Comparing Parental Questioning Across Varied Event Conditions

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Approval

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Abstract

Past anecdotal evidence (Goodman, 2006; Principe et al., 2013) shows that parents talk to their children about negative events (e.g., talking to strangers) in varying degrees of detail and may unknowingly suggest incorrect information. A sample of 26 parents (24 women, 2 men) ranging in age from 19 to 48 (M = 34.62, SD = 8.08) completed an attachment questionnaire and an interview conducted in person or via telephone. Events were presented to parents that varied across three degrees of seriousness (i.e., stolen lunch/inappropriate recording/sexual misconduct) to see how they would question their children in a situation similar to the McMartin Preschool case. Gender (male/female), age (older child/adult), and believability (low – accused received no disciplinary action vs. high - accused received disciplinary action) were manipulated to see whether/how these variables would change parents' perception of the event and consequently, their questioning style. Parents believed it was important to find the truth surrounding accusations that may have happened at their children's schools. Parents thought it would be more believable if a male were accused of sexual misconduct than of inappropriately recording a child, however, the opposite was found when assessing their perceptions of females. Parents also said they would be more likely to believe the alleged event occurred when an adult had been accused than when an older child had been accused. Results suggest caution is necessary when parents are questioning children about an event that may have occurred, so that error is not introduced.

Comparing Parental Questioning Across Varied Event Conditions

Children share both the meaningful and mundane moments of their day through conversation (Principe et al., 2013). These discussions help them to better understand the world around them and help them form memories as a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end (Weede Alexander et al., 2002). Memories are stored in this way to facilitate their accurate encoding and retrieval (Fivush et al., 2006). If children experience, or witness, an event that is stressful, their first conversation about the event is typically with their parents (Goodman, 2006). Casual dialogues are the catalyst for children to share harmful situations they may have encountered (Lawson et al., 2018). Children may not be aware the situation is problematic, even if they feel embarrassed by it, until they observe their parents' negative reaction during the disclosure (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). Children rely on these conversations to help them make sense of traumatic events and to properly organize the occurrence accurately in their memories (Mossige et al., 2005).

Positive and Negative Events

Children are more likely to talk to their parents about negative events (e.g., crimes) that have occurred than with a stranger. Thus, these conversations are essential for collecting information about potential criminal acts against children (Talwar & Crossman, 2012). By rehearsing the event with their parents, children's memory traces for it are strengthened. This provides less opportunity for error to be introduced (Klemfuss et al., 2016). Klemfuss and colleagues (2016) studied conversations involving events that parents experience with their children. These are reminiscing discussions which are typically positive in nature. When parents discuss these shared events with their children, it encourages higher remembrance of information. When children repeat an

event accurately, their memory for this event is clarified and they are better able to report what has occurred (Quas et al., 2000). Although error may still be introduced through reminiscing, it is not as extreme as is sometimes seen with recalling events. Recall occurs when children and parents have conversations about events the parents did not witness or experience. The retrieval and delivery of these incidents are up to the children to procure on their own. If parents are not present to witness the event themselves, they can draw incorrect conclusions about what happened and unintentionally produce false accusations. They do this by suggesting possible things the children may have encountered (Principe et al., 2013). Most incidents where children are victimized, occur in the absence of their parents (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). Therefore, it is important to examine whether positive reminiscing studies can serve as a guide for what to expect when children recount negative experiences they faced alone.

Although there are benefits and limitations in comparing positive and negative situations, some events that parents share with their children are unpleasant. Likewise, there are positive events that children experience alone. A positive recounting situation was examined in a study by Poole and Lindsay (1995). They explored the differences in children's (aged 3 – 8 years) memory for situations where questioning style changed. Specifically, they used a visit, followed three months later by a story, about "Mr. Science" to increase or decrease the reliability of children's memory. The children visited with Mr. Science in their classroom. If the children were given no hints about what occurred, and if misinformation (incorrect information about the event) was not introduced, the children recalled a vast amount of accurate information immediately following their encounter with Mr. Science. Three months later, the children were

provided with misleading information, or an accurate representation of what occurred, in story form, read to them by their parents. Almost half of the children began thinking that the story was the correct version of events, not the actual interaction they had with Mr. Science. The parents had been introduced to inaccurate information through the story, and through their questioning integrated it into their children's recall. Although informative of how misinformation can be introduced, assuming this would be representative of the way parents question their children is problematic because children were recalling a positive experience and the experimenters introduced the misinformation to parents through the storybook.

A real-life negative example occurred in 1983, when a daycare in California was the source of scandal after a parent accused a male teacher of molesting her son during naptime. The investigating chief of police sent a letter to the parents of McMartin Preschool students, asking for their help. He asked them to question their children about acts of "oral sex, fondling of genitals, buttock or chest area, and sodomy" (Kuhlmeyer, 1983 as quoted in Linder, 1995). Many parents inaccurately assumed their children had been victims (Linder, 2007). This assumption encouraged a style of questioning which led to numerous false accusations (Linder, 2007). Kee McFarlane, a consultant for the Children's Institute International, interviewed 400 children to see if they had experienced abuse while at the preschool (Linder, 2007). She asked many leading questions, and when the children answered "favourably" against the teacher, she rewarded them (Linder, 2007). This questioning technique resulted in 384 of the children providing allegations of abuse against the teacher (Linder, 2007).

An inaccurate assessment of the situation on the part of parents, and a misleading style of questioning, resulted in the arrest and incarceration of a potentially innocent man (Linder, 2007). Given the obvious problem with questioning techniques used, it may never be known whether the accused was actually guilty or innocent. Determining whether this is an isolated situation, or an ongoing problem with cases where children speak to their parents first, would greatly help in prosecuting cases where children have been abused and in preventing innocent individuals from being wrongfully convicted. In order to understand this better, it is essential to investigate how parents would respond if a similar situation were presented to them and any potential variables that would affect this response.

Questioning Styles

Even young children (aged 3-11) have the ability to provide accurate testimony about things that have occurred in their lives, as long as misinformation is not introduced through misleading questioning techniques (Talwar & Crossman, 2012). Suggestive or misleading questioning can be defined as a technique through which information, not previously disclosed, is introduced into the conversation by the interviewer (Garvin et al., 1998). In the McMartin case, there were many instances of suggestive questioning that contributed to the sentencing of the teacher, Ray Buckey and his mother, Peggy Buckey (Garvin et al., 1998). An example of a suggestive question that was asked to children before any comment was made about photographs or nudity was, "Can you remember the naked pictures?" (Interview Number 111, p. 29; Interview numbers were assigned by Wood et al., 1997, and are available in the archive at McGill University). Children were also asked about specific events, I: “Who do you think played that game [horsey]? C: Ray

and Miss Peggy. I: Ray and Miss Peggy? Did Miss Peggy take her clothes off? C: Yeah. I: I bet she looked funny didn't she? Did she have big boobs? C: Yeah. I: Yeah. And did they swing around? C: Yeah." (Interview Number 104, p. 83, Linder, 1990) This conversation provided a lot of information that would be impressed upon young children's memory due to it shocking nature, whether the incident occurred, or not.

Another huge concern in the McMartin case was that the interviewer told children that all of their classmates had already revealed what had occurred. Specifically, the interviewer told children, "What we found out was that there's a whole bunch of yucky secrets from your old school… We know about that game [Naked Movie Star]. Twenty kids told us about that game... Do you think if I ask you a question, you could put your thinking cap on and you might remember, Mr. Alligator [a puppet]? (Interview Number 103, pp. 13, 37, Linder, 1990). Children's environment and peers influence the accuracy of the information they are able to provide (Quas et al., 2000). When children are told information their peers have offered, then error can be introduced due to social conformity (Quas et al., 2000). This reinforces the problematic nature of this method of obtaining eyewitness information. When further accusations were made in the McMartin case so that five teachers were accused of flying the children in a helicopter to a farm to witness a mass torture and slaughter of animals as part of a satanic ritual and that the children were forced to engage in a public orgy, the charges against the individuals were dropped due to their outlandish nature (Garvin et al., 2000). However, the accusations against Buckey and his mother remained for several years before they too were dropped (Garvin et al., 2000).

It is important to not be dismissive when a child gives false information because truthful information may be concealed in the misinformation (Quas et al., 2007). It is important to ask children free recall questions as these questions allow them to provide rich information. These questions can be asked in an open-ended style or be completely unstructured. The information children provide in response to these questions is generally the most accurate information that they give (Peterson et al., 2013). Asking questions like, "who, what, when, where, and why" can prompt children for more information without introducing any information to which they had not previously been introduced (Peterson et al., 2013). By analyzing what style of questioning parents' use when asking their children to recall information, there is an opportunity to evaluate what needs to change to prevent misinformation. It is important to assess the questioning style of parents interviewing their children about events the parents did not witness or experience to see if their questioning style is a cause for concern.

Often crimes against children are committed when the children are alone, thus the intervention is dependent on if they tell and how reliable their accusations are (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). Children are less susceptible, yet not immune to suggestion, as they mature (Loftus, 1975). Garvin and colleagues (1998) created a scenario where a strange man entered the classroom. He was a man the children did not know and was dressed up. He told the children the story of the Hunchback of Notre Dame, using his top hat as his hunched back. Children were then asked questions in a similar manner to the questioning style used in the McMartin case. Misinformation was introduced through suggestive questioning and children incorporated incorrectly suggested information into their recall of the event.

A study by Leichtman and colleagues (2000) was conducted to determine whether parent/child conversations about events for which parents were not present, would affect children's memory for the event. To test this, researchers brought the children's teacher, who was on maternity leave, into the classroom so the students (aged 4 and 5) could meet her new baby. The children were told things about babies, and gifts were exchanged between the children and the baby. The same day, some of the children spoke with their mothers about the event. Three weeks later, the children were questioned about the baby's visit by an interviewer who was only given basic information about the event. Children remembered more about the event when it was also discussed with their mothers. The more elaborate the conversation with the mother, the more accurately the children recalled the conversation.

In this study, the researchers found that mothers who questioned their children about events their children had experienced alone, were able to produce more accurate information than when the same children were questioned by a stranger (Leichtman et al., 2000). This is because children discuss events that occurred in the past differently when talking to a parent than they do when talking with their peers or another adult (Candel et al., 2007).

Variables Shown to Influence Perceptions of Crime

Crime Severity

Parents can potentially facilitate a richer interview about crimes their children have witnessed or experienced, but to date, research has not shown the circumstances under which parents' questioning would help versus interfere with their children's memory for an event. For example, no research has been conducted to assess how

parents' questioning style differs depending on the crime severity, or the parents' reaction to thinking of their child being a victim of such crimes. Because of the sensitive nature of exposing children to events that could scare them, as is seen with crimes against children, it is ethically impossible to set up a realistic scenario (e.g., children witnessing abuse).

A study by Principe et al. (2002), examined how suggestibility and biased questioning can affect child discussions about an event for which the parent was not present. The authors did this by bringing a magician in to perform for preschool students. The magician entertained the children with several successful tricks. He then finished his show with an unsuccessful attempt to pull a rabbit out of a hat. The children were questioned three times within the following three weeks about the event. Half were questioned in a suggestive way (i.e., incorrect information was presented to them) and half were questioned using neutral techniques. Results showed that when children talked to their friends, they often reported inaccurate information whether they had been fed misleading information or not. Those who were given suggestions through questioning provided greater amounts of inaccurate information.

These studies have been conducted to assess child discussions in the case of a missing rabbit at a magic show (Principe et al., 2002) and parent/child conversations in the case of the baby visiting a daycare (Leichtman et al., 2000). It is unknown however, if these positive events, are a good analogue for crime. The only study to assess parent/child discussions of crime assessed the accuracy of memory if a child witnessed a theft, a less severe crime than children would typically be asked to testify about (Warren & Peterson, 2014). In a study by Warren and Peterson (2014), children watched a video of a theft and were then questioned by parents about what they had seen. Most parents used a direct

questioning style to gain more information, but this direct style of questioning led the children into making memory errors about the perpetrator, setting, and what happened.

To date, no study has compared parents' style of questioning across multiple events, making it difficult to know whether past research findings would generalize to what would be seen if children were exposed to crimes that were more severe (e.g., sexual abuse) or less severe (e.g., a stolen lunch). Crime severity is important to assess because the events children would be required to testify about would generally be severe. The severity of crime is a subjective measure, since typically it is assessed according to beliefs, standards, and norms, as well as, an assessment of personal harm to the victim (Ramchand et al., 2009). Parents may assess crime severity differently than an objective observer, but this has yet to be determined.

Similarly, research has not assessed whether parents would be distraught even when a minor crime occurs; they may introduce false information in the same manner, regardless of the way people who are uninvolved would perceive the seriousness of a crime. Although it would be unethical to show children crimes of a more serious nature, a potential way to investigate how parents would react to varying threats against their children would be to give parents fictitious scenarios and to ask how they would proceed in questioning their children, if they were to encounter such events in their own community.

Believability

Another variable that might influence the style of questioning parents use is the believability of the person who made the initial accusation. In the McMartin preschool case, the parent who made the accusation was diagnosed with a mental illness, which

produced symptoms of paranoia and delusion (Loudoun, 2017). These symptoms were aggravated by substance use and personal stress (Loudoun, 2017). If this information were known, it could have changed the way that parents viewed the accusation (Kaylor-Hughes et al., 2011), thus, changing how children were questioned (Loudoun, 2017). Children make significantly more false accusations when encouraged or rewarded for sharing information (Garvin et al., 2000). If children have been rewarded this can make their accusation of a criminal act less believable. In the McMartin case, not only were the children praised for providing accusatory testimony against the accused, but the initial child who was questioned, was not able to identify the accused from a photo lineup (Linder, 2007). The boy also showed no physical signs of the alleged abuse (Linder, 2007). It is important to assess whether the believability of the accusation and the believability of the accuser him/herself affect a parent's response.

Parental Attachment

Another variable which can affect the perception of crime is parental attachment. Parents who exhibit attachment anxiety with their child perceive situations as more threatening or stress inducing than those who have secure attachment (Nygren et al., 2012). When parents have an anxious or avoidant attachment style they can increase the stress levels experienced by their children (Melinder et al., 2010), thus increasing the chance of error being introduced when they are discussing events with their children (Saywitz, 1988). A lot can be learned about how children experience stress, by knowing their parents' adult attachment style. Adult attachment in romantic relationships is reflective of how individuals deal with stressful situations and of how open they are to seeking professional help if needed (Nygren et al., 2012). The level of security in the

relationship between couples is reflective of how families will approach a stressful situation (Nygren et al., 2012).

Although it has not been associated with memory for crime, past research assessing interviewing strategies on children's reports found differences in parent questioning according to parental attachment style (Quas et al., 2000). Memory has been found to be weakened when an individual experiences distress (Quas et al., 2000). Anxious and avoidant parents have been found to present questions in a way that could influence children's memory of an event because they ask more misleading questions than parents with a secure attachment style (Melinder et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2016). Children of securely attached parents in one study, gave more accurate reports of a stress inducing experience, perhaps because they felt more supported by the parent (Goodman et al., 1997). A study by Weede Alexander and colleagues (2002) showed that certain parental attachment styles can increase distress in children for events that the parents share with them. For example, anxious and avoidant parental attachment styles were shown to increase distress for children when discussing shared negative events to the extent that the children's memory of the event was skewed. The children were susceptible to suggestibility because of cognitive inhibition. The authors reason, a secure parental attachment style can act as a buffer to shield children and help them cope in stressful circumstances. These coping skills then enhance children's memory. When parents have anxious or avoidant attachment styles, their children have deficits in coping techniques, and this compromises their memories of the event. Children's memories become distorted and open to suggestion. A similar study conducted by Edelstein and colleagues (2004) found that self-report questionnaires of adult attachment could be used to determine how

parents communicate stressful events with their children and the impact parental attachment style has on children's memory. Therefore, it is important that parental attachment style be assessed when evaluating parents' questioning style to see how/if it will affect children's recall ability.

Gender and Age

In North America, society is more lenient with women who commit crimes against children then men who do (Sahl & Keene, 2012). An ambiguous situation for example, can be interpreted as abusive if it was committed by a man, but often would not be considered inappropriate, if the same act was by performed by a woman (Quas et al., 2002). This is found, not only in individual judgements, but in jury evaluations as well (Smith & Torstensson, 1997). Women are generally judged less harshly than men are when criminal accusations are made (Smith & Torstensson, 1997). Women are typically perceived as more nurturing, and men as dominant and assertive (Hundhammer & Mussweiler, 2012). These stereotypes likely influence the judgement of men in relation to an accusation so that they are viewed more harshly than women (Anderson, 2017). This too could influence how parents will assess a situation and how they would question their children about potential exposure to criminal acts (Smith & Torstensson, 1997). When age and gender are manipulated to determine how jury members react to crimes against children, crimes are consistently perceived as more severe, with more harm inflicted on the child, when the accused is an adult and male than when the accused is someone who is under the age of consent and female (Gabora et al., 1993; Quas et al., 2002).

Younger children are often worried that they will get in trouble if they talk about something bad that has happened to them (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). However, not a

lot is known about the age of the person being accused of a crime and how this changes how the crime is perceived. Because of this, age and gender of the perpetrator are important factors to examine when evaluating parents' assessment of crime, and their subsequent method of inquiry with respect to their children. Past research has demonstrated that parents are more likely to view a crime as serious if it was committed by an adult, than if the same crime was committed by another child (Giglio et al., 2011).

In summary, past research has shown that parents can introduce error into their children's recall of an event, the parents did not witness. This can be done in reaction to the stress they experience in response to crime and subsequent suggestive questions. This is problematic because it can lead to false accusations or to memory errors. Ethically, there is no way to investigate how parents would respond if their children had been exposed to criminal activity. Therefore, it is important to assess how parents will react to scenarios that elicit vicarious responses, similar to what was seen with the McMartin preschool investigation. The introduction of misinformation has been shown to be related to parental attachment style, which affects how parents respond to a potentially threatening situation. Although it has not been directly examined in past research, it seems likely that crime severity, as well as, the gender and age of the accused perpetrator would influence the perception of criminal acts and consequently, the style of questioning that parents would use when asking their children about these acts.

In the present study, events were presented to parents that varied across three degrees of seriousness to see how parents would respond in a situation similar to the McMartin Preschool case. Gender, age, and believability were manipulated to see how these variables would change parents' perception of the crime and if it would change their

questioning style. The seriousness of the crime was the main variable of interest. However, since there was no past research to guide a directional hypothesis, analyses regarding the nature of questioning and perceptions based on the perceived severity of a crime were exploratory in nature. It was hypothesized that parents would ask more detailed questions, would speak to more people about the potential crime, and would regard it more seriously, in the high believability scenarios than in the low believability scenarios. It was hypothesized that parents would respond more critically towards a male accused perpetrator, than towards a female accused perpetrator. Similarly, it was hypothesized, that parents would be more likely to view the crime as serious and upsetting if it was committed by an adult, than if the same crime was committed by a child. Finally, it was hypothesized that parents with a secure attachment style would be less likely to mention using problematic questioning techniques (e.g., suggestive questions) than parents with anxious or avoidant attachment styles.

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of 26 participants (24 women, 2 men) completed an attachment questionnaire (See Appendices A and B) and an in person, or telephone, interview (See Appendix C). The participants ranged in age from 19 to 48 (M = 34.62, SD = 8.08). Participants were recruited through various social media pages (See Appendix D), as well as through posters placed at various locations around Grenfell and around Corner Brook (See Appendix E)**.** All participants had at least one child between the ages of five and nine. Each participant was given a $10 gift card for compensation. If the interview was in person, participants were presented with the informed consent form (See Appendix F), which they signed before the interview began. If the interview was conducted over the phone, the informed consent form was emailed to the participants and an emailed consent was received before the interview began.

Materials

Scenarios. In 1983, parents of children who were attending McMartin preschool in Virginia were sent a letter indicating police suspected children at the school might have been victims of sexual assault. A script discussing the letter sent home to parents, by police, was read to participants to explain the purpose of the study, before they were presented with one of three fictitious events (See Appendices G and H).

In each scenario, a 5-year-old child was described as bringing home a letter from school. Contained in this letter was a warning, advising the parents that potential criminal (bad) acts had occurred at the school, and that their child may or may not have been exposed to these acts.

The scenarios were then further subdivided so that each event depicted either a male or female individual, who was described as either an adult staff member or an older child who attended the school. This individual had been accused of something that ranged in severity from stealing a child's lunch, to recording children on the playground at school, to an accusation of sexual misconduct. The scenarios were designed so there was both a high believability condition (enough information was provided to prompt a suspension of the accused) and a low believability condition (where insufficient information was provided to prompt a suspension of the accused) for each of the acts presented. There were 24 scenarios in total (See Figure 1).

Questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed how participants would talk to their children about the crimes presented in the scenarios. It included two open-ended questions, six multiple choice questions, two yes or no questions, and five 7- point Likert scale (e.g., where 1 was *strongly disagree* and 7 was *strongly agree*) questions (see Appendix C).

The questionnaire began by asking participants two questions about the age and gender of the child the participant would be thinking about in evaluating the scenarios. Next, participants were asked if they would talk to their child about the situation described in the letter. If the answer was "yes," participants were provided with an open-ended question asking how they would question their child. Next, was a multiple-choice checklist asking participants which, if any, of the people listed they would talk to before questioning their child. Then Likert style questions were given that addressed the participants' evaluation of crime severity, believability of the accusation, and the perceptions evoked by reading the scenario (e.g., How serious do you consider this

situation to be?). If participants were assigned to the staff member scenarios, two additional questions were asked that evaluated perceptions of that individual (e.g., What job do you think the staff member held?). Finally, there were seven demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, education, ethnicity, and occupation) (See Appendix I).

Scale. The Revised Inventory of Parent Attachment (Johnson et al., 2003) was added to the questionnaire to determine parental attachment style (See Appendices A and B). Participants were asked to choose which one of the four relationship styles best described them (e.g., It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me). Participants then rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 being *disagree strongly* and 7 being *agree strongly*) each of the four relationship styles to show how well or how poorly each style described them. According to past research the inventory has good reliability and validity (Johnson et al., 2003).

Procedure

Participants completed a 45-minute interview based on two fictitious scenarios. They were asked to respond in the way they would if they suspected something negative had happened at their children's school. Interviews were held in person or over the phone. All interviews were audio recorded to ensure no information about the open-ended questions was missed. Responses to the other questions were entered into Qualtrics as the interview happened. Participants did not access Qualtrics themselves, this was simply to help with data entry.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were told about the McMartin preschool case (see Appendix J) and that I was interested in learning more about how

parents would react if placed in this situation. Participants were then told to imagine if something similar had happened in their child's school, but that in this case one of three fictitious events had occurred. I randomly assigned each parent to two scenarios using Qualtrics. Specifically, the participant heard two of the three scenarios and each parent was given either a male or female alleged perpetrator portrayed as either a staff member or an older student. Parents could receive the stolen lunch scenario followed by the inappropriate recording, the stolen lunch scenario followed by sexual misconduct, or the inappropriate recording followed by sexual misconduct.

After hearing the first scenario, participants answered a series of questions about it. The scenario was presented twice. The first time, the low believability version was given and the second time, the high believability version was given. After being presented with the low believability version and answering the questions that followed (i.e., how they would question their child, who they would speak to, how upset they would be, and how serious and believable they perceive the situation to be), participants were given the high believability version and again asked the questions that followed. This was done to determine whether and how their responses would change.

Once participants finished answering all questions about the first scenario, they were then given a second scenario. Again, the scenario had either a male or female alleged perpetrator portrayed as either a staff member or an older student. As with the first scenario, participants read the second scenario and were questioned based on what happened, first with a low believability version and second with a high believability version. Each participant saw only male or female perpetrators. Similarly, each

participant saw just a staff member or an older child. Please refer to Figure 1 to see how the scenarios were set up.

Following the scenarios, all participants were asked a series of demographic questions (see Appendix I) and were asked to complete the self-report scale measuring attachment style (see Appendix A). Finally, participants were thanked for their participation and handed a debriefing page that contained information about the study and contact information for the researchers involved (see Appendix J).

Results

As seen in Figure 2, participants indicated they would speak with a variety of individuals about the letter sent home from their child's school. All participants indicated that they would talk to their child about the letter. Figure 3 illustrates the types of things parents believed that they would ask their child about in this context. In addition to this, 15.4% of participants indicated they would provide their child with examples of suggestive behaviours (e.g., "Did you ever see anyone get taken down a hallway or coming out of a room alone?" "Did anyone ask you to get undressed in front of them?") and 42.3% of participants commented specifically about the style of interviewing they would use (e.g., more general questions). Given the small number of participants, additional analyses regarding these questions were not completed. Likewise, it was not possible to examine the potential influence of attachment style.

Four MANOVAs were next conducted to look at whether participants' responses to the five questions assessing their attitudes towards the scenario would differ according to the gender of the accused, the age of the accused, and the event with which they were presented. With just one exception, only main effects were examined as the low number of participants made assessing interactions questionable.

The first MANOVA was conducted to look at participants' responses in the low believability condition (not enough evidence to suspend accused) for the first event with which they were presented. Participants' responses to the five questions assessing parental attitudes (i.e., likelihood to confront, seriousness, upset, believability, and knowing the accused) towards the event presented were the dependent variables, and gender (male and female) of the accused, age (child and adult) of the accused, and event

presented (lunch, and recording) were between subjects factors. There was a significant main effect for event presented, Wilks' $\mathbf{\Lambda} = .47$ $F(5, 14) = 3.21$, $p = .039$, $\eta^2_p = .53$. Independent measures ANOVAs, with the responses to the five questions assessing parental attitudes towards event as the dependent variables, were then completed to assess where the differences in parental attitude towards event existed.

There were significant effects of event presented for the questions assessing the likelihood parents would confront the perpetrator, $F(1, 18) = 8.06$, $p = .011$, $\eta_p^2 = .31$, the perceived seriousness of the event, $F(1, 18) = 6.09$, $p = .024$, $\eta_p^2 = .25$, and the importance of knowing the accuser, $F(1, 18) = 10.91$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .38$. Pairwise comparisons indicated that participants were significantly more likely to say they would confront the accused when they were asked about the inappropriate recording of a child (*M* = 3.83, *SD* = 2.29*)* than when they were asked about a stolen lunch (*M* = 1.50, *SD* = 1.61, mean difference = 2.21, *p* = .011, 95% CI [0.58, 3.88]). Likewise, participants viewed the situation as more serious when they were presented with an inappropriate recording (*M* = 6.00, *SD* = 1.48*)* than when they were presented with a stolen lunch (*M* = 4.43, *SD* = 1.95, mean difference = 1.60, *p* = .024, 95% CI [0.24, 2.97]). Furthermore, participants felt that it would be significantly more important for them to know the identity of the accuser when the accusation was about an inappropriate recording (*M* = 5.42, *SD* = 1.51) than when it was about a stolen lunch (*M* = 2.93, *SD* = 2.30, mean difference = 2.58, *p* = .004, 95% CI [0.94, 4.23]).

The next MANOVA was conducted to assess differences in responding in the high believability condition (enough evidence to suspend accused) for the first event presented. Again, responses to the five questions assessing parental attitudes towards event (i.e.,

likelihood to confront, seriousness, upset, believability, and knowing the accused), presented were the dependent variables, and gender (male and female) of the accused, age (child and adult) of the accused, and event presented (lunch and recording) were the between subjects factors. There were no main effects in this condition.

The third MANOVA was conducted to assess differences in responding by participants in the low believability condition (not enough evidence to suspend accused) for the second event presented. Participants' responses to the five questions assessing parental attitudes towards event (i.e., likelihood to confront, seriousness, upset, believability, and knowing the accused) presented were the dependent variables, and gender (male and female) of the accused, age (child and adult) of the accused, and event presented (recording and sexual misconduct) were between subjects factors. There was a significant main effect for event presented, Wilks' $\mathbf{\Lambda} = .46$ $F(5, 14) = 3.26$, $p = .037$, $\eta^2_p = .54$. Independent measures ANOVAs, with the responses to the five questions assessing parental attitudes towards event as the dependent variables, were then completed to assess where the differences in parental attitude towards event existed.

There were significant effects of event presented for the questions assessing whether the parents would be upset, $F(1, 18) = 5.04$, $p = .038$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$, how believable they thought the accusation would be, $F(1, 18) = 5.22$, $p = .035$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$, and the importance of them knowing the identity of the accuser, $F(1, 18) = 10.12$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .36$. Pairwise comparisons indicated that participants thought they would be more upset with a sexual misconduct scenario ($M = 6.68$, $SD = 0.75$) than with the inappropriate recording of a child ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.81$, mean difference = 1.13, $p = .038$, 95% CI [0.07, 2.18]). Likewise, participants thought they would view the situation as more

believable when presented with sexual misconduct (*M* = 6.37, *SD* = 1.01*)* than when presented with the inappropriate recording (*M* = 4.86, *SD* = 1.68, mean difference = 1.39, *p* = .035, 95% CI [0.11, 2.66]). Furthermore, participants felt that it would be significantly more important to know the identity of the accuser if the accusation was about sexual misconduct (*M* = 5.32, *SD* = 2.08) than if the accusation was about an inappropriate recording (*M* = 2.43, *SD* = 2.51, mean difference = 2.96, *p* = .005, 95% CI [1.01, 4.92]).

The last MANOVA looked at differences in responding in the high believability condition (enough evidence to suspend accused) for the second event presented. Again, responses to the five questions assessing parental attitudes towards event (i.e., likelihood to confront, seriousness, upset, believability, and knowing the accused) presented were the dependent variables, and gender (male and female) of the accused, age (child and adult) of the accused, and event presented (recording and sexual misconduct) were between subjects factors. The MANOVA revealed significant main effects for age of the accused, Wilks' $\mathbf{\Lambda}$ = .44 $F(5, 14) = 3.62$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2_p = .56$ and gender of the accused, Wilks' $\mathbf{\Lambda}$ = .41 $F(5, 14) = 4.09$, $p = .017$, $\eta^2_p = .59$. Independent measures ANOVAs, with the responses to the five questions assessing parental attitudes towards event as the dependent variables, were then completed to assess where the differences according to the age of the accused and gender of the accused existed.

When the main effect of age of the accused was considered, there was a significant difference for the question assessing the believability of the accusation, $F(1, 18) = 7.68$, $p = .013$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$. Pairwise comparisons indicated that participants were significantly more likely to think they would believe that the event had happened when an

adult had been accused (*M* = 7.00, *SD* = 0.00*)* than when an older child had been accused (*M* = 6.53, *SD* = 0.83, mean difference = 2.21, *p* = .011, 95% CI [0.58, 3.88]).

When the main effect of gender of the accused was considered, there were significant effects for the questions assessing the likelihood that the parent would confront the accused, $F(1, 18) = 5.90$, $p = .026$, $\eta_p^2 = .25$, the perceived seriousness of the event, $F(1, 18) = 9.76$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .35$, and the believability of the accusation, $F(1, 18) = 4.55$, $p = .047$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$. Pairwise comparisons indicated that participants were significantly more likely to think they would confront the accused if it was a female (*M* = 4.93, *SD* = 2.56*)* than if it was a male (*M* = 2.92, *SD* = 2.68, mean difference = 2.21, *p* = .011, 95% CI [0.58, 3.88]). Likewise, participants said they would view the situation as more serious if the accused was female (*M* = 6.93, *SD* = 0.27*)* than if the accused was male (*M* = 6.67, *SD* = 0.65, mean difference = 1.60, *p* = .024, 95% CI [0.24, 2.97]). Furthermore, participants thought the accusation would be more believable if it was made about a female (*M* = 6.86, *SD* = 0.36) than if it was made about a male (*M* = 6.58, *SD* = 0.90, mean difference = 2.58, *p* = .004, 95% CI [0.94, 4.23]).

Given the surprising direction of the main effect of gender with respect to seriousness and believability, interactions were explored and a significant gender of the perpetrator x event presented interaction was found, Wilks' $\mathbf{\Lambda} = .45$, $F(5, 14) = 3.47$, $p = .030$, $\eta^2_p = .55$. The significant gender of the perpetrator x event presented interaction was seen for both the question assessing the perceived seriousness of the event, $F(1, 18) = 12.99$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .42$, and the question assessing the perceived believability of the accusation, $F(1, 18) = 5.41$, $p = .032$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$. Independent measures ANOVAs were conducted to assess the interactions.

For the question assessing perceived seriousness, when only males were considered, there was an effect of the event presented for the question assessing perceived seriousness, $F(1, 10) = 13.33$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .57$. The situation was viewed as more serious if it was a sexual misconduct ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 0.00$) than if it was an inappropriate recording ($M = 6.00$, $SD = 0.82$, mean difference = 1.00, $p = .004$, 95% CI[0.39, 1.61]). In contrast, when only females were considered, there were no significant differences in perceived seriousness, regardless of whether a sexual misconduct or an inappropriate recording was being considered. When differences according to the gender of the perpetrator were considered for just the sexual misconduct or just the inappropriate recording, no gender differences were seen.

For the question assessing the perceived believability of the scenario, regardless of whether just the males or just the females were considered, there were no differences according to the event presented. Similarly, regardless of whether just the sexual misconduct or just the inappropriate recording was considered, there were no differences according to the gender of the perpetrator. As seen in Figure 4, participants thought males being accused of sexual assault would be more believable than males being accused of inappropriate recording, while the opposite would be true for females.

Next, analyses were completed to determine whether there would be differences in responding according to the believability of the scenario with which participants were presented. Repeated measures t-tests were ran comparing participants' responses to the questions assessing the likelihood that they would confront the accused, the seriousness of event, level of upset, believability of the event, and the importance of knowing the identity of the accuser in the low believability versus high believability conditions. These

analyses were completed for both the first and the second events with which participants were presented.

When the first event presented was considered, there were significant differences in perceived seriousness, $t(25) = 0.53$, $p = .021$, $r^2 = .19$, and the believability of the accusation, $t(25) = -2.99$, $p = .006$, $r^2 = .25$, between the low and high believability conditions. Participants considered the event to be more serious in the high believability condition, where the accused was suspended ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.51$) than they did in the low believability condition, where the accused was not suspended ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.89$). Likewise, participants considered the situation to be more believable in the high believability condition, where the accused was suspended ($M = 6.19$, $SD = 1.06$) than they did in the low believability condition, where the accused was not suspended ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.71$).

When the second event presented was considered, there were significant differences in how upset participants thought they would be, $t(25) = -2.81$, $p = .009$, $r^2 = .24$, and in the believability of the accusation, $t(25) = -3.33$, $p = .003$, $r^2 = .31$ between the low and high believability conditions. Participants considered the event to be more upsetting in the high believability condition, where the accused was suspended ($M = 7.73$, $SD = 0.72$) than they did in the low believability condition, where the accused was not suspended ($M = 6.35$, $SD = 1.23$). Likewise, participants considered the situation to be more believable in the high believability condition, where the accused was suspended ($M = 6.73$, $SD = 0.67$) than they did in the low believability condition, where the accused was not suspended ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.37$).

Finally, in order to assess whether differences in attitudes varied according to the order with which participants were presented with specific events, a series of 2 (event presented: first versus second) x 3 (order: stolen lunches followed by inappropriate recording versus stolen lunches followed by sexual misconduct versus inappropriate recording followed by sexual misconduct) mixed ANOVAs were completed with the two events presented to each participant as a within subjects variable and the order with which they were presented as the between subjects variable for each of the five questions assessing parent perceptions, Analyses were completed for both low and high believability conditions. However, given the results were the same for both, in an effort to simplify this section, only the results for the high believability conditions are presented.

There were main effects of the event presented (first versus second) for the questions asking about the likelihood that participants would confront the accused, $F(1, 23) = 11.21$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2_p = .33$, the perceived seriousness of the event presented, $F(1, 23) = 15.07$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .40$, how upset participants thought they would be, $F(1, 23) = 23.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .50$, how believable they thought the scenario was, $F(1, 23) = 4.34$, $p = .049$, $\eta^2_p = .16$, and the importance of knowing the accused, $F(1, 23) = 5.21$, $p = .032$, $\eta^2_p = .19$. Participants were more likely to say they would confront the accused for the second event ($M = 3.94$, $SE = 0.57$) than for the first event ($M = 2.22$, $SE = 0.42$, mean difference = 1.72, $p = .003$, 95% CI[0.66, 2.78]). They perceived the second event ($M = 6.78$, $SE = 0.09$) as more serious than the first event ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 0.28$, mean difference = 0.95, $p = .001$, 95% CI[0.44, 1.45]). Participants thought they would be more upset with the second event ($M = 6.71$, $SE = 0.14$) than with the first event ($M = 5.22$, $SE = 0.35$, mean difference = 1.48, $p < .001$, 95% CI[0.85, 2.12]). Likewise, they thought

they would find the second scenario more believable (M = 6.71, SE = 0.14) than the first scenario (M = 6.22, SE = 0.22, mean difference = 0.49, p =.049, 95% CI[0.01, 0.97]). And, participants felt it would be significantly more important to know the identity of the accused for the second event (M = 4.66, SE = 0.53) than for the first event (M = 3.73, SE = 0.42, mean difference = 0.92, p =.032, 95% CI[0.09, 1.76]) For the question assessing perceived seriousness, there was also a main effect of order, $F(1, 23) = 3.78$, p =.038, η^2_p = .25. Participants who were given the recording scenario followed by the sexual misconduct scenario, (M = 6.71, SE = 0.24) gave higher overall seriousness ratings than participants who were presented with the stolen lunch scenario followed by the recording scenario (M = 5.64, SE = 0.32, mean difference = 1.07, p =.014, 95% CI[0.24, 1.89]).

Discussion

This study was designed to assess the style of questioning parents thought they would use if presented with a crime that may have occurred at their child's school. This was done by manipulating several variables that could potentially affect their response to fictitious scenarios, varied across three degrees of seriousness. Specifically, seriousness of the event was measured by presenting parents with two of three potential events that were said to have been under investigation at their children's school. These ranged from a stolen lunch, to an inappropriate recording of children on a playground, and most seriously, to sexual misconduct. These events were presented first in a questionable believability scenario, where the accused had not been suspended and then in a high believability scenario, where the accused had been suspended. The accused was either presented as a female older student, male older student, female staff member, or male staff member.

Since there was no prior research to guide any hypotheses regarding crime seriousness, this research was exploratory in nature. Seriousness was assessed using both between subjects and within subjects analyses. Approximately half of the participants were first presented with the stolen lunch scenario while the other half were presented with the inappropriate recording. When these participants' responses were compared, those presented with the moderate event (i.e., the inappropriate recording) felt they would be more likely to confront the accused, would view the situation as being more serious, and would consider it more important for them to know the identity of the accuser in an accusation than those presented with the less serious event (i.e., stolen lunch). Participants were then presented with either the moderate or the most serious (i.e., sexual misconduct)

event. Participants thought they would be more upset in the case of most serious event than in the case of the moderate event. They also felt they would view the situation as more believable and thought that it would be more important for them to know the identity of the accuser in the more serious event than in the moderate event.

Parents' responses to the questions about the severity of the crime, and how it influences their perception of the event suggest events such as a missing rabbit at a magic show (Principe et al., 2002), and a baby visiting a daycare (Leichtman et al., 2000) are not a good analogue for crime. In the past, researchers have used these events to demonstrate how they believe parents would question their child in the event the child witnessed or experienced a crime. The present results suggest questioning children about a neutral event that occurred at their school is not the same as questioning them about a potential crime at their school. The differences in perceptions that were seen across conditions suggest there would be greater potential for error to be introduced when the parents see a situation as more serious, are more upset by it, and see it as more believable, and we could assume they would subsequently question their children differently.

Relative comparisons of participants' attitudes, across the two different events with which they were presented further illustrate the importance of event seriousness in parents' perceptions. Participants felt they would be more likely to confront the accused and would be more likely to want to know the identity of the accuser in the second, more serious event that was presented, than they would be in the first event. The second, more serious event, was also perceived as more serious and as more upsetting to participants. This may be because they found it more believable as well. Given participants who were

presented with a more serious event perceived it as more problematic, it is not surprising that they felt it would be important for them to confront the accused.

Participants, who were given the recording scenario followed by the sexual misconduct scenario, gave higher overall seriousness ratings than participants who were presented with the stolen lunch scenario followed by the recording scenario. This suggests that presenting the McMartin case before the first event may have minimized the perceived seriousness of the first fictitious event presented to participants (e.g., a stolen lunch may have been seen as minor when the event they hear about included sexual misconduct). This could be eliminated by presenting a neutral scenario, like those used in past research with a baby visiting a daycare (Leichtman et al., 2000), to get a more accurate effect of crime seriousness. Alternatively, the presentation of this event might have made parents take their participation more seriously, so that the questions they say they would ask in this study, would more closely mimic the questioning style parents would use if their child actually witnessed or experienced a crime. The effect that presentation of the letter may have had should be examined in future research.

The believability of the accusation and the believability of the accuser him/herself were considered in this study, in order to determine whether questioning style would change as a function of believability. Unfortunately, due to the low number of participants, it was impossible to test the hypothesis of whether participants would question their child differently when presented with a highly believable scenario after being presented with a questionable scenario. Likewise, it was impossible to see whether parents would vary in who they would speak to about these events when presented with both high and low believability scenarios.

Participants did indicate though that they would speak with a variety of individuals about the letter sent home from their child's school. A potential implication of a parent having all of these conversations, prior to speaking with their child, is that these conversations could cause the parents to theorize about the event. These incorrect suppositions might influence the style of questioning that they would use (Principe et al., 2013). In the McMartin Preschool Trial, there was a wide range of bizarre testimony from children revealing how extreme parents' questioning became after receiving the letter. Some examples of accounts children provided in court were being photographed doing naked gymnastics; nude wild west games including sexual assault, playing in nonexistent tunnels under the school; animal sacrifices, where children were forced to consume the slaughtered animal's blood; and trips to the cemetery to dig up graves in order to desecrate the bodies of the deceased (Linder, 2003).

All participants in this study indicated that they would talk to their child about the letter. In the event that children experience or witness an event that is stressful, their first conversations are typically with their parents (Goodman, 2006). Therefore, if the event did occur in the child's school, opening a conversation with the child would be important for finding the truth. Parents mentioned asking their children about whether they had noticed an unusual event, asking them where the event had occurred, and about any contact they had had with the perpetrator, which would allow them to learn details about what happened, where it happened, and who was involved. However, in this study, 15.4% of participants indicated they would provide their child with examples of suggestive behaviours. This is problematic, as parents may unintentionally produce false accusations by suggesting possible things the children may have encountered (Principe et al., 2013).

In interviews with alleged victims in the McMartin case, child interviewer Lael Rubin, used this problematic direct questioning technique (e.g., "Did you ever see a person taking pictures? Did someone tell you to take your clothes off? In the 'tickle game' were you touched on your private parts?") (Linder, 1990). The questioning style used in those interviews is not unlike some of the questions mentioned by parents in the current study (e.g., "Has any teacher been recording or using their phones around the kids or taking pictures of the kids." "Has anyone touched you or asked to see you naked?" "Has anyone asked to see your private parts,"). This suggests the importance of parents understanding the implications of using leading questions and even of asking direct questions when opening conversations with their children about events the parents have not witnessed themselves.

A combination of mostly open-ended questions followed by direct questions to learn details has been found to be the best approach for getting the most accurate information when questioning children about an event they have witnessed (Poole, & Lindsay, 1995; Sternberg, et al., 2002). However, if parents are not present to witness the event themselves, they can draw false conclusions about what happened and then through the style of questioning that they use, increase the amount of inaccurate information being relayed by children (Principe et al., 2013). Interestingly, 42.3% of participants in this study commented specifically about the style of interviewing they would use (e.g., more general questions). Despite parents' assurance they would ask open-ended questions to their children about an event, a study by Warren and Peterson (2014) found that parents most commonly ask yes/no questions, with direct prompts following closely behind.

Open-ended questions were the least frequent style of questions used by parents when questioning their children about an event the child had witnessed.

Parents in the present study acknowledged the importance of not suggesting any information to their children, perhaps recognizing that conversations with their children can provide important evidence towards the conviction or exoneration of the accused. However, if parents are beginning these conversations with direct questions or are suggesting information to their children, it is problematic. Direct questions place limitations on the amount of information that children can recall about an event (Hutcheson et al., 1995). Children might just respond to the questions asked, failing to provide information that they might have provided in response to open ended questions, which would provide the richest information (Hutcheson et al. 1995).

Parents in this study indicated that they would not provide information to their children that might suggest an incorrect piece of information. Positively, as seen in figure 3, 19.2% of participants said they would ask the child about the location and 84.6% said they would ask their child if anything unusual happened. Seventy-three percent of parents said they wanted to know if the event happened to their child, but 42.3% also stated they would want to know if their child heard about it through a friend. This is also important in that parents recognized the importance of learning not only about information the child may have as a potential victim, but also of their child's role as a potential witness as well.

Consistent with the first hypothesis, when the first event was examined, participants considered the event to be more serious and more believable in the high believability scenario, where the accused was suspended than they did in the questionable scenario, where the accused was not suspended. This suggests that parents trusted the

school administration in their assessment of the accusation and in administering disciplinary action towards the accused. However, if the information that an investigation is based upon is incorrect, such as in the McMartin case, it is troubling that parents are viewing the punishment of the accused as evidence of guilt. The child who came forward with the information may not be a child who prioritizes language as his/her primary means of communication, he/she may be denying the trauma caused by the event, or he/she may be avoiding the topic entirely (Bradley & Wood, 1996). Just because a child does not provide a detailed account of an event, it does not mean the allegation is false.

When the second event was examined, participants again, consistent with the first hypothesis, considered the event to be more upsetting and more believable in the highly believable scenario where the accused was suspended, than they did in the questionable scenario where the accused was not suspended. This is further evidence of the faith that parents place in the punishment of the accused and of their confidence in the system that could possibly be providing misleading evidence. Parents felt that in a serious event like an inappropriate recording or an accusation of sexual misconduct, they would be more upset and would find the situation more believable when the accused had been suspended than when the accused had not been suspended. In this circumstance, as in the McMartin case, parents might resort to more direct and misleading questions to ensure their child was not victimized with the goal of ensuring the accused is punished and their child gets any help he/she needs.

The current study also assessed differences in perceptions when females versus males are accused of a crime. There is an opportunity for bias when an accusation is made against someone from an expected demographic versus someone from an unexpected

demographic (Baron et al., 1991). It was hypothesized that parents would respond more critically towards a male accused perpetrator, than they would towards a female accused perpetrator. As expected, participants felt they would be more likely to confront a female who had been accused than a male who had been accused of the same incident. This may be due to gender differences in aggressive behaviour. Females typically employ a more indirect form of aggression when confronted versus males, who take a more direct approach and are therefore more intimidating (Lagerspetz et al., 1988). Participants likely felt they would be safer confronting an accused female than an accused male. However, participants also said they would view the situation as more serious and more believable if the accused was female than if the accused was male. These were unexpected findings.

When these findings were more closely examined, through a gender x event provided interaction, there was still no clear explanation as to why participants thought the situation would be more serious and believable if there was a female perpetrator than if there was a male perpetrator. Instead, as expected the interaction showed that participants thought it would be more serious if a male were accused of sexual misconduct than if a male were accused of inappropriately recording. This was an expected finding, since 79% of the accusations of sexual misconduct in Canada have a male perpetrator (Statistics Canada, 2014). These are often preceded by events where sexual assault has not occurred (Liu et al., 2011), such as the recording scenario. When believability was considered, participants thought it would be more believable to have a male accused of sexual misconduct than to have a male accused of a video recording. Most females fear a male perpetrator more than a female perpetrator (Koskela, 2002). Therefore, the sexual assault allegation is perceived as a bigger threat, in this instance,

when the perpetrator is male. However, at least in this study, the opposite was found to be true for a female.

It seems plausible that participants viewed an accusation against a female to be more problematic because of its unexpected nature. Generally, females are perceived to work in roles with children that are more personal and that require a level of trust, both in the home, as well as in employment (e.g., schoolteachers, daycare workers). This is often why crimes committed by females are underreported (Tozdan et al., 2019). Male roles are typically seen as briefer, and as involving fewer personal encounters (e.g., principals, custodians). Thus, the gender bias can influence the way parents perceive the trustworthiness of the accused (Buchan et al., 2008). Fromuth and Buckhart (1989) found that 78% of the eighty-one male university students they surveyed, who reported they had been victims of childhood sexual abuse, were abused by a female perpetrator. However, the stereotypical bias when one considers crimes against children, particularly in cases of sexual misconduct, is that the perpetrator is male, rather than female (Fromuth & Buckhart, 1989). This mindset is not unwarranted as statistically male offending is six times that of females (Bureau of Justice Statistics). Perhaps because people generally think of women as nurturing, the thought of female perpetrators was especially disturbing because the accusation contradicted participants' normative expectations. This was likely seen as especially problematic given the result was found in the high believability condition.

The current study also assessed whether parents would view a crime differently if it was committed by an adult, than if the same crime was committed by another child. Contrary to the hypothesis, parents did not view the crime as more serious and upsetting

if it was committed by an adult, than if the same crime was committed by a child. However, parents did say they would be more likely to believe the alleged event took place when an adult had been accused than when an older child had been accused. This may be due to the fact that known risk factors for violence and sexual misconduct (e.g., alcohol, violence, unemployment, marital, problems, sexual problems, and the inability to connect with other adults) (Glasser et al., 2001) are seen as adult problems. Although this is the perception, statistics have found that juvenile females have twice the rate of arrest as adult females (Bureau of Justice Statistics). Likewise, the arrest rate for juvenile males is also over twice that of adult males (Statistics Canada, 2014). Therefore, it is important that parents take the accusation against an older child seriously as statistics suggest it is likely to have happened.

The present study is not without limitations. The low number of participants made it impossible to do all of the originally planned analyses. When looking at the high effect sizes present in the output, there is evidence to suggest that with an increase in the number of participants, there would be enough power to reveal more significant effects. Another limitation is that the participants were all told about the McMartin case, which talked about a sexual assault where the accused was incarcerated. This may have influenced how they perceived the fictitious scenarios. Providing participants with a case about sexual assault may have influenced the way they perceived the less serious event presented, making it appear as trivial in comparison with the events surrounding the McMartin case. A possible direction for further study would be to create another variable where half of the participants are not primed with the McMartin scenario before the interview.

Another direction for future research would be to analyze the gender of the children whose parents were interviewed, and the crime presented. It would be interesting to see whether there is a difference in the perceptions of parents in relation to the gender of the child. A study by Finkelhor and colleagues (2009), found that male children are more likely to experience violations of property or bullying, such as a stolen lunch or inappropriate recording, whereas female children are more likely to become victims of sexual misconduct. Parents who have daughters have been found to be more concerned about them becoming victims of crime than parents who have only sons (Vozmediano et al., 2017). The gender gap is magnified when the accusation in question is about sexual misconduct (Vozmediano et al., 2017). Therefore, if the combined influence of the gender of the child and the event were assessed, there could be differences in perceptions.

Past research assessing interviewing strategies has found differences in parent questioning according to parent attachment style. As previously noted, there were too few participants to assess the hypothesis regarding attachment style. Anxious and avoidant parents have been shown to ask more misleading questions than parents with a secure attachment style (Melinder et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2016). In one study, children of securely attached parents gave more accurate reports of a stress inducing experience, perhaps because they felt more supported by the parent (Goodman et al., 1997). These studies suggest it is important that parent attachment style be assessed when evaluating parents' questioning style to see how/whether it will affect children's recall ability.

Consistent with past anecdotal evidence (Goodman, 2006, Principe, et al., 2013), parents in the present study indicated that they would talk to their children about the negative events that had been suggested to them, in varying degrees of detail. The more

serious the event presented, the more serious and upsetting parents thought they should be perceived. These assessments led parents to say they would want to confront the accused and to know the identity of the accuser, both of which would be approaches to finding the truth surrounding the accusation. However, as seen in the McMartin case, regardless of the believability of an accusation, parents discussed using suggestive questions, which could produce misinformation in their children's reports. This suggests that parents trust the disciplinary measures taken by school administrations towards the accused as indicators of guilt, rather than as evidence of guilt or innocence. Both the gender and age of the accused influenced parents' assessment of an accusation. This bias might influence how parents would question their children and has the potential to create conditions that could result in potential wrongful convictions, such as is thought to have occurred in the McMartin investigation. Therefore, there is a need for caution when questioning children about an event that may have occurred, so that error is not introduced. It is important that not only parents, but also investigators understand the implications that personal biases may have on their questioning style when they open conversations with children regarding events these children alone have witnessed.

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Figure 1

The Research Design

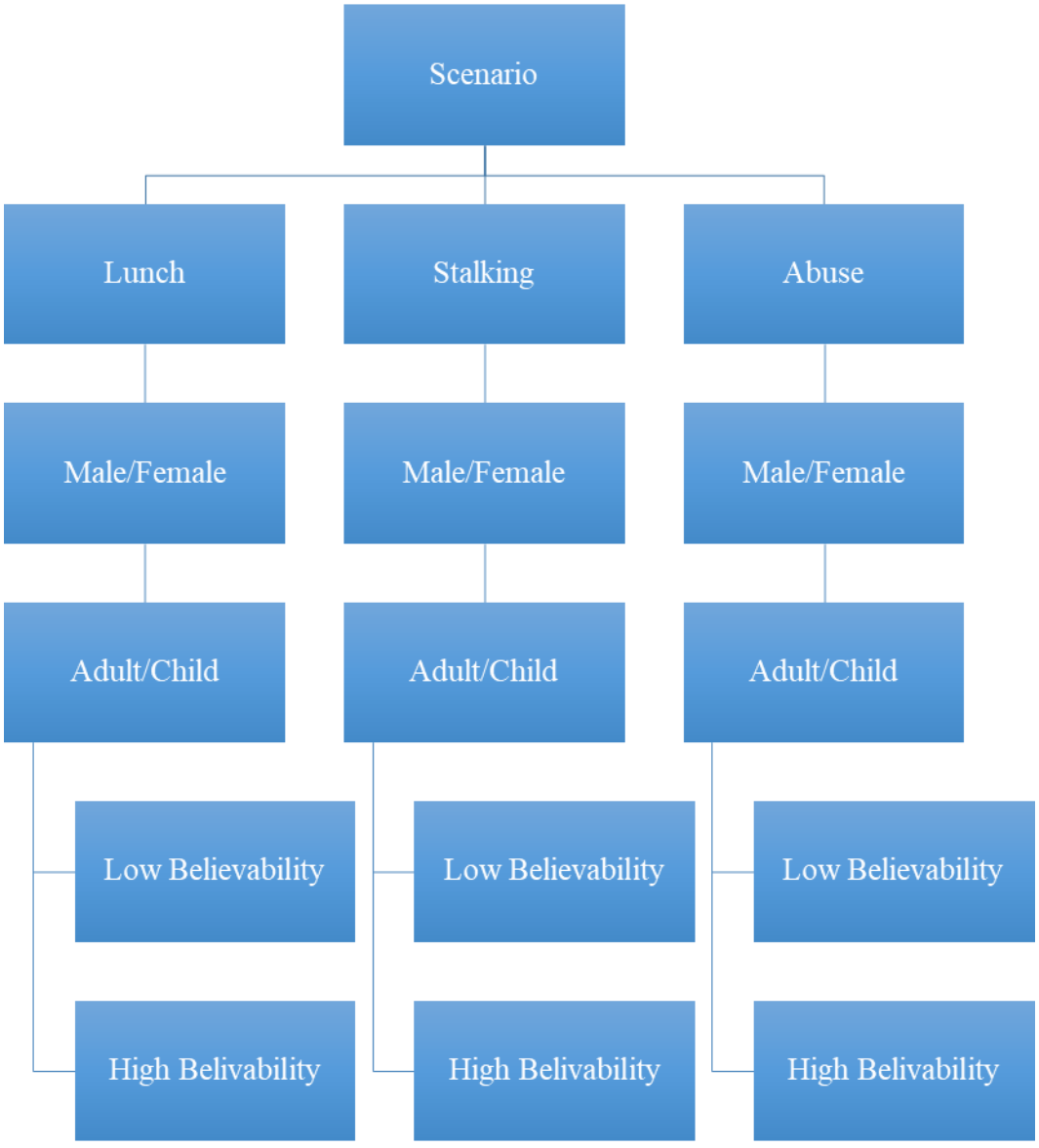
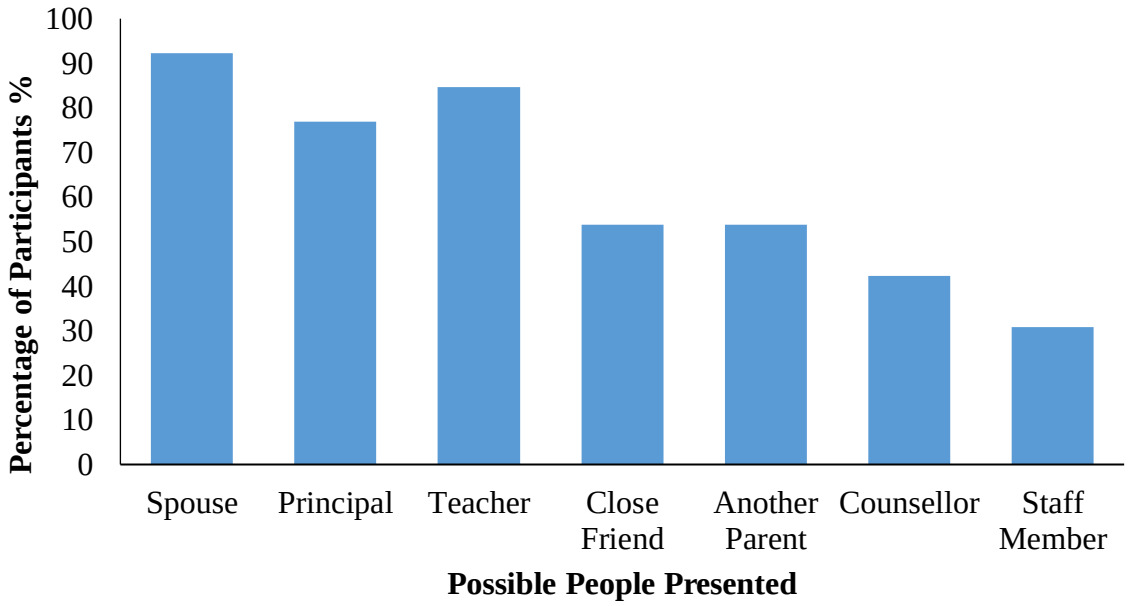


Figure 2

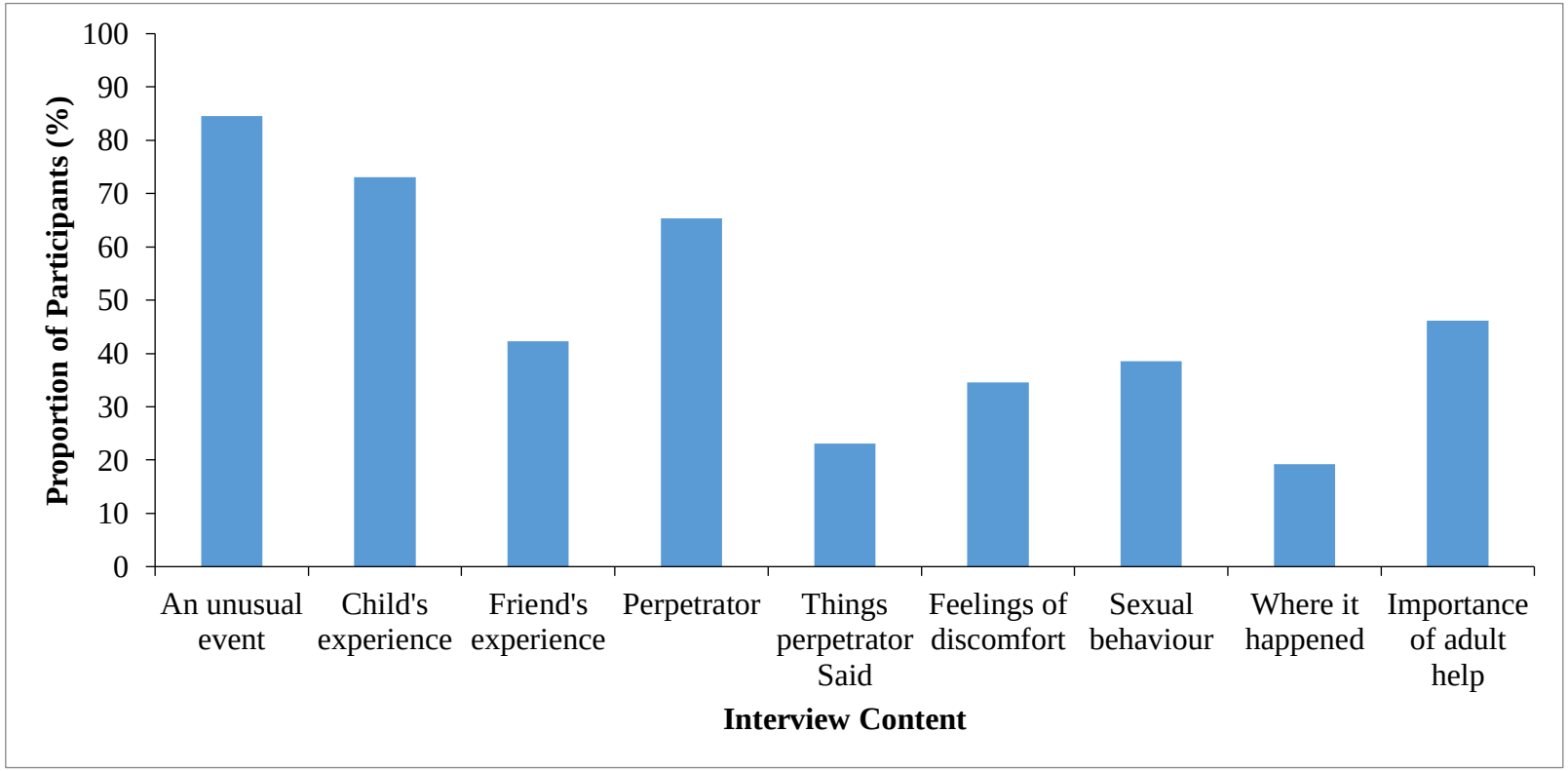
Proportion of Parents Indicating They Would Talk to Each Individual about the Letter



Note. Participants were given this list of people and were asked to indicate which, if any, they would talk to about the letter.

Figure 3

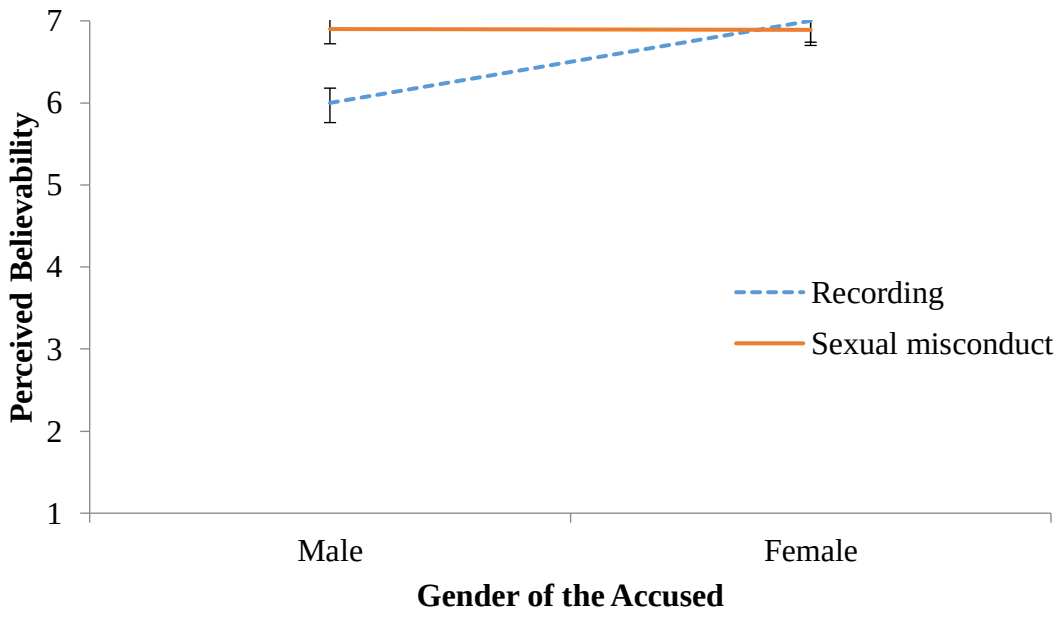
The Proportion of Parents Indicating They Would ask their Children about these Topics



Note. The topics of interview content provided were derived from parent responses to the question: what would you ask your child about this event.

Figure 4

The Gender of the Accused x Event Type Interaction for Perceived Believability in the High Believability Condition of Event Two



Appendix A

The Revised Inventory of Parent Attachment

Scale: Following are four general relationship styles that people often report. Place a checkmark next to the letter corresponding to the style that best describes you or is closest to the way you are.

____ A. It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

____ B. I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.

____ C. I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.

____ D. I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

Now please rate each of the relationship styles above to indicate how well or poorly each description corresponds to your general relationship style.

Style A

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Disagree Strongly			Neutral/ Mixed			Agree Strongly

Style B

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Disagree Strongly			Neutral/ Mixed			Agree Strongly

Style C

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Disagree Strongly			Neutral/ Mixed			Agree Strongly

Style D

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Disagree Strongly			Neutral/ Mixed			Agree Strongly

Appendix B

Do I need permission to use the RQ, RSQ, and/or Social Networks Questionnaire in my research?

No, these measures are in the public domain. Therefore, you are welcome to use any of these questionnaires without charge in your research. You need only reference the measures appropriately. You are also welcome to revise or update the measures as you see fit, as long as you clearly describe the changes in your method section.

Exceptions

Clinical use: These measures were developed for research purposes only and are not appropriate for use in individual assessments. They have not been validated for this purpose and there are not adequate norms for the measures to allow for a confident interpretation of individual results. That being said, some practitioners have found that self-report attachment measures are helpful as a basis of informal self-exploration and discussion.

Commercial use: You cannot use these measures for commercial purposes.

Appendix C

Scenario One:
A letter was sent home from school with the kindergarten and grade one students at Poplar Elementary School. The letter was sent to explain to parents that a male/female staff member/older student at the school had been accused of stealing students' lunches. The child who came forward was unable to provide any details of the incident and no disciplinary action had been administered towards the accused staff member/older child. An investigation was said to be underway.

Q1. Would you talk to your child about this situation?

Q1a. What would you ask?

Q2. Which, if any, of the following people would talk to before speaking with your child? Please check off all that apply.

- o Spouse
- o School principal
- o Child's teacher
- o One of your close friends
- o Another parent
- o Psychologist
- o School counselor
- o School secretary
- o Teacher assistant
- o Student assistant
- o Other

Please specify _____

Q3. How likely would you be to confront the accused?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Likely at all						Very Likely

Q4. How serious do you consider this situation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Serious at all						Very Serious

Q5. How upset would you be if your child brought this letter home from school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Upset at all						Very Upset

Q6. How believable do you feel the accusation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Believable at all						Very Believable

Q7. How important would it be for you to know the identity of the person making the accusation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not Important at all Very Important

Now imagine that the above letter was sent home from school with the kindergarten and grade one students at Poplar Elementary School. It was again noted that the letter was sent to explain to parents that a male/female staff member/older student at the school had been accused of stealing students' lunches. But in this case, the child who came forward provided enough details of the incident to prompt suspension of the accused staff member. An investigation was said to be underway.

Q1. Would you talk to your child about this situation?

Q1a. What would you ask?

Q2. Which, if any, of the following people would talk to before speaking with your child? Please check off all that apply.

- o Spouse
- o School principal
- o Child's teacher
- o One of your close friends
- o Another parent
- o Psychologist
- o School counselor
- o School secretary
- o Teacher assistant
- o Student assistant
- o Other

Please specify _____

Q3. How likely would you be to confront the accused?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not Likely at all Very Likely

Q4. How serious do you consider this situation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not Serious at all Very Serious

Q5. How upset would you be if your child brought this letter home from school?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not Upset at all Very Upset

Q6. How believable do you feel the accusation to be?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not Believable at all Very Believable

Q7. How important would it be for you to know the identity of the person making the accusation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Important at all						Very Important

In an unrelated instance, a letter was sent home to parents of kindergarten and grade one students at an elementary school explaining that a male/female staff member/older child at the school had been accused of inappropriately recording kindergarten and grade one students on the playground during recess. In this case, the child who came forward was unable to provide any details of the incident so therefore no disciplinary action had been administered towards the accused staff member/older student. An investigation was said to be underway.

Q1. Would you talk to your child about this situation?

Q1a. What would you ask?

Q2. Which, if any, of the following people would talk to before speaking with your child? Please check off all that apply.

- o Spouse
- o School principal
- o Child's teacher
- o One of your close friends
- o Another parent
- o Psychologist
- o School counselor
- o School secretary
- o Teacher assistant
- o Student assistant
- o Other

Please specify _____

Q3. How likely would you be to confront the accused?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Likely at all						Very Likely

Q4. How serious do you consider this situation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Serious at all						Very Serious

Q5. How upset would you be if your child brought this letter home from school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Upset at all						Very Upset

Q6. How believable do you feel the accusation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Believable at all						Very Believable

Q7. How important would it be for you to know the identity of the person making the accusation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Important at all						Very Important

As with the previous scenario, I now want you to picture that the letter was sent to explain to parents that a male/female staff member/older student at the school had been accused of inappropriately recording kindergarten and grade one students on the playground during recess. However, in this case the child who came forward provided enough details of the incident to prompt suspension of the accused staff member/older student. An investigation was said to be underway.

Q1. Would you talk to your child about this situation?

Q1a. What would you ask?

Q2. Which, if any, of the following people would talk to before speaking with your child? Please check off all that apply.

- o Spouse
- o School principal
- o Child's teacher
- o One of your close friends
- o Another parent
- o Psychologist
- o School counselor
- o School secretary
- o Teacher assistant
- o Other

Please specify _____

Q3. How likely would you be to confront the accused?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Likely at all						Very Likely

Q4. How serious do you consider this situation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Serious at all						Very Serious

Q5. How upset would you be if your child brought this letter home from school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Upset at all						Very Upset

Q6. How believable do you feel the accusation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Believable at all						Very Believable

Q7. How important would it be for you to know the identity of the person making the accusation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Important at all						Very Important

In an unrelated instance, a letter was sent home to parents of kindergarten and grade one students at an elementary school explaining that a male/female staff member/older child at the school had been accused potential sexual misconduct with students. In this case, the child who came forward was unable to provide any details of the incident so therefore no disciplinary action had been administered towards the accused staff member. An investigation was said to be underway.

Q1. Would you talk to your child about this situation?

Q1a. What would you ask?

Q2. Which, if any, of the following people would talk to before speaking with your child? Please
check off all that apply.

- o Spouse
- o School principal
- o Child's teacher
- o One of your close friends
- o Another parent
- o Psychologist
- o School counselor
- o School secretary
- o Teacher assistant
- o Student assistant
- o Other

Please specify _____

Q3. How likely would you be to confront the accused?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Likely at all						Very Likely

Q4. How serious do you consider this situation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Serious at all						Very Serious

Q5. How upset would you be if your child brought this letter home from school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Upset at all						Very Upset

Q6. How believable do you feel the accusation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Believable at all						Very Believable

Q7. How important would it be for you to know the identity of the person making the accusation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Important at all						Very Important

As with the previous scenario, I now want you to picture that the letter was sent to explain to parents that a male/female staff member/older student at the school had been accused of potential sexual misconduct with students. However, in this case the child who came forward provided enough details of the incident to prompt suspension of the accused staff member/older student. An investigation was said to be underway.

Q1. Would you talk to your child about this situation?

Q1a. What would you ask?

Q2. Which, if any, of the following people would talk to before speaking with your child? Please check off all that apply.

- o Spouse
- o School principal
- o Child's teacher
- o One of your close friends
- o Another parent
- o Psychologist
- o School counselor
- o School secretary
- o Teacher assistant
- o Student assistant
- o Other

Please specify _____

Q3. How likely would you be to confront the accused?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Likely at all						Very Likely

Q4. How serious do you consider this situation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Serious at all						Very Serious

Q5. How upset would you be if your child brought this letter home from school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Upset at all						Very Upset

Q6. How believable do you feel the accusation to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Believable at all						Very Believable

Q7. How important would it be for you to know the identity of the person making the accusation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Important at all						Very Important

Questions 8 and 9 are only given to participants in the staff member condition.

Q8. What job do you think the staff member held?

- Teacher
- Custodian
- Principal
- Teacher assistant
- School secretary
- Other

  Please specify _____

Q9. Would this be different if this was a low versus high believability situation (i.e., when you moved from the first event to the second)?

- Yes
- No

Appendix D

Recruitment Message

"As part of the requirements for my honours thesis in psychology, I am conducting a parent interview. Participants must be a parent to a child between the ages of 5-9 years. I am interested in how parents would question their children, if they suspected something negative had happened at their children's school. I would like to interview participants either in person or over the phone and that interview will be audio recorded so I can concentrate on the interview and then later go back to compare responses from different parents. The interview will take 45 minutes or less to complete. You will be given a $10 gift card in appreciation for you taking the time to be interviewed. If you are interested in participating, please email me at ecwalsh@grenfell.mun.ca. This project is being supervised by Dr. Kelly Warren in the psychology department at Grenfell Campus. She can be contacted at kwarren@grenfell.mun.ca. If you know others who might be interested in participating, please forward this message to your status or email this message directly to them. Thank you in advance!"

Appendix E

- As part of my honours thesis in psychology at Grenfell Campus, I am conducting research about how parents and children (aged 5-9) talk about crime.
- The study will take about 45 minutes to complete and will consist of a short self-report questionnaire and an interview. You will receive a $10.00 gift card for your time.
- Participation is voluntary and you can stop at any time.
- Information gathered will be used to design procedures that help both children who witness crime, and their parents.
- To inquire about participation, or for any further questions or comments about this research please email me at ecwalsh@grenfell.mun.ca. Thank you!

This project is being supervised by Dr. Kelly Warren in the psychology department at Grenfell Campus. She can be contacted at kwarren@grenfell.mun.ca. The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Grenfell Campus-Research Ethics Board and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the GC-REB through the Grenfell Research Office (gcethics@grenfell.mun.ca) or by calling (709) 639-239 -2399

Appendix F

Informed Consent Template

Comparisons in Parent/Child Questioning Based on Crime Severity
Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this Informed Consent Form is to ensure you understand the nature of this study and your involvement in it. This consent form will provide information about the study, giving you the opportunity to decide if you want to participate.

Researchers: This study is being conducted by Erin Walsh as part of the course requirements for Psychology 4959. I am under the supervision of Dr. Kelly Warren.

Purpose: The study is designed to investigate how parents would question their children about crimes. The results will be used to write my honours thesis. The study will also be used in a larger research project and may be published in the future.

Task Requirements: After hearing about a case of alleged sexual misconduct against children in the United States, in the 1980s, you will be asked to complete an audio-recorded interview regarding if/how you would talk to your child if you suspected something negative had happened to them. The scenarios with which you might be presented will be randomly selected and will vary in terms of seriousness (e.g., minor theft to sexual misconduct). There are no right or wrong answers to the questions that you will be asked; we are only interested in learning how parents would react if they suspected something negative had happened to their child and your opinions on the topic. You may omit any questions you do not wish to answer.

Duration: The interview will take approximately forty-five minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits: There are no obvious risks or benefits involved with your participation in this study. However, a potential risk is that you may have a personal reaction as a consequence of participating in the study. In the event of a personal reaction, you may contact the Mental Health Crisis Line at (888) 737-4668.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Since interviews will be completed in person or over the telephone, the anonymity of participants cannot be guaranteed. However, information relevant to the study will be kept confidential. Any information you provide about known or suspected harm to a child, 18 years old or under, will be reported to appropriate authorities. All data will be kept on a password-protected computer for the duration of the project. All information will be analyzed and reported on a group basis. Thus, individual responses cannot be identified outside this interview.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to stop participating at any time. However, once you complete this interview, it cannot be removed as I am not attaching any identifying information to the information collected

and therefore, I cannot link individuals to their responses to remove them.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me at ecwalsh@grenfell.mun.ca, or my supervisor, Dr. Kelly Warren at kwarren@grenfell.mun.ca. As well, if you are interested in knowing the results of the study, please contact Dr. Kelly Warren or me after May 2020. Results will also be presented at the Nick Nocakou Undergraduate Student Research Conference in April.

This study has been approved by an ethics review process in the psychology program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland and has been found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy as well as the GC-REB through the Grenfell Research Office (gcethics@grenfell.mun.ca) or by calling (709) 639-239 -2399.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of the study, and I freely consent to participate. This Informed Consent Form will not be stored with my data. I understand that my interview is being recorded.

Signed _____

Date _____

If you are not completing this study over the phone, please type in your name and the date and email it back to ecwalsh@grenfell.mun.ca before we can proceed with the interview.

Appendix G

Dear Parent(s)/ Guardian(s),

As part of my honours thesis in psychology at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland, I am conducting research about how parents talk to their children (aged 5-10) about crime. I am interested in how you would talk to your child about a series of randomly selected scenarios (e.g., minor theft to sexual misconduct) that vary in seriousness. Children talk to their parents differently than they talk to other people, like teachers or friends. This makes it extremely important to understand how parents talk to their children about potentially criminal events and whether these discussions would differ depending on the parent's assessment of the crime.

I would like to interview interested parents either in person or over the phone. This study takes about 45. You will be asked to complete a short self-report questionnaire and to answer a series of interview questions. This will be audio-recorded. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions; I am only interested in learning how parents would react if they suspected something negative had happened to their child and their opinions on the topic.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose to stop at any point during the study. You may omit any questions you do not wish to answer. Participation will be kept strictly confidential. The information gathered will not appear in any records, will be kept in a locked cabinet for at least five years after the completion of the study, will be seen only by the researchers involved in the study, and will be used solely for research purposes. Also, note that responses will not contain your full name or your child's name or other identifying information.

If you are interested in participating, I will contact you to set up a time at your convenience. You will be given a $10.00 gift certificate as a token of our appreciation for you taking the time to complete this study. I sincerely appreciate your cooperation. If you wish to do so, you can ask to receive a letter describing the general results of the study once it is completed. Should you have any questions or comments about this research, please contact myself, Erin Walsh, at (ecwalsh@grenfell.mun.ca) or my supervisor, Dr. Kelly Warren, at (kwarren@grenfell.mun.ca) or at (709) 639-6511.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Grenfell Campus-Research Ethics Board and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the GC-REB through the Grenfell Research Office (gcethics@grenfell.mun.ca) or by calling (709) 639-239 -2399.

Yours sincerely,

Erin Walsh
Psychology Department, Grenfell Campus

Appendix H

Principal Letter

As part of my honours thesis in psychology at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland, I am conducting research assessing how parents talk to their children (aged 5-10) about crime. The research will be carried out by myself, under the supervision of Dr. Kelly Warren. This project has been approved through an ethics review process at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am writing to respectfully request permission to hand out parent letters at your school.

I am trying to recruit parents and have them complete a 45 minute interview either in person, or over the phone. Parents will be presented with scenarios that will be randomly selected and that vary in terms of seriousness (e.g., minor theft to sexual misconduct). They will be asked to indicate if/how they would talk to their child about the events in the scenarios. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions they will be asked; we are only interested in learning how parents would react if they suspected something negative had happened to their child. Parents may omit any questions they do not wish to answer. Children talk to their parents different from the way they talk to other people, like teachers or friends. This makes it extremely important to understand how parents talk to their children about potentially criminal events.

Reaching parents of children in this age group is not an easy task. With your permission, I would like to hand out parent letters within your school for possible parent participation in this research. I am not looking to conduct research during school time, rather I am looking to send home parent letters and consent forms with children who are between the ages of 5 and 10. This letter will inform parents of the nature of the study along with their right to withdraw participation at any time. Those who wish to participate may return consent forms to teachers, which we will collect or they can email me or my supervisor at the email addresses listed below. Individuals interested in participating will be contacted to set up a time to complete the study at their own convenience outside of school hours. I greatly appreciate your support for this research. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at ecwalsh@grenfell.mun.ca, or Dr. Kelly Warren at (709) 639-6511 or kwarren@grenfell.mun.ca. If you have any ethical concerns about this research please contact the Chairperson of the GC-REB through the Grenfell Research Office (gcethics@grenfell.mun.ca) or by calling (709) 639-239 -2399. I have also attached a copy of a proposed parent letter and a consent form for your benefit.

Thank- you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erin Walsh

Appendix I

Demographics

Q1. What gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female
- Another

  Please specify _____

Q2. What is your age? _____

Q3. What is your highest level of education?

1) Some high school
2) High School diploma
3) Some College or University
4) College diploma or University degree
5) Post graduate studies

Q4. Do you work in any of the following occupations?

1) Police Officer
2) Psychologist
3) Lawyer
4) Social Worker
5) Education
6) None of the above

Q5. Which of the following do you personally identify as?

1) Caucasian
2) Hispanic
3) African Canadian
4) Asian
5) Indigenous
6) Other

Appendix J

I am interested in seeing how parents would respond in a similar situation to an actual case that happened in the US. I am going to tell you a bit about the case and then I will ask you how you would respond if you received a similar letter about two different crimes that vary in seriousness. I want you to pretend as though the letter were to come home from your child's school and answer the questions that follow in the way you believe you would react if placed in that circumstance.

In September 1983, the Manhattan Beach, chief of police wrote a letter to parents advising them that, Ray Buckey, an employee at the school, was arrested and was charged with child molestation. The letter included details about graphic sexual acts against children. The police asked the parents to assist the investigation by questioning their children to see if they had been a victim or had witnessed the crime. The chief asked parents to provide him with any details their children had witnessed or experienced including seeing other children tied up or being left in the classroom alone with Ray Buckey. An information form was enclosed, along with a stamped, addressed envelope (Linder, 1995).

Parents were warned that the accusations were under investigation and because of the highly sensitive nature of the accusations and the emotional effect it could have on the community that the investigation should not be discussed outside private conversations with their children. The letter ended with a notice in capital letters that the school was in no way implicated and no one at the school had suspected there was a cause for concern prior to this investigation.

In each of the scenarios that follow, I want you to think about your child (pick one, if you have more than one child).

Q1. What is the age of the child you have in mind? _____
Q2. What is the gender of the child? _____

Appendix K

End of Study Form

Thank you for participating in this study. It is being conducted to assess how parents would question their children if they suspected their children had been involved in a crime and whether this would change based on the specific scenario. The study is based on a real case where officials at a school in the United States believed children had been molested. However, the scenarios presented were designed for the purposes of this study and are not real. Please feel free to share my contact information with anyone you believe might be willing to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns, or if you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me or my supervisor at ecwalsh@grenfell.mun.ca or kwarren@grenfell.mun.ca respectively. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact GC-REB through the Grenfell Research Office (gcethics@grenfell.mun.ca) or by calling (709) 639-239 -2399. If you are upset by participating in the study and would like to speak to a mental health professional, please contact the Mental Health Crisis Line at (888) 737-4668. If you are interested in knowing the results of this study, please attend the Nick Nocakou Undergraduate Student Research Conference in April or contact my supervisor, Dr. Kelly Warren at kwarren@grenfell.mun.ca after May 2020.

Thank you for your participation