

African American Attitudes Toward Incest and Child Sexual Abuse

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ABSTRACT. African Americans (N = 244) were surveyed to explore the influence of blame attribution, racial identity, religious faith maturity, and demographic characteristics on attitudes excusing sexual exploitation of children. Ninety-three percent of African Americans were non-excusing of sex between an adult and a child with Victim and Offender blame correlating significantly with low scores on the ATSA. Multiple regression analyses revealed: Racial Identity significantly predicted ATSA; Age and Gender predicted Situational Blame; Gender, Age, Vertical Faith and Collective Identity predicted Victim Blame; Gender and Value for Institutions predicted Societal Blame; and Gender predicted Offender Blame. Results support the relationship between multidimensional factors and African American attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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This study sought to explore three research questions: (1) African American attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse will be related to blame attribution. An attitude not excusing child sexual exploitation will be associated with blame attribution directed at the situation, society, and offender. An attitude excusing child sexual ex-

ploitation will be associated with blame attribution directed at the victim; (2) African Self-Consciousness will be positively related to a non-excusing attitude toward child sexual exploitation and blame attribution factors; and (3) Demographic variables, specifically previous sexual and physical abuse experiences and religious denomination in combination with Racial Identity and Religious Faith Maturity will influence the attitude a person assumes towards incest and child sexual abuse and will be predictive of an African American's attitudes towards incest and child sexual abuse and blame attribution sources.

Child sexual abuse has received increasing media and research attention over the past decade. Researchers have documented that child sexual abuse effects a child's physical, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral development (National Research Council, 1993), families, communities, and society (Widom, 1992), so that prevention of child sexual abuse is currently a major focus (National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, 1995). In the past, many research projects investigated child sexual abuse, particularly among Caucasian women and secondly, African American women (Wyatt, 1985; 1990). While some African American women sought clinical treatment, researchers document that many ethnic individuals do not report abuse incidents due to a general mistrust of social agencies (Gil, 1970; McAdoo, 1982; Pierce & Pierce, 1984). Therefore, there are a great number of African American children suffering child sexual abuse who may never receive professional services. While it appears that there is no difference between short and long-term psychological effects from sexual trauma between African American and Caucasian women, researchers report a variety of unique differences, such as African American women experiences with racial discrimination which effect self-esteem and different perceptions about help seeking, which must be accounted for in trauma prevention and recovery interventions (Wyatt, 1985; Wyatt, 1990). Clinical treatment and, more important, child sexual abuse prevention, must consider unique differences that may also depend on culture.

Historically, many abuse studies did not recognize that etiology across cultures may differ; typically, researchers collected data from Caucasian subjects and generalized these findings to ethnic groups such as African Americans. These findings were not representative and disregarded unique characteristics of ethnic populations (Wyatt,

1985, 1990), such as different relationships in African American families and unique cultural strengths used to buffer stress during crises (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993; McAdoo, 1982). Another limitation in the sexual abuse literature is that much of it reflected psychological profiles of clinical samples. (Harvey, 1996). Very few studies used non-clinical samples to investigate child sexual abuse attitudes. The inclusion of non-clinical samples is important because many African Americans do not seek traditional mental health services (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Pearce, 1996; Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993). Yet, African Americans may be in a position to assess a child sexual abuse incident and their attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse could influence their assessment and response to the abuse incident. Moreover, child abuse prevention campaigns target communities; therefore, it seems vital to incorporate cultural context in the design of child sexual abuse prevention models.

In general, mental health professionals are asked more and more to increase cultural competence in providing services to ethnic communities (Sue, Bernier, Durran et al., 1982; Sue, 1990; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Dana (1996) stated that explanations of human behavior require knowledge of persons in social contexts and that knowledge includes motives, expectancies, intentions, and capacities for change. Dana emphasizes that the traditional assessment model uses other sources of data, informants, observations of behavior in a variety of settings and assesses the goodness-of-fit between persons and a variety of environmental demands. Therefore, child sexual abuse research must also examine variables within the social context and consider whether there is a goodness-of-fit between existing traditional clinical paradigms and the social, cultural context of ethnicity and culture (Dubowitz, 1997). An integration of cultural world view and values may enhance child sexual abuse programs and research.

The major purpose of the present study was: (1) to investigate attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse among religious and non-religious African Americans so that more effective cultural-based clinical and prevention interventions could be designed; and, (2) to provide data to support utilizing the Black Church for sexual abuse prevention and psychological support. A secondary goal was to assist clinicians, researchers, and abuse policy makers in understanding African American attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse. First,

a review of related literature discussing community studies of child abuse, diversity of abuse definitions, blame attribution including cultural influences, racial identity, and religious faith will be presented. Second, the research methodology and results will follow. Finally, clinical and research implications will be discussed.

COMMUNITY CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE STUDIES

One of the largest abuse studies was conducted by Gil (1970) who analyzed national data collected under the newly enacted child abuse reporting laws regarding physical abuse. Gil concluded that families that were reported to officials were drawn disproportionately from the poor, poorly educated, African American, and Puerto Rican groups. Gil acknowledged this methodological limitation and that poverty was an influential predisposer to abusive situations; however, there was tremendous controversy because the data appeared to imply that African Americans and Puerto Ricans more frequently physically abused their children than did Caucasians. Later research studies discovered that the incidence of incest and child sexual abuse was just as frequent in Caucasian middle- to high income families (Finkelhor & Hotaling, 1990; Wyatt, 1985).

Giovannoni and Becerra (1979) surveyed professionals and community members to learn their perceptions about child abuse. Subjects were presented with vignettes describing child abuse; two of the vignettes described child sexual abuse. The authors compared attitudes between community members and professional health workers and explored whether different social classes and ethnic groups shared different perceptions. Among community members, Giovanni and Becerra found strong ethnic differences: in 94% of the vignettes, Caucasian subjects rated the incidents as less serious than African American and Hispanic groups. When comparing the differences between African Americans and Hispanics, the authors found that while African Americans and Hispanics were in agreement 75 percent of the time, Hispanic subjects rated vignettes depicting sexual abuse, physical injury, and drug/alcohol abuse as more serious than did African Americans. These findings contradicted other studies, like Gil (1970), because the authors did not find statistically significant differences across all ethnic groups among educational, income, and gender cate-

gories. However, the finding that African Americans rated abuse as more serious than Caucasians and other abuses as less serious as Hispanics is an important finding for future exploration.

DIVERSITY OF DEFINITIONS

The diversity of definitions used in sexual abuse research studies and clinical treatment is a limitation noted by several authors such as Wyatt and Peters (1986) and Hauggard and Emery (1989). Wyatt and Peters (1986) conducted a review and found that there was a range of definitions used in research studies which resulted in methodological flaws such as some researchers using non-contact behaviors (e.g., showing pornography to children) and others using only contact behaviors (e.g., fondling) in definitions. Some researchers relied on legal definitions, some employed clinical definitions, and others arbitrarily set other broad (e.g., intimacy) or narrow (e.g., kissing body parts) categories (Hauggard & Emery, 1989). With such a lack of agreement between clinicians and researchers, it is possible that citizens do not have a clear understanding of what behaviors constitute sexual exploitation of children.

Complexities increase when confronting incest and child sexual abuse definitions among African Americans. Family networks comprise blood relatives as well as non-blood relatives, including friends, neighbors, parishioners, and others. Frequently, no distinction is made between true blood relatives and non-related persons assigned titles of kinship such as "uncle" or "aunt." This wide constellation of relationships may influence the perception of incest and child sexual abuse among African Americans (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993; Pierce & Pierce, 1984).

Pierce and Pierce (1984) illustrated this relationship between family relationships and child sexual abuse in which they found African American children were less likely to be abused by their natural fathers and significantly more likely to be abused by "uncles," particularly when the natural fathers did not reside with their children. Many of these "uncles" were non-related kin, for example, boyfriends of the mothers. The authors also discovered that African American mothers were twice as likely as Caucasian mothers to reject children's reports of sexual abuse. Determining what psychological, social, economic, familial, cultural, and other influences explain this latter finding requires further

exploration. Is it possible that the relationship of the perpetrator, as an extended family "uncle" made it more difficult for the African American mothers to accept their children stories as true? In the African American family, uncle could be a blood relative, a next door neighbor, the mother's boyfriend, or a title given to a close family friend (Sudakarsa, N., 1988). Pierce and Pierce acknowledged the need for clinicians and researchers to recognize differences between African American and Caucasian family structures and to examine the influences of complicated relationships among extended family members.

BLAME ATTRIBUTION AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Researchers further document that blame attribution influences an individual's attitude toward incest and child sexual abuse. Attribution theory states that one tends to attribute a person's behavior either to dispositional (internal) causes or external sources, such as environmental or situational factors (Jones, 1979). Jackson and Ferguson (1983) conducted a study which was first designed to identify attribution of blame regarding incest. Blame attribution may affect the incidence of child sexual abuse reporting and "greatly influence the quality of legal and health services victims and offenders receive" (p. 41). The authors also investigated how gender, physically abused status, and sexually abused status influenced the attribution of blame regarding incest.

In their study, the authors found evidence of four blame attribution dimensions which influenced a subject's attitude toward incest: situational variables (family conditions, socioeconomic status, alcohol/drug uses); victim blame (victim provoked sexual invitation); societal values (sex and violence in the media); and offender characteristics (mental illness). A significant finding in the Jackson and Ferguson study was the emergence of a gender difference; males blamed victims more than females. The authors designed a scale from this initial study, the Jackson Incest Blame Scale (JIBS), to measure incest attitudes. Other researchers using the JIBS also found that attitudes toward incest were influenced by blame attribution (Resick & Jackson, 1981; Jackson & Sandberg, 1985; Adams & Betz, 1993). Later studies have also discovered significant gender differences (Staley & Lapidus, 1997; McKenzie & Calder, 1993; Reidy & Hochstadt; and Back & Lips, 1998). While social scientists have studied the construct of

blame extensively, professionals and lay personnel in mental health and religious communities may not understand the implications of this construct as they interact with victims of child sexual abuse. When an adult is presented with a sexual abuse incident, the adult's interpretation of who is responsible for the sexual exploitation—for example, the victim or society—may determine how the incident is evaluated. It is critical for professionals and lay persons to reflect on their own personal interpretation of blame in order to provide an appropriate response.

One limitation among the foregoing blame studies is that none of the studies examined cultural variables which may influence whom one attributes blame to. Most of the literature identified age and gender as key variables but rarely included ethnicity or culture as important considerations. In a literature search of blame attribution and sexual abuse, the first author discovered that ethnicity and culture was included in only one study (Staley & Lapidus, 1997). Moreover, the inclusion of cultural factors such as racial identity and religious faith maturity as contextual variables in child sexual abuse research may further explain an African American's attitude toward incest and child sexual abuse and blame attribution. Because racial identity and religious faith are important in the lives of many African Americans, these two variables were incorporated into the present study. A major question was: Would an African American who is religious and who identifies African racial identity as an important aspect of his or her view about the world possess a different incest and child sexual abuse attitude and blame structure as compared to an African American who does not identify religious faith or racial identity as important values?

Because the poor and ethnic members often associate oppression with authority persons and institutions (Gil, 1970; Pierce & Pierce, 1984; Sue, 1978), many may resist reporting abuse if the perpetrator is also an African American and family members fear that involving authorities will be harmful to the child and the family (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). For example, if an African American experiences racism in American society, is it possible that personal experiences of injustice might influence how blame is attributed in the abuse incident? Would African Americans be unwilling to report a perpetrator to a system they perceive to be unfair because they may have had experiences of injustice? It is possible that an African American's blame attribution structure, which is a psychological process, could interact with what

racial identity theorists identify as psycho racial or psycho cultural dynamics (Helms & Cook, 1999)—a construct which identifies racial and/or cultural experiences as potential intra personal and interpersonal influences.

RACIAL IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS FAITH

Racial Identity. Historically, personality theories developed were based on Western culture. Very few models acknowledged racial identity as a feature in personality, yet many instruments were consequently normed with ethnic groups. Researchers have stated that racial identity is also a component of personality (Cross, 1971; Baldwin, 1985). Therefore, in order to gain a fuller understanding of African American attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse, researchers must understand the African American world view. Baldwin (1985) compares the cosmological systems of European Americans and African Americans. He proposes that a major psychological component of the Black personality structure represents a core system which is called "African Self-Consciousness"; this component represents the conscious expression of "oneness of being" a communal phenomenology which characterizes the fundamental self-extension orientation of African people. Baldwin describes one African American world view value as "Oneness or Harmony with Nature." Humanity, self, and nature are seen as one and the same phenomenon and survival of the corporate whole versus individual survival is highly valued. Could it be possible that African Americans emphasizing this world view belief might reject behaviors which threaten the survival of the corporate whole—in this case, children's lives?

Another cross cultural researcher, Wyatt (1990), introduced a Traumatic Child Abuse Model that incorporated racial identity and racism effects into sexual abuse sequelae. Wyatt proposed that often African Americans experience multiple levels of exploitation: racism, sexism, sexual. As a result, effects of sexual exploitation may be compounded due to additional impacts of power and abuse. If all abuse areas are not assessed and treated, the child may lack successful healing of the effects of sexual trauma. Many times clients will approach mental health professionals and talk about many experiences of abuse—not just the sexual abuse experience. Wyatt (1990), therefore, emphasized that sexual abuse interventions must integrate ethnicity and culture into trauma recovery programs.

Religious Faith. While mental health professionals now acknowledge that because most trauma research focuses on clinical populations, the importance of ecological factors such as religion in trauma recovery and prevention is often overlooked. African Americans frequently use ecological systems such as families, religious institutions, and community groups instead of traditional clinical services to deal with the aftermath of trauma (Harvey, 1996). It is likely that many African Americans use religion or faith experiences to heal the effects of incest and child sexual abuse. In effect, they use religion to provide both "legal adjudication" and "treatment for pain." Smith (1981) discusses the role of religion in the lives of African Americans and emphasizes that since the days of slavery, religion has served as the only mental health treatment option for African Americans. Segments of this community today may never seek traditional mental health care and the Black Church is used as a resource for prevention and recovery programs. Many African Americans use the worship experience in the Black Church as an outlet of emotional and spiritual expression instead of a therapy session. Therefore, African American's religious experiences may serve as a resource for healing child sexual abuse.

METHOD

Subjects

Recruitment consisted of 1195 African American volunteer participants of whom 244 completed the study, representing a 20% return rate. Participants came from area Protestant African American churches and neighborhoods in the metropolitan Baltimore-Washington area. Respondents ages ranged from 18 to 85, with the average age being 44. The modal group was aged 30-39 years. Educational levels ranged from some high school to professional school. Earned income levels ranged from zero/unemployed to over \$79,000. The modal group (32.8%) earned \$40-59,000. The majority of the sample were college educated and classified themselves as middle-class socioeconomic status.

The two largest religious denominations represented were Baptist (32%) and Methodist (30.8%). Eighty-four percent (N = 211) indicated that they had not experienced previous sexual abuse, 12% (N = 30) indicated they had experienced previous sexual abuse and 3.6% (N = 9)

indicated they were unsure. Seventy-five percent ($N = 188$) indicated they had not experienced previous physical abuse while 22.8% ($N = 57$) indicated they had experienced previous physical abuse. Two percent ($N = 5$) indicated they were unsure about previous physical abuse. The majority of the respondents considered themselves as religious and identified with religious denomination.

Measures

Personal Background Questionnaire (PBQ). The PBQ was a 10-item demographic questionnaire designed by the first author. Respondents were asked to identify their ethnicity as African American, African National (e.g., Nigerian, Ghana), or West Indian (e.g., Jamaica); gender, age, highest level of education, annual family income, and religious denomination. Respondents were also asked to indicate "Yes," "No" or "Unsure" to "Have you ever been sexually abused?" and "Have you ever been physically abused?"

Attitudes Towards Sexual Abuse (ATSA). The ATSA (Briere, Henschel & Smiljanich, 1992) is a 15-item scale identifying attitudes in the general population supportive of sexual contact with children. Eight items are worded in the positive (abuse excusing) direction, for example, "An adult and a child should be allowed to have sex together whenever they desire to do so," and seven are worded in the negative (abuse nonexcusing) direction, for example, "Sex between a child and an adult is likely to hurt the child in negative ways," to control for response set bias. The scale is scored on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates Disagree and 5 indicates Agree. The authors reported face validity was met; reliability was .72 for their research sample. The ATSA was modified by the addition of a probing statement: Sex between an adult and a child is wrong even if the child and adult are not related, e.g., close family friend.

The Jackson Incest Blame Scale (JIBS). Developed by Jackson and Ferguson (1983), the JIBS is a 20-item scale identifying four targets for blame attribution regarding incest: Victim, Offender, Situational, and Societal. Subjects will answer a statement such as "There is a strong connection between the current morality and the crime of incest and child sexual abuse." The scale is scored on a Likert scale of 1 to 6, where 1 indicates Strongly Disagree and 6 indicates Strongly Agree. The authors reported a reliability (Cronbach = s alpha) of .71. The JIBS was modified by the addition of a probing statement: An African

American offender who commits child sexual abuse should not be reported to the police or social services because this person has suffered racial inequities in American society.

The African Self Consciousness Scale (ASC). Developed by Baldwin (1985), this 42-item questionnaire was designed to assess the Black personality construct of African Self Consciousness. Four dimensions are assessed: African Collective Identity, Resistance to Anti-African Forces, Value for African-Centered Institutions and Cultural Expressions, and Value for African American Culture. Participants will indicate a response to statements such as "Black children should be taught that they are African at an early age." An eight-point Likert Scale is used, where 1 is Strongly Disagree, and 8 Strongly Agree. Even numbered items are scored by computing scores directly whereas odd numbered items are reverse coded. Internal consistency yielded a coefficient of $\rho = .48$ ($p < .001$). Reliability has been reported from .79 to .82.

The Faith Maturity Scale (FMS). Developed by Benson, Donahue, and Erickson (1993) this 38-item scale was designed to measure the degree of vertical faith maturity and horizontal (prosocial) faith maturity. A 12-item short form also exists and was used for the present study to reduce testing time. Subjects indicated a response to statements such as "I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world." A Likert scale of 1 to 7 is used, where 1 indicates Never True and 7 indicates Always True. Face and content validity were established by expert panels. The 12-item scale has a reliability comparable to the 38 item scale at .88 for adult respondents.

Procedures

Participants completed the research packets individually at home. Informed consent was obtained by a written consent form in the instrument packet. Participants were instructed to respond to the questionnaires in the order presented; they were also asked to contact the author if they had questions. A list of community sexual abuse treatment resources were included in the packet if participants experienced discomfort or wanted follow-up information about the topic.

RE STANDARDIZATION OF INSTRUMENTS

Reliability analyses will be reported for each instrument. These analyses are important because all of the instruments with the excep-

tion of the ASC were normed with Caucasian subjects. Alpha for the ATSA in the present study was .51 as compared with Briere et al.'s report of .71 whereas the reliability alpha for the JIBS was .73 as compared to Jackson and Ferguson's report of .72. The reliability alpha of the ASC was .83 as compared to Baldwin's reported .79 to .82; therefore, the constructs in the ASC appear to be psychometrically sound despite the present study being a community sample as compared to Baldwin's sample of college students. The reliability alpha for the FMS was .77 as compared to Benson et al.'s reported .88. The norm sample in the Benson et al.'s study had a limited sub-sample of African Americans and the authors cautioned that the FMS may not be representative of this ethnic group.

RESULTS

ATSA and JIBS

First, we will look at the two sexual abuse scales. As shown in Table 1, most respondents reported low ATSA scores which reflected attitudes which do not excuse child sexual exploitation. Therefore, the ATSA suffered from restriction of range. A score higher than 45 indicates an excusing attitude towards child sexual exploitation (Briere, Henschel, & Smiljanich, 1992).

Based on total factor mean scores, African American respondents blamed the Offender the most, Societal reasons second, Situational reasons third, and Victims the least. As shown in Table 1, *t* values revealed no significant difference between males and females on ATSA and blame attribution for Victim, Societal and Offender blame. A significant difference was found between males and females for blame to Situational reasons, $t = -2.04$, with males more prone to blame the situation.

Table 2, reports correlations between ASC, FMS and ATSA scores and JIBS Situational, Victim, Societal, and Offender blame factors. A positive correlation was found between Victim blame and ATSA, $r(234) = .30$, $p < .001$ and a negative correlation was found between Offender blame and ATSA, $r(232) = -.21$, $p < .001$. African American respondents excusing child sexual abuse tend to see it brought on by the victim rather than by the offender. The hypothesized Situational and Societal blame factors did not correlate with ATSA.

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics for ASC, ATSA, FMS and ICS

Scale	Female (n = 195)		Male (n = 52)		Alpha	t
	M	SD	M	SD		
<i>African Self Consciousness (ASC)</i>						
Collective Identity	64.23	13.78	65.25	14.51	.58	-.47
Resistance Against Anti-African Forces	24.69	6.72	24.65	6.68		.04
Value for Institutions/Cultural Expressions	30.82	6.10	32.15	6.04		-1.40
Value for Culture	8.35	3.46	7.78	4.18		1.00
<i>Attitudes Toward Incest and Child Sexual Abuse Scale (ATSA)</i>						
	28.35	5.43	29.38	6.19	.51	-1.15
<i>Faith Maturity Scale (FMS)</i>						
Vertical Faith	28.70	5.08	29.80	4.67	.77	-1.39
Horizontal Faith	18.85	4.90	20.27	4.48		-1.87
<i>Incest and Child Sexual Abuse Blame Scale (ICS)</i>						
Situational	14.41	5.13	16.01	4.63	.73	-2.04*
Victim	8.86	3.70	9.53	3.89		-1.14
Societal	21.55	4.98	20.40	5.71		1.42
Offender	23.11	3.54	22.36	3.65		1.34

Note. N ranges from 231-245
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; two tailed

TABLE 2. Correlations Between ASC, FMS, ATSA and JIBS

Variable	ATSA	Situational Blame	Victim Blame	Societal Blame	Offender Blame
<i>ASC</i>					
Identity	.03	.10	-.13*	.15*	.12*
Resistance	.10	-.19*	-.22*	.00	.18*
Institutions	-.13*	.00	-.07	.08	.04
Culture	.02	.05	.05	.02	.09
<i>FMS</i>					
Vertical	.00	.07	.02	.21***	.04
Horizontal	.07	.13*	-.04	.17***	.09

Note. N ranges from 230 to 248
*p < .05, **p < .01; ***p < .001; two tailed
Legend: Situational, Victim, Societal, and Offender Blame are JIBS subscales

ASC and ATSA

Table 2 also reports correlations between ATSA and the ASC. Value for African-Centered Institutions and Cultural Expressions negatively correlated with ATSA, $r(245) = -.13$, $p = < .01$. Respondents not excusing child sexual exploitation were African American respondents with a low valuing of African-centered institutions like the "Black Church," and a low valuing for Cultural Expressions (for example, wearing traditional African clothing and hairstyles).

ASC and Blame Attribution

The ASC significantly correlated with many blame factors. Collective African Identity negatively correlated with Victim Blame, $r(245) = -.13$, $p = < .05$, and positively correlated with Societal Blame, $r(245) = .15$, $p = < .05$ and Offender Blame, $r(245) = .12$, $p = < .05$. Resistance Against Anti-African Forces negatively correlated with Situational Blame, $r(245) = -.19$, $p = < .05$, and Victim Blame, $r(245) = -.22$, $p = < .05$, but positively correlated with Offender Blame, $r(245) = .18$, $p = < .05$. While these correlations were slight, they provide interesting interpretations.

Faith Maturity and ATSA and JIBS

Horizontal and Vertical faith maturity did not correlate significantly with ATSA. A probable explanation is the low reliability of ATSA compared with the JIBS. Three blame attribution scales significantly correlated with faith maturity. Horizontal faith positively correlated with Situation blame, $r(245) = .13$, $p = < .05$, Societal blame positively correlated with Vertical faith, $r(245) = .21$, $p < .001$ and Horizontal faith, $r(245) = .17$, $p = < .01$.

Predictive Profiles of African American Attitudes Toward Incest and Child Sexual Abuse

Five Hierarchical Stepwise Multiple Regressions were performed where the ATSA and JIBS blame subscales served as the dependent variables. The independent variables were demographic variables (religious denomination, age, gender, income, and educational levels, and previous sexual and physical abuse experiences), FMS vertical and horizontal subscales and the ASC subscales. Tables 3-8 reports the multiple regression analyses for ATSA and Blame scales.

TABLE 3. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for ATSA

Model	Predictors	R	R ²	R-Square Change	F-Change	df1	df2	Significance of F-Change
1	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income	.351	.123	.123	7.20	4	205	.000
2	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity	.357	.127	.004	.474	2	203	.623
3	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity; Value for Culture, Resistance Against Anti A-A Forces, Value for Cultural Institutions/ Cultural Expressions, Collective Identity	.423	.179	.052	3.13	4	199	.016

Legend, A-A = African American

Table 3 reports the regression model for ATSA. Previous physical abuse and sexual abuse experience did not contribute significance to predicting ATSA scores as hypothesized. Denominational affiliation was collected for all respondents and was classified as: (1) Mainline Protestant; (2) Evangelical Protestant; (3) Roman Catholic; and (4) Other or None. Only four respondents reported no denominational affiliation.

TABLE 4. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Situational Blame

Model	Predictors	R	R ²	R-Square Change	F-Change	df1	df2	Significance of F-Change
1	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income	.743	.553	.553	62.39	4	2	.000
2	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity	.749	.561	.008	1.82	2	200	.164
3	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity; Value for Culture, Resistance Against Anti A-A Forces, Value for Cultural Institutions/ Cultural Expression, Collective Identity	.754	.568	.007	.803	4	196	.524

Legend. A-A = African American

Dummy variables for denominational group were tested in the preliminary models, but of the four denominational groupings across the five models, only one affiliation, Roman Catholic, had a significant t value, and for only one model, Situational Blame. Since a significant result in one out of fifteen instances is very little better than chance, denomination was omitted from the final models. Dummy variables for Gender and Age were tested in the ATSA and Blame models. Gender and Age did not

TABLE 5. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Victim Blame

Model	Predictors	R	R ²	R-Square Change	F-Change	df1	df2	Significance of F-Change
1	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income	.661	.437	.437	39.44	4	203	.000
2	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity	.689	.474	.037	7.03	2	201	.001
3	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity Value for Culture, Against Anti A-A Forces, Value for Cultural Institutions/ Cultural Expressions, Collective Identity	.706	.499	.025	2.42	4	197	.049

Legend. A-A = African American

contribute any significance to the ATSA model; however, male African American respondents had a significant *t* value and older African American respondents had a significant *t* value in the Blame regression models.

Educational Level, Resistance Against Anti-African Forces (Racial Identity), and Income Level were the three most significant predictors of ATSA scores, Partial $F(4,199) = .423, p < .01$. African American respondents with lower Educational levels, $r = -.25, p < .000$, low

TABLE 6. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Societal Blame

Model	Predictors	R	R2	R-Square Change	F-Change	df1	df2	Significance of F-Change
1	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income	.939	.881	.881	378.87	4	205	.000
2	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity	.939	.881	.001	.476	2	203	.622
3	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity; Value for Culture, Resistance Against Anti A-A Forces, Value for Institutions/ Cultural Expressions, Collective Identity	.941	.885	.004	1.69	4	199	.153

Legend. A-A = African American

Resistance Against Anti-African Forces, $r = -.20$, $p < .00$, and lower Income levels, $r = -.14$, $p < .05$, explained the variance in ATSA scores.

Table 4 reports the regression model for Situational Blame. Gender and Age were significant predictors of Situational Blame scores, Partial $F(4,202) = .743$, $p < .000$, while Vertical Faith, Horizontal Faith,

TABLE 7. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Offender Blame

Model	Predictors	R	R2	R-Square Change	F-Change	df1	df2	Significance of F-Change
1	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income	.682	.466	.466	44.20	4	203	.000
2	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity	.682	.479	.013	2.51	2	201	.084
3	Religion, Gender, Education, Age, Income; Vertical Faith Maturity, Horizontal Faith Maturity; Value for Culture, Resistance Against Anti A-A Forces, Value for Institutions/ Cultural Expressions, Collective Identity	.710	.504	.025	2.48	4	197	.045

Legend. A-A = African American

and ASC Racial Identity subscales did not contribute to the predictive model when added to the regression analysis.

Table 5 reports the regression model for Victim Blame. Gender, Age, Vertical Faith Maturity, and African American Collective Identity (ASC) were the most significant predictors of Victim Blame scores, Partial $F(4,197) = .706$, $p < .05$. African American male and older respondents and respondents with greater Vertical Faith Maturity, $r =$

TABLE 8. Summary of Regression Coefficients for ATSA and Blame Regression Models

Model	Variable	Standardized Beta	t	Significance
ATSA	Education	-.199	-2.85	.005
	Income	-.141	-2.01	.045
	Resistance	-.203	-2.76	.006
Situational Blame	Gender	.737	15.08	.000
	Age	.129	2.46	.014
Victim Blame	Gender	-.637	-12.14	.000
	Age	.188	3.34	.001
	Vert. Faith.Mat.	.156	2.30	.022
	Collect	.190	2.97	.003
Societal Blame	Gender	.933	37.43	.000
	Institutions	-.062	-2.05	.041
Offender Blame	Gender	-.656	-12.61	.000

Legend.

Resistance = Resistance Against Anti-African American Forces

Collect = African American Collective Identity

Institutions = Value for African American Institutions and Cultural Expressions

Vert.Faith.Mat. = Vertical Faith Maturity

.15, $p < .05$, and Collective Identity, $r = .19$, $p < .01$, explained the variance in Victim Blame scores.

Table 6 reports the regression model for Societal Blame. Gender was the most significant predictor of Societal Blame, Partial $F(4,205) = .939$, $p < .000$. When Religious Faith Maturity and Racial Identity were added to the regression model, low Value for Culture (ASC), $r = -.062$, $p = .04$, added some significance but decreased the overall significance in the regression model.

Table 7 reports the regression model for Offender Blame. Gender was the only significant predictor of Offender blame with females blaming the Offender more than males. Religious Faith Maturity and Racial Identity variables did not contribute to the regression model.

Table 8 reports the coefficient betas for the variables which significantly contributed to the regression models of ATSA and the four Blame scales.

DISCUSSION

Correlations Between Attitudes Toward Incest and Child Sexual Abuse and Blame Attribution

ATSA. The results revealed that 93% of the African American respondents did not excuse an adult having sex with a child. The mean

scores were similar to the Briere et al. (1992) study where scores below 45 indicated a non-excusing attitude towards incest and child sexual abuse ($M = 28.35$, $SD = 5.43$). The present findings were also similar to Giovanni and Becerra (1979) wherein African American subjects rated child sexual abuse incidents as having more serious consequences to the child as compared to Caucasian subjects who rated behaviors as having less serious consequences. Therefore, there is some evidence that there are African Americans in the population who may not excuse incest and child sexual abuse. The prevalence of incest and child sexual abuse in African American culture may be related to other factors other than a generalized cultural "abuse tolerance" theory that was advanced by earlier research studies (e.g., Gil, 1970). While these findings show preliminary evidence of non-support for the sexual exploitation of children, the findings are not generalizable to all African Americans because the present study was not a random sample. An additional limitation exists because there are no existing studies examining African American attitudes toward child sexual abuse to compare to this research findings.

The present findings also diverge from Briere et al. (1992) in which the authors found a significant difference between male and female Caucasian university students in attitudes supporting sexual exploitation. The male students in the Briere et al. (1992) study expressed an hypothetical interest for engaging in sex with a child. In the present study of African Americans, there was no significant difference in the mean scores between males and females. Neither gender supported sex between an adult and a child. However, the lack of significance in the present study may be due to the demographics of this sample which was very different in comparison to the Briere et al. sample. This was an older adult sample of churchgoers who possessed a greater age difference to children and were also at a different developmental stage of life.

Religious Faith Maturity, Blame and ATSA. Religious Faith Maturity did not correlate with attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse. However, blame attribution correlated significantly with ATSA scores. The blame attribution findings in the present study corroborated with Jackson and Ferguson (1983) who concluded that attitudes towards incest and blame attribution were multidimensional and varied depending on the source of blame attribution. Jackson and Ferguson found that Caucasian subjects attitude towards incest varied depend-

ing on whether they blamed situational or societal reasons and the victim or offender. In the present study, African American attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse were influenced by two sources of blame attribution—victim and offender blame. Jackson and Ferguson (1983) also found that men attributed blame to victims more than females did. In the present study, there were no significant differences between male and female blame attribution scores for Victim, Offender, or Societal blame. However, there was a statistically significant difference between male and female African Americans respondents on Situational blame such that African American males blamed situational reasons more than African American females did. This difference may be due to the fact that more males in the general population are offenders (American Humane Association, 1995). In addition, men and women may perceive sexual situations differently. Males are socialized to view females as sexual objects in this culture; therefore, males may not perceive sexual dominance as exploitation based on their socialization experiences (Adams & Betz, 1993).

In this sample, African American subjects did not excuse sex between an adult and a child; therefore, there is consistency between the order of the JIBS mean scores and the respondents ATSA scores. When looking at correlations between the JIBS and ATSA, African American subjects blamed the Victim least; blamed the Offender the most, Societal reasons second, and Situational reasons third. While causality cannot be demonstrated in this study, this finding does raise additional questions. In the present middle-class African American sample, it is possible that because of their level of education and possible exposure to greater child sexual abuse prevention, some respondents learned that the offender is responsible for sexual exploitation rather than attribute blame to external factors such as situational or societal characteristics.

It is interesting, however, that in the present sample of churchgoers, blame was attributed to the victim. How could religious African Americans, with greater educational status, blame the victim? Child sexual abuse campaigns do not advocate victim blame; instead, child sexual abuse advocates emphasize that it is critical to believe the child (Veltkamp & Miller, 1994). What is the perception when the victim is older—an adolescent? Wyatt and Peters (1986) reported that the age difference between the adult and the child has been cited as an important issue in defining child sexual abuse. The ATSA contained two

statements which measured age difference in considering whether the sexual act was exploitive. It may be that in this African American sample, some respondents believe a child and teenager can sexually entice an adult. The age range in this study included many African Americans who were over 50 years old and many of these persons were educated during a time when child sexual abuse prevention was not available and common belief was that the child sexually enticed the adult (DeMause, 1988). One anecdotal experience occurred when one respondent called this researcher and stated, "I grew up in the south at a time when young girls married and had sex with a male who was an adult. I was 13 when I married my husband. Does this mean he sexually abused me?" While this conversation was one isolated call, it suggests that perhaps older African Americans had similar experiences and, therefore, might have similar questions. The present researcher had not considered geographic and time influences as contextual variables. Future child sexual abuse attitudinal investigations among African Americans should consider the variety of sociological and cultural factors among various generations. There may be other within group differences among African Americans which influence their attitudes toward child sexual abuse.

In summary, blame attribution does correlate with African American attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse. If parents and adults do not attribute blame to the appropriate source, it is possible that sexually exploited children may not receive critical medical and psychological services. Additionally, when child sexual abuse occurs in religious homes, counselors often hear reports from adult clients that the abuse negatively impacted their religious and spiritual identity; the victim suffers an additional loss from the inability to experience comfort from the religious faith. Therefore, blame is a critical factor for families, professionals, and religious communities to understand and consider carefully. The present findings from a non-clinical sample contribute new data to existing child sexual abuse research, child abuse mental health professionals, and religious lay persons who often work with sexual abuse survivors.

ASC, ATSA and JIBS. The hypothesis that racial identity (ASC) would correlate with ATSA and blame attribution was partially accepted. Only one ASC factor, Value for African-Centered Institutions and Cultural Expressions, correlated with ATSA scores. African American respondents who supported child sexual abuse were also respondents

who possessed a low appreciation for African-centered institutions, like Black Schools, and a low value for Cultural Expressions, for example, wearing traditional African clothing and hairstyles. This factor represents a value for African American culture (Baldwin, 1985; Cross, 1970). It was hypothesized that African Americans who support child sexual abuse do not possess a high degree of African racial identity. Children are prized within African American culture. Popular African American world view slogans such as "It takes a village to raise a child," "Black is Beautiful," and "A Child is a Gift From God," do not parallel an attitude that accepts that sex between an adult and a child is not harmful. Persons with greater African self-consciousness would value a child's health development and not be interested in engaging in activities that harm an African American child. It was expected, however, that more ASC factors such as Collective African Identity would correlate with ATSA. The factor Collective African Identity measures the degree to which African Americans support preserving African American world view beliefs and culture. This factor also places value on preserving the identity of African American community. Future replications could identify whether additional ASC factors correlate among a variety of African American samples.

While only one ASC factor correlated with ATSA, two ASC factors did correlate with JIBS blame factors. The ASC constructs appear to be more representative in this community sample despite the ASC norm reference group comprising African American traditional aged-college students. This finding suggests that racial identity may be an important variable to consider in the design of child sexual abuse treatment and prevention programs. Perhaps increased efforts to educate African Americans about the heritage of the African family would be an important component of child sexual abuse models. Anh and Gilbert (1996) reported that one failure of child sexual abuse campaigns is that generic prevention programs, particularly focusing on European American family structures and values, are presumed to be the template for all families. It may be that persons of different ethnic backgrounds will not respond to generic prevention programs if they do not reflect cultural beliefs and values. Many clinicians increasingly integrate African American cultural beliefs into clinical treatment programs (Fontes, 1995) and child sexual abuse advocates and mental health professionals can learn from these culture-based models.

Profile of African American Incest and Child Sexual Abuse Attitudes

In conclusion, what does the profile of African American child abuse attitudes consist of and what are recommendations based on the implications of the present study? This researcher hypothesized that demographic variables (previous sexual abuse and physical abuse experiences) combined with racial identity and faith maturity would predict ATSA and JIBS scores. It was predicted that there would be no difference in educational and income levels; however, the hypothesized prior sexual and physical abuse experiences in predicting African American attitudes towards incest and child sexual abuse was rejected. Instead, lower educational level and income levels along with Racial Identity, specifically Resistance Against Anti-African Forces, were significant predictors of ATSA. This researcher's hypothesis that Racial Identity may be a significant influence on African American attitudes toward incest and child sexual abuse is accepted. This is an interesting finding because it suggests that there are African Americans who believe it is important to preserve African American culture and, therefore, sex between an adult and a child may be destructive to the preservation of African American culture. Further research would be helpful to consider to what degree racial identity may be significant and integrated in child sexual abuse prevention and treatment models. It appears, instead, that in this sample of African American respondents, the general social variables are more significant than African American culture. The authors plan a comparative study to similar socioeconomic African Americans to further elucidate differences.

Regarding African American blame attribution attitudes, gender and age emerged as the most significant predictors over racial identity and religious faith maturity in two of the four Blame regression analyses (Situational Blame and Victim Blame); Gender was the most significant predictor of Societal and Offender Blame; Vertical Faith predicted Victim Blame; and Collective Identity was a significant predictor of Victim Blame while Value for Cultural Institutions/Expressions was a significant predictor of Societal Blame. Therefore, the hypothesis that racial identity and religious faith maturity would combine to influence a blame attitude that the African American assumes towards incest and child sexual abuse was accepted. This finding raises some questions that future studies can further explore, such as: Among religious African Americans, does religious faith have any

influence in who African Americans attribute blame to? Is the source of blame no different than what researchers report among Caucasians? Because of socialized gender and sexuality roles among males and females, gender may be similarly influential among African Americans and Caucasians? While there are cultural differences in African American sexuality and gender roles, African American males do view African American females as sexual objects (Smith, 1981). Gender continues to be a significant factor as in other studies (Adams & Betz, Jackson & Ferguson; Staley & Lapidus, 1997) and African Americans must also be challenged about the distortions in "at-risk" blame structures, such as victim blame, so that correct information can replace distorted views.

These research findings may be of particular interest to both pastoral counselors and secular clinicians who provide clinical treatment or prevention services to religious African Americans. As Gil (1988) noted Christian families sexually abuse children too. This is disturbing and suggests that religious faith may not be the most important variable influencing an African American respondent's attitude toward incest and child sexual abuse. Why is this so? It is clear in this study that gender, age, and racial identity had a greater influence; therefore, pastoral counselors, clinicians, and child advocates are urged to incorporate these variables values in the design of prevention and treatment programs. Diverse prevention models which account for age, gender, and racial identity differences would be useful. Additionally, theoretical models on child abuse and blame attribution can be enhanced by including these factors.

This study emphasized factors that are also important for future research. First, researchers should expand the use of community studies when investigating child sexual abuse with African Americans. In addition, future replications with other ethnic groups could examine the likelihood of cultural differences and create profiles of child sexual abuse attitudes as well. Few research investigations use non-clinical samples and this is important because many African Americans value spirituality and may never visit mental health services (Millet et al., 1996). Many ethnic groups use alternative helper systems (Littlejohn-Blake and Darling, 1993), therefore, prevention and education will be key "clinical" tools for reducing the prevalence of incest and child sexual abuse. Second, collecting data from African Americans with lower educational levels was difficult due to the literacy demands of

the instruments. Future replications should modify research designs for illiterate African Americans. Such research can increase the knowledge base regarding within cultural group differences and this inclusion will reduce the high incidence of generalization among African Americans—there is great variance within this population (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Pearce, 1996). Finally, pastoral counselors and clinicians should become more knowledgeable about cultural differences among ethnic groups. The “Black Church” is a viable mental health resource in the African American community (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Pearce, 1996; Helms & Cook, 1999) and very few trauma recovery models recognize this source as a potential resource. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services developed a *Coordinated Response to Child Abuse and Neglect: A Basic Manual* (1994). The last chapter stressed that many communities are developing family resource programs to equip families with information and support. Some programs are designed to equip children with information about sexual abuse and potential sex offenders. The authors discuss community-based prevention efforts and stated that families rely on a vast array of service and fraternal organizations, advocacy groups, and ethnic, cultural and religious organizations (p. 42). However, not enough attention was devoted to religious organizations and this resource can be an invaluable primary prevention and treatment resource. The current study finds support to include the Black Church, other churches, and pastoral counseling as religious resources in coordinated health care programs and resources. With careful training of church leadership and lay persons, churches can provide appropriate pastoral responses to victims and perpetrators. Pastoral counseling services may be an optimal resource because it represents African American values and provide greater economic accessibility, particularly among African Americans with limited insurance and income. The present findings should be shared with ministers, pastoral counselors, clinicians, government, and social service agencies so that the natural ecosystems within African American culture can be appreciated and solicited for child sexual abuse prevention and treatment.

Finally, incest and child sexual abuse is exploitive and has significant damaging effects for African American children, families, and communities. The “incest taboo” (DeMause, 1988) does not really exist and it is clear that the taboo reinforces the continued silence in

many communities. For ethnic communities, like African Americans, it is imperative that the taboo against speaking about child sexual abuse be lifted first by expanding research investigations, and second by developing new conceptual models which integrate multiple factors which impact the experiences of African Americans.

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