Abstract

The present study examined the effects of mood state (happy vs. neutral vs. sad) and perceptions of cost (anonymous vs. “non-anonymous”) on self-disclosure of deviant sexual fantasies and behavior (e.g. pedophilic, coercive). Research suggests that mood may affect decision making in “risky” situations, such that a positive mood state may increase risky decision making. It could be argued that disclosure of deviant sexual fantasies and behavior can be conceptualized as a “risky” situation; therefore, it is hypothesized that a positive mood state would increase disclosure of deviant sexual fantasies and behavior, but only when doing so is perceived to be “low” in cost (i.e., anonymous).

Online survey data was collected from 338 adult male and female community members recruited through an online posting service, and online and print advertisements in a weekly commuter publication. Participants provided demographic information; had their cost perception related to disclosing manipulated via different assurances of anonymity (i.e., anonymous vs. “non-anonymous”); and were induced into a happy, sad, or neutral mood state via an emotionally valenced autobiographical memory recall task. Participants then answered questions about deviant sexual fantasies, masturbatory fantasies, and behaviours; and attitudes toward sexual material; social desirability; trait happiness; and trait sadness.

Results found that high cost perception (i.e., “non-anonymous”), compared to low cost perception (i.e., anonymous), depressed the number and frequency of deviant sexual fantasies and masturbatory fantasies, but not behaviours, reported by participants. Mood did not significantly affect sexual self-disclosure. These data suggest that an assurance of anonymity helps to facilitate sexual self-disclosure, but may have an “upper limit” in its facilitative effect. This study was limited by a lack of statistical power and a relatively weak mood manipulation, both of which could be addressed in future research.