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Sexism, Just-World Beliefs, and Defensive Attribution: Relationship to Online Discourse and Child Sexual Abuse

Andrea M. Barbis
Walden University

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Andrea M. Barbis, LCSW-R

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Dr. Tracy Marsh, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Mona Hanania, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
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Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2018

Abstract

Sexism, Just-World Beliefs, and Defensive Attribution:

Relationship to Online Discourse and Child Sexual Abuse

by

Andrea M. Barbis, LCSW-R

MSW, Arizona State University, 1998

BA, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

General Psychology

Walden University

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Abstract

Research has shown that individuals' willingness to believe a disclosure of childhood
sexual abuse (CSA) is related to just-world beliefs, ambivalent sexism, and defensive
attribution. However, researchers do not know whether these variables relate to posts
made in response to online articles describing CSA. Negative or disbelieving posts may
impact not only the author, but also readers who view these comments via hindrance of
disclosures, increased self-blame, and avoidance of help seeking. In this quantitative
study, just-world, ambivalent sexism, and defensive attribution theories provided the
theoretical basis used to determine whether just-world beliefs, ambivalent sexism, and
defensive attribution influenced comments made in response to an online article about
CSA disclosure. Eight-hundred twenty participants read the article where the author
discloses she was sexually abused as a child. Response comments were coded negative,
neutral, or positive. Participants also completed demographic questions, the Global Belief
in a Just World Scale, the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, and questions regarding their
similarity to the offender and victim. Multinomial logistic regression analysis showed
relationships between negative posts and hostile sexism, perceived similarity to the
perpetrator, frequent involvement in online discourse, and, to a lesser extent, belief in a
just world. Parenthood and perceived similarity to the author increased one's odds of
posting positively. Responses of CSA survivors resulted in unexpected findings. Study
findings may be used to challenge stereotypes and vitriol often used to silence survivors
in public discourse, for thought challenging in psychotherapeutic settings, and for future
public education and research to increase support for CSA survivors.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my mother who, despite her intelligence and love of reading was told by a high school guidance counselor there was no reason for her to attend college as she had no desire to be a nurse, a teacher, or a secretary. She also introduced me to MS magazine as a child in the late 1970s, reading me the version of Jack and Jill where Jill continues on to "complete her duties as assigned."

Acknowledgements

Many people deserve recognition for support through this process. My children, Kinley, Calder (as well and their father and stepmother for their flexibility and assistance with scheduling), and Tiernan have sacrificed time in order for me to complete this process. My husband, Matthew Covert, has tolerated my emotional up and downs during this journey as well as my disengagement from household activities.

Tremendous appreciation is extended to Cynthia Stilloe Hollenbeck, MFA, for her endeavors in editing this dissertation as well as volunteering to be a coder for the response comments. I am likewise indebted to Daniele Wagstaff, RN, MS, and Carolyn Harding, LCSW-R for the time and effort they both spent in coding the response comment data.

My deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Tracy Marsh for agreeing to take me on as her student, perhaps not knowing to depths to what she was signing on for, since, as we have discussed, complication is something I tend to gravitate toward. I have appreciated her patience and support through my struggles and progress. I have also been fortunate to have had Dr. Hanania as my second committee member and a positive force behind me in this endeavor. I also want to thank Dr. Salzer in serving as URR reviewer, Dr, Sickel for her role as program director as well as accepting me into her independent research course years ago, and Dr. Hicks for his role in a time sensitive review.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

As internet use continues to increase (File & Ryan, 2014), the different media channels, including blogs, social networks, and so on, become a more common modality for people to garner information and engage in discourse. Although this discourse can help people gain knowledge and feel socially connected, it also creates a venue in which to spread negativity and hatred (Bucknell, Traper, & Paulhaus, 2014; Chen & Pain, 2016; Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Erjavec & Kovacic, 2012; Herring, Job-Sludder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002; Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011; Ksiazek, 2016).

Some survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) have found online forums to be comfortable places to disclose their experiences and seek support (Moors & Webber, 2012; Webber & Wilmot, 2012), although responses in these forums can range from invalidation of experience and blame to threats and abuse (Lewis, Rowe, & Wiper, 2016). These negative responses have the potential not only to damage the person who disclosed his or her experience online, but they may also impact untold numbers of others who may read these comments and decide whether or not to disclose their experiences. These comments may also create long-term negative consequences because sharing one's experience of CSA can be helpful and ameliorate negative effects of trauma, but in most cases only when the reaction of others is belief and support (Ullman, 2011; Ullman, Peter-Hagene, & Relyea, 2014).

Despite these factors, not much is known about why others, people who are strangers to the CSA survivor, develop negative opinions regarding the disclosed

experience of those who reveal their trauma history in an online forum. The aim of this study was to extrapolate some of the factors that correlate with readers who volunteer a negative or doubtful opinion by comparing them to others who may make supportive comments or choose not to comment at all. To date, there have been no studies that specifically investigating comments on this topic. Studies that do provide some correlates of disbelief or blame have typically used fictional vignettes and have not linked them to online comments (see Back & Lips, 1998; Bal & Van Den Bos, 2010; Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Cromer L. M., 2006; Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Rogers, Lowe, & Reddington, 2016).

The objective in this study was to provide more insight regarding people who make negative comments. This study has the potential not only to lead to future research on the topic, but also to provide insight to tailor public education efforts and dispel myths about CSA. And, at another level, this study could provide psychoeducation to survivors and aid self-talk in cognitive behavioral therapy to lessen self-blame and internalization.

This chapter briefly touches on prior literature on the contributing topics to this study that I explore more thoroughly in Chapter 2. Next, the purpose, problem and research questions are discussed. I then discuss the theoretical framework, which was taken from prior research on victim blame, before offering a brief outline of the methodology, key terms and definitions, limitations and assumptions, significance, and finally, the conclusion.

Background

According to Fortson, Klevens, Merrick, Gilbert, and Alexander (2016) in a technical package for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CSA is defined as "inducing or coercing a child to engage in sexual acts. It includes behaviors, such as fondling, penetration, and exposing a child to other sexual activities" (p.8). Overall, it is estimated that 25% of girls and one sixth of all boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthday (APA, 2014, as cited by U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Also according to the U.S. Department of Justice website (2017), most children do not disclose sexual abuse, and false allegations are not as common as the myth that has been propagated. These government statistics have been extrapolated from a vast body of research on the impact of sexual abuse, patterns of disclosure, and reactions to the disclosure. Some of these studies are highlighted in this section with a more thorough review in the next section.

The Department of Justice (2017) noted, "Historically, professionals promoted the idea that children frequently report false accounts of abuse. Current research, however, lacks systematic evidence that false allegations are common" (para. 9). It is known that CSA survivors often gauge their disclosure decisions on how they predict others might react (see Lawson & Chaffin, 1992; Shields, Ryan, & Cicchetti, 2001; Stronach, Toth, Oshri, Manly, & Cicchetti, 2011, as cited by Tahjian et al, 2016). Therefore, when myths about false disclosures show up in online forums where opinions, facts, and "alternate facts" (Todd & Conway, 2017) can easily comingle and are readily accessible to anyone

with internet access, this platform has potential to influence disclosures and CSA survivor outcomes.

Reviews of negative reactions to sexual abuse disclosure contain some overarching themes, including the following: most people do believe and support survivors of CSA, and women tend to believe more and blame less than men (see Back & Lips, 1998; Bal & Van Den Bos, 2010; Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Cromer L. M., 2006; Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Rogers, Lowe, & Reddington, 2016). However, according to the plethora of literature, patterns of belief and blame, and attitudes toward victims of sexual abuse are not universally consistent. In fact, meta-analyses of these studies have become studies themselves, and comparisons are difficult due to variations in methodology, operational definitions, and fictional vignettes (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013).

The review of literature that pertains to online responses shared the dilemma of a lack of consistency, but for a different reason. Since this is an emerging area of research, the definition of concepts and nominal categorization of comments or commenters varies from author to author, but themes overlap. Furthermore, a great deal of focus in this literature relies on vitriol and the concept of "trolling." However, in this study I was concerned with more than the vicious comments and those that contained negative emotion. Specifically, I included any type of doubt or disbelief cast on the victims. While this doubt could be cast using neutral and kind verbiage, it nonetheless could have damaging effects on survivors of CSA simply because of the doubt or disbelief.

Victim Blame, Belief, and Support

Responses to sexual abuse victim disclosures are imperative for survivors because the perceived response of others is a predominant factor when a CSA survivor makes a decision whether to disclose (Collin-Vezina, De La Sablonniere-Griffin, Palmer, & Milne, 2015). Most studies have shown that men are more likely than women to blame the victim and/or find disclosures of sexual abuse victims less credible (Back & Lips, 1998; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Judson, Johnson, & Perez, 2013).

Pre-teen victims of both genders typically have been found to be more credible and sympathetic than adolescents (Back & Lips, 1998; Davies & Rogers, 2009) but when sexual abuse victims are adults, more blame is placed on the younger men than older men or women (Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013). Interestingly, the rise in blame toward adolescent and young adult males may not be due to gender and age, but rather an effect of observer homophobia because gender was insignificant when this variable was introduced and controlled for (Judson, Johnson, & Perez, 2013).

Those who are more likely to endorse belief in a just world, a paradigm that "one reaps what one sows," explained later in this chapter, are more likely to blame a victim of sexual abuse (Sakalli-Ugurlu, Yalcin, & Glick, 2007; Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013). In fact, researchers have found that study participants physically distance themselves from a victim when the perpetrator had similar attributes, such as student status and gender. Those participants are also more degrading toward and blaming of the victim (Bal & Van Den Bos, 2010).

Sexism also appears to be a predictor of a victim being negatively judged by strangers. Pederson and Stromwell (2012) found that ambivalent sexism, a concept that, according to Glick and Fiske (1996), denotes sexism as being both blantantly negative and seemingly kind, only positively correlated with blame when it came to the latter half of the dichotomized construct, benevolent sexism (BS). Other studies have shown no correlation with BS and a positive correlation with hostile sexism (HS; Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Judson, Johnson, & Perez, 2013).

Demonstrating the relationship between ambivalent sexism and judgements of sexual abuse victims is anything but simple. Cromer and Freyd (2007) found that both elevated BS and HS reduced the propensity of a person considering an adult "having sex" with a prepubescent as child abuse, and that those high in BS, but not HS, minimized the negative impact of CSA. Further, ambivalent sexism, prior history of interpersonal trauma, myths about abuse, and participant gender are factors that influence belief of an alleged sexual abuse victim (Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Demarni, Cromer, & Freyd, 2007).

Online Comments

Online comments are likely to contribute to the impressions CSA survivors have of how their disclosures will be received. Online community interaction is becoming more common with the use of the internet (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011). Survivors often report that online forums are spaces that can help facilitate disclosure and provide a supportive environment (Moors & Webber, 2014; Webber & Wilmot, 2012). Yet, it is logical that other CSA survivors may avoid engaging or disclosing if they are reading vitriol or comments casting doubt at others' disclosures because negative reactions have a

detrimental impact on CSA survivors and hinder expression of this experience (Collin-Vezina, De La Sablonniere-Griffin, Palmer, & Milne, 2015; Ullman, 2011; Ullman, Peter-Hagene, & Relyea, 2014).

Although researchers know many factors that contribute to belief and blame of CSA victims, basic logic dictates that those who are non-supportive of CSA victims are not able to make a negative impact on victims online if they do not participate in the forum. For example, most studies have shown that women judge CSA victims as more credible and less culpable than men (Font, 2013); this information is relevant in many domains, such as jury selection. However, researchers have not shown whether people who have internal thoughts that are not considered pro-victim would express these thoughts freely via the written word in a comments sections, even if they would express this in a multiple choice survey. Thus, the negative (or positive) impact of others' opinions may only emerge if these populations will write comments to reveal these beliefs in a public space.

While the intersection of beliefs about CSA and online comments have not been studied, more research is emerging on online discourse in general. A great deal of focus has been on vitriol and encompasses terms that do not have consistent definitions, such as trolling, E-bile, and/or flaming (See Herring, Job-Sludder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002; Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011; Jane, 2014). But many studies that have used such labels have only included those containing negative or hostile intent. Other motivations for commenting have been shown to include social interaction, expressing emotion, promoting a cause, and enhancing understanding or knowledge (see Bucknell, Traper, &

Paulhaus, 2014; Canter, 2013; Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Erjavec & Kovacic, 2012; Springer, Engelmann, & Pfaffinger, 2015).

These latter motivators may be devoid of name-calling or threats, but could nonetheless contain messages of invalidation and doubt for the victim and support for an alleged offender. In fact, it is possible that doubtful messages not including vitriol could be more damaging to a victim's internalization because the fear of not being believed may make it more difficult to simply dismiss that person as a "troll."

Problem Statement

Although numerous studies have shown that reactions from others influence the recovery process or mental health outcomes of survivors of CSA (Ulman, 2013), most research on motivations for negative response to disclosure has been conducted with participants who were personally involved with the victim (Plummer, 2006; Ulman, 2002) or has used hypothetical vignettes (Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Demarni, Cromer, & Freyd, 2007). To my knowledge, no researchers to date have investigated reactions to actual sexual abuse disclosures by those who did not personally know the victim.

In contemporary society, one source of community support for CSA survivors may be virtual interaction via internet-based communication where people engage in social interactions through article response postings (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011). Although many online interactions may be supportive (Moors & Webber, 2014; Wilmont & Webber, 2012), some online participants make disparaging and invalidating comments that can have negative consequences for the victim (Ulman, 2013; Ulman, 2002). These

negative comments could also have a negative impact on CSA victims who are not featured in the articles because after reading the posts they may not wish to disclose.

This may be especially true because a high percentage of CSA survivors delay or never disclose their abuse (Ulman, 2002; Wyatt, Burns Loeb, Solis, Vargas Carmona, & Romero, 1999) and media attention to this topic can have a paradoxical effect on disclosure. Specifically, while shining a spotlight on this issue tends to result in more victims reaching out for help, initial responses to this disclosure may be negative, and negative reception has been shown to repress disclosure (Somer & Swarcberg, 2001).

Research has shown that both positive and negative informal social supports influence the well-being of sexual assault survivors (Borja, Callahan, & Long, 2006) and that there is a trend toward using the internet as a source of social interaction (Moors & Webber, 2014). In addition, there is a foundation in the literature regarding what motivates participation in online communities in general and factors that contribute to blame and doubt of CSA survivors. However, what is unknown is how some of these variables might specifically relate to the topic of CSA disclosures in an online forum.

Purpose of the Study

Understanding the motivation of people who post online responses, ranging from disbelief to attacking an alleged victim, may be critical for dispelling myths and informing the public regarding CSA. In other words, although factors which help predict those who blame victims of CSA rather than offenders, doubt their credibility, or minimize impact are already known, it is not known if these factors differ for those who readily share their opinions online, versus those who keep these opinions private.

Discovering if there are differences in people who express their unsolicited beliefs are important because those who express their opinion are more impactful to the general public and victim perception than those who remain quiet.

Thus, the purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between ambivalent sexism, belief in a just world, history of trauma, and selected demographic variables on the participant's likelihood to post and the nature of comments made in response to a published account of CSA.

<div align="center">

Research Questions & Hypotheses

</div>

RQ1: Is the presence of ambivalent sexism related to the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA)?

$H_0$1: When controlled for gender and history of CSA, elevated Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) scores, in both hostile (HS) and benevolent (BS) subscales, will not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

H_a1: When controlled for gender and history of CSA, elevated ASI scores, in both hostile and benevolent subscales, will have a relationship with the type of response comment (positive, negative, neutral/none) following stories about child sexual abuse.

RQ2: How do participant demographic variables, experiences and perceived similarities to those in the article explain the relationship to the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA)?

$H_0 2$: Demographic variables, prior experiences, and perceived similarities to the victim or offender will not predict comment type (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

$H_a 2$: Demographic variables, prior experiences, and perceived similarities to the victim or offender will predict comment type (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

RQ3: Does belief in a "Just World" influence the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA)?

$H_0 3$: When controlling for gender and history of CSA, elevated Global Belief in a Just World (GBJWS) scores will not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

$H_a 3$: When controlling for gender and history of CSA, elevated GBJWS scores will not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

Theoretical Framework

Ambivalent Sexism

Ambivalent sexism is a theoretical framework used in many studies on belief about sexual abuse claims. The theory's eponymous variable, ambivalent sexism, is measured by the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI). This inventory divides the construct of sexism into two types: hostile and benevolent. The former is aligned with historical definitions of prejudice (Glike &Fiske, 1996) and regards the male gender as superior and more "deserving of a higher status" (Becker & Wright, 2007, p. 62). The

latter construct is more complex and comprises several subconstructs, which, despite valuing women, do so in a manner that may be seen as objectification (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Furthermore, the majority of research on how rape myths and ambivalent sexism influence belief of a sexual abuse victim's claims and attribution of blame have focused on adult sexual assault (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2007; Davies, Gilston, & Russell, 2012; Feather & McKee, 2012; Judson, Johnson & Perez, 2013; Masser, Lee, & McKimmy, 2010). Since hostile sexism (HS) and/or benevolent sexism (BS) have been found to be greater in those more likely to cast more doubt on victims of sexual abuse in studies in other contexts, it was relevant to investigate the correlation of this sexism construct in relation to online comments.

While one might assume the relationship to blame or doubting credibility of a victim is because she is a woman or a child, the positive correlation to negativity toward victims has been found regardless of victim gender (Cromer & Freyd, 2007). Cromer and Freyd (2007) posited that those who endorse HS might be more suspicious of abuse claims in general. Furthermore, overall sexism correlates to the acceptance of male dominance and aggression, which might then make those who endorse the paradigm of sexism also less likely to label sexual acts between an adult male and a child as abuse.

Cromer and Freyd's (2007) may be applicable to the misguided emotional beliefs held by some white men who feel anger from the fear that they are now being oppressed by women, people of color, and more (Cabrera, 2014). Essentially, these threats of a perceived power shift or change to status quo may be a cause of fear in those who fit the demographics of those holding the traditional power; any deviation from this could pose

a conscious or subconscious threat. Therefore, it is likely that in an online forum, which has provided fertile ground for many groups, such as those labeled *alt-right*, to spread their ideas and arguments like "the legal system and media unfairly discriminate against men" (Lyons, 2017, para. 46), providing an opportunity for sharing negative posts about CSA survivors and may be correlated with higher sexism scores.

Defensive Attribution

Defensive attribution (Shaver, 1970) is another theory that is useful for understanding conservative arguments in which the gain in rights of historically oppressed or marginalized groups are framed as threating the rights of cisgender, white, heterosexual males (Garpvall, 2017). According to this theory, a person is more likely to blame one who is more differentiated from oneself and/or minimizes fault for those perceived as similar to the person judging. For instance, an unemployed factory worker might blame "Mexican illegals" for taking his or her job (even though the job is no longer available to anyone in the country) before he or she blames a person who belongs to some outwardly similar group, such as religion, ethnicity, and gender. Furthermore, the actual reason for the layoffs might have occurred because the owner or board of the company moved the factory to another country to increase their own or shareholders' profits and those stakeholders might share the surface characteristics of the factory worker.

However, if fault for an issue cannot be displaced onto an outgroup person, the person doing the judging may internally justify why the wrongdoer or recipient of misfortune is different from the self (Shaver, 1970). This is a possible explanation for why men have been shown as more likely to blame a victim in rape scenarios (Feather &

McKee, 2012; Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Judson, Johnson, & Perez, 2013; Masser, Lee, & McKimmy, 2010), because most scenarios involve a male perpetrator. Rogers, Josey, and Davies (2007) postulated that this may prompt men to have more sympathetic feelings toward alleged child sexual abuse perpetrators.

Miller, Hefner, and Leon (2014) found that mothers commenting on child sexual abuse perpetrated by a doctor on an online response thread, tended to blame the mothers of the victims and protest how they are/would be different in their parenting skills. In this study, it was hypothesized that the participants would be more likely to write negative comments if they perceived similiarites with the perpetrator and/or had similar demongraphic variables to the perpetrator in the article.

Unlike the other theoretical frameworks used in this research, there is no known scale available to measure defensive attribution. Thus, I used self-perceived similiarity to the offender and victim in the article and demographic traits as a proxy measure of this theory. Back & Lips (1998) used perceived similarity Likert-scale questions used in a prior study on blame attribution in sexual abuse vignette, which I used as a model for this study.

Just World Attribution

Just World Theory (Learner, 1980) applies to people's belief that negative events occur to people due to their own poor choices, which can then provide a facade of security because people can believe they are safe from what befell the other person. This theory has been applied to blame attribution of sexual abuse victims in several studies (see Back & Lips, 1998; Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001; Rogers, Lowe, &

Reddington, 2016) and refuted by others (Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007). Most relevant

is that some researchers have used this theory as a variable as measured by the General

Belief in a Just World scale (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987), however, only one

known study involved direct application of this theory to blame attribution and CSA.

These results demonstrated a correlation between victim blame and elevated General

Belief in a Just World scores (Stromwall, Alfresson, & Lanstrom, 2013). However,

another study measuring endorsement of just-world attribution using a different scale, the

Just World Scale (JWS; Rubin & Peplau, 1973) did not find a relationship between

attribution of victim blame and just-world beliefs (Muller, Caldwell, & Hunter, 1994).

Thus, it is not clear if the conflicting finding was a result of using a different scale to

measure this belief, or if there were other factors attributed to this disparity.

Belief in a just world has been compared to victim blame in adult sexual assault

with mixed results. Sleath and Bull (2010) did not find a relationship between blame

attribution toward adult male rape victims and elevated BJW scores, yet BJW did have a

positive relationship in blaming an adult woman rape victim in other studies (Sakallı-

Uğurlu, Yalçın, & Glick, 2007; Stromwall, Lanstrom, & Alfredson, 2014).

I predicted that those who write negative response comments in this study would

be more likely to subscribe to just-world beliefs. That is, negative commenters were

predicted to have higher scores on a measure of just-world beliefs than those who posted

positive or neutral responses.

Nature of the Study

I employed a quantitative design in this study. Because the objective was to determine a pattern of relationships and no intervention was provided, a cross-sectional, non-experimental design was used (see Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

Definitions

Age: Age in number of years.

Ambivalent sexism: Ambivalent sexism consists of two subconstructs of sexism, hostile sexism (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS). Hostile sexism is the tendency to have angry and hateful attitudes toward women. Benevolent sexism often does not look like sexism on the surface. It is loving and protective but also pejorative and role-confining. Ambivalent sexism is endorsement of both HS and BS and, although it appears paradoxical, may be explained by the idea of a person thinking they respect women but this attitude changes toward "those" women who do not conscribe to a traditional or stereotypical role (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Belief in a just world: This is a belief system that maintains people have a role in what benefits or misfortunes befall them, even if there is no rational basis for this connection. It is posited that people may endorse such a belief system to feel a sense of control over circumstances that are beyond control (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987).

Child sexual abuse (CSA): The general definition was any sexual contact or exposure (shown pornography, flashing) by an adult, significantly older child (more than 2 years), with or without consent to a child younger than 18 or below the age of consent for their state. As Font (2013) pointed out, the latter can be difficult in analysis of studies

because the age of consent is different for each state. Although, even if the age of consent is young (e.g., 14 in Pennsylvania), it is often legally considered child sexual abuse if the offender is a member of the household (such as the live-in partner of a parent) or someone legally responsible for the minor (such as a babysitter). CSA may also include similarly-aged children where there is a power differential, such as two 10-year-olds where one has an intellectual disability and the other has an average or greater IQ.

Defensive attribution: A theoretical framework coined by Shaver (1970) in which people tend to attribute less blame to those who share similarities to themselves or more easily attribute blame to misfortunes of those who are different. Furthermore, if guilt of an individual is difficult to refute, the person who shares certain state similarities will be likely to conjure other ways in which they are different from the guilty person.

History of child sexual abuse: CSA history was defined by the participant's self-report when asked if they have a history of being sexually abused before age 18. The choices were Yes, No, Not sure/prefer not to answer.

Negative posts: Negative posts were defined as those that express any negativity, blame, or doubt toward the CSA survivor in the story. This ranged from polite or seemingly innocuous as "I feel bad if it happened to him, but how can he remember that far back?" It also contained any statements that might defend or express empathy for the offender.

Offender: This term refers to anyone who is alleged to have sexually abused another person. It may be interchanged with the term *perpetrator,* which refers to someone accused of perpetrating sexual abuse.

Positive posts: Positive posts contain positive comments or attitudes toward the survivor of CSA. Conversely, they could contain negativity or even hostility toward the offender. It is a post that generally expresses belief of the survivor and blame toward the offender and is devoid of any doubt in the CSA survivor's narrative or complacency for the sexual abuse.

Posts: This refers to words written in a comments section following a piece of writing on the internet. This writing could be a person's social media platform, a blog, or a news or journal article, including an opinion piece.

Sexual abuse: Sexual abuse encompasses both CSA and sexual abuse of an adult. The latter may include "consent" under duress, limited capacity to consent due to intoxication, or use of force. Sexual assault, which generally implies more use of force or power, may be used interchangeably with sexual abuse.

Assumptions

My primary assumption in this study was that respondents would be honest in their answers, including what they wrote in response to the article in an online forum. Social desirability can compromise participants' truthfulness as they may want to please the researcher. This is often more true for users of Mechanical Turk, an online participant pool source (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). The Marlowe-Crown social desirability scale short form (Reynolds, 1982) was administered to help control for this; however, participants recruited from Mechanical Turk are more likely to be familiar with such scales and may seek to answer those in a manner to appease the researcher (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). On the other hand, some research indicates that those who score high in

social desirability might not differ much in their responses or outcomes on other measures than those who score low (Perinelli & Germegni, 2016).

Another assumption was that online comments will continue to be a relevant and continuous part of the social fabric. This is likely because despite controversy regarding comments and vitriol, many web and news site administrators continue to allow comments because it encourages engagement of readers, which is of benefit to online periodicals. Yet, many administrators also try to mitigate more toxic interactions by allowing readers to report or "flag" obscene or threatening comments (see Bucknell, Traper, & Paulhaus, 2014; Chen & Pain, 2016; Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Erjavec & Kovacic, 2012; Herring, Job-Sludder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002; Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011; Ksiazek, 2016).

Limitations

One major limitation of the study was the use of a convenience sample. Therefore, extrapolation to the full U.S. population or even all internet users cannot be made (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). However, I hoped that by using Mechanical Turk, which has users that spend a certain amount of time on the internet, the study would include a satisfactory percentage of the desired demographic.

Another potential problem that cannot be known is the participants' familiarity with the scales. Mechanical Turk users have often participated in more studies than the general public (Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014) and may have taken the ASI or the GBJWS. However, the comparison between populations

sampled using this online resource and non-online recruitment have not shown overwhelming variance (Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013).

A final limitation, known as history, includes current events and pop culture. News events that may highlight different aspects of CSA could sway public opinion or the veracity of opinions in a certain direction. Such media attention appears to go in cycles and the pendulum swings in both directions. In other words, the swings can generate fear of false accusations or more empathy for victims (Cheit, 2003).

Scope & Delimitations

There were many delimitations on the scope of this study. Primarily, targeted recruiting of people who already made negative comments about victims online was considered. However, this sample was not used because it may have compromised anonymity for some participants and would introduce an inconsistent variable: different participants would be reading and commenting on different articles. This segues into the next delimitation, which is the choice of the article. I selected one to evoke enough controversy in hopes of eliciting ample negative comments to study. Inconsistency in variables of fictional vignettes used in prior studies of belief and blame have been a conundrum in consistency of prior research (Font, 2013), and this study was not an exception.

Other limits include exclusion of certain variables. It was impossible to include every possible variable that may confound the results. For instance, a scale for homophobia is not included, and there is some indication that homophobia may be responsible for the effects of belief based on gender (Aosved & Long, 2006; Judson,

Johnson, & Perez, 2013). To include every potentially relevant independent variable and their interaction, if possible, would have created a new problem because the survey could become so lenghty it would create testing fatigue and incomplete surveys.

Significance of the Study

This study was important because there are no known studies specifically investigating those responders who display disbelief or negative opinions regarding CSA survivors in an online community, and there is no data on how this group may differ from those who do not make such displays. Researchers have established that both negative and positive social support has an emotional impact on victims of CSA (Arias & Johnson, 2013; Bolen & Lamb, 2004; Borja, Callahan, & Long, 2006; Everill & Waller, 1995; & O'Leary, Coohey, & Easton, 2010). Further, it seems that online forums, specifically, are filling some role in providing such support (Moors & Webber, 2012; Webber & Wilmont, 2013), making them a potential influence on the beliefs and feelings of blame CSA survivor may internalize (Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Davies & Rogers, 2009; DeMarni-Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Cromer, 2006; & Ulman, 2002). Those who comment will have an impact not only on the victim who is the subject of an article, but also on other CSA victims who may be reading the comments because researchers have theorized that other victims might base disclosure decisions on reactions received by others (Chandouir & Fisher, 2010; Cromer, 2006). Therefore, understanding what motivates the group of individuals who post negative comments has the potential to effect change by contributing to the body of literature that could influence future public service and educational campaigns.

If participants report that their negative online comments emanate from complex origins such as (a) ambivalent sexism, (b) personal attributions and/or experiences, or (c) belief in a just world, then public awareness campaigns, victim advocacy programs, and so on would need to be approached from an angle that takes such underlying motives into consideration. However, preliminary research has shown that some individuals make online comments to provoke debate simply for entertainment purposes (Diakopolous & Naaman, 2011). In instances where this is the case, the education might be toward victims and other positively supportive people to understand these motives are not personal in nature.

Summary and Transition

Online commentary regarding the specific topic of CSA is obviously a complex phenomenon with numerous variables that may contribute to people choosing to share their unsolicited opinion. Although it was impossible to include every potential contributing factor, in this study I chose to include the variables with frequently used and established precedent pertaining to belief and blame in CSA disclosures. It was therefore relevant to extrapolate these results from studies not investigating online comments, and see if these patterns are relevant when it pertains to online comments. The availability of online communication, both for participants and voyeurs, has the potential to shape the attitudes of others, treatment and response to survivors, and may have an impact on the decisions of other CSA survivors on whether or not to disclose.

Chapter 2 presents a more in-depth review of prior literature as it relates to the theoretical foundations of this study and the related scales, the impact of sexual abuse and

disclosures, patterns that contribute to belief and blame of strangers, and research on general online commentary.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

CSA is a pervasive issue in society that causes a significant impact on various domains, such as public health, the criminal justice system, public discourse, and individual well-being. Despite this, many myths regarding CSA continue to persist in popular culture, and this may have dire consequences to the well-being of victims and to public safety (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). Although heuristics and general misinformation about CSA have existed for decades, the trend toward more people turning to the internet as a means of social interaction and support (Moors & Webber, 2012) has added a new dimension to dissemination of information and misinformation. Web-based discourse allows people to express opinion regardless of how informed or misinformed these opinions may be. However, although opinions about blame attribution and belief in cases of CSA has been researched (see Back & Lips, 1998; Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Minto, Hornsey, Gillespie, Healy, & Jetten, 2016) the propensity to express such opinions by unrelated observers in an online forum remains unexplored.

Although the factors contributing to the expression of opinions about CSA online CSA disclosures has not been specifically studied, subtopics which cumulatively contribute to these phenomena have been researched. Therefore, pertinent peripheral knowledge will be presented in this chapter. First, it is important to establish the effects CSA often has on individuals. Second, disclosure, reactions to disclosure, and the effects of these responses are pertinent to how online discourse could potentially impact those

who disclose in that venue or are considering such. Third, information gleaned from studies regarding factors that contribute to belief, or lack of belief, in sexual abuse disclosures. Next, I review the research on how the theoretical frameworks relate to victim blame. Finally, I summarize emerging literature regarding online discourse.

Literature Research Strategies

I used three main databases for this literature review. Google Scholar was used as a first step in attempting to identify articles that contained a relevant intersection of key terms. EBSCO host, accessed through Walden University, and inclusive of all databases for peer-reviewed articles was also queried for key terms. Finally, I used the Taylor & Francis Online search tool, accessed via Walden University. The latter was especially relevant in identifying articles outside of psychology, and was used primarily in relationship to online commentary. Search terms included *ambivalent sexism, just world attribution, blame attribution, child sexual abuse, sexual abuse, defensive attribution, online comments, trolling, comment threads, reactions to child sexual abuse,* and *belief of child sexual abuse.* Searches were conducted using various combinations of key terms. I combined various key terms following attempts to use phrases directly related to the study. For instance, I queried *online comments and sexual abuse* in Google Scholar and articles pertaining to unrelated issues, such as *sex offenders using the internet to solicit teenagers*. Such key phrases did elicit useful articles as well, such as those containing information on patterns of CSA disclosure (Sjoberg & Linblad, 2002). Thus, given myriad subtopics related to, but not directly pertaining to the study, it was necessary to conduct an extensive search with various combinations of key terms.

Furthermore, I reviewed several pages of results and abstracts of articles that appeared to have relevant titles. Finally, I reviewed tables of contents for some journals, such as the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, which yielded multiple relevant results for studies published in the past 5 years in an attempt to prevent obviation of imperative information.

Theoretical Frameworks

Defensive Attribution

Shaver (1970) first introduced defensive attribution theory to explain why a person might more readily attribute blame to people who share fewer traits with the person making the judgment. Essentially, it is a method of distancing one's self from associating with behaviors or characteristics of an individual when there is an undesired outcome. Although not necessarily rational, this helps observers feel insulated from the possibility of experiencing the same ill fate (Shaver, 1970). Shaver's research was used to develop defensive attribution theory based on the earlier work of Walster (1966; as cited in Burger, 1981; Shaver, 1970) who found that participants, or observers, were more likely to blame a "victim" of a car accident as the severity of the damage increased, and posited that they were, as in defensive attribution theory, more likely to distance themselves from similarity with the "victim." Walster's results could not be replicated, however; thus, Shaver (1970) introduced new mediators into his research.

In this new experiment, Shaver (1970) introduced variables, personal attributes and situational attributes, which were both similar and different to the observer-participants in the study. Personal similarities can include variables such as age, gender, or religion, whereas situational variables are situations or environments to which the

observer can relate. For example, Donald Trump is unlikely to have similarity of situation with a person standing in line at a food pantry; however, a person receiving temporary public assistance is likely to identify with that situation.

Shaver (1970) discerned that gender alone was not enough to constitute personal similarity in his study, but discovered that people who found more similarities with the victim were less likely to attribute blame to that victim, whereas those who shared similarity with the offender were likely to attribute cause elsewhere (Shaver, 1970). Since the original theory was developed, there have been studies that both supported and failed to provide evidence for defensive attribution. Burger (1981) analyzed these studies and concluded that defensive attribution was applicable when both personal and situational similarities existed. Figure 1 represents Burger's conclusions.
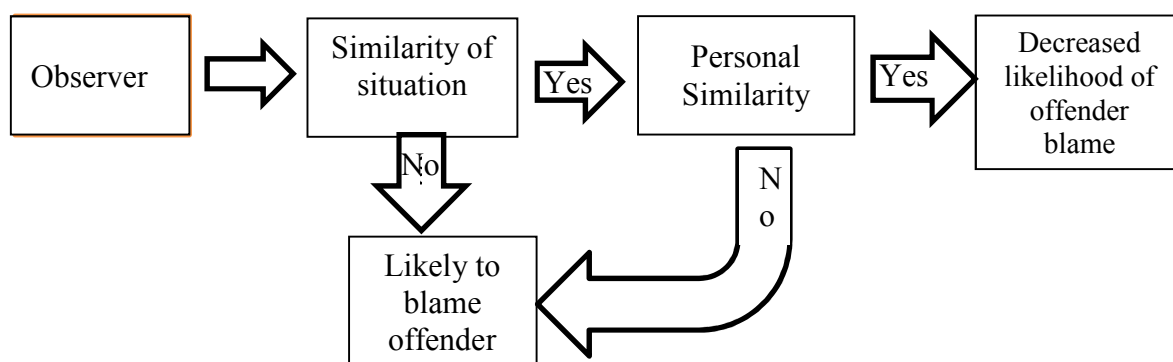
Figure 1. Defensive attribution flow chart.

Reviewing literature which refers to defensive attribution can be confusing, as if there are contradictory interpretations. However, this is likely due to the complexity of this theory. Shaver (1970) did not mention a victim in the studies involving a car accident. In some portions of the article he referred to a perpetrator (presumably the person whose parked car caused an accident). Furthermore, Burger (1981) elucidates that

in some research participants might view the perpetrator as a victim due to the negative consequences he or she endured. Many of the examples in the reviewed papers used situations where the person who caused the negative event did so without intention (see Burger, 1981), which could certainly cause a lack of dileneation for ascribing a role of perpetrator versus victim.

The role distinction confusion is illustrated in some articles showing that defensive attribution occurs when the observers feel they share commonalities with the victim, and people will find fault with the victim to distance themselves from the liklihood of befalling a similar fate (Gold, Landerman, & Bullock, 1977; Thornton, Hogate, Moirs, Pinette, & Presby, 1986). This assertion is confounding in light of Burger's assertion that the tendency of an individual under defensive attribution is to make a cognitive argument that they are disimiliar from the victim or blame another entitiy for the effect because Shaver (1970) did not focus on victims. According to Burger, such arguments are made to avoid the fear that the individual might meet the same fate.Another assertion is that when ill fate cannot be avoided, it is even more important to avoid being blamed for the negative event (Chaiken & Darley, 1973). If a victim truly is blamed, assigning responsibility to the innocent person could be seen as a form of victim derogation. Furthermore, Chiken and Darley (1973) argued that the just world hypothosis (discussed in the next section) does not apply when people identify with a victim. Shaver (1970) maintained that the just world hypothosis focuses on ascribing negative traits to victims in order to subscribe to a cognitive distortion that a bad consequence cannot befall someone holding the belief in a just world. Thus, it is

logical that, although defensive attribution can be applied to victims, defensive attribution may work simply by placing blame on the perpetrator or other external force. Shaver wrote:

> Where the perceiver is not a possible perpetrator, but rather a possible victim, the attribution is different. He can be sure of his own personal worth and can be confident that his behavior will be correct, so chance becomes the least controllable, and therefore most threatening, cause of suffering. For this reason, chance is the cause that must be denied, and the attributional response is typified by what Lerner called the belief in a "just world" where people "get what they deserve—or, after the fact, deserve what they get That the belief in a just world is an example of defensive attribution, and not an all-pervasive belief, cannot at this time be empirically demonstrated. It is easy to imagine, however, a situation that could distinguish between the two: Will a perceiver who is himself an innocent victim attribute to himself the same low intrinsic personal worth he ascribes to an "innocent" stimulus person? The notion of defensive attribution suggests that he would not, and that his suffering would be ascribed to chance. (p. 113)

This argument, it seems, has a cyclical quality and the application of defensive attribution to victims appears to be complicated at the least. Defensive attribution, it can be argued, has a clearer place in research focused on blame attribution toward an offender.

Just World Attribution

Burger (1981) asserted that both just world attribution (JWA) and defensive attribution were ways of creating and/or maintaining a false sense of self-protection. He further argued that while defensive attribution is concerned with placement of responsibility and commonalities between the observer and the person being judged, JWA is focused on defaming victims.

Learner (1970) first developed the foundation for JWA based on experiments that led college student participants to believe they were administering electrical shocks to other participants during the study. Based on outcomes of variations of the original study, he concluded there is a general tendency for people to want to believe the world is just. Evidence for this included the propensity for people to ascribe negative traits to the (fictional) person to whom they thought they were administering shocks. These negative attributions were ameliorated, however, when conditions were designed in a manner that allowed them to prescribe blame on the researcher instead of themselves. Another condition that supported Leaner's (1970) argument was that, when offered, the opportunity to provide comfort or a reward helped mitigate the participant's guilt, in essence providing a sense of balance and justice (Learner, 1970).

Later in the 1970s, the construct of JWA was used to label this phenomenon. In JWA, misfortune is somehow the result of choices or behaviors within the recipient's control and allows one to distance themselves from the suffering of others or the fear of becoming an innocent victim and gives a false sense of solace in the notion that one gets what they deserve (Learner & Miller, 1978). Rhetoric congruent with this theory can

easily be witnessed in popular culture, for instance when the focus of a rape victim shifts from the perpetrator to the victim's attire or sexual history. Extrapolating further on this theory, people who hold such convictions may also turn this paradigm inward when they experience personal misfortune (Dalbert, 1999). Separate scales have been developed to measure each construct. Adherence to this belief in cause and effect as applied to others can be assessed via the General Belief in a Just World Scale (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987) or the Global Belief In a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991), while the level at which this is internalized has been measured using the Personal Belief in a Just World scale (Dalbert, 1999). In additon, other scales have been developed to measure general or more specific aspects of JWA, which is also referred to as Just World Belief (JWB) or Belief in a Just World (BJW; see Furnam, 2003).

Ambivalent Sexism

Ambivalent sexism as a construct was developed by Glick and Fiske (1996) to address what was a myopic lens when evaluating the concept of sexism. In other words, traditional sexism was often considered synonymous with prejudice that involves both negative stereotyping and, according to Allport (1954, as cited by Glick & Fiske, 1996), social distancing. The authors argued that the latter is not a valid component of sexism because, unlike the prejudice based on racism, social distancing is rarely, if ever, possible when the group subjected to the prejudice is defined by sex or gender. Women and girls are typically intertwined in social and familial relationships with men--as mothers, sisters, daughters, and (for a majority of men) sexual partners. This provides a unique interdependency within the group subject to the prejudice.

Unique to prejudice based on sexism, Glick and Fiske argued, are positive stereotypes. These projections often appear favorable and desired on the surface, but can hold women to unrealistic standards, limit them to pejorative roles, or provoke a hostile response when these projected traits are resisted or challenged.

In more extreme manifestations, this concept can be compared to the Madonna-Whore complex, stemming from Freudian theory where women are objectified and quantified by category of "type". Those who are cherished and revered are called "Madonnas," and those who are placed into a sexually desired role, but fraught with moral turpitude, are labeled "whores" (Hartman, 2009). This dichotomy exists overtly in dogma prescribed by religious conservative groups, such as Promise Keepers, where men are taught to revere and protect women and girls in the familial roles of wives and daughters and be cautious around other women who may serve to tempt them. Arguably, this paradigm serves to reinforce a male-dominated power structure (Conrad, 2006).

To address these conflicting positive and negative attributional stereotypes, Glick and Fiske (1996, 1997) conceptualized sexism into two subtypes: benevolent sexism (BS) and hostile sexism (HS). The latter type endorses openly negative conceptualizations of women, whereas the former is more surreptitious. People may likely overlook items reinforcing benevolent sexist beliefs as a form of sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1997). For example, a meme exists on social media of a T-shirt that espouses "rules for dating my daughter" (http://www.cafepress.com/+rules-for-dating-my-daughter+t-shirts). The "rules" contain items, such as "she's my princess, not your conquest." One might equate the term "princess" with a positive descriptor and ignore the embedded language that

objectifies the daughter with use of the adjectives "my" and "your." This seemingly

protective and loving attitude exemplifies benevolent sexism because it holds the woman

in a valued position, but also reinforces a diminutive role that fails to respect the

individual's autonomy.

Glick and Fiske (1996, 1997) asserted that both hostile and benevolent sexism

share components of gender differentiation, paternalism, and heterosexuality. Each of

these three constructs contains a hostile and benevolent component. Gender

differentiation can be competitive (HS), asserting that men have superiority in performing

physical tasks and are thus justified in holding power, while complementary gender

differentiation (BS) asserts that women are better at other tasks that "complement" men,

typically those involving nurturing or "domestic" duties. Paternalism is dominant (HS) in

assuming men should be in control, whereas protective paternalism (BS) assumes males

have a responsibility to care for and protect women. Finally, the dichotomy of

heterosexuality shows that men can be hostile when viewing women as sex objects, while

also remaining wary of women who use their sexuality as a tool to obtain power.

When standardizing their scale to measure ambivalent sexism, the Ambivalent

Sexism Inventory (ASI), Glick and Fiske (1996) found no statistically significant

differentiation between heterosexual hostility, competitive gender differentiation, and

dominative paternalism as constructs of HS. However, the three sub-constructs of

benevolent sexism were mutually exclusive. Therefore, the second order domains can

score either as a combined subscale or benevolent sexism. Although most research

incorporating the ASI used BS as a single subscale, Chapleau, Oswald, and Russell

(2007) differentiated the constructs, with results suggesting there is merit for doing so.

Selected uses & findings regarding ambivalent sexism. Many traits that relate to power

and control issues share a positive correlation with ambivalent sexism. Those who

express a belief in social dominance orientation, which dictates one group is superior to

another, are also likely to score high in ambivalent sexism (Christopher & Mull, 2006;

Fowers & Fowers, 2010; Nicol & Rounding, 2013). When controlling for demographic

variables, benevolent sexism postively correlates with right wing authoritarianism

(Christopher & Mull, 2006; Nicol & Rounding, 2013). Similiarly, people who scored

higher in both types of sexism endorsed power and security values, while they scored

low on their affinity for benevolence toward others and universalism (Feather & McKee,

2012).

Ambivilant sexism has also been combined as a variable with right wing

authoritarianism in respect to sexual harrassment. While right wing authoritarism

correlates positively with the liklihood one will sexually harass another, this variable is

no longer a predictor when HS is a moderator; however, benevolent sexism's relationship

was no longer a predictor for this proclivity when the person was high in right wing

authoritarianism (Begany & Milburn, 2002). Interestingly, when it comes to judging a

case of sexual harassment, those with high HS are less likely to label a situation as such,

but this only held true when the participants were also low in benevolent sexism (Wiener,

Hurt, Russell, Mannen, & Gasper, 1997).

Perhaps not surprisingly, ambivalent sexism has been used as a variable in studies regarding domestic violence. While people who score high on both forms of sexism are more likely to minimize the gravity of domestic violence (Yamawaki, Ostenson, & Brown, 2009), scores in HS were not found to have a relationship to the propensity to be abusive, according to a study conducted by Allen, Swan, and Raghaven (2009). Furthermore, the latter study found those low in BS were less likely to become abusive (Allen, Swan, & Raghaven , 2009). High HS correlates positively with victim blame in domestic violence (Yamawaki, Ostenson, & Brown, 2009), but police officers scoring low in HS are only more likely to pursue submission of charges on domestic violence cases not pursued by vicitms when the officers also score high in empathy (Lila, Gracia, & Garcia, 2013). When the same group of officers were high in BS, they followed through on the charges when this was desired by the victims (Lila, Gracia, & Garcia, 2013). If domestic violence victim who is a woman retaliates and kills her abuser, she is less likely to be judged as culpable when the jurors are high in BS (Zaikman & Marks, 2014).

Although the above studies using the ASI are not directly related to CSA, these selected results highlight correlations and/or patterns of belief associated with ambivalent sexism. Specifically, themes of power, control, and protection emerge and can be argued to have a relationship with judgments of CSA survivors. Relationships have been shown between endorsement of gender roles, victim blame, and homophobia (Davies, Gilston, & Rogers, 2012). Furthermore, despite the fact that men are CSA victims as well, sociopolitical culture in the US and other nations often equates masculinity with power

and views male victims through a diminuative lens (see Easton, Saltzman, & Willis, 2014 for discussion). Therefore, it is a reasonable assumption that people who endorse constructs such as RWA might also be inclined to have negative views of CSA survivors as well as sexist views.

Summary of Theoretical Frameworks

The three theories, ambivalent sexism, just world hypothosis, and defensive attribution, presented for the current study have an established prescident for use in blame attribution in cases of sexual assault. Defensive attribution, the propensity to pathoogize the "other" or defend one with similar traits (Shaver, 1970), and Just World Hypothosis (Learner, 1970) the tendency to believe one reaps what they sow, are both considered theories of attribution. Ambivalent exism (Glick & Fiske, 1996) explains sexism as a dichotomous concept with both fond, but pejorative, and hostile aspects. Furthermore, the first two theories are also useful as variables due to inventories developed to quantify these constructs and have been examined in relationship to each other and victim blame. These findings will be summarized later in the next section.

<p align="center">**Review of Prior Research**</p>

Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse

The prevalence of child sexual abuse is difficult to discern in studies due to varying definitions of "abuse." For example, frottage might be considered in one study and excluded from another. Additionally, differences in sampling, age cut offs, and disclosure status can skew results. To help ameliorate this conundrum, a meta-analysis of studies concerning sexual abuse found that the mean rate of sexual abuse in the United

States was 25.3% of women and 7.5% of males. (Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gomez-Benito, 2009).

A 2011 national telephone survey involving children under the age of 18 found that 2.2% of children were sexually abused within the prior year, although this increased for the broader category of sexual victimization by including sexual harassment. All parents of the minors were surveyed, too, and children were interviewed if they were over 10 years old. Lifetime rates for sexual abuse reported were 2.5% for males and 5.9% for females but this rate increased, of course, as the age of the participants increased: 4.2% for boys, and 17.4% for girls. (Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2013). When examining these numbers, it is important to stay cognizant that they only include children who have disclosed, or were willing to disclose during the phone survey, and/or parents who were made aware of their children's sexual abuse by other means. A more recent nationwide random sampling of adults found that about 10% stated they experienced CSA and of that 10%, about a quarter were male (Perez-Fuentes, Olfson, Villegas, Morcillo, Wang, & Blanco, 2013).

It is likely that the numbers above provide an under-estimate of the prevalence of CSA due to issues involving disclosure, which will be explained later in this chapter. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume there is a link between public discourse, attitudes, and disclosure. This topic also will be addressed. This is likely complicated by newer means of communication via the Internet. A literature review failed to locate studies that specifically addressed the intersection between online responses to victim disclosures, with a specific focus on the motivation behind unsupportive comments. Therefore,

following discussion of the theoretical frameworks used, it's important to review literature on the contributing issues.

   A note on "false" accusations. Although it may be difficult to verify the veracity of published accounts of CSA, research suggests that it is far more likely for a victim to deny their abuse than it is to make false accusations (see Lawson & Chaffin, 1992; Sjoberg & Lindbland, 2002). For example, drawing from a sample of children presenting to a sexual abuse crisis center, one study found that 4.8% of children consistently denied sexual abuse despite the presence of independent corroborating evidence, while 5% of those with external evidence disclosed to someone else prior but denied abuse during the forensic interview (Elliott & Briere, 1994).

   While this is somewhat tangential to the present research, addressing this issue is important due to the controversial history of the "false memory" debate. There have been many researchers who have asserted their studies show support that recovered memories of abuse are false or that memories of CSA are implanted by therapists (see Loftus & Pickrell, 1995; Lindsay & Read, 1995; Paz-Alonzo & Goodman, 2008). Others have shown support for false memories but argue less likely these can occur in therapy (Hyman , Husband, & Billings, 1995), or asserted a mediative position on the debate in trying to conceptualize how recovered memories were neither universally true nor false (Geraerts, et al., 2009; Geraerts, Raymaekers, & Merckelbach, 2008; McNally & Geraerts, 2009). However, other research supports the phenomena of recovered memories (see Bremner, Krystal, Charney, & Southwick, 1996; Elliott & Briere, 1994; Freyd, 1994; Goldsmith, Barlow, & Freyd, 2004; Lanius, et al., 2009; Leavitt, 1997; van der Kolk,

1998; Whitefield, 1995; Williams, 1995). Since this has been a contensious topic within the academia, legal, and popular culture mileaus (see Pezdek & Freyd, 2009;; Salter, 1998 for historic overview) acknowedging this issue before moving on was warranted.

Thus, it may be legally proper to preface the term "victim" or "survivor" with the word "alleged' if there was no adjudication in a case; for simplicity's sake, these terms will be used without this preface. Firstly, many of the studies reviewed used hypothetical vignettes. Secondly, it is acknowledged that unless adjudication is specifically noted, the sexual abuse is an alleged event based on the disclosed experience of the person. The decision not to use this preface should ameliorate confusion and honor the narrative of the victim's experience.

Effects of CSA

Children who experienced multiple types of trauma, as compared to a singular categorical trauma, have been found to display more mental health and behavioral symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, and anger/aggression. Furthermore, for those who experienced rape or sexual exposure, as oppose to other traumas, were among the most likely to have been subjected to poly-trauma, with a mean of 7.2 and 7.4 types, respectively (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007). Other studies have corroborated the finding that those who experienced CSA are more likely to suffer from other traumas, such as witnessing emotional or physical violence or being the recipient of such (Lacelle, Hebert, Lavoie, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2012). In fact, the negative biopsychosocial and behavioral consequences on children from cumulative abuse has led some experts to advocate for a more accurate diagnosis that encapsulates these post-traumatic symptoms

in conjunction with developmental issues (D'Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2012).

For many people, the negative consequences of CSA persist into adulthood. Community samples of women who experienced adult sexual assault found that those who also had a history of CSA were more likely to have health conditions, such as PTSD and depression, (Perez-Fuentes, et al., 2013; Ullman, Peter-Hagene, & Relyea, 2014) and have poor coping mechanisms and reduced capacity for emotional regulation (Ullman, Peter-Hagene, & Relyea, 2014). This decreased capacity for emotional regulation could be a potential explanation for another study of college students that eluciated the following: those with CSA histories were more vulnerable to verbal and/or physical abuse, and sexual assault as adults (Messman-Moore & Long, 2000). Variables, such as the offender being a biological relative, physical injury endured during the abuse, and multiple perpetrators increased mental health symptomology (O'Leary, Coohey, & Easton, 2010).

A larger population sample in Quebec found that when combined with other childhood trauma CSA negatively impacts women's feelings of sexual autonomy, increases risky sexual behaviors and sexual health problems (Lacelle et al., 2012). Victims of CSA and/or child physical abuse were found to experience more chronic health conditions, exacerbated by either current life stressors or PTSD, but the latter two variables did not have an interactive effect (Cromer & Sachs-Ericsson, 2006). The negative consequences of CSA might not be confined to the impact on the survivor, because when controlling for other variables, such as depression, there was a negative

relationship between CSA history and the mother's warmth to their female children but not for male children. Of note, in this study an over-representation of African American and lower income participants occurred because of recruitment techniques, so the validity of extrapolation to a wider population of survivors is unknown (Cross, Kim, Vance, Robinson, Jovanovic, & Bradley, 2016).

Disclosure

It has been shown that those who avoid expressing feelings regarding CSA are at increased risk of psychological issues (Shapiro, Kaplow, Amaya-Jackson, & Dodge, 2012). Disclosure is necessary for a person to directly express emotion about the personal impact caused by CSA, but this may not be an easy decision, because 57% of people who reported a CSA while they were children experienced negative reactions to the disclosure (Wager, 2013). One study of adolescence in Europe found that only 80% of girls and 30% of boys disclose sexual assault, with the majority of these being disclosed to peers, not family or helping professionals (Priebe & Svedin, 2008).

Another study, with 3,220 randomly sampled women in the US, coincided with the finding that friends were the preferred person for disclosure demonstrated by the 22.5% of these adults who reported disclosing their CSA (limited to rape, as defined by vaginal, anal, or oral penetration in this study) at some point prior to the study. The next most popular confidant was the survivor's mother at 20.7%, but both of these percentages are lower than those women (28.1%) who never disclose their CSA history until asked in the phone survey (Smith, Letourneu, Saunders, & Best, 2000). In a meta-analysis, including the Smith et al. (2000) study, the researchers determined that between 60 and

70% of CSA survivors kept the abuse secret during childhood, and only 10 to 18% believed their victimization was reported to police or child protective services (London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005).

CSA rates of report to authorities have been found to range from 5 to 18%. The same analysis, of 14 studies, found that less than 40% of victims disclosed as minors (London, Bruck, Wright, & Ceci, 2008). Broman-Fulks et. al (2007), using a probability sample of adolescents, they found almost a third of the participants did not disclose their CSA prior to the survey, while almost 40% disclosed less than a month after the CSA, and 28.6% disclosed prior to the survey but waited at least one month . Still, lower disclosure rates, around 25%, were found in other studies (Sorenson & Snow, 1991; Wager, 2013) and Wager's (2013) web survey using snowball sampling discerned more than half of the approximate quarter of respondents who disclosed as a child felt they received a negative response from their confidant.

Attempts at determining who is likely to tell and which factors influence disclosure have been met with conflicting results (Tang, Freyd, & Wang, 2007). Ongoing sexual abuse, as opposed to an isolated incident, positively correlates with increased time to disclosure or lack of disclosure (Tashjian, Goldfarb, Goodman, Quas, & Edelstein, 2016), while father-daughter sexual abuse has also been proported to surpress disclosure (Priebe & Svedin, 2008). One study conducted in Canada used information from convicted offenders and discerned the following factors related independently, and negatively, to disclosure: (a) increased age, (b) female gender, (c) penetration, (d) relative of the offender, (e) resisting the abuse, and (f) living with the offender at the time of the

revelation. However, some of these variables were rendered insignificant, such as victim gender, use of force, relationship to the offender or living with him or her, and duration.. When the victim did not live with the perpetrator, there was a relationship between the increased age of the victim and disclosure, , but when the victim and offender lived together, age increased the likelihood of secrecy (Leclerc & Wortley, 2015).

Therefore, attempts to discover individual variables about the abuse, such as perpetrator-victim relationship, severity, and threats are difficult (see London et al., 2005; London et al., 2008). In other words, victims were reluctant to disclose when they lived with the perpatrator. In addition to the effects of potential interaction, the definition of variables study to study, and how the combination of factors interplay, make it difficult to easily predict who will disclose. For instance, London et al. (2008) pointed out a relationship between threats and disclosure as a bell curve, where those who were threatened were more likely to be on either extreme. This may relate to some children being afraid of the threat and seeking external protection, while others would be more likely to keep the abuse a secret because they felt they were protecting themselves or their families.

Some research does address the complex factors that affect disclosure. Tahjian et al. (2016) found that children who experienced both verbal and physical abuse from their parents were significantly more likely to delay disclosure of sexual abuse in cases where the abuser was another (non-parental) family member. Based on prior research that showed the fear of negative reactions may preclude disclosure (see Lawson & Chaffin, 1992; Shields, Ryan, & Cicchetti, 2001; Stronach, Toth, Oshri, Manly, & Cicchetti, 2011,

as cited by Tahjian et al, 2016), the authors posit that this may explain their findings: experiencing both types of parental abuse reinforces secrecy more significantly because it lowers the child's confidence in receiving parental protection. This finding coincided with that of Leclerc and Wortley (2015) that children who came from a dysfunctional background defined as a household with substance abuse, criminal activity, or parental neglect, were less likely to disclose.

A qualitative study of 16 adult male victims of CSA found only one participant disclosed his abuse in detail as a child, and he was met with a negative response: adults ridiculed him. Of the others who partially disclosed, disclosed but mimimizing the abuse, or attempted to disclose, most were met with negative responses and three experienced physical abuse from the parent to whom they disclosed. The authors grouped barriers to disclosure into three catagories: personal, relational, and sociocultural. Personal barriers included supression of memories, feelings of emotional vulnerability and risk, and negative feelings, such as shame. Relational barriers to disclosure centered around the fear of reactions from others, including blame and fear of loss or isolation, while sociocultural domain barriers related to stereotypes of masculinity including being perceived as weak or vulnerable (Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, & Grossman, 2008).

Even CSA survivors who attend therapy might not be provided an easy segue to disclosure because it was discovered that many healthcare professonals do not ask about CSA history (Hepworth & McGowan, 2013). These findings add to an assumed likelihood that an adult who discloses CSA through an online venue may have never disclosed before, may have experienced negative responses, and/or may have felt they

had not had a supportive outlet. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume the online community validation could be vital for both the person disclosing and for other CSA victims who may be reading the discourse and contemplating disclosure. Furthermore, the research on disclosure variable evinces the complexity and how it is erroneous to assume its credibility based on a singular variable. Since it is likely that those divested of interest might use such heuristics to make judgements of culpability, it is important to explore the factors that might influence these assumptions. Prior to this, however, it is important to present the importance of the potential impact of others' response to disclosure.

Impact of Disclosure

Over a quarter of a century ago, a triadic framework was developed for understanding a child sexual abuse victim's prognosis after disclosure of the trauma: having someone believe that the abuse occurred either community members (police officers, caseworkers, psychotherapists) or integral family members helped mitigate negative outcomes. If both systems were supportive, the positive impact was compounded (Hindman, 1989). Fear of negative responses can linger into adulthood, for example, some CSA survivors have reported that the sensitivity of and empathetic response to their disclosure from health care providers may help or hinder disclosure. This, in turn, can shape the appropriateness and participation in healthcare (McGregor, Glover, Gautam, & Julich, 2010).

Delayed disclosure, defined as at least one month after the abuse, has been shown to double the likelihood of having a major depressive disorder while not disclosing at all

increases the risk of delinquency. Disclosure to mothers decreases overall risk, and researchers posit that since the study controlled for factors, such as perceived disbelief, this correlation relates to the presence of a supportive mother (Broman-Fulks, et al., 2007). In fact, studies showed having a supportive mother increased disclosure during a forensic interview (Lippert, Cross, Jones, & Walsh, 2009).

A possibly confounding variable may exist in the lack of distinction between disclosure and discussion. When this distinction has been clearly made, however, discussion of the abuse within a year of the event ameliorated mental health symptoms in adulthood, but immediate disclosure alone intensified them (O'Leary, Coohey, & Easton, 2010). Given this information, it's reasonable to assume that a sizeable percentage of those reporting disclosure alone were met with a response that closed off further discourse.

Negative responses. Wager (2013) found that 57.4% of respondents, from an internet based study in the UK, reported a negative response from the person to whom they disclosed. Generally, these responses fell into disbelief or blame, but three respondents reported that after they disclosed, the confidant sexually abused them. Similar to Wager, Chaudoir and Fisher (2010) found a reinforcement of victim stereotypes, such as dishonesty or being blamed for the abuse, were reinforced by the confidant, and some victims felt that the general support from that person decreased. When this occurred, the researchers asserted that disclosure yielded harmful effects for the CSA victim (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010).

Although one might assume non-offending parents, such as mothers, might be the most likely to support and believe a child, studies found that mothers often waver in their support or disbelieve (Bolen & Lamb, 2007; Heriot, 1996). This response is often provoked by a factor, such as financial reliance on the alleged perpetrator. Inconsistent support has been shown to have more negative consequences on the victim (Bolen & Lamb, 2007). In fact, Wager (2013) found that most people who disclosed CSA while he or she was still a child did so to their mother.

Individuals who disclose CSA and are met with disbelief, attack, or blame experience more severe mental health issues as an adult (Ullman, 2011). In a study of women college students, those who disclosed to people in their personal lives and were met with negative responses had more severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Borja, Callahan, & Long, 2006). Furthermore, a community sample of women discerned that "turning against" reactions, which included blame and attacks, were negatively related to post-traumatic growth in adult sexual assault (Ullman, 2014).

Another disconcerting outcome more likely to occur when responses are negative is for a CSA victim to experience amnesia of the event. Wager (2013) found that dealing with negative responses to disclosure increased the risk for repressed memory by two and a half times. Interestingly, most studies found that males are more likely to experience amnesia for the trauma following negative reactions (Wolf & Nochajski, 2013), but Wager's (2013) findings supported the contrary.

Positive responses. Participants in a grounded theory design stressed how just important it was to their healing and growth to have the people they disclosed to believe that their sexual abuse happened (Arias & Johnson, 2013). Furthermore, an analysis of research of CSA survivors' experiences with health care professionals illuminated the desire and perceived importance of their providers inquiry regarding this matter (Havig, 2008), which may indicate the desire for belief and support.

Studies showed that disclosure to within a month of an incident lowered an adolescent's chances of developing depression, especially when this disclosure was to a mother. What proved problematic in the study, however, was that the researchers did not ask the teenaged participants how their mothers responded. And yet, because parental permission was obtained for the random survey (Broman-Fulks, et al., 2007) researchers could infer that the parents responded in a supportive way. To further support the assumption that the discloser was believed, children who imagined their parent would respond positively toward them upon disclosure were more likely to disclose the abuse and most children accurately predicted their parents' response (Hershkowitz, Lanes, & Lamb, 2007).

Chaudoir and Fisher (2010) outlined reasons why disclosure might benefit someone who is holding back personal information, such as a sexual trauma. They purport that letting go of the inhibition of keeping something secret, social interaction, and restructuring social information they have about the event can be beneficial. Consistent with these findings, adult college students who experienced sexual assault

reported that supportive responses from both professionals and people they interacted

with on a personal level aided their perception of experiencing growth after the trauma

(Borja, Callahan, & Long, 2006). Likewise, Ullman (2014) found that disclosure alone

was not helpful, but when it was accompanied by supportive and affirming reactions from

others, as assessed by inquiry of specific statements and behaviors via the Social

Reactions Questionnaire, increased reports of post-traumatic growth.

Summary. Overall, research on disclosure following CSA indicates a

dichotomous relationship where sharing one's experience can either be helpful or hurtful.

Typically, the former result occurs when sharing information about the abuse is met with

a supportive, believing, and or protective response. When the contrary reaction occurs,

those who suppress information regarding CSA fare better. This sheds light on the

importance of understanding the variables which influence how others judge and respond

to disclosures.

What Influences Belief?

When the person judging the credibility of an accusation has a relationship with

both the offender and the victim, his or her disbelief might be easier to envision. For

instance, mothers who rely on a perpetrator, such as a spouse, are more inclined not to

believe their child (Bolen & Lamb, 2007; Elliott & Briere, 1994). However, which

factors form opinions of credibility in a seemingly neutral, unimpacted third party?

Prior research has explored factors that determine the propensity of others to

believe a victim of sexual assault as well as where to assign blame in such a case (Back &

Lips, 1998; Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2012). Most literature refers to the latter concept as "blame attribution," which refers to how a person judges the level of culpabilty of a victim, perpetration, or others to the crime (Koepke, Eyssel, & Bohner, 2014; Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007; Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2012).

Extrapolating the constructs that contribute to the propensity of a person to believe a victim of sexual abuse is complex. A multitude of variables can influence the judgment of one person toward another. Variables that have been examined can be grouped into three domains, characteristics of the victim, the offender, and those intrinsic to the participant. A brief review of research addressing sexual assault of adults will also be included.

Victim variables. Studies have been consistent in findings that younger victims garner more support than older children, although all studies focus on reading fictional vignettes. In one portrayal of the same scenario but varying ages of the victims as five, ten or 15 years old, the participants judged the older children as less honest (Davies & Rogers, 2009). Similarly, a ten- year old was perceived as being more credible and less culpable than a 15 year old (Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007) and deemed less responsible for abuse attributed to a six-year-old victim versus a 13-year-old-child with all other demographics held constant (Back & Lips, 1998). The trend of increased victim-blame commensurate with age has held true when the two age comparison groups were older, specifically 12 and 15 (Rogers, Lowe, & Reddington, 2016).

Observers are more likely to believe a victim with continuous memory than recovered memory (Cromer L. M., 2006; Cromer & Freyd, 2007). These results are consistent with other research showing that 18.9% of participants in one study concerning jurors did not believe it was possible to forget, and then later remember their abuse (Khurshid & Jacquin, 2013).

The gender of a hypothetical victim appears to bear no relevance to belief of a victim. College student participants did not rate believability or accuracy differently for a nine-year-old male than a female (Cromer & Freyd, 2007) and the attributions were no different for gender when the hypothetical children were six and 13 (Back & Lips, 1998).

Similar to age, victim attractiveness does not influence belief in a community sample of United Kingdom participants. Interestingly, however, when the victim was attractive and the abuse in the vignette was the first time the person experienced CSA, it lowered the level of culpability attributed to the perpetrator (Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007). Although attractiveness did not make a difference, clothing choice did, with more blame attributed toward a girl dressed in revealing clothing (Rogers, Lowe, & Reddington, 2016). Finally, victim vignettes that portray a ten year old as "encouraging" abuse by her father have a positive correlation with observers that blame the child victim for her own abuse (Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001).

Offender variables. Male perpetrators, regardless of victim variables, have been judged as more culpable than female perpetrators. The disparity in blame attribution for a male versus a female offender was even greater when victim gender was used as an intervening variable; with male offenders of male victims attributed the greatest blame

(Rogers & Davies, 2007). When the offender was the father, he was rated as less culpable than a stranger, and the victim less believable. Yet, ironically, the same sample thought abuse by a father was more severe than that perpetrated by a family friend (Davies & Rogers, 2009).

Observer variables. Women are more likely to believe a victim of sexual abuse than men are (Cromer L. M., 2006; Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Cromer & Freyd, 2007). Furthermore, men rated victims as less credible, the abuse less severe, and the perpetrator of CSA less culpable than women. Likewise, women rated victims as less culpable and perpetrators more culpable especially in the first-time-victimized scenario (Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007). Men were more likely to blame and attribute responsibility to a victim (Back & Lips, 1998). However, a more recent meta-analysis found that differences in the observers gender and blame attribution have been decreasing over time (Font, 2013).

When the participants had a history of experiencing interpersonal trauma themselves, studies with college student participants have shown they were more likely to believe abuse (Cromer, 2006; Cromer & Freyd , 2007; Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Ford, Schindlet, & Medway, 2001). This difference has been found to have more statistical significance for male observers than for female observers because the difference in level of belief for the latter has not been shown to be significant (Cromer, 2006; Cromer & Freyd, 2007). However, other studies using participants sampled from a British community population found no differences in belief based on respondents' CSA history (Davies & Rogers, 2009; Davies, Josey, & Rogers, 2007).

A recent internet-based study where participants read a published news article detailing CSA of a child by a priest, showed that those with a strong catholic identity were more likely to believe the priest (denial of allegations) and discredit the victim. Non-Catholic Christians were the most likely to attribute blame to the priest and believe the victim (Minto, Hornsey, Gillespie, Healy, & Jetten, 2016). Conflicting results were found regarding the parental status of participants because no difference was found in one study (Davies & Rogers, 2009) while another result showed parents were more likely to believe (Rogers, Josey & Davies, 2007). In addition, some results show that professional education regarding CSA can lower victim-blame attributes for school professionals (Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001).

Summary of variables and blame attribution. Although overall results are not uniform and, since the parameters of each study are slightly different, a few trends emerge with some consistency. Typically, men are less likely to believe accounts of CSA than women, although this is mediated by CSA history in male participants. Secondly, younger children are viewed as less culpable and more believable. In addition, observers had more faith in victims who always remembered and maintained the abuse. In respect to offenders, men were attributed more blame than women. Intrinsic characteristics of observers and belief are addressed in the next session and are part of the study's theoretical framework.

Ambivalent Sexism & Blame Attribution

Because most research regarding blame attribution and ambivalent sexism scores has been focused on adult sexual assault, we will briefly review this after addressing the

relationship between sexism and CSA blame. In a college-student participant pool, both BS and HS were negatively correlated with labeling a nine year old (male or female) who "had sex" with an adult as sexual abuse. Yet, in the same study, only HS was correlated, also negatively, with believing disclosure. Thus, those high in only BS tended to believe a disclosure of CSA but minimized the abusiveness of the encounter (Cromer & Freyd, 2007). Another study that used sexism as a variable chose different scales, the Modern Sexism Scale and the Old-Fashioned Sexism Scale, and found college student participants less likely to believe sexual abuse occurred if they scored higher in sexism. In addition, this correlation was stronger when mediated by endorsement of CSA myths as measured by The Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (Cromer & Freyd, 2009)

Both BSand HS positively correlated with negative attitudes toward rape victims in Turkey (Sakalli-Ugurlu, Yalcin, & Glick, 2007). This is consistent with findings that HS strongly correlated with the acceptance of rape myth. In the same study, BS subscales were analyzed independently and heterosexual intimacy did not have an impact on victim blame. However, complementary gender differentiation had a positive correlation and, once interaction effects were considered, protective paternalism had a negative relationship with victim blame (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2007). With a date-rape scenario, HS was directly related to victim blame, but BS was only related to victim blame when women victims defied traditional stereotypes (Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010).

Furthermore, individuals high in HS sexism are more likely to endorse rape myth acceptance for males and females, and to believe that when a man is sexually assaulted,

he suffers less trauma than a female (Davies, Gilston, & Rogers, 2012). High HS relates both to the justification of perpetrator behavior and victim blame in adult sexual assault among college students in Germany (Koepke, Eyssel, & Bohner, 2014). Rape proclivity in Zimbabwe males in a university sample related to HS but not BS in acquaintance-rape scenarios, but not stranger-rape (Viki, Chiroro, & Abrams, Hostile sexism, 2006).

Despite the fact that there are not enough studies with consistent variables to make definitive assertions, there is indication that those high in HS tend to be higher in victim blame. However, those high in benevolent sexism are only more likely to blame victims who do not conform to expected gender roles. This may be why even children who are dressed scantily are blamed more for their sexual victimization by adults than modestly dressed children (Rogers, Lowe, & Reddington, 2016) or why mothers tend to be blamed for children's abuse for not taking a sterotypical role in protecting "their" children (Miller, Hefner, & Leon, 2014).

Belief in a Just World & Blame Attribution

Belief in a Just World, or synonymous labels, such as Just World Attribution, has often been mentioned in journal articles as a framework for explaining attributions of blame placed on CSA victims (see Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001; Font, 2013; Elliott & Briere, 1994; Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007). This theory is supported and/or posited in their literature review. However, despite the assertion that participants might be blaming the victim to support the cognitive distortion that there is a just homeostasis in the world, they did not measure this variable in their participants.

Belief in a Just World has been specifically measured as a variable in studies of sexual assault of adult victims. Individuals with higher endorsement for belief in a just world when applied to them have been found less likely to endorse rape myths; however, when people score high in their just world belief toward others, acceptance of the rape myth tends to increase (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013). Another study in Turkey, using two different scales measuring belief in a just world, GBJWS and JWS, found similar results: people with negative attitudes toward rape victims scored higher in endorsement of just world beliefs (Sakalli-Ugurlu, Yalcin, & Glick, 2007).

In respect to victim and perpetrator blame in adult sexual assault, a Swedish study elucidated that people who were less inclined to support belief in a just world were more likely to attribute blame to a hypothetical adult victim of sexual assault. Furthermore, this study of four different adult victim conditions (age 20 or 46; male or female), found that the highest level of victim blame came from male participants who strongly endorsed BJW toward the younger male victims (Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013).

Overall, belief in a just world and its relationship to victim blame warrants more investigation. However, what research that is available indicates those who endorse this paradigm, particularly when applied to the "other" are more likely to blame victims. People may find solace in the idea those victimized are deserving of their fate which provides a sense of security for themselves or their children. It is possible that, when this cognitive distortion is not feasible, the heuristic of defensive attribution predominates.

Defensive Attribution & Victim Blame

Past researchers have postulated how this theoretical framework applies to blame attribution in child sexual abuse. Rogers, Josey, and Davies (2007) found that men are more likely than women to have sympathetic feelings toward (male) perpetrators of CSA, especially when it was the offender's first offense. They posit that defensive attribution is relevant because male participants are more likely to be concerned that they could be blamed for something like that because they share descriptive traits. This is consistent with a prior study that also argued the relevance of defensive attribution in their results because men were more likely to displace responsibility in a hypothetical sexual abuse case from the male offender and onto the child victim and/or their parent (Back & Lips, 1998).

Furthermore, women have been found to be less likely to blame a parent for their child's sexual assault when a variable was clothing choice. Defensive attribution was suggested as an explanation for this because women are typically seen as being the more responsible parent for monitoring children's attire. Thus, faulting another parent for abuse could implicitly correspond with self-blame (Rogers, Lowe, & Reddington, 2016). Ford, Schlinder, and Medway (2001) asserted that defensive attribution rang true in their study by virtue of participants with CSA histories being significantly less likely to attribute blame to the victim. While the concept of defensive attribution has not been specifically mentioned in other research regarding CSA victim blame, there has been a consistent pattern of males that minimize the male offender's culpability. However, when the male participant has had an interpersonal trauma history, these gender differences are

mitigated (see Feather & McKee, 2012; Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Judson, Johnson, & Perez, 2013; Masser, Lee, & McKimmy, 2010). Another supporting argument for defensive attribution may be found in a study regarding the credibility of disclosure and guilt in a fictional sexual abuse scenario where the perpetrator was a priest.

Of Catholic, non-Catholic Christian, and non-Christian participants, Catholics were significantly more likely than the other groups to believe the priest's denial, less likely to find the victim credible, and less likely to attribute guilt to the offender (Minto, Hornsey, Gillespie, Healy, & Jetten, 2016). Although minimizing the culpability of a wrongdoer who shares characteristics of the assessor is a tenet of defensive attribution, the obverse disposition under this framework is for individuals to segregate themselves from the offending person. This theme emerged in a content analysis of comments following an online story regarding a pediatrician who sexually abused children. Mothers who wrote in often pointed out how their qualities as a parent, such as their involvement, attentiveness, and care, were different from the mothers of the victims (Miller, Hefner, & Leon, 2014).

Millet, Hefner, and Leon (2014) also provide an example of the intersection between belief in a just world and aefensive attribution theories. Implicit in the discourse of "those mothers are different from me" is not only the differentiation but also that "those mothers" were negligent in some way, thus somehow inviting the harm. If cognitive distortions can allow others to feel this way, they can also use these errors of thought to lull themselves into a sense of safety and believe there is balance in the world.

Internet Communication

Since the background regarding impact of CSA and reactions of others in relationship to the well-being of others has been established, it is important to return to the focus of the present study which is the motivation of observers to share these beliefs about strangers in a virtual forum. In order to understand this, it is not only imperative to understand general blame and belief attributions about CSA, but to understand motivation for commenting in general in an online forum. This is an emerging body of research, where theoretical perspectives are posited, some philosophical, while others are based in qualitative content analysis, and a few quantitative studies have been conducted. There has been more academic research from the field of journalism than psychology and, thus, a multidisciplinary perspective is now presented in an attempt to explain this newer mode of communication.

Disclosure, discourse & discussion threads. Ouelette and Arcy (2015) summarized literature regarding the cultural shift of self-care and self-disclosure as a form of activism under feminism, to the age of digital communication and post-feminism. This phenomenon occurs when personal sharing, through writing, video, photos, etc., enters a forum where the self can then become a commercial commodity, through advertising, as well as sanitized and homogenized via reception of feedback. In other words, an individual who initially enters this virtual space to express personal feelings and individuality might be subversively primed into adopting the dominant cultural paradigms, latent with sexism, racism, and heteronormativity (purported to be resolved issues under neoliberalism) while defining the self (Banet-Wieser, 2011; Marwick, 2015;

Senft, 2008, as cited in Ouelette & Arcy, 2015). Ouelette and Arcy (2015) argued that there are spaces on the internet where sharing still can contribute to social change through mutual support.

Specifically, they explored the interactive website Rookie, created by a teenage girl, where topics such as sexual assault are broached. They asserted that micro-rebellions against the dominant culture can constitute both a political act and self-care, as well as create work toward self-mastery as defined by Foucault (1997; as cited in Ouelette & Arcy, 2015) but asserted this framework could be extended from applicability from privileged to young women as well as those who do not prescribe to traditional gender definitions.

Rentschler (2014) argued that use of web-based platforms is a form of political activism, which provides a method for mobilizing, connecting, and speaking out against sexual assault. In her article, she reported that blogging and applications have been used to report sexual crimes, hold offenders accountable when authorities failed to respond accordingly, and provide support and disclosure opportunities for victims. Although Rentschler (2014) did not specifically address CSA, common themes exist between this concept and CSA, but, perhaps, analogous to the relationship of rape myths and CSA myths, more academic research has been done regarding the former (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). Further, many references in the paper were from or about women under 18, which, by definition, constitute child sexual abuse (Rentschler, 2014).

Although much of the literature on regarding online discourse is theoretical, some research has been conducted. On the specific topic of CSA, a qualitative study examined

readers' comments following newspaper articles on a high profile sexual abuse case and attributed blame. They found that a significant percentage of readers did blame the parents, specifically mothers. A substantial number of commenters asserted they would not have allowed this to occur to their child, while a minority defended the parents, while others did attribute blame to the perpetrator and express concern for the victims (Miller, Hefner, & Leon, 2014).

Yet another qualitative study focused on threats and other abusive comments to women who spent time promoting feminism online. While all of the women experienced some vitriol, some comments were worse than others, and many focused on personal, rather than content, issues. Specifically, one participant had disclosed her own pervasive CSA, having had been a victim of sex trafficking, starting from the age of five. Various commentators graphically, violently, and sexually threatened her. In addition, they insisted that because she was abused by men she could not be a lesbian, which she had self-identified as. Participants in this study asserted that threats such as these resulted in negative mental health symptoms and 64% of those who were the target of abusive comments multiple times per week. However, online abuse did not result in high levels of shame and most participants continued to use the online community to discuss this abuse. Essentially, participation in this forum had paradoxical effects of gaining empowerment and support from peers in this online community, despite experiencing some emotional harm from the hostile attacks (Lewis, Rowe, & Wiper, 2016).

Online comment sections. In addition to social media platforms and other online information sources, many mainstream newspapers allow readers to post comments in

response to stories published online. This is often an attempt to engage readers as more people turn away from print and to digital media, in 2014 Stroud, Scacco, and Curry found 90% of periodicals enabled this feature (Ksiazek, 2016). Various aspects of negotiating this new form of interaction with readers is a focus of journalism research (See Canter, 2013; Erjavec & Kovacic, 2012; Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011; Herring, Job-Sludder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002; Ksiazek, 2016; Santana, 2014; Singer & Ashman, 2009).

Although the research from the journalism field is peripheral to comments specifically about sexual abuse and blame attribution, the research provides important information in considering the framework in which these comments exist. One issue for journalists is whether to interact with or ignore comments. Chen and Pain (2016) found that about two-thirds of journalists believed that reading, and sometimes responding to comments was part of their job. Some journalists responded to readers' comment to remind them of the rules or to thank them for providing insights (Chen & Pain, 2016). There also is debate regarding whether to allow readers to post annonymously, with some sites allowing this and others preventing this (Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011; Santana, 2014). Still, other publications have opted to forgo their own discussion boards by using social media plugins, such as Facebook, for comments (Ksiazek, 2016).

Anonymity, or lack thereof, is important because it has an impact on the tone of discussion threads. When the identities of commentators are known, there tends to be fewer comments, but they were more likely to contain quality discourse (Hille & Bakker, 2014) and employ civility (Santana, Virtuous or vitriolic: The effect of anonymity on

civility in online newspaper reader comment boards, 2014). When those commenting did not have to disclose their identity, it not only decreased the rigor of the commentary (Hille & Bakker, 2014), but the comments were more hostile (Ksiazek, 2016; Rowe, 2015; Santana, 2014). It has also been noted that Facebook plug in comments tended to be more superficial (Hille & Bakker, 2014).

Other general findings regarding commentary included the tendency for topics that were more emotional or sensitive to garner a greater number of comments, and those comments tended to generate more hostile discourse (Ksiazek, 2016). Furthermore, some news sources turn off the comment features for particularly controversial or sensitive issues (Hille & Bakker, 2014; Santana, 2014). Although all news sources post rules or guidelines for those who participate, very few periodicals pre-screen the comments and delay posting; while most of the news sources will remove highly toxic comments; this is typically not done in a systematic or reliable manner (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Hille & Bakker, 2014). It is fair to assume CSA is viewed by many as a sensitive topic, thus, there is some liklihood some journals may disable comments for this topic. This could have positive and negative ramifications for vicitms because it could protect them from hostile comments that may be more likely on this topic, but it would inhibit a potential venue for disclosure; this online forum may have given them an outlet to discuss their trauma, and potentially garner support, while maintaining anonymity.

Flaming trolls. The definitions of constructs regarding the topic of online commentary are inconsistent, which poses a conundrum in research. Of particular concern are terms that address negative comments. In popular culture, one can easily

notice the terms "flaming" and "trolling." The individuals who engage in the latter behavior are often referred to as trolls. Yet, what defines trolling? In some academic and informal sources, the act of trolling contains an element of deception; the posting purposefully contains information that has the intention of tricking another person (Herring, Job-Sludder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002).

However, the fact that what the "troll" writes must contain an untruth is not likely to be a colloquially accepted aspect. For instance, an article in *Psychology Today* adds that offending and exaggerating are two alternate or additional aims of the troll's comment to make it qualify as trolling (Golbeck, 2014). Another study defines trolling as introducing controversy into an online discussion void of a constructive purpose (Buckells, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014). Coles and West (2016) concluded that people do not have a consistent construct of trolling, and activities of trolls can range from amusing mischief to viciousness.

The delineation between trolling and flaming is not consistent across studies. Flaming has been described as commentary fraught with insults, profanity, and offensive rhetoric (Moors, 2007). In their literature review, Hmielowski, Hutchens, and Cicchirillo (2014) define the difference between trolling and flaming, as based on intent of the writer. They support the position that the former is based on deception, while flaming is a more spontaneous aggressive reaction. Herring et al. (2002) differentiated flaming from trolling with the assertion that trolling is usually specifically targeted to a person who is likely to be more vulnerable to the comment, while they defined flaming as creating a more globalized disruption of the discussion thread which incites many or all members.

This, however, differs from the responsive nature that Hmielowski, Hutchens, and Cicchirillo (2014) discussed.

Furthering the ambivalence is the argument these hostile responses often coincide (Herring, et al., 2002). This begs the question of the difference, for if trolling is to an individual and flaming is collectively directed, it would seem either (a) the constructs are mutually exclusive, prohibiting the ability to coalesce, or (b) there is enough overlap in the definitions to argue the labels are used as synonyms.

Jane (2014) proposed a new construct to ameliorate the dilemma of where to draw boundaries between these, and other, similar terms. E-bile is a term that encapsulates the concepts of flaming and trolling, as well as cyber bullying, threats of violence, harassment, or hostility. It was suggested this term could be more useful when researching online comments as one would not have the challenge of deciding between similar terms when including comments for coding (Jane, 2014). Although the present research is not specifically focused on E-bile, specific attention on this topic was warranted for two reasons. First, anecdotally, it appears that trolling or flaming is the first idea that comes to mind for people when online comments are mentioned. Secondly, this is certainly one reason people might be motivated to comment after an online article. How E-bile might fit in to the literature on motivations to comment will be addressed in the following section.

Motivations for commenting following articles. Several studies have investigated motivators for posting comments following news articles or other postings on the internet. General catalysts for people to post include a want to express personal

opinion and a desire to interact with others (Canter, 2013). Attempts to place these motivators into categories have been ventured both through the lens of coding actual online comments, and from inquiries to those who are posting. Typically, the researchers arrive at 4-5 categories. Although the labels of such vary, there are certain categories where the definition of these labels could be argued to be a synonymous construct.

Of studies that have been conducted regarding motivation to comment, all include a category that is analogous to E-bile, or place this under a broader label. Canter (2013) addressed jokes or off-topic comments, including vitriolic ones, as "posts". This conceptualization can be considered lacking for some purposes, however, since a discussion board participant could make a hostile or abusive comment congruent with the subject. Springer, Engelmann, & Pfaffinger (2015) called this an entertainment motive which includes the sub-constructs of the activity being a "pastime" and curiosity, in addition of the more malicious motivator of enjoying the conflict created. Similar to both studies, another analysis combines those who post for humor or to incite arguing into one construct (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011).

Canter's (2013) content analysis viewed the comments through a lens of handling interaction from a journalism perspective, thus the non-E-bile motivations are not as comparable to the other authors' classifications. Aside from posts, her other four groups are all "interactions" which are preceded by the words content, post, newspaper, and advanced content. Both content and advanced content interaction has similar threads to "cognitive" motivators for posting (Springer, Engelmann, & Pfaffinger, 2015) and "information", the latter includes educating others, asking questions, and clarifying issues

(Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011). Canter's "post interactions" are akin to what other authors describe as social motives to contribute (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Springer, Engelmann, & Pfaffinger, 2015) to the discussion boards. Finally, the term "personal identity" is not as consistently defined as Diakopoulous and Naaman (2011) include the expression of emotions and/or opinion, while Springer, Engelmann, and Pfaffinger (2015) use several sub-constructs and imply a dynamic, but intrisic process of self-reflection, growth, and definition.

When applied specifically to the topic of sexual abuse, victims may post for cognitive motivators, in search of information, as well as to express feelings (personal identity), and for social interaction with both other survivors and those with expertise. Qualitative studies on how online disclosure can be helpful in these ways to those who have experienced sexual abuse have been conducted (Moors & Webber, 2012; Webber & Wilmot, 2012). While these studies indicated both supportive and negative responses, there was neither an attempt to catagorize the latter, nor did those comments clearly fit a category. However, many of the positive comments could easily be coded to fit into providing social interaction (disclosure of a respondent), information, and cognitive discourse. In a quantitative online survey, participants were given choices of the reason they post comments on social media and newstories. Of the slightly more than half who did report they post, the most common reason endorsed was to debate issues, 23.8% of the total sample. Chatting was the preferred activity of 21.3% and 5.6% reported they enjoyed trolling the most (Bucknell, Traper, & Paulhaus, 2014).

Some research has been done to investigate the specific motivations for those who post for entertainment purposes, with some specific attention to trolling. Using online and college participants, one survey investigated outsiders views of why others troll. Generally, people believe that their motivation is low self-esteem, lack of education, seeking attention, amusement, and viciousness (Maltby, et al., 2015). Interestingly, it appears that the latter supposition might have the most empirical support as another online survey found that sadism had the strongest correlation with trolling, indicating that people prompting such discord find enjoyment from provoking upset and distress in others (Buckells, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014).

One Slovenian study, of people who posted hostile responses, devised four types of E-bile commenters following anonymous chat interviews with participants. The first two, "soldiers" and "believers" have characteristics consistent with an authoritarian personality. The difference between these groups is that the former takes direction for E-bile comments from a group to which they adhere, while the believers are more independent actors for their cause. "Players" motive is to rile people up and post for the entertainment value, while "watchdogs" use hostile posts to counter the others who make pejorative statements in an attempt to promote justice (Erjavec & Kovacic, 2012).

Summary & potential implications of online discourse in CSA. Overall, research on E-bile comments, including threats, flaming, and trolling (Jane, 2014) shows that they can have negative consequences on individuals targeted by such aggression (see Coles & West, 2016; Jane, 2014; Lewis, Rowe, & Wiper, 2016; Maltby, et al., 2015; Moors & Webber, 2012; Sills, et al., 2016; Webber & Wilmot, 2012). Yet, internet

communication can provide a space for support, activism, and information (see Clark, 2016; Cole, 2015; Lewis, Rowe, & Wiper, 2016; Moors & Webber, 2012; Sills, et al., 2016; Webber & Wilmot, 2012). Due to vitrolic discourse, there has been controversy in the field of jounalism regarding responsibilities and tactics to mediate this, including disallowing anonymity or turning off comments for sensitive issues (Chen & Pain, 2016; Hille & Bakker, 2014; Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011; Ksiazek, 2016; Santana, 2016; Santana, 2014). Yet, limiting the ability to comment prevents CSA survivors from the benefits of online communication. Furhermore, if survivors cannot post anonymously, this might leave them feeling more vulnerable to E-bile and prevent participation. Maltby et al. (2016) found that those who believed the motivation for trolls was a desire for attention had the least negative emotional impact from this behavior. Thus, understanding why people might post negative, especially hostile or abusive, reactions might help insulate CSA survivors from emotional harm.

Summary

Despite emerging literature regarding online discourse, including impact on others, motivation to participate, and moderation of discussion threads, there are no known studies on motivation for people to share their beliefs about a CSA victim in such a forum. Specifically, research is needed on those who post their unsolicited comments that doubt the victim's credibility or blame the victim. As this literature review demonstrates, support and belief from others is a key variable that can have an important positive impact on the survivor's wellbeing. Since these forums are online, and publically accessible, opinions of commenters have the potential to impact more than the subject of

the article. Blame attributing comments toward CSA victims could keep other survivors silent and hinder their resiliency.

This chapter highlighted variables that have been shown to influence observer's opinions of blame attribution in child sexual abuse, but it is unknown which, if any, of these variables might contribute to expressing these opinions publically. It is plausible that there are some interactive effects between the motivators to post in general and those with stronger emotions or opinions regarding the topic of CSA. Furthermore, how might defensive attribution, ambivalent sexism, and Just World Attribution influence this? While the former has been hypothesized, it has not been directly measured regarding CSA blame attributions, nor does a specific scale exist. While the other two theoretical constructs have available scales, only ambivalent sexism has been specifically measured in relation to CSA blame attribution, while studies using belief in a just world and sexual crimes have only been located for adult victims.

In order to understand motivators for posting unsolicited negative comments following online CSA disclosures, it is necessary to target this population, as well as others who read such articles and either choose not to comment or comment in a positive or neutral manner. The next chapter will outline how this target population will be solicited, which inventories will be utilized, and other aspects of the proposed methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate motives for those who post negative comments ranging from doubt to vitriol in response threads following retrospective CSA disclosures in online media. Specifically, my objective was to determine if any relationship existed between this behavior and ambivalent sexism, just world beliefs, perceived similarities, and abuse history.

This chapter begins by outlining the research design and the rationale behind the chosen design. Next, I explain and define the variables used for the study. This is followed by information on sample size, sampling strategy, and target population. I then explain the instrumentation in further detail. This includes a discussion of two well-established scales and information regarding their psychometric properties and history of use. In this section, I also explain questions formulated specifically for this study. Research questions and hypotheses are then shared along with planned statistical tests to analyze the data. This chapter concludes with a discussion of potential threats to validity and an explanation of participant protection.

Research Design

A correlational design was employed for the study. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) argued that this type of design was a non-experimental design that did not have any type of intervention and was not an experimental design. The purpose of this design is to explore a pattern of relationships. A true experimental design could not be employed, since no intervention was applied. An experimental design also typically

utilizes a control group, and what might be considered a control group, those who are unlikely to post response comments, would better fit the definition of a comparison group than a control group. In keeping with the correlational ex-post facto design (see Campbell & Stanley, 1963), this study met criteria for a quasi-experimental design because what qualifies as an "intervention" was replaced by a past, naturally occurring event or events.

Based on assessment of prior literature, I determined that a quantitative method was the most appropriate for this study. First, two major variables, belief in a just world (Dalbert, Lipkus, Sallay, & Goch, 2001) and ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996) have well established quantitative scales for measurement. Prior researchers have shown that relationships exist between these variables and belief, blame, and attributions of responsibility (see Chapleau, Oswald, & Russel, 2007; Feinberg, 2015; Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Pederson & Strömwall, 2013; Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013; Valor-Segura, Esposito, & Moya, 2011). Second, when considering the literature regarding motivation for negative internet commenting in general, it is clear that researchers have conducted several qualitative studies on the topic.

The variables for this study included demographic variables, scores on established inventories, a free-text response box that was then coded, and historical experience questions. Multinomial logistical regression was used to determine which independent variables were predictive of likelihood respondents would post negatively, positively, or neutrally.

For the second research question, multinomial logistical regression was also used in the analysis of the relationship of various demographic, perceived similarity composite

Likert scale scores, and historical variables to type of post because there was a mix of categorical and interval independent (predictor) variables and this statistical test is better suited with such a mix (Pohar, Blas, & Turk, 2004). The final research question compared GBJWS scores to posting group membership and, again, utilized multinomial logistical regression.

Methodology

Population

The general target population for this study was adults living in the United States who have internet access. Although I was ultimately interested in factors that may contribute to the negative responses individuals make to adults disclosing CSA, it was important to include all English-proficient internet users over age 18 in the United States. This allowed for comparison groups I could use to investigate any differences that may exist between those making negative comments and those who do not.

The size of the included population was approximately 75% of the total United States population, according to the U.S. census (File & Ryan, 2014). In 2011, over 167 million adults reported having access to the internet from some location (File, 2013). The population with internet access is overrepresented by non-Hispanic Asian (86.6%) and White residents (77.4%), while a smaller percentage of non-Hispanic Black residents (61.3%) and Hispanic residents (66.7%) report household internet use. While over four-fifths of those 34-44 years of age report home internet use, access declines to under three-fifths for those over 65 years of age. In addition to these demographic differences, the

target population of this study was slightly skewed toward those having more education and higher incomes, and who were less likely to live in a rural area (File & Ryan, 2014).

Sampling Strategy

Convenience sampling through internet recruitment and online surveys were utilized for this study. This was especially appropriate given that the research pertained to comments following online articles. Participants were recruited through Mechanical Turk, which is a service from Amazon that "gives businesses and developers access to an on-demand, scalable workforce" (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014), but is also used to recruit research participants. Survey Monkey was the medium used to administer the online surveys, I had planned to use this service's participant pool as an additional source of recruitment, but this was not possible as I describe in Chapter 4. Although the sampling strategy used was non-probability sampling, Mechanical Turk has been shown to yield a more diverse participant pool than the traditional college student sample, with participant gender demographics close to or surpassing the equivalent of that in college samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). However, as compared to the general U.S. population, Mechanical Turk participants tend to be younger, more educated, and less religious (Mullinex, Leeper, Druckman, & Freese, 2015).

The only requirements for participants were that they were at least 18 years old, resided in the United States, and were proficient in English. Participants attested to this on the consent form, and, the survey platforms also used these screening criteria. A diverse participant pool was desired, especially with respect to gender. Other factors

where diversification was desired included geographical location, education level, and ethnicity. Since participant recruitment was through the internet, it was not possible to ensure that the demographics represented the general U.S. population (Groves, 2009; Granello & Wheaton, 2004), although achieving this was the ideal. Therefore, the possibility of collecting more than the minimum desired sample size was left open.

Furthermore, use of Mechanical Turk has shown more diverse participants than college populations, with 36% of respondents being non-White, slightly more likely to be male than traditional sample pools, and older (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). However, in the U.S. Mechanical Turk population it appears female respondents may be just under two-thirds of the respondents, the average age is 36, education level tends to be higher, and their income tends to be slightly lower than the median U.S. citizen. It is important to consider that this is more diverse than college samples (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Unfortunately, this study did not delineate ethnic diversity, and so specific numbers for the U.S. portion of this sample pool are unknown. However, one study found that 6% of respondents identified as Hispanic and the same number reported they were Black, while 37.5% of participants were White and 40% Asian. This study compared the Mechanical Turk population to other recruitment methods, such as college samples and social media users, and found the former to be the most diverse (Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013).

The survey was administered via the SurveyMonkey platform. Although it is possible to place survey questions directly on Mechanical Turk, the ease of use and tools did not appear to be as "user-friendly" for academic research. Mechanical Turk allowed

those accessing the survey via its site to click a link to the SurveyMonkey survey and then enter a code into Mechanical Turk upon completion.

Sample Size

Specific hypotheses and statistical analysis are discussed in a later section, but the statistical analysis requiring the largest sample size could not be reasonably calculated using typical software such as G*Power. This is because multinomial logistic regression and/or discriminant analysis was used. To calculate desired sample size using software, one needs to know the estimated correlation between predictor variables as well as distributions of the independent variables, neither of which could be reasonably estimated prior to the study. Therefore, it is suggested that a general formula is used by multiplying the number of independent variables by 30 (LeBlanc & Fitzgerald, 2000). In the second research question, there were seven predictor variables, so a minimum sample size of 210 was desired.

Likewise, calculating the required sample size for discriminant analysis is also not available in G*Power. However, this test is essentially considered the antithesis of a MANOVA (Poulson & French, n.d.), thus this statistical test was used in the G*power calculator to predict needed sample size. Keeping the confidence level set at .95, type II error value at .20 or 20%, and significance level at .05, this calculator determined the needed sample size would be 50. However, others have asserted that a multinomial multiple regression sample size can be used for a discriminant analysis. Using this model to calculate optimal sample size, 30 participants per independent variable is ideal

(Hosmer, Lemeshow, & Sturdivant, 2013, as cited in Intellectus Statistics, 2017).

Therefore, 150 participants were sought.

Materials and Procedure

Those who were interested in participation clicked on a link that took them to the Survey Monkey survey. An explanation letter with a disclosure statement, description of purpose, triggers warning, method to contact me, and notification regarding participants' ability to withdraw at any time was then presented. Participants were required to agree to participate via an online consent form that also affirmed that they were over age 18, fluent in English, and reside in the United States. Upon completion, participants were redirected to a "Thank You" page that included my contact information, information about how to obtain an outline of study results, and resources for self-help or psychotherapy should this be desired following the survey (Groves, 2009; Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

Those participating via Mechanical Turk received a small monetary compensation, of $0.50 for completing the survey.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Online Article

Participants read an article about an adult survivor of CSA that was uploaded with the survey materials. The article was from an online periodical, LennyLetter, and permission for use was granted by the author via email (Marzano-Lesnevich, 2017). I decided to copy the text from the story as opposed to providing a link to it because this

may have discouraged participation and been more distracting to the participants, especially due to advertising. However, the caveat to this was that doing such may have compromised the organic nature of the article, which was important to maintain since most other research has used fictional vignettes. In addition, the sexual abuse disclosure was not the overall focus of the story, but this was not unintentional, as many online disclosure stories are similar in this respect.

Article Questionnaire

There were three objectives to the questionnaire which followed the article but the questions were all in one section in order to ameliorate testing fatigue and for ease of design. After reading the article, participants were asked to free text or post their reaction to the article in a provided box. It was then followed by two questions to verify the participant actually read the article, "Who does the author say sexually abused her?" and "What color was the coat the author's girlfriend wore?" with multiple choice answers.

As a proxy measure of defensive attribution theory, eight, five point Likert scale questions were asked, four regarding perceived similarity to the victim and four pertaining to perceived similarity to the offender. These are modeled after Back and Lips' (1998) study, "(a) I feel that I am similar to the child; (b) I identify with the child; (c) I feel a sense of sameness with the child; and (d) The child reminds me of myself," but since, in the case of the article being first person and now he or she is an adult, "the child" will be replaced with "the author" and, for the other four questions, "the child" will be replaced with "the author's grandfather". The questions followed the precedent of a five-point Likert-type scale and combining the scores of the four items respectively

(Back & Lips, 1998). It is important to note that these perceived similarity questions only serve as a proxy for defensive attribution as there is no known reliable and validated scale to measure this construct. These questions are included in an attempt to explore a potential correlation or pattern. It also may build upon Back and Lips (1998) work and elucidate suggestions for further research.

Finally, this questionnaire had three questions regarding victim responsibility, perpetrator blame, and victim accuracy. They were also be scored on a five- point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) and were consistent with the response scale for the eight questions above. These three questions were variations of those from Rogers, Josey, and Davies (2007). They are the following: (a) "To what extent do you agree that the alleged perpetrator is to blame for the situation?" (b) "The author is not responsible for what happened to her/him," and (c) "An account of this type of event that occurred in childhood from a now adult will not be accurate".

These questions were included for preliminatory and exploratory analysis and are not part of a specific research question. For instance, a preliminary analysis looked at the relationship between participants self reported belief about the CSA in the article and the coded category in the response text box. It was posited, for example, if a majority of respondents who were coded to have positive response posts did not report blaming the perpetrator and placed responsibility on the victim for the abuse on these Likert scales, it may point to a flaw in the coding process or suggest a lack of attention or consistency in the participation of respondents.Demographic Questionnaire**.** The demographic questionnaire (see appendix B) asked for the participants' age, gender, education level,

race, sexual orientation, and parental status. Also, in a "yes/no/not sure" format, participants will be asked if they identify as a survivor of CSA. Sexual orientation is relevant, since a subscale of the ASI is heterosexual intimacy and studies have shown differing norms in a non-heterosexual population (Warriner, Nagoshi, & Nagoshi, 2013). As mentioned earlier, some studies have shown gender impacts belief of victims as does a history of childhood sexual abuse (see Back & Lips, 1998,Cromer & Freyd, 2009,Cromer & Freyd, 2007,Cromer L. M., 2006, Davies & Rogers, 2009,Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001 Pederson & Strömwall, 2013 Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013). Age, race, and education level do not have well-established correlations but were considered potentially important variables to assess because they are relevant to the dependent variable and will determine how representative the sample is to the general population.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) consists of two heterogeneous constructs of sexism, hostile and benevolent. The former is defined as what may typically equate to prejudice, which could include a hatred of women or thinking they are less capable or important than men. The latter construct was more complex to define as it encompasses behaviors that might be seen as "prosocial or intimacy seeking" (p.491), and women and girls might be viewed through a positive lens on the surface but fraught with stereotypes or patriarchal attitudes. Benevolent sexism consists of three subscales: paternalism, gender differentiation, and heterosexuality.

In order to develop the psychometrics for this scale, the authors utilized six different studies. Both community and college samples were used, and the correlation between the HS and BS subscales averaged .71. Internal consistency was found to be significant with the total scale having a Cronbach's alpha of .90, the total BS subscale was .86, and the HS was .89. Model comparisons and factor structures were then completed for the groups. The Goodness of Fit Index, as well as chi-square measures showed that benevolent and HS were indeed separate factors. Factor correlations between the two subscales showed that while distinct, BS and HS were still strongly correlated. This helped support the idea that acquiescence bias did not explain the correlation. Next, the individual items were factor loaded, and the factor structure by gender was examined (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

For reliability, alpha coefficients were examined and were consistent across groups, with the alpha for HS being more closely related to the overall ASI coefficient. Validity comparisons to the Recognition of Discrimination (RD) scale yielded interesting results in that, although the overall ASI scale scores were negatively and significantly correlated to the RD scale ($p<.001$), BS was weakly but positively related to the RD. The ASI was then compared to other sexism inventories.

Moderate correlations were shown for these other scales and HS. For instance, the HS subscale shared a correlation of .48 ($p<.01$) with the Old-Fashioned Sexism Scale and .65 with the Modern Sexism Scale (*p<.01*). The BS shared a .33 correlation with the Modern Sexism Scale and .24 with the Old Fashioned Sexism Scale. While the BS had significant partial correlations below the .01 level compared independently to these

scales, when HS was controlled, BS was not significantly correlated with the other measures of sexism (Modern Sexism Scale [r=-.03], Attitude Toward Women scale [r=.04], and Old-Fashioned Sexism scale [r=-.06]), although the correlation with HS was still significant when BS was controlled.   Specifically,) The concept ofBSsexism presented more challenges to assess this type of validity since it was a newer construct, but these findings did indicate BS was a unique construct (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Psychometric properties have held consistent through multiple cultures and it has been translated into many languages (Glick P. , et al., 2000). More recently, a large community sample (over 5000 participants) in the Basque region was used to help standardize the scale for that population and provided some normative comparison data for age and education level. This study found internal consistencies similar to those found by Glick and Fiske (1996) in developing the scale (HS= .86, BS= .90; AS= .91). They also confirmed factor loading for two distinct scales consistent with the original scale development, but some issues with confirmatory factor analysis were shown (Garaigordobil & Aliri, 2013).

It can be suggested that the Modern Sexism scale (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995) could be used in place of the ASI. In fact, Conn, Hanges, Sipe, and Salvaggio (2016) made an argument that Glick and Fiske's assertion that the Modern Sexism Scale only measured HS was erroneous and that the Modern Sexism Scale could be considered a form of ambivalent sexism. They used a sample of all college students and found that when they took the three BS subscales, there was a significant negative correlation between Gender Differentiation and Modern Sexism, but not for the other two sub-

constructs. However, in this proposition they reported how Modern Sexism contains items that assess underlying hostility and are modeled on the concept of racism. The latter is what Glick and Fiske (1996) define as similar in concept to HS, not BS. Furthermore, the design of the Modern Sexism scale does not allocate separation of the constructs, which is important in differentiating HS from BS. Therefore, although the point that there may be some ambivalence within the Modern Sexism scale, the most relevant outcome of their study to the current one and future research may be the importance of examining each sub-construct of the BS subscale (Conn, Hanges, Sipe, & Salvaggio, 2016). The ASI remains the choice scale for this study since it does clearly define these constructs and has significant precedence of use.

Just World Hypothesis and Instrumentation

Unlike the construct of ambivalent sexism that was developed and designed in concert with the scale designed to measure it, Just World Hypothesis (JWH), also known as Belief in a Just World (BJW), was defined theoretically years before a scale was developed in order to measure the construct (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987). The essential concept of this framework is akin to belief in a karmic balance in the world. That is, when people meet misfortune, there is a good chance it is a result of past poor behavior or the victim will be later compensated in some way. If this compensation or balance fails to occur, then those who endorse this belief system (often subconsciously) will take their rationalization in the opposite direction because they will imagine the person did something prior to the adverse event in question, rendering them deserving of the negative event as a sort of consequence. Endorsement of this paradigm allows people

to feel a sense of control (albeit false) and insulation from adverse events (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987; Dalbert, 2009; Learner, 1970). Belief in a just world has been found to correlate positively to religiousity, authoritarianism, and internal locus of control (Rubin & Peplau, 1975).

Rubin and Pepleu (1973; 1975) were the first to develop a scale to measure this construct, called the Just World Scale. This scale consisted of 20 questions and a six-point Likert scale, with internal reliabilities of .89 (1973), .80, and .81 (1975) . However, the reporting of these psychometrics allude to inconsistencies in measurement because the authors (Rubin & Peplau, 1975) referenced one study stating that their scale was modified. Furthermore, this original scale included both "just" and "unjust" items. Dalbert (2009) expressed surprise at the fact that the Just World Scale was used by researchers after the development of the General Belief in a Just World Scale (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987), and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (Lipkus, 1991) because both scales correlate with the Just World Scale. They only contain "just" questions for simplicity and have fewer items, six and seven, respectively, as opposed to 20.

Choosing between the General BJW scale (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987) and the Global BJW scale (Lipkus, 1991) became somewhat of an exercise in futility as they are not only strongly correlated with one another (Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996) and short, but they have both been used in studies that have relevance for the present endeavor. BJW was not found to have a significant relationship to rape victim blame

when ambivalent sexism was also considered as measured by the General BJW scale

(Pederson & Strömwall, 2013), in contrast with another study that did show higher levels

of victim blame for those high in General BJW (Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom,

2013). However, another study using this scale found vacilating results with these beliefs

and rape victim blame. Other studies have used the Global BJW with ASI (Valor-Segura,

Esposito, & Moya, 2011) as well as finding a correlation with adult sexual assault and

victim blame with increased Global BJW scores (Daugherty & Esper, 1998).

Ultimately, the Global BJW scale was decided upon as a more recent study found

it to have very strong psychometrics, with internal consistencies of (α=.904 and .739,

convergent validity of .587 and .307, and concurrent validity with the Just World Scale of

r=.751 and .708 when compared to the Multidimential Belief in a Just World Scale,

than those found in prior research.In addition, this research was conducted using a larger

participant pool and similar sampling strategy as the present study (Reich & Wang,

2015).

Marlow-Crowne Social Desirabiliy Scale-Short Form

The Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS) was developed in 1960

and has been one of the most utilized scales to measure this concept, when one includes

the latter developed short forms of this scale (Perinelli & Germegni, 2016). The original

scale consisted of 33 items answered in a dichotomous true/false format. A few items

contain inverse scoring and higher scores correlate with greater social desireability. The

MCSDS form C reduced the number of item from 33 to 13, while retaining concurrent

validity and satisfactory reliability. The latter was .76, which is less than the original

MCSDS of .82, as well as another short form , XX, at .79 (Reynolds, 1982). However,

the XX form still contains 20 items that may contribute to testing fatigue when

administered along with the scales of main interest in this study, both of which have 22 or

fewer items. The scores from this scale are not a variable in any of the research

questions, but will be used in preliminary analysis to determine if it has a strong

relationship with the variables and, if so, should be included as a control variable.

Data Analysis

Utilizing SPSS, statistical tests, primarily multinomial logistical regression, was

conducted to explore the relationship between the variables utilized in this study. This

was important in order to discern patterns in posting behaviors as explained in Chapter 2,

there is little research on the subject, especially in relation to blame attribution and sexual

abuse. Exploration of these relationships may be helpful in guiding future research. Thus,

while this study may explore the interaction of other relationships between the variables,

each of the three research questions has a primary statistical test that will be explained

along with commensurate hypotheses below.

Data preliminary analysis and cleaning was done prior to running statistical tests.

As mentioned above, type of post was compared to the Likert scale answers of belief and

blame to determine if there is a correlation. In addition, the social desirability scale

scores were utilized in a preliminary analysis to determine if this may have been an

influence on the other variables.

There are more statistical test assumptions for Discriminant Analysis than for Multinomial Logistical Regression. The first assumption for the latter test is that the dependent variables are nominal, and in this study they are for all three research questions and there are three categories. Furthermore, these categories must be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. The next assumption is that multicollinearity does not exist, which essentially means that there is no significant interaction effect between the independent variables. In addition, the results should be devoid of outliers, highly leveraged values or points. The assumptions for Discriminant Analysis are the same as for the MANOVA (Laerd, 2013). The additional assumptions include that the sample size will have more participants in each cell than dependent variables, but more is optimal, there is linearity which means the relationship between the dependent variables is in a straight line, and that there is homogeneity of variance and covariance matrices (Pallant, 2013).

Question 1

The first question and associated hypotheses were as follows:

RQ1: Is the presence of ambivalent sexism related to the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA)?", has null and alternative hypotheses as follows:

$H_0 1$: When controlled for gender and history of CSA, elevated Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) scores, in both hostile (HS) and benevolent (BS) subscales, will

not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

H_a1: When controlled for gender and history of CSA, elevated ASI scores, in both hostile and benevolent subscales, will have a relationship with the type of response comment (positive, negative, neutral/none) following stories about child sexual abuse.

Since type of post is the dependent variable in the first hypothesis and it is nominal containing three values (positive, negative, neutral), a discriminant analysis was planned if a significant number of participants are achieved for each group to meet the assumptions of this statistical test. Discriminant analysis can be used to predict group membership based on multiple continuous variables (Green & Salkind, 2011). In this case, the continuous, independent variables are scores on the ASI inventory, which contains two scales, Hostile Sexism (HS) and Benevolent Sexism (BS). In addition, the latter has three distinct subscales, Heterosexual Intimacy (HI), Complementary Gender Differentiation (CGD), and Protective Paternalism (PP). However, if the assumptions are not met, a multinomial logistical regression was thought to be the better choice (Pohar, Blas, & Turk, 2004) as discussed above.

Question 2

The second research question, "Are participant demographic variables, experiences of CSA and perceived similarities to those in the article related to the type of post following an online story regarding CSA?" contains one null and one alternative hypothesis. They are as follows:

$H_0$1: When controlled for gender and history of CSA, elevated Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) scores, in both hostile (HS) and benevolent (BS) subscales, will not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

H_a1: When controlled for gender and history of CSA, elevated ASI scores, in both hostile and benevolent subscales, will have a relationship with the type of response comment (positive, negative, neutral/none) following stories about child sexual abuse.

A multinomial logistical regression was used for this analysis. There were seven independent variables for these hypotheses. Since the correlation between these several barriers are not known, a general guideline of 30 participants per IV is the best guideline to use. This resulted in a minimum desired sample size of 210.

Question 3

The third and final research question for this study posits, "Does belief in a 'Just World' influence the type of comments posted in response to stories regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA)?" and contains one null and alternate hypothesis as follows:

$H_0$3: When controlling for gender and history of CSA, elevated Global Belief in a Just World (GBJWS) scores will not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

H_a3: When controlling for gender and history of CSA, elevated GBJWS scores will not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

A multinomial logistical regression was also employed for the statistical analysis for this question. The sample size needed for this test, using the same guidelines as described above, was 90. However, given the needed sample size of other hypotheses, it was anticipated this minimum number of participants will be exceeded.

Threats to Validity

External Validity Threats

Testing reactivity. Although this study did not employ a pre- and post-test, thus ameliorating any testing effects from this type of repeated measure, there were other potential validity threats from testing reactivity (Pelham, 1999). For instance, Landers and Behrand (2015) contended that a common concern of using online sampling like Mechanical Turk is that many from this sample pool have participated in dozens of studies. However, they asserted this is not a concern with, for example, personality inventories, as they tend not to change over time. Yet, it is unknown if participants are familiar with certain measures already and this may be especially complicated by the finding that Mechanical Turk participants have been shown to have higher social desirability and may even look up answers they anticipate to be desired (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). This complicates a way to control for the social desirability threat because providing a scale for that may have testing reactivity issues as they may be familiar with these scales. Although Mechanical Turk suggests giving participants ample time to complete surveys, providing too much time might compromise validity. That is, it

may be wise to limit excess time, so participants do not have time to surf the internet to find out more about the inventories they are completing.

Interaction effects. A major threat to validity pertaining to interaction effects is selection bias, which is a concern pertaining to any study using convenience sampling. Landers and Behrend (2015) point out that when an online crowdsourcing sample pool is used, many critics cite this validity threat as participants may opt in or decline based on the topic or nature of the study. However, they argue that this self-selection occurs with all convenience samples because, for instance, college student samples may choose or decline to participate based on the title or topic (Landers & Behrend, 2015). When 20 experiments using a large, random population pool were replicated using Mechanical Turk, 75% of the studies had similar treatment effects and statistical significance (Mullinex, Leeper, Druckman, & Freese, 2015).

Specificity of variables. When variables are poorly operationalized, this may lead to external validity concerns known as specificity of variables. For just world beliefs and ambivalent sexism, this is mitigated by using well-established scales. However, more caution in extrapolating results from the questions regarding perceived similarities needs to be taken, since these questions are based on one prior study and are not part of an established scale.

Reactive effects. Reactive effects occur when people act differently simply knowing they are part of a study. This can be complicated with online sample pools as Mechanical Turk because some research indicates these participants have a desire to

please researchers (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). As mentioned earlier, a social desirability scale can help control for this but may then present another threat to validity. That is the social desirability scale results themselves may be compromised due to testing validity because participants may have taken one before and have researched the scoring of these scales (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010).

Internal Validity Threats

History & Maturation. The threats of history and maturation are similar in that they account for natural changes over time, which could be falsely interpreted as changes due to the intervention. History refers to changes in a larger group or society, while maturation refers to changes in a particular individual that may occur naturally over time (Pelham, 1999). While this was not an overt issue for this research because it contains neither an intervention nor a pre- post-test, results could be potentially different depending on the time that the online surveys are actually presented. For instance, if another large headline news story breaks out, such as the Penn State scandal, participants might be more reactive than periods of time when CSA is not predominant in the news.

Testing. The testing threats to internal validity are like those presented for external validity in that, although pre-tests and post-tests were not utilized for this study, the participants have a greater chance of being familiar with a particular inventory than some other sample pools.

Instrumentation. Validity threats to instrumentation occur when the way a variable is measured is different before an intervention from after, or when an inventory is not reliable (Pelham, 1999). The former concern was not relevant in this study, which did not use an intervention. However, the latter threat to instrumentation is relevant. For ambivalent sexism and belief in a just world, potential threats are mitigated by use of well-established scales with sound psychometrics. The questions hoped to be related to defensive attribution are not established to do so and, thus, did not measure this directly, so cautious interpretation is discussed in the results section.

Statistical Regression. Statistical regression, also known as regression to the mean, is the tendency for those who have outlier scores on a pre-test to score closer to average on the post-test (Pelham, 1999). Since a pre- and post-test was not used in the current research, it is not an obvious concern. However, it is possible this could be an unknown threat to validity if participants have taken one or more of the inventories in the past. For instance, if the scores on the ASI or GBJWS tend to regress to the mean and not be as widely distributed as prior studies using these scales have shown, this validity threat would be suspect.

Experimental Mortality. This threat occurs when there are differences between those who drop out of a study and those who remain (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Since this is not a longitudinal study, this threat was not a relevant concern.

Protection of Participants

Research was not conducted until after approval of the Walden University Internal Review Board. All participant recruitment was conducted online without asking participants to provide any identifying information. Mechanical Turk provides for anonymity of participants. While Survey Monkey offers users of their participant pool service information on participants, there are feature options to turn this off so participants and their IP addresses are not shared with the researcher. This option was enabled. Electronic consent to participate was requested after participants read the informed consent letter, which disclosed that the topic may trigger some people because child sexual abuse was discussed. Potential participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Although data is anonymous, not confidential, the database was still stored on a password protected laptop. The other coders will only have access to the free text box information and participant number. The dataset may be shared with Walden University faculty as appropriate and will be kept for a minimum of seven years.

The informed consent page also included information on support resources should anyone become triggered by the subject matter. These included resources for referrals to local mental health services via websites and hotlines such as suicidepreventionlifeline.org, the crisis/suicide hotline (1-800-273-8255), online.rainn.org (for sexual assault survivors), and the National Sexual Assault Helpline (1-800-656-4673*).*

Summary

The research utilized a non-experimental, cross-sectional design. The purpose was to explore which factors may influence or correlate with online written negativity toward sexual abuse survivor disclosures. Although this research combines multiple concepts, efforts were made to minimize the time spent on each construct to prevent testing fatigue while preserving psychometric integrity. This was done through the selection of shorter measures that have proven validity and reliability. Other design considerations were to employ the same Likert scale for other questions in order to expedite testing. In the next chapter, I will discuss the results of the collected data. Statistical analysis and results will be presented.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between ambivalent sexism, belief in a just world, history of trauma, and selected demographic variables on the likelihood to post and the nature of comments made in response to a published account of CSA. This was broken down to three specific research questions. The first asked if the presence of ambivalent sexism was related to the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding CSA). CSA history of the participant and gender were added to control for the model based on prior research. The second question inquired if participant demographic variables, experiences, and perceived similarities to those in the article explained the relationship to the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding CSA. The third question asked whether belief in a just world influenced the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding CSA. Again, sexual abuse history and gender of the participant were added to the model as controls.

The three questions, each with one null and alternative hypothesis, were tested using statistical techniques that are reported with specific detail later in the chapter. In the next section, I describe data collection and general statistics of the participant pool.

Data Collection

Data was collected in December, 2017. Participants who were recruited via Mechanical Turk were directed to a survey created in SurveyMonkey. The first survey link on Mechanical Turk was advertised on December 19th and set for 350 participants.

This number was reached on December 20, but since some of the demographic groups had small numbers, the survey was reopened on December 27th and set to 400 participants, with 402 responses received in less than 24 hours. Although this means there were 752 respondents officially finished and compensated through Mechanical Turk, the number of participants who continued to the end of the survey was 837. Thus, some participants may have completed the survey and were not able to submit their code to Mechanical Turk before the specified number was reached and Mechanical Turk closed the survey. Because the survey was offered anonymously, it was not possible to discern which participants fell into the uncompensated category. However, participants were able to contact me through Mechanical Turk, and all who sent a message requesting compensation were compensated.

Survey Monkey data showed that 1,128 people went to the survey link and answered the question regarding consent to participate after reading the invitation and consent form. Of these, four declined participation and were directed to a disqualification page thanking them for consideration. Of the 1,128 people who agreed, 848 people used the free text box to comment on the article they read. As was stated earlier, 837 participants reached the end of the survey, answering all questions or skipping a minimal number.

Two questions were asked as an attempt to discern if the participant read the article. These questions were, "What color coat did the author's first girlfriend have?" and "Who did the author state sexually abused her?" Of the 844 persons who answered this question, 825 correctly answered *green*. The nineteen people who answered the

question incorrectly were removed from the analysis. Three people who skipped this question were included as they otherwise completed the survey and answered the second question correctly, which was more difficult. Since the second question was more difficult, this was not used as exclusion criteria. Of those who completed most of the survey and answered the first question correctly, three answered that her uncle abused her, three said her mother, and 160 participants incorrectly identified her father as the abuser. The latter answer is not surprising as the girlfriend mentioned in the article was sexually abused by her father. Five additional respondents were removed from the analysis due to missing data.

Gender

Of the 839 participants who answered the question of gender identification, 59.24% (497) identified as women, 40.29% (338) identified as men, and .48% (4), selected other. All four individuals identifying as "other" were participants included in the final sample and needed to be recoded to be used in statistical analysis. Since assigned sex at birth was also asked, the person who identified as transgender was coded as the opposite of assigned sex at birth, another participant who wrote "historically accurate male" was coded as male, the person who identified as non-binary was coded congruently as assigned sex, as was the person who wrote a number in the specification box. Thus, participants included in the final analysis were 60.2% women ($n = 494$) and 39.8% men ($n = 326$).

Sexual Abuse History

Of the finalized sample, 176 participants reported they were sexually abused before the age of 18 (21.5%), 605 (73.8%) of participants report they were not, and 37 (4.5%) were not sure. As the interaction of sexual abuse and gender on blame attribution was significant in many prior studies (Back & Lips, 1998; Cromer L. M., 2006; Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Davies, Gilston, & Rogers, 2012; Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001; Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007), a new variable was created. This variable, sexual abuse history by gender, had six categories. Women without an abuse history comprised 328 (40%) of cases in the sample, women with a CSA history numbered 140 (17.1%) of the sample, men without a CSA history equaled 277 (33.8%) of the cases, 36 men (4.4% of total sample) reported a CSA history, while 24 women (2.9%) and 13 men (1.6%) report they were unsure of a CSA victimization. Thus, 28.3% of women report a history of child sexual abuse, while 11% of men reported a history of CSA. These percentages were slightly higher than some prior research (Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gomez-Benito, 2009; Perez-Fuentes, Olfson, Villegas, Morcillo, Wang, & Blanco, 2013).

Race/Ethnicity

Participants were able to choose as many race categories as they deemed fit. Ninety-four participants (11.5%) identified as Black/African-American, 30 (3.7%) chose American Indian/Alaskan Native, 65 (7.9%) selected Asian/Pacific Islander, 652 (79.5%) identified as Caucasian/White, and 15 selected other with specifications. In order to remain consistent with the U.S. Census, the question "Are you Spanish/Hispanic or

Latino?" was listed separately from race. Sixty nine (8.4%) participants answered this question affirmatively.

For purposes of statistical analysis, a new variable "race" was created from the above information. Respondents who chose more than one race category were included as part of the category, "Multiracial" (N=38; 4.6%) which also includes eight participants who checked the other category and specified mixed or multiple races, 76 (9.3%) were categorized as Black/African American, 621 (75.7%) were labeled White, 58 (7.7%) were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 13 (1.6%) were labeled as American Indian/Alaskan Native. This yielded a diverse participant sample with slightly more Asian/Pacific Islander (7.7% vs 5.9%), multiracial (4.6 vs 2.6%), and American Indian/Native Alaskan (1.6% vs 1.3%) than the 2016 U.S. census estimates. However, there were slightly less White respondents than the 2016 Census estimates (75.7 vs 76.9%), and Black/African Americans only comprised 9.3% of participants, whereas they make up 13.3% of the general U.S. population (US Census, 2016). Those who identified as Latino/a for this study were also under-represented by slightly less than half of the Census estimate of 17.8%. However, the Census population estimates are for the total population, which could explain the disparity since the cause of the high rate of growth for Hispanics in the U.S. has been birth rates (Brown, 2014), and, since this study only included adults, this may be more reflective of the adult population.

Sexual Orientation

Most participants, 719 or 87.7%, identified as heterosexual. The next largest group was bisexual, at 67 or 8.2%, while 15 (1.8%) participants identified as lesbian, nine

(1.5%) as gay, and eight (1%) as other. Since, with exception of bisexual, the non-heterosexual response rate was small for statistical analysis, a new variable, Heterosexual, was created where respondents who identified other than heterosexual numbered 99 or 12.1% and eight or 1%, did not respond to this question.

Other Variables

Age. The mean age of the 803 respondents who did not skip this question was 36.74. Participants under 28 numbered 173 or 21.1% of the participants, 162 respondents (19.8%) were 28-32, 156 (19%) of the sample were 33-36, 152 (18.5%) were 37-46, and 160 (19.5%) were over 46.

Education. Most respondents reported having a college degree. The majority of participants had a bachelor's degree (N=312, 38%), while 154 (18.8%) held an associates, 111 (13.5%) had a master's degree, and 27 (3.3%) earned a doctorate or another terminal degree. Of those without a college education, 209 or 25.5% had a high school diploma or equivalent and only 6 or 0.7% did not finish high school.

Parental Status. The majority of participants, 429 (52.3%), considered themselves to be parents. Slightly less than half 46.8% (N=384) did not identify as parents, while another five were not sure.

Belief and Blame. To determine if the coding of the comment type correlated with belief, three Likert scale (1 [strongly disagree] to 5 [strongly agree]) questions were asked regarding belief and blame. The first two, "The author's grandfather is to blame for the situation the author says happened to her as a child" (offender blame) and "The author is not responsible for what happened to her"(victim not responsible) would be

expected to have a greater mean correlated with positive responses. The final question, "An adult memory of this type of event from childhood will not be accurate" (victim accuracy) would have the opposite expectation. That is, those who believed the victim, trusted the victim's memory, and blamed the perpetrator for the abuse would be expected to be more likely to post positive comments and less likely to post negative comments. If this correlation was not found, it would either mean that the coding was not reliable, what people post does not reflect their actual opinions and beliefs, or some combination thereof.

Although not part of this study's official research questions, I conducted preliminary analysis to explore the relationship between the coding outcome and participants' views of belief, blame, and victim accuracy. A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate posting type differences in relationship to belief and blame attribution of the author's presentation of events. The three dependent variables were offender blame, victim not responsible, and victim accuracy. The independent variable was post type with three levels: positive, negative, or neutral. Both Box's test of equality of covariance matrices and Levene's test of equality of error variances were violated; thus, the test was re-run with the more conservative alpha level of .01. Although there were still errors in both assumptions, all of the cells contained more than 30 participants, which made this less problematic (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Since there were unequal N values for the groups, Pillai's trace value was used since this increases robustness. There was a statistically significant difference between positive, negative, and neutral posters on the combined dependent variables, F

(6, 1610) = 12.12, $p < .001$; Pillai's trace = .09; partial eta squared = .04. When the results of the dependent variables were considered separately, all three differences reached statistical significance, victim accuracy F (2, 806) = 19.72, $p < .001$; author not responsible, F (2, 806) = 10.86, $p < .001$; offender blame F (2, 806) = 26.22, $p < .001$. An inspection of the mean scores indicated that neutral posters were most likely to not believe the accuracy of this type of childhood memory of a victim ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.04$), followed by negative posters ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.04$), and positive posters were most likely to belief in memory accuracy ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 0.94$). Positive posters were most likely to agree that the author/victim was not responsible for what happened to her ($M=4.48$, $SD= 1.07$), followed by neutral posters ($M=4.16$, $SD= 1.18$), and, while negative posters still expressed overall average agreement that the author was not responsible for the abuse, it was slightly lower ($M= 3.95$, $SD= 1.34$). The differences between negative ($M= 3.75$, $SD= 1.40$) and neutral ($M= 3.77$, $SD= 1.33$) were negligible, positive posters expressed a higher level of agreeing that the grandfather/perpetrator was to blame for the sexual abuse ($M=4.35$, $SD= 1.11$). These results indicated that those posting positively were more likely to believe and support the author, while blaming the grandfather, while negative posters were less likely to. The results of the neutral group are more confounding and could be the result of the compellation of different etiologies of neutral posts being merged.

Research Question 1

A multinomial logistic regression was performed to model the relationship between the predictors and membership the three type of posting groups (negative, positive, and neutral) for the first research question as follows:

RQ1: Is the presence of ambivalent sexism related to the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA)?

$H_0 1$: When controlled for gender and history of CSA, elevated Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) scores, in both hostile (HS) and benevolent (BS) subscales, will not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

$H_a 1$: When controlled for gender and history of CSA, elevated ASI scores, in both hostile and benevolent subscales, will have a relationship with the type of response comment (positive, negative, neutral/none) following stories about child sexual abuse.

The traditional .05 criterion of statistical significance was employed for all tests. Addition of the predictors to the model that contained only the intercept significantly improved the fit between model and data, $\chi^2(14, N=818) = 133.186$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .195$, $p < .001$. The only unique significant contribution was made to the model by HS (see table 1). Goodness of fit was explored by conducting Pearson and Deviance tests and in no case was this test significant. The overall percentage of correct classifications was 75.1%.

Table 1

Predictors (ASI) Unique Contributions to Commenter Group Membership (N = 818)

Predictor	X^2	df	p
Benevolent sexism	4.703	2	.095
Hostile sexism	87.788	2	< .001***
SA history by gender	11.517	10	.319

Note. SA history by gender = gender of participant combined with history of sexual abuse as a minor; X^2 = amount by which -2 log likelihood increases when predictor is removed from the full model. ***p<.001.

The reference group was those respondents who made positive posts. Each of the

predictors, sexual abuse history by gender, Hostile Sexism (HS), and Benevolent Sexism

(BS), had two parameters, one for predicting membership in the neutral posting group,

rather than the positive group, and one for membership in the negative posting group. The

parameter estimates are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Parameter Estimates Contrasting the Positive Group Versus Each of the Other Groups (ASI)

Predictor	Positive vs.	B	OR	p
Benevolent sexism	Neutral	.233	1.263	.032*
	Negative	.082	1.085	.519
Hostile sexism	Neutral	.486	1.625	<.001**
	Negative	.943	2.566	<.001**
Women, no abuse[1]	Neutral	-.145	.865	.865
	Negative	-.273	.761	.355
Women, abuse[1]	Neutral	-.798	.450	.027*
	Negative	-.427	.652	.282
Women, not sure[1]	Neutral	.148	1.160	.803
	Negative	.661	1.937	.292
Men, not sure[1]	Neutral	-.709	.492	.516
	Negative	.988	2.685	.171
Men, abuse[1]	Neutral	-.104	.901	.832
	Negative	.098	1.103	.859

Note. 1 = as compared to males denying child sexual abuse history; OR = odds ratio associated with the effect of a one standard deviation increase in the predictor; *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Significant parameters were found for three predictors in comparing the positive

commenters with the neutral commenters, BS, HS, and CSA history by gender for

women with sexual abuse histories as compared to men without sexual abuse histories.

Benevolent sexism scores significantly predicted a person posting a neutral response

over a positive response, *b*=.233, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=4.62, *p*=.032, thus for every one Likert

scale point gain in BS score, participants were 26% more likely to post neutrally than positively. The relationship between HS and posting neutrally over positively was even stronger, b=.486, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=25.02, p<.001. Those who scored as endorsing more hostile sexist beliefs had a 62.5% increase in the likelihood they would post neutrally rather than positively for each point higher they scored in HS. The final significant predictor for posting neutrally as compared to positively was an inverse predictor, b=.-,798, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=4.88, p=.027, in that women who reported a history of CSA were 55% less likely to post neutrally as oppose to positively as compared to males without a history of CSA. Negative posts as compared to positive posts only had one significant predictor variable, HS. As HS increases, the inclination of a participant to make a negative response post increases, b=.943, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=66.31, p< .001. Essentially, when BS as well as history of having been sexually abused as a child as grouped by gender remained constant, the likelihood of a participant posting a negative comment compared to a positive one increased by 157% for each point higher one scored on the HS scale.

Impact of Social Desirability

To discern if the construct of social desirability might be an influence on the model, the same multinomial logistic regression was performed with all perimeters remaining the same with the exception of adding social desirability scores as a predictor. Furthermore it did not have any impact on which predictors influenced negative posting compared to positive posting, HS was still significant, b=.944, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=66.43, p< .001. None of the other predictors influenced negative posting over positive posting. The percentage of correct classifications held constant at 75.1%.

For neutral posting compared to positive posting, however, social desirability did intervene in the significance of the predictor for BS, b=.210, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=3.71, $p < .054$. Thus, the impact of BS on neutral posting might be better attributed to social desirability than to BS. HS (b=.487, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=25.11, $p < .001$) and women CSA survivors compared to non-CSA men were still significant (b=.787, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=4.72, $p < .030$) in the same directions, when controlling for social desirability. In fact, social desirability was a significantly, albeit weak, independent predictor of posting a neutral comment over a positive one, b=.066, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=4.11, p =.043, in that for every point increase on the MCSDX, the chances of a participant posting neutrally instead of positively increased by 6.8%.

Summary of Research Question 1

The null hypothesis cannot be rejected overall for research question one. That is, ambivalent sexism as a whole does not influence belief, responsibility, and blame regarding an adult survivor of CSA, as ambivalent sexism is the intersection of both HS and BS. Benevolent sexism did not uniquely contribute to the overall model. However, it did contribute to the parameter estimate in relation to those who post neutrally in reference to those posting positive comments, in increasing the likelihood. Further, when social desirability was included in the model this negated the significance of this increase, suggesting that part of this significance might be better accounted for by concern of other's opinion.

Although the construct of ambivalent sexism as a whole did not significantly predict group membership for posting type, HS did. Thus, there is some support for the

alternative hypothesis in that those holding hostile sexist beliefs are less likely to post positive response comments following an article of an adult survivor disclosing childhood sexual abuse. Participants were 65.6% more likely to write a neutral comment as oppose to a positive one as HS increased, and they were 156.6% more likely to post negatively when holding such views. The addition of social desirability to the model slightly increased the likelihood of a neutral post, from 62.5% to 62.7% and the percent chance of posting negatively also increased slightly with social desirability was held constant but this increase was less than one percentage point per one point interval raised on the HS inventory.

Research Question 2

A multinomial logistic regression was performed to model the relationship between the predictors and membership the three type of posting groups (negative, positive, and neutral) for the following research question and hypotheses:

RQ2: How do participant demographic variables, experiences and perceived similarities to those in the article explain the relationship to the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA)?

$H_0 2$: Demographic variables, prior experiences, and perceived similarities to the victim or offender will not predict comment type (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

$H_a 2$: Demographic variables, prior experiences, and perceived similarities to the victim or offender will predict comment type (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

The traditional .05 criterion of statistical significance was employed for all tests.

Addition of the predictors to the model that contained only the intercept significantly

improved the fit between model and data, χ^2(42, N=774) = 166.734, Nagelkerke R² =

.253, p < .001. Unique significant contributions were made to the model by perceived

similarity to the victim, perceived similarity to the perpetrator, and sexual abuse history

(see table 2.1). Goodness of fit was explored by conducting Pearson and Deviance tests

and in no case was this test significant.

Table 3
Predictors Unique Contributions to Commenter Group Membership (N=774)

Predictor	X^2	df	p
Age	.214	2	.898
VicSim	86.504	2	<.001**
PerpSim	40.108	2	<.001**
Gender	.211	2	.900
Abuse History	12.322	4	.015**
Latino	.566	2	.754
Race	11.686	8	.166
Education	15.213	10	.124
Heterosexual	.330	2	.848
Parental Status	5.341	2	.069
Posting Frequency	10.591	6	.101

Note: VicSim=Likert scale score of perceived similarity to victim X^2=amount by which -2 log likelihood increases when predictor is removed from the full model**$p<.01$

The reference group was those respondents who made positive posts. Each of the

predictors, age, perceived similarity to the victim, perceived similarity to the perpetrator,

gender, history of childhood sexual abuse, Latino ethnicity, race, education, sexual

orientation (dichotomized to heterosexual or non-heterosexual), parental status, and

posting frequency had two parameters, one for predicting membership in the neutral

posting group, rather than the positive group, and one for membership in the negative

posting group. The parameter estimates are shown in table 4.

Table 4

Demographic Variable Parameter Estimates Contrasting the Positive Group versus Each of the Other Groups

Predictor	Positive vs.	B	OR	p
Age	Neutral	.005	1.005	.643
	Negative	.001	1.001	.908
VicSim	Neutral	-.727	.483	<.001***
	Negative	-1.275	.279	<.001***
PerpSim	Neutral	.852	2.345	<.001***
	Negative	.733	2.082	<.001***
Gender	Neutral	-.049	.952	.833
	Negative	-.128	.880	.658
Abuse History (Unsure vs No)	Neutral	.548	1.730	.316
	Negative	1.402	4.065	.015*
Abuse History (Yes vs No)	Neutral	.183	1.201	.582
	Negative	1.130	3.096	.003**
Latino (vs non-Latino)	Neutral	.111	1.117	.790
	Negative	.370	1.447	.446
Black (vs White)	Neutral	.452	1.571	.191
	Negative	-.144	.866	.446
Multiracial (vs White)	Neutral	.224	1.251	.657
	Negative	.760	.468	.263
Asian (vs White)	Neutral	.235	1.265	.551
	Negative	-1.986	.137	.058
Am. Indian (vs White)	Neutral	1.042	2.836	.188
	Negative	.687	1.987	.521
<HS or Equiv. (vs PhD)	Neutral	3.758	42.856	.011*
	Negative	1.676	5.344	.339
Associates (vs PhD)	Neutral	1.393	4.029	.194
	Negative	.614	1.848	.404
Bachelors (vs PhD)	Neutral	1.295	3.653	.219
	Negative	-.153	.858	.832
Masters (vs PhD)	Neutral	1.843	6.318	.087
	Negative	.154	1.166	.847
Heterosexual	Neutral	-.210	.810	.612
	Negative	-.188	.828	.716
Parent	Neutral	-.054	.947	.826
	Negative	-.691	.501	.022*
Never Posts (vs frequently)	Neutral	-.736	.479	.075

	Negative	-1.431	.239	.003**
Rarely Posts (vs frequently)	Neutral	-.587	.556	.137
	Negative	-1.022	.360	.022*
Often Posts (vs frequently)	Neutral	-.651	.522	.133
	Negative	-1.401	.246	.007**

*p<.05; **p<.01, ***p<.001*

Significant parameters were found for three predictors in comparing the positive commenters with the neutral commenters, perceived similarity to the victim, perceived similarity to the perpetrator, and education. Perceived similarity to the victim scores significantly predicted an inverse relationship to a person posting a neutral response over a positive response, $b= -.727$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=29.75$, $p<.001$, thus for every one Likert scale point gain in victim similarity score, participants were 52% less likely to post neutrally than positively. The relationship between perceived similarity to the perpetrator score and posting neutrally over positively was even stronger, $b=.852$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=34.14$, $p<.001$. Those who reported stronger feelings of similarity to the perpetrator had a 134.5% increase in the likelihood they would post neutrally rather than positively for each point higher they scored in perpetrator similarity. Those lacking a high school diploma were also more likely to post neutrally than positively, $b= 3.76$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=6.40$, $p=.011$, in that those lacking a high school diploma or GED were 4186% more likely to post neutrally compared to positively as compared to those who held a doctorate or other terminal degree. However, there were only six participants lacking a degree and 27 with a terminal degree.

Negative posts as compared to positive posts had more predictors which achieved statistical significance, victim similarity, perpetrator similarity, CSA history, parental

status, and frequency of posting responses online. As perceived similarity to the victim increases, the tendency of a participant to make a negative response post decrease, $b= -1.28$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=51.74$, $p< .001$. Thus, with all other demographic variables holding constant, the chance of posting negatively rather than positively, decreases by 72% by each one point Likert scale increase in perceived similarity. As expected, the converse is true of perceived perpetrator similarity, $b= .733$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=12.61$, $p< .001$. For every Likert scale point increase in perceived perpetrator similarity, a participant is 108% more likely to respond with a negative post over a positive post.

Participants reporting a history of being sexually abused as a child were more likely to post negatively than positively, $b= 1.13$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=8.98$, $p=.003$, with an increased odds ratio of 3.10, making it 210% more likely that a CSA survivor will make a negative post. For those who are not sure if they experienced sexual abuse as a child, there was also an increased tendency to respond with a negative post, $b= 1.40$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=5.90$, $p= .015$, resulting in a 307% increase.

Identifying as a parent lowered a participant's likelihood of responding with a negative post, $b= -.691$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=5.21$, $p= .022$. Parents were 40% less likely to post negatively than positively. The final significant value for negative posters compared to positive posters was self-reported frequency of posting response comments in online forums. Those who frequently participate by posting in online response venues were more likely to make a negative comment in this study than the three other posting groups. Those who post occasionally (1-3 times per month) were 75% less likely to post negatively than positively, $b= -1.40$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=7.20$, $p= .007$; participants who post

once a month or less were 64% less likely to post negatively than positively, b= -1.02, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=5.23, p= .022; those who deny posting response comments at all were 76% less likely to post negatively, b= -1.43, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=8.70, p= .003.

Since prior studies found that the interaction effect of gender and prior participant history of CSA correlated to belief and blame (Cromer, 2006; Cromer & Freyd , 2007; Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Ford, Schindlet, & Medway, 2001), the same multinomial logistic regression was run keeping everything constant with the exception of not treating gender and sexual abuse history as unique variables. Sexual abuse history as a child and gender were coded into a new variable which had six categories, women with CSA history, women who were not sure, women without a sexual abuse history, men with sexual abuse history, men who were not sure, and men without a history of childhood sexual abuse.

Again, the addition of the predictors to the model that contained only the intercept significantly improved the fit between model and data, $\chi^2(40, N=774) = 168.93$, Nagelkerke R^2 = .255, $p < .001$. Unique significant contributions were still made to the model by perceived similarity to the victim and perceived similarity to the perpetrator. The only missing unique contributor was abuse history which had been independently significant on his own but not when examined in the context of gender (see table 2.3). Goodness of fit was explored by conducting Pearson and Deviance tests and in no case was this test significant.

Table 5

Demographic Predictors Unique Contributions to commenter group membership (N=820)

Predictor	X^2	df	p
Age	.246	2	.884
VicSim	86.395	2	<.001**
PerpSim	40.541	2	<.001**
SA history by Gender	14.600	10	.147
Latino	.580	2	.748
Race	11.689	8	.166
Education	15.086	10	.129
Sexual Orientation	.255	2	.880
Parental Status	5.335	2	.069
Posting Frequency	10.607	6	.101

Note: VicSim=Likert scale score of perceived similarity to victim X^2=amount by which -2 log likelihood increases when

Note: SA history by gender= gender of participant combined with history of sexual abuse as a minor; X^2=amount by which -2 log likelihood increases when predictor is removed from the full model.

**p<.01

Combining CSA with gender did not impact which parameters were significant as victim similarity (b= .728, Wald χ^2(1)=29.59, p<.001), perpetrator similarity (b= .859, Wald χ^2(1)=34.53, p<.001), and education levels between those with terminal degrees and no degree (b= 3.81, Wald χ^2(1)=6.57, p= .01) all still reached statistical significance between positive and neutral posts in the same direction. The parameter estimates between positive posters and negative posters also remained the same as far as which were significant in the gender by sexual abuse combined model. As perceived similarity to the victim increases, negative posting decreased, b= -1.28, Wald χ^2(1)=51.64, p< .001, and the opposite was true for perpetrator similarity, b= .736, Wald χ^2(1)=12.66, p< .001. Parent identity still lowered odds of negatively posting, b= -.692, Wald χ^2(1)=5.21, p= .022. Finally frequent posters were still more likely to post negatively than who post occasionally, b= -1.40, Wald χ^2(1)=7.18, p= .007, as were those who rarely post, b= -

1.02, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=5.21, p= .022; those who deny posting response comments at all were 76% less likely to post negatively, b= -1.43, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=8.61, p= .003.

The difference of interest with the model change, combining child sexual abuse history with gender, still had no significant differences between neutral and positive posting for any of the six groups. When negative posting was compared to positive postings, men who were not sexually abused were used as the reference group. The only group which differed significantly were women who were sexually abused as children, b= 1.03, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=4.55, p<.033. Surprisingly, women who had a history of CSA, as compared to men without a CSA history, were 181% more likely to post negatively.

Since there were a multitude of predictors in the original model and many did not have significant effects, the model was then culled to only include those which had significant unique effects, perceived perpetrator similarity, perceived victim similarity, and child sexual abuse history. The model which resulted was statistically significant, $\chi^2(8, N=820) = 138.518$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .203$, $p < .001$. The overall percentage of correct classifications dropped slightly from 75.6% to 74.8%. As shown in table 2.4, victim similarity and perpetrator similarity remained significant for delineating between positive respondents and those responding negatively as well as positively. Abuse history was, once again, only significant for prediction of those who respond negatively as compared to those posting positively. Since child sexual abuse history was significant as a unique predictor in the original model, but this contribution was no longer significant when CSA history of the participant was coded by gender, the culled model was tested with a sample split by gender identification. Both models were still statistically

significant, χ²(8, N=492) = 87.781, Nagelkerke R² = .226, *p* < .001, for the women

participants, and, χ²(8, N=325) = 47.423, Nagelkerke R² = .166, *p* < .001 in the men.

Although both halves of the split model reached overall significance, the likelihood ratio

tests showed that CSA history of the participant was only a unique contributor for women

participants, χ²(4) = 10.313, *p* =.035, and not men participants, χ²(4) = 6.582, *p* =.160,

while the other two unique predictors, victim and perpetrator similarity, remained

significant at the <.001 level for both genders. Parameter estimates for the split sample

are also included in table 2.4.   The overall correct classifications were higher in the

women group, 80.5%, than in the men group, 67.1%.

Table 6

Parameter Estimates Contrasting the Positive Group with the other Groups (DA & Gender)

Predictor	Positive vs.	B			OR			p		
		C	W	M	C	W	M	C	W	M
vicsim	Neutral	-.663	-.794	-.428	.515	.452	.652	<.001***	<.001***	.025*
	Negative	-1.210	-1.072	-1.388	.298	.342	.250	<.001***	<.001***	<.001***
perpsim	Neutral	.913	1.240	.592	2.493	3.455	1.808	<.001***	<.001***	.001**
	Negative	.770	.769	.780	2.160	2.158	2.182	<.001***	.012*	.003**
Unsure CSA	Neutral	.496	1.116	-.591	1.643	3.052	.554	.351	.081	.586
	Negative	1.699	1.848	1.551	5.468	6.348	4.716	.001**	.006**	.030*
Positive CSA	Neutral	.120	.096	.249	1.127	1.101	1.282	.704	.815	.629
	Negative	.842	.934	.805	2.321	2.544	2.236	.016*	.039*	.172

C=Combined Sample; F=Females Only, M= Males Only; *p<.05; **p<.01, ***p<.001

Thus, with the exception of men posting neutrally, all other groups were less

likely to post neutrally or negatively than positively if they perceived similarity to the

victim. Women perceiving this likeness were 54.8% less likely to post neutrally and the

combined group was 48.5% less likely. For posting negatively, the combined group was

70.2% less likely to post with vitriol, while women feeling a commonality were 65.8%

less likely, and men reduced this chance by 75%. Perceived perpetrator similarity increased the chances of the combined sample of posting neutrally over positively by 149% for the combined group, 246% for women, and 81% for men; while negative posting was 116% more likely overall, 116% increased for women, and 118% more for men. Those who were not sure if they were abused did not have any significant change for odds of posting neutrally, but all gender groups unsure of their CSA history were more likely to post negatively, combined gender was 446.8% more likely to post negatively, women 534.8% more likely, and men 371.6% more likely. Men who were sexually abused did not differ significantly in their posting type than men who were not, but there was a statistically significant increase of negative posting for the combined group of 132.1% and of 154.4% for women.

Summary of Research Question Two

The results show that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected for several of the variables in this model. Namely, ethnicity, race, heterosexuality, age, and gender have no influence on the overall model, nor do they have any significant impact on parameter estimates. Although education had one significant relationship in that those with less than a high school education were significantly more likely to post neutrally than positively as compared to those holding a terminal degree, it is reasonable to assert the null hypothesis also cannot be rejected for this variable. Firstly, the education variable did not uniquely contribute to the model. Secondly, there were six choices for this variable by three outcome groups and only one comparison was significant at the .05 level. Finally, there were only six participants with less than a high school diploma or GED.

The alternate hypothesis is partially supported for parental status and posting frequency as these two factors do not uniquely influence the overall model, but there are significant parameter effects for some cells, specifically those who are parents, as well as those who never or rarely post, compared to frequent post responders are all less likely to type negative responses as compared to positive ones. . The alternative hypothesis was partially rejected as multinomial logistical regression test results yielded significant p values for unique contributors to the overall model, as well as in parameter estimates, in three of the predictor variables: a) sexual abuse history, b) perceived similarity to the victim, and c) perceived similarity to the offender. Feeling similar to the victim revealed an inverse relationship to neutral and negative posting, while CSA and perceived similarity to the perpetrator had a positive relationship to writing negative and neutral comments.

Research Question 3

A multinomial logistic regression was again performed to model the relationship between the predictors and membership the three type of posting groups (negative, positive, and neutral) for the third research question as follows:

Research Question (RQ) 3: Does belief in a "Just World" influence the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA)?

$H_0 3$: When controlling for gender and history of CSA, elevated Global Belief in a Just World (GBJWS) scores will not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

$H_1$3: When controlling for gender and history of CSA, elevated GBJWS scores will not be predictive of the type of response comment made (positive, negative, neutral/none) in response to stories about child sexual abuse.

The standard .05 criterion of statistical significance was employed for all tests. Addition of the predictors to the model that contained only the intercept improved the fit between model and data, χ^2(12, N=818) = 52.03, Nagelkerke R² = .080, p < .001. Global Belief in a Just World Scale scores made a unique significant contribution was made to the model while child sexual abuse history by gender did not (see table 7). Goodness of fit was explored by conducting Pearson and Deviance tests and in no case was this test significant. The percentage of correct classifications was 75.1%.

Table 7

GBJWS Predictors Unique Contributions to commenter group membership (N=820)

Predictor	X^2	df	p
GBJWS score	27.142	2	<.001***
SA history by Gender	15.605	10	.112

Note: SA history by gender= gender of participant combined with history of sexual abuse as a minor; X^2=amount by which -2 log likelihood increases when predictor is removed from the full model.; GBJWS= Global Belief in a Just World
***p<..001

The reference group was those respondents who made positive posts. The two predictors, sexual abuse history by gender and GBJWS scores had two parameters each, one for predicting membership in the neutral posting group, rather than the positive group, and one for membership in the negative posting group. The parameter estimates are shown in table 8.

Table 8

Parameter Estimates for GBJWS Contrasting the Positive Group versus Each of the Other Groups

Predictor	Positive vs.	B	OR	p
GBJWS score	Neutral	.359	1.432	<.001***
	Negative	.475	1.609	<.001***
Women, no abuse[1]	Neutral	-.284	.753	.217
	Negative	-.558	.572	.046*
Women, abuse[1]	Neutral	-.822	.439	.023*
	Negative	-.540	.583	.162
Women, not sure[1]	Neutral	.062	1.064	.917
	Negative	.392	1.480	.514
Men, not sure[1]	Neutral	-.693	.500	.519
	Negative	1.026	2.790	.113
Men, abuse[1]	Neutral	-.034	.967	.945
	Negative	.097	1.102	.855

Note: 1=as compared to males denying child sexual abuse history; *OR*=odds ratio associated with the effect of a one standard deviation increase in the predictor; GBJWS= Global Belief in a Just World Scale
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Significant parameters were found for two predictor categories in comparing the positive commenters with the neutral commenters GBJWS and sexual abuse by gender for women with sexual abuse histories as compared to men without sexual abuse histories. GBJWS scores significantly predicted a person posting a neutral response over a positive response, b=3.59, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=13.46, p< .001, thus for every one scale point gain in GBJWS score, participants were 43% more likely to post neutrally than positively. Women who were sexually abused as children differed significantly in their likelihood of posting neutrally than men who were not abused, b= -.822, Wald $\chi^2(1)$=5.19, p=.023, in that women who reported a history of CSA were 56% less likely to post neutrally as oppose to positively as compared to men without a history of CSA when just world beliefs were held constant.

Negative posts as compared to positive posts also had two significant predictor variables, GBJWS scores and women who did not report a CSA history as compared to men without CSA histories. As belief in a just world increases, the likelihood of a participant to make a negative response post increases, $b=.475$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=17.48$, $p<$ .001. Thus for every point increase in the GBJWS score, a participant increases 61% in the likelihood they will post negatively than positively. Women without CSA history were less likely to post negatively than men who were not sexually abused as children, $b= -.558$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=3.97$, $p=.046$, with a 43% less chance of posting negatively for the former group.

Impact of Social Desirability

In order to determine if social desirability was an influencing factor in the participants' posts, the regression was run again with social desirability as a predictor. Social desirability was not an independent predictor and only one variable changed in its significance (see table 3.3). This was the relationship with the weakest significance, women with no CSA as contrasted with men without CSA and negative posting, $b= -.546$, Wald $\chi^2(1)=3.79$, $p = .052$. The overall percentage of correct classifications only fell slightly to 74.9%.

Table 9

Parameter Estimates Contrasting the Positive Group versus Each of the Other Groups (GBJW & SD)

Predictor	Positive vs.	B	OR	p
GBJWS score	Neutral	.322	1.38	.001**
	Negative	.495	1.641	<.001***
SD	Neutral	.058	1.059	.071
	Negative	-.032	.968	.390

Women, no abuse[1]	Neutral	-.303	.738	.188
	Negative	-.546	.579	.052
Women, abuse[1]	Neutral	-.837	.433	.020*
	Negative	-.530	.589	.170
Women, not sure[1]	Neutral	.154	1.166	.795
	Negative	.331	1.392	.585
Men, not sure[1]	Neutral	-.569	.566	.598
	Negative	.964	2.621	.139
Men, abuse[1]	Neutral	.036	1.037	.942
	Negative	.058	1.060	.913

NOTE: 1=as compared to males denying child sexual abuse history; *OR*=odds ratio associated with the effect of a one standard deviation increase in the predictor; GBJWS= Global Belief in a Just World Scale
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine how participant demographic variables, values, and belief systems influenced the type of post (negative, positive, or neutral) people post in response to an on online article where a CSA survivor discloses abuse. Models including social desirability and excluding this variable were tested in order to explore if this variable influenced posting tendencies in a public forum.

With regard to ambivalent sexism, only the construct of HS had a significant, unique predictor to posting type. Those scoring higher in HS, indicating they are more sexist, were more likely to post either negative or neutral comments than positive comments. While not a unique predictor to the model, BS, had an statistically significant influence in increasing the odds ratio that a participant would post neutrally over positively. Incorporating social desirability into the model did not change any of the unique predictors in the overall model. However, it did mitigate the significance of the parameter estimate for BS, suggesting that the relationship between neutral posting and BS might be better accounted for by social desirability effects than by BSsexism alone.

The second research question examined if participant demographic variables (specifically parental status, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, educational attainment, gender, and age), experiences (history of child sexual abuse), posting behavior (frequency), and perceived similarity to the abuser or CSA survivor, related to the type of comment posted. The only variables that were shown to be a unique predictor to the model were perceived similarities to the abuser, perceived similarities to the victim, and participant history of CSA. Parameter estimates for this question showed that those who perceived similarities to themselves and the offender were more likely to post neutrally or negatively than positively, those who felt similarly to the victim were less likely to post negatively or neutrally. Those who reported a history of CSA or that they were unsure if they had were more likely to post negatively than positively.

There were other significant parameter estimates which were not unique predictors in the model. Those who identified as parents were less likely to post negative comments than those who did not. People who responded that they never posted comments, rarely posted comments, and occasionally posted comments were all less likely to post negatively than those who reported that they posted frequently in comment sections online. Finally, those who lack a high school degree or equivalent were more likely to post neutrally than those who hold a PhD, but the former group only had six participants.

The final research question sought to discern if belief in a "Just World" influenced the type of comment a person posts in response to stories regarding childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Scores on the Global Belief in a Just World scale were significant as

a unique predictor and parameter estimates showed that for each point a participant

scored higher on this scale, they were 43% more likely to post neutrally than positively

and 61% more likely to post negatively than positively. Therefore, those who endorsed a

belief system that the world was just, were less likely to write supportive comments to

victims and more likely to respond in a hostile or doubting manner. Parameter estimates

also reached significance for women who were not abused being less likely to post

negatively than positively and women who were abused were less likely to post neutrally

than positively. However, when social desirability scores were added to the model, the

effects on posting behavior of non-abused women no longer reached significance.

The next chapter will explore potential implications of these findings, including

comparison to prior research. Limitations of this study will be explored and suggestions

for future research. Finally, potential impact on social change will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative, non-experimental study was to explore which factors may contribute to types of response (positive, negative, or neutral) individuals make in online comment sections following an article where an adult discloses CSA. Study variables included study participants' endorsement of just world beliefs, ambivalent sexism, demographics, history of CSA, and perception of similarity to those in the online article.

The goal of this research was to increase understanding of which variables are significant in helping to predict which individuals are more likely to comment negatively following an online story in which the author discloses experiencing sexual abuse as a child. Research is emerging on factors that contribute to online negativity in comment forums generally. There is also existing research on belief, blame attribution, and responsibility in fictional sexual abuse cases or personal ones, but little research exists on those posted online. Thus, I sought to begin to fill the gap in the literature by applying the prior knowledge of internal belief and blame attribution to an actual article that was available online. Another point of this research is that those holding certain beliefs are not necessarily going to share their beliefs in a public forum. Thus, I sought to focus specifically on the response comments participants claimed they would post. This is an important difference because those expressing opinions will have more of an impact than online "lurkers."

There are several key findings for this study. Interestingly, gender did not prove to be a contributor to group membership in any of the research questions. Secondly, the impact of CSA history on type of post was not a simple relationship. When this participant variable was combined with gender, it was only significant for womenwho were abused or not sure if they were abused. Surprisingly, these groups of women were more likely to post negatively than men who were not abused. There was no significant difference in group membership for men who were sexually abused as children than men who were not, but men unsure if they experienced CSA as a child were more likely to post negative comments. These results conflict with the gender and abuse history relationship found in the first research question where ambivalent sexism was considered. This question found no statistically significant differences for type of post based on gender and sexual abuse history, except for women with abuse histories who I found to be more likely to make a positive post than a negative post. This seemingly paradoxical result may indicate that sexism has a stronger relationship to post type than gender or abuse history alone.

Another key finding was the relationship between type of post and ambivalent sexism. BS was not found to have a significant relationship, but HS had a strong relationship to post type. As HS increased, so did the chances of a participant posting negatively or neutrally as compared to positively. Other variables of significance were that people who identified as parents were more likely to post positive comments, as were people who posted less frequently, and those who scored lower in a belief in a just world.

Finally, those who felt they had similarities to the perpetrator were more likely to type a negative post and the converse was true for those who identified with the victim/author.

Interpretation of the Findings

Demographic Variables

Many demographic variables did not have significant main or interaction effects with type of response posted by the participants, including race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Results for education are also not considered significant in the results despite p =.001 in neutral posting for those without high school completion, because PhD was used as the reference group and the former group only contained six participants. While most of the demographic variables were not surprising in either direction given the lack of prior literature utilizing these demographics (for review of what little literature exists related to study participant sexual orientation and race in adult sexual assault see van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014), the null relationship of participant gender in post type was unexpected.

A great deal of prior research showed that men were more likely to attribute blame to a victim, deem them less credible, or doubt the guilt of a (usually male) perpetrator than were participants who identified as women (Back & Lips, 1998; Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Cromer L. M., 2006; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007). However, some researchers have found results that do not confirm this participant gender dichotomy (Giglio, Wolfteich, Gabrenya, & Sohn, 2011; James, 2018). The results of this study may provide further evidence to support Font's (2013) findings that

the effects of participant gender on attributions of blame in sexual abuse cases have been mitigating over time.

Parental status did have a relevant relationship to type of post in parameter estimates, although it did not provide a unique contribution to the overall model. Specifically, parents had a slightly less chance of posting negatively as compared to positively. This result was not suprising as it was projected that having children might generate more empathetic thought toward someone stating they were abused as a child. While little research has included this variable, the studies that have indicated either a similar finding (Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007; Graham, Rogers, & Davies, 2007) or no siginificant effect (Davies & Rogers, 2009; McCauley & Parker, 2001; Rogers & Davies, 2007). However, these results conflict with those in a more recent study that showed parents have more negative attitudes toward a victim when the victim acted flirtatious or dressed in a promiscous manner. Klettke, Mellor, and Hallford (2018) suggested defensive attribution as an explanation for this, in that parents may dichotomize the vignette victims as "other" children who dress or act that way and different from their own children who they can believe they parented differently. The article participants read for this study did not introduce how the author/victim dressed or acted so it is impossible to make a direct comparison. However, these results could be used to further argue the merit of Klettke, Mellor, and Hallford's argument that defensive attribution explains their findings.

Although I anticipated a relationship between participant CSA survivor status and post type, the direction of this relationship was highly unexpected. CSA status was a

predictor to the overall model. While prior studies showing CSA status had a relationship to belief and blame generally indicated that this was more true for men survivors and this made them more likely to support victims/blame offenders on par with women, my findings did not support this relationship. In fact, there were no significant differences between men who experienced CSA and those who did not. The group who differed from men denying a CSA history was women who reported having been sexually abuse as a child. Women who experienced CSA were 181% more likely to write a negative response to the article than a positive one. Although this is inconsistent with most prior research on belief and blame, there may be a seemingly paradoxical explanation for these results. One theoretical framework for this study was defensive attribution and survivor negativity toward other victims may have a basis for support of this paradigm. I used another variable in Question 2 in attempt to measure this phenomenon, and these results are discussed next. However, it is also important to note that a history of CSA in participants was not significant in the first and third research questions, when ambivalent sexism and just world beliefs were variables.

Defensive Attribution

Defensive attribution (Shaver, 1970) is a complex theoretical framework when people will devise "reasons" as to why misforture occurred to others to believe they are safe from suffering a similar misfortune, typically because the outside observer can imagine the victim did something to conjecture their fate. Understanding this theory can become more complex when a scenario contains both a victim and a perpetrator. For example, several studies reagrding belief and blame attribution in CSA have posited that

defensive attribution theory may be the reason men are more likely than women to blame

and disbelief the victim, or minimize fault of the (usually male) offender (see Back &

Lips, 1998; Ford, Schlinder, and Medway, 2001; Rogers, Josey, and Davies, 2007;

Rogers, Lowe, & Reddington, 2016). In this case, men may conjure up aspects of false

accusations to distance themselves from the fear of being accused of sexual abuse

themselves. It is also postulated to be a reason for the amelioration of gender differences

of participants' blame attributions for male participants with a sexual assault history (see

Feather & McKee, 2012; Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Judson, Johnson, & Perez, 2013;

Masser, Lee, & McKimmy, 2010). Another study with results supporting this theory

showed that Catholics were less likely to blame a child sex offender who shared their

faith, as compared to non-Christians and Protestants (Minto, Hornsey, Gillespie, Healy,

& Jetten, 2016).

The only known study in which researchers attempted to measure the

phenomenon of defensive attribution was that by Back and Lips (1998) who asked

questions regarding perceived similarity and found a negative relationship between

perceived similarity to the victim and victim blame. The current study used the questions

from this study as models, and added three parallel questions to assess perceived

similarity to the offender. For the second research question, the mean Likert scale scores

for each were the most significant contributors to the overall model, with participants

perceiving similarity to the victim/author less likely to write negative response posts, and

those with high similarity scores to the perpetrator/grandfather more likely to write a

negative response comment. Importantly, these perceptions were significant, whereas

gender was not, which leads to the observation that identifying with another transcends static characteristics. This is important to note because other researchers have claimed to measure defensive attribution based on participant demographics (Muller, Caldwell, & Hunter, 1994). Another difference is that the current study used an actual online, first person article where the author shares more personal information, going beyond "just the facts" of a vignette. Whereas this can be argued to "muddy the waters" of testing the framework, it is also measuring a more organically occurring phenomenon.

While the simple foundation of defensive attribution is that one is more likely to attribute blame to a member of a group one does not belong to than to an in-group member, the paradox of this theory may occur when participants have a more difficult time differentiating themselves from the victim. For example, Muller, Caldwell, and Hunter (1994) found that those identifying with the victim blamed the victim more. In their review of blame attributions in sexual assault, Grubb and Harrower (2005) postulated that this finding might be due to internalization of self as victim and, essentially, a projection of internalized self-blame. This could explain why, in the current findings, women survivors were more likely to post negative comments toward the author. It is also possible these comments were an attempt to differentiate the author from self as a method of perceived protection from revictimization. This complicated effect has parallels to a decades old study which showed that those making defensive attributions after hearing a rape or attempted rape scenario tended to be those who most perceived themselves at risk for experiencing the same victimization (Gold, Landerman, & Bullock, 1977).

Online Interaction

A potentially relevant finding from the second research question, again despite not being a statistically significant unique predictor to the overall model, is frequency of posting. Most notably, those who post on comment threads frequently were more likely to script a negative response than all other groups, in fact those reporting they never respond in such forums were 76% less likely to write a negative response to the article in this study than those who stated they post at least four times per month.

This information may be useful in the likely influence on the availability heuristic, making it seem to those reading online comments that those who spout negativity to CSA survivors (and potentially applicable to other topics) are more numerous than is statistically accurate. In other words, those who spout a negative opinion might just be more "vocal" than other people. This finding may help extrapolate earlier research that "trolls" in online discussion forums often post to disrupt others as a form of entertainment (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014). It has also been demonstrated that antisocial personality disorder traits or "psychopathy" and narcissism is related to frequency and negativity in online commenting. In fact, those with the former characteristics may take special pleasure in "trolling" those perceived to have popularity (Hong & Cheng, 2018; Lopes & Yu, 2017). It is certainly possible that a survivor writing with confidence regarding personal trauma, thoughts, and vulnerabilities in dating might be perceived as "popular" in this confidence and, thus, fit this target.

Ambivalent Sexism

For the first research question regarding ASI scores as a predictor of group membership, with CSA history and participant gender also considered, for posting type, HS score was the only unique contributor. Parameter estimates showed that participants were 157% more likely to write a negative post, as oppose to neutral, for each point higher they scored on the HS subscale. Neutral posts also contained higher odds ratios for each point gained in this scale, OR=1.625. While parameters estimates were significant for benevolent sexism and neutral posts, this significance ameliorated when social desirability scores were added to the model. Consistent with results from the second research question, CSA history by gender did have significant parameter estimates, when HS and BS was held constant, for women sexually abused as children, but for this model the women survivors were slightly more likely to post neutrally than positively and there were no effects on negative posts. These results suggest that there may be interaction effects of HS and women CSA survivors for the impact on posting type.

While these results were not surprising, given there has been significant literature showing sexism has an impact on blame attribution and belief in adult sexual assault, these results have been inconsistent (see Goncalves & Ferrao, 2015; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014 for review). However, the most common result is that HS typically predicts victim blame and/or disbelief (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russel, 2007; Duran, Moya, Megias, & Viki, 2010; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010; Sakalli-Ugurlu, Yalcin, & Glick, 2007) while BS has a more complex relationship, often dependent on victim attributes, with themes of women who violate traditional gender norms having less support (Abrams,

2003; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010; Viki, 2002). The few studies which have specifically examined judgements of child sexual abuse disclosure and the relationship to sexism, have not always used the ASI. Use of other sexism scales have shown a relationship to increased sexism and the minimization of damage from CSA, increased victim responsibility, decresed victim credibility, and/or lower offender responsibility (Cromer & Freyd, 2009; Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001). When the ASI was used, it found those high in HS were less likely to rate an adult's sexual intercourse with a nine year old abuse, or belief the disclosure, while those just high in BS believed, but minimized the impact of the abuse (Cromer & Freyd, 2007). It is of interest that a relationship with BS and negative responses did not exist in this study, since the author/survivor may fit the category of violating traditional gender roles as she identifies as lesbian. This may suggest that the role defying actions at the time of the assault are the focus of those blaming victims or that the relationship to BS and negativity toward a victim is more applicable to adult sexual assault.

Belief in a Just World

Global Belief in a Just World scale scores were positively correlated with posting negative or neutral comments in comparison to positive posts. For every point scored higher on the GBJWS, participant odds of a negative post increased by 61%. Thus, those who hold that one "reaps what s/he sows" are more likely to express negative views following an article of this type. These results may provide some support to the theory that Just World believes could explain victim blame or belief of incredibility, which has been posited in research which focused on CSA but did not use a scale to measure JWB

(see Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Ford, Schindler, & Medway, 2001; Font, 2013; Elliott & Briere, 1994; Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007).

Results are consistent with those showing a correlation between adult sexual assault victim blame and stronger Just World beliefs (Landstrom, Stromwell, & Alfredsson, 2016; Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013) and endorsement of rape myths (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Sakalli-Ugurlu, Yalcin, & Glick, 2007). However, strong correlations with JWS and sexual abuse survivor victim blame is not found consistently in studies (Pederson & Strömwall, 2013) and thought exists that this blame correlation might be better attributed to those holding strong Just World Beliefs also are stronger in conservatitism (Lambert & Raichle, 2000). Likewise, the stronger correlation found in the present study with HS and blame might dovetail with this postulation, that is, a variable not measured in this study such as personality disordered traits or highly conservative beliefs might overlap with the variables measured in this study (JWB, HS) and better explain the negative posts. This may be especially relevant given the article used for this study in which the author expresses some negativity toward political figures (ie C. Thomas and D. Trump) she believes have behaved in antithetical ways to support sexual assault victims and are held as conservative, "right-wing", and/or populist icons.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations in this study, many of which relate to the sampling strategy of using an online sample pool, as oppose to random sampling. Some potential limitations from this participant source, however, were not necessarily apparent. For

instance, some forms of testing reactivity were likely not to have come to fruition, such as participants looking up answers (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014) as most participants completed the survey in the lowest expected time frame, averaging 11minutes. It is wondered if the financial incentive of the Mechanical Turk platform may correlate to rapid completion rates and lessen this type of testing reactivity. Drop out rates due to testing fatigue, given the length of the survey, was not as great as anticipated; in fact 73% of participants who started the survey completed it. Furthermore, although true selection bias cannot be known since all potential participants could read the title and approximate time it might take to complete the survey before clicking the link (see Landers & Behrend, 2015), most people chose to continue after reading the full participation disclosure and a rather high percentage of participants completed the entire study.

Again, since convenience sampling was utilized, generalizability is compromised and the extent of this limitation cannot be measured. The population in the sample used tends to be younger, less religious, and more educated than a random population sample (Mullinex, Leeper, Druckman, & Freese, 2015) but is more comparable to the general population than a preponderance of social science literature which utilizes college student samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014; Pederson & Strömwall, 2013). It has also been shown that most studies using Mechanical Turk mirror statistical significance found in the general population and treatment effect, but this was not consistent for all experiements as 25% compared by the researchers did not have similar findings and there was not clear rationale for the differences. However, the similiarities between the Mechanical Turk population and the general population

surpassed that of convience sampling used in convience sampling of those exiting pollbooths (Mullinex, Leeper, Druckman, & Freese, 2015).

History and maturation was likely a limitation for this study as the #MeToo movement suddenly became popular right before the survey was available. A qualitative glance at response comments shows this as a theme adopted by participants. This popular culture campaign may have highlighted the prevalence of sexual victimization and led to a decline in negative or disbelieving reactions toward CSA survivors. However, due to constructs like defensive attribution, it also may have prompted a negative backlash for others.

The number of variables in the article also created a limitation in that the negativity expressed toward the author or topic in the comments coded as "negative" do not necessarily indicate that the participants disbelief the child sexual abuse or blame the victim/author. Although this study builds upon the constructs of blame attribution and belief used in prior research, it extrapolates this foundation into general negativity toward an adult survivor. While the author discloses that she is a child sexual abuse survivor, the primary focus is then on the prevalence of sexual victimization history for (especially) women and how this impacts life in various spheres. Specifically, she discusses dating women for the first time and socio-political issues including how this relates to the presidency. Some research elucidates that political issues often generate the strongest vitriol (citations needed here), and it is likely that, for some respondents, homophobia may have prompted negative response posts. A decision was made to code negative comments as "negative" despite the topic of this negativity (from criticizing the writing

to the disclosure of CSA) as it is assumed that any negative comment could have a deleterious impact on a survivor writing an article or those considering disclosure when reading the comments. Although Font (2013) notes that meta-analysis of blame attribution is difficult since studies introduce different variables in each vignette, the reality is that each article in an online forum will have different attributes and angles which are nearly impossible to provide control.

Recommendations for Further Research

One major gap in literature on belief and blame attributions in child sexual abuse as elucidated by Font (2013) is that it is difficult to discern participant variables in blame attribution because the vignettes used vary in variables such as victim age and gender as well as offender variables. Thus, manipulating variables in the current article, such as author/victim gender, sexual orientation, and offender/grandfather variables might help discern which of these variables influence the type of post.

Further research can also be conducted with the data collected for the present study. For instance, the scope of the present investigation did not code the nature of each post judged to be negative. For example, some posts were judged to be negative because of pejorative comments about the author's sexual orientation or her writing skills, not necessarily a negative comment about the sexual abuse disclosure. As such, categorizing the negative comments into subtypes (and possibly the neutral and positive comments as well) and discerning if a relationship between these subgroups and other predictor variables exists could provide further information on motivation for negative comments. Also possible with the current data is discerning if there are any other interaction effects

between variables used separately in the research questions. Especially of note, may be interactions effects of HS and belief in a just world as the latter had a smaller effect size and prior studies have shown some overlap (see Adolfsson & Stromwall, 2017; Pederson & Strömwall, 2013; Sakalli-Ugurlu, Yalcin, & Glick, 2007; Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013; Valor-Segura, Esposito, & Moya, 2011). Therefore, it is wondered if the impact of just world beliefs might not reach significance when HS is controlled.

Another confounding variable in the article selected for this study was the mention of the current president and allegations of sexual misconduct perpetrated by him. The predictor variables used for the current research have been found in the past to have a relationship to a social dominance orientation (SDO) and right wing authoritarianism (RWA; Feather & McKee, 2012). A relationship to support of the winner of the 2016 electoral college vote and endorsing SDO and RWA have also been clearly shown (Choma & Hanoch, 2017). Therefore, adding the variables of RWA and SDO would be of interest in discerning if HS still held as a unique predictor to the model.

Considering the relationship between vitriolic online commentary and dark triad traits, especially sociopathy (Golbeck, 2014; Hong & Cheng, 2018), this could be investigated in relationship to ambivalent sexism and negative comments regarding articles with sexual abuse disclosures. This could extrapolate if these personality traits or belief systems operate independently, have profound interaction effects, or lack relevance when it comes to post type. Variables just as this could help survivors understand if the vitriol is independent of the sexual abuse.

Another variable which was not addressed in relationship to posting and child sexual abuse disclosure was empathy. Empathy has been found to have a relationship to belief and blame in sexual assault (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Sakalli-Ugurlu, Yalcin, & Glick, 2007). In addition, recent studies also indicate that those who are prone to trolling behaviors have a lower capacity for empathy (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014; Sest & March, 2017). Since HS was one of the strongest predictor variables in relationship to post type, empathy may be especially relevant consideration for future research. Although the focus was on domestic violence toward women, not sexual abuse, Lila, Gracia, and Garcia (2013) found that among police officers scoring high in empathy, only those scoring low in HS felt the abuse should be prosecuted as a crime regardless of the victim's willingness to press charges. They theorized that those high in empathy and high in HS applied their empathy toward the perpetrator as oppose to the crime victim. Furthermore, BS had a relationship to persecutory beliefs of the officers independent of empathy scores. Since the current study did not show BS to have significance to post type (when social desireability was controled), empathy as an intervening construct to the relationship of HS to negative post responses to CSA survivors may be especially relevant. Furthermore, Lila, Gracia, and Garcia's postulation that empathic law enforcements personnel high in empathy may apply that capacity to the male perpetrators is of interest given this study's finding that perceived similarity to the offender increases the chances of posting negatively, whilst perceived similarity to the victim yielded antithetical results.

Implications

The results of this study add to the body of research regarding responses to child sexual abuse disclosures and, indirectly, blame attribution and belief. In addition, more information is provided regarding contributing factors in who is more likely to post with support or negativity. The latter is an emerging area of knowledge and there has not been much written on the topic of online discourse regarding sexual abuse.

Since online forums can provide a source of support and may feel like a safer venue for such since it eliminates the real time factor and can provide some anonymity (Andalibi, Haimson, De Choudhury, & Forte, 2016; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Moors & Webber, 2012) having more knowledge about the responses one might encounter can help in psychoeducation. This can provide a counterbalance to challenge any cognitive distortions survivors might have such as personalizing the response. Specifically, results showing that negative responses have a strong correlation with HS, feeling similarities with the perpetrator, and are more likely to come from those who post frequently. The latter is important due to the availbity heuristic where people may assume there are more people who think negatively of the victim or topic when, in truth, it is just that those who spout vitriol are, likely, simply more vociferious. This finding supports another recent study that those who post more destructively post more often (Grothe, Staar, & Janneck, 2016).

Information about posting can be useful to psychotherapists when they help clients challenge negative self-talk. Having the information about correlates to negative posting can also help with therapeutic activities such as listing pros and cons. A therapist

may help a client anticipate how he or she may feel from potential reactions to sharing a personal narrative online before doing so, just as a therapist may help a client weigh emotional consequences to confronting an offender prior to that decision. Online moderators and others in the online community having knowledge of post response patterns and what contributes to vitriol could help mitigate delitrious emotional impact on victims from such vitriol. This can be done in other online responses from supporting persons as well.

These findings can be applied to psychoeducational pursuits in conjuntion with other studies showing "Dark Triad" personality disorder traits also contribute to trolling (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014; Grothe, Staar, & Janneck, 2016; Cheng, Bernstein, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, & Leskovec, 2017; Lopes & Yu, 2017; Maltby, et al., 2015). Of particular interest is that sexual offenders are likely to have psychopathic traits (Neumann, Roy, Robertson, Knight, & Hare, 2018) as are "trolls" so CSA survivors may be encountering those with similar traits to their perpetrators. Given proper support, such as an aware psychotherapist or knowledgeable friends, responding to these people online could provide a proxy for "confronting their offender", "finding their voice", or other forms of practicing assertiveness in a physically safer venue.

Although the finding that women who were CSA survivors were less likely to post postively may seem counter-intuitive at the surface, this could elucidate issues of projected self-blame/shame, identification with the perpetrator, or a defensive attribution reaction where they may postulate fault onto others to make themselves feel safer from re-victimization in the future.. From a psychodynamic perspective, shame is often

handled through simple projection or projective identification since it is an unwanted feeling. The person experiencing shame may take these ego-dystonic attributes they think or feel about themselves and attribute them to another person as a way of ridding themselves of discomfort (Hahn, 2000). Thus, this is another psychoeducational point which can be utilized. Furthermore, Brene Brown (2007), a researcher on shame, has discussed how vulnerability and empathy can provide a pancea for shame and the current findings can dovetail with these applicable constructs to online discourse and the specific topic of CSA survivor work.

Overall, the implications of these findings on social change are that it adds to a body of literature which can be used from micro to macrolevel in education. This education can range from more informed psychotherapists using this information with their patients from psychoeducation, to thought challenging in cognitive behavioral modalities, to awareness of projection which may occur in psychodynamic methodology. The information could also then "trickle down" to media formats which are more readily digestible by the general public, such as articles one might read which cite prior research or individuals who are informed challenging those who propel ill-informed vitriol.

Also related to social change is that HS was found to be a strong contributing construct to negative posts. Therefore, social change work mitigating sexist ideology is of import in order to minimize vitriol which sexual abuse survivors may face in online forums.

Conclusions

The intent of this study was to elucidate contributing factors to the type of post, negative, positive, or neutral, that individuals might write in response to an actual online article where the author discloses a history of child sexual abuse. The purpose was to bridge prior research on belief and blame in fictional vignettes to a naturally occurring forum and to apply it to internet discourse. Unexpected findings included that gender of the participant alone was not related to type of post and CSA survivors who were women were more likely to respond negatively than men who were not survivors. Significant contributing variables to negative posts included adherence to hostile sexist beliefs, a perception of being similar to the offender, not feeling similar to the victim, posting frequently, and belief in a just world. Parents were more likely to make positive or supportive comments than those who did not consider themselves parents.

Thus, the results of this study led some support to the theoretical frameworks used. Ambivalent sexism was supported for hostile, but not BS. Just world beliefs also were noted to share a relationship with negative posts, albeit with a smaller effect size. Defensive attribution shared a strong relationship with post type, if the non-validated Likert scale questions are a valid proxy for measurement of this construct. Despite the findings, this study may have raised more questions than answers for several reasons. Firstly, it is difficult to standardize the "real world" for a study of this nature and the variables in the article read by participants are numerous. Therefore, it is wondered how a change in sexual orientation, political commentary, or gender of the author might change the responses. Secondly, since HS has some overlap with belief systems such as right

wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation, it is possible that these unmeasured constructs were of greater import to the post group type than HS alone. Finally, all subtypes of each collective post type were grouped together. Therefore, a deeper extrapolation coding subtypes of each generic post type may elucidate more specific patterns.

Of course a challenge to subcategories of negative posts is that negative posts were a small percentage of the overall post types. This, of course, is perhaps the most positive "take-away" for victims of child sexual abuse. That is, the majority of people in the online community (just like prior studies found in college or general community populations) will be demonstrative of their belief and/or support.

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Appendix A: Questions Following News Article

1) If you were to respond in a comment section following this online article what would you write?"

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2) How often do you post response comments following online newspaper or social media articles?

O Never   O Rarely (once a month or less)
O Occasionally (1-3 times per month)   O Often (more than 4 times per month)

3) What color coat did the author's first girlfriend have?

O Blue   O Black
O Green   O Red

4) Who did the author state sexually abused her?

O Her uncle   O Her grandfather
O Her father   O Her mother

Please check the column that best matches your opinion on the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that I am similar to the author					
I identify with the author					
I feel a sense of sameness with the author					
The author reminds me of myself					
I feel that I am similar to the author's grandfather					
I identify with the author's grandfather					
I feel a sense of sameness with the grandfather					
The author's grandfather reminds me of myself					
The author's grandfather is to blame for the situation the author says happened to her as a child					
The author is not responsible for what happened to her					
An adult memory of this type of event from childhood will not be accurate					

Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

1. Which gender do you currently identify as? O Female   O Male   O Other **(specify)**

2. What was your assigned gender at birth? O Female   O Male

3. Are you Spanish/Hispanic or Latino?   O Yes   O No

4. What is your race (check all that apply)?   O Black/African American O White/Caucasion   O American Indian/Alaskan Native   O Asian/Pacific Islander   O Other _____

5. What is the highest level of education you completed?   O Less than high school/GED   O   High school/GED   O Associate Degree   O Bachelor's degree O Master's Degree   O Doctoral or terminal Professional Degree (DO, MD, JD, DVM, etc.)**

6. What is your age in years? _____

7. What is your sexual orientation?   O Heterosexual   O Lesbian   O Gay   O Bisexual   O Other (specify)**

8. Do you consider yourself a parent (this can include having raised children as a guardian or step-parent)?   O Yes   O No   O Not sure**

10. Were you ever sexually abused as a child under age 18?   O Yes   O No   O Not sure**

Appendix C: Global Belief in a Just World Scale

Global Belief in a Just World Scale
GBJWS

Items_____

Please indicate your level of agreement on the following scale with respect to how well each statement applies to others and yourself.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strong disagreement					Strong agreement

_____ 1. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.

_____ 2. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded.

_____ 3. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.

_____ 4. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.

_____ 5. I feel that people get what they deserve.

_____ 6. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.

_____ 7. I basically feel that the world is a fair place.

Appendix D: Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

Below is a series of statements concerning men and women and their relationships in contemporary society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale: 0 = disagree strongly; 1 = disagree somewhat; 2 = disagree slightly; 3 = agree slightly; 4 = agree somewhat;
5 = agree strongly.

Items
B (I)   1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.
H   2. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality."
B(P)* 3. In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men.
H   4. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.
H   5. Women are too easily offended.
B(I)* 6. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex.
H*   7. Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men.
B(G) 8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.
B(P) 9. Women should be cherished and protected by men.
H   10. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.
H   11. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.
B(I) 12. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.
B(I)* 13. Men are complete without women.
H   14. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.
H   15. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.
H   16. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.
B(P) 17. A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man.
H   18. There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.
B(G) 19. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.
B(P) 20. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own wellbeing in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.
H*   21. Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men.
B(G) 22. Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste.

Note.
H = Hostile Sexism, B = Benevolent Sexism, (P) = Protective Paternalism, (G) = Complementary
Gender Differentiation, (I) = Heterosexual Intimacy, * = reverse-scored item.PsycTESTS™ is a database of the American Psychological Association

Appendix E: Online Periodical Article

Our Cultural Amnesia About Sexual Assault
Dating women made me realize how much sexual violence we were all trying to ignore.
By Alexandria Marzano-Lesnevich

The first night I kissed a woman was clear and cold. The wind smelled of snow, and as we walked the paths of Boston's Public Garden, the streetlights making the frost around us sparkle, we kept our hands shoved deep in our coat pockets. Her coat was a brilliant emerald green that seemed to glow in the light. It matched the color of her eyes.

That coat was the first thing I'd ever noticed about her, a week before. We'd met online but had traded no pictures. I'd done plenty of online dating but never before with another woman. She was much more experienced but knew enough to be careful with my shyness. Finally, we'd agreed to meet in a coffee shop. Leaving the train station to walk the few blocks there, I'd spotted a woman in that beautiful green coat, golden hair tumbling in waves over her shoulders. I'd never seen her before — and yet. Somehow I thought it was her. I walked to the coffee shop half-hoping, half-knowing it was her. And half-wishing it wasn't. That my life wasn't about to change.

But then the coffee shop door opened. And the woman in the green coat walked in.

Then, a week of coffees and drinks. Each time we'd met, I'd gotten nervous and rambled to her like a friend — then pretty much turned and ran as soon as the date, or whatever it was, was over. I hadn't touched her. She hadn't touched me. Just: ramble. Run. The night before, we'd finally had dinner together at a hippie-ish Tibetan place where nothing cost more than a few dollars and the wooden tables were beat up. When she sat down at the table, she'd slid her coat off her shoulders and revealed that she was wearing a silver sequin top slit down deep between her breasts. I stopped drinking my tea. I'm pretty sure I gulped. She grinned, and I got the point: we weren't just friends. Could I please get over my nerves, already? But at the end of the night, I ran again.

Now we stood atop a little stone arched bridge in the garden. It could have belonged in a fairy tale. Might have had a billy goat beneath it. She took her hands out of her pockets and rubbed them together, then turned and faced me. Close enough that I could see how the wind had made her eyes water, her eyelashes glisten. We were going to kiss — I could feel that we were going to kiss — and though the wind rushed cold around me, time stretched.

She looked up at me. Those eyes. Then she said, "There's something about me you should know."

And she told me her father had sexually assaulted her. For years.

***

There was a time — right after the day the *Access Hollywood* tape came out in 2016 — when it seemed like we might finally be ready to pay serious attention to the prevalence of sexual assault in this country. When it seemed like ignoring it might actually, for once, hurt someone other than those of us who live with it in our bodies.

Typing that now, though, seems almost naïve, with President Trump in the Oval Office and Clarence Thomas still sitting comfortably on the Supreme Court.

***

I listened to her talk. We didn't kiss then. Mostly, I was quiet, watching her. I asked some gentle questions when it seemed like she wanted them. Afterward, we walked around the park for a long time. Eventually we did kiss, and I remember the surprise of how sweet her mouth tasted and how full her lips were — but mostly I remember her words. My quiet.

Dating women would mean navigating the memories they carried in their bodies. And navigating how to carry mine.

And my shock.

Because while she spoke I realized that I'd never considered this part of dating women. That dating women — statistically radically more likely to be sexually assaulted than men — would mean navigating the memories they carried in their bodies. And navigating how to carry mine.

Was I supposed to tell her then that I, too, had been abused by a family member — in my case my grandfather?

***

For the ten years I'd spent in the closet, I'd worried about so many things that might happen if I came out. I'd worried about my loved ones' reactions. I'd worried about how I'd make a family, if I couldn't have what I'd grown up with: parents who were married, children who were biologically from both parents. Gay marriage was such an obscure idea, that when I'd told my college-thesis adviser I wanted to look at the legal theories in

support of it in 2001, he'd waved off the idea. We were in New York City. He was a deeply liberal sociologist. But gay marriage? That was so fringe it sounded crazy.

So I worried about how I'd be perceived. I worried whether being out as gay would harm the legal career I had then planned. (It must, I thought. How could it not?) I even worried that if people knew I'd been abused, they would think that that was why I was gay. Like that had turned me gay. That seemed like the most horrible idea of all. That even if I grew comfortable with my desire for women, others would dismiss it as just a side effect caused by a man's abuse. There are times, when I look back now at this list, that I'm dumbstruck by it. How afraid I was to just be who I am. What did I really think would be so bad? Yet how quickly social change would come was unthinkable then. So I worried.

But with all I worried about, I had never once worried about how I'd handle someone else's sexual trauma. I had male friends — two I knew about — who'd been abused, but I'd never dated them. I'd never thought about why I'd avoided it — but on some level, I'd known why. The idea had seemed hopelessly complicated: Who would hold whom, if a flashback came? What if both of us had a flashback at the same time? How could that possibly feel safe?

But then I started dating women. And soon, it was impossible to avoid.

The Trump administration doesn't lack for scandals and should-be scandals. Right now the internet is awash in tales of Harvey Weinstein's monstrous behavior. We're in a moment where the topic has risen sharply, and change seems possible. But I worry it will die away again in the endless ebb of our news cycle. Remember Jerry Sandusky? Nate Parker? Woody Allen? Roman Polanski? Casey Affleck? Bill Cosby?

The conversation flared and then died then, too.

Yet there are many of us — far too many of us — for whom it never really dies down. Memories live in our bodies and in our communities. When I began teaching creative writing, every term, a third of my students would self-disclose as having been abused or assaulted. (Though once, when I observed this to a class, a student approached me afterward, her face grim. "You know one-third's just those of us who've told you," she said.) The CDC estimates that nearly one in five women have been raped. Forty percent of black women have been subject to "coercive sexual conduct" by age eighteen. And surveys of sexual minority populations — LGBTQ people, like me — consistently show that 30 to 40 percent report having been sexually abused.

Each time I read a number like this, I recoil. I want to push back. I want to push back because I don't want it to be true. And I want to push back because there's still part of me that feels so alone in this experience — even knowing the percentage. That felt so alone each time I discovered a new lover had this in her past, too, and felt just as alone as I did.

That's the irony: Most of us do feel alone in it. A culture that's always moving on to the next thing, always stranding us with our experience, makes sure we do.

***

The woman in the green coat and I dated for months. She was my first girlfriend — but not my last. I think back over the years of dating women that have followed, and I arrive at the statistic above: yes, 40 percent.

On generous days, I want to think that some of the silence isn't malicious. That maybe the reason the culture stops talking about it so quickly is that a lot of people can afford to. That maybe it's just natural they stop thinking about it, if they don't have memories that live in their body, that make their breath run cold with panic when a moment that should be pleasure becomes a memory of terror. Or if they don't live in communities in which assault is rampant, and have to see their lover gasp with memory. They can fool themselves into thinking it's another person's problem. Just some poor person's trauma.

But then I remember the statistics. And I think of the #metoo hashtag. No matter how alone I feel sometimes, it's not just some communities. It's all of us.

So on my most generous days? On those days, I allow myself to hope that maybe yes, this is finally the moment. Maybe the culture is actually ready to hear us. Maybe it will catch up to what many of us have been living for years. And finally—finally—change.

Alexandria Marzano-Lesnevich is the author of The Fact of a Body: A Murder and a Memoir.

(From: Marzano-Lesnevich, A. (2017, October 24). *Our cultural amnesia about sexual assault: Dating women made me realize how much sexual violence we were all trying to ignore.* Retrieved October 24, 2017, from LennyLetter)

Appendix F: Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability – Short Form.

Listed below are a number of statements concerning personal attitudes and traits. Read each item and decide whether the statement is *True* or *False* as it pertains to you personally then select the appropriate box.

1. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work, if I am not encouraged.

2. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.

3. On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability.

4. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right.

5. No matter whom I am talking to, I am always a good listener.

6. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.

7. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.

8. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.

9. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.

10. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.

11. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others.

12. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me.

13. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.