Proclivity to Rape, Cognitions about Rape, and Aggressive Sexual Fantasies

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Proclivity for rape, cognitions about rape, and sexually aggressive fantasies all theoretically play a role in the perpetration of sexually coercive and aggressive behavior against adults. This symposium consists of three papers studying the relationships between these constructs and sexually aggressive behavior in samples of non-incarcerated men. The first paper examines whether proclivity to rape and proclivity to engage in sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior predicts subsequent sexually aggressive behavior in a sample of community men. The second paper explores the relationship between cognitions about rape, self-reported psychopathy, and resistance to peer influence, and their relationship with proclivity to commit rape and multiple perpetrator rape, in a sample of students. The third paper investigates the relationship between aggressive sexual fantasies, hostile cognitions about women and rape, and the ability to engage in a ‘rich fantasy life’ (e.g., vividness of mental imagery), in a sample of community men. Together these papers (a) explore proclivity for rape, cognitions about rape, and sexually aggressive fantasies in non-incarcerated samples of men, (b) highlight the value and need for more research on sexual violence in non-incarcerated samples of men, and (c) highlight implications for research, theory, and practice regarding sexually coercive and aggressive behavior against adults.

Likelihood to Rape Predicts Subsequent Sexually Coercive and Aggressive Behavior

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Self-reported likelihood to rape is a commonly used proxy for sexually aggressive behavior in research on student and community samples (e.g., Gidycz et al., 2011; Nunes et al., 2015). To the best of our knowledge, however, only one study has explored the extent to which self-reported likelihood to rape actually corresponds to future behavior. Gidycz and colleagues (2011) found likelihood to rape predicted subsequent sexually coercive and aggressive behavior in a sample of students. The purpose of the current study was to
attempt to replicate and extend Gidycz and colleagues’ findings with a sample of community men.

Community men (N = 236) were recruited online and asked to complete two surveys, approximately four months apart. At Time 1, participants completed measures of likelihood to rape, likelihood to engage in sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior, and past sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior. At Time 2, participants were asked to report any sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior that they had engaged in during the four-month period since Time 1. Both measures of self-reported likelihood to rape and/or likelihood to engage in sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior at Time 1 moderately predicted subsequent sexually coercive and aggressive behavior at Time 2 (likelihood to rape $r = .28, p < .001$; likelihood of engaging in sexually coercive/aggressive behavior $r = .29, p < .001$). Participants were also divided into three groups using their self-reported sexually coercive and/or aggressive behaviors: non-coercers/assaulters ($n = 116$) were participants who reported no sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior at Time 1 or 2; past coercers/assaulters ($n = 82$) were participants who reported engaging in sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior at Time 1, but not Time 2; and current coercers/assaulters ($n = 38$) were participants who reported sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior at Time 2, with or without reporting sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior at Time 1. Current coercers/assaulters reported greater likelihood to rape ($d = 0.83, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.45, 1.21]$) and greater likelihood to sexually coerce/aggress ($d = 0.96, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.58, 1.35]$) than non-coercers/assaulters. Current coercers/assaulters also reported greater likelihood to rape ($d = 0.57, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.18, 0.96]$) and greater likelihood to sexually coerce/aggress ($d = 0.48, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.08, 0.87]$) than past coercers/assaulters.

These results suggest that self-reported likelihood to rape and/or likelihood to engage in sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior may accurately reflect likelihood of future sexually aggressive behavior. Future research should further explore this relationship with longer follow-up periods and correctional/forensic samples. If replicated, these results suggest self-reported likelihood to rape is a viable proxy for sexually aggressive behavior in studies trying to understand and prevent sexual violence.

**Learning Goals and Objectives:**

- Learn about the relationship between likelihood to rape and/or likelihood to engage in sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior and self-reported sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior in community men;
- Learn about longitudinal research conducted online with a sample of community men;
- Discuss the use of proxy variables for studying sexual violence in samples of students and community men;
- Discuss the implications of this study for future research on sexual violence;
- Discuss the prevalence rates of sexually coercive and/or aggressive behavior in a sample of community men.
Rape Supportive Cognitions and Proclivity towards Multiple Perpetrator Sex Offending

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In order to understand multiple perpetrator rape, a number of individual, sociocultural, and situational factors are proposed to play important roles. This study aims to examine several components of a proposed multi-factorial framework (Harkins & Dixon, 2010; 2013) which outlines factors expected to be relevant in influencing whether individuals will participate in multiple perpetrator sex offending. We know a substantial proportion of sexual offenders are not apprehended (Smith et al., 2011; Wallby & Allen, 2004), thus researchers have introduced self-report methods to test propensity to engage in sexual offending among the general public (e.g., Blake & Gannon, 2010; Bohner et al., 1998). These sexual offender proclivity measures assess self-reported sexual interest in rape by lone perpetrators (e.g., Bohner et al., 1998) as well as multiple perpetrator rape proclivity (Alleyne, Gannon, O’Ciardha, & Wood, 2013). This form of measurement enables research to be conducted on these types of sexual interests in community males who may show some proclivity to sexually offend (e.g., Blake & Gannon, 2010). For example, in a sample of university males in the UK, 66% did not emphatically reject an interest in MPR (i.e., they did not endorse a complete lack of interest in engaging in this type of offending). This study uses anonymous online data collection to assess whether self-reported psychopathy, rape supportive cognitions and resistance to peer influence predict a propensity towards multiple perpetrator rape in a student population. A measure of a proclivity towards rape in general is also included to determine whether the factors examined uniquely predict an interest in multiple perpetrator rape or are related to an interest in rape in general. The implications of the results are discussed in terms of prevention and treatment of sexual violence, and in particular, in relation to multiple perpetrator rape.

Learning Goals and Objectives:

• To determine the role self-reported psychopathy plays in predicting a propensity for multiple perpetrator rape.
• To determine the role rape supportive cognitions play in predicting a propensity for multiple perpetrator rape.
• To determine the role resistance to peer influence plays in predicting a propensity for multiple perpetrator rape.
• To examine whether the same factors predict lone and multiple perpetrator rape.
• To consider the implications of the results for multiple perpetrator rape.
Aggressive Sexual Fantasies: Looking Beyond Rape-Supportive Cognition

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Many researchers have studied the prevalence and content of men’s aggressive sexual fantasies, including their link with rape-supportive cognition. However, little to no research has examined the psychological and cognitive factors that influence the use of such fantasies. In a new model, Bartels, Beech, and Harkins propose that sexual fantasizing (i.e., envisioning elaborate sexual mental imagery) is a deliberate and controlled psychological process distinct from spontaneous, fleeting sexual thoughts. As such, sexually fantasizing should be affected by one’s ability to engage in a ‘rich fantasy life’. Operationally, we argue this involves: (1) a proneness to fantasize in general; (2) an ability to vividly envision mental imagery; and (3) a greater susceptibility to dissociate. To test this, the present study hypothesized that a latent variable termed ‘Rich Fantasy Life’, via ‘Distorted Attitudes about Women’, influences the use of ‘Aggressive Sexual Fantasies’.

A sample of 159 community males was recruited. Each participant completed a measure of fantasy proneness, dissociation, and vividness of mental imagery, along with two measures that assess hostile attitudes towards women. Assessing how often the participants fantasized about rape-related and sadistic themes provided a measure of aggressive sexual fantasies. Structural equation modelling (along with bootstrapping procedures) indicated that the data had a very good fit with the hypothesized model.

The results offer an important contribution to our understanding of deviant sexual fantasizing and provide practical implications regarding the assessment and treatment of aggressive sexual fantasies. The limitations of the study are discussed, along with suggestions for future research.

Learning Goals and Objectives:

- Validate previous findings showing that a large percentage of males in the general population sexually fantasize about rape and sadistic themes.
- Demonstrate that such fantasies are influenced by rape-supportive cognition in the form of distorted and hostile attitudes about women.
- Highlight that imagery-related variables (e.g., dissociation, vividness of mental imagery, & fantasy proneness) also contribute to the use of these aggressive fantasies.
- Highlight how the findings may inform assessment and treatment of offense-supportive sexual fantasies.
- Provide suggestions for how this work be followed up in future research.