The Effect of Sexual Arousal on Rapists’ Implicit Attitudes and Explicit Cognitive Distortions toward Rape

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We would like to thank the members of the Aggressive Cognitions and Behaviour research lab at Carleton University for their support throughout this project.
Rape-related cognitions are theoretically and empirically related to rape (e.g., Bumby, 1996; DeGue & DiLillo, 2004; Hall & Hirschmann, 1991; Lanier, 2001; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004; Polaschek & Ward, 2002).

Attitudes fall within the cognitions construct.

Attitudes toward rape have received little empirical attention.
Implicit vs. Explicit cognition

Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998)
Sexual arousal theoretically plays a role in the sex offence process (e.g., Self-Regulation Model of Sex Offending; Ward & Hudson, 2000).

Sexually aroused participants report they are more likely to be sexually aggressive (Ariely & Loewenstein, 2006; Loewenstein et al., 1997).

Importance of sexual assault benefits may mediate the link between sexual arousal and sexual coercion (Bouffard, 2002).
Rape-related cognitions are theoretically and empirically important to the study of rape.

There are two types of cognition: Implicit and Explicit.

Sexual arousal is a motivational state that plays a theoretical role in the sex offence process.

Sexual arousal influences:
- Reported likelihood of rape
- May be mediated by evaluations of sexual assault benefits
How does sexual arousal influence implicit attitudes and explicit cognitive distortions toward rape in rapist and non-sex offender populations?
Participants

- **Incarcerated Rapists** ($n = 24$):
  - Sexually motivated offence with a female victim equal to or greater than 16 years old
  - Recruited from federal institutions in Ontario, Canada

- **Non Sex Offenders** ($n = 12$):
  - No evidence of committing a sex offence
  - Recruited from federal institutions and a maximum security mental health facility in Ontario, Canada
Measures

- **Rape Evaluation IAT (RE-IAT):**
  - Implicit attitudes toward rape relative to consenting sex

- **Bumby RAPE Scale:**
  - Explicit cognitive distortions
Manipulation

- **Sexual Arousal**
  - Audio recording read by female
  - 2 minute Penthouse story
  - Consensual and mutually satisfying heterosexual sexual encounter

- **Neutral**
  - Audio recording read by female
  - 2 minute story about a man grocery shopping
Background Questionnaire

- RE-IAT
- Bumby RAPE Scale

Manipulation Check

- File Review

Sexual Arousal

Neutral

RE-IAT

Bumby RAPE Scale

Counter Balance
# Participants

### Table 1

**Participants’ Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rapist Arousal</th>
<th>Rapist Neutral</th>
<th>Non Sex Offender Arousal</th>
<th>Non Sex Offender Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean Age Category (SD)</strong></td>
<td>35-39 (1.52)</td>
<td>35-39 (1.66)</td>
<td>30-34 (1.17)</td>
<td>30-34 (1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Has Grade 8 Education % (n)</strong></td>
<td>92.30% (12)</td>
<td>100% (11)</td>
<td>100% (6)</td>
<td>100% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Had a Victim Under 16 yrs old % (n)</strong></td>
<td>30.77% (4)</td>
<td>36.36% (4)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any SO Treatment % (n)</strong></td>
<td>53.85% (7)</td>
<td>63.64% (7)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Static -99 M (SD)</strong></td>
<td>5.50 (1.27)</td>
<td>6.28 (2.50)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Sexual Arousal and Implicit Attitudes toward Rape

- Rapist Arousal (d = 0.66, 95% CI 0.14 to 1.17)
- Rapist Neutral (d = 0.57, 95% CI 0.02 to 1.12)
- Non Sex Offender Arousal (d = 0.40, 95% CI -0.23 to 1.02)
- Non Sex Offender Neutral (d = 0.38, 95% CI -0.31 to 1.08)
Figure 2
Sexual Arousal and Implicit Attitudes Towards Rape when Treatment and Effectiveness of Arousal Manipulation are Controlled.

- **Rapist Arousal**
  - $d = 0.87$, 95% CI -0.15 to 1.88

- **Rapist Neutral**
  - $d = -0.16$, 95% CI -0.82 to 0.50

*Note: n = 4 in each group*
Results

Sexual Arousal and Explicit Cognitions towards Rape

- Rapist Arousal (d = -0.57, 95%CI -0.98 to -0.17)
- Rapist Neutral (d = -0.16, 95%CI -0.80 to 0.49)
- Non Sex Offender Arousal (d = -0.26, 95%CI -0.65 to 0.13)
- Non Sex Offender Neutral (d = -0.28, 95% CI -0.82 to 0.27)
**Results**

*Figures 4*

**Differences between Rapists and Non Sex Offenders on Pre Manipulation Implicit Attitudes and Explicit Cognitions toward Rape**

**Differences**

- Rapists: $d = -0.58; 95\%CI -1.28$ to $0.13$
- Non Sex Offenders: $d = -1.15$ to $-1.30$

**Graphs**

- Left: RE-1AT D Scores
- Right: Bumby RAPE Scale
Discussion

- When sexually aroused rapists implicitly evaluate rape less negatively
  > Consistent with theories of rape that suggest sexual arousal plays a role in the offence process

- When sexually aroused rapists endorse less cognitive distortions on the Bumby RAPE Scale
  > Unexpected
  > Could be because some of the cognitive distortions are not relevant to the goal of obtaining sex
Limitations

- Small Sample Size
- Effectiveness of Sexual Arousal Manipulation
- Generalizability of sample
References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Number of Trials</th>
<th>Left Key Categories</th>
<th>Right Key Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>Consenting Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Rape &amp; Positive</td>
<td>Consenting Sex &amp; Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Rape &amp; Positive</td>
<td>Consenting Sex &amp; Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Consenting Sex</td>
<td>Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B6</td>
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<td>Rape &amp; Negative</td>
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<tr>
<td>B7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Consenting Sex &amp; Positive</td>
<td>Rape &amp; Negative</td>
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*Note. Blocks 3 and 4 are counterbalanced with Blocks 6 and 7 and Blocks 1 and 5 are counterbalanced with each other, between participants.*
RE-IAT

- Evaluates implicit attitudes toward rape relative to consenting sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rape</th>
<th>Consenting Sex</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Force</td>
<td>Consent</td>
<td>Vacation</td>
<td>Rotten</td>
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<td>Mutual</td>
<td>Rainbow</td>
<td>Poison</td>
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<td>Smile</td>
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<td>Permission</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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