Reliability of Heterosocial Skills Measurement with Sex Offenders

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The heterosocial skills of 79 sex offenders were assessed using two self-report inventories, the Social Anxiety and Distress Scale (SAD) and the S–R Inventory of Anxiousness (SRI). In addition, staff members rated the offenders on modified versions of the SAD and the Heterosocial Skills Behavior Checklist for Males (HSB). Twenty-one offenders were also videotaped during a brief interaction with a female confederate. The tapes were rated using the HSB. All ratings and videotapings were conducted twice within a two-week period. The two self-report scales showed good test-retest reliability (r = .88) and correlated r = .63 with each other. However, the SAD correlated significantly with the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale and showed significant change from first to second administrations. The SRI showed less reactivity to social desirability and changed less over time. The staff ratings showed higher test-retest (r = .72–.76) than interrater (r = .36–.43) reliability. They correlated r = –.56 with each other and did not show a significant relationship to the Crowne-Marlowe. However, both staff-ratings changed significantly from test to retest. Inspection of correlations between staff and self-report measures indicated that these instruments may be strongly affected by rater variance. Different measures completed by the same person correlated higher than the same measure completed by different persons. The HSB showed high levels of interrater agreement (90–100%) and split-half reliability (r = .95–.97). However, test-retest reliability was poor for the overall score and for the category measuring form of conversation. Categories measuring voice and affect were moderately reliable over time (r = .53–.74). However, the voice category scores changed substantially from first to second videotaping. On almost all measures used in this study, the sex offenders' scores were similar to those derived from normal populations. Only the category measuring affect on the HSB seemed to differentiate this group from normals.

KEY WORDS: heterosocial skills measurement; sex offenders.

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INTRODUCTION

The psychological literature on sex offenders consists largely of clinical descriptions in which the offenders' poor heterosocial skills are often emphasized. Both Gebhard et al. (1965) and Cohen et al. (1969) have reported that inadequate social functioning is characteristic of at least some pedophile populations. In this country, such presumed deficits are frequently treated by social skills training (Abel et al., 1976; Burkhardt, 1974; Laws & Serber, 1975; Stockton et al., 1977). Despite this active interest in the heterosocial characteristics of sex offenders, there is little empirical evidence addressing heterosexual skills measurement in this population.

Assessment devices designed for heterosocial measurement have been developed primarily with the student "minimal dater" population. Since no one modality is sufficient to decipher a behavior as complex as social skill, self-report instruments are generally used in conjunction with behavioral measures (Eisler, 1976; Hersen et al., 1973; Hersen and Bellack, 1977). A few studies have evaluated the reliability and validity of these measures (Arkowitz et al., 1975; Borkovec et al., 1974; Rehm & Marston, 1968; Twentyman & McFall, 1975). However, Hersen and Bellack (1977) conclude in their recent review that "no single device has yet been clearly and thoroughly validated. Reliability (stability and homogeneity) has been an especially neglected issue" (p. 549). Furthermore, their utility as measures of heterosocial skill with sex offenders is unknown.

The present study assessed the reliability of two self-report instruments, two staff-rating scales, and one behavioral sampling procedure as measures of heterosocial skills with sex offenders. The intercorrelations between instruments were also examined. For the self-report and behavioral measures, instruments that showed the most promise were selected based on the available literature. These included the Social Anxiety and Distress Scale (Watson & Friend, 1969), the S-R Inventory of Anxiousness (Endler et al., 1962) and the Heterosocial Skills Behavior Checklist for Males (Barlow et al., 1977). The staff rating scales were developed for this study by modifying the Social Anxiety and Distress Scale and the Heterosocial Skills Behavior Checklist for Males. A repeated measures design was employed in which all measures were given twice within a two-week period in order to assess test-retest reliability.

METHOD

Subjects

All sex offenders from all levels of treatment at the North Florida Evaluation and Treatment Center, Gainesville, Florida, were asked to participate in the study. Very few refused, resulting in a sample of 79 men. These were involuntary,