A Cognitive-Based Indicator of Deviant Sexual Arousal: Concurrent Validation of the Emotional Stroop

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Abstract

One of the strongest dynamic predictors of sexual recidivism among sex offenders is deviant sexual arousal (DSA; Hanson & Bussiére, 1998; Hanson & Harris, 2000). Phallometric testing, the most commonly used method of assessing DSA, has elicited numerous methodological, ethical, and financial criticisms. Cheaper, less invasive self-report measures are vulnerable to social desirability and lack of self-awareness. Accurate assessment of DSA is necessary to assist clinicians in making high-stakes decisions about sex offender placement and treatment. More recently, in an effort to overcome some of the limitations of previous measures of DSA, researchers have employed cognitive measures including a modified version of the Stroop task to measure DSA among sexual offenders (Price & Hanson, 2007; Smith & Waterman, 2004). These original studies used victim selection to assess the concurrent validity of the Stroop as a measure of DSA. However this assumes that victim selection is based upon DSA, which is not always the case. Therefore the research to date evaluating the Stroop as a measure of DSA has been inconclusive at best. Thus the current study aims to validate the Stroop task as a measure of DSA among a non-sexual offending sample using widely used accepted corroborating measures of DSA. If the Stroop task is indeed a sound measure of DSA, this research has far reaching implications for sex offender risk assessment, as a non-invasive cognitive measure would allow clinicians to more quickly and ethically assess sexual offenders for risk of reoffending by evaluating their level of DSA.