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Associations Between Denial, Identity, and Attitudes Among Sexual Offenders Against Children

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Denial is commonly addressed in sex offender treatment programs across Canada and the United States (McGrath, Cumming, Burchard, Zeoli, & Ellerby, 2010). However, empirical studies have not consistently found a relationship between denial and risk of sexual re-offending, questioning what role or relevance denial may have among sexual offenders and their offending behaviors (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). Based on reviews of the literature, some experts have hypothesized that denial may be associated with identification as a sexual offender and perceptions of sexual offenders (Marshall, Marshall, & Kingston, 2011; Maruna & Copes, 2004). In the current study we explored the extent to which denial is associated with identity and attitudes towards sexual offenders in a sample of 30 men who had sexually offended against children. Denial was measured with the Comprehensive Inventory of Denial – Sex Offenders version (CID-SO; Jung & Daniels, 2012). Identification as a sexual offender and attitudes towards sexual offenders were assessed with self-report scales and Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures. Greater denial was associated with less self-reported identification as a sexual offender. More specifically, less self-reported identification as a sexual offender was associated with moderately more overall denial (CID-SO total), denial of sexually deviant behavior and arousal (CID-SO Cluster A), denial of the need for treatment and management of sexual offending (CID-SO Cluster B), and minimization of harm (CID-SO Cluster D), but was uncorrelated with denial of responsibility (CID-SO Cluster C). In contrast, the CID-SO and most of its subscales were only weakly correlated with the IAT measure of identification and both the self-report and IAT measures of attitudes towards sexual offenders. The current findings contribute to ongoing speculation about the functions of denial and the constructs assessed by measures of denial. Future research with larger samples should further examine the constructs assessed by the CID-SO and other measures of denial; the correlates of, motives for, and functions of denial; and their relevance for risk of sexual recidivism.

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