

SEXUAL THOUGHTS OF CHILDREN OR COERCION

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**MEN PRESENTING WITH SEXUAL THOUGHTS OF CHILDREN OR  
COERCION: FLIGHTS OF FANCY OR PLANS FOR CRIME?**

### **Abstract**

**Introduction.** There is limited evaluation of clinical and theoretical claims that sexual thoughts of children and coercing others facilitate sexual offending. The nature of these thoughts (what they contain) is also unknown.

**Aims.** To examine the relationship between child/coercive sexual thoughts and sexual offending, and to determine the nature of these thoughts and any differences between sexual offending (SO), non-sexual offending (NSO) and non-offending (NO) men.

**Methods.** In a cross-sectional computerized survey, anonymous qualitative and quantitative self-reported sexual thought and experience data were collected from 279 adult volunteers, comprising equal numbers of SO, NSO and NO men recruited from a medium-security UK prison and a community sample of 6081 men.

**Main Outcome Measures.** Computerized Interview for Sexual Thoughts and Computerized Inventory of Sexual Experiences.

**Results.** Three analytical approaches found child sexual thoughts were related to sexual offending; sexual thoughts with coercive themes were not. Latent class analyses identified three types of child sexual thought (primarily differentiated by interpersonal context: the reporting of own emotions, emotions of others or both) and four types of sexual thoughts of coercing others (chiefly discriminated by the other person's response: no emotional states reported, consent, non-consent, mixed). Type of child sexual thought and participant group were not significantly related. Type of coercive sexual thought and group were marginally related; the consensual type was more common for the NO group, the non-consensual type more common for the SO group, than expected statistically.

**Conclusions.** Child sexual thoughts are a risk factor for sexual offending and should be assessed by clinicians. Generally, sexual thoughts with coercive themes are not a risk factor, though thought type may be important (i.e. thoughts where the other person expresses an enduring lack of consent). Exploring the dynamic risk factors associated with each type of child/coercive thought may lead to more targeted treatment.

**Keywords.** Fantasy; Sexual Child Abuse; Coercion; Rape; Sex Offenses; Risk Factors.

### Introduction

Sexual fantasies are almost universally experienced [1] and related to greater sexual arousal [2], orgasm [3] and satisfaction [2,3]. They can be subject to clinical attention when particularly (in)frequent or comprising certain themes; ‘unusual’ fantasies causing distress or impairment might indicate a paraphilic disorder [4] and some sexual thoughts (e.g. of children or coercing others) may raise concerns about risk of harm to others [4,5]. Similarly, theories of sexual offending posit that ‘deviant’ fantasies facilitate and maintain sexual offending in men [e.g. 6-8] and sexual fantasies often identified, implied or operationalized as ‘deviant’ are those of children and coercing/forcing others into sex.

Whilst the premise, clinically and theoretically, is that sexual fantasies of children/coercing others facilitate action, empirical evaluation of this claim is limited and beset with definitional issues. *Sexual fantasy* is rarely defined [e.g. 9-12], and while there is often an implicit assumption that fantasies are pleasant and wanted, they are usually operationalized as nearly any sexual thought [e.g. 13-16; also see 2]. *Sexual fantasies of children* are also not defined, or operationalized differently (e.g. *children* might include pre-pubertal children or all people below the country’s legal age of consent) [e.g. 11,15,17], and *sexual fantasies of coercing others* might be operationalized with items on ‘rape’ (without a definition), non-consensual sex, or ambiguous references to ‘threats’ and ‘force’ [e.g. 9,15,18,19].

One evaluative approach to examining whether sexual fantasies of children/coercing others are related to sexual offending would be to compare the prevalence of these fantasies in men convicted for sexual offenses (a sexual offending

group/‘SO group’) with men convicted for non-sexual offenses and screened for sexual offenses (a non-sexual offending group/‘NSO group’) and community men screened for previous offenses (a non-offending group/‘NO group’); a greater prevalence of such fantasies in the SO, than comparison groups implicates the fantasies in sexual offending specifically, before and/or after the offense. Prior research, however, is problematic; inferential statistics are sometimes missing, fantasies of male children and adults are combined, fantasies of rape are combined with fantasies of pain or subsumed within broader ‘deviant’ categories, and comparison groups sometimes have a sexual offending history [9,20]. Other studies include only one comparison [10,13,14,21] or no comparison [e.g. 11] group, failing to confirm whether the prevalence is highest for SO men, comparable to men with similar criminal/legal/prison experiences or men in general. Studies also rarely separate fantasies of rape and sadism [e.g. 10,21].

A second empirical approach would be to compare the prevalence of sexual fantasies of children/coercing others in NO subgroups with a lower and higher proclivity for sexual offending, and SO subgroups with a lower and higher risk of sexual reoffending; a greater prevalence of these fantasies in the ‘higher’ than ‘lower’ subgroups suggests the fantasies are a risk factor for first time (in NO subgroups) and repeat (in SO subgroups) sexual offending. To our knowledge, in NO groups, the relationship between sexual fantasies of children and sex offending proclivity has not been examined (though these variables have been examined separately in community samples [e.g. 22]), and while some studies have investigated the relationship between sexual fantasies of coercion and rape proclivity, fantasies of rape are combined with bondage or sadism, and men with a sexual offending history have not been excluded [18,19,23]. In convicted SO

groups, research has examined the relationship between broader sexual variables (e.g. ‘sexual interests’) and the risk of sexual recidivism [e.g. 24].

A final empirical approach to examining whether sexual fantasies of children/coercing others are related to sexual offending would be to establish whether these fantasies are related to the number of child/adult victims in the SO group. Sexual fantasies of children have correlated with the number of child victims/offenses, indicating a relationship between these fantasies and sexual recidivism [e.g. 12,25, but see 15]. Other conclusions are limited; studies examining sexual fantasies of coercing adults have predominantly/completely sampled men who sexually offended against children [15,25] or investigated broader ‘deviant’ or ‘crime’ fantasy categories [16,26,27].

Sexual fantasies of children/coercing others cannot be a sufficient factor for sexual offending as these fantasies are also reported in NO groups and the causes of sexual offending are widely recognized to be multi-factorial [28]. However, whilst particular psychological, social, situational and other factors likely moderate any fantasy-offending relationship, the characteristics of the fantasies themselves might also be moderating variables. Typically, prior research has used long fantasy checklists [e.g. 9,10,17,20], providing insights into the prevalence of fantasies but nothing about their nature. Each checklist item is presented as a separate, discrete fantasy (e.g. “sex with your ex-girlfriend”); however, fantasies likely include a combination of people, actions and settings (e.g. oral sex with their ex-girlfriend on a beach) [29]. Therefore, fantasies of “having sex with a child” or “forcing someone to have sex” are unlikely to be homogenous constructs. Some studies have examined descriptions of men’s sexual fantasies, usually their favorite/most frequent [e.g. 30,31], but typically only selected

aspects are analysed and comparisons with SO groups are rare [21]. To our knowledge, descriptions of men's sexual fantasies of children or coercing others have not been examined specifically, raising questions about the nature of these fantasies (i.e. what they entail) and whether SO men have qualitatively different (i.e. different in kind) sexual fantasies of children/coercing others to NSO/NO men.

In the present study, a *sexual thought* was conceptualized as a thought with sexual content (i.e. content typically seen as sexual within a given culture, e.g. oral sex) and/or thoughts that are sexually arousing to the individual (e.g. a sexually arousing thought of an inanimate object). Within this, *sexual fantasy* was conceptualized as a sexual thought with particular experiential and functional properties; that is, a pleasant, engaging, elaborated mental picture that creates, maintains or intensifies sexual arousal. The broader construct of sexual thoughts was examined, rather than sexual fantasies, for a more complete understanding of the potential relationship with sexual offending, recognizing that sexual thoughts of children/coercing others are also experienced as unpleasant/unwanted, and that some sexual fantasies lead to negative feelings, having been arousing or enjoyable initially [e.g. 32]. *Sexual thoughts of children* were defined as all people under 16 years of age, commensurate with the age of consent in the UK. *Sexual thoughts with coercive themes* comprised forcing someone to have sex – whether simulated or not, while *sexual thoughts of coercing others* were defined as those involving forcing someone to have sex against their will.

The first aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between sexual thoughts of children/coercive themes and sexual offending using the three empirical approaches described above. Convergent findings would provide evidence for a sexual

thought-offending relationship overall, whilst divergence might suggest a more nuanced relationship or possibly a methodological artifact of a particular approach. The second aim was to examine descriptions of sexual thoughts of children and coercing others to determine their nature and a subsidiary aim was to explore whether these differed by group (i.e. SO/NSO/NO group). Sexual thoughts with coercive themes were examined for the first aim to explore whether sexual thoughts with any coercive theme might be related to sexual offending, while sexual thoughts of coercing others were explored for the second aim to gain greater insight into thoughts of forcing someone against their will specifically.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Participants comprised a subsample of 279 men from 6289 men aged 18-90 (including 208 inmates at a medium-security prison in England and 6081 community men) who participated in the Sexual Thoughts Project (STP) from 2005-2007. The STP employs a cross-sectional design and anonymous computerized administration to examine men's sexual thoughts and putative links with sexual offending.

The SO group (one or more sexual index offenses) was recruited by distributing information leaflets to inmates, holding a research information session (28/31 attendees participated) and approaching men on the 'Vulnerable Prisoner' wings (72/86 participated; 11 refused, 3 excluded due to learning disabilities/difficulty communicating in English); 7 datasets were incomplete and excluded, producing a final sample of 93 SO men. The NSO group (one or more non-sexual index offenses, no history of sexual



offending) was recruited by distributing information leaflets and approaching men on the main prison wings (108/114 participated; 4 refused, 2 excluded due to poor reading ability); 1 dataset was excluded for self-reported sexual convictions/experiences of sexual offending. For the present study, 93 NSO men were selected based on most complete datasets. Participation for both groups attracted the same pay as prison work or education sessions.

Community men were recruited via posters/advertisements in sports centers, businesses and libraries, articles in the British press, and registration of the study website with major search engines and a directory of World Wide Web links. Initial news articles lead to international press coverage, internet articles and posts on other websites and forums. There were 13,720 first-time 'hits' to the website; 6005 men participated (predominately from Britain, the Republic of Ireland, Italy, and the USA). Additionally, 130 postal alternatives were requested; 76 (58%) were returned. Participants were not paid. For the present study, 93 NO men from the UK (UK nationals with no self-reported convictions, except minor non-sexual summary offenses, e.g. speed limit offenses, and no experiences of sexual offending) were selected from a pool of 305 UK NO men (out of 1819 total datasets available at the point of selection) for comparison with the 93 SO men. Each NO and SO participant was matched on key demographic variables: 73 participants on age  $\pm$  5 years, education  $\pm$  2 years and gender of adult sexual partners (female/male/both), and where multiple matches were available, relationship status, ethnicity and religiosity; broader education and age criteria were required for the remaining 20 participants.

## Measures

### *Computerized Interview for Sexual Thoughts (CIST)*

The CIST comprised 247 open- and closed-ended questions, covering socio-demographics (including current/prior convictions for screening NO/NSO groups), favorite sexual thought, sexual thoughts of children, and sexual thoughts with coercive themes. Depending on participants' responses, and the corresponding question branching, participants were presented with a minimum of 48 of these questions (e.g. if a participant indicated no sexual thoughts involving children, they were not presented with any further questions about the nature of these particular thoughts). Participants were asked to describe their favorite sexual thought (or most frequent if no favorite) in detail (with a prompt if fewer than 20 words were provided) and then to provide the number of other people in the thought and details for up to four of them (gender, age, relationship to participant, temperament in the thought); participants without people in their thought described the objects/things instead. Sexual thoughts of children were determined by asking "*Out of 10 occasions when you have sexual thoughts, on how many occasions do you find yourself thinking about children?*", adapted from Beckett [33], with a response format of 0–10 and anchor points of *Never* (0), *Sometimes* (5) and *Always* (10). Sexual thoughts with coercive themes were determined by two questions: "*Out of 10 occasions when you have sexual thoughts, on how many occasions do you find yourself thinking about pretending to force a person to have sex with you / forcing a person to have sex with you against their will?*" In the study glossary *children* were defined as "*people under 16 years of age*", *force* as "*making someone do something against their will*". Participants with sexual thoughts of children or coercing others (a response of 1–10 for

the child or second coercive item) were asked if this had been reported earlier (e.g. as their favorite sexual thought); if not, to describe the thought in detail, with similar ‘interviewer’ prompts to favorite sexual thought.

### *Computerized Inventory of Sexual Experiences (CISE)*

The CISE comprised 410 primarily closed-ended questions (i.e. questions with defined response options), covering consensual and non-consensual adult sexual activity, sexual activity with children, masturbation, use of sexually explicit/abusive media, and childhood victimization experiences. This included participants’ sexual offending experiences (for screening NO/NSO groups) and proclivity for sexual offending. Depending on participants’ responses, and the corresponding question branching, participants were presented with a minimum of 22 questions (though this would be the case only if they had had none of the experiences outlined above). The NO/NSO groups rated their likelihood of engaging in: non-consensual sexual activity with adults (“*On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely is it that you would force an adult to have sex with you if you could be assured that you would not be caught or punished?*”, adapted from Malamuth’s [34] likelihood-to-rape item); and sexual activity with children (“*On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely is it that you would have sex with a child if you could be assured you would not be caught or punished?*”, previously adapted from the likelihood-to-rape item by Briere and Runtz [35]). Men’s reported likelihood of engaging in sexually aggressive behavior has been shown to be significantly associated with subsequent perpetration of sexually aggressive behaviors during a 3- month [36] and 4-month [37] follow-up period. The SO group completed modified proclivity items, indicating their likelihood of forcing

an adult to have sex with them *again* / have sex with a child *again*, if assured they would not be caught or punished. The SO group's total proclivity score and risk assessment (Static-99) scores were significantly correlated ( $r = .43$ ,  $P = .003$ , one-tailed), indicating convergent validity for the proclivity items.

### *The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR-6)*

The BIDR-6 [38] assesses a person's propensity to respond in a socially desirable manner. Participants indicate agreement to 40 statements on everyday events using a 7-point Likert scale. The two subscales, *Self-deceptive Enhancement (SDE)* and *Impression Management (IM)*, each comprise 10 true-keyed and 10 false-keyed items. Pertinent to this study is IM (self-presentation tailored to an audience); item 34 ("*I never read sexy books or magazines*") was omitted from scoring to avoid conflation with sexual variables [39]. All responses on the scale were counted [40]. Adjusted scores were computed for up to 5/40 missing values; participants with >5 missing values were excluded from the analysis [38]. Cronbach's alphas for IM were high (.82, .78, .75 for SO/NSO/NO groups respectively; alphas computed prior to imputing missing values).

### **Procedure**

Participants completed the CIST, a two-minute picture-matching distracter task and three counterbalanced measures: The Wilson Sex Fantasy Questionnaire (not reported here) [41], the CISE and BIDR. In prison, one or two men participated per session using secure laptops mounted with a custom computer program (2 used paper-based alternatives), positioned at either end of a private room; participation signified

consent. Community men participated using a custom web application; typing a generic password indicated consent. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and that sexual thoughts are a common human activity that can be varied and diverse [42]. Participants in prison were additionally reassured that their decision to participate in the research or not, to respond to a particular question, or what response was given, would not affect their prison sentence, treatment or parole. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Leeds and Her Majesty's Prison Service in the UK.

## **Statistical analyses**

### *Grouping variables*

The sum of the two proclivity items (scores can range from 2-10) were used to classify NO/NSO men, commensurate with usual practice [34,35], into *Lower likelihood* (score of 2) and *Higher likelihood* (scores of 3-10) of sexual offending (NO men: 74 classified as Lower likelihood, 18 Higher likelihood, 1 missing. The NSO group was excluded from further proclivity analyses as only 5 men were classified as Higher likelihood). The Static-99 [43] was used to classify SO men into *Lower likelihood* (low/moderate-low risk:  $n = 54$ ) and *Higher likelihood* (moderate-high/high risk:  $n = 14$ ) of sexual reoffending using CIST and CISE data (25 unclassified). Three minor modifications were made to coding guidelines [43]: criminal history was coded using self-report data; prior convictions for any offense was used instead of prior sentencing dates; and having lived with an intimate partner for at least two years was determined by a relationship status of married/living with partner/separated/divorced or a mean relationship duration of 2+ years.

*Qualitative analyses*

Content analysis was used for the sexual thought descriptions. The coding framework comprised 20 variables that described the content of the sexual thoughts [44]. Theoretical and research literatures were used to identify some *a priori* variables and corresponding coding schemes (e.g. the variable ‘*Paraphilic*’ behaviors with codes of *Voyeurism, Fetishism, etc.*) [31,45-47]. These coding schemes were applied to a representative subset of sexual thought descriptions, and the codes were refined or discarded as needed. For example, the codes for ‘*Paraphilic*’ behaviors were refined to distinguish between ‘paraphilic’ [47] and ‘quasi-paraphilic’ behaviors (e.g. direct observation of unsuspecting others was *Voyeurism*; of knowledgeable others was *Social voyeurism*), though pathology was not assumed in either case. Largely however, the coding framework was developed by examining participants’ descriptions of their favorite sexual thought and those of children and coercing others, and identifying additional variables and codes (e.g. the variable *Sexual dynamics* with codes of *Active, Passive, Mixed, Mutual, etc.*) – a process that continued until few new variables and codes were identified (saturation). The *a priori* and empirical variables and their coding schemes were then applied to a different representative subset of descriptions to assess coverage, refine the code definitions, and to source examples. The coding framework was formalized into a Coding Manual. The development of the coding framework (variables and coding schemes) and the coding of the descriptions were undertaken blind to group membership.

The coding framework comprised 20 variables, which were either single- or multiple-selection variables (i.e. the coder was required to select one code only for that variable or mark each code, within that variable, as Present/Absent) [44]; this resulted in 112 sub-variables being coded in total for each description. A stratified random sample of 15% ( $N = 42$ ) of favorite sexual thought descriptions (chosen as nearly all participants provided these) was independently second coded; 45% of 112 variables showed excellent agreement ( $\kappa = .81-1.00$ ), 17% good ( $\kappa = .61-.80$ ), 12% moderate ( $\kappa = .41-.60$ ), 3% fair ( $\kappa = .21-.40$ ), 17% slight ( $\kappa = .00-.20$ ), and 6% produced weak negative kappa values [48]. Perfect agreement was reached for 41% ( $n = 46$ ) of variables. Most disagreements reflected minor coding violations by the second coder so the first coder's codes were retained. After coding, composite variables were computed, including count variables (e.g. the number of different '*Paraphilic*' behaviors coded as 'present' within each description) and higher-order variables (e.g. combining codes from *Respondent's states* and *Other actors' states* to produce a new variable, *Interpersonal context*).

Latent class analysis (a form of model-based clustering [49]) was performed for all sexual thoughts of children, and for all sexual thoughts of coercing others, (favorite/non-favorite combined) using Latent Gold 4.0. The variables for analysis (derived from the men's descriptions) were reduced by excluding those least likely to discriminate between latent classes (i.e. where  $\geq 80\%$  of descriptions had been assigned the same code for a variable or where  $\geq 80\%$  of descriptions were divided over one valid code and an *Unable to determine* code for a variable). For example, if 80% or more of the descriptions were assigned a code of *Home setting* (or a code of either *Home setting* or *Unable to determine the location*), then the *Location* variable would be excluded from the

latent class analysis. Low-frequency codes were combined into higher-order codes, and missing value codes (e.g. *Not applicable/Unable to determine*) were merged. Models were generated for 1 to 4 latent classes (i.e. types of sexual thought) and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), a likelihood-based measure of model fit recommended for non-nested models [50], determined the optimum number of latent classes (five- and six-class models were generated for confirmation, if needed). Where the number of parameters (related to the number of latent classes, variables and codes within variables) for the model with the lowest BIC exceeded the number of participants, the variables were reduced by excluding those with the least variance explained by the model ( $R^2$ ); the models were then re-computed and assessed. To produce the simplest and most discriminatory model, the variable with the least effect on each latent class (as indicated by  $R^2$  for each variable within the lowest-BIC model) was excluded, and again, the models re-computed and assessed.

In SPSS v.15/20, each participant was assigned to the type of sexual thought that he was most likely to have, based on the latent class probabilities. To provide a more fine-grained analysis of the characteristics of each type of sexual thought, all variables from the final models were disaggregated and exact Pearson's chi-squares [51] were used to examine the disaggregated, and previously excluded (e.g. *Location*), variables by type of sexual thought. As some of the variables within the coding framework were multiple-selection variables, which violate the assumption of independence, separate chi-squares were calculated for each code within the multiple-selection variable and a Bonferroni correction applied [52]. When conducting Pearson's chi-squares for contingency tables



greater than 2x2, the adjusted standardized residuals (AR) were used to identify which cells were responsible for the significant chi-square value [51].

## Results

Based on self-reported current and prior convictions and sexual experience data, 46 SO men had sexually offended against children, 26 against adults, 12 against children and adults, and 9 could not be classified. The group included men who had completed (34.4%), were currently (31.1%) or had never taken part in (34.4%) a sex offender treatment program. Based on self-reported current and prior convictions, 51 NSO men had committed violent offenses, 20 non-violent only, 20 committed offenses that could be either, and 2 could not be classified. Participant characteristics and significant differences between groups are displayed in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

### Sexual thoughts involving children

Significantly more SO men reported sexual thoughts of children than would be expected statistically (SO 28.4%, AR = 4.2; NSO 2.2%, AR = -4.1; NO 14.6%, AR = 0.0) ( $\chi^2(2, 260) = 23.40, P < .001, V = .30$ ), and among SO men, the thoughts were reported only by those who sexually offended against children (35.0%), or children and adults (58.3%); those that had offended only against adults reported no sexual thoughts of children. These thoughts were also significantly more common than statistically expected in the higher likelihood subgroup for NO (Higher 43.8%; Lower 8.3%) ( $\chi^2(1, 88) = 13.04, P = .002, V = .39$ ) and SO (Higher 69.2%; Lower 20.0%) men ( $\chi^2(1, 63) = 11.87,$

$P = .001$ ,  $V = .43$ ). Furthermore, SO men with sexual thoughts of children had a significantly greater number of child victims ( $Mdn = 2$ ,  $Range = 1-12$ ) than those without these thoughts ( $Mdn = 1$ ,  $Range = 1-2$ ) ( $U = 18.00$ ,  $z = -3.15$ ,  $P = .001$ ,  $r = -.64$ ). Three 2x2 between-subjects ANOVAs examining (1) reporting sexual thoughts of children (Yes/No) and (2) either group (SO/NO), proclivity for sexual offending (Lower/Higher) or risk of sexual recidivism (Lower/Higher) on Impression Management (IM) scores found no significant main or interaction effects, indicating that men who did, and did not, report sexual thoughts of children did not differ significantly on IM scores, though cell sizes were small for the ANOVAs by level of proclivity/risk (Table 2).

#### INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The latent class analysis for sexual thoughts of children was undertaken with 16 variables, producing a three-class model of four variables [44] (Table 3). Follow-up analyses examining disaggregated and excluded variables by thought type elaborated their nature. The most common type (44.1% of those with sexual thoughts of children) described sexual acts, such as oral sex and vaginal penetration, with an unknown, attractive, 13- to 15-year-old female child or 'schoolgirl'. Sometimes, there was a fetishistic element (e.g. school uniform, underwear). There was a sole focus on the men's desire and enjoyment; the child's emotions were not described, even when prompted for them (labeled 'Self-oriented'). The second most common type (38.3%) depicted a man, and a known child of 12 years, usually female, taking turns to initiate and lead a range of sexual acts (e.g. kissing/hugging/clothed contact, genital contact, vaginal/anal penetration) in a home setting. There was a strong emphasis on mutual desire and enjoyment ('Mutual'). Accounts of personal experiences, rather than 'idealized fantasies',

could additionally include negative emotions for the man/child. The final type (17.6%) comprised sexual acts with a known female child/children. The descriptions omitted any emotions, but a prompt for them provided a range of emotions for the child, most often sexual desire ('Prompted other-oriented'). Table 4 provides illustrative extracts for each thought type.

INSERT TABLES 3 AND 4 ABOUT HERE

Cross-tabulation of thought type by group (SO/NO; only two NSO men reported sexual thoughts of children) showed that both groups reported all three types, with the Mutual type most common for SO men, and the Self type for NO men (Table 5); the association was not significant ( $\chi^2(2, 34) = 1.01, P = .71, V = .17$ ).

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

### **Sexual thoughts with coercive themes and sexual thoughts of coercing others**

Significantly more NO men reported sexual thoughts with any coercive theme than would be expected statistically (NO 51.1%, AR = 4.4; NSO 29.8%, AR = -0.9; SO 18.1%, AR = -3.6) ( $\chi^2(2, 257) = 21.94, P < .001, V = .29$ ). Among SO men, the thoughts were predominantly reported by those who sexually offended against adults (20.0%) or adults and children (41.7%; children only = 9.3%). The thoughts were not significantly more common in the higher likelihood subgroup for NO (Higher 68.8%; Lower 47.9%) ( $\chi^2(1, 89) = 2.28, P = .17, V = .16$ ) or SO (Higher 30.8%; Lower 15.7%) men ( $\chi^2(1, 64) = 1.55, P = .24, V = .16$ ). Moreover, SO men with these thoughts did not have a significantly greater number of adult victims ( $Mdn = 1, Range = 1-3$ ) than those without these thoughts ( $Mdn = 1, Range = 1-2$ ) ( $U = 36.50, z = -1.74, P = .12, r = -.36$ ). Three

factorial between-subjects ANOVAs examining (1) reporting sexual thoughts with coercive themes (Yes/No) and (2) either group (SO/NSO/NO), proclivity for sexual offending (Lower/Higher) or risk of sexual recidivism (Lower/Higher) on Impression Management (IM) scores (Table 2) showed that NSO men had lower IM scores than SO/NO men but there were no significant differences in IM between those who did and did not report sexual thoughts with coercive themes (cell sizes were small for the ANOVAS by level of proclivity/risk).

The latent class analysis of sexual thoughts of coercing others (i.e. *“forcing a person to have sex against their will”*) was undertaken with 17 variables, producing a four-class model of four variables [44] (Table 6). Follow-up analyses examining disaggregated and excluded variables by thought type provided further insight. The most common type (45.2% of those with sexual thoughts of coercing others) depicted instigating sexual acts with a person(s), often a known woman, sometimes using suffering/pain to gain her co-operation. Typically, the men described their desire/enjoyment, but omitted the woman’s emotions, even after prompting for them (labeled ‘No States’). The second type (20.1%) entailed physically forcing a female stranger(s) – who sometimes wore a uniform (e.g. French maid) - to engage in sexual acts, such as non-genital touching, oral sex and vaginal penetration. The woman’s desire and man’s enjoyment were described; thus, at least on one level, this type was experienced as consensual (‘Consensual’). The third type (20.1%) depicted physically forcing a known woman who, usually following a prompt for further information, expressed only a lack of sexual desire/enjoyment, fear, or anger (‘Non-consensual’). For some, suffering/pain was instrumental to the act; for others, it was sadistic and inflicted

solely for the man's enjoyment. The final type (14.6%) described restraining and physically forcing a known person(s) to engage in sexual acts, often vaginal penetration, in a variety of settings (e.g. home, office). The men described their desire, and typically a woman initially expressing a lack of desire, but this later giving way to her desire/enjoyment ('Mixed'). Table 7 provides illustrative extracts for each thought type.

INSERT TABLE 6 AND 7 ABOUT HERE

Cross-tabulation of thought type by group showed that the Consensual type was more common for NO, than offending groups; the Non-consensual type more common for SO, than comparison groups (Table 5). The association approached significance and was a moderate-large effect ( $\chi^2(6, 35) = 12.19, P = .053, V = .42$ ).

### **Discussion**

This research aimed to examine the relationship between sexual thoughts of children/coercion and sexual offending, explore what these thoughts entail, and determine any differences by group. Findings from three different analytical approaches supported a relationship between sexual thoughts of children and sexual offending. This relationship might involve thoughts contributing to offending, offending contributing to thoughts, or both. The findings suggested a bidirectional relationship as sexual thoughts of children were associated with a higher proclivity for first-time sexual offending (in NO men) and a higher risk of repeat sexual offending (in SO men), consistent with prior findings that a minority of SO men recall experiencing sexual fantasies of children before their first sexual offense (suggesting a relationship with first-time offending), while a greater number recall experiencing them before their second offense (suggesting a [potentially

stronger] relationship with sexual re-offending) [11,29]. However, whilst sexual thoughts of children are a risk factor for sexual (re)offending, the relationship might not be causal; for example, for some men, an underlying sexual interest in children might mediate the relationship between sexual thoughts of children and offending. Further research should identify any mediating variables, and if the association remains, identify the variables moderating whether such behavior is expressed and the mechanisms involved.

Moderating variables might be other thought characteristics (how they are experienced, e.g. vivid/frequent; their function, e.g. offence planning) and/or other vulnerability factors (e.g. anti-sociality). Sexual thoughts of children also may not be a risk factor in all cases; not all SO men experienced these thoughts, and even among SO/NO men who did, the thoughts were not always related to a likelihood of sexual (re)offending. Whilst socially desirable responding may partly explain these findings, they are also consistent with theorizing of multiple pathways to sexual offending [8].

We identified three types of sexual thoughts involving children, primarily delineated by the interpersonal context (Self-oriented, Mutual, Prompted Other-oriented). Gee et al. [29] also found a relational component to fantasy. Whilst novel to the academic literature, we might identify parallels to these types in popular culture; for example, the attractive, post-pubescent girl/schoolgirl and fetishized uniform in the Self-oriented type with Britney Spears's music video *Baby One More Time*, and the sexually aware, pre-pubescent child who's known to the man and instigates sexual activity in the Mutual type with Nabokov's novel *Lolita* and film adaptations. Trends suggested the Self-oriented type was common for NO men, the Mutual type for SO men; further research should examine whether, typically, NO men imagine scenarios with girls close to the age of

consent and SO men who have offended against children recall distorted/idealized memories of offending against pre-pubescent girls they knew.

Findings from three analytical approaches did not support a relationship between sexual thoughts with coercive themes and sexual offending. We identified four types of sexual thoughts of coercing others, principally differentiated by the other person's response. The association between thought type and group was a moderate-large effect (marginal significance), indicating that the SO group experienced the Non-consensual type and the NO group experienced the Consensual type more than would be expected statistically. These findings suggest that overall, sexual thoughts with coercive themes are not related to sexual offending, but that there may be a relationship at the level of thought type; in particular, thoughts where the other person only indicates a lack of consent. This is consistent with phallogometric research showing that SO men with adult victims had relatively greater erectile responses to non-consensual audio sex stories than community NO men, while the reverse was found for mutually consenting stories [53].

The types of sexual thought of coercing others were consistent with research employing other approaches. The Consensual dominance/submission scenes and fetishized uniforms echo factor analyses of college/community samples' fantasies [1], while the omission of the other person's emotions in the No States type and their lack of desire in the Non-consensual type reflects a psychodynamic study of young SO men's masturbatory fantasies, showing that thoughts/emotions were rarely attributed to the other person, but where given, most commonly entailed unwanted sexual contact [54]. The Mixed states, often with the woman's lack of desire giving way to desire/enjoyment, reflects *women's* sexual fantasies of coercion [55] and may again be exemplified in

popular culture (e.g. early James Bond films). Furthermore, the low prevalence of sadism overall (11.4%), and its specific association with the Non-consensual type, is consistent with the phallometric study above, showing greater erectile responses overall for non-violent, than violent, audio sex stories in SO/NO men, but a correlation between non-consent and violent indices for SO men [53].

Regarding limitations, despite efforts to minimise socially desirable responding, the prevalence rates for men with sexual thoughts of children/coercing others in this study are likely to be underestimates, particularly for SO/NSO groups, who may have lower perceived anonymity and greater concerns about making disclosures. Including SO men from a high-security prison may also produce higher prevalence rates and replication in more diverse samples (e.g. nationality, ethnicity, sexuality) is needed. Adding an additional comparison group of men who have committed undetected sexual offenses might also be illuminating [56]. Shared method variance may partly explain the relationship between sexual thoughts of children and sexual offending, where men reporting these thoughts are also willing to report a proclivity for sexual offending or prior offending; triangulation via other means might be useful, though arguably, exploring the nature of thoughts necessitates self-report, and while case files can provide offending history, these data may be incomplete and compromise anonymity, potentially increasing socially desirable responding on other questions [57]. Whilst the findings suggest a bi-directional relationship between sexual thoughts of children and sexual offending, longitudinal studies are needed of NO/SO men with these thoughts. Finally, although the thought types are consistent with academic literature and wider cultural



influences, the sample size for each type is small and thus types and associations with groups are preliminary.

### Conclusions

This research supports reports of sexual fantasies of children and coercing others in community men [e.g. 17, 22]; however, the findings also indicate that sexual thoughts of children can be related to sexual offending. Whilst this suggests that sexual thoughts of children should be a 'flag' for clinicians, indicating an increased risk for sexual (re)offending, offending is not inevitable and the thoughts might not be causal; thus, these thoughts should be considered alongside other personal and social factors. Sexual thoughts with coercive themes were generally not related to sexual offending. Women with sexual fantasies of being coerced do not wish to be a victim of rape [55] and the vast majority of men with sexual thoughts of coercing others will not wish to be a perpetrator. The research also identified data-driven typologies of men's sexual thoughts of children and coercing others for the first time, illustrating the variability of these thoughts among men and patterns by group. The findings indicated that sexual thoughts of coercing others might indicate cause for concern when the other person expresses an enduring lack of consent and further research is needed here. Researchers using fantasy checklists should also be cautious; qualitatively exploring ostensibly non-consensual thoughts ("*forcing someone to have sex against their will*") has revealed the many meanings of this item for men. Subsequent research should explore the constellation of risk factors associated with each type of sexual thought of children/coercing others and the related implications for theories of sexual offending and more targeted treatment approaches.

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## Tables

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Characteristic	SO group			NSO group			NO group		
	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	
Age <sup>a***</sup>	42.80 <sub>a</sub>	(14.12)		27.81 <sub>b</sub>	(6.73)		42.41 <sub>a</sub>	(13.70)	
Education <sup>b</sup> (years) <sup>***</sup>	12.51 <sub>a</sub>	(3.49)		10.58 <sub>b</sub>	(3.33)		13.80 <sub>c</sub>	(2.84)	
Religiosity <sup>c</sup> (1 - 5) <sup>***</sup>	2.67 <sub>a</sub>	(1.32)		1.83 <sub>b</sub>	(0.93)		2.10 <sub>b</sub>	(1.17)	
Months in prison <sup>d***</sup>	17.51	(13.25)		8.47	(12.23)				
	%	<i>n</i>	(AR)	%	<i>n</i>	(AR)	%	<i>n</i>	(AR)
Relationship status <sup>a***</sup>									
Single	36.6	34	(0.7)	41.9	39	(2.1)	22.6	21	(-2.8)
Dating	6.5	6	(-0.6)	10.8	10	(1.3)	6.5	6	(-0.6)
Living tog./Married	25.8	24	(-3.9)	41.9	39	(0.0)	58.1	54	(3.9)
Separated/Divorced	26.9	25	(3.9)	5.4	5	(-3.2)	12.9	12	(-0.7)
Widowed	2.8	4	(2.8)	0.0	0	(-1.4)	0.0	0	(-1.4)
Gender of partners <sup>e</sup>									
Female	89.0	73		96.5	82		87.6	78	
Male	4.9	4		1.2	1		5.6	5	
Females and males	6.1	5		2.4	2		6.7	6	
Ethnicity <sup>f*</sup>									
White background	92.3	84	(-0.6)	92.4	85	(-0.5)	95.7	89	(1.1)
Black background	5.5	5	(2.7)	1.1	1	(-0.9)	0.0	0	(-1.8)

Asian background	1.1	1	(0.0)	0.0	0	(-1.2)	2.2	2	(1.2)
Mixed background	1.1	1	(-1.4)	6.5	6	(2.2)	2.2	2	(-0.7)
Other background	0.0	0		0.0	0		0.0	0	

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*Note.* Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differed at  $p < .05$  at post-hoc testing.

SO = Sexual offending; NSO = Non-sexual offending; NO = Non-offending; AR = Adjusted residual; Living tog. = Living with partner. <sup>a</sup>  $N = 279$ . <sup>b</sup>  $N = 275$ . <sup>c</sup> Religiosity was self-reported using a scale of 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very*).  $N = 276$ . <sup>d</sup> Number of months the SO and NSO groups had been in prison at the time of participation.  $N = 182$ . <sup>e</sup> Gender of adult sexual partners.  $N = 256$ ; 4 in the SO group and 2 in the NO group reported no prior sexual intercourse with an adult, remaining 17 are missing data. <sup>f</sup> Response choices have been aggregated.  $N = 276$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 2. Reporting Sexual Thoughts of Children/with Coercive Themes and Impression Management Scores**

Group/subgroup	Sexual thoughts of children				Sexual thoughts with coercive themes			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>
Group <sup>a</sup>								
SO	72.09	(18.96)	71.18	(18.56)	70.87	(14.07)	71.28	(19.67)
NSO					56.36	(13.46)	56.97	(17.63)
NO	68.54	(13.31)	67.15	(16.68)	68.91	(15.24)	65.81	(16.94)
Proclivity <sup>b</sup>								
Lower	72.33	(15.74)	67.36	(17.33)	70.71	(15.94)	65.24	(17.83)
Higher	65.29	(11.01)	64.57	(12.07)	63.64	(12.12)	69.67	(4.93)
Risk of sexual recidivism <sup>c</sup>								
Lower	75.78	(23.07)	68.62	(19.00)	71.25	(16.78)	69.72	(20.69)
Higher	68.56	(15.29)	67.25	(24.84)	78.50	(5.32)	63.56	(19.44)

*Note.* SO = Sexual offending; NSO = Non-sexual offending; NO = Non-offending. Higher scores indicate greater impression management. <sup>a</sup> *N* = 154 for sexual thoughts of children, *N* = 236 for sexual thoughts with coercive themes. <sup>b</sup> *N* = 78 for sexual thoughts of children, *N* = 79 for sexual thoughts with coercive themes. <sup>c</sup> *N* = 59 for sexual thoughts of children, *N* = 61 for sexual thoughts with coercive themes. The NSO group was excluded from the group (SO/NO) x sexual thoughts of children (Yes/No) ANOVA as only two NSO men reported sexual thoughts of children; the NSO group could be included in the group (SO/NSO/NO) x sexual thoughts with coercive themes (Yes/No) ANOVA and this indicated that the NSO group (*M* = 56.80, *SD* = 16.48) had significantly lower IM scores than the SO (*M* = 71.20, *SD* = 18.64) and NO (*M* =

67.47,  $SD = 16.02$ ) groups. No other main effects and no interactions were significant for any ANOVA. Cell sizes were smaller for the ANOVAs by level of proclivity/risk, ranging from 4-58, and therefore inferential statistics should be interpreted cautiously.

**Table 3. Conditional and Latent Class Probabilities for Sexual Thoughts of Children**

	Cluster		
	1	2	3
Identity of other actors			
Known person <sup>a</sup>	0.131	0.640	0.648
Stranger <sup>b</sup>	0.683	0.287	0.346
Missing	0.186	0.073	0.006
Interpersonal context <sup>c</sup>			
No emotional states	0.309	0.003	0.007
Self-oriented	0.556	0.006	0.013
Other-oriented	0.004	0.005	0.931
Mutual	0.007	0.914	0.045
Missing	0.124	0.072	0.004
Other actors' desire			
Desire	0.010	0.988	0.511
Absent <sup>d</sup>	0.867	0.011	0.486
Missing	0.123	0.002	0.003
Provision of other actors' emotional states <sup>e</sup>			
Unprompted	0.007	0.854	0.018
Prompted	0.004	0.135	0.959
Missing	0.989	0.011	0.023

Prevalence of each cluster	0.441	0.383	0.176
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*Note.*  $N = 36$ ; 2 participants in the SO group who reported sexual thoughts of children did not provide a description. <sup>a</sup> *Known person* includes Partner, Family member, Known person, Famous person. <sup>b</sup> *Stranger* includes Occupational identification; Ethnic, national or regional identification; Stranger. <sup>c</sup> Composite variable based on whether any emotional states were reported for the participant only (*Self-oriented*), the other actor/s only (*Other-oriented*), or both (*Mutual*). <sup>d</sup> i.e. Not included within the written description or prompts. <sup>e</sup> Provided in the open-ended description (unprompted) or following ‘interviewer prompts’ for further information (prompted) where a description of fewer than 20 words was supplied and/or for the other person’s temperament in the thought. *Missing for Identity of other actors and Provision of other actors’ emotional states* includes *Not given* and *Unable to determine* (ambiguous); *Missing for Interpersonal context* and *Other actors’ desire* includes *Unable to determine* (ambiguous).

**Table 4. Illustrative Extracts for Sexual Thoughts of Children**

Type	Extract
Self-oriented	<p data-bbox="479 346 1339 682">“It would be of girls only school girls aged 13-16. They would have to be in school uniform short skirt no stockings maybe doing hanstand on a wall. They could be fighting. Exposing their underwear. G strings. I would love to see them. Maybe kiss them using my tounge.”</p> <p data-bbox="479 714 1323 829">“I like to think about lesbian school girls Well I like to think about having sex with teenagers and their friends!”</p>
Mutual	<p data-bbox="479 861 1356 1333">“My only real sexual thought is about being in an intermate relationship with a boy of around 12 years old and as the relationship develops it becomes sexual. The relationship is an important precursor to the sex and the boy has to want sexual contact and it is always in a very loving way. In many ways the sexual content is less important than the love although thinking of this loving relationship can be sexually stimulating.”</p> <p data-bbox="479 1365 1364 1848">“(…) my daughter had her friend (both 12 yrs old) stay overnight at our home and in the dark room I meant to touch her friend, but they must have changed positions and I did it to my daughter...but I had thought I had probably made that mistake all along. Then approximately 16/17 years ago my daughter left me in charge of her children (1 boy 1 girl) and a boy and girl aged 11 yrs of age came to play with them. and over a period of probably 3-4</p>

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months, in playing I touched girl 4-5 times and because she didn't object, I convinced myself this was acceptable, then one day she asked me to do it to a friend she had brought with her. I said no I daren't (...)"

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Prompted

"I am touching them all over".

other-oriented

Following prompt for other actor's temperament: "Happy".

"I think about having sex with a little girl".

Following prompt for other actor's temperament: "Gentle but a little scared".

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*Note.* All extracts are provided verbatim, including errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Participants provided additional information via the 'interviewer' prompts (only prompts for temperament for the Prompted Other-oriented type are shown).



**Table 5. Cross-tabulation of Type of Sexual Thought of Children / Coercing Others by Group**

Type of sexual thought	SO group			NSO group			NO group		
	%	<i>n</i>	(AR)	%	<i>n</i>	(AR)	%	<i>n</i>	(AR)
<b>Child<sup>a</sup></b>									
Self-oriented	38.1	8					53.8	7	
Mutual	47.6	10					30.8	4	
Prompted other-oriented	14.3	3					15.4	2	
<b>Coercing others<sup>b</sup></b>									
No states	44.4	4	(-0.1)	66.7	6	(1.5)	35.3	6	(-1.2)
Consensual	0.0	0	(-1.7)	11.1	1	(-0.8)	35.3	6	(2.2)
Non-consensual	44.4	4	(2.1)	22.2	2	(0.2)	5.9	1	(-2.0)
Mixed	11.1	1	(-0.3)	0.0	0	(-1.4)	23.5	4	(1.5)

*Note.* SO = Sexual offending; NSO = Non-sexual offending; NO = Non-offending; AR = Adjusted residual. <sup>a</sup> *N* = 34 men in the SO/NO groups who reported sexual thoughts of children and provided a written description; the NSO group was excluded from the chi-square analysis as only two men reported sexual thoughts of children. <sup>b</sup> *N* = 35 men from all groups who reported sexual thoughts of coercing others and provided a written description. Since the chi-square for coercing others approached significance ( $p = .053$ ) and was a moderate-large effect, ARs are included for this type of thought.

**Table 6. Conditional and Latent Class Probabilities for Sexual Thoughts of Coercing Others**

	Cluster			
	1	2	3	4
Valence of other actors' emotional states				
Positive only <sup>a</sup>	0.003	0.972	0.007	0.010
Negative only <sup>b</sup>	0.003	0.007	0.972	0.010
Positive and negative <sup>c</sup>	0.002	0.005	0.005	0.959
Missing	0.992	0.016	0.016	0.021
Other actors' desire and/or enjoyment				
Desire/enjoyment	0.005	0.977	0.012	0.968
Absent <sup>d</sup>	0.995	0.023	0.988	0.032
Other actors' lack of desire and/or enjoyment				
Lack of desire/enjoyment	0.005	0.011	0.838	0.967
Absent <sup>d</sup>	0.995	0.989	0.162	0.033
Provision of other actors' emotional states <sup>e</sup>				
Unprompted	0.005	0.562	0.286	0.967
Prompted	0.003	0.422	0.698	0.011
Missing	0.992	0.016	0.016	0.022
Prevalence of each cluster	0.452	0.201	0.201	0.146

*Note.*  $N = 35$ ; 1 participant in each of the SO, NSO and NO groups who reported sexual thoughts of coercing others did not provide a description. <sup>a</sup> *Positive only* includes

Attraction, Love, Desire, Enjoyment, Other positive. <sup>b</sup> *Negative only* includes Anger, Fear, No desire, No enjoyment, Other negative. <sup>c</sup> *Positive and negative* includes Transition from positive to negative, Transition from negative to positive, Concurrent positive and negative states, Complex sequence of positive and negative states. <sup>d</sup> i.e. Not included within the written description or prompts. <sup>e</sup> Provided in the open-ended description (unprompted) or following ‘interviewer prompts’ for further information (prompted) where a description of fewer than 20 words was supplied and/or for the other person’s temperament in the thought. *Missing* for *Valence of other actors’ emotional states* and *Provision of other actors’ emotional states* includes *Not given* and *Unable to determine* (ambiguous); there were no ambiguous data for *Other actors’ desire and/or enjoyment* or *Other actors’ lack of desire and/or enjoyment*.

**Table 7. Illustrative Extracts for Sexual Thoughts of Coercing Others**

Type	Extract
No states	<p data-bbox="464 375 1338 478">“I like to tie a girl up &amp; blind fold her - then i leave the room &amp; return with another girl &amp; we both take her.”</p> <p data-bbox="464 520 1317 625">“Having anal intercourse with a teenager who is wearing high heel boots and red leather mini dress.”</p>
Consensual	<p data-bbox="464 667 1365 850">“Having sex with a stranger - or more than one.. anonymous sex.. walking in to an unlocked room, the person is waiting, perhaps blindfolded or semi restrained. but willing and compliant.”</p> <p data-bbox="464 892 1360 1213">“My favorite sexual thought is to have a young lady in schoolgirl uniform, but not under-aged, and to spank her while having sex from behind. This only works, however, if the girl in question gets equal pleasure from being spanked, and my pleasure is only gratified if she is also able to reach climax.”</p>
Non-consensual	<p data-bbox="464 1255 1349 1507">“I have the person in question tied up and force myself on them, they would never agree to this, which is why it is exciting; i do not hurt them. this is pure fantasy, an impossible dream. the victim is another male.”</p> <p data-bbox="464 1549 1360 1728">“To rape women . to have sex with more than one woman at the same time - to force a woman to do sexual acts on me and on her self . to have sex with a woman at knife point . to frighten her , make her</p>

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plead and beg for it to stop .with two women it would be twice as fun.”

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Mixed

“Sometimes dream about tying up a virgin and initiating her to sex against her will. (She eventually likes it!).”

“After my divorce which was triggered by my wifes infidelity I run into her and her lover at the station in [name of place]. This severely upset me as intially he had rejected her but evidently they were at it again. He almost started a fight. Anyway several days latter I had a wet dream that involved first knocking seven bells out the lover then roughly taking the ex-wife who although pasively resisting physically was obviously enjoying it.”

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*Note.* All extracts are provided verbatim, including errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Participants provided additional information via the ‘interviewer’ prompts (not shown).