

Blank, C., Maimone, S., Nunes, K. L., Pham, A., Hermann, C. A., McPhail, I. V., Pettersen, C., Jung, S. Kostiuk, N. Sewell, R. (2015, October). Childhood sexual victimization and cognitions about the self, children, and sexual offending. In S. Maimone (Chair) *Exploring the link between childhood victimization and sexual offending*. Symposium to be conducted at the 34th Annual Research and Treatment Conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Montréal, Québec.

Childhood Sexual Victimization and Cognitions About Self, Children, and Sexual Offending

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Childhood Sexual Victimization (CSV)

- ▶ Abused-abuser hypothesis has received some preliminary support.
- ▶ Higher prevalence of CSV reported by sexual offenders against children relative to non-sexual offenders against children
 - ▶ (e.g., Cale, Leclerc, & Smallbone, 2014; Jespersen, Latumiere, & Seto, 2009).
- ▶ Causal?

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Childhood Sexual Victimization (CSV)

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graph LR; CSV[CSV] --> Cognitions[Cognitions?]; Cognitions --> Offending[Offending]
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As a first step towards understanding the link between CSV and sexual offending against children, it is helpful to identify cognitions that are associated with CSV

- ▶ Cognitions thought to be relevant to sexual offending against children.
 - ▶ Cognitions about *one's self*?
 - ▶ Cognitions about *children*?
 - ▶ Cognitions about *sexually offending*?

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Main Research Question

Is childhood sexual victimization related to cognitions thought to be relevant to sexual offending?

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The Current Study

- ▶ Study 1 (N = 17)
 - ▶ Beliefs regarding sexual offending against children
 - ▶ Evaluation of Sexual Offending against Children
- ▶ Study 2 (N = 28)
 - ▶ Low Self-Esteem
 - ▶ Evaluation of Sex Offenders
 - ▶ Identification with Child Molesters
- ▶ Study 3 (N = 19)
 - ▶ Emotional Congruence with Children
 - ▶ Identification with Children

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Study 1 Research Questions

Is childhood sexual victimization related to beliefs regarding sexual offending against children?

Is childhood sexual victimization related to evaluation of sexual offending against children?

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Study 1 Methods

- ▶ **Participants**
 - ▶ 17 adult male sexual offenders against children ($M = 42.68$ years, $SD = 9.05$)
 - ▶ 10 self-reported CSV; 7 self-reported No CSV
 - ▶ Offenders recruited from forensic and correctional institutions

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Beliefs regarding Sex with Children

- ▶ **Sex With Children scale (SWCH; Mann, Webster, Wakeling, & Marshall, 2007)**
 - ▶ **Factor 1 (Harmless Sex with Children)**
 - ▶ 11 items; *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5)
 - ▶ “Many children benefit from having sex with an adult.”
 - ▶ **Factor 2 (Provocative Sex with Children)**
 - ▶ 7 items; *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5)
 - ▶ “Children enjoy sexual attention from adults.”

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Evaluation of Sexual Offending

- ▶ **Evaluation of Sex with Boys Under 12 Semantic Differential (SD; e.g., Sewell, Hermann, Nunes, & McPhail, 2010).**
 - ▶ 7 items; *more negative* (1) to *more positive* (7)
 - ▶ “Having sex with boys under 12 is...”
- ▶ **Evaluation of Sex with Girls Under 12 Semantic Differential (SD; e.g., Sewell et al., 2010)**
 - ▶ 7 items; *more negative* (1) to *more positive* (7)
 - ▶ “Having sex with girls under 12 is...”

Negative 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Positive

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Beliefs regarding Sex with Children

Factor	CSV	No CSV	d
Harmless Sex with Children (Factor 1)	~14.5	~16.0	-0.28
Provocative Sex with Children (Factor 2)	~9.5	~8.8	0.17

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Evaluation of Sexual Offending

Category	CSV	No CSV	d
Sex with Boys under 12	~1.5	~1.0	0.65
Sex with Girls under 12	~1.3	~0.9	0.55

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Study 2 Research Questions

- ▶ *Is childhood sexual victimization related to self-esteem?*
- ▶ *Is childhood sexual victimization related to evaluation of sex offenders?*
- ▶ *Is childhood sexual victimization related to identification as a child molester?*

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Study 2 Methods

- ▶ **Participants**
 - ▶ 28 adult male sexual offenders against children ($M = 41.30$ years, $SD = 11.44$)
 - ▶ 13 with CSV; 15 with No CSV
 - ▶ According to file information
 - ▶ Offenders recruited from provincial and federal prisons, and outpatient services

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Self-Esteem

- ▶ **Self-Esteem Semantic Differential (SD; e.g., Pettersen, Kostiuk, Atlas, Grenon, Jung, & Nunes, 2013).**
 - ▶ 5 items; more negative (1) to more positive (7)
 - ▶ "I am..."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Negative						Positive
Unlikeable						Likeable
Unpleasant						Pleasant
Bad						Good
Unlovable						Lovable

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Self-Esteem

- ▶ **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965)**
 - ▶ 10 items; very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (9)
 - ▶ "I feel that I have a number of good qualities."
- ▶ **Short Self-Esteem Scale (SSES; Thornton, 1989)**
 - ▶ 8 items; Yes/ No
 - ▶ "Do you like the sort of person you are?"

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Evaluation of Sex Offenders

- ▶ **Evaluation of Sex Offenders Semantic Differential (SD; e.g., Hermann, Maimone, Atlas, Kostiuk, Jung, & Nunes, 2013).**
 - ▶ 5 items; more negative (1) to more positive (7)
 - ▶ "Sex offenders are..."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Negative						Positive
Unlikeable						Likeable
Unpleasant						Pleasant
Bad						Good
Unlovable						Lovable

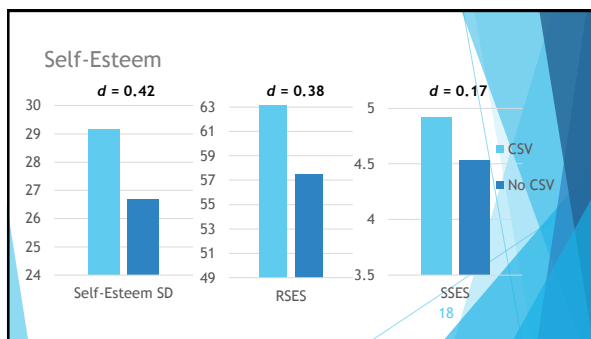
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Identification with Child Molesters

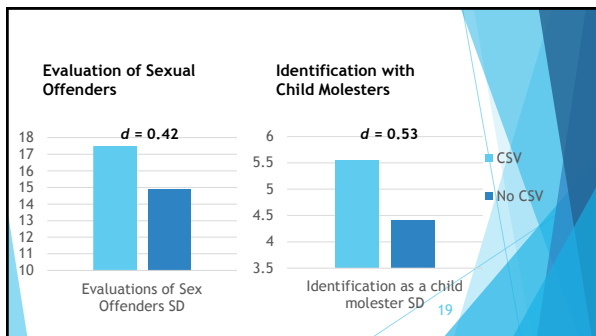
- ▶ **Identification as a Child Molester Semantic Differential (SD; e.g., Nunes, Hermann, Maimone, Woods, Pettersen, Kostiuk, & Jung, 2013)**
 - ▶ 1 item; Not a child molester (1) to A child molester (7)
 - ▶ "I am..."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not a child molester						A child molester

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Study 3 Research Questions

Is childhood sexual victimization related to emotional congruence with children?

Is childhood sexual victimization related to identification with children?

Study 3 Methods

- ▶ **Participants**
 - ▶ 19 adult male sexual offenders against children ($M = 43.26$ years, $SD = 10.34$)
 - ▶ 10 self-reported CSV; 9 self-reported No CSV
 - ▶ Offenders recruited from forensic and correctional institutions.

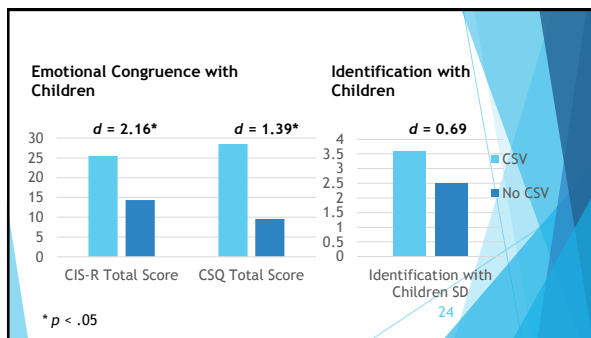
Emotional Congruence with Children (ECWC)

- ▶ **Child Identification Scale- Revised (CIS-R; Wilson, 1999)**
 - ▶ 40 items; True or False
 - ▶ "I feel closer to children than to adults."
- ▶ **Emotional Congruence with Children scale of the Children and Sex Questionnaire (CSQ; Beckett, 1987)**
 - ▶ 15 items; very untrue (1) to very true (5)
 - ▶ "I am better than most people at understanding children."

Identification with Children

- ▶ **Identification with Children Semantic Differential (SD; e.g., McPhail, 2010)**
 - ▶ 3 items; less ID with children (1) to more ID with children (7)
 - ▶ "I am..."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mature						Immature
Adult-like						Child-like
Manly						Boyish



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Summary

- ▶ CSV was moderately to strongly associated with
 - ▶ More Positive Evaluations of Sexual Offending against Children
 - ▶ More Identification as a Child Molester
 - ▶ More Emotional Congruence with Children
 - ▶ More Identification with Children

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Limitations

- ▶ Small sample sizes
 - ▶ Lack of power
- ▶ All variables were self-reported
 - ▶ But, antisocial cognitions may be accurately assessed using self-report measures (e.g., Mathie & Wakeling, 2011)
- ▶ Cross-sectional design
 - ▶ Unable to make causal inferences about the relationship

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Future Directions

- ▶ Replicate findings using more sophisticated research designs and a larger sample of offenders
 - ▶ (e.g., longitudinal research design)
- ▶ Examine whether these cognitions mediate the relationship between CSV and sexually offending against children.

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In conclusion...

- ▶ These results suggest that CSV is associated with many cognitions thought to be relevant to sexual offending against children.
- ▶ If there is a causal link between CSV and sexual offending, perhaps these cognitions may at least partly explain how CSV leads to sexual offending

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