What Clinicians Think Rapists Think About Rape

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INTRODUCTION

•Rape-supportive cognition is theoretically and empirically related to sexual aggression.

•Limiting advancement in research, theory, and practice is a lack of precision and clarity in the conceptualization and measurement of offence-supportive cognition (Gannon et al., 2007; Hermann et al., 2012; Maruna & Mann, 2006; Miller, 2010; Ó Ciardha & Gannon, 2011; Ward et al., 2006).

•Rape-supportive cognition is often assessed using self-report questionnaires that contain a mixture of cognitive constructs including attitudes, justifications, and excuses (e.g., Hermann et al., 2012).

•Attitudes are typically defined as summary evaluations of psychological objects (e.g., rape is good; Fazio, 2007).

•Excuses are cognitions that alleviate personal responsibility by attributing the cause of the event to external forces (e.g., rape is not my fault because…;Scott & Lyman, 1968).

•Justifications are cognitions that do not alleviate personal responsibility, but instead minimize the harm or wrongfulness of the event (e.g., rape is not that bad because…;Scott & Lyman, 1968).

•The purpose of the current study was to identify common attitudes, excuses, and justifications regarding rape.

METHODS

Participants
•52 professionals who had clinical experience working with rapists. 44.2% Male (*n* = 23), 53.8% Female (*n* = 28), 1.9% Missing (*n* = 1).

•On average participants were 40 to 44 years old (Mdn). Participants' age ranged from age groups 24-25 to 70 or older.

•Over one third of participants were clinical psychologists (36.5%, *n* = 19).

•Majority of participants have worked with rapists for 10+ years (57.7% *n* = 30).

•Majority of participants interact with rapists at least once a week (75.0%, *n* = 39).

•Most frequent purpose of work with rapists was assessment and treatment (46.2% , *n* = 24).

•Majority of participants reported working with rapists in moderately adversarial settings (e.g., treatment within institutions, 61.5%, *n* = 32).

Measures
•Participants completed sentence stems designed to reflect positive attitudes towards rape, negative attitudes towards rape, excuses for rape, and justifications for rape, based on their clinical experience working with rapists.

•**Instructions**: Please complete the following sentence stems based on your clinical experience working with rapists and the beliefs you typically hear expressed by these men. For each sentence stem please complete the sentence stem from your clients' perspective.

•**Sentence Stems:**
  • One POSITIVE thing about forcing a woman to have sex is…
  • One NEGATIVE thing about forcing a woman to have sex is…
  • Forcing a woman to have sex is NOT REALLY YOUR FAULT IF…
  • Forcing a woman to have sex is NOT THAT BAD IF…

Procedure
•Participants were recruited through the ATSA listserve and asked to complete an online survey.

•Online survey contained demographic questions and asked participants to complete each sentence stem five times.

•Thematic-analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to group the responses for each sentence stem into themes within each cognition type.

•**For each type of item stem:**
  1) First author familiarized herself with the data
  2) Generated initial codes for the item stem responses – codes were mutually exclusive
  3) Initial codes were organized into themes
  4) Themes were reviewed for internal consistency and external heterogeneity
  5) Themes were named and defined
  6) Frequency of responses for each theme were computed

Table 1. *Sentence Stem Themes by Cognition Type*

Positive Attitudes Towards Rape (One POSITIVE thing about forcing a woman to have sex is…)	
Theme	**Frequency % (*n*)**
Pleasure: rape is good because the offender gets to have sex or is satisfied sexually, and generally gets what he wants	**28.2 (33)**
e.g., "they'll enjoy it"; "you get sexual pleasure"; "you get what you want"	
Punishment: rape is good because the offender gets to punish and humiliate his victims	**19.7 (23)**
e.g., "you can get revenge against all women."; "it teaches her a lesson"; "to humiliate the bitch"	
Power: rape is good because the offender gets to feel powerful and exert power over his victims	**17.9 (21)**
e.g., "to have control over them"; "it makes me feel powerful"; "having power and control"	
Sexual Beings: rape is good because women are always sexually receptive, and the offender is just satisfying women's sexual needs	12.0 (14)
e.g., "women fantasize all the time about being raped; I just helped their fantasy to come true"	
Anger: rape is good because the offender gets to release his anger	3.4 (4)
e.g., "I can take out my frustration"; "I can release my anger"	
Entitlement: rape is good because the offender gets what he feels he is entitled to	3.4 (4)
e.g., "you get what you deserve"; "you deserve it"	
Rejection: rape is good because the offender avoids rejection from women	2.6 (3)
e.g., "no chance of rejection"; "you don't feel rejected"	
Relationship Avoidance: rape is good because the offender does not have to invest in a relationship	2.6 (3)
e.g., "I don't have to waste time on doing nice things for her"; "you save time and money from dating"	
Bragging: rape is good because post offence the offender can brag about his sexual accomplishments	0.8 (1)
e.g., "to brag to friends"	
Negative Attitudes Towards Rape (One NEGATIVE thing about forcing a woman to have sex is…)	
Repercussions: rape is bad because the offender may suffer legal repercussions	**40.8 (60)**
e.g., "you end up in jail"; "you get arrested and lose your job"; "you get in trouble"	
Harm: rape is bad because the victim may be physically or mentally harmed	**21.1 (31)**
e.g., "she could be hurt"; "I wouldn't want anyone to do it to my mother/sister/daughter"	
Shunned: rape is bad because the offender may be shunned post offence	10.2 (15)
e.g., "people treat you different after you've gone to jail"; "people call you names"	
Negative Emotions: rape is bad because the offender may experience negative emotions (guilt, shame, remorse) post offence	8.8 (13)
e.g., "feel ashamed afterwards"; "I hate myself for it"; "guilt/shame afterwards"	
Fear: rape is bad because it makes victims and members of the community fearful	4.8 (7)
e.g., "fear from victim"; "it ruins their ability to trust men"; "people don't feel safe"	
Immoral: rape is bad because it is immoral	3.4 (5)
e.g., "they shouldn't have to do something they don't want to"; "it's wrong"	
Disappointment: rape is bad because the offender may find the offence to be disappointing	2.0 (3)
e.g., "I want them to squirm and scream but they don't very often do that"; "it isn't as satisfying as I hoped"	
Excuses for Rape (Forcing a woman to have sex is NOT REALLY YOUR FAULT IF…)	
Promiscuity: rape is not the offender's fault if the victim was acting promiscuously, dressed provocatively, or if she consented to some sexual behaviour but not sexual intercourse	**38.1 (61)**
e.g., "they really wanted it and just said no after they got me worked up"	
Intoxicated: rape is not the offender's fault if either the perpetrator or victim is intoxicated	**17.5 (28)**
e.g., "she was drinking"; "I have been using drugs or alcohol"	
Sexual Beings: rape is not the offender's fault because women are always sexually receptive	9.4 (15)
e.g., "she wanted it"; "she really wanted it and was playing games with me"	
Resistance: rape is not the offender's fault if the victim did not resist enough	5.6 (9)
e.g., "she doesn't say no"; "she only said 'no' a couple of times"	
Previous Partner: rape is not the offender's fault if the victim was a previously consenting sexual partner	5.0 (8)
e.g., "we are OR were married"; "she is your wife and consented before"	
Certain Types of Women: rape is not the offender's fault if it is perpetrated against certain types of women	3.8 (6)
e.g., "she was a prostitute"; "if she had been raped before"	

Excuses for Rape (Continued)	
Hostility Towards Women: rape is not the offender's fault if the victim/women are perceived as mean, manipulative, or aggressive	2.5 (4)
e.g., "she is a bitch to me"; "they were going to do something mean to me anyway"	
Investment: rape is not the offender's fault if he has invested something (e.g., money, time) in the victim	2.5 (4)
e.g., "you take her out on a date"; "she lets me buy her drinks and food"	
Anger: rape is not the offender's fault if the victim made him angry	1.9 (3)
e.g., "you were really angry"; "she made me angry"; "she rejected me when I wanted to have sex"	
Sexual/Physical Abuse: rape is not the offender's fault if he was sexually or physically abused as a child	1.9 (3)
e.g., "I was physically abused as a child"; "I was sexually abused as a child"	
Mental Illness: rape is not the offender's fault if he suffers from a mental illness	0.6 (1)
e.g., "you were insane at the time"	
Justifications for Rape (Forcing a woman to have sex is NOT THAT BAD IF…)	
No Harm: rape is not that bad if the victim doesn't suffer physical or mental harm	**18.4 (25)**
e.g., "I didn't hit her"; "she didn't really get hurt"; "she does not cry or show distress"	
Previous Partner: rape is not that bad if the victim is a previously consenting sexual partner	**14.0 (19)**
e.g., "you had sex with her before"; "she is your girlfriend/wife"; "she had sex with me before"	
Certain Types of Women: rape is not that bad if it only happens to certain types of women	**11.0 (15)**
e.g., "if she's been raped before"; "she's not a virgin"	
Intoxicated rape is not that bad if either the offender or victim was intoxicated	10.3 (14)
e.g., "she's drunk - she didn't know about it"; "we were using alcohol or drugs"	
Promiscuity: rape is not that bad when the victim is perceived as promiscuous, is dressed provocatively, or if she consented to some sexual behaviour but not sexual intercourse	10.3 (14)
e.g., "she initially was enjoying it"; "she frequently has sex with many men"	
Resistance: rape is not that bad if the victim did not resist hard enough	7.4 (10)
e.g., "she didn't say no"; "they didn't resist as much as they could have"	
Sexual Beings: rape is not that bad because women are always sexually receptive	6.6 (9)
e.g., "because sometimes some women really like rough sex"; "she sexually responded to me"	
Repercussions: rape is not that bad if there are no legal repercussions	5.2 (7)
e.g., "you don't get caught"; "she does not report it to the police"; "if she doesn't tell"	
Investment: rape is not that bad if the offender invested something (e.g., time, money) in the victim	3.7 (5)
e.g., "she owed me already (for other favours that I did for her, e.g., fix her car, etc)"	
Punishment: rape is not that bad if it used as a form of punishment	2.2 (3)
e.g., "she pissed me off/fucked me over (e.g., over money, property…)"; "the victim is a bitch"	
Group: rape is not that bad if it is committed as part of a group	0.7 (1)
e.g., "a group of us did it"	

Note. Frequencies = the number of statements for that theme divided by the total number of statements for that type of item stem. Each cognition type also had the categories "other" (miscellaneous items) and "non-applicable" (items that did not fit the item stem), as a result the percentages do not add up to 100%.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

•These findings suggest that the sentiments expressed by rapists can be readily conceptualized by clinicians as reflecting attitudes, excuses, or justifications.

•Similar themes were present across cognition types, suggesting the same cognition themes (e.g., promiscuity) can serve different functions (Ward et al., 2006).

•For themes that are present across cognition types, self-report measures of cognitive distortions may assess multiple types of cognition (e.g., items assessing *Sexual Beings* cognitions may tap into positive attitudes, excuses, and justifications).

•The most frequent cognition theme differed across cognition type. The most frequent type for positive attitudes was *Pleasure*; for negative attitudes it was *Repercussions*; for excuses it was *Promiscuity*, and for justifications it was *No Harm*. These findings suggest certain cognition themes may more readily serve particular functions.

•Future research should replicate this study with a sample of rapists, as well as develop a reliable and valid measure of these different cognitive constructs to explore their relationship with sexual aggression. This work would provide insight regarding the role of each of these cognitive constructs in sexual aggression, which would be relevant for risk assessment and treatment.