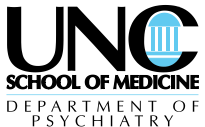


***CHILD FORENSIC
INTERVIEWING
AT AGE 30:
VIRTUOUS TO A FAULT***

Mark D. Everson PhD

Presented at San Diego International Conference
on Child and Family Maltreatment

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THESIS

The single-minded pursuit of diagnostic accuracy:

- **Has distorted our history**
- **Has contributed to an increased errors rate**
- **Has delayed consensus on best practice**

AGENDA

Core issue

Historical perspective

Best practice implications

Hopeful developments

HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIO

Observation: Anal abuse likely under-reported

Development of new interview technique to address this issue

Field-testing to compare new vs. traditional interview techniques

ANALOG STUDY DESIGN

Sample includes:

- 72 5-to-7 year old girls

Normal physical exam

- 50% receive additional anal exam
- 50% receive additional scoliosis exam

Interviewed one week later

STUDY RESULTS

	Anal exam		Scoliosis exam
	<i>True Disclosures</i>	<i>False Denials</i>	<i>False Disclosures</i>
Traditional interview method	11%	89%	0%

STUDY RESULTS

	Anal exam		Scoliosis exam
	<i>True Disclosures</i>	<i>False Denials</i>	<i>False Disclosures</i>
Traditional interview	11%	89%	0%
New interview	69%	31%	

STUDY RESULTS

	Anal exam		Scoliosis exam
	<i>True Disclosures</i>	<i>False Denials</i>	<i>False Disclosures</i>
Traditional interview	11%	89%	0%
New interview	69%	31%	6%

**Assuming additional studies
with similar results-**

***Should this new interview technique
be implemented?***

A VALUE JUDGMENT

Which is more critical to avoid?

False negative errors (False denials)

or

False positive errors (False disclosures)

CSA DECISION MAKING MODEL

Reality

Abused

Not Abused

--	--

CSA DECISION MAKING MODEL

Reality

Abused

Not Abused

**Evaluation
findings**

CSA DECISION MAKING MODEL

		Reality	
		Abused	Not Abused
Evaluation findings	Abused	True Positives	False Positives
	Not abused	False Negatives	True Negatives

Sensitivity = Concerns for False Negatives (or False Denials)

Specificity = Concerns for False Positives (or False Disclosures)

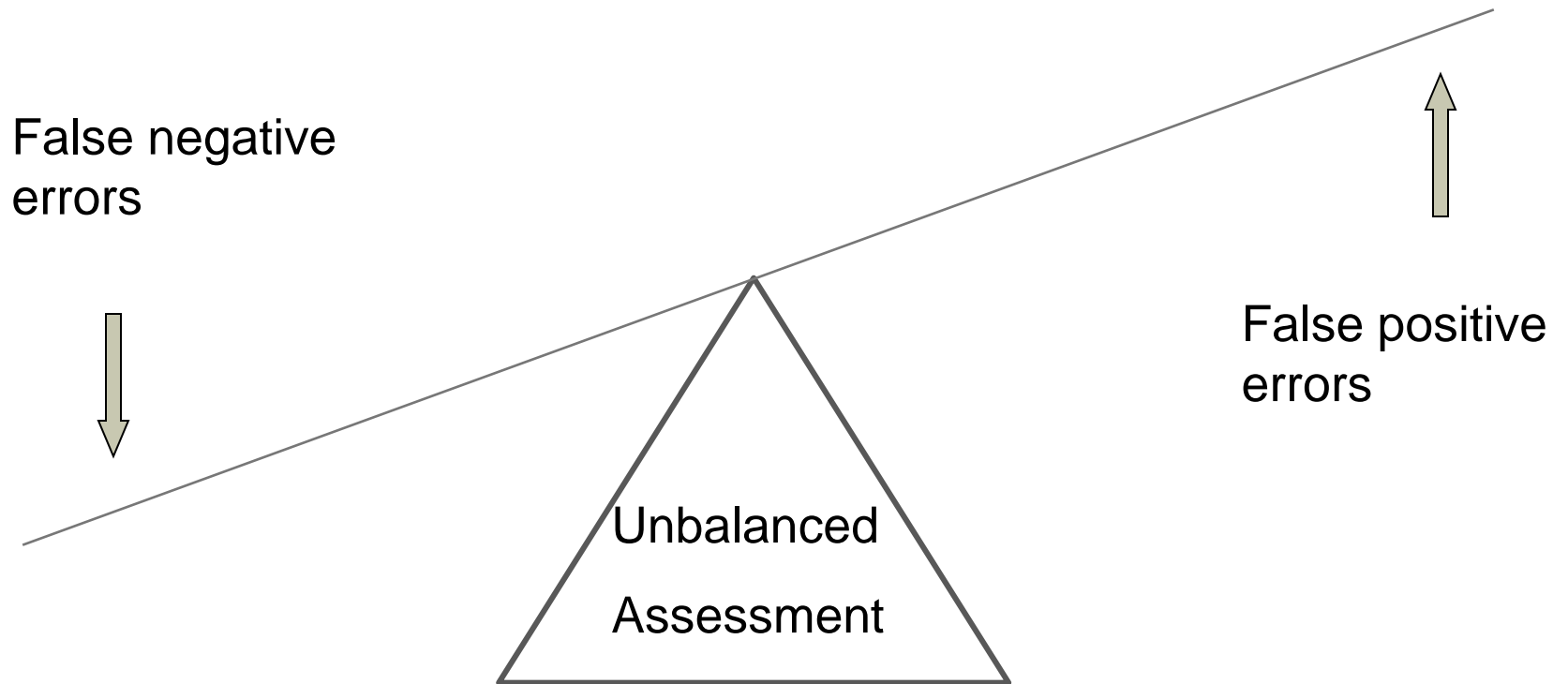
SENSITIVITY AND SPECIFICITY

Both are indicators of diagnostic accuracy.

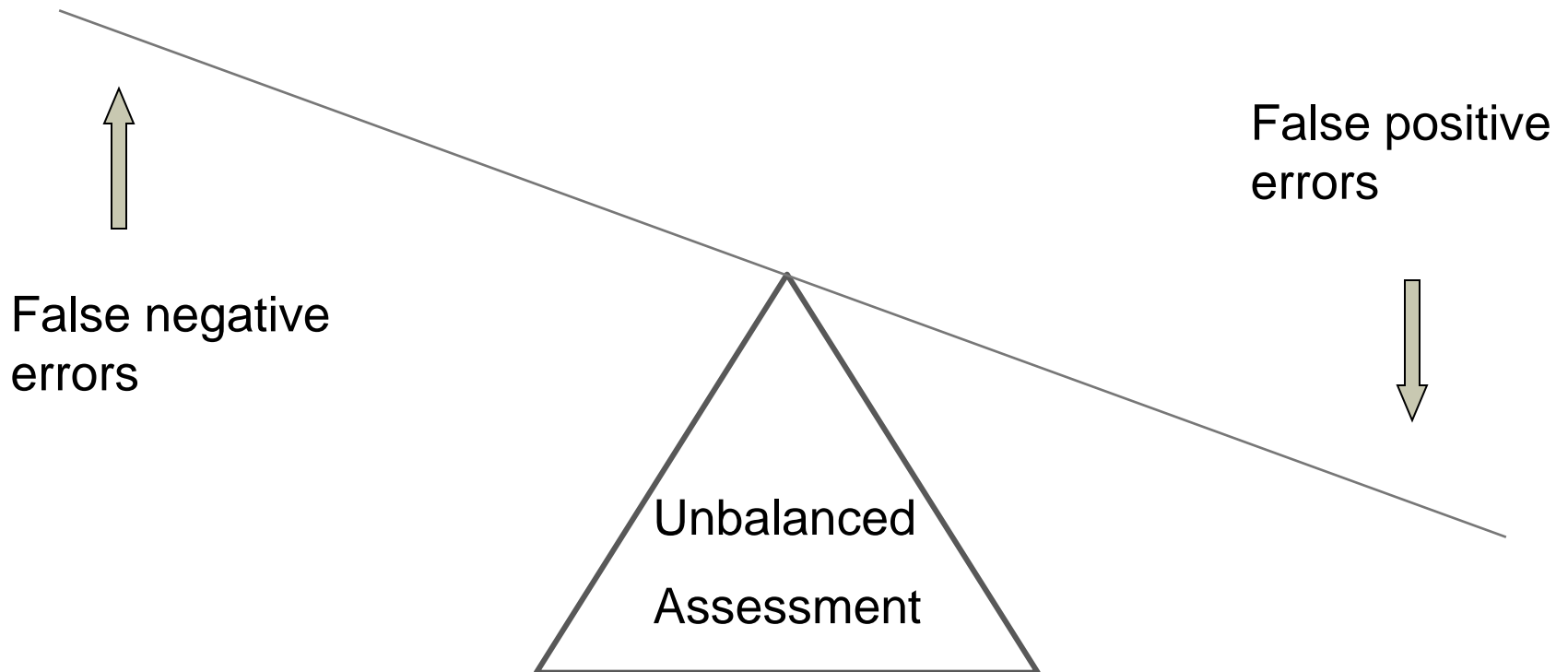
Both are desirable.

Improving one usually involves a trade-off with the other.

Over-emphasis on Sensitivity



Over-emphasis on Specificity



MODERN HISTORY OF CSA FIELD

Time period

Major theme

1896-1900

Discovery and Loss

1900-1975

The Long, Dark Night

1975-1980

Rediscovery

1980- early 1990's

Era of Sensitivity

Early to mid-1990's

Paradigm Shift

Mid-1990's to present

Era of Specificity

1896-1900: DISCOVERY AND LOSS

Freud's successes

Papers on “Infantile Seduction Theory”

Challenges and retraction

Oedipal Complex Theory

1900-1975: THE LONG, DARK NIGHT

“Fantasy” explanation of abuse allegations

**Reigning viewpoint: CSA rare, child-initiated,
harmless**

Perpetrator heaven

COMPREHENSIVE TEXTBOOK IN PSYCHIATRY, 1975

Prevalence of incest:

Textbook estimate

**1 case in 1 million
children**

or

.000001%

COMPREHENSIVE TEXTBOOK IN PSYCHIATRY, 1975

Prevalence of incest:

Textbook estimate

**1 case in 1 million
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Today's estimate

**1 case in 7 to 10
children**

or

10 to 15%

COMPREHENSIVE TEXTBOOK IN PSYCHIATRY, 1975

Explaining the causes of incest:

“The daughters collude in the incestuous liaison and play an active and even initiating role in establishing the pattern.”

1975-1980: REDISCOVERY

Discovery of physical abuse in 1960's

Feminist movement

Finkelhor's survey research on college campuses

1980- EARLY 1990'S: ERA OF SENSITIVITY

Response to seven decades of denial

Sense of urgency

Emphasis on reducing false negatives and errors of overcalling

SENSITIVITY PERSPECTIVE

“Most ongoing sexual abuse is never disclosed, at least not outside the immediate family. Treated, reported, or investigated cases are the exception, not the norm. Disclosure is an outgrowth either of overwhelming family conflict, incidental discovery by a third party, or sensitive outreach and community education by child protective agencies.”

Summit (1983), p. 182

ERA OF SENSITIVITY

Foundational assumptions:

Child sexual abuse is pervasive.

**Most victims are psychologically traumatized/
emotionally fragile.**

**Perpetrators are unlimited in depravity, deceit, and
cleverness.**

Most victims don't tell.

**Perpetrator suggestion, not interviewer
suggestion, is the greater danger.**

ERA OF SENSITIVITY

Practice implications:

“Clinical interview”

Multiple interviews

Focus on barriers to disclosure

“Suggestive” interview techniques

Suspension of disbelief

EARLY TO MID-1990'S: PARADIGM SHIFT

Reappraisal and rejection of Sensitivity Era

Devaluation of all things “clinical”

Challenge to basic tenets (e.g., impact of perp threats as “clinical lore”)

FACTORS LEADING TO EARLY-90'S PARADIGM SHIFT

1. Highly publicized, “discredited”

CSA cases such as:

Jordan, MN (1983)

McMartin Preschool case, CA (1984)

Country Walk case, FL (1984)

Kelly Michaels case, NJ (1986)

Little Rascals case, NC (1989)

FACTORS (CONTINUED)

- 2. “Media backlash” that promoted the view that CPS was over-zealous in identifying sexual abuse, etc.**

- 2. The influx of apparently false CSA allegations within the context of contested custody disputes.**

FACTORS (CONTINUED)

- 4. Research on memory and suggestibility challenging beliefs about the competence and credibility of children.**
- 5. Publication in 1995 of Jeopardy in the Courtroom: A Scientific Analysis of Children's Testimony, suggesting that the unreliability of children as witnesses was settled science.**

SPECIFICITY PERSPECTIVE

“This research indicates that suggestive interviewing procedures can lead young children to give false reports of real-life experiences, including erroneous claims about interactions involving physical contact between an adult and a child. This same research shows that few young children would fabricate **detailed claims** of bizarre sexual abuse in response to **one or two mildly leading** questions; it usually takes more than a single false suggestion to get children to adopt false beliefs, and it usually takes a long period of exposure to a biased interviewer.”

Ceci & Bruck (1995), p. 299

SPECIFICITY PERSPECTIVE

“However, there are two other areas where the social science research can present some evidence, and yet this evidence seems to go unheeded by a number of members of the mental health and legal professions. An example of the first area is the ***professional ‘lore’ that children refuse to disclose their abuse because they have been threatened by their perpetrators.*** For example, such a claim was made in four of the case studies.”

Ceci & Bruck (1995), p. 300

MID-1990'S- PRESENT: ERA OF SPECIFICITY

Rejection of sensitivity era

“Forensic” model of assessment

Emphasis on reducing false positives and errors of overcalling

ERA OF SPECIFICITY

Foundational assumptions:

Prevalence of CSA is overstated.

Just ask, they'll tell.

The degree of trauma and fragility are overstated.

Folks is Folks, including perps.

Interviewer suggestion, not perpetrator suggestion, is the more serious threat.

ERA OF SPECIFICITY

Practice implications:

“Forensic interview”

One-shot interviews

**Strict limitations on “suggestive”
techniques**

**“Convince me” approach to
assessment**

“BEST PRACTICE” IMPLICATIONS

	Sensitivity	Specificity
Disclosure		
Interview #		
Questions		

Sensitivity

Specificity

Props

Protocol use

Interview
architecture

Suggestiveness

HOPEFUL DEVELOPMENTS

Publication of Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, and Cederborg (2007 book)

Recognition of significant subset of false negatives

Discrediting of “Just Ask, They’ll Tell” model

Recognition of limits of one-shot interview

Recognition of motivational factors inhibiting disclosure

2012 AND BEYOND

Appreciation of need for balance between sensitivity and specificity

Leadership from professional organizations like APSAC

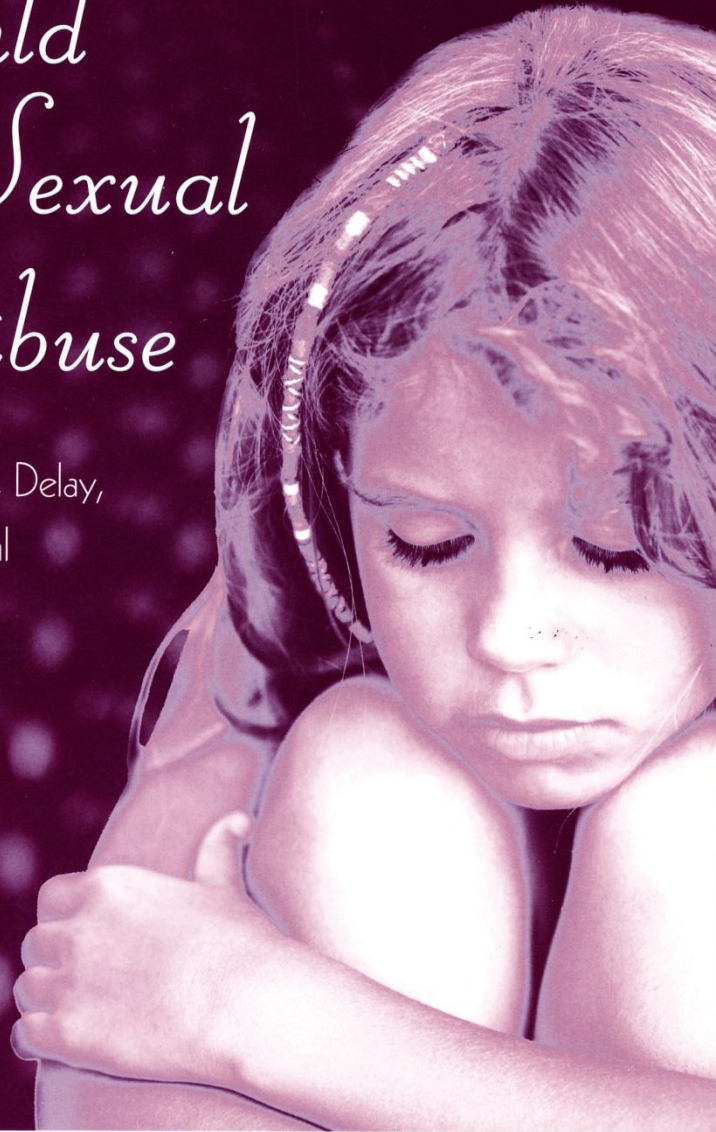
Equivalent of Environmental Impact Studies

Child Sexual Abuse

Disclosure, Delay,
and Denial

Edited by

Margaret-Ellen Pipe • Michael E. Lamb
Yael Orbach • Ann-Christin Cederborg



PRIMARY REFERENCES:

Pipe, M. E., Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., & Cederborg, A. C. (2007). *Child sexual abuse: Disclosure, delay, and denial*. NY: Routledge.