

POSTER

Denial as a Protective Factor for Sustained Change

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In 2011 a data set produced by the Florida Department of Children and Families included a Satisfaction With Life Survey (SWLS) of 313 adult male sexually violent predators. The five items of this scale relate to the transtheoretical model of change, readiness for treatment, and treatment goal attainment. In this presentation, we conceptualize the psychological construct of denial as a protective factor for reinforcing sustained therapeutic change in persons who have sexually abused. We will present our interpretation of data reported by a sample of adult male sexually violent predators on the Satisfaction With Life Scale as demonstrating identifiable levels of denial, and therefore motivation for engaging in the therapeutic process of identity reformation. We conclude by describing how denial functions as a protective factor for reinforcing sustained therapeutic change.

The Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska, & Velicer, 1997; Prochaska, & DiClemente, 1982) postulates ten stages of change. However, only three are involved in the movement from precontemplation to contemplation. Movement from precontemplation to contemplation is synonymous with disavowal in that the individual moves from a position of conscious rejection regarding the need for intrinsic change to an awareness of such a need. Often, such disavowal is misapplied in literature related to clinical change (Shelp & Perl, 1985). Psychologically, the denial construct is a mechanism for coping with emotional conflict, not the disavowal of needs, behaviors, or events. Healthy psychological denial functions to protect the persona from undesirable aspects of the self. Therefore, by definition denial serves as a protective factor. Understanding the differences between disavowal and denial, and the purpose for which they are used, better prepares treating clinicians to encourage their patient's development of healthy denial for use as a personal strength in advancing harm reduction.

Barrett and others (see Barrett, Wilson, & Long, 2003; Ward, & Brown, 2004; and Wilson, & Yates, 2009) frequently mention subjective well-being in discussions of the Good Lives Model and sex offender management. Diener (1985) has a well-researched instrument, the Satisfaction With Life Scale that, "... assesses an individual's conscious evaluative judgment of his or her life by using the person's own criteria". Interpreting the subscales on the SWLS reveals the individual's current level of emotional conflict with their life circumstances. Thus providing a simple measure of psychological distress found necessary to motivate change. The SWLS appears to offer an easily accessible and quantifiable measure of the individual sexual abuser's readiness to deny the self-identity of sexual abuser necessary to motivate movement towards the self-identity of sexual non-abuser capable of living a balanced, self-determined lifestyle, free of offending behavior. Desirable movement by sexual abusers to a non-offending self-identity is the first step towards useful social functioning such as that commonly described as the "Good Lives" model.

For this presentation, we will showcase preliminary data produced on the Satisfaction With life Scale with the reference sample. This data will be used to demonstrate the link between the denial construct and the SWLS, and how produced data can be used to enhance treatment responsivity in persons that have sexually offended. We will focus on the role of denial as a protective factor to encourage the process of identity reformation and maintenance.