

## Does Rape-Related Cognition Predict Subsequent Sexually Aggressive Behavior?

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## COGNITIONS REGARDING RAPE

- Considered important risk factors in the initiation and maintenance of sexually aggressive behavior
- Many measures have been developed to assess cognitions regarding rape (e.g., RAPE scale; Bumby, 1996)
- *Cognition regarding rape* is commonly defined as encompassing several constructs such as:
  - Attitudes, Excuses, Justifications, etc...

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## DEFINING THESE COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTS

- Attitudes
  - Evaluations of psychological objects (Ajzen, 2001; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fazio, 2007)
  - E.g., Rape is positive
- Excuses
  - Cognitions that minimize offenders' responsibility for the event (Scott & Lyman, 1968)
  - E.g., Rape is not my fault because...
- Justifications
  - Cognitions that minimize the harm or wrongfulness of the event (Scott & Lyman, 1968)
  - E.g., Rape is not that bad because...

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## ARE THESE COGNITIONS DISTINCT?

- Nunes, Hermann, White, Pettersen, & Bumby (2016) found
  - Measure of cognitions regarding rape formed a distinct factor from measure of attitudes
  - Both were independently associated with sexually aggressive behavior
- Maimone, Hermann, & Nunes (2015) found
  - Measure of cognitions regarding rape formed separate subscales reflecting distinct cognitions (i.e., attitudes/justifications and excuses)
- Distinctions may be useful for understanding sexually aggressive behavior (i.e., different cognitions may play different roles).

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## SEXUAL AGGRESSION: ATTITUDES, JUSTIFICATIONS, AND EXCUSES (SAAJE)

- SAAJE (Hermann & Nunes, 2012) items reflect the following cognitions:
  - Positive Attitudes towards Rape
    - “One POSITIVE thing about forcing a woman to have sex is...”
  - Negative Attitudes towards Rape
    - “One NEGATIVE thing about forcing a woman to have sex is...”
  - Excuses for Rape
    - “Forcing a woman to have sex is NOT REALLY YOUR FAULT IF...”
  - Justifications for Rape
    - “Forcing a woman to have sex is NOT THAT BAD IF...”
- Scores for each item range from (1) completely disagree to (5) completely agree
- Items summed for a total score for each subscale

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## CURRENT SAAJE SUBSCALES

- Maimone, Hermann, and Nunes (2015) found 3 scales according to previous analysis (33 Items)
  - Factor 1: Justifications/Positive Attitudes (14 items)
    - Scores range from 14 to 70
  - Factor 2: Excuses (11 items)
    - Scores range from 11 to 55
  - Factor 3: Negative Attitudes (8 items)
    - Scores range from 8 to 40

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## PRIOR RESEARCH USING SAAJE SCALES

• Maimone, Hermann, and Nunes (2015) found:

*All three distinct SAAJE factors were independently related to likelihood of sexual aggression but...*

*NOT prior sexual aggression*

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## CURRENT STUDY

*Do the SAAJE subscales predict subsequent sexually aggressive behavior*

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## METHOD

### Participants

- Recruited from the community through Qualtrics (\$2.00 compensation)
- Wave 1: N = 617 heterosexual, males
- Wave 2: N = 263 heterosexual, males
- Final sample (who completed scales of interest): N = 122 participants with follow-up data
- 64.7% (N = 41) were 60 years of age or older, 85.2% (N = 104) were white, and 1.6% (N = 2) completed university/college

### Measures

- SAAJE questionnaire (Hermann & Nunes, 2012)
- Modified version of the Sexual Experience Survey Tactics First (SES-TF; Abbey, Parkhill, & Koss, 2005)

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## SEXUALLY AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR (SES-TFR; MODIFIED SCALE FROM ABBEY, PARKHILL, & KOSS, 2005)

The revised scales asked about the following:

- Six Sexual Acts
  - Ranging from kissing to oral/vaginal/anal penetration
- Six Sexually Aggressive Tactics
  - Ranging from verbal pressure to physical assault
- Used to assess sexually aggressive behavior
  - $\alpha = .97$  in community male sample (Hermann, Nunes, & Maimone, 2016)

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## SES-TFR: PRIOR SEXUAL AGGRESSION

- Asked about frequency of previous perpetration (sample item below)

**How many times since you were 16 years old...**

*When a woman was passed out or too drunk to give permission or stop what was happening...*

- a) have you ever fondled, kissed, or sexually touched her without her permission

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
 Never Nine times or more

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## SES-TFR: SUBSEQUENT SEXUAL AGGRESSION

- Asked about perpetration in the 4 months since first administration (sample item below)

**How many times in the last four months...**

*When a woman was passed out or too drunk to give permission or stop what was happening...*

- a) have you ever fondled, kissed, or sexually touched her without her permission

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
 Never Nine times or more

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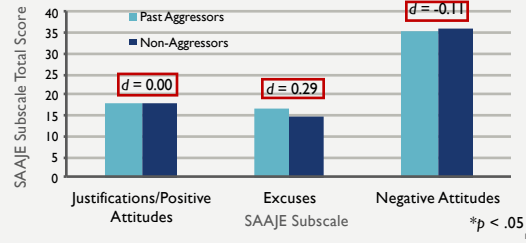
## PARTICIPANT GROUPS

- Non-aggressors ( $n = 63$ )
  - Reported no sexually aggressive behavior at Wave 1 and Wave 2
- Past aggressors ( $n = 42$ )
  - Reported sexual aggression at Wave 1 but NOT at Wave 2
- Current aggressors ( $n = 17$ )
  - Reported sexual aggression at Wave 2

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## RESULTS

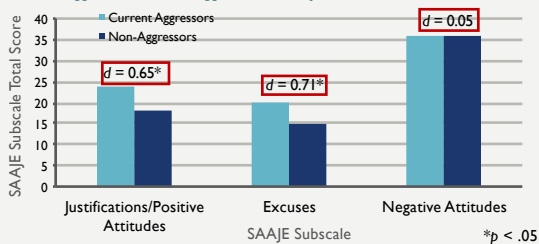
- Conventions for Cohen's  $d$  are 0.2 = small, 0.5 = moderate, and 0.8 = large
- Past Aggressors and Non-Aggressors on SAAJE Subscales



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## RESULTS

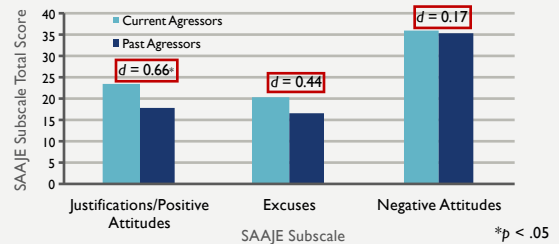
- Current Aggressors and Non-Aggressors on SAAJE Subscales



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## RESULTS

- Current Aggressors and Past Aggressors on SAAJE Subscales



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## SUMMARY

- Past aggressors did not differ from non-aggressors on justifications/positive attitudes or negative attitudes towards rape
- Past aggressors endorsed slightly more excuses for rape than non-aggressors
- Current aggressors endorsed moderately more justifications/positive attitudes towards rape and excuses for rape than non-aggressors and past aggressors
- None of the groups differed in negative attitudes towards rape

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## LIMITATIONS

- Reliance on self-report measures of sexual aggression
  - But, antisocial behaviors can accurately be assessed with self-report measures (e.g., Mathie & Wakeling, 2011; Thornberry & Krohn, 2000; Woods, Hermann, Nunes, McPhail, & Sewell, 2011)
- Small sample size
  - Low power
  - Generalizability?
  - Representativeness of sample?
- No manipulation of variables
  - Does not permit causal inferences

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## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Replication of results with larger samples and offenders
- Use more diverse measures of behavior (i.e., criminal records) rather than solely self-report
- Replication with more sophisticated research methodology
  - E.g., Experimental designs

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## CONCLUSIONS

*Justifications/positive attitudes towards rape and excuses for rape may be predictive of sexually aggressive behavior*

*And...*

*these cognitions may be important to consider when estimating risk of future sexual aggression.*

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## THANK YOU!

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### Questions?

More about our research  
Aggressive Cognitions and Behaviour Research Lab  
<http://www.carleton.ca/acbrlab/>

Maimone, S., Hermann, C.A., & Nunes, K. L. (2016, November). Does Rape-Related Cognition Predict Subsequent Sexually Aggressive Behavior? In K. L. Nunes (Chair), *Cognitions About Women and Rape*. Symposium to be presented at the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Research and Treatment Conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Orlando, Florida.

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