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YouTube Commenters' Discourse of Paedophilia: A Qualitative Social Media Analysis

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Abstract

Quantitative studies have found that although most of the general public holds negative attitudes towards people with paedophilia (PWP), a range of views exist. Nevertheless, these studies provide limited insight into the specific details or variety of attitudes or emotions. This qualitative study aimed to better understand public attitudes towards PWP by exploring how the public reacts to talks about paedophilia given by credentialled experts on social media. Seven such talks, which met our specific inclusion criteria, were selected from YouTube, and public comments on these talks were analysed. The top 100 comments of each video were selected, followed by a saturation strategy. This led to 1234 comments being coded and thematically analysed. Six key themes and eight subthemes were generated, thematically grouped into Haters (sub-themes: 'violent' and 'sophisticated'), Critics (sub-themes: 'victim erasure' and 'not a sexual orientation'), Fence-sitters (sub-themes: 'ambivalent' and 'dispassionate arguers') and Supporters' (sub-themes: 'implicit confirmers' and 'compassionate supporters'). These themes reflected a spectrum of views. At one pole, Haters exhibited absolute abhorrence and a desire to dismiss the speaker, whilst, at the other pole, Supporters showed empathy towards non-offending PWP and endorsed the speaker's perspective. Extremely polarised conversations, commonly evidencing anger and sarcasm and emphasis on the concept of help, were found across dissenting voices. These findings help us better understand the variety of public attitudes and responses to expert-delivered information on paedophilia. The effects of perceived social attitudes on PWP well-being and help-seeking behaviours, which can help prevent offending, require further exploration.

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Introduction

Paedophilia has been defined as a sexual preference for pre-pubescent children (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is estimated to have a prevalence of between 0.1 and 5%, being more common in men than women (Dombert et al., 2016; Seto, 2018). While a sexual preference for prepubescent children is a risk factor for committing child sexual abuse (CSA; Bailey et al., 2016a; Seto, 2018), there is a tendency among the general public to overestimate the link between paedophilia and CSA (Jahnke, 2018a). It has been estimated that around half of identified sex offenders against children do not have paedophilia (Seto, 2018), or such offending being driven by other comorbid conditions such as impulse-control disorders (Tenbergen et al., 2015) or antisociality (Seto, 2018). Contrary to popular belief, not all people with paedophilia (PWP) commit CSA, and many live offence-free lives (Bailey et al., 2016b; Berlin, 2014; Cantor & McPhail, 2016; Seto, 2018). Despite this, paedophilia and CSA are often conflated and used as synonymous (Goode, 2010; Jahnke & Hoyer, 2013).

Two main factors have contributed to such conflation and the stereotypical portrayal that equates individuals with paedophilic interests with those who have sexually offended against children. The first factor is a severe sampling bias in research. Until the last decade, almost all studies about paedophilia relied on forensic populations (Jahnke & Hoyer, 2013; Jahnke, 2018a). The second factor is the media. As a key source of public knowledge, the media has significantly contributed to the contemporary social construction of paedophilia (McCartan, 2014) by reinforcing common stereotypes (Ischebeck et al., 2021; Kitzinger, 2004). The disproportionate focus of the media and tabloid headlines on high-profile perpetrators of CSA (Kitzinger, 2004; McCartan, 2014), routinely labelled as "paedophiles", has helped the word "paedophile" pass from sexology and psychological discourse into the popular language (Berlin, 2014; Tomsen, 2009), often inaccurately. As societal disgust forces PWP to live in secrecy, it is difficult for the public to re-evaluate any misperceptions they may hold surrounding PWP.

To address public misunderstanding, some experts have employed the media, including social media platforms, to deliver evidence-based talks about PWP. Some scholars have argued that debunking myths and misperceptions about paedophilia and CSA is an important way to prevent sexual offending against children (Harper et al., 2018; Jahnke et al, 2014). It is believed that the mental burden of concealing stigmatised sexuality, fear of negative social attitudes and internalisation of such attitudes (Lievesley et al, 2020; Meyer, 2003) render PWP susceptible to distress (Jahnke et al., 2015b; Jahnke, 2018b). Fear of being discovered leads to diminished social and emotional functioning in PWP (Jahnke et al., 2015b) and also creates a barrier to accessing support services (Corrigan, 2004; Grady et al., 2019; Moss, 2019). Social revulsion may also push PWP into seclusion, making them vulnerable to assimilating into subcultures that endorse child–adult relationships, increasing the probability of offending behaviours (Goode, 2010; Jahnke, 2018a; Lasher & Stinson, 2017).

Understanding public attitudes towards PWP is crucial because these views impact PWP's self-perception and influence their expectations of others (Jahnke et al., 2015b). For instance, the prediction of facing discrimination or rejection from others can hinder the motivation to seek help (Vogel & Wade, 2009). Furthermore, public attitudes towards PWP are usually reflected in policy preferences which can either facilitate or impede the implementation of preventive, early intervention strategies that help this population live healthy, offence-free lives (Harper, 2016).

There has been growing research interest in measuring attitudes towards PWP. Previous studies have reported negative emotional responses (e.g., anger, disgust, fear) and negative, punitive attitudes towards PWP in the general public (Boardman & Bartels, 2018; Imhoff, 2015; Jahnke et al., 2015a). However, in a public survey (Jahnke et al., 2015a), a broader spectrum of perspectives were found. While 97% of respondents agreed that "people who are dominantly sexually interested in children but have never committed a crime" (i.e., non-offending PWP) posed a danger to children, a considerable percentage of respondents indicated that they either would not socially distance themselves from PWP or were uncertain about it. For example, when asked whether they would have a person with a dominant sexual interest in children as a friend, approximately 7% of the sample agreed, and around 8% said they were 'uncertain' (by choosing a rating of 3, which was the midpoint of a 7-point Likert scale running from 0, *do not agree at all*, to 6, *completely agree*). Similarly, around 10% agreed they would accept such a person in their neighbourhood, with 11% being uncertain, and approximately 14% agreed they would accept such a person as a work colleague, with around 11% being uncertain (see Table 1 of Jahnke et al., 2015a).

Such quantitative surveys do not allow participants to explain or justify their attitudes outside of a controlled research setting. Qualitative work is needed to help us better understand the reasons underpinning public views about PWP. The current exploratory study aimed to understand public reactions to PWP by examining comments left by the users in response to expert-delivered presentations on YouTube about paedophilia. Several experimental studies have shown that educational interventions can effectively challenge inaccurate assumptions and decrease negative affective responses and punitive attitudes towards PWP (Harper et al., 2018; Heron et al., 2021; Jahnke et al., 2014). Yet, public responses to educational content about paedophilia through social media have rarely been investigated (Theaker, 2015). This qualitative study hence aimed to identify patterns of public attitudes and explore how social media users articulate their attitudes or emotions following exposure to evidence-based information about paedophilia on YouTube.

Methods

Our central question was, 'How do the public react to expert delivered presentations on paedophilia in the public sphere?' A qualitative design is the most suitable to capture a socially situated phenomenon from the public perspective. We chose YouTube, the second most popular website globally after Google, which provides a

rich data source for qualitative inquiry with its comment function (Thelwall, 2018). Secondary data is a valuable source to access people's perspectives and attitudes without shaping responses through the researcher's mindset (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Unlike surveys, there is no concern over inattentive or random responses since social media users leave comments voluntarily.

Video Selection

Between November to December 2021, the terms "paedophilia", "paedophilic disorder", and "child sexual abuse" were searched on YouTube. Searches were carried out at the beginning, middle, and end of the month. The practical reason for the time limit criteria was to make the data more manageable. Purposive sampling was performed to identify videos that met the studies' inclusion criteria. Five inclusion criteria were used to search videos on YouTube: (1) The video discusses the topic of paedophilia; (2) The video represents the opinion of a credentialled expert; (3) The language of the video is English; (4) The video has been published in the last five years; (5) The comment section of the video is on. We evaluated the accuracy of each video by watching the content and checking the experts' backgrounds. For a video to be deemed to represent the opinion of an expert, it had to be given by a credentialled scholar with specialities in the field of mental health or sexology. Some of the resultant videos were given by leading scholars/practitioners in the field of paedophilia and sexual offending. Videos were authored by organisations or professionals' channels. Both semantic and metadata elements were considered in the YouTube query, as suggested by Mayr and Weller (2016). Semantic elements (criterion 1–2) include word searches on YouTube and screening videos. Metadata (criterion 3–5) includes other structural criteria such as time, language, and accessibility. In the screening process, we defined a set of exclusion criteria to discard ineligible YouTube items such as podcasts, non-scientific videos (e.g., arguments about politicians, religious leaders, celebrities, and vigilante content), documentaries, and other cinematic products. After one month of undertaking multiple searches, seven videos were found that met the inclusion criteria.

Video Content

The seven videos included in this study were all produced for a general audience. They lasted between 5 and 28 min. Expert speakers discussed issues, including the biological basis of paedophilia and the effects of stigma, shame, and isolation that PWP face. In five videos, intervention methods were explained. Raising awareness about non-offending PWP was one of the central themes in all videos. Experts disproved myths about paedophilia and CSA and challenged common misperceptions and stereotypes (e.g., that paedophilia is a chosen condition, that PWP are inevitably "criminal" or "sociopaths", that those who sexually abuse minors are all "out-group", "dangerous" middle-aged male strangers, that all child sex offenders are paedophilic, and that the sexual drive of PWP is uncontrollable). One video

included a first-person perspective of a non-offending man, along with an expert opinion. In another video, a short narrative from a person with paedophilia was read by the expert.

Data Gathering and Sampling Strategy

MAXQDA 20 (VERBI Software, 2022) was used to download the comments made on our selected videos. Since the collected data was too large for our research purpose (more than 10,000 comments), this necessitated a post-collection sampling strategy. Depending on the goal and scope of a study, as well as the characteristics of the datasets and platforms, various sampling strategies in social media research have been introduced (Kim et al., 2018; Mayr & Weller, 2016). These include keyword frequency (Thelwall, 2018), setting a period for collecting data units (e.g., tweets, posts, comments) (Evans et al., 2012), simple random sampling (Attard & Coulson, 2012), analysing all available data units (Rodham et al., 2013), purposefully choosing the richest units of data (Gough, 2007), focusing on the first x number or most recent x number of data units (Brendan Gough, personal communication), or combining two strategies such as time and saturation point (Altinok et al., 2021). There appears to be no agreed standard for sampling data on social media. Therefore, it falls to the individual researcher to choose the most suitable strategy according to their research question, data volume and characteristics, the platform, and the extent of their intended analyses.

In the present study, we used a mixed sampling plan. We chose the first 100 comments (if available) and continued coding comments until we reached thematic saturation. In videos with less than 100 comments, all comments were included (leading to a total of 582 comments being coded from seven videos). We reached saturation after screening over 2000 comments and coding 720 other comments (See Table 1). Although at least four different models of data saturation have been introduced (Saunders et al., 2018), in this research, we consider data saturation as a point when nothing new appears in the data. The mixed sampling plan helps us ensure rigour and offset potential unintentional bias, balancing a manageable amount of data with sufficient breadth and depth.

The sorting algorithm of comments employed by YouTube works based on combined divergent variables, including time of posting, like or dislike ratio of a comment, the overall level of engagement that each user's comments create on YouTube, and the number of replies (Baig & Dixon, 2019). This YouTube feature makes it justifiable to select the first 100 comments that appear on the top of the comment section: Comments that stand on the top represent the most popular (liked) or unpopular (disliked) opinions that generate the most arguments (replies) among users and might be considered the richest part of the data. YouTube comments are mostly sequential conversation threads rather than independent data units. Users' replies to each other's comments generate a network of interactions that adds layers of thickness to the data. This contextualisation has been emphasised in social media research (Latzko-Toth et al., 2016). Our approach of selecting the first 100 data units

Table 1 Sampling process

Video #	Total comments	Comments coded
1	56	56
2	92	92
3	1792	436 (100 + 336)
4	8,497	389 (100 + 289)
5	391	195 (100 + 95)
6	51	51
7	83	83
Total	10,962	1302
Less unintelligible/off-topic comments		68
Total		1234

as the most representative part of the dataset may not be suitable for other online platforms such as webpages or blogs.

In the data extraction and coding process by MAXQDA 20, off-topic, non-English, unintelligible, and duplicate comments were filtered out (n = 68). Comments for marketing purposes or those with links to other channels or videos were also removed from the analysis (Table 1).

Analytic Approach

Comments were coded using a complete coding approach in which the researcher codes all data units relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). We labelled comment excerpts descriptively (data-derived or semantic codes) in the initial coding phase. In the next step, we delved through the dataset to consolidate, retrieve, or merge codes that led to drawing connections between codes on broader, more conceptual levels. For instance, one of the themes we developed from our coding is called "Fence-sitters". The theme evolved based on 86 codes that were first labelled descriptively (such as "hesitation" and "inconvenience", in examples like "I am not sure how to react", and "It is uncomfortable yet informative"). Drawing on these codes that all represent a common feature of ambivalence without expressing a dominant affirmative or critical view, we developed the theme "Fence-sitters" at the conceptual level of analysis. We followed the thematic analysis method, in which patterns (themes) within data are identified, analysed, and reported without needing to be tied to a particular theory (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Themes were identified in a data-driven, "bottom-up" way, based on what we found in the data.

Trustworthiness

Initial coding was done by AN. Two other researchers (SMJ and SF) independently re-coded 50 comments (100 in total) randomly. While the positivist notion of

reliability (as a form of replicability[1]) is epistemologically at odds with subjective, socially located knowledge produced in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013), re-coding in the present study was employed to ensure the trustworthiness, communicability, and transparency of the coding process within the research team and to reach a consensual interpretation of the data (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The small amounts of discrepancies that occurred were discussed among the researchers. Differences were mainly due to utilising different labels to describe the same concept rather than conflicting interpretations. For instance, comments with highly negative attitudes were labelled as "violence", "aggression", and "insult" by three coders.

This project is part of a wider project focusing on understanding the experience and effects of hatred towards people with paedophilic interests. The focus of the researchers on the topic of hate had the potential to lead to negative comments being more salient in our analyses and in the creation of the resultant themes. A reflective awareness was hence maintained.

Ethical Considerations

The research proposal was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Medicine, Trinity College Dublin. We followed social media research guidelines (ESOMAR/GRBN, 2011; Roberts & Sipes, 2018; Williams et al., 2017) to avoid making sensitive personal information (such as IDs) identifiable. Therefore, we neither include the list of YouTube videos nor the speakers' identities here to protect commenters' online identities, given the topic's highly sensitive nature. Due to rapidly developing software technologies, tracing YouTube comments may become possible by searching verbatim quotes. To avoid the ethical challenges of reporting social media data verbatim (Williams et al., 2017), we adopted a synthesising strategy recommended by social media guidelines (ESOMAR/GRBN, 2011; Markham, 2012; Townsend & Wallace, 2016). To mask or depersonalise comments, we selected representative elements of real quotes that were thematically and linguistically identical. We composed original comments that are not traceable to an identifiable individual or interaction yet contain words and content of tens of similar comments.

Results

We found six key themes and eight subthemes across and within the data. Four themes (Haters, Critics, Fence-sitters, and Supporters) distinguished commenters from each other and reflected conceptual patterns of attitudes towards people with paedophilia across and within comments based on the correlation/tension between "hate" and "compassion". Themes describe patterns across the data rather than across individual commenters.

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[1] Replicability in the positivitist view refers to the possibility of generating the same results when the same measures/procedures are administered by different researchers.
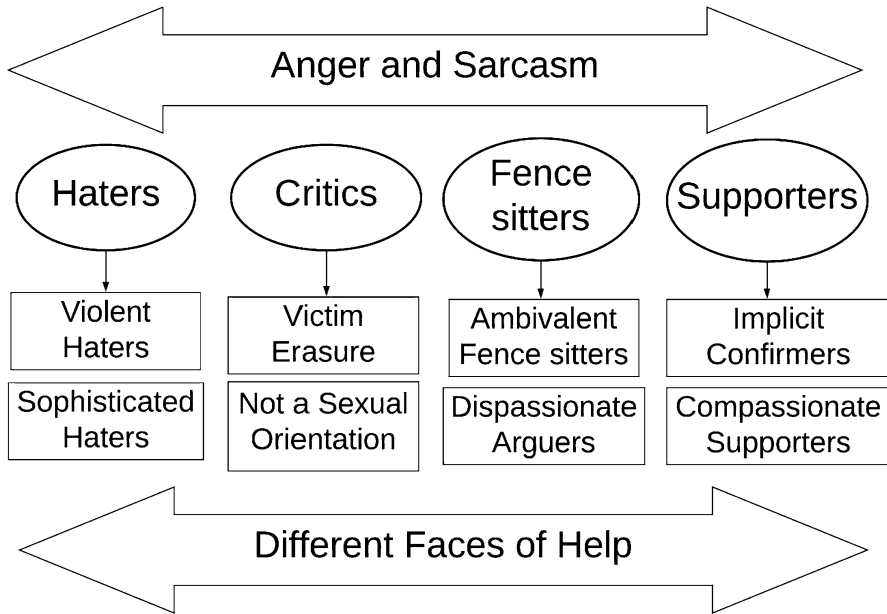
Fig. 1 Themes and Subthemes Map

Two other themes ("Anger and Sarcasm", "Different Faces of Help") can be described as overarching themes that engulfed other thematic clusters (see Fig. 1). In other words, we observed these two themes indiscriminately across different groups of commenters.

Theme 1: Haters

Hate was a consistent theme permeating accounts of many audiences, with two subthemes:

Subtheme 1: Violent Haters

A theme was identified of comments that displayed hate, violence, and anger towards PWP, the speaker or other commenters. In this report, we avoid restating some examples that contain explicit, graphic content. Violent Haters considered a person with paedophilia a "dangerous monster", a "sub-human evil" who did not deserve any rights. Composite examples of these strong expressions of contempt and knee-jerk reactions include: "I believe we must judge these […] harshly".; "Maybe the best thing for them is to kill themselves".; "They should be euthanised. It's the only cure".

Death threats, requests for the elimination and torture of PWP, humiliating messages, and dehumanisation of PWP were common examples within this category.

Comments within this theme also tended to reflect the view that all individuals with paedophilic interests are child abusers (i.e., denying the existence of non-offending PWP). In 'Violent Hate' comments, non-offending PWP were portrayed as *unreliable liars* or *lucky criminals* who had not been caught. Examples included: "*Non-offending paedophile* is a paradox. The funniest joke that I have ever heard!"; "They are all child rapists, and those who believe these [***] are fooled by them"; "They are playing the victim. Purely manipulative liars"; "Non-offending paedophiles do not exist".

Comments within this theme also described PWP as individuals destined to offend unless others intervene. All PWP were homogenised, being reduced to a single trait, assuming they all lack any sense of morality: "Under the right conditions, they will abuse kids at any moment"; "This is just a matter of time. None of them is virtuous"; "Their *mental illness* makes them compulsively want to sexually assault children; that's why I do want to kill them". Some commenters put forward various conspiracy theories. They believed speakers conspiring with "deviants" based on a *secret agenda* or *plan*. "They are pushing for acceptance. All are based on the plan"; "All paedos are [f***] sick, and this so-called doctor (like many others) is nothing more than an accomplice carrying out their preferred agenda"; "Paedophiles in power created the pseudoscience of it as a mental disorder".

Other comments in this theme used political language, linking the idea of destigmatization in the experts' talks (that was perceived as *normalisation*) to a specific politician(s) or political ideology: "I bet leftists will make it a norm in the next few years"; "This is what democrats such as [president's name] want". Other commenters assumed that anyone who does not react negatively towards the video content is either being deceived by "them" (PWP) or is one of "them": "They can fool anyone easily… You would never understand the manipulation of paedophiles"; "They are groomers, and only fools believe them!"; "This dude [expert] is extremely suspect defending these [***]; either he is obsessed with them or one of them". Violent Haters repeatedly articulated similar suspicions referring to other users or speakers. From their perspective, anyone who sympathised with "devils" or did not hate them are simpletons, if not demons themselves.

Negation of sympathy and help was recurrently highlighted in this group of comments: "I have no desire to help these evil creatures"; "I have sympathy, but not for child rapists." In all videos, experts clearly explained the distinction between the attraction to children (described as a state of mind) and acting upon this attraction (described as a crime) and emphasised that helping non-offending PWP could prevent CSA in the first place. Yet, the difference between attraction and action was not acknowledged by Violent Haters, even though some of them admitted non-offending PWP exist: "Non-offending paedophiles should still be executed"; "I fully support the death sentence for these non-offending paedophiles." Demands for harsh punishments, including death, castration, life imprisonment, forcible institutionalisation, and medically assisted suicide, were frequently made by Violent Haters. Their punitive attitudes towards non-offending PWP were subjected to sustained critiques by other YouTube commenters. In response to these critiques, Violent Haters typically did not respond by justifying their views or in a measured way. Instead, they typically reacted with anger and insults. Aversion and aggression were dominant

sentiments in their comments. Both the experts in the video and other commenters were the subjects of anger directed towards them from Violent Haters: "The number of people on this comment thread sympathising with paedophiles is disgusting. Do you wait for a wild dog to bite someone before you put it down?"; "It is absolutely abhorrent how educators are trying to lessen the harsh and justified stigma towards paedophiles".

Some Violent Haters extended their hatred of PWP towards other protected classes or perceived "others" and exhibited attitudes including racist, homophobic, ableist, and anti-Semitic insults. Paedophilia was often portrayed as being a danger that emanated from "foreigners" who were contaminating "the country", "the nation", or the (local) "culture" with their "sick", "perverted" desire. This nationalist ethnocentric discourse considers "deviant paedophiles" merely as aliens, an outgroup that is not associated with one's *beloved* land, nation, or community: "Open borders for…[] and give us back Europe"; "Send these paedos to … []".; "Mark my word! Wait and see their flag adding P to that alphabet mafia". Such commenters portrayed the "paedophile" as an immoral and dangerous stranger who is not among "us". This led some Violent Haters to tacitly sanction child sexual abuse within other countries, morally justifying having sex with minors who are perceived as outgroup members: "Why not send them [PWP] to […]? In […] they can legally have sex with a 12-year-old". In this way, they appeared more concerned with nationalism than the well-being of children.

Sub-theme 2: Sophisticated Haters

This sub-theme also comprised invective comments towards PWP. However, it was notably different to Violent Haters because comments in this category attempted to justify and rationalise loathing and prejudicial or punitive attitudes towards PWP. Although Sophisticated Haters tried to articulate their opinions in a non-violent way, their arguments typically suffered from misinformation, implausible comparisons, or incorrect premises: "Saying paedophilia is something you can't choose sounds utterly ridiculous; paedophilia is definitely an acquired taste, just like doing drugs".

Comments in this sub-theme also frequently conflated attraction to children and CSA: "I think it is legitimate to hate these people because they harm children". Some commenters put forward forms of lay theories, such as the idea that paedophilic interest is a "choice" and that PWP can decide not to have such attraction: "They can help it. Do not make excuses for evil people. This is exactly how they want you to think".; "I disagree that these things are not a choice. It could be conditioning by themselves or others".

Experts in the videos explained that societal stigma is the main barrier to service provision that hinders access to care for PWP. However, Sophisticated Haters perceived stigma as necessary to prevent PWP from offending: "If we get comfortable and accepting of those feelings, it might make them less likely to seek help as they would see it as less of a serious personal issue and more a lack of social understanding". They commonly justified their views with reference to "protecting children", considering the concern over the safety of children and de-stigmatization of paedophilia as mutually exclusive. They believed PWP should be shamed or hated to

keep children safe. Sophisticated Haters considered de-stigmatizing paedophilia as a way of reducing PWP's accountability, which would lead them not to seek help: "Calling it a disorder that they can't control will give them an excuse to act upon it". As this group considered attraction to children to be a "choice", they deemed PWP deserving of shame and ostracism: "They should be ashamed because paedophilia is despicable and shameful".; "I think their relatives and family members should reject them because they are harmful to all kids around them".

Commenters in this theme also frequently compared paedophilia per se with crimes such as rape and murder (i.e., equating the unchosen desire with the offence): "What about legalising murder?"; "Imagine one claims being a non-offending bank robber". Sophisticated Haters tended to see paedophilia as an inevitable *action* or *behaviour* rather than a state of mind that could be kept under control. A commenter ironically posited murder as a "biological disorder". This represents a common concern among the public that accepting paedophilic desire as an innate or unchosen condition would imply diminishing or absolving the responsibility of individuals with such desires for their potentially abusive behaviours. Sophisticated Haters tended to demand incapacitation measures such as long-term incarceration or civil confinement as strategies to *control* non-offending PWP. Although not as overtly violent as Violent Haters, Sophisticated Haters also expressed extremely punitive attitudes and social distance towards PWP. They portrayed non-offending PWP as *dangerous predators* who did not deserve freedom or even access to healthcare services.

Theme 2: Critics

A group of comments criticised the videos in a non-violent and non-hateful manner. Despite exhibiting prejudicial assumptions and insufficient knowledge, opinions were expressed in non-hostile ways and addressed the content or experts in the videos rather than PWP. The content of critiques ranged from the speaker's facial expression to their choice of terminology and video timing. There were two subthemes within the key theme:

Subtheme 1: Paedophilia is not a Sexual Orientation

A large group of critics opposed classifying paedophilia as a sexuality or sexual orientation. In five videos, experts employed these terminologies, which became provocative and contentious, inciting negative reactions. Commenters tried to correct the speakers' remarks by emphasising the discourse of psychopathology and deploying the notion of mental illness/disorder, sexual dysfunction, deviance, or paraphilia: "I don't consider it an orientation but mental illness"; "Paedophilia seems to be sexual dysfunction, not orientation".

Critics argued that the positive connotation of "sexual orientation" might imply supporting civil rights (e.g., legalisation) that could justify or normalise inherently non-consensual paedophilic behaviours: "I don't consider paedophilia sexual orientation because it should not be legalised"; "Paedophilia is related to age, not

gender; therefore, it cannot be a sexual orientation". Some opponents of this terminology were concerned that the stigma of paedophilia would be extended to the LGBTQ+community: "Conflating such an interest that is harmful if acted upon, to orientations that I and many others are wrongfully discriminated against for having, is horrible. Especially since right-wing trolls use this common anti-LGBT tactic, trying to convince people that paedophiles are part of the queer community". In response to critics, several outliers articulated reasons in favour of using the term "sexual orientation": "I suppose it makes sense to call attraction to minors orientation in the same way that gerontophilia, sexual attraction to elderly people exists"; "In my opinion, calling paedophilia sexual orientation does not imply consent or reciprocity. A desire doesn't necessitate to be acted upon to be called orientation".

Subtheme 2: Victim Erasure

Recurrently, Critics were concerned that efforts to reduce stigma and represent PWP as not necessarily child sex offenders implied that victims of CSA would be erased: "Instead of caring about victims, these scientists are part of the problem!"; "What about the victim whose life has been ruined forever?" While all videos highlighted the significance of providing care to non-offending PWP to prevent abuse initially, the concern over "victim erasure" mirrors the fact that some commenters could not separate the concept of paedophilia from child sexual abuse even when the discussion focused on a condition that had no victim.

Theme 3: Fence-Sitters

A group of commenters reacted to the video in an uncertain, ambivalent way or refrained from expressing a positive or critical opinion. Fence-sitters can be categorised into two subcategories:

Sub-theme 1: Ambivalent Fence-sitters

Ambivalent Fence-sitters were characterised by exhibiting ambivalent feelings in their comments, which included avoidance, hesitation, and the state of being uncomfortable about the topic: "This is a really uncomfortable yet informative video"; "I just don't want to think about this issue"; "It's rough. Not sure how to feel!" While most of them expressed negative emotions or stereotypical attitudes or tried to distance themselves from PWP, they acknowledged the necessity of helping them *to lessen risk*: "Everyone deserves to get help… However, I hate this on a moral level"; "I don't want them around me. I have no sympathy towards them. But I support their access to help to reduce their risk for kids"; "The topic is gut-wrenching… but prevention and assistance, as opposed to the condemnation of non-offenders, is important".

Ambivalent Fence-sitters frequently expressed mixed feelings, such as degrees of anger or dislike and compassion, often simultaneously: "Every fibre of my body screams out 'no', except for my brain! It makes sense. We should listen to others'

experiences"; "It must be tough going through this. I hope these people can get help, whereas I am furious about them; I understand their situation". In some cases, commenters of this category stated that they returned to YouTube to delete or edit their initial hateful comment because it had been written out of rage. They tried to re-access their immediate emotional reaction and reflect on it critically: "I have changed the opinion that I've carried out for weeks. I am working on my aggressive thoughts. I should not wish death for paedophiles. Who am I to say this? I just don't want something like this to be normalised"; "I have edited my comment after a few months. My first comment was aggressive, and I am sorry if my knee-jerk reaction hurts anyone. I watched a documentary on this, and that was what changed my mind. I think paedophiles need help to prevent them from offending". Most Fence-sitters reported complex and conflicted feelings after being exposed to the video content.

Sub-theme 2: Dispassionate Arguers

This sub-group of Fence-sitters did not seem ambivalent. However, they refrained from expressing affirmative or critical stances on the video or including their reflections. Dispassionate Arguers asked questions, engaged in conversations, or exchanged ideas about relevant topics ranging from abused-abuser theory, child–adult relations, power dynamics, age of consent, the criminal justice system, and mandatory reporting. However, they did not manifest a strong feeling or opinion about PWP: "I have a cornerstone belief that most desires that are within us are or had been functional to survive. But the attraction to a kid seems like an enigma"; "Most paedophiles' victims are female, and most perpetrators are male, so abused-abuser theory makes no sense"; "A gendered assumption about offenders usually makes it easier for the other gender to offend because they're not seen as predators by the general public".

Theme 4: Support

Another theme that emerged from the data was supporting and affirming the videos' content and sympathising with PWP. This key theme also contained two sub-themes:

Subtheme 1: Implicit Confirmers

Comments of Implicit Confirmers contained indirect endorsements of experts' accounts. While they did not express supporting opinions, by referring to societal stigma, the vulnerability of PWP, the backlash against experts, and warning against policing thoughts, they subtly affirmed the video content: "I've read more than one suicide note that can be summarised as, "I know how much of a danger I am, I had to do this"; "If we could be persecuted for our thoughts, we'd all be in trouble"; "I think trying to view everyone with compassion is very important. However, that's the problem with most taboo subjects. If you aren't as full of hate as you're supposed to be, then you're seen as one of *them*".

Subtheme 2: Compassionate Supporters

Compassionate Supporters not only endorsed the expert's opinion in their comments but also expressed firm support and sympathy towards PWP. They felt PWP deserved the same human rights as other people as long as they did not break the law. Compassionate Supporters drew on various explanations to account for their support of PWP. Many acknowledged that attraction to minors and acting upon it are not the same: "Merely having sexual thoughts and feelings does not make anybody a monster and doesn't mean they will act upon them. You can think whatever you like in your head. Actions are punished, not thoughts"; "I think we should judge people on their actions and not their thoughts. We cannot criminalise one for having sexual thoughts. We criminalise actions". Many commenters stated respect, admiration, and encouragement: "My thoughts are with those non-offending teenagers and adults out there. I have massive respect for you. Fight the good fight, guys"; "I hope this video helps many adults and children with this condition [paedophilia] to understand that they are not alone and that we care about them. Never give up"; "They spend their whole lives repressing their most fundamental desires, something the rest of us don't have to do, because they know not doing so would cause harm to others. I think it's incredibly brave of them to acknowledge their thoughts and emotions and resist acting upon them".

Some commented that stigmatising non-offending PWP could increase their risk of offence: "The severe stigma does not help paedophiles who do not want to offend. It only pushes them further underground, alienates them from society, and it adds stress to their lives, which increases their chances of offending". Compassionate Supporters also argued that PWP are not blameworthy for the attraction that they have not chosen: "They shouldn't be ashamed because they cannot control who they are attracted to like everyone else can't"; "Studies have literally proven they are born that way; they didn't call to be pedophilic." Different strategies, such as emphasising behavioural control and discussing examples of similar stigmatised desires, were adopted by Compassionate Supporters to justify their views: "If having sick thoughts makes someone a monster, where would the limit be? Does occasionally wanting to kill your boss make you a murderer?"; "They [PWP] are capable of controlling their urges like other mature adults". Unlike Haters who perceived PWP as distant from themselves (stranger-danger stereotype), Compassionate Supporters highlighted the possibility of proximity with them: "They [PWP] exist and live around us. We just don't know about their thoughts"; "What if the person with such a desire is your loved one? Your partner, your son, or your brother? Do you really want to kill him? or do you try to help him?".

In contrast to Haters who tended to homogenise PWP, deeming them interchangeable by disregarding their individuality, Compassionate Supporters emphasised the variety of people who might get the same label: "I am sure many of those who abuse children are not even paedophilic. Abuse occurs when one disrespects boundaries and misuses power. It's barely relevant to sexual desire"; "The more I think about it, the more unanswered questions come to my mind. Blanket terms such as 'paedophile' are futile labels to ostracise and vilify a diverse group of people and inclinations". By the same token, some commenters in this theme discussed the

human rights of PWP: "As far as we don't treat these people with dignity, we don't get favourable results"; "Hysteria over sexual abuse won't resolve the problem. We should deal with this issue reasonably and include minor-attracted people as those with feelings, emotions, and human rights". Some of them tried to understand the suffering that someone with paedophilic interests might experience: "Imagine the self-hatred one experiences only for having such interests"; "How hard it would be to live with this condition… I can't even imagine".

Despite similarities among Compassionate Supporters' views, they did not necessarily share similar attitudes towards people who committed a sexual offence (s) against a child(ren). The dichotomy of the "evil" child sex offenders and "desperate", "innocent" non-offending PWP, along with a punitive attitude and hate towards the former, was a dominant concept. In other words, the majority of Supporters sympathised with non-offending PWP and demarcated the realm of their compassion: "I hate child abusers and hope they rot in hell. I don't hesitate to report and put them in jail. But I can't hate anyone just for bad thoughts in their head if they do the right things in life"; "Paedophiles are not monsters. Abusers are. Loving, innocent people shouldn't be treated any differently. They just need to get help". Only a few outliers expressed the view that even individuals who committed CSA deserve rights such as access to treatment (perspectives on care will be discussed later under the theme' Different Faces of Help').

Many commenters in this category expressed gratitude for the speakers who brought the topic to public attention. They mentioned that they had never thought about PWP or had been unaware of the distinction between paedophilia and child sexual abuse. Similar to people who hesitated and deleted their hostile comments (discussed under the Fence-sitters theme), many Supporters reflected on their attitude shift towards PWP: "It was hard to get through this video. Getting over that mental wall of what I've been taught to loathe paedophiles absolutely without question… just the mention of paedophilia as an orientation stopped me thinking since I've always heard paedophiles are all child molesters. I'm thankful that this issue was brought up as it allowed me to reassess another ignorant idea imposed on me by society".

Compassionate Supporters approved of a preventive, anti-stigma approach and condemned punitive policies that limited access to care: "Maybe by reducing the stigma and making treatment readily available, these people come forward, and who knows how many incidents could be prevented? This is probably the only preventive measure that can be taken in this type of situation in a civilised society"; "Over-stigmatizing of paedophiles hasn't been helpful so far. Prevention puts the safety of children first, but stigmatisation ultimately results in more children being hurt". Many Supporters replied to hateful comments to challenge their views. They attempted to persuade Haters that they were wrong by emphasising the unchosen nature of attraction, controllability of behaviour, biological predispositions of paedophilia, and the counterproductivity of punitive or violent attitudes towards non-offending PWP.

Theme 5: Anger and Sarcasm

Commenters with opposing views frequently engaged in intense conversations that sometimes led to confronting or aggressive replies or using sarcastic language. Both

sides regarded themselves on the side of virtue and goodness. Opposing groups blamed or accused each other in various ways. Haters accused Supporters and experts in the videos of being complicit in child exploitation, normalising child abuse, or being groomed by "manipulating paedophiles": "Let them babysit your children! There is no cure. They just haven't been caught. Don't be so naïve"; "Yes, we are bad guys because we haven't allowed these poor victims of society to rape our kids!" Supporters blamed the Haters and accused them of dogmatism and self-centrism that led them to "over-react emotionally" instead of adopting a "reasonable approach": "There are mediaeval people in these comments! To anyone who said that we should just lock or kill them all: You are the problem! Damn people like you are why these guys [PWP] are afraid to get help".

Theme 6: Different Faces of Help

Help emerged as the prevailing theme among conflicting viewpoints. The word help was found 781 times across the data. Commenters with diverse perspectives construed help in various ways, drawing upon a range of justifications when discussing help, access to healthcare, or social support for PWP. Violent Haters explicitly asserted that help would not be effective for PWP and that they do not deserve help: "I don't agree with this doctor, and I seriously feel they cannot be helped because their brains are f***ed up"; "Treatment doesn't work for paedos. Children are their sexual preference". Both Sophisticated Haters and some Fence-sitters considered help as a forcible/involuntary procedure that should be imposed on PWP. This perspective considered access to mental healthcare not as a right that PWP deserve based on their needs to reduce their suffering or improve their well-being but rather as a pre-requirement of punishment, a tool for surveillance that will not allow them to make further *excuses* for abusing children: "They should get forced corrective measures by the court"; "Helping them means keeping an eye on them forever. Watching them and keeping them accountable"; "They should get treatment, and if they refuse to get help, then lock them and throw away the key".

Some commenters considered getting help a purely individual responsibility, which was the problem of the PWP, not the business of society, state, or community: "If people have sick thoughts, they should take care of themselves with therapy." These comments tended to ignore systematic access barriers such as prejudice, discrimination, and misreading of mandatory reporting law that can lead to PWP being reported to the police merely by disclosing attraction to children. Instead, such commenters put the blame on individuals: "If they would rather keep suffering their disease than be held accountable, then maybe they don't deserve to get better"; "Not unable to seek help, unwilling to seek help for the selfish reason of not wanting to be held accountable. Don't put the blame on society for your deviance!".

PWP who do not seek therapeutic support were often stereotyped as *potential abusers* rather than individuals in control of their sexual urges: "The people who don't want help are the ones that are a potential danger to the community children, nieces & nephews." Some commenters regarded help as a gift that should be granted

only to those who have insight into their condition and actively resist their urges: "Those who know it is wrong and haven't acted on their urges and want to get help to stop or push down these urges deserve the opportunity to get better. Once they cross that line and act on the urges, they deserve no rights". This virtue-based notion of deservedness to get help was in opposition to a need-based approach that relies on providing support in accordance with the needs and vulnerabilities of the target group rather than their moral framework or their insight: "I want to take a step further and say that even sex offenders who abused minors or adults should be offered comprehensive support. They are all people, and while their actions are gut-wrenching, that doesn't make any criminal some nonhuman."

Some commenters highlighted the importance of collective care and emphasised the role of the system and society: "Paedophiles can choose not to act on their attraction, and we as a society need to help them make the right decision." The use of words such as "we," "us," "society," and "community" by commenters implied a sense of connectedness, sameness, and shared responsibility towards PWP, even though the distinction between "us" and "them" emphasised the group division in relation to stigmatised others: "They need to heal, and we must help them"; "They should not fight alone. They need our help".

Similarly, some commenters addressed the structural problems in mental health-care and social policies that create more victims and perpetrators: "Today's child sex offenders are the past desperate youths that the system has failed to take care of them. I read that some of them were victimised themselves as kids and acted on their own trauma". In doing so, they often emphasised barriers to access for PWP who were seeking psychological support: "I knew someone who was reported by his psychotherapist to the police, only because of talking about his attraction to minors. That was when I realised there was no legal course of action for a paedophile to take who had never acted on their attraction and didn't want to."

Accounts of Survivors and PWP

While not constituting a separate theme, it is noteworthy that thirty-seven commenters in the sample disclosed that they were sexually abused as a child. Of these, twenty-two affirmed the content of the videos and supported a preventive, anti-stigma approach to paedophilia. Twelve were Fence-sitters. One criticised calling paedophilia a sexual orientation, and two expressed hatred and punitive attitudes towards PWP. Additionally, twenty-four commenters in the sample self-identified as having pedophilia. These individuals mainly described the difficulties of living with paedophilia, secrecy, stigma, and its detrimental consequences, such as depression and suicidality. They emphasised the importance of public awareness and affirmed the experts' opinions. The presence of these two groups among commenters added complexities to the conversations. Reactions to comments of PWP were diverse. Some people replied by asking questions and expressing curiosity. Others sympathised with them and encouraged them to stay resilient and seek support. A few commenters offered to listen to them if they wanted to talk or befriend them, whilst

others expressed disgust and verbally abused them. In a conversation thread, a survivor and a non-offending juvenile with paedophilia exchanged supportive words. One survivor wrote that she broke her silence and overcame years of shame inspired by the courage of an individual with paedophilia who sought help: "If they can share those feelings with someone, then I can share what happened to me, too".

Discussion

This study explored public reactions to expert-delivered YouTube videos about paedophilia. Our findings showed a spectrum of public attitudes and sentiments towards people with paedophilia. The anger, disgust, fear, misperceptions, and negative stereotypes reflected in the Haters theme was consistent with previous studies on public attitudes towards PWP, including observed desires to punish or avoid PWP even in the absence of crime (Imhoff, 2015; Jahnke et al., 2014, 2015a) or when PWP are described as non-offenders (Jahnke, 2018b). As Sternberg (2008) points out, people sometimes hate certain individuals not necessarily due to their real actions but rather the perception or suspicion of their actions.

Comments of Haters tended to homogenise PWP (i.e., reducing all of them to a single characteristic and assuming they all act on their fantasies), consistent with Beck's (1999) conceptualisation of hate. In this, people develop hate when they feel threatened by a perceived image of the perpetrator, which is usually distorted by cognitive biases such as over-generalisation. This distorted image of the perpetrator takes the place of the real person and creates a category of "enemy". Hatred of PWP can be viewed through the lens of the fundamental attribution error, which refers to the tendency to attribute people's crime or misbehaviour to internal characteristics rather than situational variables (Zimbardo, 2004). Attributing CSA to perpetrators with "deviant" traits or desires helps people to differentiate themselves and their loved ones from perpetrators. If an unacceptable act can be attributed to situational factors, it raises concerns that such an act could be committed by anyone, thereby challenging individuals' perceptions of self and significant others. Constructing the "monstrous paedophiles" class and hating those perceived as fundamentally *deviant* preserves one's image of self and others. This cognitive bias also creates a false sense of security (McDonald, 2014) by perpetuating the "stranger-danger" stereotype: a cliché that inhibits thoughts about the unsettling reality that the vast majority of contact CSA incidents (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2012; May-Chalal & Cawson, 2005) are perpetrated by someone whom the child knows. Hatred of PWP presumably serves psychological functions for those who harbour it. It protects their perception of self and community members and alleviates their anxiety through a process of denial (i.e., 'evils' are not around me). One reason debunking stereotypes and humanising PWP incites anger could be the threat it poses to this denial.

Critics strongly objected to labelling paedophilia as a sexual orientation by experts. In the first print version of the DSM-5, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) introduced paedophilic "sexual orientation" as an attraction to prepubescent minors without distress, interpersonal difficulty, and offending behaviours

against children (APA, 2013, p 698). However, following political criticism, the APA backtracked, claiming it had been an error, and replaced the term with "sexual interest" (Moser, 2019). Similar to the category of Critics among YouTube commenters, the APA's critics associated the term 'sexual orientation' with the civil rights of PWP (Bailey et al., 2016a). Nonetheless, from a development perspective, some researchers have endorsed considering paedophilia as a sexual orientation based on scientific criteria such as early age of onset, the consistent pattern of sexual and romantic attraction, and its stability over time (Bailey et al., 2016a; Green, 2002; Grundmann et al., 2016; Seto, 2012, 2018). Also, neurodevelopmental evidence suggests that paedophilia has strong biological predispositions (Alanko, 2013; Labelle et al., 2012; Tenbergen et al., 2015). While experts agree that behavioural expression of paedophilic interest can and should be controlled, clinical, legal, and political implications of considering paedophilia a sexual orientation continue to be disputed (Berlin, 2014; Cantor & Fedoroff, 2018; Green, 2002; Seto, 2012).

The existence of a 'Fence-sitters' theme is consistent with the public survey of Jahnke et al.(2015a), which found considerable variation in respondents' desired social distance towards PWP. Statements with a mix of positive and negative attitudes about PWP were also reported in Theaker's (2015) evaluation of public response to a radio segment about a juvenile with paedophilia. Confrontation with deep-rooted stereotypes, the fact that many audiences probably have never knowingly met a person with paedophilia, and the ethical dilemma of balancing concerns over the perceived risk of PWP and their fundamental human rights may contribute to hesitation and ambivalence. Presumably, individuals who tend to hesitate or suspend their initial judgement would be more willing to re-consider alternative perspectives, looking for additional information and critically evaluating their former viewpoints. Therefore, Fence-sitters have the potential to accept evidence-based empirical information (Lawrence & Willis, 2021).

Expression of remorse and attempts to edit or delete offensive comments by some commenters is consistent with the dual-process model of cognition modified by Harper (2016). According to this model, people use two 'systems' for processing information: One of them is automatic and non-conscious in nature, enabling people to form rapid judgments with little cognitive effort, while the second system involves conscious reasoning. Accordingly, labels such as "paedophile" incite rapid, intuitive judgments and emotive reactions that may lead to initial intense commenting followed by later hesitation or remorse.

While stigma and punitive attitudes towards PWP have been widely studied (Imhoff, 2015; Imhoff & Jahnke, 2018; Jahnke & Hoyer, 2013; Jahnke et al., 2015a; Jahnke, 2018a, 2018b), we know little about potential pro-social behaviours such as sympathy and care among the public towards PWP, probably because paedophilia has not been discussed enough in the public sphere with a humanised approach (Theaker, 2015). The media typically portrays a dramatically distorted image of PWP by covering selective and sensational headlines of high-profile, notorious child sex offenders, which perpetuates inaccurate stereotypes (such as the interchangeability of the "paedophilia" and "child molestation" concepts) (Ischebeck et al., 2021; Stelzmann et al., 2022). The findings of our analysis indicate that the evidence-based representation of non-offending PWP in the media has the potential

to rectify stereotypical assumptions and elicit positive responses among a specific audience group. Many commenters described the video content as insightful, which changed their perspective. Almost one-quarter of commenters (24%) expressed support and compassion towards PWP by emphasising the unchosen nature of attraction, the controllability of the action, the burden of stigma, and the significance of access to mental healthcare services.

Experts who publicly challenge common stereotypes about PWP might cause viewers to reduce social distance (the tendency to avoid personal contact with members of stigmatised groups at different levels). We observed that some commenters expressed interest in listening to or befriending PWP. This evolved to a discursive shift from "What if my child is a victim of CSA?" to "What if my child has paedophilic interests?" (Theaker, 2015) among the Supporters. The shift allowed some audiences to de-other individuals whose existence as human beings had been largely excluded from public discourses.

Help was the most prominent conceptual theme across diverse groups of commenters. However, diverse viewpoints about help were expressed, including negation of help, futility of help, coercive help, help as a favour and self-help. The individualistic notion of help, such as 'self-care', is consistent with neoliberal social policies that aim to dismantle public welfare resources and shift the responsibility for care onto individual citizens (Ward & Barnes, 2015) who are affected by the debilitating impacts of stigma and realistic fear of discrimination. Promoting the idea of forcible help (e.g., mandatory therapy or pre-emptive custody) reflects punitive attitudes towards PWP. Consistent with Theaker (2015), most commenters who were sexually victimised as a child endorsed the video content and preventive, antistigma approaches towards PWP.

YouTube comments are generated by users' will, independent of the researcher's theoretical framework or questions. While there are some merits to moving away from data generated for research, one disadvantage of YouTube comment analysis is the lack of demographic characteristics of commenters. YouTube commenters' gender, age, education, parental status, personal knowledge or experience and former attitudes relevant to the topic are mainly unknown.

Existing literature has indicated that sociodemographic and individual differences play a role in maintaining negative attitudes towards PWP. Younger age, less education, and having younger children at the age of potential victimisation predict higher social distance towards PWP. Also, women show higher levels of fear, anger, and perceived dangerousness towards individuals with paedophilic interests, compared to men (Jahnke et al., 2015a), along with greater levels of disgust and punitive attitudes (Jahnke, 2018a). Additionally, personality traits affect attitudes towards stigmatised groups (Yuan et al., 2018). For example, higher right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) scores predict more social distance from and more hostile attitudes towards PWP (Jahnke et al., 2014).

Despite the overall consistency of our results with similar quantitative studies on public attitudes (Imhoff, 2015; Imhoff & Jahnke, 2018; Jahnke et al., 2015a), YouTube comments may not be equivalent to standpoints expressed in other research settings (e.g., anonymous surveys or interviews). The extent, variety, and nature of hatred against PWP may have been underestimated due to the possibility of

comment-reporting, which can lead to the removal of extremely violent comments by YouTube. Similarly, some sympathising comments might have been written as a reaction triggered by drastic comments. In other words, commenters may have written affirmative words not necessarily because the video changed their attitudes towards PWP; but rather because they were troubled by death threats or violent attacks towards PWP or speakers.

For some commenters, expressing opinions in the public space about a socially contentious topic might be challenging. Social desirability might explain why some of the audience (such as "Dispassionate Arguers" and "Implicit Affirmers") tended to express their attitudes in indirect or subtle ways. Fear of being judged or labelled by other users influences the level of self-assertion. Previous studies have revealed that a greater tendency to give socially desirable responses is associated with having more punitive attitudes towards PWP (Imhoff, 2015; Jahnke, 2018a). Accordingly, anti-stigma viewpoints might be expressed covertly or indirectly to avoid the associative stigma and hate. For some commenters, however, virtual spaces can provide a unique venue for expressing hidden, alternate, or ideal selves (Seidman, 2013), which may not be easily expressed offline. As one commenter wrote, "I wish I could talk about non-offending paedophiles with my friends without losing all of them". Similarly, a few commenters recounted experiences of being unfairly judged by others in real life when they expressed more humanised attitudes towards PWP. Therefore, both possibilities of being more reserved and more expressive on social media must be considered.

YouTube users can edit their comments unlimitedly or delete them, making the commenting function more flexible than responses delivered by conventional data collection methods such as surveys or interviews. Several commenters expressed that they changed their primary comments that were written based on their immediate emotive negative reactions. It would be useful for future research to adopt a longitudinal design to test for potential attitude change about paedophilia in the short, middle, and long-term following exposure to information.

Finally, individual differences in using social media interactive features need to be considered. The significantly higher number of views than likes or comments on social media videos, including YouTube videos, indicates that many users do not necessarily express their reactions online, irrespective of the content. Users who write comments on social media might have different characteristics than those who do not. Some users might be involved in more evaluative actions, such as checking others' opinions or comparing the content with external sources rather than writing comments. Therefore, commenters merely represent the view of a specific group of the general population who use social media and tend to express themselves there. To obtain a more comprehensive and representative public perspective, it is necessary to integrate the findings from different studies utilising diverse data collection methods.

In conclusion, this study examined public responses to expert-delivered presentations on YouTube on the topic of paedophilia. A range of views were uncovered, from extreme hatred to sympathetic reactions toward non-offending individuals with paedophilic interests, improving our knowledge of how the public views PWP and reacts to expert-delivered information on this topic. This data also helped deepen

our understanding of previous quantitative findings, such as the range of views expressed by the public in relation to their desired level of social distance from PWP.

Subsequent investigations should focus on how experts can effectively communicate with the public to promote enhanced accessibility to preventive services for individuals at risk of sexual offending against children. Additionally, there is a need for further exploration to examine the impact of perceived public attitudes on the well-being and help-seeking behaviours of PWP. Utilizing samples extracted from other platforms and user-generated videos will provide more in-depth insights into social media discourses around the topic.

Declarations

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