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PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING

by

BRIDGET J. LASHBAUGH-BARNEY

(Under the Direction of Dorthie Cross)

ABSTRACT

Understanding factors that could influence attitudes and beliefs regarding child sexual abuse may inform efforts to educate clinicians, legal and medical personnel, and even the public on potential sources of bias and barriers to treatment and other service utilization, particularly in rural communities. The purpose of the current study was to experimentally investigate the impact of child accuser age and gender and participant rural status on ratings of perceived credibility of child sexual abuse allegations described in vignettes. With this study, I aimed to not only clarify and update previous findings on accuser age and gender, but also to expand the literature by examining interactions of the two, as well as examine the potential relevance of rural status to perceived credibility of child sexual abuse victims. Three hundred twenty-seven participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and were randomly assigned to read and evaluate one of six versions of a vignette that varied only in terms of child accuser age (6, 11, and 15 years old) and gender (boy, girl). The study did not find a significant effect of child accuser age on ratings of perceived credibility, but child accuser gender was found to be significant in that boys were rated as less credible than girls. Participant rural status was not significant. Moreover, no significant interactions were found. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings, as well as study limitations, are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Child sexual abuse, Perceived credibility, Gender attitudes, Rurality

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my spouse, Joshua, and daughter, Aniyah, for enabling me to complete this research through their unyielding support and encouragement.

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In gratitude to the many people who contributed to this dissertation, I would like to thank members of my committee who were remarkably willing and open to assist with the endeavor of completing this work. I would like to especially thank Dr. Dorthie Cross who has provided patient advice, guidance, and constant support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Our understanding of child sexual abuse is complicated by a number of factors, including the degree to which victims are believed if they report, underreporting, and cultural or regional differences in both prevalence of abuse and likelihood of reporting (Ménard & Ruback, 2003; Paine & Hansen, 2002). Many families and victims remain silent about sexual abuse, and child protection agencies cannot open an investigation or provide services unless they are aware of the issue, typically from reporting by victims and victims' family members, witnesses, helping professionals, or other mandated reporters (Anderson, 2016). Experts agree the incidence of child sexual abuse is greater than what is officially reported and documented (Anderson, 2016; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2012; Kenyon-George, 2016). In fact, it is estimated that between 25 and 30% of child sexual abuse cases are not reported to police, school, or medical authorities (Finkelhor et al., 2012). Consequently, our ability to estimate the prevalence of child sexual abuse based on official reports and documented cases is limited; however, according to a meta-analysis of more than 200 studies estimating prevalence rates based on participant self-report, 20% of girls and 8% of boys experience sexual abuse (Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). Even when abuse is reported, victims' claims may not be perceived as credible, and fears that one will not be believed may actually discourage reporting (McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014).

A child victim's ability to access necessary services can be greatly limited when claims of sexual abuse are disbelieved; legal authorities and mental health professionals who perceive the credibility of the child accuser's claim with skepticism will be negatively influenced when

selecting treatment modalities for the child (Bornstein, Kaplan, & Perry, 2007). Similarly, children who anticipate being doubted when reporting will be more reluctant to confide in helping professionals (McElvaney et al., 2014). It is of great importance that when children find the courage to report sexual abuse, their claims are regarded seriously and properly addressed. Thus, a greater understanding of factors influencing the perceived credibility of child sexual abuse reporting is needed. However, present research regarding the perceived credibility of child victims has presented some mixed findings. Acquiring further knowledge regarding the circumstances under which allegations of sexual abuse are doubted can aid in our education of helping professionals who need to be able to effectively help the children they serve.

Perceived credibility may vary depending on a number of factors, such as the age or gender of the individuals making the claim. Several researchers have found child accuser age moderates perceived credibility of claims, and some have specifically found that younger children were perceived more credibly than older children (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Gabora, Spanos, & Joab, 1993b). For example, mock jurors in one study evaluated vignettes based on transcriptions of child sexual abuse testimony and rated a 6-year-old accuser as more credible than a 14-year-old accuser and both a 6-year-old and a 14-year-old accuser as more credible than a 22-year-old accuser (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994). In another study mock jurors reviewed a videotape of a simulated child sexual abuse trial with the child accuser being described as either a 13 or 17-year-old child. Younger accusers were rated as more credible than older accusers and the jury was more likely to convict when the accuser was younger (Gabora et al., 1993b). In a similar study utilizing transcribed trial vignettes, jurors rated a 5-year-old accuser as more credible than a 10-year-old and a 15-year-old accuser (Davies & Rogers, 2009). However, some researchers have found a different pattern of results. For

example, Schmidt and Brigham (1996) used videotaped mock trial vignettes to investigate the effects of child accuser age on credibility. In this study, the child accuser was perceived to be most credible at nine years old, but less credible when they were younger (five years old) or older (13 years old). Moreover, McCauley and Parker (2001) had mock jurors review vignettes in which the child sexual abuse victim was either 6 or 13 years of age. No significant differences for perceived credibility were found between these age groups. Clearly, accuser age impacts perceived credibility, but less clear is whether perceived credibility steadily increases with child age or shows more fluctuation.

Two other factors related to credibility, namely suggestibility and responsibility, may be influenced in opposite directions by child age such that perceived suggestibility is higher (and credibility lower) for younger children's claims and perceived responsibility higher (and credibility lower) for older children's claims (Back & Lips, 1998; Tabak & Klettke, 2014). For example, in one study, participants who evaluated vignettes describing child sexual abuse by an adult man not only perceived older children's claims of abuse as less credible, but also attributed more sexual responsibility to older children (Back & Lips, 1998).

Accuser gender may also be relevant to perceived credibility of child sexual abuse claims, but studies examining the effect of accuser gender on perceptions of claims are fewer in number and often only address responsibility and not any other aspect of credibility. Though research examining the impact of gender on perceived credibility of child sexual abuse victims is limited and specific to perceived responsibility of the child accuser, findings relevant to responsibility seem to be consistent. Davies, Rogers, and Whitelegg (2009) examined differences in perceived blame attribution utilizing vignettes of boy and girl accusers and found that participants assigned blame more often to the boy than to the girl. Rogers and Davies (2007) also

looked at whether accuser gender influenced attribution of blame with child sexual abuse victims, and consistent with other findings, participants reviewing vignettes of child sexual abuse claims rated boy accusers as more culpable than girl accusers for their own sexual abuse. Although only measuring responsibility and no other aspects of credibility, the findings of these studies point to the possibility that boys' claims of sexual abuse might be perceived as less credible than girls' claims.

Cultural and social context may also influence whether child sexual abuse is reported and whether the claims are perceived as credible. Though underreporting is a broad problem (Finkelhor et al., 2012), the likelihood of reporting child sexual abuse can also vary by culture (see Fontes and Plummer, 2003, for a qualitative review of cultural factors influencing disclosure) or region (Ménard & Ruback, 2003; Ruback & Ménard, 2001). Ruback and Ménard (2001) analyzed Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reports and found that adult sexual victimization in rural communities was disproportionately underreported relative to urban areas, a finding which they later extended to child sexual abuse using data from Pennsylvania's Coalition Against Rape; Office of Children, Youth, and Families; and Commission on Sentencing (Ménard & Ruback, 2003).

Importantly, fewer reports of sexual abuse in rural communities does not necessarily mean fewer actual occurrences. Ménard and Ruback (2003) found that incidents of child sexual abuse were higher in rural areas than in urban areas of Pennsylvania, and a Department of Health and Human Services study found that incidence of child sexual abuse was twice as high in rural than in urban counties at a national level (Sedlak et al. 2010). Although, in general, people perceive urban areas as experiencing higher rates of crime than rural areas (Weisheit & Donnermeyer, 2000), factors predisposing individuals to commit crimes (e.g., high

unemployment rates and poverty) are frequently higher in rural areas (Donnermeyer, 2015; Ménard & Ruback, 2003). These factors are also associated with risk for experiencing sexual abuse. For example, researchers have found that children reporting sexual abuse are more likely than children who do not experience sexual abuse to come from families characterized by household dysfunction and low socioeconomic status (Drake & Pandey, 1996; Putnam, 2003; Sedlack et al., 2010). Despite findings from a handful of studies of differences in prevalence rates of child sexual abuse between rural and urban areas and of possible contributing factors, this literature is varied and mixed; one study found no difference across rural and urban settings (Anderson, Martin, Mullen, Romans, & Herbison, 1993). Whether prevalence and reporting rates of child sexual abuse truly vary between rural and non-rural communities remains unclear and requires further examination and replication. Furthermore, no study to date directly compares perceptions of claims of child sexual abuse across rural and non-rural samples. Nevertheless, the current literature has revealed that there potentially exists a greater gap between victimization and recognition of victimization in rural than in urban areas.

A potential explanation for the gap may be attributable to differences in perceived credibility of claims. Cultural values (e.g., religiosity; Tishelman & Fontes, 2017) and social pressures (e.g., knowing the accused perpetrator; Ménard & Ruback, 2003) may influence whether claims of abuse are believed by people living in rural areas. Regarding cultural values, religiosity is generally higher in rural areas, according to large-scale demographic survey studies (e.g., Lyons, 2003; see Glenna, 2003, for more on religion in rural communities), and one experimental study found that individuals were more likely to disbelieve claims of child sexual abuse if vignettes included a perpetrator who shared the participants' religion (Minto, Hornsey, Gillespie, Healy, & Jetten, 2016). Minto et al. also found that individuals who demonstrate high

levels of group loyalty or who are highly identified in-group members of religious organizations are especially motivated to disbelieve claims of child sexual abuse as a means to protect other in-group members. Regarding social pressures on survivors of sexual victimization, a study of adult rape survivors found that survivors from rural areas were less likely to access services due to family pressure to not talk about the rape and by fear of community gossip (Logan et al., 2005). Specifically, about child sexual abuse, research conducted by Evans-Thompson, Brooks, and Green (2017) surveyed survivors of child sexual abuse from a rural community and found that many participants believed that perpetrators who were well known in their communities were less likely to be prosecuted. In fact, every participant who perceived their perpetrators as having been well known in their rural community also reported that their perpetrators were not prosecuted, and of the perpetrators reported to have been prosecuted, none were perceived as having been well known, according to study participants. Unfortunately, these results were not compared to a non-rural sample.

Purpose

Earlier studies of perceived credibility of child sexual abuse victims revealed that accuser demographics, particularly age and gender, may impact perceptions of overall credibility (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Davies, Austen, & Rogers, 2011; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Davies et al., 2009; Gabora et al., 1993b; McCauley & Parker, 2001; Rogers & Davies, 2007). The present study aimed to not only clarify and update previous findings, but to also add to the literature by examining whether child accuser gender and age interact, such that an effect of child accuser age on perceived credibility might differ depending on child accuser gender. While a number of other studies have looked at how either age or gender of the child accuser influence perceived credibility, these two variables have been examined concurrently in only two studies

(Back & Lips, 1998; Crowley, O'Callaghan, & Ball, 1994), and no significant interactions were observed. Back and Lips (1998) compared vignettes of 6-year-olds and 13-year-olds and measured participants' perception of accuser responsibility. Crowley et al. (1994) compared vignettes of 6-, 9-, and 12-year-olds and measured participants' perceptions of factors related to cognitive ability and suggestibility. The current study sought to expand the current literature by investigating the impact of rurality on perceived credibility of child sexual abuse victims, in addition to the influence of accuser age and gender. To date, no studies have directly examined differences between rural and urban attitudes towards the credibility of child sexual assault victims. Lastly, this study sought to use ecologically valid vignettes based on present research on how children disclose and respond to sexual abuse incidences. In addition, much of the available research on the topic of perceptions of child sexual abuse claims is dated; so, it was hoped the present study would provide more current findings.

Significance

Legal authorities and health professionals may rightly or wrongly consider an allegation of abuse to be more or less credible, which can influence an accuser's experience seeking justice or accessing services (Broussard et al., 1991; Dollar, Perry, Fromuth, & Holt, 2004). Perceptions regarding the details of claims of child sexual abuse (e.g., accuser resistance, accuser age and gender, relationship of the perpetrator) may influence accusers' interactions with legal and mental health professionals, such that the clinicians or other helper's perceptions of how credible, severe, or traumatic the reported abuse is can influence intervention and treatment of abuse accusers (Bornstein et al., 2007). Children who expect to be doubted or blamed tend to be more hesitant to come forward, and many children feel responsible for and ashamed of their own abuse (McElvaney et al., 2014). Furthermore, the dynamics of the abusive relationship and the nature

of the grooming process used by perpetrators can lead children to believe they were willing participants (Paine & Hansen, 2002). It is imperative that when children find the confidence to report incidences of sexual abuse, their claims are taken seriously and properly investigated. Gaining an understanding of the circumstances under which allegations of child sexual abuse are more often doubted may improve education of teachers, parents, case workers, and other mandated reporters, as well as potential jury members.

Similarly, understanding the relationship of rurality with attitudes and beliefs regarding child sexual abuse may help further refine our efforts in a way that allows clinicians, legal, and medical personnel to address barriers related to treatment and service utilization in rural communities. Rural survivors of adult sexual victimization have been found to face unique barriers to service utilization such as social stigma, fear of gossip and blame, and a lack of trust in the legal system (Logan, Evans, Stevenson, & Jordan, 2005). A better understanding of the perceptions of child sexual abuse in rural communities can inform our endeavors in reducing these barriers.

Definition of Terms

Child sexual abuse. Finkelhor (1999) defines child sexual abuse as sexual contact with a child occurring under one of three conditions: when there is a great age or maturational difference between the child and the perpetrator, when the perpetrator is in a position of power or authority over the child (e.g., parent or guardian), or when the sexual acts are a result of violence, deception, or coercion. Finkelhor acknowledges there is no universal definition for child sexual abuse. For example, sexual maturity is defined differently across cultures (Whiting, Burbank, & Mitchell, 1989), and when age differences are narrow (e.g., sexual contact between older child and younger child), even professionals disagree (Smith & Kercher, 2011). Nevertheless, there is

overwhelming professional consensus that sex acts between adults and pre-pubertal children, between parents and their children, and by force, violence, deception, or coercion constitute child sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1999).

Credibility. Credibility can be conceptualized along a number of facets, including overall perceived credibility (Esnard & Dumas, 2013; Klettke, Gaesser, & Powell, 2010), perceived honesty (Connolly, Price, & Gordon, 2010), perceived responsibility (Pollard, 1992; Tabak & Klettke, 2014), and perceived cognitive ability or suggestibility (Connolly et al., 2010; Tabak & Klettke, 2014). Credible witnesses are perceived to be truthful, including about their level of responsibility in an event, and to have the competence to recall events, individuals, surroundings, and other relevant information and to not be suggestible. In instances where honesty is perceived to be more salient to an allegation, younger children are perceived as more credible than older children (Goodman et al., 1989); however, in cases in which the child's cognitive ability or suggestibility is weighted more heavily, older children are perceived as more credible than younger children (Connolly et al., 2010). Older children and boys are typically viewed as more responsible (Back & Lips, 1998; Davies et al., 2009).

Rurality. Two major definitions of rurality are used by the federal government: the U.S. Census Bureau's definition and the Office of Management and Budget's definition. The U.S. Census Bureau provides three categories (i.e., urban areas, urban clusters, and rural areas). Urban areas are defined as areas in which 50,000 or more people reside. Urban clusters are defined as areas in which at least 2,500 but fewer than 50,000 people reside. The U. S. Census Bureau does not directly define rural and instead indicates any population, housing, or territory not included within an urban area or cluster can be considered rural (Health Resources & Services Administration, 2017). Thus, a rural area would be one in which less than 2,500 individuals

reside. The Office of Management and Budget is more direct in defining rurality. A rural area is considered to be one in which less than 10,000 individuals reside (Health Resources & Services Administration, 2017). Ruback and Ménard (2001) and Ménard and Ruback (2003), perhaps the most relevant studies in terms of rurality, defined rurality according to the U. S. Census Bureau. In addition, individual researchers examining other topics also define rurality in more general ways, including with survey-based, subjective, self-reported type of region (rural vs. non-rural) where one grew up (e.g., Ford, Klibert, Tarantino, & Lamis, 2016).

CHAPTER 2

PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY OF CHILD SEXUAL ASSUALT REPORTING

Literature Review

Credibility

A child's testimony of sexual abuse is the most essential factor in determining the substantiation of the alleged incident (Melkman, Herskowitz, & Zur, 2017). Thus, whether or not the child's statement is perceived to be credible can have an immense impact on outcomes for all involved. Incorrect judgements about veritable reports of child sexual abuse can further increase risks to the child, leaving them vulnerable and feeling unprotected from their perpetrators (Melkman et al., 2017). It is imperative that when victims of sexual abuse come forward, their accounts are not erroneously discredited. The ability to accurately assess incidents of child sexual abuse is essential.

Unfortunately, standardized assessment methods for evaluating the credibility of child sexual abuse reports have not yet been developed (Melkman et al., 2017). Moreover, there has been an overreliance on the use of single-item measures when assessing credibility. For example, previous studies have asked participants questions such as "Do you think that the victim's testimony is credible?" (Esnard & Dumas, 2013) or "How credible was the victim?" (Klettke et al., 2010). These single-item measures have typically assessed the participant's overall impression of credibility when considering the instance of alleged child sexual abuse as a whole. For example, in the studies described above, credibility is assessed as a global impression of accuser believability without considering domain-specific evaluations being made. Thus, it is

more difficult to identify specific conditions that might influence specific evaluations that might weaken or strengthen overall perceived credibility.

While some studies have used multi-item measures of credibility, there still remain inconsistencies in the domain-specific facets of credibility measured. For instance, Ross, Jurden, Lindsay, and Kenney (2003) and McCauley and Parker (1996) measured the facets of honesty and cognitive ability, and Rogers, Lowe, and Boardman (2014) measured truthfulness, which aligns with honesty but is measured in a different way (e.g., being honest means not telling lies whereas being truthful means actively making known the full truth of a matter), and reliability, which overlaps with some but not all aspects of cognitive ability. Furthermore, other studies (e.g., Davies et al., 2009; Rogers & Davies, 2007) examine perceived responsibility.

Despite a lack of standardized methods for assessing credibility, research has provided some insight into the facets that influence our perceptions of when a child's report is considered credible. When looking for direction as to which facets should be considered as facets of credibility in this current study, a review of previous child credibility research guided the decision that, in addition to overall perceived credibility, cognitive ability, honesty, and responsibility should be considered integral domain-specific facets. Moreover, these three facets have consistently been included as domains of perceived credibility within previous research (Connolly et al., 2010; Ross et al., 2003; Rogers, Titterington, & Davies, 2009; Schmidt & Brigham, 1996) and provide a basis for comparison in the present study.

Honesty concerns whether or not children understand the need to be truthful and are considered as honest by those needing to make the determination (Shao & Ceci, 2011). Children may misreport events unintentionally due to cognitive immaturity or they may make intentional errors (i.e., having been coached to lie; Shao & Ceci, 2011). Cognitive ability refers to the child's

ability to remember and accurately report past experiences (Shao & Ceci, 2011). When children misreport events, it is often an unintentional mistake that derives from cognitive immaturity (i.e., errors in memory, suggestibility; Shao, & Ceci, 2011). Of note, cognitive ability may also be relevant to honesty in terms of a child's understanding of the need to be truthful or understanding of how to be intentionally not truthful. Responsibility can be considered the way others may rationalize why an individual was victimized, and attributing responsibility may turn into victim-blaming; it allows the outside observer to justify the victimization as they seek behavioral or characterological defects within the victim that would warrant their maltreatment (Back & Lips, 1998). In addition, responsibility may be relevant in terms of honesty (motivation to misrepresent responsibility) and cognitive ability (ability to consent). Thus, overall perceived credibility and these three specific facets may each reflect different but overlapping aspects of perceived credibility.

Accuser Demographics

Previous studies of perceived credibility of claims of child sexual abuse victims found that accuser demographics, particularly age and possibly gender, may predict perceptions of overall credibility (Davies, Austen, & Rogers, 2011; Davies & Rogers, 2009; McCauley & Parker, 2001), as well as the two facets of credibility, honesty and cognitive ability (Connolly et al., 2010), relevant to findings related to perceived responsibility and suggestibility (Pollard, 1992; Tabak & Klettke, 2014). Findings for age are relatively consistent with some variability in findings possibly due to methodological differences across studies (e.g., different age comparisons), as well as differences in perceptions of honesty, cognitive ability/suggestibility, and responsibility across different accuser ages (Connolly et al., 2010; Tabak & Klettke, 2014). Studies of gender are fewer in number and limited to perceived responsibility (Back & Lips,

1998; Davies et al., 2009; Rogers & Davies, 2007), and only two studies examine both age and gender together and yield conflicting findings (Back & Lips, 1998; Crowley, O'Callaghan, & Ball, 1994).

Furthermore, although previous studies found child sexual abuse may be underreported in rural communities compared to urban areas (Ménard & Ruback, 2003; Ruback & Ménard, 2001) and that cultural and social factors in rural communities (e.g., acquaintance density, Ménard & Ruback, 2003; religiosity, Minto et al., 2016) may influence how claims are handled, there are no studies specifically comparing rural and urban areas on perceived credibility of child sexual abuse claims.

Child Age. A child's age is closely related to their cognitive ability to encode and retrieve memories, with children typically being thought of as less cognitively competent to report events than adults (Connolly et al., 2010). Conversely, a research review conducted by Ceci and Friedman (2000), asserted that in instances of abuse or neglect, especially those that involve the children's' bodies and were experienced directly, recollections of those events have been found to be accurate and resistant to suggestibility and falsification. Moreover, Bottoms (1994) asserts that when reporting sexual abuse, children are generally judged more credible (i.e., 5 to 14 years old) than adults. This is due to a perceived impoverished cognitive sophistication required to fabricate and tell falsehoods about events (i.e., sexual encounters) they would typically be innocent from and have little knowledge of (Bottoms, 1993; Gabora, Spanos, & Joab, 1993b). Likewise, lying is a more cognitively complex skill for children than truthfulness, and the ability to convincingly lie develops over time throughout childhood and adolescence (Peterson, Peterson, & Seeto, 1983).

Research indicates child accuser age may influence adult perception of child testimony credibility differently for different types of incidents. Studies find consistent age-related differences in perceived credibility in cases such as robbery, murder, and vehicular homicide in that adults perceive older children (i.e., defined 10 years old in the studies) to be more credible than younger children (i.e., 6 years old) when testifying about such cases (Goodman, Golding, & Haith, 1984; Goodman, Golding, Hegelson, Haith, & Michelli, 1987). When the alleged crime is child sexual abuse, the relationship between child age and perceived credibility is generally reversed; however, some researchers have discovered the relationship generally more complicated (Gabora et al., 1993b; Goodman et al., 1989).

Researchers have found that younger child accusers' (i.e., 6 years old) testimony of sexual abuse is perceived more credibly than older child accusers' (i.e., 13 and 14 years old) testimony (Back & Lips, 1998; Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Davies & Rogers, 2009), but other studies found no age-related difference (Crowley et al., 1994; Golding, Sanchez, & Sego, 1997) or age-related differences in opposite directions depending on the salience of honesty and cognitive ability to a accuser's testimony (Connolly et al., 2010; Tabak & Klettke, 2014).

Goodman et al. (1989) asked mock jurors to review a vignette in which a female student, aged 6, 14, or 22 years old, alleged sexual abuse against a male teacher and to evaluate the credibility of the student. In contrast to studies finding participants perceived older children's testimonies of robbery, homicide and malpractice as more credible than younger children's testimonies (Goodman et al., 1984; Goodman et al., 1987), Goodman et al. (1989) found the younger the accuser in a vignette about sexual abuse, the more credible and honest they were perceived to be. In the study, jurors were most likely to convict the alleged perpetrator and rate

the child as more credible when the victim was 6 years old, somewhat less likely at 14 years old, and the least likely when the victim was 22 years old.

Gabora et al.'s (1993) study produced similar results. The study was conducted in a comparable manner as Goodman et al.'s (1989), but vignettes about an elementary-aged child were not included. Mock jurors were less likely to believe a 13-year-old capable of possessing the knowledge necessary to fabricate a sexual abuse allegation than a 17-year-old and, thus, rated younger children, age 13, as more credible than older children, aged 17.

Schmidt and Brigham (1996) investigated the effects of a child accuser's age (i.e., 5, 10, or 15 years old) on perceived credibility of their testimony in a videotaped mock trial. The child accuser was perceived most credible at nine years old, but less credible when they were younger (5 years old) or older (13 years old). Schmidt and Brigham (1996) suggested testimony of very young children may be perceived as untrustworthy because of susceptibility to suggestibility, and testimony of older children may be perceived as untrustworthy because of attributions of sexual responsibility. That is, older children are viewed as more capable of avoiding sexual abuse and, thus, more responsible when it occurs. Although consideration of sexual responsibility should not influence perceived credibility of a child sexual abuse victim, adults may often view an older child as being partly responsible for a sexual encounter and, thus, may be less likely to view the encounter as non-consensual or abusive (Schmidt & Brigham, 1996). As a result, older children are perceived to be more similar to adult rape victims than child sexual abuse victims. Because older children may be perceived as more similar to adult accusers than child accusers, misconceptions and myths associated with adult rape (e.g., putting oneself in a risky situation, "asking" to be assaulted or raped) may become salient and may influence perceived credibility of older children's claims (Gabora et al., 1993b). It is also possible that the nine-year-old accuser

was perceived by participants as having enough cognitive ability to report accurately on his or her experience and not be vulnerable to suggestibility while also not having enough cognitive ability to be dishonest, to convincingly formulate a false accusation or to know to misrepresent his or her own supposed responsibility. It is possible that middle childhood, as opposed to early childhood or adolescence, represents an age group that is the least likely to evoke concerns related to the components of credibility, such as honesty, cognitive ability/suggestibility, and responsibility.

Differences seen by Schmidt and Brigham (1996) between early and middle childhood age groups were not observed in two other studies. McCauley and Parker (2001) had mock jurors review a vignette in which the alleged sexual abuse victim was either a 6- or a 13-year-old girl. Jurors were asked to determine the perceived credibility of the child accuser based upon their perceptions of the vignette. No difference in perceived credibility of child accuser testimony was observed between vignettes using a 6-year-old or 13-year-old accuser. In a similar study, Davies and Rogers (2007) investigated accuser credibility and found that testimony by older child sexual abuse victims (15 years old) was deemed less credible than younger child accusers (5 years old and 10 years old), but credibility did not differ between the 5-year-old and 10-year-old child testimony.

Overall, the findings in this area suggest child accuser age impacts ratings of credibility. Very young children may be considered less credible due to beliefs about their suggestibility and older children may be considered less credible due to beliefs about their ability to lie and perceived shared responsibility. In the current study, I seek to examine the impact of child accuser age on perceived credibility of child sexual abuse allegations.

Child Gender. Sexual abuse of boys versus girls has notable qualitative differences that influence the perceived credibility of the child victim. While the perpetrator is typically male for both boy and girl victims (Dube et al. 2005; Spataro, Moss, & Wells, 2001), older adolescent boys are more likely than girls to be abused by a female perpetrator. Moreover, gender role stereo-types contribute to different perceptions towards boy victims than girl victims. Sexual abuse of boys is often perceived as being less serious; it is accounted for as being a rite of passage or an "early introduction to sexual prowess and manhood" (Holmes, Offen, & Waller, 1997). These perceptions are consistent with research findings that boy victims of child sexual abuse perpetrated by a female were less likely to report the incident (Deering & Mellor, 2011). Cultural ideas of masculinity also contribute to the reports of sexual abuse of boys as being less credible. These ideas include always exuding strength, being in control, and having pride in "sexual prowess" while condemning being a victim and vulnerability (Spataro, Moss, & Wells, 2001). Conversely, girls are typically stereotyped as having greater vulnerability relative to boys and thus are seen as less responsible for the abuse. (Bornstein et al., 2007). Thus, gender-role stereotypes likely contribute to perceptions of child sexual abuse and the credibility of the reporting child.

Studies examining the potential impact of child accuser gender on perceived credibility of child sexual abuse claims have been limited. Some knowledge may be inferred from studies conducted utilizing vignettes of adult accusers. A study using vignettes of adult accusers of assault or rape found that participants viewed both men and women as responsible for the assault or rape, but women were viewed as characterologically responsible (e.g., asking for it), men as more behaviorally responsible (e.g., could have avoided it if wanted; Howard, 1984). Given that responsibility is important to credibility (Dinos, Burrowes, Hammond, Cunliffe, 2015; Rogers,

Titterington, Davies, 2009), one might assume that men and women accusers are viewed as less credible, albeit for different reasons.

In studies of child sexual abuse vignettes including adolescent boy accusers, adolescent boys were found to produce more attributions of responsibility than vignettes including adolescent girls (Back & Lips, 1998; Davies et al., 2009; Rogers & Davies, 2009; Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984). Davies et al. (2009) found higher attributions of blame for boys using vignettes of 15-year-old boys and girls, and Rogers and Davies (2007) found higher attributions of blame for boys, particularly by male participants, using vignettes of 10-year-old and 15-year-old boys and girls. Back and Lips (1998), however, found no effect of accuser gender on ratings of responsibility using vignettes of 6- and 13-year-old boys and girls. Perhaps the inclusion of the younger age groups in their study impacted gender ratings, which suggests the possibility of an age by gender interaction. Overall, these studies revealed accuser gender impacts perceived shared responsibility for child sexual victimization, which is important to perceived credibility, pointing to the possibility that boys who are abused may be viewed as less credible overall. It is also possible that, and this study aims to examine if, although girl and boy accusers may both be perceived as responsible—and, thus, potentially less credible—boy accusers cross over the responsibility threshold at an earlier age than girls and may be perceived as less credible than same age girls. In the current study, I will examine the impact of child accuser gender on perceived credibility of child sexual abuse allegations, and I will examine the potential interaction of child accuser gender and age.

Rural Culture

Ménard and Ruback (2003) found a combination of social norms unique to rural settings, greater rates of poverty and unemployment, and the utilization of more informal social control

measures contribute to greater prevalence of child sexual abuse in rural areas. For example, child sexual abuse is frequently perpetrated by an acquaintance of the victim, and individuals residing in rural areas are subject to a greater population dispersion and tend to engage in more social interactions possibly described as "acquaintance" relationships.

That increased acquaintance with others in the community may partially explain findings that crime is less likely to be reported in rural areas compared to urban areas, possibly out of an attempt to conceal sensitive, personal issues (Kenyon-George, 2016). Weisheit, Wells, and Falcone (1995) found that compared to urban areas, rural areas are often characterized by greater acquaintance density, feelings of physical isolation, and a social climate that promotes informal control, mistrust of outside agencies, and a tendency to conceal internal and personal problems. Relatedly, common unwritten cultural values in rural communities emphasize preserving privacy and family reputation, sometimes at the cost of promoting justice for victims, and even criminal justice advocates in rural settings may be hesitant to proceed in child sexual abuse cases (Ménard & Ruback, 2003). Rural environments in which persuasive informal social controls dictate family secrecy and distrust of public intervention make it challenging for child sexual victims and their families to report instances of abuse (Ménard & Ruback, 2003).

Additionally, greater acquaintance density in rural communities may contribute to underreporting of child sexual abuse because victims are more likely to have previously known the perpetrator; research demonstrates that when a victim has had a prior relationship with the abuser, reporting rates are lower (Ruback, 1994; Ruback & Ménard, 2001). Although most child sexual abuse victims are known by the perpetrator prior to the abuse (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2008; Douglas & Finkelhor, 2005), rural child sexual abuse cases are further complicated by dual relationships within the community; in areas with higher acquaintance

density, mandated reporters, such as school teachers, counselors, or nurses, are more likely to have a personal or dual relationship with perpetrators. As a result, these individuals may be less likely to identify the sexual abuse as a crime and report the incident to authorities. Because of concerns about family privacy and reputation and awkwardness around reporting acquaintances, it is possible that even when abuse is made known in a rural community, either to family or other members of the community, people could engage in a kind of motivated reasoning (Lewis, 2003) to minimize or ignore what might otherwise become a very uncomfortable situation. For example, Minto et al. (2016) found people who report high levels of group loyalty are less likely to believe claims of child sexual abuse, possibly as a means of protecting other in-group members.

The Current Study

Overall, present research has revealed perceived credibility of child sexual abuse victims varies depending on both age and gender of the accuser. It is possible that, with regard to age, perceived credibility increases until around puberty, and decreases from puberty onward (Dugan et al., 1989; Gabora et al., 1993; Goodman et al., 1989). With regard to gender, girl accusers of child sexual abuse are more likely to be believed than boy accusers, especially if the girl was abused by a man (Broussard & Wagner 1998, Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984). Finally, rural status may inhibit child sexual abuse reporting as well as decrease perceived credibility of the child when they do choose to report (Lewis, 2003; Ménard & Ruback, 2003; Minto et al., 2016; Tishelman & Fontes, 2017).

Study Aims

The current study examined the impact of child accuser gender and age on perceived credibility of child sexual abuse allegations. Specifically, the study will investigate variation in

perceived credibility of a child sexual abuse allegation described in a vignette across child accuser demographics [i.e., age (6, 11, and 15 years old) and gender (girl, boy)] and participant demographics (i.e., rural status). The aim of the current study was to answer the following questions:

1a. Would child accuser age and gender interact, such that an effect of child accuser age on perceived credibility might differ depending on child accuser gender?

1b. Would perceived credibility of child sexual abuse disclosure vary by child accuser demographics (i.e., age, gender) or the participants' rural status?

Hypotheses

Based on Schmidt and Brigham's (1996) finding that very young children may be perceived as untrustworthy because of susceptibility to suggestibility, and testimony of older children may be perceived as untrustworthy because of attributions of sexual responsibility, I hypothesized I would observe main effects of child accuser age (i.e., 11-year-old child perceived as most credible).

Research is limited related to accuser gender and perceived credibility. However, given that responsibility is important to credibility (Dinos, et al., 2015; Rogers et al., 2009) and findings that adolescent boys are often attributed with more responsibility for their abuse (Back & Lips, 1998; Davies et al., 2009; Rogers & Davies, 2009; Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984), I hypothesized girls would be perceived as more credible than boys.

When considering a combination of previous findings regarding child accuser age and gender (Schmidt & Brigham, 1996; Back & Lips, 1998; Davies et al., 2009; Rogers & Davies, 2009; Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984), I also hypothesized I would observe an interaction of child accuser age and gender in that a boy would be judged as less credible at 11 and 15 years

old than a girl of the same age. More specifically, an early childhood boy and girl (age 6) would be viewed comparably, but a middle childhood and adolescent boy (age 11 and 15, respectively) would be seen as less credible than a girl of the same age, with the greatest difference at age 15.

Lastly, I proposed an exploratory hypothesis. I anticipated rural participants would perceive claims of child sexual abuse as less credible overall than urban participants, regardless of child accuser age or gender. Currently, no research has explored the relationship between rural/urban status and perceived credibility of child sexual abuse reports.

CHAPTER 3

PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY OF CHILD SEXUAL ASSUALT REPORTING

Method

Participants

The study sampled participants via the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) "workforce," which is populated by individuals who self-select to complete survey research and other tasks, called human intelligence tasks (HITs). All participants must have identified as at least 18 years old. The only other inclusion criterion for this study was residence in the United States.

Using G*Power Version 3.1.9.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), I conducted an a priori power analysis for a fixed effect, 2 × 3 × 2 full factorial ANOVA with an effect size of .25 and power of .95 yielding a projected sample size of 251. This sample size provided enough power for all other planned analyses (see Planned Analyses). Recognizing that some participants may discontinue the study prematurely or may provide low quality data, I over-recruited participants to ensure I achieved the needed sample size.

Of the 431 MTurk workers who reviewed the study informed consent document, a total of 427 workers chose to enroll in the study; four declined to participate. A total of 100 participants were excluded from further data analysis due to validity concerns for one or more of the following reasons: failure on more than one of the three attention check question (n = 45), failure on either of the experimental manipulation check questions (n = 47), spending less than five minutes total to complete the survey (n = 44), or discontinuing the study (n = 38). Of those excluded, half (n = 50) met more than one criteria for exclusion.

The final sample consisted 327 participants: 156 (47.7%) men, 170 (52%) women, and one participant who self-identified their gender as 'other' (0.3%). The mean age of participants was 39.1 (*SD* = 13.0). In regard to the racial or ethnic composition of the sample, 236 (72.2%) of participants identified as European or White; 30 (9.2%) as African, Caribbean, or Black; 22 (6.7%) as Hispanic or Latino; 16 (14.9%) as Asian; 16 (14.9%) as multiracial or multiethnic; two (0.6%) as Middle Eastern or North African; and one (0.3%) as American Indian or Alaskan Native. Four (1.2%) participants indicated that they preferred not to answer. In terms of rural status, 63 (19.0%) participants reported currently residing in a rural community, and 264 (81.0%) reported residing in a non-rural (i.e., either suburban or urban) community. For participant religious affiliation, refer to Table 1.

Materials and Measures

Experimental vignettes. Participants were presented with a series of moral dilemma vignettes (one experimental vignette and two vignettes to control for suspicion of the purpose of the study; see Appendix A). These vignettes were created specifically for this study. For the experimental vignette, participants were randomly assigned to evaluate one of six versions of the same vignette. The experimental vignette describes an instance of alleged child sexual abuse. In the vignette, the child purportedly has been sexually abused by the partner of the child's mother. The child alleges to have been inappropriately touched by the mother's male partner on occasions the mother was absent from the home or asleep in bed. The child discloses the sexual abuse to a relative but later recants the accusation when the authorities became involved. Specific elements of the experimental vignette were chosen to increase the ecological validity of the scenario described in the vignette. In line with findings related to victim-perpetrator acquaintance and proximity (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2008), the perpetrator in the vignette is

described as someone who was well known and had convenient access to the accuser over a period of several months. In addition, given that when children choose to disclose sexual abuse (Allnock, 2010), they typically first disclosed to someone known, like a family member, the child is described as first disclosing to an aunt. Furthermore, because children's disclosure of sexual abuse is frequently delayed out of worry about a negative reaction by a parent or out of fear of being physically harmed by the perpetrator (Canadian Center for Child Protection, 2012), the disclosure in the vignette is delayed. Finally, because children often do not give one detailed, clear account of the abuse and frequently recant in fear of consequences following the disclosure (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2008; Sorenson & Snow, 1991), the child in the vignette is described as recanting their report of sexual abuse.

Versions of the experimental vignette only differed in terms of the age (i.e., 6, 11, or 15 years old) and gender (i.e., boy or girl) of the child accuser. Child ages manipulated in the experimental vignette were chosen based on similarity to age groups used in prior research (Gabora et al., 1993b; Goodman et al., 1989; Schmidt & Brigham, 1996).

Credibility ratings. Following the vignette, participants made eight evaluative judgements regarding the perceived credibility based on their opinions of information presented in the vignette (see Appendix B). Experimental post-vignette evaluation questions were generated specifically for this study based on previous research (Back & Lips, 1998; Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Gabora et al., 1993; Schmidt & Brigham, 1996; Tabak & Klettke, 2014) and were considered to be a synthesis of previous methodologies. Because single-item measures can be less reliable than multi-item measures, especially if the construct is multidimensional (Sackett & Larson, 1990), as perceived credibility may be, it was hoped that the inclusion of multiple items tapping different relevant domains would result in greater

reliability. Evaluations of overall perceived credibility, perceived responsibility, perceived honesty, and perceived cognitive ability/suggestibility were each comprised of two items rated on a 0 to 7 Likert scale. Internal consistency of the two-item subscales ranged from excellent to poor, with honesty showing excellent reliability ($\alpha = .90$), responsibility showing good reliability ($\alpha = .84$), overall credibility showing acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .79$), and cognitive ability/suggestibility showing poor reliability ($\alpha = .62$). A total credibility score was also calculated based on the sum of all eight items and demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .92$).

Distractor vignettes. To minimize suspicion of the purpose of the study and potential response bias, participants also evaluated two distractor scenarios (see Appendix A). These scenarios asked participants to evaluate an incidence of academic dishonesty and workplace substance use. Immediately after each distractor scenario, participants answered a set of corresponding distractor questions (see Appendix B). These questions were included to encourage participants to view the goal of the study to be related to moral dilemma decision-making. Responses to post-scenario questions for the distractor vignettes were not analyzed.

Manipulation and attention checks. To ensure the variation in the manipulation of experimental variables (age, gender) cause the differences in the independent variable (perceived credibility), manipulation check questions were asked of participants following the completion of all vignette questionnaires (see Appendix C). These questions asked the participant to recall details related to the independent variable (i.e., child accuser age, gender) to ensure they closely read and accurately remember details from the presented vignette. If the participant failed to correctly identify both these details, data collected from that participant were eliminated from further analysis.

To further preserve the quality of data collected, three attention check questions were included and presented during the study (see Appendix C). These questions required the respondent to provide a specific response to the presented question. If the participant failed more than one of the three attention checks, the data provided by that participant were excluded from further analysis.

Demographics Form. Participants reported their age, gender, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, and rural origin status (i.e., whether they grew up in a rural area; see Appendix D). In line with other survey-based studies (e.g., Ford et al., 2016) but with clearer anchoring by incorporating the U. S. Census Bureau definitions, rural status was evaluated by asking participants to identify as originating from a rural area (i.e., population less than 2,500), urban cluster/suburban area (i.e., 2,500 to 50,000) or urban area (i.e., 50,000 or greater). For the purpose of current study analyses, rurality was coded simply as rural or non-rural (i.e., suburban and urban combined).

Supplemental questionnaires. Additional questionnaires (*Duke University Religion Index*, *Child Sexual Abuse Belief Scale*, The *Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale*, and the *Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory Short-Form*) were administered for use in future research but will not be analyzed for the current study (see Appendix E for a copy and description of each supplemental questionnaire).

Procedure

Participants were recruited with MTurk, which is owned and operated by Amazon. MTurk workers review a list of available HITs and choose to register for them based on personal interest. HITs are presented to the workers by a brief abstract indicating the purpose, nature, time commitment, and compensation for the proposed study (see Appendix F for the study description

posted on MTurk). MTurk workers interested in the current study were redirected to Qualtrics where they were presented the study informed consent document (see Appendix G) and asked to indicate whether they read the document and whether they agreed to participate in the study. Workers who indicated they read the informed consent and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study were enrolled in the study.

Participants read and evaluated three vignettes, one experimental and two distractor randomly (see Appendices A and B). Subsequent to reading and evaluating the three vignettes, participants completed a series of self-report questionnaires, including a demographics form and measures of religiosity, beliefs pertaining to child sexual abuse, and endorsement of rape myths (see Appendix E). Participants also completed manipulation and attention check items throughout the study (see Appendix C). The order of self-report questionnaires was randomized, with the exception that the demographics form was administered last.

Lastly, all participants were debriefed. As part of the debriefing process, participants were given information regarding resources they may use in the event of emotional distress following their participation in this research study (see Appendix H). The mean completion time was 16.40 minutes (SD = 12.37). See Appendix I for a study flow chart.

Analyses

To test study hypotheses, I conducted a 2 (gender: boy, girl) × 3 (age; 6, 11, and 15 years old) × 2 (rural status: rural, nonrural) between subjects ANOVA with *Total Summed Credibility* (i.e., sum of all eight post-vignette evaluation item) as the dependent variable. Furthermore, to investigate the particular facets of perceived credibility, I conducted a 2 (gender: boy, girl) × 3 (age; 6, 11, and 15 years old) × 2 (rural status: rural, nonrural) between subjects MANOVA with

each 2-item subscale of credibility (*overall credibility, responsibility, cognitive ability/suggestibility,* and *honesty*) as the dependent variables.

CHAPTER 4

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Results

Preliminary Analyses

Random assignment to experimental conditions resulted in 49 participants assigned to the 6-year-old boy condition, 53 participants to the 6-year-old girl condition, 64 participants to the 11-year-old boy condition, 52 participants to the 11-year old girl condition, 59 participants to the 15-year-old boy condition, and 50 participants to the 15-year-old girl condition. Based on the results of the MANOVA, participants did not differ significantly across conditions, or rural status, in terms of age. In addition, based on chi square analyses, participants did not differ significantly across conditions in terms of rural status, gender, or race and ethnicity.

Primary Analyses

I hypothesized perceived credibility of child sexual abuse disclosure would vary by child accuser age (i.e., 11-year-old child more credible than 6- and 15-year-old child) and gender (i.e., girl more credible than boy) and that child accuser age and gender would interact (i.e., 11- or 15-year-old girl more credible than 11- or 15-year old boy). I also presented an exploratory hypothesis regarding the impact of participant rural status on perceived credibility. To test these hypotheses, I performed a 2 (gender: boy, girl) × 3 (age; 6, 11, and 15 years old) × 2 (rural status: rural, nonrural) between subjects ANOVA with *Total Summed Credibility* (i.e., sum of all eight post-vignette evaluation items) as the dependent variable.

Contrary to my hypothesis, *Total Summed Credibility* did not significantly vary by child accuser age, $F(2, 315) = .95$, $p = .39$, $\eta^2 = .006$; however, my hypothesis that girls would be perceived as more credible was supported, $F(1, 315) = 4.56$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .014$ (see Figure 1). I

did not find support for the hypothesis that child accuser and gender would interact, $F(3, 312) = 1.38$, $p = .25$ $\eta^2 = .009$. Finally, rural status of the participant was not a significant predictor of credibility, $F(1, 315) = 2.13$, $p =.145$, $\eta^2 = .007$, nor did any interactions with rural status emerge.

To investigate the particular facets of perceived credibility, I performed a 2 (gender: boy, girl) × 3 (age; 6, 11, and 15 years old) × 2 (rural status: rural, nonrural) between subjects MANOVA with each 2-item subscale of credibility (i.e., overall credibility, responsibility, honesty, and cognitive ability/suggestibility) as the dependent variables. Neither overall credibility, nor any of the three facets of credibility varied significantly by child accuser age, $F(8, 624) = 1.334$, $p = .223$, Wilk's $\lambda = .967$, $\eta^2 = .017$; gender, $F(4, 312)$, = 2.350, $p = .054$, Wilk's $\lambda = .971$, $\eta^2 = .029$; or participant rural status, $F(4, 312) = .630$, $p = .641$, Wilk's $\lambda = .992$, $\eta^2 = .008$. Moreover, there was not a significant interaction age accuser age and gender, $F(8, 624) = .754$, $p = .644$, Wilk's $\lambda = .981$, $\eta^2 = .010$, nor was any other significant interaction found.

Although the specific facets of credibility did not vary significantly by gender, the overall effect of responsibility was nevertheless notable, and there were specific between-subjects effects for responsibility, $F(1, 315) = 6.877$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .021$, and honesty, $F(1, 315) = 3.964$, $p = .047$, $\eta^2 = .012$. This finding, though not significant in the current study, may be an opportunity for further exploration in future studies.

CHAPTER 5

PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY OF CHILD SEXUAL ASSUALT REPORTING

Discussion

Review of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of child accuser gender and age on perceived credibility of child sexual abuse allegations. Improved understanding of when child sexual abuse allegations are most often doubted can help to inform the training and education of caregivers, teachers, parents, case workers, mandated reporters, as well as those making decisions to hold perpetrators accountable. Additionally, this study sought to ascertain if there are differences in how rural participants and non-rural participants perceive the overall credibility of claims of child sexual abuse. A better understanding of the relationship of rurality with attitudes and beliefs regarding child sexual abuse may help further refine our efforts in addressing barriers related to treatment and service utilization in rural communities.

Credibility Related to Child Accuser Gender and Age

To explore potential variables impacting perceived credibility of sexual abuse allegations, this study investigated how participant ratings of credibility varied according to gender and age of the child accuser. Contrary to my hypothesis and previous studies, the current study revealed no significant differences across child accuser age conditions, suggesting the age of a child accuser may not make a considerable impact on the perceived credibility of sexual abuse allegations. Although previous research lends support for an effect of age on perceived credibility, the present research was unable to produce similar results.

Schmidt and Brigham (1996) suggest a "persuasion model" in attempt to explain the role of the child's accuser age in determinations of credibility. They assert that when a young child

testifies regarding sexual abuse, those making credibility determinations are likely to attribute weight to factors other than age in their decision-making process. These factors vary and may include the preconceived stereotypes of the child's cognitive ability, amount and quality of supporting evidence, the demeanor in which the child relays their report, and the attitudes of those individuals receiving the report.

Relating Schmidt and Brigham's (1996) persuasion model to the present study, the realistic and accurate details included within the experimental vignettes may have outweighed the influence of the child accuser age as participants made credibility decisions. When designing the experimental vignettes, efforts were made to ensure that they realistically portrayed an instance of child sexual abuse based upon knowledge of the circumstances under which child sexual abuse most often occurs. As such, it is possible that the experimental vignettes provided study participants with such a valid and realistic portrayal of child sexual abuse, the age of the child became much less salient in the decision making process than intended by this researcher. Moreover, the strength of details within the vignette may have superseded the weight given to the child's age as participants made decisions regarding credibility. It is possible child accuser age may become a more important factor when the circumstances of an allegation are more ambiguous.

Furthermore, it is possible that an effect of age on perceived credibility was not found due to the way in which this study measured cognitive ability/suggestibility, a component of overall credibility. Previous research finding an effect of age on perceived credibility have also defined cognitive ability/suggestibility as a component to overall perceived credibility, particularly in terms of the impact of accuser age (Back & Lips, 1998; Tabak & Klettke, 2014); however, it is possible the cognitive ability/suggestibility evaluative questions of this study did

not perform as well capturing this component of credibility. Moreover, in relation to the other credibility components measured, questions measuring cognitive ability/suggestibility had the lowest internal reliability ($\alpha = .62$).

While support for a significant age effect was not found, this study did find support for an influence of gender on the perceived credibility of child sexual abuse accuser in that boys were seen to be less credible than girls. This finding was congruent with previous research studies revealing a pervasive stigma associated with male victims of sexual abuse (Davies et al., 2009; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Rogers & Davies, 2009). Gender stereotypes can contribute to higher likelihood that sexual abuse reports made by boys will be perceived as less credible, specifically as it pertains to being blamed for and seen as responsible for their abuse (Back & Lip, 1998). These stereotypes include ideas that the male gender should exude strength, power and control, and take pride in their "sexual prowess," while at the same time condemning victimization (Spataro, Moss, & Wells, 2001). As in previous research, it is likely that as participants made determinations regarding the credibility of the boy sexual abuse accuser, these stereotypes influenced their decision making-process. Additionally, it seems that while other factors (i.e., realistic and accuracy nature of the report) could have potentially outweighed age as a mediating factor in determinations of credibility, male gender stereotypes were possibly attributed more influence. The current study found a notable trend for an effect of gender on perceived responsibility and honesty (i.e., boys more responsible and less honest than girls), but this finding was not significant and warrants exploration in future studies before any claims can be made.

Credibility Related to Participant Rural Status

To clarify possible differences between rural and non-rural populations, this study aimed to explore whether rural and non-rural participants differed in respect to their perceptions of credibility regarding child sexual abuse allegations. This study revealed no significant finding for rural status.

Current research into differences between rural and non-rural populations on this topic is limited. The results of the present study are interesting in that they suggest detrimental attitudes and beliefs regarding childhood sexual abuse are not as disproportionately adopted in rural communities as research previously suggested. It is possible that lower reporting rates in rural communities, as reported by Ménard and Ruback (2003) and Ruback and Ménard (2001), are not simply due to differences in perceptions of accuser credibility across rural and nonrural communities; however, the results from the current study should be viewed cautiously because only a small number of rural participants were recruited in this study ($n = 63$). As a result, some experimental groups had as little as five or nine rural participants assigned to each. It may be that non-significant results pertaining to the exploratory hypothesis were related to insufficient response from the rural population; small group sizes for rural status across experimental conditions may have led to the data being underpowered.

Clinical Implications

Disclosure of sexual abuse is already an emotionally challenging and difficult process for the child accuser. Because helping professionals may misjudge the credibility of sexual abuse allegations, the child accuser's experience seeking justice or accessing services can be greatly affected (Broussard et al., 1991; Dollar, Perry, Fromuth, & Holt, 2004). Children expecting their allegations to be disbelieved are often more hesitant to report their abuse and can feel responsible

and ashamed of their own abuse (McElvaney et al., 2014). This is especially true for male sexual abuse victims. Boys have been found significantly less likely than girls to disclose sexual abuse close to the time period an incident occurred, potentially allowing for the abuse to continue for a longer duration (O'Leary & Barber, 2008). Delayed disclosure by boys is likely related to factors such as male socialization and gender-role stereotypes (O'Leary & Barber, 2008). Moreover, even when boys find the courage to disclose sexual abuse, their reports are less likely than those of female victims to be substantiated and acted upon by caseworkers (Maikovich, Koenen, & Jaffee, 2009).

When children find the confidence to report sexual abuse, it is crucial the manner in which their claims are regarded and investigated is equitable for both boys and girls. The education of teachers, parents, case workers, mandated reporters, and others serving in a helping capacity can be improved upon with a greater understanding of gender biases related to child sexual abuse. Likewise, an understanding of the circumstances under which allegations of children are more often doubted can guide professionals in making a targeted effort to improve upon how they respond and provide services to in an impartial manner to both boy and girl child sexual abuse victims.

Limitations

Several limitations are present in the current study. As previously mentioned, vignettes presented to participants may have been too clearly described as an evident case of child sexual abuse, so participants could have been inclined to rate it as such regardless of the gender and age of the child described in the scenario. While the intention when developing the vignettes was to stay true to factual data known about child sexual abuse, doing so may have left little doubt in the minds of participants that the child described should be perceived as responsible, honest, or

possessing sufficient cognitive ability across all age groups. It may be worthwhile to explore ways to create vignettes that are both accurate in their depictions of child sexual abuse but still vague enough in their descriptions to allow for greater uncertainty.

Secondly, although the measurement of credibility utilized within this study was a good effort to synthesize varied methodologies used across similar previous studies, it can still be improved upon. While the overall reliability of the eight-item *Total Summed Credibility* score was excellent ($\alpha = .95$), the two-item subscale reliabilities ranged from excellent ($\alpha = .90$) to poor ($\alpha = .62$). The *cognitive ability/suggestibility* subscale demonstrated the lowest reliability, which ultimately limits its validity and the validity of findings based on it. It is possible the items comprising this subscale may have represented two separate constructs rather than one cohesive construct. In fact, one item ("Based on the scenario, how reliable or accurate would you say the child's memory was when recounting the events?") was constructed to measure cognitive ability, the other item ("Based on the scenario, how likely would you say it is that the child misinterpreted or misunderstood the events?") was constructed to measure suggestibility, and the two items were assumed to represent a single construct related to developmental aspects of cognitive functioning. However, these may be two separate aspects that would benefit from separate measurement in future studies. Continued research on this subject would benefit from a standardized measure which reliably assesses components of credibility.

Lastly, this study was only able to recruit a small number of rural participants ($n = 63$). As such, some experimental groups had relatively few rural participants assigned to each experimental condition, diminishing the statistical power to address questions of the impact of rural status on perceived credibility. Previous research has indicated that MTurk samples typically derive disproportionately from a more urban than rural population (Huff & Tingley,

2015). Future research should target recruitment of participants representative of the rural demographic.

General Conclusions

The present study did not find support for an influence of child accuser age or participant rural status on ratings of perceived credibility of allegations of sexual abuse; however, a significant finding for child accuser gender emerged, demonstrating that participants perceived allegations of sexual abuse by boys as less credible than allegations by girls. These findings are important for understanding how educational efforts regarding prevention and response to child sexual abuse allegations can be precisely targeted to demographic groups that may be more greatly in need.

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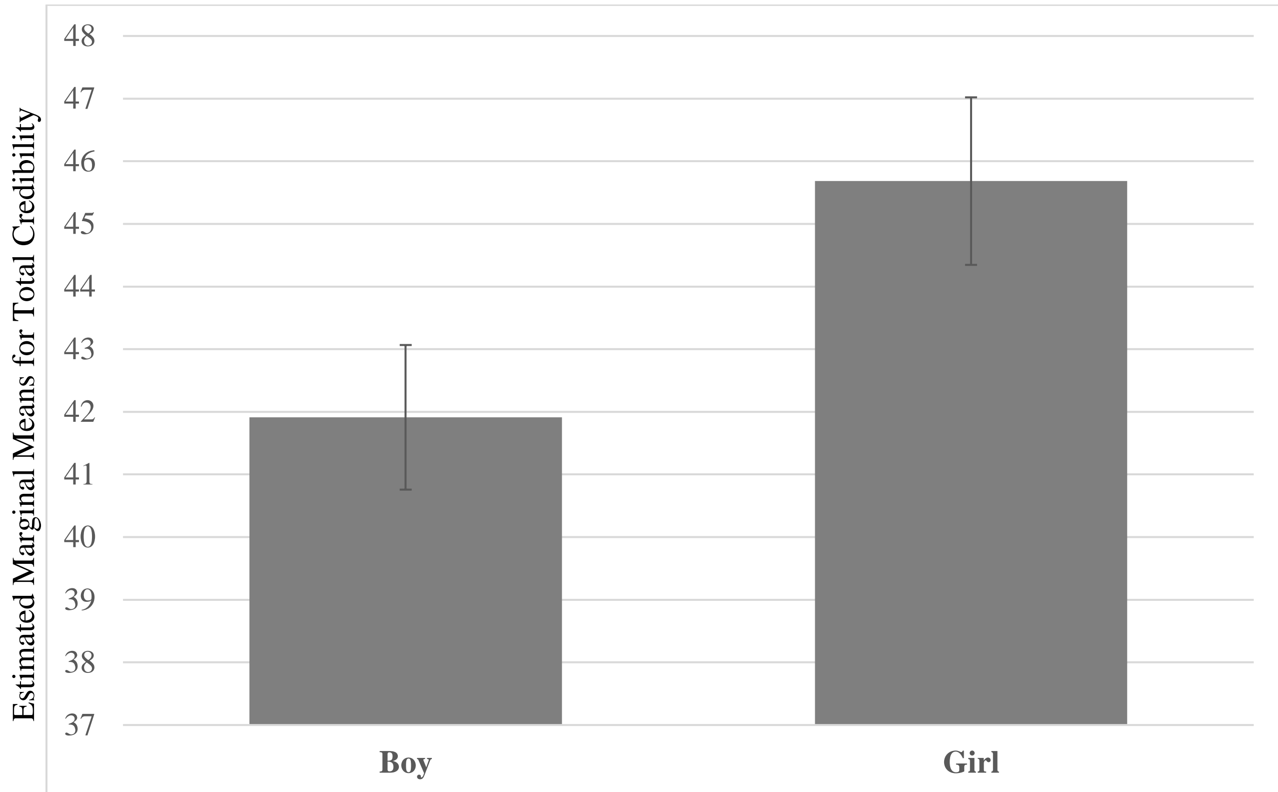
Table 1. Participant Religious Affiliation

Identified Religion	Number of Sample Endorsing	Percentage of Overall Sample
Non-Religious Secular	21	6.4
Agnostic	39	11.9
Atheist	35	10.7
Christianity	178	54.4
Judaism	7	2.1
Islam	5	1.5
Buddhism	4	1.2
Hinduism Sikhism	2	0.6
Wiccan, Pagan, Druid	2	0.6
Spiritualism	9	2.8
Native American	3	0.9
Not Listed	5	1.5
No Response	17	5.2
Total	327	100.0

Figure 1. Participant Ratings of Credibility by Child Accuser Gender



NOTE: Based on Total Credibility (i.e., the sum of all eight vignette evaluation items); error bars represent 95% confidence intervals

APPENDIX A

Study Vignettes

Experimental Vignette: Anthony (boy accuser)

Anthony is a[n] [6/11/15]-year-old boy who provided courtroom testimony alleging he was sexually abused by his mother's partner, John. Anthony reported his parents divorced when he was three years old, and after that his mother was in and out of several relationships. He stated his mother's boyfriends were frequently around his home. Anthony described many of his mother's boyfriends as violent with his mother and stated they often treated him badly. Anthony related that although his mother's newest boyfriend John was frequently angry and aggressive with his mother, he generally treated Anthony kindly.

Anthony stated that not long after his mother began dating John, he began sexually abusing Anthony. He reported the abuse first began when John started to enter his bedroom at night. He stated John began touching and fondling him, waking him up. Anthony reported that as time progressed, John would sometimes corner him in his room during the day while his mother was at work. During these times, Anthony stated John would touch and fondle him and encourage him to participate. He stated John would tell him that if he told anyone about what happened, he would hurt his mother and make sure Anthony would be taken away from her. Anthony stated, "I was so scared I didn't know what to do. He made me feel really dirty." Furthermore, Anthony stated he thought he was the bad person for allowing John to abuse him and was too embarrassed and scared to tell anyone.

Anthony stated the abuse continued for several months and had thought about speaking to a teacher but said, "I was really scared." Anthony related he had seen that John had a really bad temper with his mother and believed him to be a threatening man. Anthony related he tried to ignore what John was doing to him and pretend everything was OK.

Anthony disclosed the sexual abuse to his aunt, who then contacted the appropriate authorities. After Anthony's report of the abuse, he later recanted and stated he, "just wants all of it to go away."

Experimental Vignette: Eva (girl accuser)

Eva is a[n] [6/11/15]-year-old girl who provided courtroom testimony alleging she was sexually abused by her mother's partner, John. Eva reported her parents divorced when she was 3 years old, and after that her mother was in and out of several relationships. She stated her mother's boyfriends were frequently around her home. Eva described many of her mother's boyfriends as being violent with his mother and stated they often treated her badly. Eva related that although her mother's newest boyfriend John was frequently angry and aggressive with his mother, he generally treated Eva kindly.

Eva stated it was not long after her mother began dating John, he began to sexually abuse Eva. She reported the abuse first began when John started to enter her bedroom at night. She stated John began touching and fondling her, waking her up from her sleep. Eva reported that as time progressed, John would sometimes corner her in her room during the day while her mother was at work. During these times, Eva stated that John would touch and fondle her and encourage her to participate. She stated John would tell her that if she told anyone about what happened, he would hurt her mother and make sure Eva would be taken away from her. Eva stated "I was so scared I didn't know what to do. He made me feel really dirty." Furthermore, Eva stated she thought she was the bad person for allowing John to abuse her and was too embarrassed and scared to tell anyone.

Eva stated the abuse continued for several months. Eva stated she had thought about speaking to a teacher but said "I was really scared." Eva related she had seen that John had a really bad temper with her mother and believed him to be a threatening man. Eva related she tried to ignore what John was doing to her and pretend everything was OK.

Eva disclosed that she was being sexually abused to her aunt, who then contacted the appropriate authorities. After Eva's report of the abuse, she later recanted and stated she "Just wants all of it to go away."

Distractor Vignette 1: Bus Driver under the Influence

The Brantley's, a family of three consisting of two adults and a young child, often visit a local photo-developing center to process film for developing. They have been doing business with the center for several years and are considered to be regular customers. While dropping off and picking up their purchases, Mr. and Mrs. Brantley often make small talk with the photo-processing clerk. The photo clerk has always perceived the family to be kind and friendly based upon his interactions with them. However, he has recently become concerned.

Over the past several weeks, there have been six occasions in which the Brantley's have taken film to the center to be processed for developing. In the processed pictures, the developer noticed in some pictures what appears to be Mr. Brantley smoking marijuana while sitting behind the wheel of a school bus. In one of the pictures, the developer can clearly see a beer bottle positioned between Mr. Brantley's legs as he is sitting in the driver's seat. From the angle of the shot, the bus appears to be empty at the time the photo was taken, and the developer assumes these photos were taken outside of work hours.

The policy at the photo lab is to report and suspicious or questionable photos. If the photos are reported, there is a possibility that the suspicions of Mr. Brantley being intoxicated while transporting children is unfounded. Many school bus drivers own their own buses and Mr. Brantley may have posed for the photos on off-duty hours (i.e., the weekend). However, if Mr. Brantley is partaking in substance use prior to his duty day, he is putting the children he transports at significant risk for harm.

Distractor Vignette 2: High School Plagiarism

A high school student is under academic review for plagiarism. The student involved is a 16-year-old girl, Destiny, who is an honor student. Throughout her academic years, she has earned straight A's, has been involved in several extracurricular activities, and has gotten along well with her teachers and peers. She has never been disciplined by teachers or by the principal for behavioral problems. However, during the current semester, the student became ill with the flu and missed several weeks of classes. As a result, she found herself behind in her schoolwork and had a shortly approaching deadline to complete a large written assignment. This assignment accounted for 20% of her grade.

Destiny submitted her assignment prior to the deadline; however, her teacher was hesitant to assign a grade to her work. Destiny's teacher noticed that although the wording was not the same, her paper was strikingly similar in content to that of another student in the class. The teacher recognized the writing style to be Destiny's own, but she was suspicious that Destiny may have used another student's ideas to create her paper.

When questioned by her teacher, Destiny reported she did ask another student to give her feedback and suggestions for her paper. She was worried she missed too much of the class to adequately understand the topic. The student has been referred to the student council to make a decision as to whether or not it should be noted on her academic record that she plagiarized. If the incidence of plagiarism is entered onto her report, it is likely she will be not be eligible for admission to the university she had anticipated attending upon graduation.

APPENDIX B

Vignette Evaluations

Evaluations of Experimental Vignette

INSTRUCTIONS: The following questions ask you to make a series of judgments about the scenario you just read. Read each question carefully.

1. Based on the scenario, how believable would you say child's story was about being sexually abused?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all believable							*Completely believable*

2. Based on the scenario, how responsible or culpable would you say the child was for the events?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all responsible							*Completely responsible*

3. Based on the scenario, how reliable or accurate would you say the child's memory was when recounting the events?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all reliable/accurate							*Completely reliable/accurate*

4. Based on the scenario, how likely would you say it is that the child "enhanced" or embellished the events?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all likely							*Very likely*

5. Based on the scenario, how likely would you say it is that the child misinterpreted or misunderstood the events?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all likely							*Very likely*

6. Based on the scenario, how likely would you say it is it that the child was looking to gain sympathy or attention from the events?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all likely							*Very likely*

7. Based on the scenario, how likely would you say it is that the child could have avoided or prevented the events?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all possible							*Very possible*

8. Do you believe the described scenario describes an incidence of child sexual abuse?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Does not at all describe an incidence of sexual abuse							*Completely describes an incidence of sexual abuse*

Total Credibility = sum of items 1, 2R, 3, 4R, 5R, 6R, 7R, and 8 [higher score = more credible]
Overall Believability = sum of items 1 and 8 [higher score = more credible]
Responsibility = sum of items 2 and 7 [higher score = less credible]
Cognitive Ability/Suggestibility = sum of items 3 and 5R [higher score = more credible]
Honesty = sum of items 4R and 6R [higher score = more credible]

Evaluations of Distractor Vignettes

INSTRUCTIONS: The following questions ask you to make a series of judgments about the scenario you just read. Read each question carefully.

[Distractor Vignette 1: Bus Driver under the Influence]

1. Based on the scenario, how much do you believe Mr. Brantley consumes alcohol or using marijuana prior to performing his duties as a bus driver? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all*; 7 = *Completely believe*]
2. Based on the scenario, how responsible or culpable do you believe photo developer would be if an alcohol related bus accident occurred? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all responsible*; 7 = *Completely responsible*]
3. Based on the scenario, how reasonable is the photo developer's concern about the situation? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all reasonable*; 7 = *Completely reasonable*]
4. Based on the scenario, how great is your concern that Mr. Brantley may be putting children at risk? [Anchors: 0 = *Very little concern*; 7 = *Very great concern*]
5. Based on the scenario, how likely would you say it is that the photo developer may be misinterpreting or making erroneous judgements about the photos? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all likely*; 7 = *Very likely*]
6. Based on the scenario, how likely would you say it is it that Mr. Brantley always abstains from substance use prior to transporting children? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all likely*; 7 = *Very likely*]
7. Based on the scenario, should Mr. Brantley be allowed to continue in his position as a school bus drive? [Anchors: 0 = *Definitely should not be allowed*; 7 = *Definitely should be allowed*]
8. Do you believe the photo developer should report Mr. Brantley's photos? [Anchors: 0 = *Definitely should not report*; 7 = *Definitely should report*]

[Distractor Vignette 2: High School Plagiarism]

1. Based on the scenario, how believable is Destiny when she reported she asked for feedback and suggestions on her paper from the other student? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all believable*; 7 = *Completely believable*]
2. Based on the scenario, how responsible is Destiny for the possible consequences set forth by the student council? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all responsible*; 7 = *Completely responsible*]
3. Based on the scenario, how truthful do believe Destiny's account of the situation to be? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all truthful*; 7 = *Completely truthful*]
4. Based on the scenario, how likely is it that Destiny minimized or downplayed the amount of help she received from her peer in writing her paper? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all likely*; 7 = *Very likely*]
5. Based on the scenario, how likely is it that did not intentionally attempt to plagiarize her work? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all likely*; 7 = *Very likely*]
6. Based on the scenario, how much should Destiny's previous history as a good student be considered? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all considered*; 7 = *Very much considered*]
7. Based on the scenario, how likely would you say it is that Destiny could have avoided or prevented the events? [Anchors: 0 = *Not at all possible*; 7 = *Very possible*]
8. Do you believe the described scenario describes an incidence of plagiarism? [Anchors: 0 = *Does not at all describe an incidence of plagiarism*; 7 = *Completely describes an incidence of plagiarism*]

Not scored

APPENDIX C

Manipulation and Attention Checks

Manipulation Check Questions [*items presented after all vignettes read*]

Experimental Vignette

1. In the described vignette, how old was the child described?
   - ❍ 6
   - ❍ 11
   - ❍ 15
   - ❍ don't recall
2. Please indicate the gender of the child.
   - ❍ male
   - ❍ female
   - ❍ don't recall

Distractor Vignette 1 (items not scored)

1. In the described vignette, please indicate Mr. Brantley's profession.
   - ❍ bus driver
   - ❍ elementary school teacher
   - ❍ youth group leader
   - ❍ don't recall
2. Who became aware of Mr. Brantley possessing alcohol and marijuana on the school bus?
   - ❍ the photo processing clerk
   - ❍ Ms. Brantley
   - ❍ a student
   - ❍ don't recall

Distractor Vignette 2 (items not scored)

1. Please indicate why Destiny missed several weeks of classes.
   - ❍ she became ill with the flu
   - ❍ she suffered a broken bone
   - ❍ she experienced a death in the family
   - ❍ don't recall
2. Who suspected Destiny of possible plagiarism?
   - ❍ her teacher
   - ❍ her mother
   - ❍ a classmate
   - ❍ don't recall

Attention Check Questions

1. It is important that you pay attention to this study. Please select number one for this answer. [*item embedded in the post-vignette evaluations of distractor vignette 1*]
2. Reading this survey carefully is critical, please select the radial seven. [*item embedded in the post-vignette evaluations of experimental vignette*]
3. Respond by choosing the answer that corresponds with the number three. [*item embedded in CSABS*]

APPENDIX D

Demographics Form

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1. Your age (in years): _____
2. Your gender
   - ❍ Man
   - ❍ Woman
   - ❍ Other
   - ❍ Prefer not to answer
3. Your ethnic and racial background (check all that apply)
   - ❑ African, Caribbean, or Black
   - ❑ American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - ❑ Asian
   - ❑ European or White
   - ❑ Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   - ❑ Hispanic or Latino
   - ❑ Middle Eastern or North African
   - ❑ Prefer not to answer
4. How would you describe the community in which you currently live?
   - ❍ Rural
   - ❍ Suburban
   - ❍ Urban/Large City
5. How would you describe the community in which you grew up?
   - ❍ Rural (less than 2,500 people)
   - ❍ Suburban (greater than 2,500 people but less than 50,000)
   - ❍ Urban (greater than 50,000 people)
6. How would you describe your current religion or faith, if any?
   - ❍ Nonreligious Secular
   - ❍ Agnostic
   - ❍ Atheist
   - ❍ Christianity
   - ❍ Judaism
   - ❍ Islam
   - ❍ Buddhism
   - ❍ Hinduism Sikhism
   - ❍ Unitarian-Universalism
   - ❍ Wiccan Pagan Druid
   - ❍ Spiritualism
   - ❍ Native American
   - ❍ Baha'i
   - ❍ Not Listed
   - ❍ N/A

7. What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?
   - ❍ Never attended school or only attended kindergarten
   - ❍ Grades 1 through 8 (Elementary)
   - ❍ Grades 9 through 11 (Some high school)
   - ❍ Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)
   - ❍ College 1 year to 3 years (Some college or technical school)
   - ❍ College 4 years (College graduate)
   - ❍ Graduate School (Advanced Degree)

APPENDIX E

Supplemental Questionnaires and Descriptions

Duke University Religion Index (DUREL; Koenig et al., 1997). The DRI is a 5-item self-report measure assessing organizational, non-organizational, and intrinsic dimensions of religiosity (Koenig et al., 1997). Organizational religiosity is defined as the frequency which individuals attend organized, public religious services. Non-organizational religiosity refers to time spent in private religious practices such as prayer and meditation. Intrinsic religiosity is the degree to which the individual incorporates their religious beliefs into their daily living. The DUREL is a valid and reliable measure, correlating as expected with other measures of religiosity and demonstrating good internal consistency (α = .78-.91) and test-test reliability (intraclass correlation coefficient =.91; Koenig & Büssing, 2010). Internal reliability for the current sample was good, α =.93.

Child Sexual Abuse Belief Scale (CSABS; Gabora, Spanos, & Joab, 1993a). The CSABS is a 17-item self-report measure assessing endorsement of misconceptions related to child sexual abuse (Gabora et al., 1993a). Scale items were constructed to reflect the general belief that children typically do not make false allegations of sexual abuse unless they experience significant pressure to do so. Furthermore, the items assess beliefs such as: children frequently fail to report sexual abuse allegations for lengthy periods of time, children may falsely retract allegations of sexual abuse, physical force is not required to sexually abuse a child, and the perpetrator is typically known to the child. Respondents rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement on an 11-point Likert scale. The CSABS has demonstrated good validity and reliability, with good internal consistency (α = .72; Gabora et al., 1993a). Internal reliability for the present sample was good, α =.83.

The Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA; Payne, Lonsway, Fitzgerald, McMahon, & Farmer, 1999). Developed from a longer version created by Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999), the Updated IRMA is a 22-item self-report measure used to assess the acceptance of rape myths, defined as "false attitudes and beliefs about rape committed against women." The Updated IRMA is an effort to keep the measure relevant to student populations by refreshing outdated language. Additionally, the Updated IRMA looks to capture subtler and covert rape myths that have evolved over time (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Respondents rate the degree to which they agree or disagree with presented statements on a 5-point Likert scale. For each statement, the response choices range from 1 = *Strongly Agree* to 5 = *Strongly Disagree*. Total scores can range between 22 and 110, with higher scores indicating a greater rejection of rape myths. The Updated IRMA has good validity and reliability, with good overall internal consistency (α = .87-.86) and subscale internal consistency (α = .69-.83) in college samples (McMahon, 2010). The Updated IRMA is comprised of four subscales. Subscale 1: "She Asked for It" consists of six items (α = .91), subscale 2 "He Didn't Mean To" consists of six items (α = .88), subscale 3 "It Wasn't Really Rape" consists of five items (α =.92), and subscale 4 "She lied" consists of five items (α = .90). The reliability of the total IRMA score for the present sample was good, (α = .95).

Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory Short-Form (STAI, Marteau & Bekker, 1992). The short-form of the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory is a brief version of the commonly used Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). The short-form is a six-item measure to assess anxiety. Each statement is rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Very much). Marteau and Bekker (1992) reported good psychometric properties for the short-form of the STAI. Correlation coefficients were found to be greater than .90 using four

and six items from the STAI. Additionally, the reliability for the six-item scale in the current sample was good, $\alpha = .82$.

APPENDIX F

Study Summary Posted to MTurk

Title: Moral and Ethical Decision-Making (~ 45 minutes)

Description: In this study you will read and evaluate scenarios about moral dilemmas, and answer some questions about your opinions and about yourself. Specifically, this study will ask you to consider topics such as plagiarism, trauma, and substance abuse.

Keywords: story evaluation, survey, demographics, psychology

Reward: $1.00 per task

APPENDIX G

Study Informed Consent Document

The primary investigator of the current study is Bridget Lashbaugh-Barney, a clinical psychology doctoral graduate student. The co-investigator, Dr. Dorthie Cross, an Assistant Professor at Georgia Southern University, is supervising the project. This research is being conducted within the Department of Psychology in an effort to advance knowledge in the field of clinical psychology.

The purpose of this research is to further understand how individuals make decisions when encountering moral and ethical dilemmas. This study involves reading and evaluating short scenarios and completing questionnaires about emotions, attitudes, and personal beliefs. Specifically, this study will ask you to consider topics such as plagiarism, trauma, and substance abuse. The duration of the study session is an estimated 45 minutes.

Participating in this study involves minimal risk and should not elicit more than negligible amounts of psychological discomfort. Though some participants may experience an increase in emotional distress by reflecting on personal behaviors, attitudes, and experiences, we do not believe this discomfort would be greater than what an individual may experience on an average day. Should distress arise, in the debriefing process you are encouraged to seek assistance by contacting the United States National Suicide and Crisis Hotlines at 1-800-784-2433 or 1-800-273-8255 or from another facility within your community for further assessment.

While not a guaranteed benefit, simply participating in this study may increase your insight into personal emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Through participation in research, you may gain a greater understanding of psychological research with regard to its construction and execution—this is particularly beneficial for those interested in pursuing a career in the field of psychology. On a larger scale, participants in this study are providing data that will lead to advancement of understanding of psychological phenomena in positive psychology research.

Completion will result in a one-dollar credit. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may end your participation in this study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Furthermore, there will be no penalty should you decide not to participate in the study. It is your right to discontinue the study at any time and for whatever reason. However, should you decide to withdraw or fail to complete the study, the monetary incentive will not be awarded.

Statement of Confidentiality: The primary investigator and co-investigator will have full access to all information and is charged with ensuring data, and research documents are housed in a secure location that only the PI and CI can access. All data and accompanying research documents will be de-identified and maintained for a minimum of five years, then retained indefinitely for the purpose of verifying results and continued examination. Both researchers have completed ethical trainings in research as enforced by the Institutional Review Board at Georgia Southern University. Your information will be confidential. That is, your name or personal information will neither be collected, nor reported with your study responses.

Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the PI whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-5465.

Because the participants may be influenced by knowing the primary focus of the study ahead of time in a way that can reduce the accuracy of responses, the purpose of the study will be explained only after you complete the study. You will receive a complete explanation of the purpose of this study following your participation.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please click on the corresponding button and begin the study.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H19149.

Title of Project: Moral and Ethical Decision Making
Principal Investigator: Bridget Lashbaugh-Barney, bl02926@georgiasouthern.edu
Advisor/Co-Investigator: Dr. Dorthie Cross, dcrossmokdad@georgiasouthern.edu

- ❍ I have read the informed consent and wish to participate in this study.
- ❍ I have read the informed consent and I do NOT wish to participate in this study.
- ❍ I have NOT read the informed consent and I do NOT wish to participate in this study.

APPENDIX H

Study Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this research study on moral and ethical decision making. You were asked to complete questionnaires that assessed these areas of inquiry. The primary purpose of this study was to further our understanding the role of gender, age, and rural status of child victims has in perceptions of child sexual abuse reporting. The PI is unable to give you specific information regarding your responses due to confidentiality (that is, your data is not readily identifiable by name); however, if you find that you are uncomfortable with your data being used for whatever reason, please contact the PI, as it is your right to have data withdrawn from the for whatever reason, without penalty.

Furthermore, if you found yourself experiencing distress following the completion of this study, it strongly recommended that you seek assistance by contacting the United States National Suicide and Crisis Hotlines at 1-800-784-2433 or 1-800-273-8255 or from another facility within your community for further assessment. Thank you again for your participation. Please contact the Primary Investigator, Bridget J. Lashbaugh-Barney, bl02926@georgiasouthern.edu, Doctoral Candidate should you have any questions or concerns.

APPENDIX I

Study Flow Chart