Identifying the Implicit Theories of Child Sexual Exploitation Material Offenders

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Researchers have both proposed and found evidence that sexual offenders (i.e., child abusers, rapists, sexual murderers) hold a set of distorted entrenched beliefs about themselves, others, and the world (Beech, Fisher, & Ward, 2005; Marziano, Ward, Beech, & Pattison, 2006; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004; Polaschek & Ward, 2002; Ward & Keenan, 1999). It has been argued that these beliefs – often referred to as implicit theories (Ward, 2000) – bias information in an offence-supportive manner, contributing to the etiology of sexual offending (Ward & Beech, 2006). As such, these underlying beliefs (or implicit theories) have become of interest to treatment providers (Ó Ciardha & Gannon, 2011). In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in ‘child sexual exploitation material’ (CSEM) offenders, particularly since research suggests they are distinct from contact child abusers (Babchishin, Hanson, & VanZuylen, 2014). Given this distinction, it is hypothesized that CSEM users will possess their own set of implicit theories that guide their interpretation of intra/interpersonal information in a manner that influences online offending behavior. In this poster, a conceptualization of the implicit theories held by CSEM users is presented. The five proposed implicit theories are derived from a systematic analysis of the existing empirical and theoretical literature, alongside findings from its empirical validation, based on interviews with CSEM users ($n = 12$) at different stages in the prosecution process. The poster will inform about the content and function of these implicit theories, as well as their role in the differentiation of CSEM subtypes. Practical and research implications of this study are also highlighted.

Goals of the Poster Presentation:
1. Increase the knowledge base about users of child sexual exploitation material, as a population which remains to have a limited research base.
2. Explore the cognitive distortions of this service user group on a theoretical and conceptually sound level which will inform the assessment of criminogenic needs and responsive treatment development.
3. Initiate a critical discourse about the specific nature and phenomenology of implicit theories which will inform the ongoing research on CSEM users.