



Women, sex, hostility, power, and suspicion: Sexually aggressive men's cognitive associations[☆]

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Abstract

A sequential priming paradigm examined four theories of sexually aggressive men's cognitive associations between women and sex, women and hostility, women and power, and women and suspicion. Men with varying histories of sexually aggressive behavior viewed female images as primes (along with male image primes and baseline primes) before rendering lexical decisions about target words associated with sex, hostility, power, and suspicion. Men with a history of committing more sexually aggressive behaviors showed stronger associations in memory between women and sex and between women and hostility. Further, more sexually aggressive men also revealed greater chronicity for sex-related concepts in general, based on free recall reports. Implications of the mental representations of women underlying men's sexually aggressive behaviors are discussed.

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Introduction

Psychologists have long been aware that social information is inherently ambiguous and therefore influenced by a perceiver's goals, expectancies, and chronically accessible categories (e.g., Bruner, 1957; Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982). Social interactions between men and women about mutual sexual interest are particularly ambiguous, which has encouraged investigations of sexually aggressive men's perception of sexual information (Malamuth & Brown, 1994), the types of cues that are differentially used by sexually aggressive men and sexually non-aggressive men (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995), and the relations in memory between concepts such as power and sex (Bargh et al., 1995). Once formed, cognitive associations can have a profound impact on attention, information

storage and retrieval, and subsequent behavior (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). For example, a sexually aggressive man's strong association between women and violence could lead him to interpret women's behaviors as adversarial and antagonistic, encouraging him to behave aggressively toward them and thus eliciting confirming behavior from them (Chen & Bargh, 1997). Because cognitive associations may exert a strong influence on sexually aggressive behaviors, a critical step in understanding sexual aggression is examining sexually aggressive men's cognitive associations with women. Thus, the current research examined the cognitive associations with women held by men who vary in their history of sexually aggressive behavior.¹

Heretofore, the content of more sexually aggressive men's cognitive associations with women has received little attention. Although many theories of sexual aggression include descriptions of possible cognitive processes (e.g., Barbaree & Marshall, 1991; Hall &

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¹ Sexually aggressive behaviors can be performed by women or by men toward members of either sex. However, because the majority of cases of reported sexual aggression are perpetrated by men against women (US Department of Justice, 2000), we focused on men's sexually aggressive behaviors toward women in this study.

Hirschman, 1991; Malamuth & Brown, 1994), the mental representation of women by sexually aggressive men largely remains conceptual and has rarely been empirically investigated (cf., Bargh et al., 1995). For example, sexually aggressive men often report feeling anger and sexual arousal before a coercive or aggressive sexual incident (Pithers, Beal, Armstrong, & Petty, 1989), but psychologists have yet to examine the role of sex and hostility as components of sexually aggressive men's mental representations *about women*. Understanding how sexually aggressive men process and organize information about women is important because their memorial representations may have important implications for their attitudes about women, their beliefs about women's behaviors or communication, the emotions they experience, and ultimately their behaviors toward women.

In addition to guiding attitudes, feelings, and behaviors, cognitive associations also have implications for whether reported attitudes are consistent with performed behaviors. Most sexual aggression research relies on questionnaires that assess men's attitudes and past behaviors, increasing the importance of identifying when the "likelihood of sexual aggression" predicts the commission of sexually aggressive behaviors. Often, attitudes do not correspond to behaviors toward a social target, and reports of attitudes can be influenced by norms or respondents' social desirability concerns (Fazio, 1986, 1995). Many factors contribute to attitude-behavior consistency, but knowledge accessibility often influences perceptions, judgments, and behavior (Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999). This is especially critical for examining sexual aggression, which often occurs in private contexts or when the man is drinking, conditions that may reduce normative behavior (Fazio, 1986, 1995) or feelings of accountability (Tetlock, 1992), increasing the likelihood that accessible knowledge will guide behavior. Further, examining sexual aggression using implicit measures can minimize socially desirable responding and assess more automatic responses, which are less influenced by social norms (Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999) and potentially more predictive of behavior (McConnell & Leibold, 2001).

Examining men's cognitive associations with women can also provide a framework for evaluating existing theories by testing hypothesized underlying factors of sexual aggression. Integration or comparison of various theories of sexual aggression is nearly absent in the field, leaving many questions about how each may differentially predict sexually aggressive behaviors. In particular, four theories of sexual aggression suggest potential differences in sexually aggressive men's mental representations, which can be tested simultaneously by examining the differential memory associations for sexually aggressive men that those theories would posit.

First, differential strength of association between women and sex in memory may underlie differences between

sexually aggressive and non-aggressive men's perceptions, communications, and number of thoughts about sex. Overall, men think and fantasize about sex more each day than do women (Byers, Purdon, & Clark, 1998), and sexually aggressive men think about sex more often and are more sexually promiscuous than sexually non-aggressive men (Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995). In fact, memory associations between women and sex have been suggested by findings that men perceive more overall sexual intent in social interactions than women (Shotland & Craig, 1988), and sexually aggressive men incorrectly perceive women's communications about sex more often than do sexually non-aggressive men (Malamuth & Brown, 1994; Shotland & Goodstein, 1983). However, the cognitive associations between women and sex that underlie these differential perceptions and behaviors have not yet been explored.

Additionally, sexually aggressive men are more likely to hold hostile and adversarial attitudes about women than are sexually non-aggressive men (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Malamuth, 1986). This work argues that sexually aggressive men believe that women are manipulative, deceitful, and troublemakers, and tend to anger them. One possible, but unexplored, implication for their hostility toward women may be that sexually aggressive men have a relatively strong link in memory between women and hostility.

At least one memory association in sexually aggressive men has been explored in previous research. Bargh et al. (1995) found a chronic association between power and sex for men who held sexually aggressive attitudes, as determined by the Attraction to Sexual Aggression scale (Malamuth, 1989a, 1989b), by subliminally priming men with power-related or neutral words. Response latencies to the subsequent presentation of sex-related words were faster for power prime and sex target word combinations among men who reported more sexually aggressive attitudes. In a second experiment, after being primed with either power-related or neutral words, sexually aggressive and non-aggressive men rated the attractiveness of a female confederate. When primed with power words, all men reported equal attraction to the confederate. But, when primed with neutral words, only men who did not have sexually aggressive attitudes reported the female confederate to be attractive. Thus, it appears that power and sex are more strongly associated in memory for men with more sexually aggressive attitudes, and that power may be a necessary ingredient for sexual attraction for these men. Although Bargh et al. (1995) found that the association between power and sex concepts may discriminate between men with sexually aggressive and non-aggressive attitudes, the differential strength of association between power and *women* for sexually aggressive men remains unassessed.

Finally, cognitive associations between women and suspicion may differentiate between sexually aggressive

and non-aggressive men. The “suspicious schema” explanation suggests that sexually aggressive men believe that women are untruthful about sexual communications (Malamuth & Brown, 1994). This explanation argues that men mistrust women’s communications and assume the opposite meaning of what she communicated. For a sexually aggressive man, women’s interested behaviors are seen as rejecting, but their rejecting behaviors suggest interest. This chronicity may be represented in sexually aggressive men’s memory as an association between women and suspicion, however this prediction has not been tested.

To summarize, different lines of past research suggest that men who are more sexually aggressive may hold strong cognitive associations between women and sex, women and hostility, women and power, and women and suspicion relative to less sexually aggressive men. The current study tested these predictions using a lexical decision priming task to assess the associations between women and the four hypothesized concepts related to sexual aggression. Participants were presented with a series of trials, some of which began by presenting an image of a woman to prime the concept of “women.” Subsequently, a target word appeared, and participants judged whether the target was a word or a non-word (the lexical decision). The critical target words were chosen to test the concepts hypothesized to be strongly associated to women for sexually aggressive men. It was expected that men who reported greater sexually aggressive past behaviors would recognize these critical target concept words more quickly after the concept of women was primed, implying a stronger association in memory between these concepts for sexually aggressive men. Also, a free recall task further assessed the accessibility of the critical theoretical constructs. Better recall for the target concepts would indicate greater accessibility of those concepts in memory, which was predicted to be more likely for more sexually aggressive men.

Method

Participants and prescreening measures

Coercive sexuality survey

The coercive sexuality survey (CSS) measured the frequency and degree of sexually coercive and sexually aggressive behaviors that men reported committing (Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984). Men responded to 16 items using a 4-point scale (1 = never, 2 = once or twice, 3 = several times, and 4 = often), beginning with milder forms of coercive sexual behavior (e.g., Have you ever kissed a woman against her will?) and progressing to more forcible and aggressive behaviors with each question (e.g., Have you ever used a weapon on a woman to obtain sex?). Scale reliability was good ($\alpha = .77$), thus

scores for the items were summed, with larger CSS scores indicating a greater number, and frequency of aggressive behaviors. The CSS was administered to 213 men at Michigan State University in introductory psychology courses during a mass prescreening, and 39 at the extreme ends of the CSS distribution were recruited by phone for the primary lab session. Twenty men reported no sexually coercive behaviors ($M = 16.00$, $SD = .00$), whereas 19 men reported engaging in some degree of sexually coercive behaviors in past romantic relationships ($M = 22.05$, $SD = 2.76$).

Stimulus materials

Priming images

Ten female and ten male images (color, head- and shoulder photos) were selected for the lexical decision task primes. Twenty-five men, none of whom participated in the primary experiment, rated each image on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) for attractiveness, typicality for its gender, masculinity, and femininity. Female images were chosen that were rated as feminine, non-masculine, typical, and attractive. Male images were chosen that were rated as non-feminine, masculine, typical, and attractive.

Target words

Twelve target words represented the four concepts of interest: sex (sex, naked, and erotic), hostile (hostile, rage, and angry), power (power, influence, and dominate), and suspicious (suspicious, doubt, and sneaky). The words were selected based on 26 male pretest participants (who did not take part in the main experiment) who rated each as strongly associated to the relevant concept but as unrelated to the other three concepts. Also, a set of 8 neutral target words was selected from pretesting that were unrelated to the four critical concepts (e.g., window, song). Finally, 20 non-words (e.g., werlof, niwwod) were produced for the lexical decision task so that an equal number of words and non-words were targets.

Procedure

Participants completed the CSS during the prescreening session, then they returned to the lab several weeks later for the primary experimental session. Experimenters were unaware of the participants’ CSS scores at the primary session. Participants were seated at individual, private computers and completed the lexical decision task, which was administered on Macintosh Quadras using PsyScope 1.2 (Cohen, MacWhinney, Flatt, & Provost, 1993). Similar to Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, and Williams (1995), they were told that they would be engaged in two concurrent tasks: attending to images for a subsequent memory task and making judgments about words (the lexical decision task). The instructions regarding a later

memory test of the visual images were provided to ensure that participants would attend to the visual images, which served as priming stimuli. Participants completed a lexical decision task judgment (i.e., word or non-word) on each trial following the presentation of an image prime. The prime images were presented for 315 ms, and after a 135 ms blank screen interval, a target word was presented until a response was made by the participant, who was instructed to press a key marked “word” or a key marked “non-word” in response to the target word. Participants were told to make their judgments as quickly as possible while remaining accurate. The computer measured the response latency between target word presentation and key press.

Lexical decision task trials were divided into three blocks. During a practice block, 9 trials with neutral image primes (e.g., clock) and neutral targets (e.g., flower, werlof) were presented to ensure that participants understood the task. Next during a baseline block, 40 trials were presented where each critical target word (12), neutral target word (8), and non-word target (20) was presented on one occasion following a string of asterisks (the baseline prime). The third block consisted of 160 trials in which each target (12 critical words, 8 neutral words, and 20 non-words) were preceded by a female image prime once, a male image prime once, and baseline primes twice. Order of presentation within each block was randomly determined. When the lexical decision task was completed, participants were given a surprise free recall test for the target words. They were instructed to write down as many of the target words as they could recall in 5 min. Participants were then debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

The lexical decision task assessed the strength of memory associations between the concept of women (trials where female images were primes) and the concepts represented by the target words. Each theory (i.e., chronic sexual thinking, hostility toward women, power–sex association, or suspicious schema, respectively) would predict greater facilitation for theoretically related target concepts following female image primes compared to baseline primes for men with more sexually aggressive histories (i.e., greater CSS scores). Further, it was expected that free recall for these concepts would be greater for men who have engaged in more sexually aggressive behaviors and may also relate to corresponding patterns of facilitation observed in the lexical decision task.

Derivation of lexical decision facilitation scores

Responses were eliminated from analyses that were faster than 300 ms (1.0% of the trials) or slower than

1500 ms (2.0%), as well as the trials in which the participant made an incorrect lexical judgment (2.8%). Thus, 94.2% of the responses were retained for analyses, and log transformed because of the positive skew of the distribution (Fazio, 1990; Ratcliff, 1993).

Two mean image response latencies were calculated for each target word, one for trials preceded by a female image prime and one for trials preceded by a male image prime. The baseline response latencies were calculated by computing the mean for the three asterisks prime trials for each of the 12 critical target words. Separate facilitation scores were derived for female image prime–target word pairs and for male image prime–target word pairs by subtracting the relevant image prime–target word latency from the baseline response latency for the same target word. Thus, positive facilitation scores indicated faster response latencies when the target word was preceded by an image prime (male or female) than when it was preceded by the baseline prime. The facilitation scores for the three sex target words, three hostility target words, three power target words, and three suspicion target words were averaged to form one facilitation score for each of the target concepts. Thus, eight facilitation scores (four target concepts following female image primes, and four target concepts following male image primes) were computed. Finally, for each target concept type, the male–prime facilitation score was subtracted from the female–prime facilitation score, producing four *relative female facilitation scores*. These relative female facilitation scores represented how much a female prime, relative to a male prime, facilitated judgments for each target concept type.²

Correlations between sexually aggressive behaviors and facilitation scores

To test the relations between sexually aggressive behavior and the strength of the theoretically derived cognitive associations, correlational analyses were conducted between CSS scores and the four relative female facilitation scores. According to the theories under examination, greater CSS scores (reflecting more sexually aggressive histories) should be positively correlated to relative facilitation scores for sex, hostility, power, and suspicion targets.

As Table 1 reports, sexual aggression score and relative female facilitation for sex concept targets was significantly and positively correlated, indicating that as men’s sexually aggressive behaviors increased, their association between women and sex in memory increased. Further, relative female facilitation for hostility concept targets was significantly and positively correlated to CSS

² Analyses conducted using only the female–prime facilitation scores produced identical results. Male–prime facilitation scores showed no relations in any of the to-be-presented analyses.

Table 1

Correlations among men's sexual aggression (CSS score), relative female facilitation scores for the critical concepts, and proportion of target concept words recalled

| | CSS score | Relative female facilitation scores | | | |
|--|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| | | Sex | Hostility | Power | Suspicion |
| <i>Relative female facilitation scores</i> | | | | | |
| Sex | .34* | — | | | |
| Hostility | .39* | .33* | — | | |
| Power | -.03 | -.52* | -.06 | — | |
| Suspicion | -.00 | .02 | .08 | .02 | — |
| <i>Proportion of recall</i> | | | | | |
| Sex | .40* | .44** | .46** | -.06 | .03 |
| Hostility | -.11 | -.08 | -.09 | -.30 | .23 |
| Power | -.24 | -.05 | -.18 | -.03 | -.05 |
| Suspicion | -.04 | -.09 | .24 | .00 | .00 |

Note. $N = 39$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

score. That is, men who committed more sexually aggressive behaviors associated women and hostility more strongly in memory. Relative female facilitation scores for power targets and for suspicion targets were unrelated to CSS scores. Interestingly, men who exhibited stronger associations between women and sex also showed stronger associations between women and hostility and revealed weaker associations between women and power.

Correlations involving free recall

Two judges who were unaware of the hypotheses assessed the items listed by each participant in free recall to determine whether a target word was accurately remembered. Judges agreed on 95.8% of the items, and in cases of disagreement, a third judge broke the tie. The proportion of total words recalled for each of the four target concept categories was calculated, and they were correlated to men's CSS scores to determine if relative recall for the four target concepts was related to men's past sexually aggressive behaviors.³ Each of the four theories under evaluation would predict that more sexually aggressive men would recall proportionally more words for the relevant target concept categories than less sexually aggressive men, suggesting greater chronicity for such concepts among more sexually aggressive men. A second question of interest was whether free recall for the critical concepts was related to participants' relative facilitation scores. Positive correlations would be predicted between amount of recall and relative female facilitation scores for corresponding constructs, perhaps

especially for those concepts (i.e., sex and hostility) found to be predictive of sexually aggressive behavior.

As Table 1 reports, CSS scores were positively correlated to the proportion of recall for sex-related concept words. That is, as men reported more sexually aggressive histories, their recall was especially comprised of words associated with sex. Thus, more sexually aggressive men had stronger women–sex associations in memory (facilitation findings) and showed relatively greater chronicity for sex-related concepts overall (the recall findings). CSS scores were unrelated to recall for any other category.

We were also interested in assessing the relations between recall and relative female facilitation scores. That is, did the strength of association between women and the target concepts relate to recall for critical target concept words? Relatively greater recall for sex target words was significantly related to stronger women–sex associations and to stronger women–hostility associations. That is, as men associated women more with sex and with hostility, they were especially likely to reveal particularly good recall for sex-related target words.

Discussion

The current work examined four theories that predict sexually aggressive men's cognitive associations with women. To the extent that sexually aggressive men have systematic associations with women in memory, their representations should bias their perceptions of women and may contribute to their aggressive behaviors toward women. In particular, we evaluated whether more sexually aggressive men had stronger women–sex, women–hostility, women–power, and women–suspicion associations in memory. Moreover, we examined the extent to which greater overall accessibility for these concepts, as assessed by free recall, related to men's histories of sexual aggression and to their associations with women in memory.

³ The total amount of recall for the target concept words: sex concept words ($M = 2.23$, $SD = .78$), hostility concept words ($M = 1.59$, $SD = .93$), power concept words ($M = 1.10$, $SD = .88$), suspicion concept words ($M = 1.33$, $SD = .92$), and neutral words ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.73$). The intrusion rate was 2.5%.

Indeed, the current work found that men who engaged in more sexually aggressive behaviors toward women had stronger associations in memory between women and sex, stronger associations in memory between women and hostility, and better recall for sex-related concepts. Moreover, men who showed stronger women–sex and women–hostility associations also showed better recall for sex-related concepts. As discussed earlier, it has been speculated that sex is an important core concept for how sexually aggressive men represent women in memory. Sexually aggressive men tend to fantasize about sex more (Malamuth et al., 1995) and to interpret women's behaviors as more sexually motivated than do non-aggressive men (Shea, 1993). Thus, the current findings are consistent with these observations, and they suggest that differences among men who vary in sexual aggression may be manifested at the point of knowledge activation (i.e., spontaneously and cognitively “far upstream”).

Moreover, hostility was also more closely associated with women in memory for more sexually aggressive men. Several theories of sexual aggression incorporate men's hostile attitudes toward women as a predictor of sexual aggression (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Malamuth, 1986). For instance, Malamuth (1986) describes men's chronic and compulsive thinking about sex and their hostility toward women as pathways that additively lead to sexually aggressive behaviors. Indeed, the current findings that sexually aggressive men associate women with hostility and sex more strongly support Malamuth's (1986; Malamuth et al., 1995) theorized precursors of sexual aggression, and they offer insights into the cognitive representations that may underlie the sex and hostility pathways outlined by his model.

Although good support was found for links between men's sexual aggression and women–sex and women–hostility associations in memory, no relations were observed between men's sexually aggressive behaviors and their cognitive associations between women and suspicion and between women and power. The lack of support for associations between women and suspicion may cast some doubt on the “suspicious schema” theory of sexual aggression. At present, there seems to be no clear evidence that sexually aggressive men have stronger associations between women and suspicion. Instead, perhaps a suspicious schema guides how sexually aggressive men perceive women's *communications about sex*, and thus reflect their beliefs about communications specifically rather than their beliefs about women in general.

Perhaps more surprising, however, was the lack of support for a link between men's sexually aggressive behaviors and associations in memory between women and power. Indeed, Bargh et al. (1995) found that sexually aggressive men had a chronic association between power and sex, but the current findings suggest that power may not be directly associated with women.

For sexually aggressive men, power may be sexually arousing (Bargh et al., 1995), but it appears that power is not automatically brought to mind in the presence of women. Interestingly, men who had stronger women–sex associations in memory had weaker women–power associations in memory. It would seem that men who strongly associate women with sex also see them as less powerful. Although the current research cannot directly address the role of power in sexual aggression, recent research in our lab sheds light on this issue. Leibold and McConnell (2002) found that men with greater histories of sexual aggression who played a game against a more powerful female opponent were more physically aggressive toward her than they were against a more powerful male opponent. However, men with sexually aggressive histories were not more physically aggressive against a female opponent (relative to a male opponent) when they had power over her. These findings suggest that interpersonal power plays an important moderating role in what triggers sexual aggression in men.

It is also important to note that Bargh et al. (1995) found relations between a power–sex link and men's reports of *attitudes* toward sexual aggression (e.g., attractiveness of sexual aggression scale), whereas the current study examined men's reports of past sexually aggressive behavior. Caution must be exercised when using self-reports of attitudes or behaviors, however, it is also clear that attitudes do not always correspond to behaviors (Fazio, 1986). Because of the inherent problems with attitude-behavior consistency, future research should more fully address what predicts sexually aggressive attitudes and what predicts sexually aggressive behavior. Indeed, the conditions under which sexually aggressive behaviors are often performed will make attitude-behavior consistency less likely. This reality highlights the value of using implicit measures to predict behavior (e.g., McConnell & Leibold, 2001) and of focusing research on discovering relations between cognitive associations and behaviors (rather than attitudes).

One noteworthy aspect of the current work is that automatically activated associations with women are especially likely to guide behavior for sexually aggressive men because often their aggressive behavior occurs in situations where normative pressure or self-presentation exerts minimal influence (e.g., private situations, low accountability, and conditions involving intoxication). These factors reduce the likelihood that controlled processes will mediate the link between automatically activated associations and subsequent behavior (Fazio, 1986, 1995). Thus, understanding how automatically activated knowledge relates to behavior is especially important because deliberative processes will have less influence on sexually aggressive acts.

In addition to speaking to long-standing issues about the prediction of social behavior, the current work also addresses broader issues in the sexual aggression

literature. For instance, there is debate among researchers about the degree to which a sexual motive or a power-dominance motive influences sexually aggressive behavior (Muehlenhard, Danoff-Burg, & Powch, 1996). Feminist theory often downplays the direct role of sex in sexually aggressive behavior, citing men's need for power and dominance over women as the most influential factor leading to sexual aggression (Brownmiller, 1975; Campbell, 1993). Conversely, others (e.g., Palmer, 1988) have argued that some men separate sex from love and emotion, such that their definition of sex can include force and violence, leading to sexually motivated rape. Although the present research cannot conclusively settle this debate, the strength of sexually aggressive men's cognitive associations between women and sex and the greater availability of sex-related information in memory suggests that sex is an important component of sexual aggression.

The current findings of stronger cognitive associations between women and sex and between women and hostility for more sexually aggressive men are very consistent with the Confluence Model of sexual aggression (Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991; Malamuth et al., 1995). This model suggests two pathways additively lead to sexually aggressive behaviors. First, the hostile masculinity pathway consists of men's hostile distrust of women, their disdain for feminine qualities, and their desire to dominate women. These components contribute to some men's need to reaffirm their masculinity by acting out their hostility for femininity and women through sexual aggression. The second pathway, promiscuous-impersonal sexuality, describes an orientation toward sex that is non-committal, unrestricted, and promiscuous. Impersonal sexuality is not an increased sex-drive per se, but rather a preoccupation with sex and sexual fantasy in addition to a decreased emotional involvement during sex. The combination of impersonal sexuality and hostile masculinity predicts sexually aggressive behavior in men. The findings of the current research that men's sexually aggressive behaviors were related to strong associations in memory between sex and women, and between hostility and women, support the Confluence Model and provide insights into the processes that may underlie it.

Although the current work was designed to examine cognitive associations held by sexually aggressive men, the priming methodology used may have utility as an individual difference measure that circumvents some of the problems common to self-report measures. Explicit measures can miss people who wish to not report extreme and socially undesirable attitudes (Dunton & Fazio, 1997). Moreover, people are often unaware of their own beliefs and attitudes, and thus they may be unable to accurately report on them (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Thus, implicit measures, such as the current approach, may someday provide useful diagnostic tools for

clinical classification as well as for testing underlying theory.

The implications of how sexually aggressive men mentally represent women are far-reaching, but heretofore, unexplored. Considering the importance of identifying men who sexually aggress for prevention and treatment purposes, future research should continue to examine sexually aggressive men's cognitive associations with women. Although identification and intervention are practical goals, these endeavors must rely on an understanding of the underlying mechanisms and processes that distinguish sexually aggressive men from non-aggressive men. The current work takes a step toward such an understanding of sexually aggressive men's beliefs and behaviors. It introduced an implicit assessment technique that not only revealed differences in men who showed more sexually aggressive behaviors, but it also provided an approach to test theories of sexual aggression. The significance of the associations forged in memory on perception, encoding, and behavior was noted long ago (e.g., Bruner, 1957), and has remained in the forefront of psychological research and theory. By importing the techniques of social cognition into understanding how sexually aggressive men differ in their beliefs and behaviors toward women, we believe that theory, method, and intervention can fruitfully advance together and mutually inform each other.

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