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Loneliness in sexual offenders

A great number of researchers and clinicians have observed that sexual offenders often appear to be socially isolated, experiencing few close intimate relationships and greater feelings of loneliness compared to other offenders and community controls (Garlick, 1991; Saunders, Awad & White, 1986; Marshall, Hudson & Robertson, 1994; Bumby & Hansen, 1997). These findings are consistent with the more general research on loneliness that suggests that lonelier people are more likely to have poor social skills, have difficulty in forming relationships, and hold negative or hostile opinions of other people. These findings have prompted researchers to investigate whether the loneliness experienced by sex offenders is related to the development of sexual offending behaviour. Researchers have particularly been interested in how loneliness plays a role in the aetiology of sexual offending. For example, researchers have questioned whether the loneliness experienced by sex offenders is caused by social skill deficits, which in turn contribute to sexual offending, or is it the experience of loneliness itself that facilitates such offending behaviour? Conversely could the sexual offending behaviour or subsequent incarceration for such acts be the cause of their loneliness? This chapter aims to answer these questions by describing what researchers have learnt about the loneliness of sex offenders, and what impact loneliness has on offending behaviour. First we discuss what loneliness is, and the research evidence for loneliness in sexual offenders. We then discuss the theories that attempt to explain the link between loneliness and sexual offending.

*What is loneliness?*

Numerous studies have linked feelings of loneliness to psychological factors such as low social competence, low self esteem,anxiety, depression and suicidal feelings (see Heinrich & Gullone, 2006 for a comprehensive review). Given this wealth of evidence linking loneliness to other psychological factors, researchers have been interested in investigating individuals’ experience of loneliness and defining the processes that lead to such feelings (e.g. Peplau & Perlman, 1982a; Peplau & Perlman, 1982b; Jones, Freemon & Hockenberg, 1982). Researchers have come to the consensus that loneliness comprises of two main characteristics, first, it is an aversive experience that is similar to other negative states, such as depression or anxiety. Second a lonely individual percieves their social networks or relationships as deficient in some way (Russell et al., 1984). So in simple terms, the experience of loneliness comprises of a negative state and a perception of social isolation. In fact, Peplau and Perlman (1982a) describe the combination of these two characteristics quite simply by explaining that loneliness is an aversive state that occurs when an individual perceives a discrepancy between the interpersonal relationships that they wish to have and those relationships that they perceive they currently have.

There is still some disagreement in the loneliness literature about the exact nature of loneliness, specifically over the question of whether there are different types of loneliness that are caused by different factors. An often used typology, constructed by Weiss (1973; 1974), hypothesises that two types of loneliness exist. Emotional loneliness which arises from a lack of close personal relationships or attachments with others and social loneliness, that arises due to a lack of a network of social relationships. Weiss proposed that individuals’ subjective experiences of these two type of loneliness are qualitatively different – that is someone experiencing emotional loneliness will be affected differently from someone who is experiencing social loneliness. According to Weiss, an individual suffering from emotional loneliness will likely experience anxiety, isolation and become compelled to seek out others to create a close relationship with. An individual suffering from social loneliness however is more likely to feel emotions such as boredom and aimlessness, and will be prompted to seek out activities that might enable them to join a social network (Weiss, 1973). Many researchers have found evidence that supports this definition of two types of loneliness (Brennan & Auslander, 1979; Russell, Cutrona, Rose & Yurko, 1984; Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982; Shaver & Rubenstein, 1980) and as a result this typology is often used when examining the loneliness experiences of different groups. Researchers examining a link between loneliness and sexual offending most often examine the construct of emotional loneliness as the effects of such loneliness such as anxiety and the desire to create intimate relationships has more of a theoretical link with offending behaviour, as we shall discover later on in this chapter.

*Loneliness in the sexual offending literature*

In the sexual offending literature, loneliness is often described and examined in terms of the mechanisms or processes that facilitate loneliness. For example, researchers often examine what they call *intimacy deficits*. Intimacy is gained when a close relationship exists between two people, with this relationship involving mutual self-disclosure, warmth, affection and interdependence between partners (Fehr & Perlman, 1985; Weiss, 1973). An individual who does not have any such relationships and does not have the appropriate resources to engage in the intimate behaviours outlined above, are said to suffer from *intimacy deficits*. Intimate relationships foster a sense of security and emotional comfort which can benefit an individual both mentally and physically (Ward, Hudson & Marshall, 1996). Several researchers have postulated that emotional loneliness specifically is a consequence of a lack of intimacy in personal relationships (Cutrona, 1982; Jones, 1982; Weiss, 1982), suggesting that intimacy deficits are a primary cause of emotional loneliness. However, it is important to note that individuals with intimacy deficits may be involved in relationships with others, but it is likely that these relationships will be superficial in nature and lack intimate behaviours such as mutual self-disclosure and warmth. Due to the fact an individual with intimacy deficits is unable to engage in intimate behaviour, he or she will not feel emotionally fulfilled by their superficial relationships, again fostering feelings of emotional loneliness (Ward, Hudson & Marshall, 1996).

*Research findings for loneliness in sex offenders*

In one of the first studies to empirically examine loneliness in sex offenders, Bumby and Hansen (1997) revealed interesting differences between types of sex offender and their relative experiences of loneliness. This study compared the loneliness, intimacy deficits and fear of intimacy of interfamilial child molesters (men who offended against victims related to them), rapists, violent but non-sexual offenders and community controls. Participants completed questionnaires that assessed loneliness, level of intimacy experienced in adult relationships and fear of intimacy. The results of this study indicated that child molesters and rapists experienced significantly less overall intimacy in their adult relationships than did the violent offenders and community controls. Interestingly child molesters reported a significantly greater fear of intimacy in adult relationships specifically than both other offender groups and community controls, which might partially explain their choice of child victims, who do not pose such a threat as adults. Regarding loneliness, child molesters and rapists reported significantly more overall loneliness than the violent non-sex offenders and community controls. When the researchers examined levels of emotional and social loneliness specifically, they discovered that child molesters and rapists experienced higher levels of emotional loneliness compared to both violent offenders and community controls, but the levels of social loneliness these groups of sex offenders experienced were significantly higher than community controls only and not violent offenders. The authors suggest that these results indicate that any differences in overall loneliness between groups may be best accounted for by social loneliness (i.e. child molesters and rapists suffer more from emotional loneliness than the other groups, whilst violent offenders suffer more from social loneliness than the other groups). This study gives us a good insight into the differences between different types of offenders’ experience of loneliness but it does have a few limitations. Firstly, the sample sizes were relatively small, utilising 33 child molesters, 27 rapists, 21 violent non-sex offender and 20 community controls. Secondly the study uses self-report measures, which are known to suffer from reliability problems. Finally although the study provides evidence for sex offenders experiencing loneliness and intimacy deficits, we still can not be sure if this is a causal relationship. This is particularly salient because it is plausible that the arrest and subsequent incarceration of such offenders could in fact cause loneliness and intimacy difficulties. However, a similar study conducted on both incarcerated and non-incarcerated sex offenders by Seidman, Marshall, Hudson and Robertson (1994) discovered that both types of offenders suffered greater intimacy deficits and loneliness than community controls which goes seems to suggest that these experiences are not merely after effects of incarceration (Bumby & Hansen, 1997).

A further study that supports the presence of intimacy deficits and loneliness in sex offenders was conducted by Garlick, Marshall and Thornton (1996), who administered several questionnaires to child molesters, rapists and non-sex offenders in a UK prison. The questionnaires assessed the degree of intimacy that participants experienced in their adult romantic relationships and the levels of loneliness experienced by participants. The results supported the research hypotheses, that sex offenders would report greater intimacy deficits and experience more loneliness than non-sex offenders. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between the levels of emotional loneliness experienced by child molesters and rapists, with both groups reporting high levels, but child molesters experiencing significantly greater levels than rapists. As in the other studies, the authors considered the possibility that these deficits and feelings of loneliness could be attributed to incarceration, but an examination of the non-sex offenders scores revealed that these offenders, who were also incarcerated scored within normal limits on both measures, suggesting that incarceration itself was not the cause of the sex offenders intimacy deficits and loneliness. However, the authors do note that sex offenders are more likely to be singled out by other prisoners and treated negatively by both these other prisoners and prison staff, which may well contribute to their loneliness and lack of intimacy.

Ward, McCormak and Hudson (1997) interviewed child molesters, rapists, violent non-sex offenders, and non-violent non-sex offenders in order to identify how these groups of men differ in their perceptions of intimate relationships. Using grounded theory analysis, the authors created a set of categories that appeared in the offenders’ interviews. In total, twelve categories were formed, which indicates just how complex the construct of intimacy is. The researchers compared the different offender type and discovered some differences among their experiences of intimacy and intimate relationships. Interestingly, both groups of sex offenders (child molesters and rapists) and the violent offenders were more similar in their experiences of intimacy than the non-sex non-violent offender. The authors suggest that this is because sexual and violent crimes are offences that reflect a greater degree of impairment in relationships and sense of social cohesion compared to non-sex non-violent crime such as property crime and driving offences (typical offences committed by the non-sex non-violent group). These non-sex non-violent offenders experienced higher levels on five of the categories – self-disclosure, expression of affection, supportiveness, empathy and conflict resolution which the authors suggest are factors that would lead to greater relationship satisfaction and higher levels of intimacy. These results indicate that although non-violent non-sex offenders differed from the other groups, there were no discernable differences between child molesters, rapists and violent non-sex offenders, which contrasts with other research we have discussed. In fact in this study the researchers did not find one factor in which sexual offenders differed from the other groups, suggesting that a simple division between sex offenders and non-sex offenders can not be made (Ward et al, 1997). There are two possible explanations for these inconsistent findings, firstly the methodology used in this study, using interviews differs from the previous research which utilised questionnaires. However there is evidence to suggest that interview techniques are actually more likely to elicit accurate responses, so it is possible that the results of this study are actually more accurate than previous research. Secondly the authors postulate that perhaps their sample might be less socially impaired generally, explaining why such a wide range of intimacy factors were present in offender interviews.

*Theories of loneliness in sexual offending*

The wider literature on loneliness and intimacy deficits frequently uses attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) as a basis for explanations of loneliness and the deficits that facilitate loneliness. Marshall (1989; 1996) was one of the first researchers to examine the experience of loneliness and the antecedents of loneliness in sex offenders, and in 1996 took the groundbreaking step of applying attachment theory to sexual offending. In this theory, Marshall proposed that sex offenders’ intimacy deficits and feelings of loneliness play an important role in their offending behaviour and that these deficits arise as a result of poor relationships or attachments between the offender and their caregivers during childhood. In the next section we briefly describe the main tenets of attachment theory before describing in more detail Marshall’s use of attachment theory as an explanation of sexual offending behaviour. We also discuss the further expansion of the theory by Ward, Hudson and Marshall (1996).

*Attachment theory*

Attachment theory (Bowlby 1969, 1973, 1980) proposes that the bond a child forms with caregivers during early life is crucial for development. The bond formed between caregiver and child is known as an attachment bond, and it is this bond that provides a child with a basis for which to understand future relationships. Bowlby examined countless mother-infant interactions, and drew on theory and research from psychological, ethnological and biological sources to construct a comprehensive theory of attachment. The central tenets of this theory are thus; the attachment bond between caregiver and infant may be either secure or insecure depending on the interaction between caregiver and child. According to Bowlby, a young child needs to make a secure attachment with at least one caregiver for social and emotional development to occur normally. A secure attachment arises from a relationship that provides nurturance, comfort and closeness between caregiver and child. Under circumstances such as these, the child is likely to develop a strong bond with the caregiver and feelings of trust and confidence in the availability of the caregiver. These feelings in turn promote confidence in the child and allow them to explore and interact with the environment, further developing their social and emotional skills. An insecure attachment may arise as a result of emotional coldness, rejection or a lack of support from the caregiver, or physical, sexual or emotional abuse at the hands of a caregiver. Such an insecure attachment can leave a child lacking in confidence in the availability of the caregiver, resulting in less confidence to explore and interact with surroundings, disrupting social and emotional development. Many researchers have examined secure and insecure attached infants and found evidence to support these hypotheses. For example, children with secure attachments to caregivers were found to be more cooperative, more exploratory of their environment and more sociable with others than less securely attached children (Ainsworth, 1979; Sperling & Berman 1994).

*Attachment and intimacy*

Many researchers have suggested that insecure childhood attachment contributes to a lack of intimacy and impaired social relationships in adulthood. For example, studies have provided evidence that poor quality attachments during childhood result in low self-confidence, poor social skills, little understanding of relationship issues and a lack of empathy (Cohn, Patterson & Christopaulos, 1991; Miller, 1993; Putallaz, Constanzo & Klein, 1993). Marshall and colleagues noted that it is precisely these deficits that are shown by sex offenders (Marshall, Barbaree & Fernandez 1995; Marshall, Fernandez, Lightbody & O’Sullivan, ####). This is consistent with the view that adult intimacy is a function of the attachment bond between two people (Perlman & Fehr, 1987) and that the development of intimacy and relevant social skills is shaped by parental influences and early attachment relationships. Weiss (1982) proposed that a child who experienced problematic relationships with parents or caregivers may cause the child to be unclear about how to behave intimately in adulthood. Marshall (1996) suggested that an extreme expression of a failure to learn how to behave intimately could lead to an aggressive disposition or a tendency to seek intimacy inappropriately through seeking out less threatening partners such as children.

*Marshall’s Theory of Intimacy Deficits*

Marshall was one of the first researchers to link attachment difficulties to sexual offending behaviour, when he proposed that sex offenders may have experienced insecure attachments in both childhood and adulthood (Marshall, 1989) and it is these attachments that influence sexual offending behaviour. Marshall drew upon the theories of intimacy and loneliness researchers such as Weiss, and Perlman and Fehr, and considered that adult intimacy is achieved through an attachment bond, with the basis of this bond grounded in the type of attachment an individual experienced as a child. Marshall had previously observed that sex offenders appear to suffer from a lack on intimate relationships and often seem to lack the necessary social skills for developing such relationships. This led Marshall to postulate that sex offenders suffered from these problems because of the attachment styles they experienced as children. In other words, sex offenders fail to learn the appropriate social skills that are required to form intimate relationships because as children they failed to develop secure attachment bonds. As we have previously seen, a lack of intimate relationships facilitates feelings of emotional loneliness. Marshall proposed that this negative experience of loneliness leads to a great desire to achieve intimacy, through any means possible, which may be what leads sex offenders to seek intimacy through sexual contact, whether with an inappropriate partner, such as a child, or through non-consensual sex with an adult. This is consistent with research that suggests unpleasant emotional states can trigger sexually deviant thoughts and impulses (McKibben, Proulx & Lusignan, 1994; Pithers, Kashima, Cummins, Beal & Buell, 1988). Marshall argues that sex offenders often equate intimacy with sex, making it logical for such individuals to seek intimacy through sex. Furthermore, Marshall argues that the intimacy deficits and lack of social skills experienced by sex offenders may lead them to develop sexual fantasies that involve power and control in sexual situations. According to Marshall and colleagues, these fantasies are likely to become more deviant over time, and coupled with social skills deficits may lead to a “disposition to offend” – a tendency to commit sexual offences under certain circumstances.

*Adult Attachment Style and Sexual Offending Theory*

Ward, Hudson and Marshall (1996) took Marshall’s original theory, and extended it to incorporate adult attachment styles in romantic relationships and postulated how specific types of sex offender (i.e. child molesters or rapists) differ in these styles. These authors argued that the differences in offence behaviour of these two groups points to differences in their attachment style and associated levels of intimacy, loneliness and social skills. Bartholomew’s model of adult attachment (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), was used as a basis for this new theory of adult attachment styles. Bartholomew proposed that there are four fundamental types of attachment styles related to intimate relationships: Secure, Preoccupied, Fearful and Dismissing. Bartholomew’s styles are based upon a two-category model of attachment that involves perception of self (either negative or positive) coupled with perceptions of others (either negative or positive). Preoccupied individuals hold a negative view of themselves, but positive views of others. This often leads to a desire to seek approval from valued others. Furthermore these individuals are preoccupied with sex, and often attempt to fulfil their desires for security and affection through sexual contact (Shaver & Hazan, 1988). Individuals with a fearful attachment style have a negative perception of self and others and paradoxically desire intimacy and social contact, but experience distrust of others and fear or rejection (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver 1987). This desire for intimacy will cause an individual to seek out intimate relationships, but their fear of rejection in such a relationship means they are likely to keep their partner at a distance. They may also pursue impersonal sexual relationships as a mean of gaining intimacy without commitment. Dismissive individuals hold a positive view of self but view others negatively, and unlike those holding other styles, are sceptical of intimate relationships, and do not wish to become involved with others, instead wishing to remain independent.

Ward and colleagues use their theory to explain that these different attachment styles can be used to interpret the offence behaviours of sexual offenders. They propose that intimacy deficits, experienced by all insecure attachment types, may lead offenders to pursue intimacy in sexually inappropriate ways. The three different insecure attachment styles represent a diverse range of interpersonal styles, and it is these different styles that will characterise their offending behaviour. For example, a preoccupied man who desires intimacy may begin to fantasise about a sexual relationship with a child. Due to the fact he craves intimacy he will be likely to engage in grooming behaviour and will tend to view the child as a lover rather than a victim, believing the child is an active participant in the relationship. These feelings and beliefs mean that the offender is unlikely to engage in aggressive behaviour, as they have concern for the victim. This style therefore is consistent with the offending process for many child molesters. In contrast, a fearful individual is likely to be unconcerned about his victims welfare, and may act in a hostile or aggressive manner, due to his fear of rejection. Ward and colleagues also hypothesise that this type of individual will be self focused during their offences, intent on meeting their desire and therefore not inhibited in using force to get what they want. This style, the authors argue, characterises the offence type of rapists, who are more hostile in their behaviours than child molesters, and are also less likely to attempt to cultivate a relationship with their victim.

*Research Findings for Attachment Difficulties in Sex Offenders*

Research evidence for the presence of insecure attachment style and associated intimacy deficits and loneliness in sex offender creates a mixed picture. Some studies (e.g. Marshall, Serran & Cortoni, 2000; Ward, Hudson and Marshall, 1996, Wood & Riggs, 2008) provide support for Marshall and colleagues attachment theory of sexual offending producing evidence that suggests sex offenders are characterised by insecure attachment styles, whilst others (e.g. Smallbone & McCabe, 2003) suggest that sex offenders are more likely to generally have secure attachments than insecure attachments, but may have insecure attachments with fathers specifically. The mixed nature of the research evidence also extends to the nature of the constructs examined. Some researchers have examined adult attachment style and the links between this and loneliness or intimacy deficits (e.g. Ward et al., 1996), while others have examined childhood attachment style, and the relationship between this style and behaviour in adulthood (e.g. Smallbone and colleagues, 1998, 2000, 2003). In this section we discuss a selection of this body of research.

Ward, Hudson and Marshall (1996) were among the first researchers to examine attachment styles in sex offenders following the emergence of Marshall’s initial theory of intimacy deficits among sexual offenders and their own hypothesised extension of the theory that includes adult attachment styles. In Ward et al’s (1996) study, the adult attachment styles of four different type of incarcerated offender were studied; child molesters, rapists, violent non-sex offenders, and non-violent non-sex offenders. All participants completed two questionnaires that measured attachment patterns in close relationships in general, and romantic adult relationships. The types of attachment measured were secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing (the latter three being subtypes of the insecure attachment type). The authors predicted that child molesters and rapists would both be insecurely attached but each offender type would be characterised by different subtypes of insecure attachment – specifically that child molesters would be fearful and preoccupied, whilst rapists would be dismissive. These predictions were based on the preliminary evidence that suggests child molesters may have a greater fear of intimacy in close relationships than rapists and other groups (Bumby & Marshall, 1994) and the fact that dismissively attached types tend to be more hostile in their behaviour which is consistent with the offences rapists commit. For the most part the findings of this study supported the predictions, with child molesters and rapists both reporting insecure attachments in romantic adult relationships. However, this was not a feature unique to the two sex offender groups, as both violent non-sex and non-violent non-sex offenders also reported insecure attachment styles. The authors suggest that this may indicate a general association between insecure attachment and incarceration or criminality. This is certainly consistent with Marshall’s earlier observations that frequently offenders (of all types) have experienced abusive or neglectful childhoods, which would account for insecure attachment style (Marshall, 1989). Regarding the subtypes of insecure attachment (fearful, preoccupied and dismissive), the results of this study suggest that rapists were more likely to be dismissive in their attachment style, whilst child molesters were more likely have a fearful or preoccupied attachment style (depending on the measure used) and were less dismissive in attachment style than rapists, which is in line with the predictions made by the authors. This provides support both for Marshall’s initial theory that sexual offenders in general display insecure attachment styles, and Ward and colleagues extension of the theory that hypothesises that different offence types are associated with different adult attachment styles.

A series of studies conducted by Smallbone and colleagues examined the childhood and adult attachment styles of sexually coercive men, rapists, child molesters, non –sex offenders and non-offenders. In the first study (Smallbone and Dadds, 1998), sex offenders were compared with property offenders and non-offenders. Like Ward and colleagues (1996), Smallbone and Dadds hypothesised that attachment style would differ between offender type, but instead of emphasising the link between attachment style and behavioural characteristics of the sexual offence, this study examined the link between attachment style and the relationship context of the offence. In order to do this three groups of sex offender were examined; extra-familial child molesters(men who offend outside the family), intra-familial child molesters (men who offend against family members) and stranger rapists (men who offend against victims who were unrelated and previously unknown to them). Several predictions about the attachment style of the offenders were made. Firstly, it was predicted that sex offenders in general would be characterised by less secure attachment styles than both non-sex offenders and non-offenders. Secondly, the authors predicted that rapists would be characterised by more avoidant childhood attachment styles than all other groups, and that intra-familial child molesters would be characterised by more anxious childhood attachment styles than all other groups. Sex offenders were found to report less secure childhood and adult attachment than non-offenders supporting both Marshall’s (1989) and Ward et al’s (1995) propositions that sex offenders are likely to have experienced insecure childhood attachment and develop insecure adult attachment style. However, the prediction that sex offenders would be less secure in childhood attachment compared to non-sex offenders was only partially supported. Sex offenders were less secure than non-offenders in their maternal attachments, but not paternal attachments. The authors suggest that this result provides tentative evidence for the specificity of insecure maternal attachment being a key predictor of sexual offending. The prediction that rapists and intra-familial child molesters would have specific attachment styles was partially supported. There were no differences on global measures of avoidant and anxious attachment between the two offender groups, but differences did emerge when maternal and paternal attachments were considered separately. For example, rapists were found to have particularly insecure avoidant paternal attachments, whilst intra-familial child molesters were found to have both anxious and avoidant maternal attachments. Interestingly, the pattern of insecure paternal attachments that characterised the rapists was also found in the non-sex offender group, further supporting Ward et al’s (1997) assertions that there is not necessarily a clear divide between sex offenders and non-sex offenders attachment styles, suggesting that insecure attachments might be related to general criminality and not just sex offending.

 Similar results were also found in a later study by Smallbone and Dadds (2003) in which the childhood attachment styles of extra-familial child molesters, intra-familial child molesters and rapists were examined. When the investigators examined maternal and paternal attachments separately, they noted that although there were no differences between types of sexual offender on the likelihood of experiencing insecure maternal attachment, there were in fact differences between experiences of insecure paternal attachment, with rapists and intra-familial child molesters more likely to report insecure attachments with their fathers compared to extra-familial child molesters. However, a surprising result emerged when childhood attachment style in general was examined, as the data revealed that sex offenders as a combined group were no more likely to have experienced insecure than secure childhood attachment, which is inconsistent with Marshall’s theory and other research evidence. Furthermore, the frequency with which the sample reported insecure attachment was no greater than would be expected in the general population according to figures obtained by Campos, Barrett, Lamb, Goldsmith and Stenberg, 1983) which is inconsistent with the theoretical assumptions of Marshall and Ward and colleagues, and other research evidence. This surprising result may be due to methodological differences between this study and previous research. For example, this study used autobiographical accounts of the offenders’ childhood and adult relationships, which as a data source lacks standardisation, which furthermore makes it difficult to compare the results of this study to other previous research. However, this study does provide us with the suggestion that childhood attachment types with fathers may be most salient for future sexual offending behaviour which is consistent with other research (e.g. Smallbone & Dadds, 1998; Smallbone & Dadds, 2000). This is particularly interesting because it is often the infant-mother relationship that is focussed on by child development researchers. That authors argue that because the infant-father bond is not so often examined, it is difficult to theorise why it might be that sex offenders appear to be more likely to have an insecure attachment with their fathers than their mothers.

This small body of research on the attachment styles of sexual offenders suggests that the nature of the link between childhood attachment styles, adult attachment styles and sexual offending behaviour is complex. Some studies have found support for sex offenders having insecure attachment styles, and problematic relationships with their caregivers, particularly fathers. Ward and colleagues work points to the fact that different sex offender types have different attachment difficulties, and this is supported by the work of Smallbone and colleagues. Ward and colleagues also suggest that although sex offenders do have attachment difficulties, they may not be the only group of offenders with such difficulties, further complicating the link between such difficulties and sexual and general offending. This body of research represents a good start in the examination of attachments in sex offenders, but further research is needed to help us to further understand the processes linking attachment style with offending behaviour.

*Conclusions*

In this chapter we have examined sexual offenders’ experience of loneliness, and the factors that are assumed to cause such loneliness. Marshall was one of the first researchers to examine the link between loneliness and sexual offending, and in this chapter we have focussed on Marshall’s theoretical ideas about the affect childhood attachment bonds with caregivers have on the social skills development of sex offenders and how these deficits, along with the experience of loneliness, may lead to sexual offending. We have also discussed the extension of Marshall’s theory, by Ward and colleagues which includes theoretical links between adult attachment styles and the specific offending behaviour of different types of offender, such as child molesters, who tend to cultivate relationships with their victims, and rapists, who tend to be hostile and aggressive in their offences against victims whom they do not attempt to create a relationship bond with. Despite the importance of this attachment theory of offending, there has not been a great deal of research conducted in this area, and therefore it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from the research that has been done. Therefore it would be useful if more research was undertaken to closely examine the attachment types, intimacy deficits, and loneliness experience of sexual offenders, to fully understand how these factors interact to facilitate offending behaviour.