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Similarities between men and women in non-traditional aggressive sexuality: Prevalence, novel approaches to assessment and treatment applications

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Abstract *Surveys and focus groups were administered to two samples of US university undergraduates to compare sexual aggression prevalence as assessed based on the Power-Assertion model ($n = 139$) versus the Confluence model ($n = 318$). Men were more likely to commit all illegal acts, especially conventional rape. Women also committed illegal acts, especially non-traditional behaviours such as forcing the victim to initiate sexual contact. Men and women committed similar rates of verbal coercion. However, conventional lying and pressuring were not as common as harassing someone through e-mails/calls, manipulating the victim's social network, stalking and using pledges, bets or dares. The Confluence model was found to fit the data more effectively. We must expand beyond traditional conceptualizations of perpetrators, behaviours and treatment methods to address the current state of affairs. Non-traditional notions were especially valuable as they were based on the comments of young adults about what was missing from the traditional perspective.*

Keywords *sexual aggression; gender; sex; college; prevalence; assessment; perpetration*

Introduction

In modern society, sexual aggression seems to be the norm rather than the exception. Of college women, 34–70% report experiencing some form of sexual coercion by their first year of college (Harned, 2004; Himelein, Vogel & Wachowiak, 1994; Kelley & Parsons, 2000; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). From adolescence to the last year of college, 88% of women reported being threatened, physically abused or sexually violated while 63% reported experiencing all three (Smith, White & Holland, 2003). Men are also commonly victimized. Studies estimate that between 3% and 16% of men experience sexual victimization perpetrated by another man during their lifetime (Cameron, Proctor, Coburn, Forde, Larson & Cameron, 1986; Coxell et al., 1999; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1990; Sorenson, Stein, Siegel, Golding & Burnam, 1987; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994). Approximately 70% of male students reported experiencing some type of harassment, pressuring or coercion by a woman (Fiebert & Tucci, 1998); 8–29% of college men reported

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experiencing unwanted sexual contact with a woman due to verbal or physical coercion (Baier, Rosenzweig & Whipple, 1991; Burke, Stets & Pirog-Good, 1988; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1993); and approximately 10% experienced a completed sexual assault by a heterosexual partner during college (Hannon, Kuntz, Van Laar & Williams, 1996).

Although sexual aggression has remained present across the ages (Brownmiller, 1975; Koss & Gidycz, 1985; Sisco, Becker, Figueredo & Sales, 2006), the nature of the problem seems to have shifted in recent years, specifically in terms of sex norms. For the past three decades, sexual aggression has been viewed by feminist scholars as the result of a societal problem based on the male subjugation of women through emotional, sexual and physical domination (Brownmiller, 1975). In this capacity, men were viewed as probable perpetrators and victimization was defined by the man's aggressive role in the pursuit of unwelcome contact, usually in the form of penetration of the victim. This conception, referred to henceforth as the "Power-Assertion model," has shaped society's awareness and resistance efforts substantially with regard to sexual violence during past decades in addition to our assessment methods; however, it no longer seems to encompass the full spectrum of aggressive sexuality. As illustrated by the prevalence rates provided above, male and female college students have recently reported participating in behaviours that contrast this iconic image of the forceful male perpetrator (Sisco et al., 2006). These behaviours include women pressuring partners for sex, victims being pressured to be the active sexual initiator while the perpetrator is in a passive role (e.g. women being pressured to interact sexually with other women), technological, social networking and in-person sexually motivated stalking, using pledges, dares or bets to force the victim to perform unwanted sexual behaviours and knowingly exposing unsuspecting partners to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). When the non-traditional acts listed above are omitted from contemporary assessment, data are susceptible to significant underreporting, especially by non-traditional aggressors, such as women.

The Confluence model conceptualized by Malamuth (1998) posits that aggressive sexuality is an interpersonal tool used by both men and women. Malamuth theorized that sexual aggression occurs due to the combination of two causal influences: sexual promiscuity/preoccupation and a tendency towards general aggression. In other words, individuals who tend to enact aggression who are also highly sexually focused are more likely to enact sexual aggression than those low on either or both traits. Although men generally exhibit more sexual aggression, the Confluence model stipulates that this is solely because men have higher levels of these two risk factors than women; perpetrators are simply more sexually preoccupied and more aggressive.

There is an equal amount of variation in sexual preoccupation occurring between men and women and within each sex (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990). Both men and women vary greatly on their level of sexual preoccupation and the ways in which they view sex; there are highly conservative men and women and highly liberal men and women. Although there is a larger proportion of men who have greater preoccupation with sex, many women are also highly sexually preoccupied. Thus, a full spectrum of male and female sexual aggressors is to be expected according to the Confluence model, which contradicts the gender-based Power-Assertion model. It is unclear whether this theoretical shift reflects a change in gender roles, as evidenced in an increase in women sexually aggressing and self-reporting such acts or whether it captures previously undetected acts simply because the assessment is approached differently.

The present study compared assessment instruments modeled on the Power-Assertion model of sexual aggression, which focuses on the male subjugation of women, and the Confluence model, which focuses on a broader gender-non-specific conceptualization of sexual aggression. The assessment instruments are compared and contrasted in light of their

theoretical roots. Resulting prevalence findings are presented and contrasted based on their theoretical differences. Finally, the findings are interpreted in light of their clinical importance. For the purposes of this study, behaviours will be divided into two categories: (1) legally prohibited acts—acts that, if acknowledged in a court of law, would be punished; and (2) inappropriate acts—acts that make the recipient feel uncomfortable yet do not violate any laws.

Representative assessment instruments

Power/control-based instrument

The Sexual Experience Survey (SES) (Koss & Oros, 1982) was the first assessment instrument developed to assess the prevalence of aggressive sexual behaviours; it has been considered the “gold standard” of the Power-Assertion model for the past 25 years (Koss & Gidycz, 1985; Koss, Gidycz & Wisniewski, 1987). The revised version, the Sexual Experiences Survey—Long Form of Perpetration (SES-LFP) (Koss & SES Collaboration, 2005), is comprised of 102 items including 88 items concerning attempted or completed oral, vaginal or anal rape (six acts with 11 possible tactics of perpetration such as drugging, force, while the person was intoxicated, etc.) and 14 items regarding lesser forms of unwanted behaviour, including sexual spying, unwanted touching, public sexual acts, coercion and harassment. The SES-LFP subscales are noted in Table I (a and b). The SES-LFP produced adequate inter-item consistency ($\alpha = 0.84$) for men and women. However, women alone exhibited markedly lower inter-item consistency which may be an indication of a sex role-bias or a chaotic pattern of female perpetration ($\alpha = 0.60$) ($n = 138$, 43% female) (Sisco & Koss, 2006). It must be noted that some male respondents commented that their experiences were not captured fully by the instrument and some female respondents indicated that they felt the items were written mainly for men, and thus refrained from responding to a number of items. The main purpose of the SES-LFP is to determine the lifetime and annual prevalence and incidence rates of perpetration.

Confluence-based instrument

The Sexual Acts and Perceptions Inventory (SAPI) (Sisco & Figueredo, 2006) was developed in response to feedback regarding the purposed yet narrow scope of the SES-LFP. From anecdotal stories of students and colleagues, a list of novel behaviours marked the creation of the SAPI. The newly included legally prohibited behaviours include: forcing the victim to initiate sexual contact, forceful sexual trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping in a romantic context, intimate force and interactions with a minor (see Table Ia). The novel inappropriate behaviours include: social manipulation, romantic stalking, pressure through the pledge process, bets or dares and having unprotected sex while infected with an STD (see Table Ib). It must be noted that some of the newly included illegal and inappropriate events may not be traditionally considered as sexual wrongdoings; however, previous respondents reported experiencing variations of these acts during unwanted sexual encounters as a perpetrator attempted to attain control.

The SAPI items that represent the traditional acts of the Power-Assertion model (i.e. all legally prohibited acts, sexual coercion and sexual harassment) rendered the inter-item reliability of $\alpha = 0.96$. There was no substantial drop in reliability when the sexes were divided. The novel actions describe non-traditional behaviours and thus did not load well on the “traditional aggression factor”. These items remained in the instrument for clinical merit. In

Table I. *Legally prohibited acts and inappropriate acts subscales.*

(a) Legally prohibited acts		
SES-LFP		SAPI
Public sexual indecency—masturbated in public location	Same	
Sexual abuse—made contact with a person's breasts, buttocks or private area without the person's consent	Same with the inclusion of rubbing against and kissing a person's face, hands, or neck without permission	
Attempted vaginal rape—made contact with the vagina with an object or body part but did not penetrate without consent	Same	
Vaginal rape—penetrated the vagina with an object or body part without consent	Same	
Attempted anal rape—made contact with the anus with an object or body part but did not penetrate without consent	Same	
Anal rape—penetrated the vagina with an object or body part without consent	Same	
Sexual trespass—videotaped a person or watched the person undress without permission	Same with the inclusion of posting intimate images to the internet or sharing with friends without permission	
	Active victim—sexual abuse—forced victim to disrobe or flash, orally or manually contacted the penis or vagina of the victim, forced victim to masturbate himself in front of me	
	Active victim—passive rape—victim forced to penetrate the perpetrator vaginally or anally or to perform oral sex, masturbate self	
	Sex trafficking/pimping—by force or pressure supervising or aiding a prostitute in the craft	
	Prostitution—performing or receiving sexual actions for money	
	Kidnapping—restricting someone through physical force, blocking an exit, controlling the situation (e.g. not stopping the car for the victim to get out), or taking the victim to an isolated location against their will	
	Intimate domestic violence—slapping, pushing, strangling, kicking or hurting a romantic partner inflicting harm or leaving marks	
	Sex contact with minors—any sexual behaviour knowingly involving a person under 18	
(b) Inappropriate acts subscales		
SES-LFP		SAPI
Verbal coercion—lying, pressuring or threatening harm or rumours to attain contact	Same	
Overt sexual harassment—unwanted sexual comments, gestures, or jokes show porno pictures or sent obscene e-mails	Same	
	Manipulative social strategy—spread rumours, told about the person's private or sexual information, gained access through manipulatively befriending the person's friends, showed others sexual pictures of a person; socially isolated the person from their support	

Table I (Continued)

Romantic stalking—calling repeatedly, leaving voice messages repeatedly, e-mailed repeatedly, put the person on a listserve/junkmail list, took the person's undergarments or some other personal object

Pledges, bets, dares or jokes—had someone do a "silly" sexual act such as streaking or body shots or personally performed a sexual contact with another or exposure of body parts such as the genitalia or breasts to fulfill a pledge, bet or joke)

Knowingly passing STD

SAPI: Sexual Acts and Perceptions Inventory; SES/LFP: Sexual Experience Survey/Long Form of Perpetration; STD: sexually transmitted disease.

total, the SAPI consists of 133 items; 32 items assess inappropriate behaviours while 76 assess legally prohibited acts (14 acts were included with a varying number of strategies, which may be employed to enact them), and the remaining 25 items require the respondent to identify the difference between acts of consent versus objection in accordance with the standard definition. The strategies employed are similar to the "tactics" enlisted by the SES-LFP (i.e. pursuing someone who is unwilling or unable to consent due to state of awareness, intoxication or fear); however, the SES-LFP includes an option of "group perpetration" which the SAPI does not, and the SAPI included the strategy of using pledges, bets or dares which the SES-LFP did not. Visually, the SAPI lists a series of acts followed by two response columns. A participant would see an act such as: "Watched a person undress or in a sex act without the person knowing" and respond to the requests in both columns: column 1 "number of times in past year, 0: never, 1: once, 2: twice, 3: three or more times"; and column 2 "how much consent did the person give you? 0: no consent, 1: not clear, 2: slight consent, 3: full consent, 9: not applicable—didn't do this". The specific instructions given to the respondent are: "The following behaviours have been found to occur on college campuses. Please circle the selection that best describes your experiences in the past year. Please answer as honestly as possible, though, if some of these questions make you feel too uncomfortable, feel free to skip them. Note: *Consent* refers to the other party agreeing to participate in the act through verbal or physical affirmation."

Unlike the SES-LFP, the SAPI employs submerged scales to determine the aggressor's level of cognitive distortion, the justification an aggressor uses to undermine the significance of his/her actions. There are 21 items that signify total objection represented by an explicit "no" or physical resistance. If the respondent reported that he/she continued a sexual act after the recipient said "no" and/or physically resisted yet reported that the recipient had given some degree of consent, it implies that the respondent is cognitively distorted. From a treatment perspective, the highly distorted individual's risk to the community would be decreased substantially through intensive psychoeducation regarding appropriate sexual boundaries and communication. On the other hand, if a person enacted unwanted sexual behaviours with a full awareness of the nature of his/her behaviour, he/she may not benefit from psychoeducation. This second category of individual must be assessed rigorously and treated for the underlying dysfunction causing the behaviour to continue. These dysfunctions may include sexual addiction, empathy deficit, personality flaws such as the construct of psychopathy, anger and/or brain injury associated with inability to control impulses.

Comparing the SES-LFP and the SAPI: same focus, different purpose

The SES-LFP and SAPI both provide incidence and prevalence information on conventional definitions of sexual aggression. Both assess various modalities of perpetration (e.g. drugging versus force) of behaviourally specific actions (i.e. penetration of the vagina as opposed to rape). Despite similarity in structure, the tools are based on two distinct perspectives on aggressive sexuality in theory and in purpose. The SES-LFP serves a public health perspective, while the SAPI was designed to address a clinical perspective; it provides incidence rates and treatment relevant information such as: (a) one’s view of consent by definition versus application during their own experiences and (b) the perpetrator’s level of cognitive distortion associated with each style of aggressing. Table II presents the differences between the two instruments.

Method

The data utilized in this manuscript originated from a series of studies based on improving campus prevention efforts. The first study utilized the SES-LFP. Comments regarding the SES-LFP resulted ultimately in the formation of the SAPI (see Sisco et al., 2006), which was piloted in the second study (see Gladden, Sisco & Figueredo, in press). It must be noted that

Table II. *Differences between Power-Assertion and Confluence models*

Descriptor	SES	SAPI
	Power assertion traits	Confluence traits
Originating field	Public health	Clinical psychology
Purpose	Prevalence research	Prevalence and treatment aid
Population	Community	Community and forensic
Language	Formal with informal interjections	Youth-based informal
Response categories	Since age 14: 1, 2, 3 + times Past year: 1, 2, 3 + times	Past year: ___ times and Level of consent: None → Full
No. of items	102	108 (nine new items are being piloted)
Sample item	I had vaginal sex with a woman or penetrated her vagina with an object other than fingers after I encouraged and pressured them to drink until they were too incapacitated to object or consent *Vaginal intercourse means that you inserted <i>your penis</i> into a vagina, even if you did not <i>ejaculate (cum)</i>	Penetrated the vagina of a person with an object or body part such as a finger or penis when the person was high or drunk
Stylistic differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conventional conception of sexual violence “the penetrator is the perpetrator” ● Gender-based items including gender specific terms such as those listed above, “your penis” or “ejaculate”—women left the majority of these items blank ● Created by a collaboration of 10 experts ● Transparent measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Generation X conception including technological invasiveness, victim being forced to be the aggressor and different forms of social manipulation. ● Gender-neutral universal conceptions of violation of sexual boundaries resulting in minimal missing data ● Created through student feedback during debriefings and focus groups ● Submerged scales to assess distortion

the methods are essentially the same. The same styles of classrooms at the same university during the autumn of two consecutive years were employed. In both, first- and second-year undergraduate students enrolled in Introductory Psychology were recruited through the experimental participation website to participate in a study about sexual behaviours. In both, students answered questions anonymously and received the same amount of class credit for participating without any monetary reimbursement. The only difference between the studies was the series of questionnaires. However, the questionnaires in both studies requested information about sexual boundaries and social morays. The methods are as follows.

Study 1

Participants were 78 male and 60 female undergraduate students (average years of education = 1.8) enrolled in Introductory Psychology at the University of Arizona, which required participation in a self-selected experiment or a review paper alternative. Participants responded to questionnaires, one of which was the SES-LFP. Students mean age was 19 (range 18–41); race was 11% Hispanic, 3% black, 3% Asian, 73% white and 10% other. One participant was omitted due to missing data. Upon completion of the questionnaires, each student was given an explanation of the study, information about sexual aggression and the opportunity to share thoughts about the theory, merit of the research, its strengths and its shortcomings in the group debriefing sessions which consisted typically of 10–20 students. In addition, each participant was given the opportunity to mention personal experiences or feelings that were raised as a result of the study during a private debriefing meeting. The information obtained from the participants' comments was used in the formation of the SAPI and the second study.

Study 2

In the subsequent year, using the same method, 178 male and 140 female participants were administered a series of questionnaires, one of which was the SAPI. Participant age, education level and racial distribution were almost identical to those of Study 1 and the university's total population. It must be noted that only students enrolled in the Introductory Psychology course were invited to participate in the study; the experiment registration system required participants to have a current course identification number to take part. In addition, the only compensation available for participation pertains to the course requirements; no monetary reimbursement was available. As such, it is highly unlikely that students from the previous year participated in the experiment twice. Six participants were omitted due to missing data.

Results and discussion

Differences in reporting

In previous studies, more students reported experiencing sexual trauma than those who admitted enacting it (e.g. Sisco et al., 2006), thus: (a) perpetrators selected multiple victims and/or (b) perpetration was significantly underreported. Current findings support the second possibility (see Figure 1); the sex difference on all acts narrowed and the rate of admission by women of perpetration increased significantly with the Confluence-based SAPI.

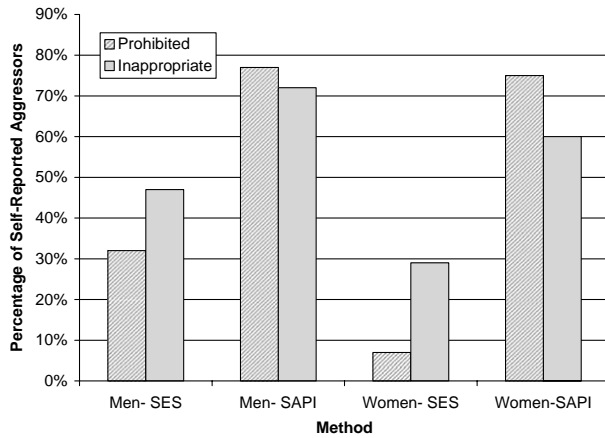


FIGURE 1. Annual frequency of sexually aggressive behaviour by gender. As can be seen, the rates of male and female reporting increased with the use of the Confluence-based assessment tool.

Differences in the spectrum of behaviours

Participants endorsed a variety of legally prohibited and inappropriate behaviours that had yet to be measured by traditional assessment instruments (see Table Ia and b for descriptions of these acts). As seen in Figure 2, men were more likely to commit all legally prohibited sexual acts and were dominant in the areas of attempted and completed anal and vaginal rape while women mainly endorsed creating an active victim through forcing or pressuring the victim into being the active participant in penetrating, fondling or orally contacting the aggressor

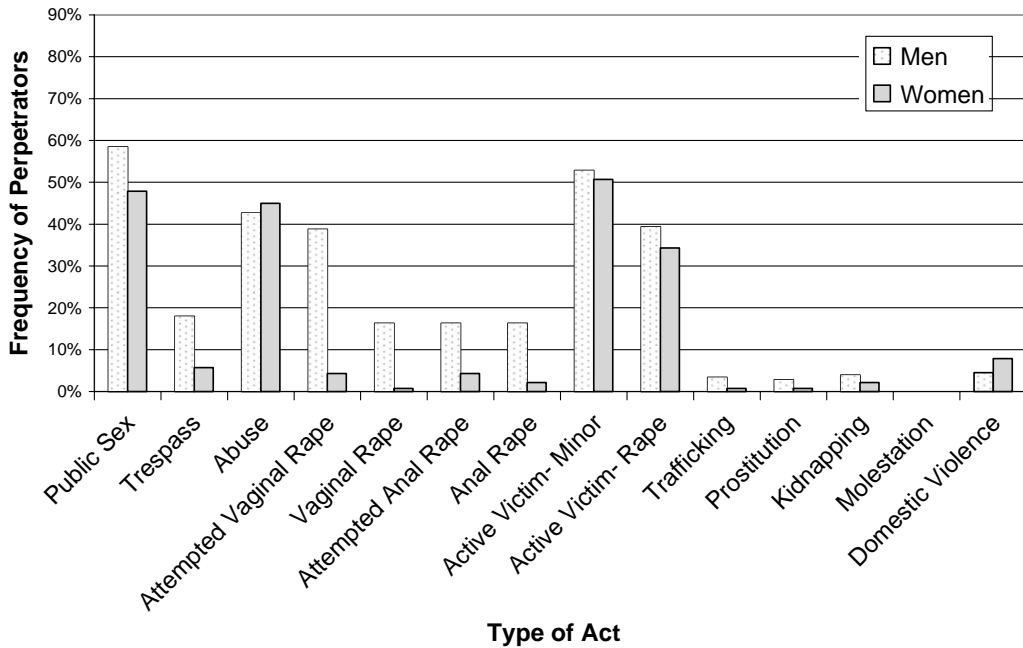


FIGURE 2. Legally prohibited acts.

against the victim's will. Three of the four categories endorsed most frequently by women were assessed only in the SAPI. Men and women were similarly likely to use each style of inappropriate sexual manipulation. However, it must be noted that traditional coercion, called "coercion" which encompasses lying and pressuring, the staple of the SES-LFP, was the second least frequent inappropriate sexual behaviour used (see Figure 3).

Confluence versus Power-Assertion models

As has been demonstrated above, the Confluence-based conceptualization expanded upon the foundation of the Power-Assertion model and seemed to describe the current phenomena more clearly. It is unclear whether these differences reflect a substantial change in the actual prevalence of sexual aggression over the year or whether the differential prevalence rates reflect the use of a broader bandwidth of assessment. It seems more likely that differences are related to assessment differences, as there is no other information indicating a major prevalence increase (University of Arizona Police Department, 2007). The important changes in assessment conceptualization are described below.

Assessing non-traditional aggressive behaviours

The Power-Assertion model of sexual aggression has served as the gateway for awareness of and preventative action against this social problem for decades. The contributions of the original researchers, such as Susan Brownmiller, Mary Koss and Dean Kilpatrick, have been substantial and have initiated important societal changes. The focus upon the traditional victim has been important, as it concentrated efforts and provided substantial relief to a large number of individuals. As with all research, changing societal influences often generate new perspectives on accepted research paradigms. The issues that face the youth today have yet to be addressed fully. These issues include prostitution and pimping, domestic violence in intimate contexts, sexual stalking, increases in woman enacted aggression and forcing the victim to act as the sexual initiator. The 21st century has been characterized by highly sexualized youth who have access to a wider variety of tools to express their sexuality including

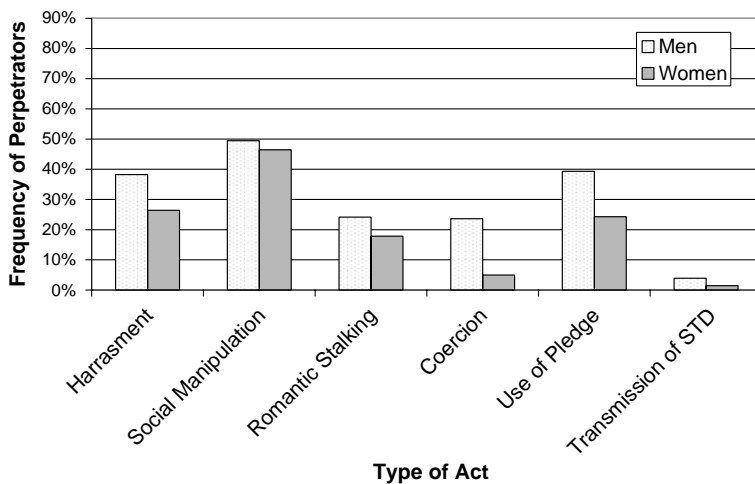


FIGURE 3. Frequency of inappropriate sexual behaviours.

the internet, cell phones, readily available adult stores and provocative sexual norms in the media. It seems that cross-sectional analysis has not yet taken into account the possibility of a cohort effect, and thus traditional assessments still focus on similar behaviours that are interpreted as they were 30 years ago. Although core behaviours have remained the same, many novel ones have cropped up. Men and women are taking part in a variety of acts that are at odds with traditional gender norms. These findings indicate that we must update our theoretical framework, assessment terminology and intervention strategies to be relevant for the current generation.

Increasing detection

Sexual aggression has been viewed by the feminist Power-Assertion model as the male subjugation of women, and thus this theoretical framework has shaped the nature of the acts that are typically assessed. For instance, in the SES-LFP, the only way that a woman could rape a man is if she penetrated his anus against his will. This narrow conceptualization limited the full exploration of the spectrum of acts that the average woman may enact with her partner. During the debriefing from Study 1, male subjects felt that women used pressure and manipulation to attain unwanted sex often and they discussed several factors that made sex unappealing, including being in a relationship with someone other than the sexual initiator, being pursued intensely by an infatuated person, being uncomfortable interacting sexually during a partner's menstruation or unhygienic state, not wanting to impregnate a woman who was seeking that commitment, not having prophylactic protection on hand, feeling too angry or stressed to desire sex, being pursued by someone who was in a relationship with a good friend or being pressured to extend into uncharted sexual territory, such as giving oral sex or taking part in sexual games. These situations extend beyond the Power-Assertion model and they do occur relatively frequently (see Figure 1). Thus, the sex differences in rate of perpetration reported in previous studies may be an artifact of biased assessment.

Recognizing the role of sex and intimate physical danger

Of students surveyed, 4% of men (eight of 178) and 8% of women (11 of 140) admitted to slapping, pushing, strangling, kicking or physically injuring a partner in a way that left marks and/or caused physical pain during the past year. Four percent of men (seven of 178) and 2% of women (three of 140) reported kidnapping a partner by physically holding the person, obstructing the exit, threatening the person verbally, by throwing things or punching something, or controlling the area of the event such as driving the car after the person had requested to get out or by taking the person to an inescapable location during the past year. One man reported repeatedly recruiting, transporting or supervising a prostitute through the use of physical force within the year. These findings indicate that the threshold of appropriate physical boundaries have been broken, despite the ongoing emphasis on communication and awareness characteristic of a university campus. Thus, even in ideal circumstances, people use physical force to control others in intimate settings. This implies that despite awareness of the inappropriateness of such acts, some people still are unable to control the urge or may choose to aggress. Thus, upcoming prevention strategies must offer more than direct presentations of "no means no" types of awareness. More research is needed to understand the underlying bases for these choices.

Addressing passive sexual aggression

Of the 340 million new cases of STDs that occur in an average year across the nations, 39 million originated in Europe and 14 million in North America (World Health Organization, 2001). Not only is the transmission of STDs increasing, e.g. there was a 63% increase in STD infection in the United Kingdom from 1987 to 2006 (Health Protection Agency, 2007), they are often carried by younger adults; in the United States, 48% of carriers were between the ages of 15 and 24 years (Weinstock, Berman & Cates, 2004). If a person willingly exposes another to an STD, the initiator has knowingly inflicted the possibility of injury on the recipient. Although this is not directly forceful, it certainly does seem to be passively aggressive. Further, it undermines the recipient's right to make an informed decision (i.e. negates consent) and results in the same feelings of powerlessness and shame that direct aggression does. In the past year, 4% of men (seven of 178) and 1% of women (two of 140) reported having unprotected sex with a person who was unaware that the respondent had an STD. This blatant disregard for the partner's safety is alarming due to the possible long-term repercussions including infertility, increased risk of cancer or death (Center for Disease Control, 2007).

Assessing subjective experience

To prevent or reduce sexual aggression we must understand not only its frequency, but also how the involved parties perceive the experience. First, the subjective experience and technical description may not align. For instance, it is unclear whether behaviour, if it is not viewed as harmful or unwanted by the recipient yet it is technically illegal, should still be deemed victimization. For example, the married couple who had sex while intoxicated technically took part in an act that is legally prohibited as one cannot provide consent in an altered state. Secondly, the motivation and intent of the perpetrator may greatly shape the treatment he/she should receive. It seems that the person who is aware of the nature of his/her hurtful actions yet continues does not share the same level of guilt as the person who is unaware. The SAPI was designed to address this second concern; its clinical applicability is as follows:

1. *Identifying the spectrum of core behaviours*: detection of peripheral inappropriate behaviours that must be addressed in treatment.
2. *Identifying distortion*: indication of personal accountability for a behaviour, or lack thereof; this may assist in treatment placement.
3. *Monitoring*: exposure of new occurrences or deceit in regards to sexually offensive behaviour or changes in repertoire when readministered.

Limitations

As the SAPI assesses unwanted interpersonal interactions, acts not involving living humans and paraphilias such as masochism were not included. These topics, as well as socio-sexual history, are necessary to fully understand a sex offender. The SAPI has an important place in treatment; however, it is not all-encompassing.

In addition, although the above studies provide support for the expanded Confluence-based model, the actual mechanisms behind the expansion of aggressive sexual behaviours have yet to be explored. More research is needed to determine underlying causal mechanisms.

Finally, as this expanded spectrum of aggressive sexuality is novel, it continues to grow; participants continue to raise situations that will continue to be added to the instrument.

Recently, several situations were described which culminated in nine additional items that are being piloted to determine if they will be added to the SAPI. They include: romantic pestering (writing on someone's car, leaving unwanted gifts or pestering someone's support network), pressuring others into novel sexual forums (going to a strip club, watching pornographic material), invasive verbalization (inquiring about sexual history, comparing someone to other sexual partners in a derogatory way) and looking at pornography that may exhibit people under 18. It seems that more focus groups in a wider variety of subjects would help to solidify this instrument. For a copy of the SAPI, contact the first author or attain it electronically at the website noted at the end of the Summary section.

Summary

Significant discrepancies existed between the small number of individuals reporting perpetration and the much larger number of individuals reporting victimization in previous studies (e.g. Sisco et al., 2006). The current findings suggest that this discrepancy is due to limitations in assessment methods, as opposed to socially motivated underreporting on the part of perpetrators. It seems that the substantial sex differences in perpetration may also be due to such limitations. Although men were more likely to commit all legally prohibited sexual acts, especially in the areas of attempted and completed vaginal rape, women aggressed in non-traditional fashions by forcing or pressuring the victim into being the active participant in penetrating, fondling or orally contacting the aggressor against the victim's will. In addition, young adults used a wider array of inappropriate sexual behaviours than expected previously. Instead of simply lying and pressuring, they commonly harassed victims by repeatedly e-mailing, texting or calling, manipulated the victim's social network to attain intimate access to the victim, stalked the victim and used pledges, bets and dares to bend the victim's will.

If prevention measures focus simply on the traditional female victim and traditional acts of penetration-based assault, the majority of unwanted behaviours would remain untreated. These findings emphasize the importance of re-conceptualizing sexual aggression as a tool used by both men and women in a broader fashion than was expected previously. It must be noted that it is still unclear what drives this behaviour; control, power, sexual gratification, some other desired outcome or inability to control one's impulses. However, it seems important to keep the ultimate goals of such work in mind, which are to: (1) increase the detection of unwanted behaviours; and (2) decrease the danger of vulnerable citizens. Today, this danger may come in the form of physical and emotional harm, social discomfort as a result of a perpetrator targeting the victim's support system as a means of gaining sexual access to him/her or becoming infected with an STD. This study series was a step towards better understanding what is happening to young adults in terms of traditional and non-traditional sexual inappropriate and illegal acts. In addition, a different perspective on assessment of such behaviours among young adults has been offered [*The Sexual Acts and Perceptions Inventory (SAPI)* is available at <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~sisco/tests.html>. It may be used free of charge. For permission to use please contact Melissa Sisco at sisco@u.arizona.edu at which time the scoring manual will be provided].

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