

Statement of Objectives – Fantasy and Fictional Sexual Outlets in MAPs

A Collaborative Research Project Between SUNY Oswego and Nottingham-Trent University

Year 1 – Exploring Psychiatric Associations of Fantasy and Fictional Sexual Outlet Use in MAPs

Background

The purpose of this project is to shed light on the prevalence of fictional and fantasy sexual outlets in the Minor Attracted Person (MAP) population, and to identify the correlates of both protective and problematic use. There is a dearth of knowledge regarding both what fictional and fantasy sexual outlets are and how they are used – both broadly in the general population as well as specifically within the MAP population (Harper & Lievesley, 2020). This proposal will discuss what is currently known about fictional and fantasy sexual outlet use – with particular emphasis placed use within the MAP community – and detail a one-year research program into identifying and examining both risk and protective factors for and from their use.

Minor Attraction

Minor attraction is a term gaining popularity for its less negative connotation than its more specific and clinical scientific terms, pedophilia and hebephilia. Minor attraction refers to a sexual preference for pre-pubertal and/or pubertal children and is related to the clinical paraphilias of pedophilia (a relative sexual preference for pre-pubertal children) and hebephilia (a relative sexual preference for pubertal children) (Cantor & McPhail, 2016). While our understanding of pedophilia has increased due to an explosion of interest in the field over the last 15 years, most of our understanding is based on pedophilia and its association with offending behavior (Tenbergen et al., 2015), and specifically uses offending populations as participants. Evidence also suggests pedophilia (and perhaps minor attraction more generally) behaves more like a form of sexual age orientation – a finding gaining consensus among scholars – as it is stable and lifelong, with early onset and apparent immunity to change (Seto, 2008, 2009, 2017, 2018). Hebephilia is a related age orientation whose focus is on pubescent children, or those who show some signs of secondary sexual characteristics and is also of considerable scientific and legal research interest (Beier et al., 2013; Blanchard et al., 2009; Fabian, 2011; Frances & First, 2011; Kramer, 2011; Prentky & Barbaree, 2011). While we have learned much about the emergent nature of minor attraction in the last decade, there is still much we do not know, specifically in relation to how people with such attractions make sense of and manage them. The use of fantasy and fictional sexual outlets by MAPs is one of those under researched and underserved sub-fields.

Fictional and Fantasy Sexual Outlets

Currently very little is known about fantasy and fictional sexual outlets, especially within the MAP community – where they could be seen as potential risk enhancers to engage in child sexual abuse behaviors. More is known about online sexual offending and the use of CSAI (previously referred to as child pornography). What is generally known about online offending is that there is a small group of online-only offenders who do transition to contact offending (i.e. physical victim is present) and for whom the use of online materials would suggest a

sensitization – and therefore risk – effect of use. Whether this applies to fantasy and fictional sexual outlets is currently unknown.

There is no consensus among scholars as to the definition of fantasy and fictional sexual outlets. For the purposes of this project, we will define fantasy and fictional sexual outlets as any material that is produced for a sexual purpose that does not refer to real events with a real person. These outlets are expected to include (but are not limited to) stories, images, avatars, videos, and virtual reality scenes that contain child-like stimuli. However, it is expected that while the characters could refer to an existing person – the story provided will contain no details of actual events.

Aim

Current Project – Year 1

1. To explore the psychiatric correlates of fantasy and fictional outlet use among MAPs.
2. To identify risk-enhancing and protective uses of fantasy and fictional outlets among MAPs with and without existing psychiatric histories.

Proposed Methods

Participants

This is an epidemiological study which will recruit self-identified Minor Attracted Persons who are currently community-dwelling. Participants will be recruited internationally with no restriction on country of residence. All genders will be recruited, though a super majority of cis-men are expected due to previous data regarding the prevalence of minor attraction among men (Cantor & McPhail, 2016; Seto, 2018). Inclusion criteria are self-reported minor attraction (with or without previous offending behaviors) and fluency in the English language. We will recruit individuals that do and do not report use of fantasy and fictional sexual outlets to allow a comparison between these groups as appropriate.

Materials

We require self-report tools to assess putative risk factors, as well as tools to assess sample demographics, general and specific psychiatric functioning, all components of stigma, loneliness, suicidality, substance use, personality traits, mainstream pornography and Child Sexual Abuse Imagery (CSAI), autism symptoms, ADHD symptoms, P-OCD, offense history, trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Procedure

Community based MAP participants will be recruited internationally via support groups, online forums, email, list-servs and social media advertising. Potential participants will be invited to take part in a study assessing the use of fantasy and fictional sexual outlets among MAPs. Participants will see a thorough informed consent document, followed by the survey content (if they consent to participate) and will finish with a debriefing form. The study should take less than 1 hour to complete.

The study will be hosted via Qualtrics and / or Soscisurvey and will be made live in Summer 2021 (IRB approval dependent) for approximately 6-8 months depending on the rate of research uptake.

Statistical Analysis

Primarily the data analyses will be focused on exploring the associations between psychiatric conditions/constructs and the use of FFSO. In relation to Aim 1, this analysis will likely take the form of simple Pearson correlations to examine the relationships between psychiatric traits (e.g., ADHD, autism, P-OCD, loneliness) and FFSO-related behaviors. For Aim 2, the analyses may take the form of moderated regression models exploring the interactions between demographic and psychiatric traits (IVs; e.g., ADHD, loneliness, trauma, P-OCD, empathy, autism) on outcomes related to offending behavior (DVs; e.g., offense status or proclivity).

Expected Results

It is difficult to form specific hypotheses about what we may find, owing to a lack of data currently available on this topic. However, it would be logical to assume that the use of FFSO will rise with the levels of different psychiatric conditions. For example, those with greater levels of autistic traits might hold larger collections of fantasy-related imagery, and those who experience greater levels of loneliness might engage more with story-based FFSO as a surrogate for physical or emotional company. We expect that FFSO are broad and highly nuanced, but that there will be patterns in their use and type of outlet used.

Implications

This project will supplement the work already being conducted by Partner B (RL and CH) into the broader use of FFSO among MAPs. Their ongoing work explores general trends in FFSO use among MAPs. By specifically understanding the links between this use and psychiatric co-morbidities, the current project will provide a rounded descriptive picture of how MAPs use FFSO. If successful, this project will be the first of its kind to identify potential correlates of both problematic and protective use among MAPs, with an emphasis on those with psychiatric preconditions.

Our aim will thus be to use this initial stage of project development to inform future research projects and grant applications, and to translate this new knowledge into the clinical domain. This will allow not only clinicians to better understand their clients and provide better treatment options for them, but also allow for politicians and policymakers to spend taxpayer funding on prevention and intervention services that are demonstrated effective, rather than on those whose effectiveness has yet to be determined.

Statement of Work Between SUNY Oswego and Nottingham-Trent University (UK)

This document will detail the projects undertaken in collaboration with researchers from Nottingham-Trent University (UK) with funding from Prostasia Foundation. An attached budget sheet is provided, and items referred to herein match those stated in the budget sheet.

Primary Project: Exploring the use of Fantasy and Fictional Sexual Outlet (FFSO) use in the Minor Attracted Person (MAP) population. Defining, measuring, and reporting on the use of FFSSO in the MAP population, with an emphasis on correlations with psychiatric co-morbidities. Funding will cover the objectives and deliverables outlined below.

Partner A: SUNY Oswego (PI: Dr. Gilian Tenbergen)

Partner B: Nottingham Trent University, UK (Co-Is: Dr. Rebecca Lievesley & Dr. Craig Harper)

Project Dates:

SUNY Oswego project start date: 1st July 2021

NTU project start date: 1st September 2021

Project end date (SUNY & NTU): 31st August 2023

Objectives

1. To systematically explore current knowledge of FFSSO among MAP populations.
2. To explore the psychiatric correlates of fantasy and fictional outlet use among MAPs.
3. To identify risk-enhancing and protective uses of fantasy and fictional outlets among MAPs with existing psychiatric histories.

Deliverables:

1. Objective 1:
 - a. Peer-reviewed manuscript outlining the current knowledge of FFSSO by MAPs with a program of research included.
2. Objective 2:
 - a. Data Collection
 - i. Provision of all agreed-to tools and measures for the study (see Amendment 1 for list of tools)
 - ii. Online data collection set-up using agreed-to system (also in Amendment 1)
 - b. Peer-reviewed manuscripts
 - i. Manuscript: Results from psychiatric correlates data.
3. Objective 3:
 - a. Peer-reviewed manuscript
 - i. Manuscript: Identification of how psychiatric preconditions contribute to risk-enhancing or protective use of FFSSO.

Detailed Objectives:

1. To generate a systematic literature review and program of research on FFSO by MAPs:
 - a. Methodology: systematic literature search of all relevant databases (e.g. PsycInfo, PubMed, Ebscohost), identification of relevant papers, review and summary of included papers, generation of outline and first draft of paper, review by all co-authors for final approval, submission of paper to identified lead journal, revision/resubmission as necessary until final publication;
 - b. Approach: Partner A will take the lead in drafting the manuscript outline. Partner B will take the lead in the systematic literature search and summarization of identified literature. Partner A will then draft the first version of the review paper, with both partners reviewing this until all parties approve the manuscript for submission.
 - c. Deliverable Deadline:
 - i. Systematic Literature Review to be submitted by December 2021 (or as soon as possible thereafter).
2. To provide epidemiological data on FFSO use by MAPs:
 - a. Methodology: identify relevant tools to measure the FFSO use and relevant psychiatric and psychosocial functioning constructs. Launch the survey to begin data collection.
 - b. Approach: Partner A will take the lead in identifying tools with input from Partner B. Partner A will purchase any necessary tools and take the lead in drafting the online survey. Partner B will contribute expertise to online data collection methods, provide tools that Partner A does not have, and solicit participation from relevant stakeholder groups. Together, Partners A and B will launch the study and continually seek participation until the closing date.
 - c. Deliverable Deadline:
 - i. Peer-Reviewed Manuscript on psychiatric correlates of FFSO use among MAPs to be submitted by the end of June 2022 (or as soon as possible thereafter).
3. To identify risk and protective factors for use of FFSO by MAPs:
 - a. Methodology: use data gathered from Objective 2 to delineate potentially risk-enhancing and protective uses of FFSO use by MAPs.
 - b. Approach: Partner B will take the lead in statistical analysis of data gathered for Objective 2 and in the initial drafting of a peer-reviewed manuscript, with both partners reviewing this until all parties approve the manuscript for submission. Partners A and B will together contribute to and generate research proposals to solicit grant funding to support the empirical validation of identified risk and protective factors.
 - c. Deliverable Deadline:
 - i. Peer-Reviewed Manuscript on risk and protective factors to be submitted by the end of June 2022 (or as soon as possible thereafter).

Authorship Note

Authorship order will be determined reflecting provided contribution. Partner A is leading the study and contributing significant intellectual merit to study design, launch, analysis, and dissemination, therefore first and/or last authorships are expected. Partner B is making

significant contributions to study design, launch, recruitment, data collection, analysis and dissemination so authorship is expected on all dissemination (e.g., journal papers, conference presentations, book chapters) and funding applications stemming from this project. Authorship of additional contributors (e.g., research assistants) will be determined by overall contribution, and Partners A and B will take a more senior authorship position on all dissemination. Co-first authorships and shared last authorships are allowed if sufficient contribution to the manuscript is provided.

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