

ADULTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN
WHO DISCLOSE A TRANSGRESSION TO PEERS OR ADULTS

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Supervised by Dr. Heather L. Price and Dr. Kaila C. Bruer

University of Regina

By

Madison B. Harvey

Regina, Saskatchewan

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Abstract

Children who witness or experience a transgression often do not disclose the event to anyone. There are a variety of reasons why a child may not disclose this event, such as being asked to keep it a secret, fear that they will not be believed, or concerns about their safety. When children do disclose, it may be to an adult or another child. Yet, it has not been established how these peer- to-peer disclosures are perceived by adults. The present study examined adult perceptions of children who disclose (or not) to a peer and children who disclose (or not) to an adult. Participants rated children on measures of credibility, honesty, and accuracy after hearing a recorded conversation of a child discussing an event to either a peer or an adult. Results indicate that children who disclosed a transgression were perceived as less credible, less honest, and less accurate when talking to another child. This has significant implications for the justice system, as it demonstrates that children who disclose a transgression may be seen as less credible witnesses.

Keywords: Children, disclosure, credibility, honesty, accuracy

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Adults' Perceptions of Children Who Disclose a Transgression to Peers or Adults

After experiencing a crime, children have several options: they may keep details of the event to themselves, they may tell a friend, they may tell a parent, or they may tell someone in a position of authority (e.g., teacher). Despite the variety of options, children often do not disclose the witnessed or experienced event. One Canadian study estimated that only one quarter of children who had been abused (i.e., physical, sexual, emotional) actually reported their assault (Ungar, Tutty, McConnell, Barter, & Fairholm, 2009). Another study found that less than 10% of female children reported their victimization (Russell, 1983). When children do decide to disclose, many children delay this disclosure until long after the event, when physical evidence may be difficult to obtain (London, Bruck, Wright, & Ceci, 2008). Once a child discloses an event, they may find themselves talking to a multitude of different adults about what has transpired: teachers, parents, police officers, lawyers, and/or judges. It is up to these adults to evaluate the child's statement and decide what is truthful. This evaluation can be imperative in deciding how to proceed with the disclosure and any legal repercussions from that disclosure. Learning more about how adults perceive children who disclose to peers allows for a better understanding of how children's disclosures, or lack thereof, and the recipients of these disclosures, may impact their credibility.

Disclosures

Factors preventing disclosure. There are many reasons why children may not disclose a transgression. Children can be prone to secrecy (Last & Aharoni-Etzioni, 1995), which may inhibit disclosures. Young children (i.e., 7 years old) may keep secrets as a form of exclusivity among peers, while older children (i.e., 12 years old) may keep secrets out of a fear of punishment or feelings of shame (Last & Aharoni-Etzioni, 1995). Children may also keep secrets

for material gain, for personal gain, or to boost their status among peers (Talwar & Crossman, 2012). Additionally, in cases of abuse, children may not disclose a transgression due to a feeling of responsibility for their situation, fear for their own or their family's safety, or even fear for the perpetrator's well-being (Paine & Hansen, 2002). Children may also worry they will not be believed if they tell their story or worry that what they say will be misinterpreted (Jensen, Gulbrandsen, Mossige, Reichelt, & Tjersland, 2005).

When deciding whether or not to disclose, children may also seek to protect parents and other loved ones (Lewis, 2015). Lyon, Ahern, Malloy, and Quas (2010) demonstrated this effect in their study when children were asked not to tell anyone about a transgression from the adult, either a parent or stranger, who committed it. When given the opportunity to disclose to another adult, children were more willing to disclose about the stranger's actions than about their parent's actions. Similarly, Lyon, Ahern, Sim, Wandrey, Licht, and Quas (2014) found that children who were prompted about a stranger's transgression in a putative confession condition (i.e., "The lady who came in here told me everything that happened and she wants you to tell the truth") were more likely to disclose about the stranger's actions than those in a control condition. The increase in disclosures following a putative confession method indicates that when children believed the interviewer was already aware of what had taken place, they were more willing to discuss the event, especially when the transgression was committed by a stranger. Overall, children may be less concerned about concealing a stranger's transgression than their loved ones.

Likelihood of disclosures. Spontaneous disclosures among children are rare, with most needing some form of prompting to feel comfortable disclosing (DeVoe & Faller, 1999). It has been found that female children are more likely to disclose than male children (DeVoe & Faller, 1999). Children who do disclose are most likely to do so to when they were sexually assaulted by

a stranger, rather than someone they had a relationship with, such as a family member or friend (Smith, Letourneau, Saunders, Kilpatrick, Resnick, & Best, 2000). When disclosing an event, younger children are more likely to disclose first to their mothers, while older children more often disclose to a peer (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2013). Of children who disclose, those who tell peers seem to do so much faster than those disclosing to an adult (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2013). Peers who receive a disclosure from a friend have a high chance of passing on the information to an adult who may be better equipped to do something about the situation (Price, Evans, & Bruer, in preparation).

Children frequently disclose being abused because they want the abuse to stop (Paine & Hansen, 2002). Alternatively, children may disclose abuse because of specific circumstances: They may have discussed abuse in school, their abuser may have been discovered for another transgression, or they may be encouraged by friends (Paine & Hansen, 2002). When children are given an opportunity to speak through conversations regarding the topic (e.g., abuse), they are also more likely to disclose (Jensen et al., 2005). Those who disclose an event often do so after a long delay, with one study finding that almost 50 percent of females who were sexually assaulted as a child waited over five years to disclose their assault (Smith et al., 2000). A relationship with the perpetrator, a younger age at time of assault, and experiencing multiple assaults are predictors of a delayed disclosure (Smith et al., 2000).

Consequences of disclosure. A child's disclosure can lead to many outcomes. If a child is believed about an event, or series of events, this can lead to removal from familiar situations and family, and result in the child being involved in the legal system (Ghetti, Alexander, & Goodman, 2002). Children may be questioned by police about their experience, and may have to further testify in court. Children may be blamed for what has occurred in cases of abuse, which

can lead to feelings of shame (Ghetti et al., 2002). If the event that a child discloses was true, the perpetrator may receive punishment for his or her actions. If the event is falsified, whether by intention of the child or due to other circumstances (e.g., suggestive questioning by an interviewer), this can lead to an innocent individual being prosecuted and potentially wrongfully convicted. Regardless of the outcome, the stress and experience associated with testifying can have a lasting negative effect on a child (Goodman et al., 1992). However, if the child's disclosure is not believed, the child may remain in contact with their abuser, may continue to be assaulted, and may suffer life-long effects (Beitchman, Zucker, Hood, DaCosta, Akman, & Cassavia, 1992; Murphy, Bishop, Jellinek, Quinn, & Poitras, 1992). Given that further investigation of these disclosures are decided based on the credibility of the child's statement, it is important to understand how such assessments are made.

Perceptions of Children

Ross, Jurden, Lindsay, and Keeney (2003) have proposed that adults perceive children to be credible based on the relative weighing of two factors: cognitive ability and honesty. Ross and colleagues (2003) found support of this two factor model of credibility specifically in cases of sexual assault; however, the degree to which each factor is relied upon when developing perceptions of child witnesses depends on the situation (Nunez, Kehn, & Wright, 2010).

Credibility. In general, children are perceived to be more credible than adults, with younger children seemingly the most credible (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994). These findings, however, may be dependent on the situation, and on the quality and type of evidence provided by a child. For example, Ross, Dunning, Toglia, and Ceci (1990) presented participants with a video of a mock trial in which a witness, either a child (aged 8 years) or an adult, testified. Participants were asked to rate the credibility of this witness. In the mock trial, the witness gave a statement

disagreeing with the defendant about the location of evidence. The 8-year old witness was viewed as more credible than the witness presented as an adult. However, when asked about opinions on child witnesses out of context of a particular trial, jurors negatively evaluated child witnesses' value within the justice system. Leippe and Romanczyk (1989) found similar results, such that children (aged 6 years) were rated as more credible witnesses than adults in a mock trial transcript in which the witness identified the suspect from a lineup. When only given the age of the witness and a summary of the event (i.e., no trial script) however, mock jurors found children to be less credible than adults, suggesting more details results in higher perceived credibility. Overall, children are generally perceived as more credible than adults, however participants may need more details regarding the specifics of a child's testimony in order to rate them as credible.

Not all research has demonstrated that children are perceived to be credible, however. Leippe and Romanczyk (1989) found children (aged 6 years) who appeared to be inconsistent during their interviews (e.g., said "it was dark" during initial police statement but said "I could see him clearly" while in the courtroom) to be rated as less credible than those who appeared consistent. Goodman, Golding, Helgeson, Haith, and Michelli (1987) showed that, across three experiments with varying trial scenarios, credibility evaluations seemed to improve with age. The youngest witness (aged 6 years), in scenarios where a witness testified about being a bystander to a motor vehicle accident or a murder, was seen as the least credible when compared to an older child (aged 10 years) or an adult. In these scenarios, however, this rating of credibility did not necessarily impact trial outcomes. Although discrepant findings may be present in the literature, it appears that participants may evaluate credibility of a child based on the nature and details of their testimony.

Honesty. Honesty refers to how truthful a child is about an event (Ross et al., 2003). Often, children are often seen as more honest than adults. When asked to rate children's honesty in a robbery or a sexual assault case, adult participants believed children to be generally more honest in cases of sexual assault (McCauley & Parker, 2000). This could be due to an impression that children are not mature enough to fabricate events that may occur during a sexual assault (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994). Nightingale (1993) suggested trends show the younger a child is, the more honest he or she is believed to be. A variety of factors can also influence ratings of children's honesty. For instance, Connolly, Price, Lavoie, and Gordon (2008) found that children who reported details of a single experienced event, rather than a repeated event, were seen as more honest, as well as more credible. Interestingly, a child's demeanour can also impact ratings of honesty. Adult participants who were presented a trial transcript with either a calm child testifying in a sexual assault case, or a crying child testifying, were significantly more likely to find the emotional child to be higher in honesty (Reagan & Baker, 1998). Generally, children are seen as honest witnesses, although the majority of the literature relies on one type of transgression (i.e., child sexual assault).

Cognitive ability. Cognitive ability can refer to a child's memory for an event, accuracy about the event, and intelligence (Ross et al., 2003). When asked to testify in court, children are often relied upon for, and questioned heavily about, their memory. Research has revealed that children are often perceived to be lacking in cognitive abilities when compared to adults. Leippe and Romanczyk (1989), for example, found participants to be wary of children's memory after reading a scenario in which children and young adults were questioned about witnessing an argument. Children were rated to be more inaccurate on a larger number of facts disclosed about a target event than adults. Some adults may believe children to be competent in their memory

abilities but believe that certain factors, such as emotions, can diminish those abilities. Leander, Christianson, Svedin, and Granhag (2007) found adults to believe emotions (e.g., fear) may hinder a child's ability to accurately recall an event. Mock jurors also believe that while younger children fail to adequately remember event, overall children's memory abilities increase with age to a certain point (Nunez et al., 2010). Trends in the literature show that children are often believed to be lacking in the cognitive ability required to produce a reliable testimony.

Present Study

While there is a substantial body of research on child disclosures and perceptions of these disclosures to adults, little is known about how adults perceive children disclosing to a peer. This is an important gap considering that peers are frequent recipients of children's disclosures (see Malloy et al., 2013). The present study assesses adults' perceptions of children's disclosures to peers, relative to disclosures to adults. Further, there is little known about perceptions of child disclosures of an event, when compared to children who do not disclose an event, another gap in the literature the present study aims to address. In the present study, participants heard an audio-recorded interview of a child discussing an event (stimuli from Price et al., in preparation). Children witnessed an adult stranger spill water onto a laptop (transgression) during an art-science show. The adult then asked the children to keep the transgression a secret. Participants heard an audio clip of a child either disclosing or not disclosing the transgression with either a peer or an adult. Participants were asked to rate children's credibility, honesty and, accuracy (Ross et al., 2003). Accuracy was used as a measure for cognitive ability as proposed by Ross and colleagues (2003). Participants were also asked to rate the children on a variety of other factors such as consistency (Brewer, Potter, Fisher, Bond, & Luszcz, 1999), confidence (Cutler, Penrod, & Stuve, 1988), and suggestibility (Castelli, Goodman, & Ghetti, 2005). As this is an

area lacking in established research, the present study offers an exploration into the area of perceptions of peer to peer disclosures, with no a priori hypotheses.

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 236 participants participated in the study. Participants were recruited from a university psychology participant pool and through social media. Participants were offered either one course credit or entered into a draw to win \$200. All participants were over the age of 18, with a mean age of $M = 21.00$ ($SD = 5.66$) and all participants were Canadian citizens. The majority of participants were female (88.9%), while a small portion did not provide gender information (1.3%). The majority of participants reported having frequent interactions (multiple times a week or month) with children between the ages of six and twelve years (79.4%). Of participants who heard a disclosure, a large portion reported believing the transgression (i.e., water spilling on a laptop) actually happened (72.3%).

The study was a 2 (disclosure: disclosure, non-disclosure) x 2 (interview type: adult, peer) between-subjects design. Participants heard either a child speaking with another child (peer interview) or a child speaking with an adult (adult interview). The interviews also featured one of two possible disclosure conditions: children who disclose, or children who do not disclose. The dependent variables of interest were participant's ratings of credibility, honesty, and accuracy.

Materials

Audio files. Interviews with children from a previously conducted study (Price et al., in preparation) were used, with parental permission, as stimuli in the present experiment. In the previous study, children witnessed a live art/science show during which an adult female committed a transgression by spilling water onto (and subsequently wrecking) a laptop not

belonging to her. The female asked the children not to tell anyone about her transgression (i.e., keep a secret). After watching the event, children were interviewed by another child who had not witnessed the show (i.e., peer interview), but was directed to find out what happened during the art/science show. The same child who witnessed the event was later interviewed individually about the show by an adult who had not witnessed the transgression (i.e., adult interview). For the purposes of the present study, participants heard children (7- to 10-years-old) being interviewed by either another child or an adult¹. Interviews were selected to ensure that half of participants heard truthful disclosures of the event (i.e., water spilling) and half heard interviews in which the children did not disclose. That is, in half of the recordings, children kept the secret the stranger requested them to while in the other half, children did not listen to the adult, and instead disclosed the mistake the adult had made. Recordings of the interviews were edited to include only relevant pieces (i.e., questions regarding the art/science show), excluding rapport building and off-topic questions (e.g., children's discussion of what they had for lunch). All interviews were edited to be similar in length (approximately three minutes).

Questionnaire. After listening to an interview, participants were asked to provide subjective ratings of the child interviewee on the dependent variables of interest, as proposed by Ross and colleagues (2003) Two-Factor Model of Credibility: Credibility, honesty, and accuracy, which was intended to measure perceived cognitive ability. Participants were also asked to rate the child on a variety of additional factors such as believability and intelligence, although these variables were not explored further. All factors were rated on a likert-type scale from one (e.g., *not at all credible*) to six (e.g., *very credible*).

¹ Participants believed the child speaking in the audio file to be, on average, around seven years old ($M = 7.17$, $SD = 1.66$). As some participants provided a range of estimated age for the child, these were recoded to the middle age within the range.

Procedure

Upon entering the lab, participants were given a consent form and basic instructions. After signing the consent form and having the chance to ask questions, participants read through a set of instructions, either on a computer or through a provided paper, informing them that they would be listening to audio files from children describing an art/science show they saw, and answering questions about the experience. Next, they listened to an audio file through provided headphones. After listening to the audio file, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire, as previously described. A small portion of participants completed the questionnaire on paper, while the majority completed the questionnaire online. Finally, participants were asked to complete a demographics survey (e.g., age, race, and experience with children). Once completely finished, participants were debriefed about the purpose of the study and were given another opportunity to ask questions.

Results

A small number of questionnaires were initially completed on paper (N = 31), while the remainder of participants completed the study in the lab, but on a computer. To examine if modality differentially impacted participant responses, we entered modality (paper, computer) into the 2 (interview type) x 2 (disclosure) analysis of variance and explored the influence on participant ratings of credibility, honesty, and accuracy. No differences were found. Due to the lack of significant differences, all versions of the questionnaire were combined for all further analyses.

Two-factor Model of Credibility

Three analyses of variance were conducted to examine the effects of interview type (peer versus adult) and disclosure (disclosure versus no disclosure) on the Two-factor Model of Credibility variables (i.e., credibility, honesty, and accuracy).

Credibility. A statistically significant main effect of disclosure on evaluations of children's credibility was revealed, $F(1, 232) = 4.65, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Children who disclosed the transgression were rated as significantly less credible than children who did not disclose the transgression. No effect of interview type on credibility was found, $F(1, 232) = 0.91, p = .34, \eta_p^2 = .004$, nor was there a significant interaction between disclosure and interview, $F(1, 232) = 3.28, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .01$.

Honesty. Like evaluations of children's credibility, there was also a statistically significant main effect of disclosure on evaluations of children's honesty, $F(1, 231) = 5.27, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Children who disclosed the transgression were seen as significantly less honest than those who did not disclose. No effect of interview type on honesty was found $F(1, 231) = 0.09, p = .77, \eta_p^2 = .00$, nor was there an interaction between disclosure and interview, $F(1, 231) = 37, p = .56, \eta_p^2 = .002$.

Accuracy. A statistically significant main effect of disclosure on accuracy was discovered, $F(1, 232) = 4.32, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .02$. This effect, however, was qualified by an interaction between interview type and disclosure, $F(1, 232) = 4.32, p = .036, \eta_p^2 = .02$. To explore this interaction, independent samples t-tests were conducted, which revealed a significant effect of disclosure within the peer interview group, $t(116) = 2.95, p = .004$, but not within the the adult interview group, $t(116) = 0.00, p = 1.00$, Children who disclosed to a peer

were less likely to be seen as accurate than children who did not disclose to a peer. No effect of interview type on accuracy was revealed, $F(1, 232) = 0.61, p = .43, \eta_p^2 = .003$.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variables

		Disclosed			No Disclosure		
		N	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	95% CI	N	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	95% CI
Child	Credibility	60	3.43(1.03)	[3.15, 3.72]	58	4.02(1.13)	[3.73, 4.31]
Interview	Honesty	60	4.75(1.13)	[4.05, 4.62]	58	4.76(1.13)	[4.47, 5.04]
	Accuracy	60	3.60(1.01)	[3.33, 3.87]	58	4.17(1.09)	[3.90, 4.44]
Adult	Credibility	59	3.55(1.26)	[3.27, 3.85]	59	3.61(1.08)	[3.32, 3.90]
Interview	Honesty	58	4.38(1.21)	[4.09, 4.67]	59	4.63(.98)	[4.34, 4.92]
	Accuracy	59	3.77(1.13)	[3.51, 4.05]	59	3.77(.93)	[3.51, 4.05]
Total	Credibility	119	3.50(1.15)	[3.23, 3.70]	117	3.81(1.12)	[3.61, 4.02]
	Honesty	118	4.36(1.18)	[4.14, 4.56]	117	4.69(1.05)	[4.49, 4.90]
	Accuracy	119	3.69(1.07)	[3.50, 3.88]	117	3.98(1.03)	[3.79, 4.17]

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore how adults perceive children as witnesses of a stranger's transgression, with particular attention to ratings of credibility, honesty, and accuracy. The findings demonstrate that children who truthfully disclose a transgression may be perceived less favourably than those who do not. When children told the truth about a witnessed transgression, they were seen as less credible and less honest, regardless of who they told. For perceptions of children's accuracy, both the child's conversational partner and whether the child

disclosed impacted adult perceptions of children. When children were speaking with a peer and disclosed the transgression, they were seen as less accurate than those who did not disclose. However, when children spoke with an adult, there were no differences in how accurate the children were perceived to be. Overall, the act of speaking about the witnessed transgression caused the children to lose credibility in the eyes of adults.

Two-Factor Model of Credibility

Credibility. Previous research suggests adults generally perceive children, especially young children, to be credible witnesses (e.g., Bottoms & Goodman, 1994). However, there is a body of research that also suggests the nature and content of a child's statement may impact their perceived credibility (see Lieppe & Romanczyk, 1989). The present research supports this idea; Children who discussed the transgression were viewed as less credible, implying the content of the child's discussion was a factor that was relied upon heavily for credibility ratings. There is also research to suggest adults are poor at determining if a child is telling the truth (Edelstein, Luten, Ekman, & Goodman, 2006). Given that some participants reported not believing the transgression actually occurred, this may have reduced their ratings of credibility. Participants who believed the water did spill may have still believed children were exaggerating, or fabricating, some details of the event. Additionally, Ross and colleagues (2003) have proposed that children's credibility is determined through perceived honesty and cognitive ability. If children are perceived to be low in honesty or accuracy, for reasons described below, this may impact participant's ratings of the child's credibility.

Honesty. In contrast to a substantial body of literature (e.g., McCauley & Parker, 2000; Nightengale, 1993), participants in our study found children who truthfully disclosed to be less honest than those who did not. Previous research (e.g., McCauley & Parker, 2000) demonstrates

that children are frequently believed to be honest in their reports of transgressions. However, these evaluations of children's honesty are based upon reports of serious transgressions, such as child sexual assault. It is believed that children are honest in their reports of abuse because they are too innocent to fabricate details of such events (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994). In the current study, however, children's disclosures of a laptop breaking are less severe, a mistake made by an adult that is neither emotional nor harmful to the child. Due to the nature of the event discussed, participants may not make the same assumptions about a children's ability to fabricate. The spilling of water on a laptop is may be an event that participants believed children could construct. The perception that children are too naive to fabricate an event may no longer be considered when evaluating the report of a less serious transgression. Adults may also have had the perception that children may lie in order to avoid punishment for their actions (Last & Aharoni-Etzioni, 1995). Participants may have believed children themselves were the ones to make a mistake, and instead blamed it on someone else to avoid consequences. As explanations for ratings were not asked of participants, further investigation into the underlying reasons may be required.

Accuracy. Disclosing the transgression to another child resulted in lower ratings of accuracy, suggesting a belief in lower cognitive ability as defined by Ross and colleagues (2003). This may be due to the fact that children may be perceived to be exaggerating the details of what happened during the initial event. Children have been known to lie in order to seem more interesting or 'cool' to their peers (Talwar & Crossman, 2012). Participants may have assumed children were engaging in this behavior when discussing the transgression with a peer, and rated them as such. The perception of children disclosing to impress a peer may reduce their perceived accuracy, but only in the child interview condition. Another possible explanation may be a

difference in accuracy ratings as a result of the amount of information children who disclosed provided in comparison to children who did not disclose. Lieppe and Romanczyk (1989) demonstrated that children who described more details about an event were seen as less accurate. Discussing extra information seemed to provide participants with additional opportunities to evaluate the child's accuracy about the event and find it lacking. As children who disclosed in the present study discussed an additional event (i.e., water spilling on a laptop) that others did not, participants may have considered this disclosure as an extra event to evaluate. However, due to the matched length of recordings across conditions, therefore suggesting all children talked for the same length of time, this explanation may not hold validity within the current findings. It appears more so that participants believed children to be exaggerating details of the event in order to increase their social standing among peers.

Implications

The current research demonstrates several important findings. First, it appears the recipient of a disclosure regarding a less severe transgression (i.e., water spilling on a laptop) has no apparent effect on a child's perceived credibility. This can have important implications for the path a child may follow when deciding to disclose an event. After experiencing a negative event, children may turn to a friend in order to tell their story (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2013). These children who truthfully disclose to a friend, who may then in turn disclose to an adult, may not suffer a loss of perceived credibility. As children, especially older children may feel more comfortable disclosing to a friend (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2013), it is meaningful to know that this may not impede their disclosures.

The present study also demonstrates other, more potentially negative, implications for children who experience a transgression as well. Not only are children who disclose seen as less

credible, but children who do not disclose, and lie by omission, are seen as more credible. Children who did not disclose were lying in order to keep the secret asked of them by an adult. Given that children may withhold disclosure at the request of the perpetrator (Lyon, Ahern, Malloy, & Quas, 2010), this finding can have serious repercussions in an applied setting. If children who are withholding information are seen as more credible, transgressions may go unreported or without further investigation. This can result in the continuation of the experienced (e.g., abuse against a child) or witnessed crime (e.g., witnessing the abuse of a family member).

The results of the present study also highlight an important problem within the justice system: Children who disclose a transgression may not be believed. As a child's testimony may be the only form of evidence, how they are perceived can be critical (Goodman et al., 1987). A child who has heard about, witnessed, or experienced a transgression likely trusts the adult when disclosing to them. It is up to the adult to decide the verity behind a child's statements. If children are seen as less credible when disclosing an event, the adult they disclosed to might not put the appropriate weight on a child's disclosure. In turn, this may hinder the adult from taking further action and investigating the claims the child has made. Without adult interference, the transgression may go without examination and the crime may continue.

When children do not disclose an event, it may be due to the fact that they fear not being believed about their report (Jensen et al., 2005). As results of the present study show, this fear may be justified. If children are aware that the individual to whom they disclose will view them as less credible, children may be reluctant to disclose the information in the first place. Alternatively, if children do disclose a less serious transgression, and are not seen as credible, this may prevent children from feeling comfortable in making further disclosures about additional transgressions. Children choosing not to disclose may have critical consequences, as it

can lead to continued or unreported abuse, or other serious transgressions, taking place. By understanding how adults perceive children who disclose, safeguards may be put in place to help children who wish to disclose an event, and efforts to promote credibility in children's disclosures (e.g., judicial instructions) may be undertaken. As well, situations that allow for children to disclose without fear of judgement or a loss of credibility can be developed. It is important to understand how children who disclose are perceived in order to understand the problems they may face when attempting to tell their story.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations

The present research is not without limitations. The audio files used in the study were taken from Price and colleagues (in preparation) study, in which children described an event they actually witnessed. Though audio files were matched for length and child age, children did not follow a script. As a result, differences across conditions may have been due, in part, to differences in the individual children represented in each condition. To minimize the effect of individual differences in children, two interviews were used for each condition. Another limitation is the nature of the transgression in the present study. Much of the research relating to assessments of children's credibility has been focused on child sexual abuse. Indeed, the dependent variables of interest (i.e., credibility, honesty accuracy) in the present work were based upon Ross and colleagues (2003) Two-Factor Model of Credibility. This model was developed to establish the factors that adults take into consideration when evaluating a child's credibility, but was derived from work on cases of child sexual assault. As the present study includes a less severe transgression (i.e., water spilling and breaking a laptop), the model may not suit the present transgression as well as a sexual assault scenario. Further research varying

the nature of transgression may help to further inform the differences found in the present research. Most importantly, the present research deals with a transgression that is impersonal and not harmful to the child. In the real world, children may be reporting about more serious events, such as sexual assault or abuse, and as such, may be viewed differently than in the current research. The nature and context of a transgression may result in varying perceptions of a child's report.

Future Directions

Once a more developed understanding of how children's disclosures are perceived by adults, further research can explore factors that may alter these perceptions. Active participation in an event has shown to improve recall memory (Tobey & Goodman, 1992), therefore exploring different natures of transgressions, such as acts the child committed themselves in comparison to acts others committed, may be the next step in this line of research. Examining if the nature of transgression impacts children's perceived credibility would allow for a better understanding of a variety of situations a child may disclose about. As the current research explores perceptions of a child reporting a less severe, and low-emotional, event, discussion of a more serious topic may also be considered in further studies. Previous research has examined perceptions of children who disclose a serious event, such as child sexual assault, (e.g., McCauley & Parker, 2000) but the relationship between serious transgression disclosures, peer to peer disclosures, and disclosures versus non disclosures has yet to be explored. Additionally, children may often suffer abuse at the hands of a relative or family friend (Connolly, Price, & Gordon, 2009). The effect of the perpetrators relationship to the child (e.g., family member) on a child's credibility is an important factor to study further. Examining factors such as the relationship between child and perpetrator, and the nature of the event will help create a more established body of research and

further inform how children within the justice system are perceived in a variety of contexts. As well, further research exploring why children who disclosed were seen as less credible in the present study should be undertaken. While the present study demonstrated these effects, the underlying reasons behind participant's judgements have yet to be explored. This would be another promising next step in continuing this important line of research.

Conclusion

When children disclose a transgression, how they are perceived can be critical as the child's testimony may be the only form of evidence. By examining how children who disclose, and who they disclose to, are viewed by adults, a better understanding of children's disclosures can be established. This will allow for potential obstacles, such as a loss of credibility, to be addressed and offset when children disclose. As these disclosures may be the only source of evidence, it is essential that children who are telling the truth about an event be believed. The present study found that children who disclosed were seen as less credible, and less honest, than those who kept the secret of the adult. Additionally, children who disclosed to another child were seen as less accurate. These findings demonstrate that children who disclose a transgression may not be seen as credible and may not be believed, which may have serious, and negative, implications for children who choose to disclose. There is a need for further research to understand why adults view children who discussed the mistake that happened as less credible. Understanding how, and why, children are actually perceived when they disclose can help establish ways to enhance their credibility when disclosing.

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