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**The influence of implicit theories and offender characteristics on judgements of sexual offenders: A moderated mediation analysis**

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### Abstract

The psychological factors underpinning responses to sexual offenders are beginning to receive increased empirical scrutiny. One such factor is offender representativeness, which refers to the extent to which a given offender example matches a stereotype of those who are typically labelled as ‘sexual offenders’. Using a sample of 252 community members, we examined the role of implicit theories about sexual offenders (i.e., whether sexual offending is seen as fixed or malleable) in mediating the relationship between affective responses to sexual offenders and policy outcome judgements. We found support for this mediating effect, although this was eliminated when participants were presented with a ‘non-representative’ offender vignette. We argue that the relationship between affective responses and policy judgements is contingent on the activation of a sexual offender stereotype, and that this link can be disrupted via the increased presentation of non-stereotypical case examples. Implications for public debate and professional practice are discussed.

*Keywords:* representativeness heuristic; sexual offenders; implicit theories; attitudes; mediation

### **The influence of implicit theories and offender characteristics on judgements of sexual offenders: A moderated mediation analysis**

Attitudes towards sexual offenders are an important topic of study, given their links to policy development and preferences for different sentencing/management approaches (Brown, 1999; Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Nelson, Herlihy, & Oescher, 2002; Shackley, Willis, & Day, 2014), and the rehabilitative prospects of people convicted of these types of crimes (Göbbels, Ward, & Willis, 2012; Willis, Levenson, & Ward, 2010). For example, several authors note that laws designed to reduce the risk of sexual offenders upon their release from custody (such as registration and community notification procedures) are driven in part by popular punitivism – the desire of the public-at-large to see some action taken by legislators in a bid to protect the public (e.g., Harper & Treadwell, 2013).

In spite of the apparent importance of attitudes towards sexual offenders, very little is currently known about the psychological mechanisms that underpin them (Brown, 2009). However, recent studies do provide some preliminary insights. For example, several authors have recently examined the notion that people hold a stereotype about who a ‘sexual offender’ might be. Salerno et al. (2010) found that judgements about “sexual offenders” (as a homogenised label) were more punitive than judgements made about specific case examples. Similarly, Harris and Socia (2014) reported how the “sexual offender” label elicited more punitive responses to adult and juvenile perpetrators of sexual offences than the more sanitised label of “people who have committed crimes of a sexual nature”. Interpreting these previous findings, in addition to corroborating data from their own survey research, King and Roberts (2015) argued that “when asked about ‘sex offenders’, many are inclined to envision the media-proliferated stereotypical image of a violent, predatory male pedophile” (p. 2). In light of this, we argue that responses to “sexual offenders” may, in part, be based upon the *representativeness heuristic* (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). That is, when making

decisions about “sexual offenders” in a general sense, people base their decisions on the implicit stereotype that they hold. In contrast, when judging individual case examples, judgements are based upon the extent to which the case shares the common characteristics (i.e., the extent to which it is *representative*) of this stereotype.

The sources and content of such stereotypes about have been discussed within the literature, although much of this debate has been conceptual in nature. For example, media reporting has been highlighted as a key driver of such views (e.g., Greer, 2012; Harper & Hogue 2015a). As outlined by Soothill and Walby (1991), and more recently by Harper and Hogue (2014; 2015a), cases that receive media attention typically involved stranger-perpetrated offences, and are composed of adult males victimising young children (i.e., the stereotypical “predatory male pedophile”; King & Roberts, 2015, p. 2). These reports have been linked to a range of stereotypes, including the view that sexual offenders are ‘dirty old men’, mentally ill, and resistant to treatment input (e.g., Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Fedoroff & Moran, 1997; Fuselier, Durham, & Wurtele, 2002; Galeste, Fradella, & Vogel, 2012; Sanghara & Wilson, 2006).

The latter of these stereotypes (i.e., that sexual offenders are resistant to change) links theoretically with the notion that people hold specific implicit theories (ITs) about the fixed or malleable nature of human attributes, traits, and behaviours (e.g., Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995)<sup>1</sup>. In this dichotomised framework, the former are described as ‘entity’ ITs while the latter are termed as ‘incremental’ ITs. According the Dweck et al. (1995), entitists view the trait/behaviour in question as fixed, and not liable to change over time, while incrementalists view traits/behaviours as malleable and subject to variation. To our knowledge, only two studies have specifically applied this framework to attitudes towards sexual offenders. First,

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that our use of Dweck et al.’s (1995) conceptualisation of ‘implicit theories’ is distinct from that put forward by Sternberg (1985), which identifies ‘implicit theories’ as a set of beliefs (i.e., knowledge structures) about personality traits. Readers are asked to be mindful to not confuse these constructs in spite of their similar terminology.

Blagden, Winder, and Hames (2016) found that forensic professionals with a more incrementally-based implicit theory about offending behaviour (in a general sense) expressed more positive attitudes towards sexual offenders than those with an implicit theory that was entity-based. In turn, these attitudes were associated with their approach to treatment and engagement with inmates at a therapeutic prison for people convicted of sexual offences.

Second, Harper and Bartels (2016) applied this dichotomous implicit theory framework to sexual offenders using a sample of British community members. The results replicated Blagden et al.'s (2016) data, in that participants expressing an incremental implicit theory about sexual offending also expressed more positive attitudes towards sexual offenders. Moreover, implicit theory orientations were linked to judgements of specific types of child abusers. That is, those with an entity-based implicit theory about sexual offending made more punitive judgements about an adult male perpetrator (operationalised as judgements about the offenders' "moral character" and deserved punishment) than those made about an adult female or a male juvenile who committed the same offence. Among incrementalists, there was little difference in these outcome judgements across the different case examples. Based on the results, Harper and Bartels (2016) argued that negative attitudes towards sexual offenders may be based upon entity-based implicit theories, with these in turn being based upon a narrow conceptualisation about who 'sexual offenders' are (i.e., a "sexual offender schema", p. 2). This argument is consistent with the view that implicit theories and the representativeness heuristic play a substantial role in the expression of attitudes and judgements about sexual offenders.

### ***Aims and Hypotheses***

On the basis of Harper and Bartels' (2016) data, it can be argued that implicit theories and the representativeness heuristic influence the relationship between generalised attitudes

towards sexual offenders and judgements of risk and sentencing. That is, they may mediate and moderate the relationship, respectively. The core aim of the present paper was to investigate this proposition. In line with this aim, we made two hypotheses:

**H1:** Sentencing and risk judgements will be moderated by offender type (such that more representative offenders will be judged more negatively than less representative alternatives) and implicit theory orientations (such that entitists about sexual offending will respond more punitively than incrementalists).

**H2:** The relationship between generalised attitudes towards sexual offenders and sentencing and risk outcome judgements will be mediated by implicit theories about sexual offenders, such that entity-based IT orientations will contribute to more negative responding in relation to sexual offender sentencing and risk.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants in this study were 252 British community members (73 males, 177 females, 2 did not disclose gender;  $M_{\text{age}} = 41.28$  years,  $SD = 15.25$  years). These participants were recruited for the study online, using invitations sent via institutional and professional mailing lists and social media advertisements placed on the authors' personal and professional Facebook and Twitter feeds. All advertisements provided general information about the content of the study (framed as an investigation into attitudes towards sexual offenders), and asked potential participants to share the link within their wider social networks. Thus, all participants were self-selecting, and opportunity and snowball sampling techniques were used. Using this approach to participant recruitment, it should be noted that our sample may not be representative of the general population (see Table 1), and care should be taken when making generalisations about the data reported later in the results section. All

participants were naïve to the aims and hypotheses of the study during data collection, and were not incentivised to take part.

## Materials

**Demographics.** Participants were asked to provide details about the age, gender, political orientation, and regular newspaper readership. A full breakdown of the sample characteristics is provided in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

**Attitudes to Sexual Offenders Scale (ATS-21).** The ATS-21 (Hogue, 2015) is a revised form of the ATS scale developed by Hogue (1993)<sup>2</sup>. The ATS-21 is comprised of 21 statements about sexual offenders. These 21 statements divide equally into three seven-item subscales, examining views about ‘Trust’ (e.g., “I would like associating with some sex offenders”), ‘Intent’ (e.g., “Sex offenders only think about themselves”; reverse-scored), and ‘Social Distance’ (e.g., “If sex offenders do well in prison/hospital, they should be let out on parole”). Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each of these statements using a 5-point Likert scale, scored from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). 11 items are reverse-scored, owing to the framing of these statements. Scores for each item are summed, meaning that each subscale has a potential scoring range of 0-24, and the total ATS-21 a range of 0-84. High scores are indicative of more positive attitudes towards sexual offenders. In this paper, we used the ATS-21 as a holistic scale of generalised attitudes

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<sup>2</sup> In a recent development study, the revised ATS-21 correlated strongly with the original form of the ATS ( $r = .98, p < .001$ ; Hogue & Harper, 2016)

towards sexual offenders, and found it to have excellent levels of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .95$ )

**Implicit Theories about Sexual Offenders (IT-SO).** We used Harper and Bartels' (2016) three-item (e.g., "Whether somebody commits a sexual crime is very much related to who they are as a person") scale of implicit theories about sexual offenders (IT-SO) to test whether participants held a fixed (entity-based) or malleable (incrementally-based) view of sexual offending. Participants responded to these items using a 6-point Likert scale, anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Scores for the three items were averaged for each participant. Those with an average score of 1-3 were classified as 'incrementalists' (meaning that they endorsed the view that sexual offending is a changeable behaviour;  $n = 66$ ), while those with an average score of 4-6 were classified as 'entitists' (meaning that they endorsed the view that sexual offending is due to some flaw within the perpetrator, and is unchangeable;  $n = 127$ ). In accordance with Dweck et al.'s (1995) scoring protocol, participants whose average IT-SO score fell between the discrete values of 3 and 4 ( $n = 59$ ) were excluded from the between-groups analyses reported below. This IT-SO measure demonstrated acceptable internal consistency within the present sample ( $\alpha = .74$ ).

**Experimental Vignettes.** Three sexual crime vignettes acted as the experimental manipulation for the analyses that follow. These vignettes were each approximately 200 words in length, and depicted a contact sexual offence being committed against a child within the context of a summer barbeque. In one, the offender was an adult male, in the second, the offender was an adult female, and in the third, the offender was a male teenager (aged 14 years). In each of these cases, the victim was a child of the opposite sex (aged nine years). The exact wording of these vignettes is provided in the Appendix.

**Perceptions of Sex Offenders Scale (PSO).** The PSO (Harper & Hogue, 2015b) is a 20-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure outcome judgements of sexual offenders on three subscales: ‘Sentencing and Management’ (10 items; e.g., “Convicted sex offenders should never be released from prison”;  $\alpha = .93$ ), ‘Stereotype Endorsement’ (five items; e.g., “Most sex offenders do not have close friends”;  $\alpha = .84$ ), and ‘Risk Perception’ (five items; “People are far too on edge about the risks posed by sex offenders”;  $\alpha = .87$ ). Participants respond to PSO items using a 6-point Likert scale, scored from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Six items are reverse-scored, and the potential scoring range is 0-100. High scores indicate more negative judgements of sexual offenders, which are characterised as a desire for more punitive sentencing, higher levels of stereotype endorsement, and inflated perceptions of sexual offenders’ risk levels. In addition to the reliability coefficients reported above, the PSO demonstrated excellent internal consistency as a holistic scale in the present sample ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

### **Procedure**

Participants were invited to take part in the study via internet-driven advertisements, as described previously. The study took the form of an online survey, with the link to this being provided in each advertisement alongside an overview of the research topic. The survey software allowed us to ensure that only UK-based participants took part in the study, such as to control for potential extraneous culture-based variables. Those interested in taking part clicked on the link and were taken to the first page of the survey, which provided more detailed information about the study. If they were happy to continue, participants clicked a button at the bottom of the page to indicate their consent to take part, and were then directed to the first page of the survey (the demographic questionnaire).

From here, participants entered their demographic information and completed the ATS-21 and IT-SO measures, before being randomly allocated by the survey software to one of the four experimental conditions. These conditions pertained to either one of the three experimental vignettes, or a 'no vignette' condition, whereby participants proceeded directly from the ATS-21 and IT-SO measures to the PSO. After reading their vignette (if applicable), participants completed the associated questions, and finally the PSO. At the end of the survey, participants were fully debriefed about the nature and hypotheses of the study, and thanked for their time. This procedure received ethical approval from an institutional review committee prior to data collection.

## Results

### Missing Data

As reported previously, data for the analyses that follow were provided by 252 self-selecting community members using an online survey. This sample represents all completed survey responses (i.e., those with no missing data) that we received. A total of 417 people started the survey, representing a completion rate of 60.43%. Participants with missing data in our original dataset were removed listwise, such as to produce a clean dataset with no missing values for analysis.

### H1: Offender Representativeness and PSO Judgements

In order to test Hypothesis 1, we conducted a 4 (Vignette Condition: Adult Male vs. Adult Female vs. Male Juvenile vs. No Vignette) x 2 (IT-SO Group: Entitist vs. Incrementalist) between-groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), with scores on the PSO measure as our outcome variable. Although there have been recent criticisms of reporting only analyses that include covariates (see Simonsohn, Nelson, & Simmons, 2014), we chose

to control for ATS-21 scores because of the strong negative correlation between the ATS-21 and PSO measures that have been reported in previous work (e.g., Harper & Hogue, 2015b). Indeed, we observed a similar correlation in the present study ( $r(191) = -.89, p < .001$ ). For full data transparency, analyses without covariates are available from the first author upon request. ATS-21 scores were found to be a significant covariate in the model ( $F(1, 192) = 361.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.35$ ).

The ANCOVA failed to find a significant main effect of Vignette Condition on PSO scores ( $F(3, 192) = 1.25, p = .293, \eta^2 < 0.01$ ), indicating that the presentation of different offender vignettes had no impact on outcome judgements. This finding is inconsistent with Hypothesis 1. However, there was a significant main effect of IT-SO Group on PSO scores ( $F(1, 192) = 8.78, p = .003, \eta^2 = 0.02$ ), whereby entitists scored higher (i.e., more negatively) on the PSO than incrementalists across all vignette conditions, with the largest effect observed in the adult male condition (see Table 2). The interaction between Vignette Condition and IT-SO Group was non-significant ( $F(3, 192) = 0.95, p = .418, \eta^2 < 0.01$ ).

[Insert Table 2 Here]

## **H2: Implicit Theories as a Mediator of the ATS-21/PSO Relationship**

Owing to the impact of IT-SO grouping on responses to sexual offenders, and the moderation of this impact by the presentation of different case vignettes (Harper & Bartels, 2016), we conducted a moderated mediation analysis in order to establish whether scores on the IT-SO measure mediated the relationship between the ATS-21 and PSO scales within each of the experimental conditions (Figure 1). That is, separate mediation analyses of the relationship between the ATS-21 and the PSO (with IT-SO scores as the mediator) were conducted for each of the experimental conditions using the PROCESS plug-in for SPSS

(version 2.15; Hayes, 2015). 95% confidence intervals were obtained using 1,000 bootstrapped re-samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

In the 'no vignette' condition, ATS-21 scores were negatively related to PSO scores ( $\beta = -0.78$ ;  $t(65) = 10.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and IT-SO scores ( $\beta = -0.05$ ;  $t(65) = 7.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, IT-SO scores were positively related to PSO scores ( $\beta = 2.78$ ;  $t(65) = 2.68$ ,  $p = .009$ ). Finally, IT-SO scores were found to have a significant mediating effect over the relationship between ATS-21 and PSO scores ( $\beta = -0.14$ ; CI = -0.27 to -0.02).

Among those in the 'adult male' condition, ATS-21 scores were again negatively related to both PSO scores ( $\beta = -0.92$ ;  $t(59) = 8.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and IT-SO scores ( $\beta = -0.06$ ;  $t(59) = 9.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ). IT-SO scores were positively related to PSO scores ( $\beta = 3.32$ ;  $t(59) = 2.24$ ,  $p = .029$ ), and were found to have a significant mediating effect over the relationship between ATS-21 and PSO scores ( $\beta = -0.19$ ; CI = -0.38 to -0.04).

In the 'adult female' condition, scores on the ATS-21 were negatively related to both PSO scores ( $\beta = -0.73$ ;  $t(62) = 6.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and IT-SO scores ( $\beta = -0.06$ ;  $t(62) = 8.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, IT-SO scores were not significantly related to PSO scores ( $\beta = 2.83$ ;  $t(62) = 1.93$ ,  $p = .059$ ). Thus, there was no mediating effect of ITs about sexual offenders on the relationship between ATS-21 and PSO scores ( $\beta = -0.16$ ; CI = -0.37 to 0.02).

Among those presented with the juvenile vignette, ATS-21 scores were again negatively related to both PSO ( $\beta = -0.83$ ;  $t(58) = 8.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and IT-SO scores ( $\beta = -0.06$ ;  $t(58) = 9.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, IT-SO scores were not significantly related to PSO scores ( $\beta = 2.38$ ;  $t(58) = 1.71$ ,  $p = .092$ ), and did not mediate the relationship between ATS-21 and PSO scores ( $\beta = -0.13$ ; CI = -0.29 to 0.02).

## Discussion

Our core aim in this paper was to examine the role of implicit theories about sexual offending, and the characteristics of different ‘types’ of sexual offenders, in outcome judgements (e.g., sentencing preferences and risk perceptions) about the perpetrators of sexual crimes. To do this, we utilised a public survey to examine these constructs, and ran inferential and mediational analyses. The non-significant effect of Condition on PSO scores was contrary to initial expectations, as outlined in Hypothesis 1. The findings of subsequent analyses, however, found significant mediating effects of IT-SO scores on the relationship between ATS-21 and PSO scores in the ‘no vignette’ and ‘adult male vignette’ conditions. However, no such mediation occurred in the ‘adult female vignette’ or ‘juvenile vignette’ conditions. These effects were consistent with Hypothesis 2.

This moderated mediation effect suggests that, generally speaking, ITs about sexual offenders have a mediating effect on the impact of attitudes towards sexual offenders on decision-making about sentencing and risk. That is, as a person becomes more entity-based in their thinking about sexual offenders, the more punitive they become in relation to sentencing and risk judgements. This is consistent with previous research using this IT paradigm (e.g., Skitka, Mullen, Griffin, Hutchinson, & Chamberlin, 2002).

Interpreting the significant mediating effect of IT-SO scores within the adult male vignette condition, we propose that the vignette served to re-affirm entitists’ implicitly-held representative image of who ‘sexual offenders’ are. As such, it could be argued that this vignette does not necessarily manipulate participants’ views (compared to those at baseline) at all. However, the presentation of vignettes depicting adult female and juvenile perpetrators offers a challenge to entitists’ implicit stereotypes about who ‘sexual offenders’ are. This would mean that all participants (both entitists and incrementalists) are guided primarily by

their affect-based responses (as reflected in their ATS-21 scores) when making judgements about sentencing and risk in these cases.

### *Implications*

These data offer some interesting implications. Most crucially, they highlight the potential importance of offender characteristics and implicit theories in judgements of different perpetrators of sexual offences. This implication is perhaps most critical within clinical contexts, where risk assessments can be the difference between release and continued incarceration. Indeed, Blagden et al. (2016) highlighted that professionals' implicit theory orientations (about offending behaviour generally) were correlated with their attitudes towards sexual offenders. In a separate study, Hogue (2015) reported a significant correlation between attitudes towards sexual offenders and perceptions of re-offending risk among a sample of licenced forensic psychologists. The data reported in this paper provide confirmatory support for these earlier studies, while also suggesting that views about 'sexual offenders' (as a homogenous label) generally play an important role in judgements about specific case examples (see also Harris & Socia, 2014).

Our moderated mediation analysis also highlights the apparent importance of offender characteristics in reducing the influence of our core implicit theories on outcome judgements. Harper and Bartels (2016) argued that entity-based implicit theories about sexual offenders may be based on a 'sexual offender schema' that is comprised of a stereotypical image of who such individuals are. As demonstrated above, the presentation of a non-representative case of sexual crime (i.e., one depicting an adult female or a juvenile perpetrator) led to the elimination of the mediating effect of implicit theories in exaggerating affective responses. That is, the presentation of a 'representative' case gives some legitimacy to these stereotypes, and means that participants' implicit theories strengthened the relationship between

generalised attitudes (as measured by the ATS-21) and outcome judgements (as measured by the PSO). However, the presentation of a case example that did not match the stereotypical 'sexual offender' meant that participants' implicit theories were not supported, and so the link between attitudes and outcome judgements was unaffected by scores on the IT-SO measure. This finding suggests that the extent to which a given example concurs with the stereotype that forms one's implicit theory about sexual offenders may be pivotal in guiding the influence of generalised attitudes over outcome judgements. Within a clinical context, this means that 'representative' offenders may be less likely to receive an objective risk assessment (comparative to 'non-representative' cases), as their characteristics may correspond with an implicitly-held stereotype, which in turn strengthens the relationship between attitudes and risk judgements (Hogue, 2015).

Further, the extent to which 'representative' cases dominate media coverage of sexual crime has the potential to feed into views about what is (and, by extension, what is not) a sexual offence, with public preferences and social support for particular legislative policies being driven by these ideas (e.g., Harper & Hogue, 2014). At present, the scale of media coverage of such 'representative' cases means that the prevailing societal stereotype of the "predatory male pedophile" suggested by King and Roberts (2015, p. 2) dominates the social and legislative discourses about the sentencing and post-conviction management of sexual offenders. Further, the dominance of this stereotype risks other counter-stereotypical offences being dismissed entirely as non-crimes, as we see happen on a regular basis in relation to cases where young female adults have been found to be involved in sexual relationships with younger boys (Harper & Hogue, 2016). Such views may be implicated in the low base rates of those reporting being victims of sexual offences among males (e.g., Briere & Elliott, 2003). Thus, addressing such stereotypes and exposing less representative cases of sexual offending may be suggested as being of great importance from a judicial standpoint.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

As suggested previously, care should be taken when generalising our data to wider populations due to the sampling methods that were used in the present study. From the demographic breakdown presented in Table 1, it can be observed that the sample used here was perhaps more educated and politically liberal than the averages for wider society. This is possibly due to the sampling approach that was taken to participant recruitment (i.e., the use of the authors' own social media accounts and email distribution lists, coupled with snowball-based techniques). As such, it would be interesting to examine whether the trends reported here still hold in a more 'typical' general public sample.

There are several aspects of this research that could be improved and developed further in subsequent research. Firstly, we make some substantial claims within our discussion about the potential role of implicit theory orientations and professionals' responses to specific cases with regard to risk assessment outcomes. In the present research, we used the PSO measure as an outcome scale. This self-report questionnaire uses the reference label "sex offenders" in each of its items, which may be problematic for the more practical implications that we suggest. Indeed, as Harris and Socia (2014) argue:

"Prompts such as "What percentage of sex offenders do you think commit new sexual crimes after their release from prison?" or "Do you think that the names and addresses of convicted sex offenders should be made available to the public?" implicitly force respondents to make general inferences and statements about a knowingly diverse population. Ultimately, it may be that the resulting research tells us more about respondents' visceral reactions to the "sex offender" label than it does about rational assessments regarding adults or youth who have perpetrated sexual offenses" (p. 2).

As such, further research is required to examine our arguments in a more direct manner. Studies could adopt a similar approach to that used by Hogue (2015), who used case vignettes and basic risk assessment outcomes (e.g., perceived risk of re-offending) in order to test these kinds of ideas. Using our data, we would hypothesise that entitists' risk assessments of 'representative' cases would be more strongly correlated with baseline attitudes than assessments made about non-representative cases. Among incrementalists, we would not expect there to be any significant differences in the correlation between baseline attitudes and risk assessment outcomes as a function of the characteristics of the case.

Further, we did not include a female juvenile offender vignette in this study, owing to the paucity of available literature on this group of potential perpetrators. Extrapolating from the data at hand, we might expect that implicit theories about sexual offending would not have mediated the relationship between ATS-21 and PSO scores, as a case such as this would not have supported the content of participants' 'sexual offender schemas'. However, further empirical work is required in order to assess this hypothesis. Further, we make assumptions about what (or who) a 'stereotypical' sexual offender is for most individuals. While our assumptions are supported by both previous research (e.g., King & Roberts, 2015) and the most common characteristics of offenders depicted in national British media reports about sexual crime (e.g., Harper & Hogue, 2014), the precise content of 'sexual offender schemas' is an important avenue for future research.

### *Conclusions*

In this paper, we sought to examine the extent to which implicit theories about sexual offending and stereotypical sexual offender characteristics play a role in changing the widely-observed relationship between generalised attitudes towards sexual offenders and judgements

about post-conviction management and risk. Consistent with previous research, we found significant effects of (entity-based) implicit theory orientations on punitive judgements about sexual offenders. Further, we found that the mediating effect of implicit theories about sexual offenders on the relationship between generalised attitudes and outcome judgements was moderated by the characteristics of a presented case. That is, a 'representative' (i.e., stereotypical) case was found to strengthen the relationship, while the presentation of counter-stereotypical cases led to a reduction of the importance of implicit theories. We argue that these data require further work in order to understand their importance, and tentatively suggest that increased exposure to counter-stereotypical examples of sexual offending are required in the public sphere in order to reduce people's reliance on general affective evaluations of sexual offenders when making important decisions about policy preferences and risk assessments.

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## Appendix

### Adult Male Vignette

Alan is a 35-year-old man. Last May he was invited to a work colleague's barbeque, which he attended with his wife. A few hours into the event, Alan went inside to use the bathroom, located on the first floor his colleague's home. On his way to the bathroom he passed the bedroom of his colleague's 8-year-old daughter, Sarah, whom he had met on several occasions and knew well. Alan entered the room to find Sarah playing with some toys. Alan sat talking to Sarah for a few minutes, asking her about the toys that she was playing with and what else she had been doing that day. During the interaction, Alan touched Sarah's genitals, telling her that it was a game that adults play. When he stopped, Alan stayed with Sarah for several more minutes, before returning to the barbeque for the remainder of the evening.

The following day, Sarah told her parents about what Alan did, and the police were informed. Alan was arrested and charged with a sexual offence. His trial begins in next month.

### Adult Female Vignette

Amanda is a 35-year-old woman. Last May she was invited to a work colleague's barbeque, which she attended with her husband. A few hours into the event, Amanda went inside to use the bathroom, located on the first floor his colleague's home. On his way to the bathroom she passed the bedroom of her colleague's 8-year-old son, Thomas, whom she had met on several occasions and knew well. Amanda entered the room to find Thomas playing with some toys. Amanda sat talking to Thomas for a few minutes, asking him about the toys that he was playing with and what else he had been doing that day. During the interaction, Amanda touched Thomas's genitals, telling him that it was a game that adults play. When she stopped, Amanda stayed with Thomas for several more minutes, before returning to the barbeque for the remainder of the evening.

The following day, Thomas told his parents about what Amanda did, and the police were informed. Amanda was arrested and charged with a sexual offence. Her trial begins in next month.

**Juvenile Vignette**

Adam is a 14-year-old boy. Last May he was attended a barbeque with his parents. A few hours into the event, Adam went inside to use the bathroom, located on the first floor of the property. On his way to the bathroom he passed the bedroom of his father's colleague's 8-year-old daughter, Sarah, whom he had met on several occasions and knew relatively well. Adam entered the room to find Sarah playing with some toys. Adam sat talking to Sarah for a few minutes, asking her about the toys that she was playing with and what else he had been doing that day. During the interaction, Adam touched Sarah's genitals, telling her that it was a game that he had heard about, that adults play. When he stopped, Adam stayed with Sarah for several more minutes, before returning to the barbeque for the remainder of the evening.

The following day, Sarah told her parents about what Adam did, and the police were informed. Alan was arrested and charged with a sexual offence. His trial begins in next month.

**Table 1:** *Sample demographic breakdown*

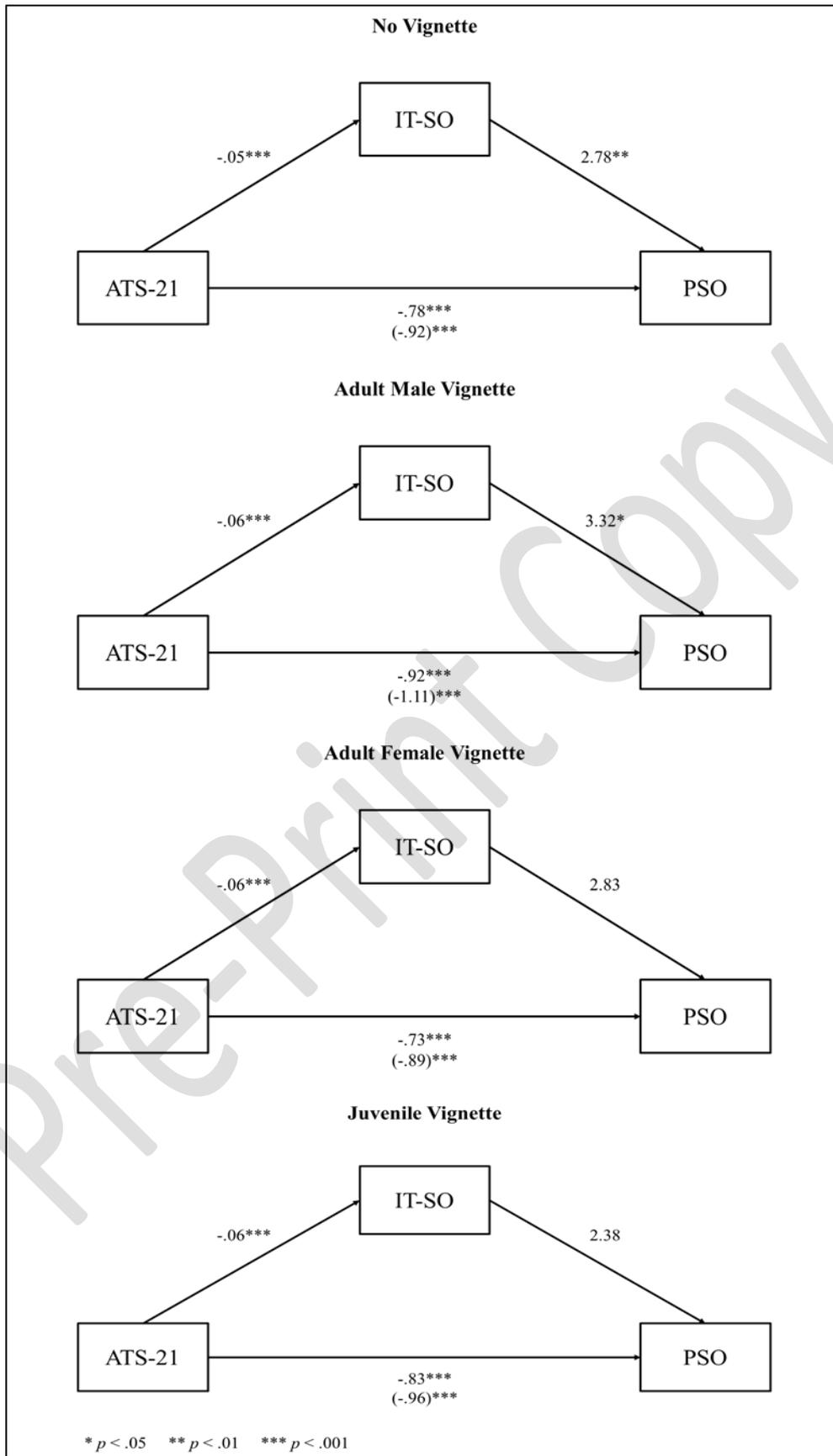
	<i>n</i>	% of sample
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	73	29.0
Female	177	70.2
Not disclosed	2	0.8
<b>Highest qualification</b>		
School leaver	29	11.5
Further education	71	28.8
Higher education	70	27.8
Postgraduate qualification	39	15.5
Professional qualification/PhD	33	13.1
Not disclosed	10	4.0
<b>Newspaper readership</b>		
Tabloids only	57	22.6
Broadsheets only	51	20.2
Both tabloids and broadsheets	44	17.5
No newspapers	99	39.3
Not disclosed	1	0.4
<b>Political orientation</b>		
Liberal	149	59.1
Centrist	45	17.9
Conservative	58	23.0

**Table 2:** *PSO scores as a function of Condition and IT-SO Group*

Vignette	IT-SO Group		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	Entitist	Incrementalist			
Adult Male	58.06 (14.21)	22.86 (12.87)	6.04	< .001	2.60
Adult Female	53.09 (14.68)	29.56 (12.14)	5.24	< .001	1.75
Juvenile	54.00 (16.36)	28.94 (10.50)	5.44	< .001	1.82
No Vignette	56.18 (14.86)	32.35 (13.53)	5.39	< .001	1.68

Note: Standard deviations are presented in parentheses

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**Figure 1:** Moderated mediation of the relationship between the ATS-21 and PSO measures by IT-SO scores, by vignette condition