

**The Early Interpersonal Relationships of Sexual Offenders:  
An Attachment Perspective.**

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**Julie McCormack**

University of Canterbury

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## ABSTRACT

Recent theoretical and empirical research suggests that the adult attachment styles and intimacy deficits associated with sexual offending may have their origins in disruptive and traumatic early interpersonal experiences. The purpose of the present study was to identify the perceptions of early interpersonal experiences of sexual offenders and two criminal comparison groups. The participants in this study included child molesters (55), rapists (30), violent nonsexual offenders (32), and nonviolent, nonsexual offenders (30). The participants were interviewed and a set of categories developed from this data using a grounded theory analysis. Responsiveness, consistency, acceptance and boundaries all emerged as significant aspects of the offender's perceptions of their relationships with their caregivers. Emotional regulation, autonomy, and self-evaluation appeared as important facets of the offender's experience of self in interaction with their attachment figures. Experiences of sexual deviation and abuse, physical abuse, loss, conflict, safety and positive mediating interactions all arose as meaningful contextual aspects of sexual offenders perceptions of their early interpersonal experiences. In the second part of the study these categories were used to identify differences in the perception of early interpersonal experiences of sexual offenders and the comparison groups. The findings also suggest that sexual offenders experience overwhelmingly negative early interpersonal experiences. These experiences are to a large extent shared by the violent offenders, and to a lesser extent by the non-violent offenders and therefore are not specific to sexual offenders. Fathers are generally perceived as more negative than mothers, in particular by rapists and violent offenders. These perceptions of early interpersonal experiences appear to represent a general vulnerability factor involved in the development of a variety of offenses and life problems. Attachment style was related to biases in the presentation of information, most notably dismissively attached individuals were found to minimise negative content. The theoretical, research and clinical implications of the findings are discussed.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In the past two decades several multifactorial models, frameworks and theories have been evolved to further our understanding of the onset and maintenance of sexual offending (eg., Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; etc). Whilst these perspectives have advanced theory development, in that they offer a broad structure within which to understand the factors and processes associated with sexual-offending, they are not without their limitations. It has been argued that for progress in theory development to continue, we need middle level theoretical explanations of the mechanisms and processes which underlie the offence cycle (for example see Johnston & Ward, 1996; Ward, Hudson, Marshall, & Siegert, 1995; Ward, Loudon, Hudson, & Marshall, 1995). Early interpersonal relationships are believed to play an important role in the development of sexually inappropriate behaviour. This may be partly as a result of their influence on adult attachment styles and the subsequent attainment of intimacy (Marshall, 1989, 1993; Ward, Hudson, Marshall, & Siegert, 1995; Ward, Hudson, & Marshall, 1997; Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997; etc).

The quality of a person's early interpersonal relationships has been found to be an important predictor of sexually inappropriate behaviour in later life (Prentky, Knight, Sims-Knight, Straus, Rokouse, & Cerce, 1989). The exact nature of the link is not well understood however, and poor quality early interpersonal relationships are not specific to sexual offending. At the current time, several overlapping areas of research point to the role of early relationships in the etiology of sex-offending. The first approach has utilised attachment theory to make predictions about the early interpersonal relationships of sexually aggressive men by examining their current adult attachment styles (Hudson, et al., 1997; Ward, et al., 1995; etc). The second perspective is exemplified by empirical researchers such as Prentky and his colleagues (1989), who look directly at dysfunctional family relationships, documenting the variables which predict later sexual aggression. Further, researchers looking at the family and peer relationships of adolescent sexual offenders have found negative interactions with parents, particularly fathers, and lower levels of emotional bonding with peers (e.g., Blaske, Borduin, Henggeler, and Mann, 1989). This study will

attempt to integrate recent findings from these different areas of research, offering the attachment system as an explanatory construct.

Clearly one aspect of interpersonal experience in need of empirical study is sexual offender's perceptions of their early attachment-related experiences. The first aim of this present study was to examine perceptions and reconstructed memories of the early interpersonal experiences of different offender groups. A qualitative method based on interview data, that is the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilised. Grounded theory was chosen because it was regarded as the most appropriate method for exploration and description of this relatively uncharted territory. The second aim of the study was to compare different offender types on the constructs that emerged from the analysis. This was in order to examine the specificity of these constructs to sexual offenders, as opposed to them being more general vulnerability factors for offending. A third aim was to consider the relative influence of parental gender on the offender's perceptions of their early interpersonal experiences. This was to be achieved by contrasting offenders perceptions of their fathers with those of mothers on the constructs derived from analysis. Finally, the last aim of the study was to compare offenders with different attachment styles on the constructs that arise from analysis.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

#### Theory Development and Sexual Offending

Over the past few decades a proliferation of research, accompanied by a range of models, frameworks and theories, has deluged the scientific literature to assist our understanding of sexual offending (e.g., Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; etc). This literature represents the range of possible theoretical orientations including psychodynamic, developmental, feminist, behavioural, socio-biological and social-cognitive approaches. Whilst these perspectives have contributed significantly to our knowledge, there is general agreement that theory development is not yet at the stage where it can offer a global theory to comprehensively account for the onset, development and maintenance of sexually abusive behaviours (Marshall, 1996; Ward & Hudson, 1998). Further, it appears that these contributions have been typically piecemeal and often ignore the existence of related research and theory.

Consequently, Ward and Hudson (in press) argue that there is a need to be aware of multiple levels of theory development. The first level of theory (Level I) is exemplified by Marshall & Barbaree (1990), that is comprehensive, multi-factorial theories which attempt to account for all aspects of sexual offending behaviour. Level II theory refers to middle level explanations of single factors thought to be related to rape, child molestation or other forms of sexual offending, for example, the presence of empathy deficits (Lisak & Ivan, 1995) or cognitive distortions (Fon, Ward, Hudson, & McCormack, 1998). Finally, Level III theories are micro-level descriptive models of the cognitive, behavioural, affective, motivational, and social factors involved in the commission of the sexual offense, that is offense processes.

Ward and Hudson (1998) have argued that middle level theoretical explanations of the mechanisms and processes which underlie the offence cycle play an important role in the progress of theory development (for example see Ward, et al., 1995). For example, social-cognitive theories point to the role of offender expectancies and beliefs about sexual behaviours and victims in biasing the processing of offense-related information (Johnston &

Ward, 1996). Further, intimacy theorists highlight the role of early interpersonal relationships, attachment style and intimacy deficits in the generation of sexual crimes (Marshall, 1989, 1993; Ward, et al., 1995; Ward, Hudson, & Marshall, 1997). The examination of these variables in this study makes a contribution to theory development in sexual offending at this middle level of description, that is Level II (Ward & Hudson, 1998). An important aim for future researchers will be to incorporate the findings of this area of theory and research into the conceptual basis of more comprehensive theories.

### **The Need for Intimacy**

The need to belong and to be intimate with someone is arguably as fundamental a human motive as the need for food and sex (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Satisfaction of this need requires frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with another person in the context of a stable and enduring relationship. Intimacy is an enduring motive that reflects an individual's preference or readiness to experience closeness, warmth and communication. Higher levels of this motive result in more intimacy enhancing behaviours, such as self-disclosure, displays of affection and support (McAdams, 1982). The need to be emotionally close to someone results in the investment of time and effort in forming and maintaining a social relationship and a tendency to resist its dissolution. From an evolutionary point of view, intimacy serves the function of maintaining the pair bond and group cohesiveness. Human beings are likely to have been selected for characteristics which maximise their ability to engage in intimate behaviours (Dahms, 1972). Although the definition of intimacy is the subject of some controversy, most researchers agree that it involves mutual self-disclosure in relationships, warmth and affection, and closeness and interdependence between partners (Marshall, 1989; Weiss, 1973). Bass and Davis (1988) defined it as the "bonding between two people based on trust, respect, love and the ability to share deeply" (p.223). Intimate relationships and the consequent sense of security and emotional comfort benefit individuals in a number of ways. For example, individuals with satisfactory close relationships appear to be more resilient to stress, feel better about themselves, and enjoy better physical and mental health (Fehr & Perlman, 1985; Horowitz, 1979). Failure to establish intimacy with another person can result in loneliness and profound dissatisfaction. The desire or need for intimacy has also been suggested as an important motivation for engaging in sexually offensive behaviour.

## Intimacy Deficits in Sexual Offenders

Neubeck (1974) found that the desire to achieve feelings of satisfaction as a result of gaining intimacy was one of the primary motives for engaging in sexually aggressive behaviour. Marshall (1989) suggested that one consequence of a lack of intimacy skills, and the subsequent experience of emotional loneliness, is that sexual offenders may indirectly seek intimacy through sex, even if they have to force a partner to participate. The fusion of the need for emotional closeness with the drive for sex, together with the awareness that intimacy needs remain unfulfilled, can lead to persistent promiscuity and increasing sexual deviancy as offenders escalate their attempts to achieve emotional intimacy through sexual contact: “a more powerful orgasm will make me feel better” (Marshall, 1989).

A number of researchers have consistently observed that sexual offenders are often socially isolated, lonely individuals who appear to have few intimate relationships (e.g., Tingle, Barnard, Newman, & Hutchinson, 1986). Those sexual offenders who have numerous social contacts paradoxically described these relationships as superficial and lacking intimacy (Marshall, 1989). Loneliness has been found to be a common experience for sexual offenders when compared to other offending groups and controls (e.g., Awad, Saunders, & Levene, 1984).

It is likely that sexual offenders have some deficiencies in their ability to form and maintain adult romantic relationships. Marshall (1989) noted a tendency of sexual offenders to enter romantic relationships more impulsively than controls, and to be more idealistic regarding their partner's qualities in the early stages. Several researchers have also noted that sexual offenders are deficient in empathy (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; Lisak & Ivan, 1995; Marshall, Barbaree, & Fernandez, 1995). More specifically, empathy may play a crucial role in maintaining and establishing intimate relationships, and therefore deficits in this capacity would inevitably create relationship problems. Another potential deficit concerns the issue of conflict resolution. Child sexual offenders have been found to have poorer conflict resolution skills than non-violent offenders, and show a tendency to withdrawal and be ambivalent, as opposed to engaging in constructive conflict resolution (Neilson, 1997).

Recent studies have focused directly on the relationship between intimacy deficits and sexual offending. Seidman, Marshall, Hudson, & Robertson (1994) compared rapists, child molesters, violent nonsexual offenders and a community control group on a number of

measures of loneliness and intimacy. Their sexual offender groups included both incarcerated and non-incarcerated individuals. Based on the results, the authors suggested that sexual offenders were more deficient in intimacy and more lonely than the other groups. These findings were replicated by Bumby and Marshall (1994) with incarcerated sexual offenders.

This preliminary research has provided some intriguing insights into the nature and extent of intimacy deficits in sexual offenders. However, it has suffered from a lack of theory to organise and guide the research. Recently in a number of theoretical and empirical papers it has been suggested that attachment theory can provide a useful framework to approach the study of interpersonal deficits in sexual offenders (Marshall, 1989, 1993; Ward, Hudson, et al., 1995; Ward, Hudson, & Marshall, 1995; Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997). This work will be reviewed following an overview of the theoretical perspective of attachment theory upon which it is based.

### **The Origins of Intimacy: Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory was originally developed by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) and refined by Ainsworth (Ainsworth, 1989, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Walls, 1978; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Bowlby's key construct was the attachment system which was originally developed as an explanatory system for aspects of emotional regulation in infants. The goal of this system is to regulate behaviours designed to obtain and maintain proximity to a preferred individual, the attachment figure, and so ensure the infant is protected (Alexander, 1992). Attachments are thought to lead to positive emotional states such as joy (when attachments are renewed) and security (when the attachment bond is maintained). Negative emotional states can occur when attachments are threatened (anxiety and/or anger) or lost (sorrow or grief). These styles of emotional regulation are believed to persist into adulthood and play an important role in interpersonal functioning.

It is this putative significance of early attachment experiences for later adult relationships that has recently engendered considerable research attention in clinical psychology and social cognition. According to Bowlby, the development of bonds to a caretaker during a child's early years constitutes the first stage of the attachment process. Whether positive or negative, attachment relationships in childhood are considered to provide growing children with a template for the construction of their future relationships (Bowlby, 1973; Hartup, 1986). The question of how a quality of a dyadic relationship is

transformed into an individual characteristic remains a hotly debated question. The prevailing view at the moment is that this process occurs with some form of internalized representation or 'internal working model' of self and relationships, that is stored in memory and guides ongoing information processing (e.g. Bretherton, 1987). Although imprecisely defined and so all encompassing as to have limited testable explanatory power, these concepts have the advantage of explicit recognition of the role of active thought processes in the mediation of the effects of experiences and in providing a mechanism for continuity and change (Rutter, 1997).

A major step forward in the delineation of individual differences with respect to attachment style, was Ainsworth's measurement of attachment security in infants (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). She suggested three types of attachment: secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant. Secure attachments develop when the parent is sensitive to the needs of the child and responds in a warm and affectionate manner (Paterson & Moran, 1988). Anxious/ambivalent attachment develops when the caregivers respond inconsistently to their infants. This inconsistency results in such children becoming attention-seeking, impulsive, tense, passive and helpless (Alexander, 1992). Avoidant attachment develops when the caregiver is detached, lacking in emotional expression and unresponsive to the child's needs. These children are characterised by emotional detachment, lack of empathy and hostile, anti-social behaviour. During the last decade it has become apparent that further categorisation was needed to provide a more comprehensive typology. This led to the development of an avoidant/ambivalent or disorganised category (e.g., Crittenden, 1988). These children are characterised by fearful, disorganised and contradictory behaviours. Often caregivers of these children are inconsistent and severely disturbed.

A central tenet of attachment theory is that attachment security remains a major feature of relationships throughout the whole of life (Rutter, 1997). However, attachment security is manifest in different ways over the lifespan, and an important unresolved issue concerns the nature and measurement of attachment qualities at different developmental stages. Hazen and Shaver (1994) offer a review of some aspects of adult relationships that are thought to reflect insecure attachment including both a lack of self-disclosure and indiscriminant, overly intimate self-disclosure, undue jealousy in close relationships, reluctance to commitment in relationships, difficulty in making relationships in a new setting, and a tendency to view partners as insufficiently attentive.

Recently researchers have applied attachment theory to the study of adult romantic relationships. These relationships are thought to fulfil the requirements of attachment bonds and are moderately stable (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Typically researchers have found correspondence between attachment styles observed in infancy and those observed in adults, with between 55% and 65% of adults being classified as securely attached in most studies (e.g., Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazen & Shaver, 1987). Bartholomew and her colleagues (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffen & Bartholomew, 1991) have contributed a two-dimensional model (of self and others) that results in four attachment styles depending on whether views of self are positive or negative. This typology identifies a secure attachment style which reflects positive views of self and others, and a preoccupied style, which corresponds to Ainsworth and Bowlby's anxious/ambivalent type, with negative views of self, but positive views of other people. The original avoidant style has been separated into a fearful type, where both models of self and others are negative, and a dismissing type, where the model of the self is positive, but others are viewed negatively.

In addition to these broad views of self and others as positive or negative, attachment style is believed to comprise of a set of distinct person goals, beliefs and expectations about self, others and the probable outcome of relationships, in addition to strategies for achieving these goals and minimising distress. This information provides the content of the 'internalised representations' or 'internal working models' and influences subsequent information processing (ie., attention, appraisal and interpretation) as well as the selection and evaluation of interpersonal strategies. Activation of 'internal working models' may occur automatically or consciously in response to attachment-related stimuli (Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996). Information that is consistent with 'internal working models' receives more attention than inconsistent information, leading to preferential processing of such data and the perpetuation of existing beliefs. In addition, 'internal working models' direct people to search for attachment related information which is consistent with their own expectancies and needs. In these ways, the postulation of internalised representations or internal working models provides a hypothetical mechanism for how people bring the memories of past experiences of attachment into play in their present relationships.

The strong influence of early interpersonal experiences in shaping attachment security throughout the lifespan is highlighted by these concepts of 'internalised representations' or

'internal working models'. There is now an abundance of evidence demonstrating the associations between insecure attachment and poor quality parenting experiences (Rutter, 1997). Higher rates of insecure attachment have been found in maltreated children, the children of depressed mothers, and as a consequence of insensitive caregiving (Rutter, 1997). More generally, poor quality attachments can result from prolonged separation (Bowlby, 1973), death of a parent (Bowlby, 1980), adoption or multiple fosterparenting (Marshall, Hudson, & Hodkinson, 1993), physical or sexual abuse (Lamb, Gaensbauer, Malkin, & Schultz, 1985) or emotional rejection (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972).

Although insecure attachment cannot be equated with psychopathology or disorder (Rutter, 1997), it is increasingly been accepted as a vulnerability factor for a wide range of psychiatric and psychological disturbances, from anxiety disorders (Goldberg, 1997) to sexual offending (Marshall, 1989; etc). In the next section, theory and research investigating the influence of insecure attachment on sexual offending will be reviewed.

### **Attachment Style and Sexual Offending**

In recent years there has been an attempt to understand the intimacy deficits of sexual offenders from an attachment perspective (Marshall 1989; 1993; Ward, et al., 1995; etc). Marshall was the first theorist to make the link between attachment theory and sexual offending. He argued that sexual offender's early, negative interpersonal experiences mean they are unable to develop secure attachment bonds in childhood, resulting in a failure to learn the interpersonal skills and self-confidence necessary to achieve intimacy with other adults. Marshall (1989) theorized that one consequence of insecure attachment, a lack of intimacy skills and the experience of emotional loneliness, in combination with other factors such as deviant sexual fantasies and distorted thinking, is that sexual offenders may indirectly seek emotional intimacy through sex, even if they have to force a partner to participate.

Recently, a more comprehensive model of the relationship between attachment style, intimacy deficits and sexual offending has been offered, which is based on Bartholomew's (1991) classification of attachment into four fundamental styles (Ward, et al., 1995). The major innovation in Bartholomew's work is her distinction between the two types of avoidant attachment: fearful and dismissive. The three separate styles of insecure attachment (fearful, dismissive and preoccupied) are determined by early interpersonal relationships, and result in a failure to achieve intimacy within adult relationships. Ward and colleagues (1995)

hypothesised that these intimacy deficits, in combination with other factors, lead sexual offenders to pursue intimacy in sexually inappropriate ways. Further, they argued that different styles of insecure attachment have different internal working models of self and others, and are likely to be associated with different interpersonal goals, strategies and relationships problems. As a reflection of their diverse interpersonal styles and particular intimacy deficits, offenders were proposed to sexually offend in different ways and against different types of individuals.

People who are securely attached (positive self/positive other) have high self-esteem and view other people as generally warm and accepting (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Their interpersonal strategies and associated internal working models frequently result in high levels of intimacy in close adult relationships. Preoccupied individuals (negative self/positive others) have a sense of personal unworthiness, which in conjunction with their positive evaluation of other people, leads them to seek the approval of valued others. This style is unlikely to lead to satisfactory relationships, may leave both partners feeling unhappy, or may lead to high levels of loneliness. They are typically sexually preoccupied and attempt to meet their strong needs for security and affection through sexual interactions (Shaver & Hazan, 1988). If a preoccupied man crosses the boundary with a child and begins to fantasise about a sexual relationship because his attachment style involves a desire for intimacy, he will initiate grooming behaviour. Such an offender typically can be expected to view the child as a lover, and that sexual involvement will most likely occur only after some period of courtship-like behaviour. Also, he typically believes that the child enjoys the sexual involvement and considers the relationship to be mutual. Because these offenders are concerned about the victim's pleasure, we would not expect them to be aggressive or use overt coercion. These expectations fit with the more general non-sexual findings concerning the anxious-ambivalent style of attachment (Alexander, 1992).

Fearful individuals (negative self/negative others) desire social contact and intimacy, but experience pervasive interpersonal distrust and fear of rejection (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Because they desire intimacy such individuals seek to establish close relationships, but their fear of rejection leads them to keep their partners at a distance. These fearful individuals are not likely to be actively hostile in their interactions with others, but they may express aggression indirectly. The fear of rejection and avoidance of closeness in relationships leads fearfully attached men to seek impersonal contacts with others.

Because sex appears to be one way in which they (inadequately) attempt to meet their needs for intimacy, their lives should be characterised by impersonal sex. We would expect fearfully attached men to be unconcerned about their victim's feelings, show little empathy towards their victims and experience little in the way of guilt about their offending. Similarly, fearful men are self-focused during their offenses and are not inhibited about using force, if necessary, to achieve their goals.

Finally, dismissive individuals (positive self/negative others) are skeptical about the value of close relationships and place a great deal of value on remaining independent and invulnerable to negative feelings. They are more likely to be actively hostile in their interpersonal style. Dismissive individuals are viewed by others as emotionally aloof and cold, and the level of intimacy obtained in close relationships by this group is typically low. Their overriding goal is to maintain a sense of autonomy and independence, and therefore they are likely to seek relationships or social contacts that involve minimal levels of emotional or personal disclosure. Thus, they may, like fearfully attached men, seek impersonal contacts, but these contacts should be characterised by a degree of hostility. Because they blame others for their lack of intimacy their hostility should be primarily directed towards the gender of their preferred adult partners. Their lack of experience in close relationships, in association with their hostility and lack of interest in the feelings of others, is likely to result in profound intimacy deficits. When these men offend, they are likely to do so aggressively. Indeed the expression of non-instrumental aggression may be as primary as, or more so than, the achievement of sexual goals. Some of these dismissively attached offenders may be so hostile, and may so frequently associate the expression of hostility with deep satisfaction, that they develop sadistic tendencies.

There has been little research specifically into attachment styles and sexual offending. Some preliminary studies have examined the adult romantic attachment styles of sexual offenders and other incarcerated offenders. Ward, Hudson, & Marshall (1997) examined a group of child molesters, rapists, violent nonsexual offenders and nonviolent, nonsexual offenders with respect to adult romantic attachment style. The majority of participants reported an insecure attachment style, leading them to conclude that insecure attachment was likely to be a general vulnerability factor for offending behaviour, rather than being specific to sexual offenders. As predicted by their model, child molesters were more likely to have a preoccupied or fearful attachment style than were rapists, and were less likely to be

dismissive. Rapists were indistinguishable from violent offenders in that both groups tended to be dismissive in style. Finally, the nonviolent, nonsexual offenders were comparatively the most frequently securely attached. These encouraging results were interpreted to suggest that romantic attachment style is associated with different offending patterns and may underlie the interpersonal difficulties of sexual offenders.

The focus of another research project was to see how characteristics of offenders such as their level and style of dealing with anger, attitudes towards women and sexual assault, loneliness and fear of intimacy would relate to their reported attachment style and predominant type of criminal activity (Hudson & Ward, 1997). This study found that attachment style provided more utility than offense type as a categorising variable, because of a greater ability to predict the individual's experience of relationships and general interpersonal style from which offense style is thought to be determined. The findings suggested that attachment style may be more useful clinically for determining an individual's motivations for offending, and offending style, than the offense itself.

In summary, the measurement of the adult romantic attachment styles in offenders has provided an important source of evidence for the disruption of attachment relationships in men who commit a variety of offenses. Further, it is clear that attachment style is a useful construct for making predictions about social competence and offense variables which have clinical and theoretical utility, especially for treatment. An additional body of research exists which provides support for the hypothesis that sexual offenders suffer disruptions to early attachment relationships. A number of researchers (e.g., Prentky, et al., 1989) have directly investigated family and peer dysfunction in sexual offenders, attempting to identify the variables associated with sexual aggression. Although these researchers have not specifically examined the attachment construct, many of the variables they document have obvious and detrimental implications for the development of attachment.

### **The Early Attachment Relationships of Sexual Offenders**

Attachment theory predicts that attachment styles develop as a result of the cumulative experiences with interpersonal relationships over time. Further, it is clear that the interpersonal relationships which have the most influence on a person's working models of relationships would be those with whom the person has the most early and frequent contact (e.g. primary caregivers). (A survey of the empirical literature indicates that many sexual

offenders have experienced some form of disruption to their early interpersonal relationships. There is evidence that family variables, specifically the quality of early interpersonal relationships and the experience of sexual deviation and abuse, play a major role in the development and severity of later sexual aggression (Prentky, et al., 1989). These two factors are consistent with, and anticipated by, the attachment model.)

One of the foremost predictions of attachment theory is that the quality of a person's attachment to a primary caregiver is crucial to the development of their interpersonal attachment style. In view of this, it seems judicious to review the literature on what is known about sexual offender's early relationships with their parents. This literature suggests that sexual offenders typically perceive their mothers more positively than their fathers (Hazelwood & Warren, 1989; Tingle, Barnard, Robins, Newman, & Hutchinson, 1986). However, this difference appears only to be one of degree. For example, in one study, 36% of sex offenders described their relationship with their mothers as warm and close, and a further 31% described their mothers as cold, distant, uncaring, indifferent, hostile and aggressive (Hazelwood & Warren, 1989). Apparently, sexual offenders' perceptions of their mothers range the full continuum from positive to negative, a finding which provides us with little predictive utility.

One study has provided further information on this issue (Tingle, et al., 1986). These researchers found that although the majority of child molesters (83%) reported that their relationships with their mothers were close, only a quarter of these described their mother as someone to whom they could turn to with a problem. These authors suggested that the closeness of child molesters to their mothers may be of a more dependant nature, rather than a reciprocal one.

More specifically, a number of difficulties have been noted in the relationships between sexual offenders and their mothers. Blaske, Borduin, Henggeler, and Mann (1989) compared adolescents who have committed a sexual offence with other non-delinquent adolescents and found lower rates of positive mother-son communication in the sex-offender group. With respect to differences across sexual offender types, (rapists were found to have significantly more arguments with their mothers than child molesters (Tingle, et al., 1986).) There is also evidence that sexual offenders identify less with their mothers than members of other offender groups (Levant & Bass, 1991).

In the sexual offending literature it has traditionally been suggested that the role of the father in the etiology of an individual's sexual offending is insignificant (Tingle, et al., 1986). This perspective may have originated from the father's relative lack of involvement in the childhood of many sexual offenders. However, the picture appears to be more complex. Of those sexual offenders who had a father present in their childhood, the relationship between father and son is typically described as more problematic and negative, than between mother and son (Lisak & Roth, 1990). Specifically, a large percentage of sexual offenders (57%) describe their fathers as cold, distant, hostile and aggressive (Lisak, 1994), with a lot less (18%) crediting their fathers with positive qualities such as warmth. This negative perception may be related to the reported high rates of physical abuse inflicted by both biological and step-fathers on sexual offenders (Kahn & Chambers, 1991). An interesting finding was that rapist's relationships with their fathers were perceived as more distant than child molesters (Tingle, Barnard, Newman, & Hutchinson, 1986). Moreover, sexual offenders identify less with their fathers than do other offender groups (Levant & Bass, 1991). A negative view of the relationship with their father was associated with a need for power and control, as well as anger and hostility towards women (Hazelwood & Warren, 1989; Lisak & Roth, 1990). In contrast, child molesters reported equivalent rates of maternal and paternal rejection to non-offender groups (Marshall & Mazzucco, 1995). These findings suggest that the fathers of sexual offenders do play a significant role in their development. This may be a function of either their lack of involvement in the upbringing of their sons and/or the violence inflicted upon them. Marshall, Hudson, & Hodgkinson, (1993) hypothesised that the problems that sexual offenders had in their relationships with their fathers would lead to a poor self-concept and consequently (along with other factors) to sexual offending. Within the more general literature on delinquency and aggression there is evidence that father absence and negative father-son relationships are linked to problematic, externalising or delinquent behaviour (e.g., Loeber, 1990).

Another important source of disruption to early interpersonal relationships resides in the experience of loss of caregivers. The relationship between a parent and their children is necessarily related to the parent's presence or absence in the family home. In a study by Ryan and Lane (1991), a large number (57%) of juvenile sexual offenders have been found to experience some form of parental loss through death, divorce or separation. Sexual offenders may be less likely than non-sexual offenders to have an intact family of origin.

There is some confusion over whether rapists or child molesters are more likely to have their parents marriage intact (Seghorn, Prentky & Boucher, 1987; Tingle, et al., 1986). The parents of rapists are less likely to be legally married in the initial instance than those of child molesters (Saunders, Awad, & White, 1986).

Regardless of whether one or both parents are present in the family home, the environments of sexual offenders are characterised by many features with the potential to damage the quality of early interpersonal relationships. One such feature is the presence of physical abuse, which has been reported at high rates in the histories of sexual offenders (e.g. Ryan & Lane, 1991). This abuse is most often carried out by biological fathers (44%) and stepfathers (20%) (Kahn & Chambers, 1991). The presence of physical abuse is unlikely to be specific to sexual offenders as rates are high for non-sexual offenders (Lewis, Shanock & Pincus, 1981). Physical abuse also tends to be more predictive of non-sexual aggression than sexual offenses (Prentky, et al., 1989). The experience of physical violence is likely to result in the development of insecure attachment and the associated belief that relationships are inherently dangerous.

The occurrence of sexual abuse as a child may occur in parallel with physical violence or exist as a separate problem. Estimates of the prevalence of sexual abuse in sexual offenders range from 9% (Fagen & Wexler, 1988) to 47% (Longo, 1982). Milner & Robertson (1990) noted that family sexual deviation is more common in the family backgrounds of sexual offenders than other offenders. Most researchers agree that sexual abuse is more than twice as likely in a sexual offender as in a non sexual offender. Across subtypes of sexual offenders, child molesters were around twice as likely to be sexually abused than rapists (Seghorn, Prentky, & Boucher, 1987). However rapists were more likely to have been abused by a family member, whereas child molesters were more likely to have been abused by non-family members (Seghorn, Prentky & Boucher, 1987). There is still some debate on this issue (Tingle, et al., 1986). Overall, a history of sexual victimisation and sexual deviation within the home has been found to be highly predictive of sexual aggression (Prentky, et al., 1989).

The very nature of sexual abuse aligns it with many ways of disrupting attachment. Even children with predominantly secure attachment styles prior to sexual abuse, may suffer disruption to their attachment style. This could be because of the onslaught on central aspects of attachment (ie. perceptions of self, perceptions of others) that are a direct result

of a sexually abusive experience (Alexander, 1992). Other mechanisms may include adversely affecting the capacity to regulate negative affective states or the learning of an association between sexually abusive behaviour and close relationships.

The consistency of caregiver availability and response has important implications for attachment style. The only study to specifically examine this variable used the term “caregiver inconstancy” to describe the stability of the primary caregiver relationship, as measured by the length of time spent with a single caregiver (Prentky, et al., 1989). They found that this variable was highly predictive of the severity of future sexual aggression. Other variables which have been found to be common in the parents of sexual offenders which may influence their ability to provide consistent, predictable caregiving include problems with substance abuse (e.g., Ryan & Lane, 1991) and involvement in the criminal justice system (e.g., Fagen & Wexler, 1988).

Once established, attachment styles are believed to be actively self-perpetuating, because of their biasing effect on incoming information, and the tendency for individuals to both select and create environments that confirm their existing beliefs (Collins & Read, 1994). Consequently, those who have insecure attachments with their caregivers are also likely to have dysfunctional relationships in other areas, such as peer relationships. Blaske, Borduin, Henggeler, and Mann (1989) concluded that sexual offenders typically have lower levels of emotional bonding with peers. Similarly, Tingle et al. (1986) reported that 86% of adult rapists and 74% of their sample of child molesters had few or no friends when young. The importance of peer groups for the development of adult attachment patterns, particularly in adolescence, is currently the focus of theoretical and empirical research in the attachment area (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

In summary, there is ample evidence that sexual offenders early interpersonal experiences are characterised by a number of problems. In theory, the attachment styles of these men would reflect these cumulative experiences with relationships and lead to problematic interpersonal expectancies, goals and strategies. Many of the variables present in their histories have the potential to disrupt their interpersonal relationships and lead to the development of insecure attachment styles. Sexual offenders typically have negative relationships with both of their parents, identify with their parents less than other offender groups, experience high rates of physical and sexual abuse, are more likely to experience the loss of caregivers, are less likely to have stable and constant relationships with caregivers

and communicate less with parents. Clearly it is appropriate and timely for empirical research to examine offender's perceptions of their early interpersonal experiences. Arguably it these perceptions that provide the crucial link between the dysfunctional family and peer experiences of sexual offenders in early childhood and the insecure attachment and intimacy deficits in adult sexual offender populations.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Rationale and Research Questions

The fundamental interpersonal nature of sexual crimes has increasingly been accepted in recent years. The serious violation of the physical and emotional integrity of another person that characterises a sexual offense represents a fundamental flaw in the ability to relate to and empathise with others. Several overlapping areas of research have identified interpersonal dysfunction in sexual offenders. The first area of research is the literature documenting insecure attachment in offenders adult romantic relationships and interactions between attachment style, intimacy deficits and offending behaviours (e.g., Ward, et al., 1997 etc). The second approach is that typified by Prentky and his colleagues (1989) with their predictive work based on aspects of dysfunctional family relationships in sexual offenders. The final area of evidence comes from the research with adolescent sexual offenders where negative caregiver and peer interactions have been documented (e.g., Blaske, et al., 1989). A number of aims and research questions to examine in this study were generated from these previous findings.

In this study initial data has been gathered on sexual offenders perceptions of their early interpersonal relationships. This data was obtained using a semi-structured interview format. There is persuasive evidence that interview measures can provide a more accurate picture of individual's perceptions of their close relationships (e.g., Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994) than questionnaire data. This is probably due to the fact that schema unconsciously influence the interpretation and encoding of interpersonal information so individuals may not be aware of their underlying relationship models, and/or, when asked directly about these may distort their responses in some way. Since the focus of this study was to explore and describe the nature of offender's perceptions of their early interpersonal relationships, the semi-structured interview format was chosen. The nature of the person's relationship with their caregivers ought to be reflected in their descriptions of these relationships, for example, how the participant perceives the parents response to their needs and distress. Once the interview data was collected the next task was to develop a set of categories describing the early interpersonal relationship variables for sexual offenders and the two criminal

comparison groups. These categories were derived from a grounded theory analysis of interview data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In the second part of the study the aim was to examine whether the various groups would differ with respect to their perceptions of their early interpersonal relationships. The earlier work of Prentky and colleagues (1989) suggested that caregiver inconstancy and the presence of sexual deviation or abuse in the family is predictive of sexual aggression, whilst the presence of physical abuse and a history of institutional care is predictive of non-sexual aggression. The first issue in this part of the study is with regard to the role of dysfunctional early interpersonal relationships for sexual offenders compared to the two comparison groups (violent and non-violent offenders). It is possible that dysfunctional family variables underlie a considerable number of social and personal problems. It may also be feasible that since both sexual and violent offenders all committed serious crimes against another person that they would exhibit greater early interpersonal dysfunction than the nonsexual, nonviolent group. This would be consistent with previous findings with respect to interpersonal variables in adult relationships (e.g., Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997).

There are also questions concerning the differences between child molesters and rapists on the derived categories. Clinical observations suggest that rapists experienced more violence in their families of origin than child molesters. Further, sexual abuse has been found to be much more common in the childhoods of child molesters than rapists (Seghorn, Prentky & Boucher, 1987). Generally rapists report being more negative relationships with their fathers than do child molesters. Further, clinical observations suggest that child molesters may have more benign, less bounded interactions with their mothers than other groups. The aim of this part of the study was to examine whether these differences would be reflected in sexual offenders' perceptions of their early interpersonal experiences.

Attachment theory predicts that early interpersonal relationships would differ for each attachment style, in terms of qualities of interactions such as responsiveness and consistency. It was hoped that the use of categories derived from the data would provide a fine grained analysis of the early interpersonal experiences associated with the various attachment styles.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Method

#### Participants and Setting

The child molester participants in this research were involved in the Kia Marama Sex Offender Treatment Program (Hudson, Marshall, Ward, Johnston, & Jones, 1995), operating within a medium security prison in New Zealand. The majority of these men participated prior to treatment. The other groups, sexual offenders with adult victims (referred to as rapists for convenience), violent non-sexual offenders (the violent group), and non-sexual, nonviolent offenders (the nonviolent group) were recruited from other areas of the same medium security prison as the child molesters, and another medium security facility within the same geographic area. None of these men from the comparison groups were in treatment.

The study participants consisted of 55 men who had offended sexually against children, 30 men who had offended sexually against adult women, 32 men with violent offenses, and 30 men incarcerated for neither sexual or violent offenses. This classification was exclusive in that the offense records of all participants were reviewed to ensure that men in the child molester group had no offenses against adult victims, men in the rapist group had no offenses against children, men in the violent group had no sexual offenses, and finally men in the nonviolent group had neither sexual or violent offenses in their criminal histories. The offenses committed by the child molesters ranged from masturbating in front of a child to completed intercourse or sodomy with force. Offenses by the rapists included sexual violations (indecent assaults) to a predatory, sadistic rape of an adult woman, with high levels of force and violence. The violent offenders had been convicted of offenses ranging from a fist fight in a bar to a premeditated and excessively violent murder. The nonviolent offenders included those convicted of driving offenses, drug-related crimes, burglary, and fraud.

There were significant differences between the groups in age with child molesters being significantly older than all the other groups, and rapists being significantly older than both the violent and nonviolent groups. Similarly, there were significant differences across

the groups in length of offending history with rapists and child molesters showing the most extensive history, then violent offenders, and finally nonviolent offenders, with the shortest history. Finally, there were also significant differences between the groups with respect to length of current sentence with rapists and violent offenders not being discriminately different from each other, but with the longest sentences, followed by child molesters, and finally the nonviolent offenders with significantly shorter sentence lengths. These differences between the groups were as expected and were not germane to the research hypotheses.

## **Materials**

### *Grounded theory*

Given the fact that the nature and quality of early interpersonal experiences are now seen as predictive of sexually inappropriate behaviour, it was considered useful and timely to describe more fully the characteristics of these early relationships. The purpose of the present study was therefore to tease out and categorise the characteristics of early interpersonal relationships in the sexual offending population. Because interview data gathered from subjects is in descriptive form, and as such does not readily lend itself to the usual quantitative analysis, a methodology was needed that was rigorous enough to generate useful categories, and yet still sensitive to qualitative data.

Qualitative methods have traditionally received little attention in psychology as they have frequently been seen as unscientific (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). However their potential contribution, particularly in the early stages of theory development is being recognised (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988). A promising method within this general approach is grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their early developmental work promulgated the potential for generating grounded theory from research data. This was further developed by Strauss (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and it is this work that has particularly influenced this study.

Grounded theory consists of a set of systematic procedures that seek to inductively derive a theory, or a set of categories, from qualitative data. Typically concepts are inductively derived from an initial set of qualitative descriptions or scripts, which, once coded into rudimentary conceptual categories, lead to the collection either of more descriptions or of quantitative data. The next step is the deduction of predictions or hypotheses concerning the ability of the provisional categories to account for new protocols.

If they fail to accommodate the new data then new categories are formulated and the process continues. Therefore there is a progressive development of categories as the research project unfolds. Researchers guided by the grounded theory approach are able to add questions, choose different samples and explore significant areas of interest depending upon the results of preliminary data analysis. The whole process of category building is dynamic and extremely sensitive to patterns detected in the data.

The particular value of this approach lies in its ability to generate useful theoretical constructs from close examination of data patterns. The current understanding of the nature and quality of early interpersonal experiences in sexual offenders, and their relationship with sexual crimes, is still quite limited. In view of this it was believed to be a useful strategy to let the offenders relatively unstructured descriptions of their early interpersonal experiences provide the basis of category development. A unique feature of the approach in this study is the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the generation and application of the categories. This approach has been successfully used before to generate a descriptive model of the offense chain for child molesters (Ward, Loudon, Hudson, & Marshall, 1995) and in the description of intimacy deficits in sexual offenders (Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997)

### *The Relationship Questionnaire*

In the second part of the study there were two independent variables, offender type and attachment style. Offender type was determined as already described. The second independent variable was attachment style. This was assessed with the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) which consists of two parts (Griffen & Bartholomew, 1994), both of which involve four short paragraphs describing prototypical attachment patterns as they apply to close relationships in general. For example, the Secure prototype reads as follows: "It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me". The Fearful prototype reads in part, "I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust". The Preoccupied prototype reads in part, "I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but often I find others reluctant to get as close as I would like. Finally, the Dismissing prototype reads, "I am comfortable without close relationships.

It is very important for me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me”.

The first task of this questionnaire which requires respondents to select which one of the four prototypical relationship styles descriptions best describes them, was used as a means of allocating the men to the four attachment styles. This process resulted in 31 of the participants being classified as securely attached, 17 as preoccupied, 48 as fearfully attached and 52 claiming dismissing attachment.

There were no significant differences in age between participants who were classified as secure, preoccupied, fearful or dismissing,  $F(3,147) = .6$ , *ns*, ( $M = 32.8, 36.8, 34.5, 32.8$ , and  $SD = 10.8, 11.2, 11.7, 12.7$  respectively). There were also no significant differences between attachment style groups with respect to length of time since first conviction,  $F(3,147) = .392$ , *ns*, ( $M = 10.3, 11.4, 12.4, 10.2$  and  $SD = 7.3, 7.2, 10.0, 10.3$ ). Similarly there were also no significant differences between attachment style groups with respect to sentence length,  $F(3,147) = 1.21$ , *ns*, ( $M = 49.1, 44.8, 57.7, 63.3$  and  $SD = 34.7, 23.0, 40.9, 49.5$ ).

## Procedure

Each of the participants completed a set of questionnaires and was also interviewed about his early interpersonal experiences and current adult romantic relationships. The questionnaires were concerned with attachment style, attitudes towards women, loneliness and intimacy, and formed the basis of another research report (Ward, Hudson, & Marshall, 1997). The section of the interview concerning the participants adult romantic relationships also formed the basis of another research report (Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997). The format for the interviews was in part a semi-structured one with 35 questions being selected from the attachment research literature (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazen & Shaver, 1994). These covered parental responsiveness to negative emotion, attention and support, consistency of parental behaviour, perception of safety and security within the home environment, degree of supportiveness or respect for them as individuals, and an overall evaluation of the relationship. For example, "How would your mother (and father if present) respond if you got upset?" (responsiveness), "Do you feel they treated you as an individual..? (respect for individuality), and "Did they tend to deal with you in a consistent way?" (parental consistency,). The interviewer was a graduate clinical psychology student

who was experienced in interviewing offender groups. Each interview took approximately one hour.

In step one the interview summaries, which contained no identifying details with respect to offender type, were subjected to a grounded theory analysis in order to develop a set of descriptive categories concerning offenders perceptions of their early interpersonal relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each of the categories were then dimensionalized on a 7 point Likert scale. A member of the research team (SH) who did not play a part in their original development took a 20% sample of the protocols as a check on the degree of category "saturation" (content validity). He read each interview transcript and noted whether or not the data was able to be fitted into the categories. In step two, the categories were used to rate each participants responses on the associated dimensions. As a check on the reliability of rating, a second researcher (KM) rated a random sample of 20% of the protocols on the various dimensions. There were no identifying details about offender type on the protocols, and therefore the researchers performing the two reliability checks were blind to which groups the subjects belonged.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Results

#### Step One

The grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin 1990) was applied to a comprehensive list of the responses provided by the participants to questions about their early interpersonal experiences. An initial data analysis was carried out which involved coding the raw information into basic categories by grouping together the responses of similar meanings.

The resulting categories were collapsed into 13 more general conceptual categories which were each dimensionalised with a 7-point Likert Scale. This allows participants to be rated as to the degree to which they described their relationship with their caregivers as consistent with each category. The categories were as follows:

Four initial categories emerged which related to aspects of the parent's behaviour and style. These categories were rated separately for mother and father. The first major category to appear was *Responsiveness* which encompassed perceptions surrounding the caregivers responsiveness, availability and support. This category could be rated from responsiveness to neglect. An example of responsiveness was "she would comfort me and listen to me" where an example of neglect may be "she wouldn't notice" and "I can't remember any help or support". A category of *Consistency* appeared as another important construct, not reducible by more abstract analysis, and thus became the second category. Included under this heading were features of the parent's behaviour relating to their consistency, reliability and predictability. Perceptions such as "Life was unpredictable day by day, didn't know what was happening" or "Mum was up and down like a yo-yo" were rated as very inconsistent on this dimension. Alternatively, a very consistent caregiver would be described with perceptions like "he was consistently abusive" or "I could always rely on her word". A category called *Acceptance* arose to describe the extent to which participants felt accepted, loved and approved of by their parents, in addition to their general experience of feeling part of the family. A participant was rated as experiencing rejection on this dimension if they said something like "father picked on me" or "I was the black sheep of the family" whilst those who received a rating of acceptance may have responded with "I felt welcomed and loved".

*Boundaries* was the name given to the category which described the approach to parenting exhibited by the parents with particular respect to supervision and discipline. Lax/undercontrolled parenting was represented by a statement such as, "didn't know where I stood". Parental style would be rated as firm if the perception was something like "parents has fair ground rules".

The next three categories to emerge reflected aspects of the individual's functioning within the attachment relationship. The first of these was a category described as emotional regulation which included the respondent's perceptions about their identification and modulation of emotion, in particular the degree to which emotional states were shared with others and support gained. An example of a response that would be labeled as defended could be "if I was in a mood I wanted space" whilst a statement such as "I would go to mum when upset" would be rated as expressive. The individual's sense of autonomy, advocacy for their rights and personal opinions, and experiences of separateness and mastery were grouped together under a category called *Autonomy*. An example of a response rated as autonomous could be "would go exploring by myself". At the other end of the continuum examples of enmeshment included statements such as "very protective of mother". *Self-evaluation* was a category that arose to encapsulate the participant's general evaluation and perceptions of self (as a child) and ranged from negative, for example "I was very underconfident" to positive, such as "did well at school" or "was a roller skating champ, good at archery too"

Reflecting more general aspects of the family environment and developmental context were a number of categories described as contextual variables. Initially sexual abuse, physical abuse and parental loss were all coded under one overarching category called developmental trauma, however it became clear as analysis progressed that these were conceptually different factors and as such warranted separate categories. *Sexual Abuse and Deviation* was the label given to the category which incorporates perceptions of sexual deviation and abuse ranging from an absence where there was no indication in the interview that the participant had been exposed to sexual abuse or sexually deviant behaviour in their developmental history, to extreme, where the participant described being a victim sexual abuse, for example "I blocked out alot of early memories due to sexual abuse". Similarly a category called *Physical Abuse* arose to account for any physical violence the participant described from physical discipline to unpredictable violence against their person. To be rated

as absence on this dimension there would have to be no mention of physical abuse of any description throughout the interview. To be rated as extreme on this dimension the participant would have reported being exposed to physical violence on a regular basis, for example "beat the shit out of us for nothing all the time". The category labeled *Loss* included all instances of loss throughout their development that the participant described, such as loss of parents, grandparents, pets and friends. The person would be rated as having suffered an absence of loss if no such occurrences were reported in the interview. On the other hand extreme loss referred to multiple or severe experiences of loss such as the death of a close caregiver, for example "felt really cut up when mother died". Initially level of conflict, degree of disunity and violence between parents, and a hostile atmosphere were coded under separate categories. However it became clear as analysis progressed that these were all features of an overarching category which was called *Conflict*. Someone from a home where harmony was apparent and the family possessed skills for resolving disputes amicably would be rated as perceiving an absence of conflict, for example, "home life was okay, no problems". In contrast, a family with substantial conflict, few skills to resolve disputes positively and a hostile atmosphere received a high rating, for example, "mother had a turbulent relationship with stepfather" or "the atmosphere, everyone mad - violence all the time".

Perceptions relating to safety and security within the home environment, and the degree to which the person's need for security was met were simply labeled *Safety*. Someone who was rated as feeling safe made statements such as "felt safe and secure, had no fears, nothing unpredictable happened". To rate someone as perceiving their environment as dangerous the statement would need to be along the lines of "constantly feared Dad would find out I'd done something wrong" or "never felt safe so didn't spend much time at home". A final category was derived which encompassed interpersonal experiences outside of primary caregiver relationships which provided the individual with an experience of positive attachment. This category was called *Positive Mediating Interactions*. The person would be rated as having an absence on this dimension if no such occurrences were reported in the interview. On the other hand perceptions of positive interactions with grandparents, teachers or others, for example, "did jiu-jitsu training and was very close to the trainer" would be rated as a substantial influence.

It is important to note that in this study the categories were developed inductively (i.e., by analysis of the data). Once the categories were formed the information was recoded using the categories. If new information was not able to be accommodated within the categories then further categories were developed and the process repeated itself. The development of the categories followed careful analysis and discussion within the research team. These discussions served as reliability checks and were made at all stages of the research. When there was disagreement, discussion occurred until complete agreement was reached. Content validity checks (saturation) were satisfactory with no piece of interview data being unable to be coded within the 13 categories. As a further reliability check the data was independently coded on the 7-point Likert scales derived from the categories, by an individual who had no involvement in the development of the categories or in any other aspects of the study. The results of this interrater reliability check were satisfactory with an overall  $r$  of approximately .80 between the two raters. (see table one)

**Table One: Interrater Reliability (Correlations)**

**Categories**

Parent Relationship Variables

Responsiveness - mother	.83
Responsiveness - father	.60
Consistency - mother	.90
Consistency - father	.85
Acceptance - mother	.85
Acceptance - father	.86
Boundaries - mother	.82
Boundaries - father	.82

Self Variables

Emotional Regulation	.67
Autonomy	.57
Self Evaluation	.82

Contextual Variables

Sexual Abuse	.89
Physical Abuse	.95
Loss	.89
Conflict	.83
Safety	.93
Positive Mediating Interactions	.77

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Overall	.79
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## Step Two

### Statistical Analysis

The statistical computer software package Statview (1986) was used in the analysis of the data. Each comparison was by way of analysis of variance (ANOVA) using Fisher's PLSD for post hoc comparisons.

### Offender Type Comparisons

There were no significant differences among the four offender groups on the *responsiveness - mother* dimension,  $F(3,140) = .81$ ,  $p = .49$ , *ns*, ( $M = 4.29, 4.33, 4.69, 4.17$  and  $SD = 1.11, 1.56, 1.63, 1.32$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively).

The four groups did differ significantly on the *responsiveness - father* dimension  $F(3,131) = 4.55$ ,  $p = .005$ , ( $M = 4.88, 5.72, 5.46, 4.77$  and  $SD = 1.24, 1.19, 1.20, 1.14$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively). Post hoc testing (Fisher's PLSD) suggested that child molesters and nonviolent offenders were indiscriminable with respect to these scores, but that both of these groups described their fathers as more significantly more responsive than rapists and violent offenders.

There were no significant differences among the groups on their ratings on the *consistency - mother* dimension,  $F(3,140) = .51$ ,  $p = .68$ , *ns*, ( $M = 3.37, 3.73, 3.69, 3.77$  and  $SD = 1.47, 1.76, 1.78, 1.98$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively).

The groups were not significantly different on their ratings on the *consistency - father* dimension,  $F(3,131) = .795$ ,  $p = .50$ , *ns*, ( $M = 3.58, 4.03, 4.14, 3.92$  and  $SD = 1.58, 1.84, 1.82, 1.88$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively).

There were no significant differences among the groups on their ratings on the *acceptance - mother* dimension,  $F(3,140) = 1.246$ ,  $p = .29$ , *ns*, ( $M = 4.31, 4.1, 4.76, 4.37$  and  $SD = 0.98, 1.73, 1.48, 1.33$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively).

There were no significant differences among the groups on their ratings on the *acceptance - father* dimension,  $F(3,131) = 2.197$ ,  $p = .09$ , *ns*, ( $M = 4.86, 5.21, 5.04, 4.35$  and  $SD = 1.14, 1.52, 1.35, 1.29$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders

respectively). However, post hoc testing revealed that there was a non-significant trend for rapists fathers to be judged as less accepting than nonviolent offenders, with child molesters and violent offenders occupying the middle ground.

The four groups differed significantly on the *boundaries - mother* dimension,  $F(3,140) = 6.49$ ,  $p = .0004$ , ( $M = 4.44, 3.3, 3.83, 4.37$  and  $SD = 1.07, 1.34, 1.37, 1.22$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively). Post hoc testing revealed that child molesters and nonviolent offenders were indiscriminable with their mothers both being rated as having significantly firmer boundaries than mothers of rapists. Child molesters were also rating more highly on this dimension than violent offenders. However, rapists were indiscriminable from violent offenders, who in turn were indiscriminable from nonviolent offenders.

There was a significant difference between the groups on the *boundaries - father* dimension,  $F(3,131) = 5.80$ ,  $p = .0009$ , ( $M = 4.76, 3.62, 3.89, 4.46$  and  $SD = 1.09, 1.35, 1.34, 1.48$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively). Again, child molesters and nonviolent offenders were indiscriminable and their fathers were both rated as having significantly firmer boundaries than rapists, with the fathers of child molesters also being rated more highly on this dimension than violent offenders. Rapists were indiscriminable from violent offenders, who in turn were indiscriminable from nonviolent offenders.

The four groups did not differ significantly on the *emotional regulation* dimension,  $F(3,139) = 1.44$ ,  $p = .233$ , *ns*, ( $M = 2.63, 2.63, 2.13, 2.57$  and  $SD = 1.02, 1.40, 0.9, 1.19$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively).

There was a significant difference between the groups with respect to the *autonomy* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 6.11$ ,  $p = .0006$ , ( $M = 3.98, 3.20, 3.40, 2.97$  and  $SD = 1.37, 0.88, 0.77, 1.22$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively). Child molesters were rated as significantly more enmeshed than nonviolent offenders and rapists, with violent offenders falling in the middle ground.

The four groups differed significantly on the *self-evaluation* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 2.84$ ,  $p = .04$ , ( $M = 3.43, 3.67, 3.33, 3.9$  and  $SD = 0.69, 0.92, 0.76, 1.09$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively). Child molesters and violent offenders who were indiscriminable, were judged to be significantly more negative in their self-evaluation than nonviolent offenders, with rapists occupying the middle ground.

The groups differed significantly on their ratings on the *sexual abuse* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 2.81, p = .04$ , ( $M = 1.91, 1.23, 1.5, 1.23$  and  $SD = 1.52, 0.90, 1.17, 0.97$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively). On this dimension child molesters were rated as perceiving significantly more sexual abuse than rapists and nonviolent offenders, with violent offenders occupying the middle ground.

On the physical abuse dimension there were significant differences across the groups,  $F(3,136) = 2.643, p = .05$ , ( $M = 3.54, 4.23, 4.29, 3.28$  and  $SD = 1.64, 1.65, 2.00, 1.65$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively). Violent offenders and rapists who were indiscriminate on this dimension, were rated as perceiving significantly more physical abuse than nonviolent offenders, with child molesters in the middle ground.

The four groups did not differ significantly on the *loss* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 1.07, p = .365, ns$ , ( $M = 2.17, 1.87, 1.8, 1.77$  and  $SD = 1.30, 1.22, 0.96, 1.10$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively).

The four groups did not differ significantly on the *conflict* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 0.76, p = .52, ns$ , ( $M = 2.36, 2.83, 2.83, 2.73$  and  $SD = 1.69, 1.68, 1.72, 1.78$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively).

The four groups differed significantly on the *safety* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 2.89, p = .03$ , ( $M = 2.87, 3.83, 3.8, 3.1$  and  $SD = 1.71, 1.80, 1.73, 1.86$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively). Child molesters were rated as perceiving significantly more safety than rapists and violent offenders, with nonviolent offenders falling in the middle ground.

The four groups did not differ significantly on the *positive mediating interactions* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 3.74, p = .77, ns$ , ( $M = 1.26, 1.43, 1.33, 1.40$  and  $SD = .59, .94, 0.76, .89$  for child molesters, rapists, violent and nonviolent offenders respectively).

### Comparisons of Mothers and Fathers

In order to compare mothers and fathers on the four relevant dimensions, only complete data sets were used. This reduced the total sample size for these comparisons.

In comparing mothers and fathers on the *responsivity* dimension there was a significant difference,  $F(1,126) = 38.50, p = .0001$ , ( $M = 4.29, 4.31, 4.70, 4.27, 4.38$  for mothers and  $4.88, 5.72, 5.41, 4.77, 5.15$  for fathers, for child molesters, rapists, violent, nonviolent offenders and overall respectively), that is fathers were perceived as less responsive than

mothers. There was also an interaction effect between offender type and gender of parent,  $F(3,126) = 2.57, p = .05$ , specifically, rapists perceived their fathers as significantly less responsive than their mothers.

In comparing mothers and fathers on the *consistency* dimension there was a significant difference,  $F(1,126) = 5.45, p = .02$ , ( $M = 3.31, 3.66, 3.74, 3.77, 3.57$  for mothers and 3.60, 4.03, 4.11, 3.92, **3.87**) for fathers, for child molesters, rapists, violent, nonviolent offenders and overall respectively), that is fathers were perceived as more inconsistent than mothers. There was no significant interaction effect between offender type and gender of parent,  $F(3,126) = 0.136, p = .94$ .

In comparing mothers and fathers on the *acceptance* dimension there was a significant difference,  $F(1,126) = 15.47, p = .0001$ , ( $M = 4.29, 4.03, 4.78, 4.46, 4.37$  for mothers and 4.83, 5.21, 4.96, 4.35, **4.85** for fathers, for child molesters, rapists, violent, nonviolent offenders and overall respectively), that is fathers were perceived as more rejecting than mothers. There was also an interaction effect between offender type and gender of parent,  $F(3,126) = 4.47, p = .005$ , specifically, rapists perceived their fathers as least accepting, followed by child molesters, with violent and non violent offenders being indiscriminately different.

In comparing mothers and fathers on the *boundaries* dimension there was a significant difference,  $F(1,126) = 6.70, p = .01$ , ( $M = 4.42, 3.24, 3.93, 4.27, 4.02$  for mothers and 4.73, 3.62, 3.93, 4.46, **4.27** for fathers, for child molesters, rapists, violent, nonviolent offenders and overall respectively), that is fathers were perceived as having firmer boundaries than mothers. There was no significant interaction effect between offender type and gender of parent,  $F(3,126) = .56, p = .64$ .

### Attachment Style Comparisons

The four attachment style groups did not differ significantly on the *responsivity - mother* dimension,  $F(3,140) = 0.504, p = .68, ns$ , ( $M = 4.21, 4.52, 4.47, 4.23$  and  $SD = 1.29, 1.49, 1.02, 1.43$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

There were significant differences among the four attachment style groups on the *responsivity - father* dimension,  $F(3,131) = 3.315, p = .02$ , ( $M = 5.26, 5.26, 5.82, 4.78$  and  $SD = 1.06, 1.29, .73, 1.37$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles

respectively). Post hoc testing (Fisher's PLSD) revealed that the fathers of the dismissing group were rated as significantly higher on responsiveness than the other three groups who were indiscriminable.

There were no significant differences between the four groups on the *consistency - mother* dimension,  $F(3,140) = 0.821$ ,  $p = .48$ , *ns*, ( $M = 3.32, 3.54, 4.11, 3.60$  and  $SD = 1.79, 1.59, 1.94, 1.67$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

There were no significant differences between the four groups on the *consistency - father* dimension,  $F(3,131) = 0.502$ ,  $p = .48$ , *ns*, ( $M = 3.63, 3.86, 4.29, 3.85$  and  $SD = 1.74, 1.83, 1.83, 1.67$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

The groups were not significantly different in ratings on the *acceptance - mother* dimension,  $F(3,140) = 1.33$ ,  $p = .26$ , *ns*, ( $M = 4.43, 4.56, 4.58, 4.06$  and  $SD = 1.29, 1.38, 1.07, 1.44$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

The groups were significantly different in their ratings on the *acceptance - father* dimension,  $F(3,131) = 5.25$ ,  $p = .002$ , ( $M = 4.74, 5.24, 5.53, 4.37$  and  $SD = 1.32, 1.23, 0.87, 1.37$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively). The secure and dismissing groups, who were indiscriminable, rated their fathers as significantly higher on acceptance than the preoccupied and fearful groups, who were indiscriminable.

The groups were not significantly different in ratings on the *boundaries - mother* dimension,  $F(3,140) = 0.44$ ,  $p = .723$ , *ns*, ( $M = 4.00, 4.15, 4.26, 3.92$  and  $SD = 1.05, 1.51, 1.20, 1.27$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

The groups were not significantly different in ratings on the *boundaries - father* dimension,  $F(3,131) = 0.457$ ,  $p = .713$ , *ns*, ( $M = 4.44, 4.33, 4.29, 4.09$  and  $SD = 1.40, 1.46, 1.11, 1.33$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

The groups did not differ significantly on the *emotional regulation* dimension,  $F(3,142) = .348$ ,  $p = .79$ , *ns*, ( $M = 2.64, 2.40, 2.42, 2.57$  and  $SD = .99, 1.12, 1.22, 1.21$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

The groups were not significantly different in ratings on the *autonomy* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 2.16$ ,  $p = .09$ , *ns*, ( $M = 3.11, 3.47, 4.00, 3.51$  and  $SD = 1.1, 1.4, 1.33, 1.21$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively). Post hoc testing

revealed a non-significant trend towards the secure group being rated as more autonomous than the preoccupied group.

There were significant differences among the four groups on the *self-evaluation* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 2.94$ ,  $p = .03$ , ( $M = 3.57, 3.43, 3.21, 3.82$  and  $SD = .74, .72, .71, 1.05$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively). Post hoc testing revealed that dismissively attached individuals were rated as significantly more likely to have a positive self-evaluation than fearful and preoccupied individuals, with the secure group occupying the middle ground.

There were no significant differences between the groups on their ratings on the *sexual abuse* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 1.167$ ,  $p = .325$ , *ns*, ( $M = 1.79, 1.47, 1.84, 1.35$  and  $SD = 1.48, 1.21, 1.71, .90$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

There were no significant differences between the groups on their ratings on the *physical abuse* dimension,  $F(3,136) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .225$ , *ns*, ( $M = 4.0, 4.02, 4.0, 3.35$  and  $SD = 1.57, 1.74, 1.80, 1.83$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

There were no significant differences between the groups on their ratings on the *loss* dimension,  $F(3,142) = .409$ ,  $p = .747$ , *ns*, ( $M = 1.75, 2.06, 1.95, 1.94$  and  $SD = 1.11, 1.34, 1.03, 1.23$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

The four groups differed significantly on the *conflict* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 4.14$ ,  $p = .008$ , ( $M = 3.5, 2.72, 2.42, 2.14$  and  $SD = 1.80, 1.79, 1.64, 1.56$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively). The secure group was rated as perceiving significantly more conflict than the preoccupied and dismissing groups, who were indiscriminate. The fearful group lay in the middle and was indiscriminate from all other groups.

The four groups did not differ significantly on the *safety* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 2.239$ ,  $p = .08$ , ( $M = 3.75, 3.60, 3.26, 2.82$  and  $SD = 1.71, 1.85, 1.63, 1.80$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively). Post hoc testing revealed a non-significant trend towards the secure and fearful groups being rated as perceiving more danger (less safety) in their environment than the dismissing group.

Finally, there were no significant differences between the groups on the *positive mediating interactions* dimension,  $F(3,142) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .106$ , ( $M = 1.14, 1.26, 1.32, 1.55$

and  $SD = .36, .57, .61, 1.08$  for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles respectively).

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion

The first aim of this study was to examine the participant's memories and perceptions of their early interpersonal histories, in order to identify the salient and meaningful features. This was viewed as important because, although these recollections may not be equivalent to what actually happened, arguably it is a person's construction of their experience that guides ongoing information processing and behaviour (Bretherton, 1987). Examination of the interview data was achieved with a grounded theory analysis (Straus & Corbin, 1990) to tease out patterns and categorise the experiences that the offenders described. Offenders were then rated on each of the dimensionalised categories. This allowed us to establish for each offender the importance of each category in their phenomenological experience.

The second aim of the study was to utilise the derived categories to investigate differences in the early interpersonal experiences of the four offender groups. The literature on adult attachment styles and interpersonal competence in these populations suggests that these variables are related to different patterns of offending behaviour. Further, research documenting the family and peer interactions of offenders has found that specific early interpersonal experiences, for example physical violence, occur more frequently in the certain offender groups, for example violent offenders. These findings, together with the evidence that early attachment experiences provide the origins for later interpersonal skills and style, meant we expected to find meaningful variations in the perceptions of their early attachment relationships across the different offender types.

The third aim of the study was to examine the relative influence of mothers and fathers in the memories and perceptions of the different offender groups. We expected that perceptions of fathers would be more negative than those of mothers, particularly for rapists. Further, a less boundaried relationship with mothers was expected for child molesters. Teasing out the relative influence of parent gender and the possible interactions between them, was viewed as a crucial aspect of understanding the early attachment relationships of sexual offenders.

The fourth and final aim of the study was to investigate differences with respect to adult attachment style with the categories of early interpersonal experiences that emerged. It was

expected that the four fundamental adult attachment styles described by Bartholomew (1991) would be associated with different perceptions of early interpersonal experiences. This is because attachment style should reflect the person's 'internal working model' of self and others, including for example, beliefs and expectancies about the responsiveness and consistency of others based upon experience.

With regard to the first aim of the study, the grounded theory analysis of the interview data revealed 13 categories to account for the participant's perceptions of their early interpersonal experiences. That these 13 categories were not reducible further points to the diversity and complexity of the interpersonal experiences of salience to offender groups. Responsiveness, consistency, acceptance and boundaries all emerged as significant aspects of the offender's perceptions of their relationships with their caregivers. Emotional regulation, autonomy, and self-evaluation appeared as important facets of the offender's experience of self in interaction with their attachment figures. Finally, experiences of sexual deviation and abuse, physical abuse, loss, conflict, safety and positive mediating interactions arose as meaningful contextual factors that offender's identified in their accounts of their early interpersonal relationships. The identification of these 13 categories makes possible, and highlights the value of, a fine grained analysis of the offender's attachment relationships. These categories will now be reviewed in detail.

The category of responsiveness emerged to account for perceptions of the caregiver's availability, support and responsiveness, especially in relation to negative emotional states. As for all of the categories describing caregiver qualities, perceptions about mothers and fathers were found to vary and therefore were considered separately. Offenders reported experiencing a range of responsiveness from substantial responsiveness to extreme neglect, with the majority experiencing a low level of responsiveness, particularly from fathers. This is consistent with previous findings, for example, of high rates of insecure attachment in prison samples. Interactions with caregivers who exhibit low levels of responsiveness are likely to lead to beliefs and expectations about others as unavailable and unresponsive. Further, this may well result in a lower likelihood of the individual utilising others for support, particularly in the context of emotional regulation. Indeed we have found in an earlier study that offender groups, in particular rapists and violent offenders, perceive themselves as receiving lower levels of support from their intimate relationships (Ward, Hudson, & McCormack, 1997) Another possibility is that the person will develop a range of behaviours

to secure responsiveness from caregivers which carry over to later relationships, for example the strategies that reflect the preoccupied and avoidant styles. An individual with a preoccupied style may go to considerable lengths to engage the attention of significant others, and in the extreme these appear as the behaviours associated with a borderline personality disorder. Alternatively, a person who has a more avoidant style may engage in coercive or aggressive behaviours to procure a response from others.

The next category to appear was that of consistency of caregivers and incorporated perceptions about the predictability, consistency, and reliability of care. Offenders described a considerable range of experiences from minimal consistency to substantial consistency. A caregiver may have been perceived as consistently reliable and responsive or consistently rejecting and violent. Alternatively, the caregiver may have been inconsistent, and therefore unpredictable. The means for the offender sample were slightly below midrange, that is somewhat inconsistent overall, however high standard deviations on this category suggested a wide variability. The most likely explanation of these findings is that whilst many offenders experienced their parents as inconsistent, many others found them to be consistent (for many, consistently negative). Some predictions can be made with respect to the impact of such experiences from an attachment perspective. Interactions with caregivers who are inconsistent may lead to high levels of anxiety in relationships and beliefs about others as untrustworthy and unpredictable. Alternatively, if parenting is consistently supportive and responsive, there is likely to be security in attachment and beliefs about others as reliable and trustworthy. Further, if the parenting is consistent, in the sense of being overcontrolling and failing to adapt to the child's individuality, then the person is likely to view themselves as incompetent and may experience a greater preoccupation with relationships outside of the primary attachment figure. Furthermore, when consistent parenting is to the extreme that it is rigid (even if generally positive), then the person may lack flexibility in their ability to make predictions about people other than the caregiver and therefore experience considerable anxiety outside primary attachment relationships. Clearly consistency is an important and complex construct.

The third category derived from the offender's perceptions of their interactions with caregivers was that of acceptance, referring to the offender's experience of caregivers as accepting, loving, and approving. Although this category ranged from acceptance to rejection, the majority of offenders described their parents, in particular their fathers, as very

rejecting. This is consistent with previous findings of more negative interactions with fathers in antisocial populations (Loeber, 1990). Interactions with rejecting caregivers are likely to lead to beliefs and expectancies about others as aversive and a sense of self as unworthy or defective. Depending on the predictability and malleability of the rejecting interaction, the person may develop strategies to avoid rejection, for example, avoiding intimacy or alternatively exhibiting behaviours to ensure approval.

The final category that arose to describe perceptions of caregivers was labeled boundaries. This category encompassed perceptions surrounding the parent's provision of supervision and discipline. Perceptions were rated from lax, undercontrolled approaches to firm limit-setting and adequate supervision. On average, offenders perceived their caregivers as providing boundaries somewhere in the middle of these two extremes suggesting a generally low level of boundaries. The experience of firm boundaries by an individual is involved in learning self-regulation, for example, internalising standards and learning to delay gratification. Lax, undercontrolled parenting leads to anxiety and increases the risk of failing to internalise society's rules and standards. Based on this low level of boundaries described by our offender sample, we would expect them to show a degree of impulsivity and disregard for social norms, common characteristics in offender populations.

Several categories emerged to explicate the participant's perceptions of self in interaction with their caregivers. The first of these was labeled emotional regulation and essentially referred to the offender's characteristic style with respect to modulation of emotional states, focusing on the degree to which they expressed emotion and sought support from others. The extremes on this dimension ranged from a defended regulation style to an expressive regulation style. The overall means for the offender groups were very low on this dimension, indicating that the majority of offenders were rated as emotionally defended. Given their previously described perceptions of their caregivers as mostly unresponsive and rejecting, it really comes as no surprise that our offender sample were reluctant to express their emotions to others. This would be because consistent experiences of low responsivity to emotional expression leads to the development expectations of negative consequences of expressing emotions to others, therefore contributing to an avoidant or defensive style of emotional regulation. Over time this style becomes entrenched as the person develops behavioural deficits in the identification and expression of emotion, and excesses in the avoidance of emotion. If this occurs at a very early stage in development,

then the skills involved in the identification and increasingly refined discrimination of emotion do not develop at all.

The next category related to perceptions of the self was titled autonomy. This category comprised the individual's perceptions about separateness of self in relationships and mastery over experience, and ranged from a positive sense of autonomy to enmeshment. The dismissiveness for the offender sample, which was not regarded as a positive sense of autonomy, was rating towards the middle on the autonomous side (around a 3). Overall offenders perceived themselves to be more autonomous than enmeshed on this dimension which is consistent with the general trends noted above, that is towards generally negative childhood experiences of relationships, which may well result in generally less value being placed upon interactions with others.

The final category describing the offender's perceptions of self was a general category called self-evaluation, which was broadly rated from positive to negative. Overall, offenders were rated as perceiving themselves as minimally more negative than positive. The standards deviations for this category were low, suggesting little variation across individuals. Given the high levels of rejection and low responsivity that the participants described in their caregiver relationships, negative self-evaluation is one understandable response. However, recent research has identified that self-evaluation is a complex, domain-specific and unstable construct. It seems that the complexity and variability of self-evaluation was not captured by this study, possibly due to the greater focus on relationships with others. Nevertheless, that a category was derived for self-evaluation, points to the importance of this construct in the offender's perceptions of their early interpersonal experiences. A task for future research will be to investigate this construct more thoroughly.

A number of additional categories were derived to account for a range of contextual interpersonal experiences and events. The presence of physical abuse was one such category. Offenders were rated on this dimension according to the severity and impact of the physical abuse they reported, from an absence to extreme violence. The overall means for this category were high, representing a substantial amount of disclosure of physical violence by all offender groups. Clearly the salience of such experiences is considerable for this population. Physical violence is typically associated with a high level of threat and would be expected to impact on the person's expectations and beliefs about the safety and hostility of other people and their personal vulnerability to dangerous events. Furthermore, these

experiences provide instances of modeling violent behaviours, attitudes towards violence and views about the integrity and value of other people. This may be possible mechanisms by which offenders learn to behave aggressively towards other people. Also relevant may be that view that threat creates high levels of emotional arousal energising any predisposing motivation the person has to act in an aggressive way.

The next category to emerge encompassed recollections of sexual deviation and abuse and was simply labeled as sexual abuse. The perceptions of the participants were rated on this dimension from an absence to extreme deviation or abuse, therefore providing an indication of severity. It is important to note for these categories, that the individual's perceptions may not reflect the reality of these experiences, instead represent they reconstructed memories of these events. Therefore ratings on these categories reflect the salience and meaning of these interpersonal events for individuals at the time of interview, not simply the frequency that such events occurred to them. Although experiences of sexual deviation and abuse were described by a number of the study's participants, this was to a lesser degree than for physical abuse. This may be because these experiences occurred less often or at lower severity than physical abuse, or because memory processes have made these experiences less salient or accessible for discussion with others. For those participants for whom experiences of sexual abuse were salient, we would expect this to be reflected in their perceptions of self and others, for example their ability to trust other people may be impaired. Further, these experiences may lead to the development of dysfunctional attitudes and expectations about sexual behaviour or impact on the person ability to modulate distress by external support.

The category of loss encapsulated the perceptions of loss reported by participants, including losses of parents, grandparents, pets and friends. The dimension was rated from an absence of loss to extreme loss, with respect to the frequency, severity and impact of the losses that the person recalled. The experience of loss was only notable for a minority of the study's participants. Perceptions of loss may be related to expectations of relationships as having a degree of instability or transience. It is unclear how this may relate to offending, though clearly high rates of loss have been documented in offender groups (Ryan & Lane, 1991). This raises the possibility of the impact of loss being greatest when a child loses their primary attachment relationship, as this leaves them vulnerable to an onslaught of less than ideal, often unstable, caregiver relationships for the remainder of their development.

A category called conflict was developed to code the degree of conflict and hostility in the family as perceived by the participant, and was rated from an absence to extreme conflict. Many of the participants described conflict in their families, and this appeared to be a more salient experience to offenders than were perceptions of sexual abuse and loss. It is clear from the marital conflict literature that conflict has deleterious effects on children, however it is not clear by what mechanism this occurs. It may well be that conflict between parents is associated with negative experiences for the child such as less responsiveness and the modeling of aggressive behaviours.

A broad category was formed to accommodate perceptions relating to safety and security within the home and family and was titled safety. Perceptions rated on this dimension ranged from feeling completely safe to experiencing the environment as dangerous. The overall means on this dimension indicate that a lack of safety was a memorable aspect of many offenders' early interpersonal relationships. This is consistent with the finding that the majority of our offender sample were insecurely attached as adults. A lack of safety would also be associated with beliefs about others as dangerous and untrustworthy, and a view of self as vulnerable and possibly helpless. Children from such environments are likely to develop a range of strategies with which to maximise safety in relationships, a common one being avoidance.

The final category of positive mediating interactions described positive attachment experiences that occurred outside of the primary caregiver relationships. These were rated from an absence to substantial interactions, depending on their frequency and impact as perceived by the participant. It appeared that for some offenders these experiences were perceived as important events in their early interpersonal histories. However, the overall means on this dimension indicate that this was the least salient interpersonal experience described by the participants in this study. This finding suggests that in addition to the generally negative attachment experiences of all the offender groups, there was a paucity of external supports and positive mediating experiences for this population. This means the potential for disconfirmation of negative beliefs about self and others, derived from primary caregiver relationships was minimal for this group. Whether this finding is characteristic of the majority of people or represents some feature inherent to offender groups is difficult to establish in the absence of norms for these types of experiences. Possible explanations for this finding may include temperamental/personality factors that make these children less

desirable to mentor or the self-perpetuating nature of social competency variables, in that children who experience poor caregiver attachments, are less likely to develop interpersonal styles and skills which elicit positive responses from others.

In summary, our group of offenders appear to have suffered a number of negative and disruptive early interpersonal experiences. This examination of the categories suggests that for most of our offender sample, they perceived their interactions with caregivers to involve high levels of neglect and rejection and low levels of supervision, discipline and consistency. Generally offenders were found to evaluate themselves negatively and describe a tendency to defend against emotions, rather than to seek support from other people. Perceptions of physical abuse were strikingly high, with a number of offenders also describing sexual abuse, loss of caregivers and conflict in the home. Further, there was a general dearth of perceptions of safety. Sadly, the early interpersonal experience described least often by all offender groups, was the presence of a positive mediating interaction. With such negative and disruptive early interpersonal experiences, it is of no surprise that the majority of the offenders (over 75%) in this study reported insecure attachment styles as adults. This is in contrast to normative samples where the majority (55-65%) of individuals rate themselves as securely attached.

The second aim of the study was to utilise these categories to investigate differences across offender groups. The most obvious finding from this analysis was that rapists and violent offenders shared a number of features of their early interpersonal relationships in common, and distinct from the child molesters and nonviolent offenders. Specifically, the fathers of rapists and violent offenders were less responsive than other groups, both mothers and fathers provided more lax boundaries than for other offender types, and both rapists and violent offenders experienced more physical abuse and less safety than other offenders. These results are consistent with predictions from the literature, which has suggested that higher rates of physical abuse in childhood are related to greater perceptions of danger and higher levels of coercive and aggressive behaviour (such as those more characteristic of rape and violent offending, than child molestation or nonviolent offences). Further, whilst no specific hypotheses were made with respect to parental style and boundaries, it has previously been suggested that aggressive, coercive behaviours may arise to secure the attention of unresponsive caregivers and those who provide poor supervision or are less involved in the child's activities (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). These behaviours

may also reflect a dismissive attachment style. Further, it has been argued that the rapists and violent offenders may have more in common, in terms of dismissing attachment styles, interpersonal and affect regulation deficits, and aggressive offense variables, than with other types of offenders (Hudson, Ward, & Marshall, 1997; Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997).

The significant finding for the responsiveness of fathers and not mothers, for rapists and violent offenders, in combination with the non-significant trend for the fathers of rapists to be less accepting (more rejecting) than for nonviolent offenders, points to the importance of offender's relationships with their fathers, at least for rapists and violent offenders. This is consistent with previous research which found that sexual offenders typically have more negative, problematic relationships with their fathers than they do with their mothers, and that this is more the case between rapists and their fathers, than with child molesters and their fathers (Lisak, 1994). It is likely that the negative father-son relationships that characterise the early interpersonal interactions of rapists and violent offenders, interact with the less boundaried interactions with mothers in the development of externalising behaviours, such as violence. Although consistent with the empirical literature, this result is in conflict with popular myths surrounding the crucial role of the mother in the causation of rapist's hostility towards women. It seems the role of the father in the development of both violent men and those who rape adult women is in need of greater recognition and understanding.

Our finding that child molesters described significantly more sexual deviation and abuse than rapists and nonviolent offenders, with violent offenders in middle, is also in keeping with the literature reviewed, where child molesters have been found to be at least twice as likely to acknowledge sexual abuse than rapists (e.g. Seghorn, Prentky & Boucher, 1987). The finding that violent offenders were also rated high on the dimension of sexual abuse was not predicted by the literature and represents an enigma. One possible explanation may be that parallel experiences of physical abuse and sexual violence, may reflect the greater disruption to attachment and increased vulnerability that the violent offenders experienced generally. However, because our category did not tally frequency of sexual abuse specifically, it is possible that this difference represents a more extreme severity of sexual abuse when it occurred, as opposed to higher frequencies of violent offenders experiencing

sexual abuse. This hypothesis would be in keeping with the findings of Prentsky and colleagues (1989) who relate severity of aggression to sexual abuse.

The findings of this study indicate that child molesters and violent offenders have a more negative evaluation of themselves than other groups. It has previously been argued that child molesters have a tendency towards fearful and preoccupied attachments, both of which are characterised by negative views of self. The present result is consistent with this pattern and with previous findings that child molesters possess a more negative view of themselves than other groups (Marshall & Mazzucco, 1995; Ward, McCormack, and Hudson, 1997). That violent offenders were also judged to have a more negative self-evaluation than other groups is interesting given the debate in the literature over whether high or low self-esteem is needed to aggress against others. Recent arguments have been made that high, unstable, self-esteem is linked to violence against others (Baumeister et al., 1996). Given that in this study, rapists along with nonviolent offenders, were found to have more positive self evaluations, it seems that these findings shed no light on this debate. One reason for this may be that the key ingredient highlighted by Baumeister and his colleagues, that of unstable self-esteem, was not delineated in the present study because of its proximal relationship to the offence, and not to the more distal factors investigated here, that of early interpersonal relationships. However, in discussing these group differences it is important to note, that although some offender groups had more positive self evaluations, overall the majority of offenders portrayed negative views of themselves. Possibly, the positive self-representations of adult offenders measured by researchers such as Baumeister, may combine actual and compensatory evaluations of self and therefore obscure important differences.

Negative evaluations of self are related to a sense of personal unworthiness and a lesser sense of autonomy. This relationship is reflected in the finding that child molesters experienced less autonomous attachment relationships than nonviolent offenders and rapists, with violent offenders again in the middle. This finding fits with previous literature that child molesters typically experience dependant relationships with their mothers (Tingle, et al., 1986) and the previously stated clinical observation that child molesters typically experience less boundaried relationships with their parents. The lesser degree of autonomy child molesters described may also be related to their greater tendency to exhibit fearful and preoccupied attachment styles, as both these attachment style desire intimate relationships

but see their attainment as problematic. This greater focus on others may be related to a higher sensitivity to rejection and tendency to seek other's approval, thereby linked to the characteristic offending behaviours of child molesters, which generally involve less overt violence and more grooming/courting behaviours. The greater autonomy of rapists may be related to dismissiveness, as opposed to the more positive experience of autonomy that would be expected for non-violent offenders.

The only categories where clear differences between the groups were not found were maternal responsiveness, maternal acceptance, consistency (both parents) and emotional regulation. Given the importance that the attachment literature places on maternal responsiveness, it is unclear why this study found no notable differences with respect to offender type on the derived categories of responsiveness and acceptance by mothers. Clearly the role of the father has more of a differentiating effect on offender type than the role of the mother, at least within an incarcerated group of offenders. However, given that maternal responsiveness and acceptance were generally low (albeit less so than for fathers) for each of the offender groups in this study, it is possible that this may represent a general vulnerability factor to offending. Investigation with community controls may help to clarify this point.

As previously stated there was no difference across offender types on the category of emotional regulation. Again this finding is somewhat puzzling and may simply reflect within group heterogeneity. However, as noted earlier, the majority of individuals in this study appeared to be at least somewhat emotionally defended. This may be related to being a male residing in a prison environment. Whether this result reflects male gender, a process of imprisonment or a general vulnerability to offending is difficult to ascertain. Again, investigation with a community control group would elucidate this issue. As it is likely that the later will be found to be the explanation, emotional regulation skills may be a useful target for preventative interventions.

Finally, that there was no significant difference between groups on the category of consistency is another mystery. Previous research has linked inconsistency, in the form of chaotic environments, loss and instability of caregiver relationships to the severity of aggression in sexual and violent offending (Prentky et al., 1989). In this study consistency combined this factor with the consistency of parenting style, possibly obscuring the difference. Further, the large standard deviations for this category may indicate that the

means concealed meaningful within group differences. However the severity of aggression involved in the sexual and violent crimes was not measured, therefore this association was not able to be examined. The role of future research could be to tease out some of these perplexities.

These results support the increasingly accepted notion that sexual offenders do not represent a homogenous group (Hudson, Ward, & Marshall, 1997). Certainly it seems that a simple division between sexual offenders and other criminal offenders is not warranted. In this study, there was not one factor in which both groups of sexual offenders concurrently differed from the other groups. In fact, it seems that at least with respect to their early interpersonal relationships, rapists have more in common with violent offenders than they do with child molesters. This fits with both the general literature and our previous findings in terms of intimacy variables (Ward, McCormack & Hudson, 1997). Child molesters were in many respects more similar to the nonviolent offenders, with the only aspects of early interpersonal relationships as specifically highlighted as more salient for them, being the presence of a history of sexual deviation or abuse and generally less autonomy in relationships.

In summary, it can be seen that sexual and violent offenders described a greater degree of disruption to their early interpersonal relationships than non-violent offenders, who tended to report less rejection, firmer boundaries (equivalent to the child molesters), greater autonomy, more positive self-evaluations, less sexual abuse (equivalent to rapists), less physical abuse, and a greater sense of safety (equivalent to the child molesters), than other offender types. These are all aspects of early interpersonal experiences which are likely to lead to more secure and positive representations of self and others, in addition to facilitating social cohesion, affect regulation and empathy. Together these variables may protect the individual from violating the integrity and boundaries of other people and society, and therefore reduce the likelihood of committing crimes of a sexual or violent nature.

The third aim of the study was to make use of the categories to look at the relative differences between the perceptions of mothers and fathers across the offender groups. In terms of responsiveness, fathers were perceived as less responsive than mothers, in particular by rapists. In terms of the acceptance category, fathers were rated as less accepting (more rejecting) by rapists, and to a lesser extent by child molesters. Finally, for all

offender groups, fathers were rated as less consistent and more boundaried than mothers. These results are consistent with the general literature where negative relationships with fathers, in conjunction with more benign and less boundaried interactions with mothers, have been documented in the histories of both sexual and violent offenders. Once again these findings highlight the salience of rejection and neglect by fathers, in the perceptions that rapists offer of their early interpersonal relationships.

The fourth aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between the attachment style reported by the offenders in their adult romantic relationships and their perceptions of early attachment relationships. There were few significant results with attachment style as an independent variable. However, consistent with predictions from the attachment literature, dismissing individuals perceived their early attachment relationships as generally more positive than other attachment styles. More specifically, the dismissing group rated their fathers as more responsive and accepting, were judged to evaluate themselves more positively, reported higher levels of safety, and indicated that their families experienced less conflict. These findings are consistent with the positive evaluation of self and the strong denial of negative emotional experience that is the function of the dismissive type, even if seemingly paradoxical.

Also consistent with predictions from the attachment literature, is the finding that the preoccupied group were rated as having the most negative self-perception. This is likely to reflect the negative internal view of self that Bartholomew (1990) described as a distinctive feature of the preoccupied attachment style. Also compatible with predictions was the non-significant trend of the preoccupied group to be less autonomous than secure individuals. Relatedly, their fathers were perceived by them to be significantly less responsive and accepting and they described less conflict in their relationships with their caregivers. These findings probably reflect the discrepancy between reality and their greater idealisation of and preoccupation with relationships.

Along with the preoccupied group, the fearful group were judged to evaluate themselves more negatively than other groups. Again, this is consistent with the negative view of self that is predicted for this attachment style. That their fathers were found to be more rejecting, and that there was a non-significant trend towards experiencing their environments as more unsafe, are also consistent with the negative and untrustworthy views of others that is characteristic of fearful attachment.

Secure individuals, whilst less numerous than the insecure styles were found to be more likely to rate their fathers as accepting, themselves as autonomous and their environments as conflictual than other groups. Although these results are consistent with predictions from the attachment literature, for example, that secure attachment relationships derive from sensitive and responsive caregiving, lead to the development of security and autonomy in relationships, and allow the individual to present a balanced view of their attachment relationships, it is puzzling that more significant results were not found on the other categories. For example, a higher level of maternal responsiveness and acceptance would be expected with secure attachment. The nonsignificant trend that the secure group experienced their early environments as more unsafe than other groups is another puzzle. One possible explanation for this, is the greater access that secure people have to their negative emotional states. This may have led to a greater degree of acknowledgement of anxiety (less denial) in their perceptions of their attachment relationships. This possibility raises profound questions as to how this sort of data best be accessed both in research and more generally in assessment.

It would also appear from the present study that experiences of sexual and physical abuse, loss of caregivers and positive mediating interactions had no significant relationship to specific attachment styles. Further, given the importance of responsiveness, consistency, and maternal acceptance to developing attachment styles and that attachment style is meant to reflect a system of emotional regulation, the absence of significant findings on these variables requires an explanation. One possibility may be that the Relationship Questionnaire is too crude a measure of attachment style. Alternatively, the derived categories may be too broad to assess such subtle differences between attachment styles. An even more finegrained analysis may be required. Another possible explanation could be that our data set was relatively brief and therefore the ability to make detailed comparisons was limited. Finally it is also possible that the similarities in the early interpersonal experiences of the prison inmates may obscure the differences.

### **Implications of the Present Study**

The findings of this study raise a number of important issues and questions. The 13 categories derived from the interviews point to the diversity and complexity of offender's perceptions of the early interpersonal experiences. These categories represent an unpacking

of the phenomenology of the interpersonal experiences that underlie the typically insecure, adult attachment styles and interpersonal difficulties that predominate in offender groups. The categories are consistent with the review of the literature which identified a wide range of dysfunctional family relationships and traumatic interpersonal events associated with different offending behaviours and styles. Further, these categories complement the research on attachment style and intimacy deficits in offender samples, by providing further evidence for disruptive attachment relationships in these populations and the pointing to the influence of these on ongoing perceptions and presentation. This study highlights the distinction between the historical events themselves, and the ongoing perceptions of early interpersonal experiences, these perceptions or reconstructed memories being the mechanism by which early experiences continue to influence the attitudes, expectations, strategies and behaviours of individuals in their adult interactions. These perceptions have not usually been a focus of assessment or therapeutic interventions, yet clearly play a major role in mediating ongoing experiences. The approach developed in this study allows clinicians to identify the specific perceptions of early interpersonal experiences with relevance to the range of adult attachment styles, intimacy deficits and offending behaviours. Interview data can be coded using the dimensions and in conjunction with questionnaire data and information from significant others, and can help the clinician to pinpoint problematic interpersonal issues and set appropriate therapy goals.

One major finding of the present study was that sexual offenders received ratings on a range of dimensions which indicated negative perceptions of their early interpersonal experiences. Another major finding was that these deficits were to a large extent shared by violent offenders, and nonviolent offenders though to a lesser degree. These findings suggest that negative attachment experiences may represent a generalised vulnerability factor leading to the development of a variety of offending patterns and life problems. This is consistent with the high level of general psychopathology found in these population (Hudson & Ward, 1996), as well as our previous findings that incarcerated sexual and violent offenders have a range of intimacy deficits in common (Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997). Further, this finding highlights the salience of these experiences for all offender groups and suggests that clinicians need to carefully evaluate early attachment relationships and their impact when working with these populations. Furthermore, these findings also support the notion that the

targets for psychological treatment should probably be less offense specific and more related to aspects of social competence (Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997).

However, whilst negative perceptions of early interpersonal relationships appears to represent a generalised vulnerability factor to offending, this study also found that the offender groups varied in their perceptions of some, specific early interpersonal experiences. For example, the findings that rapists and violent offenders perceived more negative interactions with fathers, greater physical abuse, less safety and fewer boundaries, whilst child molesters described more sexual deviation and abuse, is highly likely to have etiological significance. These perceptions probably have specific and offense-related implications for internal working models of self, others and strategies for interacting in the world. Consequently there are a number of implications for treatment. Most obviously, these findings reflect the reality that violent offenders and rapists are notoriously reluctant to enter therapeutic relationships. Based on their perceptions, these types of offenders usually experience relationships (including therapeutic ones) as unsafe, aversive and best avoided or used coercively for self-enhancement. Concepts of trust and emotional intimacy are frequently alien to them, and certainly not desirable. The primary role of the therapist with these men is therefore to establish safety in the therapeutic relationship, with the major focus being on the development of a positive therapeutic alliance. Over time the issue of boundaries is likely to appear requiring a greater than usual flexibility and persistence with the maintenance of these. Broadly speaking, child molesters are likely to represent different therapeutic challenges associated with their greater likelihood of fearful and preoccupied attachment styles and more frequent perceptions of sexual deviation and abuse. Specifically, child molesters with fearful and preoccupied attachment styles may require therapeutic input focusing on restructuring their negative self-evaluations and enhancing their sense of autonomy. Further, those with preoccupied styles may need assistance to challenge their often idealised expectations of relationships, whilst fearful individuals are in particular need of experiencing positive relationships, both to enhance their sense of trust and from which to develop positive expectations about others. As these styles both reflect insecure attachments there is a likelihood of considerable anxiety within relationships and difficulties with the regulation thereof. Therapists need to be aware of these possibilities, which again points to the importance of a safe therapeutic alliance. Finally, the more salient perceptions of sexual

deviation and abuse by child molesters points to a specific target for treatment with this offender type.

One of the most dramatic findings of the study was the presentation bias associated with the various attachment styles. The defensiveness of dismissive individuals, for example, their minimisation of negative emotional experiences, idealised accounts of relationships and generally vague and incoherent recall, has major implications for the use of self-report in assessment. Questions are also raised about accessing emotionally laden material in therapy with these individuals. Clearly, their defensiveness serves a function, presumably the regulation of anxiety in intimate relationships. Clinicians need to respect this function and find a balance between gaining access to therapeutic material and avoiding retraumatisation. This may be achieved by use of therapeutic styles, such as Briere's "therapeutic window" approach (1995). Clearly, greater attention needs to be paid to the therapeutic climate than is the case currently. More generally, clinicians working with offenders should to be aware of the presentation biases associated with the different attachment styles. This is because of their impact on the offenders ease of self-disclosure, comfort with therapeutic intimacy and strategies for the regulation of emotion. These issues will be further highlighted when working with offenders in groups.

Another implication of the high levels of insecure attachment in offenders is the potential for cognitive deconstruction and dissociation under high levels of anxiety, such as that which might be expected to occur with the emotional closeness of a therapeutic relationship or group treatment. This seems to highlight the value of a non-confrontational approach to therapy, such as that advocated by Beck with his notion of 'collaborative empirism'. It is somewhat puzzling that the predominant style of therapy with offender populations, that is of confrontation, is the style most likely to evoke such negative processes in the client

The focus of this study has been on distal influences upon behaviours, albeit by accessing current perceptions. This is in contrast to research which examines factors proximal to the offending (for example, investigations of cognitive distortions, e.g., Fon, Ward, Hudson, & McCormack, 1998), the significance in this approach lies in the focus of attention on variables further back in the etiological chain, thereby making opportunities for early identification and prevention more obvious. Clearly, historical events cannot be regarded as causes of present behaviour. As stated, events have their influence on the

person's construction of internal working models of self, others and the environment, and it is these which provide the guide for ongoing processing and behaviours. However, in early identification and prevention the aim is to identify "at risk" populations and expose them to experiences which ameliorate their risk to some degree. Such experiences are probably most valuable when they prevent negative events from occurring, for example, preventing the occurrence of sexual abuse. However, there is also value in mediating between events and the development of perceptions, for example, with the provision of support upon disclosure of sexual abuse. Alternatively the provision of experiences which provide discrepant information to existing perceptions, such as a positive mentoring relationship may go some way towards an individual developing more flexible, positive expectancies about self and others.

Finally, along with other recent research, this study highlights the importance of the father-son relationships in the development of violent and sexually aggressive behaviours. Further, rejection, neglect and inconsistency by fathers appears to occur in the context of poor boundaries by both parents, and a generally a negative mother-son relationship. It seems that for these offenders there is an absence of positive, responsive, accepting, consistent and bounded experiences from which to learn vital skills, such as empathy and emotional regulation, and that this is reflected in their more coercive and violent behaviours towards others. This finding has general implications for assessment, treatment, prevention and societal values and practices. Specifically it seems that in contrast to popular belief, the role of fathers has major implications for development, at least for sexually aggressive and violent men. We can see that society minimises the value of father-son relationships when we examine popular attitudes, the general contributions of fathers to parenting, the outcomes of custody arrangements and disputes and even the psychological literature on attachment. This study suggests that this is a trend in dire need of transformation. This transformation probably needs to occur within the context of a greater general awareness of the factors which constitute positive parenting and promote the development of children. Certainly the men in this study have not experienced the type of early interpersonal interactions which promote positive views of self and others, or which assist in the development of such vitally important skills as empathy and emotional regulation. A major role of future research will be the delineation of interpersonal interactions that have positive and protective influences. This will allow both prevention and treatment efforts to focus

attention on variables that make a difference to the interpersonal competencies of both potential and actual offenders.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

This study represents a preliminary, exploratory study which aimed to describe the early interpersonal experiences of sexual offenders and as is always the case there were a number of limitations in the design. With respect to the participants, there are limitations as to how representative a sample of incarcerated offenders are when they represent only a minority of those who commit offenses. The incarcerated group may have the most severe difficulties or dysfunction or there may be some other reason why they have detected and been through the court process. Arguably, this may reflect social competency variables (Ward, 1998). Further, to a certain extent offender groups represent heterogeneous and relatively meaningless categories (Hudson & Ward, 1998).

There are always constraints in carrying out research in a correctional setting. Foremost, participants may be reluctant to disclose information they perceive (incorrectly) may negatively impact on their sentence or parole. Related to the issue of disclosure is the difficulties with trust that are intrinsic to offender groups (Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997). Also notable is the possible impact of being in prison for committing a crime on an individual's perceptions, for example, individuals in this situation may be attempting to rationalise or justify their behaviours by perceiving historical events as causal of their crime. This may increase their motivation to convince other people (e.g., researchers) of the same.

A number of limitations in design are evident. As already highlighted, there are problems with the self-report of early attachment experiences in that attachment style has direct influences on recall, introspection, aggregation and interpretation of experience. More generally, perceptions may represent tenuous links to reality and there are the usual constraints associated with retrospective analysis. This problem was exacerbated by the collection of only one source of data which was not validated by other sources. More specifically, the interview and data set was possibly too brief and some of the constructs that arose from the participants descriptions were not directly queried.

That the categories were applied to the same group for analysis represents the major weakness of this study. Future research will require replication of the categories and

comparisons, which will include applying the categories to an independent sample and incorporating a community control group.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The preliminary results of this study suggests that future research is needed to tease out more carefully the nature and severity of the early interpersonal experiences of sexual offenders. It is also clear that these issues are pertinent to non-sexual offenders, and research with these populations will also need to consider these variables and their influences. An integrated measurement approach is favored where multiple methods (e.g., interview data, questionnaires and experimental methods) to provide a clearer picture of why, and how, these experiences are related to sexual crimes.

The use of interview data is unquestionably a helpful source of data in research on sexual offending and interpersonal experiences (Ward, McCormack, & Hudson, 1997) and complements information obtained from other avenues such as file review. It is recommended that future research attempt to delineate the variables identified in this study with a more comprehensive, unstructured interview. This would allow a more finegrained analysis to permit researchers to investigate the relevant constructs more thoroughly. Another interesting avenue of investigation would be to make comparisons between sources of data that assess individual perceptions, such as interview data, and those that may link more closely with actual experience, such as hospital and psychiatric files.

Highlighted by this research was the similarity of prison samples in terms of perceptions of their early interpersonal experiences. This was made obvious by the absence of findings for a number of variables with theoretical significance, for example, maternal responsivity. Future research should include a community control group and a community based group of offenders to make more explicit the reason for this paucity of results, to allow general comparisons between offender and non-offender groups and to clarify differences between incarcerated and community samples. Related to this is the already stated need to replicate this study with an independent sample.

Although this study documents that our offender sample perceived their early interpersonal histories in a generally negative way, and that specific perceptions were related to particular offending and attachment styles, we did not address the link between these perceptions and sexual offending. Further, we did not determine the direction of causality, or

consider contributions of individual's functioning, such as temperamental variables, to their attachment interactions. This was only a preliminary study and the role of future research will be to elucidate the nature of these experiences and to connect them with more comprehensive theories of sexual offending.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the limitations outlined notwithstanding, the current study provides evidence that the early interpersonal experiences of offenders are overwhelmingly negative, and for rapists and violent offenders, the most negative of these experiences were with their fathers. We all need to take heed of these findings, for there are major implications for the almost universal experience of parenting. As yet we know little about what constitutes the types of caregiving experiences which create individuals who commit crimes against people and society. This study is a major leap forward, in understanding from the perceptions of offenders, the range of early interpersonal experiences that may contribute to their development. That the picture is so negative, converges with the emerging picture of incarcerated offenders as interpersonally disadvantaged individuals. What is new from this study, is that the origins of this disadvantage have now been traced to the early interpersonal experiences of offenders. The task of researchers, clinicians, and politicians is therefore to direct attention and resources to the promotion of positive early interpersonal experiences, for example parenting, in the hope that they will have positive outcomes for individuals and society alike.

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## APPENDIX

**Close Relationships: Information Sheet**

The aim of this project is to look at the relationship between the way men in prison feel about close relationships, the way they see problems in these relationships, and how they see the sorts of behaviours that brought them into prison.

**Your Tasks:** It will involve you filling out some questionnaires and being asked some questions about your relationships and reasons for being in prison, and your file being reviewed by one of the researchers.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study will be appreciated but is entirely up to you. There are no personal advantages for you as far as the prison system is concerned, in either agreeing to participate in this study, or disadvantages if you decline. It will not have any effect on your chances for parole or the outcome of any other prison matter.

**Confidentiality:** All information collected from you will remain confidential. Information will be securely stored at the university and only have code numbers on it, not your name. The research will be written up for publication but only groups averages and the like will be reported. There will be no way in which any one individual would be able to be identified.

**Risks Associated with Participation:** There are no obvious risks associated with this research project.

**Time required:** Approximately one and half to two hours.

**Name of Researchers:** Dr Tony Ward, Dr Steve Hudson, Ms. Julie McCormack

I have read the description of this research project above and agree to participation under these conditions. I know that I may stop being involved at any point, and that this will cause no difficulties for me.

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_