Non sex offenders display distorted thinking and have empathy deficits too: A thematic analysis of cognitions and the application of empathy

***Abstract***

It is generally assumed that empathy acts to disinhibit behaviour that could be perceived as detrimental to others and as a result is a common feature of offender treatment programmes. The present research hypothesised that empathy in all populations is both a situational and a selective process that is ultimately governed by self-interest and further, that it is the nature of the self-interest that distinguishes individuals rather than a general empathy deficit *per se*. Empathic processes were observed in a non-offending population in a personal situation normally regarded as evocative of empathy, infidelity. Thematic analysis of data from individuals who reported being faithful or unfaithful to their partners, revealed five dominant themes: Vulnerable Predisposition, Emotional Motivators, Rational Emotive Decision Making, Avoiding Cognitive Dissonance, and Lack of Remorse. The themes all revealed how individuals employed cognitive strategies, which were managed by self-interest that functioned to create cognitive states devoid of empathy.

Key words: Empathy, thematic analysis, cognitive distortions, cognitive dissonance, sexual offending.

Please cite as: Walker, K., Brown, S., Gannon, T. A., & Keown, K. (2013). Creating a psychologically comfortable position: The link between empathy and cognitions in sex offenders. *Journal of Sexual Aggression, 19,*  275-294.doi: 10.1080/13552600.2012.747223.

***Introduction***

Empathy is generally understood as an entity that shapes behaviour; a potentially fundamental concept that has been linked to aggression (Kaukiainen et al*.,* 1999), prosocial and antisocial behaviour (Kavussanu, Stamp, Slade, & Ring, 2009), altruism (Bierhoff & Rohman, 2004) and bullying interactions (Nickerson, Mele, & Princiotta, 2008). Empathy has been consistently found to be causally related to prosocial behaviour, supporting an empathy-altruism hypothesis (Piliavin & Charng, 1990). In addition, most clinicians assume that empathy is important to relationship functioning, and is described as both a crucial and central aspect of a healthy couple relationship (e.g., Ickes, 2001; Simpson, Oriña, & Ickes2004). However, research is equivocal about how empathy is manifested in couples (Gilhotra, 1993; Gottman, 1999), or how it should be addressed and taught in interventions and whether such interventions are effective (Siegal, 1995; Ickes 2001; Simpson et al*.,* 2004); but there is agreement that it is an important part of a relationship (Busby & Gardner, 2008).

In theory, following an empathetic response one potential behavioural outcome would be to help another person in distress; this tends to be referred to as the ‘bystander effect’ which is associated with much research, particularly in relation to prosocial behaviour, social responsibility and the empathy/altruism hypothesis (see Bierhoff, 2008). However, only a small body of research has investigated how empathy is employed to deter an individual from engaging in actions that would be perceived as negative or hurtful towards other people. This has been theorised as relating to overcoming internal inhibitions (Finkelhor, 1995), theory of mind (Blair, 2005) and/or moral development (Hoffman, 2000). Research that analyses the assumption that empathy acts as an ‘inhibitor’ of actions that cause harm to others is limited, and the research that has been conducted has tended to focus on offending populations. This has resulted in the assumption that offenders have different levels of empathy compared to, or use empathy differently from, ‘normal’ populations. The purpose of the current research is to examine empathy in a non-offending population in a situation evocative of empathy, i.e. infidelity within a relationship. The supposition is that the use, or lack of use, of empathy in non-offenders may actually be similar to that of offenders, thereby challenging the assumption that offenders use empathy differently to ‘normal’ populations.

In relation to those who offend, Farrington (2007 p. 610) has suggested that the link between empathy and offending is based on the belief that an individual is less likely to victimise someone if they can appreciate and/or experience a victim’s feelings. Empathy is therefore viewed as an individual difference factor, where its presence in some individuals may decrease the chance that they will commit certain types of offending behaviour, whilst its absence in others may have a facilitating influence on offending (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004). We could therefore make the assumption that a similar argument would be logical, when discussing a non-offending population in relation to empathy affecting a behaviour that could be deemed as detrimental to others, or lead to ‘hurt’. However this association has been mainly applied to offenders and seems to suggest that the findings *only* apply to this group, such that empathetic deficits differentiate offenders from non-offenders. This has therefore led to the authors of this current research to speculate whether this assumption is in fact correct and to undertake this study to investigate ‘hurtful’ behaviours in ‘normal’ populations in an attempt to understand the process of empathy more broadly.

It is notoriously difficult to conceptualise and define empathy, then in turn measure it (Blackburn, 1995). In addition, the reliability and validity of the measures developed has been challenged and is well documented (for example, see Chlopan, McCain, Carbonell, & Hagen,1985; Tierney & McCabe, 2001; Blake & Gannon, 2008). A further complexity, raised by Jolliffe and Farrington (2004), is the debate as to whether there is an affective or cognitive aspect to empathy. The contemporary view of empathy tends to encompass both, as acknowledged by Cohen and Strayer (1996 p. 988), who defined empathy as ‘the ability to *understand* and *share* in another’s emotional state or context’ [emphasis added]. Furthermore, there is confusion regarding whether empathy should be perceived as a discrete or continuous variable. The former suggests that individuals are either empathetic or lack empathy, whilst the latter conceptualises that individuals have different levels of empathy, that sit upon a continuum ranging from low to high empathy. Generally it is argued that it is more realistic to conceptualise empathy as a continuous variable (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004); however, we frequently refer to people, especially offenders as ‘lacking’ empathy. Overall it is clear that empathy needs to be operationalised as a cognitive, affective and behavioural process; a point stressed by Marshall et al. (1995) when they address the relationship between empathy and sex offending. The authors argue that empathic responding is a staged process involving: (1) emotion recognition; (2) perspective taking; (3) emotion replication; and (4) response decision. This model has been used to underpin empathy research in relation to sexual offending; however, it should be equally applicable to the application of empathy in non-offending situations by non-offender populations.

Irrespective of the difficulties defining and conceptualising empathy and then in turn measuring it, empathy enhancement remains a key component in treatment programmes for sex offenders. Murphy, Abel, and Becker (1980) draw attention to the fact that Abel and colleagues initially introduced this component back in the 1970s. In the late 1980s and 1990s enhancing empathy in the treatment of sex offenders remained a major focal point (Pithers, 1994), with Marshall (1996a) reporting that even with the absence of evidence indicating a lack of empathy in sexual offenders, 94% of treatment programmes in North America used empathy enhancement as a central component. This level of practical application generates an assumption of a relationship between empathy and sex offending; moreover a strong theoretical relationship between empathy and sex offenders has arisen within the academic arena (Mann & Marshall, 2009). What remains contentious, however, is the exact nature of this relationship, as research has struggled to substantiate if offenders do indeed present with empathy deficits *per se*, as findings are inconsistent and equivocal (e.g., Abbey, Parkhill, Clinton-Sherrod, & Zawacki,2007; Buschman, Wilcox, Spreen, Marshall, & Bogaerts,2008).

Although the literature suggests that there is little evidence that sex offenders have general empathy deficits (e.g., Monto, Zgourides, & Harris, 1998; Moriarty, Stough, Tidmarsh, Eger, & Dennison, 2001; Cohen et al*.*, 2002; Hosser & Bosold, 2006), the proposition that empathy deficits may be specifically related to an offender’s own victim(s) shows more promise (e.g., Marshall, Champagne, Sturgeon, & Bryce, 1997; Fernandez, Marshall, Lightbody, & O’Sullivan, 1999; Fisher, Beech, & Browne, 1999; Webster & Beech, 2000; Marshall, Hamilton, & Ferdinand, 2001). A range of studies has examined empathy in sex offenders in relation to non-specific victims (e.g., Rice, Chaplin, Harris, & Coutts, 1994; Hanson & Scott, 1995; McGrath, Cann, & Konopasky, 1998; Hennessy, Walter, & Vess 2002; Wood & Riggs, 2008). Whilst some of the findings are inconsistent, generally sexual offenders reported less victim empathy towards non-specific victims of sexual abuse. However, more robust findings are seen when examining the relationship between sex offenders and their empathetic responses specifically towards their *own* victims; both quantitative and qualitative research reveal that sexual offenders displayed significant empathy deficits in these circumstances (e.g., Scully, 1988; Fernandez et al., 1999; Webster Beech, 2000; Fernandez & Marshall, 2003; Buschman et al., 2008). Fernandezet al. (1999) found that child molesters were most deficient in empathy towards their own victims, but were as empathetic as non-offenders towards children in general. These findings may indicate that the apparent deficits in empathy actually reflect the situational/ contextual nature of empathy, which may be directed by cognition (Marshall et al., 2001).

As the findings from the literature on victim-specific empathy offers more promise, this is arguably a useful starting point from which to suppose, that for most individuals, the expression of empathy is subject to a selective, variable process and not merely a construct for which they have a specific level that is applied in all situations. This would imply that the empathy process is basically the same for all populations but that it is the objects and type of self-interest that differ. If this proposal is then applied to sex offenders, the distinguishing factor is not a general deficit for empathy, but the self-interest or motivation in relation to sexual offending. For example, motivation for intimacy (Ward, 2003) or sexual gratification (Marshall, 1996b) inhibits the expression of empathy. Such aspects may control the selective process of empathy by the employment of cognitions that justify the behaviour and/or minimise the harm it causes. For example, empathy becomes redundant with thoughts such as ‘children don’t tell others about the sexual abuse because they like it’ and ‘having sex with children brings the adult and child closer together.’ These types of thoughts have been found in many clinical populations (Abel, Becker, Cunningham-Rathner, 1984), and imply that there is no need to apply empathy as no harm is being caused to the child.

The argument underpinning this research study, therefore, is that empathy in all populations is only applied in certain situations and should be regarded as a situational or contextual construct that is governed by self-interest. Moreover that the selective application of empathy means that the stage process of empathy outlined by Marshall et al. (1995) is either not entered into, or is only partially completed. The findings that sex offenders are able to present with empathy in certain situations support this proposal. It is therefore hypothesised that non-offenders, in a personal situation that would normally be regarded as evocative of empathy, will display strategies indicative of a selective process of empathy, guided or controlled by aspects of self-interest. To test this hypothesis this research examines the thoughts and behaviours in a non-offending sample in relation to infidelity; a situation that arguably is driven by personal and physical desire, which creates a ‘victim’ (the unknowing partner of the person committing the infidelity), and as such should be evocative of empathy. Although it is clear that a situation of infidelity in a non-sex offending sample cannot be directly comparable to sex offending, the exploratory nature of this study, and the requirement to find situations in a non-offending sample that in theory should produce an empathic response, justifies the design employed.

As this research was exploratory in nature and the first to undertake an analysis of empathy of this type, a qualitative design was employed. A sample of individuals who had been in long-term relationships, who reported that they either had or had not engaged in an affair was interviewed. The participants were not directly asked about empathy but about their relationships and their experiences regarding infidelity. The focus of the analysis of this conversation was to discover if specific themes could be identified that indicate the management of empathy, therefore thematic analysis was considered an appropriate method.

***Method***

*Participants*

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Coventry University before participants were approached and recruited. An opportunitistic, snowball-sampling strategy was used to find participants who had been in a heterosexual relationship for at least 5 years. A total of 8 individuals (4 males and 4 females) participated. Half of the group (2 males and 2 females) reported being unfaithful and the other half (2 males and 2 females) reported being faithful. All the affairs had taken place prior to the interviews and none of the participants had remained with the partner who they were unfaithful to. Two of the participants reported they were currently with the people that they had the affair with, whilst the other two stated that they were in completely new relationships. All participants were White/British and ranged in age from 36 to 50 (*M* = 41 *SD* = 4.6). To achieve anonymity the participants were allocated with a code number which identified their gender and if they were in the affair (A) or non-affair (NA) group. For example A1M refers to male participant 1 from affair group; NA4F refers to female participant 4 from the non-affair group. Snowball sampling means that the participants are not representative of the population of the United Kingdom as a whole; however, it is felt that the findings will still be illuminative of the management of empathy in this situation.

*Interviews and analysis*

In–depth, semi-structured, digitally recorded interviews were conducted with each participant on an individual basis. As the aim of this research was to investigate the process of empathy, the interview schedule (available upon request) was developed with open-ended questions. Its structure was broadly based on the offence chain process for sexual offenders and so included (a) background factors, (b) pre-offence period, and (c) offence and post-offense period (Ward, Hudson, & Marshall,1995; Polaschek, Hudson, Ward, & Sieger, 2001; Gannon, Rose, & Ward, 2008). Questions were divided into these three sections and for each part of the chain, the questions were structured to ascertain contextual and situational factors present within participants’ relationships and lives, as well as participants’ thoughts and feelings about their situation, their partner and their behaviour. For example the questions based on the pre-offence period included: ‘How were things going in your life then? How would you describe your relationship? What were feelings towards your partner at that time?’ As none of the participants were discussing a situation or behaviour that involved committing an offence, for the purpose of the present research the second and third stages of this chain were termed, pre-affair period and affair and post-affair period. The interviews were transcribed verbatim retaining all grammar, pauses and unfinished sentences. Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data, as this approach enabled the researcher to develop multiple interpretations of the interviews.

The thematic analysis was based in a broadly essentialist/realist approach, as it enabled motivations, experience and meaning to be theorised in a straightforward way. Braun and Clarke (2006 p. 85) identify that within this framework ‘a simple, largely unidirectional relationship is assumed between meaning and experience and language’. Codes can either be constructed in an inductive framework and developed from the words and the syntax within the raw information (Boyatzis, 1998), or in a deductive framework, based on the assumption that there are ‘laws’ or principles applied to a phenomenon (Diesing, 1971). The deductive framework utilises existing theories and previously identified variables, so the conception and wording of the themes emerge from theorists’ prior constructions of meaning, demonstrated in these existing theories or models (Boyatzis, 1998). The approach taken in this research was in essence a deductive approach, in that the analysis was underpinned by a theoretical and analytic interest, albeit a theory not previously developed. In addition, preconceptions of the data were employed, as the interview questions were constructed based on the theoretical model of an offence chain for offenders (Gannon et al., 2008; Ward et al.,1995). The themes were developed at a latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006), in order to identify the underlying ideas and conceptualisations informing the semantic content of the data.

Analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis. This involved the first stage of becoming familiar with the data, which was achieved by repeated reading and re-reading of the data set following transcription. The second stage involved generation of initial codes, whereby interesting features of the data were coded manually and systematically across the entire data set. In phase three, the initial codes were grouped and potential themes were developed. These groupings were continually reviewed so a definition and exhaustive set of data to support each category was identified. This initially revealed 20 categories, which were given some provisional definitions e.g. type of motivation, psychological imbalance, and transferring blame. In stage four, themes were refined and the data was organised into dominant themes and associated sub-themes. For example, motivation was deemed to be a dominant theme and three types of motivation were found across the data and identified as sub-themes. This stage also included re-reading of the data set to ensure that the themes identified accurately reflected the meaning that was evident throughout the data set, and that the analysis had remained true to the data collected. Stage five included defining and naming themes. This revealed five dominant themes e.g. Vulnerable Predisposition, and 12 sub-themes e.g. *Contextual and Emotional Pressure Points*. The sixth and last phase, involved the final analysis and writing up of the report.

***Results***

The analysis generated five dominant themes that provided an overarching framework and structure for the associated sub-themes derived from the data. These themes comprised of: 1) Vulnerable Predisposition, 2) Behavioural Motivators, 3) Rational Emotive Decision Making, 4) Managing Cognitive Dissonance, and 5) Lack of Remorse. Within these dominant themes, several sub-themes were identified; this is represented in Table 1. Due to space restrictions and the focus of the current paper on empathy, attention will only be given to four of the five themes identified. The omitted theme, rational emotive decision making, whilst prominent in the accounts, focuses on the rational thought process that the individuals made in their decisions to be faithful or not. These decisions did not have a clear and direct association with empathetic processes, so for that reason have been omitted from this paper.

TABLE 1

**Vulnerable predisposition**

This addresses the features of individuals’ backgrounds and their environments. The data specifically revealed negative aspects experienced by the participants within their relationships that could be deemed as being influential on their behaviour. From the analysis of the transcripts this theme has two sub-themes; *Contextual Pressure Points and Emotional Deficits* and *Coping Strategies.*

*Contextual Pressure Points and Emotional Deficits*

Consistently, although perhaps not unexpectedly, regardless of gender and whether in the affair or non-affair group, all participants reported evidence of contextual pressure points throughout the course of their relationships. Whilst stressful periods have been identified as a risk factor associated with sexual offending (Pithers, 1990), these contextual pressure points were present in both groups and so in isolation were not a differential that influenced behaviour. All participants reported general situational life stressors, such as work stress (A1M; NA3M), financial problems (A2M; NA1F; NA4F), and pressures that are associated with having children (A2; A3; NA1; NA3). These factors can evolve into points of disagreement between partners and were viewed as something to be expected within a relationship. This general situation was summed up particularly well by one of the participants who identified that:

NA1F: Yes, well you just get stuck in a rut and life becomes about paying the bills and looking after children but nothing more than any other marriage goes through...

However, the commonality of these everyday stressors for both groups suggests the presence of these is not the differentiating influence in the process of having an affair.

What is a distinctive feature is the perceived impact in terms of the emotional gaps and deficits that then develop due to these stressors, how the individuals interpret these gaps and deficits, and then in turn react to the situation. Pithers (1990) identified that negative personal states *and* emotional states were linked to offending behaviour. A distinguishing feature between the two groups in this study is that the affair group discussed their emotional reactions and gaps that developed in their relationships due to different stressors, whereas the non-affair group merely discussed the context of the stressors identified. Both male and female participants in the affair group acknowledged that an emotional loneliness developed, due to a lack of emotional intimacy, emotional support and stability within their relationships, which seemed to arise from everyday stressors. This observation is comparable to the findings by Marshall (2010), that attachment problems and distressing adult experiences results in intimacy deficits and loneliness in sex offenders, and that emotional loneliness is a critical factor in the initiation and continuation of sexual offending.

One of the female participants, who experienced negative emotions as a result of relational dissatisfaction, echoed these sentiments. What this participant also describes is that the emotional ‘gaps’ were not always related to sex and intimacy, but issues within the wider relationship.

A4F: He was a bit, you know, wishy-washy as a boyfriend hmm and when the whole relationship was quite wishy-washy where it was very much a case of meet up, you know, have sex with each other and then kind of go our separate ways, so it wasn’t…it didn’t even feel like a relationship to me.

Stressors were evident in all the participants’ relationships, but it is the perceptions regarding the impact of these stressors in relation to emotional gaps and deficits that develop in the relationships, which distinguishes the affair group from the non-affair group. In addition to this, the coping mechanisms employed to manage these stressors were also identified as a distinguishing factor between these groups, which is represented by the second sub-theme.

*Coping Strategies*

This theme relates to how the participants dealt with stressors and strains they identified as being evident within their relationships. Different coping styles, identified previously by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), were observed, in that a striking feature was that those in the non-affair group used more task-focused strategies, whereas the affair group employed more emotional/avoidance focused strategies. The non-affair group coped with stress by focusing on the specific problems and worked them through with their partners, using an external reference to manage the situation. As one of the males in the non-affair group explained, both he and his partner work through stresses together by identifying the problem and tackling it head on. This demonstrates what has been theorised as problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984): an approach that is task-orientated where individuals channel resources in order to reduce stress, therefore demonstrating a direct effort to resolve the problem. Endler and Parker (1990) suggest this is predictive of positive consequences and this was evident in the non-affair group.

NA2M: We have to sit down and sort it out, it’s the only way forward. Well we wait till she calms down. (laughter).....Hmm well, talk through what happened and how you can sort out what went wrong.

NA4F: Hmm I think both of us go quiet for a bit and then it sort of comes to a head and then we will sit down and talk about it.

Those in the affair group were more inclined to use an internal reference in order to cope with the emotional stress that they described in their relationships. Their coping response could be described as emotion-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), a strategy used to ease internal tension and enable coping. Strategies that have been previously recognised in the literature as emotion-focused problem solving were identified in the current research, and included wishful thinking;

A2M: I wish the relationship had never happened. I wish I could turn back the clock and I wish that I’d never had children.

rationalisation and distancing;

A1M: Hmm I guess I had my own coping mechanisms, you know, I don’t open up very often about my kind of feelings and hmm particularly to partners. You know, I’m not one that sort of comes home and bring my troubles home… So I often find that my stress valve is just to go out for a run, go for a bike ride or whatever.

avoidance of thoughts about the situation, failure to confront the situation and denial of its implication (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, Mikulincer & Florian, 1995):

A2M : Hmm, there was an immense amount of arguments. An immense amount of stress and strains. I was drinking quite heavily and again not going home, drinking down the pub and coming home drunk, not drunk but .....And as you know with drink, it hmm seems to take a different perspective......And wasn’t coming home and beating her, but coming home and actually not bothered and going to bed and it became an incredibly bad habit of going down the pub every night.

These strategies are clearly not problem-focused leave problems and stress unresolved (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It could be surmised that the affair group had less effective problem solving abilities and/or employed less effective strategies that may have had some bearing on their unfaithful behaviour. This is similar to findings by Hudson, Ward and McCormack(1999) who observed an association between deficits in problem solving and coping strategies and those who sexually offend (Hudson et al*.*, 1999). At this ‘pre-affair’ stage the application of empathy is not yet relevant as the affair has not started; however, it is interesting to note the ‘distancing’ of the partners in the affair group, which perhaps later in the ‘empathy process’ helps to place more focus on an individuals own thoughts, feelings and desires and prevent the application of empathy to partners, as will be discussed in more detail below.

**Behavioural Motivators**

This theme captures motivational factors that act as an inhibitor or a facilitator for people in relation to having an affair. The non-affair group only reported an inhibitor that acted as a preventative mechanism to having an affair. This was identified in the theme *Motivation to Maintain Security.* However, the affair group reported the facilitators of *Towards Motivation* and *Away Motivation,* which served to provide this group with what they perceived to be explanations and/or justifications for having affairs.

*Inhibitor: Motivation to Maintain Security*

This theme emerged when the non-affair group discussed why they thought they would not have affairs and what specifically stops them engaging in this behaviour. All four participants’ initial reactions were in relation to what they risked losing if they were unfaithful.

NA4F: I’ve just got too much to lose. …. And we’ve got kids... I think when you’ve been in a long-term relationship like we have, hmm I mean there are so many things to consider, you would wreck two sets of families.

NA1F: Because I know if I… there comes a line that you don’t cross and you don’t cross that line because what you’ve got at home is something that you don’t want to lose.

Throughout their accounts the non-affair group aspire for security. This perhaps demonstrate a safety need that manifests itself as a preference for security (Maslow, 1970), and a desire for predictability over excitement where inconsistencies are under control. This female participant clearly defined her reasoning for remaining faithful:

NA1F: He’s [husband] just generally an all-round nice guy, not particularly you know horrendously bright but there is more to be said for someone who’s not bright you know – he is bright but he is not as bright as some of us, like you and I have been through the old university bit but he has other qualities, you know he is a lovely bloke and I know for a fact that he would never slap me, I know for a fact that the mortgage would always be paid. I know that…he just offers me security hmm he’s just generally a lovely guy.

This motivation to maintain security acts as an inhibitor for the non-affair group but is not seen within the affair group.

*Facilitator: Towards Motivated Behaviour*

This theme captures one part of a dichotomous motivation (towards and away) that was evident in the affair group, which has been conceptualised here as a facilitator. Towards motivation found in the affair group is akin to approach motivation, which is defined by Elliot (2006 p. 112) as ‘energization of behaviour or the direction of behaviour towards positive stimuli (objects, events, possibilities)’. ‘Movement towards’ can signify attaining something positive that is absent, or keeping something positive that is present (Elliot, 2006). The affair group were motivated by gaining something positive - the excitement, sexual desire and the benefits of being with someone they see as having many attractive features. One of the males discussed how he was drawn towards someone he was physically attracted to and wanted to become sexually intimate with.

A1M: I kind of felt quite flattered that it was a reciprocal thing with a work colleague as I’d known her for a long long time. When I joined the police she was kind of, you know, for me in terms of physical looks, she was on a pedestal, you know. This women that everyone fancies, she was gorgeous, you know, kind of thing, although this was 20 years later, she still for me was extremely attractive and very funny. She was a good personality, something that, things that ticked all the boxes for me, made me kind of notice her more than other work colleagues. Same kind of age group, hmm and we just began to hit it off a lot lot more… Becoming sexually intimate was something that I was aspiring to I guess. Hmm I think maybe if I reverse the question and had it not have happened, how would I have felt then maybe I would be disappointed.

The other male participant was drawn by the need for self-ingratiation.

A2M: I think that I became unfaithful down to more of an ego drive. And my unfaithfulness was based on the fact that I’d lost confidence in myself so I went to the arms of a woman who smiled and said I was great.

The females also articulated this ‘towards motivation,’ which was linked to the feelings they experienced for the individuals they had the affairs with.

A3F: Hmm I sought it. I didn’t run away from it, definitely not. In fact I probably instigated it. Hmm but there was no… it was something that I wanted and didn’t feel strongly enough to save my marriage to stop it, it didn’t occur to me…I was excited, it was something that I wanted and something I was happy to have regardless.

A4F: To be honest I probably felt more strongly about the person I had the affair with than him [her partner] at that point in time because this person was quite important to me and was there for me.

*Facilitator: Away Motivated Behaviour*

This represents the fact the behaviour of those who had an affair was also motivated by moving away from a situation that they did not like.

A1M: Hmm maybe also that the personal kind of side of my relationship partly was becoming more strangled because it was getting towards the end of this 3 year period because I kind of had the novelty of the first kind of 6 months, 12 months, then got used to it and then I kind of think not having her to talk to every night....was may be a catalyst that I went elsewhere.

‘Away motivation’ is an avoidance motivation, defined by Elliot (2006 p. 112) as ‘energization of behaviour or the direction of behaviour away from negative stimuli (objects, events, possibilities).’ This represents keeping away from something negative that is currently absent, or getting away from something negative that is currently present (Elliot, 2006). The affair participants all built up a picture of negative situations, which resulted in behaviours that were ‘away motivated’ to avoid unhappiness and were related to the physical and/or emotional rejection of their partners.

A2M: At this time, I would say probably more of guilt ridden about she’s the mother of my children but not in the slightest bit interest in her physically or emotionally. Hmm in fact, you know, it got to the point where you don’t want to be touched ….

A3F: Well at the end, as it was coming to an end, it was hmm …I didn’t like, or rather, I didn’t like the look of him, a lot of the things he found important I didn’t and vice versa and I think we just got to the stage where we both wanted each other to be something we would never, we were never going to be.

This ‘towards motivation’ *attracted* individuals to a desirable situation that served to *draw* them ‘away’ from their currently unsatisfying situations with their partners. Whilst motivation in sex offenders is complex and multifaceted, a similar scenario has been found for some offenders who report being drawn ‘towards’ deviant sexual arousal and ‘away’ from situations (at home) where their sexual needs are not being met (Marshal 1989, 2010)

It is important to note that the behaviours of all the participants in this study were motivated by self-interest and there is no evidence of any empathic responses or thoughts being shown towards participants’ partners. The focus on ‘the self’ in both groups is particularly noteworthy; the affair group described *their* desires for the people with whom they would have affairs and *their* release from negative situations being facilitators for the affairs, whilst the non-affair group was inhibited by speculating what *their* losses could potentially be if they were to be unfaithful.

**Managing Cognitive Dissonance**

Managing Cognitive Dissonance is perhaps the strongest theme found in the data. It relates to how individuals manage the fact that having an affair is likely to be psychologically uncomfortable for them, due to an awareness of the probable negative consequences that their actions are likely to cause. According to Festinger (1962), the theory of cognitive dissonance is grounded in the observation that human beings strive for consistency in relation to their images of themselves and their worlds. Individuals are adept at restoring consonance (i.e. consistency) when dissonance (i.e. inconsistency) threatens. Therefore when dissonance is present, individuals not only try to reduce it but avoid situations and information that increases dissonance (Festinger, 1962). The sub-themes that represent this dissonance-reducing strategy are *Parallel Existences* and *Externalising Locus of Control.*

*Parallel Existences*

This represents how the participants who had an affair created two separate independent lives. The participants compartmentalised their home life and their affair as two separate entities, and were able to immerse themselves in either one of the situations and focus solely on that, at that point in time. This separation meant that the participants could create harmony in two discrete situations that were completely independent of each other, where ideally the facets of one existence were unable to upset the status quo (consonance), of the other. Within this creation of a parallel existence, the individuals were able to fully commit themselves to each relationship in each of the two existences, which would also serve the purpose of ignoring the need to apply empathy to their partners.

A4F: Yeah, I think it was just a case of when I was with, it was awful really but when I was with that person I was with them and when I was with the other person I was with them and it didn’t actually…I didn’t, I’d be lying if I said that I, at that point I felt any remorse…yeah that’s the kind of, yeah it’s compartmentalising definitely.

The process of separation of two existences was achieved by the participants’ ability to entirely ‘block out’ any thoughts and feelings about their partners. The affair group avoided exposure to information that could arouse dissonance, theorised as the selective exposure hypothesis (Frey & Rosch, 1984). Crucially, they avoided thinking about the ‘other life’, which either served not to not activate the empathy process, or to ignore it.

A1M: So in terms of my kind of feeling to my partner at home, hmm, initially I guess as this kind of growth in the relationship was going on, I wasn’t kind of thinking about feelings or thoughts around my partner…And what’s going on at home is actually just a burden and you don’t really kind of think of it. And I think because she was away as well, it was kind of, I suppose a little bit of out of sight out of mind…but I think because I could just block it off and not think about it and I’ll think about it tomorrow and that’ll be tomorrow’s issue.

A2M: I kind of blocked it out. I kind of blocked it out and said well this is hmm the situation I’m going through, knowing full well at that point, I was never ever going to leave my wife. So if I could keep it on the quiet, then who knows where it may lead.

One of the female participants, however, did have some empathic responses in relation to her partner, acknowledging him as a potential victim. In order to minimise the dissonance that this could cause her, she blocked out thinking about her husband, a mechanism that she described as being her saving.

A3F**:** I’m ashamed to say I didn’t [think of partner]. And I think that was probably my saving because I do believe I…what I did I shouldn’t have done. What I did wasn’t, I didn’t believe to be fair. Hmm I don’t look back at myself at that time and think, did I do right by somebody else. I can’t say hand on heart I did. You know, I think I absolutely devastated somebody that I had had a very close relationship with and you know, I feel, I still feel pretty bad about that. I had to cut, cut my feelings about it. I had to distance myself from it.

Interestingly, when the non-affair group were asked to imagine what their thoughts would be if they were in situations that could potentially lead to them being unfaithful, their responses appeared to describe failings in the blocking mechanism previously portrayed by the affair group. Some empathy for partners can be seen in the data from the non-affair group, for example, one of the female participants acknowledged that her thoughts and feelings towards her partner would stop her from being unfaithful. However this is still surrounded by aspects of self-interest, as she also emphasised how dreadful the impact would be on herself i.e. how she would feel and the difficulty she would have living with her actions.

NA4F: Hmm so I just think that I would always see \*\*\*[husband], I would always see \*\*\* and the kids…I think I would have to tell him anyway. I don’t think I could just do it and hope I didn’t get caught, I don’t think I could live with it.

A male participant described a compulsion to confess, indicating that he would not be able to maintain the parallel existences required to sustain an affair. Again, there may be some evidence of empathic response, as this inability to maintain parallel existences is guided by thoughts of his partner, but as in the previous example this is directed by self-interest. What is clear in the participant’s hypothetical contemplation is that he anticipated the cognitive dissonance likely to arise within himself by having an affair, and that this would ultimately prove intolerable.

NA3M: To me, the trick here is I know. That’s what stops it. ….. I couldn’t look \*\*\*\*[wife] in the eye knowing that I’d been unfaithful…I would have to say [confess to affair], and say it because I would want to feel that I had the capability to live with the consequences of my actions… I need inner contentment and happiness and to get that inner resolve I need to feel happy with myself. So if I’m carrying that baggage that I’m carrying this lie I won’t do, so unless I got that out hmm I know I’m going to be to some extent greater or less, not tortured that’s a very strong word, but I’m going to be perplexed.

*Externalising Locus of Control*

Dissonance reduction is also found in the form of rationalisation for continuing the affair. This could be interpreted as a type of disengagement of beliefs, also known as self-exempting beliefs or permission-giving beliefs (Kleinjan, van den Eijnden, & Engels, 2009). Having these beliefs, the participants can disengage from the idea that they should not carry on with the affairs. Disengagement is achieved by externalising locus of control. Locus of control refers to an individual’s perception regarding the ability to exercise control over their environment; the external view is that their lives are controlled by external factors (Rotter, 1966). Externalising behaviour represents how the participants appeared to adopt fatalistic views of events that evolved over the course of time, almost as if the affairs had lives of their own, which they played no in. A comparable concept to this found in the sexual offending literature is where sexual offenders make seemingly irrelevant decisions (SID; Pithers, 1990), this being lapses that make reoffending more likely. For example a sex offender might ‘find’ themselves near children as they ‘accidently’ walk past a school (Laws, 1999), thereby attributing the decision to relapse to external factors. Offenders then report that the offence ‘just happened’ and was out of their control (Bickley & Beech, 2002), as observed in the present study where external factors were seen to be responsible in part for causing the affairs to ‘just happen’.

A2M: Well it was a series of coincidences that manifested itself over a period of time …,

A1M: I’m a big believer in fate; you know, things happen for a reason.

This externalisation serves to distance the individual from the negative consequences of the behaviour: whilst there may be some recognition that others are being hurt/harmed, the individual does not feel compelled to act or take responsibility for this as it is fate, or someone/something else’s fault; and hence he/she is unable to act to resolve the situation, or halt the inevitable.

**Lack of remorse**

This theme relates to a lack of remorse from the affair group once their partners became aware that they were having affairs. It should be noted that all the affairs were discovered by the partners: not of the participants made voluntary decisions to confess. The sub-themes that represent this are U*nburdening* and *Avoiding and Minimising Guilt.*

*Unburdening*

The eventual detection of the affair was regarded in an almost positive light that achieved a cathartic effect; and albeit with sadness, represented a turning point. It is notable that the description of this catharsis is entirely selfish with no evidence of empathy, remorse or concern for the long-term partners. This perhaps was more so for the male participants than the female ones.

A2M: I was absolutely pleased as punch. I was absolutely made up.

*Avoiding and Minimising Guilt*

Guilt is an emotion associated with infidelity (Fisher, Voracek, Rekkas, & Cox,2008) and is activated when an individual comprehends that their behaviour is wrong, as it resulted in harm to someone else that caused suffering (Tangney, 1998; Olthof, Schouten, Kuiper, Stegge, & Jennekens-Schinkel, 2000). Guilt can also be perceived as a moral emotion because it is other-orientated (Tangey & Dearing, 2002). The non-affair group predicted that they would be unable to minimise or avoid feelings of guilt and anticipatory guilt acts as an inhibitory mechanism preventing affairs. Empathy for these participants’ partners is observed in that the non-affair group recognise the potential impact, devastation and hurt they could cause their partners by being unfaithful. However, this is underpinned by self-interest, as emphasis is placed on their inability to live with the anticipated guilt, rather than the impact that this would have on their partners.

NA1F: How would I feel? If I had been unfaithful. Quite guilty actually - I’d feel guilty. What else would I feel? I’d feel guilty. I would be very conscious of my behaviour. He [husband] would be devastated. Because everything then that he has got would be gone…I could not face all that guilt.

NA2M: If I had an affair…Guilt. That you’ve done it in the first place…And the hurt. Yeah it’s mainly the hurt that it causes. Guilt is a horrible feeling to have.

Conversely, the affair group minimised their feelings of guilt. One of the participants achieved this by blocking and avoiding communication with their partner, so they escaped from sharing in any emotional pain caused. This male participant reported that he shut down emotionally, and used avoidance as a strategy.

A1M: Well I didn’t want to talk about it, it doesn’t matter kind of thing, and lots of questions were coming out from her and I found that difficult. I mean, in some ways in kind of, I kind of, locked down, you know, my kind of emotions and my kind of conversation because I think that that was the hard bit for me, well now I’ve got to talk about it with you and I don’t really want to ...I just want to go over there now and not have to face this and it was kind of a survival kind of thing for me I guess. I didn’t want to have to go through the emotions she was going through. If that kind of makes sense because I knew if I actually spoke to her about it I was going to have to open up and let my guard down and be honest I guess.

The other male participant minimised guilt by attempting to rationalise the situation and almost diminish the suffering and pain that having an affair caused. This is observed in his suggestion that his wife should have been able to cope with the situation relating to his infidelity, and by his reference to what he perceived to be her failings. He almost saw himself as a victim, which enabled him to minimise his own guilt and pass it on to his partner.

A2M:And she hides the fact that she may have seen it coming. She’s buried that. That emotion does not su…live in that lady’s life. It was…this was a bolt, you’ve completely devastated us all and you are selfish and you could have done at lot more to to….I think I agree with only one part of it, that she is old enough and big enough to survive. The children on the other hand are not. And she is going to have to live with that, but hell has no fury like a woman scorned.

One of the female participants also seemed to minimise guilt by rationalising the extent of the hurt she caused. Guilt is only activated on acknowledgement that harm has actually been caused (Olthof et al., 2000), so the female participant by diminishing the extent of suffering that occurred because of her actions was able to minimise or even dispel her feelings of guilt.

A3F: Because that’s [finding out about the affair] got to hurt. Well having said that though, in all of this, some of the things that happened, that I thought would absolutely really upset him, …., I didn’t know that he knew about that letter [written by A3F to the person she was having the affair with, which talked about the affair]…. until two weeks after. So I question now how upset he really was and I don’t know that he was particularly upset. I think he was upset that hmm that I had done what I did and I think that that must have been upsetting to his pride, but I honestly don’t know if I can say he loved…I think he loved the idea of having a wife and two children but in, I was, am not the person for him I believe.

The affair group seems to be able to minimise guilt by shutting down emotionally, placing a block on communication with their partner or by reducing in their own minds the extent of the hurt that they caused. Interestingly, in the sex offending population it is argued that many offenders do not actually experience guilt, however those who do describe ‘feeling bad’ tend to experience shame rather than guilt, the difference being with shame the focus is on the self rather than on the behaviour (Proeve & Howells, 2002).

***Discussion***

In this analysis of individuals’ reflections of a personal situation that might normally be expected to be evocative of empathy, infidelity, the most striking finding was the general lack of empathy displayed by *all* participants who, irrespective of whether they had an affair or not, seemed to focus mainly on ‘the self.’ Within the accounts, there was no evidence of dishonesty among the participants and no obvious social desirability in their responding; e.g. A2M admitting his goal was to have an affair and this could be with a prostitute; NA1F admitting her reason for staying faithful is ‘all about me’ and not her husband. However, the focus on ‘I’ and ‘me’ was surprisingly extensive. Whilst perhaps not so surprising in regard to the affair group, the similar level of self-interest in the non-affair group was unexpected and might suggest our behaviours are moderated by self-interest to a greater extent than we might like to believe, although further research would be required to understand this better, particularly in non-offending populations.

In line with previous research on offenders, the affair group used various strategies which created cognitive states devoid of any requirement of empathy (e.g. rationalisation, justification and reducing dissonance), managed by their current objects of self-interest, which during the infidelity was maintaining the affair itself, and post affair was to avoid cognitive dissonance or minimise guilt. Therefore, support for the research proposal was founded on the following two key points: (i) the apparent empathy deficit among this non-offending sample, a characteristic which previous research has reserved as a discriminatory factor for offenders and sex offenders (e.g. Fernandez et al., 1999; Marshall & Moulden, 2001; Wood & Riggs 2008); (ii) the evidence within the themes of cognitive strategies governed by self-interest, which appear to determine the presence or absence of empathy. What is particularly interesting is that these strategies are remarkably similar to those reported in the offending and sexual offending literature.

Cognitive distortions (Abel et al*.,* 1989), or cognitions regarding behaviours, served to explain the sub-themes relating to Vulnerable Predisposition and Behavioural Motivators . All the participants in the affair group held beliefs of mitigating and extenuating factors and looked to shift responsibility for their behaviour. This has been examined in sex offenders, who have relatively well-established and generalised offence-related beliefs that facilitate their sexual offending behaviours (see Abel et al*.*, 1989; Ward & Keenan, 1999; Ward, 2000; Blake & Gannon, 2008). Arguably these beliefs have a self-serving function that relates inversely to empathy (McCrady et al*.,* 2008), which was observed in the present study in relation to infidelity.

The conceptualisation of these offense supportive cognitions has led to debate (see Gannon, 2009), as to whether ‘cognitive distortions’ are post-offence justifications, excuses and self-serving management strategies (e.g., Saradjian & Nobus, 2003; McCrady et al.,2008, Maruna & Mann, 2006), or implicit beliefs that actually play an aetiological role in sexual offending (e.g., Ward & Keenen, 1999; Brown, Gray, & Snowden, 2009; Dawson, Barnes-Holmes, Gresswell, Hart, & Gore,2009). In this study, the non-affair group’s security motivation could be seen as an ‘implicit theory’ or belief about the importance of stability and family that prevented them from having an affair. The affair group described uncontrollability, an implicit belief identified in sexual offending literature (Ward, 2000), which regards actions as inexorable, whereby individuals externalise locus of control (Drake, Ward, Nathan, & Lee,2001). However some of the statements recorded by the affair group also support the opposing view that ‘cognitive distortions’ are post-affair rationalisations, whereby for example, the participants attempted to justify their behaviours (e.g. emotional stressors with partners, unhappiness at home) and minimise guilt (shifting blame on to partners).

This highlights an inherent design issue both in the present study and in the sex-offending literature in that data is collected retrospectively. The distinction between pre-affair attitudes and post-affair rationalisation is impossible to establish. It might have been that the affair group held a ‘security implicit belief’ at some point, but that this was ‘lost’ or ‘over-ruled’ by motivations to have an affair, or because of perceived problems with the relationship. It might also be expected that if they did have an affair, the non-affair group in this study would show similar cognitions as the affair group. Determining this, however, could be achieved only with a longitudinal study, but this would raise ethical and practical implications. Even in the absence of longitudinal evidence, there still appears an agreement that offending-related beliefs are linked to the aetiology of sex offending (e.g. Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; Hall & Hirschman, 1992; Ward & Siergert, 2002). Furthermore if these beliefs are not aetiological they are at least related to the maintenance of offending behaviour (Abel et al*.,* 1989). However, whether the beliefs occur prior to, or after the behaviour in question, they are related to self-interest and help create contexts/beliefs that do not require the application of empathy. For example, implicit theories justify the affair/offence (i.e. as not being wrong or harmful), whereas post-offence rationalisations allow the individual to shift the responsibility of their actions and avoid guilt.

Cognitive dissonance was noted in the accounts of participants in the current study in the sub-themes of *Parallel Existences* and *Externalising Locus of Control,* and has also been identified in the sex offending literature*.* Cognitive dissonance refers to the presence of two or more dissonant cognitions, which result in motivational tension (Festinger, 1962). The affair group look to avoid cognitive dissonance by creating two separate (or parallel) lives i.e. ‘home’ and ‘affair’. Cognitive deconstruction (Baumeister, 1991) is a strategy that reduces the negative implications of self-awareness and arises during a state of cognitive dissonance. Ward, Hudson and Marshall (1995) applied this theoretical framework to sex offenders and observed the suspension of self-regulation, the failure to consider the long-term consequences of their actions, (i.e. the welfare of their victim), and a shift to a lower level of meaning or action identification (Ward, Hudson & Marshall 1995 p. 73).

*Avoiding and Minimising Guilt* represented a sub-theme relating to Lack of Remorse that, similarly to the sub-themes of Managing Cognitive Dissonance, created a situation where empathy could be avoided, or was not needed. Guilt has been found to correlate with empathy in the general population (Tangney, 1991) and in sex offenders (Bumby, 2000). Within the non-affair group, guilt is regarded as a negative emotion that participants seek to avoid; hence it functions as an inhibitor for having an affair. Guilt is only activated by the acknowledgment that harm has been caused (Olthof et al*.,* 2000), and the affair group tended to diminish this. This was achieved by the rationalisation of behaviour, which in turn minimised guilt and any associated empathic responses. Sex offenders have been found to experience shame rather than guilt, the former of which is a negative appraisal of the self (Barrett, 1995; Tangney, 1995), which blocks the offender’s recognition of the effects on their victim, thereby preventing an emphatic response (Marshall, Marshall, Serran, & O’Brien,2009**)**. It has therefore been argued that sex offenders need to move away from shame and towards guilt in order to experience empathy (Proeve & Howells, 2002; Marshall et al*.,* 2009). It would appear that the distinction between sex offenders and non-offenders in this study is not the type of adaptive strategies employed to avoid feelings of guilt and the associated empathy, but the type of motivation or self-interest of the groups.

There are a number of limitations to the present study. The small sample size hinders the ability to generalise the findings, although the qualitative design of this research generated the rich type of data required to explore the cognitions of the participants. Both the exploratory nature and design of this study generates weak external validity, in that it is impossible to identify what attitudes the affair group held before commencing their affairs, or any other contributing factors to their behaviour that were not disclosed. The extent to which these findings are attributable to sex offenders is also debatable. Sex offenders clearly represent a different population to those participating in the present study; however the aim of this study was to investigate processes that have been assumed to only apply to certain populations with limited, if any, investigation of them in non-offending populations, and so a suitable non-offending population was needed. Replication and further investigation in other non-offending, and offending samples is required to understand the use, or lack of use of empathy more fully.

***Implications and future research***

The findings from this study indicate that much further research in the processes and application of empathy is necessary. This study supports the proposal that empathy is a selective process governed by self-interest but this requires further validation. Investigation is required to assess the different types of strategies employed to manage empathy in different populations and in a variety of situations/contexts; for example, it is not clear if we use strategies to avoid empathy, or if we fail to activate it. De Vignemont (2006) argues that we are not empathetic all the time, and that empathy is not an automatic response but one that is selectively activated by a complex set of motivational and cognitive factors. Research is needed to understand the application of empathy. Perhaps investigating people who are required to consciously manage empathy on a day-to-day basis, perhaps because of their occupation, such as accident teams or hospice staff would further our understanding of empathy.

The findings from this study also have some interesting implications for the treatment of sex offenders. Treatment design needs to not only consider the situational determinants of empathy, as previously established in the literature focussing on victim empathy, but also the use of strategies that may be employed in order to achieve cognitive states that avoid the need for empathy. Improving the empathic responses of offenders will be redundant if they continue to fail to notice when empathy ought to be applied. It may be helpful to highlight that non-offenders, also use the types of strategies used by offenders to avoid the application of empathy, and are likely to be used by them in other situations. Understanding how cognitions contributed to the lack of application of empathy in non-offending situations, may enable offenders to more easily identify this in offending situations, and therefore guide them in generating strategies to avoid similar cognitions/behaviours in future.

References

Abel, G.G., Becker, J.V. & Cunningham-Rathner, J. (1984). Complications, consent and cognitions in sex between children and adults. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry 7*, 103-189.

Abel, G. G., Gore, D. K., Holland, C. L., Camp, N., Becker, J. V. & Rathner, J. (1989). The measurement of the cognitive distortions of child molesters. *Annals of Sex Research* *2*, 135−153.

Abbey, A., Parkhill, M.R., Clinton-Sherrod, A.M. & Zawacki, T. (2007). A comparison of men who committed different types of sexual assault in a community sample. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 22*(12), 1567-1580.

Barrett, K.C. (1995). A functionalist approach to shame and guilt. In J.P.Tangney, K.W. Fischer (Ed.), *Self-conscious emotions: The psychology of shame and guilt, embarrassment, and pride* (pp. 25-63). New York: Guilford Press.

Baumeister, R. F. (1991). *Escaping the Self.* New York: Basic Books.

Bickley, J.A. & Beech, A.R. (2002). An investigation of the Ward and Hudson Pathway Model of the sexual offense process with child abusers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 17*, 371-393.

Bierhoff, H.W. (2008) Prosocial behaviour. InM*.* Hewstone, W. Stroebe, & K. Jonas, (Eds.), *Introduction to social psychology* *(4th ed.)* (pp. 176-195)*.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing:

Bierhoff, H. & Rohman, E. (2004). Altruistic personality in the context of the empathy-altruism hypothesis. *European Journal of Personality 18,* 351-365.

Blackburn, R. (1995). *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct: Theory Research and Practice.* Chichester: Wiley.

Blair, R.J.R. (2005). [Responding to the emotions of others: Dissociating forms of empathy through the study of typical and psychiatric populations.](http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/viewarticle?data=dGJyMPPp44rp2%2fdV0%2bnjisfk5Ie46bdQtai2S7ak63nn5Kx95uXxjL6nsEeypbBIrq%2beT7ipslKurJ5Zy5zyit%2fk8Xnh6ueH7N%2fiVaups0%2b1rLVPs6ekhN%2fk5VXj5KR84LPfUeac8nnls79mpNfsVa%2bvr02wrbFLpNztiuvX8lXk6%2bqE8tv2jAAA&hid=5) *Consciousness & Cognition* *14(4)*, 698-718

Blake, E. & Gannon, T. (2008). Social perception deficits, cognitive distortions, and empathy deficits in sex offenders. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse 9*(1), 34-55

Boyatzis, R.E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology 3*,77-101.

Brown, A. S., Gray, N. S. & Snowden, R. J. (2009). Implicit measurement of sexual associations in child sex abusers: Role of victim type and denial. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 21*, 166-180.

Bumby, K.M. (2000) Empathy inhibition, intimacy deficits, and attachment difficulties in sex offenders. In D.R. Laws, S.M. Hudson & T. Ward (Eds.), *Remaking relapse prevention with sex offenders: A sourcebook* (pp. 143-166)*.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Buschman, J., Wilcox, D., Spreen, M., Marshall, B. & Bogaerts, S. (2008). Victim ranking among sexual offenders. *Journal of Sexual Aggression* *14*(1), 45-52.

Chlopan, B.E., McCain, M.L., Carbonell, J.L. & Hagen, R.L. (1985). Empathy: Review of Available Measures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 48*, 635-653.

Clarke, R.V. (1983). Situational crime prevention: Its theoretical basis and practical scope. In M. Tonry & E. Morris (Eds.), *Crime and justice. An annual review* (pp. 225-256)*.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cohen, L.J., McGeoch, P. G., Watras-Gans, S., Acker, S., Poznansky, O., Cullen, K., Itskovich, Y. & Galynker, I. (2002). Personality impairment in male pedophiles. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* *63*(10), 912-919.

Cohen, D. & Strayer, J. (1996). Empathy in conduct-disordered and comparison youth. *Developmental Psychology 32,* 988-998.

Dawson, D. L., Barnes-Holmes, D., Gresswell, D. M., Hart, A. J. P. & Gore, N. J. (2009). Assessing the implicit beliefs of sexual offenders using the Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure: A First Study. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* *21*, 57-75.

De Vignemont, F. (2006).When do we empathize? In C. Frith (Ed.), *Empathy and Fairness* (pp. 180-195). Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

Diesing, P. (1971). *Patterns of discovery in the social sciences*. New York: Aldine

Drake**,** C.R., Ward, T., Nathan, P. & Lee, J. (2001). Challenging the cognitive distortions of child molesters: An implicit theory approach. *Journal of Sexual Aggression 7*(2), 25-40.

Elliot, A.J. (2006). The hierarchical model of approach-avoidance motivation. *Motivation and Emotion 30*, 111-116.

Endler, N.S. & Parker, J.D.A. (1990). Multidimensional assessment of coping: A critical evaluation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 58*, 844-854.

Farrington, D. P. (2007). Childhood risk factors and risk-focused prevention. In M. Maguire, R. Morgan, & R. Reiner (Eds.), R., *The Oxford handbook of criminology* (pp. 610-640). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fernandez, Y.M. & Marshall, W.L. (2003). Victim empathy, social self-esteem, and psychopathy in rapists. Se*xual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 15*(1), 11-26.

Fernandez, Y.M., Marshall, W.L., Lightbody, S. & O’Sullivan, C. (1999). The child molester empathy measure: Description and examination of its reliability and validity. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 11*(1), 17-31.

Festinger, L. (1962). *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* London: Tavistock Publications.

Finkelhor, D. (1995). [The victimization of children: A developmental perspective.](http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/viewarticle?data=dGJyMPPp44rp2%2fdV0%2bnjisfk5Ie46bdQtai2S7ak63nn5Kx95uXxjL6nsEeypbBIrq%2beT7ipslKurJ5Zy5zyit%2fk8Xnh6ueH7N%2fiVaups0%2b1rLVPs6ekhN%2fk5VXj5KR84LPfUeac8nnls79mpNfsVberrk2uq65Is66kfu3o63nys%2bSN6uLyffbq&hid=5) *American* *Journal of Orthopsychiatry* *65*(2), 177, 194.

Fisher, D., Beech, A. & Browne, K. (1999). Comparison of sex offenders to nonoffenders on selected psychological measures. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology 4*(4), 473-491.

Fisher, M., Voracek, M., Rekkas, P.V. & Cox, A. (2008). Sex differences in feelings of guilt arising from infidelity. *Evolutionary Psychology 6*(3), 436-446.

Frey, D. & Rosch, M. (1984). Information seeking after decisions: The roles of novelty of information and decision reversibility. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 10*, 91-98.

Gannon, T. (2009). Current Cognitive distortion theory and research: An internalist approach to cognition. *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 15*(3),* 225-246.

Gannon, T.A., Rose, M.R. & Ward, T. (2008)./ A descriptive model of the offense process for female sexual offenders.  *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 20*(3), 352-374.

Gilhotra, J. (1993). The concepts of self object function and empathy in couples therapy. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry 27*(2), 294-297

Gottman, J.M. (1999). *The marriage clinic: A scientifically-based marital therapy.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Hall, G. C. N. & Hirschman, R. (1992). Sexual aggression against children: A conceptual perspective of etiology. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour* *19*, 8−23.

Hanson, R.K. & Scott, H. (1995). Assessing perspective taking among sexual offenders, nonsexual criminals, and nonoffenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 7*(4), 259-277.

Hennessy, M., Walter, J.S. & Vess, J. (2002). An evaluation of the Empat as a measure of victim empathy with civilly committed sexual offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 14*(4), 241-251.

Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development. Implications for caring and justice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hosser, D. & Bosold, C. (2006). A comparison of sexual and violent offenders in a German youth prison. *The Howard Journal 45*(2), 159-170.

Hudson, S.M., Ward, T. & McCormack, J.C. (1999). Offense pathways in sexual offenders. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* *14*, 779-798.

Ickes, W. (2001). Measuring empathetic accuracy. In J.A. Hall, & F.J. Bernieri (Eds.), *Interpersonal sensitivity: Theory and measurement* (pp. 219-241)*.* Mahwah, NJ: EDrlbaum.

Jolliffe, D. & Farrington, D.P. (2004). Empathy and offending: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour 9,* 441-476.

Jolliffe, D. & Farrington, D.P. (2006). Development and validation of the Basic Empathy Scale. *Journal of Adolescence 29*, 589–611.

Kavussanu, M., Stamp, R., Slade, G. & Ring, C. (2009). Observed prosocial and antisocial behaviours in male and female soccer players. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology 21*(1), 62-75.

Kaukiainen, A., Björkqvist, K., Lagerspetz, K., Österman, K., Salmivalli, C., Rothberg, S. & Ahlbom, A. (1999). The relationship between social intelligence, empathy and three types of aggression. *Aggressive Behaviour 25,* 81-89.

Kleinjan, M., van den Eijnden, R. & Engels, R. (2009). Adolescents' rationalizations to continue smoking: The role of disengagement beliefs and nicotine dependence in smoking cessation. *Addictive Behaviors* *34*, 440-445.

Laws, D.R. (1999). Relapse Prevention: The state of the art. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 14, 285-302.

Lazarus, R.S. and Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* New York: Springer.

Mann, R.E. & Marshall, W.L. (2009). Advances in the treatment of adult incarcerated sex offenders. In A.R. Beech, L.A. Craig, & Browne, K.D. (Eds.), *Assessment and treatment of sex offenders: A handbook* (pp. 329-348). Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Marshall, W.L. (1996a). Assessment, treatment, and theorizing about sex offenders: Developments during the past twenty years and future directions. *Criminal Justice and Behavior 23*(1),162-199

Marshall, W.L. (1996b). The sexual offender: Monster, victim or everyman? *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 8*, 317-335

Marshall, W.L. (2010). The role of attachment, intimacy and loneliness in the etiology and maintenance of sexual offending. *Sexual Relationship Therapy* 25(1), 73-85

Marshall, W. L. & Barbaree, H. E. (1990). An integrated theory of sexual offending. In W.L. Marshall, D.R. Laws, & H.E. Barbaree (Eds.), *Handbook of sexual assault: Issues, theories and treatment of the offender* (pp. 363-385).New York: Plenum.

Marshall, W.L., Champagne, F., Sturgeon, C. & Bryce, P. (1997). Increasing self-esteem of child molesters. *Sexual Abuse: Journal of Research and Treatment* *9*(4), 321-333.

Marshal, W.L., Hamilton, K. & Ferdinand, Y. (2001). Empathy deficits and cognitive distortions in child molesters. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 13*(2), 123-130.

Marshall, W.L., Marshall, L.E., Serran, G.A. & O’Brien, M.D. (2009). Self-esteem, shame, cognitive distortions and empathy in sexual offenders: Their integration and treatment implications. *Psychology, Crime and Law 15*(2&3), 217-234.

Marshall, W.L. & Moulden, H. (2001). Hostility towards women and victim empathy in rapists. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 13*(4), 249-255.

Maruna, S. & Mann, R. E. (2006). A fundamental attribution error?: Rethinking cognitive distortions. *Legal and Criminological Psychology 11,* 155-177.

Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper and Row.

McCrady, F., Kaufman, K., Vasey, M.W., Barriga, A.Q., Devlin, R.S. & Gibbs, J.C. (2008). It’s all about me: A brief report of incarcerated sex offenders’ generic and sex-specific cognitive distortions. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 20*(3), 261-271.

McGrath, M., Cann, S. & Konopasky, R. (1998). New measures of defensiveness, empathy, and cognitive distortions for sexual offenders against children. *Sexual Abuse: Journal of Research and Treatment* *10*(1), 25-36.

Monto, M., Zgourides, G. & Harris, R. (1998). Empathy, self-esteem, and the adolescent sexual offender. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 10*(2). 127-140

Moriarty, N., Stough, C., Tidmarsh, P., Eger, D. & Dennison, S. (2001). Deficits in emotional intelligence underlying adolescent sexual offending. *Journal of Adolescence 24*,1-9.

Mikulincer, M. & Florian, V. (1995). Stress, coping and fear of personal death: The case of middle age men facing early job retirement. *Death Studies 19*, 413-431.

Murphy, W.D., Abel, G.G. & Becker, J.V. (1980). Future research issues. In D.J. Cox & R.J. Daitzman (Eds.), *Exhibitionism: Description, assessment and treatment* (pp. 339-392)*.* New York: Springer*.*

Nickerson, A.B., Mele, D. & Princiotta, D. (2008). Attachment and empathy as predictors of roles as defenders or outsiders in bullying interactions. *Journal of School Psychology 46,* 687-703.

Olthof, T., Schouten, A., Kuiper, H., Stegge, H. & Jennekens-Schinkel, A. (2000). Shame and guilt in children: Differential situational antecedents and experimental correlates. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* *18*, 51–64.

Piliavin, J.A., & Charng, H. (1990). Altruism: A review of recent theory and research. *Annual Review of Sociology 16,* 27-65.

Pithers, W.D. (1990) Relapse prevention with sexual aggressors: A method for maintaining therapeutic gain and enhancing external supervision. In W.L. Marshall, D.R. Laws, D.R. & H.D. Barbaree (Eds.), *Handbook of Sexual Assault Issues, Theories and Treatment of the Offender* (pp. 343-361)*.* New York: Plenum.

Pithers, W.D. (1994). Process evaluation of a group therapy component designed to enhance sex offenders' empathy for sexual abuse survivors. *Behaviour Research and Therapy 32*(5), 565-570.

Polaschek, D.L.L., Hudson, S.M., Ward, T. & Sieger, R.J. (2001). Rapists’ offense processes a preliminary descriptive model. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 16*(6), 523-544.

Pollock, N.L. & Hashmall, J.M. (1991). The excuses of child molesters. *Behavioural Science and the Law 9*, 53-51.

Proeve, M. & Howells, K. (2002). Shame and guilt in child sexual offenders. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* *46*(6), 657-667.

Rice, M.E., Chaplin, T.C., Harris, G.T. & Coutts, J. (1994). Empathy for the victim and sexual arousal among rapists and nonrapists. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 9*(4), 435-449.

Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monograph 80*, 1–28.

Saradjian, A. & Nobus, D. (2003). Cognitive distortions of religious professionals who sexually abuse children. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 18*, 905-923.

Scully, D. (1988). Convicted rapists’ perceptions of self and victim: Role taking and emotions.’ *Gender and Society 2*(2), 200-213.

Siegal, J. (1995). *Repairing intimacy.*  New York: Jason Aronson.

Simpson**,** J.A., Oriña, M. M. & Ickes, W. (2004). When accuracyhurts, and when it helps: A test of the empathic accuracymodel in marital interactions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 85*(5), 881-893.

Tangney, J.P. (1995). Shame and guilt in interpersonal relationships. In J.P. Tangney, & K.W. Fischer (Eds.), *Self-conscious emotions: The psychology of shame and guilt, embarrassment, and pride* (pp. 114-139)*.* New York: Guilford Press.

Tangney, J. P. (1998). How does guilt differ from shame? In J. Bybee (Ed.), *Guilt and children* (pp. 1-17)*.* San Diego: Academy Press.

Tangney, J. P. & Dearing, R. L. (2002). *Shame and guilt.* New York: Guilford.

Tangney, J.P. (1991). Moral affect: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* *61*, 598-607.

Tierney, D.W. & McCabe, M.P. (2001). The assessment of denial, cognitive distortions and victim empathy among pedophilic sex offenders: An evaluation of the utility of self report measures*. Trauma, Violence and Abuse 2*(3), 259-270.

Ward, T. (2000). Sexual offenders’ cognitive distortions as implicit theories. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour 5*, 491-507.

Ward, T. (2003). The explanation, assessment and treatment of child sexual abuse. *International Journal of Forensic Psychology 1*(1), 10-25.

Ward, T., Hudson, S. & Marshall, W.L. (1995). Cognitive distortions and affective deficits in sex offenders: A cognitive deconstructionist interpretation. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment 7*(1), 67-83.

Ward, T. & Keenan, T. (1999). Child molesters’ implicit theories. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 14*(8), 821-838.

Ward, T., Louden, K., Hudson, S. & Marshall, W.L. (1995). A descriptive model of the offense chain for child molesters. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 10*(4), 452-472.

Ward, T. & Siegert, R. (2002). Toward a comprehensive theory of child sexual abuse: A theory knitting perspective. *Psychology, Crime, and Law* *8*, 319−351.

Webster, S.D. & Beech, A.R. (2000). The nature of sexual offenders’ affective empathy: A grounded theory analysis. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of research and Treatment 12*(4), 249-261.

Wood, E. & Riggs, S. (2008). Predictors of child molestation: Adult attachment, cognitive distortion, and empathy. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* *23*(2), 259-275.