

2023

Modus Operandi and Target Selection Criteria of Child Sexual Predators in Protestant Churches

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Joshua K. White

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

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Churches

by

Joshua K. White

MS, Walden University, 2019

BS, Columbia Southern University, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

Although there has been much media focusing on child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, in many cases Protestant church leaders who committed child sexual abuse were held to no level of accountability. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the modus operandi of child sexual predators and their target selection criteria in Protestant churches. Hickey's relational paraphilic attachment theory provided the framework for the study. Fifteen cases from the United States were analyzed using inductive coding to identify six themes: (a) Leaders from Protestant churches who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed gross psychological immaturity, (b) they possessed narcissistic tendencies, (c) they used authoritarian leadership styles to leverage and manipulate their victims, (d) they used religious status as a celebrity cover to disguise their true intentions, (e) they selected their targets opportunistically, and (f) they developed and utilized personal safe operation zones to abuse their victims and prevent discovery. Law enforcement agencies and child protective services may benefit from findings in this study in their efforts to protect society's most vulnerable people. Findings may also be used for positive social change to change the life course for victims as they gain the courage to tell their stories.

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Dedication

With extraordinary pride, I dedicate this project to Rhoda White, my spouse and first love. You have worked tirelessly over many years to ensure I could see this project come to life. You faithfully provided a sense of direction when I lost my way. You opened my mind up when I had no more to write. Your methods have taught me that anything is possible. Your heart has warmly accepted every additional duty. Your commitment to lifelong learning has been contagious. Your spirit of loving and serving every person you meet, especially those others might cast aside as worthless, has taught me the true value of human life. I could imagine nothing better than experiencing the rest of it with you. I love you!

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my parents, Kenneth and Diana White, for starting me on this path and providing me with opportunities galore. Mary, my sister, has always loved and supported me in every area of life. Brady and Jason, my brothers, have put up with my craziness from the beginning and have taught me some important lessons.

Randy and Ruth Gilley, my father-in-law and mother-in-law, have honored me like their son from the first time we met. Thank you both for the deep and inspiring conversations we have enjoyed. Ruth, you have been my editor-in-chief for this project. Your critical eye for spelling and grammar errors has been a lifeline.

To my friends: Donnie, you kept me going when I did not want to keep pushing. You helped me find a way when I did not see one. Jamie, your leadership, critical thinking skills, and inspiration are second to none. Learning from you has helped me believe I could see my dreams fulfilled. John, you inspire me to be a better individual. From the early days of our friendship until now, I have learned so much from you. Pursuing our educational endeavors together has been incredible. You have provided valuable pointers and critical thinking skills that have helped make this project what it is. Paul, you have been there for me when I needed to practice my oral defense or when I needed an expert's eye to guide my work. Your teaching and mentoring talent has meant the world to me. I am excited to see where your pursuits take you.

Guinevere, as my oldest child, you taught me how to be a father. You are my pride and joy. Thank you for teaching me how to build a PowerPoint presentation. Your then eight-year-old brain taught me so much. Sebastian, you are a rock-solid young man.

Nobody can take away your compassion and love for the underdog. You are constantly teaching me the value of human life. Charlotte, you have a special place in my heart. You are so enthusiastic about everything you do. Nothing will stop you from seeing justice fulfilled. Frederick, you live life to the maximum. You love and care about people, especially your mom, with all of your heart. I hope each of you and any future additions to our family will never forget that your mother and I will always be your biggest cheer section. I love each of you. Rhoda, I hope everyone around us can see how much you mean to me. You continue to inspire me.

Dr. Eric Hickey, I started to dream about this project when you first “found” me. Your encouragement opened this door of opportunity for me back then. Studying under you has been the highest honor! I could not recommend you enough. Your patience with me as an individual, investment in my professional growth, and inspiration have stuck with me since we first met.

Dr. Bethany Walters, you have been a fantastic asset as I have worked through this process. Your thoughtful comments told me where I needed to make edits. You teach in such a compassionate manner. I have learned much about the scholarly writing process from you.

Most of all, I thank Almighty God for his guiding hand in my life. I saw this project as a dream, yet it is a reality. I hope this study can adequately reflect your constant work in my life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the modus operandi (MO) and target selection criteria of child sexual predators who hunt for their victims through the context of Protestant churches. Little is known about predators who use their affiliation with Protestant churches to find and prey on their victims (Rashid & Barron, 2019). Conversely, the Catholic Church has seen significant studies of child sexual predators among its leadership (Perillo et al., 2017; Rashid & Barron, 2019). The current study may provide law enforcement, child protective services, and legal and religious professionals with additional knowledge of prevention and reactive efforts that may assist in eliminating this problem.

This chapter begins by sharing the background of the study and problem statement. The purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, and nature of the study are also included. Finally, there are sections on definitions of terms used, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance.

Background

Sexual violence is one of global society's more significant problems (Easton et al., 2019; McGraw et al., 2019; McMackin et al., 2008). Before the turn of the century, many Americans believed their churches were safe places free of sexual violence (Raine & Kent, 2019). Members of Christian church organizations, both Catholic and Protestant, viewed their peers as having similar, if not the same, goals of striving for their version of human perfection and attaining the holy grail of their respective doctrines (Kleiven, 2018). They aspired to be good people focused on the common goal of peace and

perfection. As a result, many within these organizations blindly trusted others, often to the detriment of their most vulnerable members (Raine & Kent, 2019).

Much of the scholarly material about sexual abuse in churches has been associated with the Catholic Church (Perillo et al., 2017). Documented evidence of the abuse was available as far back as 1950, although it was hidden from the public until much later (Perillo et al., 2017; Rashid & Barron, 2019). Over the last 20 years, numerous investigations have been performed, and clergy have been the subject(s) of criminal justice actions (Perillo et al., 2017). Early on, clergy were transferred to other locations and allowed to continue perpetrating their unwanted sexual acts on others while maintaining their credentials and reputation (Perillo et al., 2017). Their unwanted sex acts were covered up. Sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy, found in six dioceses by a special investigation report (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2018), indicated more than 1,000 victims spanning the last 70 years in which cases were mishandled or not reported to law enforcement. Unreported cases were believed to be significantly higher. Much less was known about the sexual abuse of minors by Protestant-affiliated clergy and lay leadership. Much scholarly material has been published on sexual abuse by officials associated with the Catholic Church within the past 2 decades (Perillo et al., 2017). Although news reports and official actions against members and churches reflected similar levels of abuse (Graham, 2021), little has been written regarding sexual predators in Protestant churches (Rashid & Barron, 2019).

Problem Statement

In the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, Protestant churches have seen little scholarly research regarding sexual predators—mainly cases involving minors as targets of abuse (Rashid & Barron, 2019). However, Protestant churches have provided unique vulnerabilities for child sexual predators to exploit (Perillo et al., 2017; Raine & Kent, 2019). Parents and church leaders instructed children and youths to respect adults, take personal responsibility for their actions, never blame others, and think before speaking to avoid offending others. However, this training created a significant power imbalance within relationships between predators and their underage targets (Kleiven, 2018).

Child sexual abuse (CSA) by religious authorities has been known to cause variation among victims' future religious practices, causing some to turn away from their faith and others to become more devout. However, as a whole, victims of CSA by religious authorities typically reported more significant difficulties in trusting God and others (Stevens et al., 2019). In addition, religious organizations occasionally promoted unhealthy social environments in which children felt unable to inform natural protectors of the abuse for fear of not being believed (Raine & Kent, 2019). The abusers, on the other hand, were enabled by their positions as leaders of their congregations (Moore et al., 2014). CSA by powerful abusers has had devastating effects. Moore et al. (2014) held that CSA committed by highly esteemed individuals within Protestant religious traditions had a significant adverse impact on their victims lasting into adulthood. Emotional and psychological devastation such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, sexual risk-taking behavior, eating issues, suicide and suicidal ideation,

and other self-harming actions have been common among victims (Easton et al., 2019; McElvaney, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the MO and target selection criteria of child sexual predators who hunted for their victims through the context of Protestant churches. I used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the details of each offender's MO (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). MO includes understanding the predators' hunting behavior patterns, location-specific preferences, precrime activities, postcrime activities, related environmental factors, and choice of victim preferences (Rebocho & Gonçalves, 2012). The current study filled a gap in the research literature by seeking to understand the phenomenon's essence.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the modus operandi of the child sexual predator who chooses their victims in Protestant churches?

This question was intended to address the detailed plans, actions, thoughts, behaviors, motives, and circumstances that supported the attainment of the child predator's goal. Although most areas of life have been infiltrated by child predators, the Protestant church provides a unique area of vulnerability for minors (Kleiven, 2018; Raine & Kent, 2019). Those who were taught to respect their elders, forgive and forget, and acknowledge that this hurtful punishment was for their greater good must deal with conflicting emotional and physical responses to sexual predation by adults. However,

they must first attempt to overcome the ingrained classical thought processes that blame the minors themselves (Kleiven, 2018).

RQ2: What are the child sexual predator's target selection criteria in Protestant churches?

This question addressed the nature of offenders in Protestant churches. Target selection criteria were described as the type of victim pursued. For example, the perpetrator could have been exclusive in their pursuit of a single prepubescent child with whom they desired to have a sexual relationship. On the other hand, the perpetrator could have chosen to pursue various ages and sexes of individuals for sexual gratification.

Theoretical Framework

Relational paraphilic attachment (RPA) was used to explain the relational attachment experienced by Protestant church-affiliated child sexual predators with their victims (see Hickey, 2015). Emotional dysregulation has been associated with sexual abuse perpetration (Gunst et al., 2019). Healthy, mature individuals learn to navigate the relationships in everyday society. They have worked to develop these relationships across the spectrum of social settings, including business/professional, friendship, caregiver, teacher/student, parent/child, and other unspecified familial relationships. However, some individuals became stunted in their emotional or intellectual growth. As a result, they do not connect socially like those around them can. These offenders build unrealistic fantasy relationships in their minds, attaching themselves to one or more individuals with whom a healthy relationship was impossible. In some cases, these socially inept individuals begin acting out their fantasies upon those around them without the consent or approval

of those around whom the fantasies were formed. This is how unhealthy, paraphilic attachments emerge.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative phenomenology study addressed the MO and target selection criteria of child sexual predators who hunted for prey within Protestant churches. Phenomenological inquiry was necessary to understand each offender's behavioral patterns (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The subjects were convicted in a court of law for sexually abusing minors while using their positions as leaders or parishioners to access their targets. Subjects were selected using purposeful sampling. They were chosen because of the details of their cases and the amount of relevant information available.

Definitions

Child/minor: The age of consent for various sexual acts in the United States is complicated (SOL Research, 2009). In 2003 and 2006, Congress established the federal age of consent at 18 years of age for any person being photographed or filmed in a depiction of sexual content (SOL Research, 2009). However, within the special maritime or territorial jurisdiction of the United States or in a federal prison facility, no individual may engage in sex with another person who is under 16 years of age, providing the other party is over 4 years older than the juvenile (Cornell Law School, n.d.). Many states have set their respective ages of consent for sexual activity at 18. Some of these states have added a Romeo and Juliet protection by ensuring that consenting sexual partners within 4 years of age are not punished under the law.

The nature of consent for sexual activities requires that each party understands the gravity of the act and can provide their approval for it, regardless of any negative consequences. The differences between state and federal laws regarding the age at which an individual can legally provide consent for sexual intercourse are numerous. Due to these variations, any use of “child” or “minor” in the current study referred to individuals less than 18 years of age.

Child molester: Some studies defined “child molester” loosely as an individual who engaged in sexual activity with another person under the age of 16 years (Garofalo & Bogaerts, 2019; Winters & Jeglic, 2017). This category of perpetrators is far less discriminating than pedophiles. Child molesters often target children or minors between 13 and 18 years of age as one category of their victims. They may marry and have children while maintaining sexual relationships with underage victims. In addition, child molesters may engage in heterosexual and same-sex relationships with adults and children throughout their lifetime (Hickey, 2015).

Child sexual abuse (CSA): CSA was defined as sexual activities involving a child and another individual when the child could not or did not consent. This person may have been an older or more powerful person who took advantage of the child to fulfill someone’s sexual desires (Townsend et al., 2015). Some organizations and researchers engaged in prevention efforts have declined to include noncontact offenses in their studies. Further, the inclusion of CSA perpetrated by peers or near peers in this category was up for debate (Townsend et al., 2015). However, for the current study, CSA was

defined as sexual activities, including contact and noncontact offenses, perpetrated against a child for an individual's gratification or fulfillment.

Pedophile: This was an individual who engaged in or attempted to engage in acts for sexual gratification with prepubescent children. Hickey (2015) defined pedophilia as involving oneself in sexual acts with minors; pedophilia usually included coercive actions to obtain the victim's cooperation (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). One of the main characteristics of a pedophile is that they focus the fulfillment of their sexual psyche on obtaining gratification through sexual acts with undeveloped children. Pedophiles do not typically marry and have no sexual desire for adults (Hickey, 2015). Pedophiles work to ensure their access to young children is unhindered, sometimes by taking a job or focusing a career on ensuring proximity to their victims.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that ethical considerations for perpetrators dictated that they could not be asked to provide an honest retelling of their abusive behavior. Second, I assumed that adequate secondary data were accessible through public records. Third, I assumed that secondary data gathering and analysis would render an accurate picture of facts related to each case. Child sexual predators have considerable motivation to hide or skew the case information that would cause them to be viewed negatively. Lastly, I assumed adult males were the largest category of CSA perpetrators in Protestant churches.

Scope and Delimitations

This study included cases of adult males who were former Protestant church leaders, including social or idealistic leaders, who had used their position to further their goal of CSA. Due to this scope, any male perpetrators of CSA who did not meet this criterion were excluded. Further, female CSA perpetrators were excluded from the study due to the likely differences in motivations and actions related to this category of offenses.

Limitations

As with any study of this type, several limitations were expected. These included the scope of cases to be selected and challenges related to obtaining adequate and reliable data. In addition, due to the qualitative nature of this study, findings cannot be generalized across broader population groups (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, I anticipated providing qualitative findings that would apply to other subjects who abused minors in Protestant church settings.

Obtaining data from sources such as law enforcement and court records required several steps. Some information became available by filing a Freedom of Information Act request or state-level equivalent. However, this level of work was not necessary for every situation. The availability of information related to each case was unknown until significant investigative work was undertaken.

CSA perpetrators include adults and juveniles of any gender identity. However, the volume of data would have been greater by necessity if they all were included. In

addition, the goals, ambitions, and actions would have differed for each type of offender. Therefore, this study included only adult male perpetrators.

Significance

Like many religious-based institutions, Protestant churches are social organizations on which community members rely for social support needs (Easton et al., 2019). These churches provide their parishioners with spiritual and often physical support as their ability allows. Given the substantial impact on communities, transparency and accountability of its staff and attendees are necessary to ensure the safety of all involved (Kleiven, 2018). However, the Catholic Church and many denominations of Protestant churches have shielded their people from punishment under the law by taking no legal action against them (Rashid & Barron, 2019). In some cases, the accuser was silenced, and the accused continued to serve in some capacity (McGraw et al., 2019; Rashid & Barron, 2019). Through both willful and unwilling ignorance on the subject, sexual abuse of minors in Protestant churches has continued.

The current study was intended to provide information to those within Protestant churches who have attempted to protect minors against sexual abuse within their organization. Another goal was to assist with early prevention efforts by informing policies intended to provide a safe environment within which traditional religious education and worship could be exercised. This research was expected to expand the knowledge on sexual predators within community organizations. Findings may also assist law enforcement in understanding the strategies of these offenders.

Summary

Chapter 1 covered the introduction to the study, background for the research, problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. These sections led to an overview of recent literature on CSA and many aspects of offenders. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on CSA including victimology, conducive situations and circumstances, pertinent characteristics of offenders, and offending strategies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This qualitative phenomenological study addressed the MO and target selection criteria that child sexual predators employ to access their targets within Protestant churches. Current literature regarding CSA in a religious context in the United States was a product of the recent Catholic Church sexual abuse crisis (Rashid & Barron, 2019). Although research has begun to address some aspects of CSA in Protestant churches, the recent research was limited.

This chapter provides an exhaustive review of literature on child sexual perpetrators, their relationship with their victims, situational factors affecting the abuse, and subsequent reporting to the proper legal authorities. The chapter begins with a discussion of the literature search strategy used for this project. I then explore CSA and religion's role in its expansion and cover-up in the United States. The role of the Catholic Church is discussed, followed by Protestant church traditions. Next, statistical evidence of the problem, investigation reports, and known cover-ups preceding situational and environmental issues and denial of the problem are explored. Following this, studies on victims and perpetrators are discussed. The chapter concludes with the identification of a gap in the literature on CSA by sexual predators in Protestant churches.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review strategy included searching Thoreau to find peer-reviewed articles related topically to CSA in churches. Subsequent queries addressed APA PsychInfo, APA PsychArticles, APA PsychBooks, APA PsychExtra, MEDLINE, and other databases. Keywords used to find literature included *sexual abuse*, *sexual assault*,

*sex**, *church*, *protestant*, *catholic*, *religion*, *perpetrator*, *offender*, *cover-up*, *child**, and *institution**. After locating valuable articles on the topic, I mined their reference lists for additional books and articles related to the topic. Finally, Google searches were conducted to obtain website information for major studies (e.g., final reports by grand juries convened to investigate this issue [mainly in the Catholic Church] and reports written by research personnel at John Jay School of Criminal Justice).

Theoretical Foundation

Hickey's (2015) theory of RPA was used as a theoretical foundation for this study because it explained why child molesters and pedophiles engage in sexual activities with underage individuals. When socially inept individuals fail to establish and maintain healthy relationships with appropriate and eligible sexual partners, they engage with their desired partners through fantasy. Although these relationships began in the fantasy realm, they are often translated into paraphilic sexual behaviors conducted with nonconsenting and often unaware victims.

According to Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991), individuals develop their ability to interact with the world around them, specifically the social aspects, beginning from infancy. The ability to have a healthy attachment to one's caregiver from an early age could affect future functionality in their social environment. Ainsworth and Bowlby described three main categories of attachment: secure, anxious, and avoidant. Secure attachment allows young children to observe and explore the environment near their primary caregiver. The child learns early that the caregiver is available and willing to provide comfort, encouragement, and support as the child learns about their environment.

Children who develop anxious attachments desire a close, secure relationship. However, the caregiver is either unavailable when needed or provides inconsistent or negative responses to the child's request for support. The child becomes accustomed to being rebuffed and therefore develops insecurity as they try to figure out fundamental aspects of living independently without support. Children develop avoidant attachment when they react to the lack of readily available support and comfort by avoiding the caregiver.

Garofalo and Bogaerts (2019) pointed out that insecure attachments developed early and carried through a person's life affect essential social functions such as self-regulation of emotions, behaviors, and social cognitions. Ward and Beech (2006) connected the lack of emotional congruence between sexual partners with avoidant attachment. This deficit manifests as a natural or subconscious objectification of other individuals, regardless of their age, socioeconomic status, or relationship. One example of this manifestation occurs when victims are treated like sex objects through which perpetrators seek personal pleasure without considering the victim's opinions, preferences, and needs.

Anxious attachment manifests through emotional neediness and worry or fear of not receiving enough love and affection from others. Anxious attachment has been linked to borderline, histrionic, dependent, paranoid, schizotypal, avoidant, obsessive-compulsive, and narcissistic personality disorders (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Garofalo & Bogaerts, 2019). Avoidant attachment has been related to paranoid, schizotypal, antisocial, schizoid, avoidant, and depressive personality disorders (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Garofalo & Bogaerts, 2019). Child molesters have lower levels of secure

attachment and higher personality disorder scores, except for obsessive-compulsive disorder (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Garofalo & Bogaerts, 2019). Trust or the lack thereof significantly mediates the presence of personality disorders and insecure attachments (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Garofalo & Bogaerts, 2019).

Freund and Watson (1990) identified the term “courtship disorder” to describe when individuals intensify one of the four chronological steps used in normal sexual relationships while treating the other as rudimentary. In normal human mating behavior, the person looking for a sexual relationship must first locate and evaluate another person’s suitability level. Second, the pursuer typically engages in visual, verbal, and body language expressions designed to establish and maintain effective communication between them and their desired sexual partner. Third, both individuals respond positively toward each other, escalating communications to physically touching each other. Finally, the two individuals are mutually connected through some form of climactic sexual encounter. When one of the steps in the normal romantic process is attempted with disproportionately elevated intensity at the behest of the others, courtship disorders become the result.

In the theory of RPA, Hickey (2015) pointed out that sexual distortions often began in individuals’ fantasies when they desire sexual intimacy but are unable to fulfill their needs through the usual social pathway. Possessing this level of social incompetence while having strong desires for sexual interaction, these individuals attach themselves through intense fantasies to others they identify as objects of their desires. Through this process, perpetrators often feel like they have a real relationship with their victims. They

continue by engaging in one or more deviant sexual acts that directly or indirectly involves the person or people at the center of their fantasies in fulfilling their needs.

These inappropriate sexual desires are cognitive distortions of normal sexual behaviors that developed during periods of the individual's life. The inappropriate sexual desires could be formulated quickly or develop over an extended period (Hickey, 2015). RPA occurs when the socially inept individual engages in deviant fantasies to fulfill sexual needs by attaching themselves to the individuals identified for that purpose. However, the object of their fantasies possesses no desire for mutual sexual expression and is unaware of it occurring.

RPA occurs in many ways, including voyeurism, exhibitionism, frotteurism, hot burglaries, and other rape-type fantasies. RPA has also been scientifically observed through inappropriate choices such as attaching oneself to objects of sexual fantasies that are inappropriately disproportionate to their normal age range, including those younger or older than the perpetrator (Hickey, 2015). Specific to CSA research, cognitive distortions include the belief that no harm will come to the child through sexual acts with them. Another distortion is that the child wants the sexual act and can make a rational decision to engage in such behavior (Bartol & Bartol, 2017; Hickey, 2015).

Hickey (2015) noted that sexual paraphilia and fetishes operationalized through RPA are often formulated during intense negative experiences in perpetrators' lives. These intense periods often include traumatic childhood experiences that inform the fantasies. Further, the negative experiences often paralyze the individual's psyche to the extent that they cannot continue healthy social and emotional development. These

negative experiences may result from a single traumatic event or include intense negative encounters that occur over the individual's lifetime. In either case, they usually inform the abnormal fantasy development.

Religion and CSA

Researchers have accepted that institutional CSA has been problematic within most religious organizations, including the Catholic Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Choruby-Whiteley & Morrow, 2021; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, 2011). In addition, mainstream Protestant denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention, Church of the Nazarene, and others, have experienced this problem (Agazue, 2015; Rashid & Barron, 2019). Ending child abuse should be a fundamental goal of every society. However, understanding the scope of the problem has been complicated.

Catholic Church

In recent years, the Catholic Church has been a target of Western society's wrath because of the infamous mishandling of the CSA crisis over the last 20 years (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, 2011; Rashid & Barron, 2019). However, these actions have resulted from well-intended efforts to prevent future CSA offending. The extensive worldwide range of accusations released through media sources has kept the focus on the Catholic Church (Perillo et al., 2017; Rashid & Barron, 2019). As the media frenzy became known, geographical locations separate from those initially accused dioceses began having their files reviewed for instances of CSA that may have been covered up. Because of the organizational size of the Catholic Church and the degree of their youth-

serving efforts, public perceptions of the extent to which clergy and others perpetrated CSA have tarnished the Catholic Church's reputation. However, the extensive media coverage and highlights of a few serial clergy offenders have kept the blame for CSA perpetrated through other organizations out of the spotlight (Rashid & Barron, 2019).

Protestant Churches

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer (2007, as cited in Denney et al., 2018) reported that most of the information regarding issues of CSA perpetrated in Protestant churches has come from three religious-based insurance organizations. They provided financial protection for approximately 155,500 churches and 5,500 other religious-oriented organizations, most of which are Protestant based. Between 1987 and 2007, these organizations paid \$87.5 million as a result of 7,095 claims filed. Even though those numbers showed that significant research and prevention efforts are needed, little has been undertaken in the area of CSA perpetrated within Protestant church organizations. This would be more difficult to accomplish than investigations in the Catholic Church due to the decentralized organizational structure of many of the largest Protestant denominations and complete autonomy in others (Rashid & Barron, 2019). This lack of structure and oversight has facilitated few accurate records related to church business. Later research into CSA in Protestant churches has been limited and has focused on qualitative analysis of specific phenomena (Moore et al., 2014; Raine & Kent, 2019).

Statistics

Dube et al. (2005) surveyed male and female health maintenance organization recipients from San Diego, CA, between 1995 and 1997, with a mean age of 57. Dube et

al. asked participants about CSA victimization and comorbid social problems such as intrafamily physical and psychological abuse. The study revealed that 15% of males and 25% of females experienced contact CSA before their 18th birthday. Another study under similar conditions revealed similar overall outcome estimates (Finkelhor et al., 1990).

More recent studies targeting younger demographics revealed a much lower prevalence of contact sexual offenses against juveniles. Finkelhor et al. (2014) surveyed 14-, 15-, and 17-year-old individuals in 2003, 2008, and 2011, and placed overall prevalence rates for CSA of females at 26.6% and males at 5.1%. When considering CSA by adult perpetrators alone, prevalence rates were 11.2% and 1.9% for females and males, respectively. Townsend et al. (2015) found comparable results with overall prevalence rates (including peer-perpetrated offenses) for contact offenses with female victims between 20% and 26.6% and male victims between 5% and 5.1%. When Townsend et al. included only adult-perpetrated contact offenses, those numbers decreased to 11.7%–12.2% and 4.1%–4.5%, respectively.

Based on these statistics, the prevalence of CSA appears to have been declining overall. However, these observations have not been without issues. First, Townsend et al. (2015) and Finkelhor et al. (2014) documented substantial decreases for male victims of contact CSA at about 11% lower. Although this could signal high success rates in decreasing the overall social problem, it is more likely that the younger males surveyed (14–18 years old as opposed to 57 years old at the time of polling) were unwilling or unable to report their abuse at that time for one or more reasons (Sorensen & Snow, 1991).

Studies including both types of survey populations have intrinsic value. For example, recent studies added more updated data to the literature (Finkelhor et al., 2014; Townsend et al., 2015). In contrast, older studies have provided a more realistic depiction of prevalence rates of CSA because participants had more time to address and overcome emotional and psychological barriers to future disclosure. Related to retrospective studies such as the current one, the historically higher prevalence rates have provided a more accurate depiction of constituents who would later profit from the effects of this study in a reactive manner (Dube et al., 2005; Finkelhor et al., 1990). Some variation could also occur because of differences in definitions of CSA.

The credibility of sexual violence reports has been disputed, with little scientific evidence used to shape an accurate understanding (Lisak et al., 2010; Melkman et al., 2017). Lisak et al. (2010) found few studies examining this issue, and of those found few used an established scientific definition to identify false allegations. For example, McMillan (2018) found that law enforcement often allowed their personal beliefs about the frequency of truthful sexual violence allegation reporting to affect future investigations into this type of crime. Officers with, at a minimum, special training on appropriate sexual violence first responder methods believed that between 5% and 90% of all sexual violence allegations were false. However, Lisak et al. found that numbers of false allegations were between 2% and 10%, signaling that most allegations were true. Further, Townsend et al. (2015) found that over 90% of CSA allegations were valid.

Other researchers have come up with differing statistics to validate levels of credibility in child abuse interviews. Melkman et al. (2017) found that 58% of the

interviews their study assessed were adjudicated to be credible by the team, and the remaining 42% were categorized as “no judgment possible.” However, when comparing this lower credibility rating to that discussed above, it should be noted that the criteria on which to base the analysis were entirely different. In Melkman et al., child abuse investigators made credibility determinations based on referral information, preliminary statement analysis, and the child’s behavior during the interview. The interviewers had bachelor’s degrees in social work and little investigative experience. Guidelines based on scientific criteria were nonexistent. Males were judged to be less credible than females. Further, those who reported experiencing long-term sexual abuse were considered less credible than those from two-parent homes with one-incident abuse allegations.

Lisak et al. (2010) noted that it is imperative to establish clearly defined criteria to evaluate the credibility of any sexual abuse/assault allegation. After a thorough investigation, an assessment should have been completed to corroborate or refute details presented in an initial victim interview. Lisak et al. critically adjudicated a lower validity rating to studies that merely accepted assessments such as that above, wherein lesser-trained professionals used no specific defining criteria with probable significant bias levels. If there was insufficient evidence to deem a report credible after a thorough investigation and subsequent analysis of corroborating efforts, it should not be considered false unless credible evidence of fraudulent reporting existed (Lisak et al., 2010).

Of the allegations found to be false, motivations were often much more complex than criminal justice personnel typically believed (Horselenberg & Koppen, 2018; Neal et al., 2013). For example, one type of false allegation common among youth was a report

explicitly fabricated to avoid trouble with parents or other guardians of whom the minor was fearful. It typically involved being abducted by an unknown individual from a bus stop or similar location to be sexually abused (Neal et al., 2013) in an attempt to explain their absence from school, curfew, or another comparable situation. The complexity of these false allegations was found in the narrative discourse, signaling a highly dysfunctional relationship between some youth and their caregivers.

Disclosure of sexual abuse by minors has long been a complex social problem. Wallis and Woodworth (2020) found that children who were younger at the occurrence of the abuse, experienced more severe or higher frequency abuse, or were emotionally close to their perpetrators were much more likely to delay reporting the abuse. Male-gendered children were also more likely to wait to report their abuse. However, the authors found males in their sample to have experienced a greater frequency of abuse perpetration, while females received more significant support from parents.

In a study of disclosure characteristics for child sexual abuse survivors, DeVoe and Faller (1999) found that 77.6% of children were involved with Child Protective Services (CPS). In addition, 28% were in foster care by their initial interview, at least 36% personally witnessed domestic violence (DV), and over 50% had DV issues in their homes. Parents were underemployed or jobless (50%), had a mental illness (25%), or had engaged in criminal behavior (25%). Over 53% had been the subject of a child maltreatment report the previous year. Children were White (87%), African American (9.2%), Middle Eastern (2.6%), or Latinx (1.3%). Assink et al. (2019) obtained comparable results through a meta-analysis of 72 studies to synthesize risk factors of

CSA victimization. The authors categorized 765 risk factors into 35 different themes, 23 of which were statistically significant, under three types of risk, namely those relating to the child, their parents, and their familial environments. Most important were prior CSA and non-CSA victimization of children or family members, including parents. In particular, Assink et al. noted that a child raised in an environment other than a traditional two-parent home presented a significant risk. Results further revealed that intrafamilial CSA was commonly perpetrated by biological fathers (50%), siblings (13.4%), stepfathers (13.9%), or a guardian's boyfriend (12%).

Comorbid social issues were commonly reported with child sexual abuse victimization. For example, men were 1.3 times more likely to have alcohol problems, 1.5 times more likely to have abused controlled substances, and 2.1 times more likely than their non-abuse control group to have attempted suicide at least once. On the other hand, women were 1.6 times more likely to have abused alcohol, 1.7 times more likely to have consumed controlled substances illicitly, and 2.2 times more likely to have attempted suicide than the control group (Assink et al., 2019; DeVoe & Faller, 1999; Dube et al., 2005).

Some researchers took issue with conservative viewpoints and lifestyles. For example, Clemens et al. (2020) found that right-wing socio-political attitudes contributed to authoritarian-type family dynamics and, specifically, the normalized use of corporal punishment for children. They found that the most significant predictive factor for transgenerational authoritarian family dynamics, including patriarchal authoritarian rule by a dominant figure and submission to that rule, was previous generational exposure to

authoritarian family structures, a tradition often associated with conservative evangelical Protestantism. Raine and Kent (2019) identified prominent levels of religious worldview familial enmeshment and a lack of individuality in family circles contributing to religious institutional sexual abuse. They found in religious institutions that often blind trust was unquestioningly given to and expected by others, especially church leaders such as pastors, youth leaders, and children's workers. This lack of individual trust evaluation and exercise was a critical factor in institutional leaders' enabling of sexual abuse. Some found that youth exposed to community levels of violence were more likely to experience CSA than those who were not exposed (Assink et al., 2019; Eisman et al., 2018). Assink et al. (2019), in studying, categorizing, and documenting their 35 domains of child sexual abuse risk meta-analytically from 72 studies, established credible risk in 23 of those domains. Specifically, 23 risk categories had statistically significant correlations with contact or non-contact CSA. However, Assink et al. did not find a statistically significant correlation between conservative religious lifestyles and CSA.

Research has shown that children were not often ready or able to fully disclose CSA to law enforcement or CPS when authorities became aware of an allegation (Sorensen & Snow, 1991). Seventy-four percent of child disclosures were accidental or unintentional. Rather than a single event in which the child articulated a detailed account of the circumstances, disclosure was often an extended exercise during which the child was slowly able to provide lesser amounts of detail over time. Sorensen and Snow found that CSA disclosure commonly followed a pattern: denial, disclosure, recantation, and subsequent reaffirmation. Disclosure was broken down into tentative and later active

disclosure. Tentative disclosure was characterized by an often-hesitant victim who may confirm some details or provide only tertiary information at this subset stage, often coupled with other information that made “little to no sense” to authorities or parents. Active disclosure represented a more deliberate account with detailed information about the allegation. A skilled child forensic interviewer was sometimes able to facilitate active disclosure.

The study sample included 116 children whose sexual abuse victimization was verified by 1) a confession or guilty plea, 2) a criminal conviction, or 3) significant medical evidence that strongly supported the abuse allegation. Children were abused either by family or others known to the family. In this sample, strangers did not commit any CSA. Only 11% were able to provide a detailed disclosure during the first formal interview without first denying or only providing tertiary details. The total number of children who eventually provided a detailed disclosure rose to 96% after utilizing several interviews and extending over several months. Seventy-nine percent of the children initially denied the abuse occurred or presented with tentative disclosure characteristics during their initial active disclosure, which often resulted in law enforcement or CPS deeming the allegation not credible or lacking sufficient evidence to support an investigation. When concerns of suggestibility, witness contamination, or false allegations become of primary concern, leading law enforcement, CPS, and others tended to withdraw otherwise normal levels of emotional and psychological support to the child during the investigative process, which was especially problematic.

Of those who eventually provided active disclosure, 79% initially denied the incident(s) occurred or tentatively disclosed before they provided an active disclosure. Eleven percent actively disclosed when initially approached by protective adults. The pathway for the remaining 10% who made it to full disclosure was unclear. Of interest, 22% of those who actively disclosed at some point eventually fully recanted their statements regarding their allegations. Victims in 93% of the recantations later reaffirmed the allegations.

As stated above, a child's recantation of a CSA allegation has been historically common (Lanning, 2005; Sorensen & Snow, 1991). There were many reasons why they returned to say their allegation was untrue. Much of this stemmed from some level of compliance the child had learned as a method of survival in their current environment. Some of the social and environmental pressures that caused a child to change their statement were as follows: social pressure from the child's familial environment including from parents, the perpetrator convincing the child to recant, adverse social experiences that the child viewed as interconnected with the CSA disclosure, and any level of perceived doubt during the investigatory process or judicial proceedings.

Sorensen and Snow (1991) hold that recantation of a CSA allegation should not be considered the final word on whether an allegation was credible. Instead, the totality of circumstances should be weighed heavily, often resulting in additional interviews and more investigative work to understand the nature of either situation more thoroughly.

Lanning further addressed this issue when he pointed out that popular opinions in culture have often been oblivious to reality (Lanning, 2005.). He heavily cautioned

against viewing adolescent victims, in particular, as near-adults, lacking in sex drive, or altogether superhuman in their abilities to comprehend the gravity of consequences related to sexual violence. Lanning further explained that legal codes to “statutorily” protect children and adolescents were correctly designed to criminalize the behavior of the adults who took advantage of vulnerable children, regardless of whether they convinced the child to participate.

Bradley and Wood (1996) found little support for CSA disclosure in multiple stages. For example, their study revealed a denial rate of 6% and a 4% recantation rate. In addition, their cases were taken from law enforcement investigations and reports to CPS, whereas Sorensen and Snow utilized a sample taken from minors who received therapeutic treatment and whose cases were verified by law enforcement and other similar means (Bradley & Wood, 1996; Sorensen & Snow, 1991). This interstudy variation of cases used could have explained much of the difference in outcomes.

Major Investigation Reports

Although it was far from the first of its kind, the Boston Globe (2002) ran a series of Spotlight articles throughout the year, highlighting the scandalous behavior of numerous Catholic Priests and other personnel. This report sought to expose the grandiosity with which Catholic Dioceses failed its vulnerable population. Unfortunately, the Church allowed many predatory Priests to remain in their leadership positions while committing sexual abuse. These individuals were accused of engaging in sexual abuse of minors within the care of the Boston Archdiocese throughout the past half-century. Further, senior Church figureheads such as Cardinal Bernard Law were accused of

transferring these perpetrators from one assignment to the next, often without warning of their past behavior. On occasion, some of these men were transferred after being declared rehabilitated by medical personnel at special Catholic treatment centers. By the end of 2002, Cardinal Law was forced to resign. His fall from grace was a dramatic debacle for the Boston Archdiocese and left the Church scrambling to pay settlements to its many victims.

In 2004, the University of New York's John Jay School of Criminal Justice was commissioned to conduct a massive scholarly review of the scope and management of the Catholic Church's child sexual abuse crisis. The mandate included all Catholic Dioceses within the continental United States between 1950 and 2002. The report had many limitations.

Due to privacy and other concerns, researchers utilized a double-blind protocol to ensure anonymity for both Church leaders and victims. As a result, each allegation of sexual abuse by priests had varying levels of credibility. Before this study was completed, few allegations were reported to law enforcement authorities for criminal investigation and consideration for prosecution. Cases involving later recantations or withdrawal of allegations were not considered. Although limiting the study to creditable allegations within the stated timeframe presented severe issues with its credibility overall, this action was appropriate, considering the vast nature of the study. However, based on typical male reporting rates, it was likely that this decision caused many possible truthful allegations to be discarded (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004; Melkman et al., 2017; Sorensen & Snow, 1991; Wallis & Woodworth, 2020).

In 2011, the researchers at John Jay School of Criminal Justice conducted a follow-up study of the context and causes of CSA perpetrated by Catholic priests. Many priests had intimacy deficits, underdeveloped psychosexual maturity, situational stressors, or any combination of these. Researchers hypothesized that intimacy deficits were rooted in unsuccessful attempts at securely attaching to a primary caregiver in childhood. These deficits could have included low interpersonal skills, empathy deficits, and greater loneliness in adulthood. In addition, the authors identified an underdeveloped psychosexual identity as a solid inhibitor to successful relationships, both platonic and sexual, with adult males and females.

On the other hand, situational stressors were possible triggers leading to CSA by priests. In addition, researchers noted combinations of social, psychological, and developmental issues as associated with the CSA, pointing out that a greater level of vulnerability increased the risk that a priest would sexually abuse children. Further, they found that less than 5% of the CSA offenders met the criteria to be diagnosed as pedophiles (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2011; Kappler et al., 2020).

Following the example of several news outlets and the John Jay School of Criminal Justice, scholarly and investigative reports by various levels of government have sought to address the problem of CSA in the Catholic Church in some way. The overall trend of reporting by victims of CSA as perpetrated by church leaders has taken many forms, depending upon the organization or government entity and the scope of their authority to do so. For example, Bishopaccountability.org maintained a database of

Catholic churches, priests, and other organizations accused of promoting or perpetrating CSA. They also briefly listed some articles on CSA in different religious and public service organizations. However, this was by no means the full extent of the problem.

Research and Grand Jury investigative reports of church-specific institutional sexual abuse found that children and youth were much less likely to report during periods when the abuse was most often covered up and abusers allowed to continue (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2018; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004). However, after many of the past allegations became public knowledge, many additional allegations quickly surfaced (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2018; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, 2011).

It is noteworthy that victims who have continued to feel unheard by church leaders have, in addition to reaching out to major journalistic avenues, taken to social media platforms and other internet sites to find their voice in recent years. Common themes included several hashtags on Twitter such as #MeToo, #ChurchToo, #SBCToo, and others. In addition, popular websites intending to tell victims' stories, such as StopBaptistPredators.com, silentlambs.com, Survivors for Justice, and others, have been set up to address this need.

Known Cover-Ups

Covering up sexual abuse is not a new idea.⁸ Institutional sexual abuse specific to churches and other religious organizations has been no different. The report by John Jay School of Criminal Justice (2004) revealed that sexual abuse incidents involving Catholic Church clergy as perpetrators had been mostly managed "in-house." Some staff were

given different appointments. However, the new position often did not include any warning to parishioners, especially any new potential victims. Others were sent for treatment at Catholic Church facilities before returning to ministry, only to re-offend in many cases.

An investigation about sexual abuse cover-ups and mishandling of allegations by church leaders within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was recently in the national news. A Group of alleged abuse survivors and their supporters accused SBC leaders, specifically the Executive Committee, of mishandling abuse claims. Specifically, in their lawsuit, some of the survivors alleged cover-up and enabling of the abuse by perpetrators while attempting to silence the voices of their victims (Wingfield, 2021).

Situational/Environmental Factors

Some unique characteristics that created victimization opportunities were not directly related to the perpetrator or victim. Factors associated with the social or environmental setting were occasionally manipulated, providing unique weaknesses through which the victim could have been exploited. Examples of situational vulnerabilities that have allowed a perpetrator to gain access to their targets included the sudden death of a parent or close loved one, a divorce that left a single parent scrambling to find adequate childcare, a low socioeconomic status that prevented a family from providing better social or economic circumstances and living in a violent neighborhood (Assink et al., 2019).

Sense of Community and Trust

Within the religious setting, there were often unique vulnerabilities relatively uncommon elsewhere. In addition, common vulnerabilities within other institutions were typically present in religious settings. However, different social norms tended to enshrine special issues related to attendance and membership with a church-like environment.

Regardless of the specific affiliation, Christian churches inherently assumed high respect and admiration for their leadership, especially the lead pastor or priest (Kleiven, 2018). Elders, deacons, bishops, and other teachers also often received high admiration. This spiritual hierarchy has been present at least from the time of Jesus Christ and has continued in some form into the present day. The Holy Bible, accepted by many Christians as personally inspired by God in its original form, had many examples of this hierarchal structure (New International Version, 2011). For example, Moses and Aaron were nearly untouchable in the Old Testament (OT; Numbers 15:1 - 40). Later in Matthew (15:19), Jesus gave the “keys to the kingdom” to Simon Peter, one of his chosen 12. The Didache also instructed followers to respect and honor their leaders (Legacy Icons, 2015). Some groups’ rigid application of these ideals helped shape many patriarchal and sometimes authoritarian worldviews common in Western societies (Raine & Kent, 2019).

Any interchurch and intra-church hierarchal leadership structure has derived its power from being representatives of God (Kleiven, 2018). Further, church leaders exercised power from this spiritual position on behalf of their parishioners. Mostly, they appeared to exert a solid effort to provide a safe and secure environment to worship and

find a powerful sense of community. However, some leaders leveraged this spiritual power differential to gain the compliance of their intended victims (Raine & Kent, 2019; Rashid & Barron, 2019).

The relationship between church leaders and their parishioners has naturally created a social power imbalance as followers have sought to learn and understand meaning related to their lives from God (Kleiven, 2018). In and of itself, this situation was not uncommon. Still, the leader of the corporate relationship should have established healthy boundaries and promoted a culture of safety, thereby ensuring the security of a church's weakest members. Unfortunately, some pastors and other church leaders have used the power dynamic of their relationship with parishioners to integrate sexual activities with vulnerable individuals as part of religious exercise, claiming these actions were part of an exorcism, made them holy or clean, or brought them closer to God (e.g., Agazue, 2015; Raine & Kent, 2019).

The church has often fulfilled a quasi-familial role for many families (Moore et al., 2014). Moreover, members often depended on this role for assistance with areas of their lives otherwise left vacant. For example, it was not uncommon in some African American circles for a male church leader to serve as a role model to the child(ren) of a struggling single mother (Moore et al., 2014; Perry-Burney et al., 2013). Through these charitable efforts, trusting adults have allowed perpetrators private access to children they intended to victimize.

Denial of the Problem

Historically, when children have experienced CSA in churches, leaders have favored abusers more than victims (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2018; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2011). In addition, perpetrators have spent considerable effort before, during, and after abuse to build a believable façade, thus making their misdeeds harder to detect.

The Catholic Church was exposed in the last 20 years as profoundly guilty of using several different strategies to cover CSA by its priests over the last half of the 20th Century (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, 2011). The Church expended considerable efforts to rehabilitate some of its offenders. However, others were sent to their next job posting without a word to any ranking priests at their respective locations. The main reason for doing all of this was the fleeting hope of the Church to maintain a spotless reputation. In addition, Catholic leaders believed exposure might hinder the furtherance of Catholicism on a broader scale.

Although the Catholic Church has endured the most of Western Society's wrath, Protestantism has been believed by some researchers to be guilty of an equivalent or even greater level of CSA and subsequent cover-up (Rashid & Barron, 2019). Religious leaders have not been trained for the most part in conducting CSA investigations. They commonly allowed the perpetrators to skew their judgment regarding the truthfulness of allegations against them (e.g., McElvaney, 2019). Victims were then quickly pushed to the sideline and discredited due to the belief that the allegation against the accused would ruin their reputation without cause. However, by providing adequate support to the

victim, reporting all allegations of CSA to law enforcement authorities promptly, and temporarily removing the accused individual from any leadership position until the situation has been resolved, church leaders can foster an environment of freedom to report abuse and cultivate respect for those who suffer from CSA.

Victims

Victims of CSA have come from any demographic. They have appeared to outside sources as having little to no vulnerability toward being sexually abused. However, weaknesses of this type have been hidden quite well. Often, victims had an exposure or lack of fulfillment in one or more areas of their lives that perpetrators could exploit.

Trust Betrayal

Early thoughts related to “stranger danger” influenced parents and guardians in how they trained children in general social interactions. However, most victims know their perpetrators before the abuse occurs (Assink et al., 2019). The relationship through which perpetrators could target their victims can be personal or professional. John Jay School of Criminal Justice (2011) found that priests usually connected with their victims’ families through a professional relationship as their religious leader. Religious families usually gave Catholic priests or Protestant clergy an elevated level of personal and professional trust, due to their leadership position, without regard to their character (Kleiven, 2018). These relationships often developed from that point through a façade of personal mentorship or *loco parentis* toward the intended victim(s). Both victims and their parents were greatly confused as they experienced their own form of cognitive

dissonance—the shattered belief that no “man of God” would ever betray a sacred religious trust in that way (Raine & Kent, 2019).

In the preliminary stages of cognitive development, children heavily relied on priests, pastors, youth workers, and other teachers to explain the proper way to exercise their beliefs and serve the higher power (Raine & Kent, 2019). Because religious leaders held the key to a specific type of social capital—religious knowledge and understanding—parishioners and their children were naturally vulnerable through their desire to grow and become more aligned with their group’s specific religious views. Through advanced educational attainment or the false portrayal of a more extraordinary ability to understand religious meaning, leaders occasionally took advantage of the clergy/parishioner relationship, manipulating children into sexual encounters through various means, portraying CSA as a means to worship, exorcise demons and evil spirits, or to attain salvation (e.g., Agazue, 2015; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004; Kent, 2012; Raine & Kent, 2019).

Religious teaching passed to children by their parents has been a critical component of emotional safety and abuse. Parents usually try to pass their belief systems to their children. Children, in turn, are instilled with the religious lens through which they make sense of the world. Many children suffer significant emotional loss when their acquired belief system breaks down (Raine & Kent, 2019).

Disclosure Issues

It has been common for victims of CSA to either delay their report to law enforcement for a significant length of time or not file it at all. Many factors have played

an essential role in that process by positively or negatively affecting it. For example, victims were affected by protection factors such as a positive social environment and parental support. However, negative factors such as poor emotional connection to parents and feeling alone and unsupported also affected them. Delayed reporting of CSA on any level has been critical because the primary evidence to support such a claim was the disclosure itself, with little to no physical evidence to tie the perpetrator to the crime (e.g., Faller, 2020; Leach et al., 2017a).

Wallis and Woodworth (2020) found several concerning issues that prevented children from disclosing their abuse in their study of situational characteristics that hindered or delayed reporting of CSA to law enforcement or CPS. Their analysis revealed gender, severity and frequency of abuse, and the perpetrator's relationship to the child to have a statistically significant impact on the time when disclosure occurred. For example, female children were quicker to disclose than males. Older children were more likely to disclose at the onset of abuse than younger children. A closer relationship between the child and perpetrator often resulted in an increased timeframe for disclosure. Disclosure was increasingly delayed when CSA was more frequently perpetrated, or an abusive act was more severe (Wallis & Woodworth, 2020).

Interestingly, older children were more likely to be abused by a stranger, and the youngest category of children was more likely to be abused by an intrafamilial offender. According to Augusti and Myhre (2021), feeling unsupported, judged, or disbelieved by peers delayed the disclosure. Some victims who later disclosed their abuse reported being

asked about it before the disclosure, explaining that they would have told it earlier if they had been asked an additional time.

Although the Wallis and Woodworth (2020) study revealed that an increase in age was associated with children more quickly disclosing CSA, other studies conflicted with these results. For example, (Leach et al., 2017) found that an increase in age up to 11 years resulted in the child disclosing more quickly during a forensic interview. Continued increases in age beyond 11 negatively affected the timing of disclosure out to the maximum age of their study participants (15 years old). However, Leach et al.'s findings were specific to the forensic interview setting. McElvaney et al. (2020) found that children were more likely to disclose to anyone during the developmental period of their life in which the abuse occurred.

The person to whom the victim eventually disclosed CSA could vary significantly. Some common choices of people to whom disclosure has been made include mothers, fathers, siblings, extended members of the victims' families, foster parents, and school or other authority figures in the children's lives (McElvaney et al., 2020). McElvaney et al. further explained that children ages 13 and up were more likely to disclose to a peer, whereas children 12 and under were more likely to confide in an authority figure within their lives. Adult family members were more likely to believe a child's disclosure if the perpetrator was not part of the family (Grandgenett et al., 2021). Augusti and Myhre (2021) found that adolescents gradually shifted from disclosures to parents or guardians to trusted peers. One of their main concerns with disclosing to parents involved their fear of undesirable parental reactions or the possibility of being

blamed or punished due to the incident(s). Further, they noted that some adolescents did not view the abuse as necessary to disclose. It was unclear whether victims thought their issues did not deserve consideration due to feeling unimportant to adults and peers or feeling little to no adverse personal reaction to the abuse.

Some victims chose not to disclose until they felt physically and emotionally safe. Finding a trustworthy individual with whom to share their story of abuse was considered a critical point of disclosure among victims of CSA (Brattfjell & Flam, 2019). Brattfjell and Flam and others also documented reasons for disclosure, such as after being prompted or asked questions by a trusted individual, when the victim felt an increased sense of urgency to end the abusive behavior, after sensing a desire to put the abuse behind them, or at a point of significant life change in adulthood (Faller, 2020). Augusti and Myhre (2021) noted that as adolescents increased in age, their peers increasingly became the trusted support network through which any subsequent disclosure was made possible.

Perpetrators

CSA perpetrators often have at least some of several factors that are true about them. First, the perpetrator must have an opportunity to commit the offense. Through extensive planning and development, perpetrators have created opportunities to abuse. The prospects have been naturally occurring, developed by the future perpetrator, or some combination of the two. Second, the perpetrator must have possessed the ability to overcome the dissonance that occurred when deviant sexual thoughts met social

inhibitions. Finally, the perpetrator might have possessed poor impulse control and might have been rejected by adult partners or potential partners (Naidoo & van Hout, 2021).

Relationships between a CSA perpetrator and victim may have taken on one or more of many different forms. The relationship might have been built on love wherein the perpetrator believed the child reciprocated with affection. The sexual relationship was only part of the mutual connection viewed from the perpetrator's perspective. However, this was only possible when the perpetrator possessed similar psychosexual and emotional maturity levels to the victim (Anderson, 2015; Hickey, 2015). Other types of relationships included transactional, guardianship, role reversal, and the child taking responsibility for the occurrence of the relationship (Naidoo & van Hout, 2021).

Some people believed that individuals who previously were victims of CSA could likely become perpetrators at some point. However, this is not necessarily true. In reality, females are more likely to become victims of CSA, and males are more likely to become perpetrators (Dube et al., 2005; Finkelhor et al., 2013). Plummer and Cossins (2018) found that only about 5% of male CSA victims were later convicted of a sexual offense. However, among males who were 12 yrs. and older at the time of initial victimization, 9.2% of them were later convicted of a sexual offense. In addition, Plummer and Cossins observed additional evidence related to males' future offending behavior such as being subjected to frequent sexual abuse, more serious sexual abuse, and when the victim was primarily dependent on the perpetrator for basic needs (e.g., father, stepfather, or guardian).

Many individuals who later became CSA perpetrators were exposed to significant trauma and a dysfunctional home climate, including an inappropriate level of environmental sexualization (Naidoo & van Hout, 2021; Plummer & Cossins, 2018). Traumatic experiences have been related to future offending behavior, including but not limited to interpersonal domestic violence or sexual violence victimization. In addition, some perpetrators lived alone or with their parents, partially because of psychological issues such as emotional dysregulation, identity issues and self-esteem, harmful coping skills, and feeling powerless to have normal, peer-type sexual relationships (Naidoo & van Hout, 2021). Some findings suggested that greater levels of CSA victimization were found among sexual violence offenders compared to non-offending samples (Drury et al., 2019).

Although they may have wanted normal social and sexual relationships, CSA perpetrators frequently were unable to engage peers in a normal social context (Naidoo & van Hout, 2021). In addition, traumatic experiences in their past have stunted their emotional and psychological maturation process. Because of this, future perpetrators have felt comfortable engaging children who were much younger but considered by them as near-peers (Hickey, 2015).

Predator Typology

Rebocho and Gonçalves (2012) categorized four common types of search and attack behaviors for CSA perpetrators. They included the hunter, the poacher, the troller, and the trapper. Hunters looked for victims from their home base and used their typical awareness space to find their prey. They looked for suitable targets from this position,

based on their preferred criteria. These predators stayed in their general locations when they committed CSA.

Poachers saw prey and snatched it up quickly. The poacher traveled out of their home area, commuting significantly to find what they sought. Due to this long distance from their home base, they have worked from alternative bases such as hotels or other short-term stay facilities. The poacher needed to travel to desirable locations to find their preferred prey (Rebocho & Gonçalves, 2012).

The troller, an opportunistic predator, typically found its prey while conducting routine daily activities. They were usually spontaneous and had low impulse control. Although opportunism was the known key feature, trollers have likely fantasized extensively before finding suitable prey, adding a premeditation feature to this type of offender. The difference between the poacher and the troller is that the troller did not necessarily plan to commit the crime until after a victim was located (Rebocho & Gonçalves, 2012).

Trappers chose an occupation or position where they could have access to victims. For the most part, trappers have allowed victims to come to them. They may have tried to entice victims into their comfortable space because it appeared more advantageous to them (Rebocho & Gonçalves, 2012).

In their use of Massachusetts Treatment Center's Child Molester Classification Systems (MTC: CM3 and MTC: CM4, respectively), Bartol and Bartol (2017) discussed fixated, regressed, exploitative, and aggressive/sadistic offender types. Fixated offenders experienced long-term attraction to children, both physically and sexually. These

offenders may have experienced interest based on their victim's youthful physical appearance, but they have also been drawn toward children due to strong emotional congruence. Further, some fixated offenders preferred submissive targets (Kanters et al., 2015). Regressed offenders may have maintained some normal adult relationships; however, during times of high stress or after their self-esteem has taken a significant hit, they seek out children for sexual acts. Exploitative offenders use threats or physical force to control their victims so that they can accomplish their goals. However, their goal was not to physically harm the child beyond the need to control them. Finally, aggressive or sadistic child sexual offenders have caused emotional distress and physical harm to the child because the pain stimulated them sexually (Bartol & Bartol, 2017).

Like the Massachusetts Treatment Centers, Bartol and Bartol (2017) explained the Groth Classification system which divided CSA offenders into immature or fixated and regressed offenders. Groth hypothesized that immature offenders were fixated on younger children due to the offender's underlying stunted psychological growth. As a result, they were likely to recidivate, and there was little hope for their rehabilitation. Alternatively, regressed offenders typically had normal social relationships with peer adults. However, under extreme stress or a self-esteem crisis, they targeted children to meet their emotional and sexual needs.

Hunting/Targeting

Child sexual predators typically engage in rational thought when deciding to commit abuse. Although their views were quite distorted in most cases, the engagement likely involved a highly complex decision-making process. The perpetrator will have

needed to consider their characteristics and regular activities, the victim's characteristics and known activities, and environmental and situational cues that could come into play, thus affecting their ability to commit a crime and remain undiscovered. Of note, humans have been considered complex targets because of their mobility and difficulty in being controlled. Because of this, the methods used to perpetrate the crime and remain undiscovered needed to be fluid (Rebocho & Gonçalves, 2012).

CSA perpetrators typically used one of three different attack methods. Raptors attacked almost immediately upon the identification of their intended victims. Ambushers baited their prey into their desired location. They chose the location because of desirable characteristics which enabled the perpetrator to remain in control. On the other hand, stalkers followed and observed their prey. It was their goal to move into the victim's operation zone. Stalking could have occurred over a brief period, or the predator might have waited and watched for an extended time (Rebocho & Gonçalves, 2012).

Hunting patterns among the distinct types of offenders have significantly varied. They must have considered not only the rational choices of the perpetrator but also responses to victim behavior and geographical and situational factors. According to Rebocho and Gonçalves (2012), any accurate assessment of CSA perpetrators must have included these considerations. Hunting patterns that should have been considered included, at a minimum, the routine activities of both the perpetrator and the potential victims, the choice of the predator's hunting environment, the reasons why the perpetrator looked favorably on the potential victim, the perpetrator's method of approach including the preferential location for the attack, methods utilized for

transporting or delivering a victim to the preferred crime location, the crime location itself, the preferred way in which the crime was committed, and the considerations related to the release of the victim including method and location.

Pre- and Postcrime Behaviors

Intrafamilial CSA perpetrators have usually controlled their victims through traditional family dynamics. Control was facilitated with exacting ease when an offender was a parent or guardian, primarily due to the offender's power to supply or withhold basic primate human needs. The extrafamilial exercise of securing and maintaining access to suitable victims was unnecessary in most cases involving intrafamilial abuse (Lanning & Dietz, 2013).

It has not been uncommon for extrafamilial acquaintance CSA perpetrators to serve in a career or volunteer capacity with a youth-serving or other community organization. However, CSA perpetrators serving in institutional settings have not always chosen careers or volunteer opportunities that afforded them greater access to children for future offending. Many organizationally affiliated perpetrators were genuinely interested in serving children before eventually turning to CSA perpetration. Some perpetrators discovered their sexual interest in children only after serving them in an institutional setting (Lanning & Dietz, 2013).

One particular type of institutional perpetrator used powerful social status to gain and maintain access to victims. Dubbed the powerful perpetrator, others often viewed them as the institution's greatest asset. This type of individual obtained their social power through the authority associated with possessing a high-level position within the

organization, activating their natural charisma and persuasive power, or leveraging their status as a local or national celebrity. While understanding that some institutional rules and laws were meant to govern the organization's operation, powerful perpetrators often believed they were not subject to them. This person will likely circumvent established safety policies and other regulations by making personal exceptions due to their social status. It has not been unusual for the powerful perpetrator to believe the selfish idea that future victims desire to have sexual relationships with them. Because this type of perpetrator was usually a charismatic and well-networked "nice guy," they tended to perpetrate CSA with minimal worry of exposure. On numerous occasions, these perpetrators have gone unreported due to fear of negative repercussions on the witness or the organization (Erooga et al., 2020).

CSA perpetrators may have considered pursuing a relationship with a single parent as a facade to gain proximity to a child. However, by the time any marriage or other significant commitment has occurred between the perpetrator and the single parent, the perpetrator has already begun grooming the child and may have started a sexual relationship (Naidoo & van Hout, 2021).

After having a sexual relationship with another adult, some perpetrators have regressed to seeking sexual relationships with minors after feeling rejected by adults (Hickey, 2015; Naidoo & van Hout, 2021). A sexual relationship that allowed them to feel a sense of control may have only been possible with a child because of their emotional and psychological incongruence with adults. It was typical for this type of perpetrator to experience significant cognitive distortions, such as believing the sexual

relationship with the child was not harmful. Instead, they believed the relationship was mutually beneficial and that the child possessed the cognitive abilities to understand and make an entirely rational choice to engage in a sexual relationship.

When potential CSA perpetrators cannot connect socially to peers, they fantasize about having these relationships with children to fulfill their intimate needs. Although they understand that society generally condemns sexual relationships with children, reducing social inhibitions makes it easier (Hickey, 2015). For example, they may use drugs, alcohol, and pornography, including child pornography, to help them overcome the cognitive dissonance they experience (Naidoo & van Hout, 2021).

Grooming

Grooming was the process by which a perpetrator prepared the victim, environment, and other variables through coercive means to be less sensitive to sexual violence planned against an intended victim. Many attempts to develop a formally accepted definition in scholarly literature have fallen short of receiving wide acceptance (Craven et al., 2006; Winters et al., 2021). The term's inherently complex nature and the need to include various actions and motives while remaining specific in its context have made it difficult. A perpetrator may have used grooming to isolate a minor from their sources of protection (e.g., parents, siblings, peer groups, or any others who might likely report abuse) by providing opportunities otherwise not afforded to the victim or to fill a void (e.g., sleepovers, camping, overnight outings).

Some researchers considered the term "grooming" to be synonymous with "seduction" (Dietz, 2018; Lanning, 2018), with some preferring this term. However,

Dietz further noted a historically archaic association of seduction with the now-defunct idea of a child seducing an adult. Lanning described the behavior as remarkably similar to the act of romance between two consenting adults. However, he initially viewed grooming as a minor aspect of the overall phenomenon (seduction). To avoid confusion, Lanning eventually came to use the terms synonymously. In the context of the above authors' writings, grooming and seduction have not included violent, forcibly coercive, or threatening behavior. Nevertheless, other researchers commonly accepted "grooming" as the sole term to describe the phenomenon (Craven et al., 2006; Martschuk et al., 2018; Raine & Kent, 2019; Spraitz & Bowen, 2019; Winters et al., 2021). Further, contrary to Lanning, these authors understood some types of physical coercion as falling within the accepted meaning of the term.

Researchers estimated that as much as half of child sexual predators groomed their victims (Craven et al., 2006; Winters et al., 2021; Winters & Jeglic, 2017). This phenomenon varied significantly based on the environment and relationship between the perpetrator and their selected victim (Craven et al., 2006; Lanning, 2018; Martschuk et al., 2018; McElvaney, 2019; Wolf et al., 2018). Plummer (2018) found that in some intrafamilial minor sexual abuse cases, the perpetrator had a close familial relationship with the victim before any abuse occurred. In those cases, the victims did not recount any pre-abuse grooming, which may have accounted for some of the ones that did not involve grooming.

Methods used to groom a minor were as widely varied as the motives behind the desire to commit sexual abuse against them (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). Perpetrators often

adapted their specific methods based on environmental and situational factors that directly or indirectly affected the relationship with their future victims (Martschuk et al., 2018). For example, a teacher may have rearranged her classroom to allow better direct physical contact with a male student she was attempting to isolate without being discovered. A family friend may have convinced a young female to conceal their sexual relationship to avoid getting them in trouble.

Grooming may include any number of manipulative tactics (Lanning, 2018; Raine & Kent, 2019; Winters & Jeglic, 2021). Perpetrators may have chosen to work in an environment that involved caring for children, such as in a daycare, school, or church. They might have volunteered to lead a sports team or after-school community program. Perpetrators have often built upon their reputations to cause others to trust them.

Detection Prevention

Grooming has been historically difficult to detect (Craven et al., 2006; Martschuk et al., 2018; Plummer, 2018; Raine & Kent, 2019; Winters et al., 2021; Winters & Jeglic, 2017). Despite their strong beliefs to the contrary, most individuals could not accurately decipher between grooming behavior and the genuine investment by adults who cared for the well-being of children (Winters & Jeglic, 2015). There were a couple of reasons for this: First, some research found that many of the techniques utilized by perpetrators, especially those employed during the initial stages of the process, appeared like otherwise legitimate coaching or guiding actions (Martschuk et al., 2018). Second, the only tangible difference may have been the perpetrator's motives (Winters et al., 2021; Winters & Jeglic, 2017).

Engaging a child through grooming behaviors has consistently been dynamic (Martschuk et al., 2018). Therefore, the subcategory of objectives for which a child sexual predator might have groomed has changed. As the perpetrator observed each stage's dynamic nature, they will have been required to alter tactics in response to each variable.

When perceived as beneficial, child sexual predators have groomed more dynamic variables than just their intended victim(s) (Winters et al., 2020, 2021). Perceived significant players were constantly and dynamically analyzed for future engagement as necessary. Specifically, those often-included parents, siblings, schoolteachers, childcare workers, and other individuals vested in the child's healthy development.

Winters et al. (2020) established environmental grooming as a significant part of the overall process. To facilitate access to children, perpetrators engaged in actions that provided them a pathway to abuse, such as earning a college degree in a field of study related to children or childcare.

Craven et al. (2006) found that perpetrators engaged in a cognitive dissonance regarding their past, present, and future offending behavior, seeking to lessen the feelings of guilt within their moral conscience. Offenders sought to justify or repress "voices of good and evil" within their cognitions, enabling or preventing them from engaging in a sexual relationship with the child. Perpetrators have chosen one type of thought process and repressed others to fulfill their distorted sexual fantasies successfully (Hickey, 2015).

Stages of the Process

Scholarly literature has suggested there were several stages of grooming. Winters et al. (2020) sought to validate them by conducting a historical review of grooming literature to document the characteristics of each stage. An experiential survey of experts in the field solidified the identification of goals and behaviors which attempted to further those goals. Literature established the following stages of grooming: victim selection, gaining access, trust development, desensitization, and post-abuse maintenance. Many aspects of those stages overlapped and were difficult to discuss under only one alignment heading.

Victim Selection. The first stage in the process was victim selection. Victims could catch perpetrators' attention for several reasons: identified vulnerabilities, ease of access, or perceived beauty/physical attractiveness (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). Craven et al. (2006) argued that perpetrators might select their victims based on internal or externally focused criteria. For example, perpetrators might have chosen a victim from within their current social reach. However, they could also expand their hunting area by seeking additional training, education, or other professional or volunteer opportunities. Some perpetrators selected and isolated multiple children at a time, continually narrowing down their pool of potential victims until they chose one above the rest.

Gaining Access. Gaining access to a child was a complex process based upon a plethora of specific details and could have included perpetrator self-grooming, grooming of environment and significant others, and grooming of the child (Plummer, 2018; Winters et al., 2020). After selecting their intended victim, most perpetrators began

working to gain access to and isolate their intended victim. This step occurred at varying rates of speed, as the perpetrator could feel the need to groom those within the child's circle of influence or environment, depending upon perceived reactions. Most perpetrators were highly skilled at reading the nonverbal cues of those within their operational environment. Winters and Jeglic (2017) found that children with perceived psychological vulnerabilities such as naivety, social insecurity, and strong dependence on others were often sought out by sexual perpetrators.

The perpetrator often chooses to isolate the victim from others by providing childcare, mentorship, special outings, gifts, exclusive access to desirable circumstances, and special attention, all of which make the child feel a social obligation to the perpetrator (Craven et al., 2006; Winters & Jeglic, 2017). Isolation is a two-fold state of being brought onto the victim and includes physical and social/emotional isolation.

Physical isolation involves removing the child from their place of security to create distance from their protective environment. Social isolation allows the perpetrator to gain the complete trust of the intended victim (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). For example, victims might be persuaded to leave their friends and family behind and follow the perpetrator (McElvaney, 2019). Psychological manipulation was a vital component of this type of isolation. It regularly included various means of convincing the minor they were special and could make their own decisions about sexuality apart from outside influences except the perpetrator's own. Occasionally threats and perceived emotional or physical harm to the child or others were used if the child did not comply (Plummer, 2018; Winters et al., 2020).

For those who chose intrafamilial abuse, access to the child was naturally facilitated most of the time by living in the same environment, visiting one's family member, or even marrying into a family to target the new spouse's children (Martschuk et al., 2018). A pseudo-family member could also have held this type of relationship. The perpetrator may have exclusive access to the child through ordinary, daily interactions (Winters et al., 2020). A stepfather, for example, usually lived in the same home and could slip into a child's bedroom to commit abuse without being noticed. Due to this proximity, he could quickly provide plausible justification to others in the home if someone challenged him regarding his actions. Of significant interest, Plummer (2018) found that in some situations, members of the victim's family were fully aware of and participated in sexual abuse.

Extrafamilial abuse included both institutional and non-institutional abuse. Non-institutional abuse often involved a neighbor or other person who, although perceived as trustworthy by the child's primary caregiver, took advantage of being alone with a child. This extrafamilial abuse was often occurring when the primary caregiver was working to provide financially for the family (Martschuk et al., 2018). Institutional sexual abuse occurs when a perpetrator utilizes an institutional place of trust (e.g., youth minister, boy scout troop leader, daycare worker) as the launching point to commit sexual abuse (Martschuk et al., 2018). The institutional setting assisted with trust-building exercises, but it also potentially provided physically remote access to the child separate from protection (e.g., driving the child home after troop meetings; spiritual mentorship of the child outside of regular church-sponsored functions) (McElvaney, 2019).

Perpetrators have sought to groom significant personnel related to the victim. Those deemed necessary would be chosen based on their perceived social proximity to the intended victim (Craven et al., 2006; Winters et al., 2020). Research has shown that to accomplish their abuse, perpetrators engaged in behaviors that sought to shape the perspectives of persons who served as protectors of the intended victim (McElvaney, 2019; Plummer, 2018). They did this as part of their attempt at being regarded above reproach. It also assisted with convincing the victim's guardian(s) to allow for trips away or one-on-one coaching and mentoring of the child (Martschuk et al., 2018).

Trust Development. As the perpetrator worked on trust development with the significant protectors (e.g., parents, guardians, or older siblings) of the child, they may offer to personally mentor the child one-on-one in an environment that was set apart from the child's traditional regimen (e.g., They might offer to provide piano lessons at the perpetrator's private residence or overnight camping trips with only the child.) (McElvaney, 2019). Social isolation occurs when the child feels trapped by the relationship and after the perpetrator has poured significant social capital into the child. The perpetrator's desire for exclusivity and approval slowly makes the child feel a social obligation toward them.

Unique vulnerabilities related to sexual grooming have become incredibly complicated in religious settings (Easton et al., 2019; Kleiven, 2018; Raine & Kent, 2019). The results have been devastating when the spiritual authority figure who provides "approval" or validation to enter "Heaven" instead of "Hell" has been secretly abusive. The child may have wanted nothing other than to gain approval and assurance that they

would enter a blissful afterlife one day. By manipulative interpretations of Scripture, abusive spiritual authorities have justified sexual acts with minors as some means of spiritual sanctification, demonic exorcism (casting demons out of the child), or other spiritual acts (Agazue, 2015). Some alternative religious leaders have even portrayed themselves as messianic prophets, thus making intercourse necessary with whomever they chose (Agazue, 2015).

In some circumstances, the trust relationship may have already been present (Raine & Kent, 2019). For example, church leaders such as pastors, youth ministers, or Catholic priests have typically held complete trust without working for it (Kleiven, 2018). They can quickly grow their relationship with a victim's caregiver(s) to the point where total isolation of the child is seen by their caregivers as a tremendous opportunity for one-on-one mentorship (Denney et al., 2018).

Desensitization. The next step in the process, commonly referred to as desensitization, has involved perpetrators working to reduce the overall inhibitions of victims who might otherwise resist their sexual advances (Craven et al., 2006; Plummer, 2018; Winters et al., 2021; Winters & Jeglic, 2017). Some often do not appear as an overtly sexual act to the outside observer in their preliminary stages (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). After selecting a vulnerable minor and isolating them from the group, the perpetrator may begin touching the minor victim in an increasingly sexual manner (Easton et al., 2019; McElvaney, 2019; Plummer, 2018). Some perpetrators readily prepare alternative rationale for their actions which could convince the victim or another individual the touch was innocent if they become confrontational (Winters et al., 2021).

Plummer (2018) reported an example in which the perpetrator hugged his intended victim from behind during grief. However, he placed his arms, so his hands landed on his victim's genitals/crotch area.

Another commonly utilized approach for desensitization uses vulgar or sexually charged language when communicating with the child (Easton et al., 2019; Plummer, 2018). Once the child has developed a sense of trust for the perpetrator, they can be subjected to this language to establish it as normal for maturing children and youth. In addition, the perpetrator may try to watch several types of pornography with the child to normalize the acts and stimulate the child's sexual curiosity (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). These acts have made children feel that the intended future sexual abuse was a regular part of continued social maturity.

Postabuse Maintenance. Perpetrators work to control their victims for a significant period, even though the abuse could have occurred only for an abbreviated period (McElvaney, 2019). The victim might only perceive this ongoing sense of control as being in existence, or the perpetrator could steadily maintain it for an extended period (Plummer, 2018). This phase has aimed to allow for continued abuse in some cases. However, it was always to maintain secrecy and prevent disclosure to authorities (Winters & Jeglic, 2017).

Sexually abused children commonly experience their own cognitive dissonance (Raine & Kent, 2019). This dissonance resulted from innocently believing the perpetrator could be ultimately trusted while trying to understand the feelings of guilt and shame experienced because of the perpetrator's actions (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2018).

This ongoing cognitive dissonance has greatly assisted perpetrators in remaining hidden. In addition, it has caused the child to feel hopeless, worthless, and not believed if they disclose the abuse (McElvaney, 2019).

Some institutional environments, such as a Protestant church, have intrinsically provided unique opportunities and experiences associated with the grooming process (Martschuk et al., 2018). Young, malleable personalities have been subjected to some variation of the traditionally patriarchal “Christian” worldview (Kleiven, 2018). Especially in fundamentalist, literal-interpreting circles of biblical Protestantism, children have been taught their parents’ understanding of religion as the only “right” way; they were rarely able to draw from other worldviews to interpret all matters of social interaction (Raine & Kent, 2019). Through this lens, parents have taught children to find meaning in life’s complicated issues.

Literature Gap

Because of the hierarchal leadership structure in the Catholic Church, as well as its perceived deep financial pockets, much of the focus of clergy perpetrated CSA has fallen on them (Rashid & Barron, 2019). Even though scholars widely accepted the idea of church leader-perpetrated CSA as a universal problem, investigative reports and scholarly discourse on religious institutions other than the Catholic Church have been quite limited (Perillo et al., 2017). This has been partially due to most Protestant church leadership models’ decentralized structure. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant Christian denomination in the United States, has not

maintained substantial control of its member congregations. Instead, they operated semi-autonomously (SBC, 2022).

The research literature has developed a significant understanding in science about many aspects of CSA perpetrators. For example, much is known about risk factors, victimology, and many distinct aspects of these predators' behavior typologies. In addition, literature has recently developed significantly in the area of grooming behaviors (Winters et al., 2020; Winters & Jeglic, 2021). Further, the child sexual abuse crisis within the Catholic Church that picked up speed in the early 2000s resulted in significantly increased knowledge about the predators within institutional and, specifically, Catholic institutions. However, no simple profile can be drafted to explain all or most of the specific aspects regarding the predators or how and why they commit these crimes (Bartol & Bartol, 2017). Although quite a bit is known about these research areas, little has been written about CSA perpetrators affiliated with Protestant churches. This study will examine the MO and target selection criteria of CSA perpetrators in Protestant churches.

Chapter 3 explains the research design and methodology used to conduct this study. The chapter began with the research design and rationale and the role of the researcher, including the acknowledgment of personal and professional biases. Following this, the methodology addressed participant selection logic, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Finally, Chapter 3 discussed issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the MO and target selection criteria of child sexual predators who hunt for their victims in the context of Protestant churches. A qualitative phenomenology design was appropriate to answer the research questions and helped me understand the essence of this phenomenon. This chapter includes the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary. The methodology includes the participant selection logic, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design and Rationale

RQ1: What is the modus operandi of the child sexual predator who chooses their victims in Protestant churches?

RQ2: What are the child sexual predator's target selection criteria in Protestant churches?

The phenomenon of interest for this study was a detailed understanding of the offender, victim, situations, circumstances, behaviors, associations, and interactions related to CSA perpetrators in Protestant churches. In addition, I sought to understand each offender's targeting preferences. Specifically, this study addressed whether the CSA perpetrators showed evidentiary signs of being child molesters or the more exclusive category of pedophiles.

I explored the background, early environmental circumstances and socialization, familial and other significant relationships, and victims' and offenders' relevant psychological and emotional cues. In addition, all pertinent warning signs of future

offending behavior were reviewed. Because of the study's purpose, qualitative phenomenology was selected as the research design. This approach consisted of an in-depth inquiry into the essence of the chosen phenomenon. I used archival data available to the general public for exploration and analysis. Data sources included court transcripts and case files, presentence investigation reports, and public records.

Role of the Researcher

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the researcher plays an instrumental role in qualitative research. Researchers need to conduct interviews with participants, observe real-time scenarios, and review documents and other data sources. Qualitative researchers collect data in multiple ways and catalogue and analyze the data to identify themes.

Because of the type of data collected and analyzed, personal biases may have played a role in this study. Traditionally, the researcher observes, documents, and conduct interviews of participants, ensuring that direct actions are part of the data collection process. These collection methods insert the researcher and their personality, opinions, and feelings into the data collection process before data analysis. I collected secondary data, thereby eliminating this direct insertion of researcher bias into an early stage of the process.

Researcher bias could have played a role in the study. For example, the selection of research subjects was purposeful, focusing on adult males. Due to this, subjects may have subconsciously been chosen based on likeability by me.

I had considerable professional experience in this field of study. As part of my role as a special agent in the U.S. Army, I investigated many cases involving sexual violence and CSA. I teamed up with several individuals with varying skills and experience levels. Some of them played significant roles in my professional development. Extensive training shaped my decision-making abilities in this area as an experienced investigator. These professional experiences shaped my ability to compartmentalize each case and set aside my personal feelings related to CSA, allowing me to view each case and associated individual objectively.

I attended church as a practicing Protestant Christian for most of my life, including active volunteer roles such as a teaching assistant in various scenarios and as a musical worship leader. In these roles, I observed the consequences of CSA in several church settings, including the cleanup or lack thereof. In addition, I watched the damage CSA does to people, including those serving in an observing role.

To manage the potential bias from my previous roles that could have shaped my view of the data and results, I took steps to ensure the credibility of this study. First, as with adults who understand CSA as a legitimate problem, I loathed it and its aftereffects on some of the world's most vulnerable individuals, especially children. Because of the personal trauma that often occurs to those in helping professions, I sought extensive professional help through therapeutic counseling to ensure I could remain unjaded as much as possible. Finally, through effective training, education, and professional mentorship, I was able to set aside my anger and frustration by replacing them with a more objective outlook on the problem.

Methodology

Qualitative phenomenology was selected as the methodology and design best suited to answer the research questions. Qualitative phenomenology allowed me to answer the research questions by exploring a small selection of relevant cases and analyzing the data. Qualitative phenomenology was appropriate for this study because it enabled me to present a clear picture of why predators selected religious settings for their crimes. Data consisted of archival records that provided details to analyze and understand the MO and target selection criteria of CSA perpetrators who targeted their victims within a Protestant church.

Participant Selection Logic

I explored 15 cases of CSA perpetrated by male leaders in Protestant church congregations in the United States. Each offender was convicted in a court of law or pled guilty to each offense. Using data from convictions served the ethical purpose of leaving no question about each offender's guilt. The number of cases identified was an estimate of how many were needed to reach data saturation. Saturation was estimated to occur between 14 and 20 cases. However, saturation occurred with 15 cases analyzed because data results began to overlap.

The subjects for this study were male offenders who had been convicted in a criminal court for committing CSA by taking advantage of one or more victims under the age of 18 years through an association with a Protestant church. Convictions for these offenders occurred within the last 10 years. Other than gender and residence in the United States, demographic variables were not used to exclude any participants from the study. I

expected most of the subjects to be White males. However, Whites were not the only research subjects. Although various Protestant denominations have obtained a greater or lesser status at various times in national news headlines over their handling of CSA, no denominational limitations beyond Protestant Christian were established. In addition, geographic diversity in the United States was preferred over obtaining subjects from a few states.

Data Collection

Collecting archival data best served the purpose of obtaining accurate information in an ethical manner. Offenders convicted of their crimes typically had one or more of the following files available for access: court transcripts, presentence investigation report, or other reports drafted by court-appointed assessment personnel. In addition, scholarly materials, books, investigative journalism, and other publicly available reliable archival data sources assisted with understanding the details of each case.

To obtain these data, I used several approaches. Cases managed by federal courts were obtained through database searches of local U.S. district court records. Some state and local court jurisdictions were willing to provide data through similar formal requests, subject to their records release procedures. On occasion, personal contact with staff in professional offices assisted with acquiring data.

Scholarly database searches did not reveal published works with reliable data on each case. Google and other internet search engines provided data or pointed me toward other methods of obtaining credible information. Some information required an in-person visit to the correct public service office to request them.

Desired data were obtained in several different forms. For example, copies of sworn statements made to law enforcement, write-ups by law enforcement personnel after conducting verbal interviews with people involved in the case, or video and audio recordings of interviews conducted were rich sources of information available for analysis in some cases. Transcripts of court proceedings and documentation of evidence entered into court for each proceeding provided rich data. Presentence investigation documentation was available for review and analysis in a few cases. These documents provided background information, mitigation, and aggravating evidence related to the case, which revealed the details needed to answer the research questions. Due to the nature of presentence documents and their general lack of availability, I made several attempts and waited for outcomes related to acquiring them. Scholarly material, books, and other websites and news articles provided only a small amount of additional corroboration to validate previously received data sources' reliability. A multifaced approach was taken when data collection commenced, ensuring an adequate number of cases was acquired for review and analysis. This approach included a thorough review of all data received to ensure they provided the details necessary to answer the research questions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began by separating each case and saving all collected information onto a cloud drive regardless of data type. Next, I used NVivo to continue with data organization, cataloging, and analysis. Each step commenced as data became available, resulting in near simultaneous collection, organization, and analysis.

Using NVivo, I uploaded data and combed through them to ensure relevancy. As the first few cases were received, inductive analysis was used to decipher relevant codes for use with preliminary analysis. This process continued through inductive work until the initial codes were identified. Next, these codes were expanded across initial cases until relevant patterns emerged. Finally, as more case data were received, the previously developed codes and patterns were applied to relevant portions of each case analyzed.

I did not use predetermined codes. Instead, I analyzed inductively to produce relevant coding descriptions from which patterns and categories were developed. This method ensured that the data spoke for themselves instead of me superimposing meaning through other means. The analysis took place by first reviewing all data to derive basic codes from the contents (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Then I focused on reviewing specific statements and deriving the meaning from these content areas.

Interpretation of Results

After the data were analyzed, the results were reported in an understandable fashion (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To accomplish this, I began with a summary of the findings. After this, the results were compared to the recent literature and Hickey's (2015) theory of relational paraphilic attachment as reviewed in Chapter 2. Finally, I assessed the study's limitations and the recommendations for future research in this area.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Several steps were taken to ensure the quality, dependability, and sustainability of results (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I used triangulation, bias mitigation, and open discussion and explanation of results to ensure validity. In addition, I employed the direct

supervision of my committee who provided quality control mechanisms to ensure a sufficient level of credibility.

Several critical steps ensured dependability. First, I thoroughly reviewed the transcripts to ensure their accuracy. Second, I developed and reviewed the definitions of codes to avoid a shift in their meaning. Third, I maintained open discourse with my chair to seek clarification and supporting guidance as needed, thereby ensuring more accurate final results (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

The interviewing of CSA perpetrators would have presented ethical challenges. Asking an offender to admit to a crime that must be reported to law enforcement meant there was a high probability of research participant legal entrapment. If convicted offenders provided details of an offense for which they were not yet held legally accountable, they could be prosecuted for that offense. Further, due to this awareness by offenders and the social stigma connected with these types of crimes, it was unlikely that perpetrators would agree to sit for an interview or provide reliable answers to interview questions. Creating legal trouble for a research subject due to an honest response to an interview question dictated that I had to collect secondary data.

I did not approach family members, friends, or other individuals with a known vested personal interest in the research subjects to obtain data. All data collected were obtained through publicly available means. Data collection necessitated filing several requests to obtain data from different sources about each subject.

Data were initially organized and cataloged in a separate digital folder for each criminal case to prepare for analysis. Each case had its folder saved on a password-protected cloud drive. Subfolders were created to deposit possible relevant data that could contribute to answering the research questions. Cases were considered for inclusion based on the type, quantity, and quality of relevant details. Those cases selected to be part of the study were assigned a number through which a reference was made, thereby ensuring that no names associated with CSA perpetrators would be used.

I submitted Walden University's Research Ethics Form A to the Institutional Review Board after receiving approval from my dissertation committee chair and second committee member. To ensure strict compliance with federal regulations governing ethical research practices and to adhere to university guidance governing the same, I submitted all requested documents, initially and with follow-up, to the Walden Institutional Review Board and sought full approval for my study. I began data collection and analysis shortly after receiving their full approval (Approval: 08-16-22-0978852).

Summary

This chapter included a discussion of the design and methodology and rationale for choosing them, including an explanation of how they would answer the research questions. The role of the researcher and the individual biases in the study were also discussed. Data collection and analysis methods were explained as an ethical process that ensured minimal adverse effects on me and research participants. Finally, trustworthiness issues were addressed to demonstrate the credibility of this research.

Chapter 4: Results

This study's purpose was to examine the MO and target selection criteria of Protestant church sexual predators. This study had two research questions:

RQ1: What is the modus operandi of the child sexual predator who chooses their victims in Protestant churches?

RQ2: What are the child sexual predator's target selection criteria in Protestant churches?

Chapter 4 focuses on data collection and analysis and the results of the study. First, the data collection setting, or the general location and means of obtaining each case, is discussed. Next, demographic information of the perpetrators is reviewed. Lastly, the results of data analysis are presented. I conducted an in-depth analysis of the data to answer the research questions through thematic analysis.

Setting

The requests to obtain court transcripts for a few cases included waiting several weeks to receive them. This challenge sometimes rendered the data out of reach. One case involved months of informal email communications to obtain. When the case was received, it provided one of the more data-rich cases used in the study. A login username and password were created to obtain case documents about research subjects who were prosecuted in a U.S. district court. The necessary documents quickly became available through this system once it was successfully navigated.

Although the ability to acquire data from numerous sources was anticipated, this did not occur as planned. Due to the sensitive nature of the cases sought, law enforcement

agencies were generally not in a suitable position to assist with data collection efforts. Similarly, prosecutors' offices could not provide data on any cases. However, after the complete resolution of each case, many of them could be located within the digital archives of the associated trial jurisdiction. Searches for scholarly works about each case yielded limited results.

Demographics

Perpetrators whose cases were used for this study were convicted through either a guilty plea or by trial in a court of law. Men from any race or ethnic background found guilty of at least one CSA offense within the last 10 years were sought. Each case was located in the continental United States. Convictions were secured in federal, state, or local courts within the last 10 years. The men ranged in age between 24 and 72 at the time of their convictions. Table 1 provides a brief description of demographic data for the sample.

Table 1*Demographics of Sample*

Protestant church sexual predator	Number
Eastern region	2
Western region	3
Midwestern region	5
Southern region	6
Federal court conviction	7
State/local court conviction	9
Senior pastors	6
Retired pastors	2
Music ministers/youth workers	5
Other volunteers	2

The educational attainment of the offenders in this study varied. One offender completed an eighth-grade education and had difficulty comprehending average-level reading material in court. One offender completed a doctoral degree approximately 30 years before his arrest. Many offenders completed at least some college education or learned a skilled trade. Education level did not seem to correlate with offending behavior among this group of offenders.

There was no clear sex discrimination among the perpetrators' preferences as both males and females were targeted. Eleven perpetrators targeted early teen victims of either

sex. Three of the other four perpetrators targeted much younger children between the ages of 4 and 10 years. The last perpetrator targeted two victims 6 months old and 11 years old. Table 2 provides information related to each offender's victim preference.

Table 2

Choice of Victim Preference

Protestant church sexual predator	Number
Targets of opportunity	15
Prepubescent minors	4
Pubescent minors	11
Offenders with two or more known victims	8
Child pornography manufactured	6

Data Collection

This study focused on archival data from various government organizations at various levels of statutory authority. The search for data began with an informal word-of-mouth channel to identify names of offenders who fit into the parameters of this study. Subsequently, numerous internet searches using the Google search engine identified male pastors and church leaders from various Protestant denominations. One of the most helpful documents used in this process was the formerly secretive list of Baptist predators whom the SBC considered credibly accused. This document provided the names of many Protestant church leaders convicted within the last 10 years (The Executive Committee, 2022). From that list, some criminal convictions were traced to their primary territorial

jurisdiction to find the transcript of court proceedings. Another significant contribution came from reading news articles from different states and local populations.

The availability of transcripts from court proceedings varied, ranging from being wholly denied to obtaining a complete file for free. In some cases, sifting through useful and unnecessary documents uploaded to a public access website was the extent necessary. Other cases required numerous phone calls and follow-up emails. Two cases were acquired by traveling in person to the circuit clerk's office to make formal requests and wait for them to be shipped.

Some cases required the payment of a fee to cover the costs of providing them. One office provided a waiver form that was filled out and returned to them. They subsequently waived the nearly \$500 fee that would otherwise have been due. Two cases were provided in video format at \$25 per disk plus shipping.

After identifying research subjects who fit this study's parameters, I needed to obtain quality data that could be depended on for accurate analysis. The records custodians who supported each federal, state, or local judicial authority were contacted individually. Appropriate requests were made to obtain court transcripts of the proceedings related to each research subject. These requests were submitted in several ways including in person, telephonic, email, formal requests through individual organizational websites, and through the federal court system's PACER database.

Because the data quality on each subject was not known before requesting the transcripts, each case needed additional evaluation as to its ability to inform the study on specific data points. As a result, I initiated an inquiry to obtain the documents of 31 cases.

However, only 15 provided enough qualitative data that could be used to answer one or both research questions. Searches for reliable data included coordination with law enforcement organizations, prosecuting attorneys' offices, books, and other scholarly databases, none of which revealed any additional information of significant value to the study.

Data Analysis

Coding Strategy

Qualitative coding for this study was intended to be developed in an inductive manner. Initially, data were scanned to assess the overall quality of the information in each case transcript. After an initial evaluation, all cases with adequate, useful data were deposited into separate files, one per case. Next, each case's documents were subjected to the necessary formatting, which permitted them to be broken down and coded by highlighting points of data to be categorized.

When the document formatting was completed, each case was uploaded into NVivo qualitative coding software. Because I was unaware of the codes these data would produce, the process began slowly. First, data were assessed and evaluated until each segment indicated a meaning unit. Then, each unit was labeled according to its meaning and significance until many codes were developed. As codes with similar meanings were developed, they were given a categorical label to group them together. This process was repeated until the main themes were developed and refined.

The initial code development occurred within the first three or four analyzed cases. After that point, each new case usually produced between one and three more

codes until about 10 cases were analyzed. The inductive analysis occurred over most cases and continued until saturation was attained after the 13th case. The last two cases were analyzed because the case quantity goal was 14–20. This data collection and subsequent coding were finalized with the 15th case. After completing the coding process, I revisited each theme to ensure its rightful place in the coding hierarchy.

Themes

Six themes emerged from the data analysis. They, along with subthemes for Themes 1 and 5, are represented in Table 3.

Table 3*Themes Derived From the Data*

Theme	Subtheme
Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed gross psychological immaturity.	Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed low interpersonal relationship functioning.
Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed narcissistic tendencies.	Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed empathy deficits.
Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors used authoritarian leadership styles to leverage and manipulate their victims.	Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed low emotional intelligence.
Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors used religious status as a celebrity cover to disguise their true intentions to commit a sexual offense against a minor child.	
Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors selected their targets opportunistically.	Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors leveraged accessible vulnerabilities to abuse their victims.
Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors developed and utilized personal safe operation zones to abuse their victims and prevent discovery.	Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors created unique vulnerabilities to access and abuse their victims.

Data Discrepancies

A total of 31 cases were initially identified for analysis. Each was assessed as having fit the parameters of this study during the initial review. However, not every case had enough details available. Some were discarded because of the prohibitive cost of obtaining them. Within each case, significant variations were found (e.g., specific motivations) when the details were compared to the others. Due to purposeful sampling, no cases were included in the final 15 with any significant discrepancies that would require noting here.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Several strategies were enacted to ensure the credibility of this study. The literature and theoretical framework provided consistent background information to ground the study. The purpose and research questions remained clear while I coded the data. Regular self-analysis regarding the data was also helpful in maintaining the understood meaning of each code across each case as they were analyzed. Bias clarification occurred smoothly as I thoughtfully created notes about feelings and other biases related to the data. Bracketing notes helped separate personal feelings and emotions associated with the meaning of data points, enabling a more precise analysis.

Issues arose with triangulation as it was envisioned. The initial plan involved obtaining data from various sources pertaining to each case. In the end, this was not feasible. However, the sources from which data were obtained were reputable, ensuring the accuracy of the information received. Furthermore, as themes emerged, they were found to triangulate consistently from different cases. For example, the codes developed

inductively at the beginning remained consistent across cases, with few additions after the first several cases were completed.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, findings cannot be generalized over specific population groups. However, some of the themes may be identified if the developed codebook for this study were used to analyze additional cases within the same category of CSA. This element of transferability may be consistent across a wide array of cases with similar outcomes.

One of the main points of reliability related to this study was set within the supervision and review process. Although I went to great lengths to ensure the credibility and dependability of each step, the mandatory review process completed by my dissertation committee worked as an effective quality control measure to ensure the study's overall reliability.

Results

Theme 1

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed gross psychological immaturity. Perpetrators served in positions requiring wisdom and life experience to properly lead their parishioners. However, each of them pursued a dual-natured lifestyle. Most possessed very low self-esteem and attempted to cover it by appearing competent, wise, and professional.

Offender 13 was a music minister with a master's degree from a Midwestern Seminary. He filled the role of a thoughtful and wise church leader (his public persona) on Sunday mornings. During the week, he often answered Craigslist ads for deviant

sexual encounters, including one involving the sexual abuse of a child. His spouse requested he stop engaging in inappropriate sex outside their marriage. Instead of heeding her requests, he continued the behavior, ultimately leading to his arrest for CSA.

“[Offender 13] knew when he went back to the house that sexual activity – oral sex – was going to happen between him and the child and the child and [unnamed co-conspirator].” “[He] considered calling a friend who had retired from the FBI, but he didn’t. He continued to go back to the house on several occasions, to receive oral sex from the child, and paid [unnamed co-conspirator] money.” Instead of stopping the continued CSA by multiple adults, he personally returned at least seven times to receive sexual gratification at the expense of a young child. “[He] is an individual that has battled a sense of emptiness and low self-esteem over the years which he attempted to remedy through fantasy and compulsive masturbation.” He felt compelled to return to the scene of the crime multiple times when his co-conspirator demanded he do so. “He was saying...there might be a post you really, you really need to come over.”

He also was easily manipulated into paying money for sexual activity. He admitted to being asked,

...it was like, you know, we really need, uh, you know, we really need some rent money, uh, you know. I think one time it was her birthday or something. It would be nice for her to have, you know, some money to, to have a party or to get some clothes or something like that.

When asked why he returned to the residence multiple times, he admitted,

Well, well, I-I, honestly, I mean I was afraid because he had the email address. I-I was just afraid of what he, he might do. I didn't, I didn't know if...I-I-I just didn't know. I was, honestly I was, was scared slapped to death.

"I'm just, uh, I am scared at this point because I'm afraid that, again, uh, that I'm going to get exposed in some way."

Offender 1 held three vocational leadership positions, which each could have generated additional CSA candidates. However, he was known to only engage in sexual abuse with his daughter. Further, he reserved his CSA perpetration for when his frequently traveling spouse was out of the home. This offender admitted he abused his victim "because it was convenient and she didn't say no." He told law enforcement that "he wanted to tell police about this inappropriate behavior so that his family could 'move on.'" Unfortunately, he did not take responsibility for his conduct and only confessed to some of his deviant actions.

In contrast, the victim stated, "...as she got older, she began fighting back to prevent these sexual assaults from occurring." In addition, she reported that the offender "...would hit her with an open hand on multiple parts of her body when she would resist." After the forensic interview, law enforcement confronted him with his victim's full disclosure, and he admitted that her version of events was mostly correct.

Offender 8 built a widely known youth ministry, regularly speaking at megachurches and significant youth events across the United States. He needed others to consider him competent, wise, and worthy of ultimate respect and trust. He worked at great lengths to ensure other well-known religious leaders spoke well of him. However,

he used this ministry to arrange and fund sexual encounters with young males he met through his work. His ministry served as an avenue of quid pro quo to trade special trips and favors for sexual encounters with his abuse victims. One of his victims stated, “[The offender] molested me from the age of 12 until I was 15.” He was “...seen as a cool guy. So it made sense to want to be a part of his inner circle. It was not until I was in too deep that I realized this was nowhere near where I wanted to be.” However, the offender ...made it easy. He never brought up what we did when we were alone, even once. He sweetened the deal by buying me nice clothes, giving me money, and taking me on cool trips. As long as I ignored what I had to do to receive these perks, I could convince [myself] that I was living the good life.

Subtheme 1.1

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed low interpersonal relationship functioning. Protestant church-affiliated sexual predators were found to have very low functional ability to thrive in everyday social situations. They could not engage in a social give-and-take with people of similar age and intelligence. They regularly struggled to advocate for their personal preferences and struggled to communicate or maintain appropriate social boundaries. As a result, these individuals were found to seek out younger victims upon whom they felt more confident in asserting their sexual desires or needs. These younger individuals were chosen in many cases because of their lesser likelihood of declaring their personal boundaries and asserting their need for individuality instead of compliance.

Offender 6 could not function at a mature adult relationship level. Instead of engaging with socially congruent individuals with mutual heterosexual interests, he sought sexual fulfillment from a minor in his youth group. He initially engaged her under the guise of a mentorship relationship after she began talking about sexual encounters with other boys her own age. After obtaining her cellular phone number, he quickly led the conversation into sexualized discussions, ultimately resulting in them meeting at various locations for sexualized behaviors. After continually escalating the behavior, he eventually informed the senior pastor, who contacted law enforcement. When interviewed, he admitted "...he was unfamiliar with such attention from females of any age and that 'nobody had ever talked to [him] like that.'" Initially, he claimed his victim began discussing "...her sexual relationships with boys her age. [He] believed she needed guidance and 'allowed her to confide in him.'" In addition, the offender claimed his victim requested a description of "...the things he would like to do to her body." He responded with a desire to "...put her on his lap and run his hand up her leg." Further, when asked about the most beautiful part of her body, he responded, "Your butt." The victim was a teen female, and he was almost 40 years old.

Offender 11 served as a youth minister to several of his victims. He engaged in sexual relationships with several underage females from his youth group. He boldly checked some of the teens out of high school without parental consent and transported them to off-site locations such as hotel rooms to have sex. A victim's mother became suspicious after discovering blatant discrepancies between her child's actions and declarations regarding her activities. "[The victim] claimed she was spending all day at

school with a guidance counselor, and [the mother] learned that [the victim] was not at school that day.” The mother began reading one of the victim’s journal entries, “...which detailed events of [the offender] picking her up from school and taking her off campus without the parent’s knowledge. [The victim] also discussed going to a motel room and drinking beer...” with the offender. When interviewed about the conduct, the victim admitted “...she had sexual intercourse with [the offender], on several occasions” at his residence and a local hotel.

Subtheme 1.2

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed empathy deficits. Protestant church-affiliated child sexual predators possessed a remarkable lack of empathy toward others. Instead of concern for the thoughts, feelings, opinions, and desires of those around them, they regularly evidenced a need to seek personal satisfaction and fulfillment in their actions. As a whole, they were inwardly focused.

When Offender 13 was returning multiple times to sexually abuse a young female, the focus of his concern was on himself. “You know, uh. And I kept, you know, saying hey listen. You know, what...this...this is not good you know. She’s...you know, what if she...something happens? What if she says something?”

When Offender 3 became the senior pastor of his congregation, he wasted no time before sexually abusing children. After only a few months, he targeted his first known victim—a 5-year-old child. His abusive behavior occurred with at least three different children over several years. When she came to his office, he took her behind the desk and

sexually abused her. The victim stated, “Um, I just remember him [putting his fingers in my vagina] and I peed on the carpet and he was angry about it and I-I don’t remember anything past that.”

Ironically, the dress she wore—an outfit mandated for females by him and the church rules—made it much easier for him to access her body. During the offender’s trial, a prosecutor asked the victim, “And you mentioned that pants were disallowed so you would’ve been probably wearing a dress that day?” The victim replied, “Yeah.”

On another occasion, the offender was preaching using fear tactics to control his congregation. When the victim sought help, he forced her to perform oral sex on him.

He had been preaching a lot about hell, fire and brimstone, and I was scared so I went into his office to ask about salvation. I don’t remember his exact words, but I know it’s something along the lines of doing this would help, something like that. I just remember thinking that I might die because I can’t breathe, and I was choking, and I just checked out mentally.

“He ejaculated in my mouth and I spit it onto the carpet because it was disgusting.” The prosecutor asked, “And I believe you said in a response to your request for salvation the result was that he performed the oral sex on you that you described?” In response to this question, the victim responded with “Yes.” The victim testified about a third incident, saying, “He raped me.” “He attempted to put his penis in my vagina, but only the tip went in.” He followed her outside after dark one evening after “...I had gotten into a fight with one of my friends and I went outside to be alone.” “I remember being pinned on my back, and he attempted to penetrate me. Only the tip went in. He got frustrated, and he left.”

Offender 5 built an empire-like church scenario that regularly fed his sexual obsessions. His extremely long sermons each Sunday regularly focused on his viewpoints about sex. He often explained, "...that females are sluts and whores."

He then would say it was necessary for him to counsel them. The he would bring them in and that's when he would start the process privately of having sex with him, so that they wouldn't have this unquenchable fire anymore.

He began by preaching that "...you can't think about God and Jesus if you've got this unquenchable fire..." "I am the one who can take care of that problem for you." In reality, he owned a limousine and maintained a soundproof room at his home that he used to sexually abuse women.

His powerful influence led many parents to bring their underage daughters to him for special "counseling," as he called it. During these sessions, he sexually abused the young girls before returning them to their parents' care. His life revolved around fulfilling his personal interests, and he regularly failed to consider any opinions, desires, and needs other than his own. One of his victims stated,

Waking up on Christmas morning, excited to open my presents and use my new things. Getting a phone call from him demanding me to get to his house immediately. And me, sobbing in my bedroom, sobbing to my parents and begging and pleading not to take me to his house. Just to please say no.

Subtheme 1.3

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed low emotional intelligence. On the surface, perpetrators wanted their groups of

church attendees and others in their circles of influence to view them as professionals. They wanted to be seen as mature leaders who competently developed their people. However, they typically displayed low emotional intelligence in their third-person persona. Many of these men tirelessly worked to cover their true core identity in how they served at their church.

Law enforcement investigations of these individuals and subsequent legal proceedings in court revealed a different side than they portrayed to the general public. Most of these men quietly pursued minors for sexual purposes while attempting to appear as legitimate community leaders to those in their immediate public circle of influence. Moreover, their hunting behavior was intentionally semi-covert because their behavior was readily condemned by Protestant church religious beliefs and society as a whole.

Offender 14 held a doctoral degree and actively served as the senior pastor of his church during the time when his victim came forward with their initial CSA report. During his known sexual abuse, he took significant steps to appear legitimate to his parishioners at the expense of his family. He “blamed a relative of [his primary victim] for the allegations made by [his primary victim], claiming that the relative suffered some unspecified mental health and addiction issues.”

This offender spent quite some time attempting to groom and manipulate his primary victim. In one instance, the offender had been rejected by the angry victim after he offered to allow the victim to “...take a look at his penis any time...”, “...touch his penis, play with his penis and suck on his penis like a lollipop.” The offender told the victim they could “...tell him ‘anything,’ and ask him any questions, and that [the

primary victim] can show him anything ‘without having to be afraid, without having to be ashamed and without being embarrassed.’” He further stated that he “...will never do anything to hurt [the primary victim], will never force [them] to do anything [they do not] want to do.” The offender confirmed he would never tell anyone else what happened between them.

He later mailed some pages from a personal journal documenting some of his sexual abuse. He “...kept a journal. After [the primary victim’s family] relocated, [he] mailed some of the pages from the journal to [the primary victim].” He offered to allow the victim to read more of it after turning 18. He sent the journal portions after his primary victim angrily left his last in-person grooming session.

Theme 2

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors possessed narcissistic tendencies. Each of the offenders displayed some narcissistic tendencies. Five of the 15 perpetrators were exuberant personalities—self-made celebrities in their own right. The other 10 were also very narcissistic, but how they displayed it was different. For example, they still displayed confidence on the surface. However, their egos were effortlessly crushed. Many needed permission or encouragement from another person to act, even when targeting a minor for sexual abuse.

Offender 8 branded himself as a nationally recognized youth minister and New York Times bestselling author. He was recognized by famous Christian music artists and others as an authentic, talented person with a heart for Protestant youth. Megachurch pastors regularly invited him to speak, and he traveled significantly to accomplish his

obligations. He needed to be recognized by others as a top-caliber minister and individual with an overall mature self-concept. Indeed, he needed to cover past sexual abuse as a victim and later his actions to sexually abuse other young teens. A forensic expert stated about him, "...he is emotionally stunted, [and he] did not develop emotionally in the manner expected of a young male in society."

One of his victims stated,

Lastly and most importantly in my opinion, the sacrilegious method [this offender] used to recruit his victims has long driven a divide between me and my God, and I am still trying to reconcile. The pastor is often associated with the word that he preaches and is called to be an example for his flock. [The offender's] complete mockery of everything a minister is supposed to be has taught me to be skeptical of all clergy, not only the clergy but also the message they are preaching.

"One thing I am absolutely certain of is that if given the chance, [the offender] will immediately begin hunting other sheep. He is a wolf in sheep's skin that preys on the vulnerable, and like a wolf, his hunger is never satisfied."

Offender 2 exerted significant effort to show most people he was upstanding. He often sought to fill a mentorship role for many young people. In fact, he used this dialog to justify the sexual abuse of his primary victim. "...he decided he needed to stretch her legs, and he kept inching higher and higher, closer to her vagina." In response to her voiced discomfort, he replied, "...this is what Serena Williams's dad does for her." His victim stated, "After he would massage my leg muscles, he would make his way to my

private parts, and then he would massage there. When I told him to stop, he told me that this was the only way I would beat other people.” He slowly used his inflated self-image as the primary weapon in convincing his victim the abusive behavior was for her professional development as a student-athlete.

He needed approval or permission to act on his sexual urges. The first exposure occurred when his wife brought him and the victim into the master bedroom. Inside, she commanded the victim to remove all clothing, including underwear, and beat the victim with a belt. It became so intense that his wife chased the victim around the room while violently hitting her. Once his spouse beat the victim in this manner, he began to do this on his own, again ordering the victim to strip for her beating.

He emotionally groomed his victim intensely. She told him to stop on some occasions, but on others, “...he would convince me that this was for the greater good.” He spoke with his victim often about checking her “hymen” to see if she was still a virgin. When asked when and where this occurred, she stated, “He usually just incorporated it into an everyday conversation that we had.”

Offender 10 was a dynamic individual with a gifted ability to charm his victim. He appeared to think quite highly of himself. In bold fashion, he explained male ejaculation before demonstrating it for her. He traveled across multiple states to sexually abuse his victim and then preach to her father’s congregation the following day. This happened several times. He “...quietly laughed at me as he pushed and pulled my head up and down while I choked on his penis” in her parents’ basement when she was 15. Writing about his victim, he described “...me as a forest that he trailblazed.” When asked

by his victim, he explained that "...the world' wouldn't understand the illicit affair of ours he was suggesting, but God had provided us a path that we should follow together in secret." His victim later explained, "He had me, and my trusting parents, exactly where he wanted as he encouraged regular cross-country visits. I spent my free time, and my parent's free income, on making my way to his home: where he spent hours kissing and cuddling the body of a child. My body...."

Theme 3

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors used authoritarian leadership styles to leverage and manipulate their victims. In cooperation with another church leader, offender 15 used his leadership position to order underage victims to bathe using provided utensils in a wading pool. The offender "...admits that he conspired with [his unnamed co-conspirator] to record minors at the [unnamed Protestant church]. [They] set up hidden cameras around a room, all positioned to capture the genitals of the minors who entered the room." The offender and co-conspirator "...instructed the minors to stand in a plastic wading pool in the middle of the room, undress, and use buckets of water to clean their bodies and hair." The offender used his position of power to force his 11-14 year-old victims to undress and bathe in a room with inconspicuous recording devices. Because of that influence, the minors complied. The offender and co-conspirator "...surreptitiously recorded the minors, from multiple cameras, capturing the minors' genitals and anuses while they undressed, washed, toweled off, and redressed."

Offender 5 actively built his circle of influence. Although he was very active in recruiting outsiders into his church group, his idealistic nature drew them in. Once they came to his church, he held them there by preaching long sermons each Sunday, between two and four hours, in which he regularly spoke of sex. Specifically, he explained how all females were “whores” with insatiable sexual desires that needed taming so their hearts and minds could be drawn more fully toward God. Fortunately for them, he was the person who could “relieve their tension” so they could focus on God. However, his minor victims told a different story of

“...constantly flashing back to moments in the presence of a man taking away what I had left of my innocence and making me want to do nothing more than take my own life, rather than to even have to dwell on one more thought of [the abuse].”

One teen victim remembered her mother driving far to drop her at his house for counseling. On one occasion, she was excited to wake up on Christmas morning until her family received “...a phone call from him demanding me to get to his house immediately. And me, sobbing in my bedroom, sobbing to my parents and begging and pleading not to take me to his house. Just to please say no.” She further explained,

“Having so much taken away from me. And what was this all for? Sexual desires and pleasures. One man took away my innocence, my entire childhood, memories and happiness that can never be given back to me, for your own personal satisfaction.”

When he thought law enforcement began to see him as a farce, he fiercely demanded victims and others destroy DNA evidence to prevent him from getting caught. He demanded a victim go with one of his assistants to a storage unit where she was to dump a gallon of bleach on approximately 30 sex toys. The assistant also destroyed several computer hard drives.

Theme 4

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors used religious status as a celebrity cover to disguise their true intentions. Religious status was a significant contributing theme throughout each of the cases. Twelve offenders used their status to gain the trust of their victims and others who were present. They used their status as a defense, both implied and overtly, against the possibility that they could commit CSA.

One offender acquired his victim through Craigslist, but he maintained a flawless reputation through the church. Offender 13 admitted he placed ads for sexual activity involving a “grandpa fantasy.” In response to what type of ad he might place, the offender stated, “Gosh, uh, you know, sometimes I’ll say 62 years old, which I am, I am 62. Uh, you know, would like to meet a younger woman or something like that. Uh, now I-I, I’ve-I’ve never posted anything for anyone...I always say legal age on there.” “Yeah, I don’t put uh, excuse me, looking for anything illegal.” After someone responded to this ad, he met a co-conspirator who, upon arrival, informed him “a boy was in one room and a girl in the other.” After he went into the girl’s room, the man demanded the 10- or 11-year-old girl perform oral sex on him. “She put her mouth on [his] penis, but he claimed

that he could not reach an erection.” Subsequent trips resulted in similar CSA by this offender.

While committing these acts, the offender still held to an otherwise partially benevolent lifestyle. He was “...a man who took time to ‘visit the sick at the hospitals and nursing homes, a great personal friend, and a mentor.’” He maintained the persona of a good person whose family wanted him to return to their lives, including by influencing their children in the future. The judge believed this offender was highly amenable to rehabilitation. However, he made immoral and illegal choices over some time and would likely re-offend if given similar opportunities again.

Offender 9 was a trusted foster parent to a young female after the child was sexually abused by her family. He maintained his status as a pastor while committing brutal CSA on the child.

The child victim came into the custody of the defendant, and she came into his custody as a foster child because she had been sexually abused by her parents, because her parents had sold her for sex, for drugs. So when she went into the defendant’s custody, she went into his custody because she was looking for a safe home to live in and for the four years that she was in his custody, he sodomized her, he raped her and he sexually abused her. This child was five years old, and for four years, he raped, sexually abused and sodomized her.

Offender 12 held a volunteer leadership position in his church when he targeted minor females using social media platforms. He used his digital skills as a means to inhibit being discovered. The sentencing judge stated,

You have admitted to the crime, and in this crime in particular you were talking to a under 12-year-old female and trying to get her to show her sexual organs and breasts and, while you talked to her in a sexually provocative manner.

Although he was not known to use his status as a volunteer youth leader to further his CSA perpetration, he used his status in the community to protect his true identity from discovery—that of a CSA perpetrator. Because of his social status, he was able to remain undiscovered for some time. In addition, he convinced those around him, including the sentencing judge, that his actions were a once-in-a-lifetime act.

Theme 5

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors selected their targets opportunistically. Each of the 15 perpetrators was a child molester who sought minor victims as opportunistic targets. Four of the perpetrators performed sexual acts on prepubescent minors. However, each was married to adult females and held father-like positions, whether biological or legal guardianship. The other 11 perpetrators were primarily interested in post-pubescent victims with physical development yet without social maturity. None of the 15 perpetrators were true pedophiles.

Offender 7 was a middle-aged male senior pastor when he chose to sexually abuse his victim. His attorney represented the victim as having engaged in a consensual sexual relationship with the offender. The offender

...truly did care for the victim in this case, and I think she may have cared for him, at least what I have read in the dairies and whatnot. There was sex. The sex appears to have been between people consenting to the interaction.

“This was not a situation where [the offender], you know, sprung it on her and got her in a moment of weakness.” However, the victim said, “The worst thing that ever happened to me already happened in my own church, my own town.” “It’s been horrible and it’s been scary and it’s been one of the worst things I have ever been through.”

The offender gained access to his victim when adult friends invited him into their home. Instead of building a mutual relationship with the adults, he seized the opportunity to fulfill his inappropriate sexual fantasies. “This wasn’t her fault. And I want to apologize to [the victim’s parents] too. They were friends that invited me into their home. And it is not their fault. I was completely responsible.” It appeared that he tried to take some responsibility for his actions. However, the sentencing judge stated,

I would note...in the presentence investigation, as I read it, I got the distinct impression that you were blaming [the victim] for coming onto you and enticing you into the circumstances that eventually developed into your sexual relationship with her. It seems clear to me that [the victim] was emotionally dependent upon you....

Offender 4 leveraged his position as a retired pastor to convince his victim’s single mother of his benign motives. He represented himself as a wholesome father figure who could provide adult male guidance to her child. In addition, he acted like he would provide protection and appropriate oversight to the child while the victim’s mother worked multiple jobs to meet her financial obligations.

The offender’s son and the victim became friends, so the victim was regularly at the offender’s home next door. However, the offender invited him over “...to make a

little money...” by doing chores. About a year later, the offender asked the victim “...if [he] experimented and told me it was normal for guys to practice for when a girl comes around.” Then, through additional grooming actions to explain and convince his victim those actions were typical, the offender used “his hand” to touch “my penis” when the victim was only 11. The offender also requested “his penis” be touched by the victim’s hand and several other sexual acts. The offender also threatened to commit violence against the victim and his family if he ever spoke to anyone about the sexual activity between them.

Subtheme 5.1

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors leveraged accessible vulnerabilities to abuse their victims. These offenders masterfully manipulated their victims by taking advantage of the intrinsic vulnerabilities they possessed. For example, it was not uncommon for victims to have high levels of vulnerability in areas such as low socioeconomic status, children of a single parent, parents who were not focused on their children, or living with a stepparent.

Offender Number Eight used his seeming popularity among youth ministry partners to gain access to his male teen victims. Most of them were beginning to sort out their identity, and he used those circumstances to get what he wanted. He leveraged the money donated to his ministry to buy gifts such as nice clothing and special trips for his victims, effectively trapping them in his web. “[The offender] was seen as a cool guy. So it made sense to want to be part of his inner circle.” “[The offender’s] deeds also left me

confused. Puberty is difficult enough without having repeated traumatic instances inflicted on oneself. I spent several years questioning my own sexuality....”

Offender 4 located his primary victim quite easily and volunteered to be a positive role model in his life. The victim’s single mother struggled to meet financial ends and needed assistance. She likely trusted the retired pastor next door because she saw few other options. The victim’s mother testified she “...noticed over the years he became darker, more rebellious. Couldn’t quite understand what was going on...” “...I guess you don’t expect something like this to happen from someone that you trust, that has been trusted in the community. It’s been devastating. You know, I’ve seen my son almost destroyed. He’s almost died over this....” The offender kept an iron grip on the victim. In his own words, the victim explained, “He would kill everybody and himself before the cops ever got to him” if anyone was to ever report the criminal activity to law enforcement.

Subtheme 5.2

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors created unique vulnerabilities to access and abuse their victims. Offender Number Three, in addition to manipulating already present social vulnerabilities, created opportunities to abuse several of his victims. One of his victims was picked up weekly for a children’s class the church hosted. When the child needed to relieve himself in the restroom, he was denied, based upon informal policy at the church. The offender then decided to take the child to the restroom and “check him for rashes.”

Offender 5 recruited new parishioners for his church, then preached to them for lengthy periods about the horrors of females' sex drives. One victim testified,

...I was in high school. He was telling me that I was gonna be this horrible person, that I was gonna become pregnant, I was gonna be doing drugs, gonna end up doing all this stuff and basically made me scared of myself. And since he was my pastor and I trusted him, he advised me that I needed to be counseled by him and that he was the only person that could help me.

The victim was in the offender's truck for her second counseling session when he instructed her to "relax" and "take your pants off." The victim stated she complied, "Because I trusted him. He was my pastor. At that time, I trusted him..."

Theme 6

Protestant church leaders who were convicted of sexually abusing minors developed and utilized personal safe operation zones to abuse their victims and prevent discovery. Each perpetrator targeted their victims in specific safety zones. Grooming and CSA perpetration occurred within a specific environmental setup prepared by each offender. The reason for this location preference was to ensure they were not discovered. They also specifically chose their working environment so that others would not be present to confront or stop them from committing abuse.

Offender 1 waited until his spouse was away from home before manipulating his daughter. According to the victim, "...the sexual conduct occurred at [the family] residence in both [the offender's] and [the victim's] bedrooms. The offender "began touching her vagina with his finger when she was 6 or 7 years old." Sexual abuse

escalated from those actions until the offender abruptly stopped when the victim was 14. During the criminal case adjudication process, the prosecution noted, “All the incidences of molestation occurred in the familial home at times when [the offender] was alone with [the victim]. [The offender], disturbingly, describes these times as being ‘convenient.’ In reality, however, [the offender] planned his actions each night as he put [the victim] to bed.” He “...knew he would be alone with [the victim] and admitted that his wife traveled often and he would take advantage of her absence.”

Offender 6 used multiple discovery prevention zones to allow free and unobstructed access to his victim. He later admitted that the interactions “felt good,” and he was “unfamiliar with such attention from females of any age.” To ensure continued access, this offender communicated with his victim via SMS. He also selected meeting places where they could get together for hugs that also included the offender “touching her butt.”

Eventually, the offender began approaching his victim when she was in their church’s sound booth. While there, “he pressed his groin and erect penis against her buttocks.” On the final occasion, [the victim] tried to leave the sound booth. However, “he pulled her back. He hugged her, grabbed her butt, and kissed her neck before they separated.”

Offender 11 was quite creative in establishing his operation zones. He preferred to engage in sexual activities with teen females from his youth group. He [picked] her up from school and [took] her off campus without the parent’s knowledge. The offender performed sexual activities with his victims at one of his residences and a local hotel. In

addition, videos were recovered from one of the victim's phones which depicted "...sexually explicit activity between a White male and female." The offender also utilized Twitter to "DM" his victim, resulting in a barrage of sexually explicit images being sent and received by the offender.

Summary

The MO of Protestant church sexual predators involved a perpetrator with low emotional intelligence who developed paraphilic attachments to minors within their circle of influence. These perpetrators developed and manipulated their social environment to ensure it was conducive for the perpetration of CSA within the Protestant church setting. Further, the perpetrators analyzed in this study were opportunistic predators who took advantage of the problematic situations within Protestant churches to obtain their desired outcomes.

This chapter thoroughly covered this study's collection of data and its analysis. This included the setting from which the data was collected and a brief overview of the research subjects' demographics. Next, this study's results presented six qualitative themes drawn from the data and answered both research questions. Finally, chapter 5 will wrap up this study by comprehensively documenting the interpretation of findings, study limitations, recommendations, study implications, and the study conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of findings for the study. The first subtopic addresses the social and physical environmental factors that were relevant. Some unique vulnerabilities related to Protestant church CSA victimization are discussed, and victim characteristics and vulnerabilities are addressed. Next, perpetrator typology is covered. Finally, the chapter includes a discussion of the study's implications and provides recommendations for future research related to this topic.

Interpretation of Findings

Environment

Consistent with recent literature, findings suggest that minors face unique vulnerabilities in becoming victims of CSA within Protestant churches (see Kleiven, 2018; Raine & Kent, 2019). Leaders built hierarchal structures from which they ruled. Others created opportunities by using their office or reputation as a convincing bid for trust by church leaders to those needing additional assistance (see Agazue, 2016). Offenders regularly distanced themselves from the rule of law. Some believed they were local or national celebrities upon whom the rules of law and morality could not be enforced (see Erooga et al., 2020). Others believed they were too morally good to fail.

Patriarchal Authoritarianism

Authoritarian familial and social structures were found to be present in many of the cases that were studied. These structures set the stage for leaders to take advantage of weaker people, specifically minors, without worrying that they would be exposed (Clemens et al., 2020; Kleiven, 2018). For example, a well-educated, authoritarian leader

convinced his church that his granddaughter, his primary victim, was fabricating lies about him. The perpetrator blamed the victim's father (the perpetrator's son) by saying the son convinced her to make false allegations. Many people continued to believe the suspect for several years. The perpetrator preached his version of doctrines by convincing the parishioners that everything he said was correct because he said it. Parishioners hung on his every word (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 2020).

Offender 3, the church's senior pastor, set up a strong patriarchal authoritarian environment within which females of any age had little or no voice. As a result, many of the church's most dominant males rallied around the pastor in a group-think-type followership. A physical fight broke out when one man attempted to protect his family from continued abuse, even though he was unaware of the degree of psychological damage already done (Clerk of Courts for Erie County, Ohio, 2020).

This perpetrator engrained into his followers the view that a biblically sound family and spiritual life involved total submission to patriarchal authoritarian leaders (see Clemens et al., 2020; Kleiven, 2018). No one was allowed to say anything against him or disagree with his preaching because words from his mouth came straight from God. He then took advantage of the different vulnerabilities of his victims. One victim approached him because she was young and afraid. Another was at his church as part of their bus ministry outreach. He then "checked the child for rashes" in the restroom. A third victim was inappropriately touched in the pastor's office through his clothes. This perpetrator had a deteriorating relationship with his then wife during this time and shortly thereafter (Clerk of Courts for Erie County, Ohio, 2020).

Patriarchal authoritarianism was a dominant theme in many Protestant churches where leaders sexually abused minors. Patriarchal authoritarianism commonly occurred in ways that made parents and other significant adults with direct influence over a minor's life lose sight of the importance of proper social development in the younger person's core. Instead, disregarding minors' needs was the thinking pathway often used by adults. There were several reasons why this was significant.

Disregarding minors' needs set the stage for the leader to control every aspect of the victim's life by normalizing the lifestyle. The victim in most cases did not know any other lifestyle and therefore was not likely to resist the abuse. When a victim is taught to completely submit to the authority of church and familial leaders, an abusive leader can easily gain submission to CSA. Perpetrators used high levels of authoritarian power to convince victims they held the keys to eternal life. The minor was subjected to CSA as a perceived means to their salvation or to gain favor with the perpetrator and, subsequently, his blessing (see Agazue, 2016). Victims became accustomed to having their opinions, thoughts, and ideas disregarded as irrelevant by the people who were most important to them. Moreover, the disregard created more dysfunction within other families, making proper socialization of minors and young adults less likely.

Minors were preconditioned to believe no one would take an interest in their imminent demise. As a result, they were subconsciously trained to remain silent when CSA was perpetrated against them. Because it is humiliating, minors were less likely to cry out for help because they did not believe anyone would listen or provide relief.

Many church leaders who imposed this level of control transferred it from elsewhere: (a) They learned it through transgenerational patriarchal authoritarianism, or (b) they adapted it naturally due to dysfunctional personality characteristics (see Clemens et al., 2020). For example, extreme authoritarian control may be imposed when the offender feels inadequate, trapped, out of control, unheard, or disregarded within their core self. These feelings may occur as delusional perceptions, or they may be present in reality. These core problems are rooted in unhealthy attachment styles developed during childhood and in young adults (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Patriarchal authoritarianism demanded that church members and regular attendees, both adults and minors, blindly trust their leaders. When leaders demanded total submission, often by quoting scripture out of context or referring to their teachings as coming directly from God, those being taught were expected to give complete trust to perpetrators. Perpetrators can access victims and potential victims without regard for social concerns or primary boundaries that nonleaders must follow.

Minors were regularly taught a particular set of values through which they were required to make sense of life. Instead of being taught to assess and evaluate teachings and ideas for themselves, they were taught to embody the values of their predecessors without regard for personal, logical, or emotional connection. The truth was often taught as lists of rules instead of guiding principles through which every circumstance should be evaluated (see Raine & Kent, 2019). As a result, minors' overall prevalence of similar heartfelt religious expression in the future was diminished. There were inadequate means through which younger people could make sense of their environments, leaving them to

discard most points often made by their parents. Furthermore, this inadequate means to process life experiences often left minor victims more scarred and less equipped to recover from complex trauma.

Many of these cases created cognitive dissonance for bystanders. The evidence suggested that the façade created to convince those on the sidelines of a perpetrator's innocence made honest consideration of the evidence difficult. If a perpetrator was to be exposed, the person trying to report the injurious behavior would face psychological battles as they stood against many other people within their Protestant church. Anyone who reported a perpetrator was quickly alienated in several cases (17-CR-00139, 2020; E-20-0023, 2020; 2:19-CR-00311-WB, 2020).

Offender 5 highlighted the patriarchal authoritarian pastor who led the structural groupthink at his church. The perpetrator convinced the church body that his lengthy sexualized sermons provided unique guidance to deliver his female parishioners from “whoredom” into a life focused on God’s work. In his view, he was the only one qualified to deliver these women and girls from sexual frustration by performing sex acts on them. Numerous parents brought their young daughters to him for counseling, and he sexually violated them to “relieve stress” (Circuit Clerk of Clark County, Nevada, 2016).

The data suggested that this trust for church leaders is often requested and given naively and blindly (see Kleiven, 2018; Raine & Kent, 2019). As a result, perpetrators could sexually abuse the children under their care for some time. For example, when a stepfather took advantage of an environmental stage set by his wife, he was able to sexually abuse his stepdaughter for about a year (Circuit Clerk for Boone County,

Kentucky, 2020). When doubts regarding his character were brought against him, his charismatic talent convinced those closest to him that he was innocent. His wife complained after her husband's conviction that the legal system was supposed to protect innocent parties, implying her husband was innocent.

Blind Trust

Kleiven (2018) noted that because of the power differential between leaders and their followers in many Christian religious circles, leaders were often given complete trust because of their position. However, when trust was unquestioningly given, several victims from the current study were left with the consequences. Although not every Protestant church leader is unworthy of trust, responsible parties should always consider the evidence before giving it to them.

Consistent with findings from Moore et al. (2015) and Assink et al. (2019), children of single parents were significantly more vulnerable to CSA by church leaders. Because single parents often struggle with meeting financial obligations and are overwhelmed by absorbing the additional responsibility otherwise carried between two adults, the single parent's struggle to survive makes accepting assistance of almost any type mandatory. Viable options for relief, especially when considering meals and childcare, are often more difficult for single parents. Because single parents are not likely to have time to investigate an individual's character claims, a pastor, who typically holds the highest level of relational trust in his religious circle, is likely to be given access to the single parent's children without being questioned. Additionally, it would not be

uncommon for other parishioners from a church to vouch for their leaders as possessing strong character.

Social Boundaries

Powerful perpetrators were able to set themselves up, in some cases, as larger-than-life celebrities (see Erooga et al., 2020). Because perpetrators believed and taught that the rules did not apply to them, their actions often entailed unacceptable nuances that would have been condemned had they been attributed to another individual. However, because of these perpetrators' charismatic appeal, they were able to convince others to accept their inappropriate actions as justifiable.

The lack of acceptable yet firm social boundaries within many Protestant churches means that minors subjected to CSA will believe they are the only ones who experienced abuse at the hands of their perpetrator (Raine & Kent, 2019). Even though this was found to be a common belief in the current study, it was rarely a realistic viewpoint. For example, several of Offender 5's victims believed they were the only person enduring sexual abuse, even though he simultaneously took advantage of multiple victims.

Protestant church culture was wrought with teaching that included regurgitations of shallow understanding of denominational-level, human-endorsed, doctrinal beliefs (Raine & Kent, 2019). As time progressed, initial depths of idea development were endorsed by increasing numbers of newer followers but with decreasing remembrance of important motivational conclusions held by early leadership. The decreased understanding subjugated followers who considered group-level thinking acceptable.

Minors who were exposed to religious expressions in this way gave up these thinking pathways when acceptable alternatives were made known. However, if they were caught between egotistical authoritarian leaders' views with little value in individual thought, they appeared much more likely to fall prey to sexual abuse. This problem reduced minors' ability to think and express opinions as individuals in a manner that was perceived as socially safe.

Victims

For purposes of this study, a victim of CSA was a human being who experienced sexual abuse at the age of 17 or less perpetrated by an adult male Protestant church leader. Victims were not responsible for and did not have control over the sexual abuse perpetrated against them. Furthermore, in most situations, they had no control over any aspect of the abuse, including any ability to escape it.

This group of minors was accustomed to being instructed in every aspect of life. Especially in Protestant church circles, they were expected to obey, in most situations, their guardians and anyone else held by their guardians to a high standard, such as ministers and other leaders. Several characteristics were present in the minors who became the prey of male Protestant church sexual predators.

Victims had little to no ability to change critical aspects of their lives. They typically were not allowed to choose their family, church, and other adult support personnel. These choices were made for them. The level of familial dysfunctionality was out of their control. If the victim became isolated from one parent through divorce, death, or another challenging circumstance, it was out of their control. However, in each case

analyzed for this study, the victimized minors were stuck trying to survive the hardships presented with little recourse. Victims were sometimes not believed when they reached out for help.

Offender 2 held on to his victim, a stepdaughter, with an iron fist. He escalated the level of his CSA quickly, leaving his victim overwhelmed and unable to find relief anywhere. He resorted to threatening and carrying out physical violence to control every aspect of her life. He engaged in quid pro quo with her to release small restriction levels if she let him perform his preferred sexual acts on her. In this way, he abused her many times over approximately 1 year. After about a year of abuse, his victim made an inadvertent disclosure to a friend who reported the incidents to law enforcement. However, the victim was afraid to speak up to anyone, including her mother. When the victim tried several times to seek help from her mother, the mother repelled each cry for help. At one point, the mother recorded herself screaming at the minor victim. Offender 2's victim found no recourse until law enforcement and child protective services got involved.

Offender 5 recruited people to join his church body. He then conditioned future victims and their parents to believe he could help them focus on God by sexually abusing them. The brainwashing was so effective that some parents brought their children to him to be "counseled." One victim was brought to him on Christmas Day after he called the parents and demanded the child be brought to him. The quantity and quality of his CSA were extensive.

Offender 14 considered himself a celebrity to whom no rules applied. He abused his primary victim, a prepubescent grandchild, many times over several years in the master bedroom of his residence. This victim, too, had little recourse. Even after the child's parents filed a report with law enforcement, they continued to leave the victim and their sibling in Offender 14's care. Meanwhile, he continued trying to sexually abuse the child.

Parents and legal guardians are responsible for the safety of the children and youths under their care. Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) explained how healthy attachment begins with emotional regulation, love, and support of the child by a primary caregiver. When the child seeks comfort or the fulfillment of basic needs such as nourishment or safety reassurance, the primary caregiver's response to each need dictates the child's emotional development over the long term. The type and degree of interpersonal dysfunction will depend on the basic makeup of the infant's core personality and the style of negative interactions with the primary caregiver.

For some minors, obvious signs of tragic loss or emotional trauma at some point during their early lives appeared to significantly impact their social vulnerability. While not explicitly understood, it is possible that some minors never experienced healthy attachments. When minors do not experience the appropriate level of healthy emotional attachment as a baby, it is not impossible for them to later develop a healthy attachment. However, it is more difficult (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). CSA is only one of many possible adverse outcomes for minors who are unable, for whatever reason, to develop a healthy attachment.

Preventing CSA is one of many reasons parents, guardians, and other primary caregivers should ensure minors can develop through proper socialization throughout their childhood. Unfortunately, victims of CSA perpetrators in this study were disregarded and unheard. Their thoughts and opinions did not hold sufficient value and meaning to those closest to them. It is not simply enough that caregivers become available in the fateful moments surrounding potentially abusive situations.

The level of emotional security necessary for potential future victims to feel safe enough to talk to caregivers begins at the earliest age possible. When minors cannot feel secure and confident in their caregivers, they feel unimportant, disregarded, and hopeless. In this way, they are opened to psychological vulnerability in several ways. First, they crave emotional intimacy. When a potential predator begins to groom the minor, they can quickly fill that role, making the minor feel connected and loved (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). This allows CSA to be a natural next step. The minor is left with contrasting thoughts of wanting love yet receiving painful experiences from those with whom they felt connected for a time. Caregivers are still left out because they never established the relationship that gave the minor their voice. Second, when minors connect with their caregivers appropriately, their filled “love tank” brings a sense of calm and confidence to their person. It also leaves an open channel through which the minor may continue to reach out for help. This sense of confidence and open communication potentially diminish the chance that the minor will be victimized by CSA.

Raine and Kent (2019) pointed out the disastrous aftermath of minors who experience CSA or other abusive treatment that causes their worldview to collapse.

Specific to this situation was how caregivers worked to transfer their personal religious values and beliefs to those primarily under their care. For example, when a caregiver pushes the minor to encapsulate their religious belief system without permitting alternative options to harvest meaning from the world around them, they will likely experience a traumatic collapse within their worldview. The minors have little hope of finding significant meaning through difficult circumstances. They often entirely reject the belief system so intently impressed upon them.

Some of the now-adult victims whose cases were analyzed for this study found their circumstances were similar to those described above. For example, two of Offender Three's victims held contrasting views of the aftermath of their victimization. One victim found difficulty holding to any religious faith after being abused numerous times between five and nine years old. In fact, the first incident occurred when they went to ask questions of the pastor in the hope of finding relief from his frightening sermons.

Offender 10's victim was trying desperately to figure out much of their personal identity when they attended an out-of-state Protestant church camp and was singled out by him. The way he lived a double-sided lifestyle, including his portrayal of Christian living, while committing CSA against his primary known victim caused their worldview to collapse. They later referred to aspects of their religious belief system in a way that exemplified serious doubts as to whether any of it could be true. He contributed significantly to the total destruction of their religious understanding.

The way that some caregivers simply push their values onto those minors under their care runs closely together with minors being ignored and unheard. Beginning at a

young age, children have plenty of thoughts and opinions to express. However, over time, they become conditioned to withhold their communications from those appearing to be closest to them. It happens when, at an early age, the child is not given proper attention, care, and support (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Victims were selected from a wide variety of circumstances. Much of the unique vulnerabilities in Protestant church settings allowed them to be manipulated. Lack of social knowledge and appropriateness of behavior also led to some victims of sexual abuse being targeted (e.g., Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2018; John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2011).

Offender 5 regarded himself quite high in the area of counseling underage females. Through his unique preaching content on sexuality for long periods at a time, he manipulated an entire church body. This manipulation made it possible for him to spend considerable time on multiple occasions “relieving stress” from these young minors when he sexually abused them. When he informed parents of his need to counsel their young daughters, they brought their children to him. This was despite the regular sexually explicit “preaching” using inappropriate language aimed directly at females (Circuit Clerk of Clark County, Nevada, 2016).

Another minister convinced his congregation he could do no wrong. He then successfully abused two grandchildren—one was six months old. It took several more years and additional incidents before law enforcement successfully stopped his child sexual abuse (2:19-CR-00311-WB, 2020). This pastor was held in such high regard that parishioners would question nothing in his character under any circumstances.

When another minister was hired as a senior pastor, he began sexually abusing minor victims between five and 10 years old. The first victim, a five-year-old female, was grossly afraid of his “hellfire and brimstone” preaching and wanted to know how she could be saved from this horror. When she came to the pastor’s office, he digitally penetrated her, causing her to accidentally urinate on his office floor. When the victim was much older, she testified in court that his church body considered his words as if they originated from God’s mouth. Because he manipulated her worldview through fear, his victim came to him for help, allowing him to abuse her (Clerk of Courts for Erie County, Ohio, 2020).

Another child of a minister was successfully abused for 10 years because she was an “available” and “convenient” victim to her father during his wife’s frequent travels. When the abuse was made known while dealing with a family issue, his wife and other family members refused to report him to law enforcement. When he reported himself to law enforcement a year later, he was only partially truthful to avoid getting in as much trouble (Indiana Office of Court Services, 2021).

Although these characteristics may undoubtedly be found among other victims of CSA, many of this study’s victims could not assert their identity, personal desires, and needs. The authoritarian leadership styles in some Protestant churches and parishioners’ homes were a primary theme among victims who were ignored and considered unimportant. Leaders’ attitudes and direct actions taught victims that they were not allowed to consider alternative options to perpetrators’ opinions on right and wrong. Patriarchal authoritarianism appeared to serve as a primary catalyst that blended victims’

families into enmeshed groups which lacked healthy levels of individuality (Kleiven, 2018; Raine & Kent, 2019). The level of psychological enmeshment found may have been a primary reason for the unquestioned, blind trust given to church leaders who did not earn or deserve it.

Some victims relied heavily on Protestant church leaders to understand their social, psychological, and spiritual deficits. Relying on leaders made it difficult for victims after having their trust betrayed in such a traumatic way. Overall, CSA victimization had some effect on victims' future religious endeavors. Knowing that some perpetrators' ultimate betrayal of their trust had perceived adverse effects on several victims' future relationships with God. One of Offender Three's victims reiterated that she became more devoted to her faith after being sexually abused. However, other victims were not as sure. Some felt like they had no idea how to factor religion into their lives after experiencing the CSA (Circuit Clerk of Clark County, Nevada, 2016; Clerk of Courts for Erie County, Ohio, 2020; U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, 2022).

Perpetrators

Perpetrators comprised a wide array of offenders. Some utilized their charm to manipulate parents into bringing their children to them for sexual abuse in the name of counseling or babysitting. Some church leaders created religious terror in their victims' eyes, setting them up as keyholders to the kingdom of God. Others used their mandates to welcome vulnerable minors to attend featured experiences such as youth events. One offender engaged his target after meeting her at an out-of-state event. After returning

home, he continued to groom her from multiple states away. He invested significantly in convincing her father, a pastor, of his righteous intentions, even while he took advantage of her in his basement.

Perpetrator characteristics were discussed in Chapter 4 specifically as they related to each offender. No offender possessed every characteristic. As additional perpetrators get added to this research, more characteristics may be highlighted that could provide additional insight.

Warning Signs

In alignment with Dr. Hickey's RPA (2015), offenders with grossly misaligned social skills and low psychosocial intelligence were able to work their way into leadership positions in Protestant churches across the United States. At the time of their leadership installation, many of these men did not cognitively process the idea of actualizing sexual deviance with minors. However, each of the then-future perpetrators possessed the social inability to function at a normal level of relationship status. Because of this, it may be possible to enact efforts that prevent the quantity of CSA-perpetrating male Protestant church leaders from abusing minors.

No person who aspires to lead any church body will ever be completely free from the possibility of developing inappropriate sexual relationships. However, warning signs may be observed related to future offending behavior. For example, male Protestant church leaders who interact with young, vulnerable females under their care should caution themselves against free interactions separate from the placement of specific, clearly communicated social boundaries. This should be a careful consideration,

especially if the man has difficulty expressing some of his sexual desires to his current spouse.

In some cases, a spouse or close friend may be the only reliable source of information used to assess whether a male Protestant church leader perpetrated or is considering the perpetration of CSA. Offender 8 worked tirelessly to build a popular, nationally known youth ministry. He regularly spoke at widely known Protestant church youth events. He was reviewed with much praise by nationally known worship music bands and others. However, his wife understood something else that was occurring. She filed for divorce two days after he was arrested for CSA perpetrated on multiple early teen males. She expressed fear for her personal safety, believing as her husband's ministry façade crumbled, he would potentially take her life.

Offender 8's spouse understood warning signs that he was engaging in inappropriate sexual behavior with underage males. Even though many people in his circle could not see the problems, his wife understood something was wrong and took action to ensure her safety once his cover was broken.

Offender 10's spouse understood that he was going through major depression. She discovered his sexual misbehavior with the early teen sometime before any law enforcement intervention occurred. His wife spoke about being a strong person during his sentencing hearing. She could have reported her husband sooner if she had been as independent as she wanted others to believe. This could have stopped the abuse more quickly.

His wife knew his secrets for many years. In fact, she asked him to quit posting ads on Craigslist and quit responding to others' requests for deviant sexual encounters with them. Even though she continued begging him to stop, she chose to stay with him. She knew that on Sunday, when he was in front of the church body leading them in worship music, he was fulfilling his double life.

It is quite interesting that most of the warning signs related to these perpetrators were identified and observed by people closest to them. Still, in some cases, those near the offenders did not stand up and resist them. His wife, on the other hand, tried unsuccessfully but was disregarded.

It should be noted that many offender characteristics are difficult to discern and may only be possible by someone with intimate firsthand knowledge of the perpetrator. Only people who can decipher first persona characteristics about an individual are likely to see and understand many important warning signs pointing to an offender.

Psychosocial Immaturity

Before intense sexually deviant risk-taking in a potential relationship, signs of immaturity may be evident, even without sexual overtones. Offender 6 served as a worship minister and youth leader. Beginning well before his sexual deviance started with his primary victim, compelling evidence pointed to general social immaturity in his personality. He expressed what he credited as his original musical compilations when they were borrowed tunes and lyrics with a few words or phrases changed. He attempted to express himself on multiple occasions but fell short of the ability to connect with

adults of similar age. Further, he acted like he had more mutual social connections with teens than middle-aged adults in his then-current age class.

Another example of significant psychological immaturity was recorded in Offender 5's sermon archives. His inward-focused talks involve his ability to save women from unnecessary stress due to uncontrollable sexual tension. He overtly portrayed himself as these young women's sexual savior with the power to free them to have logical, cognitive thoughts in essential areas of life, such as focusing on God. His blatantly immature self-portrayals should have been a significant warning sign to anyone near him. However, due to unheeded warning signs, he was able to sexually abuse multiple vulnerable underage females over the years. He convinced many parents to facilitate the abuse by transporting their children to his desired locations of abuse perpetration and leaving the minors in his care for his version of specialized counseling. The level of inward-focused self-talk characteristic of him should be a significant warning sign of stunted psychological development to any individual or group, considering the behavioral implications. Other signs of psychological maldevelopment may include extreme fear of others' disapproval or social opposition, discomfort with one's core self, few or no social boundaries, dysfunctional early home life, living a double life, and personal willingness to preserve self at a high cost to others.

Narcissistic Tendencies

Many perpetrators in this study exhibited narcissistic tendencies. Indeed, some could be diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Five out of 15 perpetrators fashioned their own type of grandiose

celebrity status. They genuinely believed that society's rules regarding CSA did not apply to them, and they could continue sexually violating minors and not be held accountable. They firmly held, in varying ways, that others should look up to them as "special" and "intelligent." Some were offended when held accountable for their actions and blamed the system or others for their plight. By appearances, it seemed like many offenders plead guilty because they needed to appear righteous and contrite in their hearts.

Even though Offender 5 received a trial by jury in a fair manner, he attempted to hijack the sentencing proceedings and rant continuously about receiving a "lynching" instead of a fair trial. On the other end of the spectrum, 14 acted like he was taking full responsibility in court after he shamelessly violated two of his grandchildren. Before his arrest, he accused his victims' father (his own son) of lying and convincing his victims to lie about him and make up untrue stories. After spending time in pretrial confinement, he explained that the explicit photographs and videos of his grandchildren's sexual abuse were intended to be private and only viewed by him. In this way, he continued trying to justify his actions. Only when he realized the evidence was strong did he plead guilty to the charges against him.

Consistent with the four categories of offenders offered by Rebocho and Goncalves (2012), three offenders fell into the hunter category. Hunters looked for their victims from within their general location. Some hunters utilized their specific social circle as their hunting ground.

Three offenders whose cases were used for this study were classified as poachers. These perpetrators quickly snatched up their prey and began sexually abusing them. They

traveled some distance away from their home bases to find their victims. Interestingly, it appeared like these offenders wanted to continue a lifestyle façade at their base and allow it to remain free from interruption (Rebocho & Gonçalves, 2012).

Four perpetrators fell into the category of trollers. Trollers have poor impulse control and are likely to fantasize about sexual interactions for a significant period before any offense occurs. When trollers realize they can live out their fantasies and develop them further, they act out their desired sexual abuse upon the victim they identified (Rebocho & Gonçalves, 2012).

Some of the most dangerous perpetrators try to entice or bait their victims to a location that is highly advantageous to the execution of their planned crimes (Rebocho & Gonçalves, 2012). Called a trapper, this offender may choose an occupation or position that allows them the maximum return on their investment. They may wait long before striking if they can better prepare the stage for their crimes.

Groth Classification

Two offenders were fixated on a particular group of victims (Bartol & Bartol, 2017). One of these attacked his victims by taking advantage of their psychological vulnerabilities. One of his victims was afraid due to his aggressive preaching of fearful topics (Clerk of Courts for Erie County, Ohio, 2020). The other used his popular youth ministry to meet future victims. In addition, quickly exchanging social media or cellular phone numbers gave him immediate opportunities to request sexual behaviors with them (Circuit Clerk of Etowah County, Alabama, 2019).

Several perpetrators regressed from sexual relationships with adult intimate partners to hunting out minor victims to manipulate (Bartol & Bartol, 2017). In some cases, the specific reason for the regression seemed unclear. In others, their adult counterparts' perceived rejection or lack of availability led them to pursue illicit relationships with minors.

As Bartol and Bartol (2017) added, exploitative offenders threaten or use physical force or violence against their victims to control them. For example, a father figure slapped his victim if she resisted him (Indiana Office of Court Services, 2021). During the earlier years of her victimization, she was compliant. However, once she became a teen, her father felt it necessary to enact violence to bring her back into compliance.

Aggressive/Sadistic offenders are sexually stimulated when their victim faces perceived or actual pain. This study revealed one such offender. Although his spouse first caused the sexualized pain and violence in his presence, the perpetrator quickly began using it for sexual fulfillment and other sexual acts. He also used the threat of violence to gain compliance while he performed less violent sexual acts on his victim (Bartol & Bartol, 2017; Circuit Clerk for Boone County, Kentucky, 2020).

Relational Paraphilic Attachment

Dr. Hickey's theory of Relational Paraphilic Attachment says that sexual offenders develop fantasy and authentic relationships with their victims when they cannot build or maintain a normal romantic relationship with their lover of choice (Hickey, 2015). Consistent with this approach, the findings of this study confirm the application of this theory to child sexual abuse. In Protestant churches, pastors and often other leaders

struggled with developing normal romantic relationships within the confines of their respective doctrines. Due to the religious context, these relationships are perceived to have been shaped by greater psychological discipline, creating blind acceptability within the church. These parameters, often considered unrealistic by outsiders, put additional pressure on Protestant church leaders to act in a specific way. This adds the need for perceived secrecy and possible greater maladjustment in normalized sexual behavior.

Similar to Catholic priests, Protestant church sexual predators possessed grossly underdeveloped psychosexual maturity, low impulse control, low levels of mature interpersonal socialization skills, and substantial empathy deficits. These were found to exist in several ways (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2011).

One of the essential social deficits was Protestant church leaders' inability to recognize the appropriate relationship with their parishioners. Perpetrators could not comprehend the high standard of conduct and correct social boundaries needed to lead their church (Kleiven, 2018). For example, Offender 11 genuinely wanted to serve to give back to society. However, he could never operate with strong emotional congruity to similar-aged adults. As a result, he connected with many younger teens and regularly enjoyed sexual relationships with them (U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida, 2016).

Similarly, Offender Eight expended excessive efforts to be portrayed as mature and able to lead others. However, despite his efforts to cover his gross immaturity, his behind-the-scenes requests for sexual relationships with young teen boys eventually caught up with him. He needed to appear perfect, organized, and professionally

connected. However, after several years, he could not maintain the façade (Circuit Clerk of Etowah County, Alabama, 2019).

Offender 14 possessed a Doctoral degree and served in senior church leadership. However, he possessed low emotional intelligence and attached himself to two of his grandchildren, establishing sexual relationships with minors between six months and 11 years old. He was, however, able to convince many adults that he did not attempt any inappropriate relationship with anyone else. He was assumed to be mature due to his age, professional experience, and advanced education (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 2020).

Still, others, namely Offenders Six and Seven, found they could connect mutually with early teen females during emotional insecurity. Offender Six admitted to law enforcement that the attention his victim gave him felt excellent. He was not used to receiving sexually charged approval from and connection with any females before his illegal relationship with his victim (Stoltenburg, 2016). Offender Seven found himself sexually attracted to his teen female volunteer assistant. Since he failed to recognize the need to set and solidify a social boundary with her as her pastor, it appeared acceptable to perform various sex acts with her. Interestingly, he viewed himself as nearly equal to his victim at about 50(Circuit Clerk of Lincoln, South Dakota, 2015).

While the data collected for this study appeared consistent with the theoretical framework, paraphilic attachments by these pastors can occur for several reasons. Unfortunately, much of the holistic background information related to the reasons behind relational paraphilic attachments was not as readily available as other data. In addition,

due to the limited scope of this study, additional research into the relational paraphilic attachments of Protestant church-affiliated men who sexually abuse minors is needed.

Limitations

As with any qualitative phenomenology, quite a few significant limitations exist. First, cases only included former male Protestant church leaders convicted of CSA. The study was limited to convictions occurring in the last 10 years within the 48 contiguous states of the United States. The author acknowledges that the variety of CSA perpetrators is expansive and can include more than one gender and sexual orientation. However, expanding to include these additional offenders would make the study unreasonably massive and cause an overall loss of focus.

Within this limitation, several cases were initially selected for use. However, they could not be included for reasons outside the author's control. One such situation occurred within one of the states when the author requested case information for two cases. For both cases, the cost per page to obtain was greater than considered reasonable. In addition, many of the other cases identified initially for collection proved to be challenging to find. In the end, some others that were more easily obtained were substituted.

Data was obtained from transcripts of court proceedings for the research subjects. As expected, there was little to no shortage of cases for this type of data. However, as to other sources, most of the searching yielded disappointing results. Law enforcement agencies were not able to assist with collection efforts because their data was incomplete and often sensitive. Prosecutors' Offices were also unable to provide data on sensitive

investigations. However, once the final adjudication of each case was complete, the data became available for use. As a result, all sampling was purposefully based on reliability and ease of information obtained.

Data were obtained for perpetrators of more than one race. However, the variety did not accurately represent the offender group's demographics. Even so, the diversity provided some insight into clues for research subjects other than White males.

While this study revealed critical qualitative details about Protestant church-affiliated male perpetrators of CSA, none of the study results can be generalized across any population group. However, general profiles can be built from the resulting information. The data can provide a better understanding to professionals in multiple fields of study.

Recommendations

As a result of the knowledge gained by this exercise, I recommend several areas of future research. First, a qualitative inquiry into the psychological aspects of offenders' backgrounds could more effectively inform professionals who work in forensic settings. Second, a qualitative study into victim characteristics could provide additional scientific development to create profiles and further proactive crime prevention efforts. Third, statistical research into the prevalence rates of these offenses in Protestant churches could help scientists, legal authorities, and church leaders better understand the seriousness of this social problem.

Decision-makers in the legal and social science disciplines could benefit from research into other areas of this phenomenon. For example, society has not seen as many

female offenders using Protestant church settings as a means to sexually abuse children. However, this phenomenon merits the effort needed to understand it. Another inquiry could shed light on any older children who may use similar circumstances to their advantage against their younger counterparts.

Implications

This study contributes uniquely to forensic psychology by delving into Protestant church-affiliated male CSA perpetrators' MO and target selection criteria. Its findings are not exhaustive, but they provide a general overview of the lives and criminal activities of several of society's more devious child sexual predators—those who use Protestant religious exercise as their primary means to abuse minors.

In today's social climate, minors are likely to become vulnerable to sexual violence. The primary leadership responsibility to prevent this vulnerability is primarily with each child's caregiver. Beginning at the time of birth, the primary caregiver can begin facilitating a solid bond with the child. By regularly providing comfort, nourishment, and emotional regulation through care for the child's needs, this adult can begin a relationship of trust that continues throughout the child's life. The relationship can mature as the child grows into adulthood (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Though not all traumatic circumstances are preventable in a child's life, developing healthy attachments with children could diminish the overall chance that strongly negative situations occur. For example, a child who feels safe communicating their feelings to an adult may be more likely to open up about unsafe conditions.

Furthermore, clear communication may, in some situations, be a deterrence to a potential CSA perpetrator if they observe a strong relationship with their primary caregiver.

Strong social development across a child's period of growth into adulthood, as facilitated beginning with the child's primary caregiver, could lead to less of a chance the child might become a future perpetrator. When a minor learns how to develop a strong relationship with a possible sexual partner, they are more likely to engage with the individual in socially healthy ways (Freund & Watson, 1990; Hickey, 2015).

The data confirmed the presence and the nature of these offenders. RPA successfully guided the overall study and revealed specific details of the motives and context of the offenses. The extraordinary lengths some offenders will go to perpetrate their crimes were thoroughly documented. As a result of the findings, additional aspects of society responsible for protecting minors can significantly profit from sharing this information.

Protestant churches that live up to the ideas presented by Jesus Christ and the New Testament writers concerning protecting children from abusers can significantly benefit from the knowledge gained (New International Version, 2011). Church hiring committees and senior leaders can better understand signs of sexual deviance aimed at coercing children into abusive situations. Furthermore, with this knowledge, they can affirm victims of CSA by more thoroughly understanding the signs that point to perpetration in their circle of influence, especially in the face of offender denials. Church leaders can also benefit from understanding when they should contact authorities to deal with a situation of this magnitude.

Law enforcement agencies and child protective services can benefit from training developed in this study. The ability of investigative personnel to decipher perceived and actual truth related to incidents of CSA in church will be valued beyond measure. In addition, the added authority resulting from this information will instill confidence in their efforts to protect society's most vulnerable humans.

Legal teams could benefit from this study because it reveals a measure of information already assumed to exist but not yet academically addressed in this magnitude. In addition, it will help them inform triers of facts in a court of law, whether they are a jury or judge in civil or criminal proceedings.

Finally, the opportunities to provide training on this topic could significantly inform individuals from diverse levels of society. The likely outcome could be changing the life course for some victims as they regain the necessary hope to tell their stories. It could also cause more professionals to listen better when victims speak up. Most of all, small parts of society can be more aware of this phenomenon and more affirmingly approach their response to victimization by CSA perpetrators in Protestant churches.

Conclusion

In summary, this study's goal was to examine the modus operandi and target selection criteria of male, Protestant church-affiliated child sexual abuse perpetrators. This study determined that Hickey's Relational Paraphilic Attachment details offenders who use their affiliation with Protestant churches to sexually victimize minors. These offenders, like many others, develop deviant sexual fantasies with their victims that are often acted out through real-life scenarios.

Due to the socially demanding environment of the Protestant religious setting, offenders appear to lean toward these deviant opportunities differently. Furthermore, offenders can create more opportunities by grooming their environments and those of their victims to be more conducive to offending. Because of these offenders' social standing, they can more easily facilitate the necessary facets of preparation and setup, which lead to the offending behavior. Furthermore, data from this study presented specific areas of vulnerability that will plague the Protestant church in the future unless strong countermeasures are exacted against these social problems.

Unique vulnerabilities related to Protestant church religious circles can more easily turn vulnerable minors into victims of violent sexual abuse. Traditional patriarchal authoritarian viewpoints common among this category of victims and offenders seem to set a stage for blatant CSA to be perpetrated. This operational social environment virtually eliminates the opportunity for vulnerable minors who otherwise might attempt to speak up. When forced to endure greater punishment, they are not likely to tell of the abuse they have suffered. Overall, this environment teaches minors to be present without giving their opinions or discussing anything with adults who do not usually care to hear from them.

Data in this area revealed that some perpetrators worked extensively to cover up and subsequently deny involvement in such behaviors. In some cases, their efforts paid off, allowing victims to be further traumatized by the social circles around these events. Victims were made to feel worthless and hopeless. They were called many different unprofessional and unkind names. They were blamed for destroying perpetrators'

reputations and ministry circles. Supporters from perpetrators' churches, friends, and families often blatantly refused to believe victims, even in the face of direct evidence that the offenses occurred as described.

In addition, authoritarian leaders often charismatically proclaimed their version of events as the truth, even while knowing they were blatantly lying. Their thoroughly convincing arguments to never doubt the senior leader's opinions or the trust demanded blindly of followers also add to the unique issues facing these Protestant churches. This environment further facilitates an unhealthy social fear of others within weak persons when they refuse to follow such traditions blindly.

CSA perpetrators within Protestant church environments have a vulnerable population on which to prey. Minors are told how to believe and what stance to take on any subject. They are told the only way to "Heaven" is by being dedicated followers. Then, when societal waves of disagreement attack their uniquely planted ideals, the lens through which all central societal processing occurs begins to collapse. In those critical moments, few resources remain to assist with a foundational understanding of their victimization by publicly glamorized and glorified perpetrators. Victims are left reeling as a result. Often, they never fully recover from the psychological damage.

Fundamental change in how minors are trained and equipped to face daunting life circumstances could assist with making great strides in prevention efforts. Giving immense value to the thoughts and opinions of minors can help them feel welcome to report an incident of CSA or attempted CSA to their protectors. Furthermore, declining to consider grossly narcissistic personalities with egotistical desires to prove their views

may be one of the most substantial prevention efforts to ensure future CSA does not occur in Protestant churches.

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Appendix: Summary of Criminal Cases

Offender 1

A middle-aged, married White male performed sexual acts upon his adopted daughter over eight years. In addition, he violated at least one of the daughter's friends during a sleepover at his residence. During that timeframe, he worked as a school nurse at local elementary and middle schools, served several years as an assistant pastor at a local Church of the Nazarene, and ran his private ministry firm. In addition, his spouse traveled significantly, and he waited until she was away before performing the sexual abuse (Indiana Office of Court Services, 2021).

While attempting to assist his primary victim through some relationship difficulties, she burst into tears. She demanded that he inform his spouse regarding his sexual abuse of her. The victim threatened that if Offender One did not do so, she would share the details with her mother.

After he confessed his actions, the spouse took their other daughter and the victim away for the weekend but returned home a few days later. Instead, the victim was supported by her mother and his sister, an aunt from a different state of whom the victim was quite fond.

Initially, no report was made to law enforcement. The spouse was unwilling to permanently remove the primary victim and her sister from contact with the abuser. After an entire year, the abuser contacted law enforcement to report his behavior and was subsequently arrested. The spouse also was arrested for failing to protect a juvenile from sexual harm and for failing to report the incident to law enforcement.

Offender 2

While pastoring a small, tight-knit, nondenominational group of parishioners, Offender Two groomed his daughter and sexually abused her. He was a middle-aged African American male with a formidable reputation among parishioners. While maintaining this cover, he used sports and corporal punishment to gain access to and violate his 14-year-old daughter (Circuit Clerk for Boone County, Kentucky, 2020).

He began corporal punishment on the victim only after she turned 14. The beatings appeared severe and were administered by both him and his female spouse. The first incident happened after the victim got in trouble. His spouse forced the victim to remove all her clothing, including underwear, to receive a naked beating with a belt. His spouse conducted the beating in his immediate presence. The victim later reported to the court that while he observed, the spouse chased the victim around the bedroom, striking her wherever the belt could make contact.

He only started beating the victim naked after her mother forced her to remove her clothing in her father's presence to receive a beating with a belt. The resulting quid pro quo allowed him to view and digitally penetrate her genitalia in exchange for his mercy in the face of severe physical abuse. His demands to violate his victim sexually in exchange for mercy slowly expanded to circumstances when the spouse planned to discipline the victim harshly. At one point, the victim was allowed to attend a homecoming dance only after she allowed her father to penetrate her digitally.

Around the same timeframe, the victim began running cross-country. He used this circumstance to "stretch" his daughter's leg muscles as she lay down. He spent

considerable time explaining that Venus and Serena Williams' father helped them with stretching exercises. Then, he massaged his victim's legs while moving his hands closer to her genital area. Finally, he slid her shorts and underwear to the side and penetrated her.

He spent considerable effort to control the overall narrative in a fashion that initially inhibited discovery and overall believability when his victim tried to break his hold on her. When she disclosed this to a friend, the friend informed law enforcement and started the investigation. The daughter bravely pressed forward while receiving intense psychological pressure from her abuser and his spouse. The victim's mother refused to listen to or believe her, even after he went to prison for his crimes. The victim was subjected to several different means of gaining psychological submission so that her father's sexual pleasure could be fulfilled.

Offender 3

Almost immediately after becoming senior pastor of an Independent Fundamental Baptist (IFB) church, Offender Three began selecting and grooming his victims. He was an older White male married with children during most of the known sexual abuse he perpetrated (Clerk of Courts for Erie County, Ohio, 2020). He was tried and convicted three separate times. The first two attempts were declared invalid. Important technicalities caused a mistrial on one occasion and resulted in the conviction being overturned on the other. At the third trial, he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Subsequent appeals have been denied to date.

He set the stage to sexually abuse prepubescent children by grooming the congregation. He was so convincing that his parishioners understood his preaching as coming “from the mouth of God.” He worked tirelessly to ensure his authoritarian rule was never questioned. The specifics of this group’s beliefs allowed him to remain above reproach while he violated his victims. He established rules such as “females must only wear skirts and dresses (not pants or slacks)” and “no consumption of alcoholic beverages.”

He utilized numerous tools to violate his victims and ensure no one questioned his motives or actions. This allowed him to acquire at least three prepubescent victims. When one came to him out of fear they would go to hell, he used that time to create hell on Earth for her. All of his known victims were under 10 during their abuse. Most of them engaged in self-harm or physical harm toward others.

Through skillful manipulation tactics, he maintained his freedom for several years after his first victim made an important disclosure. Unfortunately, his ability to control the narrative allowed additional harm to other children before the known extent of his crimes became known. As a result, he was sentenced to serve a life sentence and will never be released.

Offender 4

After over 50 years of ministry, Offender Four retired and began working at a small Christian K-12 education center. After retirement, he was arrested for sexually violent conduct against an 11-year-old male who lived next to him. The subsequent investigation uncovered several years of sexual abuse by him upon his male victim

during his most recent preaching assignment before retiring (Circuit Clerk of Tate County, Mississippi, 2013).

As a prepubescent male, the victim was invited to his house to do chores and other odd jobs for insignificant amounts of money. During that time, the victim also befriended his son. After a few years, he began to slowly groom the victim by engaging in sexually explicit conversations with him. This progressed until he decided to educate the victim so he would be prepared for when it became time to have sex with a similar-aged female.

He engaged his victim in sexually violent conduct, including fondling him, penetrating his mouth and anus, having the victim perform those same acts upon him, and exposing photographs of the behavior. During those instances, he explained to the victim how their actions were “normal” and prepared him to have a great sex life later. Finally, he convinced the victim to engage in bi-directional sexual penetration.

As the victim aged, the conduct continued. When the offender’s explanations of the behavior broke down, he maintained control of the victim by ensuring the victim believed he would go on a murder/suicide rampage. He confirmed that he would murder the victim and himself before law enforcement arrived at the residence. As a result, the victim was emotionally trapped for several years.

Once the victim spoke with his single mother about the crimes, law enforcement got involved. During a secretly recorded phone conversation between them, he freely spoke about observing the growth of the victim’s penis over an extended period. Law enforcement collected the phone call as evidence, and he was arrested.

Offender 5

The fiery antics and long sermons that Offender Five preached set the stage for him to abuse multiple female teen victims (C-12-282760-1, 2015). Not only were his sermons excessive in length, but the content of his preaching was often explicit. Members and regular attendees of his church were taught that females were “whores” who could not function in society because they possessed an extensive sex drive. Fortunately, their savior from this evil situation came as himself, a ready and willing sexual partner for all oppressed women.

He regularly sexually abused multiple teen females under the guise of counseling them. He used sexually explicit language during long sermons and an extensive array of sex toys on the females he counseled, doing so only to help them “release tension.” This was, of course, supposed to enable them to function adequately within society. But, most importantly, it cleared their minds to follow God’s guidance, as he interpreted from the Bible. Through his counseling, they were told he could enable them to live decent lives separate from the innately evil desires at the core of who they were.

Offender Five was one of the most daring research subjects of this study. He made personal investments in such items as a well-equipped limousine with a “special” seat that laid out into a bed. An upstairs bedroom repurposed as a soundproof music studio was also used for more deviant purposes.

Offender Five was an expert in manipulation, and his charisma and charm convinced several females from his church, both adults and underage, to be manipulated by his tactics. Some of them believed he loved and cared for them. Several of them

thought that he exclusively engaged in sexual behavior with them. On at least one occasion, victims were convinced that he loved them, and they helped him destroy DNA evidence on some of his sex toys in his storage unit.

During the legal due process, he became a fugitive from justice. However, he was captured shortly after that and remained in law enforcement custody. He later declared after a jury trial convicted him of multiple sexual offenses that he received a “lynching” instead of a trial. He repeated these antics whenever he was allowed to speak in court, including during his sentencing hearing. As a result, he was sentenced to several life terms in prison for his crimes.

Offender 6

As a music minister and youth worker, Offender Six often interacted with his sole known 13-year-old victim. They began to connect through various youth group functions at his church. What started as a platonic relationship quickly turned romantic once he gave his cell phone number to her (#27567-a-JMK, 2015). He spent considerable time communicating with his victim each week. When she began openly discussing her sexual relationships with other boys, he quickly took on the role of counselor for her.

The physical acts of sexuality were not as extensive as some of the other research subjects acted upon their victims. However, the explicit sexting between him and the victim was grossly flagrant and occurred over time. After attempts to control himself sexually, he made a fatal, nonpenetrative sexual gratification attempt with his victim. He met his victim occasionally to kiss her and “grab her butt.” Recognizing his conduct as a

poor sense of judgment, he reported his behavior to the senior pastor, who contacted law enforcement.

Offender 7

Shortly after becoming pastor of a local Lutheran congregation, Offender Seven requested the assistance of one of his church's youth, a then 14-year-old female. This initial agreement for her to provide technical assistance quickly led to a relationship change based on physical attraction. Unfortunately, he then entertained his romantic feelings instead of challenging them, even though he was already married and had children with his wife (CR 13-000550, 2014). As a result, he broke his commitments to his family and church body by acting unprofessionally with his victim.

Although he understood his victim fancied the idea of having a sexual relationship with him, he knew it was wrong. He chose to step over the social and legal boundaries set by the church and the law. He went as far as to use an internet search engine to identify whether it was legal for him to have sex with his victim. Unfortunately, he engaged in inappropriate sex because it felt good in the moment. As a result, he lost everything he had, including his career and spouse.

Offender Seven was known to have performed several sexual acts upon and with his victim. To both of them, these acts felt good. However, he put his victim in a position where she could not make a well-informed decision due to her social vulnerability. He was her pastor. For that choice, he was sent to prison.

Offender 8

While leading a well-known ministry life, Offender Eight, a middle-aged White male, arranged for several early teen boys to engage in sexual activities with him. He served at several churches by leading youth programs, maintaining a busy speaking engagement schedule, and even authoring a book. Famous Christian artists and others with equally high-profile reputations spoke highly of him. However, the reality behind the façade was eventually discovered (Circuit Clerk of Etowah County Alabama, 2019).

He seemed to have a social connection for every situation in life. He regularly spoke at megachurches with celebrity pastors widely known on TV. He was able to get married in Hawaii on one of Aerosmith's bandmember's private beach. He and his wife were married by a well-known celebrity pastor. Additionally, he had the diamond for his wife's engagement ring mined from Tel Aviv, prepared in Italy, then sent to a private jeweler in New York who set it in the ring.

Even though it seemed like he had most things he could ever want, including his celebrity status, his darker side eventually caught up with him. He began meeting with his victims at various locations to facilitate sexual activities with them. He checked some of them out of school during the day, bought them lunch, and took them to multiple places to bribe them. He also gave them gifts and arranged trips for them through his ministry. He further lured them with promises of additional favor, including special arrangements to hang out with their friends.

He convinced these young men, 12-14 years old, to look at pornography and participate in mutual masturbation, oral sex, and other penetration-type sexual activities. He often quickly exchanged contact information with each young man shortly after

meeting them and began grooming them. He used his social status and charm to make them feel special.

His wife filed for divorce only two days after his arrest, saying she feared for her life. When his case went to court, every judge in the local jurisdiction recused themselves because of his social status—the former son-in-law of a judge. In the end, a specially appointed judge handed him a sentence of over 1,000 years in prison and \$1 million in fines.

Offender 9

Offender Nine was an older White male who pastored a small country church when he molested a five-year-old female under his care (15-CR-210, 2018). It continued for four years. The child had been placed in the foster system because of a suspected sexual abuse history within her biological family. Initially, he was charged with several offenses, but he chose to plead guilty instead of taking his case to trial. His guilty plea allowed him significant personal benefit as part of the agreement by drastically reducing the time he would be required to serve.

As part of the plea agreement, he was required to admit to sexual intercourse with his prepubescent child victim on more than one occasion. However, he was not required to take responsibility for some of the additional sexual acts performed on the young girl. One crucial detail continued to surface during his court proceedings. His attorney claimed he only possessed an eighth-grade education. She further claimed that he could not read. During the proceedings, she went to great lengths to ensure that he understood the proceedings and the associated paperwork.

Offender 10

This research subject met his victim at an out-of-state youth event. He began grooming her almost immediately. Although it was unclear if his initial motive was sexual abuse, he engaged the same principles of flattery to make his victim feel like she was special and not like other preteens. He quickly began isolating her from her friends and family—especially her parents—while they paid for her to visit him. He sexually abused his victim for several years in multiple states (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, 2022).

He was a middle-aged White male with strong charisma and an uncanny ability to make a person feel special. He traveled twice across state lines to his victim's residence to meet up with her. He also talked her into traveling to his out-of-state residence to meet with him for sexual activity. When he went to his victim's residence, he spent Saturday night manipulating his victim into performing sexual acts with him. The following day, he confidently delivered the Sunday sermon at her father's church, acting as if nothing wrong had been done the night before.

During the four years, he sexually abused his victim, he was also married. He often referred to his victim as his "gift from God." He told her that outsiders would not understand their relationship. His words of affirmation and use of his social position left his victim virtually powerless to resist him. In addition, he was an expert in manipulation.

Numerous individuals from various backgrounds wrote the sentencing judge to appeal to his perceived past and future positive social value as a leader. Most focused on

his many accomplishments from their perspective. However, none adequately considered the damage his actions over four years had on his victim and her family.

Offender 11

Offender 11 was a young, multi-talented White male who, on the surface, appeared to be a pretty noble human. He wanted to give back to society by leading a youth group, similar to how one of his mentors invested in him. However, underneath this façade was a more deviant side (2:14-MJ-00135-FJL, 2015). He engaged several pubescent teen females by playing on their emotions. He regularly communicated sexualized content through social media platforms and traditional text messaging. He often provided his victims with explicit digital depictions of his genitalia and made numerous requests for reciprocity. He was pretty successful in obtaining pornographic content from his victims. Further, he invited them to his house and took them to hotel rooms for his sexual fulfillment.

He displayed his deviant side in several ways. Not only did he “sext” with his teen victims and arrange to meet them for sex, but he also checked these teens out of school unbeknownst to their primary guardians for the same purpose. In addition, during this period, he dated, became engaged to, and eventually married his spouse, who was an assistant prosecuting attorney in a different county.

He had his own sexual abuse/misuse victimization history. Others sexually abused him on multiple occasions from an early age. One middle-aged female engaged him in strip-tease games for several years.

Offender 12

Offender 12 was a middle-aged White male who disguised himself through social media software often utilized by children and youth to solicit the manufacture and distribution of victim-created child pornography (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee, 2018). He had a stable work history at a middle-class skilled trades job and led ministry at his local church on a volunteer basis.

When the mother of an 11-year-old female in a different state became suspicious of some communications involving her daughter, she began reviewing her daughter's digital media. In doing so, she identified explicit communications with a male who identified himself with a fake name. He claimed to be 17 years old. Within the messages, she identified sexually explicit content wherein he described the various acts he wanted to do to her body. He also requested that the victim photograph herself in front of a bathroom mirror. He gave his victim specific instructions to better enable him to view her genitalia. Fortunately, the victim only sent one digital depiction, and she was partially clothed in her underwear. Nevertheless, the victim's mother reported the communications to law enforcement.

A law enforcement investigator went undercover into the victim's profile and continued communications with him. Advanced investigative techniques revealed the names registered to the social media profile, internet protocol addresses, specific date/time stamps, and physical locations. The result led straight to this offender. When confronted with the evidence, he admitted what he had done, including receiving the photograph of the victim posing in her underwear. However, he denied ever receiving any other digital depictions from her.

This offender agreed to plead guilty when he had his day in court. In exchange, he only received 10 years of incarceration as punishment. The judge noted that he had significant familial and friend support. He believed this perpetrator could be rehabilitated and productive after prison. During the sentencing hearing, he apologized for his behavior and admitted he knew it was wrong. He informed the judge that this kind of behavior was out of character. However, he previously admitted to law enforcement that he had communicated with numerous underage victims and received sexually explicit photographs from several of them. Further, he deleted and reactivated his social media account multiple times because he knew his pattern of behavior was illegal and unethical.

Offender 13

Offender 13 was an older White male who served as the minister of music to a medium-sized congregation from a small, tight-knit community. He was highly educated, earning a Master's Degree aligned with his chosen profession. While everything seemed ok on the surface, he regularly engaged in conduct unbecoming individuals who served in areas of public trust. By responding to and publishing ads on a widely known national bartering website, he regularly experimented with various sexual ploys involving different people who were mostly adults. These acts occurred under the knowing eye and regular protest of his spouse of over 40 years (3:13-CR-00108-JHM, 2015).

On one of these escapades, he traveled some distance to meet what he thought would be an adult male and his spouse for group sexual activities. On the contrary, the male took him inside and commanded a prepubescent stepdaughter to perform sexual acts

on him. Over the next year, he returned to the same residence multiple times and paid the male to have the victim service him.

Offender 13 was identified and subsequently arrested after another male from a separate state was apprehended for paying for sex from the same victim. A highly technical investigation identified him as one of the additional males who abused the victim. At the same time, her stepfather participated in and photographed the episodes.

When confronted by law enforcement, he immediately accepted responsibility for most of his illegal activities. He readily admitted his role at the time. He later agreed to a plea bargain that saw him receive a drastically reduced sentence. During his sentencing hearing, he received significant social support from many people, especially his children and spouse. When it was his opportunity to speak, he desperately tried to sell himself as a human who made a mistake and denied being a monster. The sentencing judge noted that he had many opportunities to help the trafficked victim escape her tragic circumstances. However, instead, he returned to the residence for more sexual self-gratification.

Offender 14

Offender 14 was an elderly White male who served as the senior pastor of his congregation. He earned his Doctorate in the early 1990s and had served in church leadership since then. He was known for his solid reputation. However, underneath the façade, a self-seeking individual took advantage of two grandchildren for sexual self-gratification (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 2020).

Even after he was credibly accused, he convinced those in his circle of influence that his victim lied. He told his church that his son manipulated his granddaughter into

making false allegations against him. The strategy worked in his favor for several years as he avoided legal repercussions for some time.

Circumstances eventually turned against him when he attempted to perform sexual acts upon her one last time before her family moved away. He offered to let her view and touch his penis whenever she desired. After he undressed, the victim angrily left the bedroom and immediately contacted her mother, who was in a different state at the time. Another local relative stepped in when asked and removed the victim from his residence.

When law enforcement was contacted because of the latest occurrence, they tore his life apart. The investigation revealed that he groomed at least two of his grandchildren when he supervised them on behalf of their parents. In addition, he recorded grooming activities aimed at his grandchildren and sexual conduct with one grandchild as young as six months old. At his sentencing hearing, his biological children requested the judge hand down the maximum penalty of 200 years of incarceration for his deeds.

Offender 15

Offender 15 was an older White male who conspired with another male to strategically place hidden cameras in areas where preteen females regularly bathed and changed clothes. He used the hidden devices to record the 11-13-year-old females as they disrobed, bathed, and dressed. He and his co-conspirator recorded their victims in various undressing stages while focusing on their genitalia (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, 2021).

While pastor of a Church of the Nazarene-affiliated congregation, he recorded a 13-year-old female in the restroom of a separate home. His teamwork with the co-conspirator occurred when they set up and recorded young females at the church where he was a pastor. On at least one occasion, these men set up the recording devices and then sent the young females to use a small wading pool for bathing. The victims were told to wash their bodies with buckets of water from the pool.

The offender was in the position of ultimate trust and complete responsibility by serving as the senior pastor during his offenses. However, he violated the trust placed in him as someone who represented God when he grossly violated the privacy of these juvenile females. Additionally, he violated the girls' privacy by sharing the digital recordings with another individual. Instead of taking full responsibility for his actions, he negotiated a plea bargain that advantaged his agenda of serving as little time as possible.