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Jessica Lunsford's father awoke on February 24, 2005 to discover his nine-year-old daughter was missing. John Couey, Jessica's neighbor, had entered their home at 1:00 AM the previous night and abducted the little girl. After sexually assaulting her, he dug a hole and buried her alive. A forty-nine-year-old homeless man, Brian Mitchell, abducted fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Smart at knifepoint from her bedroom in an affluent district of Salt Lake City. She was found after nine months of sexual abuse, deprivation, and threats to her life. The scruffy drifter was arrested and awaits trial.

In recent months, newscasters have brought the images of these unshaven, dirty predators and their fair, sweet victims into our households. Now imagine that these predators are attractive young women in business suits and heels and their victims are rowdy little boys in baggy clothes. Impossible? Perhaps most people think so. Why is it that we envision the prototypical child molester as one of the men represented above? Why is that we envision the prototypical sexual abuse victim as a fragile little girl?

Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is a heinous act endured by 100,000 to 500,000 children in the United States every year (Maes & Baum, 2001). Child sexual abuse is defined as any act on an individual 18 years or younger by an adult that includes, but is not limited to, attempted and or completed intercourse, inappropriate touching or kissing, photographing a child sexually, or by exhibiting sexual body parts to a child (Fieldman & Crespi, 2002). The prevalence of cases of child sexual abuse varies to some degree because individuals define sexual abuse differently. Consequently, some instances of child sexual abuse may not be identified because the victims did not consider the behaviors perpetrated upon them to be abusive and interviewers' questions were not specific enough (e.g., about a behavior) to eliminate interpretation (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1990).

Child sexual abuse has many consequences for those children involved. One of the most common consequences is posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) including symptoms such as hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, flashbacks, and restricted affect (Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993). In addition to symptoms of PTSD, children show withdrawn behavior, self-injurious behavior, and age inappropriate sexual knowledge and behavior (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993). These consequences are more prevalent in some age groups than in other age groups. PTSD is the most common consequence for pre-school age children. Fear, nightmares, and school issues are the most common consequences for school age children. Depression and suicidal or self-injurious behavior are the most common consequences for adolescents (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993). More severe forms of sexual abuse, such as incidents that include penetration, tend to be extremely damaging to a child and extremely likely to be associated with psychopathology (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993).

Severity of child sexual victimization is defined by three primary characteristics (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993). First, instances in which a child is penetrated vaginally or anally are considered more severe than are instances in which there is no penetration. Second, instances in which the perpetrator is psychologically and socially close to a child are more severe than are instances in which the perpetrator is not psychologically and socially close to a child. Third, instances in which force or threat of force is used are more severe than are instances in which force or threat of force is absent. Consequently, the severity of child sexual victimization may range from least severe (e.g., a child is coerced into letting an adult neighbor see her naked) to most severe (e.g., a child is forcibly sodomized by his step-father who threatens to kill him if he tells anyone). Victims of longer durations of sexual abuse also tend to have more consequences (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993).

In addition to the previously mentioned psychopathology, victims of child sexual abuse are more likely to become perpetrators of child sexual abuse than are individuals with no history of child sexual victimization. Wilcox, Richards and O'Keeffe (2004), for example, noted that 72% of sexually aggressive pre-teenage children had themselves been sexually abused. Researchers have found that 75% of females who are sexually abusive were sexually abused as children (Wilcox et al., 2004). Researchers have also found that 40% of males who are sexually abusive were sexually abused as children (Wilcox et al., 2004). Perpetrators who sexually victimize children are more likely to have been abused themselves than are perpetrators who sexually victimize adults (Wilcox et al., 2004). Transmission of sexually abusive behavior from one generation to the next is not, however, an inevitable consequence of being sexually abused (Cicchetti & Rizley, 1981).

There are many misconceptions about who perpetrates child sexual abuse. One general belief is that males are nearly always perpetrators (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). A belief that males will most often perpetrate may result in a lack of response from outsiders when a female perpetrates (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). Another general belief is that victims are nearly always girls. A belief that girls will most often be victims may result in a lack of response from outsiders when a boy is victimized (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). College students, for example, tend to believe that when a male child and female adult interact sexually, the interaction is not child abuse (Denov, 2003; Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). College students reported that they believed that a male child is not scarred by a sexual encounter with a female adult (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). In general, college students rated same sex sexual interactions to be sexual abuse more than they rated opposite-sex sexual interactions to be sexual abuse (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997).

Individuals also tend to believe that females do not possess the potential to be sexually aggressive (Denov, 2003). Clinicians perpetuate this belief when they report female sexual aggression as rare (Denov, 2003). In fact, it is written in several state laws that a female cannot commit an act of rape (Denov, 2003). Idaho's statute on rape, for example, reads "rape is defined as the penetration, however slight, of the oral, anal or vaginal opening with the perpetrator's penis …" (Denov, 2003, p. 309). Given that a woman does not have a penis, it is virtually impossible for a woman to be charged with rape even if she has sex forcibly or if she penetrates her victim's orifices with an object. As a result of these beliefs and laws, victims are fearful of reporting sexual abuse perpetrated by a female because victims feel that they are less likely to be believed or protected (Denov, 2003).

Although perpetrators may be male or female, perpetrators do tend to differ in terms of their relationship to a victim. Individuals known to a victim (e.g., biological relatives, family friends, and adults living in the female victim's home) are most often perpetrators in cases where penetration takes place with a female victim

(Carlstedt, Forsman & Soderstrom, 2001; Finkelor et. al., 1990). Individuals unknown to a victim (e.g., a neighbor, a bus driver, and a total stranger) are most often perpetrators in cases where penetration takes place with a male victim (Caelstedt et al., 2001; Finkelor et al., 1990). The older a child is, the more likely it is for a perpetrator to be a stranger (Caelstedt et al., 2001).

Females play an important role as perpetrators. The general public often likes to deny that females are also perpetrators of child sexual abuse (Denov, 2003). In a study of 348 convicted male rapists, 106 of these men had been victims of child sexual trauma (Denov, 2003). Of these 106 inmates, 42% of them reported that their perpetrator had been female (Denov, 2003). In a study of male college students, Fritz, Stoll and Wagner (1981) found that 60% of the male students who reported being sexually abused as children reported that the perpetrator was a female. Taken together, these and other researchers suggest that females may account for approximately half of the perpetrators of sexual abuse against male victims.

There are misconceptions that individuals hold as well about children who are sexually abused. Individuals tend to deny that sex between an adult and an older child constitutes abuse. Child sexual abuse is often seen as less abusive when a victim is an adolescent than when a victim is a pre-pubescent child (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). Sex of the child also plays a role in whether a child or an adult is held responsible for the sexual encounter. Sexual interactions between a male child and a female perpetrator are seen as less abusive than are sexual interactions between a female child and a male perpetrator (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997).

Misconceptions about prevalence and harmfulness of child sex abuse may be related to the fact that perceptions of sexual abuse do not reflect the actual incidence of sexual abuse. Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis and Smith (1990) conducted a national survey collecting data on child sexual abuse. A random sampling was conducted through phone interviews in which individuals were asked about their views on and experiences with child sexual abuse. Of the 1,145 men and 1,481 women that were called, 16% of the men reported experiencing child sexual abuse and 27% of the women reported experiencing child sexual abuse. The average age that males reported being victims of child sexual abuse was 9.9 years old. The average age that females reported being victims of child sexual abuse was 9.6 years old. Twenty-two percent of the males and 23% of the females who had been abused reported having been abused before the age of 8 (Finkelor et al., 1990).

However, the actual incidence of sexual victimization of males may in fact be even higher than that reflected in court and medical records. Finkelhor et al. (1990) found that 42% of males who had been sexually abused had never previously disclosed this fact to anyone. The higher percentage of female victims than male victims may be due both to a higher rate of sexual abuse of females than males as well as the underreporting by male victims that reduces the prosecution of perpetrators against male children.

Clearly there are many disparities between the actual incidence of child sexual abuse and the perceived incidence of child sexual abuse. Additionally, perceptions of perpetrators and victims of child sexual abuse do not reflect the realities of these situations. The percentage of sexual molestation perpetrated by females is higher than that estimated by individuals, and the percentage of sexual molestation perpetrated against males is higher than that estimated by individuals. The consequences of under estimating cases in which females perpetrate and males are victimized lead to inequitable treatment of perpetrators and victims. Why then is it that individuals are unable or unwilling to acknowledge cases that involve female perpetrators and male victims? One reason may be people's reliance upon stereotypes.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping is an act of grouping people into categories based on characteristics such as sex, age, and race (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Inferences are then made about an individual group member based on preconceived notions of that group (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). Individuals categorize members of groups based on a number of different characteristics. Because perpetrators and victims of child sexual abuse may be either male or female, sex stereotyping may play a significant role in how perpetrators and victims of child sexual abuse are perceived. Males are, for example, typically perceived as more aggressive than are females (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). An individual holding this stereotype of males may assume that a male is more likely to victimize a child. This individual might then assume that a *male* teacher is guilty of having victimized a child when a child makes an accusation of having been molested by a teacher.

There is a natural need to place people into categories in the same way that people place other objects into categories such as knowing an object is a chair versus a car even if all cars and chairs don't look the same (Allport, 1957; See Fiske, 1998 for a review). Through the use of categorization, an individual can quickly determine the purpose of an object. Likewise, through categorization or stereotyping people, an individual can make quick judgments about these people.

Individuals are not born holding specific stereotypes. Instead individuals acquire stereotypes by one of two means. Individuals develop stereotypes from first hand experience or from secondhand knowledge acquired from other people (Thompson, Judd & Park, 2000). Receiving information about another person or group of people seems to have a stronger effect of creating a stereotype than experiencing an event first-hand. A person who hears an account secondhand often has a stronger reaction to a stereotype than a person who is recounting that experience. A person hearing the story does not have all of the facts from the experience, but is instead basing judgments on the exclusively negative information provided secondhand.

Thus a person hearing an account of an event is more likely to stereotype (Thompson et. al., 2000).

Stereotypes also have greater impact when they are believed by a majority of an in-group than when they are not believed by a majority of an in-group (Thompson et. al., 2000). An in-group is any group to which a person belongs. People are more likely to believe a stereotype when the stereotype comes from a person in their in-group (Thompson et. al., 2000).

One reason people perceive members of a group as possessing the same characteristic may be due to the out-group homogeneity effect (See Fiske, 1998 for a review). In contrast to an in-group, an out-group is any group to which a person does not belong. Differences in characteristics of out-groups as compared with in-groups are magnified and are relied upon to place individuals into stereotyped categories (See Fiske, 1998 for a review). In-group members are seen as having diverse characteristics while out-group members are seen as having similar characteristics. This view of out-group members as similar in characteristics is known as the out-group homogeneity effect (Thompson et. al., 2000).

The ability to recognize one's own in-group can be very important to survival. By placing people in categories, individuals can rapidly decide whether another person is or is not a part of their in-group (See Fiske, 1998 for a review). Thus, categorizing people becomes an automatic process (See Fiske, 1998 for a review). When statements fit a participant's stereotype they can quickly make a judgment about the statements. The advantage then of using stereotypes is that stereotyping reduces mental workload (See Fiske, 1998 for a review). Stereotypes allow people to focus on other items in their surroundings without having to deliberate over the intentions, qualifications, or attitudes of other people who are present (See Fiske, 1998 for a review).

Stereotyping includes several different cognitive processes including information processing, memory, perceptions, judgments, and behaviors (see Fiske, 1998 for a review). Individuals utilize previously acquired information that has been assimilated into categories (e.g., sex, race, age) to make sense of newly acquired information (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). When exposed to a new person or object, individuals rely upon their established stereotypes or categories to make judgments about a new person or object (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Individuals might, for example, hold a stereotype of women as communal, nurturing, and kind. When individuals encounter a woman they have not met before, individuals may perceive and judge this woman's behavior to be communal, nurturing, and kind. Individuals are inclined to attend to, perceive, and categorize behaviors about a person that are consistent with their stereotypes (see Fiske, 1998 for a review).

Individuals relying upon stereotypes are inclined to attend to stereotype confirming information about a person and disregard stereotype disconfirming information about a person (See Fiske, 1998 for a review). People are then seen as more similar to a stereotype than they may in fact be because individuals fail to process individual differences (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Individuals, for example, may tend to focus on an individual woman's nurturing behavior because nurturing behavior is consistent with their stereotype of women as nurturing. Individuals also tend to disregard information that is inconsistent with their stereotype. Individuals, for example, may tend to ignore an individual woman's harsh behavior because harsh behavior is inconsistent with their stereotype of women as nurturing. By attending to stereotype consistent information and failing to process stereotype inconsistent information, individuals' stereotypes are reinforced. The nurturing stereotype of women, for example, may become increasingly enduring (See Fiske, 1998 for a review).

Individuals relying upon stereotypes are not only inclined to attend to stereotype consistent information more readily than stereotype inconsistent information, but they are also inclined to process stereotype consistent information more easily than stereotype inconsistent information. Individuals presented with stereotype inconsistent information need to utilize cognitive effort to make sense of that information. They may discount or somehow alter the meaning of stereotype inconsistent information (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Confronted with a man who is tearful, for example, an individual may discount the possibility that this man is crying (i.e., being emotional) and assume this man has something in his eye. By so doing, an individual has made stereotype inconsistent information (i.e., an emotional man) stereotype consistent (i.e., an injured man).

Just as individuals relying upon stereotypes are inclined to attend to and process information differently, individuals relying upon stereotypes may recall information differently (see Fiske, 1998 for a review). Individuals relying on stereotypes recall stereotype consistent information more easily than they recall stereotype inconsistent information (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Suppose, for example, individuals held a stereotype of soccer coaches as demanding, loud, aggressive, and insensitive. If these individuals witnessed the interactions between a soccer coach and his team they might recall instances in which a coach yelled at his players on the field and might fail to recall instances in which a coach was consoling a player. In other words, a coach yelling is consistent with stereotypes about soccer coaches and therefore is recalled. A coach consoling a player is inconsistent with stereotypes about soccer coaches and therefore is not recalled.

Individuals also rely upon stereotypes when making judgments about people (see Fiske, 1998 for a review). Because individuals relying upon stereotypes process and recall stereotype consistent rather than stereotype inconsistent information when faced with a new person, individuals will make

stereotypic judgments about a new person. Individuals, for example, when witnessing from afar a soccer coach consoling a female player may be more inclined to attribute this coach's behavior to inappropriate intimacy with the child (i.e., a stereotype consistent behavior) rather than to attempts to comfort the child (i.e., a stereotype inconsistent behavior).

Individuals also rely on stereotypes when determining how to behave with other people (see Fiske, 1998 for a review). Individuals relying upon stereotypes make judgments about out-group members that justify discriminatory behavior. People who are stereotyped are therefore frequently the targets of discrimination. Because individuals may stereotype an adolescent boy as obsessed with sex, for example, they may judge an adolescent boy who has been involved sexually with his teacher as being a willing participant rather than victimized by an adult. They may then justify their discriminatory behavior in failing to intervene or report this case of sexual abuse. By engaging in these prejudicial judgments and discriminatory behaviors, individuals are able to "dismiss, ignore, or otherwise detach themselves from the targets of these attitudes and actions" (Snyder & Miene, 1994, p. 47). In other words, prejudice and discrimination serve as detachment functions.

Stereotypes that are specific to this study of perceptions about sexual encounters between an adult and adolescent involve sex stereotypes. There are several stereotypes that are generally believed about males. Males are thought to be more agentic, competent, adventurous, and independent than are females (Deaux, 1995; Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). There are also several stereotypes about females. Females are thought to be more emotional, communal, nurturing, and sentimental than are males (Deaux, 1995; See Fiske, 1998 for a review). Additional stereotypes that exist about men and women are the perceptions that women are kind but not competent while men are seen as competent but perhaps not as kind (See Fiske, 1998 for a review). Both men and women are affected by these stereotypes in their everyday lives. Women who choose roles that do not fit stereotypical roles, such as being housewives or being employed in typically female jobs (e.g., nursing or teaching), are often viewed negatively (See Fiske, 1998 for a review). Men who choose roles that do not fit stereotypical roles, such as being the breadwinner or being an athlete, are also viewed negatively.

A person's sex stereotypes may affect views about perpetrators and victims of child sexual abuse. A belief that males are most often perpetrators and that girls are most often victims is one way a person's sex stereotypes may influence attitudes toward child sexual abuse (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). These stereotypes may result in a person placing less blame on a female perpetrator than on a male perpetrator. Similarly, these stereotypes may result in a person being less sympathetic toward a male victim than toward a female victim. There is also a strong stereotypical belief that females do not possess the potential to be sexually aggressive. This belief may result in a lack of prosecution of females who do commit acts of child sexual abuse because law officials believe females are unable to commit such acts (Denov 2003). Consequently, victims of a female perpetrator are less likely to report sexual abuse because they feel they will not be believed.

Not all individuals rely upon stereotypes to the same degree. Some individuals are more likely to process stereotype inconsistent information than are others. One characteristic that may influence reliance upon stereotypes is individual differences in the need for cognition.

Need for Cognition
Need for cognition is a person's tendency to participate in and enjoy effortful thought (see Cacioppo, Petty Feinstein & Jarvis, 1996 for a review). Individuals who are high in need for cognition tend to want to think longer about a problem (Good, Hepper, Hillenbrand-Gunn & Wang, 1995). They are inclined to

seek and critically evaluate information. Individuals high in need for cognition also tend to rely upon central cues (e.g., logic of a message) when evaluating information (Perlini & Hansen, 2001). Individuals who are low in need for cognition tend to want to think as little as possible (Good et al, 1995). They are not inclined to seek and critically evaluate information. Individuals low in need for cognition also tend to rely upon peripheral or superficial cues (e.g., attractiveness of a message source) when evaluating information (Perlini & Hansen, 2001).

Individuals high in need for cognition are more likely to pay attention to the logic and quality of an argument than are individuals low in need for cognition. Conversely, individuals low in need for cognition are more likely to pay attention to heuristic cues than are individuals high in need for cognition (e.g., Perlini & Hansen, 2001). Need for cognition, for example, is a strong indicator of whether males will or will not believe rape myths. Males who are low in need for cognition believe rape myths more often than males who are high in need for cognition (Good et al, 1995). Males low in need for cognition would attend to such heuristic cues as stereotypes of females as provocative instigators of rape. Males high in need for cognition would attend to such logical arguments as no woman deserves to be raped. This difference in attention may therefore contribute to why males low in need for cognition are more likely than males high in need for cognition to believe myths about rape.

Individuals' need for cognition propensity affects how group opinions will alter their attitudes as well (e.g., Areni, Ferrell, &Wilcox, 2000). Group opinions are often formed using non-complex arguments (Axsom, Yates & Chaiken, 1987). Since many group opinions are formed in this manner, group opinions are more appealing to an individual who is low in need for cognition than to an individual high in need for cognition. An individual who is low in need for cognition is therefore likely to be swayed by the majority opinion of a group. When group opinions are, however, derived through complex analysis of a situation, an individual high in need for

cognition may be swayed by the group opinion (Areni et al., 2000). Individuals who are high in need for cognition are more likely to look for a complex explanation than are individuals who are low in need for cognition (Areni et al., 2000). For example, an allegation of child sexual abuse is made about a young male teacher of fourth graders. In a PTA meeting a group of parents, relying upon their stereotype of males as sexually aggressive, wants to fire the teacher without investigating the allegations. Individuals in the PTA meeting who are low in need for cognition are likely to agree with this group decision that was arrived at by relying upon heuristics. Individuals high in need for cognition, however, are likely to disagree with this group decision and seek more information that they can analyze.

In addition to the complexity of an argument, individuals differing in need for cognition are affected differently by the quality of an argument (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Individuals high in need for cognition tend to enjoy thinking about and analyzing an argument. They therefore would be influenced by the quality of an argument. Individuals low in need for cognition tend to avoid thinking about and analyzing an argument. They therefore would not be influenced by the quality of an argument. In fact, researchers have consistently found a relationship between need for cognition and argument quality such that individuals high in need for cognition are more affected by the quality of a persuasive argument than are individuals low in need for cognition (see Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis 1996 for review). Individuals low in need for cognition use less cognitive energy when considering the merits of a recommendation than do individuals high in need for cognition (Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986). Individuals low in need for cognition are therefore more likely to rely upon stereotypes when considering the merits of a recommendation. Recall the previous example of the male teacher

accused of child sexual abuse. Suppose that the child accusing this teacher has given contradictory information that can easily be refuted. Individuals low in need for cognition are more likely than individuals high in need for cognition to be persuaded by the discredited argument because it fits their stereotypes that a male is sexually aggressive. Individuals high in need for cognition are less likely than individuals low in need for cognition to be persuaded by the discredited argument because they will have enjoyed analyzing the argument.

In addition to being influenced differently by the quality of an argument, individuals high and low in need for cognition are influenced differently by the source of an argument (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Individuals low in need for cognition are more likely than are individuals high in need for cognition to rely on news sources that require little cognitive effort to process. Individuals low in need for cognition, having heard a new law has been passed requiring a background check for virtually every person who enters a school, may watch a television news cast to find out about the purpose of the law. They would find out the law was enacted in order for school officials to make certain no construction workers or other individuals working in proximity to the students has a criminal history. The individuals low in need for cognition might approve of the law given the reported purpose of the law. Individuals high in need for cognition, having heard a new law has been passed requiring a background check for virtually every person who enters a school, may look for news magazines and newspapers to read about the purpose of the law. They would find out the law was enacted in order for school official to make certain no construction workers or other individuals working in proximity to the students has a criminal history. But they might also analyze other factors such as the cost of the required background checks, the limited access to schools for parents who may not have had a background check, the difficulty in enforcing the law. Individuals high in need for cognition might disapprove of the law because, having analyzed the impact of the law, they might find it impractical.

Individuals low in need for cognition are more likely than individuals high in need for cognition to rely on peripheral cues such as trustworthiness, attractiveness, or expertise of the source of an argument (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981; Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995). When an individual is presented with a trustworthy source, that source is more likely to be believed. Specifically people low in need for cognition are more likely to believe an honest, trustworthy source than an untrustworthy source. Knowing that a source is trustworthy allows a low in need for cognition individual to believe an argument without evaluating the quality of an argument and relying solely on the trustworthiness of that source thereby expending minimal cognitive energy (e.g., Petty, Haugtvedt & Smith, 1995). When a principal, for example, assures parents that a teacher accused of child sexual abuse is not a threat to students, individuals low in need for cognition may be convinced that a teacher is not a threat simply because individuals low in need for cognition would think that the principle is trustworthy and therefore believable.

Individuals low in need for cognition are also more likely to rely on extrinsic persuasion cues than are individuals high in need for cognition (Axsom, et. al, 1987). Reliance on extrinsic cues by individuals low in need for cognition may be because extrinsic persuasion cues require minimal cognitive processing. In the domain of child sexual abuse, an individual low in need for cognition is likely to accept extrinsic persuasion cues to evaluate what is acceptable behavior (Axsom et al., 1987). Some of these extrinsic cues may come from cultural stereotypes. Males, for example, are stereotypically viewed as pursuers of females in sexual relationships. Females are stereotypically viewed as the object of males' pursuits in sexual relationships. By using cultural stereotypes, an individual low in need for cognition may

conclude that males are more sexually aggressive than are females.

Individuals low in need for cognition tend to be disengaged from issues that do not directly affect them. Individuals high in need for cognition tend to be involved in issues that do not directly affect them (Thompson & Zanna, 1995). Consequently, individuals low in need for cognition are particularly likely to rely on peripheral cues when an issue being considered is unrelated to them. In contrast, individuals high in the need for cognition are likely to focus on central cues when an issue being considered is unrelated to them (Thompson & Zanna, 1995). It would be expected then that individuals high in need for cognition would be more personally involved in a social issue such as child sexual abuse than would individuals low in need for cognition.

People differ in how they engage in problem solving based on their need for cognition (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Individuals high in need for cognition enjoy tasks that require them to think and to problem solve. Individuals low in need for cognition prefer tasks that do not require them to think and to problem solve. Individuals high in need for cognition also prefer complex rules and tend to avoid activities that do not have complex rules. Individuals low in need for cognition prefer simple rules and tend to avoid activities that do not have simple rules (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Individuals high in need for cognition also tend to engage in personal problem solving more often than do individuals low in need for cognition (Cacioppo et. al, 1986). Individuals high in need for cognition are therefore more likely than individuals low in need for cognition to consider how they can address such complex social issues as child sexual abuse even when this issue does not directly affect them.

If individuals high in need for cognition are engaged in issues, prefer complex information, consider central cues, critically analyze information, and in general expend substantial cognitive effort, it is likely that they also generate a significant number of thoughts (Cacioppo et al., 1996). If individuals low in need for cognition are disengaged in issues,

prefer simple information, consider peripheral cues, avoid analyzing information, and in general expend minimal cognitive effort, it is likely that they also generate a minimal number of thoughts (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Individuals high in need for cognition tend to generate more thoughts as well as more task-relevant thoughts after controlling for task-irrelevant thoughts than do individuals low in need for cognition (e.g., Lassiter, Briggs, & Slaw, 1991; Verplanken, 1993). It is likely then that individuals high in need for cognition would generate more thoughts than would individuals low in need for cognition when considering how to manage a case of suspected child sexual abuse.

If individuals high in need for cognition invest considerable cognitive effort in processing and analyzing information, then individuals high in need for cognition would also be expected to recall more information than would individuals low in need for cognition. In contrast, if individuals low in need for cognition invest minimal cognitive effort in processing and analyzing information, then individuals low in need for cognition would be expected to recall less information than would individuals high in need for cognition. In a meta-analysis, Cacioppo, Petty, and colleagues determined that individuals high in need for cognition did in fact recall more of the information to which they had been exposed than did individuals low in need for cognition (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Individuals high in need for cognition in contrast to individuals low in need for cognition would therefore be expected to recall more information about an incident of child sexual abuse.

If individuals high in need for cognition expend substantial cognitive energy processing and analyzing information and they are also able to recall a significant amount of this information, it stands to reason that individuals high in need for cognition would have an extensive knowledge base. If individuals low in need for cognition expend minimal cognitive

energy processing and analyzing information and they are also able to recall a sparse amount of this information, it stands to reason that individuals low in need for cognition would have a small knowledge base. When it comes to politics, individuals high in need for cognition were more knowledgeable about presidential candidates (Cacioppo et al., 1986), more knowledgeable about consequences of electing specific candidates (Ahlering, 1987), and more knowledgeable about reasons for supporting specific candidates (Condra, 1992) than were individuals low in need for cognition. Wolfe and Grosch (1990) also found that individuals high in need for cognition were better able to perform on a trivia quiz than were individuals low in need for cognition. It stands to reason then that individuals high in need for cognition will be more knowledgeable than individuals low in need for cognition about other issues such as child sexual abuse.

Given that individuals high in need for cognition expend substantial cognitive effort processing and analyzing information, rely on central cues, and tend to have a broad knowledge base about many issues, it is reasonable to expect that individuals high in need for cognition will make judgments based on the recall and analysis of existing as well as new information. In contrast, given that individuals low in need for cognition expend minimal cognitive effort processing and analyzing information, rely upon peripheral cues, and tend to have a small knowledge base about many issues, it is reasonable to expect that individuals low in need for cognition will make judgments based on heuristics such as stereotypes. In fact, judgments by individuals high in need for cognition tend to be correlated with thoughts generated by these individuals. Judgments by individuals low in need for cognition tend to be uncorrelated with thoughts generated by these individuals (Haugtvedt, Petty & Cacioppo, 1992). When considering a social issue such as child sexual abuse, individuals high in need for cognition would be likely to have a broad knowledge base as well as a desire to analyze information when making judgments about a perpetrator, a victim, and an interaction. In contrast, individuals low in need

for cognition would be likely to have a small knowledge base as well as an aversion to analyzing information when making judgments about a perpetrator, a victim, and an interaction. In other words, individuals low in need for cognition would be more likely to rely upon stereotypes when making judgments about child sexual abuse than would individuals high in need for cognition.

Hypotheses

After reviewing the literature on child sexual abuse, stereotyping, and the need for cognition, several hypotheses were proposed. First, participants were expected to report more negative attitudes toward male perpetrators than female perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Second, participants were expected to report more negative attitudes toward male victims than female victims of child sexual abuse. Third, participants were expected to report less negative attitudes toward a sexual encounter between a female perpetrator and a male victim than toward sexual encounters between a male perpetrator and a male victim, a male perpetrator and a female victim, or a female perpetrator and a female victim. Finally, differences in attitudes toward perpetrators and victims of child sexual abuse were expected to be moderated by the participants' individual differences in need for cognition. In other words, participants low in need for cognition were expected to express more stereotypical attitudes about perpetrators and victims of child sexual abuse than were participants high in need for cognition.

Method

Participants

One hundred and seven participants were recruited to participate in an experiment titled Adult-Adolescent Sexual Encounters. Participants were recruited through the psychology department from undergraduate psychology classes. Participants voluntarily signed up to participate and were given a location and

time to appear. Participants were given an opportunity to receive extra credit in their courses for participating in this study. The only restriction on participants was that they must have been eighteen years old or older.

This sample of participants consisted of 69 female (64.5%) and 36 male (33.6%) participants. Participants came from a range of racial backgrounds including White/Caucasian (72.9%), Black/African American (13.1%), Hispanic/Latino (5.6%), Asian/Pacific Islander (2.8%), or other (3.7%). The majority of participants ranged in age from 18 to 24 years (73.8%). Approximately 76% of participants reported being single and never married. Approximately 81% reported having no children. Two participants failed to record any demographic information.

Of the 107 people who participated in this study, 107 completed the survey except for two individuals who did not provide demographic information. All participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. All participants were treated in accordance with the guidelines of Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (American Psychological Association, 2002).

Procedure

Participants completed this study in small groups of no more than ten individuals. Participants were informed of the purpose of this study as well as the possibility that they might find the topics of this study emotionally distressing. Participants were informed of alternative means of earning extra credit and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were assured of complete anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Participants' questions were answered to their satisfaction. Each participant signed a written informed consent form that was collected prior to distributing the surveys.

Participants were told that they would read a scenario depicting a sexual interaction between an adult and an adolescent and then respond to statements about their perceptions of this interaction and those people involved.

Participants were given one of four possible scenarios depicting a scene involving an eighth-grade adolescent (male or female) and a teacher (male or female) in which the adolescent was asked to perform and accept sexual acts. An example of a scenario involving a female victim and a female perpetrator is as follows:

Mary, an eighth grader in Ms. Jones class, stayed after school for help with her homework. Ms. Jones asked Mary to help stack some books in the closet. While moving the books, Mary and Ms. Jones began to talk. Ms. Jones told Mary that she thought Mary was very mature for her age. Ms. Jones said that she thought Mary was very attractive. The teacher placed her hand on Mary's leg and began rubbing Mary's body. Mary watched silently. Ms. Jones asked Mary to lie down on the floor, telling her she would enjoy this, that it would feel good. Mary did nothing. The teacher continued rubbing Mary's body and then slowly undressed her. When Mary was naked, the teacher began kissing Mary's body, starting with Mary's face and working her way down to Mary's thighs. Ms. Jones performed oral sex on Mary. Then the teacher sat up and put Mary's hand inside Ms. Jones' slacks and asked Mary to rub the teacher's body as the teacher had done to her. Then the teacher undressed and lay on top of Mary while she fondled Mary's buttocks. Ms. Jones brought Mary's face down to her crotch and asked Mary to perform oral sex on the teacher. Mary did as she was asked. Ms. Jones fondled Mary's genitals as she continued to caress Mary's body. Then Ms. Jones got up and brought Mary her clothes and asked her not to tell her parents what had happened. The teacher asked Mary that their relationship remain their secret.

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four versions of a scenario in

which the sex of the adult and the sex of the adolescent were manipulated: male adult/male adolescent, female adult/male adolescent, male adult/female adolescent, and female adult/female adolescent.

Using a 5-point scale, participants then responded to ten items from the semantic differential (e.g., good/bad) (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). Items were counterbalanced such that for some items the negative descriptor was on the right pole of the scale and at other times the negative descriptor was on the left pole of the scale. Scores for responses on items with the negative descriptor on the left were reverse scored so that higher scores on an item reflected more negative attitudes about the encounter. After reverse scoring, scores were summed and higher total scores reflected more negative attitudes than did lower total scores. In this sample, a Cronbach's α of .80 was obtained in this study for scores on items from the semantic differential scale.

After responding to statements about the scenario, participants were given the 18-item Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984). Participants responded to items in the scale with a 5-point Likert type scale: *strongly disagree, moderately disagree, uncertain/undecided, moderately agree or strongly agree*. Included in the scale were both negatively and positively worded statements. Agreement with positively worded items indicated a high need for cognition (e.g., "I would prefer complex to simple problems"). Disagreement with negatively worded items indicated a high need for cognition (e.g., "I prefer to think about small, daily projects to long-term ones").

Responses to statements where disagreement with these statements indicated a high need for cognition were reverse scored. Scores for responses on individual items were then summed and higher scores indicated a higher need for cognition and lower scores indicated a lower need for cognition. Participants' scores on the scale were dichotomized into high and low using a median split.

Using the 18-item Need for Cognition Scale, Berzonsky and Sullivan (1992) found a Cronbach's alpha of .91 for scores on this scale. Peltier and Schibrowsky (1994) found a Cronbach's alpha of .97 for scores on this scale. Other researchers have found Cronbach's alphas of .87 or higher for scores on this scale (e.g., Booth-Butterfeild & Booth-Butterfeild, 1990; Furlong, 1993; Kernis, Grannemann & Barclay, 1992). A Cronbach's alpha of .84 was found for scores on this scale in this study.

Positive correlations have been found between scores on the Need for Cognition Scale and scores on scales of other constructs of theoretical interest. There are positive correlations between scores on scales measuring individuals' need for cognition and individuals' high aptitude for college performance (e.g., Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) individuals' desire for new experiences that stimulate thinking (e.g., Pearson, 1970) and individuals' low apprehension regarding interpersonal communication (e.g., Wheeless, 1975). Correlations between scores on the Need for Cognition Scale and scores on these conceptually related scales are evidence of construct validity for the Need for Cognition Scale. Scores on the Need for Cognition are not correlated with scores on Bem Sex-Role Inventory (e.g., Waters & Zakrajsek, 1990), scores on the Need for Closure scale (e.g., Petty & Jarvis, 1996) and scores on the Need to Evaluate scale (e.g., Jarvis & Petty, 1996). The lack of correlation between scores on the Need for Cognition Scale and scores on these conceptually unrelated scales are evidence of discriminant validity for the Need for Cognition Scale.

A series of manipulation checks were included on the questionnaire to ascertain whether participants correctly recalled the sex of the victim (Mark or Mary) and the sex of the perpetrator (Mr. Jones or Mrs. Jones) in the scenario they were given. Participants were also asked a series of demographic questions (e.g., age, race, marital status) as well as whether or not they had any children. Participants were also asked questions about their own

experiences with child sexual abuse. Participants were asked three questions about their own sexual experiences before age 16 with any individual five or more years their senior (e.g., Another person, five or more years older than you, attempted oral sex, anal sex or vaginal intercourse.).

Participants placed their completed answer sheets in an envelope to ensure total anonymity. Envelopes were then placed in a box away from the researcher. Participants received a debriefing sheet that provided them with information about on campus and after hour counseling services in the event that material from this study resulted in emotional distress for the participants.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive Statistics. We performed a preliminary analysis of the data to obtain the mean, standard deviation, and range of scores for each of the measures (see Table 1). We evaluated scores on each of the measures for skewness and kurtosis. Scores on the Need for Cognition Scale had skewness and kurtosis coefficients near zero indicating that scores on this scale did not violate assumptions of normality (Marcoulides & Hershberger, 1997). Scores on the ad-hoc measure of attitudes toward child molestation had skewness coefficient of -2.44 and kurtosis coefficient of 8.11 indicating that the scores on this scale did violate assumptions of normality. For this ad-hoc measure, the minimum possible score was 10 and the maximum possible score was 50. Actual scores for the scale were a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 50. The possible range of scores was 40, while actual range of scores was 37.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for independent and dependent measures

Scale	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
Need for Cognition	60.94	9.80	-.14	.29
Semantic Differential	44.24	6.05	-2.44	8.11

Chi Square Analysis. We computed analyses for measures of Need for Cognition and sex of participant to determine if there was multicolinearity. Scores on the Need for Cognition scale were not significantly related to sex of participant, $\chi^2 < 1$, *p* not significant. Scores on the Need for Cognition Scale were not confounded with sex of the participant.

Manipulation Check. At the conclusion of the study, we asked participants to recall the sex of the adult and the sex of the adolescent in the scenario at the beginning of the study. If in fact the manipulation of sex of perpetrator and sex of victim was effective, we expected participants to recall the sex of the perpetrator and the sex of the victim correctly. Participants did in fact recall and record the sex of the perpetrator correctly

94% of the time and the sex of the victim correctly 94% of the time indicating that the manipulation of perpetrator and victim sex were effective.

Main Analysis

The predictor variable was need for cognition as measured by the Need for Cognition Scale (high vs. low). Other independent variables were sex of perpetrator (male vs. female) and sex of victim (male vs. female). This study was therefore a 2 (high vs. low need for cognition) x 2 sex of perpetrator (male vs. female) x 2 sex of victim (male vs. female) factorial design. The criterion (dependent) variable was attitudes toward child molestation as measured by the semantic differential scale. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical analyses.

Recall the first hypothesis. Participants would perceive male perpetrators more harshly than female perpetrators. That is, participants would express more negative attitudes about male perpetrators than female perpetrators. There was not, however, a main effect for sex of perpetrator on attitudes towards child sexual abuse, $F(1,106) = 1.49$, $p > .05$. Therefore, there was no support for the first hypothesis.

According to the second hypothesis, participants would perceive male victims more harshly than female victims. That is, participants would express more negative attitudes toward male victims than female victims. There was not, however, a main effect for sex of victim, $F(1,106) < 1.00$, $p > .05$. Therefore, there was no support for the second hypothesis.

In the third hypothesis, participants were predicted to view a sexual encounter between a female adult and a male adolescent less negatively than other dyads. There was an interaction of sex of perpetrator and sex of victim such that the encounter between the female perpetrator and male victim were viewed less negatively than were the other three dyads, $F(1,106) = 3.33$, $p < .07$ (see Table 2).

Therefore, there was support for the third hypothesis.

Table 2. *Attitudes Toward Sexual Interaction*

Perpetrator/Victim	M	SD
Female/Female	45.07	4.06
Female/Male	41.70	8.18
Male/Female	44.27	6.14
Male/Male	45.85	4.41

Finally, the effect of sex of perpetrator and sex of victim was expected to be influenced by participants' need for cognition. That is, individuals low in need for cognition were expected to report more negative attitudes towards male perpetrators than were individuals high in need for cognition. Individuals low in need for cognition were also expected to report more negative attitudes toward male victims than were individuals high in need for cognition. Additionally, individuals low in need for cognition were expected to report less negative attitudes toward a female adult and male adolescent sexual encounter than were individuals high in need for cognition.

There was a three way interaction between sex of perpetrator, sex of victim, and need for cognition of participant, $F(1,106) = 3.53$, $p < .06$ (see Figure 1). Participants low in need for cognition did not, however, express more negative attitudes overall about male perpetrators than did participants high in need for cognition. Participants low in need for cognition and participants high in need for cognition expressed nearly equal negative attitudes about male and female victims. Participants low in need for cognition did, however, express less negative attitudes about female perpetrators with male victims than did participants high in need for cognition.
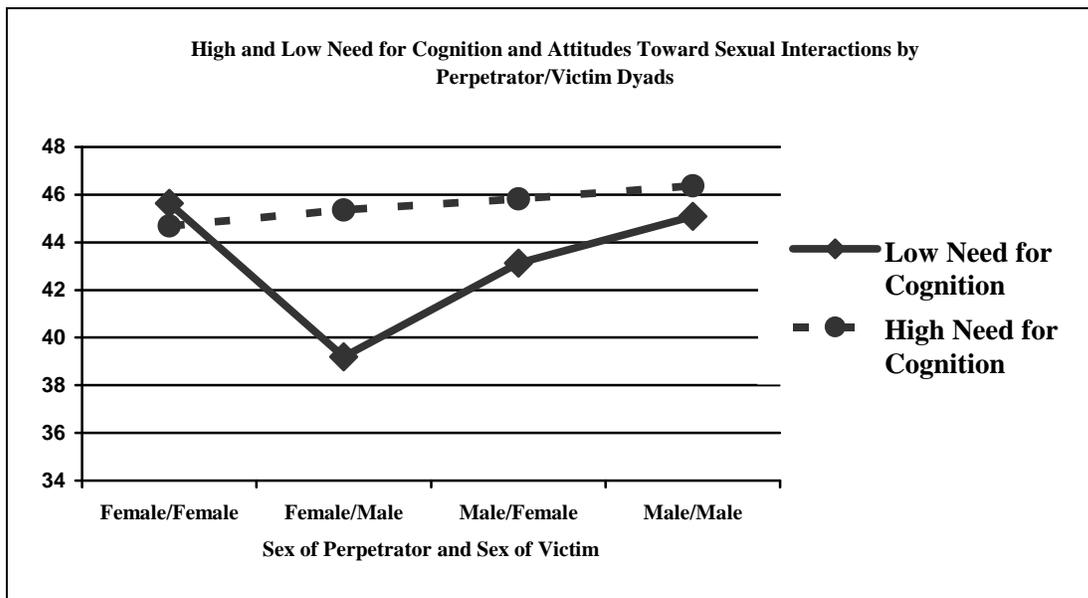
High and Low Need for Cognition and Attitudes Toward Sexual Interactions by Perpetrator/Victim Dyads

Figure 1. Mean attitude scores for high and low need for cognition participants as a function of perpetrator and victim dyads.

Discussion

In the first hypothesis, it was predicted that male perpetrators would be perceived more negatively than female perpetrators, this prediction was not supported. Males are stereotypically seen as more aggressive than are females. Crimes in which behaviors are stereotypical (e.g., males are more aggressive) are typically perceived as more likely to reoccur and more deserving of harsh punishment than are behaviors that are not stereotypical (Bodenhausen & Wyer, 1985). Due to the nature of the sexual encounter in this current study, participants may not have relied on this stereotype when assessing their attitudes towards child sexual abuse. Participants may view a sexual encounter as less of an aggressive act than they would view other types of assault. Participants may instead view a sexual assault as more of a consensual act than an act of aggression. If so, then participants would be less inclined to rely on their stereotypes of males as aggressive than if the encounter had been physical assault. In some previous studies, researchers have found attributions of responsibility for sexual molestation were not influenced by the sex of the perpetrator of sexual molestation (Maynard & Weiderman, 1997).

In the second hypothesis it was predicted that participants would perceive male victims more negatively than female victims. This hypothesis was also not supported. Previously, researchers have obtained mixed results for the effect of sex of victim on attitudes toward victims. Female victims have been stereotyped as provocative instigators of their victimization deserving of both sympathy and partial responsibility (Glaser, 1993; Howard, 1984). In contrast, male victims have been stereotyped as sexual aggressors in sexual encounters deserving more of responsibility than sympathy (Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss & Tanaka, 1991; Koss, Gidycz & Wisniewski, 1987). It is possible that some participants relied upon their stereotypes of males as aggressive and other participants relied upon their stereotypes of females as instigators. Consequently, the effect of the stereotypes may not have been apparent in this study because the two effects may have canceled one another out. In order to capture participants' reliance upon these opposing stereotypes, it would be helpful to have participants record their impressions of those victims.

The third hypothesis was supported in that sexual interactions between a female perpetrator and male victim were perceived less negatively than were sexual interactions between a male perpetrator and female or male victim as well as a female perpetrator and a female victim. In general, people tend to view a sexual interaction between a female adult and male adolescent as not being detrimental to that "victim" (Broussard, Wagner, & Kazelskis, 1991). An encounter between a female adult and a male adolescent is typically not viewed as abusive (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). The widely accepted attitude toward a female adult and male adolescent sexual interaction is consistent with cultural stereotypes in that early sexual behavior for males is condoned where as early sexual behavior for females is condemned (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991).

The fourth hypothesis received partial support in that low need for cognition participants' attitudes about the sexual interaction were influenced by the sex of perpetrator and sex of victim whereas high need for cognition participants' attitudes about the sexual interaction were not influenced by the sex of the perpetrator and the sex of the victim. Specifically, participants low in need for cognition viewed a sexual interaction between a female perpetrator and a male victim less negatively than they did sexual interactions between a male perpetrator and a male or a female victim as well as a sexual interaction between a female perpetrator and a female victim. In contrast, participants high in need for cognition viewed a sexual interaction between a female perpetrator and a male victim equally negatively as sexual interactions between a male perpetrator and a male or a female victim as well as a sexual interaction between a female perpetrator and a female victim.

Limitations

Although there was no support for the first two hypotheses, results of this study could have been influenced in part by the sample. Participants may have been different from the general population in that participants were from a sample of college students. Because of their desire to become educated, individuals attending college might be expected to be higher in need for cognition than individuals in the general population. College students involved in education must engage in cognitive endeavors in order to succeed. Consequently, a sample of college students may be higher in need for cognition than people in general. It is unlikely that differences in college student's need for cognition and general populations need for cognition, if they do exist, had an effect in this study because a median split was used to dichotomize those individuals' scores in need for cognition. Consequently, differences in need for cognition were relative to this sample.

The results of this study could also have been influenced by the effectiveness of the manipulations. Sex of the perpetrator was subtly manipulated by changing only the form of address (i.e., Mr. or Ms.) Perhaps participants did not comprehend that the adult in the scenario was a male (Mr. Jones) or a female (Ms. Jones). Sex of the victim was subtly manipulated by changing the name of the adolescent (i.e., Mark or Mary) Perhaps participants did not comprehend that the adolescent in the scenario was a male (Mark) or a female (Mary). This explanation is, however, also unlikely because 94% of the participants recalled and reported the sex of the perpetrator and the sex of the victim in the scenarios correctly.

Additionally, the results of the study could have been influenced by the measures employed. All of the measures used in the study were self-report instruments and were therefore subject to influences of social desirability. No identifying information was, however, recorded on any of the responses. Participants were assured of confidentiality (i.e., that no individual responses but only aggregate data would be reported). Participants, upon completing the surveys, inserted their responses into a plain brown envelope and deposited them in a box. It is therefore unlikely that participants felt they needed to answer in socially desirable ways because participants'

responses were anonymous and confidential.

The Need for Cognition scale has previously been shown to be a reliable and valid measure (see Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis 1996 for a review). In the current study, scores on the Need for Cognition scale appeared to be internally consistent as well. Consequently, it is unlikely that the way in which need for cognition was measured influenced the results of the study.

The ad hoc measure of the dependent variable included a scenario modeled after a scenario that had been employed in a previous study (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). Attempts were made to use a measure that already had been validated, but it was necessary to alter the scenario slightly to capture the information needed in this study. It is possible that the scenario did not depict a plausible sexual encounter between an adult and an adolescent. This is, however, unlikely because the responses to items about the scenario resulted in nearly a full range of scores.

The ad hoc measure of the dependent variable, consisting of ten items from the semantic differential scale, was created specifically for this study. Therefore, the measure used may not have been valid. Scores on the ad hoc measure of attitudes toward child molestation were, however, internally consistent. It is therefore unlikely that the way in which attitudes toward child sexual abuse was measured influenced the results of the study.

Future Directions

In the current study the sex of the perpetrator and the sex of the victim were manipulated. A number of other characteristics of perpetrators and victims as well as characteristics of their relationship may influence people's perceptions of sexual abuse. Maynard and Weiderman (1997) noted that individuals are more likely to blame a fifteen-year-old victim than a seven-year-old victim. Additional research exploring the impact of the age of the victim on attitudes would be valuable. Other characteristics such as race of perpetrators and victims, sexual orientation of perpetrators, and socio-economic status of

perpetrators and victims may also warrant investigation.

Characteristics of the relationship between perpetrators and victims may also be valuable topics for future research. Parents are most often perpetrators of child physical abuse (Gelles & Straus, 1988). Individuals may therefore believe that parents are most often the perpetrators of sexual abuse. Individuals' perceptions of child sexual abuse may also influenced by media attention focused on cases in which strangers have abducted and sexually assaulted children. It would therefore be important to examine the influence of the relationship between perpetrators and victims on people's perceptions of child sexual abuse.

Severity of the sexual abuse (e.g., use or threat of force, penetration) has been shown by other researchers to impact the victim (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993). Perhaps individuals would have different attitudes toward perpetrators and victims of severe sexual abuse versus victims of moderate or mild sexual abuse. Future research examining the influence of abuse severity on people's perceptions of victims and perpetrators may therefore be valuable.

In addition to the influences of characteristics of perpetrators and victims as well as situational factors, individual differences in perceivers may impact attitudes toward child sexual abuse. In this study, research was centered on the individual difference in participants' need for cognition. Differences in need for cognition did influence perceptions of child sexual abuse in this study. Other individual difference variables may also be related to participants' attitude towards child sexual abuse. Need for closure, for example, is a persons preference for order, predictability, and lack of ambiguity (Leone, Wallace & Modglin, 1999; Neuberg, Judice & West, 1997;Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals with a high need for closure desire stability and want knowledge to be consistent across situations and time (Webster& Kruglanski, 1994). A person

who is high in need for closure is likely to be "closed minded" (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). This closed mindedness may be related to strong preconceived notions about what is and isn't child sexual abuse, which may in turn be related to individuals' attitudes towards child sexual abuse.

Recall the cases of Jessica Lunsford and Elizabeth Smart. Now in contrast consider the following cases. Mary Kay Letourneau, an attractive middle-aged woman, was arrested and convicted of second-degree child rape and sentenced to seven years in prison only to have that sentence suspended. She managed to have two children with her adolescent victim. Or consider the case of Debra LaFave, a middle school reading teacher and former model, who was charged with lewd and lascivious battery and lewd and lascivious exhibition after repeatedly having sex with a fourteen-year-old student. School representatives expressed concern that because LaFave is pretty, her young male student will not be seen as a victim (CBS News, 2005). Her defense attorneys plan to use an insanity defense and justify her behavior by portraying her as depressed and ill since her older sister's death a few years earlier (CBS News, 2003). It is hard to imagine that a case in which a middle-aged man had sex repeatedly with a child and bore two children with her would have resulted in a seven-year sentence. It is even harder to imagine a male schoolteacher having sex with his student would consider an insanity defense because of depression.

Whether because of the stereotypes people hold or because of individual differences that are related to the use of stereotypes, healthcare professionals, law enforcement officials, and other individuals charged with protecting children do not handle cases of child sexual abuse equitably (Ajdukovic, Petak, & Mrsic, 1993; Elliott, Tong, & Tan, 1997; Marshall & Locke, 1997). This inequitable treatment leads to a lack of protection for children who become victims of child sexual abuse. Understanding why people treat cases of child sexual abuse in inequitable manners may help to change societal norms that will help protect children from continuing to endure this heinous crime.

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