Cognitions about Women and Rape

Symposium Chair: Kevin L. Nunes, Ph.D., Carleton University

There are a number of cognitions that may be relevant for understanding and reducing sexual offending against adults. In this symposium three papers will explore some of these cognitions and their relationship with sexual aggression. The first paper will test whether excuses for and evaluations of sexual aggression predict sexual aggression. The second paper will examine the association between rape and implicit and explicit hostility towards women. The third paper will explore men's reported expected outcomes for rape. Together these papers advance knowledge about the content and measurement of these cognitions, and their relationship with sexual offending against adults.

Does Rape-Related Cognition Predict Subsequent Sexually Aggressive Behavior?

Sacha Maimone, M.A., Carleton University
Chantal A. Hermann, Ph.D., Carleton University
Kevin L. Nunes, Ph.D., Carleton University

Rape-related cognition is considered an important risk factor in the initiation and maintenance of sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior (Bumby, 1996; Helmus, Hanson, Babchishin, & Mann, 2013; Malamuth, 2003; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; O'Ciardha & Ward, 2013; Thornton, 2002; Ward, Gannon, & Keown, 2006). The purpose of the current study was to assess whether cognitions regarding rape as measured by the Sexual Aggression: Attitudes, Justifications, and Excuses (SAAJE; Hermann & Nunes, 2012) scale predict future sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior. A sample of community men (N = 122) completed the SAAJE and self-report measures of sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior at Time 1. Four months later (Time 2), participants reported on their sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior since Time 1. Participants were classified into one of three groups: those who reported no sexually coercive and/or aggression behavior at Time 1 or Time 2 (non-coercers/assailters; n = 63), those who reported sexual coercion and/or aggression at Time 1 but not at Time 2 (past coercers/assailters; n = 42), and those who reported sexual coercion and/or aggression at Time 2 (current coercers/assailters; n = 17). Past coercers/assailters did not differ significantly from non-coercers/assailters on any of the SAAJE factors (justifications/positive attitudes, excuses, or negative attitudes; Cohen's $d$ ranged from -0.11 to 0.29). In contrast, current coercers/assailters endorsed
significantly and moderately more justifications/positive attitudes and excuses regarding rape than did non-coercers/assaulters (Cohen’s $d$ of 0.65 and 0.71, respectively), but they did not differ on negative attitudes towards rape ($d = 0.05$). Similarly, current coercers/assaulters endorsed significantly and moderately more justifications/positive attitudes regarding rape than did past coercers/assaulters ($d = 0.66$). In addition, a moderate difference was found between current and past coercers/assaulters on excuses regarding rape, with current coercers/assaulters endorsing more excuses regarding rape than past coercers/assaulters, although this difference was not significant ($d = 0.44$). Last, current and past coercers/assaulters did not differ on negative attitudes regarding rape ($d = 0.17$). In summary, current coercers/assaulters generally endorsed more rape-related cognitions (i.e., justifications/positive attitudes and excuses) than non-coercers/assaulters and past coercers/assaulters. Justifications/positive attitudes and excuses regarding rape may be predictive of future sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior. These cognitions may be important to consider when estimating risk of future sexual aggression.

**Learning Goals and Objectives**

In this presentation, we will:

- Review the literature on the relationship between rape-related cognition and sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior;
- Present the SAAJE as a measure of distinct cognitions regarding rape (i.e., justifications/positive attitudes, excuses, and negative attitudes);
- Examine the relationship between the SAAJE factors and subsequent sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior;
- Discuss the implications of these findings in terms of the predictive validity of the SAAJE;
- Discuss the implications of these findings for theory, research, and assessment aimed at understanding sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior.

**Implicit and Explicit Attitudes towards Women in Rapists and Community Controls**

Wineke Smid, Ph.D., Forensic Care Specialists
Eveline Schippers, MSc., Forensic Care Specialists

Hostility towards women (HTW) can be seen as a specific category attitudes towards women, based on the implicit theory that women are unknowable, deceitful and ‘out to get’ men (Ward, 2000). Research suggests a role for HTW in the onset of sexual offending against women, both in community samples (e.g. Kingree & Thompson, 2014; Malamuth & Brown, 1994) and in forensic samples (e.g. DeGue, DiLillo, & Scalora, 2010; Johnson & Knight, 2000). Scarce literature also suggests a relationship between HTW and sex offender recidivism (Thornton, 2002; Hanson, Harris, Scott & Helmus, 2007); hence HTW was included as a dynamic risk factor in Stable-2007.
Clinical practice, on the other hand, provides various examples of high-risk (serial) rapists who seem to put women on a pedestal and long for a (sexual) relationship with a woman. A possible explanation for this apparent contradiction is provided by Glick and Fiske (1996), who suggest that there are two sides to sexist attitudes: hostile and benevolent, and that these two are positively correlated. Supporting that notion, a recent study (Berliant, Nunes, and Sperling, 2011) found that possible rapists with high levels of HTW (explicitly rated) at the same time showed the most positive view of women (implicitly assessed). Berliant et al. suggest that the discrepancy between implicit attitudes and explicit beliefs may add to the risk for sexual violence.

This paper presentation aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What positive and/or negative attitudes towards women are recognized by treatment providers as being most prominently present among high-risk rapists?

2. Can differences be assessed between high-risk rapists and community controls regarding these attitudes, using both explicit and implicit measures?

3. Can differences be assessed between high-risk rapists and community controls regarding the discrepancies between these explicit and implicit attitudes?

Results indicate ‘women are deceitful’ as the most prevalent negative attitude towards women and ‘women provide prestige’ as the most prevalent positive attitude towards women among high-risk rapists in residential treatment. High-risk rapists showed more positive and less negative attitudes towards women compared to community controls. Both rapists and community controls showed comparable discrepancies between implicit and explicitly rated deceitfulness.

References


Learning Goals and Objectives:

- Hostility towards women is related to sexual coercion in community and prison samples.
- Findings related to sexual coercion from community and prison samples might not be generalizable to high-risk rapists in inpatient treatment.
- Assessment of relatively “positive” attitudes towards women is uncommon in rapists.
- Rapists might show more ambiguous attitudes and not merely hostility towards women.
- Hostility towards women is considered a risk factor for sexual offenses. Current results add nuance to this and might have implications for risk assessment and treatment of rapists.

What do Men Think Would Happen if They Raped a Woman?

W. Eric Filleter, M.A. Candidate, Carleton University
Kevin L. Nunes, Ph.D., Carleton University
Sacha Maimone, Ph.D. Candidate, Carleton University
Chantel A. Hermann, Ph.D., Carleton University
Josh Peter, B.A. Honours, Carleton University
Emily Start, B.A. Honours, Carleton University

Cost and benefit analyses of certain behaviors have been linked to the likelihood of an individual engaging in that behavior (Bandura, 1973; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). In terms of sexually abusive behavior, expected likelihood of positive and negative outcomes occurring has been linked to sexual aggressive behavior (e.g., Bouffard, 2002). The purpose of the current study is to more closely examine the outcomes men anticipate for rape. Samples of men from the community and a university were asked to report expected outcomes for rape (“List three things that you think could happen if you were to force a woman to have sex with you”). We identified a number of broad themes into which we classified the reported outcomes. The most frequently listed outcomes referred to legal consequences, harm to the victim, harm to the rapist, and damage to the rapist’s social life.
Additionally, a number of participants listed outcomes pertaining to sexual gratification for both the rapist and victim. Our findings provide a better sense of the outcomes men typically anticipate for rape. These results could inform the development or refinement of measures of rape outcome expectancies, which would facilitate future research on the role such expectancies may play in sexual aggression.

**Learning Goals and Objectives**
In this presentation we will:
- Review the literature on outcome expectancies,
- Present the broad themes within which we organized participants’ reported outcomes expectancies for rape,
- Present specific examples of each theme,
- Consider our findings in the context of theory and past research, and
- Discuss future directions for research and implications of our findings.