexual behavior and attractions were viewed as potentially having malleability whereas sexual orientation was believed to be more rigid. Previous literature findings had comparable conclusions regarding the immutability of sexual orientation compared to attractions (see Spock et al., 2022).

Behavior change was another topic that showed congruence from previous literature findings and the current study. Change was viewed as only applicable to sexual behavior and had no effect on the underlying sexual orientation. A person could be influenced into trying different partners or actions to reach gratification, for instance, without changing sexual orientation. A major reason that these efforts of change were unsustainable is likely due to nonautonomous motivational factors, as evidenced in previous literature (see Sheeran et al., 2021). Participants from the study were steadfast in their recognition towards societal stigmas as important contributors of behavior change efforts. Biological causal attributions likely had a significant influence on how societal stigmas were experienced by these individuals. Participants from the study experienced instances in which they felt inherently harmful due to their pedophilic attractions and highlighted rationalizations used for endorsing behavior change efforts.

Many previous literature findings were also extended by the current study and the interpretations that resulted. Causal attributions associated with a lack of control were viewed less negatively, which could potentially have influence on personal perception regarding pedophilia development. Causal attributions associated with a lack of control also affected behavior change beliefs, which could influence perceptions related to immutability. Biological causal attributions may, therefore, be perceived as more acceptable and less effortful. Previous literature findings have shown that social expectations can influence implicit beliefs when associated with less negative perceptions (Bruchmann et al., 2022). Innate traits or characteristics are viewed as uncontrollable, which could lend themselves to less stigmatism and accountability. Uncontrollability has

been a common theme among pedophiles, which could be due to innateness or possibly avoidance.

Sexual orientation or how it is perceived was another topic that gained traction and extended previous literature findings. Sexual orientation has predominantly been considered biological, which was also apparent amongst this pedophile population. Perceptions of immutability associated with sexual orientation were subjectively linked to biological origins. Participants believed the biological nature of pedophilia development limited any potential for changing sexual orientation or attractions. Some recent literature findings addressed that sexual orientation may not be stable throughout an entire lifespan (see Spock et al., 2022). Participants from this study discussed how their sexual behavior changed, at times, due to circumstances, but their sexual orientation remained regardless of those experiences. Previous literature findings and interpretations from this study seem to suggest that pedophiles' sexual behavior may be misinterpreted for the potential of changing sexual orientation (see Fedoroff, 2020).

Another discussion furthered by interpretations of the study includes behavior change and its relation to pedophilia. A major point of emphasis in this discussion was the unique differences between changing sexual behavior compared to sexual orientation. The overall belief regarding sexual orientation is that the potential for change has been considered low (Tozdan, Kalt, Keller, & Briken, 2018), and participants in this study were in agreement. Sexual behaviors, on the other hand, have been perceived as distinct from sexual orientation and, therefore, are not viewed as immutable. Participants from this study believed that they had control of their sexual behaviors and could engage in

alternative relationships that did not include children; however, their sexual orientation to minors would never change. A critical predictor of potential behavior change involves the perceived expectations (Shiferaw Jada & van den Berg, 2022). Participants viewed behavior change efforts as futile due to the perceived biological nature of pedophilia, which seemingly influenced their actions.

Conceptual Framework Relevance

One primary component of the conceptual framework includes causal attributions, which refers to how individuals assign responsibility towards a given event or issues. Causal attributions could be assigned either internally or externally, depending on how individuals perceived the event or issue. An internal attribution related to pedophilia development would indicate individuals assigned responsibility personally. Participants from this study perceived their pedophilia development as a biological predisposition that was randomly assigned. In other words, participants viewed pedophilia as being assigned to them rather than something they wanted. The biological random assignment was interpreted as an external attribution due to individuals not choosing pedophilia. External causal attributions are suggested to have a significant influence on implicit beliefs associated with pedophilic immutability (Lyndon et al., 2019).

The other principal component of the conceptual framework involves implicit beliefs, which refer to perceptions that are not qualified through any evidentiary methods. Implicit beliefs could be either entity or incremental depending on the stability individuals apply to a trait or characteristic. An incremental implicit belief related to pedophilic immutability would suggest that individuals believed pedophilia could change

whereas entity beliefs are indicative of immutability. Participants from this study perceived that the biological foundations of pedophilia were associated with an immutable state. Participants believed that specific behaviors could potentially be modified whereas the underlying sexual orientation of pedophilia was fixed. The immutability associated with pedophilia was interpreted as an entity implicit belief due to skepticism to change. Entity implicit beliefs could potentially be linked to feelings of uncontrollability, which then change efforts (Thai et al., 2020).

The foundational principles of the conceptual framework included components from both attribution theory and implicit theory. Relationships between causal attributions and implicit beliefs are essential to conceptual framework development. Causal attributions and implicit beliefs are likely to have connections that can potentially affect perceptions, beliefs, or even behavior (Kimber et al., 2021). External causal attributions are specifically viewed as a major influencing factor on entity implicit beliefs. The responses participants offered seemed like an ideal example, which could demonstrate the conceptual framework principles. Participants perceived their sexual orientation as biological and random, resulting in beliefs that pedophilia is also immutable. Interpretations from these findings provide support that participants' entity implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability were influenced by their external causal attributions associated with pedophilia development.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are an inherent component of scientific research and must be discussed thoroughly to provide context for their emergence. A variety of limitations

emerged during the qualitative research study, ranging between anticipated barriers and unexpected issues. The qualitative approach guiding this research was a major contributor to the myriad limitations that arose. The limitations that arose that were more anticipated included issues such as transferability and self-report concerns. Limitations that arose unexpectedly were associated more with population and sample size. I attempted multiple strategies to prevent limitations, resulting in substandard outcomes. Limitations are discussed in depth to provide a rationale for the processes involved and resulting conclusions that were identified.

Qualitative research is unique for the type of limitations that result more frequently in this setting due to the inherent complexity associated with the subjectivity involved. The majority of data collection was gathered during semistructured interviews that incorporated self-reporting as the primary data source. Self-report has considerable limitations that are contingent on the honesty and reliability of each participants' responses. Social desirability bias is another common obstacle of self-reporting, which can also influence individuals to underreport certain behaviors or attitudes (King, 2022). Participants were asked questions regarding their sexual attractions to children, representing a personal and sensitive subject that can influence how individuals respond. The questions used could have prompted reserved or self-serving responses due to the associated stigmas of pedophilia. Accommodations such as anonymity and member checks were employed to minimize anticipated self-reporting limitations.

One of the major unanticipated limitations that occurred during the study involved the restrictions from Walden University concerning inclusion criteria. Vulnerable

populations such as pedophiles need additional safety protocols due to the potential for negative outcomes, such as legally mandated reporting or mental health issues. Walden University officials did not allow individuals who had sexually abused children, directly or indirectly, to participate in the study. The potential for issues to arise that required mandated reporting was considered too risky for participants who had committed criminal offenses. Another requisite from the inclusion criteria involved individuals having to be in therapy with a mental health professional. Potential participants were also required to schedule a postinterview session with their mental health professional to reduce any likelihood of distress. The inclusion criteria restrictions related to acceptable participants limited diversity among the recruited participant pool.

Another limitation associated with Walden University restrictions involved the types of interview questions that could be used during the semistructured interviews. The restrictions applied to interview questions were required as a preventative method for any potential legal ramifications. Interview questions were only allowed to solicit general information regarding pedophilia and related perceptions. Initial interview questions regarding pedophilia development and pedophilic immutability were modified to meet university requirements. I was prohibited from engaging in discussions regarding personal sexual relationships or experiences that included minors in the interview sessions. Participants were also informed that discussions pertaining to criminal activity, not only including child sexual abuse, would be reported, which may have had an influence on responses. The exclusion or dilution of certain interview questions limited the depth and context that could be gathered from participants' responses.

The general composition of the recruited population was another limitation that likely hindered interpretations resulting from the study. Demographic information excluding gender was not required for participation, which complicates transferability potential. The participant population only consisted of adult males who had sexual attractions to children. The recruited pedophile population was only allowed to participate if they had not perpetrated any type of child sexual abuse, direct or indirect. A specific distinction such as nonabusive pedophiles weakened an already disregarded population into a smaller subset group. The individuals who participated were obligated to be in counseling or therapy, which further lessened the overall participant pool and offended some potential participants. The interpretations of findings from this study are thus limited to a specific type of pedophile and not applicable generally.

The sample size included in this study was another major obstacle which limited the significance of interpretations. The initial recruitment goal was to collect between seven and ten participants for the qualitative research interviews. A total of only four individuals volunteered to participate in the study due the restrictive nature associated with inclusion criteria and subsequent requirements. A monetary incentive was eventually recommended to attract more participants following several weeks of unsuccessful recruiting efforts. Some potential participants were uninterested in the incentive options and reported that their nonparticipation was mainly a result of the restrictive inclusion criteria. A difficult to reach and vulnerable population was made even less accessible by employing inclusion criteria that was unfavorable to a large

percentage of pedophiles. The limitations associated with sample size barriers of this study were mitigated by adding more data collection events for each participant.

Researcher bias was another limitation inherent to the qualitative nature shaping the study. Researcher bias could originate from childhood upbringing, religion, or implicit beliefs which emphasize the significance of its influence (Carter et al., 2021). Pedophilia is a subject that evokes multitudes of emotions which can influence how other individuals perceive pedophiles and their behavior (see Harper et al., 2022). Negative or stigmatizing views of pedophiles may be common due to the perceived threats concerning child safety and welfare. The subjectivity of researchers is under even more scrutiny when investigating and interpreting findings from sensitive topics such as pedophilia. I used introspection practices to mitigate any potential researcher bias which might have emerged throughout the study. I achieved impartiality by implementing reflexive journaling and collaborative peer review to limit potential bias.

Transferability was another byproduct of qualitative research which resulted in a prominent limitation. The applicability of this study's findings to other contexts, settings, or populations was limited by several varying factors. The inclusion criteria used for this study restricted the types of pedophiles who were allowed to participate. The participants recruited for this study were not considered a general representation of the overall pedophile population. Sample size was another contributing factor to the overall limitations associated with the study. A total of four participants were interviewed for the study which left much to be desired concerning transferability purposes. Multiple data

collection events for each participant were coordinated, and rich description was gathered to reduce potential transferability limitations.

Recommendations

Exploratory findings were unearthed during this qualitative research study although more concrete results could potentially be discovered with further guidance and investigation. As such, several components of the research study should be modified to gather further evidence regarding perceptions associated with pedophilic immutability. Recommendations were made to enhance future research with the intention of potentially developing a conceptual framework regarding pedophilic immutability. Alternative outlooks such as quantitative methodology could produce more compelling evidence to support a conceptual framework. The inclusion of various pedophile groups who were excluded, such as females, may provide invaluable insight that is unobservable or unappreciated by their male counterparts. Additional questions which further explore causal attributions and implicit beliefs associated with pedophilic immutability should be used to gather more definitive evidence. Recommendations are discussed exhaustively to provide multiple avenues for future research exploration.

One recommendation that stands out more than others involves modifications to the inclusion criteria used for this study. The inclusion criteria used in this study severely restricted the type of individuals who could be eligible for participation. Subsequently, potential participants even reported that the inclusion criteria were objectionable and a primary reason for declining participation. Pedophiles were already a hard to identify group and requirements such as being engaged in therapeutic services seemed needlessly

limiting. Therapeutic services could have been offered as necessary, instead of mandated, for any distress so as not to seem overly invasive or controlling. Participation requirements were extended too broadly due to potential legal ramifications which could be avoided with independent studies outside of the university umbrella. Inclusion criteria which significantly limit population eligibility should be reviewed and modified in future efforts.

The recruitment method and process were other components which could have supported the study more effectively with adjustments. I conducted recruitment at only one site due to the restrictive nature of inclusion criteria. The online community forum was unique in its composition of pedophiles who were abstinent from child sexual abuse. Different recruitment sites matching the inclusion criteria were not located even after an exhaustive search. The inclusion of alternative recruitment sites would likely have broadened the population pool and potentially resulted in a larger sample size. Additionally, a snowball sampling method could have offered a more effective approach to reach this clandestine population. Virtual and physical recruitment sites used in combination would provide access to a more indicative representation of the population.

The interview questions were another area which seemed too narrow in scope and could benefit from a broader perspective. The interview questions I developed adhered to an approach which recommended only using general questions about perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability. Questions about personal experience were excluded due to the potential for admission of guilt concerning child sexual abuse. Personal experience questions could provide more definitive interpretations compared to the

general approach that was employed. Experiences related to sexual encounters or abusive events might provide rationale for how perceptions are developed. Additional interview questions could be developed to reinforce and ensure consistency within participants' answers. A survey method could provide unlimited time for thorough and elaborate responses.

One seemingly foreseeable recommendation was to recruit a larger sample size for future research participation. The sample size for this study was minimal compared to the goals originally set which subsequently limited interpretations. Interpretations from this exploratory research study seemed sufficiently in support of the development of a conceptual framework associated with pedophilic immutability concepts in the future. A sample population that is larger and diversified could provide a more comprehensive view of pedophilic immutability. Eight to 10 participants are an ideal target for an exploratory qualitative study whereas a range of 50 or more would be more suitable in quantitative research. Incentives were unsuccessful in this study although an increased value of incentive could lead to improved recruitment. Additionally, the removal of the restrictive inclusion criteria would also boost recruitment efforts.

Diversification of the research population that was eligible for recruitment is another recommendation to pursue in future efforts. Potential participants were severely restricted from eligibility which resulted in recruiting a microcosm of the pedophile population. Nonabusers were the only group allowed to participate which omitted a large portion of the pedophile population. The group of nonabusers also were required to be in a therapeutic relationship which diluted the participant pool further. Individuals that seek

out and commit to therapy may be unique in their views regarding pedophilia. Individuals that abuse children possibly have different opinions, beliefs, and perspectives than their counterparts which would expand interpretations of findings related to pedophilic immutability. The inclusion of child sex abusers was necessary to gather a complete and comprehensive understanding of pedophilic immutability.

The possibilities of diversifying the identified participant pool could and should be extended beyond male pedophiles as they are not alone or the only representatives in the population. Research associated with pedophilia could be developed further by also including women with sexual attractions to minors. Female pedophiles were excluded from the research study predominantly due to the overabundance of males in the population. Males and females differ on a variety of subjects such as perceptions of risk and the associated risk-taking behavior (DeGrace et al., 2021). Evidence has shown that males and females also have differing opinions and beliefs regarding relationship styles or sexual preferences (Emadi & Sohrabi, 2020). A future exercise should be to explore whether males and females have contrasting or complimentary perceptions regarding pedophilic immutability. Pedophilic immutability would be better understood by utilizing all available resources with pertinent information.

Another recommendation which could likely enhance transferability would be the employment of a multimethod approach. A qualitative approach was employed for this study due to the exploratory nature of pedophilic immutability research. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches would provide unparalleled data triangulation in future research. Semistructured interviews were the main form of data collection in this

study which was exemplary for exploration. Survey questionnaires such as Likert scales could be added to improve data collection and determine the strength of certain perceptions or beliefs. A qualitative or quantitative approach alone is not sufficient to establish a comprehensive understanding of pedophilic immutability. A multimethod approach could function as the mediator which synthesizes the best of both worlds.

The recommendation to modify the methodology employed in the research study can be supported with a supplemental change in research design as well. A research design with more experimental control could provide valuable insight that is elusive to smaller scale studies. The pedophile population contains multiple subsets which could be grouped separately to examine any potential differences between groups. Categorizations of groups could include factors besides gender such as sexual identity and abuse history. Child sexual abusers and pedophiles are not synonymous which represents a clear distinction to explore in future research. Nevertheless, pedophilia has seemingly been used interchangeably with nonoffenders, pedophiles, and abusers not attracted to minors due to subtle and unobservable differences between the groups. As such, future research should prioritize distinguishing and understanding each group due to the associated stigma that is associated with pedophilia.

Implications

My interpretations from the study findings resulted in multiple potential implications which could provide social significance. Positive social change was a fundamental objective which was highlighted to identify potential benefits resulting from the study. The impact of the study's interpretations is likely to affect pedophiles

individually and the general population on a societal level. As such, a more comprehensive understanding of pedophilia and its development was critical to achieve as the primary purpose of the study. Moreover, the interpretations of findings from this exploratory study could potentially be developed into a conceptual framework related to pedophilic immutability. The identified relationships between causal attributions and implicit beliefs associated with pedophilic immutability could facilitate a foundation from which to build in future research. The implications which emerged during the study seemed full of potential related to positive social change for pedophiles and the pedophilic community.

The depth of understanding related to pedophilia has been unequivocally shallow considering how current research is interpreted. The discussion regarding how pedophilia is developed continues to be a significant debate with major implications for potential treatment. Pedophiles believed that their sexual attractions to children were the result of an innate characteristic or uncontrolled development. The notion of choosing to have pedophilic attractions was unsubstantiated by self-report in addition to observed behavior. The perceived innateness of pedophilia provided reasonable justification for why pedophiles believe their pedophilic attractions are immutable. Development of interventions which could facilitate modification for perceptions, beliefs, or thoughts may be beneficial to pedophiles. Pedophilia development is a complex phenomenon not yet fully understood which could benefit from further exploration.

Pedophilia has been viewed with a negative societal outlook due to the perceived inherent harm that results from pedophilic relationships. As such, the classification as a

pedophile carries an unfavorable presumption that the individual has desires to sexually abuse children. Additionally, the terminology, minor-attracted person, can be perceived as a maneuver by the pedophile community to be viewed more positively in society. Participants from this study were representative of pedophiles that were not child sexual abusers. One implication that can be derived from these findings is the validity of the minor-attracted person terminology. The definition of minor-attracted person should be applicable for individuals who have attractions to children which do not result in child sexual abuse. At minimum, classifications of pedophiles should be able to distinguish the differences between child abusers and nonabusive pedophiles.

The development of a conceptual framework associated with pedophilic immutability has been elusive due to its noted complexity. A collaboration between attribution theory and implicit theory could provide the basis for a conceptual framework related to pedophilic immutability. Causal attributions associated with the development of pedophilia may influence pedophiles' implicit beliefs regarding their ability to change sexual attractions. The participants from this study reported external causal attributions which were highly linked with entity implicit beliefs. Participants believed their pedophilia could not change due to its innateness and uncontrollability. A contrasting perspective could conclude that internal causal attributions may result in incremental implicit beliefs and an uninhibited approach regarding potential change. Subsequently, possible relationships between internal causal attributions and incremental implicit beliefs could provide a foundation for future treatment development.

One unanticipated yet significant implication which emerged from the study findings involved each pedophile's self-reported capacity to control their behavior. The term pedophile has predominantly been viewed as interchangeable with child sex-abuser from a societal perspective which illustrates the disconnect between subjects and observers. The participants from this study identified as pedophiles who had never abused children in any form which represented a unique part of the population. The participants self-reported that pedophilic attractions were incapable of change, however, sexual behavior could be controlled. The self-reported personal history of participants provided evidence to substantiate their assertions regarding sexual behavior controllability. The ability to control sexual behavior could possibly only apply to this specific group although its application should be explored with other groups. A more complete understanding regarding how these individuals abstain from their natural sexual desires could provide valuable insight for behavioral interventions.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of pedophiles to understand its associated relationship with pedophilic immutability. A qualitative approach was considered most befitting for the purposes of the proposed research due to its exploratory nature. The perceived immutability of pedophilia has been a complex phenomenon which has been mostly underserved and yet to be fully understood. A seemingly glaring oversight associated with previous research was the predominant disregard of pedophiles' experience or accounts as a primary data source. A firmer grasp of pedophilic immutability and its development was a central objective which

necessitated feedback directly from pedophiles. Causal attributions and implicit beliefs related to pedophilic immutability were identified as critical factors in how pedophiles' perceptions developed. The exploratory nature of this study should provide a foundation for future research opportunities and potential treatment strategies.

Findings from this study resulted in significant interpretations regarding the development of pedophilic immutability. Participants' reports regarding their perceptions of pedophilic immutability highlighted the importance of causal attributions and implicit beliefs. Causal attributions of pedophilia were predominantly perceived to be a randomly assigned predisposition which was interpreted as an external attribution. Implicit beliefs of pedophilia were predominantly perceived to be immutable which was interpreted as an entity belief. Entity implicit beliefs seem to be a likely result of external causal attributions, specifically when associated with innate and uncontrollable traits. An individual who feels they were born a certain way is unlikely to believe change is possible. The opposing view to that dichotomy could potentially be more appropriately suited and supportive of pedophilic behavior change.

Another significant finding which emerged during the study involved the ability of participants to abstain from sexual abuse. The prevention of individuals having pedophilia is likely impossible whereas eliminating child sexual abuse may prove more manageable and achievable. Participants believed sexual attractions to children were immutable because of the associated innateness and uncontrollability. Participants also admitted their sexual behavior was controllable, which offered valuable insight regarding possible treatment strategies. The ability for pedophiles to control their behavior is

indicative of a resiliency which should be promoted with similar populations. Strategies to help prevent behavior could benefit by identifying pedophiles who have avoided child sexual abuse. The research study I conducted provides preliminary findings which can establish an initial point of interest to further explore.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Could you describe what you believe causes sexual attraction to children?
2. Do you believe sexual attractions to children can change?
 - a. If so, why do you believe they can change?
 - b. If not, why do you believe they can't change?
3. How have your views changed over time?
4. Have you ever wanted to stop being attracted to children?
 - a. What made you feel that way?

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

I am a PhD student conducting anonymous research interviews with 5-10 males who have sexual interests in children but have never acted on those attractions. The research study will consist of a short interview of 30-60 minutes and questions will be about your *perceptions of the nature of pedophilia in general*. Interviews will take place over a virtual platform like Zoom without the use of camera and will be audio-recorded only. A short 10-15 minute debriefing session will occur immediately following the interview. Volunteers can also participate in an optional follow-up session once data analysis is completed. Once I have typed up the responses, the audio recordings will be destroyed. Recordings will not be shared with anyone and interviewees' names will not be requested at any time. Additionally, the \$20 thank you gift card (Visa) will be sent via email after completion of the research interview.

Volunteers must be:

- members in the Virtuous Pedophile forum for a minimum of 6 months
- males at least 18 years of age
- attracted to children 13 years or younger but never acted on those attractions (no sexual communication or contact with children and no viewing of child pornography)
- Current one-on-one therapy/counseling
- Agree to process the interview experience with therapist/counselor within week of interview

I am asking that interview volunteers contact me by email and then we can further discuss any further specifics, questions, and/or concerns. If you wish to remain anonymous, please don't use your full name. Additionally, it is recommended that participants coordinate a debriefing session with a counselor or therapist after the conclusion of the interview. Thanks for your time.

Please contact XXX@waldenu.edu for any questions or concerns regarding potential participation.