


Nunes, K. L., & Jung, S. (2011, November). Symmetry between cognitive distortions and denial/minimization? In K. L. Nunes (Chair), *Denial and minimization: Association with treatment motivation, cognitive distortions, and recidivism*. Symposium conducted at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Research and Treatment Conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Toronto, Ontario.

**Symmetry Between Cognitive Distortions and Denial/Minimization?**


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**Symposium conducted at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Research and Treatment Conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Toronto, Ontario**




**Cognitive Distortions**

- Cognitive distortions (CD) condone, justify, excuse, minimize, rationalize, or otherwise support sexual offending
- Theorists have speculated that cognitive distortions play a causal role in sex offending
- Addressed in sex offender risk assessment and most treatment programs in North America




**Denial and Minimization**

- Denial/minimization (DM) of guilt, responsibility, harm, offense planning, sexual deviance, risk of future offending, and need for treatment (e.g., Jung, 2004; Langton et al., 2003; Peacock, 2000; Schneider & Wright, 2001)
- Addressed in most treatment programs in North America




**Cognitive Distortions vs. Denial and Minimization**

- Seem to address similar themes
  - Victim harm, responsibility, denial, offense planning, sexual deviance, risk/need, and victim desire
- General- vs. self-focus
  - “An offence” vs. “my offence”




**Victim Harm**

Measure	Sample item
MOLEST	Many children who are sexually assaulted do not experience any major problems because of the assaults
RAPE	As long as a man does not slap or punch a woman in the process, forcing her to have sex is not as bad
Acceptance of Victim Harm (SOARS)	The victim(s) of my sexual offending recovered quickly



**Same or Different?**


- Same
  - Abel et al. (1984); Abel et al. (1989); Marshall, Marshall, & Kingston (2011); Yates, 2009
- Different
  - Blumenthal, Gudjonsson, & Burns (1999); Gannon & Polaschek (2006); Mann, Hanson, & Thornton (2010); Schneider & Wright (2001)



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**Past Research**

- CD and DM seem to be related, but distinct
- Observed relationship between CD and DM seems to vary depending on the operational definition and measure
  - Gudjonsson (1990)
  - Blumenthal, Gudjonsson, & Burns (1999)
  - Schneider & Wright (2001)




**Current Research**

- Examined association between CD and DM measures among child molesters and rapists
- Three studies
- Meta-analysis of findings from Studies 1, 2, and 3



**Study 1**


- 104 adult male sex offenders serving federal sentences in Canada
- MOLEST and RAPE Scales (Bumby, 1996)
- Sex Offender Acceptance of Responsibility Scales (SOARS; Peacock, 2000)



**Correlations for Offenders with Current Victims Under 12-Years Old**

SOARS	MOLEST
Acceptance of Sexual Offense	-.28*
Acceptance of Offense Planning	-.25*
Acceptance of Victim Harm	-.35*
Motivation to Change	-.33*
Justifications for Sexual Offending	.06
Acceptance of Sexual Interests	-.02


*n* = 73  
\* *p* < .05



**Correlations for Offenders with Current Victims Over 17-Years Old**


SOARS	RAPE
Acceptance of Sexual Offense	-.29
Acceptance of Offense Planning	-.06
Acceptance of Victim Harm	-.39*
Motivation to Change	-.30
Justifications for Sexual Offending	.24
Acceptance of Sexual Interests	.21

*n* = 41  
\* *p* < .05



**Study 2**


- 42 adult male sex offenders at a forensic outpatient clinic who offended against victims 12 years old or younger
- Sexual Entitlement scale and Sexy Children scale of HSAQ (Hanson et al., 1994)
- Sex Offender Acceptance of Responsibility Scales (SOARS; Peacock, 2000)



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**Correlations Between SOARS and HSAQ Scales**

SOARS	Sexual Entitlement	Sexy Children
Acceptance of Sexual Offense	-.25	-.11
Acceptance of Offense Planning	-.30	-.18
Acceptance of Victim Harm	-.27	-.09
Motivation to Change	.05	.19
Justifications for Sexual Offending	.10	.26
Acceptance of Sexual Interests	-.15	-.02

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 n = 42  
 \* p < .05


**Study 3**

- 52 adult male sex offenders recruited from outpatient forensic and parole agencies and federal prisons
- MOLEST and RAPE Scales (Bumby, 1996)
- Comprehensive Inventory of Denial – Sex Offender Version (CID-SO; Jung, 2004)

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**Correlations for Offenders with Current Victims Under 12-Years Old**

CID-SO	MOLEST
Denying Sexually Deviant Behaviours and Arousal (Cluster A)	.08
Denying Need for Treatment/Management of Sexual Offending (Cluster B)	.20
Denying Responsibility (Cluster C)	.23
Minimizing Harm (Cluster D)	.36*

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 n = 38  
 \* p < .05


**Correlations for Offenders with Current Victims Over 17-Years Old**

CID-SO	RAPE
Denying Sexually Deviant Behaviours and Arousal (Cluster A)	.51
Denying Need for Treatment/Management of Sexual Offending (Cluster B)	.49
Denying Responsibility (Cluster C)	.47
Minimizing Harm (Cluster D)	.42

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 n = 14  
 \* p < .05


**Meta-Analysis**

DM Theme	r	95% CI			k	Q (p)
		LL	UL			
Guilt and deviance	.22*	.09	.35	5	2.22 (.69)	
Victim harm	.32*	.20	.44	5	1.64 (.80)	
Need for treatment	.21*	.07	.33	5	8.28 (.08)	
Responsibility	.18*	.04	.31	5	2.47 (.65)	
Non-deviant sexual desire	-.02	-.17	.14	3	2.08 (.35)	
All	.20*	.07	.33	5	1.49 (.84)	


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 \* p < .05

**Discussion**

- In Studies 1, 2, and 3, correlations between CD and DM ranged from small to large
- Meta-analysis revealed that CD were associated with greater DM of guilt and deviance, victim harm, need for treatment, and responsibility, but were not associated with DM of non-deviant sexual desire


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### Limitations

- Small sample sizes
- Measures were confounded with samples
- CD and DM measures differed beyond general vs. self focus
- Unknown construct validity of measures




### Conclusions

- The current studies and past research indicate that CD are associated with greater DM in many domains
- However, correlations are not high enough to indicate the measures are assessing the same construct




- CD and DM appear to be distinct and may not be interchangeable (e.g., Blumenthal, Gudjonsson, & Burns, 1999; Gannon & Polaschek, 2006; Mann, Hanson, & Thornton, 2010; Schneider & Wright, 2001)




### Future Directions

- What is the nature of the relationship between these correlated, yet apparently distinct, constructs?
- Increasing precision and clarity in measurement and conceptualization of cognitive constructs will facilitate better understanding of the role these cognitions play in sex offending and, consequently, better assessment and treatment



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