Children's testimony:

Grooming, disclosure, memory and blame

Edited by
P.A. Granhag & L.A. Strömwall

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Proceedings of the First Joint Nordic PhD course in Legal and Investigative Psychology (2007)

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Contents

In June 2007, the *First Nordic PhD Course in Legal and Investigative Psychology* was held in Göteborg, Sweden. The course was organized by The Nordic Network for research on Psychology and Law (NNPL) and it was officially sponsored by NordForsk. In total, 8 PhD and Master students participated in the course (from all the Nordic countries and from Estonia)

One of the goals of the course was to draw attention to the dissemination of research results to practitioners and policy makers. Hence, as a part of the examination the students wrote an individual review paper on a self-selected topic within psychology and law. This volume contains these eight papers.

Interestingly, the majority of the papers can be placed under the heading *Children's testimony*. In the first paper, *Bryndís Björk Ásgeirsdóttir* (Iceland) writes on disclosure of sexual abuse, and asks the rather provocative question of whether such disclosure can be harmful for the child. In the second paper, *Gunn Astrid Baugerud* (Norway) discusses a number of memory related factors which affect the reliability of children's testimony, an issue at the heart of most investigations. In the third paper, *Louise Boye Søby* (Denmark) reveals the psychological mechanisms behind 'sexual abuse secrecy'. In the fourth paper, *Kristjan Kask* (Estonia) shows how children's person descriptions can be improved. In the fifth paper, *Sara Landström* (Sweden) contrasts children's in-court and out-of-court testimonies, both in terms of children's anxiety and jurors' perception. In the sixth paper, *Ida Majlund Mikkelsen* (Denmark) discusses a number of psychological aspects with respect to how potential perpetrators use grooming to approach their victims. In the seventh paper, *Emma Roos af Hjelmsäter* (Sweden) shows how witnesses' reports are sensitive to co-witness information, and in the final paper *Taija Stoat* (Finland) reviews different aspects of blame attribution within the context of legal psychology.

All in all, as editors we think that the papers in this volume are impressively high, both in terms of scientific quality and forensic relevance. We also believe that this collection of papers shows that junior researchers are able to inform practitioners and policy makers about pertinent psycho-legal issues, and perhaps should do this more often.

Is Disclosure of Sexual Abuse Harmful for the Children?

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There has been a great concern that intervention and child legal involvement following disclosure of sexual abuse might negatively impact the victims. New research in this area has indicated that legal involvement, in forms of multiple interviewing and testifying following disclosure, can have negative long-term effects on mental health of sexual abuse survivors (Quas, Goodman, Ghetti et al., 2005). Furthermore, child victims, interviewed after their experiences with this involvement, have called for support and trust by professionals to minimise the stress and negative effects that the intervention and legal involvement often brings about (Berliner & Conte, 1995).

In general, research has demonstrated that child sexual abuse is associated with a range of psychological and behavioural problems in childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Feerick & Snow, 2005; Kendall-Tackett, Williams & Finkelhor, 1993; Polusny & Follette, 1995). New theory and research, focusing on the impact of sexual abuse on the health and behaviour of victims, suggests that sexual abuse is a stressor consisting of a series of events that can adversely affect the child involved, including; sexual abuse events, abuse- and family related events, and disclosure-related events, such as reaction to disclosure and support, following disclosure. These events can each be stressful for the child and accumulatively add to the risk for mal-adaptive outcome (Kendall-Tackett, Williams & Finkelhor, 1993; Spaccarelli, 1994).

Accordingly, despite the fact that disclosure of sexual abuse is critical for intervention and forensic investigation of sexual abuse, research has indicated that disclosure can have either negative (i.e. stressful) or positive effects on the health and behaviour of the victims involved. Disclosure of sexual abuse is therefore not necessarily helpful for the well being of all children (Berliner & Conte, 1995; Jonzon & Lindblad, 2004; Ruggiero, et al., 2004; Sinclair & Gold, 1997) and research have indicated that different aspects and situations of disclosure can have exacerbating or ameliorating consequences (Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Paine & Hansen, 2002). For example, research has shown that purposeful disclosure is related to anxiety and difficulties in coping for child

sexual abuse survivors (Nagel, Putnam, Noll, & Trickett, 1997). Even more importantly negative reactions following disclosure have been associated with poorer adult psychological outcome (Roesler, 1994). Furthermore, being believed and getting support from at least one parent following disclosure seems to predict fewer symptoms where a more dysfunctional family situation predicts more problems (Elliott & Briere, 1994; Kendall-Tackett et al. 1993; Luster, & Small, 1997).

Additionally, disclosure of child sexual abuse often follows a long process of forensic investigation and intervention involving a variety of social systems. The key designated systems for this process are child protective services, law enforcement, and the criminal courts (Henry, 1997). This requires sexually abused children to participate in several system interventions simultaneously, each having its own demands and expectations (Henry, 1997). This process can take weeks, months, or even years, and can create many different sources of stress and anxiety among the children involved. Unfortunately, victimised children can be negatively affected by these stressful situations, causing the investigation and intervention to have exacerbating effects on psychological and behavioural problems among this vulnerable group. Research has indicated that among factors that can have negative effects on children involved in legal sexual abuse cases and interventions are; separation from their family, formality and unfamiliarity with the legal environment and procedures, shame, and stigma, and multiple interviewing and testifying (for a review see, Ghetti, Alexander & Goodman, 2002).

The aim of this paper is to specifically review studies focusing on short and long-term effects of interviewing and testifying among sexually abused children. Furthermore, research is reviewed that has investigated the role of support and trust from professionals and adults involved in this process.

Sexually Abused Children's Reaction to Interviewing

Children who are involved in forensic investigation and intervention following disclosure of sexual abuse are interviewed, for example by the child protective services and law enforcement agents. These interviews are very important for information purposes but can be difficult for the children involved, whereas they are demanded to go through and communicate very painful memories and events relating to the abusive experiences. Research has indicated that this

re-experiencing and communicating of the sexual abuse events in interviews can serve as an additional trauma for the children.

A research was conducted among ninety children and adolescents who had been involved with the juvenile or criminal courts in the USA, because of sexual abuse by adult household member (Henry, 1997). Data was gathered by interviews and through review of legal records from court files, legal proceedings, police reports, and social services sections. The results indicated that higher number of investigatory interviews the children went through in this process predicted higher trauma scores. Further, number of interviews was related to more trauma experiences. This was so, also when influences of other possibly influential factors such as, characteristics of the sexual abuse (severity), testifying and removal from home, had been controlled for. A great majority of the children in this research, or 84%, reported that the most difficult part of the process was to have to divulge details of the sexual abuse experience. Furthermore, 37% of the children stated that the initial interview was the most difficult part of the system intervention.

Calam et al. did a 2 years follow-up study in 1998 on emotional and behavioural disturbances in children who were currently under investigation due to suspected sexual abuse. Data was gathered from 144 children who were alleged or suspected to have been abused within a specific time period. The data gathering included a proforma with information on family related information and professional involvements, interviews with the child legal intervention et cetera. In the first assessment, a total of 101 children participated. Nine month follow-up consisted of a total of 91 children and in the two year follow up a total of 66 children participated. The results indicated that the number of interviews were only related to increased problems for girls in a nine months follow up, whereas those who were interviewed two to three times had more problems than those interviewed one or four times.

A recent and comprehensive study reported valuable information on the long-term outcomes of participating in criminal cases following child sexual abuse (Quas, Goodman, Ghetti, et al., 2005). This was a 12 years follow up study, following 174 children, who had been victims/witnesses in child sexual abuse cases in the 1980s and participated then in the study on short-term sequel of legal involvement. The results indicated that participants who experienced more interviews during their childhood legal case, 12 years later reported higher self-reported mental health problems. The authors conclude these results to be consistent with previous research whereas number of interviews seems to be an important

source of stress for children in child sexual abuse investigations. That in turn increases subsequent risk for mental health problems in the long run (Quas, Goodman, Ghetti, et al., 2005). In accordance with these results, Tedesco and Schnell (1987) found that self-reported distress was higher among sexually abused children who had been interviewed multiple times, and a research by Berliner and Conte (1995) indicated that more contacts with intervention professionals was associated with increased distress for the children.

Sexually Abused Children's Reaction to Testifying

The most studied legal event that might affect mental health of children victims and witnesses is testifying (Quas, Goodman, Ghetti, et al., 2005). Along with the possible traumatic experiences involved in communicating in public and to strangers, very painful memories and events relating to the abusive experiences, cross examinations and facing defendants, are among other possible stressful experiences that some children have to face when testifying.

In 1992, Goodman et al. conducted a study where they compared the behavioural adjustments among sexually abused children who testified in the criminal case, to those who were involved in the criminal case, but did not testify. The two groups were similar in respect to age and characteristics and severity of sexual abuse. The results indicated the strongest predictor of continued problems following their involvement in the legal case was testifying multiple times. As a follow up from this study, 12 years later, Quas, Goodman, Ghetti, et al., (2005) studied the long-term outcomes among this group of children that had participated in sexual abuse criminal case. Confirming prior results, testifying repeatedly, even approximately 12 years later, was still associated with poorer mental health, including more trauma–related symptoms and severe internalizing and externalizing symptoms. This was so even when other possibly influential factors had been controlled for, such as former psychological problems and other important sexual abuse and life stressors factors. Further, the effects of testifying on mental health showed to be interconnected with 1) severity of the abuse and with 2) severity of the sentence the perpetrator got. Testifying repeatedly had thus worse consequences if the abuse was more severe (involving intrafamily abuse or penetration) than if not. Additionally, poorer outcome was evident among individuals who testified repeatedly when the perpetrator received a heavy sentence and among individuals that did not testify when the perpetrator

received a light sentence. Best mental health outcome was among the group that did not testify against a perpetrator that was severely punished (Quas, Goodman, Ghetti, et al., 2005). These results indicating negative effects of multiple testifying in criminal proceedings on children involved in sexual abuse cases have been reported by others investigating self-reported stress (Tedesco & Schnell, 1987).

Furthermore, Berliner and Conte (1995) interviewed 82 children and their families about their disclosure experiences and the intervention process. The results indicated that testifying per se was not linked to distress, as reported on average 3.5 years later, but the interviews revealed that although some children said that testifying was anxiety provoking, some said it was not as bad as they had expected, and others expressed regret that they had not been able to testify. These results, regarding children's regrets of not testifying, are in accordance with the 12 year longitudinal study mentioned above, that indicated, that not testifying can in fact have negative effects on the mental health outcome for a subgroup of children (Quas, Goodman, Ghetti, et al., 2005).

In another study among intrafamily abuse victims only, 30 out of 90 participants testified during the legal intervention process (Henry, 1997). Among this small group trauma and testifying did not turn out to be interconnected but when the participants were asked about their opinions about its effects on them, 34% of those who testified still defined it as harmful. They reported that they felt either scared or felt as though they were on trial. The most frightening experience reported by the children was testifying in the presence of the perpetrator in the courtroom. This negative experience of confronting the perpetrator when testifying in court has been documented in other empirical research (Goodman et al., 1992). Despite common negative experiences, interestingly, 48% of the children described testifying as helpful and 59% of the children stated that testifying assisted them in building more trust in professionals.

The Importance of Support and Trust in the Process of Interviewing and Testifying

Research has indicated that there are ways to make these negative experiences of interviewing and testifying not as stressful for children. In a study among intrafamily abuse victims, results showed that having a trusted relationship with a legal professional predicted a reduced number of trauma symptoms (Henry, 1997).

Furthermore, approximately 96% of the children in the research stated that having a trusted person with them when testifying was helpful. The primary reasons given by the children for why trust occurred were a caring attitude by the professional that he or she was willing to listen to them, and that they had frequent contacts. These trusted persons were most of the time counselors, attorneys or social workers.

In another study focusing on the effects of disclosure and intervention among child sexual abuse victims, the children were interviewed and asked about their experiences regarding legal interviews, testimonies and their perceptions of the professionals involved (Berliner & Conte, 1995). The results indicated that many of the children stated that support and trust by professionals made their testifying easier. The children really appreciated when they were treated in a personal and caring fashion and they wanted to be reckoned as children facing very difficult situations instead of "just another case". Further, a common experience among the children was the importance of being treated respectfully. They generally wanted to be informed of the purpose and the processes, given credit for their abilities and not pressured or discounted. Thus, the results indicated that although the prospect of partici-pation in the criminal justice system or testifying can be anxiety evoking, with support, the children would prefer to participate. In accordance to these two studies mentioned above, results have indicated that lack of support from the children's mother increases distress when testifying (Goodman et al. 1992). Furthermore Sas (1993), in 3 years follow–up research after children's court involvement, reported that the most important predictor of better adjustment at follow-up was maternal support (in Quas, et al., 2005). Jointly, these results indicate that it is important for children to have a trusted and supportive relationship with their parents and professionals involved in the legal process.

Discussion

The aforementioned results suggest that interviewing and testifying multiple times can have negative psychological and behavioural effects on children involved in sexual abuse cases. This is particularly so for children who have experienced severe sexual abuse, including penetration or intrafamily abuse, since they are at greater risk for negative consequences of testifying. Luckily, not all sexually abused children that testify and are interviewed develop mental health problems following their legal involvement. Most

likely these children that are not significantly harmed testify and/or are interviewed only once. Additionally, children that have support during their involvement are more likely to show less trauma related symptoms. Furthermore, it is of notice that not testifying is not necessarily conductive to healing since children who do not testify can be at greater risk than those who testify once, particularly if the perpetrator received a light sentence.

These findings on the effects of interviewing and testifying following disclosure of child sexual abuse, suggest that circumstances of the investigation and intervention following disclosure may be an aspect of identifying and encouraging better outcome for this vulnerable group of children (Henry, 1997). These results therefore indicate ways to prevent some of the negative consequences reported in the literature. Since interviewing and testifying multiple times has in particular been linked to maladaptive outcome among children, it is important to try to limit interviews and testifying to one time only. In relations to this it has been suggested that videotaping and improving interviewing techniques can help to attain this goal, although it has its complications (for further readings see a review by Ghetti et al., 2002). Furthermore, there are reasons to take particular care, in limiting the number of interviews and testifying, when the children involved have been victims of severe sexual abuse and to prevent that the child needs to confront the perpetrator in the courtroom. Finally, it is encouraging when aiming at intervention, if support and trust of the professionals involved can diminish negative effects of testifying and interviewing on children involved in sexual abuse cases, as some research has indicated. As mentioned above, children have called for support and trust by professionals to minimise the stress and negative effects that the intervention and legal involvement often brings about. In particular, they described the importance of being listened to and given credit for their abilities (Berliner & Conte, 1995; Henry, 1997). Furthermore, they have reported that they wanted to be treated in a personal, caring and respectful fashion and to be informed about the processes they were involved in. These results should encourage professionals to ensure a supportive role for all children involved in such intervention and investigation processes following child sexual abuse. The supportive role of parents in this often long lasting, complicated and stressful process should also be emphasized and facilitated as possible and if not available, the supportive role of the professionals should be considered prioritized.

Despite some encouraging results discussed above, two points should be considered. First, some methodological limitation of many of the aforementioned studies are of relevance since some of them rely on retrospective self-reports only and all of them are based on quite small groups of children, especially the groups of children testifying. Thus, further research is needed to enhance our understanding in this area. In that regard, further research investigating the link between professional's support, court involvement and outcome among child witnesses would be beneficial. More knowledge is needed to gain better understanding of how support and trust by professionals can maximize its preventive effects. Second, empirical research investigating the effectiveness of interventional programmes designed and implemented to ameliorate or prevent consequences of interviewing and testifying among these children is limited. Some research has though indicated the benefit of such programs but other programs have yet to be evaluated (for further readings see a review by Whitcomb, 2003).

In conclusion, research has indicated that child legal involvement, in forms of multiple interviewing and testifying following disclosure of sexual abuse can have negative effects on their mental health. According to research, professionals involved in child sexual abuse intervention and legal involvement following disclosure, can take actions that should decrease the likelihood of trauma to the child victims involved. It should be emphasized to develop research based interventional programs and actions to be taken in cases of child sexual abuse investigations. Furthermore, it is of great importance that such interventions are evaluated to test for their effectiveness. The aim should be to find the best ways to support the children through their difficulties instead of adding to their aversive experiences.

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Are Children More or Less Reliable as Witnesses?

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Memory can be a troublemaker. Sometimes it produces false or illusory recall and recognition of episodes that never occurred. The consequences of our memory *failure* may be of great importance in forensic settings, where false memories are a serious topic of current interest.

Concerns about false memories, and the relative ease of creating such memories in adults, began in the United States in the1970s. In the last fifteen years, there has been an increased focus on children, and many of the same experiments that were performed with adults have been repeated with children. Several reversals of convictions have made researchers aware of their responsibilities in advising the courts. One example of such a reversal is the Kelly Michael case from the US in the 1980s. Kelly Michael worked in the Wee Care Nursery School and was convicted of sexual abuse. In her appeal, the court emphasized that the evidence of child witnesses seem too be infected by false memory reports. The reversal of her case received a lot of attention in the US, and generated interest in the area of children and false-memory research.

Several other examples exist. In Norway, the first large- scale sexual abuse court case, the Bjugn case from the 1990s, involved accusations of serious abuse against children, with a pre-school assistant in a kindergarten as the main suspect. Shortly after the investigation started, about 30 people were accused of sexual abuse. Stories that surfaced included ritual abuse, violence, rape and binding of the children. By the time the investigation was closed, the suspected adults were all acquitted. Subsequently, psychologists and others asked how this could have taken place. It appeared that one of the main reasons was poor interviewing practices; serious mistakes were made regarding the interrogation of the children. Research shows that children are capable of provide accurate memories about experienced events, but at the same time children are affected by the way they are being questioned and the quality of the communication between them and the interviewer. The outcome off the Bjugn case illustrates this, the expert witnesses concluded that the children were sexually abused but the court did not emphasize the testimonies. This case has contributed to both increased consciousness of children as witnesses and the way

children are questioned in Norway. Consequently, after the Bjugn case, a barrister in Norway managed to reverse convictions and release a number of convicts who have been in jail for the reason of sexual abuse of children.

Generally we tend to think that young children have less credibility as witnesses because they do not remember as well as adults and older children, and because they mix fantasy and real events. So are their testimonies less reliable? Should we, or should we not attach great importance to them?

These questions have been asked several times in forensic setting by police officers, lawyers, judges and others. Researchers have also been asking the same type of questions in studies the last two decades. After some years with research one have gained insights into the area of false memories and children and as it turns out, not believe in children as witnesses just because they are children is a serious under-evaluation of young children's capabilities. Recent research has contributed to an increased understanding of both the capabilities and the limitations of children's memory functions. This knowledge is crucial in the court system in cases, for instance in which a child may be the only witness to a crime.

Children's Memory

Psychologists have, until relatively recently, assumed that young children and infants lack the capacity to recall events. However, investigations using non-verbal tests analogues to testing older children by verbal reports have made clear that even young children by the age of one are able to recall events from the past. To prove this, researchers as Patricia Bauer and colleagues have used a technique with babies in whom they have employed imitation tasks. The researchers have used objects to produce an action or sequence of actions and the baby is then invited to imitate these actions either immediately, or after a delay. These experiments have shown that the infants are able to imitate such actions and have given evidence to infants as young as six months have capacity to recall.

Turning to studies of children's long-term memory for autobiographical events, memories of specific events that happened to oneself at a particular time and place, delays measured in weeks and years have shown that few children or adults have the ability to verbal recall anything they experienced before the age of 2 ½ in average. According to Bauer, investigations have shown that even 1-year-olds have long-term verbal memory for some events that

occurred several months in the past. This phenomenon which shows limited memory for early life events is called infantile amnesia and is explained by lack of neurological maturity and difference in cognitive processing in the encoding and storing of memories in young and older children. The lack of language abilities and understanding of events in infants, as well as shift in attention, is also thought to be important factors in explaining infantile amnesia. This seems to apply to traumatic as well as non-traumatic experiences.

It is demonstrated over the last two decades that older children in general remember more than younger children. For example, in a 1999 study by Quas and colleagues older children reported significantly more information from a painful medical procedure than younger children when interviewed about the event. The older children reported a larger amount, as well as more detailed information about the medical examination. The traditional view in false memory research has been that older children is less vulnerable to produce false memory-reports compared to younger children, and that it increase again later in life. Other memory researchers as Reyna claim that age differences in false memories will be highly dependent of what kind of memory task given to the children. What theoretical frame offered in the occurrence of false memories is probably important in the divergent views.

Children's memory, as in adult memory, consists of several systems and not one single unit, as we tend to speak about it in every day life. Memory researchers distinguish between explicit and implicit memory. The explicit memory system consists of our autobiographical memory, in which we store personal memories connected to time and place (such as recall of my confirmation, what I had for dinner last night). The other part of our explicit memory consists of general (semantic) knowledge in which we store facts for example the name of the capital of our country, knowing that a pigeon is a bird. Implicit memories on the other hand, refer to memories that are not openly accessible to recollection. Skills such as cycling or writing are examples of implicit memory, as well as conditioned behaviours like brushing teeth in the evening and taking a shower in the morning. These implicit memories are stored in the implicit memory system, and consist of thing we usually do without conscious thought. See Figure 1.
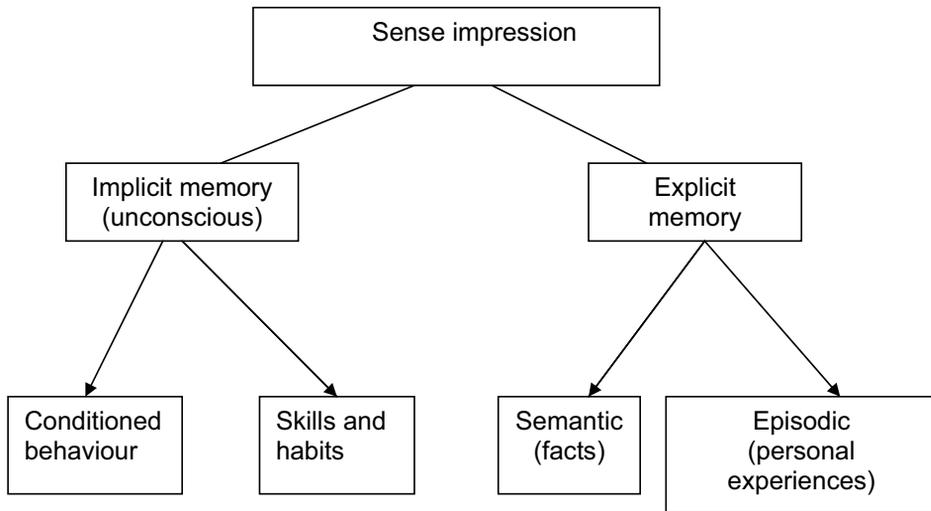
Figure 1. Simplified illustration of long-term memory systems.

Trauma, Distinctiveness and Memory Fallibility

In forensic psychology the focus is on witnesses episodic or autobiographical memory as the testimony is generally related to what the witness saw, heard and experienced in a specific situation. Researchers have, over the last years used real life events to investigate how children's autobiographical memory operates: how they remember traumatic events, such as natural disasters, painful medical procedures and injures treated in hospital emergency units. In fact, children who have been interviewed about real-life events that have been highly distressing for them, show surprisingly good memory for the central elements in the stressful experience, even years after the experience. For example Peterson and colleagues interviewed children in the age of 2- to 13- year-old after being treated in an emergency unit. Five years after their injury the children did not remember the details in their hospital stay, but they recalled very well the injury they had been treated for.

It seems that traumatic memories are more consistent over time than other memories, and that children generally remember emotionally negative events such as traumas, better than mundane, neutral or positive events. The reasons for this may be many, but factors as for instance distinctiveness, personal significance and neuro-biological mechanisms, such as changes in hormonal

regulation, are important. The way encoding, storage and retrieval of emotionally arousing events takes place is also crucial.

To try to give some answers to the questions of what impact traumatic events may have in memory functions and false memories, psychologists have for some years investigated the role of distinctiveness; the processing of something different from a context. A central idea here is that distinctive information, typical very different from the information we usually experience for example a car accident, reduces false memories. Results of laboratory research with adults have for some time supported the view that distinctiveness enhances autobiographical memory, and that remarkable and unique information is better retained over time-delays in memory. People tend to remember events that are personally important, are turning points in their lives or are distinctive when it comes to a persons' self, better than neutral events.

Traumatic events typically involve highly distinct information. Although the body of evidence suggests that distinctiveness is better recalled than more mundane events and thus suppresses false memories, it remains uncertain whether the same pattern exists when it comes to children and their memories.

However, experiments suggest that distinctive information may suppress false memories in children as well as adults. Ghetti and her colleagues conducted such a study in 2002. Children 5-and 7-year-old were presented with lists of words which was associated by meaning for instance; *sewing, sharp, point, thimble, pin, stack, hurt, pain*. When asked to recall these words, many participants reported the studied words but also the associated un-presented "lure word" *needle*. This experimental procedure named the Deese/Roediger/McDermott (DRM) procedure, was originally invented by Deese in 1959 and has been taken as important evidence of peoples' ability to create false memories and mentally re-experiencing events that never occurred. The children in Ghetti's study created false memories, but they were less likely to falsely recall the *lure* words when pictures were presented along with the words. This indicates that distinctive information may suppress false memories in children as well as adults.

Another well-known memory researcher, Mark Howe, claims that there is no generation effect in generating false memories in the DRM procedure. He claims that adults and children are using the same memory mechanisms, for example making an association between the list word *dog* and *bark* instead of sharing a categorical relation as *dog* and *rabbit*. In a study published in 2006, Howe used

a test procedure in which children 5 and 7-years- old were presented for pictures within the same category, such as "four-footed animal" (dog, cat, horse, cow), and DRM word lists (thread, pin, eye, sewing, sharp). The children recalled fewer false memories for the picture lists and these experiments demonstrate that distinctive information seems to be easier to encode and remember, than non distinctive information.

As these studies show, there are age differences in the ability to recall from the past and distinctive information seems to be better recalled in children than it does in adults; however several questions still remain unexplained when it comes to the impact of traumatic experiences on memory processing in children.

The False Memory Syndrome

False memories refer to circumstances in which we are convinced of definite memories of an event, which are not true. An example is the witness who claims she saw the defendant in a crime scene, when she in fact saw the defendant in another situation. It is difficult for us to become aware of false memories because we often experience false memories as being as lively and real as true memories, and with the same intensity of emotions as a real event. Experimental studies over the last decades have shown that we actually tend to rate our false memories with the same confidence as real memories. For example, in a 2004 study Dewhurst and Farrand presented different words from different categories (e.g., music, four-legged animals, furnitures) for a group of adults. Later the participants were instructed to categorize each recognized word as Remember, Know or Guess. Results showed that the false Remember responses were indistinguishable from the true Remember responses, showing the difficulty of differentiating between true recollections and false recollection of events. The Remember and Know distinction is often used in an attempt to determine whether recollections are based on episodic (conscious) or semantic (unconscious) memory. Generally when people give the Remember response in such an experiment, it is based on episodic memory and the Know response is based on semantic memory. This, and other comparable studies, shows that false memories are characteristic of our normal remembering, and underlines the difficulties we have with separating false from true.

One of the most well known experimental methods cognitive psychologists have used over the last decades when studying false memories is the DRM paradigm. This procedure, has been widely used when examining memory illusions. About 4 - 5 out of 10 recalls

the highly associated un-presented *lure* word as for example the word *doctor* when presented for words such as hospital, needle, nurse, bed, ill etc. Furthermore, in a second part of this procedure consisting of a recognition task, participants have to respond yes or no when presented with a list of both presented and un-presented words. Again, results show noteworthy high levels of false recognition of the critical non-studies items.

A huge problem in forensic psychology research is that in real life legal cases we do not have the precise knowledge of what happened, and the case is depending on a witness memory. This makes it difficult to know if a witness memory report is true or false, if not there are physical evidence to confirm what happened. To control for this uncertainty, Elisabeth Loftus and other memory researchers have developed procedures in which events and objects are presented to participants by having them observe live or filmed sequences of events. After this participants are interviewed about what they saw. Once again, significant evidence exists regarding incorporation of deliberate mis-information, which distorts an individual memory for actual objects and events. This is exemplified by a simple story told by Loftus. Chris was fourteen years old when he was supplied with four events that supposedly happened in his childhood involving his mother and older brother Jim. One of the events was false, and was about that Chris had got lost in a shopping mall when he was five years old. Jim helped to construct the event. Chris was instructed to write down what he remembered from the events. A few days later he started to reconstruct details from the false event, and after two weeks he had created a cohesive story about the untrue episode.

This idea that memories can be induced goes back to Loftus original studies from the 80 s that shows that eyewitnesses add false details to their experiences. In one of these studies eyewitnesses watched a video tape showing a car accident in which a pedestrian was injured by a red car (Datsun). The participants were then interviewed about the event. Half of them were given a leading question: "Did another car pass the Datsun while it stopped at the yield sign? Participants who had received the suggestive question could not discriminate the sign they saw (a stop sign) from the suggested yield sign, which shows the difficulty with separating what they saw and what was implemented in them. This experimental procedure has been widely used and shows that eyewitnesses add false details to their experiences, and are influenced by leading questions and suggestive statements. Loftus'

results and later findings have then been taken as *important* evidence for the ability to remember events that never happened.

False Memory in Children

When it comes to children, research has pointed out resemblances between children's and adult's memory functions, children as adults can selectively *forget* information when they are told to do so. Studies have investigated whether children are as suggestible as adults for misleading information and false memories, and research shows that children are, more than adults, able to inhibit false memories when instructed to do so. In a 2005 study of young children (5, 7, and 11 years) Mark Howe used the DRM procedure. He found that when children were given word lists for memorizing and afterwards given instructions to forget them, they did not produce false memories, unlike adults whose false recall increased with the same instructions.

Over the years, children have received more attention in false-memory research and researchers have been concerned about children's errors of commission that is, false memory reports. Additionally, children's errors of omission, i.e. true events not reported, are another subject which has resulted in quite a lot of questions concerning the accuracy of their memories.

One of the problems with young children's memory errors from a forensic perspective has been connected to suggestibility. This occurs, when an individual accepts and subsequently incorporates misinformation when recalling an event. For example, when exposed to suggestive interviewing procedures, children remembered abusive events despite the absence of any objective evidence. It is worth noting that psychological research has shown the existence of developmental differences in suggestibility, where the youngest pre-school children are more susceptible to misleading information than school children, who in turn are more susceptible than adolescents. In the study of Quas, dolls were used as cues when interviewing young children about a painful medical procedure. They managed to elicit more information from the children, but at the same time, false memory reports tend to increase.

Other findings is the relatively stability of false memories in children, Brainerd and colleagues have reported studies that show this pattern, in one of these studies 6- and 11- years- old children were tested on an immediate and delayed (1 week and 1month) memory test. The results showed a greater stability for false than for true memories, interesting the same pattern did not hold for the

adult data. Similar research has reported the same tendency of persistence of *spontaneous* false memories in children after delay, but not for *implanted* false memories, the latter do not seem to be that stable over time. Such knowledge seem very theoretical but is important to have for a court for instance in cases when a child show inconsistencies in his/hers testimony. Further, to know the consequences of suggestive interviewing practices and letting the court know the implications this may have for the witness's testimony is of great importance. Such knowledge may avoid serious doubt about a child's credibility and competency.

Age Variability and Fuzzy-trace Theory

Developmental variability is one of the factors that researchers have been investigating, and of major interest is whether or not young children are particularly prone to false memories. There is substantial evidence that children are at danger to create false reports; these indications come from young children's spontaneous story-telling, and from their recollection of real-life events. Additional indications come from different experiments in which children are asked to recall words and picture-lists. However, this evidence needs to be carefully analyzed due to possible differences in settings, procedures and the way false memories are measured.

In false memory research, the experimental DRM procedure has been used comprehensively with adults, but few have employed this test on children and the results vary when it comes to occurrence of false memories in young children. Brainerd and Reyna conducted a study in 2002, they found that false recall in 5 -and 7-years old children was very low less than 9% which is by far beneath adolescent and adult level. They infer that this is due to young children not being capable of *getting the gist*, or the meaning present in the DRM material. According to their *Fuzzy-trace theory,* a cognitive developmental theory of memory processes and decision making, people rely on two types of memory traces, gist and verbatim encoded for a memory experience.

The verbatim memory consists of the features of an event which is memorized; a mental picture of the event's surface qualities and contextual detail, for example remember the exact details around "drinking a coke" or "eating a hot dog". The gist memory on the other hand, consists of a person's understanding and meaning of the experience "drank a soft drink" or "had some warm food" and recalling that "I had have some food and drinks" overlap and affects the exact memories of it. According to Brainerd and Reyna, the false

memory reports depend on gist-memory abilities, which develop slowly and as a result, do not produce the same extent of false memory reports that older children and adults, whose gist-memory ability is improved.

Worth nothing a contrary result was reported by Ghetti and her colleagues in which children 5-and 7-years old evinced significantly more false memories than the older children, when given the DRM task. Ghetti and colleagues explain the variation in false memories as differences in procedure and list lengths. Exactly why the developmental trend in Ghetti and her colleagues study differs from the previous study, may be the result of different familiarity with the words in the age groups. It may be that the familiarity with the words was lower for the youngest children and in that way making it more difficult for them to make the same connections between the words and as a result they were at a lower risk for producing false memories. The explanation of difference in list length could not account for the inconsistencies, because in a study of ninety Norwegian schoolchildren aged 6 to 9 years old, the children were tested with the same DRM procedure and list-length as Ghetti and her colleagues used. This study showed, as Brainerd and Reyna's, that the youngest children evinced fewer false memories, and supports the Fuzzy Trace notion that younger children do not have the ability to connect the meaning across the words, see Figure 2. Although explanation of the result might be that the strength of the meaning between the words varied, some words eliciting more easily associations to a *lure* word than others and that these association were different for the age groups (Baugerud, 2006).
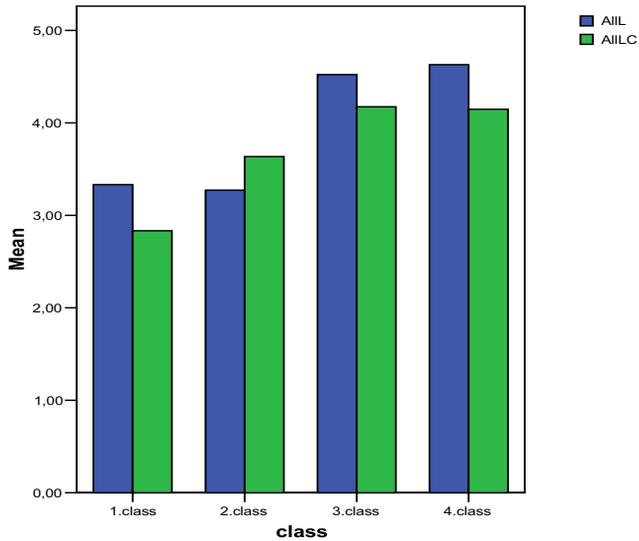
Figure 2. Mean values for increase in recognition of false words (i.e., critical lures of studied lists, and critical lures of non-studied lists) by class (6 to 9-years-olds). The data are findings from the DRM study of Norwegian school children.

The Truth about Children as Witnesses

Further understanding of children's memory development is highly valuable, as their position as witnesses often are not unavoidable. Statistical reports have pointed out that crimes against children are common, and in many circum-stances a child may be the only witness to a crime. When minor children are involved in a crime both Child Protective Services and Police are often drawn in to the court case and questions about the children's memory accuracy and suggestibility are often examined. In the legal arena examples such as the Kelly Michael case from the US and Bjugn case from Norway, have shown what may go wrong when suggestible procedures and poorly conducted interviews are used. This may in fact create false accusations and get innocent people in jail.

On the other hand, recent research conducted has shown that young children in fact are capable to report highly correct information about an experienced event. For instance, in 2004 Melinder and colleagues examined 4-year-old children who had undergone a medical examination, and found that that using a verbal interviewing practice, compared to a play-observations technique (the child is offered dolls, stuffed animals and other

facilities), had impact on the type of information the child gave. The verbal interviewing technique resulted in more correct memory reports and fewer false memory reports.

So what is the truth about children's memories? The truth is that older children and adults have more knowledge which affects how children encode, organize and store information in general: thus more background knowledge, thus the better information is remembered. But, even if young children recall a smaller quantity of information than older children and adults does, it seems that their memories are less infected by false memories than previously assumed. Fuzzy trace theory offers one explanation on how our brain manages to pull together information, form unrelated experiences and create false memory.

Thus, the traditional perspective that young children are less reliable as witnesses has been called into question by research during the last years. However, we still need to examine in more depth, the developmental pattern of false memories in children because many unanswered questions regarding developmental differences remain. Knowledge from laboratory settings gives us important knowledge, but it is crucial to investigate children's memories from real life events to get the precise knowledge of how the reconstructive process of our memory creates illusionary memories. At the same time it is important to be aware of the fact that being a child witness's is a vulnerable position.

The upshot for everybody involved in forensic settings with children, is that we should be open-minded to the potential of young children's ability to correctly remember a distinctive event, but at the same time be watchful of false memories and what may elicit them.

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Children Keep Sexual Abuse A Secret Because Of Psychological Manipulation

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Children often keep sexual abuse a secret to protect themselves and their loved ones – but surprisingly for many, children often keep abuse a secret to protect the perpetrator! Research indicates that disclosure of sexual abuse is delayed and even prevented, when the child feels responsibility, shame and fear in regards to the abuse and its consequences. But also when there is an emotional bond between the offender and the child.

In addition to this, research results show that a lot of children never disclose sexual abuse. The children in the studies in this article have all disclosed, most of them with delay, indicating that there must be a significant number of children, who keep sexual abuse a secret well into adulthood and perhaps forever.

As a professional working with child sexual abuse cases it is of great importance to understand the mechanisms involved in the disclosure difficulties of children, who have been subjected to sexual abuse.

The child is often the only witness in sexual abuse cases, where the suspect denies, which means, that the testimony of the child is the only proof. Because of threats, manipulations and the emotional bond between the perpetrator and the child, it is very common, that the child does not wish to – or even is afraid to make any statements. It is rather rare that any one apart from the child will admit to knowing about the abuse. Mostly knowledge of the abuse comes from the child, or from symptoms that indicate child abuse. Hence there are rarely any real witnesses apart from the child and the molester.

When a child does not disclose during a forensic interview, it can indicate that the abuse suspicion was groundless. But more importantly it may indicate that the child is unwilling to disclose abuse that has taken place. It is of crucial importance for forensic interviewers to have knowledge about the mechanisms that can influence this nondisclosure. Failing to identify abuse as a professional is abandoning the child, leaving it helplessly in the abuse. In addition to this, failing to identify abuse also jeopardizes the safety of other children.

The studies in this article indicate that feelings of shame, guilt and fear are often so strong in sexually abused children, that the secret of the abuse is never disclosed or disclosed with great delay. The findings point to, that these feelings are likely to have been planted in the child by the offender. Thus, the adult offender often has strategies well thought through to keep the child from disclosing the abuse strategies collectively known as *grooming*. Grooming occurs on many different and intertwining levels before, during and after the abuse has taken place.

Certain characteristics about the children that the offender seeks out can make it easier to understand why the children often do not disclose their abuse. Mostly, the offender hunts for children, who are emotionally vulnerable and needy, often because their parents lack the resources that they need. The offender knows that these children are in need of adult affection and therefore are very susceptible to attention from an interested adult. Having gained access to a vulnerable child makes it all the more easy for the offender to abuse the child with out the interference of parents or other concerned adults – simply because there probably aren't any. This also means, that the offender can be reasonably sure, that the child probably does not have anyone to confide in- and if the child does, the offender will be sure to threaten the child into secrecy. These threats could be of the sort were the offender makes the child believe, that something awful will happen to someone they love, if the abuse is ever disclosed. Having said that, it is important to understand, that the age and maturity of the child can affect the offender's grooming strategies, meaning that threats are not always part of the grooming process.

Feelings of shame can be said to be influenced by society. Abuse is shameful, because we were taught that it is wrong and taboo. But feelings of shame can also be reinforced by the offender. It is very common for the offender to make the child feel responsible for the abuse. By doing this the offender ensures that the shame the child feels for being "responsible" for something so wrong will keep the child from disclosing the abuse. These feelings of shame naturally lead the child into feelings of guilt. And voila the offender has seen to it that feelings of fear, shame and guilt are fixed in the child preventing it from disclosing the abuse.

To protect the children it is of utmost importance to understand why children do not disclose sexual abuse. In the area of professional psychology it is agreed upon that children do not willingly disclose sexual abuse, but there is still extensive debate as to whether or not children will disclose at once when asked directly.

The fact that children are limited developmentally, socially, cognitively and emotionally make them very susceptible to adult influences, indicating that an adult through the power of being superior in the above mentioned areas can manipulate, pressure and control the child. This suggests that children can be manipulated into false reports of sexual abuse by anxious adults, but more importantly - if reversed - children often end up not disclosing abuse, because they have been manipulated by the offender. As Professor Gail Goodman puts it:

> "We already know that children's limitations make them susceptible to adult influence. Well researched is the fact that such susceptibility results in some children, under some circumstances, being vulnerable to false reports. However, the flip side is worthy of equal, if not greater, attention – that some children can be all to easily influenced not to disclose, including when directly asked."
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> (in Pipe, Lamb, Orbach & Cederborg (Eds.) 2007, viii).

Children are Reluctant to Disclose Sexual Abuse Because Of Psychological Manipulation

Over the past ten years there has been conducted a lot of research on the matter of children's disclosure difficulties. A lot of research has been focusing on children having a tendency to lye, fantasize and not being able to recall details. Some researchers have been focusing on the fact that small children are unreliable, because their ability to remember depends on the support of adults- something that can jeopardize the forensic interview if the adult is not careful (Berntsen, 1999). Instead of focusing on this, the newest research concentrates on the fact that emotionally vulnerable children of all ages are very susceptible to the psychological manipulation an offender often subjects their victim to- something that can take on many shapes and forms and something that to an alarming extent affects children's willingness to disclose sexual abuse. One might even say that all children are vulnerable merely because they are children and thus, unequal put side by side with adults (Conte, Wolf & Smith, 1989).

One thing that is important to understand when it comes to children's disclosure of sexual abuse is that some children may have been too young to understand, that they have been abused, which can explain nondisclosure. A molester in the study by Conte, Wolf & Smith (1989) explains the following showing that his strategy for not getting caught was targeting very young victims: *"Some were even 3 years old, and I don't think they knew what was going on. I went after the victims that had a low potential for telling someone."* (p. 296). Other children may have reached an age, where they may have

mistaken the grooming involved in the abuse for a love affair, meaning that they too do not understand that they were subjected to abuse. Another molester explains the following about how he engaged an older child into sexual contact in the study by Conte et al. (1989): *"With the 15 year old, I told her I loved her and if she loved me she would let me do it."* (p. 297). These two examples point out how complex the issue of nondisclosure is and that many different variables such as age, emotional and social maturity, cognition and motivation influence whether or not the child is capable of disclosing the abuse (Bussy & Grimbeek, 1995).

Current Research Shows that Sex Offenders Often Pick Vulnerable Children and Manipulate Them into Nondisclosure

Current research indicates that most children never disclose or delay disclosure for significant periods of time, when different variables are present (Herskowitz, Lanes & Lamb, 2007); Paine & Hansen, 2002). To understand why children often do not disclose sexual abuse or delay disclosure, one needs to understand the child, the offender and the dynamics surrounding the relationship between the child and the offender.

Vulnerable children do not disclose

A study from a sexual assault centre in Seattle showed that the offenders were all persons that the child was either related to or familiar with. In the study conducted by Berliner & Conte (1990) 23 victims of sexual abuse aged between 10-18 years were interviewed about how they were victimized. The children had been abused from a few times to a period of 12 years, and almost half of the children had been victimized by more than one person. The study was conducted, because Berliner & Conte (1990) were interested in describing the so called grooming behaviour that characterizes the child sexual abuser, but also to highlight the fact that offenders often seek out children, who in some way are troubled and vulnerable and therefore more susceptible to grooming. It was found that it was common for the offender to sexualize his relationship with the child, to justify the sexual contact, and to use different strategies to maintain the cooperation of the child.

As mentioned, Conte et al. (1989) conducted a study on the process molesters use to identify, engage and maintain children in sexual abuse. This study was the first of its kind and the findings in the study are consistent with the findings in contemporary studies

regarding the grooming strategies of offenders. In the study 20 child sexual abuse offenders were interviewed about their strategies to prevent disclosure. Among other things, it was found that they claimed they could identify vulnerable children and would use that vulnerability to sexually abuse the child. It was also found that a majority of the offenders threatened the children into keeping the abuse a secret using their superiority and authority over the child. As one offender describes about his strategy:

> *"First you groom your victim by heavy handedness promoting fear…then isolate the victim so that no one else would be around. The next step would involve making the child think that everything is OK so they wouldn't run and tell."*
>
> (Conte et al., 1989, p. 298).

Conte et al. (1989) regard all children as being vulnerable to sexual abuse, because being a child often implies being vulnerable to the superiority of adults. The offenders interviewed in the study by Conte et al. (1989) were more likely to victimize younger children, due to the fact that they were less likely to disclose the abuse. In accordance with the statements of the offenders interviewed in the study, a new study by Cederborg et al. (2007) confirms earlier studies, as the study shows that children who were very young when abused were not able to provide specific details of the abuse. Regarding the age of the victims Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones & Gordon (2003) found that older children were more likely to be influenced by the fear of negative consequences, to feel they had some responsibility for the abuse, and to feel they could have ended or escaped the abuse.

Familiarity with the offender keeps children from disclosing

Numerous studies regarding disclosure have found that children, who were intrafamilially abused, delayed their disclosure for longer periods of time, than those who were extrafamilally abused. Studies also found that children took longer time to disclose, if they thought the disclosure would create a negative outcome (Hershkowitz, Horowitz & Lamb, 2005; Goodman-Brown et al., 2003).

The study by Cederborg, Lamb & Laurell (2007) explains why some children delay disclosure, and why they would minimize and even deny the abuse despite of evidence of the contrary. 10 victims of sexual abuse were interviewed in the study. The children were between 3 and 11.1 years old when abused and between 4.1 and 12.7 when interviewed. There was no doubt that the children had been victimized because there were videotapes showing the abuse of all

the children by the same perpetrator. In accordance with the study by Goodman-Brown et al. (2003) it was found that the variations in the information given by the children depended on variables such as age, the nature of their relationship with the perpetrator and the number of incidents and type of abuse experienced.

Feelings of responsibility, fear and shame prevent disclosure

Research has shown that children are less likely to disclose quickly if they felt responsible for the abuse (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Berliner & Conte, 1990; Cederborg et al., 2007) indicating that the feeling of responsibility could have been planted in the child as part of a grooming process, causing feelings such as shame and embarrassment, consequently influencing the child's willingness to disclose.

Cederborg et al. (2007) suggest that the children in their study refused disclosure because of feelings of fear, responsibility, guilt and shame planted in them by the perpetrator. It was found that some of the children refrained from disclosure out of fear for retaliation by the perpetrator. In addition to this, almost a third of the children in the study were directly instructed by the perpetrator to keep the abuse a secret.

Berliner & Conte (1990) found that the children in their study felt responsible for the abuse and therefore were willing to maintain the secret of the abuse because of feelings of shame and the fear of not being believed. When it comes to concerns regarding self, Paine & Hansen (2002) state that the dynamics involved in the relationship between the victim and the offender, and the character of the grooming process combined, can lead to children perceiving them selves "*as willing participants in a "relationship" with the offender"* (p.281).

Hershkowitz et al. (2007) found that the majority of children, aged 7-12 years, who were victims of severe abuse, did not disclose the abuse right away. Similarly, a majority of the victims of repeated abuse and victims, who were familiar with the perpetrator, did not disclose right away. In the study thirty alleged victims of sexual abuse by perpetrators, who they were not related to, and their parents, were interviewed about the disclosure of their abuse.

In accordance with the findings in the studies by Goodman-Brown et al. (2003), Berliner & Conte (1990) and Cederborg et al. (2007), Hershkowitz et al. also found that a greater part of the children in their study expressed fear and shame, when they were familiar with the perpetrator, and the abuse was serious and

repeated. In comparison only 8% of the children abused by a stranger expressed fear and shame. Furthermore the study showed that 29% of the children, who had allegedly been abused repeatedly by a familiar person, withdrew their allegations.

In the study by Hershkowitz et al. (2007) all 30 children had disclosed the abuse they had been subjected to prior to the study, but a little over half of the disclosures were delayed for up to two years. However, most of the children in the study delayed for up to one month. Almost a quarter of the children were given emotional rewards for keeping silent about the abuse, and one third of the children were directly threatened. This means that a majority of the children in the study were not threatened or rewarded. This could indicate that children, who were threatened, rewarded or in other ways sexually groomed, could be less likely to disclose abuse out of fear.

The Child-Offender Relationship Affects Disclosure

The studies by Cederborg et al. (2007); Goodman-Brown et al. (2003) and Berliner & Conte (1990) all found that the children in their studies were concerned about the physical and emotional well being of the offender. In the study by Cederborg et al. (2007) a close relationship with the perpetrator kept the children in the study from disclosing, thus, a majority of the children, who had experienced severe abuse, knew the perpetrator either because they were related to him, or because he was their caregiver.

This might seem odd, but a lot of the literature regarding child sexual abuse provides evidence to support the assumption, that the relationship between the child and the perpetrator is often close, and that this will prevent and delay disclosure[1] – something that the skilled perpetrator may try to ease by targeting children, who are emotionally vulnerable. When it comes to the relationship between a child victim and an adult sexual offender we are, according to Furniss (1992), dealing with so called *traumatic bonding*, where factors such as feelings of attachment, cognitive distortions and behavioural strategies work to strengthen the bond between the perpetrator and the child. In theory, this explains the uncanny feelings of loyalty and attachment the child has towards the offender, feelings that could explain why disclosure is delayed and even prevented.

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[1] According to Gomes-Schwartz (1990), the main motive for concealing abuse is often the fear of loosing the affection of the offender.

Conclusions and Discussion of the Findings in the Studies

A common theme in the empirical findings of the studies above is that the victimization process, also known as the grooming process, influences the fact that children are reluctant to disclose abuse. In all of the studies I have looked at all children involved eventually disclosed, so it must be presumed that their fears regarding disclosure were outweighed by their expectations of a positive outcome, that they were pressured or prompted into disclosure by a suspecting adult or, as in the study by Cederborg et al. (2007), that there were unambi-guous evidence of abuse. The above certainly makes one suspect that it is very likely that a significant number of abused children never come to our attention.

In the following I will look at some of the gaps, contradictions and inconsistencies in the studies I have looked at.

Concerning the vulnerability of children this can be understood both as the overall vulnerability of children, and the vulnerability of certain children. As regards to the first understanding of vulnerability, the age and developmental level of the child can make grooming very complex, consequently making the child's motives for nondisclosure even more complex. As an example, there have been cases where older children who due to grooming have come to believe that they are in love with the offender (Lindblad, 2007). Seeing as the children in the study by Berliner & Conte (1990) were aged up to 18 years, this could be the case for some of the children in this study. On the other hand, the child could also have been so young during the abuse that it does not understand or feel that it was abused and thus one cannot expect the child to disclose, as seen in the study by Cederborg et al. (2007). The point is that the offender does not always create fear in the child as a part of the grooming strategy. This is reflected in inconsistencies in the findings of the studies: The findings of Goodman-Brown et al. (2003) are consistent with the findings reviewed in London, Bruck, Ceci & Shuman (2007) indicating that adolescents are increasingly aware of the consequences of disclosure and thus, more willing to withhold information. It is not however consistent with the findings of Hershkowitz et al. (2005) indicating that adolescents and pre-adolescents are more likely to disclose than school-aged children[2].

These inconsistencies indicate that many intertwined circumstances are involved in the individual case. Regarding the second understanding of vulnerability – meaning the emotional

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[2] This being regardless of the type of abuse and the child's relationship with the offender.

vulnerability of children – it is hard to measure whether or not a child is emotionally vulnerable, though it is likely that a child from a family with few emotional resources, or a child that is withdrawn, unhappy or depressed, is more susceptible to adult attention.

Three of the studies looked at gender differences. Goodman-Brown et al. (2003) found that gender was unrelated to disclosure, but the sample size in this study was rather small; only 16 males participated compared to 98 females. These findings are inconsistent with the results of Hershkowitz et al. (2005), who found that the rates of disclosure varied significantly depending on the child's gender (boys were less likely to disclose abuse). One might speculate that this is not due to there being more girls than boys being victims of sexual abuse, but rather, due to feeling of shame and stigma, making it harder for boys to disclose sexual abuse by male offenders. Similarly, only two of the victims in the study by Berliner & Conte (1990) were boys.

Concerning the child-offender relationship, the findings in all of the above reviewed studies (Berliner & Conte, 1990; Goodman-Brown et al., 2007; Hershkowitz et al., 2007; Cederborg et al., 2007 and Conte et al., 1989) indicate that the child's relationship with the offender affects disclosure – meaning that the closer the relation-ship is, the more likely it is, that the child does not disclose or delays disclosure. These findings point to the theorized belief that children often try to protect the offender, if it is an emotionally significant person. All in all, the findings indicate that the fears and concerns of the victim are often so profound, that they are a serious obstacle to disclosure, delaying it for months and years.

One could also speculate that the findings point towards, that nondisclosure is linked to the fact, that children are often threatened by manipulative offenders as part of the so called grooming process. As an example, concerns regarding family and loved ones are often planted in the child by the offender. This way the child feels responsible for the safety of its family. The child may also be concerns that the family might disrupt due to for example separation, if the abuse is ever disclosed. But also, the fear of negative responses such as rejection and disbelief, are major factors leading children not to disclose. The distinction between intrafamilial and extrafamilial abuse is something that represents a gap in the study by Goodman-Brown et al. (2003). Hershkowitz et al. (2007) distinguished between familiar offenders versus unfamiliar offenders and found that children were less likely to disclose being abused by a familiar person. Due to grooming, the familiarity of an offender could be seen as resembling the familiarity

of a family member to the child. In the study by Goodman-Brown et al. (2003) it is not clarified if the extrafamilial offenders were familiar or unfamiliar persons to the child.

The studies reviewed in this article have certain limitations when it comes to being able to identify connections between disclosure and abuse variables such as age, gender, child-perpetrator relationship and so on. These limitations are partly due to the relatively small number of participants in each study, making it harder to determine, if the results are just a coincidence. Also, the many participant differences across the studies and the differences in the definitions in the studies, make the studies harder to compare.

Conclusively it should be clear now that with what we know about the grooming process, and the consequences of grooming, it is not hard to understand, why children have grave difficulties disclosing abuse. The studies above were based only on children who had actually disclosed abuse, which means, that there is reason to believe, that children who do not disclose abuse have far-reaching emotional and personal motives for not doing so.

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How to Improve Children's Person Descriptions

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Improving children's person descriptions has crucial value. Suppose that a police officer, soon after a crime has been committed, has to make a quick decision about the culprit based on the information given by a child witness. If the estimates of age, height, and weight differ from the actual characteristics of the perpetrator, then a lot of time would be wasted and the culprit could disappear without difficulty. Also, the police rely very much on eyewitness testimony, especially at the beginning of their investigation (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992).

More and more research on children witnesses has been conducted in the past decades, however, children's person descriptions are quite sparse and skeletal (Marin, Holmes, Guth, & Kovac, 1979). Several attempts have been made to improve children's eyewitness testimony but they have had limited success. Techniques such as the usage of anatomical dolls, body map, "Draw and Tell"-technique, and the usage of a standard are proven not to help children to recall significantly more information. Although children's person descriptions are short but accurate (Marin et al., 1979), more information can be obtained by using appropriate questions and structured interview techniques.

The aim of this overview is to introduce some general issues in children's person descriptions and review methods that should be effective with children (but often are not). Finally, the influence of different question types on children's accounts is overviewed.

Beliefs about Child Witnesses

In recent years, increasing numbers of children have been called upon to testify in court. There has been an increase in the amount of research on children's witness competency (Westcott, Davies, & Bull, 2002). Many of the court cases with children may involve allegations of sexual or physical abuse by members of the child's family or other persons known to the child. However, children may be also victims or bystander witnesses to crimes such as traffic accidents, thefts, assaults, and murders that have been committed by strangers. The face that adults often consider children as unreliable witnesses makes this topic relevant. For example, surveys

of adults' beliefs about child eyewitnesses have suggested that children's eyewitness capabilities can be seen in a very pessimistic manner and that adult witnesses are rated to be more credible than child witnesses (Pozzulo, Lemieux, Wells, & McCuaig, 2006).

Children's Person Descriptions

Person descriptions generally contain references to physical appearance (mainly face, height and weight) and clothing. Descriptions regarding the face can be crucial for identifying a person. However, it is difficult to translate a visual impression into a detailed verbal description. A factor that may have an influence on our limited ability to provide a very detailed person description is that our vocabulary for expressing the physical features of faces is rather limited when compared to the large number of adjectives available for describing character traits. This effect is even more profound for children. It has been found that witnesses tend to mention character attributes in their descriptions of a once-seen person, even when they have been explicitly instructed to provide only descriptions of physical features (Sporer, 1996).

Concerning children's person descriptions it has been demonstrated that even three to four-year-old children can provide some descriptive details about a once-seen person (Sporer, 1996). Also, children from this age onwards are capable of reporting accurately the behaviour of others and, therefore, their testimonies can be considered credible in the justice system (if they are interviewed in a developmentally appropriate manner).

Some children can describe the person relatively easily, for example, "He was a short guy who came into the classroom and took our teacher's wallet" as another child can simply say "He was short". When children are allowed to recall information freely, even very young children can produce material that is as accurate as those given by adults (Hutcheson, Baxter, Telfer, & Warden, 1995). However, children's testimonies contain significantly fewer details than adults' or adolescents' testimonies. One possible solution to the problem of adults' statements being usually longer and more detailed could be that especi-ally younger children do not encode and store information as effectively as adults and older children (Brainerd, Reyna, Howe, & Kingma, 1990). Therefore, the coherence in children's accounts might seem to adults as ineffective.

Children's prompted recall (where the interviewer is asking questions to help to recall more information about the person) can occasionally result in a fuller report but some of this will be

inaccurate. In prompted recall, there is an everlasting dilemma concerning the quantity and quality of information. If more questions are asked then the quantity of information increases (the child will talk more). However, at the same time the quality of the interview de-creases (in terms of what the child says can be more inaccurate). The question is how to balance those two categories for the optimally maximum result.

There is a noticeable difference in what adults and children tend to describe in their person descriptions. If adults usually describe well the clothing of the perpetrator then children describe well the actions (King & Yuille, 1986). Children's preference for (describing) actions could be explained by the fact that when they are learning language, they first learn the action-associated (frequently heard) verbs (Glenberg & Kaschak, 2002). Therefore, they could notice more (and comment) what a person does rather than how the person looks like.

Children's Height, Weight, and Age Estimates

Although children's person descriptions are generally accurate, their estimates about person's physical characteristics (such as height, weight, and age) can be quite poor. Younger children's limited performance in case of descriptors could be due to their limited experience of (or exposure to) different persons (Davies, 1996). Also, it is difficult for children to judge correctly adults' characteristics because adults are older, taller, and heavier than children.

Studies comparing actual and estimated height (Janssen & Horowski, 1980, see in Meissner, Sporer & Schooler, 2006) have revealed that the estimations of older children were more correct than of younger children. Also, children's own height probably makes it more difficult to estimate the height of adults. Children have also problems with estimating the unfamiliar person's physical characteristics, especially age. As the perpetrator can be someone the child already knows, this finding is even more troubling in case some incident would happen involving a stranger. In age estimates, the problem might be that the younger subjects are not aware of the appropriate facial cues to aging (Ellis, 1990) or the concept of aging itself.

Interestingly, so-called own-age bias has been found in both children's and adults' person descriptions and face recognition. Own-age bias is an effect where people are better at describing and recognising own-age persons compared to other-age persons.

Lindholm (2005) found that children were more accurate in describing other children than adults, whereas adults were good at describing both children and adults. This could be explained by the fact that adults (who have once been children themselves) have more information about what will developmentally occur. Another study by Anastasi and Rhodes (2005) demonstrated that both adults and five to eight-year-old children recognized more accurately own-age faces than other-age faces. This could mean that children are so to say ´developmentally handicapped` (as Ellis previously noted) in the sense that they do not understand or recognise characteristics which are more relevant to estimating peoples' height, weight, and especially age.

Attempts to Improve the Quality of Children's Testimony

As mentioned above, children's free recall is accurate but short. To be able to aid children to recall more information about the perpetrator(s), several attempts have been made to improve children's eyewitness testimony but the success has been limited. These attempts have included the usage of anatomical dolls (Ceci & Bruck, 1995; Thierry, Lamb, Orbach, & Pipe, 2005), body map (Willcock, Morgan, & Hayne, 2006), "Draw and Tell"-technique (Poole & Lamb, 1998), and using a standard (Kask, Bull, Heinla, & Davies, 2007).

First of all, issues with *anatomical dolls* are introduced. Anatomical dolls are supplied with all the primary and secondary sexual characteristics that humans have. These dolls are used during interviews with children who are suspected of having been sexually abused. The plastic or cotton dolls wear removable clothing, and the male doll's penis fits into the other dolls' oral, anal, and vaginal openings, as do the dolls' fingers, so that sex relating to these orifices may be simulated. The genitals of the early anatomically correct dolls were not actually anatomically correct, as they were found to be dis-proportionately large when compared to the rest of the body but this mistake has since been corrected.

The anatomical dolls were recommended for use especially in case of sexual abuse starting from mid-1980s. Much of what has been written about the proper use of dolls could be summarized in the following two rules according to APSAC Practice Guidelines (1995). First, it is important that both the interviewer and the child are capable of using anatomical dolls. It means that the interviewer should have completed the training for using these dolls (which includes the reading of relevant research, hands on practice and

feedback, and adherence to professional guidelines). It is suggested that the dolls should be used with three to four-year-old or older children because then they have enough cognitive abilities to understand that the doll is going to represent the child or another actual person, and that it is not an instrument for play.

Secondly, it is improper to use the anatomical dolls exclusively, that is, without a verbal statement, (in order) to find out that a child has been sexually abused. This kind of use would be considered a diagnostic test and it could be considered as an inappropriate use of the dolls. The child's demonstration with the doll is only one part of the forensic interview just as the forensic interview is one part of the investigation.

Anatomical dolls can be considered as useful adjuncts to enable children to demonstrate actions which they are unable to describe verbally. However, there are concerns that the use of dolls might lead to an increase in incorrect as well as correct information about events (Ceci & Bruck, 1995) or encourage fantasy among younger and more suggestible children (Thierry, Lamb, Orbach, & Pipe, 2005). Therefore, anatomic dolls should be use very cautiously with children and only as *one* tool among others that helps to interview the child.

The second alternative method in aiding children to recollect information is the use of *body maps* which often encouraged as a non-suggestive alternative to dolls (Lamb, 1994). Body maps are drawings of children's and adults' naked bodies from the front and the back of the body. When body maps are used in interviewing when the child is talking about the event, he/she can point to the possible parts of the body where he/she was touched. Similarly to the anatomical dolls, this technique was introduced for helping children to recall more information about the body parts where the perpetrator touched the child. However, Willcock, Morgan, and Hayne (2006) have found that body maps led five to six-year-old children to provide both inaccurate and accurate inform-tion. Therefore, this technique has also its advantages and disadvantages.

The third technique that could be used is to ask children to *draw* (so-called "Draw and Tell"-technique) during the investigative interviews (Poole & Lamb, 1998). It should be mentioned that letting children to draw during the interview is supposed to reduce their stress but it is not important to examine more closely (afterwards) what exactly the children were drawing. It is argued that drawing can help children to recall more details and also to decrease anxiety in communication with the interviewer (Gross & Hayne, 1998). Some studies have reported that drawing might

increase free recall accuracy in five to ten-year-old children (Gross & Hayne, 1998) but others have claimed that children aged five to six years show an increase in incorrect as well as correct details if the "Draw and Tell" technique is used (Bruck & Melnyk, 2004). Therefore, drawing can help children to recall better but it might not be always helpful.

As children's person descriptions and spontaneous recall are usually quite poor, it has been suggested that providing people with possible ranges (to evaluate the person's height and weight) or a colour plate (to evaluate the correct color of the person's clothes and hair), may lead to better results in some aspects of person descriptions (Sporer, 1996; Meissner, Sporer, & Schooler, 2006). A method that has been suggested for increasing the quantity of information children provide about a once-seen person is to invite them to provide descriptions relative to a "*standard*", for example a person in their visual field (Sporer, 1996; Meissner, et al., 2006). This means that children can compare their recollections about a once-seen person with the person who is interviewing them (e.g. police officer) using the interviewer as a standard when recalling different stable (i.e. height, weight, and age) and unstable (i.e. type and color of hair and clothes) characteristics about the person.

The author of this overview has examined this option more closely and has found that provision of such a standard did not help six to eight-year-old children to recall more information about a once-seen person. However, when answering questions younger children's performance was better in if the standard was available (Kask, et al., 2007). Therefore, some children in that study may not have fully understood what the idea of using a standard was. Thus, the use of a standard did not have an effect on the number of details in children's person descriptions.

In conclusion, several techniques have been provided to aid children to give better person descriptions such as anatomical dolls, body maps, drawings, and using a standard. However, their effect has been minimal. What would work then in helping children to recall more information?

The Effect of Different Questioning Types on Children's Accounts

As children's person descriptions are often vague, more information is needed about the person whom the child saw. It is not so much of the problem that the child *cannot* remember but that the child might not have *access* to the information or does not have sufficient *verbal skills* to actively recall the details about the (once-seen)

person. This phenomenon is similar to learning a foreign language: people can understand more but they are not able to speak actively. This effect is similar to the language development in children (e.g. they might not be able to actively recall details but remember them very well when questions are asked). Therefore, different types of questions and their influence on children's accounts are more closely examined in the next sections.

Even very young children are capable of accurate reports if they are questioned in ways that take note of their developmental needs. As children's free recall can be poor, the way *how* police officers interview them is important. It is common for interviewers to misunderstand children's speech or to overestimate their linguistic capacities (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, & Esplin, 1999). The following excerpt is from a real police interview with eight-year-old child where police officer is explaining to the child what is going to happen during the interview and what the child should consider when answering police officer's questions:

> "I will explain you now what is going to happen. This thing in the corner is a video camera which will record our conversation. The purpose of recording our conversation is that it saves time, we can get it over with more quickly, and I can ask you things which I need to ask you. And I say also that the tape is not shown to any stranger, it goes safely to court archives and is only seen by people who have to see it. All right? And about the interview I want to tell you that if you have to go to toilet during our conversation you can do it or if you have questions, you can ask them freely. If you don't understand my questions, then say it right away. Then I will rephrase my question. And also I'd note that if you don't remember or don't know the answer, then say so. This is also an answer if you say you don't remember or don't know. You don't have to say ´yes´ right away. And if you need to take time out then also say that to me. All right? How do you feel now?"

This excerpt is an elegant example how the interview should *not* be started. Experts recommend that forensic interviewers should use free recall and open-ended prompts as much as possible (Home Office, 2002).

Example of a free recall:
- *What happened then?*
- *I went to the elevator and then he came along. The man pushed the button, turned around and didn't let me out.*

Example of an open-ended question:
- *How many times did he punch you?*
- *Three... three times.*

Developmentally, it is more efficient to ask children general questions because specific questions or difficult explanations can confuse children and result in increased numbers of false details. Although open-ended questions could elicit less information then specific questions can decrease children's overall accuracy which could result in providing an erroneous person description (Hutcheson et al., 1995). However, closed and suggestive questions are still widely used during the police interviews.

Example of an option-posing question:
- *So you said you were both on the bed. Did you sat there or did you lie down?*
- *Lie down.*

Example of a suggestive question:
- *All the time? How come all the time, was it every...every day?*
- *Almost every day*

In practice option-posing and suggestive questions are often introduced early in interviews (sometimes as the very first thing the interviewer utters) and can contaminate subsequent information (Cederborg, Orbach, & Sternberg, 2000). Furthermore, there is a tendency in police interviews that interviewers tend to ask few open questions and many specific or closed questions throughout interviews (Westcott & Kynan, 2006). This could also result in more erroneous statements by children.

    In sum, the amount of information increases in children's accounts with some question types whereas the accuracy decreases which results in having a longer but more erroneous person description. If children are trained to respond to open-ended prompts in forensic contexts, they produce more information when prompted to "tell everything" (i.e. free recall) about the event or person (Sternberg et al., 1997).

What Would then Help the Police Officers to Collect Accurate and Detailed Person Descriptions?

It has been found that if interviewers use a protocol designed to interview children, they use more recommended practices than those interviewers who do not use the protocol. Also, if children are being interviewed using the protocol then they provide more free

narrative details than children interviewed without the protocol (Orbach et al, 2000).

Therefore, in order to achieve the best balance between quantity and quality in children's accounts, better police training in the adoption of best-practice guidelines in interviewing children is required. It is suggested that police officers should be encouraged to use structured methods such as the NICHD protocol (Orbach et al., 2000) or cognitive interview (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992). Both of those methods have been found to be effective with children (Milne & Bull, 2003) and are therefore strongly recommended.

In NICHD protocol interviewer introduces him/herself before explaining the purpose of the interview. The child is told that it is acceptable to tell the interviewer they do not know the answer to a question and they should correct the interviewer if he or she is mistaken. Then the child is provided with practice session how to respond to open-ended prompts when describing their (positive and negative) experiences. Then the event is investigated with free recall prompts followed by open-ended questions. Closed questions are used towards the end of the interview (in case when some details are still missing from child's account). Finally, it is asked whether the child remembers something else and a more neutral topic will be discussed before closing the interview.

In cognitive interview the interviewer also introduces him/herself to decrease child's level of arousal and to create a trustful relationship with him or her (Memon, Wark, Holley, Bull, & Koehnken, 1997). Then the goals and structure of the interview are introduced with a brief explanation of the techniques that will be used. The child is encouraged to report in full without screening out anything they consider to be irrelevant (or for which they have only partial recall) and also to recreate mentally the environmental aspects of the original scene (to describe any sounds, smells and physical conditions during the event). After that the child is asked to recall freely what happened and *then* the interviewer should ask (primarily open-ended) questions with several mnemonic techniques which could help the child to recall more information.

Two additional techniques can be used with children older than eight to nine years such as (i) the instruction to recall the event in different orders (i.e. to recall from the beginning, the end and/or the most salient details) and/or (ii) to recall from different perspectives (i.e. from the perspective of another person or by placing oneself in a different location). Finally, the interviewer summarizes and closes the interview. It is found that the amount of information increased 40% with structured interview methods compared to usual

unstructured interview (Fisher, Geiselman, & Amador, 1989). Also, police officers asked less questions in total (more open-ended questions and less suggestive questions), and made more pauses and less interruptions during the course of the interview.

It has been found that when intensive training in the use of a highly structured interview protocol was followed by continuing supervision that was provided to police officers (as monthly day-long seminars and feedback on all field interviews), then these activities yielded good improvements in their interview quality (Lamb et al, 2002).

Conclusion

Different issues concerning children's person descriptions were discussed in this paper, such as the usage of anatomical dolls, body map, ´Draw and Tell` technique, and the usage of a standard. However, all of these techniques have had limited success. As children's spontaneous person descriptions are short (but accurate), quantitatively and qualitatively more information could be obtained by using developmentally appropriate interviewing techniques. Investigators should follow a structured interview protocol and allow children to recall freely information about a person before applying open-ended (and closed) questions into practice.

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Children's In- and Out-of-court Testimony: Children's Anxiety and Juror's Scepticism

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The court system, established with adult defendant and witnesses in mind, does not easily accommodate children's special needs. Nevertheless, in USA in 1990 a young girl was asked to testify in an alleged child sexual abuse case. The girl was suffering from severe emotional trauma and was reportedly unable to testify in the physical presence of the defendant. Due to the Sixth Amendment's Confrontation Clause, which provides criminal defendants with the right to confront witnesses, children like this girl are often (and unfortunately) asked to stand trial. However, in this particular case (Maryland vs. Craig) the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that defendants' right to face-to-face confrontation were not absolute and that the Sixth Amendment's Confrontation Clause did not conflict with the use of one-way closed-circuit television (CCTV) to present the girl's testimony. As a result, the court set the girl up in a separate room with the judge, the prosecutor, and the defense attorney so that the defendant and jury could watch her testify via the live television screen in the courtroom, but she could not watch them. The girl testified, the defendant was convicted, and from this date forth courts in USA are asked to rule on the use of innovative procedures in individual cases to minimize the pressured traumatic effects on children of court appearances and to maximize children's ability to provide accurate testimonies. The use of CCTV was later spread to Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. In other countries, (e.g., Sweden) the use is still running slow. Instead, Swedish children (under the age of 15) are videotaped during the preliminary police hearings. This videotaped material is later shown on a television screen (just like CCTV testimonies) in court as evidence.

Will Innovative Courtroom Procedures Help or Hinder Child Witnesses?

In many cases where children are alleged victims, their testimony is the sole piece of evidence, due to lack of medical and other physical evidence (Bussey & Grimbeek, 1995). It is therefore important to investigate if courtroom innovations (e.g., CCTV, protective shields, videotaped interviews etc) will help these children to provide

accurate and complete statements. It is also of importance to consider the psychological effects these protective aids could have on jurors. In this paper I will present a selection of findings from research investigating children's experience of testifying in and out of the court, and jurors' perception of children's in-, and out-of-court testimonies with focus on the following research questions: (i) Will children who testify out of court be less stressed than children who testify in court? (ii) Will children who testify out of court be able to provide a more complete and detailed statement? (iii) Will jurors' perception of the child witnesses be affected by the different presentation formats? And if so, (iv) will children be viewed as more or less credible when seen on a TV screen, as compared to when seen live in court? And finally, (v) will jurors be better or worse of at assessing children's veracity when the children is testifying out of court, as compared to when the child is seen live in court? In short, will innovative courtroom procedures help or hinder child witnesses?

The Empirical Studies

A handful of empirical studies have shed light on these forensically relevant research questions (Goodman et al., 1998; Goodman et al., 2006; Landström, Granhag, & Hartwig, 2007; Orcutt, Goodman, Tobey, Batterman-Faunce, & Thomas 2001; Tobey, Goodman, Batterman-Faunce, Orcutt, & Sachsenmaier, 1995). All the studies are structurally similar and consisted of two phases. The first phase employed mock crime scenarios, in which the participating children took part in either a play session with an unfamiliar male confederate, or in a brief encounter with a male confederate outside the children's school. In three of the studies children either participated in this mock crime or learned about it through hearsay (from adults or peers) (Goodman et al., 2006; Landström et al., 2007; Orcutt et al., 2001). Several weeks after the mock crime the children were asked to testify about it. All children (both those who had experienced it and those who had not) were asked to talk about the mock crime as having really experienced it. Thus, the studies included both truthful and deceptive children. In the other two studies, all children experienced the event that they were to testify about (Goodman et al., 1998; Tobey et al., 1995).

   In the second phase, adult mock jurors watched the children's testimonies either live in-court or via CCTV (or on videotape). In three of the studies different children were used for the out-of-court trial and in-court trial providing the researchers the opportunity to

investigate the children's experience of the different trial settings (Goodman et al., 1998; Orcutt et al., 2001; Tobey et al., 1995). In the other two studies the same group of children appeared in both the in-, and out-of-court trials. This procedure gave the researchers a chance to control for the children's individual differences in the different trial settings (live and video) and instead focus solely on the jurors' perception of the children depending on the trial settings (Goodman et al., 2006; Landström et al., 2007).

Children's Anxiety

In terms of the children's experience of different trial settings the results showed, in line with what one would anticipate, that the children who were allowed to testify out of court, via CCTV showed less pretrial anxiety and were more relaxed during the trial than the children who testified in court (Goodman et al., 1998). This finding is in accordance with previous courtroom research (conducted in real-life court cases), showing that children who are asked to testify in cases of alleged sexual abuse may experience severe stress and anxiety, especially if they have to give their testimonies face to face to the defendant in open court (Goodman et al., 1992). The children, who testified via CCTV were also able to provide more complete and detailed statements (Goodman el al., 1998; Tobey et al., 1995). Testifying live in open court appears to be more problematic for younger children (5-6 year olds) than older children (8-9 year olds). Specifically, younger children were more suggestible to misleading questions, and made both more commission and omission errors, when they testified live in court compared to via CCTV (Goodman el al., 1998; Tobey et al., 1995).

In sum, the results suggest that from the perspective of child witnesses out-of-court testimonies are preferable to live in-court testimonies. Since out-of-courtroom procedures do minimize the pressured traumatic effects of the children and maximize the children's ability to provide accurate statements.

Jurors' Scepticism

Since children benefit from out-of-court testimonies, one would hope that jurors would favour these testimonies to in-court testimonies. However, the result paints a rather gloomy picture of jurors' perception of children's out-of-court testimonies showing that children that give out-of-court testimonies are associated with more negative ratings than are children who give live in-court

testimonies (Goodman et al., 1998; Goodman et al., 2006; Landström et al., 2007; Orcuttet al., 2001; Tobey et al., 1995). Children who testified out of court were perceived as less believable, honest, accurate, attractive, intelligent, and confident than were children testifying in court (Goodman et al., 1998; Orcutt et al., 2001; Tobey et al., 1995). In accordance with this, children's out-of-court statements were perceived as less convincing than children's live in-court statements (Landström et al., 2007), and jurors were found to show a greater sympathy for children testifying in court than children testifying out-of-court (Goodman et al., 2006). In addition, jurors watching children's out-of-court statements showed an inferior memory performance of the children's statements than did the live in-court jurors (Landström et al., 2007).

Thus, the results shows that jurors' perception of children's testimonies are indeed affected by the presentation format via which the child is testifying and, unfortunately, children that are seen testifying on a TV screen are perceived as less credible than children that are testifying live in court. Put differently, children's out-of-court testimonies do not seem to have the same impact on the jurors as children's in court testimonies.

The answer to the crucial question of whether or not jurors would be better at detecting deception when the child is seen on a TV screen, as compared to when the child is seen live in court would appear to be "no". Jurors' ability to assess the children's veracity seem to be unaffected by the presentation format. Overall, their ability to distinguish between children's truthful and deceptive testimonies was poor regardless of the trial settings (Goodman et al., 2006; Landström et al., 2007; Orcutt et al., 2001). This result corresponds well with previous research showing that adults' ability to discriminate between children's lies and truths is at chance level (Vrij, 2002).

Theoretical Backdrop

Why do jurors associate out-of-court testimonies with more negative ratings of children's testimonies? Davies and Noon (1991) and Cashmore (1992) suggest that the rational behind this is that testimonies given via CCTV lack the emotional impact and immediacy that live testimonies have. The lack of immediacy may distance the jurors and reduce their empathy for the child. One theoretical explanation as to why out-of-court testimonies are perceived more negatively than live testimonies is due to what is called the *vividness effect* (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). According to this

effect, testimonies can be considered vivid if they are "(a) emotionally interesting, (b) concrete and imagery-provoking, and (c) proximate in a sensory, temporal, or spatial way" (Nisbett & Ross, 1980, p. 45). Research has shown that vivid testimonies are paid more attention, perceived as more credible, and are also better remembered (Bell & Loftus, 1985). The fact that live in-court testimonies (compared to out-of-court testimonies) are more proximal in a spatial way suggests that these testimonies are also more intense and emotional involving, and as a result, they are perceived as more credible and are better remembered than out-of-court testimonies.

Summing up

The combined research findings on children's out-of court statements introduce the following dilemma: Children who testify out of court are less stressed and provide more complete and detailed statements. At the same time, jurors associate the children who testify out of court with more negative ratings than they do children who testify in court. Consequently, it is not an easy task for legal policy-makers to decide whether or not to use courtroom technology such as CCTV and videotaped testimonies in court. What is most important, the child's right to a tranquil trial or the child's right to a fair trial? Nevertheless, same group of people would profit from considering the outcome of psycho-legal research on different presentation formats when establishing and/or reforming standards for courtroom procedures. In the end, it is significant to bear in mind that even if jurors' perception of children's out-of-court testimonies is somewhat discouraging, and that children's out-of-court testimonies do not seem to have the same impact on the jurors, the children still benefit from the out of court procedure as they do not have to testify in the proximity of the defendant. Especially since many children in alleged child sexual abuse cases are experience severe stress and anxiety when they have to give their testimonies face to face to the defendant in open court (Goodman et al., 1992).

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The People that are Too Good to be True

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It has been repeatedly found that many case of child sexual abuse are never disclosed (O'Connell, Leberg and Donaldsen, 1990). This has been suggested among other things to be due to the offenders' sexual grooming of their child victims (Salter, 1995).

As we will discover in this article, new research suggests that the child sex offender not only grooms and manipulates the child, but also the adult community and society in general. This manipulation adds to the difficulty of preventing and discovering child sexual abuse and furthermore to effectively punish a guilty child sex offender.

For this reason, it is important for law enforcement to be up to date with how the child sex offender grooms significant adults, institutions and society in order to be able to investigate a case objectively and avoid becoming a victim of the child sex offenders' advanced manipulation skills.

In this article, current research will be drawn upon that sheds light on the child sex offenders' behaviour and ways to manipulate their victims' surroundings and society in general into believing that they are trustworthy and innocent citizens. Connecting this new knowledge with research on human thinking emphasizes the risk, that law enforcement agents, though professionals, might not realize that they have been manipulated by the offender and own or others' thinking errors into believing in a guilty person's innocence.

The Deep-Rooted "Stranger-Danger" Myth.

Most children are told that they should never speak with strangers. This "Stranger-Danger" threat has influenced the way people think of who is a likely child sex offender. To abuse a child, the sex offender nevertheless needs time alone with the child. Who has access to children and have the time to go through with the assault? Only the ones we trust our children with. This has been emphasized by research on child sexual abuse.

In a study from 1990 where 23 child victims of sexual abuse aged between 10 and 18 were interviewed, Berliner and Conte found that all victims knew the perpetrator who was either the "child's father, mother's boyfriend, neighbours and babysitters" (p.30). The

finding, that the child sex offender mostly is one the child knows has been repeated by several other researchers such as Van Dam (2001; 2006), Salter, (1995; 2003), Sanderson (2004), and Elliott, Browne and Kilcoyne (1995).

Hence, the incorrect Stranger- Danger myth benefits the child sex offender leaving people incapable of suspecting loved ones of being a child sex offender. We will now look more into the child sex offenders strategies used to gain access to their victims and manipulate society into trusting them.

A Review of Current Research on Child Sex Offenders' Adult Grooming Strategies.

Countries such as Norway, Sweden and the UK have attempted to criminalize what has been labelled "Sexual Grooming" of children. Sexual Grooming has been identified as a conscious preparatory stage to a sexual abuse offence, where the offender will befriend a child and build up a trust relationship, while he is preparing the child for later sexual acts. The grooming behaviour will continue throughout and after the abuse period to minimize threat of disclosure (Craven, Brown and Gilchrist, 2006).

Though not much research has been conducted on child sex offenders' grooming strategies and ways to keep a child in an abusive relationship, this topic has received more attention than how the child sex offenders deceive the community and people surrounding his victims, though some research suggests that this behaviour is a part of the overall offence chain as is sexual grooming of the child (Sanderson, 2004; Salter, 1995).

The research included below is based on interviews with child sex offenders and parents of victimized children. It is very hard to research grooming directly, for the reason that grooming is hard to define and distinguish from normal behaviour. Therefore, we have to rely on child sex offenders' own reports of their strategies and the descriptions given by victims or their parents to get an idea of the manipulations and the dynamics in play between the child sex offender and people surrounding him.

Problematically, we cannot be sure whether the child sex offender's self report reflects the truth. Some research suggests that child sex offenders' engage in Social Desirability behaviours meaning that they like to portray themselves in a "nicer" way than they really are. Interestingly, however, Bates and Metcalf (2007) found that internet sex offenders were much more prone to biased

social desirability replies in their self reporting than were active contact sex offenders, the latter being the ones that will be focused on in this article. Though female sex offenders exist, most child sex offenders are male, why "he" is used to refer to the child sex offender.

Research conducted by Salter (1995, 2003), Van Dam (2001, 2006), Sanderson (2004), Elliott, Browne and Kilcoyne (1995) and Leberg (1997) suggests that child sex offenders spend a fair amount of time grooming the child's surroundings. This is partly done to gain the trust of the child's parents or caretakers for in this way to gain access to the victims, but as we shall see also to minimize suspicion and to create loyal allies in case of disclosure. Some offenders have spent years on this preparatory stage to be sure that they become an invisibly part of the community and the children's families - trusted and well-liked (Van Dam, 2001, 2006; Sanderson, 2004). Grooming the adult community will keep the suspicion down and also signal to the child that whatever the offender does, it most be okay as the child's parents like the offender. We shall return to this later.

Befriending Victims' Parents

In a study by Elliott, Browne and Kilcoyne from 1995 where 91 child sex offenders were interviewed about their strategies and tactics to access a child and keep the child in an abusive relationship, 33% disclosed that they recruited their victims by befriending the victims' parents. 20% of the child sex offenders claimed to have gained the trust of the whole family and 48% sexually abused their victims while they were babysitting. The latter suggests that the victims' parents trusted the offender enough to leave him alone with the child.

Anna Salter, a PhD from Harvard, has written several books about sex offenders in which she merges international literature and research with her own experiences as a researcher and clinical psychologist working with victims and sex offenders. One sex offender, who she interviewed, disclosed:

> Their parents were always my friends. And their fathers, you know, we went hunting together and fishing together and things like that. And there were a lot of times, you know, that me and the father and the sons would all go fishing or hunting, and then there would be times that just me and the boys would go hunting and fishing and whatever. And the parents, you know, pretty much, you know, allowed me to have a lot of time with their children and everything. They made it pretty easy as far as having access to their children

(Salter, 1995, p. 55)

This quote illuminates the importance of befriending parents to gain access to his victims. It has been found that child sex offenders engage in a particular kind of victim selection, choosing only children who are vulnerable (Sanderson, 2004: Van Dam, 2001, 2006). The same strategy seems to be utilized to target the victims' parents. Van Dam (2001) who interviewed American male child sex offenders and parents of victimized children found that some child sex offenders particularly target parents hanging out in bars and who exhibited parenting difficulties. Similarly, in the study by Conte, Wolf and Smith (1989) 20 adult child sex offenders were interviewed and asked to write a manual about how to sexually abuse a child. In reply, one child sex offender suggested to "be in a position where you are close friends with someone who is involved with alcohol and drugs and probably has the attitude that kids are like dogs, just around the house (…)" (p. 298). This quote exemplifies how some child sex offenders on purpose chose to befriend vulnerable parents to gain access.
Sanderson (2004) who works with child sex offenders in the UK has similarly found that child sex offenders might target single parents or parents who do not have that many resources. Access is gained as the child sex offenders are professionals when it comes to filling other people's need. Due to lack of resources of single parents, the child sex offender more easily take on the role of the helper and nice guy.

One important point from Salter's (1995, 2003) research is that sexual abuse of children does not "just happen". In line with Carla Van Dam's (2001, 2006) and Leberg's (1997) research, she emphasizes how important the preparatory stages are in planning the smallest details. Child sex offenders know that they cannot just grab a child and then start molesting it, which is exemplified by the following quotation from an interviewed child sex offender:

> When a person like myself wants to obtain access to a child, you don't just go up and get the child and sexually molest the child. There's a process of obtaining the child's friendship, and, in my case, also obtaining the families' friendship and their trust. When you get their trust, that's when the child becomes vulnerable and you can molest the child (…).
>
> (Salter, 1995, p.38)

Obtaining the victim's parent's trust is an important step for the child sex offender to successfully go through with abusing the child. Trust is a term to be emphasized, because trust is what child sex

offenders aim to create in their victims and the surroundings. And only when this trust is established can the offender misuse it. The quotation below illustrates the child sex offender's conscious manipulation of significant adults aimed to build up trust:

> In the meantime, you're grooming the family. You portray yourself as a church leader or a music teacher or whatever, whatever it takes to make that family think you are okay. You show that child, you show the parents that you're really interested in that kid. And you just trick the family into believing that you are the most trustworthy [italics added] person in the world. Every one of my victims, their families just totally offered, they thought that there was nobody for their kids than me and they trusted me wholeheartedly with their children.
>
> <div align="right">(Salter, 1995, p. 80)</div>

After the above cited child sex offender had been sentenced some of the children' families, who he had been in contact with still kept contact with him and refused to help the police in their investigation (Salter, 2003).

Being too Good to be True

The child molesters are experts in seeming very sympathetic and likeable both to adults and children. This has been the conclusion of Carla Van Dam's (2006) research. The men she interviewed were liked in the community and known for being extraordinary helpful and engaged in social events in the community. Van Dam deduces that *they were so helpful that it actually should be a warning sign* when people do not ask for anything in return for their favours. This is exemplified with the below quote from an interviewed child sex offender:

> I was always trying to be a nice guy. For instance, my wife had a girlfriend calling up one night [while] we were sitting around the table eating supper. Her car had broken down. I got up from the supper table and went to get her car jumped. I had in the back of my mind "I can probably have sex with her daughter. This might be worth it in the long run. I might be giving a little bit now, but what might be getting in the end?" I could have said to her, "I can't right now, but maybe in a little while if you can't get it started".
>
> <div align="right">(Van Dam, 2001, p. 97)</div>

As suggested above, it seems like the child sex offender will go through extraordinary lengths to project a very nice and helpful image of himself.

Grooming the Local Community and Institutions

Van Dam (2006) found that many child sex offenders loved to work for the community, arranging events and taking on extra tasks when some kind of community arrangement was to be established. This kind of grooming behaviour is emphasized by Leberg (1997) who found that child sex offenders were eager to groom colleagues by doing additional work – and the "dirty" work – with the outcome that:

> An entire community can be groomed. The child molester is able to concentrate his energies so effectively that, without knowing it, everyone in the community or town can be set up in advance to believe the offender is innocent, no matter what the evidence suggests.
>
> (Leberg, 1997, p. 25)

In support of this, Leberg (1997) quotes Kenning Lanning, from the FBI training academy in Quantico, Virginia:

> Prosecution of many child molesters may not be welcomed by their communities, especially if the molester is a prominent citizen. Citizens may protest, and community organizations may rally to the support of the offender and even attack the victims. City Officials may apply pressure to halt or cover up the investigation.
>
> (Lanning, 1986, cited in Leberg, 1997, p.39)

Hence, grooming the adult community and the society as a whole gives access, allies and even assists (though unconsciously) the child sex offenders' transgressions

Taking on extra tasks and assignments, which the offenders' colleagues are happy to avoid, gives the offender a special status and makes him indispensable in the community or at work. Leberg (1997) speculates that this results in public recognition leaving the offender in a very positive light for everybody to notice which again reinforces the positive impression of the child sex offender.

An additional kind of community grooming occurs when child sex offenders get jobs which entail a lot of trust between the offender and the community/society as a whole. McAlinden (2006) has termed this for "Institutional Grooming". Sullivan and Beech (2004) interviewed 41 so called professional perpetrators, who they defined as those who "use either the institutions or organizations within which they work to target and abuse children" (Sullivan and Beech, 2002, cited in Sullivan and Beech, 2004). 41.5% of these

acknowledged that finding a job that gave them direct access to children was part of the reason why they decided to work with children. Sullivan and Beech (2002) emphasize the risk of professional perpetrators choosing careers within foster care, churches, schools and voluntary settings. It is important to emphasize, however, that all men working with children are not child sex offenders.

Grooming the Adults and the Community Minimizes the Threat of Disclosure.

So why is it an advantage for child molesters to groom the child's environment? It is not barely an advantage because they gain easier access to their victims. There are other incentives for the child sex offenders to continue grooming the victims' surroundings and the community. Interesting research has been conducted regarding the influence of positive stereotyping and children's reports by Leichtman and Ceci (1995) and Memon, Holliday and Hill (2006).

For example, Leichtman and Ceci (1995) told 3-6 year-old children three stories, which included positive, negative or neutral information about a person called Sam Stone. After seeing Sam Stone, Leichtman and Ceci (1995) found that the children's recollections of Sam were affected so that the children who had heard something positive about him beforehand would recall Sam in more positive terms and those who had heard negative pre-information would recall Sam in more negative terms.

Similarly, Memon, Holliday and Hill (2006) found that 5-year-old children were more likely to integrate post-event positive information in their recall of a person when they had heard something positive about the person beforehand.

Transferred to our grooming context, research like the above mentioned, could suggest that when a child sex offender is well-liked by the community and more importantly the victims' parents, it is very likely that the parent will transfer a positive image of the offender on the child. This could be speculated to make it less likely that the child will disclose any abuse as the child does not think the offender could do anything bad when he is liked by the child's parents.

But is it only children that can be influenced by what they have been told about a person? Now we will look at research suggesting that we all can be misled into believing a guilty person's innocence.

How Human Thinking Might Assist the Child Sex Offender's Transgressions

The research in this article points to that the child sex offender by means of grooming strategies in many instances have made sure that no one would ever suspect him and if he is suspected he most probably would have many people claiming his innocence. Research on human cognition has repeatedly shown that we are all prone to making different kinds of irrational judgements based on our prior hypothesises about a person – that is, we would like to selectively pick up information that confirms our beliefs. This has been termed *the confirmation bias* (Evans, 1989 and Nickerson, 1998, both cited in Ask and Granhag, 2005).

Ask and Granhag (2005) argue that this kind of biased thinking can occur in two ways: 1) we might select the information we get in a biased way and 2) we might interpret existing information in a biased way. It could be speculated that both kinds of biased thinking could occur when the local police are called out to investigate an alleged child sex offender in the community.

Child sex offenders normally are well established and acknowledged people in society and do not easily fall in under the myths ascribed to them, that is – that the child sex offender is nasty, a stranger, old and so forth. It is possible that the police already would know the child sex offender by name or as an acknowledged citizen of the local community. This possibly could leave the police maybe unconsciously in favour of the suspect before beginning investigating the case. This could be speculated to make the police interpret existing information in a biased way.

Adding to this, the research investigated here suggests that it is very likely that the police will only get positive information about the alleged child sex offender, from his work, his neighbours, his wife – he might even seem extremely nice to the police and also seem very worried about the child who made the claims. It could be speculated that the police would only look at these positives about the child sex offender to get their prior belief of the alleged child sex offender confirmed.

The fact that in many instances, when it comes to CSA, there is no evidence except from the child's claim adds to the problem. And in the case of CSA with grooming, it is likely that such a claim will never surface (Salter, 1995). Moreover, some research has shown that children are susceptible to misleading information, which could be speculated, leaves the child's credibility very low in the eyes of many law enforcement personnel.

In conclusion, due to the advanced grooming skills of many child sex offenders it is a worry that unless the police and law enforcement are educated about these kinds of grooming behaviours, many child sex offenders will never be brought to justice due to the fact that the police could fall prey to the child sex offenders' grooming strategies and their own biased thinking and might not investigate the alleged child sex offender thoroughly enough.

Perspectives of Research Findings

The research papers reviewed above sheds light on how important it is for the law enforcement, police and lawyers to be aware of the strategies used by child sex offenders to avoid disclosure of their abuse. Furthermore, it is of importance to understand how we all might react to these kinds of manipulations in terms of adjusting our interpretation of information to become consistent with our prior beliefs.

The best way to protect our children seems to be by being aware. The children at risk are most probably not the ones from families where the parents are informed of the risk, but from those families where no interest and precautions are taken.

As not all families are informed it is up to law enforcement to be knowledgeable for them to be able to protect children against further abuse. It is therefore important for the law enforcement to acknowledge that child sex offenders are very conscious about displaying a very nice image of themselves – that they can be very well liked citizens, well spoken and seemingly very warm hearted. This means that the alleged child sex offender most probably also have several people who will testify for their innocence in the local community, coming up with a range of evidence that this guy is "a good one". Child sex offenders have shown to be experts in manipulations. They have shown to be "good" citizens and do not fall under the myths ascribed to them. For law enforcement per-sonnel investigating a suspect, it is very important to keep a critical eye though the suspects seems like a well intended innocent who has been framed by a young child with "wild fantasies" or an over hysterical parent. Likewise it is important to acknowledge that we all engage in a thinking pattern that can prove to be biased. This concerns the people who have been around the offender for years as it concerns the law enforcement personnel dealing with the suspect.

Most of us would not like to think that the local nice doctor, priest or old sports teacher is capable of abusing small children for

their own diverted sexual gratification. We want to have our image of that person confirmed and therefore will, maybe without being conscious about it, engage in selective information gathering or believe so much in the suspects' explanations that inconsistencies will be overlooked and not investigated further.

Limitations of Grooming Literature

Due to the transparent nature of grooming, the research conducted on the grooming process mostly stem from interviews with child sex offenders or victims/parents of victimized children. Some of the sources, such as Van Dam (2001, 2006), Salter (1995, 2003), Sanderson, (2004) and Leberg (1997) all work as clinical psychologists with sex offenders or victims and their books are the result of many years of experience within this area and written for a wider audience than academics. Therefore, the books at times seem quite vague in their scientific foundation. It is hard to gather the demographics of the child sex offenders, who they are and how exactly they have been interviewed, why they are in therapy and if they are facing any legal procedures at the time of the interviewing. This kind of information is important for us to get an idea of potential biases. The empirical foundation for this kind of research is purely qualitatively and could be subjectively biased - if the child sex offender is undergoing legal procedures he might not want to speak the truth. That is, if the child sex offenders were undergoing any legal procedures which could add to the motivation of reflecting themselves in a more social desirable manner and thereby not telling the truth. Yet, due the nature of sexual offences against children, most research will have to rely on retrospective self-reporting. Furthermore, victims often have to reconstruct their memories and as many victims often first disclose the abuse as adults, we cannot be sure if this reconstruction is correct.

The research conducted which is more scientifically founded and transparent when it comes to use of methodology suffer from small subject samples such as the research conducted by Berliner and Conte (1990) who interviewed 23 victims of sexual abuse aged between 10 and 18 and Conte, Wolf and Smith (1989), who interviewed 20 adult child sex offenders with regards to their strategies to gain access and maintain the abusive relationship with their victims. These studies and the ones by Beech and Sullivan (2004) who interviewed 41 professional perpetrators and Elliott, Browne and Kilcoyne (1995) who interviewed 91 child sex offenders all have made it clear the situation that their subjects were in when

interviewed. Yet, the fact that the above research replicates each other in terms of findings points to the fact that the child sex offenders' accounts could be reliable.

Although research in the area is sparse, and more research on the area ought to be conducted, they all conquer that strategies are used to groom the child's surroundings. It could be speculated that even though this area would be more intensely researched, findings would amount to the same, for the reason, that it has been argued that when child sex offenders have found efficient strategies – they stay with them (Elliott, Browne and Kilcoyne, 1995; Salter, 1995). Ignoring the area of child sex offenders' manipulations of adults and society, due to lack of research on the subject – or lack of hardcore scientific evidence on child sex offenders' methods of grooming, might prove to prolong the fair dealing with alleged child sex offenders.

Yet, if the above research is not approached with a rational mind, it could bring about people to be over worried and sceptical towards innocent and plainly friendly men. A worry is that the research could cause a witch hunt in society, preventing men from applying for care taking roles in institutions and taking up coaching jobs in schools out of fear of being suspected of sexually abusing the children in their care.

Nevertheless, the research is essential for the reason that a complete denial of the fact that your own husband or brother could be sexual abusing children assists the offences.

Thus, with informed law enforcement, the child sex offender faces a much harder time assuring his innocence. Hence, awareness of the factors investigated in this paper will help police and lawyers prevent sexual abuse of children.

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The Effect of Co-witness Misinformation on Witnesses' Memory Reports

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When police investigate a crime, reports from eyewitnesses are often an important source of information. But how can we know whether a person's report can be trusted? Memory can fail, and the quality of eyewitnesses' memory reports depends on a combination of factors. This paper examines one such factor, namely how a witness' report can be influenced by information received from other witnesses. It is not uncommon that witnesses of a crime talk about their experiences with other persons or read a media report of the event before they are questioned by police. When people are exposed to new information about an event they have witnessed, they might incorporate this information into their memories of the event, even if the information is incorrect (misinformation). This can have serious consequences in legal settings, and therefore it is important to know how misinformation from co-witnesses can affect a witness' report.

Social Influence is Powerful Influence

Misinformation can be encountered in several ways, but are there ways that are more influential than others? A study which compared this was made by Paterson and Kemp (2006). In their study, all participants were shown a crime video and one week later their memories for the event were tested. Before the test, the participants were exposed to correct and incorrect information about the video. One of four methods was used to deliver the information: (a) leading questions, (b) media report, (c) indirect co-witness information, or (d) co-witness discussion. There was also a control group which received no information. The authors could thus compare different ways of encountering misinformation to see whether one or more were especially influential. It was found that participants who had received misinformation via a co-witness, whether it was direct (through discussion with the other witness) or indirect (through reading sentences supposedly written by another witness), were more likely to report the erroneous information than participants who had received misinformation through leading questions or through reading a media report. That is, misinformation which

came from another witness was shown to be a particularly powerful way of influence.

Misinformation Before and During the Interview

Experimental studies which examine the effect of co-witness misinformation can use different methods to introduce the misinformation. One distinction that can be made is between misinformation which is introduced before or during the interview. Methods that have been used to introduce misinformation before the interview include allowing co-witness to discuss the event with each other, and witnesses reading a report of the event (which has supposedly been provided by a co-witness). Erroneous information can be introduced during the interview by nestling it within the interviewer's questions, or by interviewing two witnesses at the same time (where the second person's answers can be influenced by the first person's answers). The focus of this paper is on studies where misinformation is delivered before (and separate to) the interview. This is because of two reasons. First, a substantial part of research has been focusing on misinformation delivered during the interview. It has been shown that for example misleading questions and interviewing two witnesses at a time have a negative effect on the correctness of witnesses' reports. An interviewer who is aware of these negative effects could quite easily make precautions to avoid them (i.e. use open questions, interrogate one person at a time). But how can an interviewer make sure that a witness does not discuss the event with others before he questions him? It is a quite natural phenomenon to discuss our memories and experiences with others, and since this is something an interviewer can not control, it is even more important to know how and when misinformation encountered before an interview can alter memories or memory reports. Second, it is possible that different processes are involved when people accept false suggestions delivered before and during an interview. When people are exposed to misinformation during the interview, they might feel pressure to conform, and therefore accept erroneous suggestions. Misinformation that is separate to the interview is less likely to be caused by conformity pressure, and in that sense it is unlike misinformation which is delivered during the interview. Therefore, one could argue that these two should be studied separately.

When Witnesses Discuss with Each Other

What happens when people who have experienced one version of an event discuss the event together with someone who has experienced a slightly different version of the same event? In real-life situations, it is highly likely that people have not taken notice of and remembered the same details, even though they have experienced the same event. There is research that try to mimic these kinds of situations. One example is a study by Wright, Self, and Justice (2000). In their study, participants were given storybooks (pictures) which described a theft. The storybooks differed in one aspect (half showed an accomplice with the thief, half did not). Participants subsequently discussed the theft in pairs, together with a participant who had studied a different version of the storybook. Although initial memories were very accurate, most pairs conformed after discussion. That is, many participants changed their initial memory reports after they heard that someone else remembered differently. Similar results where found by Gabbert, Memon, and Allan (2003), who let participants watch a video of a simulated crime event. Participants believed they had watched the same version, but were teamed up for discussion with a participant who had seen a different version of the video. Results showed that after discussion, many participants reported details which they had not actually seen themselves, but had received information about in the discussion. At the same time, participants who had not discussed with another participant were highly correct.

Directly or Indirectly Social

So, it seems as if the effect of co-witness misinformation is large, but does it also matter whether the person the information comes from is actually present? Are people more easily influenced by social misinformation when they encounter it directly though face-to-face interaction with another person, or are they just as easily influenced when the misinformation is delivered indirectly, for example when they are presented with an account that has previously been given by another witness? A study by Gabbert, Memon, Allan, and Wright, (2004) investigated whether misinformation had greater effect when it was directly or indirectly social. Participants watched a video and were later to answer questions about the content of the video. Before questioning, one third of the participants received no misinformation (control), one third received misinformation through discussion with another person (a confederate acting as a

participant), and one third received misinformation through reading a narrative that was supposedly an account given by a previous participant. Results showed that co-witness misinformation had negative effects on witnesses' memory reports, and more speci-fically, that participants were more susceptible to influence when misinformation came directly from a person than when it came from a narrative. Meade and Roediger (2002, experiment 4) also compared direct and indirect co-witness misinformation, but they also added an extra dimension in that they examined source monitoring, i.e. when participants reported a false memory, they were asked where they had got this information from. Participants were presented with pictures of scenes, each containing several items. Before an individual memory test, misinformation was delivered either through collaborate recall with a confederate (direct social influence), or through evaluating a protocol which (supposedly) showed answers from a previous participant (indirect social influence). First, memory was tested by asking the participants to freely recall as many items as they could remember from pictures they had previously been shown. No difference was found in misinformation effects between those who had the mis-information delivered by direct social influence compared to those who had it delivered indirectly. These results suggest that the power of a virtual confederate can be as strong as that of an actual confederate. But when they were asked about the source of their memories, the pattern was different. Participants were presented with one item at a time, and asked whether they recognised it. When there was false recognition (that is, when they said they recognised an item that had not been present in the pictures), they were also asked whether they recognised it from the pictures or from the confederate/protocol. It was found that participants who have received misinformation through a confederate were more prone to confuse the source of their memory, that is, they more often said they remembered the items from the pictures (even though the item was not in the pictures, but merely suggested by the participant). Taken together, research results are not consistent when it comes to the question whether misinformation has a stronger effect when it is delivered face-to-face.

More People are Less Influential

Another factor that might influence the effect of co-witness misinformation was examined in a study by Dalton and Daneman (2006). They wanted to examine whether the effect was stronger

when misinformation was delivered in discussion with only one other witness, or in a group discussion. In their study, Dalton and Daneman let participants view a video clip of an action sequence and then asked them to discuss the event with one co-witness or a group of co-witnesses. During the discussion misinformation was presented by a confederate. Results indicated that participants accepted the false suggestions offered by the confederate, and that participants who had had a one-to-one discussion more often accepted the false suggestions (68% of the time) than participants who had taken part in a group discussion (who accepted the false suggestions 49% of the time). How come the effect of social misinformation was smaller for group discussions? The authors suggest that it might be a result of the fact that in a group discussion, there are more individuals who might dismiss the false suggestions, and thereby participants can find support for the authenticity of their own memories. Some support for this idea was found when the discussions were analysed. Group discussions lasted on average longer than one-to-one discussions, and also more time was spent on direct arguments over the false suggestions in the group discussion than in the one-to-one discussions.

The Importance of Details

Yet another aspect to consider is what the misinformation is about. Most research has attempted to manipulate people's memory about minor details or details that have no importance to the event to be remembered. It is possible that such details are easily changed because they have not been thoroughly encoded, and when one's own memory is insufficient, people might rely more on other information. In their study, Dalton and Daneman (2006) also compared the effect of misinformation about central details (such as implying that a person did not collide with a car when in fact he did) and peripheral details (such as implying that a boy was wearing a baseball hat when in fact he was wearing a clown's balloon hat). They found that participants were more easily mislead by suggestions about peripheral items than items which were central to the event. The finding that misinformation has a smaller effect when it is about a more central and important aspect of an event seem a quite natural one. One problem though, lies in the definition of what is a central and what is a peripheral detail. What can be considered a central detail, and do all witnesses agree that they are central? Research in this area is still sparse, and the definitions of

central/peripheral details have not been consistent across studies (Dalton & Daneman, 2006).

Conclusions

Taken together, research has clearly shown that people can be mislead by information that they have received from another witness. The effect seems strongest when misinformation is encountered by direct interaction in a one-to-one situation, and when the misinformation is about something that is not too central to the event in question. A more difficult question is how this knowledge could be used in practice. A first step is to be aware of the importance of interrogating witnesses individually and, if possible, before they have had a chance to discuss the event with others. Efforts should be made to find out whether the witness has talked to anyone else, and if so, what had been said. It is important to be aware of the effects of co-witness influence, and to try to adjust evaluations and judgements accordingly. Basically, in order to determine what weight a particular witness statement is to have in court or in a police investigation, it is important to take into account whether, and how, the witness has previously discussed his/her experiences with others.

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"Whose Fault Is It?"
Blame Attribution In The Context of Legal Psychology

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You are driving home from work with your spouse. You are a bit tired after a long day, your spouse is talking non-stop and trying to involve you to plan the dinner later on that evening. Suddenly a rabbit jumps right on front of the car. You automatically try to avoid hitting the rabbit, hit the brakes quite hard and hence the car behind you crashes into your back bumper. The rabbit is killed, your car is damaged but all the passengers in both cars are ok. Who do you blame for what happened? Do you blame yourself for driving a little bit too fast? Do you blame your spouse for taking your attention from the driving? Instead, do you blame the driver behind you for not keeping a safe distance? Would you blame the rabbit for jumping on to the road? Or blame the city council for not providing fences surrounding the roads to protect the wildlife? Would you feel guilty about what happened? Do you say to yourself that what happened was out of your control? Regardless of your reaction, all such questions are central to the concept of attribution of blame.

Attribution of Blame – How Does It Work?

Attributions are involved in processes where we construct causal explanations for our own behaviour and for the behaviour of others (Hall, French, & Marteau, 2003). According to the research, two different types of attribution seem particularly relevant when explaining human behaviour (Kelley & Michela, 1980). *Internal attribution* locates the explanation within the personal qualities of the individual. In the example above, internal attribution would mean that you blame the accident, for example, on your tiredness or your poor concentration. *External attribution,* in turn, occurs when the cause for the behaviour is located outside the person. This could in the previous example mean that you blame somebody or something else for what happened. In the context of legal psychology, issues related to attribution are most often linked with criminal behaviour. When a person enters the legal system and is being accused of a crime, one the most central questions throughout the legal processes are "what happened?" and "why?". At the beginning of the process the person asking those questions might be

a police officer questioning the subject and at the other end, it might be a professional who is evaluating is it safe to release the offender back to the community. By answering those questions the offender uses the processes of blame attribution. Internal attribution is relation to a criminal offence may, for example, mean that the offender explains the act on the intentions, personality characteristics or on certain mental state of him or herself (Gudjonsson & Pettursson, 1991). Examples of external attribution are blaming the crime on social circumstances, environmental pressures or the society (Gudjonsson & Singh, 1988). Another type of attribution independent from the internal-external dimension, deals with the offenders' perceived freedom to act (Gudjonsson, 1984). Statement such as "I killed her because I was furious and lost control of myself" locates the blame to the internal qualities of the person, but it also contains a sense of responsibility for the committed act. It has also been suggested that in addition to the internal-external dimension, the above described *mental-element attribution* is relevant to criminal behaviour and should therefore be taken into account (Gudjonsson, 1984). Mental attributions are more about the person's own *understanding* of his or her behaviour rather than the actual causes, which may indeed be different from each other. Therefore, in order the offender being able to make sense of his or her criminal behaviour and the legal professionals being able to make decisions about the offender, the processes of blame attribution need to be considered. But what do we already know about offenders' blame attribution?

Offenders Attributing Blame –
What Do We Already Know About It?

Because thoughts and feelings are very subjective experiences, in the field of psychology they have mainly been assessed by self-report questionnaires. Icelandic researcher Gudjonsson (1984; Gudjonsson & Singh, 1989) has developed *Blame Attribution Inventory* (GBAI), which assesses how the offenders attribute blame for their criminal act. In this self-report scale blame can be attributed to external attribution (blaming the offence on social and environmental causes, including provocation) and mental element attribution (blaming the offence on individual's internal, mental factors). Since attributions are closely related to issues such as responsibility and guilt, this questionnaire also takes into account the extent of feelings of remorse (Peersen, Gudjonsson, & Sigurdsson, 2000). Studies which have used the GBAI questionnaire to measure blame

attribution of offenders, have found interesting links between the type of committed crime and the extent to which offenders report remorse. In general, it seems that the more serious and more interpersonal the offence has been – more guilt is reported by the offenders and the blame is mostly placed within the offenders' internal characters (Gudjonsson & Singh, 1988). If different types of serious crimes are compared with each other, there is evidence that offenders convicted of serious bodily harm or homicide place most blame on their own mental characteristics. When comparing different types of sex offenders with each other, research suggests that those sex offenders who have offended against adults report more externalized blame and those offending children, in turn, report more guilt feelings (Blumenthal, Gudjonsson, & Burns, 1999). External blame has also been found to be associated with cognitive distortions among child molesters, personality disorders, psychotism and elements of psychopathy with various types of offenders (Dolan, 1995; Gudjonsson,1984; Gudjonsson, 1990; Gudjonsson, & Pettursson, 1991; Gudjonsson & Singh, 1988; Peersen et al., 2000). Taken together, we therefore know that when offenders who have committed different types of crimes are compared with each other, differences can be found and that offenders guilty of certain types of crimes, may also have certain ways of explaining their crime.

Since most crimes are committed by men, have most research studies also concentrated on male offenders. However, it is important to know are they any differences between men and women on how they explain their criminal acts and on the extent they feel guilty about it. A study of Finnish female offenders found lower levels of reported guilt feelings than what were reported by men in previous studies (Weizmann-Henelius, Sailas, Viemerö, & Eronen; 2002). Women who had committed a homicide reported higher levels of guilt than women who had committed other types of violent crimes. Interestingly, the guilt feelings were lower in cases where the offender had committed prior violent crimes. It seems, therefore, that coping with the offence is difficult for the female offenders who have previous criminal history. With those violent female offenders, whose victims had survived, the guilt feelings seemed to increase with the passing of the time (Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2002). As indicated by the researchers, this might suggest that it could be easier for the offenders to cope with the offence when the victim has survived. Therefore it seems that at least with female offenders those who accept blame for their criminal act, due to their own character or temperament, have a

better capacity for remorse than those who blame others or factors in the environment. Looked from the other direction, the more defective the capacity for guilt and remorse is, the more insufficient is the ability of the offender to cope with the offence and hence the risk for re-offending becomes greater. This type of information about blame attribution and guilt is very important in relation to risk, coping and treatment. In order to get to the reasons behind the criminal act, motivate the offender to change their criminal behaviour and to choose the suitable method of intervention, the way in which the offender explains the act and whether or not the offender accepts responsibility is assessed. Hence, existing knowledge about how guilt feelings, expressions of responsibility or the lack of them are linked with recidivism, coping or treatment outcomes may assist professionals to make grounded decisions about the offenders. But can the results of scientific research be applied to practice just like that?

Caveats of the Research – Is It Really That Simple?

Scientific studies always have their limitations and applying scientific knowledge to practice is not always straightforward. Assessing human behaviour, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes is a difficult task. To make that type of assessment practical, economical, and straightforward enough such qualities are often assessed by self-report questionnaires. It is well recognized in the literature that the use of self-report questionnaires has its limitations in forensic settings, particularly when dealing with individuals who might be motivated to deceive in terms of their self-presentation (Moore & Gudjonsson, 2002). Although under-standably, the findings of the research only rely on those participants who were willing and capable to participate studies. It must also be recognized that attributing blame is a very complex process and any inventory attempting to capture the attributions of offenders, presents a complex process in an oversimplified form. Many factors, such as the apprehension or conviction of an offender might have an effect on how he or she accepts responsibility for the act or reports feelings of guilt. Also, in order a person to attribute blame to mental, internal factors, must he or she at least to some extent first accept the fact that they were mentally unstable at the time of the offence (Gudjonsson, 1984). It is also important to note that elements measured by the tests are not exhausting or all explanatory. For example, low scores on external attribution does not necessarily imply acceptance of responsibility. Blaming

someone or something else for what happened is not merely a negative thing either. Attributions may also function to enhance the individual's feelings of control over the environment, help to protect their self-esteem and sense of personal worth, to reduce anxiety and guilt and therefore does not automatically imply lack of empathy (Anderson, Beattie, & Spencer, 2001; Gudjonsson & Singh, 1989). Hence, research studies on psychological issues such as blame attributions of criminal offenders do have their limitations, but the limitations still do not outweigh the value of the information they produce. The processes involved on attributions of blame are not an exclusivity of the offenders. People in general have a tendency to attribute their own undesirable behaviour to some external forces whereas the reverse seems to be true when explaining other people's behaviour (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Further, the research also shows that the general public and us, the legal professionals, may be no less vulnerable to generating justifications that make a serious offence seem reasonable than those who have been convicted of such offences. Therefore, if the concepts of blame attribution, external, internal and mental seemed to be just some abstract concepts somewhere out there, they might actually catch us by being closer than we first thought.

Attributing Blame to the Offenders –
What Does It Have to Do with Us?

Within the legal system, allocating responsibility for criminal behaviour precedes some form of punishment. Research has suggested that if, for example, alcohol has been involved in the criminal incident, may this influence the attributions people make about perpetrators and victims, and to play a role in what type of punishments they would assign to the offenders (Lane & Knowles, 2000). It seems that the more severe the consequences of the criminal event, the greater the responsibility placed on the perpetrator, and less on the context in which the incident occurred (Lane & Knowles, 2000). In a study of attributions in relation to domestic violence, it was found that study participants who had higher levels of acceptance of interpersonal violence themselves, suggested more lenient punishments to the offenders (Lane & Knowles, 2000). This raises a question could attributions also have a role to play on those decisions that are made by the legal professionals?

Legal professionals such as police officers, judges and insurance loss-adjusters often have to make decisions on the culpability of

people in relation to criminal acts. Clinicians in forensic settings, in turn, have a responsibility to make judgements about the nature and validity of the remorse or responsibility expressed by the offenders (Moore & Gudjonsson, 2002). For example, lack of guilt or remorse is often viewed by the professionals as a sign that the offender might still be a danger to the community, compared to the offender who has taken responsibility for his or her criminal behaviour. Decisions on offender culpability or responsibility often have considerable influence on the lives of the individuals in question. In real life, such decisions by the professionals often have to be made on basis of incomplete and inconsistent information. Results of the research suggest that people do share certain pre-existing stereotypes, which can influence the judgements they make (Davies & Patel, 2005). One study concluded that jurors in rape cases frequently hold views which influence their attribution of blame and can even be inconsistent with an accurate application of the law (Finch & Munro, 2004). Although some of the study findings cannot directly be compared with real-life legal contexts, a very important point is made by them to the professionals working in the field involving law and psychology. Any counter factual, non productive attitudes and causal assumptions by us, the professionals, might have an effect on the significant decisions, interventions, recommendations that we give. There are a number of well-established, empirically supported treatment methods, rehabilitation programmes and intervention options for many different types of offenders. The value of them, however, remains quite low without appropriate and constructive attitudes of the professionals applying them (Jackson, Witte, & Petretic-Jackson, 2001). Also many legal, medical and other professionals engage in attitudes, personal beliefs and assumptions of victim and situational blaming such as "victims did something to deserve or contribute to their victimization" and "offenders can't control their actions if they are too drunk or too stressed" (Idisis, Ben-David, & Ben-Nachum, 2007; Jackson et al., 2001). Therefore, it is important for the professionals who interact with the offenders to be aware, to assess, and to re-assess their own existing blame attribution attitudes, beliefs and consequent behaviours.

Concluding Comments –
Why Is the Scientific Knowledge Important?

Even the law itself consists of complex theories of culpability and is concerned with many other concepts such as voluntary or involuntary action and justifiable or not justifiable act. In many

countries and cultures, legal theories also take into account varying degrees of responsibility for criminal acts, depending on the mental state of the offender. The importance of the concept of blame attribution can be seen throughout the legal contexts, from start to finish. Taken the limitations of the research, the way in which offenders attribute blame for their crimes still has very important implications for factors such as offender mental state (e.g. Gudjonsson, 1984; Moore, & Gudjonsson, 2002), -personality (e.g. Shine, 1997) and -treatment (e.g. Fox, De Koning, & Leicht, 2002). In order to increase the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing the risk of re-offending, it is important to understand how the offenders interpret and explain their offences. The interventions associated with recidivism reduction are likely to be different for those who acknowledge responsibility for their offence, compared to those who deny the crime or blame something or somebody else for it (Moore & Gudjonsson, 2002). The way in which an offender attributes blame for the crime, also undoubtedly has an effect on how eager the offender is to admit or to deny the offence. This in turn could have an important effect on the interviewing strategies used by the police investigators. These topics are yet rather under-researched and would deserve a greater interest from the researchers and from the professionals working in the arena of psychology and law. Not least because the researchers and the professionals themselves are also effected by the processes of attributing blame, both in their professional and personal lives.

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