

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

F-18

Thinking, Drinking, and Intervening in the Dynamics of Sexual Aggression

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Cognition and alcohol often feature in the explanation and prevention of sexually aggressive behavior. In this symposium three papers will explore the potential relevance of alcohol, evaluative attitudes, outcome expectancies, and norms to the perpetration and prevention of sexual aggression. The first paper examines the relationship between heavy drinking, adherence to traditional masculinity, and bystander efforts to prevent or interrupt the perpetration of sexual aggression. The second paper presents a meta-analysis of the relationship of evaluative attitudes and outcome expectancies with sexually aggressive behavior. The final paper tests the relationship between norms, evaluative attitudes, and sexually aggressive behavior. Together these papers advance our understanding of the relationship between the variables examined and set the stage for future research to more conclusively test their hypothesized role in the perpetration and prevention of sexual aggression.

Real Men Don't Intervene: Heavy Drinking, Masculinity, and Bystander Behavior

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Bystander training programs that focus on preparing individuals to intervene when witnessing high-risk sexual situations have proliferated on college campuses to prevent alcohol and non-alcohol related sexual aggression. However, many programs fail to address the effects of a bystander's alcohol use on intervention. This is not surprising due to the limited research examining this association. To this end, the present study examined how heavy drinking and a known correlate of intervention, men's adherence to a traditional masculinity, are jointly and independently associated with bystander behavior in drinking contexts. Participants were 148 community men between the ages of 21 and 30 who completed measures of heavy drinking, adherence to traditional masculinities, and prior bystander behavior in drinking contexts aimed at helping friends and strangers. Hierarchical linear regressions demonstrated that adherence to the belief that men should attain social status was associated with more frequent bystander behavior for friends, whereas adherence to the belief that men should avoid stereotypical feminine activities

SHAPING THE FUTURE

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was associated with less frequent bystander behavior for friends. Additionally, the relation between adherence to the belief that men should avoid stereotypical feminine activities and bystander behavior for friends was significant and negative among heavy drinkers but not among non-heavy drinkers. Findings extend prior research by demonstrating that adherence to traditional male role norms differentially predict bystander behavior in drinking contexts. These data also suggest that alcohol-induced myopia magnifies men's perception of risks to their masculine – and specifically antifeminine – identity. With such a heightened focus on reasons not to intervene, heavy drinking men who strongly endorse the belief that men should avoid stereotypical feminine activities are especially unlikely to engage in bystander intervention toward friends in drinking contexts. These men are likely consuming alcohol in these party contexts, and may benefit from targeted, gender-specific, interventions.

Learning Goals:

- Describe the role of alcohol use on bystander behavior for sexual aggression.
- Describe how unique dimensions of traditional masculinity differentially impact bystander behavior among heavy drinking men.
- Discuss ways in which bystander training programs can be modified to target bystander's alcohol use.

Evaluative Attitudes, Rape Outcome Expectancies, and Sexual Aggression: A Meta-Analysis

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Evaluative attitudes and outcome expectancies for engaging in a behavior are considered important determinants of engagement in that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Evaluative attitudes towards sexual aggression are evaluations of sexually aggressive behavior (e.g., sexual assault is positive vs. negative; Nunes et al., 2018). Evaluative attitudes appear to be distinct from other cognitions related to sexual aggression (e.g. rape myths) and are independently associated with self-reported sexually aggressive behavior (Nunes et al., 2018). Outcome expectancies for sexually aggressive behavior refer to the perceived expectation that an outcome will occur following a behavior such as rape or sexual aggression, and the importance placed on the occurrence or non-occurrence of that outcome (O'Donohue, McKay, & Shewe, 1996; Williams, Anderson, & Winett, 2005). In the

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

current study, we conducted a random-effects meta-analysis to quantitatively examine the relationships between evaluative attitudes, outcome expectancies, and sexually aggressive behavior.

Our review included 10 original, published studies ($n = 2150$) which recorded relationships between evaluative attitudes or rape outcome expectancies with sexually aggressive behavior (i.e., self-reported past sexually aggressive behavior or likelihood to rape) by male perpetrators against female victims. The sample studies included student or community participants recruited in North America. Additionally, the studies had to report sufficient statistical or descriptive information to permit calculation of an effect size.

Results demonstrated that, overall, evaluative attitudes and outcome expectancies were significantly associated with sexually aggressive behavior ($r = .13$, $[.01, .24]$). Evaluative attitudes were moderately positively correlated with sexual aggression ($r = .26$, $[.21, .31]$, $k = 5$, $N = 1401$), where more positive evaluations of sexually aggressive behavior were associated with more sexually aggressive behavior. The relationship between outcome expectancies for sexual aggression and sexually aggressive behavior was small and not statistically significant ($r = .08$, $[-.04, .19]$, $k = 8$, $N = 1317$). These results are consistent with the possibility that evaluative attitudes play a role in sexually aggressive behavior. Future research should test whether evaluative attitudes predict and explain sexually aggressive behavior.

Learning Goals:

- Define evaluative attitudes and outcome expectancies for sexual aggression.
- Quantitatively summarize the relationship between evaluative attitudes, outcome expectancies, and perpetration of sexually aggressive behavior.
- Discuss future directions for research on evaluative attitudes, outcome expectancies for sexually aggressive behavior, and perpetration of sexually aggressive behavior.

Evaluative Attitudes May Explain the Link Between Social Norms and Sexual Aggression

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Upwards of 30% of women attending college have reported being sexually assaulted in adulthood (Fedina, Holmes, & Backes, 2018), with college-age women (between 15 and 24) having the highest risk of being sexually assaulted than any other age group (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008). Male peer groups have been identified as an important factor in the

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

perpetration of sexual aggression against women. Specifically, peer approval of sexual aggression has been associated with more sexually aggressive behavior (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001) and pro-rape norms have been found to increase intentions of engaging in sexual aggression in the future (Edwards & Vogel, 2013). The mechanisms through which social norms influence sexually aggressive behavior, however, have received little empirical attention. One potential explanation for this relationship may be that social norms have an impact on personal *evaluative attitudes* about sexual aggression and that, in turn, these attitudes influence sexually aggressive behavior. Evaluative attitudes reflect the extent to which behavior is evaluated favorably or unfavorably (Ajzen, 1991, 2011; Eagly & Chaiken, 2007) and have been associated with past and future likelihood of sexual aggression.

The current study explored the extent to which evaluative attitudes mediate the relationship between peer norms and sexual aggression in a sample of 200 male undergraduate students. Students completed self-report measures of personal and perceived peer evaluative attitudes, as well as measures of past and future likelihood of sexual aggression. Of the 200 participants, 25% reported engaging in at least one sexually coercive or aggressive act since the age of 16. Results suggest that participants' personal evaluative attitudes mediated (i.e., explained) the relationship between peer norms and past sexual aggression (Indirect effect = 92.21, 95% bias corrected bootstrapped CI [24.88, 152.24]), as well as likelihood of engaging in sexually aggressive behavior (Indirect effect = .41, 95% bias corrected bootstrapped CI [.11, .74]). This suggests that evaluative attitudes towards sexual aggression may represent one mechanism through which peer norms are associated with sexually aggressive behavior. If more rigorous research establishes a causal relationship between peer norms, evaluative attitudes, and sexually aggressive behavior, this would suggest that targeting these factors in prevention programs may reduce sexual aggression.

Learning Goals:

In this presentation, we will:

- Review the relationship between social norms and sexual aggression
- Present results from a study suggesting evaluative attitudes may explain the relationship between social norms and sexual aggression, and
- Discuss potential implications of this research for interventions aimed at reducing sexual aggression.

Chloe Pedneault is completing her Ph.D. in experimental psychology at Carleton University, where she is an active member of the Aggressive Cognitions and Behavior Research lab. Her primary research interests involve examining the role cognitions play in the initiation and maintenance of sexually coercive and aggressive behavior.

Ruschelle M. Leone, MA is a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Georgia State University. She is currently completing her clinical internship at the Medical University of

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

South Carolina. Her research program focuses on the intersection of alcohol use, interpersonal violence, and bystander intervention.

Alicia LaPierre is currently completing her M.A. in Psychology at Carleton University. She received her B.A. (Hons.) with a Co-operative Education Diploma in Psychology at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The focus of her thesis is to examine the factor structure of the items and the uniqueness of the Violence Propensity Vignette Questionnaire (VPVQ). Other research interests include sexual and intimate partner violence, perceptions of sexuality and consent, campus sexual violence, and prevention.