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2018 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 18 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

T-08

Sexual Fantasies of Clinical and Non-Clinical Populations: Similarities and Differences

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Although deviant sexual fantasies are associated with recidivism among sexual offenders, significant proportions of non-offending persons acknowledge having similar fantasies. Therefore, the nature of a sexual fantasy is not a good predictor of sexual acting-out. The main goal of this symposium is to present recent data and theories concerning deviant (i.e. concerning illegal acts) sexual fantasies of males recruited among the general population and forensic institutions to determine which aspects of sexual fantasies represent risk factors for the commission of a sexual assault. It will be suggested that contrarily to common wisdom, sexual offenders generally have poorer fantasizing abilities than non-offender men, due to lower cognitive executive functioning and a lack of mentalization capacities. Other sexual fantasy qualities, such as intensity, rigidity, necessity, and obsession seem to be much more important than their nature to predict risk of acting out.

Deviant Sexual Fantasies of Non-Offending Men and Sexual Adult and Adolescents Sex Offenders: More Similarities Than Differences

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The fact that deviant sexual fantasies represent an important risk factor for sexual recidivism is well established and rather obvious. Determining which aspects, if any, of sexual fantasies of non-offenders who will sexually offend is much more difficult. A first step to achieve this goal is to document the nature and prevalence of deviant (i.e. illegal content) sexual fantasies of adult males from the general population. A second step is to compare specific characteristics of sexual fantasies reported by these men vs. those of sexual offenders. Based on three independent studies (N=1442 men), it will be argued that a significant proportions of men have deviant sexual fantasies among the general population. Therefore, the simple nature of a sexual fantasy is not a good predictor of acting-out. Based on qualitative data obtained with sex offenders, however, it will be suggested that factors such as intensity, frequency, and necessity of sexual fantasies are

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much more important for evaluation of risk. In addition, preliminary data suggest that most sexual offenders tended to possess a poor fantasy life (and not the opposite), reporting a lower diversity of sexual fantasies than men from the general population. The results will be discussed in line neuropsychological characteristics of sexual offenders, linking for instance low imagination capacities, poor mentalization abilities, and executive dysfunctioning

Learning Goals:

- Presenting the nature of sexual fantasies of men from the general population
- Differentiating sexual fantasies of non-offending men, adolescents who sexually offended and adult male sexual offenders
- Suggesting important aspects of sexual fantasies for the prediction of sexual acting-out.

Using Non-Deviant Sexual Fantasies of Sex Offenders to Better Understand Their Mainstream Sexuality

Geneviève Martin, PhD
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Research examining the sphere of sexuality among sex offenders has mostly focused on deviancy. While sexual deviance is associated with sexual recidivism risk, little is known about non-deviant sexuality of sex offenders or its association with deviant sexuality. Thus, sex offenders' experience of non-deviant sexuality and the various ways in which it may contribute to protect against sexual offending or feed into sexual deviance/offending are not well understood. The objective of this study was to examine sexual fantasies of sex offenders in light of their dispositions toward non-deviant sexuality. It was hypothesized that sex offenders with less diverse sexual fantasies would show a lower investment of the sexual sphere. In addition, sex offenders were expected to report fewer non-deviant fantasies and a lesser investment of sexuality than nonsexual offenders. For this purpose, 195 male sex offenders and 113 male nonsexual offenders were recruited and individually interviewed. Recruitment occurred in prisons, parole offices, and outpatient treatment centers. Participants completed self-report questionnaires measuring different aspects of sexual functioning. Correlational and inter-group statistical comparisons were conducted to assess sex offenders and nonsexual offenders' dispositions toward non-deviant sexuality. Although nonsexual offenders obtained higher scores of intensity, on average, for certain sexual fantasies compared with sexual offenders, the opposite was not true: not a single sexual fantasies obtained a higher intensity score from sex offenders, on average, than from nonsex offenders. As hypothesized, a wider range of fantasies was indeed associated with greater investment of the sexual sphere, among both groups, and sex

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offenders showed a lesser investment of the sexual sphere than nonsexual offenders. Results will be discussed in relation with the need to examine the interface between non-deviant and deviant sexuality and to consider non-deviant fantasies in treatment as a way to better understand sex offenders' experience of sexuality.

Learning Goals:

- Presenting the nature of sexual fantasies of male sexual and non-sexual offenders
- Presenting similarities and differences between sexual fantasies of male sexual and non-sexual offenders
- Stressing the usefulness of analyzing non-deviant sexual fantasies of sexual offenders to better understand their non-deviant sexuality.

Sexual Fantasy vs. Sexual Fantasizing - Implications for Research & Practice

Ross M. Bartels, PhD
University of Lincoln

Sexual fantasies have long played an important role in understanding and treating sexual offenders. However, an evaluation of the literature, along with an appraisal of the existing theoretical accounts, indicates that sexual fantasy is not a well conceptualized construct. For example, it is defined as almost any form of mental imagery (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995), yet there is a lack of research that investigates sexual fantasy from a mental imagery perspective. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between “sexual fantasy” (as a synonym for sexual interest) and sexual fantasizing (i.e., a mental activity involving the envisioning of a sexual scenario). Drawing upon relevant constructs (e.g., mental imagery, associative and controlled processes, working memory, episodic remembering/imagining) and knitting them with research on sexual fantasy, a new theoretical model has been recently developed - the Dual-Process Model of Sexual Thinking (DPM-ST). This model helps to unpack the processes involved in the act of sexual fantasizing (which is argued to be controlled process), and also helps distinguish it from the automatic process that results in the experience of a spontaneous sexual thought. In this presentation, the DPM-ST will be described, along with research findings that provide support for the theory. The practical implications of the DPM-ST and associated research will be discussed.

Learning Goals:

- (1) Highlight conceptual differences between sexual fantasy and sexual fantasizing, as well as spontaneous sexual thoughts and elaborate sexual fantasizing.
- (2) Introduce and discuss the DPM-ST and how it can help explain the processes involved in sexual fantasizing.
- (3) Demonstrate how the above points can be used to advance theory and practice.

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Ross M. Bartels, PhD, is a senior lecturer a forensic psychology and member of the 'Forensic and Clinical Research Group' at the University of Lincoln (UK). Ross' research focuses on adapting socio-cognitive paradigms and indirect measures to gain new insight into the processes underlying and associated with distorted sexual cognitions, interests, and fantasies, as well as attitudes towards sexual offenders and non-offending pedophiles.