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**The impact of child sexual abuse on adult women's possible  
selves and self-efficacy**

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The University of Arizona, 1994

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THE IMPACT OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE  
ON ADULT WOMEN'S  
POSSIBLE SELVES AND SELF-EFFICACY

by

Nadine Irene Ross

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the  
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS  
WITH A MAJOR IN COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE

In the Graduate College  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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*April 14, 1994*  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God...(Romans 8:37-39)

In my life, there have been so many who have helped me to become a conqueror. You each share in this accomplishment in a special way. I would not have conquered without your support and wisdom. Thank You.

I would specifically like to thank each of you who have walked with me these past two years and supported my goals. For my parents who showed and taught me the compassion and love that is necessary to be a counselor in today's world. To Joan, my classmate who has "spurred me on" and whose similar values let me know I am not alone. Most of all, to my husband Chad who continued to tell me "God will make a way" when there seemed to be no way, I can admit that you were right. I love you.

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### ABSTRACT

Childhood sexual abuse has many long term impacts upon women. Abuse can impact the area of self-schemas including possible selves and self-efficacy. Adult women who had not been sexually abused as children (n=36) were compared with adult women who had been sexually abused (n=17). The Possible Selves Questionnaire and The Self-Efficacy Scale were used to determine impact of past abuse. Women with past abuse had higher negative now selves when compared to women without abuse but also had greater probable positive selves. No difference was found for self-efficacy. There was a significant correlation between self-efficacy and possible selves. However, very little correlation was able to be obtained from this sample for abuse factors with possible selves or self-efficacy.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, women's issues have continued to gain prominence. Policies addressing discrimination, benefits for pregnant women, employment, health, and poverty as well as other issues have made recent headlines (Hagen and Davis, 1992). As women have increasingly joined the work force, roles within the family and society at large have changed (Moore, Spain, and Bianchi, 1984). However, in spite of the progress women have made, they continue to face many difficulties. In addition to issues such as sexual harassment, single parenthood, and dual career couples, both men and women still must face the consequences of child sexual abuse.

Although a significant number of men experience child sexual abuse, the research indicates a higher percentage of unwanted sexual contact by women. As many as 35% of women have experienced childhood sexual abuse (Rew, Esparza, and Sands, 1991). Among clinical samples, women who have experienced abuse represent approximately 45% and may be as high as 70% (Briere and Runtz, 1991; Gold, 1986). For incest alone, rates may be as high as 16% (Jackson, Calhoun, Amick, Maddever, and Habif, 1990). Incest is defined as sexual contact when a pre-existing relationship exists,

mainly one of parental form or blood relative (Faria and Belohlavek, 1984; Gelinas, 1983). Sexual abuse in general is defined as "forced or coerced sexual behavior imposed on a child and sexual activity between a child and a much older person whether or not obvious coercion is involved" (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986, p. 66).

The effects of child sexual abuse have been researched extensively (Bagley and Ramsey, 1985; Gelinas, 1983; Jackson et. al., 1990; Rew et. al., 1991). Research indicates that several factors mediate these effects. Duration and frequency of abuse, relationship to the abuser, type of abuse, use of force, age of the victim, and parental response to disclosing the abuse may all determine to some degree the victim's response. (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986). In their review of the literature, Browne and Finkelhor (1986) found that victims were affected in several areas. They found that many victims experience difficulty relating to others. One study found that 79% of incest victims have difficulty relating to men and, in another study, 12% feared women (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986).

Sexuality is another area affected by abuse. Research has shown that 45% of women abused as children reported difficulty with sexual adjustment as an adult. The research has also indicated later promiscuous behavior by victims. (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986). Later social functioning may

also be affected by sexual abuse. Additional research indicates that sexual abuse correlates with prostitution and substance abuse (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986).

Sexual abuse has also been found to impact victims emotionally. One of the most prominent symptoms of child sexual abuse seems to be depression. A significant amount of victims, 65%, reported a higher number of depressive symptoms than did non-victims(43%) (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986). Victims have also been found to be more self-destructive (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986). In addition to these effects, the victim's self-perception seems to be affected. Levels of self-esteem tend to be lower for victims as well as increased likelihood of a poorer body image (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Jackson et. al., 1990). Additional research regarding victim's self-perceptions and cognitions tends to be limited. Two areas of self-perception which continue to require research are self-schemas and self-efficacy.

Cognitive therapy has developed the concept of schemas as a system of cognitive structures about the self (Fong and Markus, 1982). Cognitive self-schemas are "cognate generalizations about the self, derived from past experiences, that organize and guide the processing of self-related information" (Fong and Markus, 1982, p. 192) A self-schema is an affective-cognitive structure developed

in a given domain (Markus and Ruvolo, 1989) This study focuses on one element of self-schemas, possible selves.

Possible selves give structure and meaning to the future of a certain domain for an individual (Markus and Ruvolo, 1989). Markus and Nurius (1986) define possible selves as:

The ideal selves we would very much like to become. Possible selves are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming...possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats. Possible selves provide the specific self-relevant form, meaning, organization, and direction to these dynamics. As such, they provide the essential link between the self-concept and motivation (p.954).

Through attempted validation of these possible selves, cognitions about the self are converted into self-regulated action. Possible selves could also be conceptualized as goals to be achieved and serve as standards for behavior (Wurf and Markus, 1991). Wurf and Markus(1991) state that how a person achieves these goals is partially determined by their self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is a "person's belief that he or she is or is not capable of performing the behavior or behaviors in question" (Maddux and Stanley, 1986, p. 250). Four different sources provide self-efficacy information: performance experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal

persuasion, and emotional or physiological states. Performance experiences are found to be the most powerful in affecting self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Maddux and Stanley, 1986). A person's self-efficacy expectancies determine both initiation of behaviors and persistence (Maddux and Stanley, 1986). The stronger a person's sense of self-efficacy, the more likely they are to initiate a behavior and continue to perform in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1982). Recent research has shown that child sexual abuse has some impact on reducing an individual's sense of self-efficacy (Rew, Esparza, and Sands, 1991). More research is needed to determine how significant an impact sexual abuse has on self-efficacy.

#### Purpose and Problem Statement

This study addresses differences between adult women who were sexually abused as children and adult women who were not. The specific questions addressed are:

1. Do sexually abused women have less positive and more negative possible selves than non-abused women?
2. Do sexually abused women have a lower sense of self-efficacy than non-abused women?
3. Does self-efficacy correlate with possible selves?
4. Are there any correlations between the type of abuse, age at onset of abuse, age at end of abuse, number of

times abused, or perpetrator and self-efficacy or possible selves?

This study hypothesizes that women with a history of sexual abuse will have different possible selves than non-victims. This may include fewer positive selves, a greater number of negative selves, or an imbalance between positive and negative selves. Also, it is hypothesized that victims of sexual abuse will have a lower sense of self-efficacy than non-victims. Finally, it was postulated that possible selves and self-efficacy will correlate to some degree.

#### Definitions

The following terms are used throughout this study and are included for explanation and clarification.

1. Possible Selves: Possible Selves are an individual's ideas of what they might become, what they are afraid of becoming(negative possible selves), and what they hope to become(positive possible selves). They derive from representations of the self in the past and include representations of the self in the future (Markus and Nurius, 1986).
2. Self-Efficacy: A person's belief that he or she is or is not capable of successfully performing certain behaviors in question (Bandura, 1977; Maddux and Stanley, 1986)

3. Sexual abuse: For the purpose of this study, a very broad definition of sexual abuse will be used. This includes any type of unwanted sexual activity or exploitation between a child (under the age of 18) and another individual. This includes behaviors such as intercourse, fondling, exhibitionism, and verbal stimulation (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Rew et. al., 1991).

#### Assumptions

This study held several underlying assumptions to be true. They are:

1. Those participants reporting child sexual abuse were, in fact, abused.
2. Those participants who did not report child sexual abuse were, in fact, not abused.
3. The participants answered the questionnaires honestly.
4. The participants used in this study are representative of the general population.
5. The questionnaires used in this study accurately measured the variables.

### Limitations

There were several limitations noted for this study.

They include:

1. The sample size may be inadequate.
2. The sample of participants was not randomly selected.
3. This study did not address other types of abuse possibly present in the population.

### Summary

Sexual abuse continues to be a concern for many women and researchers. Sexual abuse can impact women in many different areas of their lives including their self-perceptions. Possible selves and self-efficacy are included in self-perceptions. It is these two areas which this study will address. This study will consider the differences between women who have been victims of child sexual abuse and women who have not in the areas of self-efficacy and possible selves. The following chapters will discuss the review of the literature, the procedures and methods of this study, and its findings.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter addresses several main areas of research. The first, cognitive theory and research, will discuss the development of cognitive schemas and the concept of possible selves. It will also discuss the area of self-efficacy development and motivation. The second area of research will define childhood sexual abuse and identify the implications of childhood female sexual abuse.

#### Cognitive Theory and Research

Cognitive theory and research have been extensive and have involved many various concepts as well as researchers. This review focuses on the concept of schemas and much of the research conducted by Hazel Markus in this area. Bandura's work in self-efficacy is also emphasized.

#### **Schemas**

The ability of an individual to process incoming information has been considered extensively. The encoding and representation of this information has been discussed in the terms of scripts, names, and schemata (Markus, 1977). Schemas develop in many areas including the area of the self. Markus (1977) has defined these schemas as "self-schemas." Self-schemata are cognitive structures which are

associated with processing information about the self. They are derived from past experiences and influence both incoming and outgoing information about the self (Markus, 1977).

Self-schemas also act to determine what types of information are attended to, the importance attached to the information, and what happens to the information subsequently. Repeated experiences help to fortify self-schemas leading them to be "increasingly resistant to inconsistent or contradictory information, although they are never totally invulnerable to it (Markus, 1977; p. 64)." Self-schemas allow for individuals to do several things. Markus and Sentis (1982) assert that they allow an individual to see beyond the information that is available and predict future behavior in the domain as well as simplifying information into categories when there is too much.

Because self-schemas are based mainly upon past experiences, certain experiences can lead to negative, or maladaptive schemas (Young, 1990). Young (1990) asserts that maladaptive schemas are the "... cumulative result of dysfunctional early experiences with parents, siblings, and peers, rather than of isolated traumatic events (p. 12)." However, while this may be true concerning the development of schemas, traumatic events appear to have an affect on

changing schematic domains (Janoff-Bulman, 1989). Integrating the data of a traumatic victimization can significantly alter one's view of the world as well as the view of oneself (Janoff-Bulman, 1989). Victims can integrate this data through several methods in order to minimize change to self-schemas, however, some alterations must still take place. Victims may use behavioral self-blame, which involves blaming past behavior, in order to maintain assumptions such as a benevolent world or self-worth and decency. Characterological self-blame places blame on one's character for the victimization. This type of integration would lead to more disruption in the self-schemas (Janoff-Bulman, 1989).

### **Possible Selves**

The relationship between schemas and behavior continues to remain vague in spite of the research on self-schemata. Markus and Nurius (1986) propose that, within self-schemas, certain components provide more specific information for behavior and link schemas with motivation. These components are "possible selves." Possible selves reflect a person's "perceived potential" as well as who individuals would like to become and are afraid of becoming (Cantor, Markus, Niedenthal, and Nurius, 1986). While self-schemas are cognitive structures of information about the self, possible

selves are the "cognitive manifestations of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears and threats. Possible selves provide the specific self-relevant form, meaning, organization, and direction to these dynamics" (Markus and Nurius, 1986; p. 954).

Possible selves serve at least two functions within the self concept. They function as incentives for future behavior and provide an interpretive context for the present view of the self. Possible selves function in the first case by representing what a person is able to achieve and particularizing motivation. Markus and Nurius (1986) discuss a study in which the possible selves of three groups were compared. The three groups were: Those who had recently experienced a life crisis and felt they had not recovered, those who had experienced similar life crises and had recovered, and those who had not experienced a life crisis. Both groups which had experienced a crisis identified with more negative current selves than the non-crisis group. However, those subjects who felt that they had recovered were more likely to endorse a greater number of future positive possible selves almost equal to those who had experienced no crisis at all. Those subjects who had not recovered endorsed even more negative future possible selves than either other group. It seems that those with more positive future selves were able to recover faster, or

that the presence of these positive possible selves facilitated faster recovery. Markus and Ruvolo (1989) discuss the relationship between various possible selves. They suggest that a possible self will provide maximal motivation when paired with a countervailing possible self in the same domain. A feared self, although motivating, becomes more effective when a hoped for self provides an outline of how to avoid the feared possibility. It is possible that without this positive self, action will be disorganized or situational. As Wurf and Markus (1991) explain, those who lack the presence of positive possible selves "cannot achieve the integration necessary to shape behavior to achieve a more positive future" (p. 56). A balance allows for more control over behavior within a domain due to a variety of motivational resources made available (Markus and Ruvolo, 1989).

The second function allows for criteria against which outcomes of behavior are evaluated (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The current view of self is evaluated by comparing it to possibilities held within the self-concept. Also, validating the current view of self, especially positive possible selves, generally includes eliciting and interpreting information which is congruent with one's view of self (Nurius, 1991).

Possible selves are also related to affect. Possible selves can be viewed as positive or negative or, perhaps, neutral. If a negative possible self (a feared self) is activated, negative affective associations are also activated. Subsequent behavior can thus be impacted. Also, in the case that an individual can or cannot achieve a possible self, they may feel positively or negatively (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

Finally, possible selves "provide for a complex and variable self-concept but are authentic in the sense that they represent the individual's persistent hopes and fears and indicate what could be realized given appropriate social conditions" (Markus and Nurius, 1986; p.965). Certain social conditions will act to evoke certain possible selves and thus affect behavioral direction. However, as asserted before, if there is a preponderance of negative possible selves, it will be difficult for an individual to "self-regulate their behavior... and garner positive mood and social rewards" (Nurius, 1991; p. 248).

### **Self-Efficacy**

In relation to possible selves is the concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a person's belief that he or she is or is not capable of performing certain required behaviors. Self-efficacy can regulate both behavioral

initiation and persistence (Maddux and Stanley, 1986). Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy expectancies as having three dimensions: magnitude, generality, and strength. Magnitude concerns the level of difficulty associated with a task. Generality is the ability of an experience to extend beyond the specific situation, and strength determines how easily the expectancy can be extinguished. Self-efficacy expectancies are developed through personal experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and through emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977).

When faced with situations in the environment, a person's self-judgments of efficacy will determine not only how to behave, but also how to interpret difficulties. Bandura (1982) states that "those who judge themselves inefficacious in coping with environmental demands dwell on their personal deficiencies and imagine potential difficulties as more formidable than they really are" (p. 123). A strong sense of self-efficacy allows for increased effort and attention on the task (Bandura, 1982).

Because possible-selves are potentially hoped-for or feared end-states, self-efficacy will play a role in either achieving or avoiding them (Cantor et. al., 1986; Wurf and Markus, 1991). Markus and Nurius (1986) state that efficacy beliefs can be more influential when specifically linked to clearly envisioned possible selves. Wurf and Markus (1991)

also discuss validation of possible selves as being influenced by self-efficacy. If a person does not believe that a desired self is an achievable goal, he or she may not even attempt to validate or achieve this goal. Wurf and Markus (1991) also state that people who are high in their efficacy beliefs not only believe positive outcomes are possible, but also likely.

The action necessary in achieving possible selves (or avoiding them) may be "activated by thought, and cognitive appraisal of arousal states to a large extent determines the level and direction of motivational inducements to action" (Bandura and Adams, 1977). Thus, the probability of achieving or avoiding possible selves is partially dependent upon the person's sense of self-efficacy.

#### Child Sexual Abuse of Women

The topic of child sexual abuse has become widely studied in the past decade. By understanding the findings of these studies, counselors can be more effective in working with those who have been sexually abused. This section will focus on the definition of sexual abuse, the prevalence of abuse, factors mediating the effects of abuse, and its effects upon women in several areas.

**Definition of Sexual Abuse**

There are many conflicting definitions of sexual abuse in the literature. The definitions depend upon certain variables such as age of victim, age of perpetrator, relationship to perpetrator, and types of activities involved.

Browne and Finkelhor (1986) defined sexual abuse in two ways: Forced or coerced sexual behavior imposed on a child and sexual activity between a child and a much older person. Gold (1986) limited her definition of abuse to children under the age of 16. Included within these definitions is incest, which is sexual abuse committed within a pre-existing (generally familial) relationship (Gelinas, 1983). For purposes of this study, a broad definition of sexual abuse was used as defined by Wyatt and Mickey (1988). They define sexual abuse as "contact of a sexual nature occurring prior to the age of 18 by a perpetrator any age or relationship to the subject"(p. 215). This includes only those situations in which sexual contact was unwanted and involved some degree of coercion.

**Prevalence of Abuse**

The statistical prevalence of abuse varies widely within the literature. This is due to several factors including the definition of abuse used by the researcher as

well as the population examined. However, it is evident that many women and men are subjected to child sexual abuse. Estimates range from 8 to 35% for women (Rew et al., 1991). Sexual abuse was identified in 27% of women in a general population sample in 1989 (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, and Smith, 1989). Among clinical samples, the rate is much higher at approximately 45% (Gold, 1986). These findings make it clear that counselors must be aware of the effects of sexual abuse in order to work effectively with many of their clients.

#### **Mediating Factors of Abuse**

Research findings among sexual abuse victims have often been contradictory. This may be because sexual abuse effects are mediated by several factors. The impact of abuse may depend upon certain factors such as the age of the child at the time of abuse, the frequency, the duration, the relationship to the offender, and the severity of the abuse (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Gil, 1991).

Tsai, Feldman-Summers, and Edgar (1979) found that a clinical sample of abused women were older than the non-clinical sample at the age of last incident of abuse. They also found that clinical group reported a longer duration of abuse as well as a higher frequency of abuse. Browne and Finkelhor (1986) cite studies supporting these findings as

well as several which found conflicting evidence. Browne and Finkelhor (1986) also cite several studies which have found that the relationship to the abuser is also important. Abuse by a father or step-father appears to be the most significant and traumatic when compared to all other types of relationships.

Studies have also shown that the type of abuse can be important. Greater distress seems to be associated with more severe types of abuse such as attempted or completed intercourse when compared to abuse consisting of sexual fondling or kissing (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986). Other factors cited by Browne and Finkelhor (1986) which seem to impact the effects include age at onset, force, and sex of offender. Although conflicting studies exist, the research shows a trend supporting these mediating factors. However, it is important for counselors to remember that each individual will be affected differently.

### **Effects of Child Sexual Abuse**

A great deal of research has been done attempting to identify the long term effects of child sexual abuse. Researchers have found effects in many different areas. These areas include sexual functioning, social and interpersonal relationships, emotions, and self-perceptions

(Briere and Runtz, 1991; Jackson, Calhoun, Amick, Maddever, and Habif, 1990).

Women who have been sexually abused frequently demonstrate more difficulty in sexual functioning (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, and Smith, 1989). Browne and Finkelhor (1986) cite several studies in which victims have more difficulty with sexual adjustment, decreased sex drive, and have experienced orgasm less often. Also, some studies have shown that victims have a compulsive desire for sex.

Victims of sexual abuse have also indicated difficulties in social adjustment (Jackson et. al., 1990). Dating and social activities are often more problematic as well as such activities as parenting and making friends (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Gold, 1986; Jackson et. al., 1990). Victims are also more likely to become revictimized either by strangers or partners (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Gelinas, 1983). Finkelhor et. al. (1989) found that victims significantly experience greater marital disruption as well. A strong association also seems to exist between abuse and prostitution as well as with substance abuse (Briere and Runtz, 1991; Browne and Finkelhor, 1986).

One of the most significant emotional effects of abuse seems to be depression (Bagley and Ramsey, 1986; Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Jackson et. al., 1990). Jackson et. al. (1990) also identify that victims show a greater ratio of

negative to positive affect. Research has also shown that anxiety and tension are also demonstrated to a greater extent by victims of sexual abuse (Bagley and Ramsey, 1986; Browne and Finkelhor, 1986). The use of emotive coping was found to a greater extent in abused women than in any other group in the study by Rew, Esparza, and Sands (1991).

The effects most pertinent to this study are those upon the self-perception and cognitions. Jackson et. al. (1990) found that those who were abused reported lower self esteem as well as a poorer body image. Other researchers report similar findings (Bagley and Ramsey, 1986; Browne and Finkelhor, 1986). Rew, Esparza, and Sands (1991) discussed their findings of lower self-efficacy and well-being scores for abused subjects. However, very little research has been done to identify specific cognitions and schemas directly related with sexual abuse. Brier and Runtz (1991) cite several studies which find that victims of sexual abuse have greater difficulty developing a sense of self and internal awareness. Jehu, Klassen, and Gazan (1986) performed a study using cognitive interventions with women who were abused and found that certain cognitive beliefs changed over the course of the study including beliefs about trusting men, inferiority, and relationships.

### Summary

Experiences of the past are carried into the present through schemas. The present is then projected into the future through possible selves. These experiences, schemas, and possibilities allow people to process information about themselves as well as about others and the world. They also provide a filter through which conflicting information is integrated or deleted. Possible selves also provide the link between schemas and action. They, along with self-efficacy, lead to action and purpose.

However, when sexual abuse has taken place in the past, schemas, possible selves, and self-efficacy may be affected negatively. Individuals may also be affected emotionally and in relationships. These negative consequences make it very important for counselors to be aware of the impact of sexual abuse. By identifying the effect abuse has upon possible selves and self-efficacy, counselors will be able to help clients change their possible selves and, in turn, their course of action.

This study focused upon identifying the differences in both possible selves and self-efficacy between women who had been abused and those who had not. It is hypothesized that women who had been abused would report more negative possible selves and less positive possible selves than non-

abused women. Also, women who had been abused would report less self-efficacy.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study addresses differences between adult women who were sexually abused as children and adult women who were not. Specific differences addressed are variations in possible selves and self-efficacy. The study is concerned with whether sexually abused women have different possible selves than non-victims and whether they have a lower self-efficacy than non-victims. This chapter will discuss methods and procedures of the study, participants, instruments used, research design, and methods of data analysis.

#### Methods

##### **Subjects**

The population of this study will consist of 60 women, divided into two groups based upon self-report of sexual abuse during childhood. Subjects will be obtained through use of a convenient sample in addition to being contacted by various individuals within the community.

##### **Instruments**

Research instruments used in this study include an explanatory statement by the author (Appendix A), a

demographics questionnaire, the Possible Selves questionnaire (Markus and Nurius, 1986), and The Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer and Maddux, 1982).

Demographic Information. A demographics questionnaire was included which asks for the participants age, income, education, marital status, and sexual abuse information. A checklist format was used in the questionnaire (Appendix A).

Possible Selves Questionnaire. Markus and Nurius (1986) developed the Possible Selves Questionnaire (PSQ) which originally included 150 items in six areas. These were general descriptors, physical descriptors, life-style possibilities, general abilities, occupational possibilities, and possibilities tied to others opinions. These descriptors were also categorized as either positive, neutral, or negative. A revised version was used for this study containing 80 items. These items were positive and negative and were not classified in the six areas mentioned above. Participants are asked to respond to three questions for each descriptor using a 5-point Lichert scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much". A mean score is calculated for positive now selves, negative now selves, positive like-to-be selves, negative like-to-be selves, positive probable selves, and negative probable selves. For positive selves, the higher the score, the more positive the view. For negative selves, the higher the score the more

negative the view. The questionnaire was included in this study to determine what possible selves participants hold.

The PSQ was determined to have a one week test-retest reliability of .72 for positive selves and .89 for negative selves (Markus, 1987). Concurrent validity of the PSQ was determined by correlating it with several other scales of self-concept (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Possible selves correlated at a level of .34 to .42 with self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), at .21 to .41 with affect (Derogatis, 1975), and at .27 with locus of control (Rotter, 1966).

The Self-Efficacy Scale. Sherer and Maddux (1982) developed The Self-Efficacy Scale to be a measure of general efficacy, "not tied to specific situations or behavior" (p. 664). The Self-Efficacy Scale consists of 30 items and utilizes a 5-point Lichert scale. Seven items were null questions and left out of scoring. The scale ranged from "disagree strongly" to "agree strongly". Three scores are obtained: A mean for total self-efficacy, a mean for general self-efficacy, and a mean for social self-efficacy. Permission was obtained from the author for use in this study (Appendix B) .

Two factors were included within the questionnaire, general self-efficacy and social self-efficacy. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients were obtained of .86 and .71 for these factors, respectively. Construct validity

correlations were found between the Self-efficacy Scale and several other personality measurements including the Rosenberg (1965) Self-esteem scale (-.510 for general self-efficacy and -.279 for social self-efficacy). In addition, support for the Self-efficacy Scale was also found in correlations with scales of the MMPI (Sherer and Adams, 1983).

#### Procedures

The questionnaires were to be given to adult women who agreed to participate in the study. The questionnaire contained a cover sheet which describes the study as being in fulfillment of a Master's thesis and that the study addresses ways they think and feel (Appendix A).

Each of the questionnaires were given a number in order to maintain confidentiality and it was requested that the participants leave no identifying information on the questionnaire. Voluntary participation was ensured by stating to participants that, if they chose to complete the questionnaire, they had given their consent, but that they could choose to discontinue at any time. Participants were given an opportunity to speak with the researcher or to be referred if, in the course of answering the questionnaire, issues concerning sexual abuse were discovered.

Participants from Arizona were obtained in two ways: (1) the researcher personally handed questionnaires to women, and (2) the researcher gave questionnaires to other individuals who administered the questionnaires to women. It was requested that the questionnaires be returned to the researcher through the mail in an envelope provided.

Participants were not asked if they had been sexually abused but were simply asked if they would be willing to participate. Respondents who agreed were given a questionnaire to complete. This study has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee of the University of Arizona (Appendix C).

#### Research Design

This study utilized a correlational design in order to discover the relationships between the variables. This type of research design appeared to be most appropriate because, according to Lobiondo-Wood and Haber (1990), it allows for "quantifying the magnitude or strength of the relationship between the variables" (p. 168). The relationships between (1) demographical data, (2) sexual abuse information, (3) possible selves, and (4) self-efficacy were examined. This allowed for the exploration of the impact sexual abuse may have upon possible selves and self-efficacy.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using between groups and within-groups analysis. Specific statistical procedures included frequency distributions, measures of central tendency,  $t$  tests, and Pearson correlation coefficients.

### Summary

This study explored the difference in possible selves and self-efficacy between women who were sexually abused as children and women who were not. It also addressed demographical data and sexual abuse information. Questionnaires were administered to voluntary participants who completed the instruments and returned them to the researcher. Correlational statistics were compiled to address the differences between and within the groups. The following chapter will discuss the results of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to identify differences in possible selves and self-efficacy between women with a history of sexual abuse and those without a history of sexual abuse. This thesis also addressed correlations between possible selves and self-efficacy as well as correlations between abuse factors and/or possible selves and self-efficacy.

Demographic characteristics were gathered to identify similarities and differences between the two groups. These characteristics were age, education, marital status, and income. In addition, some abuse characteristics were gathered including sex of the abuser, relationship to the abuser, type of abuse, frequency of abuse, age at the initial abuse, and at the end of the abuse.

The Possible Selves Questionnaire (Markus and Nurius, 1986) was used to identify subjects' possible selves and determine if women who have been abused maintain different possible selves than those who have not been abused. The Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (Sherer and Maddux, 1982) was used to identify whether abused women have lower self-efficacy than non-abused women.

Research hypotheses were developed surrounding these areas. The results of the data analysis are presented in this chapter along with tables to illustrate the findings.

### Description of the Subjects

Two groups of subjects participated in this study. The first group of subjects were women who stated that they had no history of sexual abuse. The second group consisted of women who declared that they had a history of childhood sexual abuse. Table 1 represents the results of the demographic data for the two groups. The data concerning the groups will be discussed separately and then compared for similarities and differences.

#### **Non-Abused Subjects**

The non-sexually abused subjects consisted of 36 women over the age of 18 who responded to the questionnaire. They each stated that they had not been sexually abused. These participants were found by a convenient sample and distributed to women known to the researcher as well as to other counselors in the area who then distributed questionnaires to women they knew. Subjects were asked to return the questionnaire in a self-addressed stamped envelope provided by the researcher.

Approximately 115 questionnaires were distributed and 40 of these returned fit into the non-abused category. Four questionnaires were not used because they were incomplete.

The ages of the non-abused subject ranged from 18 to 75 with a mean of 42.4 years and a standard deviation of 16.8 years. Three of these women (8.3%) reported having an education of less than a high school diploma, 5 (13.9%) reported a high school diploma, 13 (36.1%) had some college, and none had a technical or associates degree. Ten women were college graduates (27.8%) and 5 (13.9%) were either in graduate school or had a graduate degree.

Eleven of the non-abused subjects were single (30.5%), 18 were married (50%), 1 was widowed (2.7%) and 6 were divorced (16.7%). Income demographics were reported as follows: 4 women did not report their income (11.1%), 8 women had incomes less than \$10,000 (22.2%), 7 women (19.4%) reported incomes between \$10,000 and \$19,999, 1 subject (2.7%) had an income between \$20,000 and \$29,999, and 16 women had incomes over \$30,000 (44.4%).

In summary, these women are married, an average age of 42 years, with at least some college education, and earn over \$30,000 a year.

### **Sexually Abused Subjects**

The subjects which stated they had been sexually abused (n=17) consisted of women over the age of 18 that chose to respond to the questionnaires. Twenty questionnaires were returned falling in this category, 3 of which were unusable due to incompleteness or age at first abuse being after the age of 18. These women were found through a convenient sample known by the researcher and through other counselors and individuals in the area who distributed questionnaires to women known to them. They were asked to return the questionnaire to the research in an envelope provided.

The age of the group ranged from 20 to 65 years with a mean age of 35.8 years (SD=11.2). None of these women reported an education of less than high school and 2 (11.8%) reported having a high school level education. Six of these women (35.3%) had some college, 1 (5.9%) had an associates or technical degree, 5 were college graduates (29.4%), and 3 (17.5%) were either in graduate school or had graduate level degrees.

An even number of women were single and married. Seven women were single (41.2%) and 7 women were married (41.2%). None of the women were widowed and 3 were divorced (17.6%). Three women did not report their income (17.6%), 2 (11.6%) had incomes under \$10,000, 5 women had incomes between

Table 1. Results of demographic data between non-abused women and sexually abused women

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Non- Abused</u> (n=36)		<u>Sexually Abused</u> (n=17)	
<u>Age</u>				
Mean	42.4		35.8	
<u>Education</u>				
	n	%	n	%
Less than High School	3	8.3	0	0
High School	5	13.9	2	11.8
Some College	13	36.1	6	35.3
Technical/Assoc. Degree	0	0	1	5.9
College Graduate	10	27.8	5	29.4
Graduate School/Degree	5	13.9	3	17.6
<u>Marital Status</u>				
Single	11	30.5	7	41.2
Married	18	50.0	7	41.2
Widowed	1	2.7	0	0
Divorced	6	16.7	3	17.6
<u>Income</u>				
Not Reported	4	11.1	3	17.6
Under \$10,000	8	22.2	2	11.8
\$10,000-\$19,999	7	19.4	5	29.4
\$20,000-\$29,999	1	2.7	3	17.6
Over \$30,000	16	44.4	4	23.5

\$10,000 and \$19,999 (29.4%), 3 women (17.6%) between \$20,000 and \$29,999, and 4 women earning over \$30,000 a year (23.5%).

This group basically consisted of women 36 years of age, either single or married, with at least some college, and earning between \$10,000 and \$20,000 a year.

### **Comparison of Groups**

The groups, when compared by age, did not have a significant difference ( $p < .14$ ). The non-abused group had a mean of 42.4 years and the abused group had a mean of 35.8 years.

There were no significant differences found between the groups regarding income ( $p < .50$ ) or in regards to education ( $p < .38$ ). There was also no apparent difference with regard to marital status.

In general, these groups did not differ regarding age, income, education, or marital status.

### **Abuse Characteristics of Abused Subjects**

Several questions were asked concerning factors of the subjects abuse. These included the sex of the abuser, relationship to the abuser, type of abuse, age at onset of abuse, age at end of abuse, and number of times abused. Data is reported in Table 2 and Table 3.

Sex of the Abuser. The majority of the women reported being abused by males (n=16), but 1 woman did report being abused by both a male and a female (Table 2).

Relationship to the Abuser. Many of these women reported being abused by more than one person. More than half (n=9, 53%) were abused by a relative including their, father (5.9%), mother (5.9%), grandfather (5.9%), brothers/step-brothers (5.9%), and other relatives such as uncles (17.6%). Two women (11.8%) did not specify a relative. Relationships other than a relative accounted for 13 other abuse experiences. Two women were abused by a friend or a friend of the family (11.8%), 1 woman by an acquaintance (5.9%), 3 women by strangers (17.6%), 2 women by a boyfriend or date (11.8%), 1 woman by a high school counselor (5.9%), and 2 women by their baby-sitters (11.8%). In addition, 3 women were abused by more than one of these persons (17.6%).

In general, the abusers were largely males, most likely a relative, and the woman was probably abused by both a relative and another perpetrator. Other than a relative, a stranger was the most common perpetrator (Table 2).

Type of Abuse. This question addressed the severity of abuse women experienced. Women often responded to more than one category of abuse and were classified by their most severe response with intercourse being most severe and

Table 2. Sex of Abuser and Relationship To Subject

<u>Variable</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Sex of Abuser</u>		
Male	16	94.1
Female	0	0
Both	1	5.9
<u>Relationship to Abuser</u>		
Relative		
Not Specified	2	11.8
Father	1	5.9
Grandfather	1	5.9
Both parents	1	5.9
Brother/Step-brother	1	5.9
Other relatives (>2)	3	17.6
Other		
Friend/Family Friend	2	11.8
Acquaintance	1	5.9
Stranger	3	17.6
Date/Boyfriend	2	11.8
H.S. Counselor	1	5.9
Baby-sitter	2	11.8
Others (>2)	3	17.6

touching/kissing being least severe. The most common type of abuse was attempted or completed vaginal/oral/anal intercourse experienced by 12 women (70.6%). Genital fondling and/or digital penetration was experienced by 4 women (23.5%) and sexual touching and kissing was experienced by 1 woman (5.9%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Type of Abuse, Age at Onset, Age at End, and Number of Times Abused

<u>Variable</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Type of abuse</u>		
Intercourse	12	70.6
Genital Fondling	4	23.5
Kissing/Touching	1	5.9
<u>Age at Onset</u>		
Under 5	3	17.6
5-9	9	52.9
10-16	5	29.4
	Mean = 8.4	
	SD = 4.3	
<u>Age at End</u>		
Under 8	3	17.6
9-15	5	29.4
16-22	9	52.9
	Mean = 14.1	
	SD = 5.4	
<u>Number of Times Abused</u>		
1	3	17.6
2-3	5	29.4
4-5	2	11.8
5-30	1	5.9
>30	6	35.3

Age at Onset of Abuse. The majority of the women, 9 (52.9%) were first abused between the ages of 5 and 9 years. This is followed by 5 women (29.4%) who were abused between the ages of 10 and 16 years. An additional 3 women (17.6%) were abused under the age of 5 years. The mean age for first abuse was 8.4 years (SD=4.3) of age (Table 3).

Age at the End of Abuse. The age at the end of the abuse was most commonly between 16 years and 22 years of age. Nine women (52.9%) fell into this category. Five women (29.4%) were last abused between the ages of 9 years and 15 years. In the last category, 3 women (17.6%) were last abused under the age of 8 years. The mean age for last abuse was 14.1 years (SD=5.4) (Table 3).

Number of Times Abused. There was a wide range of number of times these women had been abused. Three of the women (17.6%) had been abused one time. Five women (29.4%) reported being abused two to three times and two women (11.8%) reported being abused four to five times. One woman (5.9%) reported being abused between 5 and 30 times. She reported a number of 15. A majority of women, 6 (35.3%), reported being abused over 30 times. Many of these women wrote in such responses as "too many to count" and were therefor included in this category (Table 3).

In summary, the abused woman in this study was approximately 8 years of age when the abuse began and 14 years of age when it ended. She experienced attempted or completed intercourse and was most likely abused an extensive number of times.

### Research Questions

Each of the research questions were addressed in this section and relevant statistical information was reported. For all of the research questions, the women were divided into two groups, those who had not been abused, and those who reported child sexual abuse.

#### Question 1

The first research question asked if women who reported child sexual abuse had differing possible selves than women who did not report child sexual abuse. The Possible Selves Questionnaire was used to measure the subjects possible selves in several areas. The first area was current views of self, both positive and negative (Table 4).

Table 4. Now Positive and Now Negative Scores by Group

<u>Sample</u>	<u>Now Positive</u>		<u>Now Negative</u>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Non-Abused (n=36)	143.06	16.22	60.83	12.15
Sexually Abused (n=17)	139.24	19.1	73.53	19.46
	t = -.76 p = .45		t = 2.91 p = .005	

The mean positive now score for the non-sexually abused group was 143.06 (SD=16.22, SEM=2.70) and the mean for the sexually abused group was 139.24 (SD=19.1, SEM=4.63). This difference did not reach significance with a pooled variance estimate of  $t = -.76$ ,  $df=51$ , and a two-tailed probability = .45.

The mean negative now score for the non-abused subjects was equal to 60.83 (SD=12.15, SEM=2.03). The mean for the abused subjects was higher at 73.53 (SD= 19.46, SEM=4.72). This difference was found to be significant with a pooled variance estimate  $t=2.91$ ,  $df=51$ , and a two-tailed probability = .005.

The second area of possible selves examined was positive and negative "like to be" possible selves (Table 5).

Table 5. Positive and Negative Like to Be Scores by Group

<u>Sample</u>	<u>Like Positives</u>		<u>Like Negatives</u>	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Non-Abused (n=36)	173.36	13.78	45.44	5.36
Sexually Abused (n=17)	178.17	13.76	48.23	11.12
	$t = 1.19$		$t = 1.24$	
	$p = .24$		$p = .22$	

The mean "like to be" positive score for the non-abused group was 173.36 (SD=13.78, SEM=2.30). The mean for the abused group was 178.17 (SD=13.76, SEM=3.34). This difference was not found to be significant with pooled variance estimate  $t=1.19$ ,  $df=51$ , and two-tailed probability = .24.

The mean negative "like to be" score for the non-abused group was 45.44 (SD=5.36, SEM=.89). The mean negative "like to be" score for the abused group was 48.24 (SD=11.12, SEM=2.70). This difference was not found to be significant with a pooled variance estimate  $t=1.24$ ,  $df=51$ , and two-tailed probability = .22.

The third area addressed in Question 1 is the probable possible selves, both positive and negative (Table 6).

Table 6. Probable Positive and Negative Scores by Group

<u>Sample</u>	<u>Probable Positive</u>		<u>Probable Negative</u>	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Non-Abused (n=36)	155.69	17.17	62.64	19.79
Sexually Abused(n=17)	165.94	18.96	68.65	13.51
	$t = 1.96$		$t = 1.13$	
	$p = .055$		$p = .26$	

The mean probable positive score for the non-abused subjects was 155.69 (SD=17.17, SEM=2.86). The mean score for the sexually abused subjects was 165.94 (SD=18.96, SEM=4.60). This difference was very close to significance with  $t=1.96$ ,  $df=51$ , and two-tailed probability of .055.

The mean probable negative score for the non-abused subjects was equal to 62.64 (SD=19.79, SEM=3.30). The mean for the sexually abused subjects was 68.65 (SD=13.51, SEM=3.29). This difference was not found to be significant with pooled variance estimates  $t=1.13$ ,  $df=51$ , and two-tailed probability = .26.

When the scores were pooled and compared for these two groups, the women who had been sexually abused had higher negative now scores than non-abused women at a significant level. However, they also had higher probable positive selves than women who had not been abused.

## **Question 2**

The second research question addressed the level of self-efficacy of abused women compared to the level of self-efficacy of non-abused women. It was asked if women who had experienced child sexual abuse have a lower sense of self-efficacy than women who had not experienced sexual abuse. The statistical results are discussed here and shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Efficacy Scores and Subscales by Group

<u>Instrument Scale</u>	<u>Non-Abused</u> (n=36)		<u>Sexually Abused</u> (n=17)	
	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>
Total Efficacy	85.78	19.39	83.00	12.61
				t = -.54 p = .59
General Efficacy	65.31	14.47	63.47	9.85
				t = -.47 p = .64
Social efficacy	20.47	6.29	19.53	5.43
				t = -.53 p = .59

The Self-Efficacy Questionnaire consisted of one total scale and two subscales, General Self-Efficacy and Social Self-Efficacy. The total self-efficacy mean for the non-abused group of women was 85.78 (SD=19.38, SEM=3.23) and the mean for the sexually abused group was 83.00 (SD=12.61, SEM=3.06). This difference was not found to be significant when pooled variance estimates were calculated ( $t=-.54$ ,  $df=51$ , two-tailed probability = .593).

The General Self-Efficacy subscale mean for non-abused women was equal to 65.31 ( $SD=14.47$ ,  $SEM=2.41$ ). The mean for sexually abused women was 63.47 ( $SD=9.85$ ,  $SEM=2.39$ ). This difference was also found not to be significant with pooled variance estimates  $t=-.47$ ,  $df=51$ , and two-tailed probability = .64.

The Social Self-Efficacy subscale mean for the women who had not been sexually abused was 20.47 ( $SD=6.29$ ,  $SEM=1.05$ ). For women who had been sexually abused, the mean was 19.53 ( $SD=5.43$ ,  $SEM=1.32$ ). This difference was not significant with  $t=-.53$ ,  $df=51$ , and two-tailed probability = .60.

No significant differences were found when the two groups were compared for level of self-efficacy. The differences were not significant on all scales and subscales.

### **Question 3**

The third question of this study asked if there was any correlation between possible selves and self-efficacy. For this question, self-efficacy scores on the total scale and both subscales were correlated with each set of possible selves, both positive and negative. These correlations will be discussed and relevant statistical data reported (Table 8).

Table 8. Possible Self and Self-Efficacy Correlations

<u>Possible Self</u>	<u>Self-Efficacy Scale</u>		
	Total	General	Social
Positive			
Now	.48**	.48**	.36**
Like to Be	.24	.20	.28*
Probable	.41**	.41**	.29*
Negative			
Now	-.42**	-.40**	-.35*
Like to Be	-.15	-.08	-.24
Probable	-.26	-.17	-.39**
* p=.05			
** p=.01			

Significant correlations were found between several sets of possible selves and self-efficacy scales. Total self-efficacy was found to correlate at a level of .48 ( $p=.01$ ) with current positive selves. Total self-efficacy was also found to correlate with probable positive selves at a level of .41 ( $p=.01$ ) and current negative selves at  $-.42$  ( $p=.01$ ). All other correlations to total self-efficacy were not significant.

General self-efficacy was also found to correlate with current positive selves at a level of .48 ( $p=.01$ ) and probable positive selves at a level of .41 ( $p=.01$ ). Current negative selves correlated with general self-efficacy at a significant level of  $-.40$  ( $p=.01$ ). No other significant correlations were found with general self-efficacy.

Social self-efficacy correlated with current positive selves at .36 ( $p=.01$ ) and like-to-be positive selves at a level of .27 ( $p=.05$ ). Social self-efficacy also correlated with probable positive selves at .30 ( $p=.05$ ). The correlation coefficient for negative now selves and social self-efficacy was  $-.35$  ( $p=.05$ ) and  $-.39$  ( $p=.01$ ) for social self-efficacy and probable negative selves. Social self-efficacy was not found to correlate significantly with negative like-to-be selves.

Significant correlation coefficients were found when self-efficacy scales were correlated with possible selves. Current positive selves, current negative selves, and probable positive selves correlated with all scales of self-efficacy. Other possible selves correlated with some self-efficacy scales.

**Question 4**

This question considered whether or not certain factors associated with sexual abuse impact and correlate with possible selves or self-efficacy. Several factors were to be examined including the sex of the perpetrator, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, type of abuse, the number of times abused, the age of onset of the abuse, and the age at which the abuse ended. Correlations were not performed for several of these areas. Because all but one of the sexually abused subjects were abused by a male, no correlations were done for sex of the abuser. Also, because of the small sample size and varying answers for relationship, these correlations were also not run. Also, because such a large majority of women experienced the same type of abuse, attempted/completed intercourse, no correlations were made. Finally, no correlations were made with the age at the end of abuse due to statistical considerations. Duration of abuse may have been a better factor to consider.

Correlations were found for the number of times abused and the age at onset of abuse. The number of times abused was found to correlate with the probable positive selves at .32 ( $p=.05$ ), current negative selves at .42 ( $p=.01$ ), and like-to-be negative selves at .51 ( $p=.01$ ). However, these correlations included four subjects who could not calculate

the number of times they were abused and were possible assigned an inflated value. Age at onset of abuse was found to correlate only with current negative selves at .35 ( $p=.05$ ). No significant correlations were found with self-efficacy.

#### Summary

This chapter presented the statistical findings of this study. There were no statistical differences between the groups in age, income, marital status, or education when sexually abused subjects were compared with non-sexually abused subjects.

The majority of the women who had been sexually abused were abused by a male relative and experienced very severe abuse, attempted or completed intercourse. The highest incidence of abuse by someone other than a relative was a stranger. The mean age for the onset of abuse was slightly greater than 8 years of age and ended around the age of 14 years. The women were abused multiple times, frequently more than 30 times.

Sexually abused women had significantly different possible selves than non-abused women in only two areas, positive probable selves and current negative selves. They held higher probable positive scores and lower negative current scores. There was no significant difference between

the groups on self-efficacy.

Possible selves was found to significantly correlate with self-efficacy in several areas. These included all scales and subscales of self-efficacy with several of the possible selves scales including probable positive selves, current positive selves, current negative selves, and probable negative selves.

Lastly, correlations between possible selves and/or self-efficacy and several abuse factors were not able to be performed due to small sample size and a variety of answers. Correlations were found between the number of times abused, although these may not be accurate, and the age at which the abuse began. The age at onset of abuse positively correlated with probable positive selves, current negative selves, and negative like-to-be selves. The findings of this chapter will be discussed in chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of this study as well as possible interpretations of these findings. The first section will cover the purpose of the study, the subjects, the research questions, the instruments and questionnaires, and the results of the study. The second section gives consideration to possible explanations for the findings. Finally, recommendations for further study will be addressed.

#### Summary

##### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine if women who had been sexually abused as children had a more negative image of the possibilities available to themselves than women who had not been sexually abused. This was addressed through measuring their possible selves. In addition, this study was concerned with the level of self-efficacy of sexually abused women compared to non-abused women. Also, this study addressed whether or not there existed a correlation between possible selves and self-efficacy. Finally, this study examined any correlations between abuse factors and possible selves and/or self-efficacy.

**Research Subjects**

The non-abused subject group consisted of 36 women, averaging 42 years of age and primarily with some college education. They were mostly married with an income over \$30,000 per year.

The sexually abused subjects, 17 women, averaged slightly younger with an age of 35 years. They were also well educated with a high percentage having some college. An even number of women were married or single and the income level was slightly lower with the highest frequency falling in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 range.

The sexual abuse subjects also reported some abuse statistics. All but one of the subjects were abused by a male and the remaining subject was abused by both a male and female. Over half of the subjects were abused by a relative including father, grandfather, and several other extended relatives. Many of the subjects were abused by both a relative and another person. The most common perpetrator was a stranger. The majority of the women also experienced various types of abuse, but primarily attempted or completed intercourse of some type was experienced. The average age for first abuse was 8.4 years and the average age at which abuse ended was 14.1 years. Many subjects were abused multiple times. No mean was calculated because several

subjects reported being abused "too many times to count" or similar reports.

These groups of subjects did not differ significantly on any of the demographic variables. Income, age, education, and marital status was primarily the same for both groups.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed several research questions to determine the effects of child sexual abuse on the cognitive schemas of women. This was assessed by measuring the possible selves and self-efficacy of women who had been abused and comparing them to possible selves and self-efficacy of women who had not been abused. Also, this study questioned if there was any correlation between possible selves and self-efficacy. Finally, abuse factors were considered to determine if they correlated with either possible selves or self-efficacy.

### **Possible Selves Questionnaire**

The Possible Selves Questionnaire was used to assess the subjects possible selves in several areas. The positive and negative possible selves of the subjects are assessed for current possible selves, like-to-be possible selves, and probable possible selves. This questionnaire was used to

determine if women who had been sexually abused as children would have higher negative scores and lower positive scores than women who had not been abused.

### **The Self-Efficacy Scale**

The Self-Efficacy Scale was used to determine if women who had been sexually abused had lower self-efficacy than women who had not been abused. This scale was also used to determine if any correlations existed between possible selves and self-efficacy. The scale measures self-efficacy on a total scale as well as a general subscale and a social subscale.

### **Results**

The statistical findings of this study did reveal that sexual abuse does have some long-term correlation with cognitive schemas. Abuse affected several areas of possible selves but did not seem to affect self-efficacy.

The first research question asked if women who had been sexually abused had more negative possible selves and less positive possible selves than women who had not been abused. The findings showed that sexually abused women did have significantly more negative current possible selves but an equal amount of positive current possible selves. Groups did not differ on like-to be possible selves, either

positive or negative. For probable positive selves, it was found that women who had been abused had significantly greater belief in probable positive selves than non-abused women. However, there was no difference for negative probable selves.

The second research question asked if women who had been sexually abused had a lower sense of self-efficacy than non-abused women. The statistical findings of this study did not show any difference in self-efficacy between the groups. This was true for the complete scale and both subscales.

The third question asked if there was any correlation between self-efficacy and possible selves. All self-efficacy scales correlated significantly with current positive selves, probable positive selves, and current negative selves. Social self-efficacy also correlated with like-to-be positive selves and probable negative selves. All correlations with positive scales were positive correlations and all correlations with negative scales were negative correlations.

The final question considered if there was any correlation between abuse factors and possible selves or self-efficacy. Many of these factors could not be correlated due to the small sample size and varying degree of answers. However, the age at which the abuse began

positively correlated with current negative possible selves. The number of times abuse occurred correlated with current negative selves and like-to-be negative selves as well as probable positive selves. However, the number of times abuse occurred may have been exaggerated due to unclear reporting and these correlations may not be reliable.

This research study has addressed possible differences between women who have been sexually abused and women who have not been abused. Some significant findings were found. The conclusions based on these findings are discussed in the next section.

### Conclusions

Several conclusions can be made from the previous findings. Some of these conclusions support previous research while others are unique to this study.

This study began with the hypothesis that women who had been sexually abused would have significantly different cognitive schemas due to the abuse than women who had not experienced sexual abuse. It was believed that the traumatic event of the abuse would impact a woman's self-schemas especially, including possible selves and self-efficacy. It was also believed that possible selves would highly correlate with self-efficacy due to the motivational factors of possible selves. Also, it was thought that

certain abuse factors such as relationship to the abuser and frequency of abuse would affect the woman's ability to maintain positive possible selves and increase the belief in negative possible selves as well as lower self-efficacy. These beliefs were only partially supported by this study.

Sexual abuse seemed to mainly correlate with a woman's current view of her self. The abused subjects did have greater amounts of negative current selves than non-abused women. However, they had an equal amount of positive current selves available to them as non-abused women. This could constitute the imbalance between positive and negative selves which Markus and Nurius (1986) discuss. The greater incidence of negative selves may become more easily accessible to the abused woman than her positive selves.

There was no difference between the groups concerning like-to-be positive or negative selves. This was expected due to the nature of the question. It is logical that women will not want to be something negative and will want to be something positive whether they have been abused or not.

The only other significant difference in possible selves occurred within probable positive selves. Probable negative selves did not prove to be affected by sexual abuse. It is interesting that women who had been sexually abused had greater belief in probable positive selves than women who had not been sexually abused. This could be due

to the sexually abused woman's attempt to overcompensate for the experience of the abuse. This finding is also similar to the study which found that those who believed they had recovered from a life crisis fared significantly better when considering future possible selves than current possible selves. Those who had recovered from the crisis scored low on current negative selves, similar to those who had not recovered, but scored higher than the non-recovered group when considering the future (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Thus it is possible that this sample of abused women feel fairly confident that they have recovered from the abuse and will be better off in the future.

There may have been more significant findings regarding possible selves if the sample size had been larger. Also, if the possible selves questionnaire had been designed to assess more specific possible selves associated with abuse. Possible selves in areas such as relationships, emotions, or sexuality may have been more pertinent due to the impact abuse seems to have on these areas.

Significant differences were not found in regard to self-efficacy. This may also be attributed to the women's beliefs that they have recovered from abuse and will be better off in the future. However, this is consistent with other research which has not found significant effect upon self-efficacy by abuse. This may have been different if

there had been more subjects in the study as well as if the self-efficacy scale had been designed to assess more specific efficacy issues associated with abuse such as relationship efficacy and sexual efficacy. The scale used in this study was designed to be a "general measure" of efficacy.

There was a significant amount of correlation found between possible selves and self-efficacy. Results show that as positive possible selves, both current and probable, are more readily accessible or more prominent, self-efficacy also increases. Also, the greater amount of self-efficacy held by the person, the less negatively they think about themselves currently and in the future. As negative possible selves become less accessible and positive possible selves become more accessible, self-efficacy increases.

Finally, due to the small sample size of this study, many abuse factors could not be correlated with possible selves or self-efficacy. The only significant correlation indicated when the number of times abused increases, the more negative subjects thought about themselves currently. The number of times abused also correlated with negative like-to-be selves. This seems to indicate that as a person is abused more frequently, she begins to think of negative possible selves as not being quite as negative as those who have not been abused or have been abused fewer times. This

supports the frequently maladaptive views some extensively abused women have about the world, concerning what is desirable or expected in and of the world.

However, this study also seems to indicate a correlation between number of times abused and probable positive selves. This would imply a certain hopefulness for escape from the abuse as it becomes more frequent. However, these correlations may be unreliable due to the way in which the number of times abused was reported. The number of times abused may have been inflated. The age at which the abuse began correlated significantly only with current negative possible selves. This seems to imply a certain process over time which allows abused women to see themselves more positively as they recover from the abuse. Because of the small sample size of this study, the findings are unable to distinguish if there is an age bracket which may be more closely correlated with possible selves. Research has indicated that abuse occurring during the developmental years is the most harmful.

With a larger sample size and more specific instruments, these findings may have been more generalizable to the population. The next section will discuss recommendations for counselors and for further study based on these conclusions.

## Recommendations

This section will provide recommendations for counselors working with women who have been sexually abused. It will also provide recommendations for future research needed in this area.

### **Recommendations for Counselors**

It is important for counselors to understand the impact abuse can have on possible selves. Because they can serve as incentives for behavior and as filters, counselors need to understand how the client views the world and themselves.

It is also important for the counselor to help the client identify specific positive and negative possible selves which they hold to be true or possible for them. The client may be overly focused on negative current selves which need to be balanced with positive selves. The counselor can also help the client to focus on behaviors which will help her achieve probable positive selves and avoid negative feared selves. Counselors can help clients identify self-defeating behaviors which prevent women from achieving the positive probable selves and which, in turn, can increase the negative views they currently hold. If counselors can help increase belief in positive selves, clients' self-efficacy and ability to achieve them may also increase.

It is also important for the counselor to identify specific factors of the abuse which may impact the clients possible selves. The impact of the abuse will be different for each individual and needs to be assessed for each client.

The counselor can help the client to identify maladaptive schemas and possible selves which hinder the client from achieving the hoped for future selves. By providing balance between the positive and negative possible selves, the client will have easier access to positive possible selves in the working self-concept.

#### **Recommendations for Researchers**

This study could be modified in the future in several ways. Some recommendations are made below for future research.

First, it is recommended that this study be done with a much larger sample size in order to attain more generalizable results. This would allow for a greater variety of subjects as well as an expanded view of the impact of abuse.

Second, it is recommended that a possible selves questionnaire be specifically designed for women who have been abused. An open ended version may also be helpful. It is hoped that a more specific questionnaire would assess

possible selves associated directly with sexual abuse. It would also be helpful to design a self-efficacy scale which could measure women's self-efficacy in areas which may be more directly affected by the abuse.

It is also recommended that subjects be assessed on several other variables such as if they have received counseling, their perception of the abuse, possible verbal or physical abuse, and other traumatic events or personality disorders. Also, research addressing the link between possible selves and specific behaviors in those areas would be helpful. Current negative selves may impact behavior in such a way that prevents future positive selves from being attained.

Finally, the ability for women to continue to believe strongly in future positive selves needs to be addressed. This could provide a potential source of strength to the woman and, if activated, lead to more effective recovery and coping skills.

These women continuing to become a growing need in the counseling field. Counselors and researchers must be aware of their needs and how to best help them succeed at dealing with the abuse of the past. These women must be allowed to cultivate their strengths and hopes for the future while effectively dealing with the emotions of the past.

Counselors and researchers can impact how sexual abuse victims view themselves and the world.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Nadine I. Ross, B.S., and I am a graduate student in the Counseling and Guidance Department at the University of Arizona (phone 621-3218). The following questionnaires are a part of my masters thesis.

This study looks at the way you think and feel. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. If at any time, while filling out these questionnaires you wish to stop, you may do so. Simply return the unfinished questionnaires to the researcher in the envelope provided. If you complete the questionnaires, I will understand that you have given your consent to participate in the study. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete the entire questionnaire packet. Please return the entire questionnaire, including this page, in the envelope provided.

This study is anonymous and confidentiality will be maintained. The questionnaires do not ask for any identifying information such as your name, address, or phone number. Please do not leave any such information on the questionnaires.

If, while completing these questionnaires, you find that they touch on personal issues which you feel you would like to discuss with someone, I am available to meet with you and talk about what you are experiencing. I will provide you with a referral for ongoing counseling if needed. I hope that by participating in this study, you will gain insight into various aspects of yourself which will help you grow in areas of your life.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Human Subjects Committee office at 621-6721. You may obtain further information regarding this study by calling me at the number given previously for the Counseling and Guidance office. You may also contact me if you are interested in receiving results of this study.

Thank you for your participation.  
Nadine I. Ross, B.S.



9. Approximate number of times I was abused\_\_\_\_\_.
10. I was first abused at the approximate age of\_\_\_\_\_.
11. Approximate age at the time the abuse ended\_\_\_\_\_.

APPENDIX B  
LETTER OF PERMISSION

The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research (TIRR)

1333 Moursund, Houston, Texas 77030-3405  
In the Texas Medical Center  
Telephone (713) 799-5000, 797-5790 (TDD)  
Fax (713) 799-7095



September 13, 1993

Ms. Nadine Ross  
219 E. Blacklidge  
Tucson, Arizona 85705

Dear Ms. Ross:

I am writing to give you formal permission to use the Self-efficacy Scale in your research. I have enclosed two copies of the scale. One copy is marked with scoring instructions, the other may be reproduced for use in your research.

I hope these materials are helpful to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Mark Sherer', written in black ink.

Mark Sherer, Ph.D., ABPP  
Director of Neuropsychology

APPENDIX C  
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER

Human Subjects Committee

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ARIZONA**  
 HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

1690 N. Warren (Bldg. 5200)  
 Tucson, Arizona 85724  
 (602) 626-6721 or 626-7575

February 8, 1994

Nadine I. Ross, Master's Candidate  
 c/o Betty J. Newlon, Ph.D.  
 FCR: Counseling/Guidance  
 Esquire Apartments, Suite 210  
 1230 N. Park Avenue  
 Campus Mail

RE: HSC #93-200 THE EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ON POSSIBLE  
 SELVES AND SELF-EFFICACY

Dear Ms. Ross:

We received your 27 January 1994 letter and accompanying revised subject disclaimer form for your above referenced project. All of the conditions as set out in our 14 December 1993 letter to you have been met. Therefore, full Committee approval for this subjects-at-risk project is granted effective 8 February 1994 for a period of one year.

The Human Subjects Committee (Institutional Review Board) of the University of Arizona has a current assurance of compliance, number M-1233, which is on file with the Department of Health and Human Services and covers this activity.

Approval is granted with the understanding that no further changes or additions will be made either to the procedures followed or to the consent form(s) used (copies of which we have on file) without the knowledge and approval of the Human Subjects Committee and your College or Departmental Review Committee. Any research related physical or psychological harm to any subject must also be reported to each committee.

A university policy requires that all signed subject consent forms be kept in a permanent file in an area designated for that purpose by the Department Head or comparable authority. This will assure their accessibility in the event that university officials require the information and the principal investigator is unavailable for some reason.

Sincerely yours,

*W. Denny*

William F. Denny, M.D.  
 Chairman  
 Human Subjects Committee

WFD:rs

cc: Departmental/College Review Committee

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