ASSESSING AND UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL INTEREST IN CHILDREN

Is Pedophilia a Categorical or Dimensional Construct? A Taxometric Analysis Utilizing Self-Report, Behavioural, and Sexual Arousal Indicators

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Background: Researchers have recently begun to apply taxometric techniques in order to address whether pedophilic interest is categorical (i.e., taxon) or dimensional (i.e., continuous). Mackaronis, Strassberg, & Marcus (2011) utilized self-report data and found that pedophilia was dimensional. Conversely, Schmidt, Mokros, and Banse (2013) utilized cognitive measures of pedophilia and found that pedophilia was categorical. It is possible that these studies yielded contradictory results because of small sample sizes and because each study used only one type of indicator of pedophilic interest (self-report vs. cognitive). As such, the present study builds on previous work by conducting taxometric analysis using a larger sample size and a combination of indicator types. Specifically, the present study will combine self-report, behavioural, and sexual arousal data. Although phallometry has not yet been included in taxometric research, it is viewed as the gold standard in the assessment of atypical sexual interests (Laws, 2009) and is utilized in the present study.

Method: The study sample is comprised of 2,238 adult male sexual offenders assessed at a large sexual behaviour clinic. The majority of offenders in the sample had committed sexual offenses involving children under the age of 15 (82%) and the rest committed sexual offenses involving adult victims. Approximately half (48%) were referred by probation or parole. Offenders underwent a comprehensive assessment of their sexual interests at the clinic, including interviews about their sexual interests and behavior as well as volumetric testing of their penile responses to child and adult stimuli. Indicators of pedophilia were a combination of self-report, behavioural, and arousal measures. The self-report pedophilia index was created in which the maximum self-report sexual interest score for adults was subtracted from the maximum self-report interest score for prepubescent children. A phallometric pedophilia index was calculated by subtracting the maximum arousal score to adult stimuli from the maximum score to child stimuli. Finally, the revised Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interests (SSPI-2; Seto, Stephens, Lalumière, & Cantor, 2015), a five item scale of
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sexual victim characteristics associated with pedophilic sexual arousal in the lab, was utilized as the third indicator of pedophilic interest.

**Results:** The data set is complete and we are currently completing the analyses. Taxometric analyses is being conducted using the taxometric package for R developed by Rusico Haslam, & Merin Rusico (2006). Three distinct taxometric procedures will be employed: latent mode (L-Mode); mean-above-minus-below-a-cut (MAMBAC); and maximum eigenvalue (MAXEIG). Data will be inspected visually and through the comparison curve fit index (CCFI), a numerical value that represents the fit of stimulated to observed research data.

**Discussion:** The question of whether pedophilia is categorical or dimensional has implications for the classification, diagnosis, and the etiology of pedophilia (e.g., Rusico, et al., 2006). The results of the present study will be discussed with specific attention paid to the diagnosis of pedophilia in sexual offenders and wider implications for the diagnostic nosology.

**References:**

**Learning Goals and Objectives:**
- Discuss the existing research regarding whether pedophilic sexual interest represents a taxon or dimension.
- Discuss the clinical implications of past findings and the importance of taxometric research.
- Explore the results of a taxometric analysis in a large sample of adult male sexual offenders utilizing multiple methods.
- Discuss the clinical implications of the present study for assessment and diagnosis.
- Discuss the research implications of the present findings.
Informative Failures: Viewing Time Assessment and Ipsative Scores

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Over the last ten years I have tried to develop norm-referenced procedures for screening and diagnosis. Using both the Affinity 2.5 and the LOOK, I have developed reliable expected curves from self-reported exclusively heterosexual males and females. I have then obtained samples of outpatient males who have offended sexually. I have used Chi-square Goodness of Fit logic to differentiate offenders from the expected non-offender profiles. Both attempts have failed. Closer inspection showed significant diversity within both samples; offenders and non-offenders.

The results seem to indicate that norm-referencing is not effective and that sexual attractions really need to be considered in an ipsative framework only. This presentation will discuss the implications of an exclusively ipsative approach.

Learning Goals and Objectives
Attendees will:
- Differentiate norm-referenced scores from ipsative scores.
- Identify the liabilities of mis-interpretation of ipsative scores.
- Understand the logic of Chi-square Goodness of Fit scoring for screening and diagnosis.
- Understand the sensitivity/specificity outcomes of two recent experiments.
- Understand the implications of exclusively ipsative assessment.