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Men's Acknowledgment of Their Sexual Victimization Experiences

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Sexual victimization of boys and men is understudied despite its alarming prevalence and potentially detrimental outcomes. Research suggests that the majority of men who have experienced something that would qualify as child sexual abuse (CSA) or adult rape based on research definitions do not label their experiences as sexual abuse or rape. This study sought to examine men's labeling of their own victimization by examining acknowledgment of CSA and adult rape in a convenience sample of 323 men who completed an online survey. In this sample, 49% of CSA victims and 24% of rape victims used the labels of sexual abuse and rape, respectively. Correlates of CSA acknowledgment included the perpetrator's use of physical force during the incident. Correlates of rape acknowledgment included perpetrator's use of force and a male rather than a female perpetrator. Acknowledged CSA victims reported more distress and higher rates of adult sexual revictimization compared with unacknowledged CSA victims. Unacknowledged rape victims, but not acknowledged rape victims, reported higher rates of distress compared to non-victims. Rape myths and rigid definitions of masculinity are discussed as possible factors contributing to the high rates of unacknowledged sexual victimization in this sample.

Keywords: victimization, child sexual abuse, rape, unacknowledged rape, men

Historically, sexual violence researchers have largely overlooked men who have been victims of child sexual abuse (CSA) and adult rape as well the potential negative outcomes associated with men's sexual victimization (Weiss, 2010). Understanding men's perceptions of their victimization and how those perceptions impact the negative outcomes associated with sexual victimization will advance clinical and research initiatives in this population. Specifically, it is likely that a large percentage of men who have experienced something that would qualify as CSA or adult sexual assault based on research definitions do not label or "acknowledge" their experiences as sexual abuse or rape. Lack of acknowledgment of sexual victimization may positively or negatively influence men's recovery after the sexual abuse or rape. For example, men who self-label as victims of CSA or rape may be more likely to engage in help-seeking behaviors than men who do not use those labels, but they may also view themselves as more vulnerable or damaged. Understanding men's acknowledgment of sexual victimization is also important because illuminating unacknowledged sexual victimization among men may help to mitigate the continued invisibility of men's victimization and the lack of sufficient health services for male victims.

Prevalence of Male Victimization

Despite assumptions to the contrary, male sexual victimization is not uncommon. Research findings on rates of male sexual victimization are complicated by highly inconsistent definitions and methodology across studies (Peterson, Voller, Polusny, & Murdoch, 2011). However, when studies define CSA as (1) sexual contact occurring before age 18 in which the perpetrator was at least 5 years older or (2) forced sexual contact with a perpetrator of any age before age 18, rates of CSA among men are approximately 7–14% (Briere & Elliott, 2003; Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gomez-Benito, 2009). When adult rape is defined as sexual contact obtained through threat or force, approximately 4–5% of community and college men report victimization (Conway, Mendelson, Giannopoulos, Csank, & Holm, 2004; Elliott, Mok, & Briere, 2004). It is also worth noting that nonheterosexual men report higher rates of CSA, rape, and other types of sexual victimization than heterosexual men (Peterson et al., 2011; Tomeo, Templer, Andereson, & Kotler, 2001; Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013). Although this prior research reveals that a substantial number of men endorse experiences that meet behavioral definitions of CSA and rape on questionnaires and in interviews, it is likely that far fewer men would label those experiences as CSA or rape.

Acknowledgment of Male Victimization

Acknowledgment of CSA

In the last 15 years, there have been a number of studies that have begun to examine acknowledgment of CSA in men (Dolezal & Carballo-Dieguez, 2002; Fondacaro, Holt, & Powell, 1999; Stander, Olson, & Merrill, 2002; Stanley, Bartholomew, & Oram, 2004; Steever, Follette, & Naugle, 2001; Widom & Morris, 1997). Studies sampling diverse groups of men have found that 15–59% of men who endorse behaviorally specific indicators of sexual abuse acknowledge that they have been victims of sexual abuse (Dolezal & Carballo-Dieguez, 2002; Fondacaro et al., 1999; Holmes, 2008; Stander et al., 2002; Stanley et al., 2004; Steever et al., 2001). The wide variability in rates of acknowledgment among

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these studies likely reflects the variations in populations of male victims (samples are drawn from specific populations including gay/bisexual men, Navy recruits, college students, and criminally prosecuted child abuse cases) and the variations in the research definitions of CSA. Researchers have identified a number of correlates of acknowledgment among men, including use physical force or threats by the perpetrator, physical injury experienced by the victim, and perpetrators who were family members (Dolezal & Carballo-Dieguez, 2002; Fondacaro et al., 1999; Holmes, 2008; Stander et al., 2002; Stanley et al., 2004; Steever et al., 2001).

Acknowledgment of Rape

Research examining the occurrence and associated features of men's acknowledgment of adult nonconsensual sexual experiences is notably scarce. To our knowledge, there is only one study that has reported data on rape acknowledgment in men. Although not the focus of the study, results from the National Crime Victims Survey (Weiss, 2010) showed that, although 20% of the men reported an incident that met the research definition of rape, "few men" (actual rates not reported) used the term rape to label their experience (p. 286). Research on acknowledgment of a related problem, sexual harassment (e.g., sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment), may serve as a relevant comparison for rape and adult sexual assault acknowledgment in men. In one particularly relevant study, among male undergraduates who endorsed behaviorally defined experiences of "unwanted or inappropriate physical or sexual contact" and "forced sexual intercourse" initiated by faculty or other students, only 36% and 73% of men acknowledged these as sexual harassment, respectively (Shepela & Levesque, 1998). Studies on rape acknowledgment in women may also provide some clues about the frequency of men's labeling of rape. Estimates indicate that only 11–47% of women who have experienced rape as defined by legal or research definitions actually label their experience as rape (Bondurant, 2001; Harned, 2004; McMullin & White, 2006). Based on acknowledgment rates among female victims and based on our expectation that acknowledging sexual victimization would be a challenge to masculine stereotypes, it is likely that there are high rates of unacknowledged victimization among men.

Masculinity and Acknowledgment

Widom and Morris (1997) found that 16% of men with documented histories of sexual abuse labeled their experiences as abuse and 64% of women with documented histories labeled their experiences as abuse. The lower rate of acknowledgment among men relative to women seeks an explanation. Cultural assumptions about gender and sexual victimization as well as common rape myth such as "it is impossible. . .to rape a man" and "men [who are raped] are to blame for not escaping" may affect men's acknowledgment of sexual victimization (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; p. 90; see also Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008; Weiss, 2010). In fact, the United States Department of Justice (2012) changed its definition of rape in January 2012 to allow for male victims of rape for the first time. The failure to acknowledge men's experiences of sexual victimization may reflect the fact that, although femininity is associated with vulnerability and passivity, masculinity is associated with strength and dangerousness; in other words, "Despite the reality of violence against men. . .vulnerability is not a part of shared cultural conceptions of masculinity" (Hollander, 2001, p. 85). Further, masculinity is often associated with insatiable sexual desire and prowess, so a man who fails to consent to sex may be viewed lacking in masculinity (e.g., Graham, 2006). Indeed, in studies of male victims of sexual assault, men commonly report they perceived their sexual victimization as a threat to their masculinity or sense of manhood (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005b). Denying or minimizing sexual victimization may be aimed at neutralizing potentially distressing gender role conflict created by a threat to a victim's masculine self-image based on these cultural standards of masculinity (O'Neil, 2008). Consistent with this idea, Durfee (2011) reported that male victims of domestic violence tend to resist portraying themselves as "victims" because that label undermines their masculinity.

If, as we theorize, concerns about masculinity are important factors in unacknowledged sexual victimization among men, then contextual variables that impact the threat to masculinity may influence the likelihood of men's acknowledgment. For example, the sex of the perpetrator might be a correlate of men's acknowledgment of adult rape. Being overpowered by a male perpetrator is perhaps less threatening to one's masculinity than being overpowered by a female perpetrator; thus, men might be more willing to label their experience as rape if they were victimized by a man than if they were victimized by a woman. Further, prior research has suggested that men, on average, are less distressed when they are sexually assaulted by a woman than by a man (Krahé, Waizenhofer, & Moller, 2003; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994)—perhaps because sex (even nonconsensual sex) with a woman is less threatening to masculinity than sex with a man. Because of their relatively lower level of distress, men who are raped by a woman might be less likely to conceptualize their experience as rape as compared with men who are raped by another man. Further, research has demonstrated that gay men tend to experience less gender role stress than heterosexual men (O'Neil, 2008); thus, to the extent that acknowledging sexual victimization is a challenge to traditional masculinity, acknowledging sexual victimization may be less threatening to nonheterosexual men than to heterosexual men, and nonheterosexual men may be more likely to acknowledge their sexual victimization than heterosexual men.

Male Sexual Victimization and Negative Outcomes

CSA and rape appear to have a deleterious effect on the psychological, physical, and social functioning of male victims, including increasing their risk for symptoms of psychological distress such as depression and anxiety (Briere & Elliott, 2003; Coxell & King, 1996; Frazier, 1993; Maniglio, 2009; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005a, 2005b; Weiss, 2010). Revictimization can be conceptualized as another negative outcome of CSA. Men with a history of CSA appear to be at higher risk for sexual victimization in adulthood than men without a history of CSA. Several studies with men, including studies using community samples, gay men, and twin pairs, have found that CSA history is positively associated with a greater likelihood of being sexually victimized in adulthood (Coxell, King, Mezey, & Gordon, 1999; Desai, Arias, Thompson, & Basile, 2002; Nelson et al., 2002). These patterns of

negative outcomes are consistent with a large literature on sexual revictimization in women (e.g., Classen, Palesh, & Aggarwal, 2005). Unfortunately, there is little empirical research examining correlates of revictimization in men.

Acknowledgment and Negative Outcomes

Acknowledgment of victimization may be one factor that helps to explain variability in recovery after sexual victimization. There is only minimal research with men on the mediating role of acknowledgment in predicting distress and other negative consequences of sexual victimization. Studies with male victims of CSA have indicated that, compared with unacknowledged victims, men who label their experiences as abuse report more interpersonal difficulties; lifetime and current PTSD symptoms; and sexual risk-taking, as defined by unprotected sex and greater numbers of sexual partners (Dolezal & Carballo-Dieguez, 2002; Fondacaro et al., 1999; Stanley et al., 2004). In contrast, Holmes (2008) found that, compared with acknowledged victims, men who did not acknowledge their experiences as CSA had more lifetime sexual partners and more reports of sex while intoxicated. In a sample of gay and bisexual men, participants who labeled their experience as CSA reported more alcohol use than nonlabelers (Dolezal & Carballo-Dieguez, 2002); however, in a different study, heterosexual men who used the CSA label reported less alcohol abuse compared to nonlabelers (Fondacaro et al., 1999). No studies have examined more general symptoms of psychological distress relative to acknowledgment of CSA.

There have been no studies that have examined the impact of acknowledgment of adult rape on distress in men, and equivalent studies with women have found mixed results. Women who acknowledge rape have been found to report more psychological distress (Conoscenti & McNally, 2006; Kahn & Mathie, 2000; Littleton, Axsom, & Grills-Taquechel, 2009) and less psychological distress (Botta & Pingree, 1997; Clements & Ogle, 2009) than unacknowledged victims. Still other studies have found that acknowledgment is unrelated to distress in women (Conoscenti & McNally, 2006; Frazier & Seales, 1997; Harned, 2004). Similarly, one study with men found that distress was unrelated to labeling of sexual harassment (Munson, Miner, & Hulin, 2001). Given the inconsistent findings related to women's rape acknowledgment, as well as the lack of data on men's acknowledgment of adult sexual assault, more research is needed to examine the relationship between labeling and postassault distress in men.

The Present Study

The present study sought to examine men's acknowledgment of two types of sexual victimization—CSA (forced or coerced sexual experiences or sexual experiences with a partner 5 or more years older occurring before age 14) and adult rape (defined as oral or anal intercourse obtained through intoxication, threats, or force occurring at age 14 or older). To our knowledge, this is the first study to systematically examine prevalence and correlates of acknowledgment of adult rape in men. Additionally, this study expands the existing literature of acknowledgment of CSA in men by examining its relationship with more generalized psychological distress (rather than PTSD or other specific problems) and exploring the connections between acknowledgment of CSA and adult sexual victimization. For this study, we set out to address four research goals: (1) Describe the frequency of CSA and rape acknowledgment in a community sample of men who have experienced sexual victimization. (2) Examine the correlates of acknowledgment of CSA and rape. Based on the past research findings and based on the theorized role of traditional masculinity in acknowledgment, we focused on the following potential correlates: for CSA acknowledgment, sexual orientation of the victim, relationship with the perpetrator, and use of force; for rape acknowledgment, sexual orientation of the victim, gender of the perpetrator, and use of force. (3) Compare men with no victimization history, acknowledged victims, and unacknowledged victims in terms of their current levels of general psychological distress to investigate the relationship between acknowledgment and distress. (4) Examine acknowledgment of CSA as a correlate of adult rape; in other words, examine whether CSA acknowledgment is associated with sexual revictimization.

Method

Participants

In response to web-based advertisements, a total of 696 men consented to complete an online questionnaire. Of this total, 276 men discontinued the survey before completing the demographics measure and an additional 97 men did not respond to items assessing sexual victimization history. Our final sample consisted of 323 men, who completed most items (85% or more) on each of the measures relevant to this study. The 46% completion rate in this study was somewhat lower than the completion rate (69%) in other online research (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998). The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 68, $M = 32.11$, $SD = 12.72$. Other demographic characteristics of this sample are represented in Table 1. The majority (91%) of participants indicated they were from the United States, while 1% endorsed Canada, 3% endorsed the United Kingdom, 3% endorsed "other" (including Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Greece, Germany, Norway, India, and the Philippines), and .01% had missing data. There were no significant differences between U.S. and non-U.S. participants on study variables of interest including endorsement of behavioral indicators of sexual victimization, acknowledgment of CSA or rape, and total psychological distress.

Procedure

Advertisements posted on Web sites (e.g., Craigslist and a Web site that lists multiple online psychological studies [www.wexlist.net]) directed interested participants to an anonymous online questionnaire. The advertisements invited men to participate in a study about "sexual experiences and attitudes" and included information about the length of and compensation for the survey. Participants who provided informed consent were given access to the survey, which took approximately 35 minutes to complete. Upon completion, participants were given the opportunity to enter their contact information into a separate web-form for entry into a raffle for a $100 gift card. By separating the raffle form from the actual survey, anonymity was preserved. The methods of this study were approved by the institutional review board at the university where this study took place.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample

	n	% of sample
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual/straight	274	84.8%
Homosexual/gay	13	4.0%
Bisexual	25	7.7%
Uncertain	7	2.2%
Other	3	0.9%
Education		
Completed high school	22	6.8%
Attended college, technical school, or university	40	12.4%
Still attending college, technical school, or university	122	37.8%
Earned a degree from a college, technical school, or university	80	24.8%
Attending graduate school	22	6.8%
Earned an advanced degree	35	10.8%
Household Income		
$14k or less	67	20.7%
$15k – $29k	38	11.8%
$30k – $59k	70	21.7%
$60k – $99k	80	24.8%
$100k – $149k	41	12.7%
$150k or more	23	7.1%
Religion		
Catholic	65	20.1%
Jewish	7	2.2%
Muslim	5	1.5%
Protestant	54	16.7%
None	101	31.3%
Other	89	27.6%
Marital status[a]		
Single/never married	164	50.8%
Cohabitating/living together	27	8.4%
Married	100	31.0%
Separated/divorced	34	10.5%
Widowed	1	0.3%
Race[a]		
American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Native	18	5.6%
Asian/Asian American	18	5.6%
Black/African American	27	8.4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	0.6%
White/European American	247	76.5%
Hispanic/Latino	38	11.8%

[a] Participants could endorse multiple options for marital status and race.

Measures

Demographics measure. A 15-item questionnaire developed for this study was used to collect basic demographic information including age, home country, religion, marital status, education, income, race, and ethnicity.

Child sexual abuse. History of CSA experience was measured using a modified version of a widely used childhood sexual abuse questionnaire initially developed by Finkelhor (1981). The measure includes 11 behaviorally specific sexual abuse items ranging in severity from kissing and hugging to oral, anal, and penile-vaginal intercourse. Items asked about sexual acts (with or without the use of force) with individuals who were at least five years older than the participant and about coerced or forced sexual acts with perpetrators of any age. Men were asked to rate how many times they experienced each act (*0* to *8 or more*) before the age of 14. The original measure asks about behaviors occurring before age 16; we revised the measure to ask about behaviors occurring before age 14 for the measure to be consistent with the well-established adult victimization measure (see below, SES-SFV), which assesses adult victimization since age 14. This reference age is supported by literature indicating that nonconsensual sexual experiences occurring between ages 14–17 more closely resemble adult sexual assault than CSA (Koss et al., 2007; Livingston, Hequembourg, Testa, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2007; Testa & Livingston, 1999). Responses were coded as negative for CSA if the participants endorsed zero on all 11 items or positive for CSA if they endorsed any item occurring one or more times. For each item, participants were also asked to indicate their relationship with the other person (nine options, which were recoded as "family member," "nonfamily member," or "both") and whether the perpetrator used physical force (response options included *yes*, *no*, and *no answer*). Participants were considered to have experienced force if they indicated that the perpetrator used force on any of the 11 items.

Self-labeling of CSA was assessed using a single item from the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein, Fink, Handelsman, & Foote, 1994), which asked participants to rate the degree

to which they agree with the statement "When I was growing up, I believe I was sexually abused." Responses were rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (*Never true*) to 5 (*Very often true*). Among men who reported child sexual abuse on the behavioral measure, any response greater than 1 on the CTQ item was considered acknowledgment. The CTQ measures a variety of experiences with childhood maltreatment, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and emotional and physical neglect. The entire CTQ was administered, and this item was embedded within the scale. The remainder of the measure was not used in these analyses.

Adult sexual victimization. The revised Sexual Experiences Survey Short Form Victimization (SES-SFV; Koss et al., 2007) was used to measure behaviorally specific indicators of sexual assault in the prior 12 months and since age 14. The SES-SFV includes five items with five subquestions per item assessing sex play and completed and attempted oral sex and anal penetration by verbal coercion, incapacitation by alcohol or drugs, threat, or force. Participants are asked to indicate whether they have experienced each act *0*, *1*, *2*, or *3 or more times*. For this study, rape was defined conservatively to include endorsement of one or more occasions of completed oral sex or anal penetration through the use of force, threat of force, or incapacitation. Participants who reported zero experiences or who failed to provide a response to all items were considered to be nonvictims. The final question on the SES-SFV is a dichotomous item asking respondents if they had ever been raped; this item was used to measure acknowledgment. Men were also asked to indicate the sex of the perpetrator(s) with options including "female only," "male only," and "both females and males." Participants were considered to have experienced force if they endorsed the use of physical force on any of the behaviorally defined rape items. Reliability and validity for this revised version of the SES has not yet been established; however, prior forms of the SES have shown adequate test-retest reliabilities as well as convergent validity with other measures of sexual victimization for female participants (Cecil & Matson, 2006; Gylys & McNamara, 1996; Koss, Figueredo, Bell, Tharan, & Tromp, 1996; Koss & Gidycz, 1985; Krahé, Reimer, Scheinberger-Olwig, & Fritsche, 1999; Messman-Moore, Long, & Siegried, 2000).

Psychological distress. General psychological distress was measured with the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-Short Form (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The self-report measure includes 21 items producing a total psychological distress score comprised of three subscales including depression, anxiety, and stress. Participants are asked to indicate how they have felt over the past week. Items, such as "I felt that I have nothing to look forward to," are rated on a scale from 0 (*did not apply to me at all*) to 3 (*applied to me very much, or most of the time*). For this study, a total score was computed by adding the ratings of all the items and multiplying by two as directed in the scoring instructions for the measure (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). Missing data for the DASS were replaced using multiple imputation. The DASS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties including a factor structure that has been replicated, total score internal consistency of .96, and adequate concurrent validity with other measures of depression, anxiety, and stress (e.g., Antony, Bieling, Cox, Enns, & Swinson, 1998; Crawford & Henry, 2003). Results indicated that psychological distress in this current sample ($M = 27.72$, $SD = 24.72$, Range = 0–126) was slightly higher than in a nonclinical general adult sample, $M = 18.38$, $SD = 18.82$, Range = 0–121 (Crawford & Henry, 2003). The measure demonstrated excellent internal consistency reliability for the sample in the current study, $\alpha = .95$.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Of the 323 men in this sample, 120 (37%) men endorsed behavioral indicators of CSA and/or adult rape. More specifically, 99 (31% of the entire sample) endorsed at least one behavioral indicator of CSA. Twenty-two of these men identified as nonheterosexual (i.e., homosexual, bisexual, uncertain, or "other") and 77 identified as heterosexual. Proportionately, heterosexual men (29% abused) were less like to report CSA than nonheterosexual men (46% abused), $\chi^2 = 5.70$, $p = .02$, $\delta = -.13$. The types of CSA perpetrated by someone at least five years older than the participant included sexual kissing or hugging ($n = 77$), fondling of the participant ($n = 64$), fondling of the perpetrator ($n = 60$), touching of the participant's genitals ($n = 67$), touching of the perpetrator's genitals ($n = 53$), oral sex performed on the perpetrator ($n = 29$), oral sex performed on the participant ($n = 40$), vaginal–penile intercourse ($n = 34$), anal sex performed on the participant ($n = 19$), and anal sex performed on the perpetrator ($n = 15$). Additionally, 37 men reported that someone of any age coerced or forced sexual intercourse when they were younger than age 14. Seventy-three (73%) of the male victims had been victimized at least once by a nonfamily perpetrator, 39 men (39%) had been victimized by a family member, and 12 (12%) had been victimized by both (could be more than one perpetrator for a single incident and/or different perpetrators for different incidents). Information about the gender of the perpetrator was not collected.

Forty-five men (14% of the entire sample) reported at least one behavioral indicator of adult rape. Fourteen of these men identified as nonheterosexual, and 31 identified as heterosexual. Proportionately, nonheterosexual men (29% raped) were more likely to report a rape than heterosexual men (11% raped), $\chi^2 = 10.83$, $p < .001$, $\delta = -.18$. Participants were able to endorse multiple types of victimization measured by type of act for both the previous 12 months and since age 14. Victimization occurring in the prior 12 months included incapacitated oral sex ($n = 14$), oral sex by threat of harm ($n = 7$), forced oral sex ($n = 8$), incapacitated anal penetration ($n = 10$), anal penetration by threat of harm ($n = 8$), and forced anal penetration ($n = 11$). Victimization occurring since age 14 included incapacitated oral sex ($n = 33$), oral sex by threat of harm ($n = 16$), forced oral sex ($n = 17$), incapacitated anal penetration ($n = 14$), anal penetration by threat of harm ($n = 13$), and forced anal penetration ($n = 13$). The participants indicated that the perpetrators of rape (could be more than one occasion) were female only (49%), male only (20%), or both male and female (16%). The remaining seven (16%) participants' responses to this question stated that they had not experienced any type of victimization, which was inconsistent with their previous affirmative endorsement of a behavioral rape item. Information about the participant's relationship with the perpetrator was not collected.

Research Goal 1: Frequency of Acknowledgment

CSA. Of the 99 men who endorsed behavioral indicators of at least one CSA experience, 52% ($n = 51$) did not self-label as CSA

victims. An additional 15 men denied experiencing any of the behavioral indicators of CSA, but still self-labeled as victims of CSA. These men were excluded from further analyses because it was not possible to identify if their experience met our research definition of CSA without a behavioral endorsement. This exclusion criterion is consistent with other studies examining acknowledgment of sexual victimization (McMullin & White, 2006; Steever et al., 2001).

Rape. Of the 45 men who were raped, 76% ($n = 34$) did not acknowledge the experience as rape. Additionally, nine men indicated that they had been raped but did not affirmatively endorse behavioral indicators of rape as defined by our research criteria (oral sex or anal penetration through use of force, threat of force, or incapacitation). These men were excluded from further analyses.

Research Goal 2: Correlates of Acknowledgment

We examined the relationship between CSA acknowledgment and the participant's relationship to the perpetrator and found no difference in rates of CSA acknowledgment among men with family perpetrators, nonfamily perpetrators, and both family and nonfamily perpetrators, χ^2 (2, 98) = 1.46, $p = .48$, $\delta = .12$. Examining the relationship between acknowledgment and experience of force, we found that participants who reported that their perpetrator used physical force during CSA were more likely to label the experience as sexual abuse (76% acknowledged) than men reporting no physical force (38% acknowledged), χ^2 (1, 96) = 10.68, $p < .001$, $\delta = .33$. We found no difference in rates of CSA acknowledgment based on sexual orientation, χ^2 (1, 99) = 1.27, $p = .26$, $\delta = -.11$.

Similarly, participants who reported that the perpetrator of their adult rape used physical force were more likely to endorse that they had experienced a rape (42% acknowledged) than men reporting no physical force (8% acknowledged), χ^2 (1, 44) = 7.15, $p = .01$, $\delta = .40$. Rape acknowledgment also differed significantly according to the gender of the perpetrator, χ^2 (3, 44) = 11.28, $p = .01$, $\delta = .51$. Follow-up chi-square analyses indicated that participants with a female perpetrator were less likely to acknowledge that they had experienced a rape (5% acknowledged) as compared with those with a male perpetrator (56% acknowledged), χ^2 (1, 30) = 10.16, $p = .01$, $\delta = .58$, and as compared with those with both female and male perpetrators (43% acknowledged), χ^2 (1, 28) = 6.22, $p = .04$, $\delta = .47$. We found no difference in rates of rape acknowledgment based on sexual orientation, χ^2 (1, 44) = .40, $p = .53$, $\delta = -.10$.

Research Goal 3: Acknowledgment and Psychological Distress

CSA. Using an univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA), we compared men who had not experienced CSA, unacknowledged CSA victims, and acknowledged CSA victims on level of psychological distress and found an overall group difference, $F(3, 287) = 14.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 13$. Men who acknowledged CSA endorsed significantly greater psychological distress ($M = 48.00$; $SD = 34.16$) than nonabused men ($M = 24.88$; $SD = 21.32$), $p < .001$, and than unacknowledged CSA victims ($M = 19.57$; $SD = 18.38$), $p < .001$. We did not find a significant difference in psychological distress between nonabused men and unacknowledged CSA victims.

Rape. Using an ANOVA, we compared the men who had not experienced rape, unacknowledged rape victims, and acknowledged rape victims on level of psychological distress and found an overall group difference, $F(3, 290) = 4.49$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = 04$. Although there was not a significant difference between the nonvictimized ($M = 25.80$; $SD = 22.94$) and acknowledged groups ($M = 45.60$; $SD = 41.81$), men who did not acknowledge their rape ($M = 38.50$; $SD = 29.30$) endorsed significantly greater psychological distress than nonvictims, $p = .03$.

Research Goal 4: Acknowledgment and Revictimization

The revictimization rate of men who had experienced CSA was 24%; of the 99 men who reported a history of childhood sexual abuse, 24 endorsed behavioral indices of rape in adulthood. This group represented more than half (53%) of the men who indicated that they had been raped as adults. Of the 24 men endorsing behavioral indicators of CSA and rape, seven (29%) acknowledged both types of victimization, three (13%) acknowledged neither type of victimization, 11 (46%) acknowledged CSA only, and two (8%) acknowledged adult victimization only. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between labeling of CSA and adult revictimization. Among men who were sexually abused as children, those who labeled their experience of CSA as sexual abuse were more likely to have been raped as an adult (42% raped) than men who did not acknowledge CSA (11% raped), χ^2 (1, 99) = 11.94, $p < .001$, $\delta = .35$.

Discussion

This study aimed to provide a better understanding of men's acknowledgment of CSA and adult rape by examining rates of acknowledgment; the relationship between acknowledgment and perpetrator variables; and the relationship between acknowledgment and negative outcomes, including psychological distress and revictimization. The majority of the men in this study who endorsed behavioral indicators of rape or CSA did not self-label as "rape" or "child sexual abuse" victims. This was expected given the low rates of acknowledgment observed among men and women in previous studies. For example, for CSA, the 49% of male victims self-labeling their experiences as CSA in this study is within the range of 15–59% that has previously been observed in other studies examining men's acknowledgment of CSA (Dolezal & Carballo-Dieguez, 2002; Fondacaro et al., 1999; Holmes, 2008; Stander et al., 2002; Stanley et al., 2004; Steever et al., 2001). Further, the 24% of male rape victims labeling their experiences as rape in this study is comparable to the 11–47% rape acknowledgment previously observed in women (Bondurant, 2001; Harned, 2004; McMullin & White, 2006).

Though low rates of acknowledgment were expected given the data on men and women's acknowledgment and given the seeming incompatibility between masculinity and victimhood (e.g., Hollander, 2001), the disparity between CSA labeling and rape labeling is somewhat surprising. Nearly half of the men who endorsed behavioral indicators of CSA also self-labeled as victims of CSA, whereas less than a quarter of men endorsing behavioral indicators

of rape self-labeled as victims of rape. Consistent with this, among the subsample of men who reported behavioral indicators of *both* CSA and rape, more were willing to acknowledge CSA (46%) than adult rape (8%). Thus, on our measures, male victims appeared more willing to acknowledge CSA than adult sexual assault. There are a range of possible explanations for this disparity. For example, it is possible that, for men, the definition of CSA is clearer than the definition of rape; after all, some state laws do not allow for men to be victims of "rape" even if they have experienced forced oral or anal sex (Turchik & Edwards, 2012); perhaps men would have been more willing to label their adult sexual victimization experiences as "sexual assault" or "sexual coercion" than rape.

However, it is also possible that adult men are more willing to use the CSA label than the rape label to describe their nonconsensual sexual experiences. The male rape myths discussed earlier, such as "it is impossible to rape a man" and "men [who are raped] are to blame for not escaping" (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; p. 90) stem from gender role stereotypes about masculine invulnerability and male sexual insatiability (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Adult men are expected to be physically strong and capable of fighting or resisting attack, and they are expected to always be in the mood for sex; thus, cultural myths may suggest that a man should never refuse sex and even if he did, he should be able to easily resist if someone tries to force him. Men who acknowledge victimization in adulthood may feel as though they have failed to live up to the masculine ideal. In contrast, acknowledging sexual abuse in childhood might be viewed by men as less threatening to their masculinity because children are assumed to lack power and physical strength and are assumed not to desire sexual activity.

It also might be expected that another commonly identified male rape myth, that "only homosexual men get raped" (Davies & McCartney, 2003, p. 395), would lead to lower rates of acknowledgment among heterosexual men than among gay men. Although proportionately more nonheterosexual men than heterosexual men endorsed behaviorally defined experiences of CSA and rape, no significant difference was observed in acknowledgment based on sexual orientation. It is possible that this myth is not an important determinant of victimization acknowledgment. However, it is also possible that nonheterosexual men are impacted by this myth in much the same way as heterosexual men. That is, some nonheterosexual men may not want to be "outed" as gay or bisexual, or they may fear that they will be blamed for the victimization because they were "asking for it" by engaging in same-sex sexual activity. Clearly more research is needed to replicate our findings and to better understand the role of rape myths in men's acknowledgment of victimization.

Beyond frequency of acknowledgment, we also aimed to examine correlates of men's acknowledgment of victimization. Previous research has indicated that use of physical force and perpetration by family members is associated with increased rates of CSA acknowledgment among men (e.g., Dolezal & Carballo-Dieguez, 2002). Our results supported the relationship between physical force and acknowledgment for both CSA and adult rape. Although prior research findings suggest that men may be more likely to be victims of nonphysical sexual abuse and assault (e.g., nonconsensual sex obtained through verbal coercion or incapacitation) than forceful rape (Peterson et al., 2011; Walters et al., 2013), it seems that physical force is more consistent with men's own preconceptions about rape and CSA.

Surprisingly, we did not find a significant difference in rates of CSA acknowledgment for family versus nonfamily perpetrators, which is inconsistent with the findings reported in several previous studies (e.g., Dolezal & Carballo-Dieguez, 2002; Stander et al., 2002; Stanley et al., 2004; Steever et al., 2001). However, in one study conducted with a community sample of men (Holmes, 2008), no difference was found in CSA acknowledgment based on relationship to the perpetrator. Arguably, our study used a sample that was similar to that of the Holmes (2008) study, whereas the other studies were conducted with more homogeneous samples (e.g., inmates, Navy recruits, college students). It is also possible that our gross categorization of perpetrators as "family members" or "nonfamily members" was not adequate to capture differences in acknowledgment based on relationship to the perpetrator; for example, CSA perpetrated by a distant uncle is clearly a different experience from CSA perpetrated by a parent. Obviously, more research is needed to better understand how relationship to the perpetrator impacts men's CSA acknowledgment.

In terms of the impact of perpetrator gender on rape acknowledgment, we found that men were significantly less likely to acknowledge adult rape when it was perpetrated by a woman as compared to a man. This finding is consistent with the myth that "it is impossible for a women to rape a man" (p. 90; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Prior research also indicates that people tend to place more blame on male victims when perpetrators are female as opposed to male, and people tend to assume that men are less upset when they are sexually assaulted by a woman as compared with a man (e.g., Turchik & Edwards, 2012). In fact, there are also data to suggest that men, on average, do experience less distress when they are sexually assaulted by a woman versus a man (e.g., Krahé et al., 2003; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994). Thus, men may refrain from labeling nonconsensual sex with a woman as rape (1) because they accept myths that women cannot perpetrate rape or that they are to blame if they are raped by a woman or (2) because they feel that they are not distressed enough by the experience for it to count as rape.

Prior research on both men and women has provided inconsistent results regarding the relationship between acknowledgment of victimization and negative outcomes. In terms of CSA acknowledgment, most studies of men have shown higher rates of negative outcomes associated with acknowledged CSA as compared to unacknowledged CSA (e.g., Dolezal & Carballo-Dieguez, 2002; Fondacaro et al., 1999; Stanley et al., 2004), though some studies have found that, compared with men who acknowledge CSA, men who do not acknowledge CSA endorse more risky sexual and drinking behaviors (Fondacaro et al., 1999; Holmes, 2008). For acknowledgment of adult victimization, no research has been done with men, and the findings related to women are highly mixed, with some studies showing increased rates of psychological distress associated with acknowledged rape (e.g., Conoscenti & McNally, 2006; Kahn & Mathie, 2000; Littleton, Axsom, & Grills-Taquechel, 2009), some showing decreased distress with acknowledged rape (e.g., Botta & Pingree, 1997; Clements & Ogle, 2009), and some showing no link between acknowledgment and distress (e.g., Conoscenti & McNally, 2006; Frazier & Seales, 1997; Harned, 2004). In the present study, acknowledged CSA victims

endorsed more distress than unacknowledged CSA victims or non-victims, whereas unacknowledged rape victims—but not acknowledged rape victims—endorsed more distress than non-victims. Notably, our ability to detect differences between acknowledged rape victims, unacknowledged rape victims, and non-victims may have been hampered by the small number of acknowledged rape victims in our sample. Nevertheless, based on our results, the relationship between labeling and psychological distress differs between adult and childhood experiences of victimization. Although the reasons for these differences are not yet apparent, it is possible that severe or prolonged abuse in childhood may increase the likelihood that men will acknowledge CSA, and severe and prolonged abuse also may lead to increased distress. This possibility received some initial support in the current study, in that physical force was associated with higher rates of CSA acknowledgment, and acknowledgment was associated with higher rates of distress. In contrast, in adulthood, victimization may be a single event rather than a prolonged exposure to abuse, so the severity or length of the abuse may not account for the relationship between acknowledgment and distress. Instead, as has been proposed with unacknowledged female rape victims (Littleton et al., 2009), a lack of rape acknowledgment among adult men may prevent utilization of services and access to social support following victimization, resulting in heightened distress. Alternatively, the meaning of acknowledgment may differ across the two experiences. For example, acknowledgment of CSA may be associated with preoccupation or rumination regarding the experience, whereas unacknowledged adult rape may be associated with psychological avoidance. Similar explanations have previously been proposed regarding differential outcomes related to acknowledged versus unacknowledged CSA (Fondacaro et al., 1999). More research is clearly needed to better understand the consequences of men's labeling, particularly in light of the inconsistent findings that have been observed previously.

Previous research has provided strong indications that childhood victimization increases the likelihood for adult revictimization (e.g., Coxell et al., 1999; Desai et al., 2002; Nelson et al., 2002). Results of our study were consistent with those prior findings, in that nearly a quarter (24%) of the male participants who reported behavioral indicators of CSA also reported behavioral indicators of adult rape. We examined acknowledgment of CSA as a correlate of adult rape, providing some indication of a possible relationship between acknowledgment and revictimization. It appears that male victims who label their childhood experiences as sexual abuse report significantly higher rates of rape in adulthood as compared with male victims who do not label their childhood experiences as sexual abuse. Given that CSA labeling is being done retrospectively, it is possible that men's adult rape experiences cause them to reevaluate early childhood experiences as being abusive; this reevaluation may not occur in men with no history of rape in adulthood. Alternatively, it is possible that the severity of the early sexual abuse experience both predicts labeling and increases long-term risk factors for revictimization. Finally, it is possible that men who think of themselves as victims of child sexual abuse, in comparison with men who do not use that label, take more sexual risks that leave them vulnerable to adult victimization. More research is needed to understanding the relationship between labeling and revictimization, as it has the potential to impact both intervention and treatment.

Limitations

This study is unique in that it is perhaps the only study to date that examines men's labeling of both adult and childhood sexual victimization experiences. However, there were limitations with this study's measurement of victimization. One major limitation of the current study is that the measures used to assess the behavioral indicators of rape and CSA were not completely equivalent nor were they entirely comprehensive. For example, the CSA measure included many sexual acts that were not included in the adult measure of rape; thus, the CSA measure may have assessed a wider range of victimization experiences than the adult rape measure. Additionally, the SES-SFV, which we used to measure behavioral indicators of rape in adulthood, does not assess for men's experiences with forced penile-vaginal intercourse; thus, the SES-SFV excludes incidents of female perpetration except in cases in which a woman anally penetrated a man with a finger or object or forced oral sex on a man. It is also important to note that acknowledgment was measured overall rather than measured specific to each behaviorally endorsed experience of victimization; thus, "acknowledged" victims could have been labeling an event that was not measured by one of the behaviorally specific items in this study. Last, the definition of revictimization in this study was limited to participants who reported both CSA and rape. In actuality, multiple experiences of CSA or multiple experiences of rape could also be considered revictimization. Future studies are needed to take a more comprehensive approach to understanding the relationship between revictimization and acknowledgment in men.

Consistent with the broader sexual victimization acknowledgment literature, this study specifically defined acknowledgment of sexual victimization as using the label "rape" or "sexual abuse." Some victims may not label their experience as rape or sexual abuse but instead may label it as an assault, a violation, or a crime. The importance of acknowledgment for the individual likely lies not in whether the victim uses the specific terms "rape" or "sexual abuse" but in whether he acknowledges that he has been wronged, hurt, or victimized. A victim's conceptualization of being wronged or victimized may be a more important determinant of help-seeking behaviors (e.g., seeking legal support, social support, or mental health services) than his use of specific labels like rape or sexual abuse. In the future, CSA and rape acknowledgment researchers might consider moving beyond comparing individuals who do and do not use specific terms to label their experience and instead compare individuals who do and do not identify their sexual victimization as a violation or a crime.

Another limitation of this study was the low completion rate among consented participants (46%). As previously indicated, the attrition rate in this study is somewhat higher than other online research (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998), though attrition may be lower when participants are emailed directly as opposed to recruited from survey Web sites, as we did in this study. Low completion rates may bias results in that those who complete the study may differ systematically from those who do not. For example, given the sensitive nature this study, it could be that those who did not complete the study were particularly uncomfortable with the questions because of their sexual history or attitudes; thus, completers and noncompleters may have differed in relation to our variables of interest. However, the fact that most of the noncompleters discontinued before even viewing the main research mea-

sures assuages some concerns about the potential for systematic differences between the completers and noncompleters. Further, our sample was a convenience sample, and although online research allows for access to diverse segments of the population (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004), it is possible that the individuals who decided to participate differed systematically from those who were either unaware of the study or who decided not to participate in it. Low completion rates and convenience sampling has the potential to limit the generalizability of these results.

A final limitation of the study relates to our ability to examine differences in acknowledgment related to sexual orientation. Our sample of nonheterosexual men was not large enough for us to run all of our analyses separately for heterosexual and nonheterosexual men. This is problematic, given that previous research has indicated that nonheterosexual men are at greater risk for sexual victimization than heterosexual men (Peterson et al., 2011; Walters et al., 2013). Future research is needed to assess the impact of sexual orientation on acknowledgment more completely.

Conclusions

Despite the limitations, this research confirms for men what has been previously observed in studies of women; men who have had experiences meeting research definitions of CSA or rape frequently do not label their experiences as CSA or rape. Although awareness of male victimization continues to grow, male victims of sexual abuse and rape, relative to female victims, are frequently overlooked by service providers and social science researchers alike (Bullock & Beckson, 2011); if men do not acknowledge their victimization, male victims will continue to remain hidden. Lack of acknowledgment of victimization among men may be, in part, a reflection of commonly held myths about male rape. These myths promote a traditional view of masculinity that portrays "real" men as strong, invulnerable, and always in the mood for sex. Given these cultural messages, men who are victimized may avoid labeling their experiences as abuse or rape because doing so implies a failure of their masculinity. Challenging cultural myths about male sexual abuse and rape may help men to feel more comfortable acknowledging their victimization and seeking support.

Edwards and colleagues make a number of recommendations for change at the individual and institutional level to eradicate cultural myths about sexual victimization (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011). In addition to prevention education aimed at providing evidence challenging these myths for college students and adolescents, they suggest that social and religious leaders have the ability to influence representation of ideologies, which could promote change. For example, Edwards and colleagues (2011) encourage journalists to shape media messages about sexual victimization in a way that challenges rape myths, and they suggest that legal professionals should be educated about how rape myths bias legal decisions.

Although men's acknowledgment of sexual victimization is desirable from a societal standpoint because it has the potential to increase prosecution of criminal behavior and to enhance prevention efforts, the impact of acknowledgment for individual men may not always be so positive. This research provides some support for a relationship between labeling and negative outcomes, albeit a complicated relationship. Acknowledging CSA was associated with increased psychological distress in our sample, but acknowledging rape was associated with decreased distress. Thus, simplistic conclusions about the benefits or drawbacks to labeling an experience as rape or CSA for individual men are not possible. Rather, it appears that the results of labeling may vary, depending on the individual and the specific circumstances of the victimization. Given this, care providers who work with male victims of CSA and rape should take care in imposing their own labels on the male victims.

More research on male victims is clearly needed to provide researchers, policymakers, and helping professionals with the information needed to better understand how men make sense of their victimization experiences. In the interim, our study provides strong support for the notion that most male victims do not label their victimization as abuse or rape. This suggests that it is important for treatment providers to routinely ask men about victimization history in behaviorally specific terms rather than asking about experiences with "sexual abuse" or "rape." Probst and colleagues (2011) have outlined practice guidelines for routine assessment of sexual assault in clinical settings, taking into consideration the specific challenges associated with assessment among adult men. Further, in their work with male victims, clinicians and advocates can begin to promote cultural change by working to dispel male rape myths that promote narrow definitions of masculinity and that blame men for their own victimization.

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