Investigating the victim pseudomaturity effect: How a victim’s chronological age and dress style influences attributions in a depicted case of child sexual assault

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Abstract

Three hundred and seven members of the UK public read a hypothetical child sexual abuse (CSA) case in which the victim’s chronological age (12 vs. 15 years) and dress style (sexualised vs. non-sexualised) were experimentally manipulated. They completed 22 items relating to attributions of victim, perpetrator and non-offending third party blame, victim attire and perceived assault severity. It was predicted that the older and the sexually dressed victim would be assigned more blame for her own CSA with most blame attributed to 15 year old wearing sexualised attire. Additionally, males were expected to be more blaming generally, but especially of the older and/or sexually dressed victim. Results were generally in line with predictions and highlight the role seemingly controllable victim characteristics play in blaming CSA victims. Findings are discussed in relation to the defensive attributions, gender stereotyping and the newly suggested victim pseudomaturity effect (VPE). Criminal justice, victim welfare and rape myth implications, together with methodological issues and ideas for future research work, are also considered.

Keywords: CHILD SEX ABUSE; BLAME; AGE; DRESS; GENDER; MATURITY
The past two decades has seen a growth of academic interest in factors shaping lay perceptions of depicted child sexual abuse (CSA) cases. As with adult rape victims (cf. Pollard, 1992) CSA survivors are often deemed partly to blame for their own victimization, with perpetrators invariably absolved from complete responsibility (e.g., Rogers & Davies, 2007). Because such attitudes are likely to damage a child’s long-term recovery from sexual assault (e.g., Broussard & Wagner, 1988) studies of CSA blame have important practical, as well as theoretical, implications.

The current paper examines the extent to which three factors - the victim’s chronological age, her style of dress and respondent gender - shape attributions towards the victim, perpetrator and non-offending third parties in a hypothetical CSA case. Focus is given to a female victim who dresses in a sexualised (arguably provocative) manner; a topic which to date has been ignored in the context of CSA blame. Relevant literature is now discussed.

**Victim Age**

Robust evidence suggests older CSA victims (i.e. those close to or at puberty) are deemed more accountable, less trustworthy and less credible witnesses to their own assault than younger victims (i.e. those yet to approach puberty). These trends suggest perceived victim naivety is an important factor in shaping CSA blame; a child disclosing sexual experiences they should normally lack knowledge of must, it is reasoned, be telling the truth (e.g., Rogers & Davies, 2007). Indeed, adolescent victims are deemed just as capable of lying and "leading on" their abusers as are their adult counterparts (e.g. Davies, Smith & Rogers., 2009). In such instances, issues relevant to negative gender role stereotypes (discussed below) also become salient.

**Victim Dress Style**

Studies of adult rape blame suggests a victim’s clothing (at the time of assault) influences how the victim, perpetrator and assault are generally perceived, with at least some inferences
about the victim’s character and behavioural responsibility based on her attire (Pollard, 1992). In one study Dull and Giacopassi (1987) found over half their sample (57%; n=449) believed "you can pretty well tell a girl's character by how she dresses”. In another, Cassidy and Hurrell (1995) presented photographs of rape victims dressed in either provocative else conservative clothing and found the former were judged more responsible for their own sexual assault than the latter. Additionally, perpetrator behaviour was seen as more justifiable with unwanted sexual intercourse less frequently viewed as rape. As yet, no study has examined the extent to which victim dress influences perceptions of CSA.

Victim dress also seems a suitable variable for exploring how perceived victim maturity shapes CSA attributions, especially when the child victim has passed puberty. Galambos and Tilton-Weaver (2000) identify three types of adolescent maturity, namely genuinely mature, immature, and pseudomature. Genuinely mature adolescents tend to display developmentally appropriate levels of psychosocial maturity and a relatively few problem behaviours. By comparison, immature adolescents tend to display developmentally low levels of psychosocial maturity and often report feeling younger and/or less experienced than would be expected for their chronological age. Despite this, immature adolescents also present relatively few problem behaviours. Finally, pseudomature adolescents - who in terms of physical appearance are qualitatively different (e.g., taller, more developed) than their peers - tend to display mixed levels of psychosocial maturity; whilst they report feeling distinctly older than their peers pseudomature adolescents (aka. "adultoids") tend to score below average on psychometric measures of actual psychosocial maturity. Unlike the other two groups adultoids present comparatively high levels of problem behaviour (Tilton-Weaver, Vitunski & Galambos, 2001) and tend to engage in behaviours which are inappropriately-old for their chronological age (e.g., wearing overtly sexual clothing). Given their psychosocial immaturity, such adult-like behaviour leaves them vulnerable to (sexual) exploitation.
Investigating how children who behave age-inappropriately are viewed in the context of CSA blaming is likely to have important theoretical and practical implications. Yet surprisingly only two studies have examined victim maturity outside of chronological age. In the first, Rogers, Davies, Anderson and Potton (2011) presented a hypothetical scenario in which either a 12 or 15 year old female CSA victim was depicted as either pre-pubescent (i.e. not yet menstrual with no secondary sex characteristics) or post-pubescent (i.e. menstrual with secondary sex characteristics including fully developed breasts) at the time of her abuse. In this context, a post-pubescent 12 year old was depicted as excessively mature with the pre-pubescent 15 year old presented as excessively immature at the physiological, if not behavioural, level. Surprisingly, differences in the victim's physiological maturity had no impact on victim blame attributions. In contrast, post-pubescent physiological maturity was judged more encouraging of sexual activity when the victim was 12 years (vs. 15 years) old. This suggests CSA victims are not blamed for factors which are beyond their personal control even when these have the potential to be sexually alluring (e.g., a fully developed bosom).

More recently, Rogers, McCarrick and Lowe (2015) examined the extent to which CSA attributions are shaped by a more controllable aspect of perceived victim maturity, namely the victim's behaviour just prior to her sexual assault. Here, the victim was described as either 13 verses 15 years old who behaved in a manner deemed either age-appropriate (i.e. attending a school party with similarly aged guests, requesting a non-alcoholic drink and talking about who party-goers fancied at school) verses inappropriately old (i.e. attending a University party where guests were considerably older, requesting an alcoholic drink and talking about who party-goers had slept with at University). As predicted, the victim was deemed more blameworthy if her sexual assault occurred within an inappropriately-old setting where she was deemed, by implication, to have placed herself at higher risk of sexual activity (unwanted or otherwise). Surprisingly, the girl’s chronological age had no impact; for respondents it
mattered only that the girl was too young to attend a University party, with the extent by which she was too young deemed irrelevant for blaming purposes. Rogers and colleagues termed this the “victim pseudomaturity effect” (VPE). The present study extends this work by exploring the VPE in relation to victim attire.

**Respondent Gender**

Well documented gender differences in the CSA literature mirror those found in adult rape cases, with men generally more negative towards victims than women. Notably, men are more negative towards children of all ages/developmental stages, including infants as young as 5 years (e.g., Davies & Rogers, 2009), pre-pubescent victims in middle childhood around 10 years (e.g., Rogers, Josey & Davies., 2007) and post-pubescent adolescent victims up to 15 years of age (e.g. Davies & Rogers, 2009).

Motivational theories also explain why at least some victims are negatively evaluated in relation to their own sexual assault with perhaps the most widely cited being Shaver's (1970) **Defensive Attribution Hypothesis** (DAH). According to the DAH women perceive greater similarity and identify more with, and so attribute less blame to, predominantly female victims than do men. In contrast, men do likewise for predominantly male perpetrators of sexual assault (see Davies & Rogers, 2009). Feminist and gender stereotyping accounts argue, instead, that the sexual victimisation of women is actively endorsed by inherently patriarchal societies. Any female whose behaviour does not conform to society's preferred “good girl” image and who instead displays “bad girl” behaviour (e.g., excessive alcohol consumption, overtly sexual attire) is blamed for her own assault by virtue of her so-called deviant ways (Pollard, 1992). Such views are also consistent with Lerner’s (1980) **Just World Theory** whereby good things are assumed to happen to "good people", with “bad people” deserving all the misfortune they get. These models explain why men are more blaming of female rape and CSA victims than women. However, whilst negative gender stereotypes are
often applied to adolescent victims (Anderson, Davies & Rogers, 2009), such explanations seem less useful in cases of CSA where the child is much younger and (presumably) deemed more sexually naive and hence more innocent. The current study explored this idea further.

**The Blaming of Non-Offending Others**

Attributions of CSA culpability are not limited to just victims and perpetrators; non-offending "others" such as members of the victim’s family or non-familial authority figures are often blamed too with, to date, mixed evidence for whether men are more, less or equally blaming of these third-parties than women (e.g., Graham, Rogers & Davies, 2007; Rogers, Davies & Cottam, 2010; Rogers et al., 2007). Interestingly, Back and Lips (1998) found the parents of older children were deemed less responsible for their child’s CSA. According to these authors attributions of responsibility for a child’s well-being and safety seem to be a function of the child’ age with non-offending parents becoming less responsible as their child approaches adulthood. Recently, Rogers and colleagues (2015) found non-offending individuals - here, the victim’s mother, best friend and innocent party-goers - were blamed more if the victim's behaviour was deemed inappropriately old rather than age-appropriate. Furthermore, this was true regardless of the girl's chronological age (13 vs. 15 years). It seems observers also blame non-offending others as a means of denying their own feelings of personal vulnerability (cf. Shaver, 1970).

Aside from the above, few studies have explored the blaming of non-offending others who are not part of the victim’s family (e.g., authority figures). Moreover, no research has yet examined the extent to which a victim's style of dress impacts on blame assigned to non-offending actors. Because parents are likely to exert at least some influence on what their offspring wear - especially when the child is female and/or younger - they should, by extension, be blamed more for their daughter’s CSA if they allow her to dress in overtly sexualised, and for a child inappropriately old, attire. The implied assumption here is that
parents should have some influence over the extent to which CSA victims “encourage” their own assault (cf. Broussard & Wagner, 1988).

**Study Aims and Predictions**

The current study investigates the impact victim age, victim dress style and respondent gender have on lay perceptions of the victim, perpetrator, non-offending others and assault severity in a hypothetical CSA case. Study materials and procedures were based on previous work (e.g., Davies & Rogers, 2009; see below) with, pending the outcome of exploratory principal components analysis, the following hypotheses forwarded.

H01 to H05: significant victim age effects will be found (all) respondents attributing more victim blame, less perpetrator blame, less non-offending other blame, lower assault severity and judging the girl's dress style more appropriate (respectively) when CSA involves a 15 year old, as opposed to 12 year old, victim.

H06 to H10: significant victim dress style effects will emerge (all) respondents ascribing more victim blame, less perpetrator blame, *more* other blame, lower assault severity and deem the victim’s attire *less* appropriate (respectively) when the girl wears sexualised rather than non-sexualised attire.

H11 to H15: significant respondent gender effects males will exist, with males assigning more victim blame, less perpetrator blame, less other blame, lower assault severity and rate the victim’s dress style more appropriate (respectively) than females.

H16 to H20: significant victim age x dress style interactions will be found such that the aforementioned differences across victim age will be more pronounced when the victim dons sexualised attire.

H21 to H25: similarly, the aforementioned differences across victim dress style will more pronounced for the chronologically older girl
H26 to H30: significant respondent gender x victim age interactions will also be found with respondent gender effects, for the most part, more pronounced when the victim is chronologically older.

H31 to H35: likewise, respondent gender effects will also be larger when the victim dons sexualized attire.

H36 to H40: finally, significant respondent gender x victim age x victim dress style interactions will be found with the aforementioned gender differences most pronounced when the victim is chronologically older and wearing sexualized attire.

**Method**

**Design**

The current study employed a 2 (victim age: 12 years vs. 15 years) x 2 (victim dress style: sexualised vs. non-sexualized) x 2 (respondent gender: male vs. female) between subjects design. Dependent measures were latent factors derived from numerous items assessing attributions of victim, perpetrator and non-offending other blame, assault severity and victim credibility (cf. Rogers et al, 2011).

**Participants**

A total of 325 questionnaires were distributed via opportunistic sampling. Of these 307 were returned; a response rate of 94.5%. Respondents were aged 17-76 years ($M$=37.8 years; $SD$=14.9 years) with the majority male (54.2%), of Caucasian ethnicity (85.7%) and employed (59.3%), with sizeable numbers either in full-time higher education (10.7%) else retired (8.8%), hommakers (6.2%) or unemployed (8.1%). A small number of respondents were educated to undergraduate degree or higher (6.6%). Few claimed to have experienced any kind of CSA themselves (3.6%) or to have children (0.7%) or friends (5.5%) who were CSA survivors.

**Materials**
CSA scenarios. These were approximately 360 words in length and depicted a hypothetical case of child sexual assault in which a victim was touched inappropriately at a local youth club. In line with previous research examining victim pseudomaturity (Rogers et al., 2011) the victim - here named “Laura”- was depicted as either someone who is clearly still a child (12 years old) versus a mid-range teenager one year below the UK’s age of sexual consent (15 years old). For current purposes, the girl was also depicted as wearing either a short skirt, revealing top, fashionable hair and make-up (overtly sexualised attire) verses conservative clothing, unfashionable hair and no make-up (non-sexualized attire), with the former assumed to represent a form of age-inappropriate – that is, adultoid - behaviour regardless of whether the girl was a pre-teen or adolescent (cf. Levin & Kilbourne, 2008). Also in line with previous work CSA was depicted as unwanted genital fondling with the perpetrator a 35-year-old male acquaintance - here a known youth worker named “Martin” - who was aware of the girl's chronological age.

Attributions. Twenty-two items assessed attributions of victim, perpetrator, and non-offending other blame with the latter focusing of the victim’s parents and the youth club manager. Items measuring perceived assault severity were also included. For current purposes, five novel items assessing perceptions of the victim's dress style as being conservative, sexual, provocative or age-appropriate were also included. These also served as a validity check for experimental manipulations in victim dress style. Where necessary, minor changes were made to ensure items were worded in accordance with each experimental condition³. All items were rated on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”.

Demographics. Items assessing respondents’ gender, age, ethnicity (16 categories), occupational status (12 categories), general educational qualifications (from 1 “no
qualifications” to 5 “Professional/Postgraduate Degree”) and whether respondents, their children or friends had experienced CSA of any kind (all yes/no) were also included.

**Procedure**

Questionnaires were distributed via “cold-calling” to residential homes and local businesses within four randomly selected suburbs of Halifax, a medium sized town in Northern England. Most of those approached agreed to take part, with volunteers handed a questionnaire pack, asked to read the instructions and accompanying CSA scenario before completing all attribution and demographic items. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured with respondents given 24 hours to complete this task before the third author (KR) returned to collect questionnaires in person. Alternatively, completed questionnaires could be returned via the post using a prepaid envelope. All aspects of the study confirmed to School and British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical guidelines.

**Results**

**Preliminary Analyses**

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Davies & Rogers, 2009) attribution items were (re)coded such that high scores reflected a more pro-victim/anti-perpetrator/anti-other/more severe stance. Exploratory Principle Components Analysis (PCA) incorporating orthogonal (Varimax) rotation was undertaken to ascertain the data set's latent structure, with the number of factors extracted limited to those with eigenvalues greater than 1 (i.e. Kaiser’s criterion) and factor loadings restricted to those greater than .40.

Preliminary results suggested six latent factors should be extracted which combined accounted for 63.5% of total attribution variance. Of these, three factors had poor internal reliabilities (alpha’s <.53) which either could not be improved to a satisfactory level through item removal and/or were uninterpretable. These were dropped with Table 1 presenting the final, three factor solution.
As Table 1 shows, five items loaded onto Factor 1, which had good internal reliability (alpha=.81) and explained 25.2% of the total variance in attribution items. This factor was interpreted as "victim's dress appropriateness". A further six items loaded onto Factor 2. Initially, this factor had poor internal reliability (alpha=.55) although removal of one item (Q18 victim culpability) improved this to an acceptable level (alpha=.79). Factor 2, which explained 13.3% of total attribution variance, was subsequently named “victim culpability”. Finally, three items loaded onto Factor 3 which, initially, had very poor internal reliability (alpha=-.16) but which again improved considerably (alpha=.82) following removal of one item (Q16 parental blame). This revised Factor 3 explained 8.2% of total attribution variance and was labelled “parental culpability”.

Normality tests confirmed that two factors - Factor 1 victim's dress appropriateness, \textit{K-S}=1.87; \textit{p}=.002; \textit{n}=307, and Factor 3 parental culpability, \textit{K-S}=1.93; \textit{p}=.001; \textit{n}=307 - had non-normal distributions. However, boxplots revealed no outliers in any factor with inspection of histograms confirming that all three retained factors were suitable for parametric analysis.

**Correlations**

A significant correlation between parental culpability scores and respondents' general qualification level was found, \textit{r}=.16; \textit{p}=.005; \textit{n}=307; two-tailed, with less educated respondents judging non-offending parents less culpable for their daughter's CSA than those with higher education attainment. Future analyses will control for this single demographic correlate.

**Multivariate Analysis of Covariance**

The absence of internally reliable factors for perpetrator culpability and perceived assault severity meant that, unfortunately, a number of hypotheses pertaining to such attributions...
could not be tested. With this in mind a 2 (victim age) x 2 (victim dress style) x 2 (respondent gender) between subjects MANCOVA - controlling for respondents' general level of qualification - was performed across the three retained factors (see Table 2).

*** Table 2 about here ***

Qualification level was not a significant multivariate covariate. In contrast, highly significant multivariate main effects were found for the three independent measures, namely victim age, Wilks' Lambda=.97; *F*(3,217)=30.05; *p*<.001; partial *eta*²=.29, victim dress style, Wilks' Lambda=.31; *F*(3,217)=163.11; *p*<.001; partial *eta*²=.69; and respondent gender Wilks' Lambda=.66; *F*(3,217)=38.18; *p*<.001; partial *eta*²=.35. Significant two-way multivariate interactions also emerged for victim age x victim dress, Wilks' Lambda=.79; *F*(3,217)=19.62; *p*<.001; partial *eta*²=.21 and victim dress x respondent gender, Wilks' Lambda=.96; *F*(3,217)=3.17; *p*=.025; partial *eta*²=.04. These were supported by a significant three-way victim age x victim dress x respondent gender multivariate interaction, Wilks' Lambda=.93; *F*(3,217)=5.63; *p*=.001; partial *eta*²=.07.

Subsequent post hoc univariate ANCOVA revealed general qualifications to be a significant covariate of just parental culpability, *F*(1,219)=4.24; *p*=.041; partial *eta*²=.02, with less academically educated respondents ascribing less blame to the victim's non-offending parents than their more educated equivalents. Several univariate main and interaction effects also emerged as summarised in Table 3.

*** Table 3 about here ***

First, highly significant victim age effects were found for both victim culpability and parental culpability ratings. Means data (see Table 2) suggest the victim was deemed more culpable, and her non-offending parents less culpable, when the girl was depicted as being 15 years (verses 12 years) of age. No such differences were found for victim dress appropriateness. In sum, Hypotheses H01 and H03 are supported.
Second, a main effect of victim dress emerged for all three factors with means data suggesting the girl was deemed more culpable (of her own CSA), her non-offending parents less culpable, and her dress style less appropriate when she wore sexualised (verses non-sexualised) attire. Hypotheses H06, H08 and H10 are therefore supported with, importantly, the suitability of dress style manipulations also confirmed (see Figure 1).

*** Figure 1 about here ***

Third, significant respondent gender effects emerged for two factors, with males judging the victim more culpable and her parents less culpable than females. No such differences were found for victim dress appropriateness. Thus, Hypotheses H11 and H13 are supported.

Finally, several two and three-way univariate interaction effects also emerged. First, a highly significant victim age x victim dress style interaction was found for dress appropriateness ratings. Post hoc simple effects analyses - controlling for respondents’ general qualifications and with alpha adjusted to .0125 - confirmed that a 12 year old victim with a sexualized attire was deemed less appropriately dressed than both (a) the 12 year old in non-sexualized attire, $F(1,115)=421.55; p<.001; \text{partial} \ \eta^2=.79$, and (b) the 15 year old in sexualized attire, $F(1,110)=9.27; p=.003; \text{partial} \ \eta^2=.08$. Further, the sexually attired 15 year old was deemed less appropriately dressed than (c) the 15 year old non-sexually dressed victim, $F(1,107)=100.68; p<.001; \text{partial} \ \eta^2=.49$, but more appropriately dressed than (d) the 12 year old sexually dressed victim, $F(1,112)=38.25; p<.001; \text{partial} \ \eta^2=.26$. Hypotheses H20 and H25 are thus supported.

A significant two-way victim age x victim dress was also revealed for ratings of parental culpability. This was supported by an additional, three-way victim age x victim dress style x respondent gender interaction. Simple effects analysis - with the same demographic covariate and alpha adjusted to .005 - confirmed that males deemed the girl's non-offending parents more culpable when (a) the 12 year as opposed to 15 year old wore sexualised clothes,
F(1,63)=22.59; p<.001; partial eta²=.26, and (b) the 12 year old donned sexualized rather than non-sexualized attire, F(1,55)=11.83; p=.001; partial eta²=.18. Additionally, (c) males judged the non-offending parents of the 12 year old, sexually dressed girl more culpable than did females, F(1,57)=22.33; p<.001; partial eta²=.29. By comparison, females assigned more parental culpability when both (d) the 12 year old, F(1,57)=9.72; p=.003; partial eta²=.15, and (e) the 15 year old, F(1,45)=8.05; p=.007; partial eta²=.15, victim had a sexualized as opposed to non-sexualized dress style. Similarly, females blamed non-offending parents more when their daughter was (f) sexually dressed and aged 12 rather than 15 years, F(1,56)=61.21; p<.001; partial eta²=.52. Finally, parallel victim age differences in females’ perceptions of the child who dressed in a non-sexually manner did not materialize. In sum, Hypotheses H18 and H23 are supported with reasonable support for Hypothesis H38 also emerging (see Figure 2). No other significant univariate effects were found.

*** Figure 2 about here ***

Additional Findings

No significant differences in any factor were found across respondents who either had (verses had not) experienced CSA themselves, or those who knew (verses did not know) of friends who were CSA survivors.

Discussion

Exploratory PCA generated three internally reliable factors reflecting attributions of dress appropriateness (Factor 1), victim culpability (Factor 2) and parental culpability (Factor 3). As such, hypotheses relating to both perpetrator blame [i.e. H02, H07, H12, H17, H22, H27, H32 and H37] and perceived assault severity [i.e. H04, H09, H14, H19, H24, H29, H34 and H39] could not be tested.

As predicted, the 15 year old girl was judged more to blame for her own CSA than was her 12 year old counterpart. Consistent with previous trends (e.g., Rogers & Davies, 2007)
current findings suggest children closer to the legal age of sexual consent are treated (more) like adults and as such are presumed to be independently and morally responsible for their actions.

In the current study adolescent victims were blamed in much the same way as adult females are when dressed in an overtly sexualised manner (cf. Cassidy & Hurrell, 1995). Specifically, being dressed in a short skirt, revealing top, fashionable hair and make-up was deemed more inappropriate attire than was wearing conservative clothing with unfashionable hair and no make-up. As predicted, the victim was blamed more for her own CSA if she was dressed in the former sexualised style. Such observer negativity is consistent with Lerner’s (1980) *Just World Hypothesis* whereby people are deemed more deserving of misfortune and more blameworthy if they present some “bad” characteristic or behaviour; dressing provocatively, which implies a lack of "female respectability", is one such behaviour (Pollard, 1992).

Societal attitudes which direct hostility and blame to (female) sexual assault victims, particularly those judged to be partly responsible for their ordeal, have been long recognised (e.g. Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980). Such secondary victimisation (Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994) exacerbate rape trauma and hinder recovery especially, if expressed by individuals from whom the victim might normally seek help (e.g., family, friends, non-familial authority figures). In some cases, secondary victimisation may even prevent justice being done (Ward, 1995). Current findings, which are consistent with these trends, have clear implications for those working with CSA survivors (see below for further discussion).

As also predicted, men were more blaming of a female CSA victim than were women; trends which are consistent with both the CSA attributions (Anderson et al., 2009) and adult rape attributions literature (Pollard, 1992). Contrary to expectations, men were just as blaming of a girl who was chronologically older and/or dressed in a sexualised (adult-like)
manner than they were of a girl who was chronologically younger and/or dressed in a non-sexualised manner. The implication here is that men are just as influenced by the victim's actual age and/or dress style as women. Follow-up research is needed to confirm this unexpected outcome.

**Non-Offending Other Blame**

Consistent with previous work (e.g., Davies & Rogers, 2009; Graham et al., 2007) males were generally more blaming of non-offending parents than were women. That said, a series of significant interactions suggest gender differences in non-offending other - here parental - blame are more complex when examined across different contexts. Specifically, men and women both judged parents more culpable for their daughter’s CSA when she was allowed to wear sexualized (inappropriately old) rather than non-sexualized (age-appropriate) clothing. Both genders also viewed the parents of a sexually dressed 12 year old more blameworthy than they did the parents of an equivalently dressed 15 year old girl. In contrast, only women attributed more blame to the parents of a 15 year old girl allowed to wear sexualized, as opposed to non-sexualized, clothing. Overall, it seems parents’ protective function extends to monitoring their offspring’s style of dress, with parents blamed more should their daughter “encourage” (cf. Broussard & Wagner, 1988) a sexual assault through what she wears. This applies more to younger offspring who are presumed less morally responsible than their older, adolescent counterparts. Once a child reaches adolescence she is ascribed more moral responsibility with parents’ protective role diminishing accordingly. In such instances, most CSA blame shifts away from family members and on to the child herself (Rogers et al., 2007). Noticeably, this view is more prevalent amongst male than female observers. With women tending to adopt the primary care-giving role in modern Western families (e.g., Coltrane, 2010), it seems reasonable to assume women are also more inclined to monitor and veto their children’s style of dress. In line with Shaver's (1970) *Defensive Attributions*
Hypothesis, women will are more likely to identify with non-offending parents and so less inclined to attribute parental blame. Presumably men tend to feel dress style monitoring is not one of their parental duties, and with less perceived similarity to draw upon, are liable to engage in more parental blaming. This speculative interpretation warrants further study.

Finally, consistent with previous trends (e.g., Graham et al., 2007), being or knowing someone who is a CSA survivor has no impact on perceptions of a CSA victims or assault severity.

Criminal Justice and Educational Implications

The present study highlights some important and perhaps worrying implications for how dress style impacts on CSA attributions. It seems a child is blamed more for her own CSA if she acts in a pseudomature way by dressing in a age-inappropriate (sexualised) manner as depicted here or by attending an age-inappropriate (university) party as depicted in Rogers et al. (2015). Victim blaming is even more pronounced when the child is deemed old enough to be morally responsible for her actions. Unlike physiological maturity which is deemed uncontrollable and thus no reason to ascribe victim blame (Rogers et al., 2010), deliberately engaging in adult-like behaviour is seen by many to be an irresponsible and preventable act deserving of all it gets (cf. Lerner, 1980). It seems this view is applied to adolescents in much the same way it is for adults (Cassidy & Hurrell, 1995). Subjecting children and adolescents to blame attributions akin to those ascribed to adult rape survivors can be very damaging and will likely hinder, if not prevent, the victim’s (full) recovery from CSA trauma.

Recent crime reduction strategies (e.g., “We Can Stop it”; Police Scotland, 2015) have publicised how victim blame is driven by underlying rape myths. The “We Can Stop it” campaign aims to sensitively educate and empower young women about - not blame them for - their sexual assault. Parallel campaigns are needed to educate and empower CSA survives and their families.
Methodological Issues and Ideas for Future Research

The present study employs a robust methodology based on a large, randomly selected, non-student UK sample. As such, current findings are generalizable at least to the UK population. Nevertheless, future studies should sample other geographic locations to test this generalizability still further. Several other methodological issues are also worthy of note.

First, current conclusions are limited to adolescent CSA survivors aged 12 to 15 years. Future work should explore the impact victim dress style and other pseudomature behaviours have on the blaming of much younger children (cf. Davies & Rogers, 2009). Similarly, extending the current design to include adult (i.e. post 18 year old) rape survivors would offer a more robust test of the "victim pseudomaturity effect" (VPE). Parallel effects across perpetrators age (e.g., similarly-aged vs. much older offenders; cf. Giglio, Wolfteich, Gabrenya & Sohn, 2011) could also be investigated.

Second, current conclusions are also limited to female CSA survivors. Examination of the VPE should be extended to child and adolescent victims of male sexual assault (see Davies & Rogers, 2006). The maintenance of strong gender role stereotypes (e.g., the “bad boy” versus the “good girl”) may have some relevance in this context (Anderson et al, 2009).

Third, the current study focuses on a controllable victim characteristic. Whilst the role one uncontrollable facet - the victim's physiological maturity - has been explored (Rogers et al., 2011), the potential role other uncontrollable characteristics (e.g., a child's facial and/or vocal maturity; Zuckerman, Miyake & Elkin, 1995) have on CSA attributions seems worthy of investigation.

Fourth, the strength of the VPE should also be tested on other sections of the community such as those working in the police or welfare professions (cf. Davies et al., 2009).

Finally, the current study utilises a written vignette which may limit the impact victim dress has on respondents’ perceptions. In one study Rogers et al. (2007) employed attractive
versus unattractive victim photographs and found victim culpability scores to be generally higher (overall mean=6.07; SD=.90) than those reported here. Whilst written vignette studies have also generated comparably high victim culpability scores (e.g., Davies & Rogers, 2009), use of photographic materials in which dress style manipulations are presented visually (and not explicitly highlighted) would improve current methodology.

**General Conclusion**

The current study is the first to examine the role victim dress style plays in shaping lay attributions of CSA blame. Overall, it seems a CSA survivor who dresses in a sexualised fashion is seen as behaving inappropriately old for her age and for this reason is ascribed the same level of blame normally assigned to adult rape victims. Dressing adult-like is seen as implicating a mature level of sexual awareness with associated blaming attributed accordingly. Present findings have clear practical implications for those working with (especially adultoid) CSA survivors in, say, clinical, welfare, educational and criminal justice settings. Nevertheless, more research is needed to further explore how CSA attributions are shaped by a victim's perceived maturity and thus the Victim Pseudomaturity Effect. Recognising that pseudomature adolescents are especially vulnerable to being blamed for their own sexual assault will hopefully improve the quality of future treatment and education programmes for this particularly vulnerable cohort.
Footnotes

1. Use of gender-specific terms is justified given both the prevalence of female over male sexual assault victims (Fergusson & Mullen, 1999) plus the current study’s depiction of a female - but not male - CSA survivor.

2. Given conflicting two-way hypotheses no *directional* prediction is made for any three-way interaction involving non-offending other blame.

3. Vignettes and attribution items are available from the first author (PR) on request.

4. An additional “other” qualification category was included but dropped from analyses. Note that respondent qualifications are included as index of general educational/academic attainment and serve as a basic demographic variable rather than to implicate one being more or less educated to make judgements of, say, victim blame.

5. Just two respondents reported knowing that their child(ren) had experienced CSA of any kind. Due to low numbers, these data were dropped from analyses.

6. As one anonymous reviewer noted young CSA victims are tend to experience speedier physiological development including earlier puberty onset (Trickett, Noll & Putnam, 2011). By implication, pseudomaturity may have implications not only for CSA blame and risk of sexual victimization, but also to the child’s risk of sexual *re*-victimization.
References


Rogers, P., McCarrick, L & Lowe, M., (2015). Examining the importance of a victim’s age-inappropriate behaviour on public perceptions of adolescent sexual assault. Unpublished manuscript, School of Psychology, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK.


### Table 1: Factor Loadings, Eigenvalues & Percentage Variance For Each Factor†.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors &amp; Items</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factor 1</td>
<td>Factor 2</td>
<td>Factor 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Dress Appropriateness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue: 5.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance explained: 25.4 %</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.79</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01. acts old via dress style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. conservative dress</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04. appropriate dress</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05. sexual dress</td>
<td>-.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. acts old in other ways</td>
<td>-.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Victim culpability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue: 2.92</td>
<td></td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance explained: 13.3 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. victim guilt</td>
<td></td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. victim blame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03. encouraging dress</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08. perpetrator responsibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09. perpetrator blame</td>
<td>-.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Parental culpability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue: 1.81</td>
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<td>.88</td>
<td>.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variance explained: 8.2 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>02. parental guilt,</td>
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<td>.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. parental responsibility</td>
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†Final versions of each factor presented. $n=307$
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<th>Attribution Factor</th>
<th>Resp. Gender</th>
<th>Sexual Dress</th>
<th>Non-sexual Dress</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Sig. Effects</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 years M (SE)</td>
<td>15 years M (SE)</td>
<td>All M (SE)</td>
<td>12 years M (SE)</td>
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<td>Victim's Dress</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.87 (.13)</td>
<td>3.08 (.13)</td>
<td>2.98 (.09)</td>
<td>5.35 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2.75 (.12)</td>
<td>3.37 (.13)</td>
<td>3.06 (.09)</td>
<td>5.27 (.13)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>2.81 (.09)</td>
<td>3.23 (.09)</td>
<td>3.02 (.06)</td>
<td>5.31 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.87 (.13)</td>
<td>3.08 (.13)</td>
<td>2.98 (.09)</td>
<td>5.35 (.12)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2.75 (.12)</td>
<td>3.37 (.13)</td>
<td>3.06 (.09)</td>
<td>5.27 (.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>2.81 (.09)</td>
<td>3.23 (.09)</td>
<td>3.02 (.06)</td>
<td>5.31 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3.72 (.16)</td>
<td>3.32 (.16)</td>
<td>3.52 (.11)</td>
<td>4.79 (.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>5.28 (.15)</td>
<td>4.53 (.16)</td>
<td>4.91 (.11)</td>
<td>5.80 (.16)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>4.50 (.11)</td>
<td>3.92 (.11)</td>
<td>4.21 (.08)</td>
<td>5.29 (.11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culpability</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3.82 (.22)</td>
<td>4.63 (.22)</td>
<td>4.22 (.16)</td>
<td>2.72 (.21)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2.42 (.20)</td>
<td>4.40 (.23)</td>
<td>3.41 (.15)</td>
<td>3.25 (.22)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>3.12 (.15)</td>
<td>4.51 (.16)</td>
<td>3.82 (.11)</td>
<td>2.99 (.15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†Adjusted means following MANCOA. Range: 1 ‘not at all’ to 7 ‘very / totally’: higher scores reflect more pro-victim/anti-other stance. Sig. Victim Dress Style (D), Victim Age (A), Respondent Gender (G) and subsequent interaction effects at the * p<.05 ** p<.01 and *** p<.001 levels (two-tailed; n=228)
Table 3: Summary of Inferential Statistics for all Post Hoc ANCOVA (controlling for respondent qualifications)

<table>
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<th>Attribution Factor &amp; Effects</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>partial eta²</th>
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<td>victim dress</td>
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<td>&lt;.001</td>
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<td>victim age</td>
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<td>.084</td>
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<td>resp. gender</td>
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<td>.778</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>victim dress x victim age</td>
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<td>39.23</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>***</td>
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<td>victim dress x respondent gender</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<td><strong>Victim Culpability</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>4.05</td>
<td>.035</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Parental Culpability</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.27</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>victim age</td>
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<td>57.06</td>
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<td>5.72</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>.158</td>
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<td>victim dress x victim age x respondent gender</td>
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<td>11.73</td>
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</table>

Sig. effects at the * p<.05 ** p<.01 and *** p<.001 levels (two-tailed; n=228)
Figure 1. Mean Victim Dress Appropriateness Ratings across Victim Dress Style & Victim Age (with 5% error bars)
Figure 2. Mean Parental Culpability Ratings across Victim Dress Style, Victim Age & Respondent Gender (with 5% error bars)