

Denying Rape but Endorsing Forceful Intercourse: Exploring Differences Among Responders

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Abstract

Sexual assault is a problem on many college campuses, and many researchers have conducted studies assessing the prevalence of sexual assault perpetration and intentions to be coercive. Behaviorally descriptive survey items (i.e., “Have you ever coerced somebody to intercourse by holding them down?”) versus labeling survey items (i.e., “Have you ever raped somebody?”) will yield different responses, in that more men will admit to sexually coercive behaviors and more women will self-report victimization when behavioral descriptions are used (Koss 1998) instead of labels. Indeed, some men will endorse items asking whether they have used force to obtain intercourse, but will deny having raped a woman. There has been little research on differences between individuals to endorse a behaviorally descriptive item versus a labeling item. The present study uses discriminant function analysis to separate men who do not report intentions to be sexually coercive, those who endorse behaviorally descriptive intentions but deny it when the word rape is used, and those who endorse intentions to rape outright. Results indicated that participants can be differentiated into three groups based on scores from scales on hypermasculinity and hostility toward women. High hostility toward woman and callous sexual attitudes separated the no intentions group from those who endorsed either intentions to rape or those who endorses only the behavioral description of rape. The two types of offender groups were distinguishable mostly by varying levels of hostility, suggesting that men who endorse using force to obtain intercourse on survey items but deny rape on the same may not experience hostile affect in response to women, but might have dispositions more in line with benevolent sexism.

Introduction

FEDERAL DATA ESTIMATE THAT about one in five women becomes the victim of sexual assault while in college, most of which is committed by assailants known to the victim (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control 2012). These staggering numbers, as well as the government’s response of creating a task force addressing college sexual assault, have generated an increase in news coverage with some mainstream media and social network users questioning whether many of these cases constitute rape. For example, commentators have suggested that rape only occurs if a woman labels it as such, while experiencing an unwanted sexual experience under the influence does not constitute rape. This perspective demonstrates stereotypical assumptions many people still hold about rape, considering it to be an act of extreme violence perpetrated by an unknown assailant upon an unsuspecting woman who is willing to defend her sexual purity with her life. Such sentiments contribute to a culture that continues to put at least partial responsibility for sexual assault on the victim

and normalizes sexual aggression as part of the male gender role. Such thinking highlights a well-known phenomenon in research on sexual aggression, in which individuals struggle with accurately identifying the range of different circumstances that all might constitute sexual assault (Bachman and Paternoster 1993; Littleton and Axsom 2003; Littleton et al. 2009).

Specifically, when survey items describe behaviors (i.e., “Have you ever coerced somebody to intercourse by holding them down?”) instead of simply label them (i.e., “Have you ever raped somebody?”), more men will admit to sexually coercive behaviors in the past and more women will self-report past victimization (Koss 1998). Little research has examined what dispositional factors might prompt an individual to admit to rape when asked through behaviorally worded questions as opposed to labeling themselves a rapist. Given that rape is defined as intercourse by use of force or threat of force against a victim’s wishes, this discrepancy suggests that at least some men who rape do not seem to classify their behaviors as such. Hence, we would like to explore the dispositional motivations and reasons that

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some individuals endorse behaviorally descriptive intentions to use force to engage in sexual aggression, but deny intentions to rape, and other individuals endorse intentions to rape. The present study is an exploratory attempt to distinguish between these different types of rapists via the dispositional constructs of hostility toward women, and callous sexual attitudes.

Callous Sexual Attitudes

Callous sexual attitudes are commonly defined as attitudes that objectify women and expect men to exhibit sexual dominance (Donaldson 1993). Callous sexual attitudes are a part of the larger group of constructs that make up hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity reflects an exaggeration of traditional masculine messages, such as dictating that real men should enjoy danger, aggressively pursue sexual opportunities, and stand ground in a fight. While previous studies have related hypermasculine attitudes to sexual aggression (Koralewski and Conger 1992; Good et al. 1995; Suarez-Al-Adam et al. 2000; Tatum and Foubert 2009), treating hypermasculinity as a global construct creates difficulty in determining which particular dimensions of hypermasculinity predict sexual aggression. Understanding specific dimensions that contribute to sexual aggression may help refine sexual assault prevention programming or rehabilitation programming for sexual offenders.

Most research specifically links one dimension of hypermasculinity, callous sexual attitudes, with sexual aggression (Koralewski and Conger 1992; Parrot and Zeichner 2003). Vokey et al. (2013) noted that the dominant nature of callous sexual attitudes prompts the hypermasculine sexual exchange to become a depersonalized act rather than an expression of intimacy. This is supported by research demonstrating that men who exhibit higher sexual coercion exhibit more callous sexual attitudes when compared to less sexually coercive men (Koralewski and Conger 1992). Further, research indicates that callous sexual attitudes are linked with laboratory aggression (Parrot and Zeichner 2003) as well as cultural attitudes that justify rape or rape myth acceptance (e.g., endorsing the belief that wearing a short skirt invites rape) (Good et al. 1995; Tatum and Foubert 2009). Ryan (2004) proposed that the relationship between rape myth acceptance and sexual aggression might be due to the extent to which callous sexual attitudes support rape beliefs. This indicates that callous sexual attitudes may be a unique contributor to sexual aggression.

Given that callous sexual attitudes permit violence and consider women as passive sexual objects, it follows that for men who endorse these, sexual aggression becomes an appropriate and accepted expression of masculinity. In this sense, using force to obtain intercourse does not become an act of rape, but rather an expression of hypermasculinity, which may be thought of as a desirable disposition in certain subcultures. Taken together, these research findings suggest that an expression of hypermasculinity through callous sexual attitudes may relate to an inclination to endorse a behavioral description (i.e., using force to hold an individual down) versus referring to a sexually aggressive act as rape. Hence, we hypothesize that the construct of callous sexual attitudes will be found at the highest levels in those men who endorse intentions to force a woman to sexual acts but deny intentions to rape.

Hostility Toward Women

Hostility toward women is a tendency to be focused on negative interactions with women (i.e., attacks, rejections), resulting in an angry and unfriendly attitude toward them (Check 1985). Hostility toward women reflects a disposition in which men view women's motives as manipulative or deceitful. By extension, hostility toward women can feature an unwillingness to trust women, as well as a tendency to blame women for one's problems.

Generally, sexually aggressive men, in both offending populations and college populations, exhibit higher levels of hostility toward women (Bernat et al. 1997; Rando et al. 1998). In a correlational study examining various attitudes related to sexual aggression, Forbes et al. (2004) concluded that hostility towards women closely related to college men's levels of sexual coercion and sexual aggression. Rando et al. (1998) found that sexually aggressive men ranked higher on hostility toward women when compared to nonsexually aggressive men. Perpetrators of sexual violence scored higher on hostility toward women compared to nonsexually violent criminal offenders (Gudjonsson et al. 1989; Marshall and Moulden 2001). However, research investigating the relationship of hostility toward women and sexual offending is not conclusive (Beech et al. 2006). Overall, while some research points to a relationship between hostility toward women and sexual aggression, most investigations do not differentiate between sexual coercion (i.e., utilizing nonphysical tactics to obtain a nonconsensual sexual encounter), and rape (i.e., utilizing force to obtain nonconsensual sexual encounter). Combining the constructs of sexual coercion and rape may limit the predictive power of attitudinal measures, and potentially reflects an assumption that all manifestations of sexually aggressive behavior reflect the same dispositional pathway. Hence, examining the extent to which hostility toward women predicts male's perceptions of future intentions as constituting rape or force could help differentiate such mixed results.

Prior research differentiated coercive men (i.e., utilizing nonphysical means to obtain a nonconsensual sexual encounter) from sexually aggressive men (i.e., utilizing physical force to obtain a nonconsensual sexual encounter). DeGue et al. (2010) found that only sexually aggressive men exhibited hostility toward women when compared to men that utilized consent, and sexually coercive men. However, DeGue et al. also noted that a substantial proportion of the sample indicated that they engaged in both sexual coercion and sexual aggression, which may have resulted in an overall lack of prominent differences between sexually coercive men and sexually aggressive men. Such results support the exploration of delineating between perceiving one's use of forceful sexual behaviors as constituting rape or not. We believe that men exhibiting higher levels of hostility toward women will exhibit awareness that their behaviors constitute rape, and still endorse use of force given that the motivation of the encounter is to punish women.

The Present Study

We investigated whether the constructs of hostility toward women and callous sexual attitudes differed among men who self-identify as denying any likelihood to rape or use force to obtain intercourse from women in the future,

self-identify as using force to obtain intercourse but denying any intentions to rape ever, and men who respond affirmatively to both having intentions to rape and using force in the future. This allows us to test whether there are differences in men who do not identify with the "rape" label on sexual aggression surveys, although they have committed acts that would be defined as rape. Men who admit intentions to force women to have sexual intercourse only, but do not believe that this act constitutes rape, might not be primarily motivated by a desire to retaliate and overpower women. Their behavior could be guided by other factors in line with stereotypically masculine gender roles such as having a high desire for sexual activity, viewing sexuality as a competition and a way to gain respect among peers, and lacking consideration for women or viewing them as sexual objects. Therefore, we hypothesize that men do not endorse any intentions for sexual aggression will differ from the other two groups of men primarily on a dimension characterized by hostility toward women as the strongest loading factor. Men who openly endorse intentions to rape women versus those who only endorse intentions to use force but deny rape are hypothesized to differ along a second dimension on which callous sexual attitudes play a more important role. In other words, we expect a pattern of results showing two significant functions along which we can differentiate the three groups of men.

Materials and Methods

Participants and measures

Eighty-six male college students received extra credit for their participation. All participants were over 18 ($M=21$, $SD=3.6$) and most were juniors in college. The overwhelming majority of participants (>90%) identified as Caucasian, consistent with the general student make up at this university, and all identified as heterosexual, with prior sexual experiences.

Hostility toward women. The hostility toward women scale (Check 1985) assesses hostile, negative, and resentful feelings participants might hold against women. This scale consists of 22 items, specifically addressing male hostility against females, such as: "I feel that many women flirt with men just to tease them and hurt them" or "I am easily angered by women." Judgments were made on a 0 (*strongly agree*) to 6 (*strongly disagree*) response scale, with higher scores indicating more hostility. The scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha=.87$) in the current study.

Hypermasculinity scale. The survey also included the callous sexual attitudes subscale from the hypermasculinity scale (Mosher and Sirkin 1984). This scale consists of three subscales: viewing danger as exciting, regarding violence as manly, and endorsement of callous sexual attitudes. Only the callous sexual attitudes subscale was used in this study, because we were interested specifically in the contribution of callous sexual attitudes to likelihood to commit sexual assault. The subscale consisted of 10 forced choice items. The scale demonstrated good reliability in this study ($\alpha=0.86$).

Attraction to sexual aggression. The survey concluded with part of the attraction to sexual aggression scale (Ma-

lamuth 1989a,b). This scale measures self-reported likelihood to engage in a variety of sexual behaviors "if nobody would ever know and there wouldn't be any consequences" for the participants. The behaviors that were included were heterosexual intercourse, forcing a female to do something sexual she does not want to, and rape. We chose to use a hypothetical scale like this because we believed that it would lead to less social desirability bias in this research, as well as lessen any concerns participants might have about divulging information about past crimes. In addition, for the purpose of this study, the key points of having labels (rape) versus behavioral descriptions of sexual aggression is completely addressed with this scale.

Marlow–Crowne Social Desirability Scale. Participants also completed the Marlow–Crowne Social Desirability Scale in order to account for biases in reporting (Crowne and Marlow 1960). Participants agreed with 10 dichotomous items designed to assess the respondent's propensity to wanting to paint themselves in a favorable light.

Procedure

A male research assistant collected informed consent and administered the survey in a private location. After finishing the survey, participants dropped the survey into a mailbox. Participants were then debriefed by the experimenter. The debriefing was extensive and provided hotline information, addressed rape myths, social norms campaign, university policy on sexual assault, and a full presentation aimed at preventing sexual aggression. This debriefing also included resources to obtain free counseling services. Providing an educational debriefing is a common practice in research examining sexual aggression or utilizing sexually aggressive materials (Allen et al. 1996), and our debriefing followed all appropriate guidelines.

Results

The Marlow–Crown scale was not correlated with any of the measures of interest, indicating that participants did not exhibit any significant bias in reporting. Hence, we were able to proceed with our analyses as planned. Data of the participants' intentions to commit sexual assault are displayed in Table 1. Table 2 shows the correlations of dispositional variables and self-reported intentions to commit sexual assault.

To investigate whether hostility toward women and callous sexual attitudes differentiated among participants who endorsed forced sex but not rape versus those who endorsed both or neither, a descriptive discriminant function analysis was conducted. We chose this analysis because it is well suited to describe differences between preexisting groups along multiple constructs at the same time. Discriminant function analysis attempts to predict group membership

TABLE 1. FREQUENCY OF INTENTIONS BY ITEM WORDING

	Yes	No
Intentions to force a woman to sexual intercourse	31.7% ($n=26$)	68.3% ($n=56$)
Any intentions to rape a woman	13.6% ($n=11$)	86.4% ($n=70$)

TABLE 2. CORRELATIONS OF DISPOSITIONAL MEASURES AND INTENTIONS TO COMMIT SEXUAL ASSAULT

	<i>Hostility</i>	<i>Callous sexual attitudes</i>	<i>Intentions to rape</i>	<i>Intentions to use force</i>
Hostility		0.43**	0.32**	0.35**
Callous sexual attitudes			0.09	0.24*
Intentions to rape				0.81**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

based on canonical variables created by a given set of predictors. This allows the researcher to understand the nature of the differences in groups more clearly by revealing which variables are important and in which manner they should be combined to optimally describe the distinction between groups. Each of the discriminant functions represents a canonical variable that is made up of a unique linear combination of the constructs used (Duarte Silva and Stam 1995). In this study, we attempted to predict membership in the three groups (reports no intentions to be sexually coercive, reports intentions to force a woman to have sex but denies intentions to rape, and reports intentions to rape a woman) based on hostility toward women scores and callous sexual attitudes. In a sense, discriminant function analysis can be viewed as a reverse multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA).

There was one participant who indicated that he would rape a woman, but denied any likelihood to use force to obtain intercourse. Because we did not know how to make sense of this answer and could not exclude a random error (e.g., careless marking), this case was dropped from the analysis. Cases with missing data for the dispositional measures or intentions were also dropped. This left us 73 cases for analysis, which all fell into one of these groups: endorsing no intentions of sexual assault ($n=49$), endorsing intentions to use force but denying intentions to rape a woman ($n=13$), and endorsing both ($n=10$). Statistical guidelines for our chosen analysis suggests that the minimum number of cases per group should exceed the number of variables to be workable, and 5 observations per variable entered into the analysis, although 20 is preferred. For our 3 groups and 2 variables, we have 73 cases that surpass these requirements (Tabachnick and Fidell 1996).

In discriminant function analysis, each function consists of a unique linear combination of the predictor variables

TABLE 3. STRUCTURE MATRIX AND FUNCTIONS AT GROUP CENTROIDS BY FUNCTION AND DISPOSITIONAL MEASURE

<i>Structure matrix</i>	<i>Function 1</i>	<i>Function 2</i>
Hostility	0.84	-0.55
Callous sex	0.81	0.58
Functions at group centroids		
No intentions	-0.37	0.05
Force	1.06	0.34
Rape	0.52	-0.64

used (here: hostility toward women and callous sexual attitudes). Function 1 significantly discriminated among groups: $\lambda = 0.65$, $\chi^2(4) = 32.76$, $p < 0.001$. Observing the standardized canonical function coefficients and structure matrix suggests that the first function is very strongly related to hostility toward women ($r_s = 0.87$), and moderately strongly related to callous sexual attitudes ($r_s = 0.75$). Function 2 was also significant: $\lambda = 0.91$, $\chi^2(1) = 7.20$, $p < 0.01$. Function 2 appears to represent moderately strong callous sexual attitudes ($r_s = 0.66$), and a moderate inverse of hostility ($r_s = -0.50$). Plotting the group centroids along the 2 significant dimensions represented by the functions suggests that function 1 differentiates between respondents who deny any intentions to rape or use force and the other participants, as seen by the large distance between group 1 and groups 2 and 3 along the x axis in Figure 1. Given that hostility is the attribute most strongly represented on the first canonical variable, with moderately high levels of callous sexual attitudes also represented, we interpret this as confirmation of previous research that suggests men who do not act sexually coercive to have lower levels of both hostility toward women and callous sexual attitudes compared to sexually coercive men.

Inspection of function 2 in Figure 1 suggests that this dimension separated all three groups, although most strongly the "force" group from the "rape" group, as seen by the distance between groups on the y axis in figure. Moderately high levels of callous sexual attitudes coupled with an inverse of hostility suggest that this function represents a unique set of characteristics where the predominant disposition is not related to being angry or violent toward women. Table 3 lists the structure matrix and group centroids.

Discussion

The present study serves as initial investigation to examine how respondents who endorse behavioral descriptions of rape but deny rape when labeled as such outright differ from those who self-report intentions to rape and those who do not endorse any sexual coercion. A descriptive discriminant function analysis was used to reveal which variables should be combined in what manner to best distinguish between the groups. As hypothesized, a sizable number of participants indicated that they might use force to obtain intercourse, but would not rape a woman. Men who indicate intentions to use force but deny intentions to rape exhibit a unique disposition featuring an inverse construct of hostility toward women but high levels of callous sexual attitudes (Check 1985). Given that hostility toward women involves resentment, bitterness, rejection sensitivity, and paranoia about women's motives, we consider the inverse of hostility toward women in men

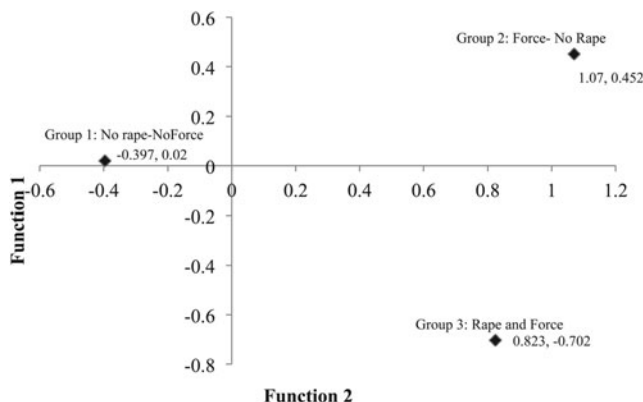


FIG. 1. Functions at group centroids.

that intend to use force to be indicative of an affable, trusting, and nonreactive affect toward women. When combined with callous sexual attitudes, we interpret this function as representing personality characteristics that might lend themselves to allowing men to not perceive his actions as rape and may even view the forced intercourse as an achievement. The primary motivation in this case could be sexual gratification, accomplishment, and/or perceived compliance with stereotypical masculine gender norms. The use of force in these cases might be seen as an acceptable mean to reach one's goal, or the woman's "no" is perceived as a token resistance consistent with stereotypical gender norms. While the ultimate outcome of either act constitutes rape, this pattern of results suggests that there might be different types of offenders with potential differences in underlying motivation, cognition, and/or personality traits.

These results are informative because knowing ahead of time that a particular subgrouping of men exhibit higher levels of callous sexual attitudes may suggest that males in this group are more likely to commit rape without labeling it as such. Therefore, programming for these men needs to include a strong educational component focused on clarifying different behaviors that all constitute sexual assault, but do not follow the stereotypically imagined scenarios related to rape. Furthermore, such programming would also have to prompt men to be engaged and open to thinking about their own behaviors to avoid having participants internally distance themselves (i.e., exhibiting an "I am not that kind of guy who rapes women, this programming is not for me" attitude) that would preclude men from fully participating and benefitting from the program.

Males who might assault women without conceptualizing their actions as rape might benefit more from psychoeducation and immersion in cultural messages that do not condone the use of force, but might actually not take in rape prevention messages directly due to not identifying with the role of rapist. If improper beliefs and attitudes were supplanted with acceptable ones, the potential for sexual assaults might be reduced, and the men could develop mutually satisfying sexual relationships with women. If hostility, on the other hand, is a prominent motivator, successful interventions likely need to include techniques to manage affect, manage and/or process anger toward women, and cognitive restructuring to disconnect negative feelings and women. These men might need more individual services to allow for successful processing of their affective bases of sexually violent behaviors toward women, and would likely not benefit from rape awareness and prevention programming that focuses on norms and definitions of consent.

Limitations and Future Directions

There is likely more than hostility toward women and callous sexual attitudes that distinguishes men who endorse forced intercourse but not rape from those who admit to rape on psychological studies. Our study was only a first exploration of this topic. Future studies could help account for this by examining more dispositional measures. Given the high perpetration of sexual assaults on college campuses (Abbey et al. 1996), coupled with the fact that many studies on sexual assault use college men, we felt that a convenience sample of college males was a good place to start.

Understanding the motives and meaning associated with such rapes is beyond this scope of the present research; however, future studies could better clarify such motivations by examining the extent to which other dimensions of sexual aggression predict intentions to use force versus rape. Further, it is important to note that sexual aggression is a multidimensional construct, and both hostility toward women and hypermasculinity relate to rape myth acceptance (Forbs et al. 2004; Ryan 2004). Given that our discriminant function analysis points to a construct that objectifies women but exhibits positive affect toward women, future research should incorporate other measures such as rape myth acceptance, the full hypermasculinity scale, or benevolent sexism to achieve a greater dimension on the dispositions contributing to different behavioral manifestations of sexual aggression.

Conclusions

Our results suggest that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to sexual assault prevention. If men who sexually assault harbor different motivations to varying degrees, identifying them ahead of time and targeting interventions toward groups of men with similar motivations, or better even, providing personalized prevention programs, may be more successful. Men who are primarily motivated by negative, hostile affect toward women and who conceptualize their own intentions and behaviors as rape are unlikely to benefit from the large group primary prevention efforts done as part of college outreach efforts. However, programming using a group and norm-based approach appears to be appropriate for men who endorse force but deny rape, as long as the programming can establish rapport and credibility with participants. Because these men do not view their sexually aggressive intentions as rape, failing to attend to issues around beliefs about the stereotypical rapist and not identifying with them could weaken the effectiveness of the programming due to not receiving buy in from participants. This would ultimately likely leave the men who could benefit most from these prevention efforts disengaged.

Author Disclosure Statement

In the present study, no competing financial interests exist.

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