



Personality Characteristics of Juvenile Sexual Offenders Who Admit Their Offense Compared to Non-Admitters



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Introduction

Previous Research

- A significant portion of sexual offenders minimize or outright deny their inappropriate sexual behavior upon entering treatment (Maletzky, 1991; Barbaree, 1991).
- Deceptive behaviors including minimization and denial have been associated with several negative treatment outcomes including poor motivation throughout the group treatment process (Salter, 1988; Schlank & Shaw, 1997) and an increased likelihood of failing to successfully complete identified treatment goals (Hunter & Figuered, 1999).
- Juvenile sexual offender treatment programs have increasingly utilized results from psychometric instruments, including measures of personality, to formulate meaningful offender-specific classification systems which better inform case conceptualizations and treatment decisions (Worling, 2001).

Goals

- To examine personality characteristics of juvenile sexual offenders on the Jesness Inventory.
- To determine if meaningful personality differences exist between those juveniles who readily acknowledge details of their offense behavior to those who engage in complete denial during a pre-treatment assessment interview.
- To contribute to the limited literature regarding deceptive behaviors demonstrated by juvenile sexual offenders.

Methods

Participants

- Juvenile youth-offenders incarcerated at an Alabama Department of Youth Services correctional facility.
- Youth from throughout the state of Alabama were housed within this correctional facility.
- N= 534; 66 (12.36%) denied committing a sexual offense
- Mean Age = 15.67 years old (*SD* = 1.56 years).
- Sex offenders incarcerated on any of following charges: rape (attempted), sodomy (attempted), sexual abuse (attempted), incest (attempted), or sexual assault (attempted).
- Demographic Breakdown: Caucasian (55.9%), African-Americans (40.9%), and "Other" (3.2%).

Instrument

- The Jesness Inventory (JI; Jesness, 1996).
- 155-item true/false self-report personality inventory originally designed for clinical and treatment purposes to assess personality characteristics for delinquent juveniles (ages 9 to 18 years of age).
- The JI norms are from both delinquent and "normal" youth.

Jesness Scales

Conventional and Personality Scales

Social Maladjustment
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Value Orientation
Immaturity
Autism
Alienation
Manifest Aggression
Withdrawal-Depression
Social Anxiety
Repression
Denial
Asocial Index

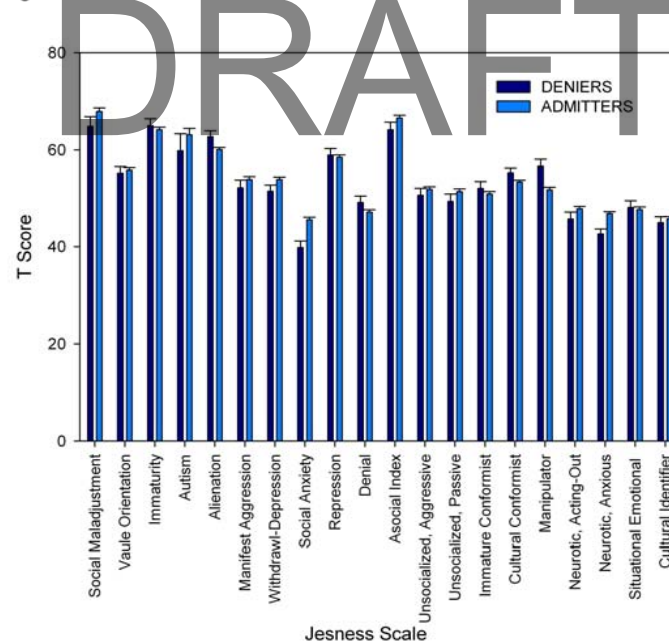
Subtype Scales

Unsocialized, Aggressive/Undersocialized
Unsocialized, Passive/Undersocialized
Immature Conformist/Conformist
Cultural Conformist/ Group Oriented
Manipulator/ Pragmatist
Neurotic, Acting-Out/ Autonomy
Neurotic, Anxious/Introspective
Situational Emotional Reaction/Inhibited
Cultural Identifier/Adaptive

Procedures

- Participants completed the Jesness after an initial facility orientation period of approximately 10 days.
- Undergraduate research assistants orally administered the Jesness as a component of an assessment battery of self-report measures.
- Item responses were scored via computer scoring software and entered into a database for analysis.
- Subjects were classified as a "denier" if they completely denied the convicting offense during a pre-treatment interview. Subjects who acknowledged engaging in inappropriate sexual behaviors were classified as "admitters."

Figure 1. Jesness Mean Scale Scores of Offense Deniers and Admitters.



Results

- Significant differences on the Jesness between those who deny and those who admit a sexual offense were measured by a multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA); Wilks' Lambda = .913, $F(20, 512) = 2.453, p < .001$.
- Subsequent univariate ANCOVAs indicated significant differences between mean scale Jesness scores of those who denied their offense and those who acknowledged some inappropriate sexual behavior. (see Figure 1). Groups differed on the following Jesness scales:
Alienation ($F(1, 527) = 4.59, p = .03$)
Social Anxiety ($F(1, 527) = 17.13, p < .001$)
Manipulator/Pragmatist ($F(1, 527) = 10.92, p < .001$)
Neurotic, Anxious/Introspective ($F(1, 527) = 14.97, p < .001$).

Discussion

- This investigation measured personality differences between those who acknowledged a sexual offense compared to those who denied any inappropriate sexual behavior based on responses to the Jesness Inventory administered prior to the onset of treatment.
 - Deniers reported a greater level of distrust and estrangement in relationships with authority figures as well as greater alienation from social norms based upon differences measured on the Alienation scale.
 - Based upon responses on the Social Anxiety scale, those who admitted a sexual offense reported a greater feeling of anxiety and conscious emotional discomfort in interpersonal relations.
 - Those who acknowledged a sexual offense were more likely to be conforming, anxious, insecure, and have a non-delinquent orientation based on responses on the Neurotic, Anxious/Introspective subtype scale.
 - Non-admitters were measured to behave in a manipulative, sometimes in obtrusive ways, and show inconsistency between self-evaluations and objective measure
 - Based on measured personality differences, these results suggest that groups, as a whole, may present with unique concerns in which tailored, treatment-specific interventions may be beneficial compared to a "universal" treatment approach.
- Future Directions:**
- Examine if groups differ across additional psychometric instruments that may better inform case formulation and treatment suggestions.
 - Examine the association between denial and therapists' ratings of individual and group treatment progress.
 - Examine the association between denial and the total length of incarceration and rate of recidivism.

Contact Patrick Cook with any questions at cookpat@auburn.edu or visit the Burkhart research laboratory webpage to view additional projects examining juvenile offenders at www.auburn.edu/~burkhbr