The Effect of Mood on Attitudes Towards Sexual Aggression

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INTRODUCTION

- Theory and empirical evidence suggest a link between mood and sexual offending (Hudson, Ward, & McCormack, 1999; Polaschek & Hudson, 2004) as well as a link between attitudes and sexual offending (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002).
- There is evidence that anger affects attitudes towards rape (Nunes, Ratcliffe, Babchishin, & Kessous, 2006) and is related to sexually aggressive behaviour (Hanson & Harris, 2000).
- We suggest that moods influence attitudes, and attitudes may in turn influence behaviour.
- This study is designed to test the extent to which moods influence attitudes towards sexual aggression.

Hypothesis: Anger will lead to more positive implicit attitudes towards rape.

METHODS

Participants: 172 male university students completed a battery of computer based tasks and questionnaires after listening to a music mood induction procedure.
- They were all heterosexual, English speaking males.
- Median age category was 19-20.
- Groups did not significantly differ on levels of past sexual coercion.

RESULTS

The simple effect of mood
- When participants received the consenting sex + positive phase first, there was no significant differences between mood groups.
- When participants received the rape + positive pairing in the first phase of the RE-IAT, there was a significant difference between the neutral versus angry mood conditions.

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DISCUSSION

- These experimental findings provide some evidence for a causal influence of negative mood on attitudes towards rape. These findings are consistent with theory and correlational research implicating negative affect in sexual aggression.
- The difference between the sad and neutral mood conditions under the rape + positive pairing is approaching significance.
- The results of this study also provide support for the use of affect regulation treatment programs with sexual offenders.
- These results raise the question of whether attitudes may mediate the relationship between mood and sexual offending.

Limitations

- Student sample
  - May not generalize to offender population
- Mood manipulation was only moderately effective
  - 56% of participants could identify the emotion of the music they listened to.
- However, only 42% of participants felt a mood that was congruent with their assigned mood condition while listening to the music.
- In spite of the moderate effectiveness of the mood manipulation, moderate to large effects of mood on implicit attitudes towards rape were still found for some conditions.

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