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**”Being friends with my story”
How young men who have sexually offended view their
sexuality**

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Research on sexual offenders tends to focus on the coercive aspect of their sexuality and overlook the non-coercive aspect. This study explored sexual experiences and intimate relationships among 20 men who sexually offended in their adolescence and were labelled as “juvenile sex offenders”. The males were interviewed during their adolescence and early adulthood and the transcripts were thematically analysed. The results showed that the boys had a view of sexuality characterized by lack of knowledge, few positive experiences and several negative experiences. As young adults, they struggled with intimacy and seemed to handle this through different strategies. The results points to the necessity for treatments aimed at strengthening the non-coercive aspect of sexuality rather than simply eliminating the coercive sexuality.

Sexuality is an essential part of humanity (World Health Organisation, 2006) and a vital aspect of developing a healthy and prosocial lifestyle (Perry & Ohm, 1999). Sexual health can be described as being “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; *it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity* [emphasis added]. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, *free of coercion* [emphasis added], discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled” (World Health Organisation, 2006). Thus, sexual coercion is not only harmful for the victim, but can also be seen as an obstacle for individuals who sexually coerce to attain a positive sexuality themselves. In regards to individuals who sexually coerce, or sexual offenders, there is a vast body of research. Most of it focuses on adult sexual offenders rather than adolescents (Vandiver & Teske, Jr., 2006; Seto & Lalumière, 2010) although juveniles who have sexually offended compose around almost one fourth (23%) of known sex offenders (NSOPW, 2018). The research on sexual offenders also tends to focus on the coercive sexuality or the characteristics of the individuals who offend (Cale, Leclerc & Smallbone, 2014; Cortoni & Marshall, 2001) rather than their non-coercive sexuality, that is, a sexuality that can be considered positive and functional (Cale, et. al, 2014). In other words, research focused on adolescents who have sexually offended is in short supply, and more knowledge needs to be gained not only about their coercive sexuality but about their non-coercive sexuality as well.

Focus on the coercive sexuality has been seen in treatment of individuals who have sexually offended as well. Previously, the emphasis has mainly been on eliminating their risky sexual behaviours rather than promoting their positive sexual

behaviours (Lindsay, Ward, Morgan & Wilson, 2007). However, researchers have argued for the benefits of having a treatment that adds focus to the non-coercive sexuality (Perry & Ohm, 1999). An example of this is the development of the “Good Life Model” (GLM, first proposed in 2003; Lindsay et al., 2007) in which treatment and rehabilitation of individuals who have sexually offended have a more positive framing – that is, not only reducing risk factors but also finding a life that is worth living. In this model, the emphasis lies on the offenders’ human needs and that reducing harmful behaviours to the self or others can be done by promoting inner and outer conditions that enables the individual to achieve those needs without having to resort to, for example, sexual offending as an attempt to feel intimacy. Lindsay et al. (2007) thus argues that individuals who sexually offend do so because they do not possess the possibilities or skills needed to achieve the results they want (e.g. intimacy) in a way that is socially adaptive and thus, they turn to negative ways to reach their goals. This view has been supported by e.g. Ward, McCormack and Hudson (1997) who found that sexual offenders have a range of intimacy deficits which hinder them in pursuing intimate relationships. In Martin and Tardif’s study (2015), it was also found that sexual offenders suffer from specific intimacy deficits, such as abandonment issues, low sexual self-esteem and feelings of sexual depression (that is, feeling sad, unhappy and/or discouraged about their sexual practices).

The authors of the GLM model thus suggest that sexual offending is an example of a maladaptive strategy which can, and should be, replaced by adaptive ones in treatment (Lindsay et al., 2007). The same argument has been made by other researchers who suggest that sexual offending, rather than being a failure to cope, can actually be an inappropriate way of coping in its own right when faced with difficult situations which generates negative emotional states (Cortoni & Marshall, 2001). In Cortoni and Marshall’s study (2001), adult sexual offenders reported using coercive as well as non-coercive sexual behaviours as a coping mechanism to deal with psychological stressors and such strategies were used more frequently by those who reported intimacy deficits and loneliness. In other words, sexual offenders, compared to nonsexual offenders, were more likely to use sex as means of coping with stressful and difficult situations (Cortoni & Marshall, 2001). This is also supported by Daleiden, Kaufman, Hilliker, and O’Neil (1998) who in their study found that the coercive sexual history of sexual offenders to a high extent was the same as the non-coercive sexual history of non-sexual offenders. The frequencies of sexual deviant fantasies were the same in both the sexual and non-sexual offender group. However, the frequency of non-deviant sexual fantasies was lower in the offending group than the non-offender group (Daleiden et al., 1998). In other words, Daleiden et al. (1998) suggested that this, in contrast to what is generally argued, could mean that sexual offending is connected to a suppression of positive, non-deviant sexual fantasies rather than increased levels of deviant, coercive ones. Other studies, in contrast, have shown that sexual offenders do display a so-called atypical sexual interest. For example, in a meta-analysis by Seto and Lalumière (2010) when comparing sexual offenders with general offenders, atypical sexual interests was shown to be the single largest group difference ($d = .67$). Mackaronis, Byrne and Strassberg (2016) argue that treatment with adolescents who have committed sexual offences therefore needs to focus on tackling such atypical or deviant sexual interests. However, a deviant sexuality does not automatically lead to sexual offending (Cale et al., 2014). It should also be mentioned that adolescents who have sexually offended have a low risk of recidivism for new sexual offences (Christiansen & Vincent, 2013; Lussier &

Blokland, 2014; Righthand & Welch, 2004) and adolescent sexual offending often appear to be one part of a general delinquency pattern (Milloy, 1994; Righthand & Welch, 2004).

In other words, and in the context of previous points, it could be argued that sexual offending could be considered as a maladaptive strategy, an inappropriate coping skill, a consequence of repressed non-deviant sexual fantasies and/or an atypical sexual interest. Treatment could thus work to address such sexual matters in two ways: by focusing on eliminating the maladaptive and inappropriate, or by focusing on replacing it with something adaptive, appropriate, and more socially acceptable instead (Perry & Ohm, 1999). The arguments for the latter could be said to be the following: eliminating the maladaptive and inappropriate strategy leaves a sexual void, whereas a focus on positive sexuality could instead be used as a replacement to boost functional, non-coercive sexual behaviours. In other words, a focus on eliminating sexual coercion removes an option for sexual expression, albeit deviant, whereas a focus on non-coercive sexuality instead adds a positive option for sexual expression.

To focus on the positive sexuality of individuals who have sexually offended, one needs to understand how they view and express their own non-coercive sexuality.

Aim of study

The aim of the study was to explore experiences of sexuality and intimate relationships among young men who had committed sexual offences during their adolescence and were labelled as “juvenile sex offenders”. The main focus was on their non-coercive sexual history and intimate experiences but some parts of their coercive sexuality were also highlighted, since these offences are part of their sexual experiences.

Method

Participants

2003 to 2007, data was gathered from 45 adolescent males who were in treatment for having sexually offended against children, youths, or adults. These boys were aged between 13 and 22 ($M=16,2$ years) when interviewed, but all of them had committed the sexual offence when they were under 18 years of age (Tidefors, Goulding & Arvidsson, 2011). Ten years later, these men were again contacted for follow-up interviews, something which had been agreed upon in the initial data collection (Ingevaldson, Goulding, & Tidefors, 2016). Of the original 45 males, 20 participated in the follow-up whereas the others either declined or was unable to reach. Thus, the participants in this study consist of the 20 men who participated in both interview occasions. The men who participated in the second data gathering were aged between 22 and 31 ($M=25,7$). From the previous study, the following was known about the participants. Eighteen out of the 20 men had been subjected to some kind of abuse as children, ten of them sexually (Ingevaldson et al., 2016). The sexual offences committed by the participants in their youth had been against a child (12 men), against peers (three men), against adults (two men) and against victims of mixed ages (three men) (Ingevaldson et al., 2016).

Data gathering

The data for this study consisted of forty interviews in total, 20 of the initial 45 interviews with adolescent males and the 20 follow-up interviews conducted when the same participants had reached early adulthood. Digital access was given to these transcribed interviews which made analysis possible.

The initial study gathered data between 2003 and 2007 (Tidefors et al., 2011). Tidefors contacted different units working with teenage boys who had committed sexual offences and enquired if they wished to participate. After positively responding to the enquiry, an individual at each unit was appointed as contact person and informed the boys and their parents regarding the project. Via this contact, consent information was administered to both the boy and, in cases where the boy was less than 15 years old, to the parents. Participants received full information regarding the research focus, emphasizing that participation was completely voluntary and that the boy could at any time cancel his participation with no questions asked. Six different ethical committees approved the study. At completion, 45 boys participated. Eight of the boys and their parents who were asked did not participate. The youths were then asked whether they could be contacted for follow-up studies and all of them consented. Ten years later, the participants were thus again contacted for follow-up interviews (Ingevaldson et al., 2016). Twenty men agreed to participate, 11 declined, and 14 could not be reached. Information about the purpose of study, voluntary participation, guaranteed anonymity as well as the option of withdrawing their consent at any time without explaining why was notified to the participants. The interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. Ethical consent was given by the Regional Ethical Review Board, University of Gothenburg.

The interviews were semi-structured and revolved around several different topics. For this study, themes regarding 'sexuality', 'sexual experiences' and 'intimate relationships' were the most relevant. Examples of questions regarding this theme during the interview with the boys as teenagers were as follows: 'how did you experience entering puberty', 'what kind of sexual experiences do you have', and 'what did you think of those experiences'. Examples of questions during the follow-up interview related to sexuality and intimacy were: 'how is your sexual life', 'how do you feel about sex in general', and 'what are your experiences with relationship'.

Analysis

The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis with a critical realistic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to find recurring themes among the narratives relating to the question of "how young males who have sexually offended view their sexuality". All of the forty interviews were read in full, beginning with the interview conducted when the participant was a teenager and then directly after, the interview conducted when the participant was a young adult. Reading in this order provided a feeling of "life narrative" as the participant described his childhood, teenage years, adulthood and hopes for the future.

The parts of the interviews relating to puberty, sexuality and sexual experiences were extracted to a new document. A short summary of the interview excerpt was written about each participant. Ideas, thoughts and similarities that were noticed in the material while actively reading the interviews were also written down. These excerpts were then repeatedly read through, during which time coding began and themes started

to form. The themes relevant to the codes and to the overall data contained both a descriptive as well as a hermeneutic element. The hermeneutic approach allowed the analysis to contain an interpretation of the narratives beyond the explicit, semantic level. Two main themes were decided, labelled “View of sexuality” and “Struggles with intimacy” respectively. Each main theme contained a number of subthemes.

Results

The first main theme consisted of the view of sexuality that could be seen through the participants’ narratives. The theme was organised into three subthemes: “lack of knowledge”, “lack of positive experiences” and “presence of negative experiences”. The second main theme comprised the participants’ struggles with intimacy. They seemed to handle this struggle through the use of different behaviours which could be seen as strategies. Each strategy makes up a subtheme. There were five subthemes in total which were labelled “secure context”, “sex without intimacy”, “downplaying”, “keeping a secret” and “not growing up”. The main- and subthemes are presented in Table 1. Each subtheme includes quotes to give a vivid illustration of the topic. To provide the quotes with context, each quote contains a fictitious name and information on whether the quote stems from the interview when the participant was a teenager or a young adult. The quotes were translated from Swedish into English and are occasionally edited to facilitate reading.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes

View of sexuality

Lack of knowledge

Lack of positive experiences

Presence of negative experiences

Struggles with intimacy

Secure context

Sex without intimacy

Downplaying

Keeping a secret

Not growing up

View of sexuality

One theme that was expressed through the narratives of these males was their somewhat distorted view about what a positive sexuality actually is. It was clear that their difficulties in the sexual domain had started long before they had committed a sexual offence, by having an environment that did not convey a positive view of sexuality nor provided models with how to become ordinary sexual beings. Thus, the boys had no real way of developing an educated and positive view of sexual practices. In addition to this, they were already at a young age subjected to degrees of sexual coercion, such as having sex without wanting to in order to please the other person. Furthermore, half of the boys had been sexually abused by peers or parents. Their view

of sexuality was seen primarily in three different ways. The first by a lack of knowledge, the second by a lack of positive experiences, and the third by a presence of negative experiences.

Lack of knowledge. One thing that came through the narratives was the apparent lack of sexual knowledge, both from school and parents. Sexual education in school was described in most case as existent, but sorely lacking in both content and frequency. It was also rare that parents had talks with the boys regarding sex and what this means, and in the few instances they had “the talk”, it had been more about what the boys should not do rather than giving real information. None of the participants mentioned visiting a youth clinic.

The majority of the boys said that they had sexual education in school of some sorts. Most of them, however, had found this lacking in a lot of different aspects. It was either too little sexual education, or it was not very satisfactory. Farah described it as “crap” and something he did not want to go to.

It was crap, I didn't want to be there.... it's weird to hear people talk about sex. (Farah, teenager)

Similarly, Tom described it as something boring and did not seem to find it worth his time.

Yeah, we had the sex-knowledge-thingy... It was super boring. (Tom, teenager)

That sexual education in school seemed to have been lacking for most of the boys were also seen in the narratives when the boys were asked about puberty. A lot of the the boys did not know what the word ‘puberty’ even meant.

Puberty? What's that? (Rickard, teenager)

Michel did not know what puberty meant. Furthermore, he was unaware of the changes puberty brings and thus was uncertain if he had entered it although he was 15 years old when interviewed.

I have no idea what puberty is. I don't even know how to notice that you have entered puberty so I don't know if I have? I have no idea. (Michel, teenager)

When asked how they were affected by the change that puberty brings, a number of the boys described it as insignificant or strange. Just as the boys shown in the quotes above, Pasa did not really know what puberty was and further described himself as having no specific feelings attached to it.

Puberty? What does that mean? I don't know what I think about puberty... It's like it's always been, it's not something I go around thinking about. (Pasa, teenager)

Rickard on the other hand, was confused by the experience and mentioned that he did not understand this development into puberty and sexual maturity.

Puberty was strange... I didn't understand it. (Rickard, teenager)

When school is lacking in providing sexual education, one could hope for parents to step in to cover up for it. However, in addition to feeling that the school had not been enough in this area, several of the boys also described parents who had never talked to them about sex or sexuality.

I haven't talked to anyone about sex. Like mum and dad are not, they're not those types you get the birds and the bees-talk with. (Michel, teenager)

Sometimes the boys did describe having their parents talk to them about sexuality and puberty. The thing they remembered though revolved around sex being something “you should be older before you do” or “you should be married before you do it”, or discussing whether or not they use contraceptives. Björn described his family context as “stricter than in a convent”.

This family... it's like, it's so strict. It's stricter than in a convent... there was no talking about sex whatsoever. Nothing at all. (Björn, teenager)

Farahs parents believed sex was something that should only be performed when married. Farahs only memories of his parents talking about sex or love were in relation to them pushing him to get married.

Ever since I was little, my dad talked about... “When are you getting married” and stuff... They don't want me to do it, they don't like me having sex. (Farah, teenager)

Lack of positive experiences. The second subtheme was based on the fact that the boys had few, if any, early positive sexual experiences. The majority of the boys had had some kind of sexual experiences, whether with other individuals or through masturbation. As stated by for example WHO, sexual health is not simply “the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity” but also to have a positive view on sexual practice and the ability to enjoy sexual experiences.

At the first interview occasion with the boys as teenagers, several had already had intercourse and debuted early, often with an older partner who they had not been romantically involved with and did not have feelings for. Sometimes, they had had sex with girls despite not wanting to themselves. No one described their first sexual encounter as an altogether positive, loving experience but rather had a tendency to describe it as some kind of failure. Björn had his first sexual experience at 16. He talked about it in negative terms and as something he did not enjoy.

Yeah it wasn't so good. I know I thought it was overrated, and it wasn't very appealing. It was tedious and not very enjoyable. If I'm to be honest, it was quite a failure. (Björn, teenager)

As an adult, Calle also thought back on the first time he had sexual intercourse and did not describe it as a good experience. He mentioned that before having sex, he did not really know a lot about it.

What to say... Not very well planned maybe... You don't know how you want it, you don't really know anything so... (Calle, adult)

Markus described it coolly, saying it was something you can not “whine about” afterwards. Just as Calle, Markus also described not knowing a lot about sex before having it himself, saying his only information about it had come from magazines.

No, you can't really whine about it... you had only seen it in magazines and so on... so before you've learned. (Markus, teenager)

Few described themselves as having feelings for the person they first had sexual contact with. Gaby had his first sexual intercourse when he was 13-14 years old with a female friend of his that was somewhat older. When asked if he was in love with her, he answered no and that he had just been curious.

In love? No. Just a little curious. I don't know. It was kinda weird in a way. (Gaby, teenager)

When asked if he had felt intimacy, warmth, love, comfort or safety while having intercourse with a girl, Gaby replied with a “no” on all questions. So did the boy called Tom. Tom had not yet had intercourse. He had however had other experiences with girls, such as kissing and hugging, but had felt no positive feelings connected with this.

Interviewer: How did it feel when you've been with a girl and hugging and kissing, what have you felt then?

Tom: It's okay.

Interviewer: One can feel intimacy, have you felt that? Love, sexual excitement or that it felt good?

Tom: No. (Tom, teenager)

Pasa had his sexual debut at 11-12 years old and described it as exciting but that he had not looked forward to it. He also found the experience to become less and less exciting after each time. He had not been in love with any of the girls he had had sexual intercourse with.

It's not like... it's not like you think, oh first time, it's gonna feel good and so on. It's not like that. The first time... it was exciting but once you had done it, after two, three times you knew how it was supposed to be so it wasn't exciting anymore... In love? I wasn't in love with them but I liked them. (Pasa, teenager)

Farah, like Gaby, found his first time to be “weird”. He also brought up that sometimes, he had sex even though he did not actually want to.

It was weird actually. Both thought it was weird... I've had about nine relationships, but there are some that you haven't, like sometimes you've had sex without wanting to... (Farah, teenager)

As an adult, he described himself as regretting almost all sexual experiences he had.

If I could take it all back then I would have... I wouldn't have had sex with a single one. Not a single one. I regret all of them besides... yeah, maybe three-four girls. All others I regret. All others. (Farah, adult)

Michel had his first intercourse at 13. He did not find it special, and described it as being a friend of his that wanted to do it, rather than something he himself longed for. When asked if he had felt feelings of unease connected to sex, he asked the interviewer if she meant times when he had sex with his girlfriends because she wanted to. Like Farah, having sex even though you did not want to yourself seemed to be something these boys thought was expected of them.

No it wasn't very special... It was mostly she who wanted to. I was just friends with her...she was a little older... I don't think it was a very good debut... Sometimes when the girl wants to have sex, when you're together you're like, ok, for your sake, we can. (Michel, teenager)

The participants were also asked questions about what feelings they had towards masturbation, that is, sex with themselves. The opinions differed. Some did mention this in positive terms. Markus was one of them, but he also thought that other boys did it more frequently than he did.

It feels good. But I think I do it less than other boys. (Markus, teenager)

Others said that they did not remember when they had started masturbating or if they had had any specific feelings connected to this.

I don't remember when I started masturbating. I don't really remember how I felt about it either (Björn, teenager)

Several of the boys, however, mentioned not liking it very much but that it was something they did anyway.

I don't really like it. I mean, you do it sometimes but it's not like you do it very often (Farah, teenager)

Presence of negative sexual experiences. Another thing that seemed to have been an obstacle for these boys to have a positive view of themselves as sexual human beings was that not only did they have an absence of positive sexual experiences, they had also been subjected to a lot of negative sexual experiences. These negative sexual experiences usually had an element of coercion in them. The experiences included being subjected to pornography, sexual coercion by older peers, step-fathers or their own mothers, and also having sexually coerced others themselves.

Several of the boys mentioned having watched pornography. Some had been subjected to it via adults, such as watching it while working in a video store or finding pornography movies in their parents' bedroom. Pornography usually gives a picture of sex that is not what most people would consider normative. In addition, a lot of pornographic content includes violence or multiple sexual partners.

I have seen a lot of porn because I did an internship in a video store that sold porn. The owner got those banana boxes, seven-eight a week with porn movies. You had to go through them to see that they were intact and then you had to label them, so then you saw a lot of porn... it took a couple of hours... (Daniel, teenager)

Sven had not only watched porn, but had done it at a friend's house while his friend's mother stood beside the television.

Yeah it was pretty weird because my friends older brother, they found some of that crap. It's weird because his mother stood right beside the television and talked on the phone with her mother for like three or four hours while we watched porn. (Sven, teenager)

Hasse talked about a similar experience, that is, having pornography indirectly "okayed" by parents. His involvement with pornography had to do with being in his parent's room and finding his dad's pornographic movies.

It's when you've been in mum and dad's room and found dad's porno movies, then you watched them sometimes... thought it was interesting. (Hasse, teenager)

The most negative sexual experience, however, was own experiences of sexual abuse. Ten of the 20 boys had been sexually coerced themselves as children. Jon had been raped by older peers in school and had never told anyone about it before.

Yes, it was sometime in school... They were mad at me because I had been doing mischief, and when I was gonna run around a hedge, they took two directions, then I couldn't get anywhere so I fell down. Then they pulled my pants down and someone there... did things with their penis there. I didn't like that... it didn't feel good. But I never told anyone about it. (Jon, teenager)

Rickard had been sexually abused by a peer as well.

When his sperm came inside me, I felt something warm you know. That was what I thought about, how painful it was when he pushed his penis inside of me. And then I just felt the warm. (Rickard, teenager)

Yngve had also been sexually abused by an older peer when he was in kindergarten. Although he could not remember exactly what the boy had done, he remembered bleeding from it.

When I was in kindergarten, by another boy who was older than me... I don't remember what sexual abuse he did, I just remember I was bleeding. (Yngve, teenager)

Björn had been sexually abused by his mother and described that this had strongly affected him. He also quite directly related himself being sexually coerced as a reason for committing a sexual offence himself.

...it has affected me in all ways... I handled it by being pretty introverted... and then I sexually offended one of my nieces... I was eight nine, something like that, I don't remember exactly but my mother put her hand down my pants and all sorts of things. Before then, when I was really young, it was some time when she had me in the bed, doing things... (Björn, teenager)

Even though the participants' own sexual offence was not part of the study's main focus, it was a part of their sexual experiences that seemed to have affected them negatively. Reading through the interviews, it seemed that the majority of the boys did not commit a sexual offence motivated by sexual desire. Instead, the sexual offence seemed to be more one part of a general acting-out, stemming from feelings of aggression and depression.

I had fights at home, I was really pissed off then because it felt like mum and dad didn't listen to me... So I went out and it just happened... I don't know, I feel powerless... I wanted to take out my aggression on someone else. And it happened through that action. Afterwards, I felt worthless. Destroying someone's life... I felt worthless... (Yngve, teenager)

Viktor, when replying to the interviewer, described the offence like something that eased an internal pressure and made him feel liberated.

Viktor: Before the offence I felt like shit... Afterwards I felt liberated.

Interviewer: Like you had eased some kind of pressure?

Viktor: Yes. (Viktor, teenager)

A few of the boys mentioned specific reasons for sexually offending as a way of reaching a certain goal. Axel described that he committed the offence to get away from his father who he was afraid of and who physically abused him.

I did it to get away from there. I wanted to move away. My dad kept saying he would throw me out and yeah, everything. He has hit me several times... He was always angry. (Axel, teenager)

Pasa's mother had become involved with a man who sexually abused him and his sister. The mother knew of the sexual offence but stayed involved with the man, despite him being notified and charged with a restraining order towards Pasa and his sister. Pasa described sexually abusing someone else as a way of getting back at her rather than something sexually motivated. In fact, he said it felt disgusting.

Pasa: The sexual offence was probably because I wanted to get revenge on my mother... because of her new boyfriend... he was horrible, mean, against me and my sister.

Interviewer: While sexually offending, do you think you felt any sexual excitement or lust?

Pasa: No, no. No. I didn't feel anything... In a way I found it disgusting then... I found it disgusting while we did it. (Pasa, teenager)

As an adult, Pasa had come to the realisation that being sexually abused by this man, and having his mother still being married with him despite knowing about the sexual

abuse, was the underlying reason for most of the hardships in his life, such as being in jail, taking drugs and not being able to have a long-term relationship. He talked about not being “friends with his story” but that he felt he had to learn how to accept it.

What I've had to learn here is that it is all due to my previous sexual abuse.... I'm far from friends with my story. But I can't do anything else but accept what's happened. (Pasa, adult)

In summary, in the first theme the following was present. When growing up, the boys had had an environment that actively hindered the development of a positive, functional, and non-coercive view of sexuality. This was shown in three ways. First, by a lack of knowledge as neither school nor parents had been sufficient in providing factual information about what puberty, sexual development, or sexuality means. In cases when parents had talked to the boys about sex, it had mostly been lectures or prohibits about things they should and should not do rather than relaying information about the phenomena of sex in itself.

This is also interesting since some of the boys talked about curiosity as a motivating factor for them committing the offence, and even after offending, not being sure about what they had actually done. Second, in addition to this, or maybe to a part because of this, most of the participants described a lack of positive emotions related to sexual experiences. A lot of them had an early sexual debut with an older girl whom they did not have any feelings for. Several also mentioned having had sex because the girl wanted to even though they themselves had not wanted to. Having sex with themselves, that is, masturbating also seemed to be an experience that was not altogether positive. Although some boys did mention it as something sexually exciting, it seemed for most participants to be a topic they preferred not to talk about and several mentioned not liking it very much. Third, the boys' environment was characterized by a presence of negative sexual experiences. One of these was having watched pornography. Several times, access to porn had been given through adults. They had also to a large extent been sexually coerced themselves as children. Furthermore, as they grew older, they themselves acted out and committed own sexual offenses. Thus, coercive sexual actions had not only been acted out against them, they themselves described how they had used it as means of punishing others, something that further put the concept of sex as something negative and punishing, rather than something involving love and intimacy.

Struggles with intimacy

Most prevalent in the narratives of these men, especially in the interviews conducted during early adulthood, was that more or less all of them mentioned difficulties regarding their sexual behaviour or intimate relationships. A common aspect for these difficulties seemed to be struggles with intimacy, a fear of getting too close and showing too much of themselves. To handle this struggle, the participants described an array of different behaviours which seemed almost like strategies and these are described in the following subthemes: “secure context”, “sex without intimacy”, “downplaying”, “keeping a secret” and “not growing up”. Some participants described

behaviours relating to mainly one of these subthemes, whereas others seemed to use several simultaneously.

Secure context. One of the strategies that came up in the analysis was the importance of only having sexual intercourse with a partner whom the men were in a long-term, stable relationship with. In other words, a need for a secure context seemed to be vital before the participant felt ready or wanted to perform any sexual behaviour that could inspire a feeling of intimacy. The sexual act in itself was described as something not to be taken lightly, and which should only be performed together with someone you love or feel a deep connection with.

Sex is an intimate thing. You do it with someone you like. I've only done that, never had one of those one night stand or so. It's kind of a deeper love... that you get with someone you really like. I think that you should love someone in order to have that kind of sexual contact. (Markus, adult)

Furthermore, sex and intimacy was closely connected to trust. Knowing the person and being able to trust your partner was described as crucial in order for sexual intercourse to be considered, and getting there was worth waiting for. The kind of temporary casual sex that 'one-night stands' could be said to symbolize, were talked about as something very apart. Yngve described that he could not pick someone up in a bar because of this reason. He needed to be able to know and trust the people he had sex with.

I'm not with a person I don't trust. I'm not the kind who goes out to the bar and take someone home to sleep with on a weekend. I don't work like that... I might be a bit of a careful person. Like, sex is a thing, but it's not the most important one. I want to get to know a person. I think that's more important than jumping into bed at once. I prefer knowing the person before I do anything... and trust a person before, because I don't want to be put in that same situation again. (Yngve, adult)

Calle had never had a "one night stand" with someone and described similar sentiments like Yngve. He linked the sexual offense he committed more directly to this and he also thought that he, just as Yngve did, had become more "careful" due to this.

It could be that the sexual offense is the reason that I choose to have sex in relationships... If you're at the bar and that, you can meet someone and then what happens happens. But I mean, that doesn't exist for me. And it won't either. So that could be one of the things that got affected. I've gotten more careful. (Calle, adult)

Giri also described wanting to know the person before having sex and described it as "not good for him" and "a catastrophe" if he did not. This also seemed to be related to trust and a wish for "finding out the truth" about the person before going further.

It's not good for me to have sex with anyone... if I know the person, it's one thing. If I don't know the person then it becomes a catastrophe for me. Like first I want to know the person. If she has friends, I need to hear from her friends what kind of girl she is. Is she a good girl and all that? I also need to find the truth... I just can't find out that she says one thing and the next day I hear something else... Should she lie, then I wouldn't even have contact with

her. I should be honest with her and she should be honest with me too. (Giri, adult)

Sex without intimacy. The second strategy described by several of the participants stood in contrast to the first and involved having only so called “one-night stands”, that is, a sexual encounter where there is no expectation of establishing a long-term, intimate relationship. The narratives included in this sub-theme consisted of descriptions about having a high number of temporary sexual encounters and sometimes descriptions of themselves as overly sexual. Thus, instead of securing themselves in a stable relationship to avoid worrying about whether or not the other person could be trusted in order to handle their fear of intimacy, it seemed like they could avoid the intimate part of sex altogether and just have casual sex. Some of the men related this to the sexual offence they committed themselves. For example, Farah described that sex stopped being meaningful and felt more like “a handshake” after a while than anything intimate and loving. He quite directly related his “oversexuality” as a way of compensating for the sexual offence he committed and his need to run from the label as a “rapist”.

The sexual offence has affected me negatively, especially with girls. I have felt forced to compensate for that. So I've had too many girls. I have been oversexual just to compensate. I have felt forced to have sex all the time with different people. I've had sex with people I don't like, with people I like as siblings, with people I haven't planned on having sex with. It's not right. Sex becomes nothing, like a handshake. And just because I might be running from a label as yeah... rapist. So you overcompensate. (Farah, adult)

To a high extent, these males seemed to have separated the aspect of sex from the aspect of intimacy and love. The two was seemingly not connected and this split was shown through different examples. One participant described a willingness to sell sex for money through a chat camera, the only obstacle for him was not knowing who the people watching were.

I would sell sex if I could. If I got money then I would have done that.... I would have liked to sit at home in front of a chat camera for money. That's not so hard. I don't know why, I know it sounds a little strange like that but I'm thinking... money... But on the other hand it might be stupid because you don't know the person who sits behind the other screen. What kind of people they are. (Gaby, adult)

Farah described that even though he had not explicitly sold sex for money, he had performed sexual acts in exchange for food, free alcohol, and marijuana.

Farah: He made those special food dishes and we got free alcohol and yeah, in exchange for a small contribution or contribution I don't know, that's not selling sex or I don't think so.

Interviewer: Did you perform some kind of favour?

Farah: Yeah, or like we had sex. And... hash, we got hash, we got alcohol and a lot of things. (Farah, adult)

Another example of how love and sex did not seem to be connected was present in Pasa's description, which mentioned having a lot of temporary sexual encounters and

sometimes sexual relations with the same girl over a long period of time. However, he had never actually called someone his girlfriend, which is generally implied to require intimacy and affection as well as sex. Pasa also described that after having sex with someone, he generally stopped finding them interesting enough for anything else but sex.

I have actually never had a girlfriend to whom I've said 'this is my girlfriend'. Never. I have never had a girlfriend. But I've met girls. I have some girls who have been with me since I was 14 years old... and I've only met them sporadically for a sexual relation. And I've had a lot of sexual relations... I have anxiety over never being able to call someone my girlfriend. I have an easy time being a gentleman and get them to like me and all these first bits before sex, and then when we do have sex it goes 360 degrees. It's like yeah, now I've had sex with you, there is no more interest in it and next time I see her, it's just to have sex with her, nothing else. (Pasa, adult)

Michel described similarly that he had had a lot of sexual encounters and relationships, but also lost interest in girls and grew bored of them. He described that it might be because he could not open up properly or because he pushed them away as soon as intimacy started to grow between them. He described that he thought about trying to find "a mother", that is, a women who was safe and could be a good mother for future children rather than finding a love interest.

In relationship, no matter how good it is... I get bored eventually... when it's too much with the same person I get bored in the end. So eh this might sound very sick but my idea is to find a mother... if you're gonna have kids I guess you have to find a girl with very good circumstances around her like a good family... I know the problem lies with me that I grow bored... maybe I don't open up enough or whenever we get too close I push them away... But I've always had girls and I've always had relationships... Like I could have sex with three-four different girls at school the same day. (Michel, adult)

Rickard said that he thought he had had more girls than most men. He could not count how many he actually had have sex with but described it as "quite a lot". However, Rickard, as well as a few other men who described using this strategy, did talk about preferring the sexual encounters where he felt some kind of connection with the girl. He also described that the temporary sexual encounters he usually had was not very fulfilling and that they did not mean very much to him, which seemed to indicate a longing for more intimate relations.

I've been pretty popular among girls... since the first time I had sex until now, you know, I can't count how many girls I've had sex with, it's quite a lot. I do like it the most when you have sex with a girl who you have a different kind of connection with rather than just sex you know. Because it's happened a lot of times that girls who I know, they call or I call them and they come to the party and then at the end of the evening, it ends with sex. It's not very fulfilling that. Having sex with girls you know is better, like someone you're together with and have a relation with, I think it's better than one night stands... It's a little more meaningful than having sex only

once. I know a lot of girls that I had sex with just once... they don't mean very much. (Rickard, adult)

Downplaying. Some of the participants had handled their struggles with intimacy by downplaying the importance of sex, via either abstaining from sex in varying degrees and/or describing sex as something unimportant or even disgusting. In other words, sex was devalued as something they seemed to be able to manage without. Some of the men linked their devaluation of sex back to their own feelings of shame over having committed a sexual offence.

Some avoided sex to an extent, such as having a low amount of sexual activity in their relationships, whereas other abstained from relationships and sex completely. Axel described himself as wanting a lot less sexual activity than his partner and that this put on a strain on the relationship. He described pushing her away and not loving her in the moments when she wanted sex “too much”.

It gets a little too much when she wants it. So that's why sex maybe happens once a month or so. I push her away when she wants it too much... I don't love her just then... She's a bit hornier than me... When I want it, I get it, but when she wants to, I rarely want to. I think it gets too much... Because she wants it constantly, like the whole time now... and she says 'why don't you want to?'. We actually don't kiss that much... It's like eh, let's take in next week... so... maybe three kisses a week. (Axel, adult)

Gaby described having problems with sexuality and that every time he started thinking about sex with someone, it felt “weird” for him.

... it goes well for a while but then I start thinking sexually, that I want sex with them or something, suddenly it starts to feel weird and I stop talking. It gets a little weird like that. (Gaby, adult)

Daniel had only had sex with his wife and described their sexuality as working well but that he was not “desperate” for sex. He related this to being incarcerated for the offence as a teenager and believed he would have wanted more sex more if he had not ended up there.

I'm not desperate without sex, like if we don't have sex for a week, fourteen days... But on the other hand, had I not ended up at the institution, then I think I would have searched more for sex... like, all the time. (Daniel, adult)

Some participants described never having sexual relations and had gotten used to not having a partner.

Not much sex right now... Not anyone ever actually. I've gotten used to it. Yeah, that this is me. (Thomas, adult)

Michel described himself as staying away from relationships and said that nowadays he was not feeling interested in other people.

Nowadays I can't even be bothered to go into this thing and... like I'm not interested in getting to know other people, not interested in keeping contact

with other people... I don't feel like doing this thing of being interested in what a girl wants to get a relationship. I'm not interested in a relationship ...I've pretty much stayed away from relations. (Michel, adult)

Several of the males who described themselves as avoiding sex and intimacy also talked about sex and relationships as something not very important to them. As a teenager, Daniel mentioned that his brother had a lot of girlfriends, but that he himself had not. He said that he preferred having an education before he got a girlfriend and that a girlfriend was something you could get “whenever you want it”.

I want to have an education before I get a girlfriend... You want to get an education. You can get a girlfriend whenever you want it. When you're 20 or you get it when you're 19, what does it matter? (Daniel, teenager)

As an adult, however, Daniel said that the fact that his brother had a lot of girlfriends and he did not was a “trigger” for him which spurred him into committing sexual offences.

That which triggered me to do it was because my brother got a lot more girls than I did... my mother thought 'why don't you get a girlfriend'... and she had asked my brother twice 'why doesn't Daniel bring home any girls?' and he answered that 'maybe he can't find any girls' or something like that. (Daniel, adult)

Jon did not like answering questions about sex because he no longer had sexual relations. He described that relationships just does not work for him and also downplayed the importance of having sexual relations by reporting that he no longer cares about it.

I answer no on almost all sex-related questions because I haven't had sex in years... I don't care anymore... Relationships don't work. (Jon, adult)

Furthermore, some of the men seemed to not only avoid and downplay the importance of sex and intimacy, but actively devalued sex to the point of despising it. They also described a level of contempt for people who were openly sexual and wanted to have sex. Giri described “desperate people” as those who only thought of sex and emphasized strongly that he was not one of those people.

I'm not that kind of desperate person, 'I want sex' ... And I don't want a girl who's desperate... If she wants to be desperate than she can find someone else... I rather hang with my friends than thinking about stuff like that... (Giri, adult)

When asked what feelings he felt when he thought about sex, Giri described feeling “nothing” and that having sex with “desperate girls” was bad for him.

I feel nothing actually.... I don't even think that I think about sex. You know I meet girls like... I'm thinking what the hell girls, how in the hell can they... like as soon as you meet someone they already want sex. It's not good for me... (Giri, 25 years)

Just as Giri, Viktor found other people's view of sex as something negative. When asked what he thought other men's attitude to sex and sexuality was, he answered:

I don't even want to think about that. I think it's pretty repulsive... (Viktor, adult)

These negative emotions regarding sex seemed to be present when Viktor talked about his own sexual relations as well. He described his own sexuality in a quite cold way as something "normal" that "works" and it did not seem to be something he enjoyed. When asked if sex was connected with positive emotions for him, he replied that he "at least doesn't see it as negative".

*Interviewer: Right now you experience sex as something that is...
Viktor: Normal... It works... I don't see it as negative at least... All other people do strange things or maybe not all others but some does pretty strange things, yeah, I wouldn't really count that as sex... (Viktor, adult)*

Axel described negative emotions towards public sexual expressions of love between adults, such as kissing, and thought of it as something almost shameful that should be done "at home" and not among other people.

I see a lot of adults whose like 40 years old who is standing and making out on the sidewalk when you're waiting for the bus... and you're like... like what the hell, do you have to do that here? Can't you do that at home? (Axel, adult)

Giri described this even further by saying that "sexual people" must have some kind of disease and that they need help.

'I'm sexual', what is that? It must be something for the people who always have sex 24/7, they must have some kind of disease. No I'm not like that... It's their problem... they need help really. It's sick. (Giri, adult)

Tom also described having had feelings of contempt and disgust towards sex. He more explicitly related this to himself though, and the shame he had felt over committing a sexual offence.

In the beginning the offence affected my sexual life ... I felt some shame over it... It was the kind of shame I had to walk around with... I was disgusted by sex... it was almost like I despised it. (Tom, adult)

Keeping a secret. Another strategy that appeared in the analysis of the participants' narratives was to keep the sexual offence they had committed a secret which seemed to create a certain distance towards partners or close friends. Even though a lot of the participants described having a partner or close friend who they could "trust completely", the majority still kept the offence secret in fear of what the consequence of telling could be. Some discussed a fear that their partner's view of them would change as a result of them finding out. Other feared mostly that it could be used against them in

an argument or in case of break-ups. Either way, to not tell was a way of keeping oneself safe.

Viktor described that while he was drunk, he had once told a friend in High School about committing a sexual offence. As a result, he had gotten bullied in school for three years and had had people in his hometown shout “rapist” after him. Since then, he had not told anyone and strongly emphasized not wanting to tell his girlfriend.

She knows nothing... I'll never in my life tell her...if she were to ask a question about it then I would flee the country. (Viktor, adult)

Tom had never told anyone, and could not pinpoint exactly the reason why but described more a general fear about it.

I've never been able to and I don't think I ever will be able to tell anyone... I don't know what reactions I would actually get. My mother is one thing but if I would tell for example a really close friend... like I don't know, I don't know if I would have dared.(Tom, adult)

Axel was afraid that his relationship would be affected if he said too much and that his girlfriend would find him “disgusting and stupid”. He also described a fear of how it would affect them having kids as well as being afraid that the information would “get out” and become public in case they would break up.

Now I have a great girl who listens, but you don't want to say too much because you never know if it's going to affect the relationship... She would probably think that I'm disgusting and stupid and then she'll be worried when we get kids now... you never know what's gonna happen, you never know if you'll get divorced ... maybe when we've been married or been living together so long that we really know each other, I'll want to tell it. Because if we broke up and I've told her and she tells her parents and then it gets out... We have to really, really know each other a lot better before I tell. (Axel, adult)

Yngve had not told anyone but was also afraid that it would “get out” anyway and be used against him, and that it could affect his relation to his children as a result.

I was with my ex for eight years. She doesn't know anything and we have two kids. If she had found out, everything would have been over.... If it would have gotten out and I would have lost my children because of it in some way... Can she use it against me? (Yngve, adult)

Björn had not told the woman he was living with either. Just as Yngve and Axel, he described a fear of it being used against him in some way.

The thing I'm most afraid of is that it will be used as knowledge against you, that it becomes a weapon towards you. (Björn, adult)

However, even though the majority of the males showed a strong reluctance to tell their partner about having committed a sexual offence in their adolescence, a few men described having told their partners and that this was important for their relationship.

For example, Gaby felt like if he it was something he had to do if he was serious with his girlfriend.

I know if I really want to be with this girl then I have to tell as much as possible about myself so that she knows what kind of person I am and what I've been through... (Gaby, adult)

Not growing up. Another strategy that seemed to be used in order to handle struggles with intimacy was the unwillingness to grow up and acknowledge the ability to have adult, intimate relationships. Several of the participants described themselves as adult children that did not want to grow up, but rather found themselves wishing they could have another childhood, and this time, a better one. Many described not having a childhood in the first place and that this was partly a result of being incarcerated due to the sexual offence they had committed.

It felt hard... It was like half my life was just over... in only a couple years. I didn't get a real childhood. And that's left its mark. And then you had to grow up so fast... you shouldn't take the years from a child. You should be allowed to be a child, as long as you can. But I was taken so early that I had to grow up, so quickly... Already at fifteen I had to act like an adult. (Markus, adult)

Similarly, Yngve described the incarceration as a loss of his youth.

So that's that. I have been inside, lost my entire teenage years. (Yngve, adult)

Calle thought the same and also compared his experience to the experience of other “normal” kids.

You haven't lived like other normal kids in the same age in that way. So it's like you missed out on a lot of the teenage years and stuff like that.(Calle, adult)

Tom felt the same, and also expressed a wish for wanting to come back and “re-do” his childhood as a way of making his life different.

Right after I was released from the institution... I didn't want to be a grown-up. Like I wanted to go back to my childhood and so on and live there and hope to re-do things, so that things changes. (Tom, adult)

Thomas described himself as having an adult body but still feeling like a child.

Yeah, what is the saying? You are grown in, no what the hell is it that you usually say? An adult in the body but not in the head maybe. (Thomas, adult)

Pasa also described not feeling like an adult and that growing up is scary because of the responsibilities that follow with it.

I don't feel like an adult, I feel like an adult child... But as I see it, a grown person or a grown man takes responsibility. I have always loved irresponsibility. I have loved not having to be on time, I have loved to be able to do what I want when I want... And just being generally irresponsible and this thing with having to start taking responsibility now, it's frightening because it's new. I've never done it before and all the new things scares me. It's scary.(Pasa, adult)

The reluctance to shoulder the role of an adult man could be seen as a way of trying to avoid serious and stable relationships. Pasa did connect his fear of new responsibilities as something that stopped him from going into serious relationships and that this was one of the reasons why he had never wanted to call someone his girlfriend.

... It's a lot of Peter Pan-psyche in it, I'm afraid of responsibility when it comes to relationships as well. When it starts getting serious, when you start talking about getting engaged, moving in together and all that, it scares me like hell. So it's a lot like, I've never had a girlfriend because I've never wanted to... I have chosen to not start a relationship. (Pasa, adult)

In summary, all the men's narratives, especially in the interviews conducted during early adulthood, seemed to contain struggles with intimacy and difficulties with sexual relations. Most of them described, in varying degrees of directness, that this struggle seemed to stem from having committed a sexual offense, as well as from growing up in troubled homes characterised by a lack of affection and closeness. They used different behaviours which can be seen as strategies in order to manage this struggle. Some males managed it by only having sex in stable relationship that guaranteed a secure context. It seemed that being able to trust the other person was vital before any intimacy could occur. Others managed it in contrasting ways, that is, by only having casual, one-night stands that did not require intimacy at all. In this way, sex could be enjoyed without having to handle serious, intimate relationships. Some handled their struggles with intimacy by downplaying the importance of sex and subsequently avoided sex and intimacy in varying degrees, some to the extent of never having it all. Several of the men also degraded and despised sex which also worked as a way of handling own feelings of fear since if you do not want it, you do not need it. A majority of the men also used the strategy of keeping the fact that they had committed a sexual offence a secret. Since several of men described the sexual offence and subsequent incarceration as a big, life-changing event, withholding this information from a significant other could be seen as quite a big secret which makes full disclosure and intimacy between the partners difficult, or even impossible. Last not least, some males showed an unwillingness to grow up and described themselves as feeling as adult children, which could make it difficult to be a part of an intimate and serious, lasting relationship.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore experiences of sexuality and intimate relationships among young men who had committed sexual offences during their adolescence and were labelled as "juvenile sex offenders". The results showed two main themes which consisted of their view of sexuality and struggles with intimacy.

The first theme developed out of the participant's descriptions of growing up in an environment that seemed to not only fail to encourage the development of a positive, non-coercive view of sexuality, but rather seemed to actively inhibit such development. The first subtheme included a lack of knowledge. The boys mentioned having experienced a deficient sexual education from their schools. In addition to this, the narratives involved parents who appeared to have been either unable to step in to fill this gap, or had done so in a lecturing manner of "do's and do not's" rather than giving factual knowledge about puberty and the development of sexuality.

Perhaps as a result of this, most of the boys, when having their first sexual experiences, described that they did not know what having sex meant or what to expect from intercourse, and seemed to have sex more out of curiosity or to "get it over and done with" rather than being spurred by own emotions of love and intimacy. Almost all of the boys described their first time as a failure that felt 'weird' rather than a positive experience. The participants' descriptions of their "failed" first-time sexual experiences, however, are not markedly different from the norm. In fact, most youths describe their first sexual intercourse as something not very enjoyable and lacking in either physiological or psychological satisfaction (Higgins, Trussel, Moore & Davidson, 2010; Sprecher, Barbee & Schwartz 1995). Sprecher et al. (1995) found that both men and women share feelings relating to anxiety before their first sexual intercourse. In addition, several of the participants in this study mentioned that they had had sexual intercourse because the girls wanted to even though they did not want to have sex themselves. Therefore, it could be said that for some of the boys, already from the first sexual act and in subsequent relationships, having sex even though they did not want to, seemed to be something they believed was expected of them. Furthermore, having sex with oneself through masturbation also seemed to be an experience that was not positive for most boys. Some mentioned it as pleasurable, but most boys did not seem to want to talk about it or mentioned that they did not enjoy it very much. Thus, the second subtheme included a lack of positive sexual experiences. Furthermore, in addition to the lack of sexual knowledge and lack of positive sexual experiences, the boys' narratives seemed to describe a context characterized by a high presence of negative sexual experiences. This was seen through the use of pornography, being sexually coerced as children, and in a way, sexually offending someone themselves. When sexual education received from schools and/or parents is deficient, most children turn to peers or pornography to find information and usually, that information is not very reliable when it comes to showing how sex actually works (Lehmiller, 2014). A lot of the boys mentioned watching pornography and also described having friends as their source of sexual information or having girlfriends who had taught them how to have sex. However, as Lehmiller (2014) writes, it can be assumed that this might not always be the most reliable source of sexual education and thus, a lot of teenagers tends to have a sexual debut despite lacking factual knowledge about sex except for what they have heard from peers or seen in pornographic movies or magazines (Lehmiller, 2014). Porn may also have shaped the view of sex for these boys, since they may have thought that the sex shown in pornography was "normal" and how it is "supposed to be" despite the fact that pornography often show the opposite to what could be considered "normal" (Bowater, 2011). That is, sex presented in pornography, often includes violence towards women and having a lot of sexual partners (Lehmiller, 2014). Furthermore, pornography was often described as being accessed through adults. For example, one participant described watching pornography for several hours at a friend's house with his friend's

mother present. Another mentioned having gained access to pornography by looking at his father's pornography movies. Furthermore, ten out of the 20 boys had also been sexually abused themselves as younger children, meaning sexual acts had been coerced upon them. Being sexually abused as children is something that seem to increase the risk of sexually abusing someone themselves (Seto & Lalumière, 2010). When the participants became older and acted out because of different reasons, it seemed like sexual acts became a way of punishing and taking revenge on others. Additionally, it has been suggested by researchers that one of the reasons for sexual offending could be an inhibition of positive, non-coercive sexual fantasies rather than a manifestation of deviant, coercive ones (Daleiden et al., 1998). This inhibition might well be an actual lack of positive experiences of what an enjoyable, non-coercive sexuality is. That is, in the absence of positive sexual models, the only remaining models are negative experiences.

The second theme highlights how the sexual problems described by the participants as teenagers became further noticeable as they grew older. The interviews conducted during early adulthood painted a picture of men who struggled with intimacy which seemed to interfere with their sexuality. The sexual difficulties that came through in the narratives was not always explicitly expressed though, quite the opposite. Most of the participants when asked directly described their sexual activity along the lines of "good", "working well" or "no problems there". As sexuality can be a sensitive and private subject for anyone, and especially for someone labelled a "sexual offender", this is not unexpected. However, when asked to give concrete examples of how they viewed their sexuality or about their sexual activity in the present or past, the dominant image was not of positive, rewarding sexual relations but rather descriptions of sexual difficulties that seemed to differ from what could be called "ordinary" sexual behaviour (e.g. having a sexual debut at 11 and then by age 18, reporting having over 60-65 sexual partners). To handle their struggles with intimacy, the men described behaviours that could be seen as different strategies. Some males seemed to manage their struggle by finding a secure and trusting context, that is, a stable relationship before any sexual activity occurred. In this way, intimacy seemed to become less frightening. Others seemed to have only casual, 'one-night stands' that did not require a high degree of intimacy, if any at all. In this way, intimacy could be avoided whilst still having the possibility to have sex. Others appeared to handle struggles with intimacy by downplaying sex and its importance. Some mentioned avoiding sex and intimacy to varying degrees, and sometimes sex was downplayed to the extent of being actively despised. There also appeared to be a strategy based on keeping the sexual offence a secret from one's partners or close friends. Keeping this secret could be seen as a way to create a distance to their partner, thus ensuring that full intimacy was never attained since most of the males described their offence and following incarceration as a life-changing event. Last but not least, some participants described an unwillingness to grow up and described themselves as adult children, thus making it difficult to be a part of an intimate and serious, lasting relationship.

One important part of these results is that the boys described obstacles for developing a positive view of sexuality on their own from early in life. This gives support for the importance of content in treatments like the 'Good Life Model' which focus on the positive aspects of helping individuals who have sexually offended to develop intimate relationships and a positive sexuality (Lindsay et al., 2007). Without the emphasis of the positive aspects of sexuality, there is a risk of confirming the view

of sexuality that these boys seemed to gain in adolescence, that is, a view of sexuality as something diffuse, negative, and coercive that should be avoided. Promoting healthy sexuality could thus be a key point in treatment (Lindsey et al., 2007; Perry & Ohm, 1999) and help create to a good life for this stigmatized group while simultaneously minimizing the risks for relapse.

Another important part of the results is that so many of the men did have an active sexual life, but one that could be described as narrow. In other words, some males had a high degree of casual sex but had never had a girlfriend, whereas other had never had a one-night stand but only had sex in long-lasting relationships. Now, whereas neither of this by itself could be consider troublesome, (for example, modern society often promotes a more open sexuality, and religion tends to promote sex as something that is only supposed to happen in marriage) what could possibly be called problematic though is the lack of flexibility. For example, most men talked along the lines of it being “non-existent” to have casual sex, or having some kind of “inability” to form lasting relationships, or that relationships “simply didn’t work” and thus, it was better to abstain from sex altogether. An increased flexibility, that is, both the ability to experience loving sex in a relationship as well as the ability to be able to enjoy sexual acts outside a relationship without experiencing this as unsafe and frightening, could perhaps make sexuality and intimacy less threatening parts of life for these men. In psychological practices, flexibility is often considered to be a sign of health. In psychodynamic therapy, being able to use different defence mechanisms in the face of difficulties is related to mental health (McWilliams, 1994). In cognitive- behavioural therapy, having a behavioural repertoire with different actions to choose from increases the chance for adaptive and meaningful living (KBT-gruppen, 2018). Thus, there is a possibility that having a flexible sexuality could likewise contribute to a positive sexuality. Understanding how these men struggle with intimacy thus provides information about what content is needed in treatment to give opportunities to develop a more flexible and positive sexuality, which in turn could lead to better relations and an increased ability to both provide and receive intimacy. In this way, it can also help with the intimacy deficits that many sexual offenders are said to suffer from (Martin & Tardif, 2015; Ward, McCormack & Hudson, 1997).

One limitation with this study is that the interviews were received in transcribed form. Thus, a lot of possible intonations, body language, or even ironical remarks could have been lost from simply reading the written material. This can have made the results less reliable. This is even more important since the results contain an interpretative element, that is, the analysis aimed to look beyond the semantic level and get a deeper understanding of how the participants thought and felt regarding their sexual experiences based on examples from their life. In a lot of cases, contradictions emerged in the narratives, e.g. “I trust my partner completely but I would never tell her about committing a sexual offence” or “My sexual life works well but I don’t feel like kissing my wife” and these contradictions provided valuable information. It seemed that most of the participants had ambivalent feelings regarding their current sexuality and intimate relations. However, it could also be that the participants actually thought one thing, but due to social pressure or a wish to appear in a certain way, answered differently. One reason for this could be the context in which the questions were asked. Since the participants were involved with a project who focused on studying adolescents who had committed sexual offences, the participants, both as boys and adults, might have been keen to minimize their sexual desires and portrait themselves as non-sexual beings.

The interviews conducted with these men has been analysed and written about in several studies (e.g. Ingevaldson et al., 2016; Ingevaldson, 2018). When reading the interviews, one receives a feeling of “life-perspective” since the interviews follows the participants from adolescence up into young adulthood. An interesting area of further research could thus be recurring interviews that follows these young males who has been labelled sexual offenders not only up until early adulthood, but perhaps into late adulthood or even retirement. As teenagers, a lot of the boys had difficulties reflecting about their life and the reasons for committing sexual offences. Even in early adulthood, a lot of the men had difficulties understanding and explaining their life experiences. Thus, it would be interesting to be able to conduct further interviews with them at a slightly older age, say 40 years, when their life might be more “stable” than at present, since several of the participants at the time of the second interview was working hard to, for example, find full-time employment or start a family with children of their own. How would their narrative about their life and feelings about sex and intimacy sound at 40 years? At 60 years? Would it be the same, and if not, what would be different and why?

One area for further research could be the topic of having sex with oneself, i.e. masturbation. Masturbation was only slightly mentioned in this study under the sub-theme ‘lack of positive experiences’ and opinions about it differed in the participant’s narratives. It would be interesting to see if there is any correlation between how the boys felt about having sex with themselves (masturbating) and how they felt about having sex with someone else. Masturbation frequency has been shown to be unrelated to sexual difficulties in both men and women (Laumann, Paik, & Rosen 1999). However, this does not take into account feelings connected with masturbating. It is not unlikely that one’s attitude towards masturbation practices might match the attitude towards sex in general. In addition, masturbation, even though it is something practiced alone, can enhance one’s ability for intimacy with others (Coleman, 2002). Thus, it could be of interest to conduct a study aiming to see if and how the participants view on masturbation and masturbation practices are connected to their view of a positive sexuality and struggles with intimacy.

A possible area of future research could also be additional studies on the reasons behind sexual offending, especially adolescent sexual offending. A lot of the boys narratives’ seemed to imply that the sexual offending was not actually sexual at all, but rather one aspect of a general “acting-out” behaviour. This theory has been supported by several researchers, e.g. Milloy (1994) and Righthand and Welch (2004). Furthermore, the risk for recidivism for adolescents who have committed a sexual offence is low and the majority of juvenile sexual offenders do not commit another sexual offence later in life (Christiansen & Vincent, 2013; Lussier & Blokland, 2014; Righthand & Welch, 2004). However, they are more likely to offend again non-sexually (Christiansen & Vincent, 2013; Righthand & Welch, 2004). Thus, some of these boys might benefit more from treatment based on general offending. It is also important to note, especially when considering that most adolescents who commit a sexual offence never do so again, the impact on their lives due to this. As put by Righthand and Welch (2004): “to label them ‘juvenile sex offenders’ at a time when they are developing their identity may have deleterious effects” (p.28).

My own conclusion is that “young sexual offenders” are more than just “sexual offenders”; first and foremost they are human beings coming from problematic

backgrounds who struggles with the transition from teenager to young adult while simultaneously trying to develop a positive sexuality.

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