Illegal Behavior:  
Sex, Violence & ASD 

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Overview
- Quick overview of sex in ASD
- Quick overview of violence in ASD
- Core features and how they relate to criminal behavior
- Assessing risk
- Actions to take

Caveat about Risk
- Victimization is primary risk
- Failure to teach and deficits inherent in ASD can lead to risk of inadvertent criminal sexual behavior, just as core deficits in ASD can lead to violent behavior
- That said, there is no free pass and no reason why people with ASD can’t knowingly commit criminal behavior. It’s case dependent!
Charges?

Sexual Behavior

- Estimated only 10% of adults with ASD have had sexual relationship(s), but Most desire relationships (Koegel et al, 2014)
- Asexuality may be more common in ASD but not clear
- If there is more asexuality, why?
  - Selectivity theory
  - Autoeroticism may explain some perceived asexuality
  - Single focus

- Some studies find high rates of bisexuality and homosexuality in ASD

Sexual Identity

- Unclear #s in ASD
- Seem to be higher rates of GLBT in ASD
- For typical population, Identity < Behavior (NSSHB, 2010)
Core Features of ASD & Sexuality

- Theory of Mind
  - May not recognize what others want
  - May not recognize what others perceive
- Social-Communication
- Atypical behaviors
  - Insistence On Sameness
  - Sensory Experience (Ex: Mouth Noises)
- Secondary traits: Anxiety

Atypical Interests & Behavior?

Maybe because
- Preoccupying interests
- Stickiness
- Social isolation
- Limited social norms
- Perspective taking limitations
- Past social failures

ATYPICAL ≠ PATHOLOGICAL or ILLEGAL
How do people with ASD get into criminal sexual behaviors?

Gateways/Pathways/Floodgates
- Seem to be different pathways by offense type
- Risk factors and pathways happen at multiple levels
  - Personal
  - Family
  - Societal

Circumscribed Interests

Westphal 2016
Violence is Not a Core Feature

The core features of ASD may render the person more vulnerable to environmental triggers, which could result in acts of violence.

Instrumental Violence

Instrumental violence involves acts that are likely to be perpetrated in an emotionally detached way and represent a means to an end behavior (Harkins, Ware, & Mann, 2012).
Co-occurring Mental Health Conditions

• Often psychosis
• Developmental shift
• Tipping point
• Lack of opportunities

Circumscribed interest in violence

• Hare et al. (1999) found that 25% of the forensic patients with ASD in their study had circumscribed interests in violence.
• In some of the cases the violent interests were connected to the crime they committed.

Lack of Access to Circumscribed Interest

In one study, limits set on access video games was the most consistently cited factor for inpatient stay.
Significant increase in violent behaviors including violent assault, property destruction, severe self-injury, suicide attempts.
Expressive Violence

Expressive violence describes acts that are impulsive, reactive and may result from unendurable levels of sensory and physiological arousal that can exacerbate communication challenges.
What can be done?

- Counteract media influence
- Provide complete guidelines/rules
- Teach the difficult topics
- Be comprehensive in education
- Transition programming
- Treat comorbidities

INDIVIDUAL

- Psychiatric comorbidity
- Social isolation
  - No competing points of view
  - Little scheduled activity
  - Loneliness & misanthropy
  - Worsening of comorbid conditions
- Violent areas of interest
- Social cognitive deficits
- Sexual frustration?
Family
- Family culture
  - Extreme beliefs
  - Weapons in home
  - DV
- Caregiver fatigue
- Lack of supervision online
- Social modeling of conflict resolution

Societal
- Internet content
  - Search algorithms
  - Susceptibility to influence
- Access to weapons, gun loopholes
- Naïve consumption of media & VM
  - Film
  - Video games
- Lack of adult programming
- Limited job opportunities
- Limited housing opportunities
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