Differences in cognitive distortions between Caucasian and African American male adolescent sexual offenders

Kai Erika Wilson

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations

Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. For more information, please contact cwiseman@auctr.edu.
ABSTRACT

SOCIAL WORK

WILSON, KAI E. B.A. SPELMAN COLLEGE, 1994

DIFFERENCES IN COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS BETWEEN CAUCASIAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ADOLESCENT SEXUAL OFFENDERS

Advisor: Richard Lyle, Ph.D.

Thesis dated July, 1998

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of age of initial sexual orientation and family composition on cognitive distortions among adolescent Caucasian and African American male sexual offenders. This study was based on the assumption that the age of initial sexual orientation and single parent households effect the amount of cognitive distortions present in Caucasian and African American males who have been identified as sexual offenders. Parenting make-up (single parents or married couples) and age of orientation to sexuality were considered the two independent variables in this study. The dependent variable was identified as cognitive distortion. A case study analysis approach was used to analyze data that were obtained from completed Adolescent Cognition Scales and Psychosexual Assessments provided by a clinical social work expert in the field of adolescent sexual offenders.

The conclusion drawn from the findings indicated that there was a weak positive relationship between age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions. The findings further revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between family composition and cognitive distortions and that African American adolescent sexual offenders had a slightly higher degree of cognitive distortions than Caucasian adolescent sexual offenders.
DIFFERENCES IN COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS BETWEEN CAUCASIAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ADOLESCENT SEXUAL OFFENDERS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY

KAI E. WILSON

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

JULY 1998
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER

**I. INTRODUCTION**
- Statement of the Problem ........................................ 1
- Significance of the Study ........................................ 2
- Purpose of the Study ............................................. 3

**II. LITERATURE REVIEW**
- Prevalence of Sexual Offenses .................................... 7
- Sexual Deviant Behaviors ......................................... 8
- Development of Sexual Cognitive Distortions ...................... 12
- Relationship Between Age and Cognitive Distortions ............ 14
- Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions ................. 17
- Development of Cognitive Distortions from Incestuous Relations 20
- Caucasian and African American Male Sexual Offenders .......... 26
- Cognitive Distortions .............................................. 31
- Theoretical Framework ............................................. 31
- Social Learning Theory ............................................ 37
- Cognitive Theory .................................................. 37
- Cultural Relativistic Approach ................................... 41
- Research Questions and Hypotheses ............................... 49
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

### III. METHODOLOGY

- Design and Sample .......................................................... 52
- Measurements and Instrumentation ........................................ 52

### IV. FINDINGS

- Hypotheses Results ........................................................... 61

### V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- Age of Initial Sexual Orientation and Cognitive Distortions ........ 63
- Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions .......................... 64
- Cognitive Distortions for Caucasians and African Americans ......... 64
  - Sexual Orientation and Cognitive Distortions for Caucasians and African Americans .......... 65
  - Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions for Caucasians and African Americans .......... 65
- Implications for Future Research and Social Work Practice .......... 66

## APPENDIX

- .......................................................... 69

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- .......................................................... 70
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Frequency Distributions of Study Variables</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Results of t-test Analysis of Cognitive Distortions and Family Composition</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Research on male sexual offenders indicates that a sexual perpetrator's first offense usually does not begin in adulthood.\(^1\) It is in childhood that the future offender begins to develop a skewed perception of reality, or what will be labeled here, cognitive distortions. Gene Abel, one of the major researchers and contributors to the field of inappropriate sexual behavior among adolescents, has suggested that approximately 50% of adult sexual offenders began offending when they were adolescents, with some initial offenses occurring as early as age eight or nine.\(^2\) A high number of these sexual offenders were themselves the victim of sexual abuse.\(^3\) Though a direct correlation has not yet been proven, there is a high likelihood that the victims created may go on to be sexual abusers if not identified early.

The distortions underlying sexual crimes are often complex and misunderstood. Unlike previous ideologies that considered reasons behind sexual crimes as the misguided

---


\(^2\) Gene Abel, “The Outcome of Assessment Treatment at the Sexual Behavior Clinic and its Relevance to the Need for Treatment Programs for Adolescent Sex Offenders in New York State,” paper presented at a Prison Research/Education/Action Project in Albany, New York (unpublished; no date given).

need for sexual stimulation, research has shown that sexual offenses are usually driven by a need for power and control by an individual who has feelings of inadequacies. Reports indicate that individuals who commit this type of crime reportedly satisfy their need for power by planning their offense in advance and successfully carrying it out. Though their need for power may be satisfied, offenders have reported feeling both satisfied and confused after their crime is committed. This confusion often leads to isolation, emotional dissonance, a lowering of one’s self-esteem and even more distorted thinking patterns. More than likely, the adolescent offender has not developed the appropriate social skills necessary to discuss his confusion with others and may sexually act out more as an outlet to his frustration.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is a large quantity of information available regarding the psyche and cognitive distortions of sexual offenders, but few studies have actually compared the differences between Caucasian and African American male sexual offenders. The emphasis of research in this area is usually on adult, Caucasian males. Though there are some studies available on the adolescent offender, there is a significant lack of research

---


5 Perry and Orchard, 5.

6 Ageton, 99.

currently available on adolescent African American males who commit sexual crimes. Therefore there is a critical need for more research that examines racial differences in cognitive distortions among male adolescent sexual offenders.

**Significance of the Study**

There are several possible negative consequences for not examining differences in cognitive distortions among male adolescent sexual offenders. These consequences may have negative effects for social work practice and for several reasons.

Historically in Eurocentric treatment, practitioners have used only one or two treatment modalities when working with sexually inappropriate clients. Over time however, these treatment methods have proven to be grossly ineffective due to the rising number of ethnic minorities in treatment and the recent discussions regarding sexually deviant behavior among adolescents. For example, today, there is a tremendous lack of research available regarding thinking patterns and sexuality among African American adolescents. One can easily find literature regarding the delinquent behavior of inner city African American youth, but more scholarly information regarding cognitive distortions or sexual pathology on this particular population is just not available. What may be sexually acceptable in one racial or ethnic group, may not be acceptable in another group. The professional who does not perform adequate cultural research may believe that a client’s views regarding his sexuality is distorted. This may be a reason why sexuality among each race needs to be researched by every social welfare professional and the treatment needs to be “customized” in order to discover the true cognitive distortions among their clients.
Another reason for examining the cognitive distortions among male adolescent sexual offenders is high victim/offender ratio. If not identified at an early age, research indicates that the average adolescent sexual offender who has not been treated, may go on to create 380 victims during his lifetime.\(^8\) If identified early on however, practitioners may be able to alleviate the distorted thinking patterns of the adolescent offender so that they do not go on to create more victims. Residential treatment centers are experiencing a sharp increase in the admittance of adolescents who have committed sexual offenses. These offenders appear to be getting younger and younger and the types of offenses committed are more severe, creating serious emotional and physical damage to their victims. There has also been an increase in the number of African American youth who have been charged with sexual offenses. The precipitating factors surrounding these crimes may vary for African American and Caucasians with different treatment modalities required. Incongruent treatment methods may not only be ineffective but may also lead to more disturbed thinking patterns. This is why the importance lies in identifying varying causal factors and possible correlations of sexually offensive behaviors. Without this identification, exploration for treatment and rehabilitation cannot begin.

There are several studies available regarding both sexuality among adolescents and differences in single parent and married family households, but these studies fail to adequately explore the effects early sexual acting out and household composition have on cognitive distortions among male adolescents. These studies also fail to determine whether or not the effects of sexual orientation and family composition on cognitive

\(^8\) Ibid.
distortions vary for African American and Caucasian youth. Prevailing literature reviews immature sexual practices and single family households in terms of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, economic stressors and lack of adequate supervision, but the effects these factors have on the adolescents in terms of how they rationalize behaviors is relatively unknown. If determined that early sexual behavior or single family households contribute to cognitive distortions among adolescents, programs and intervention methods such as sexual education being taught at an earlier age, structured and instructional after school activities geared specifically to children of single parents and more education for parents on how to parent effectively without a mate, can be put in place to help alleviate these distortions for the adolescents. If these factors prove to be more or less significant for one race or another due to cultural variations, treatment programs can then be geared more specifically towards a particular cultural viewpoint. Modalities that are insignificant to a particular race can be a waste of money, time and effort and can greatly delay the treatment process for the adolescent sexual offender.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of age of initial sexual orientation and family composition on cognitive distortions among adolescent Caucasian and African American male sexual offenders. Racial differences on the effects that age and family composition have on cognitive distortion will be examined. This will be done by examining whether the relationship between age of initial sexual orientation and
cognitive distortions and family composition and cognitive distortions significantly vary between adolescent Caucasian and African American male sexual offenders.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many complex issues regarding sexually deviant behaviors among adolescents. The following pages will address some of these issues by presenting background information and related literature regarding cognitive distortions and sexually offensive behaviors. For the purposes of this study, cognitive distortions can be defined as justifications, perceptions and judgments used by the sexual offender to rationalize his behavior. Some perceptual and judgmental indicators of cognitive distortions that have been identified in the literature include an overabundance of fantasy behavior by the adolescent (basing real life situations on fantasies), lack of internal control, inadequate guilt feelings, loose morals, depressive symptoms including a negative self image or isolation, sexually aggressive thoughts or feelings including acceptance of rape or sadist activities, poor social skills or a domineering or inflated ego.¹ Sexually offensive behaviors, early onset of sexual activity, a tumultuous home environment, lack of parental guidance as well as other factors have been identified as contributing factors of cognitive

¹ Gail D. Ryan and Sandy Lane, Juvenile Sexual Offending: Causes, Consequences and Correction. (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990), 8-10.
distortions. These factors and the indicators previously mentioned, will be discussed in the following sections as dimensions of cognitive distortions. This review will be divided into five major sections including the prevalence of adolescent sexual offenses, ideas regarding the development of sexual cognitive distortions, the relationship between both age and family composition and cognitive distortions and cognitive differences among African American and Caucasian sexual offenders. It is this writer’s opinion that after reviewing the sections below, the importance of identifying differences among sexual offenders will be realized.

Prevalence of Sexual Offenses

The social boundaries of families in today’s societies have generally become more open to cultural influences regarding sex. Various reasons have been offered for this. Some of these reasons include increased media impact within the home, loosening of traditional religious values, earlier onset of adolescence and accompanying peer group influence, heightened awareness of cultural and ethnic pluralism and a variety of other cultural and technological factors.

Each of these issues have had some influence on sexuality. The overall effect of these changes have necessitated more frequent and substantial changes in sexual meanings and behavior patterns. With the upsurge in sexually offensive crimes, the legal systems’ response to the sexual offenses of juveniles

---

2 Ibid., 13.

has also changed drastically over the years. In many jurisdictions around the country, the
corrections system has been inundated with “sex offenders.” In many cases, local and
state juvenile corrections systems were ill prepared for this dramatic increase in their
populations and expanding numbers of violent young offenders have placed a burden on
the courts, jails and prisons. In a 1985 Los Angeles Times poll, 57% of reported cases of
sexual abuse of male children were perpetrated by teenagers and 15% to 25% of female
sexual abuse victims were molested by a juvenile. Those statistics were from 13 years
ago with the current statistics already surpassing those from 1985. The legal system’s
once passive and reactive gestures have had to change in order to begin taking on a
tougher stance. Instead of receiving a “slap on the wrist,” professionals who work within
the legal system and social welfare have expressed that the sexual offenses of juveniles
tend to become chronic and that these youth benefit from being held legally accountable
and mandated to complete specialized treatment programs. It is in these treatment
programs that their specific issues will be targeted and specialized services will hopefully
be geared towards the sexual offenders cognitive distortions.

What many individuals picture when they think of the “typical” adolescent sexual
offender may be inaccurate (for example, shabbily dressed and groomed individual, large
stature, mentally retarded). Surprisingly, many juvenile sex offenders are male 14 year old

---

4 Ryan and Lane, 185.
5 Ibid., 10.
6 Ibid., 188.
Caucasians living in a fairly stable home environment with both parents. Besides the basic appearance, the identification of the adolescent offender is not an easy task due to the unlikely event that the offender has had any previous convictions for sexual assault. The first identification of the sexual offender usually takes place in the juvenile detention center once their crime has already taken place and once it is too late.

Research studies by Morrison, Erooga and Beckett have revealed that compared with adolescent non-sexual offenders, the young sexual offender exhibits a relatively high degree of withdrawal and social anxiety. Approximately twice as many sexual offenders compared to non-sexual offenders reported that they had been bullied in school and many felt that they had few friends or social contacts. This social isolation has also been shown to have an impact on the adolescent’s dating behavior, with only 50% of them having had no real significant relationships with females their age.

Along with the systemic pressures to use community corrections for first offenders, recent criminal justice research has found that rehabilitation approaches are more effective than punitive measures in reducing re-arrest. This new understanding is

---

7 Ryan and Lane, 5.

8 Ibid., 6.


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.
in lieu of the new realization that not only do these offenders have legal concerns, they
also have serious issues pertaining to cognitive distortions that need to be addressed for a
successful transition back into the community.

As mentioned previously, workers in juvenile corrections and human sexuality
programs have begun to see that many of the juveniles committed or referred on lesser
complaints, had actually committed serious prior sexual offenses and had serious errors in
their judgment. These workers indicate that sexual assault by adolescents was much more
prevalent than previously thought. So many sexual abuse cases committed by adolescents
on children go undetected for years and at the time of discovery, that adolescent offender
may have committed several additional crimes with their reasoning becoming even more
skewed and disturbed. The final discovery of the offensive act may be due to the act
actually taking place within the adolescent’s own home. Clinicians have indicated that
access to victims plays a central role in the pattern of adolescent sexual abuse. This may
be because adolescents are less mobile and less likely to have adult abusers’ skills in
targeting their victims. Thus, their victims are often siblings or neighbors of the
adolescent offender.

---

Sexual Deviant Behaviors

A scale used in this study to identify cognitive distortions, the Adolescent Cognition Scale, uses phrases or topics that if answered in the affirmative, are considered signs of sexual deviance. Some of these topics include voyeurism, exhibitionism, masochistic activities and rape. These topics are explored in detail in the following paragraph.

Voyeurism and exhibitionism are paraphilias which involve deviations of sexual activity. These disorders have two major characteristics. First, sexual gratification is displaced to early components in the chain of sexual responses. In voyeurism and exhibitionism, observing and exposing become focal activities for the perpetrator. The second characteristic of deviation of sexual activity, is that both voyeurs and exhibitionists typically avoid sexual partners who voluntarily participate, and prefer instead no contact or consent from their partners.13

The act of voyeurism or as some would say, "Peeping Tom," is considered deviant because it is preferred to coitus, the individual being observed does not consent to the observation and the voyeur risks serious consequences if detected. In pursuit of what he prefers to see, a voyeur may cling to narrow window ledges, scale high fences, run from people who discover him, or sit patiently for hours. Many clinicians even feel that the element of risk or danger is sexually stimulating in itself for the voyeur.14


14 Ibid.
Exhibitionism on the other hand, can be defined as the exposure of the sexual organs to the opposite sex in situations in which exposure is socially defined as inappropriate and is carried out for the purpose of sexual arousal and gratification.\textsuperscript{15} Exhibitionists are more likely to be male and receive gratification from exposing themselves to “uninterested” individuals.

Sadism is derived from the name of the Marquis de Sade who for sexual purposes, inflicted such cruelty on his victims, that he was eventually committed as insane. Sadism is the act of achieving sexual gratification through the infliction of pain on a partner.\textsuperscript{16}

Another concept addressed by the Adolescent Cognition Scale is rape. Rape involves sexual activity with an individual under conditions of force, threat or trickery or with a person not competent to give consent. Rape is a crime that combines sexual and aggressive behavior\textsuperscript{17} but is often considered more of a way to obtain power over one’s victim than actual sexual gratification.

The above concepts are considered sexually deviant due to the nature and extent of the particular activity. The adolescent male who exhibits these behaviors has been shown to have cognitive distortions due to their approval, acceptance and undertaking of these activities, as well as their failure to realize the effects of the behavior on their victims.

\textsuperscript{15} Tollison and Adams, 237.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 286.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 307.
The majority of people in our society are not involved in any forms of sexual abuse, nor are sexual perpetrators or victims. However, it has become clear that the dynamics of sexually linked conflict, abuse and violence touch the lives of many more people than was previously believed.\textsuperscript{18} Due to the prevalence of the crime, it is obvious that pre-detection of juvenile sexual offenders is extremely difficult. This is why it is even more important to utilize specialized rehabilitative services, especially in the juvenile justice system. For the detention center professional, this may perhaps mean that more work can be done with the adolescents around the areas of growing up, sex, assault and victimization while in placement, instead of merely dealing with the offenders’ presenting issues regarding their incarceration.

\textbf{Development of Sexual Cognitive Distortions}

Sexuality, which is a milestone all individuals must confront, is greatly influenced by outside sources. Literature indicates that some of the factors contributing to sexually deviant acts by children and adolescents, include a high incidence of physical abuse in their families, a history of other criminal activity and behavior problems, poor school achievement, depression and among the most violent offenders, a high incidence of neurological and cognitive deficits.\textsuperscript{19} Beck, in his cognitive model of depression, suggested that depressed individuals made logical errors, which result in systematic

\textsuperscript{18} Maddock and Larson, 66.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 45.
misinterpretation of the meaning of events, reflecting and perpetrating negative views of the self, the outside world and the future. This suggests that when looking at cognitive distortions experienced by an adolescent, it would be important to focus in on depressive symptoms as an indicator of cognitive distortions.

The Sexual Assault Cycle, which is one model of behavior that attempts to explain the development of sexual deviance, discusses how a negative self image can eventually lead to sexually abusive behavior. This model was derived from the cognitive behavior dysfunction cycle and involves six stages. These stages are outlined below:

1. **IMAGE STAGE** - beginning in adolescents, individuals who have a negative self image have an increased probability of exhibiting maladaptive coping strategies when confronted with negative responses to him or her

2. **PREDICTION/REJECTION STAGE** - this negative self image can then lead to the individual to predict a negative reaction from others

3. **ISOLATION STAGE** - to protect against this anticipated rejection, the adolescent will become socially isolated and withdrawn

4. **FANTASY STAGE** - after becoming withdrawn, the adolescent will then begin to fantasize to compensate for his/her feelings of lack of control or powerlessness

5. **PLANNING STAGE** - the fantasies may provide the opportunity to visualize the offense

6. **SEXUAL OFFENSE STAGE** - the sexual offense is carried out physically, leading to more negative self image and thoughts of rejection

---


Though this is only one particular model, the Sexual Assault Cycle further advances the belief that sexual assaults are primarily fueled by feelings of powerlessness, a negative self image and poor coping and social skills. Because climactic release is often a source of comfort for the adolescent boy, this particular child may release his feelings of inadequacies in the form of sexual abuse.

It is a common belief that sexual cognitive distortions or sexually aggressive thoughts or actions, are caused by being sexually abused. An abundance of research however has failed to indicate a cause and effect relationship between a child being sexually abused and subsequently sexually abusing others.22 There are just too many other factors involved. For the children who have been sexually abused however, studies show that they can develop what's called “fantasy behavior” or skewed thinking patterns as a means of protecting themselves further from emotional trauma. This “fantasy behavior” or skewed thinking can include pretending to have control over situations, pretending to be someone else, or believing that aggressive acts towards others are justified, or causes others no distress. Studies also show that for the sexual abuse victim, the earlier the age of onset of sexual abuse, the longer the abuse was sustained and the more violent the abuse was, the earlier the onset of possible sexually coercive or fantasy behavior.23 This fantasy behavior can lead to even more isolation which may further contribute to the child’s’ distorted thinking patterns and a lack of coping and social skills. Even though

---

22 Roy Chancey, Interviews regarding male adolescent sexual offenders, interviews by author, dictation, Atlanta, GA., 1-18 November 1996.

23 Tems, Stewart, Skinner, et al., 316-326.
there may not be a direct causal relationship, the coping strategies used by the victim of sexual abuse may eventually lead the child to be a sexual perpetrator.

Often, the abusers' distorted thought processes and inappropriate attitudes are dealt with using role play, questionnaires, information provision and discussion in therapeutic settings. Cognitive distortions that demonstrate inappropriate beliefs are challenged and explored in group sessions. The underlying constructs are confronted and alternative perspectives are provided. Role plays where the offender adopts the role of a child's parent and is then presented with distorted reasons for the abuse occurring, have been found to be particularly effective when working with this particular population.24

Relationship Between Age and Cognitive Distortions

Adolescence is the major point for consolidation of sexual identity.25 Starting at around age six through twelve, concepts of sex differences become clarified and the sense of time and the ability to differentiate between fantasy and reality should begin to be established. The child compares earlier reactions such as shame, against exhibitionistic urges and a sense of guilt that contains sexual and aggressive wishes. Sex play is a part of this point in the child's development and is coupled with voyeuristic tendencies and the urge to touch. The sex play often may be more discreet at this age but may also be overt with much interest and curiosity. The parents reaction to their child's' sexual shame, guilt

---


or sex play is very important in shaping that child’s later sexual development. Because the child at this stage may be feeling dissonance regarding their urges, a repugnant response to catching their child in masturbatory activity for example, can lead to isolation regarding sexuality and a negative self image which has previously been described as an indicator of cognitive distortion. When the child reaches puberty, they struggle with achieving mastery of their body and of sexual and aggressive urges. During this struggle, the sexual behavior of the adolescent may range from regressive sexual activities (including voyeuristic or impulsive behavior) to petting and mutual masturbation and eventually intercourse. Adolescents who lack internal controls may sexually molest a young child as a means of compensating for their lack of power, control and social graces as well as a means of denying their anxiety regarding growing up.

Age appropriate sexual education and positive and stable role models lead to positive thinking and accurate problem solving skills. A child’s initial orientation to sexuality stems from the attitudes, expectations and behavior of his/her family members. From family interaction, these beliefs are modified by the experiences of the parents and by the children who acquire ideas regarding sex from other outside sources. As mentioned previously, it is this early development of attitudes that previous research indicates largely

26 Ibid., 52.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
determine the subsequent patterns of adult sexual behavior.\textsuperscript{30} Parents or primary caregivers teach values, and it is from them that individuals learn how to process what’s right from wrong. Children from sexually unstable home environments, children who experience sexual activity at an early age or the child viewing sexual interactions between the parental figures, may contribute to deviant behavior by the child.\textsuperscript{31} If a child is introduced to sexuality at an age that is incongruent with his or his family’s developmental cycle, it can also lead to both difficulty within the family as well as cognitive distortions within the child. According to Maddock and Larson, some families may “over-sexualize” many of the interactions between family members, attempt to break down all personal boundaries of privacy and make eroticism and its consequences a major emphasis in members’ experience.\textsuperscript{32} If a child is a member of a family such as this and are too young to question these interactions, they may begin to believe that open regulations of erotic issues are normal for all families and individuals. They then may attempt to impose their beliefs or perceptions on others.

The ecological perspective on family sexual abuse concerns itself with disturbances in parent-child relationships, malfunctions among various family dyads (spouses in particular), family role performance difficulties and interactions of the family with the community. This perspective also concerns itself with the societal context that shapes

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, 163.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Maddock and Larson, 53.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
family member’s attitudes and behaviors related to sexuality, intimacy and child socialization. Sexually abusive families are typically closed, inflexible and characterized by sexualized dependency. The boundary between this family and their community is usually rigid, preventing social feedback that would be necessary to alleviate at least some cognitive distortions. Consequently, all the family members’ needs are met by the family members themselves. In these “enmeshed” families, the boundaries between generations and individual members usually become diffuse which may result in generalized role confusion. The children in these families often perform tasks or duties that are more appropriate for adults. Thus, sexuality and eroticism may develop at an earlier age creating severe cognitive distortions within the child or adolescent.

Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions

Interest has grown as to whether the families of adolescent sexual abusers display any common characteristics. Such characteristics as distant, inaccessible parents, parents who stimulated a sexual climate in their home and a family history of maintaining secrets, were all common characteristics of families with sexually abusive adolescents. Also, the data base of the National Adolescent Perpetrator Network revealed that only 28% of juveniles were living with both parents at the time of their offense. Some will argue that

---

33 Ibid., 70.
34 Ibid.
35 Morrison, Erooga and Beckett, 154.
in general, most children who grow up in a household with only one parent are worse off, regardless of how well that particular parent parents the child.\textsuperscript{36} Sigmund Freud’s observations about family life seem to suggest that the single parent family deprives children of role models and childhood experiences necessary for the acquisition of appropriate sex role behavior, progress through successive developmental stages and for adult moral behavior.\textsuperscript{37} It is of the writer’s opinion that in order to get a complete understanding of relationships between the sexes, a child must be constantly engrossed in the company of two parents. From this relationship is where the child gets ideas about males, females and overall appropriate interactive behavior. The child who has an absent parent may attempt to fill in the voids of unknown by their own fantasies regarding the absent parent which may lead to cognitive distortions. The assumption is made in this study that the degree of cognitive distortions in the child from a single family household is higher because of the lack of complete knowledge and understanding that would be obtained from two parents.

A complete family is the basic context in which human beings are transformed into participants in complex social systems who retain autonomous identities as individuals. Families also are responsible for transforming elements of the social and material


environment into meaningful components of experience for its members.\textsuperscript{38} Consequently, there is no doubt that children who grow up in a single family household compared to those who grow up with two parent families have different rearing experiences.

Researchers in childhood development suspect that parental involvement and supervision are weaker in one parent families and that one parent families spend less time with their children and have less authority over them.\textsuperscript{39} Because this parent is not only responsible for the child’s emotional well being but also for the functioning of the home, that child may be forced to learn ways of coping, behaving or basic problem solving skills from other outside sources.\textsuperscript{40} These sources are often misguided and incorrect. The assumption will also be made that in families in which one spouse works all the time, the amount of healthy information instilled is still higher than in single family households. At least that child knows that two parents are responsible for his/her care and that the parents are sharing a responsibility of providing for the household and their emotional development. In a one parent family, the cooperation is not seen and the child may take on a singular thinking.\textsuperscript{41} The child from a single family home may not want to burden the one parent with questions regarding their feelings or sexual development. The child may

\textsuperscript{38} Maddock and Larson, 50.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 95.


\textsuperscript{41} Maddock and Larson, 95.
also learn that they may not have to answer to anyone in terms of their behavior and may choose to “act out” because they feel there are no consequences. A child in a single family household may take on some of the tasks of the absent family member. In some families, children may also take responsibility in a maladaptive fashion for tasks neglected by the parent.  

A child may initiate the behavior of this sick or deviant absent parent. If this behavior helps the family unite in an effort to improve the child’s behavior, the family may reward the child’s maladaptive behavior, thus creating cognitive distortions.

For single parents that actively date, they may inadvertently encourage early sexual activity in their children by bringing several different people into that child’s environment. Researchers have indicated that indeed, adolescents from single parent homes typically begin sexual activity at younger ages than do their peers from two parent families. When the children see mom or dad bringing someone home and that same someone is still there in the morning, that child may begin to take on a sense of irresponsibility and loose judgments and morals which may lead to cognitive distortions. Cognitively, the youth may think that is all right to experiment with different partners. If they do not receive the emotional support from that single parent, they may seek it out by other deviant means.

42 Ibid.

43 Mash, Hamerlynck and Handy, 70.

44 Ibid., 37.

Literature suggests that single parents have been shown to make fewer maturity demands of their children. They may let them get away with more child-like behavior or allow them to not take responsibility as often for their actions. Single parents have also been shown to not communicate as often with their children and show inconsistency in discipline and have lack of control over their children. The single parent is forced to not only carry out the discipline, but teach the child right from wrong. The struggle may prove too difficult for the parent. They may allow things to “slide” a little more often than two parent families. There are studies that indicate that children who are aggressive and defiant come from households that are led by single parents. Aggression is an indicator of cognitive distortions. The child’s internal control system is not as developed because of the lack of external control in their household. These cognitive distortions that develop may not only lead to delinquent behavior but to sexually abusive behavior as well.

It is important for a child’s healthy development to be able to identify with adults of the opposite gender as well as appropriate ways of behaving from the adult of the same gender as the child. The ability to identify and understand the opposite sex is lessened when a child grows up in a single parent household. Maternal warmth facilitates the child’s identification with the mother and paternal nurturance facilitates the male.

---

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 278.
49 Ibid., 132.
child’s identification with the father. Identification with either parent however should lead the child to incorporate into his or her own identity those ideas, attitudes beliefs and feelings about the child expressed by both of the parents.\textsuperscript{50} Even though there has been more and more research about single fathers, there is still actually little known about single fathers and their relationship to or impact on their children.\textsuperscript{51} It is believed however that in households led by single fathers, the adolescent boy has a difficult time discerning between the appropriate and inappropriate interactions of males and females. He may not learn the appropriate ways of treating a woman. Also, single fathers seem better prepared for the physical aspects of parenting such as shopping or cleaning, than for dealing with their child’s emotional needs.\textsuperscript{52} Issues regarding sexuality may be difficult for the father to explain or discuss with their child who may have been caught masturbating or looking at sexually explicit material. Instead of discussing these issues, the father may ignore it hoping that it will just go away. Especially in males, single fathers tend to express more anxiety over the sexual behavior of their daughters than of their sons.\textsuperscript{53} Perhaps they feel that the males need no sexual instruction. This attitude can often lead to cognitive distorted patterns regarding sexuality. For the emotional child who is concerned about


\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 181.

\textsuperscript{52} Vander Zanden, 472.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
their sexual feelings, single fathers may sometimes view these feelings as irrational, and blow them off.

The obstacle of raising boys in a single parent family led by a mother is extremely large. Because boys are naturally more aggressive than girls, it may be difficult for a single mother to raise her son into a "man," while still maintaining parental control. The coercive cycle\(^{54}\) is a term used when the son tends to become more aggressive as he matures, more abusive, demanding and unaffectionate to the mother. The mother in this cycle may respond with depression, low self-esteem and less control with her parenting becoming worse.\(^{55}\) This cycle tends to reinforce the already inflated ego of the son which may lead to sexually deviant behavior.

Development of Cognitive Distortions from Incestuous Relations

Reluctance to disclose and discuss the details of abuse is not uncommon for victims of domestic violence due to the emotional bonding that may occur. Literature reveals that emotional bonding has often been noted between concentration camp captives and their guards, as well as between devotees of cults and their leaders. The hostages even sometimes engage in behaviors that seem to place them at risk for further or increased victimization by their captors.\(^{56}\) Traumatic bonding is one of the concepts used

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 278.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

to explain these often perplexing features of victimization. Traumatic bonding can be defined as "strong emotional ties that develop between two persons where one person intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses or intimidates the other."\(^{57}\) The bond is more than just a strong emotional tie, it also involves cognitive distortions and behavioral strategies of both victim and victimizer that can unintentionally reinforce the tie.

The child who has been sexually abused will often try to make sense out of what has happened to him or her, but their conclusions will be only as sophisticated as their cognitive development will allow them to be. Consequently, many of their questions are likely to be answered from the egocentric perspective of a child.\(^{58}\) The abused child may hold himself or herself responsible for the sexual abuse and wonder what they did to deserve it, what role they played in it and how they will cope with it. The child will search for cues from their abusive parent in order to predict if and when the act will occur again. The child may feel powerless and to compensate for this feeling, may attempt to control when the abuse takes place. By doing this, the child facilitates the completion of the sexual act and controls when the relief from it will begin.\(^{59}\) The child may begin to develop fantasy behavior as a means of emotional defense, develop a negative self image or take on an acceptance of sexually aggressive acts. All of these behaviors are

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 166.

\(^{58}\) Lewis and Volkmar, 241.

\(^{59}\) Young and Lowry, 170.
considered indicators of cognitive distortions. Young and Lowry present the following example in their study:

This child knew the moment her father walked into the house whether he was going to abuse her sexually that day. "I could see it in his eyes," she said, "He would follow me around the house everywhere I went, and I knew what he wanted to do." When her anxiety had increased to an intolerable point, she would go to her room, lie down on her bed, and wait for him to come in and have intercourse with her. "I'd just get it over with," she says. She would feel so much relief when it was over that she would accompany her father to a restaurant for dinner.60

Whatever the behavior the child engages in to gain mastery over their feelings and the cues that produce them, it will paradoxically affirm and reinforce the cognitive distortions of their abusive parent. The child's cognitions can be similarly distorted. They may blame themselves for the sexual act while unintentionally eliciting more undesired sexual contact. The effects on their self-esteem of this personal blame are likely to be disastrous.

Cognitive distortions that may evolve in therapy of incestuous clients may revolve around issues of blame, responsibility, power and trust. These distortions arise from the traumatic bond of the child and parent. Any cognitive restructuring that takes place in therapy must be analyzed in terms of the interaction between the child and the abusive parent.61 As previously stated, sexual abuse may have more to do with power than the actual sexual gratification. Because the child in an incestuous relationship may have some power, therapeutic techniques need to be utilized so that that child does not attempt to use this power as a means of controlling or abusing other individuals.

---

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 171.
A study done by Tems, Stewart et al.,\textsuperscript{62} showed that the number of cognitive distortions found in adolescents declined after being in a residential treatment facility. This may prove to be a formidable option for the adolescent sexual offender. Another approach that has also been found to be helpful are cognitive-behavioral treatment. Examples of cognitive distortions are gathered from a number of sources during assessment and treatment. Some of these examples include distortion questionnaires (as used in this study), clinical interviews (also used in this study), analysis of the offending chain and/or victim empathy training.\textsuperscript{63} During treatment, the therapist educates the client on the relationship between cognitive distortions and offending behavior. Since deviant arousal is considered to be one of the prime motivating factors in sexually abusive behavior, its modification is a core component of many treatment programs. The cognitive-behavioral interventions focus on altering patterns of deviant arousal, correcting distorted thinking and increasing social competence with educational input assisting offenders to gain knowledge in sexual matters and stopping the effects of sexual abuse and sexual assault cycles. Although some authors have raised questions regarding the overall efficiency of sex offender treatment programs, there are some specialized programs that seem very effective. The majority of these specialized programs combine individual and group approaches utilizing educational, cognitive-behavioral and family system

\textsuperscript{62} Tems, Stewart, Skinner, et al., 323.

\textsuperscript{63} Morrison, Erooga and Beckett, 80-81.
intervention strategies. With intra-familial offenders in particular, family therapy is a critical component if successful rehabilitation is to be attempted.\textsuperscript{64}

Although there has been a fair amount of research on the adolescent sexual offender, there are still many unanswered questions regarding the development and maintenance of sexually abusive behavior. For example, there are as yet no clear indications as to what specific characteristics, experiences or circumstances are the most significant in the development of sexually abusive behavior; which adolescents are most likely to re-abuse, or what issues are most effective to address in treatment.\textsuperscript{65} This is why this particular study is even more important in identifying the young offender.

Over the past twenty years, social welfare professionals have increasingly come to recognize that the single parent home is a different but viable family form. This study makes no attempt to view the single parent household as destructive or pathological. It is designed to show that the single parent environment may contribute even more to the cognitive distortions of the adolescent sexual offender. In fact, many empirical studies of the single parent family reveal fewer differences between children in single parent and two parent families than within each family type.\textsuperscript{66} The study is justified however with the large amount of single parent homes and the adolescent sexual offender that may be emerging in their presence. More so than married parents, the single parent needs to be

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 94.

\textsuperscript{65} Maddock and Larson, 66-67.

\textsuperscript{66} Mash, Hamerlynck and Handy, 66.
informed about the likelihood that an imbalanced relationship will prevail during the
combined and adolescent years. These children need to learn to use positive
reinforcement as a means of controlling their cognitive distortions and the single parent
must learn to reward these efforts made by their offspring.

**Caucasian and African American Male Sexual Offenders**

**Cognitive Distortions**

The prevalence of African American adolescent males committing sexually
offensive crimes is rising. Even though there are statistically more Caucasian adolescent
sexual offenders than African American sexual offenders, recent statistics have shown that
those arrested for committing sexual abuse are disproportionately African American,
urban adolescents.\(^{67}\) A goal of this study is to examine whether or not real and significant
differences exist in the degree of cognitive distortions between African American and
Caucasian sexual offenders.

In research designs that compare African American and Caucasian individuals, it is
reasonable to assume that the hypotheses obtained were derived from knowledge of the
Caucasian subculture. Recently, there has been a move away from thinking of race in
normative terms and toward an emphasis on prejudice. Almost always the focus is on
prejudice of the majority (Caucasians) against the minority (African Americans). This
makes it seem acceptable or even appropriate to devote exclusive attention to members of

the Caucasian subculture.\(^68\) In the United States, racial differentiation has long been considered of fundamental importance, but making broad generalizations about any race can be dangerous due to the variations in belief and behaviors among individuals of all races and cultures.\(^69\)

In 1990, for the first time, there were more African American than Caucasian children in treatment facilities for various disorders.\(^70\) A main reason is for inappropriate sexual acting out. Perhaps a reason that cognitive distortions exist is because when teaching about sex, individuals fail to remember the differences between cultures. Such breakdown might result from using a language or terminology that is unfamiliar or inappropriate to certain groups. The degree of distortions might also come from assuming that certain sexual behaviors are favored by everyone instead of recognizing that cultures assign different values to sexual practice.\(^71\) An individuals’ capacity to openly discuss sexual material and how they feel is largely determined by their general attitude towards sexuality. Basically, how do they feel about it?\(^72\) Without this open dialogue, cognitive distortions can develop. Further, the lack of correct information and internalization of

---


\(^{71}\) Irvine, preface xiii.

\(^{72}\) Cullen and Travis, 223.
stereotypes can lead to destructive consequences from negative self-esteem to a justification for dangerous activities.\textsuperscript{73}

**Relationship Differences Between Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions**

It is estimated that 42\% of Caucasian children and 86\% of African American children will live in a single parent household sometime in their youth.\textsuperscript{74} At least 20\% of all children currently live in single parent households\textsuperscript{75} and 85\% of Caucasian and 94\% of African American children are living with only their mothers.\textsuperscript{76} These differences in family composition can greatly influence the way in which a child views himself. The statistics indicate a higher number of African American children growing up in single family households as compared to Caucasian children. As mentioned in previous sections, individuals raised in single family households may be more prone to cognitive distortions than the child raised in a two parent home due to the fantasy behavior or inflated self ego. The Cultural Relativistic Approach, which will be expanded on later, indicates however that the African American who grows up in a single parent home, is raised by not only by the one parent, but by the entire community due to the African American belief of

\textsuperscript{73} Irvine, 60.

\textsuperscript{74} Ken Cullen and Sheldon Travis, “Assessment and Treatment of Spanish Speaking Sex Offenders: Special Considerations,” *Psychiatric Quarterly* 61, no.4 (Winter 1990): 223-276.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} Vander Zanden, 468.
cooperative effort and collective responsibility. The child’s perception of their situation may not be skewed by outside sources due to this strong support system. The Caucasian youth however who is raised in a single parent home does not have the tradition behind them of a strong community unit. They may be more accessible to outside influences on their perception including isolative behavior and depressive symptoms.

How a person views him or herself can be greatly influenced by how they imagine others view their appearance, mannerisms and personality. According to Reginald Jones and at odds with previous literature presented in this study, there is a recognition among African American researchers that “color” affects the environmental responses of all African Americans, regardless of social class. Perception is the basic process of cognition as it is the process through which the living organism maintains contact with the environment. Research in this area makes the assumption that perception is heavily influenced by one’s socialization and past experiences. The question of a unique perceptual style within the African American community has been around for some time. It was first raised by L.E. Tyler in 1956 and again by J.M. Mandler and N.L. Stein in 1977 in an article entitled “The Myth of Perceptual Defect: Sources and Evidence.” Although it is an issue which has not been confronted directly, it is one which seems to manifest

---

77 Jones, 157.


79 Jones, 233.

80 Ibid., 246.
itself continually as we look for a pattern which represents how African American and European culture trains its children to learn.

From the above studies and information, we can expect that the African American adolescent sexual offenders in this study who were raised in single parent homes, will have a lower degree of cognitive distortions than the Caucasian adolescent sexual offenders.

**Relationship Differences Between Age and Cognitive Distortions**

Previous studies have indicated that the age of first sexual intercourse is influenced strongly by race with African Americans more likely to report younger ages of first sexual intercourse than Caucasians or Hispanics and that African Americans are more liberal and accepting of sex, pursued it more and were more open about it than other races. Other experts in the field also indicate that a high number of African Americans’ first sexual experience is with a relative. Even though the age of their initial orientation to sexuality may be younger, the fact that African Americans are more open about sexuality and discuss it more freely, indicates that the degree of their fantasy behavior may be lower than Caucasians due to this open dialogue. Maddock and Larson have indicated that a family that lacks motivation and appropriate comfort levels to transact sex-related business among members, are seriously limited in their capacity for honesty, intimacy and change.

---


82 Weinberg and Williams, 197.

It can therefore be expected that the degree of cognitive distortions will be higher in its relationship to age, for the Caucasian adolescent sexual offender.

Sexual differences emerge from a combination of cultural traditions and other factors by which people are different.\(^{84}\) Culture is "a set of historically created world views, rules and practices by which a group organizes itself."\(^{85}\) We know that culture has a lot to do with how we think and behave, but there are relatively few studies available regarding sexuality among different American cultures. The current studies that are available often are not generalizable and ignore the effect of social class and distorted thinking patterns on sexuality.\(^{86}\) Instead of theorizing that sexual differences exist due to race, it has been hypothesized that existing racial differences are more a function of social class than of actual race itself. Statistics indicate that a large proportion of African Americans compared to Caucasians are relegated to the lower class, thus their behavior would reflect lower class sexual patterns.\(^{87}\)

In order for race research to have a liberating effect on society, researchers need to improve their conceptualization of race related variables, broaden the kinds of studies designed and consider alternative interpretations of studies that have been done in the past.


\(^{85}\) Irvine, 25.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 72.

Theoretical Framework

Theories regarding cognitive distortions have not specifically addressed the relationship between sexual orientation and family composition on the cognitive distorted patterns of adolescent sexual offenders. Further, theories regarding the differences between cognitive distortions in Caucasian and African American adolescent male offenders simply do not exist. Expectations regarding the differences can be inferred however, from both the social learning and cognitive theory. Both theories will be used in this study to attempt to explain the effects that age of initial orientation to sexuality and family composition have on cognitive distortions among male adolescent sexual offenders. Using the cultural relativistic approach, the differences between Caucasian and African American males on both the relationship between age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions and family composition and cognitive distortions will be hypothesized.

Social Learning Theory

Several researchers agree that the social learning theory appears to be the best framework for understanding sexual offenders. The social learning theory grew out of learning theory and has influenced several different aspects in the social welfare arena. Some of these areas include clear and specific goal setting, contracting, ecological outlooks, step-by-step treatment planning and measurable treatment outcomes and

evaluation protocol. According to social learning theory, behavior becomes associated with a stimulus. After several pairings of the behavior and stimulus, the mere stimulus of something will be enough to cue the behavior. That is, some specific action, behavior or event is responsible for triggering behavior in individuals. Social learning maintains that most learning takes place through observation and vicarious reinforcement or punishment. This is true of operant conditioning which is another concept derived from the social learning theory. Operant conditioning is when the behavior of the individual is governed by the consequences of their actions. Thus, if an individual’s particular actions receive positive responses, that individual is likely to continue that action. Consequently, if an individuals’ actions receive negative responses, that individual is likely to cease their behavior.

The social learning principles have been shown to be useful in helping individuals make desired changes. The next area of discussion will deal with the social learning theory and its relevance in explaining the relationship between age of initial sexual orientation on cognitive distortions.

Social Learning, Age of Initial Sexual Orientation and Cognitive Distortions

The social learning theory takes into account the interaction of antecedents, consequences and reinforcement on molestation behaviors. With these factors combined, social learning theorists believe that they lead the sexual offender to pair memories and

---

89 Ibid., 60.

90 Ibid., 61.
fantasies with masturbation and orgasm. Because these offenders have cognitive
distortions, these fantasies are paired with the orgasm instead of actual and real situations.
The orgasm experienced by the offender consequently maintains the inappropriate
behavior.\textsuperscript{91} An individual exposed to sexual activity at an early age more than likely has
not had a multitude of sexual experiences. What they may pair their masturbatory activity
with, may be the one or two sexual experiences they actually experienced. These
experiences may not have been positive for the young child, nor is the child
developmentally capable of differentiating between positive and negative sexual
experiences. Thus, the younger the child is at his or her initial orientation to sexuality, the
more fantasy behavior he or she will experience.

Two reasons indicated in literature for the maintenance of molestation behaviors is
that there are often no negative consequences for sexual involvement with children
(parents or caretakers may just pass off the behavior on experimentation or curiosity,
especially the younger the child may be) or the offender may never actually witness the
negative effects suffered by the person they perpetrated.\textsuperscript{92} Because of their age, many
offenders never get caught or admit to their sexual wrong doing. The caretaker may feel
that because the child is so young, there is no need to punish him or her due to the belief
that he or she may not be developmentally able to understand their situation. Due to

\textsuperscript{91} Gene Abel, David Gore, C.L. Holland, Nancy Camp, Judith Becker and Jerry Rathner, “The

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 139.
societal pressures, there is more likelihood that an older perpetrator will be consequented for his or her actions. A lack of consequences for the younger child may lead to inadequate guilt feelings for the sexually offensive act. As mentioned previously, inadequate guilt feelings have been described as indicators of cognitive distortions. Therefore, because the young perpetrator is seldom punished, his or her offending behavior may continue into adulthood, creating more victims as they age.

Social Learning, Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions

Social learning emphasizes that the social environment acts on the individual and the individual influences the social environment. Children are often taught about the roles of men and women indirectly by the adult figures that surround them and whether these images are positive or negative, a large amount of information regarding sex roles and sexuality is ingrained by the time a child is three or four years old. If the child is exposed to inappropriate interactions by the adult, fantasy behavior or an acceptance of sexually aggressive beliefs can emerge which may eventually lead the child to develop into an offending adolescent. The structure of the single parent home is often much more loose than the structure of the home in which two parents are present. There are many

93 Gene, Gore, Hollad et. al., 138.


more opportunities for a child to learn about inappropriate sex roles or sexual behavior in a single parent home due to factors such as dating or a lack of appropriate supervision. Within the social learning theory, issues of reward and punishment are more important for maintenance, than actual acquisition of behaviors. Anticipated consequences have been shown to be more of a behavioral predictor than actual consequences. Because belief about a consequence often differs from actual experience, it is the thought of the consequence that actually guide individual behavior. If perceived ideas regarding consequences differ from actual consequences, then one’s behavior is weakly guided by the actual consequences of the behavior. If the lack of supervision in a single parent home leads to a lack of consequences for negative behavior, then not only will that child not experience the consequences for his behavior but he will not even have appropriate perceptions regarding his behavior or the consequences. The lack of external control may develop into a lack of internal control or impulsive behavior for the child, which may further lead to cognitive distortions.

Cognitive Theory

Cognitions involve how we go about representing, organizing, treating and transforming information as we devise our behavior. It encompasses such phenomena as sensation, perception, imagery, retention, recall, problem solving, reasoning and thinking. Jean Piaget, the developer of the cognitive approach, is most famous for his cognitive

96 Ibid.
97 Vander Zanden, 47.
stages of development and the aspects of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation, which is the process of taking in new information and interpreting it in such a manner that the information conforms to a currently held model of the world, and accommodation is the process of changing a scheme (a scheme is the term Piaget used for cognitive structures that people evolve for dealing with specific kinds of situations in their environment) to make it a better match to the world of reality. In other words, assimilation is the fitting of new experiences to old ones and accommodation is the fitting of old experiences to new ones.\(^98\) Usually around the time of adolescence, adolescents should have acquired the ability to imagine many possibilities inherent in a situation to generate mentally all possible outcomes of an event and thus to place less reliance upon real objects and events.\(^99\) The adolescent with cognitive distortions has not yet met this level of development.

During the preschool and early elementary school years, children are immersed in an authoritarian environment in which they are inferior to adults. As children enter into adolescence, a new stage emerges in moral development which is the stage of autonomous morality.\(^100\) Heterogamous morality evolves from the unequal relationships between children and adults and autonomous morality arises from the interaction among the peers equals. The adolescents' peer group now has more influence than their own parents.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., 49.
\(^{99}\) Ibid., 374.
\(^{100}\) Ibid., 315.
When coupled with intellectual growth and a weakening in the constraints of adult authority, the healthy adolescent begins to develop a morality that is characterized by rationality, flexibility, and social consciousness.

Cognitive Theory, Age of Sexual Orientation and Cognitive Distortions

The strength of the sex drive is determined largely by the way an individual thinks and feels toward sex. Without completely thinking about the consequences of this sex drive that could turn into a sexual deviant act, the effects of the offenders’ act and the feelings associated with it may not truly be realized by the adolescent perpetrator. The younger a child is at his or her initial orientation to sexuality, the less able they are to contemplate their sexual feelings. Cognitive distortions may develop more so in this younger child due to the over abundance of sexual stimuli into his or her underdeveloped mental schemes. Fantasy behavior is more prevalent in the younger child and what they perceive to be real situations, may be just figments of their imagination. The younger child may not be mentally able to rationalize his thoughts or feelings and may act out impulsively in the form of sexual inappropriate behavior.

Cognitive Theory, Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions

Everyday thinking and decision making often occur in situations of uncertainty. A critical feature of thinking and decision making under uncertainty is the need to consider possible consequences for our beliefs and actions. It is suggested that in situations of

\(^{101}\) Rubin, 51.
uncertainty, certain people tend to refrain from fully contemplating the consequences of their actions.\textsuperscript{102} This may certainly be true for the sexual offender. According to cognitive therapists, distortions of reality are based on misconceptions, uncertainty regarding consequences and erroneous beliefs that originated in defected learning during childhood.\textsuperscript{103} In single parent households, the opportunity for discussion regarding decisions and consequences may not be easily accessible. In two parent homes, if one parent is unavailable, there is still the opportunity for that child to discuss his feelings with the available parent. The young boy in a single parent home may be forced to contemplate his own dilemmas with his existing schemes. He may feel frustrated or confused which can lead to a negative self image or he may begin to fantasize. Children from two parent homes have at least someone in which to clarify their perceptions or judgments.

\textbf{Cognitive Theory and Race}

Social oppression greatly influence our youngsters. More times than not, African American youth are subjected to negative images of individuals of their same race. The majority of information in our society is transmitted through visually oriented material. The cognitive theory suggests that when individuals take in new information, they interpret this new information to fit into their beliefs that have already been somewhat formalized. The adolescent African Americans’ delicate perception of life may be skewed


already by the distorted images that are constantly bombarding them in the media. They may feel hopeless as to who to turn to in times of mental confusion. As in the social learning theory, these adolescents may not have an opportunity to alter their offending ways. Due to low image thinking, the adolescent may not turn to anyone when feeling frustrated or powerless. Through identification, the young male learns to assume the roles and attitudes of others with whom he interacts. This has significance not only for how he responds to others, but also for how he reacts to himself. The individuals' sense of self is developed, molded, and controlled by his assuming the attitudes and definitions of others toward him. Therefore, the extent to which an individual is a member of this society, its values, goals, attitudes and norms are his.\textsuperscript{104}

Cultural Relativistic Approach

According to Joseph Baldwin, Raeford Brown and Reginald Hopkins,\textsuperscript{105} "western psychology has effectively denied the existence of a distinct African American culture as the only valid conceptual framework for defining, understanding and explaining black behavior." Typically, this would lead one to assume that only the experiences of slavery and racial oppression have created the differences in the experiences between African American and Caucasian individuals in this country. The cultural relativistic approach, along with the afrocentric perspective assumes that the cultural orientation of African

\textsuperscript{104} Jones, 668.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 141.
Americans in this country, is very much African in its basic nature. According to Baldwin, Brown and Hopkins, the distortions created among African Americans have more than likely resulted from over three centuries of victimization by European American cultural oppression. Therefore, the differences in behaviors between African Americans and Caucasians should always be examined and interpreted within the context of this total perspective.

What the cultural relativistic approach does, is assume the existence of fundamental differences between African American culture and European American culture and their corresponding psychological functioning and behavioral manifestations. This perspective endorses the value for unity, cooperative effort, collective responsibility and concern for the community among African Americans. Whereas Caucasians may tend to think in terms of “I,” African Americans think in terms of “We.” Though there are definite distortions among the African American community, it is of this author’s opinion that because of the Caucasian singular thinking, the male adolescent sexual offenders of that race will have a higher degree of cognitive distortions than their African American counterparts.

Reginald Jones reveals that the essential nature of the concept of self, is a derivative of the European world view. This philosophical orientation is based on the

---

106 Ibid., 157.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
guiding principles of control over nature and survival of the fittest. The assumption that
the process of thought, including cognitions, distinguishes human beings from their
surroundings (nature), accounts for the Eurocentric adherence to the principle of “control
or mastery over nature.” Since human beings are capable of complex mental functioning,
the Eurocentric person has internalized the belief that man is also destined to rule over all
of that which he could contemplate. The European self is therefore separate from and in
conflict with nature. This principle is operationalized through such major themes as
oppression, suppression, repression and the unnatural alteration of all objects that are
inconsistent with its value framework. The focus of the self is based on a value for the
individual over the collective. This notion purports that the individual’s identity can be
forged independently of the group identity which is primarily responsible for the
individual’s existence. These Eurocentric values for the self are translated into psycho-
behavioral modalities that are best expressed in terms of the self as competitor, aggressor,
initiator, influencer, and controller. Because the African American individual can be said
to have more of a tie to his community, it can be assumed that thoughts regarding the
victimization of someone in his own community will be contemplated more so than the
Caucasian individual, thus creating less distortions.

**Cultural Relativistic Approach, Age of Sexual Orientation and Cognitive Distortions**

As mentioned in previous sections, African Americans have traditionally had
experience with sex at an earlier age than Caucasians. However, because African

\[^{109}\text{Ibid., 145.}\]
Americans tend to be more open regarding sexuality issues according to Weinberg and Williams,\textsuperscript{110} they may have a lower degree of fantasy behavior or sexually aggressive thoughts. According to the cultural relativistic approach, African Americans are more likely to seek guidance from members either within their own family or race. Sexuality issues are more likely to be taught to the child by his own family or race instead of outside sources. Caucasians often seek guidance from others who may not have any interest in their maintenance of appropriate behavior or care for where the consequences of where their advice may lead the individual. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that cognitive distortions will be higher for the Caucasian offender in terms of age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions.

\textbf{Cultural Relativistic Approach, Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions}

The cultural relativistic approach assumes that the identity of African Americans is not independent of their race. Even though African American children grow up in more single family homes than Caucasian children, the African American child has an abundance of other caretakers besides his own parent. Extended family as well as people within the community tend to take on a mutual responsibility in raising their children. Even though there is only one parent in the home, the child may receive guidance and support from various other people within the community. If the child has questions regarding sex that his or her own parent cannot or will not answer, the child has

\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{110} Weinberg and Williams, 197.}\end{footnote}
many other family members and neighbors from which to seek guidance. The Caucasian child may not have this “reservoir” of resources which may lead the child to problem solve on his or her own. This may lead to a higher degree of cognitive distortions for the Caucasian adolescent. From this discussion, it can be hypothesized that the degree of cognitive distortions will be lower for the African American offender emerging from a single family background.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

According to cognitive theory, mental development occurs within a series of stages. If an adolescent is exposed to sexuality prior to their appropriate chronological stage of development, then their degree of cognitive distortions should be higher.

Based on the aforementioned literature review, theoretical framework and general purpose of this study, the research question for the first hypothesis becomes, is there a negative and significant relationship between the age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions among male adolescent sexual offenders? The hypothesis may then be formally stated as:

**H1:** There will be a negative and significant relationship between the age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions among Caucasian and African American male adolescent sexual offenders.

As the literature suggests, there are definite differences between single and married family households. In the single parent home, the adolescent is unable to identify with the absent parent and therefore cannot model appropriate interactions between the opposite
sexes. In this case, the research question becomes, is there a significant difference between adolescents raised in single parent homes and adolescents raised in two parent homes on cognitive distortions? The hypothesis may be formally stated as:

H2: Adolescent male sexual offenders raised in single parent homes will have significantly greater cognitive distortions than those raised in two parent homes.

Cognitive distortions are errors in thinking or judgment errors. The Afrocentric perspective suggests that Caucasian individuals tend to think in the singular whereas African American individuals have a more diurnal perspective on life. What this perspective therefore assumes, is that instead of handling situations of uncertainty or confusion, the African American adolescent will seek external supports to help alleviate his or her skewed thinking. It is of this author’s opinion that Caucasian adolescent male sexual offenders will have a higher degree of cognitive distortions than African American male adolescent sexual offenders. The research question then becomes, will the relationship between age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions and family composition and cognitive distortions be significantly different for Caucasian and African American male adolescent sexual offenders? The hypotheses are stated as such:

H3*: Cognitive distortions will be higher for Caucasian male adolescent sexual offenders than for African American sexual offenders in general. More specifically, there will be a negative and significant relationship between the age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions among Caucasian and African American male adolescent sexual offenders but the degree of cognitive distortions
will be higher for the Caucasian adolescent than for the African American adolescent.

H3b The difference between Caucasian adolescent sexual offenders who are raised in single parent homes on cognitive distortions will be significantly greater than the degree of cognitive distortions of African American male adolescents raised in single parent homes.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Design and Sample

The sample on which the present study is based, was drawn from male adolescent sexual offenders that have been evaluated by a clinical social work expert in the field of adolescent sexual offenders. Data were collected from sixty psycho-sexual assessments and cognition scales. Of the fifty-eight assessments and scales that had previously been administered, twenty-nine respondents were Caucasian and twenty-nine were African American. All respondents were male and ranged in age from eleven to seventeen. The method of sampling used for this study was convenience non-probability sampling using an unobtrusive design (data source were documents).

Measurements and Instrumentation

Two different measurement devices were used for this study. The two independent variables, age of initial sexual orientation and family composition, were gathered from Psychosexual Assessments (format originally developed by Ross, Loss and Associates, copyright 1987). This assessment is based on several different areas including Precipitating Factor to Offense, Family System Functioning, Non-Offending Sexual History and Past Victimization, etc. The participant is asked by the evaluator questions regarding his past sexual history, family dynamics and academic achievement. This is
intended to help determine how much normal sexual development is present in the offenders history.

The two independent variables that were found using the Psychosexual Assessment were age of initial sexual orientation and family composition. The areas in which these variables were located were in the sections entitled "Family System Functioning" and "Non-Offending Sexual History and Past Victimization." Age of initial sexual orientation is operationally defined as the chronological age at which one is exposed to the manipulation of genitalia (fondling) or sexual intercourse. Family composition is operationally defined as married parents in same household or single parent households.

The second scale used to measure the dependent variable, cognitive distortions, was a modified version of the Adolescent Cognition Scale (utilized ten questions instead of the fifty-four on the original format). Cognitive Distortions was operationalized as justifications, perceptions and judgments used by the sexual offender to rationalize his sexually offending behavior. The Adolescent Cognition Scale will be used in providing data for this study. The Adolescent Cognition Scale, which was developed in 1985 by Gene Abel, Joanne L. Rouleau and Michael Hilan, is considered a self-anchored rating scale in which participants are asked to rate themselves on a continuum. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1" strongly agree to "5" strongly disagree with all
items scored in the same direction. For example, the lower the score, the more deviant the cognition.¹ The reliability coefficient for this scale with this sample was .739.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter will summarize data collected from the study. Table 1 presents frequencies and percentages for age of sexual orientation, family composition and cognitive distortions. The next analysis presents results of Pearson r correlations for the relationships between the age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions for the entire sample, Caucasian and African American male adolescent sexual offenders. The last analysis presented in Table 2 presents t-test results of cognitive distortions by family composition for entire sample, Caucasian and African American male adolescent sexual offenders. The level of significance was set at .10 to determine whether to accept or reject the study hypotheses.

There were a total of sixty respondents in this study. African Americans and Caucasians accounted for equal numbers within this sample. Ages of the respondents ranged from eleven to seventeen.

Findings from the frequency distribution for the entire sample indicate a mean score of 12.35 for age of sexual orientation, which means on average, the respondents first sexual orientation was around 12 years old. The standard deviation for this variable was 2.47 and the median was 13.00. The ages of initial orientation to sexuality for eight percent of the sample were from ages four to eight (low), thirty-eight percent of the
sample had ages of initial sexual orientation from nine to twelve (medium) and fifty-three percent of the sample had their initial orientation to sexuality between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. The mean score for age of sexual orientation for Caucasian male adolescent sexual offenders was 12.433, with standard deviation of 2.285 and median of 13. African American male adolescent sexual offenders in this study had a mean score of 12.267 for initial orientation to sexuality, with a standard deviation of 2.677 and median of 12.

There was on average, more adolescent sexual offenders who came from two-parent homes in this sample. Approximately fifty-two respondents came from two parent homes and forty-nine percent came from single family households. Eighteen African American respondents came from single parent households as opposed to nine Caucasians coming from similar type households. Eleven African American respondents came from two parent households and twenty Caucasians came from two parent households.

Findings from the frequency distributions further indicate a mean score of 38.22 for cognitive distortions, which indicates that the respondents had a “medium” level of cognitive distortions. The standard deviation for this variable was 5.93 and the median was 40. Approximately twenty-nine percent of the respondents had few cognitive distortions, fifty-five percent had a medium level of distortions and fifteen percent had high levels of cognitive distortions. The mean score for cognitive distortions for Caucasian male adolescent sexual offenders was 38.93, with standard deviation of 4.76 and median of 40. African American male adolescent sexual offenders in this study had a
mean score of 37.52 for cognitive distortions, with a standard deviation of 6.92 and median of 36.
### TABLE 1: Frequency Distributions of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION(^a)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW (4-8)</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIUM (9-12)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH (13-16)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAMILY COMPOSITION(^b)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARRIED</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGLE</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS(^c)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW DISTORTIONS (41.5-49)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIUM DISTORTIONS (33.5-41.5)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH DISTORTIONS (20-33.5)</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) mean = 12.350  
standard deviation = 2.469  
median = 13.000

\(^b\) mean = 1.483  
standard deviation = .504  
median = 1 (single parent household)

\(^c\) mean = 38.224  
standard deviation = 5.927  
median = 40.000

* Percents may not total 100% or may exceed 100%
Table 2 represents t values and levels of significance for family composition. The t-test is most commonly used to examine whether two groups are significantly different from one another.

Findings from t-test statistical test indicate that for the entire sample, the mean score of 40.10 for a two parent family and 36.07 for participants coming from one parent families. The t value for the entire sample was equal to 2.72 with degrees of freedom being 56 and a significance level of .009.

The total population for this sample was further broken down in terms of African American and Caucasian adolescents. The mean score for Caucasian adolescent sexual offenders emerging from a two parent family was 40 with a mean score of single parent households of 36.56. The t value for this subset was 1.88 with degrees of freedom of 27 and level of significance at .070.

The mean score for African American adolescent sexual offenders emerging from a two parent household was 40.27 and the mean score for those emerging from a single family households was 35.83. The t value for African Americans was 1.74 with degrees of freedom of 27 and level of significance at .094.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>SIGNIFICANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENTIRE SAMPLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Two Parent</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40.10</td>
<td>t = 2.72, df = 56, p = .009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. One Parent</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CAUCASIAN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Two Parent</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>t = 1.88, df = 27, p = .070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. One Parent</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AFRICAN AMERICAN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Two Parent</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40.27</td>
<td>t = 1.74, df = 27, p = .094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. One Parent</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypotheses Results

Hypothesis 1 stated that there will be a significant negative relationship between the age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions among male adolescent sexual offenders. The analysis of this relationship revealed that there was a fairly weak, positive and no statistically significant relationship at the .10 level between age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions ($r = .2048$ and $p = .123$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Hypothesis 2 stated that sexual offenders in single family households will have significantly greater cognitive distortions than adolescent sexual offenders in two parent homes. The analysis of this relationship reveals that there was no statistically significant relationship between family composition and cognitive distortions among adolescent sexual offenders. Hypothesis 2 is therefore rejected ($t = 2.72$).

Hypothesis 3A suggested that cognitive distortions will be higher for Caucasian male adolescent sexual offenders than for African American sexual offenders in general as well as in relationship to age of initial sexual orientation on cognitive distortions. The analysis of this relationship revealed a slightly lower number of cognitive distortions for Caucasian adolescent offenders with no statistically significant relationship between age of initial sexual orientation and cognitive distortions (mean = 38.931, $p = .870$, $r = .0318$). The results of the analysis of the African American adolescent sexual offenders in this study also revealed no statistically significant relationship between age of initial sexual orientation to sexuality on cognitive distortions but that this relationship was more
significant and stronger for African Americans than for Caucasians. (mean = 37.517, p = .110, r = .3034. Hypothesis 3A is therefore rejected.

Hypothesis 3B suggested that cognitive distortions will be greater for Caucasian male adolescent sexual offenders in single parent homes than for African American adolescent sexual offenders who grew up in single parent homes. The analysis revealed a higher degree of cognitive distortions for African American youth who were raised in single family households than Caucasians (African American mean = 35.833, Caucasian mean = 36.556). Hypothesis 3B is rejected.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Age of Initial Sexual Orientation and Cognitive Distortions

The findings for this study revealed a positive but not statistically significant relationship between the age of initial sexual orientation on the degree of cognitive distortions a male adolescent sexual offender possesses. These positive findings can possibly suggest that the younger an individual is at their initial orientation to sexuality, the lower degree of cognitive distortions they will posses. On the other hand, these findings can also suggest that the older an individual is at his or her initial orientation to sexuality, the higher degree of cognitive distortions he or she will posses. These findings are inconsistent with current literature that suggests that an individual who is not developmentally advanced enough to handle sexual stimulation may have judgment difficulties pertaining to social and sexual dysfunction. However, because the results of this study were not statistically significant, (indicating that age of sexual orientation has no bearing on cognitive distortions), it can be assumed that other factors are more significant in the development of cognitive distortions in sexual offenders.
Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions

As discussed in the literature review section of this study, several studies support the claim that children who are raised in single parent households are generally worse off than children raised in two parent homes when it comes to social and emotional factors. In this study, there were slightly more adolescent sexual offenders who were raised in two parent homes than those raised in single parent homes. Results of this study indicate, not significantly however, that the sexual offenders who were raised in single family households did have a higher degree of cognitive distortions than those from two parent home environments. These results were consistent with the literature previously presented in this study.

Cognitive Distortions for Caucasians and African Americans

Existing research indicates the prevalence of cognitive distortions among adolescent sexual offenders. This study therefore complimented existing literature indicating that cognitive distortions were found among male adolescent sexual offenders. It was found that statistically, there were not significant differences in cognitive distortions among Caucasian and African American male adolescent sexual offenders, however, the Caucasian respondents did have a slightly lower level of distortions than the African American males in this study. This finding is inconsistent with the study hypothesis but does indicate the predominance of racial stressors on the African American individual in relationship to cognitive distortions presented in the cultural relativistic approach.
Sexual Orientation and Cognitive Distortions for Caucasians and African Americans

The average age of initial sexual orientation to sexuality for Caucasian sexual offenders in this study was 12.433. This age was slightly higher than the African American males in this study whose average age of initial sexual orientation was 12.267. This finding is consistent with current literature suggesting younger ages of sexual orientation for African Americans. Even though the results were not statistically significant, the relationship between age of initial sexual orientation on cognitive distortions was stronger and more significant for African Americans than for Caucasians in this study. These results suggest that age of initial sexual orientation has more of an impact on the development of cognitive distortions on African American male adolescents than on Caucasian adolescent males in this study.

Family Composition and Cognitive Distortions for Caucasians and African Americans

Though there were an equal number of African Americans and Caucasians in this study, there were almost twice as many African American adolescents than Caucasians who came from single parent households and that family composition has more of an effect on cognitive distortions than the age of initial sexual orientation for adolescent sexual offenders. The analysis further revealed a higher degree of cognitive distortions for African American youth who were raised in single family households than Caucasian adolescent sexual offenders. These results were incongruent with existing literature.
Implications For Future Research and Social Work Practice

Cognitive distortions are present in all adolescent sexual offenders but the results of this study that indicate that African American sexual offensive adolescents had a slightly higher level of cognitive distortions, can be equated to the prevalence of social oppression within the African American community and the effect this oppression has on all aspects of the African Americans' life. It is of prime importance for social workers to understand the effects of this oppression and advocate for equal services to all oppressed groups. Further research in this area could also begin to look at not only the cognitive distortions among adolescent sexual offenders, but the degree of distortions that may be present in both non-sexual offenders and non-offenders in general.

Individually, it is one of the many responsibilities of social workers to promote an open atmosphere for children and their families to discuss sexual issues in detail and the implications on life events. Obstacles exist however for providing sex education and reproductive health services for youths. Some of these obstacles include political overtures in dealing with the controversial nature of sexuality education and family planning issues, agency constraints and the current emphasis on short term treatment options.

In this study, there was a disproportionate number of African American youth emerging from single parent households. Unfortunately, this finding was representative of society as a whole. This suggests that the alarming high divorce rate and pregnancy out of wedlock has an effect not only on economic issues, but also on the thinking and
processing patterns of our young as well as possible legal complications. Practitioners who deal in family practice need to really emphasize to single family households the importance of providing a complete, whole and nurturing environment for their children.

Defining normal, problematic or abusive sexual behaviors is a major difficulty for professionals with the responsibility of teaching and/or treating adolescents. The uncertainty created can make both clinicians and parents feel powerless to respond to behaviors that trouble or concern them. Sexuality is a fundamental aspect of human existence. It is a basic dimension of human experience and of family life. When looking at concepts regarding sexuality, gender and family development are key aspects of family organization. Gender linked factors powerfully affect patterns of interaction and communication among all family members, reflecting differences in individual experience and social expectations. The family development patterns and the psychosexual development of individual family members are believed to be mutually influential. Stages of family development are strongly influenced by the sequence of significant events in the psychosexual development of individual family members. Also, patterns of individual psychosexual development are powerfully affected by changing patterns of family interaction at various stages of the family life cycle. Sexual meanings and behaviors in the family intersect with a variety of elements in the family’s historical and cultural environment in mutually influential ways. How a family deals with sexuality affects its relationship to its surrounding community. Similarly, what happens in the larger society has an impact on sexuality. Family members’ experiences outside of the family, as well as
circumstantial factors in the broader social and physical environment, inevitably affect their sex related behavior.¹

This study failed to examine other sources of cognitive distortions which can include, but are not limited to, physical abuse, alcohol and drugs or academic achievement. Also, because this study indicated that family composition had more of a bearing on cognitive distortions than age of initial sexual orientation, other factors can be examined in the future including the effects of divorce and grandparents as primary care givers.

An outcry from the public for community protection has led to the placement of some adolescent sexual offenders being placed in adult correctional facilities where there is absolutely no treatment geared towards the adolescent mind. The role of the social worker and the criminal justice system has diminished in recent years, but there are some definite team efforts that can be made among the two disciplines. The primary role of the criminal justice employee is to ensure community safety but the role of the social worker in this system should be to help these adolescents move forward and create productive lives for themselves and the individuals within their community.

APPENDIX
APPENDIX A

ADOLESCENT'S COGNITION SCALE (MODIFIED)

Read each of the statements below, and circle the number that indicates your agreement.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral (neither agree or disagree)
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Numbers 1-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. If somebody stared at my penis as I exposed myself it would mean they like what they see.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If other guys have sexually felt and touched strangers on the subway or bus it is all right for me to do it also.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Getting turned on by being tortured won't interfere with your sex life when you're married.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A very young child can make their own decision as to whether they want to have sex with me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If I try to have sex with somebody and they don't try to stop me the whole time, it couldn't be called rape.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If I expose my dick (flash) to someone in public, it won't harm that person.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. If a young child doesn't tell others about having sex with me they want to continue having sex with me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Some people are shy about asking for sex so they really want you to force sex on them.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If I have sex with my sister or brother and they don't tell anyone it means they really enjoy it and want some more.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Rape is so common anymore that most people aren't very upset by being raped.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abel, Gene, “The Outcome of Assessment Treatment at the Sexual Behavior Clinic and its Relevance to the Need for Treatment Programs for Adolescent Sex Offenders in New York State.” A paper presented at a Prison Research/Education/Action Project in Albany, New York (unpublished; no date given).


