Abstract

EFFECTIVENESS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES IN INCREASING DEVIAN
SEXUAL FANTASY SELF-DISCLOSURES

by

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The assessment of deviant sexual fantasy and interests is an important component in sex
defender risk assessment and subsequent treatment planning. However, clinicians and researchers
have long acknowledged that sex offenders often distort or underreport details related to their sex
offenses, particularly details relating to offense-related deviant sexual fantasy and interests.
Some of the common methods used to minimize underreporting of deviant sexual fantasy and
interests include the use of phallometry (or plethysmography) and polygraphy; however, not all
assessment/treatment facilities or private practitioners providing services to sex offenders have
access to such resources. Thus the development of more efficient, cost-effective and less
invasive methods for the assessment of deviant sexual fantasy and interests would be valuable.

As a first step in a program of research attempting to address this issue, the current research
project sought to determine if techniques derived from clinical, social, and marketing
psychology—Foot-in-the-Door (FITD), Door-in-the-Face (DITF), Normalization (Norm), and
Bogus Pipeline (BPL)—could be adapted for use with a self-report questionnaire to increase
disclosure rates of deviant sexual fantasy among non-offenders. It was hypothesized that
participants exposed to these adapted techniques would endorse greater rates of deviant sexual
fantasy than participants in the control condition. Six hundred seventy eight undergraduate
participants were recruited and randomly assigned to one of five conditions (control, FITD,
DITF, Norm, or BPL). Each participant completed a battery of questionnaires online, including
sexual fantasy and detailed demographic questionnaires. A between-groups design was utilized to allow us to assess the effectiveness of these techniques. Overall, no significant differences between groups were found and results indicated equivalent disclosure rates across all experimental conditions. Potential reasons for the obtained results are offered and future directions for this line of research are proposed.