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WHEN ARE ADULT-CHILD SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS ACCEPTABLE? STEREOTYPING AND NEED FOR COGNITIVE CLOSURE

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Child sexual abuse is an escalating problem involving both young males and young females. Stories of child sexual abuse and adult-child sexual relationships are on the news almost nightly. One of these most recent cases involved a young girl taken from her own bed, molested, bound, and buried alive - not by a stranger but by her next door neighbor. Perhaps attitudes about this sexual abuse case were based on individuals' use of stereotypes. Before we can asses how individuals use stereotypes, we must get a basis for how researchers define child sexual abuse.

Child Sexual Abuse

Researchers define child sexual abuse as fondling, intercourse, or imposed sexual behavior with a child (e.g., Burton & Myers, 1992). Researchers also state that child sexual abuse includes coercion or force by a person much older (i.e., five years or more) than a child (e.g., Browne & Finkelhor, 1986). For purposes of this paper, child sexual abuse is defined as any contact from fondling to intercourse by an individual five or more years older than a child or adolescent victim.

Reported rates of child sexual abuse vary between sex of victims. In 1990, researchers reported that approximately 16% of adult males and 27% of adult females in America had been sexually abused as children (e.g., Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990). In 1991, researchers reported that approximately 404,100 children had been sexually abused in America (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994). The reported rate of childhood sexual abuse for females is estimated to be 1.5 to 3 times higher than the reported rate of childhood sexual abuse for males (Finkelhor et al., 1990). When instances of child sexual abuse are reported, a majority of sexual experiences are one time events (Finkelhor et al., 1990).

Living environments and family situations are factors related to child sexual abuse prevalence. A pattern has been revealed in a series of studies in which researchers determined that children who were sexually abused often lived in a non-traditional home (e.g., Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Finkelhor, 1979; Finkelhor et al., 1990; Herman & Hirschman, 1981; Russell, 1986). A non-traditional home, for example, may not include one or both biological parents (Finkelhor et al., 1990).

Child victims may experience both short-term and long-term consequences from child sexual abuse. Short-term consequences of child sexual abuse are generally exhibited in behavior and are different for male victims and female victims (Finkelhor, 1990). Behavioral changes result from feelings which can be either externalized (i.e., shown on the outside) or internalized (i.e., kept on the inside). Externalized behaviors include aggression, angry outbursts, and seemingly uncontrollable behavior; internalized behaviors include depression, fear, anxiety, and sleep disturbances (Friedrich., Urquiza, & Beilke, 1986). Young males are more likely to externalize feelings than to internalize feelings, whereas young females are more likely to internalize feelings than externalize feelings (Finkelhor, 1990).

Finkelhor (1990) states that long-term consequences of child sexual abuse are similar for male and female victims and include depression, self-destructive behavior, anxiousness, low self-esteem, poor trust of others, retardation in sexual adjustment, and substance abuse (cf. Rind & Tromovitch, 1997). Male victims are

more likely than female victims to become sexual abusers (e.g., molesters, rapists) later in life (Finkelhor, 1990). Female victims are more likely than male victims to develop a psychiatric disorder later in life (Finkelhor, 1990).

There are factors correlated with degree of intensity for these long term consequences of child sexual abuse. Situational factors such as a close relationship between perpetrator and victim, a longer period of abuse, a threat or use of force, and a victim's age are correlated with intensity of long term consequences of child sexual abuse (Friedrich et. al., 1986). Situational factors that involve a social stigma are correlated with a child victim's externalized aggression (Finkelhor, 1990). Male victims sexually abused by male perpetrators, for example, may become especially aggressive. This increased aggression may occur because male victims who are sexually abused by male perpetrators may be stigmatized as homosexual. Alternatively, this increased aggression may occur because people believe that a male victim should be strong enough to stop being sexually abused.

Although some victims of child sexual abuse may exhibit adverse behavioral changes, some victims exhibit no signs of adverse consequences (i.e., asymptomatic). According to Finkelhor (1990), there are several reasons why victims may exhibit no behavioral changes. Asymptomatic victims could be in a state of denial. Asymptomatic victims' abusive experiences may have been less severe (i.e., perpetrated by someone relatively unknown, for a short duration, without threat or actual force) than symptomatic victims' abusive experiences (i.e., perpetrated by someone well known, for a long duration, with threat of or actual force). Emotional support for asymptomatic children may also be more consistent or thorough than emotional support for symptomatic victims.

Although a widely accepted definition of child sexual abuse includes an individual five or more years older than a victim, age differences between a perpetrator and a victim may vary widely. Child sexual abuse may involve a prepubescent (e.g., 14 years of age or younger) male or female victim and a considerably older male or female perpetrator (e.g., 10 or more years older) than a victim (Murray, 2000). In comparison to female victims, male victims are usually slightly older (e.g., three to four months older) at onset of sexual abuse (Ames & Houston, 1990). In a telephone sample survey of 2,626 males and females, 43% of total respondents (both male and female) reported experiencing sexual abuse as a child. An average age of onset of abuse in this sample was 9.9 years for males and 9.6 years for females (Finkelhor et al., 1990).

According to Murray (2000), there are several similarities among perpetrator and victim relationships in child sexual abuse cases. Most child sexual abuse victims are familiar with or known to their abuser. Child sexual abuse victims often perceive their abuser as an authority figure such as a parent, teacher, neighbor, or family friend. Perpetrators use this pre-existing relationship to pursue children sexually. Although force is not unheard of, perpetrators most often use other methods of coercion such as persuasion and guilt. Perpetrators more often use force with male victims than with female victims. Perpetrators create situations that often do not require force to seduce child victims. Perpetrators, for example, may expose themselves, ask for or offer oral sex, request nudity, or simply observe a child disrobing or bathing (Murray, 2000).

Researchers also use multiple terms (e.g., child molesters, pedophiles) for adults involved in adult-child sexual encounters (e.g., Burton & Myers, 1992; Finkelhor & Araji, 1986). Because child sexual abuse is a crime, perpetrator (for an adult) and victim (for a child) are terms used in this paper. People who have a psychological propensity to commit acts of child sexual abuse often lack some emotional or social abilities in their character (Dreznick, 2003). When some people hear the term "child sexual abuse perpetrator", for example, they may visualize an older male outcaste from society forced to seek sexual relations with children. Although this generalized idea of perpetrators is stereotypical, there

is evidence that perpetrators in fact are actually less capable than others of appropriate interaction in social settings (Bumby & Hansen, 1997). Researchers found that perpetrators often lack "heterosocial competence (Dreznick, 2003)." That is, perpetrators often lack an ability to cooperate with people of similar age and opposite sex. Other researchers found that along with a heterosocial deficiency, perpetrators often have poor self-esteem and are sometimes unable to clearly view their abilities in an adult relationship (Murray, 2000). Perpetrators often favor sexual contact with adults but settle for contact with children (Murray, 2000). Perpetrators choose children because perpetrators often view children as weak and attainable (Murray, 2000). Perpetrators may view a child as passive and nonjudgmental whereas perpetrators may view an adult as threatening and judgmental (Dreznick, 2003).

In reported cases of child sexual abuse, perpetrators are statistically most often male (Finkelhor et. al, 1990; Murray, 2000). Male perpetrators typically seek victims whom are five to ten years younger than themselves. Most male perpetrators are between adolescence and midlife (Murray, 2000). That is, most male perpetrators are between 14 and 45 years of age. Perpetrators may be bisexual, heterosexual, or homosexual (Murray, 2000). Male perpetrators may also be married and have children of their own (Murray, 2000). Although reported perpetrators are most often male, perpetrators may also be female.

Even though females are capable of child sexual abuse, people may perceive females as weak, vulnerable, and submissive (Howard, 1984). According to societal norms, women are sex avoiders rather than sexual pleasure seekers (Denov, 2003). However, in a sample of 270 child abuse cases involving teachers and staff, 30% of perpetrators were women (Murray, 2000). A majority of these females were married with children of their own. An average age of these female perpetrators was 35 years of age. In contrast to male offenders in this sample, female perpetrators were more socially involved, more educated, and had less history of deviant behavior (Murray, 2000).

To review, child sexual abuse is an escalating problem. Consequences of child sexual abuse can be both short-term and long-term. Short-term consequences are usually exhibited through inappropriate behavior (e.g., angry outbursts). Long-term consequences are usually exhibited through relationships with others (e.g., poor trust). Reported victims of child sexual abuse are usually young females. Reported perpetrators of child sexual abuse are usually males between adolescence and midlife.

As previously stated, perpetrators of child sexual abuse are often male and victims of child sexual abuse are often female. Recently, however, there have been several adult females accused of child sexual abuse with young males. Perhaps there is variance between a reported occurrence of child sexual abuse and an actual occurrence of child sexual abuse because of a use of stereotypes.

Stereotypes

Most people rely on stereotypes, however implicit or explicit, in every day life (e.g., Fiske, 1998). Application of a stereotype can be as implicit as a subconscious thought about an aggressive male or as explicit as a deciding factor against an aggressive male among a grand jury. According to Fiske (1998), stereotypes are part of a process known as group-based reactions. Group-based reactions are how a person perceives groups of people or individuals which represent groups of people (e.g., a female represents all females). According to Fiske, groups of people from which a person's group-based reaction is formed can either be a person's in-group (i.e., a group of people with whom a person feels related) or a person's out-group (i.e., a group of people with whom a person feels unrelated). Elements of group-based reactions include cognitive (e.g., stereotype), affective (i.e., prejudice), and behavioral (i.e., discrimination).

Stereotypes are a cognitive element of group-based reactions (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Petty &

Wegener, 1998). Stereotypes are people's thoughts about groups of people. People may hold stereotypes about groups of people based on various characteristics such as age, sex, and race. Most people, for example, think females are more likely than males to be victims of assault (e.g., Howard, 1984). Also, most people think rape (as compared to robbery) is the most likely type of assault toward a female and the least likely type of assault toward a male (e.g., Howard, 1984).

Although there are varying functions of stereotypes (e.g., psychodynamic, social orientation), the cognitive function of stereotypes will be the primary focus in this paper. People utilize the cognitive function of stereotypes to help manage or organize learned information (Snyder & Miene, 1994). By making learned information manageable, most people are better able to predict their social world than are people who are unable to manage learned information (Snyder & Miene, 1994).

One process in the cognitive element of group-based reactions is attention (Fiske, 1998). According to Fiske, people often pay more attention to stereotype-confirming information than to stereotype-disconfirming information. Recently, for example, a small number of female child sexual abuse victims (and male sexual abuse perpetrators) have been reported across the United States. Nonetheless, news representatives have focused on reports of child molestation involving stereotypical relationships (i.e., male perpetrators and female victim). With extensive exposure to stereotype-confirming information (e.g., male sexual abuse perpetrators and female sexual abuse victims), individuals may begin to make inferences regarding certain stereotypes.

Inference is another process in the cognitive element of group-based reactions (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Inference is a process people use to "fill in the blanks" after learning information about a group or individuals within a group (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). People, for example, may think that (a) females are more appropriate to work with young children than are males and (b) males who work with young children possess motives other than simply caring for young children. A mother, for example, may encounter an adult male Boy Scout leader

and infer that he is a child molester because he works with young children.

Also, people are more likely to infer negative reasons for out-group behaviors than positive reasons for out-group behaviors (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Upon meeting a male, for example, a female is more likely to infer this male is aggressive and insensitive than to infer this male is gentle and compassionate. A person easily forms inferences when that person has a comprehensive memory of stereotype-confirming information (Hilton & Von HIppel, 1996). When a person has a comprehensive memory of stereotype-confirming information, that person is better able to access that information than is a person who has little or no memory of stereotype-confirming information. A female, for example, may be more likely to infer a male is aggressive and insensitive if she has a comprehensive memory of aggressive and insensitive males.

Memory is another process of the cognitive element in group-based reactions (Fiske, 1998). People are more likely to remember a stereotype if they are exposed to a stereotype repeatedly than if they are exposed to a stereotype only once or twice (e.g., Smith, 1998). Recent news headlines, for example, include adult-child "relationships" between female adults and male children as well as "relationships" between male adults and female children. These adult females are portrayed as moral, professional persons. In contrast, these male adults are portrayed as immoral, unprofessional persons. With repeated exposure to these portrayals, people may make assumptions that all female sexual abusers are moral and professional and that all male sexual abusers are immoral and unprofessional. Additionally, repeated exposure to stereotypes allows people to become efficient at retrieving stereotypic information (Fiske, 1998). An individual, for example, who is repeatedly exposed to sexually aggressive males may easily

recall that males are sexually aggressive whereas that individual may not easily recall that some males are not sexually aggressive.

Attribution is another process in the cognitive element of group-based reactions (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Attribution occurs when a person provides reason for a behavior of another person or group of persons (Fiske, 1998). When presented with stereotype-confirming information about a target (i.e., a person to whom someone is attaching a stereotype), people may attribute stereotypic motives to that target rather than to a situation in which that target may have been involved (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). If a male is accused of molesting a female, for example, information that he is naturally sexually aggressive (characteristic of a person) will likely override other information that the molestation was actually mutual sex (situation of a person). Also, stereotype-confirming explanations may dominate over stereotype-disconfirming explanations of a behavior (e.g., Sanbonmatsu, Akimoto, & Gibson, 1994). A mother, for example, may attribute a male becoming a scout leader to his perceived homosexuality (stereotype-confirming) rather than his drive to become a mentor for young boys (stereotype-disconfirming). Attributions along with other cognitive elements of group-based reactions are often combined with the affective element (prejudice).

Prejudice is an affective element of group-based reactions (Fiske, 1998). Prejudices are emotional feelings one has about behaviors of a group. How a person, for example, feels about people of another race (that person's out-group) may be a prejudice. People can hold positive prejudices. Individuals, for example, may feel comfort around adult females (vs. adult males) because individuals feel adult females are more comforting than adult males. People, however, usually hold negative prejudices (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996).

Discrimination is a behavioral element of group reactions (Fiske, 1998). Discrimination is behavior based on stereotypic beliefs (Fiske, 1998). Individuals may hold positive or negative stereotypes and therefore individuals may exhibit positive or negative discrimination.

An example of positive discrimination may stem from a stereotype known as "what is beautiful is good (Dion, Berschid, Walster, 1972)." Individuals may hold this stereotype and believe that any individual perceived to be beautiful is positive or good in nature. An attractive female, for example, (what is beautiful) may be perceived as unable to sexually abuse a child.

An example of negative discrimination may stem from a stereotype about males as being sexually aggressive. Individuals may hold a stereotype and believe that males are likely to sexually abuse children. A male, for example, may be denied employment working with children (e.g., a nanny) simply because he is a male.

Individuals may discriminate for various reasons. Snyder and Miene (1994) describe detachment as a function of discrimination. Individuals may separate themselves from a target (i.e., person who is being discriminated) so that individuals can feel comfortable discriminating. Individuals may use several different tactics (e.g., ignore, blame, aggress) to detach themselves from a target (Snyder & Miene, 1994). A mother, for example, may fail to hire a male as a babysitter because she believes all males are sexually aggressive toward children. To ensure her feeling of detachment from males, that mother may ignore all males close to her (e.g., males in her neighborhood).

To review, most people use stereotypes in everyday life. Stereotypes are the cognitive function of group based reactions. Memory, attention, inference, and attribution are all processes involved in the cognitive function of group-based reactions. Prejudice is an affective aspect of group based reactions. Discrimination is a behavioral aspect of group based reactions. People who rely on stereotypes sometimes react to groups based on inaccurate information (e.g., perceive male perpetrators of child sexual abuse

more negative than female perpetrators). Perhaps this reliance on inaccurate information is prevalent in certain types of people.

Need for closure

Some individuals feel a need to have a definitive and permanent answer on a given topic. Some individuals do not feel a need to have a definitive and permanent answer on a given topic. Individuals' desire for definitive answers may depend on those individuals' need for cognitive closure. Researchers use the Need for Cognitive Closure Scale to measure individual differences in the degree to which individuals seek definitive answers and keep those specific answers permanently (e.g., Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

Individuals who are high in need for cognitive closure not only seek specific answers, but these individuals also seek them quickly and permanently. Individuals who seek cognitive closure are participating in a two-part process. Kruglanski & Webster (1996) describe this two-part process as "seizing" information as well as "freezing" information. When information is presented to individuals high in need for cognitive closure, these individuals will first seize that incoming information by accepting information quickly and then will freeze incoming information by keeping information permanently. When information is presented to individuals low in need for cognitive closure, these individuals may not seize (i.e., accept information quickly) or freeze (i.e., keep information permanently).

An individual, for example, may learn that female teachers are caring and professional. A high need for closure individual will seize (i.e., accept quickly) that information about female teachers and freeze (i.e., keep permanently) that information. If later that high need for closure individual hears inconsistent information about a female teacher (e.g., a female teacher is accused of child sexual abuse), then that individual may refute this accusation about a female teacher because that inconsistent information does not support previously held information about female teachers. A low need for closure individual in that same situation will not seize or freeze that information (i.e., that female teachers are caring

and professional) about female teachers. If later that low need for closure individual hears inconsistent information about a female teacher (e.g., a female teacher is accused of child sexual abuse), then that individual will accept information that female teachers are caring and professional as well as integrate newly learned information that a female teacher was accused of child sexual abuse.

One aspect of the need for cognitive closure concept is an individual's preference for predictability (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals who seek predictability prefer to know what their future holds for them (e.g., Thompson, Naccarato, Parker, & Moskowitz, 1993). Individuals who seek predictable situations are likely high in need for cognitive closure whereas individuals who do not seek predictable situations are likely low in need for cognitive closure. Parents who are, for example, high in need for closure may have a strong desire to know the sex of their child's teacher prior to beginning school. In contrast, parents who are low in need for closure may feel indifferent toward knowing the sex of their child's teacher prior to beginning school.

Another aspect of the need for closure concept is an individual's preference for order and structure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals who seek order and structure prefer to have a concise mode of life with little change. Individuals who seek order and structure are likely high in need for cognitive closure whereas individuals who do not seek order and structure are likely low in need for cognitive closure. A child, for example, may have a female art teacher and a male physical education teacher. If this child's mother is in high in need for closure, for example, that mother may be uncomfortable with a change in her child's teachers (e.g., a new male teacher for art class, a new female teacher for physical education class). In contrast, a mother who is low in need for closure

may have no problem with her child's teachers changing positions.

Another aspect of the need for cognitive closure concept is an individual's comfort level when presented with ambiguity (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Ambiguity refers to a situation or topic that is vague or unclear. Individuals who are high in need for cognitive closure are generally insecure when presented with ambiguity because those individuals rely on having definitive answers and decisions to given topics. Individuals who are low in need for cognitive closure, however, are not generally insecure when presented with ambiguity because those individuals do not rely on definitive decisions and answers. A mother who is high in need for cognitive closure, for example, who learns a male teacher may or may not be a child molester may feel insecure when presented with this ambiguous possibility. She in turn may decide that male teacher is a child molester (even without sufficient evidence or support) to satisfy her intolerance of ambiguity. A mother who is low in need for cognitive closure faced with the same situation may question that male teacher or investigate that situation before making a definitive conclusion.

Another aspect of the need for cognitive closure concept is an individual's degree of decisiveness (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals who are high in need for cognitive closure are generally more decisive than are individuals who are low in need for cognitive closure. Individuals who are high in need for cognitive closure may have a desire to come to a decision - any decision - on a given question rather than leave a question unanswered. Individuals who are low in need for cognitive closure may not have a desire to come to a decision and may feel comfortable leaving a question unanswered. When presented with a child sexual abuse case, a juror who is high in need for cognitive closure, for example, may feel compelled to reach a verdict even if insufficient evidence is presented. In contrast, a juror low in need for cognitive closure presented with that same child sexual abuse case may not feel compelled to reach a verdict quickly but rather wait until sufficient evidence is presented.

Another aspect of the need for cognitive closure concept is an individual's close-mindedness (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals who are high in need for cognitive closure are generally more close minded than are individuals who are low in need for cognitive closure. That is, individuals who are high in need for cognitive closure may not be as willing to alter previously held knowledge as individuals who are low in need for cognitive closure. When presented with stereotype-confirming information (e.g., a sexually promiscuous male), individuals high in need for cognitive closure may not be forced to alter previous held knowledge, but instead match new information with what they already know (e.g., all males are sexually promiscuous). In contrast, when presented with stereotype-disconfirming information (e.g., a sexually promiscuous female), individuals high in need for cognitive closure may be forced to alter previous held knowledge (e.g., females are not sexually promiscuous). When presented with contradictory information, an individual high in need for cognitive closure may feel uncomfortable and therefore reject new information. In this current example, individuals high in need for cognitive closure may continue to believe that all males are sexually promiscuous. If an individual low in need for cognitive closure is presented with that same information, then that individual may feel comfortable assimilating that new information.

According to Kruglanski & Webster (1996), there are several situational factors which contribute to an individual's need for cognitive closure. Individuals may seek cognitive closure if those individuals are confronted with an unpleasant task. Individuals may feel that by seeking closure, those individuals can end an unpleasant task. Individuals may seek cognitive closure if those individuals have responsibility of judgment on a specific topic. Individuals may feel that by

seeking closure, those individuals can avoid placing unwanted judgment on a specific topic. Individuals may seek cognitive closure if those individuals perceive contemplating or thinking about a specific topic as dangerous or aversive. Individuals may feel that by seeking closure, those individuals can avoid contemplation and in turn danger. Finally, individuals may seek cognitive closure if other individuals value cognitive closure on a topic. Individuals may feel that by seeking closure, those individuals can improve self-esteem or status.

In contrast, there are several situational factors which contribute to an individual's need to avoid cognitive closure. Individuals may seek to avoid cognitive closure if those individuals fear invalidity (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Individuals may feel that by avoiding closure, those individuals may avoid making a quick, possibly incorrect, decision. Individuals may seek to avoid cognitive closure if those individuals feel that invalidity will have negative repercussions (so much so that negative outcomes outweigh the benefits of cognitive closure). Individuals may feel that by avoiding closure, those individuals may avoid those negative repercussions. Individuals may seek to avoid cognitive closure if those individuals are participating in a task (e.g., thinking) which is perceived as enjoyable. Individuals may feel that by avoiding closure, those individuals may continue that task without seeking a permanent resolution to a topic (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Finally, Individuals may seek to avoid cognitive closure if those individuals fear "evaluation apprehension" (e.g., Chirumbolo, Livi, Mannetti, Pierro & Kruglanski, 2004). Individuals may feel that by avoiding closure, those individuals avoid having others judge their final conclusion.

Several researchers have demonstrated that an individual's need for cognitive closure is related to that individual's ability to retrieve stereotype-confirming (or disconfirming) information (e.g., Bodenhausen & Lichtenstein, 1987; Dijksterhuis & Van Knippenberg, 1995; Kruglanski, Shah, Pierro & Mannetti, 2002). Individuals can easily retrieve and store stereotypes in memory (Fiske, 1998). If, for example, individuals high in need for closure are presented with information that all child sexual

abuse perpetrators are male (stereotype-confirming), then those individual will seize (i.e., take quickly) and freeze (i.e., keep permanently) that information. If those individuals are later presented with a child sexual abuse case, then those individuals may make a stereotypical judgment that the sexual perpetrator involved is male. In contrast, individuals low in need for cognitive closure presented with the same situation may not rely on stereotypical judgment and may instead consider both a male (stereotype-confirming) and a female (stereotype-disconfirming) as a possible perpetrator.

Researchers have demonstrated that individuals who are high in need for cognitive closure are more likely than individuals low in need for cognitive closure to make stereotypical judgments and show favoritism toward in-groups (e.g., Doherty, 1998; Kossowska, Van Hiel, Chun & Kruglanski, 2002). In contrast, individuals who are low in need for cognitive closure are not likely to make stereotypical judgments or to show favoritism toward in-groups. Therefore, individuals high in need for cognitive closure are more likely than individuals low in need for cognitive closure to hold and use stereotypes (e.g., de Drue, Koole & Oldersma, 1999; Ford & Kruglanski, 1995).

Hypotheses

Based on a review of literature, we proposed the following hypotheses. First, participants will have more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter which includes a female victim than a sexual encounter which includes a male victim. Second, participants will have more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter which includes a male perpetrator than a sexual encounter which includes female perpetrator. Third, participants will have more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter which includes a male perpetrator and a female victim than (a) a sexual encounter which

includes a male perpetrator and male victim or (b) a sexual encounter which includes a female perpetrator and either a male or female victim. Finally, because participants who are high in need for cognitive closure are more likely to make stereotype-based judgments, we predict that individuals high in need for cognitive closure will have more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter that is stereotypical (i.e., a male perpetrator and female victim) than any other dyad of sexual abuse (e.g., a male perpetrator and male victim; female perpetrator and either a male or female victim).

<div align="center">Method</div>

Participants

A sample of 163 students from undergraduate psychology classes were recruited to take part in this study. Participants volunteered to take part in a study titled "Perceptions of Adult-Child Sexual Encounters II." Participants who participated in this study were awarded extra credit in their psychology classes. Participants were also given alternative opportunities to earn extra credit (e.g., writing an article summary, attending a related seminar) for their psychology classes. Special requirements for this study were that participants had to be at least 18 years of age. Participants who completed a similar study titled "Perceptions of Adult-Child Sexual Encounters" were ineligible to participate.

In this current sample, there were 79 female and 83 male participants. Most (69%) participants were between 18 and 24 years of age. A majority of participants identified themselves as either Caucasian (63%) or African American (12%). Approximately 80% of participants reported being single and approximately 87% of participants reported having no biological children.

Of the 162 participants who agreed to take part in this study, 161 completed this entire study. Of those participants who did not complete the entire survey, none were female and one (.01%) was male. All participants were asked to sign a written informed consent before completing this study. Participants were treated in accordance with the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (American Psychological Association, 2002).

Procedure

Participants completed this study in groups of no larger than ten. A female researcher informed participants of the topic of this study and a potential for emotional distress. She assured participants of complete anonymity of their responses and informed participants that they may withdraw at any time from this study without being penalized. She then gave each participant a written consent form which was signed by each participant and returned to the researcher prior to being handed a survey.

Each participant was then handed a survey and an answer sheet. Participants were asked to read their survey and to record their answers on an answer sheet. Participants were given one of four possible scenarios depicting a sexual encounter between an adult (perpetrator) and a child (victim). An example of a scenario involving a female victim and a female perpetrator is as follows:

> Mary, a fifth grader in Ms. Jones class, stayed after school for help with her homework. Ms. Jones asked Mary to help stack some books in the closet. While moving the books, Mary and Ms. Jones began to talk. Ms. Jones told Mary that she thought Mary was very mature for her age. Ms. Jones said that she thought Mary was very attractive. The teacher placed her hand on Mary's leg and began rubbing Mary's body. Mary watched silently. Ms. Jones asked Mary to lie down on the floor, telling her she would enjoy this, that it would feel good. Mary did nothing. The teacher continued rubbing Mary's body and then slowly undressed her. When Mary was naked, the teacher began kissing Mary's body, starting with Mary's face and working her way down to Mary's thighs. Ms. Jones performed oral sex on Mary. Then the teacher sat up and put Mary's hand inside Ms. Jones' slacks and asked Mary to rub the teacher's body as the teacher had done to her. Then the

teacher undressed and laid on top of Mary while she fondled Mary's buttocks. Ms. Jones brought Mary's face down to her crotch and asked Mary to perform oral sex on the teacher. Mary did as she was asked. Ms. Jones fondled Mary's genitals as she continued to caress Mary's body. Then Ms. Jones got up and brought Mary her clothes and asked her not to tell her parents what had happened. The teacher asked Mary that their relationship remain their secret.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four scenarios (i.e., experimental conditions). In these scenarios, interactions occurred either between (a) a male perpetrator and female victim, (b) a male perpetrator and male victim, (c) a female perpetrator and female victim, or (d) a female perpetrator and a male victim.

To express their attitudes about the adult-child sexual encounter scenario, participants responded to ten items from the semantic differential (e.g., good/bad). Items were counterbalanced such that for some items the negative descriptor was on the right pole of the scale and for other items the negative descriptor was on the left pole of the scale. We reverse scored responses with a negative descriptor on the left pole. After reverse scoring, the researcher summed responses to all ten items on the scale. Participants with high scores (i.e., about a median) indicated more negative attitudes about an encounter than did participants with low scores (i.e., below a median). In this sample, a Cronbach's α of .81 was obtained for scores on the semantic differential scale.

After responding to statements about a scenario, participants were given the 42- item Need for Closure Scale (Kruglanski et. al., 1993). Participants responded to this scale using a 5-point Likert scale: *strongly disagree, moderately disagree, uncertain/undecided, moderately agree or strongly agree*. The scale included five subscales which are preference for order and structure (e.g., "I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life"), predictability (e.g., "I hate to change my plans at the last minute"), intolerance of ambiguity (e.g., "I don't like situations that are uncertain"), decisiveness (e.g., "I would describe myself as indecisive"), and

close-mindedness (e.g., "I do not usually consult many different options before forming my own view"). Included in this scale were both negatively and positively worded statements. Agreement with positively worded items indicated a high need for closure (e.g., "I don't like situations that are uncertain."). Agreement with negatively worded items indicated a low need for closure (e.g., "My personal space is usually messy and disorganized.").

Responses to statements where disagreement with a statement indicated a high need for closure were reverse scored. Scores for responses on individual items were then summed. Based on a median split of scores on the Need for Closure Scale, we classified participants as either high or low need for closure. Participants with high scores on this scale had a high need for closure and participants with low scores on this scale had a low need for closure.

Webster and Kruglanski (1994) found a Cronbach's alpha of .84 for scores on the 42-item Need for Closure Scale as well as a Cronbach's alpha of .62 for scores on the Closed Mindedness facet and a Cronbach's alpha of .82 for scores on the Structure facet of this scale. After a twelve week period, Webster and Kruglanski (1994) found a test-retest correlation for scores on the Need for Closure Scale of $r = .86$. A Cronbach's alpha for scores on the Need for Closure Scale of .83 was found in our study (i.e., Perceptions of Adult-Child Sexual Encounters)

Scores on the Need for Closure Scale have convergent validity with scores on the Personal Need for Structure Scale, Intolerance of Ambiguity Scale, and measures of decisiveness (Neuberg, Judice & West, 1997). Researchers indicate that measures of Personal Need for Structure, Intolerance of Ambiguity and decisiveness are very similar to the Need for Closure Scale (e.g., Neuberg et. al., 1997). Researchers use the Personal

Need for Structure Scale to measure a person's need to organize their lives into simple forms (e.g., Hansen & Bartsch, 2001). Researchers use the Intolerance of Ambiguity Scale and measures of decisiveness to determine to what degree a person feels uncomfortable in an ambiguous situation and to what degree a person needs to reach decisions (e.g., Van Heil & Mervielde, 2002). Scores on the Need for Closure Scale have been found to be strongly positively correlated with scores on measures of personal need for structure (e.g., Leone, Wallace,& Modglin, 1999; Nueberg et al. 1997). Scores on the Need for Closure Scale have also been found to be correlated with scores on measures of intolerance of ambiguity (e.g., Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; Leone et al., 1999). Scores on the Need for Closure Scale have convergent validity with scores on measures of Personal Need for Structure Scale, Intolerance of Ambiguity Scale, and measures of decisiveness (Neuberg et. al, 1997).

Scores on the Need for Closure Scale have Discriminant validity with scores on measures such as the Need for Cognition (e.g., Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Researchers (e.g., Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) indicate that scores on the Need for Cognition scale measure a person's desire to think whereas scores on the Need for Closure Scale measure a person's need for a quick and permanent answer to a given topic. Scores on the Need for Closure Scale have been found to be negatively correlated with scores on the Need for Cognition Scale and uncorrelated with measures of social desirability (e.g., Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). In sum, scores on the Need for Closure Scale have Discriminant validity with scores on measures such as the Need for Cognition Scale (e.g., Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

We included a series of manipulation checks in each questionnaire to ensure that participants correctly recalled the sex of the victim (Mark or Mary) and the sex of the perpetrator (Mr. Jones or Ms. Jones) for each sexual scenario.

Participants were also asked questions pertaining to demographics. We asked for information about participant's sex (i.e., male; female), age (i.e., 18-24; 25-31; 32-38; 39-45; over 45), race (i.e., Caucasian; African American; Hispanic or Latino; Asian or Pacific Islander; Other), marital status (i.e., Single, never been married; Single, currently divorced; Married, only once; Remarried, after divorce; Widowed) and children (i.e., biological – none, one, two, three, four or more; step-children – none, one, two, three, four or more).

Participants were also asked about their own experiences with child sexual abuse before age 16. Participants were first asked to report if "Another person, five or more years older than you, fondled you in a sexual way or touched or stroked your sex organs; or you touched or stroked another person's sex organs at his/her request." Participants were then asked to report if "Another person, five or more years older than you, attempted oral sex, anal sex, or vaginal intercourse." Participants were finally asked to report if "Another person, give or more years older than you, had sex (oral, anal, or vaginal) with you (any amount of penetration of any orifice- ejaculation not necessary)."

After completion of this study, participants placed their survey and answer sheets in an envelope and placed that envelope in a box away from the experimenter to insure confidentiality. Participants were then handed a debriefing sheet and informed of various counseling services available to these participants should they experience emotional distress (e.g., on campus counseling, after hours emergency numbers).

Results
Preliminary Analysis

We included a manipulation check to verify that when participants read a particular sexual encounter, those participants reported attitudes about that particular sexual encounter. If, for example, participants read a sexual encounter depicting a male perpetrator and female victim, those participants should have only reported attitudes about that scenario which included a male

perpetrator and female victim. After participants read a sexual encounter and reported their attitudes about a sexual encounter, participants were asked to recall the sex (i.e., male; female; do not recall) of (a) the adult and (b) the child in that sexual encounter. We expected that participants would be able to correctly recall both the sex of an adult and the sex of a child in each sexual encounter.

We performed a chi square analysis to test the effectiveness this manipulation. Overall, participants correctly recalled the sex of a perpetrator in these sexual encounters, χ^2 (1, N=162) = 150.24, p <.01. When a perpetrator in a sexual encounter was male, participants correctly recalled the sex of that perpetrator 97.59% of the time. When a perpetrator in a sexual encounter was female, participants correctly recalled the sex of that perpetrator 98.73% of the time. Overall, participants also correctly recalled the sex of a victim in these sexual encounters, χ^2 (1, N=162) = 150.10, p <.0001. When a victim in a sexual encounter was male, participants correctly recalled the sex of that victim 97.78% of the time. When a victim in a sexual encounter was female, participants correctly recalled the sex of that victim 98.75% of the time. Therefore, we can conclude that our manipulation of the sex of both a perpetrator and a victim in a sexual encounter were effective.

Additionally, we tested to find if there was a restriction in the range of participants' attitudes. As previously stated, participants reported attitudes based on a set of semantic differential scales. Participants' scores on these semantic differential scales could range between 10 and 50. A scalar midpoint for scores on these semantic differential scales was 30. Therefore, participants who had scores above 30 had negative attitudes about a sexual encounter and participants who had scores below 30 had positive attitudes about a sexual encounter. Of the 162 participants in our study, only two participants (1.8%) had scores below this scalar midpoint (i.e., positive attitudes) and 160 participants (97.2%) had scores above this scalar midpoint (i.e., negative attitudes). Interestingly, both participants who reported positive attitudes in our study read a sexual encounter which included a female perpetrator and a male victim.

Overall, participants in our study reported overwhelmingly negative attitudes (M= 45.17, SD = 5.18) toward a sexual encounter (coefficient of skewness of -2.29). In our study, therefore, we found a restriction in range in participants' scores on a set of semantic differential scales.

Main Analysis

Recall our design. Our measured predictor variable was need for closure of participant (high, low). Our manipulated independent variables were sex of victim (male, female) and sex of perpetrator (male, female). Therefore, this study was a 2 (high vs. low need for closure) x 2 sex of victim (male vs. female) x 2 sex of perpetrator (male vs. female) factorial design. Our dependent variable was attitudes about child sexual abuse. To test these hypotheses, we performed a three-way ANOVA. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical analyses.

Our first hypothesis was that participants would have more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter that included a male perpetrator than a sexual encounter that included a female perpetrator. That is, we expected to find a significant main effect for sex of perpetrator. There was a marginally reliable main effect for sex of perpetrator of child sexual abuse, F (1, 155) = 3.19, p < .10 [t (162) = 1.79, p <.05 one tailed]. Participants perceived a sexual encounter that included a male perpetrator (M= 45.92, SD = 4.10) more negatively than a sexual encounter that included a female perpetrator (M= 44.40, SD = 6.01). Therefore, this hypothesis was partially supported.

Our second hypothesis was that participants would have more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter that included a female victim than a sexual encounter that included a male victim. That is, we expected to find a significant main effect for sex of victim. There was a main effect for sex of victim of child sexual abuse, F (1, 155) = 4.06, p < .05.

Participants perceived a sexual encounter that included a female victim ($M = 45.98$, $SD = 3.72$) more negatively than a sexual encounter that included a male victim ($M = 44.40$, $SD = 6.18$). Therefore, this hypothesis was supported.

Our third hypothesis was that participants would perceive a sexual encounter between a male perpetrator and female victim more negatively than any other sexual encounter (i.e., male perpetrator and male victim; female perpetrator and either a male or female victim). That is, we expected to find a significant interaction between sex of perpetrator and sex of victim. There was a marginally reliable interaction between sex of perpetrator and sex of victim, $F (1, 155) = 2.80$, $p < .10$. We performed post-hoc analyses to determine which specific sexual encounter participants perceived as most negative. There was a simple main effect of sex of perpetrator when a victim was male, $F (1, 81) = 4.16$, $p < .05$. Specifically, participants perceived a sexual encounter that included a male victim and male perpetrator more negatively ($M = 45.74$, $SD = 4.26$) than a sexual encounter that included a male victim and a female perpetrator ($M = 43.02$, $SD = 7.47$) (see Figure 1). There was no simple main effect for sex of perpetrator when a victim was female, $F (1, 81) < 1.00$. Therefore, this hypothesis was not supported.

Figure 1. *Interaction Between Sex of Victim and Sex of Perpetrator*

Our final hypothesis was that participants' perceptions of a sexual encounter would vary based on participants' need for closure. Specifically, individuals high in need for closure were expected to perceive a sexual encounter between a male perpetrator and female victim more negatively than any other sexual encounter (i.e., a male perpetrator and male victim; a female perpetrator and either a male or female victim). That is, we expected to find a significant three way interaction between sex of perpetrator, sex of victim, and need for closure of participant. There was not, however, an interaction between sex of perpetrator, sex of victim, and need for closure, F (1, 155) < 1.00. Therefore, our final hypothesis was not supported.

Exploratory Analysis

We did not find significant effects for differences in the need for closure. Perhaps this lack of differences was a result of an influence of other individual differences (e.g., sex of participant, personal experience of participants). We performed exploratory analyses to determine if there were other individual differences that may have been related to participant attitudes about a sexual encounter. Specifically, we performed a

three-way ANOVA to determine if sex of participant was related to participant attitudes about a sexual encounter.

There was a main effect for sex of participant, F (1, 154) = 15.59, $p < .01$. Male participants ($M = 46.59$, $SD = 3.65$) reported more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter than did female participants ($M = 43.70$, $SD = 6.10$). We also found an interaction between sex of participant and sex of victim, F (1, 154) = 5.15, $p < .05$ (see figure 2). We performed post-hoc analyses to determine which specific sexual encounter participants perceived as the most negative sexual encounter. We found that female participants had more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter that included a female victim ($M = 45.28$, $SD = 3.85$) than a sexual encounter that included a male victim ($M = 42.37$, $SD = 7.26$), F (1, 77) = 4.76, $p < .05$. We did not find that male participants' attitudes about a sexual encounter varied based on victim sex, $F < 1.00$.
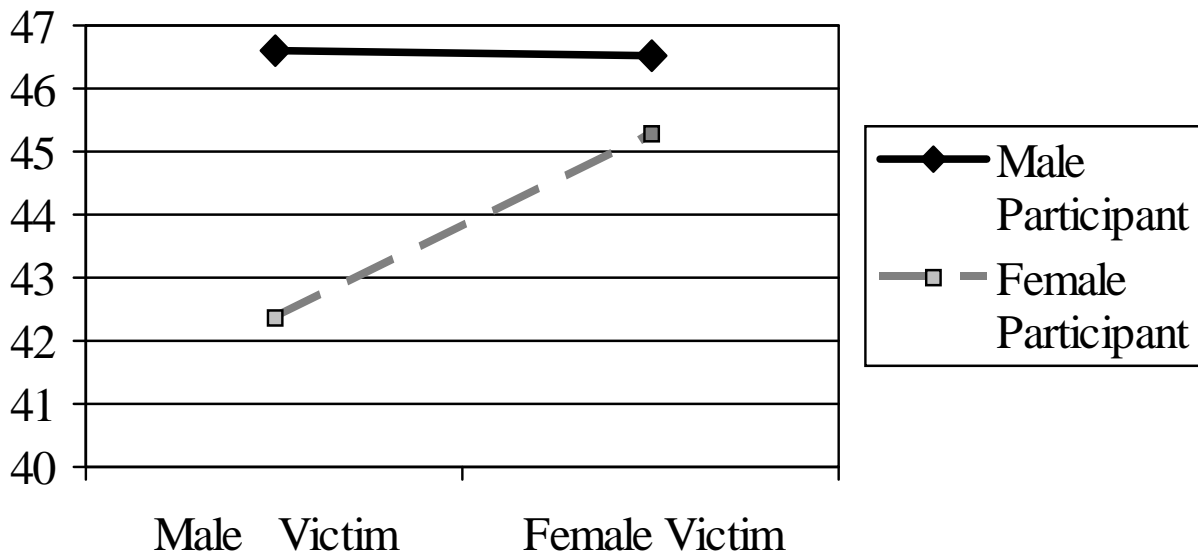

Figure 2. *Interaction Between Sex of Victim and Sex of Participant*

We then explored to what degree participants had personal experience with a sexual encounter before age 16. Participants responded to three questions pertaining to personal sexual experience. We first asked participants to report if "Another person, five or more years older than you, fondled you in a sexual way or touched or stroked your sex organs; or you touched or stroked another person's sex organs at his/her request." Of 162 participants, 26 participants (16%) reported yes to this question and 134 participants (84%) reported no to this question. We then asked participants to report if "Another person, five or more years older than you, attempted oral sex, anal sex, or vaginal intercourse." Of 162 participants, 15 participants (9.3%) reported yes to this question and 147 participants (90.8%) reported no to this question. Finally we asked participants to report if "Another person, five or more years older than you, had sex (oral, anal, or vaginal) with you (any amount of penetration of any orifice--ejaculation not necessary)." Of 162 participants, 9 participants (5.6%) reported yes to this question and 153 participants (94%) reported no to this question.

We wondered if those participants who reported yes to our first question also reported yes to our second and third questions. Because answers were reported categorically (i.e., yes or no), we performed chi square analyses to test this relationship. We found that participants reported the same answer on question two as they did on question one, $\chi^2 (1, N=162) = 73.28$, $p < .01$. In other words, of those participants who reported yes to question one (i.e., another person fondled or stroked you), 14 participants (53.9%) reported yes to question two (i.e., another person attempted sex with you) and 12 participants (46.1%) reported no to question two. However, of those participants who reported no to question one, 1 participant (.7%) reported yes to question two and 135 participants (99.3%) reported no to question two.

We also found that participants reported the same answer on question three as they did on question one, $\chi^2 (1, N=162) = 49.85$, $p < .01$. In other words, of those participants who reported yes to question one (i.e., another person fondled or stroked you), 9 participants (34.6%) reported

yes to question three (i.e., another person had sex with you) and 17 participants (65.4%) reported no to question three. However, all of those participants who reported no to question one also reported no to question three.

We also found that overall, participants reported the same answer on question three as they did on question two, $\chi^2 (1, N=162) = 93.39$, $p < .01$. In other words, of those participants who reported yes to question two (i.e., another person attempted sex with you), 9 participants (60.0%) reported yes to question three (i.e., another person had sex with you) and 6 participants (40.0%) reported no to question three. However, all of those participants who reported no to question two also reported no to question three.

Discussion

Recall our hypotheses. We predicted that participants would have more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter that included a female victim than a sexual encounter that included a male victim, and this hypothesis was supported. We also predicted that participants would have more negative attitudes about a sexual encounter that included a male perpetrator than a sexual encounter that included a female perpetrator, and this hypothesis was supported. We predicted that participants would have the most negative attitudes about a sexual encounter that included a male perpetrator and female victim as opposed to a sexual encounter that included (a) a male perpetrator and male victim or (b) a female perpetrator and either a male or female victim, and this hypothesis was also supported. Finally, we predicted that participants who were high in need for closure would have the most negative attitudes about a sexual encounter which included a male perpetrator and female victim as opposed to other sexual encounters. This hypothesis was not supported.

We believe that our first three hypotheses were supported because our participants reported attitudes based on sex stereotypes. Recall that stereotypes are thoughts about groups of individuals (Fiske, 1998). Our participants perceived a sexual encounter which included a female victim more negatively than a sexual encounter which included a male victim. This finding is consistent with common stereotypes of males (e.g., sexually aggressive) and females (e.g., sexually avoidant).

In another study, researchers found that participants use stereotypes when making judgments about a target's behavior (Bodenhausen & Wyer, 1985). Participants in that study were asked to make judgments about a specific target, whereas participants in our study were asked to make judgments about a sexual encounter. Participants in that study were also asked to make judgments about criminals up for parole, whereas participants in our study were asked to make judgments about a sexual encounter. Despite these differences, participants from that study (i.e., Bodenhausen & Wyer) as well as participants from our study reported attitudes based on stereotypes.

Similarly, researchers have found that (a) most people stereotype females as more likely than males to be victims of rape and that (b) people perceive female victims more negatively than male victims (e.g., Howard, 1984). Participants in that study were asked to report attributions (e.g., cause, responsibility) of a victim, whereas participants in our study were asked to report attitudes about a sexual encounter. Participants in that study were also asked to make comparisons between multiple types of assault (e.g., rape, robbery), whereas participants in our study were not asked to make comparisons between multiple types of assault. Nonetheless, participants from that study (i.e., Howard) as well as participants from our study used stereotypes when reporting attitudes.

Our findings are also similar to findings from a previous study (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). In that study, researchers found an interaction between perpetrator sex and victim sex such that individuals perceived heterosexual sexual encounters (i.e., a female victim and male perpetrator; a male victim and female perpetrator)

as less abusive than homosexual sexual encounters (i.e., female victim and female perpetrator; male victim and male perpetrator). In our study we also found that a heterosexual sexual encounter (i.e., a female perpetrator and male victim) was perceived less negatively than a homosexual sexual encounter (i.e., a female perpetrator and a female victim). However, those researchers (i.e., Maynard & Wiederman, 1997) manipulated victim sex, perpetrator sex, and age of victim, whereas we only manipulated victim sex and perpetrator sex. Those researchers also used a sexual encounter which depicted a victim and perpetrator as neighbors, whereas we used a sexual encounter which depicted a victim and perpetrator as student and teacher respectively. Even with these differences, participants in that study (i.e., Maynard & Wiederman, 1997) as well as our participants reported attitudes based on stereotypes.

Although our first three hypotheses were supported, our fourth hypothesis was not supported. Attitudes about a sexual encounter were not influenced by participants' need for cognitive closure. We believed that participants who were high in need for closure would be more likely than participants low in need for closure to use stereotypes and thus have stereotypical attitudes about a sexual encounter. However, participants who were high in need for closure and participants who were low in need for closure both reported negative attitudes about sexual encounters. Perhaps all of our participants experienced one or more situational factors (e.g., lack of evaluation apprehension, lack of fear of invalidity) that contribute to individuals' desire for closure (e.g., Chirumbolo, Livi, Mannetti, Pierro & Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). In other words, perhaps all of our participants (both high and low need for closure) sought closure.

Individuals may feel evaluation apprehension or fear of invalidity if they feel that their attitudes will be judged or evaluated. In other words, if individuals feel that their responses will be judged, those individuals may avoid cognitive closure (i.e., making a quick and permanent decision) in order to avoid being incorrect. If individuals do not feel that their attitudes will be judged or evaluated, those individuals may seek cognitive closure. Other researchers found that when individuals experience evaluation apprehension, those individuals are likely to experience a fear of invalidity and in turn fail to "freeze" (i.e., make a permanent decision) on a given topic (e.g., Freund, Kruglanski & Shpitzajzen, 1985). In contrast, perhaps when individuals do not experience evaluation apprehension, those individuals do not experience a fear of invalidity and in turn proceed to "freeze" (i.e., make a permanent decision) on a given topic). In attempts to eliminate evaluation apprehension and fear of invalidity, we assured participants that their responses would be kept completely anonymous. We also assured participants that there were no correct or incorrect response options. Perhaps both participants who were high in need for closure and participants who were low in need for closure did not feel evaluation apprehension and fear of invalidity and therefore sought closure.

Possible Limitations

A possible limitation in our study was a restriction in range. Participants reported their attitudes on a series of 5 point semantic differential scales. Participants with high scores (i.e., above a median) indicated more negative attitudes about an encounter than did participants with low scores (i.e., below a median). We expected that participants' attitudes would vary between the lowest and highest possible scores. Participants' scores, however, did not vary between the lowest and highest possible scores. In fact, participants reported generally negative attitudes about all sexual encounters. This restriction may have occurred because of the controversial nature of those sexual encounters that participants read. In other words, perhaps sexual encounters between an adult and a child

are controversial enough to be perceived as negative by most individuals. With this restriction, we might expect null results or limited findings. With our data, however, we found significant results for sex of perpetrator and/or sex of victim but not for need for closure.

Another possible limitation in this study is the use of a measured, not a manipulated, independent variable. We did not manipulate an individual's need for closure; we measured an individual's need for closure. With this measurement, we looked for a relationship between need for closure and attitudes about a sexual encounter. Even if we did find need for closure effects, we could not determine causality with correlational data. In other words, we could not assume that an individual's need for closure caused that individual's attitude toward a sexual encounter. In addition, we cannot eliminate a possibility that an individual's attitude caused that individual to be high or low in need for closure.

Furthermore, perhaps there could have been a third variable (e.g., an individual difference variable other than need for closure) that could have influenced participant's attitudes about a sexual encounter. Perhaps participants' need for affect, for example, could have influenced participants' attitudes about a sexual encounter. An individual's need for affect is a desire to approach or avoid situations that are emotional for that individual or others (Maio & Esses, 2001). Researchers found that individuals who are high in need for affect report more extreme attitudes than individuals who are low in need for affect (Maio & Esses, 2001). Participants in that study (i.e., Maoi & Esses, 2001) reported attitudes about various controversial issues (e.g., abortion, censorship, euthanasia), whereas participants in our study reported attitudes about one controversial issue (i.e., a sexual encounter between an adult and a child). In addition, those researchers found that

females are generally higher in need for affect than are males. In other words, females in that study had more extreme attitudes than did males. In our study, however, males had more negative attitudes than did females.

Another possible limitation in our study is participants' exposure to current news concerning child sexual abuse cases. When participants reported attitudes about a hypothetical sexual encounter in our study, participants may have actually reported their attitudes about an actual sexual encounter presented on television. Recently, there have been two prominent cases involving sexual encounters presented on television between an adult and a child. One sexual encounter involved an adult female teacher and a young male student. Another sexual encounter involved an adult male day care worker and several young children. When exposed to the case of Debra Lafave, a female teacher who had sex with a fourteen year old male student, many individuals probably did not express negativity. In fact, Lafave did not serve a prison sentence after pleading guilty to two counts of lewd and lascivious battery (CBS, 2005). In contrast, when exposed to the case of Joshua Palin, a male day care worker who molested numerous children, many individuals probably did express negativity. Palin will serve 17 years in prison after pleading no contest to four counts of lewd and lascivious molestation and three charges of lewd and lascivious battery (MSNBC, 2006). Because these cases both involved sexual activity between an adult and a minor, participants perhaps recalled these actual cases when reading our hypothetical sexual encounter. And perhaps participants reported their attitudes about an actual sexual encounter (e.g., the case of Debra Lafave, the case of Joshua Palin) instead of a hypothetical sexual encounter (i.e., a sexual encounter provided in a survey). Therefore, participants' exposure to current media may have biased participants' attitudes.

Yet another possible limitation may be a participant's need to be socially desirable. In other words, a participant may have reported attitudes based on what that participant felt was socially desirable. A participant may have reported attitudes to be socially desirable for various reasons. First, a participant may have

reported an inaccurate attitude (i.e., an attitude not consistent with how that participant actually feels) because that participant did not want us to know how that participant actually felt toward a sexual encounter. Participants, for example, who actually feel that some sexual encounters between an adult and a child are acceptable may not report this actual feeling because those participants do not want us to know their attitudes. Second, participants may have reported inaccurate attitudes because those participants did not want to believe what they actually feel. Participants, for example, who actually feel that some sexual encounters between an adult and a child are acceptable may not report this feeling because those participant do not want to accept this feeling. To limit participants' tendencies to report socially desirable attitudes, we thoroughly explained to participants that all data would be kept confidential and anonymous. We also assured participants that there were no correct or incorrect answers to questions we asked. Nonetheless, participants may have felt uncomfortable reporting their actual attitudes.

Last, another possible limitation in this study is a lack of generalizability. We collected data for this study from a convenience sample of college students. Most participants were Caucasian females between 18 and 24 years of age. Other researchers may not find similar results when studying different samples (e.g., other college samples, a predominately older sample). In a study comparing Indian and American students' attitudes about a sexual encounter, researchers found distinct differences between these two samples (Mellot, Wagner, & Broussard, 1997). In fact, in most instances, Indian students and American students reported opposing attitudes about sexual encounters. Perhaps this finding indicates that American students' attitudes are not generalizable to other students'

attitudes. In that study, however, researchers used a sexual encounter which depicted a perpetrator and victim as neighbors, whereas in our study we used a sexual encounter which depicted a perpetrator as a teacher and a victim as a student.

Future Directions

Although there were limitations in our study, our results may have implications for social policy. Based on our results, researchers can conclude that female perpetrators of child sexual abuse are not perceived as negatively as male perpetrators of child sexual abuse – even when their crime is identical. Other researchers have found females sometimes receive more lenient sentences than males for similar or identical crimes (e.g., Curran, 1983). Perhaps with a knowledge of these findings, those who prosecute males and females can make changes in how females and males are prosecuted. If a female and a male were charged with identical crimes, then perhaps that female and that male would be prosecuted similarly.

For future studies in this line of inquiry, researchers may want to vary different types of perpetrators (e.g., scout leader, clergy). Researchers may find that certain types of perpetrators (e.g., scout leader, neighbor) are viewed more or less negatively than are other types of perpetrators (e.g., teacher, clergy). Also, researchers may want to vary different relationships between a perpetrator and victim in a child sexual abuse encounter. Researchers, for example, may create sexual encounters that portray incestuous and non-incestuous relationships. This manipulation may allow researchers to compare attitudes about sexual encounters that differ by relationship between perpetrator and victim. For future studies of child sexual abuse, researchers may also want to include different variables. In this study, we chose to measure participant's need for closure and attitudes about child sexual abuse. Perhaps researchers could study other personality variables (e.g., intolerance of ambiguity, need for cognition) and attributions about perpetrators and victims. Perhaps by measuring these different variables, researchers could find patterns in stereotype use.

Conclusion

Child sexual abuse is a serious problem which not only occurs with young males but also with young females. Although most child sexual abuse perpetrators are male, child sexual abuse perpetrators may often be female. Most people, however, hold stereotypes that females are sexually avoidant and males are sexually deviant. This discrepancy between perceptions of males and females may lead individuals to perceive male and female perpetrators differently. Individuals, for example, may perceive a male perpetrator of child sexual abuse more negatively than a female perpetrator of child sexual abuse. Individuals who are likely to use stereotypes may be high in need for cognitive closure. Recall that an individual's need for closure is a degree to which that individual seeks answers on a given topic quickly and permanently. Stereotypes are easily retrieved from memory and if an individual seeks an answer quickly, then that individual may use a stereotype. Therefore, individuals high in need for closure may be more likely than individuals low in need for closure to use stereotypes. An individual, for example, high in need for closure may perceive male perpetrators of child sexual abuse more negatively than female perpetrators of child sexual abuse because male perpetrators are stereotypical.

Although we did not find results for need for closure, we did find that participants perceived stereotypical sexual encounters (e.g., male perpetrator, female victim) more negatively than non-stereotypical sexual encounters (e.g., female perpetrator, male victim). We believe that these findings are a result of stereotype use. Perhaps with these findings, individuals can see that males and females are not always perceived equally.

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