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2018 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 18 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

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The Help Wanted Project: Results from Phase II

Symposium Chair: Ryan T. Shields, PhD
University of Massachusetts Lowell

The purpose of this symposium is to present results from Phase II of the Help Wanted Project, a collaborative and novel effort to develop a web-based prevention intervention for adolescents with a sexual interest in children. Results from Phase I were previously presented at the 2016 ATSA conference. With this symposium, we provide an update on this innovative project, including: 1) a presentation of results from a recent analysis of Help Wanted qualitative data; 2) a discussion of the conceptual and technical decision making behind the development of the prevention intervention; and 3) a presentation of each of the five modules included in the online intervention. This symposium will close with a facilitated discussion of the elements presented and a description of Phase III project activities.

Mental Health and Coping Among Adolescents with Attraction to Children

Maggie Ingram, M.H.S.
John Thorne, M.H.S.
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People with an attraction to children face a high degree of stigma in our society. This stigma is reflected in the literature, which has focused primarily on forensic populations of people who have already offended against children. In recent years, there has been a greater focus on understanding individuals with an attraction to children who have not offended, and how the stigma surrounding their attractions has impacted their lives. Preliminary research suggests that people with an attraction to children have higher rates of depression, social isolation, and anxiety, mood, and substance use disorders than the general population. These mental health problems are both highly damaging to the individual and can be risk factors for perpetrating child sexual abuse. We also know that the initial discovery of this attraction, which occurs during the already very tumultuous time of puberty, can cause a high degree of distress. More research is needed in order to fully understand the mental health issues faced by individuals with an attraction to children, including adolescents who are becoming aware of their attraction. More research is also needed in order to understand the various ways individuals cope with the mental health issues associated with the stigma of having an attraction to children, including social relationships and online support.

The Help Wanted Project is a landmark study which seeks to provide insight into some of the experiences of a non-forensic sample of individuals who are attracted to children and generate important questions for future investigation. The project consists of in-depth, qualitative interviews of 30 young adults with an attraction to children. The current study represents a sub-analysis of the Help Wanted project. In this sub-analysis, we explored descriptions of participants' experiences during adolescence to identify common themes. Using grounded theory, we analyzed all 30 qualitative interviews and coded the text into themes based on recurring concepts or experiences. Key themes that emerged within the descriptions of participants' adolescent experiences included distress surrounding the awareness of their attraction to children; mental health issues during adolescence such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation/attempts; and a sense of isolation. We explored descriptions of how individuals coped with these issues, including seeking support and information online. Conclusions: Results suggest that adolescents who are becoming aware of their attraction to children may be at risk of experiencing adverse mental health and social outcomes. They also may turn to the internet to find social support as well as to obtain information, creating a valuable opportunity for intervention.

Learning Goals:

- To understand some of the mental health issues that may impact adolescents who are attracted to children
- To explore coping strategies utilized by some adolescents who are attracted to children
- To consider the implications in terms of developing interventions

Development of an Online Prevention Intervention for Adolescents Attracted to Children

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Because of the stigma surrounding pedophilia, little is known about the prevalence of individuals living with an attraction to prepubescent children. Research on adults indicates that between 1-3% of men, (or approximately 1.18 million to 3.54 million U.S. men), are sexually attracted to prepubescent children (Seto, 2008). This attraction develops at an early stage, perhaps in utero (Blanchard et al., 2000, Blanchard et al., 2007, Cantor et al., 2007) and typically emerges at the same time as gender preferences become clear – that is, in early adolescence. However, there is even less known about the prevalence of adolescents with an attraction to younger children, especially in those who have not offended. There are little to no resources available to these adolescents and significant challenges in providing a prevention intervention to them.

An online intervention is necessary to provide adolescents with an attraction to younger children with the tools necessary to live a healthy, fulfilling life, while

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understanding that child sexual abuse is harmful and must be prevented. The ATSA Collaborative has conducted a qualitative study with 30 young adults (ages 18-30) who self-identified as having an attraction to prepubescent children and used the results of these interviews to form the content of the *Help Wanted* online prevention intervention. This presentation will examine the important steps taken to use qualitative interview data to develop intervention content and work with a web developer to adapt the *Help Wanted* intervention to an online format. Ideas on how to disseminate and advertise the intervention online will be discussed.

References

1. Blanchard, R., Kolla, N., Cantor, J., Klassen, P., Dickey, R., Kuban, M., & Blak, T. (2007). IQ, Handedness, and Pedophilia in Adult Male Patients Stratified by Referral Source. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 285-309.
2. Blanchard, R., Klassen, P., Dickey, R., Kuban, M., & Blak, T. (n.d.). Sensitivity and specificity of the phallometric test for pedophilia in nonadmitting sex offenders. *Psychological Assessment*, 118-126.
3. Cantor, J., Kuban, M., Blak, T., Klassen, P., Dickey, R., & Blanchard, R. (2007). Physical Height in Pedophilic and Hebephilic Sexual Offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 395-407.
4. Seto, M. (2008). *Pedophilia and sexual offending against children: Theory, assessment, and intervention*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Learning Goals:

- To discuss ways the ATSA Collaborative worked together to identify important focus areas for the *Help Wanted* prevention intervention based on qualitative interviews.
- To examine the steps and strategies used to develop online intervention content.
- To recognize important considerations when creating an online intervention specifically for hard to reach or sensitive populations.

Help Wanted: An Intervention for Adolescents Sexually Attracted to Children

Ryan T. Shields, Ph.D.
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Prior research has also shown that between a third to one-half of all cases of child sexual abuse involve other adolescents as perpetrators [1-2]. Youth engage in harmful sexual behavior for a variety of reasons, and in some cases, adolescents may be motivated by a sexual interest in prepubescent children. Recent work suggests that a sexual attraction to children has neurobiological roots [3-5] and typically emerges during puberty. Research has also shown that there are few resources for adolescents who may be acknowledging an emerging sexual attraction to children and are looking for help [6]. To address this need, the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual

Abuse has partnered with 3C Institute to develop *The Help Wanted Project*, an online prevention intervention for adolescents with a sexual interest in children.

The purpose of this presentation is to familiarize ATSA members with this recently developed resource. Specifically, this presentation will introduce each of the intervention's modules, showcasing content, activities, and resources offered in each session. In addition, this discussion will examine challenges to evaluating and disseminating this resource and review potential solutions to these issues.

References:

1. Finkelhor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, H. A., & Hamby, S. L. (2014). The lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse and sexual assault assessed in late adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 55*(3), 329-333.
2. Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., & Chaffin, M. (December, 2009). Juveniles who commit sexual offenses against minors. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (1-12). U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227763.pdf>
3. Blanchard, R., Christensen, B. K., Strong, S. M., Cantor, J. M., Kuban, M. E., Klassen, P., ... & Blak, T. (2002). Retrospective self-reports of childhood accidents causing unconsciousness in phallometrically diagnosed pedophiles. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 31*(6), 511-526.
4. Blanchard, R., Kolla, N. J., Cantor, J. M., Klassen, P. E., Dickey, R., Kuban, M. E., & Blak, T. (2007). IQ, handedness, and pedophilia in adult male patients stratified by referral source. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 19*(3), 285-309.
5. Cantor, J. M., Kuban, M. E., Blak, T., Klassen, P. E., Dickey, R., & Blanchard, R. (2007). Physical height in pedophilic and hebephilic sexual offenders. *Sexual abuse: a journal of research and treatment, 19*(4), 395-407.
6. Cantor, J. M., & McPhail, I. V. (2016). Non-offending pedophiles. *Current Sexual Health Reports, 8*(3), 121-128.

Learning Goals:

- To explore a newly developed web-based prevention intervention for adolescents with a sexual interest in children
- To examine the identified areas of intervention and evaluate the messaging and content used to address this population's needs
- To identify challenges, and related solutions, for evaluating and disseminating this resource

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Ryan T. Shields, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the School of Criminology and Justice Studies at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. He is the former Associate Director of the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. His scholarship centers on the intersection of criminology, criminal justice, and public health. His recent work has examined policies aimed at youth who have sexually offended, such as juvenile transfer to adult court and sex offender registration and notification policies. He is also currently leading a project to develop an online prevention intervention for adolescents with a sexual interest in children.

Maggie Ingram earned her M.H.S. in the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, where she is now pursuing her doctorate degree in the Department of Mental Health. Her primary research interests are the primary prevention of child sexual abuse and the mental health and well-being of individuals with attraction to children.

John Thorne is currently a PhD candidate at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, in the department of Mental Health, where he also completed his M.H.S. His research interests are in the prevention of child sexual abuse, with a particular interest in focusing on risk factors relating to the perpetration of child sexual abuse. He is also interested in the mental health and well-being of non-offending people with an attraction to children.

Amanda E. Ruzicka, MA, is a research associate at the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in the Department of Mental Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Amanda has research experience designing, implementing, and managing research projects at non-profit and academic institutions and completed a clinical internship at a residential treatment facility for youth with problem sexual behaviors. At the Moore Center, she focuses on research project and intervention development and manages the Center's research studies, events, and administrative functions. Amanda completed her MA in Clinical Psychology from Towson University and her BS in Clinical/Counseling Psychology from Kutztown University.