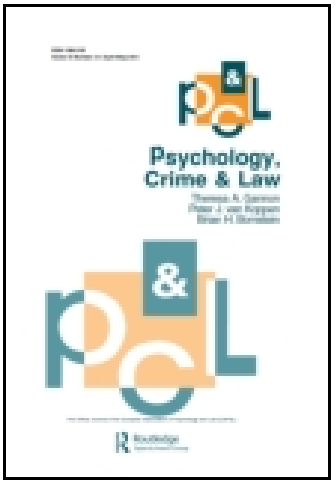

Psychology, Crime & Law
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gpcl20

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Published online: 11 Jul 2012.

To cite this article: Catherine Esnard & Rafaele Dumas (2013) Perceptions of male victim blame in a child sexual abuse case: effects of gender, age and need for closure, Psychology, Crime & Law, 19:9, 817-844, DOI: 10.1080/1068316X.2012.700310

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2012.700310

Psychology, Crime & Law, 2013
Vol. 19, No. 9, 817–844, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2012.700310

Perceptions of male victim blame in a child sexual abuse case: effects of gender, age and need for closure

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(*Received 25 May 2011; final version received 14 May 2012*)

According to the gender stereotypes attributed to men, and research on adult male victims, boys subjected to sexual abuse are expected to be better able to defend themselves than girls, and are thought to be more likely to adopt a proactive attitude in the victim–perpetrator relationship. They are consequently regarded as more blameworthy than female victims. In the present study, 384 French respondents read through a sexual abuse scenario in which the child victim's gender, perpetrator's gender and victim's age (7 vs. 12 years old) were manipulated. As expected, male respondents blamed the victim more than female respondents did, especially when the victim was a boy. Furthermore, male respondents blamed the perpetrator less than female respondents did, especially when the perpetrator was a woman and the victim a boy. However, these effects were observed for victims of both 7 and 12 years old while it was expected only for the 12-year-old victims. Finally, as expected, respondents who expressed a high need for closure perceived the victim as less credible and more guilty than respondents who expressed a low need for closure, particularly when the victim was 12 years old. This cognitive characteristic thus appears to moderate the expression of stereotypical representations.

Keywords: gender stereotype; victim blame; child sexual abuse; need for closure

Introduction

The 2007 French national crime victimization survey (French National Monitoring Center on Crime, *Observatoire National de la Délinquance*) revealed clear disparities in gender, with approximately 92% of victims being female (mainly girls under 15 years old) and 96% of perpetrators being male. Women jurors may thus return guilty verdicts in sex crime cases more often than their male counterparts simply because they are more likely to become victims than men (Crowley, O'Callaghan, & Ball, 1994; Gabora, Spanos, & Joab, 1993; Schutte & Hosch, 1997). However, studies of the perceptions and representations expressed by jurors about victims and perpetrators have shown that these verdicts are not influenced solely by a rebalancing of power. This view is further supported by research on the relationship between the gender of the protagonists (victim, perpetrator, jurors) and sexual abuse verdicts.

Gender belongs to the category of legally inadmissible information – referred to as extralegal information – that can influence the judicial process by activating stereotypes (Bodenhausen, 1988; Jones & Kaplan, 2003; Van Knippenberg,

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Dijksterhuis, & Vermeulen, 1999; Wittenbrink, Gist, & Hilton, 1997) which then interact with other extralegal factors (e.g., age, ethnic group, physical appearance, declared sexual orientation, etc.), depending on the characteristics of the case being heard (Ellsworth & Mauro, 1998; Greene et al., 2002; Köhnken, Fiedler, & Möhlenbeck, 2004; Nietzel, McCarthy, & Kern, 1999). Most studies of the impact of gender stereotype on verdicts have concerned female, rather than male, stereotypes, as little research has been carried out on the male victims of sexual abuse (Mezey & King, 1989; Rogers, 1998). Furthermore, research on victimization has shown that only a minority of male victims file sexual abuse complaints (Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005), suggesting that these boys and men go on to suffer a form of secondary victimization (Campbell et al., 1999; Williams, 1984) as a result of having to keep silent about the assault in order to preserve the image of virility that is expected from them.

The first objective of the present study with French respondents was to replicate variations in jurors' blame perceptions arising from the stereotypical view that a male victim is better able to defend himself than a female one and may also adopt a more proactive attitude in the victim–perpetrator relationship (Davies & Rogers, 2006; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Smith, Pine, & Hawley, 1988). Very few studies have examined the relationship between victim age and victim gender. We therefore set out to ascertain whether the impact of gender stereotypes on the stigmatization of adult male victims also applies to child victims and, as recent studies have tended to show, whether perceptions of blame are directed more toward pre-teenagers (12-year-old), than toward younger children (7-year-old).

The second objective of this study was to examine whether, in the case of judgment under uncertainty, the need for emotional or cognitive closure (Kruglanski & Webster, 1994) has an impact on the stigmatization process involving gender stereotypes. These questions seem particularly relevant in a context where jurors have to cope with highly complex and ambiguous evidence (Leippe, Eisenstadt, Rauch, & Seib, 2004; Shestowsky & Horowitz, 2004).

Role of gender stereotypes in sexual abuse verdicts

Gender stereotypes and perceptions of victim and perpetrator blame

The notion of gender is subtended by the different social roles attributed to men and women – roles that govern people's expectations and representations in social interactions (Eagly, 1987). Consequently, the influence of the victim's gender on blame perceptions cannot be explored independently of the perpetrator's gender and that of the jurors. Furthermore, in studies of sexual abuse verdicts, measures of blame perceptions usually concern the victim (Pollard, 1992) as much as the perpetrator, the aim being to see how much responsibility and guilt is apportioned to each protagonist.

Concerning victim blame in sexual abuse cases, these perceptions stigmatize male victims just as much, if not more so, than female victims (Davies & McCartney, 2003; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). The stereotype of the greater vulnerability of women (Thompson & Pleck, 1986) means that sexual abuse is regarded as more traumatizing for female victims than for male ones (Davies, Pollard, & Archer, 2001), even though it has been established that a sexual assault psychologically affects male victims just as much as female ones (Walker et al., 2005).

The attribution of blame to male victims is related to the stereotypes of strength and assertiveness associated with virility, according to which a man is more capable than a woman of resisting and, consequently, of avoiding such a situation (Archer, 1992; Herek, 1986; Thompson & Pleck, 1986). In their review of the literature, Davies and Rogers (2006) cite Howard's study (1984) highlighting differences in the nature of blame – differences that are deeply rooted in gender expectations. Thus, behavioral blame is laid on a male victim (who was not capable of running away or defending himself) and characterological blame on a female victim (who was too careless). However, these results, which were not replicated in a later study (Anderson, 1999), need to be reconsidered. In all probability, it is essentially the perception of the victim's degree of physical resistance during the assault that influences the attribution of blame (Anderson, 1999; Kassing & Prieto, 2003; Perrot & Webber, 1996; Pollard, 1992). Corollary, Schneider, Soh-Chiew Ee, and Aronson (1994) showed that the perpetrator of a male victim is perceived to be less guilty and deserving of a lighter prison sentence than the perpetrator of a female victim. These authors explained this difference in the light of gender stereotypes, which induce perceptions of male victims being less psychologically fragile than female victims. More specifically, according to the stereotypes of proactive male sexual behavior and passive female sexual behavior (Smith et al., 1988; Struckman-Johnson, 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992), even though men may be victims, they are nonetheless perceived of as initiators of the act and experiencing more pleasure if they are abused by a woman than by a man; this difference in perception being particularly marked among male jurors (Smith et al., 1988), for whom the assault of a man by a woman could even be regarded as an additional sexual experience. Rogers and Davies (2007) showed, moreover, that acts committed by a woman are considered to be less serious than those same acts committed by a man. Consequently, stigmatization can also concern the male perpetrator.

Studies of jurors' gender have regularly revealed greater stigmatization of male victims by male jurors than by female ones, the former reprimanding them more and feeling less sympathy toward them (Davies et al., 2001; Howard, 1984; McCaul, Veltrum, Boyechko, & Crawford, 1990; Perrot & Webber, 1996; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). Furthermore, men tend to blame male victims more than female ones. These results show that men, more than women, carry around stereotypes about the supposed characteristics of manliness (Archer, 1992; Thompson & Pleck, 1986). Smith et al. (1988) noted that 47% of the male respondents in their study (compared with just 9% of the women) believed that male victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by female perpetrators should derive satisfaction from the experience. This effect was strengthened by the victims' perceived sexual orientation. Victims were judged more harshly when they were perceived of as homosexuals than when they presented themselves as heterosexuals (Ford, Liwag-McLamb, & Foley, 1998; Wakelin & Long, 2003; White & Robinson Kurpius, 2002). More specifically, male jurors identified as heterosexual and homophobic have been found to reprimand male victims more severely (Burt & DeMello, 2002). The greater blame attributed to male victims by male jurors (Davies et al., 2001; Davies, Pollard, & Archer, 2006; Howard, 1984; McCaul et al., 1990; Perrot & Webber, 1996) can be explained by the fact that men are generally more homophobic than women (Kite & Whitley, 1996).

Role of representations in relation to the victim's age

In child sexual abuse cases, the impact of the victim' gender would appear to be less perceptible but, where it does manifest itself, its effects are very similar to those observed in adult victims. Its presence depends on the victim's age and thus on the perception of the victim's intention to participate in the act. Generally, whatever the victim's gender, most young children (less than 10 years old) are judged to be less blameworthy than 15-year-old teenagers (legal age of consent in the United States), as they are perceived of as being too immature for their participation in the act to be deliberate (Burt & Estep, 1981). The child's perceived ability to resist the act is positively correlated with age (Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984). Rogers and Davies (2007) also observed that the act is perceived of as more serious when the victim is less than 10 years old, regardless of the victim's and perpetrator's gender. Accordingly, adolescence seems to be the stage at which the stereotypical gender representations applied in the cases of adult victims start to come to the fore. As shown in Davies and Rogers' (2006) review, in both American, British and Indian populations, a boy of 15 or more who falls victim to a female perpetrator is regarded as more blameworthy than a younger child would be. However, Davies and Rogers (2006) suggest that similar disapproval may also be expressed toward male prepubescent victims (10-year-old). It seems that these representations and their impact on attributions of blame are concerning younger and younger children, but as yet we have insufficient data on the subject.

Finally, with regard to the jurors' gender, although men, like women, adopt pro-victim attitudes in child sexual abuse cases (Rogers, Josey, & Davies, 2007), they are more inclined to apportion a degree of blame to the victim and to regard the act as less serious than women do (Broussard & Wagner, 1988; Davies & Rogers, 2004, 2009; Davies, Rogers, & Bates, 2008; Davies, Rogers, & Hood, 2009a; Davies, Rogers, & Witelegg, 2009b; Eisenberg, Owens, & Dewey, 1987; Maynard & Wiederman, 1997; Rogers & Davies, 2007) even in the case of child victims as young as 6 years (Back & Lips, 1998).

Moreover, it is important to underline that, specifically in testimonies given by the child victims of sexual abuse, verdicts and attributions of blame are based on perceptions of the credibility of the victims' testimony. There is a major risk of judicial error, particularly in cases involving minors (e.g., the Outreau appeal trial in France (in 2004 and 2005) revealing a famous miscarriage of justice concerning an alleged pedophile ring). Two levels of analysis allow us to estimate the victim's credibility: skill in producing an exact description of the event and sincerity (Miller & Burgoon, 1982). According to McCauley and Parker (2001), the child's perceived sincerity is the factor that most strongly determines the credibility of testimony in sexual abuse cases. Moreover, several studies (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin, Stewart, & Mitchell, 2003; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Rogers et al., 2007) agree that most young children (10 years old and younger) are less capable of retaining precise memories of the event than older ones. Notably, younger children are more likely than older children to be suggestible during their testimony, specifically when they have to reply to forced-choice and yes/no questions (Bruck, Ceci, Francouer, & Renick, 1995; Walker, Lunning, & Eilts, 1996) whereas their reports are typically no less accurate than those of older children or adults when they have to produce free-recall accounts or reply to nonleading questions (Goodman,

Bottoms, Schwartz-Kenney, & Rudy, 1991; Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, & Abbott, 2007; Yuille, Hunter, Joffe, & Zaparniuk, 1993). However that may be because younger children are regarded as sexually innocent, they are judged to be more sincere and are thus seen to be more credible than older children (15 years old). Lastly, as sexual naivety is perceived of as becoming less marked with age, the closer children are to adulthood, the less credibility they are given.

Davies and Rogers (2009) recently emphasized that there is no consensus on the precise age at which these perceptions start to be influenced by the stereotypes that prevail for adult victims: when McCauley and Parker (2001) compared the testimonies of a 6-year-old child and a 13-year-old one, they failed to observe the difference in perceived credibility reported by Bottoms and Goodman (1994) between a 6-year-old child and a 14-year-old teenager. According to Rogers and Davies (2007), 10-year-old children remain more credible than 15-year-old teenagers. Concerning victim blame, it seems that the effects of juror gender (men blame victims more than women do) can be observed for children as young as 12 years old (Rogers, Titterington, & Davies, 2009).

Cognitive and motivational regulation of gender stereotypes: respondents' need for closure

Role of stereotypes in the perception of blame

Numerous studies have sought to explain the influence of stereotypes on blame perceptions (Bodenhausen, 1988; Burt, 1980; Jones & Kaplan, 2003; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; McCaul et al., 1990; Van Knippenberg et al., 1999), demonstrating their role in reducing doubt in the construction of judicial judgments. Defined by Leyens and Dardenne (1994, p. 90) as 'general beliefs about the personality, physical appearance and behavior which a group maintains about the members of another group or itself', stereotypes are classically conceived of as empirical rules of judgment, often leading to biased interpretations in our perceptions of others (Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977), though not in any conscious way (Dovidio, Evans, & Tyler, 1986). More specifically, stereotypes help to confirm individuals' expectations about the victims. For example, it is important for victims to be credible, reliable and coherent in their victim role, so that their innocence is not questioned. This need for certainty is probably uppermost in judges' minds when they are confronted with such abject crimes as child sexual abuse. For this reason, explanatory processes based on stereotypes are probably affected by cognitive motivations.

Need for closure

According to Kruglanski (1990), information processing can be influenced by epistemic needs, such as the need for cognition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) and the need for closure (Kruglanski, 1990; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Unlike the need for cognition, the need for closure (NFC) has rarely been studied with regard to judicial judgments. Kruglanski (1990, p. 337) defined the NFC as 'a need of answer, any answer rather than the confusion and the ambiguity' (need for nonspecific closure) or a need of particular answers with regard to particular questions (need for specific closure). By opting for an answer – any answer – rather than remaining in a state of confusion and ambiguity, individuals escape from a situation of uncertainty

and reduce their cognitive investment. Their motivations depend on the perception of the 'costs of the indecision' (Leyens & Fiske, 1997). According to Webster and Kruglanski (1994), the NFC can stem from a dispositional characteristic. In other words, individuals differ substantially in their ability to grasp the world in all its ambiguity. For example, a person with a high NFC will more readily jump to the most obvious conclusion and will be reluctant to consider other points of view. On the basis of a scale measuring the need for nonspecific closure, these authors compared respondents expressing a high NFC with respondents expressing a low NFC, and observed that the former used more stereotypes in their judgments (Dijksterhuis, Van Knippenberg, Kruglanski, & Schaper, 1996; Jamieson & Zanna, 1989; Kruglanski & Freund, 1983). In this context, stereotypes provide a fast and stable outcome to decision-making. This makes the NFC a relevant concept for determining when and where stereotypes liable to affect blame perceptions are activated within the framework of judicial judgments under uncertainty.

Overview and hypotheses

The main objective of the present study was to see whether the greater stigmatization, in terms of blame attribution by jurors, especially male ones, of male victims compared with female victims (effects widely observed in cases of adult sexual abuse) would also be expressed in a hypothetical child sexual abuse case. The greater stigmatization of male victims results from the gender stereotype whereby males (adults, but also children) are capable of defending themselves and of resisting during an assault (Davies & Rogers, 2006) and adopt a proactive attitude in sexual relations (Smith et al., 1988). Moreover, the greater stigmatization of male victims in the case of male perpetrators can be explained by homophobic attitudes among male jurors (Kite & Whitley, 1996). In these configurations, the more a male victim is blamed, the less the perpetrator is perceived of as responsible (Pollard, 1994). Numerous studies have shown that, in sexual abuse cases, the child victim's share of perceived responsibility is always small, regardless of his or her gender. However, given that children gradually become able to resist in the same way as adults (Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984), while at the same time gradually losing their sexual naivety, their perceived responsibility increases with age and the credibility of their testimonies decreases. We therefore expected perceptions of blame to vary with the victim's age (7 or 12 years old).

The second objective of this study was to ascertain whether the respondents' NFC reinforced the effect of these gender stereotypes on their judgments. We expected the predicted perceptions of blame to be more pronounced in high-NFC respondents than in low-NFC ones.

We measured the effects of these factors on the respondents' ratings of the victim's credibility, and on their perceptions of blame with regard to the victim and perpetrator. Blame referred to guilt (i.e., notion of having committed a fault or a reprehensible act) and responsibility (i.e., notion of having to answer for one's actions). Consequently, we formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. We expected male jurors to blame the victim more than female jurors, that is, we predicted that male jurors would perceive the child victim as (a) less credible, (b) more responsible and (c) more guilty, especially when the victim was a boy, when he was

12 years old and when the perpetrator was a woman. We expected these effects to be greater among jurors who expressed a high NFC.

Hypothesis 2. At the same time, and because measures of blame perceptions usually concern both the victim and the perpetrator, we expected male jurors to blame the perpetrator less than female jurors, that is, we predicted that male jurors would perceive the perpetrator as (a) less responsible and (b) less guilty, especially when the victim was a boy, when he was 12 years old and when the perpetrator was a woman. We expected these effects to be greater among jurors who express a high NFC.

Method

Design

We adopted a 2 (respondents' gender) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (perpetrator gender) x 2 (victim age: 7 vs. 12 years old) between-respondents design. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the eight experimental conditions.

Respondents and procedure

A total of 384 adults took part in this study. The sample included 232 women and the average age was 27.36 years ($SD = 11.53$; range: 18–88). We ensured that the sample displayed good heterogeneity in terms of the respondents' age and socioeconomic status (students, employees, unemployed) so that it was as representative as possible. Respondents included 124 undergraduate students from the University of Poitiers (France). No payments or other incentives were offered for participation.

Respondents were individually interviewed either in waiting rooms in public places (70%), in an educational setting (at the end of lectures) or at the end of association meetings. The study was always presented in the same way, by one of the two female experimenters, as part of research on jury verdicts conducted by the Department of Psychology at Poitiers University. Standardized instructions invited respondents to read through the description of the fictitious case carefully, at their own pace and to answer the list of questions spontaneously, in their order of presentation, and not to confer with others. Individual and standardized interview conditions (no interruption or disturbance of any kind during the interview) were respected for all of the questionnaires included in the analyses. The interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. Respondent anonymity was assured. Finally, respondents were thanked and completely debriefed.

Sexual abuse scenario

A scenario was constructed along similar lines to ones used in two previous studies investigating blame perception in sexual abuse cases (Graham, Rogers, & Davies, 2007; Rogers & Davies, 2007). Each scenario was 227 words long and depicted a fictitious situation of sexual abuse. A victim, named Lucie (vs. Luc), who is either a child (7-year-old) or an adolescent (12-year-old) claims to have been sexually assaulted by an adult. The alleged perpetrator, named Jeanne (vs. Jean), aged 35 years, is a neighbor of the victim's family who was supposed to stay overnight to babysit the victim. The victim reports the assault to her/his mother the following morning, after the babysitter has left the house. S/he subsequently retracts her/his

testimony at the police station. We deliberately chose common, age-appropriate French names for the victim and perpetrator depicted in the scenario (see Appendix 1 for the complete scenario). The scenario was intended to be both realistic and ambiguous, the objective being to create a context of judgment under uncertainty.

A pilot study conducted with 60 students aged 18–38 years allowed us to (1) hone the scenario in order to achieve a satisfactory level of variability across pro-victim and pro-perpetrator positions, and (2) verify the participants' understanding of the items. During collective sessions, we collected participants' comments on the protocol in the course of elaboration. The participants indicated that, in view of the context of activated judicial judgment, the term 'responsibility' referred to the notion of having to answer for one's actions (legal terminology) rather than being the cause of something (common meaning). The term 'guilty' was understood as referring to the notion of having committed a fault or a reprehensible act in the situation described in the scenario. The pilot study also confirmed the ambiguity of the scenario through the uncertainty of the respondents' judgments: the average rating of judgment confidence fell in the middle of a scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all confident*) to 7 (*Totally confident*), $M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.20$.

Measures

Blame and credibility perception

In accordance with the method usually used in previous studies investigating blame perception in sexual abuse cases (Graham et al., 2007; Rogers & Davies, 2007), each scenario was followed by questions about the perpetrator's and victim's culpability and responsibility (2 x 2 items) and the victim's credibility (1 item). The order of the questions concerning culpability and responsibility was randomized: half of the respondents answered questions about the victim first and half answered questions about the perpetrator first. All items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*No*) to 7 (*Yes*) (see Appendix 2 for the questionnaire).

Need for closure

Respondents then answered the need for closure (NFC) Scale developed by Kruglanski and Webster (1994) and translated into French (Caroff, Berjot, Fievet, & Drozda-Senkowka, 2002). The 42 items in this scale measure five dimensions of the NFC: Preference for order and structure (10 items), Desire for predictability (8 items), Decisiveness (7 items), Discomfort with ambiguity (9 items) and Closed-mindedness (8 items). The items are rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly agree*), meaning that overall scores can range from 42 to 252. Internal consistency for the overall scale was satisfactory (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$). The mean NFC score was 152.58 ($SD = 18.56$; min = 94, max = 207).

In order to estimate the validity of the fictitious case, the respondents answered questions about the seriousness of the reported facts (1 item), and the respondents' confidence in their judgments (1 item) on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all serious/confident*) to 7 (*Extremely serious/confident*).

Finally, respondents were asked to report their age and gender.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Table 1 sets out the overall means and standard deviations for each measured variable and the correlations between them. Preliminary analyses showed that respondents perceived the hypothetical sexual abuse case used in this study as very serious. They also expressed a relatively high level of confidence in their judgments. For both case seriousness, $t(383) = 31.52$, $p < .0001$, and confidence, $t(383) = 10.45$, $p < .0001$, respondents' ratings were higher than the theoretical mean (4).

Furthermore, preliminary analyses showed results consistent with those obtained in previous studies (Pollard, 1992; Rogers et al., 2007). First, respondents adopted a pro-victim attitude: they perceived the perpetrator to be both more responsible, $t(383) = -23.32$, $p < .0001$, and guiltier, $t(383) = -22.32$, $p < .0001$, than the victim. Second, correlations showed that both the responsibility and the culpability apportioned to the victim were negatively correlated with the responsibility and culpability attributed to the perpetrator. Third, victim's credibility ratings were positively and highly correlated with both the responsibility and the culpability attributed to the perpetrator.

Finally, the respondents' age was significantly linked to all the dependent variables of interest. In addition, the mean age of the male respondents was significantly higher than that of the female respondents ($M = 32.67$, $SD = 14.39$ vs. $M = 23.9$, $SD = 7.39$; $t(382) = 7.84$, $p < .001$). Thus, the respondents' age was included in all the analyses as a covariate, in order to control for its impact. However, since the respondents' age was not the focus of this study, results on this variable are not reported.

The hypotheses were tested using factorial regression analyses including the five factors of interest (i.e., respondents' gender, perpetrator's gender, victim's gender, victim's age and NFC) and the respondents' age to control for its effect, as specified above.[1] The dichotomous factors were centered by coding female/7-year-old -1 and male/12-year-old +1. The NFC score, a continuous variable, was also centered before being included in the analyses. Significant interaction effects were probed with the simple slopes method. For the NFC scores, the conditional values used to test the simple effects were the values 1 *SD* above and 1 *SD* below the mean of the centered variable (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Table 2 sets out the means and standard deviations across the respondent, perpetrator, and victim gender and victim age conditions.

Credibility attribution to the victim

The main effect of respondents' gender was significant, $\beta = -.20$, $F(1, 351) = 13.38$, $p < .001$. As expected, men rated the victim less credible than women.

The interaction between respondents' gender, victim's gender and NFC was significant, $\beta = -.11$, $F(1, 351) = 4$, $p = .046$. When the victim was a boy, the main effect of the respondents' gender remained significant, $\beta = -.28$, $F(1, 180) = 15.79$, $p = .0001$. In addition, the main effect of NFC also was significant, $\beta = -.15$, $F(1, 180) = 4.60$, $p = .033$, showing as expected that respondents with a higher NFC rated the victim less credible than respondents with a lower NFC. However, the interaction between respondents' gender and NFC was not significant, $F(1, 180) = 2.21$, *ns*.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between measures of victim credibility (VCr), victim responsibility (VR), victim culpability (VCu), perpetrator responsibility (PR), perpetrator culpability (PC), perceived seriousness (PS), confidence in judgment (CJ) and respondents' age (Age).

	M	*SD*	Max	Min	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. VCr	5.06	1.34	1	7	–							
2. VR	2.05	1.78	1	7	−.22**	–						
3. VCu	2.28	1.53	1	7	−.23**	.58**	–					
4. PR	5.94	1.35	1	7	.47**	−.26**	−.25**	–				
5. PC	4.80	1.41	1	7	.49**	−.22**	−.12*	.57**	–			
6. NFC	152.58	18.56	94	207	−.10	.12*	−.08	−.02	.08	–		
7. CJ	4.85	1.60	1	7	.27**	.11*	−.09'	.19**	.24**	.13**	–	
8. PS	6.08	1.29	1	7	.38**	−.21**	−.19**	.37**	.30**	.00	.15*	–
9. Age	27.39	11.53	1	7	−.14*	.25**	.15**	−.16**	−.23**	.24**	.04	−.21**

Note: $N = 384$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; all of the items were rated on 7-point Likert-type scales (with the exception of the age variable).

Table 2. Victim credibility, victim responsibility and culpability, and perpetrator responsibility and culpability ratings across respondent, perpetrator, victim gender and victim age.

	Victim	Respond	Male Perpetrator						Female perpetrator						All						
			Male Victim		Female Victim		All		Male Victim		Female Victim		All		Male Victim		Female Victim		All		
	Age	Gender	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Significant Effects
Victim Cred.	12 years	Male	4.20	1.42	4.64	1.49	4.43	1.45	4.46	1.77	4.87	1.26	4.66	1.54	4.36	1.63	4.78	1.35	4.57	1.50	
		Female	5.50	1.14	5.15	1.01	5.31	1.07	5.07	1.27	5.05	1.35	5.06	1.29	5.27	1.21	5.11	1.14	5.19	1.18	
		All	5.02	1.38	4.97	1.21	5.00	1.28	4.77	1.55	4.95	1.29	4.85	1.43	4.88	1.47	4.96	1.24	4.92	1.36	
	7 years	Male	4.68	1.35	4.70	1.40	4.69	1.35	4.94	1.58	5.00	1.32	4.97	1.44	4.82	1.46	4.85	1.35	4.84	1.40	
		Female	5.72	1.12	5.29	1.33	5.49	1.25	5.40	1.09	5.12	1.23	5.24	1.17	5.61	1.11	5.23	1.29	5.40	1.22	
		All	5.41	1.27	5.13	1.37	5.26	1.33	5.17	1.35	5.06	1.26	5.12	1.29	5.31	1.30	5.10	1.32	5.20	1.31	
	All	Male	4.45	1.38	4.67	1.42	4.56	1.40	4.66	1.69	4.92	1.27	4.79	1.50	4.57	1.56	4.81	1.34	4.69	1.46	
		Female	5.63	1.12	5.23	1.20	5.41	1.18	5.20	1.20	5.08	1.27	5.15	1.23	5.45	1.17	5.18	1.23	5.31	1.20	
		All	5.24	1.33	5.06	1.30	5.14	1.31	4.94	1.47	5.01	1.27	4.97	1.37	5.09	1.41	5.04	1.28	5.06	1.34	
Victim Resp.	12 years	Male	3.20	2.04	3.00	1.62	3.09	1.80	3.61	2.13	2.95	2.19	3.30	2.16	3.46	2.08	2.97	1.95	3.21	2.02	
		Female	2.15	1.89	2.15	1.11	2.15	1.49	2.71	1.86	2.05	1.60	2.43	1.77	2.44	1.88	2.11	1.30	2.28	1.62	
		All	2.53	1.98	2.44	1.35	2.48	1.66	3.14	2.03	2.54	1.98	2.87	2.02	2.88	2.02	2.49	1.67	2.69	1.86	
	7 years	Male	2.75	1.80	2.58	1.76	2.66	1.76	3.10	2.05	3.05	2.20	3.08	2.09	2.94	1.92	2.82	1.99	2.88	1.94	
		Female	1.86	1.22	2.18	1.64	2.03	1.47	2.15	1.59	1.88	1.33	2.00	1.44	1.96	1.36	2.07	1.53	2.02	1.45	
		All	2.13	1.46	2.29	1.67	2.21	1.57	2.61	1.87	2.37	1.82	2.48	1.84	2.33	1.65	2.32	1.73	2.33	1.69	
	All	Male	2.96	1.90	2.79	1.68	2.87	1.78	3.40	2.09	3.00	2.17	3.20	2.13	3.22	2.01	2.90	1.96	3.06	1.98	
		Female	1.98	1.52	2.17	1.43	2.08	1.47	2.47	1.76	1.95	1.44	2.22	1.62	2.19	1.64	2.09	1.43	2.14	1.53	
		All	2.30	1.71	2.36	1.53	2.33	1.61	2.92	1.97	2.45	1.89	2.70	1.94	2.61	1.86	2.40	1.70	2.50	1.78	

Table 2 (*Continued*)

	Victim	Respond	Male Perpetrator						Female perpetrator						All						Significant Effects
			Male Victim		Female Victim		All		Male Victim		Female Victim		All		Male Victim		Female Victim		All		
	Age	Gender	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Victim Culp.	12 years	Male	3.06	1.79	2.58	1.46	2.81	1.61	2.84	1.91	2.29	1.45	2.58	1.71	2.92	1.84	2.41	1.44	2.67	1.67	
		Female	2.26	1.56	2.18	1.28	2.22	1.40	2.75	1.75	1.90	1.51	2.39	1.69	2.51	1.66	2.07	1.36	2.30	1.53	
		All	2.56	1.67	2.32	1.34	2.43	1.49	2.79	1.81	2.11	1.48	2.48	1.70	2.69	1.75	2.22	1.40	2.46	1.60	
	7 years	Male	2.93	1.34	2.05	1.47	2.48	1.46	2.84	1.95	2.16	1.54	2.51	1.77	2.88	1.67	2.11	1.49	2.50	1.62	
		Female	2.02	1.53	1.88	1.26	1.95	1.38	2.00	1.21	1.68	1.06	1.82	1.13	2.01	1.42	1.81	1.19	1.90	1.29	
		All	2.30	1.52	1.93	1.31	2.10	1.42	2.41	1.64	1.88	1.29	2.13	1.48	2.34	1.57	1.91	1.30	2.11	1.44	
	All	Male	3.00	1.54	2.32	1.47	2.64	1.53	2.84	1.90	2.23	1.47	2.55	1.73	2.90	1.76	2.27	1.46	2.59	1.64	
		Female	2.12	1.53	2.01	1.27	2.06	1.39	2.43	1.58	1.77	1.27	2.11	1.47	2.26	1.55	1.92	1.27	2.08	1.42	
		All	2.41	1.58	2.10	1.33	2.25	1.46	2.63	1.74	2.00	1.38	2.32	1.61	2.52	1.66	2.06	1.35	2.28	1.53	
Perpetrator Resp.	12 years	Male	5.20	1.82	4.64	1.90	4.90	1.85	4.69	1.78	5.41	1.13	5.04	1.53	4.87	1.79	5.09	1.52	4.98	1.65	
		Female	6.07	.93	5.93	.84	6.00	.87	5.60	1.54	5.60	1.18	5.60	1.39	5.83	1.29	5.80	.99	5.82	1.15	
		All	5.75	1.37	5.48	1.43	5.61	1.40	5.16	1.71	5.50	1.15	5.31	1.48	5.42	1.59	5.49	1.29	5.45	1.45	
	7 years	Male	5.87	.95	5.05	1.24	5.45	1.17	4.89	1.48	5.33	1.60	5.10	1.54	5.34	1.34	5.20	1.43	5.27	1.38	
		Female	5.59	1.36	6.02	.84	5.82	1.12	5.60	1.35	5.20	1.00	5.37	1.17	5.59	1.34	5.72	.98	5.66	1.15	
		All	5.67	1.25	5.75	1.05	5.71	1.14	5.25	1.44	5.25	1.27	5.25	1.35	5.50	1.34	5.54	1.17	5.52	1.25	
	All	Male	5.54	1.45	4.85	1.59	5.18	1.56	4.77	1.64	5.38	1.34	5.06	1.53	5.09	1.60	5.14	1.47	5.11	1.53	
		Female	5.79	1.22	5.98	.84	5.89	1.03	5.60	1.45	5.37	1.09	5.49	1.29	5.71	1.32	5.76	.98	5.73	1.15	
		All	5.71	1.30	5.63	1.23	5.67	1.26	5.20	1.59	5.37	1.21	5.28	1.42	5.45	1.47	5.52	1.23	5.49	1.35	

Table 2 (*Continued*)

	Victim	Respond	Male Perpetrator						Female perpetrator						All						Significant Effects
			Male Victim		Female Victim		All		Male Victim		Female Victim		All		Male Victim		Female Victim		All		
	Age	Gender	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Perpetrator Culp.	12 years	Male	4.06	1.57	4.29	1.79	4.18	1.67	3.65	1.59	4.33	.91	3.98	1.34	3.80	1.58	4.31	1.33	4.06	1.47	
		Female	5.50	.90	4.90	1.05	5.17	1.02	4.64	1.49	4.55	1.46	4.60	1.46	5.05	1.30	4.76	1.23	4.91	1.27	
		All	4.97	1.36	4.69	1.37	4.82	1.37	4.16	1.61	4.43	1.18	4.28	1.43	4.51	1.55	4.56	1.28	4.54	1.42	
	7 years	Male	4.75	1.39	4.17	1.38	4.45	1.39	4.26	1.69	4.55	1.58	4.40	1.62	4.48	1.56	4.37	1.47	4.42	1.50	
		Female	5.54	1.09	5.70	.92	5.62	1.00	5.40	1.31	4.72	1.02	5.02	1.19	5.49	1.16	5.34	1.06	5.41	1.11	
		All	5.30	1.23	5.27	1.26	5.28	1.24	4.84	1.59	4.65	1.27	4.74	1.42	5.10	1.40	5.01	1.29	5.06	1.34	
	All	Male	4.41	1.50	4.23	1.57	4.32	1.53	3.91	1.64	4.42	1.23	4.16	1.47	4.11	1.59	4.34	1.39	4.23	1.49	
		Female	5.52	1.01	5.36	1.05	5.43	1.03	4.95	1.45	4.64	1.22	4.80	1.35	5.27	1.25	5.09	1.17	5.18	1.21	
		All	5.15	1.29	5.01	1.34	5.08	1.31	4.45	1.63	4.54	1.22	4.49	1.44	4.80	1.51	4.80	1.31	4.80	1.41	

When the victim was a girl, the interaction between respondents' gender and NFC was significant, $\beta = .14$, $F(1, 190) = 3.94$, $p = .048$, whereas the main effects of the variables were not significant, Fs$(1, 186) < 1.76$, ps $> .18$. At a lower level of NFC, men rated the female victim less credible than women, $\beta = -.26$, $F(1, 190) = 5.62$, $p = .018$, whereas no difference was observed at a higher level of NFC, $F(1, 190) < 1$.

Finally, the interaction between the respondents' gender x perpetrator's gender x victim's age x NFC interactions was significant, $\beta = -.12$, $F(1, 351) = 4.78$, $p = .029$, Figure 1.

When the victim was 7 years old, the main effect of respondents' gender was marginally significant, $\beta = -.14$, $F(1, 186) = 3.83$, $p = .051$, and the interaction between respondents' gender, perpetrator's gender and NFC was significant, $\beta = .17$, $F(1, 186) = 6.02$, $p = .015$. When the perpetrator was a male, the main effect of the respondents' gender was significant, $\beta = -.23$, $F(1, 108) = 5.56$, $p = .020$, as well as the interaction between respondents' gender and NFC, $\beta = .21$, $F(1, 108) = 5.26$, $p = .023$: men rated the victim less credible than women only at a lower level of NFC, $\beta = -.44$, $F(1, 108) = 13.26$, $p = .0004$; higher level of NFC, $F(1, 108) < 1$. When the perpetrator was a female, no difference was observed, Fs$(1, 76) < 1$.

When the victim was 12 years old, the main effect of NFC was significant only, $\beta = -.16$, $F(1, 178) = 4.20$, $p = .041$: respondents at a higher level of NFC estimated

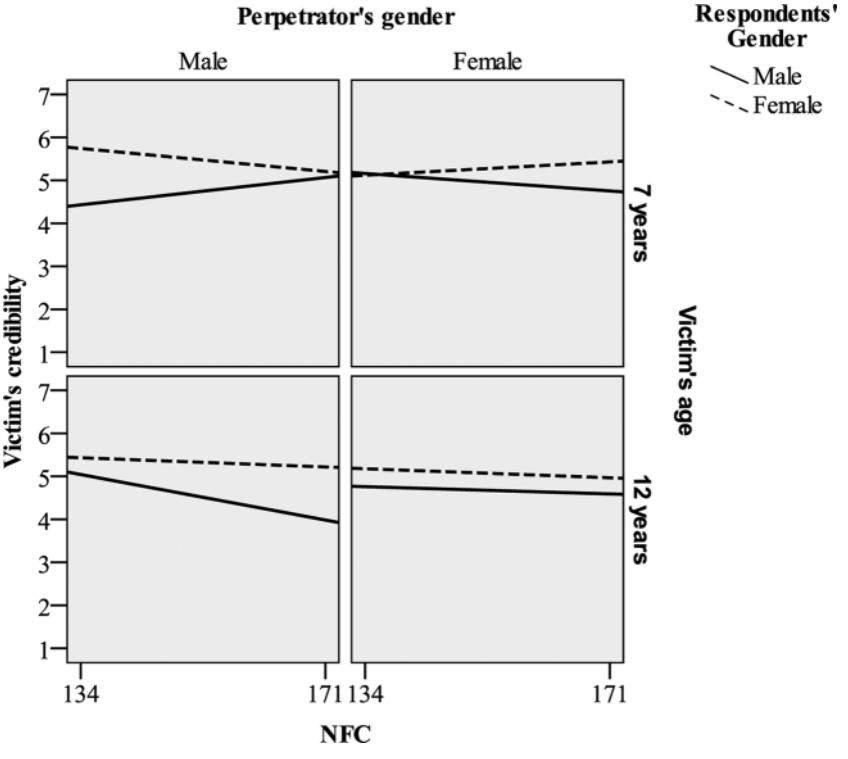

Figure 1. Victim's credibility attributions according to respondents' gender, victim's age, perpetrator's gender and NFC (at the two levels of the centered mean -1 *SD* and $+1$ *SD*).

the victim less credible than respondents at a lower level of NFC. No other main effect or interaction reached significance, $Fs(1, 351) < 2.97$, $ps > .08$.

Responsibility attribution to the victim

The main effect of respondents' gender was significant, $\beta = .17$, $F(1, 351) = 10.30$, $p = .001$. As expected, male respondents ascribed greater responsibility to the victim than female respondents did. However, the analysis did not reveal any other significant result, $Fs(1, 351) < 1.99$, $ps > .15$.

Culpability attribution to the victim

As for credibility and responsibility attributions, the main effect of respondents' gender was significant, $\beta = .14$, $F(1, 351) = 6.60$, $p = .01$: men attributed more culpability to the victim than women. In addition, the main effect of the victim's gender, $\beta = .16$, $F(1, 351) = 9.95$, $p = .001$, was also significant indicating that the male victim was rated guiltier than the female one.

The interaction between the respondents' gender, victim's gender and NFC was significant, $\beta = .14$, $F(1, 351) = 6.78$, $p = .009$. When the victim was a boy, men attributed more culpability than women to the victim, $\beta = .16$, $F(1, 180) = 4.74$, $p = .030$. Furthermore, the interaction between respondents' gender and NFC score was marginally significant, $\beta = .14$, $F(1, 180) = 3.62$, $p = .058$. In conformity with the hypothesis 1, the difference between men's and women's culpability attributions to the victim was observed only at a higher level of NFC, $\beta = .29$, $F(1, 180) = 7.46$, $p = .006$; lower level of NFC, $\beta = .03$, $F(1, 180) < 1$. When the victim was a girl, no significant difference was observed in respondents' judgment, $Fs(1, 190) < 1.45$, $ps > .22$.

Finally, the interaction between respondents' gender, victim's gender, victim's age and NFC was significant, $\beta = .11$, $F(1, 351) = 4.01$, $p = .045$, Figure 2a.

When the victim was 7 years old, the two main effects of respondents' gender, $\beta = .17$, $F(1, 186) = 5.15$, $p = .024$, and victim's gender, $\beta = .17$, $F(1, 351) = 5.47$, $p = .020$, remained significant. However, no interaction was significant, $Fs(1, 186) < 2.28$, $ps > .13$. When the victim was 12 years old, the interaction between respondents' gender, victim's gender and NFC score was significant, $\beta = .23$, $F(1, 178) = 9.79$, $p = .002$. When the victim was a boy, respondents' culpability attributions depended on the level of NFC, $\beta = .30$, $F(1, 89) = 7.58$, $p = .007$. At a higher level of NFC, men attributed more culpability to the victim than women, $\beta = .31$, $F(1, 89) = 4.68$, $p = .033$, whereas no difference was observed at a lower level of NFC, $Fs(1, 89) < 2.52$, *ns.* When the victim was a girl, no significant difference was observed, $Fs(1, 87) < 1.99$, *ns.*

No other main effect or interaction reached significance, $Fs(1, 351) < 2.55$, $ps > .11$

Responsibility attribution to the perpetrator

The significant main effect of respondents' gender was again significant and in the expected direction, $\beta = -.17$, $F(1, 351) = 9.61$, $p = .002$: men rated the perpetrator less responsible than women. In addition, the respondents' gender x victim's gender x

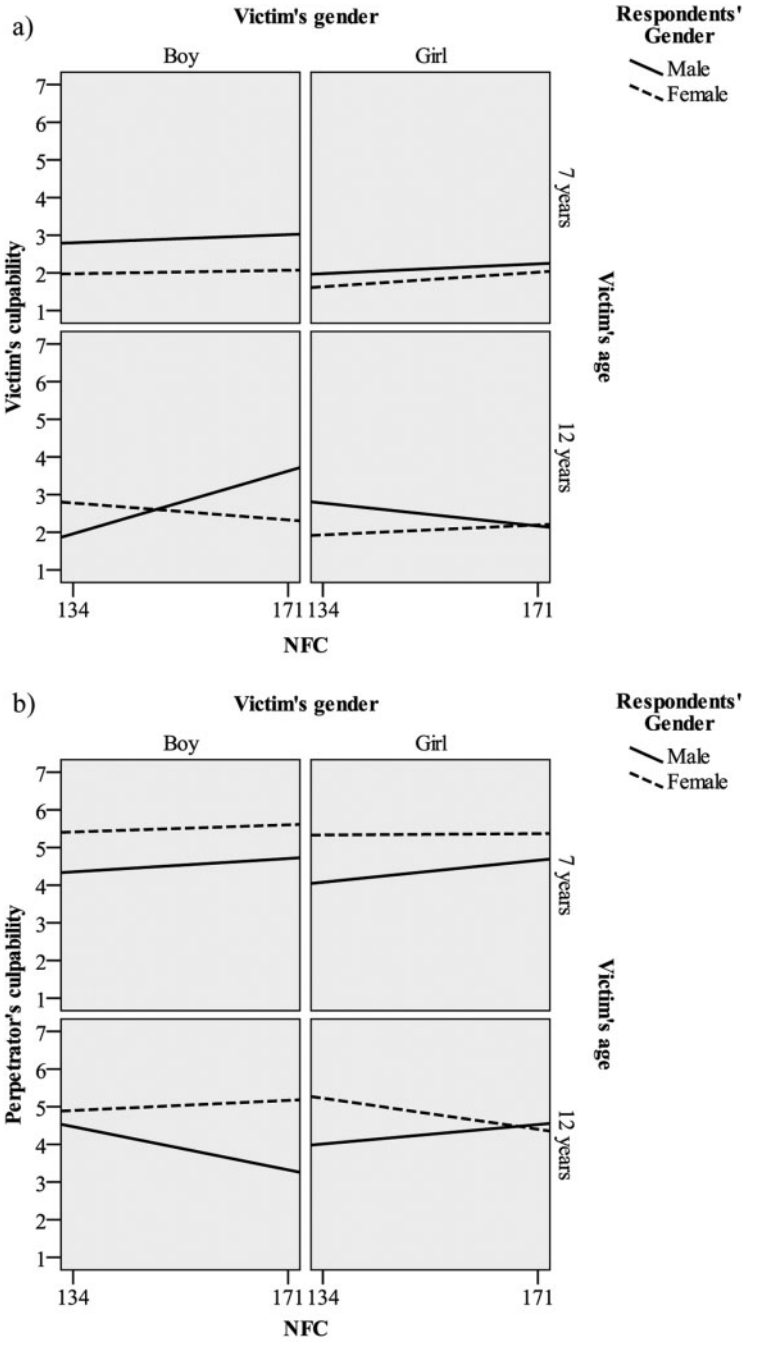

Figure 2. Culpability attributions to (a) the victim and to (b) the perpetrator according to respondents' gender, victim's gender, victim's age and NFC (at the two levels of the centered mean -1 *SD* and $+1$ *SD*).

perpetrator's gender interaction was significant, $\beta = .14$, $F(1, 351) = 7.96$, $p = .005$, Figure 3a.

When the perpetrator was a male, the main effect of respondents' gender remained significant, $\beta = -.23$, $F(1, 197) = 10.37$, $p = .001$. In addition, the interaction between respondents' gender and victim's gender was significant, $\beta = .16$, $F(1, 197) = 5.40$, $p = .021$. No difference was observed when the victim was a boy, $\beta = -.07$, $F(1, 89) < 1$, whereas men attributed less responsibility to the male perpetrator than women when the victim was a girl, $\beta = -.41$, $F(1, 105) = 18.79$, $p < .0001$.

When the perpetrator was a female, the main effect of respondents' gender was not significant, $F(1, 173) = 1.57$, *ns*, while the interaction between respondents' gender and victim's gender was significant, $\beta = -.16$, $F(1, 173) = 4.62$, $p = .032$. As expected, when the victim was a boy, men attributed less responsibility to the female perpetrator than women, $\beta = -.20$, $F(1, 88) = 3.99$, $p = .048$, whereas no difference was observed when the victim was a girl, $\beta = -.04$, $F(1, 82) < 1$.

No other main effect or interaction reached significance, Fs$(1, 351) < 3.27$, ps $> .07$.

Culpability attribution to the perpetrator

The main effects of respondents' gender, $\beta = -.25$, $F(1, 351) = 22.91$, $p < .001$, perpetrator's gender, $\beta = .10$, $F(1, 351) = 4.67$, $p = .031$, and victim's age, $\beta = -.15$, $F(1, 351) = 9.26$, $p = .002$, were significant. The perpetrator was rated guiltier when he was a male, when the respondents were female, and when the victim was 7 years old.

As observed for responsibility attributions to the perpetrator, the respondents' gender x perpetrator's gender x victim's gender interaction was significant, $\beta = .09$, $F(1, 351) = 3.85$, $p = .05$, Figure 3b.

When the perpetrator was a male, the main effect of respondents' gender was significant, $\beta = -.38$, $F(1, 197) = 31.29$, $p < .0001$, but it was not sensitive to the victim's gender, $F(1, 197) < 1$. When the perpetrator was a female, the main effect of respondents' gender was not significant, $F(1, 173) = 2.31$, *ns*, but the interaction between respondents' gender and victim's gender was significant, $\beta = -.19$, $F(1, 173) = 7.22$, $p = .007$. As expected, when the victim was a boy, men attributed less culpability to the female perpetrator than women, $\beta = -.24$, $F(1, 88) = 6.82$, $p = .01$, whereas no difference was observed when the victim was a girl, $F(1, 82) < 1$.

In addition, as observed for culpability attributions to the victim, the respondents' gender x victim's gender x NFC interaction, $\beta = -.15$, $F(1, 351) = 8.25$, $p = .004$, and the respondents' gender x victim's gender x victim's age x NFC interaction, $\beta = -.11$, $F(1, 351) = 4.37$, $p = .037$, Figure 2b, were significant.

The analysis of the respondents' gender x victim's gender x NFC interaction showed a reverse pattern of results than the one observed for culpability attributions to the victim. When the victim was a boy, the main effect of respondents' gender remained significant, $\beta = -.29$, $F(1, 180) = 17.86$, $p < .0001$, and was not modulated by NFC, $F(1, 180) < 1$. When the victim was a girl, the main effect of respondents' gender also remained significant, $\beta = -.24$, $F(1, 190) = 9.84$, $p = .001$. In addition, it was modulated by NFC, $\beta = .179$, $F(1, 190) = 6.53$, $p = .011$. At a higher level of NFC, men attributed less culpability to the perpetrator than women, $\beta = -.43$, $F(1,$

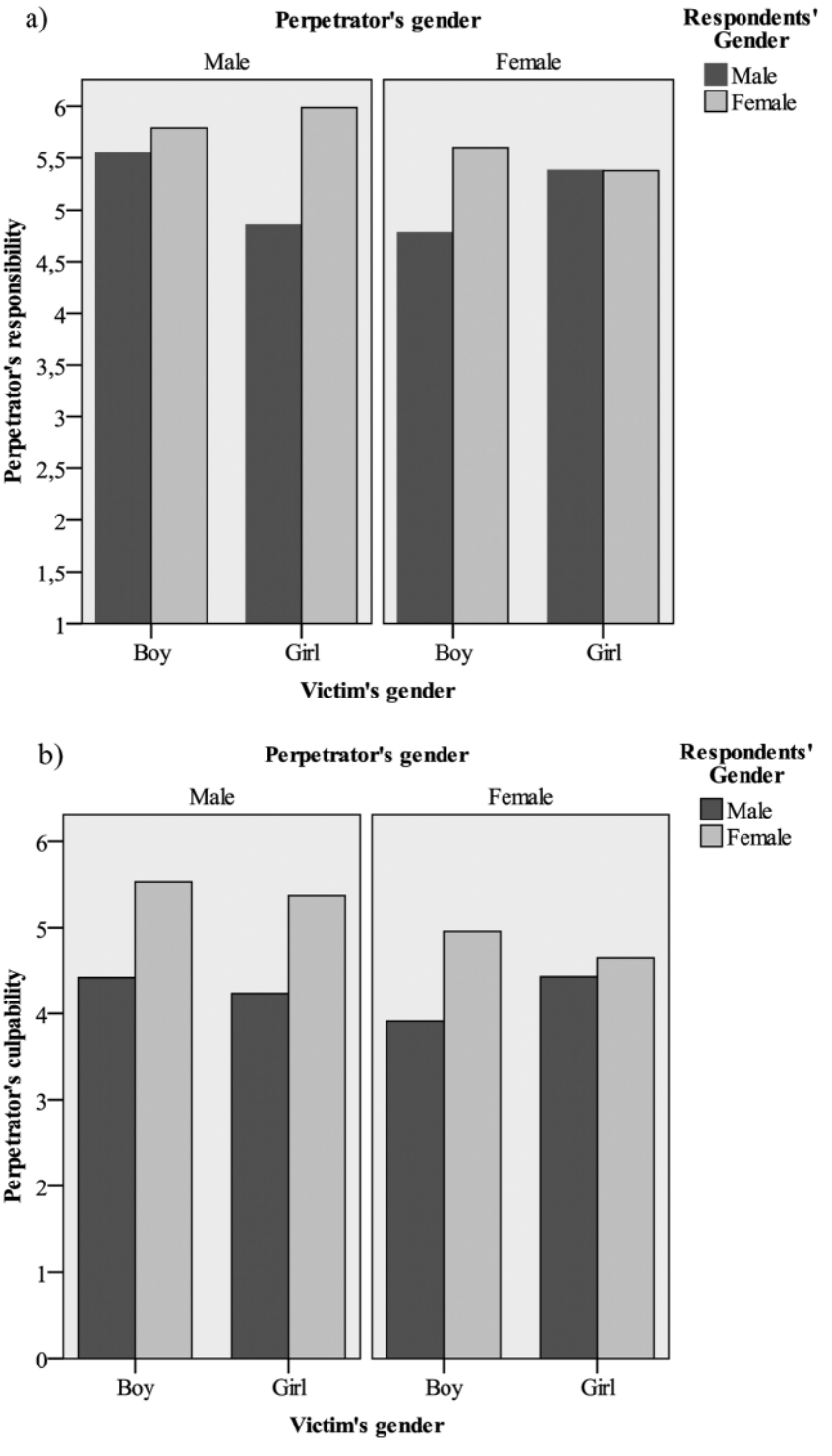

Figure 3. (a) Responsibility (b) and culpability attributions to the perpetrator according to respondents' gender, victim's gender and perpetrator's gender.

190) = 16.66, $p < .0001$, whereas no difference was observed at a lower level of NFC, $F(1, 190) < 1$.

Finally, the respondents' gender x victim's gender x victim's age x NFC interaction analysis also revealed a reverse pattern of results than the one observed for culpability attributions to the victim. When the victim was 7 years old, the main effect of respondents' gender was significant, $\beta = -.31$, $F(1, 186) = 18.12$, $p < .0001$. Men attributed less culpability to the perpetrator than women. No other effect was significant, Fs(1, 186) < 2.11, ps > .14. When the victim was 12 years old, the main effect of respondents' gender was again significant, $\beta = -.20$, $F(1, 178) = 8.10$, $p = .004$. In addition, the interaction between respondent's gender and NFC was marginally significant, $\beta = -.12$, $F(1, 178) = 3.24$, $p = .075$, and the interaction between respondent's gender, victim's gender and NFC was significant, $\beta = -.21$, $F(1, 178) = 9.85$, $p < .001$. When the victim was a boy, the significant main effect of respondents' gender confirmed that men attributed less culpability to the perpetrator than women, $\beta = -.24$, $F(1, 89) = 7.64$, $p = .006$. When the victim was a girl, men marginally attributed less culpability to the perpetrator than women, $\beta = -.21$, $F(1, 87) = 3.45$, $p = .066$. This main effect was modulated by NFC, $\beta = .22$, $F(1, 87) = 4.75$, $p = .031$: at a lower level of NFC, men attributed less culpability to the perpetrator than women, $\beta = -.46$, $F(1, 87) = 7.73$, $p = .006$, whereas no difference was observed at a higher level of NFC, Fs < 1.

No other main effect or interaction reached significance, Fs(1, 351) < 3.37, ps > .07.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to replicate and refine the results of previous research on jurors' perceptions of blame toward male child victims, in a hypothetical sexual abuse case. We also wanted to observe whether the jurors' need for closure, insofar as it reduces uncertainty, regulated the perceptions of blame they expressed. In line with previous studies in the field of sexual abuse – of children as well as adults – respondents adopted a clearly pro-victim attitude. The results of this study generally supported our hypotheses.

As expected in hypothesis 1, male respondents blamed the victim more than female respondents did: they perceived the child victim as less credible, more responsible and more guilty than female respondents did. Furthermore, this effect was especially observed for attributions of credibility and responsibility to the male victim as stated in hypothesis 1. However, these effects were observed for the victims of both 7 and 12 years old while it was expected only for the 12-year-old victim. The results did not confirm an impact of the perpetrator's gender on blame attributions to the victim either. Finally, as expected respondents' NFC regulated the results: respondents who expressed a high NFC perceived the victim as less credible and more guilty than respondents who expressed a low NFC, particularly when the victim was 12 years old.

In line with the hypothesis 2, the attribution of blame to the perpetrator followed the inverse pattern of the attribution of blame to the victim. The results showed that male respondents blamed the perpetrator less than female respondents did: they perceived the perpetrator as less responsible and less guilty than female respondents did. This was especially observed when the victim was a girl and, for culpability

attributions, when respondents expressed a high NFC. As for the victim's blame, the lower attribution of culpability to the perpetrator by male respondents was obtained when the victim was 7 or 12 years old, regardless the victim gender. Concerning the perpetrator's gender, results also confirmed our hypothesis: male respondents perceived the female perpetrator as less responsible and less guilty than female respondents, especially when the victim was 7 or 12 years old. Finally, we observed that male respondents perceived the male perpetrator as less responsible when the victim was a girl than female respondents did, and they perceived the male perpetrator as less guilty than female respondents did, regardless the victim's gender.

These results raise a number of questions about the respondents' perceptions of factors such as victim's and perpetrator's gender according to their own gender. Male respondents attributed less credibility to the boy's testimony and rated him more responsible and guilty than female respondents. In other words, it suggests that a boy was more likely than a girl to have committed a fault or a reprehensible act in the situation described in the scenario. The term 'responsibility' refers to the notion of having to answer for one's actions, as well as for the circumstances in which the act is perpetrated and all its consequences. The fact that a female perpetrator was held less responsible and less guilty than a male perpetrator when the victim was a boy implies that the victim may have adopted a proactive attitude in the fictitious sexual relations. We underline that it is specifically the male respondents who were less likely to hold a female perpetrator responsible when the victim was a boy. So, we observe that these stereotypical representations are kept alive by men. These results confirm those of numerous previous studies (Back & Lips, 1998; Broussard &Wagner, 1988; Davies & Rogers, 2004, 2009; Davies et al., 2001, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Eisenberg et al., 1987; Howard, 1984; Maynard & Wiederman, 1997; McCaul et al., 1990; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Rogers et al., 2007): men attribute a greater blame to the victim than women in child sexual abuse cases, they also blame male victims more than women do, and they blame more male victims than female victims. Men's endorsement of the traditional, stereotypical gender role is probably one of the main reasons behind male victim stigmatization (Davies & Rogers, 2006; Davies et al., 2001). This greater attribution of responsibility to male victims could also be interpreted as an example of 'defensive attribution' (Shaver, 1970), whereby observers keep their distance from the victim in order to protect themselves (i.e., by refusing all identification with the victim, they can reject the idea of potentially being in his or her shoes). Observers more strongly blame whichever of the two – victim or perpetrator – they feel most distant from, in terms of empathy, perceived similarity (physical, psychological or behavioral) and also actual similarity (i.e., gender identification). This reasoning could also explain why, as shown by Rogers and Davies (2007), male respondents attribute less responsibility to male perpetrators than to the female ones, specifically when the victim is a girl. This situation evokes traditional heterosexual relations where the girl could be proactive. On the contrary, in terms of defensive attribution, when a boy is victim of male perpetrator, male respondents' blame could preclude any possible identification with the perpetrator, thereby refuting the homophobic attributions generated by the evocation of sexual relations between two males (Davies et al., 2001, 2006).

We observed no main effect of victim age on attribution of blame. On the whole, the 7-year-old victim was perceived as responsible and guilty with regard to the facts described in the scenario than a 12-year-old victim. However, a recurrent result was

that female respondents blamed more male perpetrators when the victim is 7 years old than male respondents did. In addition, the results of the present study did yield one new finding: the respondents' NFC modulated the victim blame (credibility and culpability) only when the victim was 12 years old. This suggests that NFC was related to a reduction in the credibility ratings of children around puberty, referring mainly to what many authors have identified as the perception of weaker sexual naivety (Burt & Estep, 1981; Davies & Rogers, 2006, 2009; Rogers & Davies, 2007; Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984). Additional studies are needed to replicate and clarify these results, notably with different fictitious cases where different victim's ages could be manipulated.

Finally, only one main effect of NFC level was observed: high-NFC respondents ascribed less credibility to child testimony. This means that NFC levels were essentially effective in interaction with other variables, notably victim age. Our data confirmed that NFC could effectively moderate the expression of this perception in favor of stereotypical representations. For example, male respondents with high NFC perceived the perpetrator as less responsible and less guilty than female respondents did when the victim is a girl. In this case, men's attributions could reflect the stereotype of seductive female behavior. This finding indicates that care needs to be taken in situations of judicial judgments and decision-making. Judicial judgments, as criminal investigations, are subject to two opposing pressures (Ask & Granhag, 2005; Esnard, 2005). Time pressure heightens awareness of the cost of uncertainty, while the need for accuracy heightens awareness of the cost of making mistakes. In all probability, the high NFC leads respondents to be more sensitive to the cost of the uncertainty, especially if they feel under time pressure and have to deal with an important social issue, as in the case of child sexual abuse. In these conditions, swift and assured decision-making, based on stereotypes, is often perceived of as a guarantee of confidence in one's judgment, but, given what is at stake for the defendants and victims, the risk of error can be harmful for the judge, as well as for the target of the judgment.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study had a number of shortcomings which future studies will need to overcome. Our findings suggest that the respondents' expressions of blame were subtended by stereotypical representations, activated mainly by the protagonists' gender. However, these results must be confirmed by systematic measure of the respondents' initial attitudes in relation to these gender stereotypes. Following the example of many previous studies (see Davies & Rogers, 2006), future research will need to include measurements before the respondents read through the fictitious case, in order to gauge their degree of adherence to male stereotypes (ability to defend oneself and to resist during an assault, adoption of a proactive attitude in sexual relations) and their homophobic attitudes.

We believe that it will also be necessary to refine the measure of credibility of the victim's testimony. Rather than using an overall measure of credibility, it would be advisable to distinguish between the victim's ability to make accurate statements and his or her trustworthiness, following the example of Bottoms and Goodman (1994). We can hypothesize that it is trustworthiness, rather than perceived ability, that is directly linked to the perception of children's sexual naivety and proactive attitude,

and which is therefore a better indicator of the impact of stereotypes on attributions of blame toward child victims.

Finally, the realistic nature of research on jurors' perceptions is an essential question because the aim is obviously to generalize findings to real-life judicial proceedings. In spite of the need to observe the precise influence of variables and despite the value of results yielded by studies such as ours, it is important to incorporate such findings into a coherent description of the mechanisms by which judicial judgments are constructed. None of the studies conducted so far have allowed us to comprehend how members of a jury integrate all the information to which they are exposed in the course of a trial. It is necessary to elucidate the mechanisms by which jurors arrive at their verdicts and, by so doing, come up with recommendations for the judicial system. This means adopting a broader conception of judicial judgments that can account for the interdependence of the factors that influence them. Our currently rather fragmented approach to judicial judgments must be replaced by a more integrative perspective on the mechanisms involved in their construction.

Conclusion and applied perspectives

Up to now, most studies of the effects of gender on perceptions of blame in child sexual abuse cases have been conducted within English-speaking populations. The present study has yielded valuable empirical data illustrating these effects within a French population. It confirms what Davies and Rogers (2006) concluded at the end of their review of the literature, namely that male victims are ascribed greater blame than female victims because a man is perceived of as being better able to resist in a confrontational situation than a woman. Furthermore, as homophobic attitudes are more prevalent among men (Davies, 2004; Kite & Whitley, 1996), more blame is attributed by male respondents to perpetrators when those perpetrators are men. The results of this study, in line with previous research, clearly show that this selective blame attribution, apparently subtended by gender stereotypes and myths relative to sexual abuse, also affects pre-teenagers. In view of this finding, it is important to guard against the risk of secondary victimization (Williams, 1984), especially among very young boys, whose identity is still a fragile construction. The undermining of their identification with the male image, via other people's perceptions, may well heighten their state of psychological distress engendered by the assault. This study helps to relativize the scope of the feminist analysis, which ascribes the stigmatization of the female victims of sexual abuse to the application of gender stereotypes perpetuating men's social and cultural dominance. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need to undertake a more systematic investigation of the cognitive and motivational regulation of judicial judgments influenced by gender stereotypes.

Within the framework of real-life court cases, our results suggest that jurors need to be made aware of the potential ways in which their judgments can be affected. When a child sexual abuse case involving a male victim arrives in court, it means that the child was deemed to be credible during the pretrial investigation. However, when confronted with legal area, jurors rely on their everyday stereotypical knowledge to define criminal responsibility (Finkel, Maloney, Valbuena, & Groscup, 1995). Two possible solutions have been tested but are not currently applied in France. First, a psychologist can provide an objective interpretative framework for the facts

presented during the child sexual abuse trial (Crowley et al., 1994; Kovera, Gresham, Borgida, Gray, & Regan, 1997). Second, the impact of jurors' representation could be reduced with instructions designed to revise people misconceptions (Smith, 1993).

A second level concerns the filing of complaints. One reason why there are so few cases involving male victims is the low frequency of complaints. It would surely be useful to provide training for the police officers who handle such complaints and who carry out the pretrial investigation, accompanying them in their everyday judgment practices.

The third and final level concerns the education of all those who may one day become a victim or a judge. Young boys and teenagers are exposed to very powerful gender stereotypes during their development (Dorais, 2008). They are the target of messages that encourage them to ascribe a positive value to any early sexual experience. They therefore risk viewing a situation of abuse as a new experience. Conforming to the criterion of virility also leads young boys to think that the man has to take all of the initiative in sexual matters, at the risk of not being perceived as a 'real man', leading them to convince themselves that they doubtless provoked the sexual contacts themselves.

These social prescriptions mean that boys who fall victim to sexual abuse may well become locked into their own private suffering (i.e., risk of secondary victimization; Williams, 1984), all the more so since men are expected to be capable of solving problems by themselves and expressing the emotions and feelings that belong to 'real' men, namely anger and aggressiveness, with all the acts of crime and violence that are connected with these feelings. Societal and legislative change has been slow in the face of gender stereotypes. For example, in the USA, until very recently, the national crime statistics on rape only included assaults against women and girls committed by men under a narrow set of circumstances. In 2012, the federal government expanded the definition of rape to include a wider range of sexual assaults, including assaults on male victims (*New York Times*, January 24, 2012). Consequently, we need to develop this research on gender discrimination in both Anglo-American and European cultural contexts, in order to help associations for male victims gain a fuller understanding of the consequences of sexual abuse and identify how victims' recovery can best be promoted.

Note

1. All full regression models were significant, credibility: $R^2 = 0.13$, $F(32, 351) = 1.68$, $p = .012$, $f^2 = .153$; victim's responsibility: $R^2 = 0.139$, $F(32, 351) = 1.77$, $p = .007$, $f^2 = .161$; victim's culpability: $R^2 = 0.139$, $F(32, 351) = 1.77$, $p = .007$, $f^2 = .161$; perpetrator's responsibility: $R^2 = 0.16$, $F(32, 351) = 2.13$, $p = .0005$, $f^2 = .186$; perpetrator's culpability: $R^2 = 0.246$, $F(32, 351) = 3.58$ $p < .0001$, $f^2 = .186$. Tolerance values for the predictors ranged from .36 to .72.

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Appendix 1. Hypothetical sexual abuse scenario

Luc (vs. Lucie) is 7 (vs. 12) years old, he (she) likes school and is intelligent. His (her) parents decide to go on a romantic weekend to celebrate their tenth wedding anniversary, spending the night in a hotel. As Luc (Lucie) is too young to be left alone for the night, his (her parents) ask a friend to come and sleep in their house on Saturday night to babysit their son (daughter). Jean (vs. Jeanne) is an old family friend who lives a few streets from their home. He (she) is 35 years old and lives alone. Luc (Lucie) and Jean (Jeanne) get along well and enjoy playing the Wii (game console) together. The parents return the next day, at lunchtime. Jean (Jeanne) has already left, as arranged, and Luc (Lucie) is very silent and withdrawn. His (her) mother asks him (her) what the matter is, but Luc (Lucie) remains silent. His (her) mother is worried, continues to ask questions, and Luc (Lucie) finally bursts into tears. He (she) says that Jean (Jeanne) got up during the night, came into his (her) bedroom and talked to him (her) about sexual things. Luc's (Lucie's) mother asks for more details. If, for example, Jean (Jeanne) kissed or touched him (her) . . . Luc (Lucie) answers that Jean (Jeanne) kissed him (her) repeatedly and touched his (her) genitals. He (she) also says that Jean (Jeanne) later left his (her) bedroom. His (her) mother, in a panic, calls the police to lodge a complaint. Under questioning, Luc (Lucie) denies everything and says that nothing happened.

Appendix 2. Questionnaire items

Items 1–5 were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*No*) to 7 (*Yes*); Item 6 was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all serious*) to 7 (*Extremely serious*) and Item 7 was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all confident*) to 7 (*Extremely confident*)

(1) In your opinion, can Jean (vs. Jeanne) be held responsible for the situation described by Luc (vs. Lucie)?
(2) Do you think that Jean (vs. Jeanne) is guilty of the acts reported by Luc (vs. Lucie)?
(3) Do you think that Luc's (vs. Lucie's) testimony is credible?
(4) In your opinion, can Luc (vs. Lucie) be held responsible for the situation he (she) described?
(5) In your opinion, is Luc (vs. Lucie) guilty of the acts insinuated in his (her) testimony?
(6) On the basis of Luc (vs. Lucie)'s testimony, would you describe the situation as . . .
(7) Are you confident in the answers you have given to the above questions