The Determination of Blame in a Hypothetical Case of Sexual Abuse Based on Respondent Age

Robert A. Carey

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
The Chicago School of Professional Psychology
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Psychology

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Abstract

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Attributions of blame in cases of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) have been studied in relation to factors including: victim age, victim gender, perpetrator gender, and respondent gender. The current study examined the effect of respondent age on attributions of blame in a hypothetical case of CSA, involving an adolescent male and an adult female. It was predicted that younger respondents would attribute more blame to the adult and the family and less blame to the adolescent in the scenario than would older respondents. Participants were asked to read a brief scenario depicting sexual abuse and to answer questions pertaining to victim, perpetrator and family blame. Respondents were invited to include a narrative response to the scenario and survey. Significant differences between age groups were found only in relation to victim blame however, the difference was in the opposite direction than that which was hypothesized. Directions for future research are discussed.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Studies show that Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) continues to affect a significant portion of the population (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2013). Globally, prevalence estimates vary widely, from as low as zero in one study from China, to as high as 60% in a survey from South Africa (Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gómez-Benito, 2009a). In the United States, approximately one in four females and one in six males experience CSA (Pérez-Fuentes et al.). CSA victims are more likely than their non-abused peers to commit suicide (Plunkett et al., 2001), and to have problems with drug and alcohol abuse (Simpson & Miller, 2002), poor self-esteem (Holmes & Slap, 1998; McAlpine & Shanks, 2010), eating disorders (Ross, 2009), difficulties in the workplace (Lee & Tolman, 2006), a pattern of bad relationships (Walker, Holman, & Busby, 2009), and various problems with sexual desire, functioning, and satisfaction (Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005a; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005b). In addition to suffering most of the same difficulties experienced by female victims, male victims also encounter gender specific issues. Among these are anger management problems, confusion about masculine roles, and confusion about sexual preference (Winder, 1996).

Research indicates that outcomes for CSA survivors are largely impacted by the quality of disclosure experience (Lovett, 2004). Survivors who were believed and supported when they initially disclosed their abuse experiences report shorter recovery periods and more complete recoveries than those who were disbelieved or unsupported upon disclosure. Whether disclosure takes place at the time of the abuse or years later,

quality of disclosure experience appears to have similar effects (Weaver, Varvaro, Connors, & Regan-Kubinski, 1994).

The views and attitudes of the person to whom abuse is disclosed are a major factor in determining the quality of the disclosure experience for the survivor. Survey research has examined respondent's views and attitudes toward victims and perpetrators in CSA scenarios by measuring attributions of blame (Curry, Lee, & Rodriguez, 2004; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Davies, Rogers, & Hood, 2009; DeMarni Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Duke, 2006; Fromuth, Holt, & Parker, 2001; Gerber, Cronin, & Steigman, 2004; Graham, Rogers, & Davies, 2007; Hestick & Perrino, 2009; Kahn et al., 2011; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007; Rogers, Titterington, & Davies, 2009; Schutte & Hosch, 1997). Attribution of blame has been examined in light of several variables including victim age, victim gender, perpetrator gender and respondent gender (Curry et al.; Davies & Rogers; Davies et al.; DeMarni Cromer & Freyd; Duke; Fromuth et al.; Gerber et al.; Graham et al.; Hestick & Perrino; Kahn et al.; Rogers & Davies; Rogers et al., 2007; Rogers et al., 2009).

Previous studies have found that scenarios involving adolescent male victims and female perpetrators receive the highest amount of blame for victims and the lowest amount for perpetrators. Previous studies have not examined the impact of respondent age on attributions of blame (Davies & Rogers, 2009; Davies et al., 2009; Rogers et al., 2009; Rogers et al., 2007).

Considering the importance of individual's perceptions about CSA on recovery outcomes, treating professionals should have sufficient understanding of the factors that

shape those perceptions. In light of the fact that no research has been published regarding the impact of respondent age on attributions of blame and that a shift in society's attitudes may be in progress, a study that examines respondent age in relation to attributions of blame is called for.

The quality of the disclosure experience has forensic implications because it affects long-term outcomes for CSA survivors. Survivors have an increased likelihood of contact with the legal system in a variety of matters both civil and criminal. Prosecuting offenders often requires that victims be willing and able to testify. Adult survivors may sue their abusers for damages and child victims may be needed to testify in matters of custody. Male survivors in particular have been found to display heightened rates of antisocial personality disorder, anger management problems, aggressive behavior, running away from home, and other legal troubles (Holmes & Slap, 1998). Additionally, men in substance abuse treatment report a prevalence rate of 29% (Janikowski, Bordieri & Glover, 1997) compared with approximately 16% in the general population (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2013). Given that the negative sequelae of CSA increases the odds of male survivor's contact with the legal system and that disclosure experience plays a role in the long-term effects, research that improves understanding of the factors impacting disclosure has bearing on the study of forensic psychology.

Outline of Remaining Chapters

In short, the current body of literature has established the importance of the disclosure experience for CSA survivors and has begun to investigate factors affecting its

quality. The current study provides additional insight into the attitudes that shape individual reactions to disclosure. The remaining chapters of this writing will communicate the knowledge gained in the following manner: Chapter Two will provide a detailed review of the published literature related to the current study. The third chapter will discuss the methodology employed. Chapter Four will present the statistical results. Lastly, Chapter Five will summarize the current findings, discuss their conclusions, and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature related to the disclosure of CSA, including a discussion of the varied array of definitions employed in previous research and the effects of those meanings on reported prevalence rates; before continuing with an examination of aspects of the CSA experience that are unique to male survivors. The chapter then proceeds with a discussion of attribution theory and its potential to explain the attitudes of observers regarding CSA scenarios involving male victims. Finally the chapter addresses gaps in the current body of literature.

Relevance of the Research

A review of literature concerning prevalence rates from several countries reveals wide discrepancies across various populations including: 4.3% for boys and 12.8% for girls in Canada (MacMillan et al., 1997) and 18.7% combining sexes in Mexico (Pineda-Lucatero, Trujillo-Hernández, Millán-Guerrero, & Vásquez, 2009). New Zealand women reported a range from 23.5% to 28.2% (Fanslow, Robinson, Crengle, & Perese, 2007), and South Korean men indicate that 13.5% have been sexually abused (Han, Lee, Yoo, & Hong, 2011). Two studies from Sweden indicated ranges of 11.2% to 28% for women and 3.1% to 5.5% for men (Edgardh & Ormstad, 2000; Priebe & Svedin, 2009). Finally two meta-analyses examining studies from around the world report rates ranging from

0% to 53% for women and 0% to 60% for men (Pereda et al., 2009a; Stoltenborgh, van Ijzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011).

Frequently the magnitude of various social problems is expressed in terms of the economic impacts on society; however, estimating the economic impacts of childhood maltreatment has proven difficult (Corso & Fertig, 2010). Bonomi et al. (2008) conducted one of the few studies of economic impact that offers estimates by type of abuse. The authors indicated that health care costs for women reporting a history of sexual abuse only were 16% higher than non-abused women. Costs other than those related to health care were not considered. Fang, Brown, Florence, and Mercy (2012) considered the impact of all forms of childhood maltreatment jointly and included estimated costs in the forms of productivity losses, child welfare costs, criminal justice expenses, special education expenditures, and the average cost per fatality. Fang et al. based their calculations on an estimate of new substantiated cases of childhood maltreatment for the year 2008 of 579,000. By the authors own admission their method results in an underestimate of the number of cases leading to a "conservative, lower-bound estimate" (Fang et al., 2012, p. 162) of the associated expenses. Still the study arrived at an approximate life-time cost of $124 billion or $210,012 per victim.

The human costs of CSA extend not only to victims but to their current and future families as well. Victims suffer a host of effects both directly and indirectly from CSA exposure. Further, victims can experience additional consequences related to the quality of the disclosure experience (Lovett, 2004). Walker et al. (2009) describe the mechanism by which a history of CSA combines with other factors to negatively affect the quality of

the survivor's adult relationships. Concurrently, survivor's romantic partners report less relationship satisfaction largely due to deficiencies in intimacy and emotional support (MacIntosh & Johnson, 2008). Non-abusing parents of CSA victims report problems in the areas of emotional distress, family functioning, and parental-role satisfaction following childhood disclosures (Manion et al., 1996).

While some studies indicate that the rate of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) incidents in the United States may have decreased between 1990 and 2004 (Finkelhor & Jones, 2006), the cause of this apparent decline remains unknown (Finkelhor & Jones). As Wynkoop, Capps, and Priest (1995) explain, there are important differences between incidence and prevalence. Incidence typically denotes the number of cases of CSA that happened within a specific time-frame; whereas prevalence indicates the percentage of people who have experienced victimization at any time during childhood (Wynkoop et al.). Changes in incidence from year-to-year, therefore, may not necessarily translate into changes in prevalence (Wynkoop et al.). Further, incidence data is usually gathered from police departments and child protection agencies while prevalence figures are normally collected by surveying a population (Wynkoop et al.). Incidence studies are therefore believed to be even more subject to under-reporting than are prevalence studies (Wynkoop et al.). Further, numerous studies provide evidence that CSA is still a wide-spread problem with far reaching consequences (Fanslow et al., 2007; Han et al., 2011; Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gomez-Benito, 2009b; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2013; Pineda-Lucatero et al., 2009; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011).

Establishing prevalence rates of CSA has been complicated by differences among research in population studied, definition of CSA, and method of data collection (Runyan et al., 2005). Population studied accounts for the largest amount of variation (Holmes & Slap, 1998). However definitions used and research methods contribute significantly to discrepancies and these represent areas where increased consistency among researchers may facilitate greater comparability between studies (Haugaard, 2000; Holmes & Slap).

Definitions of Sexual Abuse

Definitions differ, regarding the nature of sexual abuse. The federal government's definition of CSA is provided in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). The act as amended states that sexual abuse is defined as,

> The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, and in cases of caretaker or interfamilial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children. (CAPTA, 2003, p. 44)

The California State Legislature details its definition in section 11165.1 of the State's penal code. The behaviors included in California's definition include essentially, all forms of contact-sexual abuse, any involvement with child pornography, exhibitionism, and voyeurism. Additionally, California Law specifically adds the act of

masturbation in the presence of a child (Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act of 2000).

Researchers employ a variety of definitions that are tailored to specific research questions. Some, but relatively few studies require penetration to classify an act as abuse (Carballo-Diéguez & Dolezal, 1995; Holmes & Slap, 1998), while others include contact other than penetration, such as fondling (Elliott & Briere, 1995; Gordon, 1990). Additional studies have included non-contact acts, such as intentional exposure to pornography, in their definitions (Dembo et al., 1989; Ellason, Ross, Sainton, & Mayran, 1996; Fromuth & Burkhart, 1989). Consistency of definitions has also been hampered by differences in the consideration of age of both victim and perpetrator. Some studies include only sexual activity between a child and an adult (Dembo et al.). Child is sometimes defined as anyone under the age of 18 but some studies have used 16 (Cole, 1988; Cupoli & Sewell, 1988; Elliott & Briere), or even 13, as the cutoff (Carballo-Diéguez & Dolezal; Dembo et al.; Dubé & Hébert, 1988). Adult is usually defined as someone 18 or older (Dembo et al.). Other studies waive the adult requirement in favor of using an age differential requirement (Carballo-Diéguez & Dolezal; Elliott & Briere; Fromuth & Burkhart). Even among these studies however there is variation, with some research using a 5 year difference regardless of victim age (Carballo-Diéguez & Dolezal; Elliott & Briere) while others have adjusted the age differential depending on the age of the victim (Fromuth & Burkhart), with incidents involving older victims requiring a larger difference, sometimes as much as 10 years, to be considered CSA. Some definitions require threats, force, or another form of coercion while others do not

(Holmes & Slap) and some hinge upon the victim's subjective appraisal of negative reactions to the event (Deykin, Buka, & Zeena, 1992; Erickson & Rapkin, 1991; Gordon; Hibbard, 1990; Janikowski et al., 1997).

Previous Research Methods

Differences in method of data collection have also complicated estimates of prevalence. In their 1998 meta-analysis on the sexual abuse of boys, Holmes and Slap reported that 48% of the studies reviewed either did not question subjects directly, relying on data collected from other sources, or did not report how subjects were questioned. Subjective questioning which relies on the subject's interpretation of events as abusive was used in 27% of studies and objective questioning was employed in 25%. Research shows that studies using objective questioning consistently result in much higher prevalence rates than those using subjective inquiries (Holmes & Slap, 1998).

Prevalence

Currently, the most widely accepted prevalence rates of CSA in the general population are approximately 25% for females and 16% for males (Dong et al., 2003). Factors reported to increase the likelihood of experiencing sexual abuse include: age, race, socio-economic status, and parental co-habitation (Holmes & Slap, 1998; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2013). Children under 13 are more likely than adolescents to experience sexual abuse (Holmes & Slap; Pérez-Fuentes et al.). Additionally, non-whites experience more CSA than do whites (Holmes & Slap; Pérez-Fuentes et al.). Further, socio-

economic status is negatively correlated with rates of sexual abuse (Holmes & Slap; Pérez-Fuentes et al.). Finally, Children who live with only one parent or no parents at all are more likely to experience CSA than those who live with both parents (Holmes & Slap).

Characteristics of Male CSA

Gender appears to affect the nature of the sexual abuse suffered by males. Compared to females, male CSA survivors are more likely to have only one perpetrator, more likely to have a female perpetrator, and less likely to have been abuse by a family member (Baker, Curtis, & Papa-Lentini, 2006). Male adolescents who are the victim of non-forcible sexual assault are 11 times more likely to be assaulted by female perpetrators than by males (McCloskey & Raphael, 2005). Study participants view CSA of adolescents less seriously when the victim is male and the perpetrator is female than when the genders are reversed (Fromuth et al., 2001).

Sequelae

A history of CSA has been associated with an increased likelihood of developing cannabis abuse/dependence in adolescence (Duncan et al., 2008). Women with a history of CSA were found to have more negative self-concepts and used more negative words in describing their mothers than women without a history of CSA, presumably contributing to a pattern of poor relationships (McAlpine & Shanks, 2010). In conjunction with other

childhood experiences, CSA experiences have a negative impact on adult's romantic relationship quality (Walker et al., 2009).

Male CSA survivors suffer a unique set of consequences that appear to be gender specific. In addition to experiencing many of the same symptoms common to female CSA survivors: poor psychological functioning; low self-esteem (Walker et al., 2005a); and array of self-harming behaviors including suicide and the abuse of drugs, alcohol, or food (Walker et al., 2005b). Male CSA survivors often express problems with anger, confusion about masculine roles, and confusion about sexual preference (Winder, 1996). Additionally, sexually abused males have been found to score lower on measures of assertive communication than non-sexually abused males. This can potentially compromise their well-being (Johnson, Rew, & Kouzekanani, 2006).

Gender differences may be attributable to the peculiar social position that men occupy. Men are both socially advantaged and disadvantaged by their gender. While men as a group have power over women, individual men often feel oppressed by women in general (Mankowski & Maton, 2010).

Problems with Disclosure

CSA survivors report difficulty disclosing their experiences. Disclosure of CSA is often so difficult that specific training programs have been developed to teach medical and mental health professionals how to appropriately assist clients in discussing their abuse (Tong & Gillespie, 2011). Socio-cultural factors unique to men have been found to complicate disclosure for male CSA survivors (Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, & Grossman, 2008).

Male victims of child sexual abuse are less likely than female victims to disclose at the time of the incident. Further, adult men take longer to disclose CSA experiences compared to women (O'Leary & Barber, 2008). Sexually abused men are silenced by masculine stereotypes (Andersen, 2008). Men have reported difficulties disclosing their experiences due to a fear of being seen as homosexual or being perceived as weak or unmanly (Sorsoli et al.). Lower rates of CSA among males may in part be attributed to lower rates of disclosure among male CSA survivors (Tang, Freyd, & Wang, 2007).

The choice of how and when to disclose one's CSA experiences has been shown to impact treatment outcomes. Hunter (2010) examined various narratives used by CSA survivors to describe their experiences. Participants who employed a narrative of silence were described as initially believing that their experiences had no personal impact, however, survivors had recently made connections between personal problems and abuse experiences. Additionally, a mother reacting in a protective, supportive manner has been linked with improved psychological outcomes for victims (Lovett, 2004). While treatment programs have shown early improvement in some negative impacts of CSA on male victims, no success has been shown in treating the tendency of survivors to blame their abuse on factors related to their own character (Romano & De Luca, 2005).

Attribution Theory

The study of Attribution Theory may contribute to an improved understanding of the disclosure experience. Attribution Theory concerns itself largely with the perceived causes of behaviors and outcomes. The theory attempts to understand attributions

associated with one's own behaviors and outcomes as well as those of others. Attributions made by an observer have been shown to influence the observer's positive feelings, including esteem and trust toward actors in various situations. Additionally the observer's estimation of an actor's persuasiveness can be affected (Kelley & Michela, 1980).

One of the earliest known experiments in the field of Attribution Theory dates back to that of Thibaut and Riecken in 1955. Subjects were placed in a position that required eliciting help from two people. One person was of a higher status than the subject, the other of lower status. Following the experiment, subjects were asked why they thought each person had helped them and were also asked whether their opinion of each person had changed. The higher status person was more frequently judged to have acted for internal reasons (because he wanted to). Conversely the lower status person's behavior was attributed to external factors (because of the pressure applied by the subject). Further, subjects reported a greater favorable shift in their evaluation of the higher status person. The increased esteem for the high-status person was presumed to be the result of the motives that subjects attributed to the behavior.

Thibaut and Riecken (1955) demonstrated two of the basic premises of Attribution Theory. First, subjects are capable of attributing behaviors to either internal or external causes. Second, attributions have both antecedents and consequences. Kelley and Michela (1980) propose a model in which antecedents include information, beliefs, and motivation; attributions are the perceived causes; and consequences include behavior, affect, and expectancy. Additionally the model divides the body of research into two

broad categories of Attribution Theories and Attritional Theories. The former is described as theories that concern themselves with the link between antecedents and attributions and the latter is focused on the link between attributions and consequences.

Subsequent research shows that attributions can also be classified as either stable or unstable (Weiner et al., 1972); and that subjects make attributions regarding not only specific behaviors but also circumstances such as wealth, poverty, success, or failure. Further the distinction between causes that are intentional versus unintentional has been shown to influence subjects appraisals of actors.

Thus, when evaluating CSA scenarios, subjects can attribute the survivor's circumstances to factors in eight possible combinations. These include internal-stable-intentional (he always places himself in the victim role); internal-stable-unintentional (he is just one of those people who get victimized); internal-unstable intentional (he chose to go drink beer with the perpetrator); internal-unstable-unintentional (his depression and loneliness caused him to hang around with the wrong people); external-stable-intentional (the perpetrator is a predatory child molester); external-stable-unintentional (pedophiles just cannot help themselves); external-unstable-intentional (the perpetrator got drunk and lost control); or external-unstable-unintentional (the death of the perpetrator's wife caused him to act out). As subject's attributions have been shown to influence both like and trust for the actor (in this case the CSA survivor), it can be inferred that such attributions have the capacity to impact the overall quality of the disclosure experience for the survivor (Kelley & Michela, 1980).

Attributions, Gender, and CSA

One study concluded that victim gender does not play a role in how negatively respondents view perpetrators (Duke, 2006). However victim gender does play a role in attributions of blame toward victims. Child victims who consent to sexual intercourse, which occurs more frequently among male victims, are viewed more negatively than those who are physically forced (Davies et al., 2009; Rogers et al., 2009). Male respondents have been shown to be less confident that CSA has occurred when the victim is male and the perpetrator is female (Hestick & Perrino, 2009).

Several studies have examined respondent gender as a factor effecting attributions of blame (Davies & Rogers, 2009; DeMarni Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Graham et al., 2007; Hestick & Perrino, 2009; Rogers et al., 2007; Rogers et al., 2009; Schutte & Hosch, 1997). Davies and Rogers, for example, examined respondent gender along with victim age and victim/perpetrator relationship as factors affecting attributions of blame and credibility. Participants consisted of 391 members of the general public in the UK. Consistent with the majority of studies, female respondents reported more positive feelings toward victims and considered them more credible. Victim age was negatively correlated with perceived credibility and victims whose perpetrators were strangers were regarded more positively and believed more than those who were abused by a father or family friend.

Women are more likely than men to vote to convict in cases of rape and child sexual abuse (Schutte & Hosch, 1997). Men are less likely than women to believe the CSA disclosures of others (DeMarni Cromer & Freyd, 2009). Men are less positive

towards victims of CSA than are women (Davies & Rogers, 2009). Men tend to assign more blame to the victim in cases of non-contact CSA (Graham et al., 2007). Hestick and Perrino (2009) found that individual's perception of CSA varies based on gender of victims, perpetrators, and respondents. Other factors found to influence attributions of blame include victim age (Davies & Rogers; Rogers et al., 2007) and victim resistance (Rogers et al., 2009).

Gender and Social Status

Ridgeway (2001) explains the connection between gender and attributions of blame as a function of status beliefs. Status beliefs are commonly held beliefs about various groups within society based on demographic factors including gender, age, race, and socio-economic status. In much of western society high status is associated with being male, older, white, wealthy, and well educated. Conversely low status is associated with being female, young, non-white, poor, and uneducated. Given Thibaut and Riecken's (1955) results that showed status to weigh heavily on attributions of blame it is not surprising that varying the gender of both victim and perpetrator appears to lead to respondents attributing different levels of blame to characters in hypothetical scenarios of CSA.

Additionally status beliefs may provide a partial explanation for attribution differences made by male and female respondents. Status beliefs are unique when compared with other characterizations of groups in that they are shared by dominate as

well as non-dominate groups. Thus, both male and female respondents attribute higher status to male actors in studies (Jackman, 1994).

Gerber et al. (2004) shed light on gender as it affects attributions of blame in cases of rape. The authors contend that male subjects identify with traits associated with power and are, therefore, more likely to identify with the perpetrator in a rape scenario than with the victim, regardless of the actors' genders. Female subjects, conversely, identify with communal traits and are more likely to empathize with the victim regardless of the actors' genders. Kahn et al. (2011) provided partial support for Gerber et al. with a study that also asked subjects to what extent they identified with both the perpetrator and the victim. In the Kahn et al. study, male respondents blamed victims more than did female respondents and female respondents attributed more blame to perpetrators than their male counterparts. The results regarding victim blame however did not correlate with the respondents' level of identification with either actor. The authors suggest, as a possible explanation, that attributions regarding the victim's behavior are more difficult than those pertaining to the perpetrators actions.

Perpetrator Gender

In recent years the attention that popular media has focused on CSA situations involving adolescent male victims and female perpetrators appears to have increased considerably (Johnson, 2008). The notoriety of defendants like Mary Kay Letourneau, the 33-year-old teacher from the state of Washington who was convicted of second-degree child rape for having sex with her sixth grade male student (Ward, 2000), and Elizabeth

Stow, the 27-year-old high school teacher in California who was convicted on multiple counts related to her sexual activities with three male students aged 16-17 (Jimenez, 2006), is an indication of the recent attention focused on this particular victim/perpetrator combination.

While the vast majority of CSA continues to be perpetrated by males, male victims are far more likely than their female peers to be abused by female perpetrators. Professional response to female perpetrators of CSA has been surveyed and was found to be lacking (Hetherton & Beardsall, 1998). Specifically, risk assessment tools and treatment programs tailored to this population are needed (Bunting, 2007). Many professionals minimize the seriousness of crimes committed by female sex offenders (Hetherton & Beardsall). They often see female perpetrators as harmless and frequently blame the victim (Hetherton & Beardsall). Studies of mental health professionals and police officers have found that female perpetrators are more likely to be shown leniency while their victims are shown less sympathy than those who are abused by men (Denov, 2004). Additionally observers report less perceived impact on victims in cases involving only a female perpetrator (Denov, 2001). Female consumers of internet child pornography have been found to score lower in neuroticism; which can involve any of several features of adverse emotion, including anxiety, guilt, and anger; and higher in hedonistic moral decision making, in other words, more concerned with increasing personal pleasure than with adhering to social norms, laws, or even internal standards, when compared with female non-consumers (Seigfried-Spellar & Rogers, 2010).

Criminal law and sentencing guidelines make no allowances for gender of either victims or perpetrators. For example the California Penal Code uses only gender-neutral words in its definitions related to sexual abuse such as, "person, perpetrator and caretaker" (Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act of 2000). Nevertheless research yields evidence of gender related disparities (Mustard, 2001). Female perpetrators of sex offences were found to receive lighter sentences than their male counterparts (Embry & Lyons, 2012). Further, Curry et al. (2004) demonstrate that victim gender correlates with severity of sentencing such that perpetrators who commit violent crimes against female victims are sentenced more harshly than those who victimize males. Gender disparities in sentencing speak to perceptions of crimes committed by females and offences against males being viewed less seriously by society at large.

Gaps in the Literature

The current body of literature regarding male CSA survivors reveals that knowledge of salient factors affecting the population and their impact is still very limited. Inconsistent definitions have led to widely differing prevalence rates (Finkelhor & Jones, 2006; Holmes & Slap, 1998). A number of sequelae have been identified, however the mechanisms by which CSA is related to these factors is still, in most cases, poorly understood (Duncan et al., 2008; Johnson, Rew et al., 2006; Mankowski & Maton, 2010; McAlpine & Shanks, 2010; Walker et al., 2005a; Walker et al., 2005b; Walker et al., 2009; Winder, 1996). Duncan et al. for instance studied the effects of CSA and Childhood Physical Abuse (CPA) on Cannabis Abuse or Dependence after controlling for

an impressive list of genetic and environmental risk factors. The authors conducted a semi-structured telephone interview with 819 participants who were adolescent or young adult children of military veterans. Their fathers were all twins. The study was able to control for the influence of risk factors including: gender, alcohol abuse/dependence, Conduct Disorder, sibling psychopathology, paternal psychopathology, maternal psychopathology paternal Substance Abuse/Dependence, and maternal Substance Abuse/Dependence. Results indicated that CSA, but not CPA, is a significant and independent risk factor for Cannabis Abuse and Dependence. A significant limitation is that the study was not able to control for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which the authors report has been shown to mediate the relationship between trauma and Substance Abuse/Dependence.

Correlates have revealed a number of potential risk factors for victimization as well as perpetration yet little data is available regarding effective means of prevention (Baker et al., 2006; Finkelhor & Jones, 2006; Fromuth et al., 2001; Holmes & Slap, 1998; McCloskey & Raphael, 2005; Winder, 1996). Social stigma is commonly cited as a barrier to male survivors disclosing their experiences and seeking help with recovery (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Andersen, 2008; Bunting, 2007; DeMarni Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Holmes & Slap; Hunter, 2010; Johnson, Ross et al., 2006; MacMillan et al., 1997; Painter, 1986; Pereda et al., 2009a; Pérez-Fuentes et al.; Saewyc, Pettingell, & Magee, 2003; Sorsoli et al., 2008; Tang et al., 2007; Walker, Carey, Mohr, Stein, & Seedat, 2004). However, neither a thorough understanding of the causes of stigma nor an effective method of eliminating it has been determined (Andersen; Davies & Rogers,

2009; Davies et al., 2009; DeMarni Cromer & Freyd; Duke, 2006; Graham et al., 2007; Hestick & Perrino, 2009; Hunter; Lovett, 2004; O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Rogers et al., 2007; Rogers et al., 2009; ; Romano & De Luca, 2005; Schutte & Hosch, 1997;Sorsoli et al.; Tang et al.; Tong & Gillespie, 2011).

Alaggia and Millington (2008) offer a partial explanation regarding the causes of stigma and advice for treatment professionals to help clients deal with its effects. The authors report on the lived experiences of 14 male participants from a phenomenological study that also included 26 female CSA survivors. Themes that emerged from the male respondents' accounts included frequent references to shame, gender-role confusion, and feelings of responsibility for their own abuse. The authors further explain how these feelings have been reinforced by the experiences of some survivors who were disbelieved or not taken seriously upon initial disclosure attempts.

Sorsoli et al. (2008) conducted qualitative interviews with 16 male CSA survivors. Each participant was interviewed twice for two to three hours each time. Participants reported barriers to disclosure of CSA that included shame, isolation, and a fear that others would be unable to accept men as victims. Interestingly this study was originally intended to examine resiliency but barriers to disclosure were mentioned so prevalently by participants that the authors felt a need to analyze and report them separately.

The current study sought to further our understanding of barriers to treatment by assessing the possible effect of respondent age on attributions of blame in a hypothetical case of male CSA. It was hoped that improved understanding might lead to better

disclosure experiences for survivors, which in turn might facilitate reductions in negative sequelae for some members of the forensic population. Problem areas where survivors might benefit include substance abuse (Harrison, Edwall, Hoffman, & Worthen, 1990; Robin, Chester, Rasmussen, Jaranson, & Goldman, 1997; Windle, Windle, Scheidt, & Miller, 1995), anger management problems (Langevin, Wright, & Handy, 1989), aggressive behavior (Langevin et al.), antisocial personality disorder (Windle et al.), and run-a-way behavior (Harrison et al.).

Chapter Summary

In summary the literature indicates that age and gender may be important factors in shaping attributions of blame in CSA scenarios. The variables of victim gender, perpetrator gender and respondent gender have each been studied. Additionally age has been considered in relation to both the victim and the perpetrator. Age of the respondent however has yet to be examined.

Chapter Three: Methods

Chapter Overview

Chapter Three presents a description of the research methods employed during the current study including the following: the rationale for the hypotheses tested, a description of the sample population, a discussion of the measure employed (detailed examples of which are provided in appendices B and C), and finally a description of the data collection procedure. The chapter provides support for the use of the unique attributional survey used in the study. Additionally, the testing procedures used to examine each hypothesis are described.

Rationale

The current study attempted to determine whether respondent age impacts perceptions of blame in CSA cases involving adolescent male victims and female perpetrators. Perceptions of blame were examined as they applied to the victim, the perpetrator and the family.

American society as a whole appears to be developing more sympathy for male CSA victims than in previous years as indicated by comparisons of media coverage analyses over two distinct time periods (Beckett, 1996; Cheit, Shavit, & Reiss-Davis, 2010). Additionally public sentiment seems to be evolving toward holding female perpetrators more responsible for their crimes (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013). It was thought that younger generations might have a different view of female perpetrator/male victim

CSA than do older generations and that as younger generations begin to make up a larger percentage of the adult population their views may become more influential. The following hypotheses were proposed to investigate these possibilities.

Hypotheses

HO: There will be no difference between four age groups of participants in their attributions of blame toward the victim in the scenario.

Hypothesis 1: Younger participants will attribute less blame to the victim in the scenario than older participants.

HO: There will be no difference between four age groups of participants in their attributions of blame toward the perpetrator in the scenario.

Hypothesis 2: Younger participants will attribute more blame to the perpetrator in the scenario than older participants.

HO: There will be no difference between four age groups of participants in their attributions of blame toward the family in the scenario.

Hypothesis 3: Younger participants will attribute more blame to the family in the scenario than older participants.

Participants

Participants for the current study were recruited from several campuses of a large university in Southern California. A variety of graduate level and undergraduate classes were selected in an effort to obtain a subject pool with the widest possible age range.

A total of 54 participants responded to the survey. One response was excluded due to a missing date of birth. The remaining respondents (n = 53) provided answer sheets that were correctly completed with respect to the demographic section and Likert Scale responses. Responses were divided into four age categories as shown in Table 1. Additionally, 30 participants provided comments in the optional narrative section (see Appendix A), clarifying various aspects of their responses. Subjects' narratives are intended to be used as points of interest when verbally presenting data and to inform directions for future research.

Table 1

Means by Age Category

Age Category	*N*	Mean Victim Blame	Mean Perpetrator Blame	Mean Family Blame
21-29	18	1.6111	4.4444	1.8333
30-39	16	1.7500	4.3125	2.4375
40-49	12	1.2500	4.7500	1.8333
50-60	7	1.2857	4.5714	2.0000
Total	53	1.5283	4.4906	2.0377

Measure

Participants were presented with a vignette (see Appendix B) depicting a sexual relationship (the event) between an adult female (Robin) and an adolescent male (James).

Subjects were then asked to rate their level of agreement with each of eleven statements on a five point Likert Scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Examples of rated statements include, "James should be blamed for the event," and "Robin should be blamed for the event." The questionnaire (see Appendix C) also included a space for participants' free-form reactions to the survey. The instrument was modeled after those used in several previous studies related to attributions of blame (Davies & Rogers, 2009; Davies et al., 2009; DeMarni Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Duke, 2006; Fromuth et al., 2001; Graham et al., 2007; Hestick & Perrino, 2009; Johnson, Mullick, & Mulford, 2002; Kahn et al., 2011; Muller, Caldwell, & Hunter, 1994; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Rogers et al., 2007; Rogers et al., 2009) and represents common practice in the field of attributional research which is grounded in Attribution Theory.

Procedure

The researcher visited college classrooms and obtained verbal consent from participants. The study posed only minimal risk to participants and if written consent had been required, the consent form would have been the only record linking the subject to the research, as no identifying information was collected. It was therefore determined that obtaining verbal consent only was appropriate. A written survey was then distributed containing a hypothetical scenario, demographic questions, and survey questions.

Data Analysis

Respondents ranged in age from 21 years to 60 years. Subjects were grouped into four age-based categories. Category One consists of (n = 18) respondents aged 21 to 29 years. Category Two includes (n = 16) subjects aged 30 to 39 years. Category Three is made up of (n = 12) participants aged 40 to 49. Finally, category Four encompasses (n = 7) respondents aged 50 to 60 years. Alternate methods of categorization were considered. Specifically, thought was given to the use of fewer categories in order to facilitate larger groups and thereby increase statistical power. Considering however, that the purpose of the current study is to examine the possibility of respondent age effecting attributions of blame, it was determined that a larger number of categories would be more useful in understanding any relationships that might be found.

Responses to each of the Likert Scale questions were assigned a numeric value as follows: Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 3, Agree = 4, and Strongly Agree = 5. Three dependent variables were chosen for analysis. Victim Blame was measured by the subjects indicated level of agreement with the statement, "James should be blamed for the event." After transforming data to reduce the impact of outliers, this variable was coded as "J_blame_2." Perpetrator Blame was measured by the subjects indicated level of agreement with the statement, "Robin should be blamed for the event." After transforming to reduce the impact of outliers, this variable was coded as "R_blame_2." Family Blame was measured by the subjects indicated level of agreement with the statement, "The family should be blamed for the event." After transforming to reduce the impact of outliers, this variable was coded as "Fam_blame_2."

The normality of the distribution for each combination of dependent variable and age category was evaluated by examining its skewness and kurtosis values. All dependent variables were normally distributed within each age category.

Tests for homogeneity of variances yielded the following results. Regarding the variable J_blame_2, there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance (p = .396). Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance for the variable R_blame_2 found that there was homogeneity of variances (p = .176). Finally variances related to the variable Fam_blame_2 were found to display homogeneity (p= .358).

Statement of Hypotheses

HO: There will be no difference between the four age groups of participants in their attributions of blame toward the victim in the scenario.

Hypothesis 1: Younger participants will attribute less blame to the victim in the scenario than older participants.

Testing procedure 1. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether significant differences existed between age groups in level of blame attributed to the victim.

HO: There will be no difference between the four age groups of participants in their attributions of blame toward the perpetrator in the scenario.

Hypothesis 2: Younger participants will attribute more blame to the perpetrator in the scenario than older participants.

Testing procedure 2. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether significant differences existed between age groups in level of blame attributed to the perpetrator.

HO: There will be no difference between the four age groups of participants in their attributions of blame toward the family in the scenario.

Hypothesis 3: Younger participants will attribute more blame to the family in the scenario than older participants.

Testing procedure 3. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether significant differences existed between age groups in level of blame attributed to the family.

Rationale of Hypotheses

Previous studies have examined the roles of several variables in attributions of blame in CSA scenarios. Attribution differences based on victim age, victim gender, perpetrator gender and respondent gender have been well established. No prior research had considered the possible influence of respondent age. Recent high-profile cases involving female perpetrators and adolescent male victims provide some support for the

possibility that public attitudes regarding this specific victim/perpetrator combination may be changing.

Chapter Summary

The current study was conducted using a convenience sample of college undergrads and graduate students. The vignette and attribution questionnaire used were modeled after those commonly employed in a number of studies that have examined similar research questions. A series of ANOVA were completed to look for between-groups differences in attributions of blame. Verbal rather than written consent was obtained in order to ensure anonymity of participants.

Chapter Four: Results

Chapter Overview

Chapter Four reports the results for each of the three ANOVAs conducted. Findings are presented by hypothesis in numeric order. A brief summary is provided at the end of the chapter.

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one stated that younger participants would attribute less blame to the victim in the scenario than would older participants. Victim blame was measured by the respondents' level of agreement with the statement that "James should be blamed for the event." Overall victim blame was low across all age groups (See Table 1) with the sample mean of 1.5283 (1 indicating strong disagreement with the victim-blaming statement) A one-way ANOVA was conducted which indicated statistically significant between-group differences F (3, 49) = 3.36, $p < 0.026$ (See Table 2). Post-Hoc tests revealed statistically significant mean differences between age groups two (M = 1.75) and three (M = 1.25) however the direction of the difference was the opposite of that predicted; therefore the research hypothesis was not supported. As shown in Table 2, differences between all other age group pairs were not statistically significant.

Table 2

ANOVA Results for Victim Blame

ANOVA
Victim Blame

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Between Groups	2.251	3	.750	3.356	.026
Within Groups	10.956	49	.224		
Total	13.208	52			

Post Hoc Tests
Dependent Variable: Victim Blame

	Age Category		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Tukey HSD	1.00	2.00	-.13889	.16247	.828
		3.00	.36111	.17623	.184
		4.00	.32540	.21063	.419
	2.00	3.00	.50000*	.18058	.038
		4.00	.46429	.21428	.147
	3.00	4.00	-.03571	.22489	.999

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis two stated that younger participants would attribute more blame to the perpetrator in the scenario than would older participants. This hypothesis was not supported. A one-way ANOVA demonstrated no significant between-groups differences

in the variable R_blame_2, which measured subjects' level of agreement with the statement, "Robin should be blamed for the event," F (3, 49) = 1.93, $p < 0.137$.

Table 3

Perpetrator Blame

ANOVA
Perpetrator Blame

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Between Groups	1.399	3	.466	1.929	.137
Within Groups	11.846	49	.242		
Total	13.245	52			

Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis three stated that younger participants would attribute more blame to the family in the scenario than would older participants. This hypothesis was not supported. A one-way ANOVA demonstrated no significant between-groups differences in the variable Fam_blame_2, which measured subjects' level of agreement with the statement, "The family should be blamed for the event," F (3, 49) = 2.07, $p < 0.116$.

Table 4

Family Blame

ANOVA
Family Blame

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Between Groups	3.820	3	1.273	2.073	.116
Within Groups	30.104	49	.614		
Total	33.925	52			

Chapter Summary

In summary, no significant differences were found between age groups on the variables of family blame or perpetrator blame. A statistically significant difference was found between age groups two and three on the variable of victim blame. The direction of the difference however was opposite that which had been predicted, with younger participants actually engaging in more victim blaming than older participants. Overall, victim blame was low and perpetrator blame was high across all age groups.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Chapter Overview

Chapter Five provides an in-depth discussion of the research findings and their Implications, as well as the limitations of the current study. Recommendations are offered for future research. Final conclusions are drawn based on results obtained.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether respondent age has any effect on subjects' attributions of blame regarding a hypothetical case of sexual abuse. The combination of adolescent male victim and adult female perpetrator was chosen specifically because prior research has indicated that this pairing yields the greatest amount of victim blaming and the least amount of blame attributed to perpetrators (Hestick & Perrino, 2009; Hetherton, 1999; Hetherton & Beardsall, 1998; Kite & Tyson, 2004; Rodriguez-Srednicki & Twaite, 1999; Rudin, Zalewski, & Bodmer-Turner, 1995; Smith, Fromuth, & Morris, 1997). It was therefore thought that the particular victim/perpetrator combination would provide the widest potential range of responses. Participants were grouped into four age categories to facilitate the identification of any trends that might exist in the data based on respondent age.

Previous research indicates that respondent gender, perpetrator gender, victim gender and victim age have been shown to affect attributions of blame in response to sexual abuse scenarios (Davies & Rogers, 2009; Davies et al., 2009; DeMarni Cromer &

Freyd, 2009; Graham et al., 2007; Hestick & Perrino, 2009; Rogers et al., 2007; Rogers et al., 2009; Schutte & Hosch, 1997). Considering the lack of research into the possible effects of observer age, it appeared a study of this factor might provide useful information to further our understanding of the disclosure experience for CSA survivors.

Interpretation and Implication of Findings

The present study yielded mixed results regarding the effects of respondent age on attributions of blame. The lack of significant findings with regard to perpetrator blame and family blame would appear to indicate that respondent age is not a determining factor in either of these types of attribution. Conversely however, the finding of significant between-groups differences regarding mean victim-blame provides support for the idea that factors related to observer age may influence attributions in this area.

Importantly, while there was a statistically significant difference between two of four age categories, there was no correlation between age and victim-blame. In other words, it cannot be said that victim-blame increased or decreased with age. In fact as shown in Figure 1 below, victim-blame was highest among subjects 30-39, followed closely by those 20-29; and lowest among respondents 40-49, who indicated only slightly less victim blame than participants 50-60. The variation in victim-blame across age groups points to two possible explanations. First, it is possible that rather than age itself, certain age-related factors may influence attribution of blame toward victims. Secondly, there may be factors not measured in the current study that mitigate the effects of age. Thibaut and Riecken (1955) found that observers in their experiment attributed different

motives to the actions of confederates based on the perceived social power of the actor. Specifically, the observer's perception of the actor's social power relative to his or her own was found to be the determining factor. Essentially, when observers were asked to speculate about the motives of those whom they perceived as more socially powerful than themselves, they indicated more altruistic motives than when they perceived the actor to have less social power than themselves. Additionally, observers reported a greater increase in the positive regard felt for the more powerful actor.

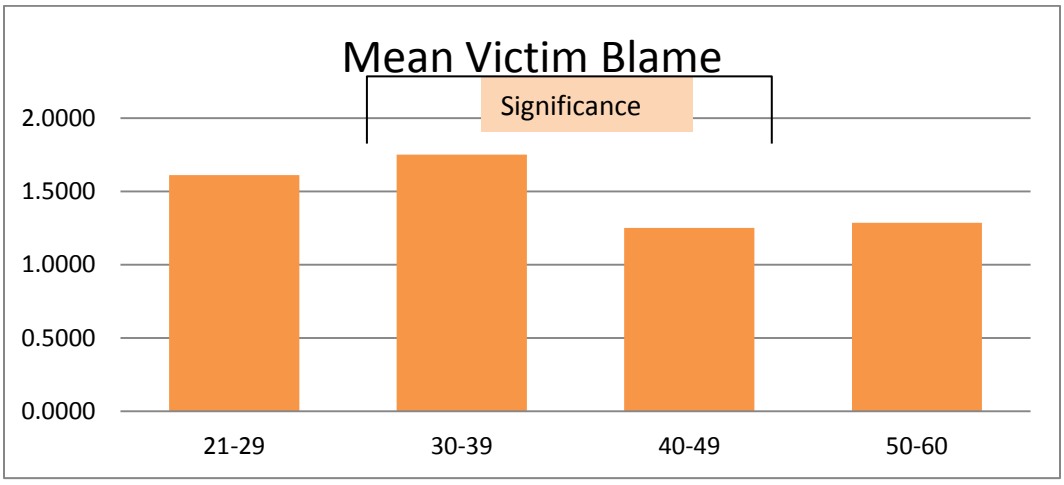

Figure 1. Mean victim blame by age category.

Graham and Baker (1989) found support for the idea that social status increases as one approaches middle-age and then begins to decline with advanced age. Perceptions related to social status have been found to impact subjects' physical and psychological

health (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000); physiological reactions to stress (Gruenewald, Kemeny, & Aziz, 2006); and propensity for aggression toward others (Sandstrom & Herlan, 2007). Additionally, Sirin, McCreary, and Mahalik (2004) found that perceived gender-role violations by actors in a scenario impact subjects' appraisals of social-status. In the current study, respondents aged 30 to 39 reported the highest degree of victim blaming. It seems plausible that respondents in this group might have a different perception of the actors' social power in relation to their own, when compared with other age groups.

Alternatively, it should be noted that the perpetrator in the scenario was reported as 35 years old, placing her in the middle of the age group that assigned the most blame to the victim. It is possible that the 30 to 39 year olds identified more closely with the perpetrator than did other groups. Conversely, this group would also be more likely to have children that are close in age to the victim in the vignette (Mathews & Hamilton, 2002). The just world hypothesis might explain these scores as parents attributing more blame to the victim in order to feel more secure regarding the safety of their own children (Muller et al., 1994).

Other factors that may contribute to attribution differences between age groups include various cultural factors that may have differing impacts on specific age cohorts. It is also possible that developmental differences throughout the lifespan may be at work. Even varying types and levels of every-day life stressors among different age groups could potentially affect results (Speakes-Lewis, 2011).

Limitations

One of the primary limitations of the current study is its small sample size (n = 53). Dividing the sample into four decades of life left groups ranging in number from 7 to 18. The use of small groups increases the risk of type II error and reduces the power of the statistical analysis. Additionally, smaller groups are less likely to be representative of the larger population. Therefore any attempt to generalize the results of this study to the general population would be ill-advised.

Subjects for the current study were recruited from college classrooms. Both graduate and under graduate cohorts were approached in order to obtain the maximum variability of respondent age. Some limitations inherent in this method of recruitment center on the lack of representativeness of the sample demographically. First the sample is, on average, more educated than the general population. Kane and Kyyrö (2001) found that education was negatively correlated with victim-blaming, therefore, a higher level of education among subjects in the current study may have led to an overall propensity for victim-blaming that is different from that of the greater population. Additionally, differences in level of education may have contributed to the different levels of victim-blame reported in the study as older participants were likely to have higher levels of education than younger subjects.

Second, males were very under-represented in the study. Men made up only 22.6% of respondents. Considering the fact that respondent gender has been shown, in prior research to be a significant factor in victim-blaming, a sample that more closely approached equal numbers of men and women would have been preferred. Further, it is

possible that differing gender ratios within each of the four age groups studied, may have influenced group means of victim-blame.

Finally, while efforts were made to recruit a broad age-range of participants, it is unlikely that the age-distribution of the sample is similar to that of the general population. Given that respondent age was the only independent variable studied, similar age-distributions between the sample and the population would increase representativeness.

The current study was intended only to examine the effects of respondent age on attributions of blame, therefore, very little demographic information was collected. In view of the survey results and considering subsequent research that continued throughout the data-collection and analysis phases of the study, it seems likely that additional questions may have led to a deeper understanding of the results. Also, additional survey-related questions about the respondents' level of identification with the actors in the scenario might have provided more insight into responses.

Directions for Future Research

Arguably, the most apparent avenue for future research would simply entail adjusting for the limitations of the current study. The survey could be modified to include a great deal more demographic information and personal history questions. For instance it may be beneficial to the analysis to know education and income levels, current occupation, race/ethnicity, marital/relationship status, numbers, ages and genders of children, respondents sexual abuse history (if any), and adult attachment style. Additionally it would be useful to measure participants' knowledge and beliefs about

CSA and its consequences prior to their viewing the scenario. Questions related to the specific scenario could be added to deepen understanding of participants motives for responding in a particular manner.

Limitations related to sample size and demographics can be overcome by changes in recruitment methods. Funding for mass market advertising or providing incentives for participation may help to attract a larger, more representative sample. Internet/social-network based initiatives could reduce the cost of reaching large numbers of participants. Additionally it may be possible to partner with other large research studies to maximize the effectiveness of recruitment efforts.

A small but growing number of studies have examined various factors as possibly influencing attributions of blame in CSA scenarios. It seems likely that individual perceptions regarding CSA cases are determined by a combination of many divergent factors. Therefore future study is warranted to examine the possible influences of many variables across several domains. Examples include perceptions of social power, quality of childhood attachments, adult attachment style, individual propensities toward empathy or altruism, sense of social responsibility, social/political views, and level of attributional complexity. The potential for research opportunities in this area is expansive.

Recent advances in technology may facilitate the development of new research methods that promise to enlighten our understanding of the public's views regarding CSA. For example, it is now economically feasible, even on a small budget, to purchase equipment the can measure participants autonomic responses while viewing a video of a re-enacted CSA disclosure. It may be possible to physically measure a subject’s level of

discomfort with disclosure narratives while manipulating factors such as victim age, victim gender, or perpetrator gender. Additionally the availability of tablets and smart phones places a great deal of computing power in the hands of researchers. While it may be impractical to ask research participants to answer very large numbers of questions, it is now more practical to employ computer administered testing that can utilize a fixed-branching simulation to quickly pinpoint the factors most relevant to a specific respondent. This strategy can allow for the examination of more factors in a single study than was previously feasible.

Conclusion

The present study was intended to examine the effect of respondent age on attributions of blame toward the victim, the perpetrator, and the victim's family in a hypothetical case of CSA. The study found no relationship between respondent age and the levels of blame attributed to either the perpetrator or the victim's family. Participants across all age categories attributed a high level of blame to the perpetrator and a low amount to the victim's family.

Analysis of responses to the survey revealed a statistically significant effect of respondent age on the level of blame assigned to the victim. Interestingly however no directional trend was uncovered across age groups. Thirty to 39 year olds reported the highest mean victim-blame score, followed closely by participants aged 21 to 29. The lowest victim-blame scores were provided by 40 to 49 year olds. The oldest group, those ages 50 to 60 generated a mean victim-blame that was slightly higher but still very close

to the 40 to 49 group. A proportionally large gap was created between the two highest scoring groups and the two lowest scoring. The distribution of scores suggests that rather than age itself, some other factor, possibly related to age, may have caused the difference in means.

The impetus for the development of this study was derived from an impression, based on anecdotal evidence that public perceptions regarding CSA cases with female perpetrators and adolescent male victims appear to be evolving in a more pro-victim/anti-perpetrator direction. The lack of reliable baseline data and the limited scope of the current study precluded a direct examination of that question. It is interesting to note however, that the overall mean victim-blame in the current study was very low. On a scale with one indicating the lowest possible amount of blame and five indicating the highest, the sample mean in this study was approximately 1.5. This finding may be cause for cautious optimism regarding the quality of future disclosure experiences, however much research is still needed to enrich our understanding of factors affecting this important aspect of the CSA survivor's healing journey.

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Appendix A: Subjects' Narrative Reactions to Survey Material

"This situation seems to be more innocent or morally acceptable than a secret sexual relationship with a man and young teen. Personally, I don't find this particular scenario to be as serious as the laws make it. I have a hard time believing that Robin was sexually abusing James. A 39 y/o woman should not pursue a sexual relationship with a 15 y/o boy, (because it's against the law) but I also don't think Robin should be imprisoned for it, if she were turned in by the family." (31-year-old Female)

"Obviously, Robin was responsible. However, a woman having sex with a younger boy is not that serious. Hell, I wished this happened to me when I was 15!" (29-year-old Male)

"Due to the ages of the parties, Robin might be considered the one at fault, if any; however the description suggested to me that the sexual relationship was mutual, albeit constituting sexual abuse of a child." (26-year-old Male)

"I'm not as upset over the situation because it was a male. I know that's sexist. There are less repercussions to the event for a male." (33-year-old Female)

"Although it is against the law to have sexual intercourse with a minor, it takes two to tango. It is the fault of Robin since she allowed it to happen." (34-year-old Male)

"This situation is hard to judge because the sexual relationship was consensual. Although James is a minor (which makes it wrong) he is still old enough to know right from wrong and may already be involved in sexual activity. Overall Robin is the ADULT and should have stopped it." (28-year-old Female)

“I am not entirely convinced, due to James' age, that he will have a negative impact. There may be underlying issues stemming from the incident and an evaluation should be conducted for the mental health of all parties involved.” (37-year-old Male)

“I believe that keeping the event private will best serve the minor. As with criminal records, I think an event like this should be kept confidential.” (38-year-old Female)

“My response was neutral for #3 because there is no way of knowing how this event will impact his life. The family kept it a secret but it will affect his sexual behavior in the future. However, some victims of sexual abuse are resilient.” (25-year-old Female)

“James should be held responsible for his actions knowing it was not a good idea having sex with a married, much older woman. However, ultimately the fact is Robin is an adult and should behave as such. She is a role model and this act broke the law.” (32-year-old Female)

“James was not to blame for the event, as it seems Robin planned the event. However, James participated willingly and is partially responsible.” (22-year-old Female)

“I hope that this is not a true story.” (48-year-old Female)

“I think the family should have told James' mother. I think his life will be impacted forever with this sexual abuse.” (34-year-old Male)

“I think something more should have been done about the situation.” (28-year-old Female)

"Tough scenario. By the letter of the law it is child abuse. I would have been very disappointed if Robin had been my, or my wife's friend." (57-year-old Male)

"The reason I feel the way I do is because by 15 these days most teens are having sex. I believe that Robin as adult should have stopped the event but it is not out of the question that James could have pushed the situation. Robin and her husband had a responsibility to tell the parents just in case there was a negative impact on James later." (43-year-old Female)

"Robin is the adult in this situation and should have set the appropriate boundaries. The questions above ask about the 'event.' In my opinion, the series of sexual contacts is considered one 'event' James' family choosing to keep the incident a secret to avoid upsetting other family members is another 'event.' I answered questions 9-11 based on the sexual relationship as the 'event' not the family's reaction to it." (39-year-old Female)

"I believe that there seemed to be severe problems between Robin and her husband's relationship to cause her to seek a relationship (sexual) with James who is a minor. Robin being the adult had a choice to prevent anything inappropriate from occurring between her and James." (34 year old Female)

"Robin is the mature adult and should have stopped the interaction before it resulted in physical relationship." (53-year-old Female)

"Robin was the adult and it was her responsibility to exercise good judgment. James was not responsible but he could have excused himself and left the premises. The family's reaction should have been different I think. James should have been taken to counseling as well as Robin." (60-year-old Female)

"I believe that Robin was the adult and as such she should have stopped the episode to the ultimate ending which was have sex with a minor. She also violated the family trust placed on her. James might get the impression that all older women whether they are married or not could be available for sex." (46-year-old Female)

"James is a minor. Robin should have known the impact of the sexual encounter would leave is she continued with it." (50-year-old Male)

"The parties involved need counseling. As an adult Robin especially needs to understand the severity of this situation. Fifteen-year-old boys will always be open to sexual adventure/opportunity but it's the adult's responsibility to protect child/adolescent and get therapy/counseling etc." (41-year-old Female)

"James was too young to be held responsible for his actions." (26-year-old Female)

"I think of Robin as being the 'responsible party' (i.e., the adult). She should have kept healthy boundaries." (44-year-old Female)

"The police should have been called and James should go to therapy." (40-year-old Female)

"Sexual abuse is hard on a child, has they tend to blame themselves. Such as what did they do, why did this happen to me, etc. He will need to have a good therapist who will be able to process this event with him. No sexual abuse should be kept as a secret as this is a form of shaming." (55-year-old Female)

"I strongly believe Robin took advantage of James, with her being the adult she could have prevented the entire incident. James is a child and was acting on impulse from

a family friend. James should be removed from the home; his parents must be prosecuted for allowing such behavior." (59-year-old Female)

"I believe it is clearly child abuse. The woman not only is an adult, but has obviously misused her power and family trust." (31-year-old Female)

"There might be some psychologically advanced 15 year olds but the onus is on Robin. She knew better and continued. One time event not excusable. But to continue un-excusable. She is 35. He is 15. Not his fault. Total blame on her." (45-year-old Male)

Appendix B: Hypothetical Scenario

James is a 15-year-old boy and is an only child. James' parents have been divorced for several years and he lives with his mother. James is a bright student. He enjoys playing sports and spending time with friends.

Robin is 35 years old. She and James' mother have been best friends since childhood. She is considered part of the family by James' grandparents and other relatives. She has known James for his entire life. Robin is married but her husband is frequently out of town for business. Robin often calls upon James for help around the house in her husband's absence.

One afternoon Robin had asked James to help her paint a room in her home. While painting, Robin accidentally brushed paint on James. This led to a paint fight which progressed to a playful wrestling match. Both parties were excited by the physical contact and the interaction soon became passionate. The pair spent the rest of the afternoon having sex.

A sexual relationship continued for several weeks after that day. Ultimately Robin's husband discovered what had been happening and confronted her, but not before informing James' mother of the situation. In an effort to save her marriage, Robin broke off the relationship with James. To avoid upsetting other family members, all the parties agreed to keep the entire incident a secret.

Gender (M/F)_____ **Date of Birth**_____ **Today's Date**_____

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 The event, as described, amounts to sexual abuse of a child.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2 This was a serious event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3 James' life will be negatively impacted by the event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4 James was responsible for the event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5 James should be blamed for the event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6 Robin's life will be negatively impacted by the event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7 Robin was responsible for the event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8 Robin should be blamed for the event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9 The family reacted appropriately to the event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10 The family is responsible for the event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11 The family should be blamed for the event.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please use the following space to discuss your reactions to the survey, the scenario or the reasons for your answers:

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