Humans, Robots, or Avatars? Which do children and young people prefer disclosing forensic information to?

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Humans, Robots, or Avatars? Which do children and young people prefer disclosing forensic information to?

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Introduction

Physical and sexual abuse of children poses a substantial threat to young people both in the UK and across the rest of the world. Recent reports by the NSPCC [1 and 2] show

- 1 in 14 young people aged 11-17 in the UK experienced physical abuse
- 1 in 20 young people aged 11-17 in the UK experienced sexual abuse

On average it takes 7 years for young people to disclose sexual abuse [3].

Preferred disclosure recipients for young people can vary drastically depending on the ages and genders of the victims and witnesses [4].

Exploring disclosure preferences may help practitioners understand to who young people may be most willing to confide information.

Novel technologies such as computer-mediated communication can increase young people's willingness to self-disclose intimate information [5, 6, and 7].

Virtual human avatar characters (VCs) are beneficial for eliciting disclosure from adults [8, and 9] but are underexplored in younger age groups.

Aims & Objectives

- To measure how age, gender, and relationship with a perpetrator influence children's preferred disclosure recipients.
- To design virtual characters that will enhance disclosure from young people during forensic interviews.

Method

***Participants and Recruitment*:**

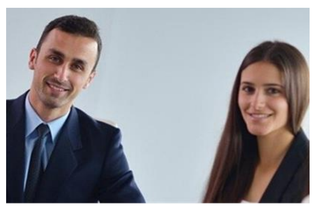
- 23 Participants (Mean Age: 10.87; SD: 2.26)
- Children (aged 8-to-11) and adolescents (aged 12-to-16)
- Online advertisement using social media, word of mouth, and schools

Design

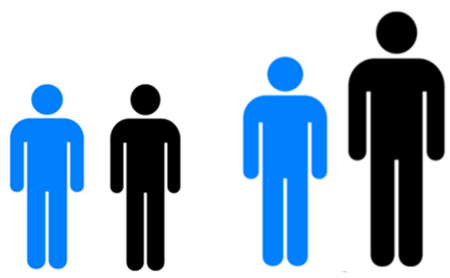
- 2 (Involvement: Victim/Witness) X 2 (Relationship: Family Member/Stranger) Within-Subjects
- *DV:* Participants rated how they felt about disclosing on a scale of 1 (Very Bad) to 5 (Very Good) and indicated their preferred disclosure recipient (age/gender/human/not human) and disclosure environment (online/offline) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Preferred Disclosure Recipient Appearance and Environment

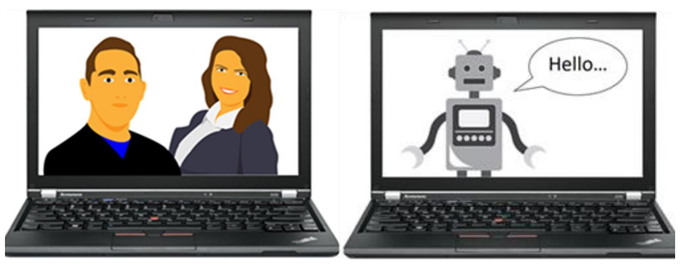
i) Online OR Face-to-Face



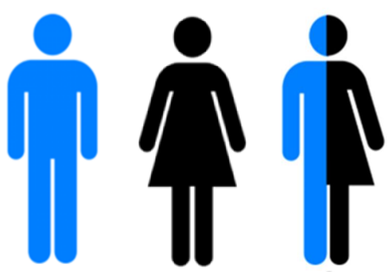
ii) Someone your age OR an adult



iii) Online character that is human OR Online character that is not human



iv) Male OR female OR non-binary



Procedure:

- Participants read four hypothetical scenarios on an online Qualtrics survey
  - i. Two wherein they are a victim of theft (money or phone)
  - ii. Two wherein they are a witness to a theft (also money or phone)
- The perpetrator in these scenarios was either a *'family member'* or a *'stranger'.*
- For each scenario, participants rated how they felt about disclosing and picked their preferred disclosure recipient and environment.

Results

Involvement (witness/victim) and Relationship (stranger/family) conditions

- There were no significant differences in how participants felt about disclosing across all conditions (p=.774)
- There were no significant differences in the preferred age (p=.507) and gender (p=.891) of the recipients across all conditions

Online character preference (human vs not human)

- Human characters were preferred (75%) to non-human characters i.e., robots (25%)

Participant age and preferred recipient age/disclosure method

- Adult recipients were preferred (95%) to recipients that were age-matched (5%)
- Both age groups preferred face to face disclosure (p =.039, see fig 1)
- Children felt better about disclosure compared to adolescents, p < .001 (see fig 2)

Fig 1.

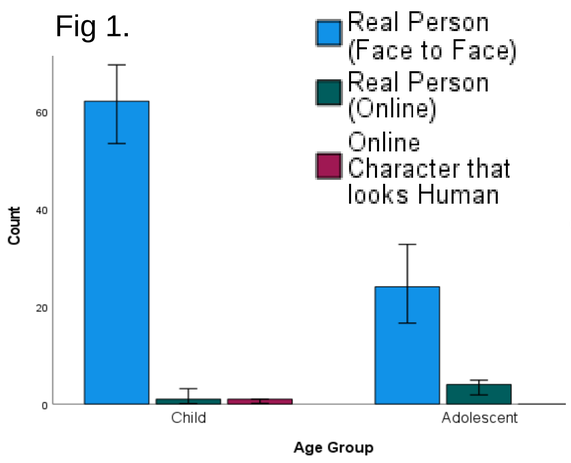
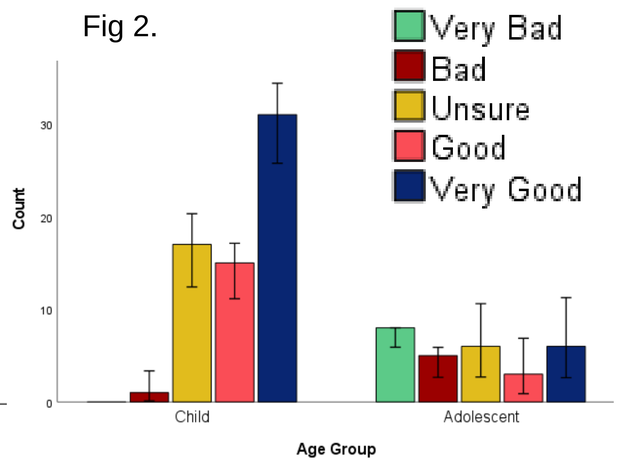


Fig 2.



Participant gender and preferred recipient gender/disclosure method

- Males and females preferred face to face disclosure, p= .013 (see fig 3)
- Participants preferred recipients that were gender-matched, p = <.001, (see fig 4)
- Females felt worse about their disclosure compared to males, p = .004

Fig 3.

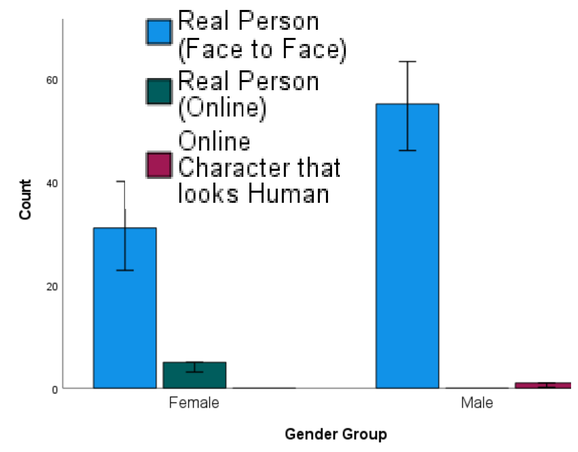
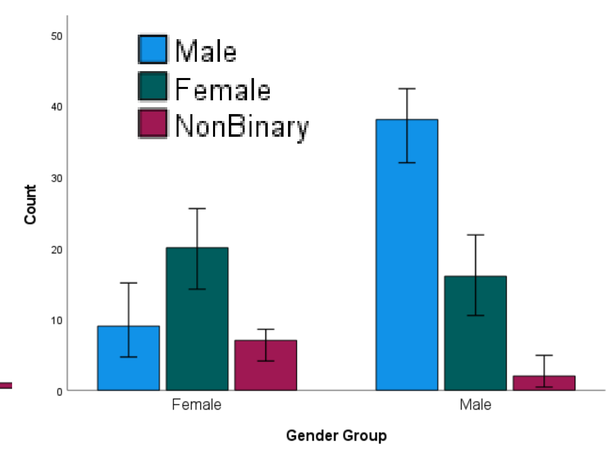


Fig 4.



Conclusions & Future Directions

- Relationship and Involvement did not have any significant effect on disclosure recipient preference or how participants felt about their disclosure
- Adult, gender-matched disclosure recipients are preferred, but in practice may not always be available.
- Human online characters were also preferred to nonhuman characters i.e., robots
- ***Upcoming study***: we are examining the ability of humans and avatars to enhance disclosure and episodic memory, and reduce suggestibility in young people

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