

Examining the judgments of pedophiles in relation to a non-sexual offense

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Abstract

Even though pedophilia is not synonymous with child sexual abuse, it remains a highly stigmatized phenomenon. As such, non-offending pedophilic individuals are judged as being dangerous, abnormal, amoral, and in need of punishment. It is unknown, however, whether a pedophilic individual would be judged more harshly than a heterosexual individual and a homosexual individual in relation to a nonsexual, nonviolent offense. This was the aim of the present study. A final sample of 309 participants were recruited online and allocated to one of three sexual orientation conditions. Participants read the same hypothetical crime report (breaking and entering) followed by a suspect profile that was identical across conditions except for sexual orientation. They then provided sentencing and moral character judgements of the suspect. Participants also completed a punitive attitudes scale pertaining to pedophilia. Results showed that the pedophilic individual received harsher judgments relative to the opposite-attracted individual, but only at higher levels of pre-existing punitive attitudes. These findings suggest that anti-pedophilia stigma can bias judgments about offenses that are

not sexual. We argue that this is due to a ‘reverse halo effect’. However, we consider an alternative explanation based on the idea of interpreting information in a schema-consistent manner. Limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Pedophilia, Stigma, Nonsexual Offense, Reverse halo effect, Sexual Orientation

Introduction

Pedophilia is defined as a persistent sexual interest in prepubescent children (Seto, 2009). According to the DSM-V (APA, 2013), it is not deemed to be pathological unless it is accompanied by other criteria (e.g., distress). Indeed, it has been proposed that pedophilia, in and of itself, can be regarded as a sexual orientation due to having, for example, an early age of onset and a resistance to change (Seto, 2017). However, this view is not without debate, as some pedophilic individuals report not experiencing an early age of onset (Tozdan & Briken, 2015). Also, some have argued that non-exclusive pedophilia may be mutable (Tozdan et al., 2018), suggesting that not all forms of pedophilia can be regarded as a sexual orientation.

However, regardless of its form and status as a sexual orientation, pedophilia is *not* synonymous with child sexual abuse. Indeed, it is becoming more widely acknowledged that many pedophilic men within the general community have no desire to offend against children (Cantor & McPhail, 2016). This has led forensic researchers and clinicians to develop services and schemes aimed at helping pedophilic individuals (who have never offended) to manage their sexual interests so that they can live content, productive, and law-abiding lives (Jahnke, 2018a). However, pedophilia is one of the most stigmatized human characteristics (Feldman & Crandall, 2007; Jahnke, 2018a). As a result, preventative efforts and awareness

raising strategies are often met with strong antagonism from the general public. Moreover, the stigma discourages non-offending pedophilic individuals to come forward and seek help (Jahnke, Schmidt, Geradt, & Hoyer, 2015). As such, it is crucial to have a better understanding of the stigmatization of pedophilia and its impact on people's judgments.

According to Goffman (1963), stigma can be defined as "an attribute that links a person to an undesirable stereotype" (p. 11). The undesirable stereotypes associated with pedophilic individuals include dangerousness, amorality, and the intention to be attracted to children (Imhoff, 2015; Imhoff & Jahnke, 2018; Jahnke, 2018b; Jahnke, Imhoff, & Hoyer, 2015; Richards, 2018). Judgments, defined as an "opinion about the status of some event in the real world" (Siegel-Jacobs & Yates, 1996, p.4), that reflect the endorsement of these stereotypical attributes are often linked to negative emotions. For example, Jahnke (2018b) found that ratings of dangerousness predicted greater fear, ratings of amorality predicted greater levels of disgust, and both dangerousness and amorality predicted higher levels of anger. Further, these responses were associated with harsher punitive attitudes, which has also been found in other studies (e.g., Boardman & Bartels, 2018; Imhoff, 2015; Imhoff & Jahnke, 2018). What is most striking about Jahnke's (2018b) study is that the responses were made in relation to a pedophilic individual who had refrained from committing an act of sexual abuse.

These observed judgements may be due to the misconception that a 'pedophile' is synonymous with a 'sex offender', or that someone with pedophilia will inevitably offend against a child (Jahnke, 2018b; Lam, Mitchell, & Seto, 2010). Indeed, people view "sexually abusing children" as a core characteristic of pedophiles (McCartan, 2010). An alternative possibility, however, is that these stigmatizing judgments are the result of a 'reverse halo effect'. Halo effects are a form of cognitive bias that affect impression formation and evaluative judgments (Thorndike, 1920). A positive halo effect occurs when, by virtue of

possessing a positive characteristic in one domain (e.g., attractiveness), an object is judged to possess positive characteristics in other domains (e.g., intelligence). Thus, a negative or reverse halo effect (also called the ‘devil effect’ or ‘horns effect’;Forgas & Laham, 2017) refers to inferring that someone possesses negative characteristics by virtue of possessing another, unrelated negative characteristic. Previous research indicates that reverse halo effects can be triggered by stigmatized characteristics such as a learning disability (Shifrer, 2013), unattractiveness (Gibson & Gore, 2015), and negative behaviors, such as oppositionality in children (Jackson & King, 2004) and steroid use in athletes (Chantel, Bernache-Assollant, & Schiano-Lomoriello, 2013). The latter aligns with Gibson and Gore’s (2015) finding that the reverse halo effect is strongly predicted by norm violations.

Jahnke (2018b) briefly suggested that pedophilia may be a characteristic that “produces a *reverse halo effect*, in which strongly negative apprehensions of one aspect of a person influence judgments about other characteristics of that person’s character” (p. 367, italics added). There is some indirect support for this proposition. For example, McCartan (2010) found that pedophiles were judged to be devious, lacking in remorse, abnormal, and socially inept. In her recent study, Jahnke (2018b) found that non-offending pedophilic individuals were rated as more abnormal and amoral than those with a teleophilic orientation. However, Jahnke’s (2018b) study focused on judging a pedophilic individual that had chosen not to sexually abuse a child. Thus, the sexual offense context (although avoided) may have played a role in biasing participants’ judgments. If a reverse halo effect does play a role in influencing participants’ responses about pedophilic individuals, we would expect to see harsher judgments emerge within the context of non-sexual offence also. This was the aim of the present study.

Present study

The present study aimed to expand on the pedophilia stigma literature in a novel way by investigating whether people report more negative judgments about people with pedophilic sexual interests in the context of a non-sexual offense (due to a reverse halo effect). Specifically, the study involved presenting participants with a hypothetical report of a breaking and entering offense, followed by the description of the suspect. All information of the suspect was consistent except for the sexual orientation, which was either heterosexual, homosexual, or pedophilic. Participants were then asked to provide judgments about the suspect's deserved sentence. That is, the extent to which they should be rehabilitated versus punished. It was hypothesized that those presented with a pedophilic suspect would report harsher sentencing (i.e., less rehabilitative) judgments. Participants' moral judgments were also assessed. According to Haidt (2001), moral judgments are evaluations (e.g., good vs. bad) of a person's actions or character. Recent theory and research in this area has adopted a person-centered account of moral judgments, whereby the unit of focus is the individual committing the act, not the act itself (Pizzaro & Tannenbaum, 2011; Uhlmann, Pizarro, & Diermeier, 2015). In other words, people primarily strive to "try to understand other people's moral character via their actions" (Landy & Uhlmann, 2018, p. 121). However, when information is available that provides clues about a person's disposition (e.g., dislikeable, careless), these character-based inferences can spill over into other judgments (Malle, Guglielmo, & Monroe, 2014; Uhlmann et al., 2015). As mentioned earlier, previous research shows that pedophiles are deemed to be dangerous and devious. Thus, it can be argued that these character inferences will spill over into participants' moral judgments. As such, we hypothesized that those in the pedophilic condition would report harsher moral character judgments than those in the other two conditions. We also hypothesized that these judgments would be moderated by pre-existing punitive attitudes towards pedophiles.

Method

Design

This study used a between-subjects design, whereby sentencing and moral character judgments were compared across three sexual orientation conditions (Heterosexual vs. Homosexual vs. Pedophilic), with pre-existing punitive attitudes towards pedophiles included as moderator variable.

Participants

A priori power analysis (using G-power) indicated a minimum sample of 159 participants was required to attain a power of 0.8 with a moderate effect size. After advertising the study (via a Qualtrics link) on social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) and via snowball sampling procedures, we quickly had 490 responses. After removing those who did not complete the full study ($n = 166$), we were left with a sample of 324 participants (75 male, 248 female, one gender fluid). The participants were aged between 18 and 79 ($M_{age} = 42.5$, $SD = 19.38$). Eight-seven participants were students, 167 were employed, and a further 70 were retired.

Materials

Punitive Attitudes: To assess punitive attitudes, we used Punitive Subscale from the Pedophilia Stigma and Punitiveness Scale (Imhoff, 2015). This subscale includes 13 items that measure existing punitive attitudes towards pedophiles (e.g., “Pedophiles should be chemically castrated”). Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Greater scores indicate greater punitive attitudes towards pedophiles. In the present study, the punitive subscale showed acceptable levels of internal consistency ($\alpha = .75$).

Mock crime report: This 97-word report served to provide participants with basic information about the non-sexual crime that the individual committed; namely, the unlawful entry of a neighborhood house (see Appendix). The motive for entering the house was not mentioned. This particular crime was chosen as it is low in severity, non-contact, and has no obvious link to sexual orientation.

Mock suspect profile: This brief description (118 words including subheadings) provided demographic information about the suspect referred to in the mock crime report. This information included age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, behavioral characteristics, and other descriptive information, such as hair and eye color, height, and the fact he had no previous convictions (see Appendix). All information was identical across the three conditions, except for sexual orientation. Thus, there were three versions of the suspect profile; one where sexual orientation was reported as ‘heterosexual’, one as ‘homosexual’, and one as ‘pedophilic’.

Outcome questions: To measure sentencing judgments, participants responded to the question “If found guilty, what type of sentencing should the suspect receive for his actions?” using a single semantic differential scale ranging from 0 (Punishment) to 10 (Rehabilitative). Thus, greater scores signified more rehabilitative judgments. To assess moral character judgments, participants responded to the question “To what extent is this behavior indicative of the suspect’s moral character?” using a scale that ranged from 0 (Not at all Indicative) to 10 (Very Indicative). Higher scores indicated more negative moral character judgments. In addition, participants’ explanations for why the suspect entered the house were assessed by having them complete the sentence: “The suspect broke into the house because ____”.

Procedure

Qualtrics was programmed in such a way that when participants clicked on the study link, they were randomly allocated (evenly) into one of the three conditions. After reading the study brief and consenting to take part, participants were first asked to provide some basic demographic information (i.e., age, gender, occupation). Half of the participants then completed the punitive scale, with the other half completing it after the experimental task. This was done to account for any priming effects that the punitive scale may have had on the experimental manipulation, since the questionnaire makes it clear that participants' views about pedophilia are being assessed.

The experimental task involved reading the mock crime report and then reading the suspect profile. As mentioned above, only the suspect's sexual orientation was manipulated across the three conditions (i.e., heterosexual, homosexual, or pedophilic). After reading the suspect description, participants provided sentencing and moral character judgments, and completed the sentence for why they thought the suspect had entered the house. At the end of the study, participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their time. All materials presented to participants was in English. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the university at which the research was developed and conducted.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Examination of Explanations

Before the main analyses, we examined the qualitative explanations participants gave for why the suspect entered the house. This provided an indication of whether participants linked the behavior to burglary (as one might expect). Moreover, it provided an indication of

whether those in the pedophilic condition explained the behavior in line with the stereotypical view of pedophiles (i.e., entering the house to commit a sexual offense against a child). All but 12 participants ($n = 312$) provided an explanation. Both authors independently classified these explanations into the following categories: (a) child-related; (b) theft; (c) unspecified opportunity; (d) general crime; (e) relationship-related; (f) mental instability; (g) physical harm; (h) miscellaneous (e.g., “it was his own house”); (i) don’t know; and (j) no explanation. The inter-rater agreement was very good (percent agreement = 84.3%; $\kappa = .80$, $p <.001$). The authors then met to discuss the initial disagreements in order to come to a final decision on the classifications.

Insert Figure 1 here

Figure 1 shows the distribution of explanations. ‘Don’t know’ (34.3%) was the most common category. These participants may have focused more on the information provided in the report, as it gave no clues as to motive for entering the house. The most common explanation was ‘Theft’ (18.8%), which is understandable given that the unlawful entry of a house (the most salient aspect of the report) is prototypical of burglary.

All 15 of the ‘Child-related’ explanations (4.9%) were provided by participants in the pedophilic condition, suggesting that they were influenced by the pedophile label. To test whether this led to harsher judgments than the other participants within the pedophilic condition, we subsumed the crime-related explanations into one category (‘General crime’) and the non-crime explanations into another category (‘Non-crime’). Using a one-way ANOVA, we then compared the sentencing and moral character judgments of those who (in the pedophilic condition) provided ‘Child-related’ explanations against those who provided the other two types of explanation.

For sentencing judgments, the effect of explanation was significant, $F(2, 110) = 4.41$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Post-hoc analyses (with Bonferroni correction) showed that the sentencing judgments of those providing ‘Child-related’ explanations were significantly lower ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 2.96$) than those who provided ‘General crime’ explanations ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 2.89$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.78$) and ‘Non-crime’ explanations ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 2.60$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.83$), indicating a more punitive judgment. Similarly, a significant effect was found for moral character judgments, $F(2, 112) = 7.48$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Bonferroni corrected post-hoc analyses showed that participants with ‘Child-related’ explanations gave greater (i.e., harsher) moral character judgments ($M = 7.47$, $SD = 1.99$) than those with ‘General crime’ explanations ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 2.51$, $p = .006$, $d = 1.09$) and ‘Non-crime’ explanations ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 2.41$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.17$). Since the aim of this study was to test whether the pedophile label influenced judgments about a non-sexual offense, we ran the main analysis with these 15 participants removed (as they were expected to bias the results). This left a final sample of 309 participants.

Examination of Questionnaire Order

Half of the sample completed Imhoff’s (2015) punitive scale after the experimental manipulation, potentially biasing punitive attitude scores (via a priming effect). However, subjecting punitive attitude scores to a 3 (Sexual Orientation: Pedophile vs. Heterosexual vs. Homosexual) x 2 (Questionnaire order: Before task vs. After task) ANOVA revealed: (1) no main effect of Condition, $F(2, 292) = .96$, $p = .38$, $\eta^2 = .007$; (2) no main effect of Questionnaire order, $F(1, 292) = .22$, $p = .64$, $\eta^2 = .001$; and (3) no interaction effect, $F(2, 292) = 1.58$, $p = .21$, $\eta^2 = .011$. Based on these null findings, punitive attitude data were collapsed across the two time points of administration.

Main analyses

Sentencing Judgments: Group differences

A significant main effect of Sexual Orientation was observed, $F(2, 298) = 3.10, p = .047, \eta^2 = .02$. As Table 1 shows, participants in the pedophilic condition gave lower (i.e., less rehabilitative) judgments than those in the heterosexual condition. However, this difference did not reach statistical significance ($p = .056, d = 0.34$). No differences were found between the pedophilic and homosexual conditions ($p = .19$), or the heterosexual and homosexual conditions ($p = 1.0$)¹.

To qualify the assumption that including the 15 participants who gave a child-related explanation would bias the results, we re-ran the ANOVA with their data added. The effect of Sexual Orientation was now stronger, $F(2, 319) = 5.74, p = .004, \eta^2 = .04$. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons (with Bonferroni corrections) revealed that, in the pedophile condition, sentencing judgments were even less rehabilitative ($M = 4.87, SE = .26$) than those in the heterosexual condition ($p = .005, d = 0.43$). Moreover, sentencing judgments in the pedophile condition were now significantly less rehabilitative than those in homosexual condition ($p = .03, d = 0.35$). These findings corroborated our assumption that including participants that provided a sexual offense interpretation would inflate the results. Thus, the reduced dataset continued to be used for the subsequent moderation analyses.

Sentencing Judgments: Moderation analyses

Using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013), we explored whether pre-existing punitive attitudes towards pedophiles moderated the labeling effect on sentencing judgments. Since there were three experimental conditions, we specified the independent variable as a multcategorical variable in PROCESS using indicator coding (Hayes &

¹ Questionnaire order (of the Punitive Scale) had no effect on sentencing judgments ($p = .45$) nor did it show an interaction effect with the Sexual Orientation conditions ($p = .33$). Also, there was no main effect of participant gender ($p = .09$) or a Gender x Sexual Orientation interaction effect ($p = .98$) on the sentencing scores.

Montoya, 2017). This resulted in two dummy variables being coded, with the pedophilic condition as the reference group. Thus, for all moderation analyses, D1 denotes the comparison between the heterosexual and pedophilic condition, while D2 denotes comparisons between the homosexual and pedophilic condition (Table 2).

Insert Table 2 here

As shown in Table 2, sentencing judgments were significantly predicted by punitive attitudes ($p < .001$), in that, those with harsher punitive attitudes about pedophiles gave less rehabilitative sentencing judgments. D1 comparisons had a significant effect ($p = .046$), but not D2 ($p = .58$). A significant $D1 \times$ Punitive attitudes interaction was also found ($p = .006$). Examination of the conditional effects showed that, at lower levels of punitive attitudes (i.e., 1 SD below the mean), sentencing judgments did not significantly differ between the pedophilic and heterosexual conditions ($p = .15$). However, at a higher level of punitive attitudes (i.e., 1 SD above the mean), those in the pedophilic condition showed significantly less rehabilitative sentencing judgments compared those in the heterosexual condition ($b = 2.15$, $SE = .58$, $t = 3.73$, $p = .001$) (see Figure 2). The $D2 \times$ Punitive attitude interaction was not significant ($p = .92$).

Insert Figure 2 here

Moral Character judgments: Group differences

A one-way independent ANOVA revealed an effect of Sexual Orientation on moral character judgments, $F(2, 300) = 3.74$, $p = .025$, $\eta^2 = .02$. As Table 1 shows, Bonferroni correction comparisons showed that moral character judgments were greater in the pedophilic

condition than in the homosexual condition ($p = .02$) but not compared to those in the heterosexual condition ($p = .43$). Moral character judgments did not differ between the heterosexual and homosexual condition ($p = .58$)². Again, the effect was stronger when the (initially removed) 15 participants were included in the dataset, $F(2, 316) = 7.05, p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. The difference between the pedophilic and homosexual condition remained significant ($p = .001$). Moreover, those in the pedophilic now were seen to give significantly harsher moral character judgments than the heterosexual condition ($p = .04$). This, again, demonstrates the biasing effect of including participants who interpreted the breaking and entering as being related to a sexual offense.

Moral Character judgments: Moderation analyses

As Table 2 shows, moral character judgments were predicted by punitive attitudes ($b = -.05, SE = .02, t = 2.84, p < .005$), whereby those with harsher punitive attitudes gave harsher moral character judgments. The D1 comparison also had a significant effect ($b = 3.96, SE = 1.32, t = 3.00, p = .003$), but not the D2 comparison ($b = -.74, SE = 1.23, t = -.60, p = .55$). The interaction between D1 \times Punitive attitudes was significant ($b = -.09, SE = .03, t = -3.52, p < .001$). The conditional effects revealed that, at lower levels of punitive attitudes, moral character judgments did not differ between the pedophilic and heterosexual conditions ($M = 4.37$ vs. $M = 4.87$, respectively; $p = .26$). However, when punitive attitudes were higher, those in the pedophilic condition showed harsher moral character judgments than those in the heterosexual condition ($b = -1.97, SE = .53, t = -3.72, p < .001$) (see Figure 2). The D2 \times Punitive attitude interaction was not significant ($p = .79$).

² The order of the Punitive Scale had no effect on moral character judgments ($p = .75$) nor did it show an interaction effect with Sexual Orientation ($p = .89$). In addition, there was no main effect of Participant Gender ($p = .06$) and no Gender \times Sexual Orientation effect ($p = .10$).

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to test the hypothesis that: (1) sentencing and moral character judgements regarding a non-sexual offense (breaking and entering) would be harsher for a pedophilic individual relative to an opposite-gender and homosexual individual; and (2) that these judgements would be influenced by pre-existing punitive attitudes about pedophilia. The results of the group comparison analyses showed that sentencing judgments about the pedophilic individual were less rehabilitative than those made about the heterosexual individual, although this effect was just shy of statistical significance. No differences were observed between the pedophilic and homosexual conditions, or between the homosexual and heterosexual conditions. With regards to moral character judgements, those in the pedophilic condition gave harsher judgements than those in the homosexual condition. There was no difference between the pedophilic and heterosexual conditions, or between the homosexual and heterosexual conditions.

While the pattern of results is as expected, the results do not statistically support the first hypothesis. However, the moderation analyses highlighted the importance of considering pre-existing punitive attitudes towards pedophilia when examining context-dependent judgements. That is, when punitive attitudes were low, there was no difference in sentencing and moral character judgement between the pedophilic and heterosexual conditions. However, when punitive attitudes were higher, harsher judgments were observed in the pedophilic condition relative to the heterosexual condition. These results support the second hypothesis, but only partially as no moderation effect was observed when comparing the pedophilic and homosexual conditions.

In theory, sentencing and moral character judgments about the suspect should have been relatively equal across conditions since all of the information presented about offence and suspect was identical, except for sexual orientation. Nevertheless, judgments were

harsher in the pedophilic condition. This suggests that the negativity associated with pedophilia biased participants' judgements. In other words, it can be argued that knowing that the suspect was pedophilic induced a 'reverse halo effect'. This interpretation is further supported by finding that the harshness of participants' judgments was magnified at higher levels of punitive attitudes.

Interestingly, however, the moderation analyses did not reveal a significant effect of D2 (i.e., pedophilic versus homosexual condition) on either sentencing or moral character judgments. Also, pre-existing punitive attitudes towards pedophilic individuals did not moderate the difference in judgments between the two conditions. Instead, as Figure 2 shows, the pattern of results was similar across both conditions, suggesting that punitive attitudes towards pedophilic individuals may also influence judgments about a homosexual person. It could be argued that some people mistakenly view homosexuality as being linked to pedophilia (Lam et al., 2010). A more likely interpretation, however, is that a third variable (that connects anti-pedophilia stigma and homophobia) is driving this effect, such as general right-wing authoritarianism (Jahnke, Imhoff, & Hoyer, 2015) or feelings of disgust (Jahnke, 2018b). This would be interesting to examine in future research. For example, a scale assessing attitudes towards homosexuality could be included in a future study to examine whether homophobic attitudes influence judgments towards pedophilic targets, and whether this is mediated by right-wing authoritarianism or disgust sensitivity. This would help unpack the mechanics underlying the present effects with respect to pedophilic individuals.

A number of elements within this study were designed to account for certain confounding factors. First, it is possible that the punitive attitudes scale would prime participants and affect their judgments. Thus, half the sample completed the questionnaire before the manipulation and the other half afterwards. Fortunately, we found no effect of questionnaire order on judgment scores, nor did we find that punitive attitude scores were

affected by the experimental manipulation. Second, we asked participants to provide an explanation for why the suspect entered the house. This enabled us to check whether participants in the pedophilic condition interpreted the motive as being child-related, which could have inflated their responses due to perceiving the crime as being sexual in nature. Indeed, the 15 participants that provided a child-related explanation in the pedophilic condition gave harsher judgements than those providing a non-sexual crime explanation (e.g., burglary) or a non-crime explanation (e.g., mental illness). Interestingly, no differences were found between those providing a non-sexual crime and a non-crime explanation. This may be because people deem acquisitive crimes to not be worthy of harsh judgment or punishment (relative to sexual or violent crimes for example). Regardless of this, the participants who gave child-related explanations were removed in an effort to examine only those who self-reported that the offence was non-sexual. This strategy appeared to be appropriate because when those 15 participants were added back into the dataset, the between-condition effects were a lot stronger.

It should be noted, however, that a sizeable percentage of participants stated that they did not know why the person entered the house. Even though these participants did not provide a definitive answer, it is possible that they considered or suspected a child-related motive, which may have (knowingly or unknowingly) biased their judgements. If this was the case, it could suggest an alternative explanation for the findings; namely, the interpretive effect of a schema. Schemas affect the interpretation of a perceived stimulus, whereby “if an ambiguous stimulus is encountered within an event that has an associated schema, then the schema should aid interpretation of the ambiguity” (Tuckey & Brewer, 2003, p. 103). Previous research suggests that the schema people hold about pedophiles typically involves the sexual abuse of children (McCartan, 2010). Thus, it is possible that a pedophile schema was activated in participants within the pedophilic condition, leading them to interpret the

ambiguous crime scenario in a schema-consistent manner (i.e., being motivated by the desire to sexually abuse a child). It should be noted, however, that if this alternative explanation is correct, it still demonstrates how stigmatizing beliefs about pedophilia can impact and bias people's judgments. To help isolate reverse halo effects, future researchers could investigate how people judge pedophilic individuals in terms of their personal characteristics (e.g., attractiveness, personality, intelligence) in a general sense, rather than within an offending context. If a reverse halo effect is at play, these characteristics would be judged negatively.

Limitations and future research

To authors' knowledge, this is the first experimental study to show that the stigma associated with pedophilia can negatively bias judgments related to a *non-sexual* offense. Nevertheless, a number of limitations should be highlighted to help direct future research. First, we did not include a manipulation check. We found that only 4.9% of the sample in the pedophilic condition provided a child-related explanation. In addition to the possibility that some participants suspected but did not commit to a child-related explanation, it is also conceivable that some participants did not see or read the sexual orientation information. Had we included a question at the end of the study asking participants what the suspect's sexual orientation was, we could have ruled out this possibility. Moreover, even though we still found the expected pattern of results, the effects sizes were small to moderate. Thus, identifying and using only those participants who had read the sexual orientation information would have helped to detect 'purer' and possibly stronger effects. This is something to note for any conceptual replications of this study. Second, although the sample showed diversity in terms of age and occupation, there were more females than males. Therefore, future research may want to focus on gaining a more gender-balanced sample (although we did not find a gender effect).

A third potential issue pertains to the nature of the manipulation used. For example, it is possible that the term ‘pedophilic’ was experienced as incongruent within the context of the suspect profile, especially as it was a non-sexual crime. While this does not negate the biasing effect observed in this study, it may have directed participants’ attention to the suspect’s sexual orientation, artificially amplifying the biasing effect. Future research could involve embedding the sexual orientation information in a more natural manner (e.g., reading a transcript or summary of a police interview in which sexual orientation is mentioned in a more realistic manner). In addition, the particular crime used in the scenario may have been more readily open to a schema-consistent interpretation. Thus, future researchers may want to consider using a non-sexual crime that is less easily linked to a child-related motive (e.g., fraud, bank robbery). Also, in a further attempt to control for this, participants could be asked to what extent the offense is related to the suspect’s sexual orientation. If it is found that these crimes are still perceived to be linked to the suspect’s pedophilic interest, it may suggest that the reverse halo effect rests on people’s belief that all actions performed by a pedophilic individual are underpinned by the goal to abuse children.

Finally, future research should look more deeply into the participants’ moral judgments. Research on moral judgments shows there is a distinction between evaluations of a person performing a certain act and evaluations of the act itself (see Landy & Uhlmann, 2018 for a review). The single-item measure we used did not provide an insight into this ‘act-person dissociation’. It is possible that our findings reflect a sole person-based moral judgment (irrespective of the act), or a negative act-based moral judgment that is inflated by knowing the person was a pedophile (perhaps indicating a form of ‘double deviance’). While both possibilities would suggest a negative bias towards pedophiles, the exact nature of the moral judgment cannot be unpacked from our data. In addition, moral character is composed of multiple traits, such as honesty, justness, courage, etc (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014).

Again, our data does not indicate what aspects of moral character were being rated by the participants. Thus, future studies in this area that assess for moral character judgments needs to incorporate the abovementioned elements of moral judgments.

Conclusion

Pedophilia is a highly misunderstood and stigmatized phenomenon. Previous research indicates that people view pedophilic individuals as being a danger to children, amoral, and even ‘evil’ (Jahnke, 2018b; McCartan, 2004). The present study extends the existing literature by showing that pedophilic individuals (relative to heterosexual individuals) are at risk of being more harshly judged for a non-sexual, non-violent offense, especially if people hold existing punitive attitudes towards pedophiles. These findings have implications for the destigmatization of pedophilia, which (in part) involves encouraging people to judge a pedophilic individual (like all others) on the basis of their actions; not their sexual preference. The current findings emphasize the difficulty of this task, as the offense-related actions on which participants had to base their judgments were non-sexual in nature. Whether this effect was driven by a reverse halo effect, a schema-driven interpretation, or a combination of both, it highlights just how damaging pedophilia-related stigma can be. This underscores the need for further research into this area, as well as highlighting the issues that need consideration when developing strategies to help reduce this particular stigma.

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Appendix

Mock Crime Report

Details of Event:

On the 2nd February (2017), a man was seen entering a neighborhood home. CCTV cameras in the area failed to identify a clear visual of the suspect due to poor lighting. However, the crime was reported at 9pm on the date in question by a neighbor who saw the suspect entering the property. The event has been recorded as the ‘unlawful entry’ of a neighborhood home. The suspect was apprehended whilst still inside the property. There appears to be no further crime committed inside the property beyond the unlawful entry. This appears to be an isolated case.

Suspect Description:

Age: 25 years old

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Gender: Male

Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual/Homosexual/Paedophilic (*depending on condition*)

Behavioural characteristics: Suspect was quiet when interviewed and polite whenever he was spoken to. He refuses to comment on the incident and keeps to himself when asked about other aspects of his life. He is reported as being an extraverted individual. However, on this occasion he appears introverted and subdued.

Other Information: Suspect is Caucasian with short brown hair and green eyes. Suspect is

6ft and has an athletic build. There are no defining features such as scars or tattoos.

Reported as being innovative and resourceful. The suspect has no previous criminal convictions

and is not known to the police for any previous issues.

Table 1: Differences in sentencing and moral character judgments between Sexual Orientation conditions.

Judgment	Condition			Pairwise comparisons					
	Heterosexual (n = 103)	Homosexual (n = 99)	Pedophilic (n = 98)	Pedophilic vs. Heterosexual		Pedophilic vs. Homosexual		Heterosexual vs. Homosexual	
	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)	p	d	p	d	p	d
Sentence	6.05 (.27)	5.87 (.27)	5.15 (.27)	.056	0.34	.19	0.26	1.00	0.07
Moral Character	4.42 (.24)	3.98 (.24)	4.92 (.24)	.43	0.21	.02	0.38	.58	0.18

Note: Lower sentencing scores denote greater punitive judgements, while greater moral character scores denote harsher judgments

Table 2: Effect of Sexual Orientation on sentencing and moral character judgements as a function of pre-existing punitive attitudes

Predictors	DV: Sentencing Judgments			DV: Moral Character		
	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
M	-.07	.02	<.001	.05	.02	.005
D1 ^a	-2.89	1.44	.046	3.96	1.32	.003
D2 ^b	.76	1.35	.56	-.74	1.23	.55
M x D1	.08	.03	.006	-.09	.03	<.001
M x D2	.002	.03	.96	-.01	.02	.79
$R^2 = .123 \Delta R^2 = .033 \Delta F = 5.40, p = .005$				$R^2 = .10 \Delta R^2 = .053 \Delta F = 8.44, p < .001$		

Note: M = moderator (i.e., punitive attitudes)

^a D1: 1 = Heterosexual; 0 = Pedophilic (reference group)

^b D2: 1 = Homosexual; 0 = Pedophilic (reference group)

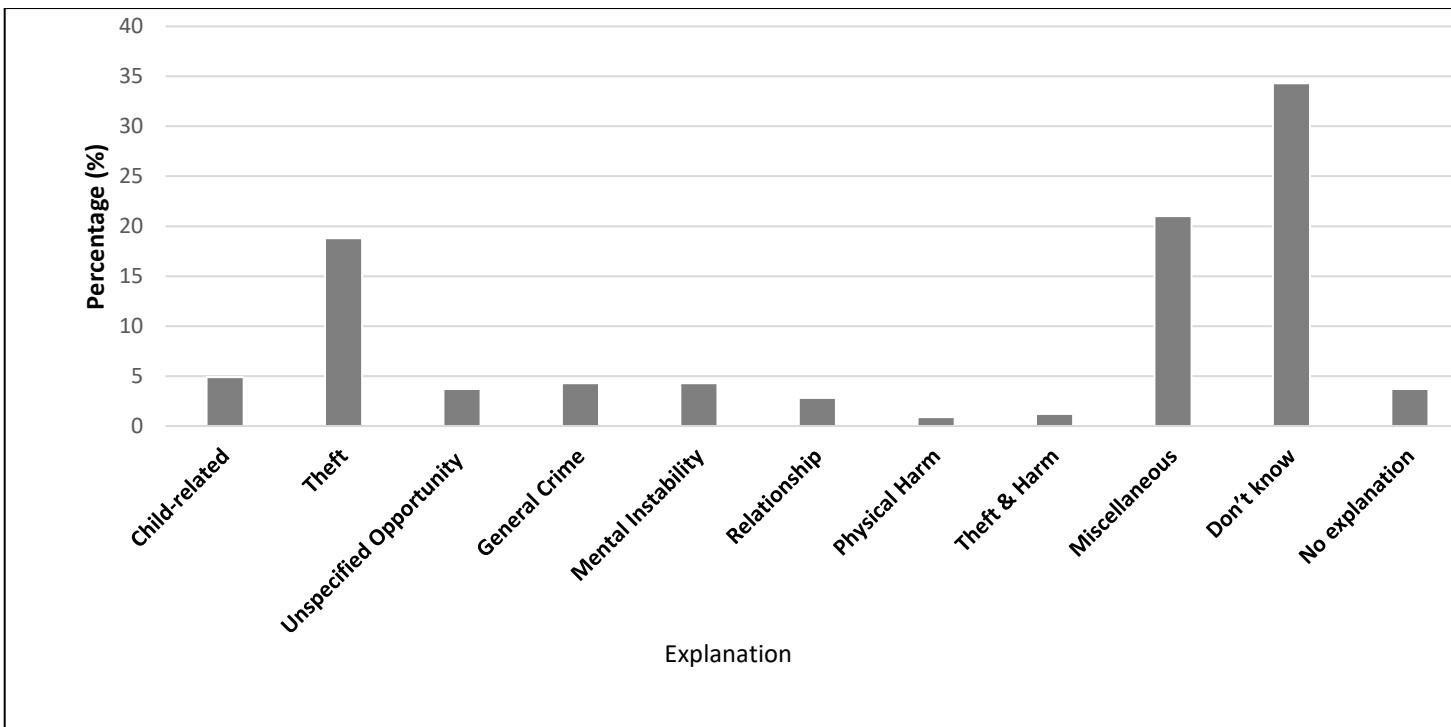


Figure 1: Percentage of different explanations offered by participants ($N = 324$)

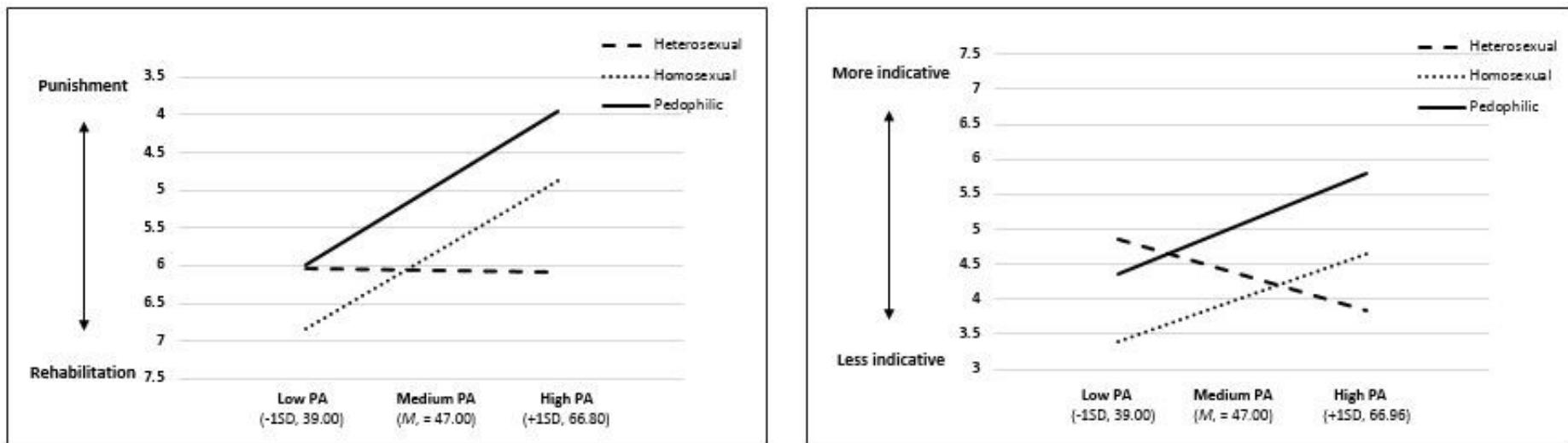


Figure 2: Sentencing judgments (left) and moral character judgments (right) as a function of sexual orientation and punitive attitudes. PA = Punitive attitudes