



Psychopathic traits predict harsh attitudes toward rape victims among undergraduates[☆]



Ashley L. Watts^{a,*}, Shauna M. Bowes^a, Robert D. Litzman^b, Scott O. Lilienfeld^a

^a Department of Psychology, Emory University, 36 Eagle Row, Atlanta, GA, 30322, United States

^b Department of Psychology, Georgia State University, 36 Eagle Row, Atlanta, GA, 30322, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 September 2016

Received in revised form 12 October 2016

Accepted 14 October 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Psychopathic personality

Rape myths

Sexual aggression

ABSTRACT

Sexual aggression is pervasive in American society and affects deleteriously the lives of men and women. Two potential predictors sexual assault are psychopathic personality (psychopathy) traits and rape myth acceptance (RMA), although there is a paucity of research on the relation between RMA and psychopathic traits. We adopted a multi-measure approach to the associations among all three variables in two racially diverse college undergraduate samples (overall $N = 608$). Consistent with our predictions, most psychopathy features significantly predicted RMA, and relations were most pronounced for subdimensions reflecting callousness, antagonism, and lack of empathy (r s ranged from 0.34 to 0.46). In contrast, boldness features were not significant predictors of RMA (r s ranged from 0.01 to 0.12). Gender moderated the relations between coldheartedness and RMA, such that effects were significantly stronger for females. Taken together, our findings demonstrate that the traditional, maladaptive aspects of psychopathy were moderate predictors of RMA, with effects being strongest for cold and guiltless psychopathy features, followed by disinhibition. These findings raise the possibility that RMA may be one mechanism by which psychopathy influences sexual aggression given that RMA is regarded as an attitudinal precursor to these outcomes.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Psychopathy (psychopathic personality) is a constellation of interpersonal, affective, and behavioral personality features, such as superficial charm, grandiosity, lack of empathy, lack of guilt, poor impulse control, and social deviance (e.g., Hare, 2003). Limited research (e.g., Mouliso & Calhoun, 2013) suggests that psychopathic traits are associated with the acceptance of rape myths (RMA), which are defined as stereotyped and false beliefs concerning rape, rape victims, and rape perpetrators (Burt, 1980). Given that both psychopathy and RMA appear to predict those who go on to sexually offend (Greendlinger & Byrne, 1987; Seto & Lalumiere, 2010), the extent to which psychopathic traits predict RMA is of theoretical and practical importance. Thus, we sought to expand upon previous research and elucidate the relation between psychopathy subdimensions and RMA among two large, racially diverse college undergraduate samples, using multiple indices of both overarching constructs.

An estimated 84,041 reported rapes, according to the legal definition, occurred in the United States during 2014 alone (FBI Uniform Crime Report, 2014). These numbers probably underestimate the prevalence

of sexual assault given that rape is among the most underreported crimes (Sable, Danis, Mauzy, & Gallagher, 2006). Compared with other age groups, college-aged individuals are especially likely to become both the victims and perpetrators of rape. For instance, college-aged females consistently represent the demographic most at risk for rape and sexual assault victimization (Sinozich & Langton, 2014), and 13 to 35% of college-aged males reported perpetrating some form of sexual assault while in college (Voller & Long, 2009). These statistics point to undergraduate culture as a potentially crucial point of intervention for sexual assault (e.g., Stewart, 2014). Among a number of widely-studied risk factors associated with the perpetration of sexual assault, individual differences in personality among perpetrators may be of particular importance. Two relevant individual differences may be psychopathy and RMA.

1.1. Psychopathy

Growing data suggest that psychopathy is a combination or even configuration of multiple traits that may give rise to numerous phenotypic presentations (e.g., Harpur, Hare, & Hakstian, 1989). In their influential triarchic model of psychopathy, Patrick, Fowles, and Krueger (2009) proposed that prototypical psychopathy is composed of three separable traits. According to this model, psychopathy consists of Boldness, conceptually related to the construct of Fearless Dominance;

[☆] We thank Allison Derovanesian, Madeline Nagel, and Eliana Rabinovitz for their help with data entry.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: ashleylwatts@gmail.com (A.L. Watts).

Disinhibition, conceptually related to the construct of Self-centered Impulsivity; and Meanness, conceptually related to the construct of Cold-heartedness, although marked by a more pronounced component of antagonism (Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005). Boldness ostensibly reflects a relative insensitivity to threat signals, and comprises interpersonal dominance, reduced stress reactivity, physical harm avoidance, and thrill seeking. Disinhibition is a predisposition toward deficits in impulse control marked by a lack of planfulness, foresight, and affect regulation. Finally, Meanness is marked by a lack of empathy and social attachment, guiltlessness, disdain toward others, and rebelliousness (Patrick et al., 2009).

Moreover, psychopathy's subdimensions often diverge sharply in terms of their relations with external criteria, including internalizing and externalizing symptomology and normal-range personality (Lilienfeld, Watts, Smith, Berg, & Latzman, 2015). These findings may extend to sexual attitudes and behaviors. For instance, limited research suggests that meanness psychopathy features may best predict the use of violent force in sexual acts (Kosson, Kelly, & White, 1997), whereas disinhibition features may best predict broader sexual aggression, such as sexual coercion and attempted rape (e.g., O'Connell & Marcus, 2016). These preliminary findings raise the possibility that psychopathy dimensions relate differentially to RMA and various forms of sexual aggression.

1.2. Rape myth acceptance

RMA is a multidimensional construct comprising implicit and explicit attitudes that blame victims of rape or sexual assault, deny harm to the victim, reject rape as a legitimate crime, or all three (Burt, 1980); high scores on RMA measures typically reflect harsh attitudes toward rape victims. Measures of RMA include content ranging from victim blaming to trivializing the seriousness of rape and include attitudes like "all women secretly want to be raped" and "men cannot control their desire." Undergraduate and community males with higher levels of RMA consistently report more sexual misconduct (e.g., Hersh & Gray-Little, 1998) and sexually deviant practices than those with lower RMA (Malamuth, 1986).

1.3. Psychopathy and RMA

Although a substantial body of research indicates that psychopathy is strongly associated with sexual aggression, less is known psychopathy's relationship with rape attitudes. Three studies have examined this association (Abbey, Jacques-Tiura, & LeBreton, 2011; Debowska, Boduszek, Dhingra, Kola, & Meller-Pruniska, 2014; Mouilso & Calhoun, 2013), all of which relied exclusively on the widely-used Hare Self-Report Psychopathy Scale, third version (SRP-III; Paulhus, Neumann, & Hare, *in press*). In these studies, psychopathy factors related differentially to rape attitudes: the meanness (i.e., callous) features were moderately positively associated with harsh rape attitudes, and the disinhibited features were positively associated with such attitudes to a lesser extent.

Mouilso and Calhoun (2013) found that psychopathy total scores correlated significantly with 6 of the 7 subscales of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999) but that psychopathy subdimensions preferentially predicted different aspects of RMA. Meanness features were positively associated with rape myths that directly blame the victim, whereas the disinhibited features were weakly correlated with these subscales. Additionally, all psychopathy features were positively correlated with myths serving to trivialize rape or depict the victim as dishonest. Collectively, these findings suggest that psychopathy relates broadly to RMA, with some psychopathy factors potentially relating more strongly to RMA than others, especially when specific features of RMA are isolated.

1.4. Current study

The literature on psychopathy and rape myths, although useful, is marked by several limitations. First, although studies point to moderate relations between psychopathy and RMA, it is unclear which features of psychopathy are most related to RMA. Second, the role of gender in these associations requires clarification. Although males typically exhibit higher mean levels of psychopathic traits and RMA than do females (e.g., Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008), no research has examined the extent to which the relations among these constructs vary by gender. In fact, two of the studies that examined the relations between psychopathy and RMA have used all-male samples, rendering the extent to which their findings extend to females unclear. Although all-male studies benefit from pronounced mean levels of psychopathy and RMA, they do not address the extent to which the correlational finding may differ in males and females. This issue is of theoretical and pragmatic importance given numerous suggestions that at least some psychopathic traits are differentially expressed in males versus females (see Verona & Vitale, 2006, for a review). At the same time, the evidence for such differential manifestations has been mixed and inconsistent (e.g., Miller, Watts, & Jones, 2011).

Herein, we examined these issues using two large undergraduate samples with diverse demographic backgrounds and multiple indices of both psychopathy and RMA to better understand which features of psychopathy are most strongly associated with harsher attitudes toward rape and rape victims. To address the limitations of existing research, we adopted multiple psychopathy measures that differ in their coverage of these traits. Given that a burgeoning literature suggests that psychopathy is a constellation or configuration of several largely distinct features, it is imperative to examine these features' independent correlates.

Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Abbey et al., 2011), we hypothesized that psychopathic traits broadly construed would positively correlate with RMA, suggesting that psychopathic individuals hold looser attitudes toward the permissibility of rape and are more likely to externalize responsibility for rape onto victims. More specifically, we predicted that both the mean (or cold) and disinhibited features would predict RMA, but that relations would be strongest for the mean features, reflecting the strongest relations for the features comprising callous affect and lack of empathy. We did not expect boldness to relate significantly to RMA, as this subdimension is not typically related to maladaptive attitudes and behaviors. Lastly, we predicted that relations between psychopathy and RMA would be consistent across gender given the overall lack of evidence for gender differences in the manifestation of psychopathy among Western samples (Miller et al., 2011).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were undergraduates enrolled in one of two universities in the Southeastern United States, one a large, racially-diverse public university ($n = 308$) and the other a mid-sized private university ($n = 300$). Sample (dummy-coded as a dichotomous variable) did not moderate any of the relations between psychopathy and RMA, suggesting replication in our major findings across the two samples. As such, we combined these two samples for the remaining analyses ($N = 608$). The combined sample largely comprised females (73%; $n_{\text{females}} = 444$, $n_{\text{males}} = 164$) who were mostly freshmen (38%), sophomores (29%), or juniors (22%) in college. Participants from the mid-sized private university were predominantly of Caucasian (47%), Asian (33%), or African American (9%) descent, and participants from the large public university were predominantly of Caucasian (35%), African American (35%), or Asian (20%) descent. The mean age for the former sample was 19.13 years ($SD = 1.20$). Age data for the latter were not available,

although previously published studies using students from this university have reported mean ages similar to the other sample included in this study (e.g., Hecht, Berg, Lilienfeld, & Latzman, 2016).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Psychopathy

Participants completed three well-validated self-report psychopathy measures, the *Triarchic Psychopathy Measure* (TriPM; Patrick, 2010), the *Psychopathic Personality Inventory-Revised* (Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005), and the *Levenson Self-report Psychopathy Scale* (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995). The TriPM assesses the constructs of the Triarchic model of psychopathy, which comprises Boldness ($\alpha = 0.81$), Disinhibition ($\alpha = 0.84$), and Meanness ($\alpha = 0.89$). The PPI-R yields a total score; eight lower-order subscale scores, including Coldheartedness (C; subscale α s ranged from 0.84 to 0.87); and scores on two higher-order factors, Fearless Dominance (FD; $\alpha = 0.89$) and Self-centered Impulsivity (SCI; $\alpha = 0.91$). Boldness and Disinhibition largely overlap with PPI-R FD and SCI, respectively. Meanness differs somewhat in content from PPI-R Coldheartedness, with the former placing a stronger emphasis on antagonism and the latter on emotional detachment. In contrast to the TriPM and PPI-R, the LSRP yields scores on two factors that are not directly aligned conceptually with those of the triarchic model: Factor 1 (F1; $\alpha = 0.87$) measures selfish, uncaring, and manipulative postures toward others, whereas Factor 2 (F2; $\alpha = 0.74$) measures impulsivity and self-defeating lifestyle behaviors.

2.2.2. Rape attitudes

Participants completed two self-report measures assessing attitudes toward rape victims and RMA, the *Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale* (ARVS; Ward, 1988) and the *Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* (RMAS), the latter of which is a composite of common rape myths from two widely used and well-validated measures designed by Burt (1980) and Payne et al. (1999). The ARVS is a 25-item scale intended to assess favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward rape victims with a particular emphasis on victim blame, credibility, and trivialization. Items include: “A raped woman is a less desirable woman,” and “Sexually experienced women are not really damaged by rape” ($\alpha = 0.84$).

The RMAS is 53-item scale that examines the degree to which an individual holds a victim accountable for rape. The first 51 items yield a total RMAS composite score in addition to scores on seven subscales ($\alpha = 0.87$). The subscales range in content, and include attitudes assessing the following broad attitudes: She asked for it; It wasn't really rape; He didn't mean to; She wanted it; She lied; Rape is a trivial event; and Rape is a rare event. In addition, participants self-reported the percentage of women they believe falsely report rape (a) out of anger to get back at the accused perpetrator, and (b) after becoming pregnant to protect their reputation, given that these two items are not included in any of the aforementioned subscales, we examined these questions as standalone indices of attitudes toward rape victims. The ARVS and RMAS scores were highly correlated ($r = 0.83$, $p < 0.001$), supporting that harsher attitudes toward rape victims and RMA are strongly inter-related. Given the large degree of overlap between these two indices, we heretofore refer to these measures using the same umbrella terms (i.e., RMA, rape attitudes).

2.2.3. Data analysis

In addition to examining the zero-order relations between psychopathy and RMA, we examined the proportionate contribution of each psychopathy subdimension relative to the other subdimensions in predicting R^2 . We did so by conducting relative importance analyses (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2014) which decompose the predicted variance in the outcome explained by each predictor, taking into account each predictor's direct effect and its combined effect with the other predictors. In addition to the zero-order correlations, we present the raw weights for each predictor within measure in addition the rescaled

raw weights, the latter of which rescales the raw weights into the proportion of predicted variance accounted for by each predictor. We conducted these analyses within as opposed to across measures given the high degree of overlap between constructs across measures (i.e., PPI-R SCI and TriPM Disinhibition). Lastly, to explore gender differences in the relations between psychopathy features and RMA, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses in which the psychopathy-by-gender interaction term was entered after the mean-centered psychopathy and gender main effects using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012).

3. Results

3.1. Relations between psychopathy and RMA

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between psychopathy and rape attitudes. By and large, psychopathy subdimensions and factors were consistently positively associated with the various indices of rape attitudes (i.e., the ARVS and RMAS), with the exception of boldness features, which were typically not significantly associated with these attitudes. The relations for boldness were generally very small in magnitude (r s ranged from 0.01 to 0.12 for total rape attitudes scores). Of the PPI-R FD subscales, however, Fearlessness but not Stress Immunity or Social Influence was consistently positively associated with rape attitudes (r s ranged from 0.14 to 0.22),¹ suggesting that this aspect of boldness predicted maladaptive rape attitudes.

Disinhibition and meanness features generally manifested moderate to medium-sized relations with rape attitudes, indicating a robust relationship between psychopathy and the endorsement of rape myths and negative attitudes toward rape victims (r s ranged from 0.27 to 0.46). As predicted, with regards to the relative importance analyses, meanness-related psychopathy features accounted for the overwhelming portion of the predicted variance in rape attitudes (accounting for between 49 and 76% of the variance in RMA outcomes depending on measure), followed by the disinhibited features (accounting for between 23 and 48%). Boldness features were not significant predictors of rape attitudes after taking into account the cold/mean and disinhibited psychopathy features (i.e., their confidence intervals contained zero). In contrast, both coldness/meanness and disinhibition features significantly predicted rape attitudes after accounting for the unique prediction of each subdimension.²

With regards to psychopathy's differential relations with specific components of rape myths, the RMAS subscales typically exhibited low discriminant validity, with a few notable exceptions. For instance, psychopathy subdimensions were mostly unrelated to RMA implying that the perpetrator “did not mean to do it,” whereas psychopathy subdimensions were typically most strongly related to RMA that trivialize rape. In addition, although PPI-R FD was typically not significantly associated with RMAS subscales, it was moderately positively associated with “she wanted it” rape attitudes, indicating that PPI-R FD predicted rape attitudes that trivialized the significance of rape by suggesting that women enjoy forceful sexual encounters.

3.2. Gender differences

Consistent with existing research, males exhibited higher levels of psychopathy and RMA compared with females, with one exception (p s < 0.01 ; with the exception of LSRP F2, d s ranged from 0.29 [TriPM Disinhibition] to 0.73 [TriPM Meanness]); there were no gender

¹ Full PPI-R subscale results available from first author upon request.

² We also examined the unique contribution of each psychopathy dimension in statistically predicting RMA. Controlling for the coldhearted or mean psychopathy features reduced the other subdimensions' relations with RMA, indicating that the disinhibited features' relations with RMA were due in part to the overlap with the interpersonal and affective features of psychopathy.

Table 1
Correlations between psychopathy and rape attitudes.

	M (SD)	ARVS total			RMAS total			RMAS items		RMAS subscales						
		<i>r</i>	RW	RS-RW	<i>r</i>	RW	RS-RW	Angry	Pregnant	She asked for it	Not rape	Didn't mean to	She wanted it	Lied about it	Trivial event	Deviant event
PPI-R Fearless Dominance (18.01)	110.78	0.12^a	0.01*	2.53	0.11	0.00*	3.06	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.08	0.07	0.17	0.11	0.11	0.09
PPI-R Self-centered Impulsivity (23.27)	142.67	0.38	0.10*	48.27*	0.35	0.09*	64.97*	0.19	0.21	0.25	0.37	0.10	0.34	0.30	0.42	0.31
PPI-R Coldheartedness (7.49)	31.15	0.38^a	0.10*	49.20*	0.27^a	0.05*	31.97*	0.13	0.12	0.22	0.29	0.03	0.26	0.21	0.35	0.25
TriPM Boldness (8.57)	49.78	0.01	0.00*	0.20	0.02	0.00*	0.19	−0.05	−0.06	0.01	−0.02	0.02	0.05	0.05	−0.01	−0.02
TriPM Disinhibition (9.32)	38.23	0.29^a	0.04*	23.49*	0.20^a	0.02*	14.80*	0.11	0.16	0.13	0.27	0.02	0.19	0.16	0.29	0.17
TriPM Meanness (9.66)	33.53	0.43^a	0.14*	76.30*	0.38^a	0.12*	85.02*	0.22	0.24	0.30	0.41	0.10	0.33	0.29	0.45	0.36
LSRP Factor 1 (8.54)	31.78	0.46	0.16*	72.18*	0.42	0.14*	75.12*	0.26	0.28	0.35	0.44	0.17	0.37	0.34	0.47	0.39
LSRP Factor 2 (5.02)	20.46	0.34	0.06*	27.81*	0.29	0.05*	24.88*	0.21	0.23	0.23	0.32	0.12	0.27^a	0.24^a	0.35	0.26^a

Note: Bolded is $p < 0.001$, italicized is $p < 0.05$. RW = Relative weights, which represent the proportion of variance attributed to each predictor; RS-RW = Rescaled relative weights, which represent the percentage of predicted variance attributed to each predictor.

^a Denotes a significant gender moderation effect. LSRP = Levenson Self-report Psychopathy Scale; PPI = Psychopathic Personality Inventory; TriPM = Triarchic Psychopathy Measure; ARVS = Attitudes Toward Rape Victims; RMAS = Rape Myths Acceptance Scale; Angry = Refers to the following RMAS item: "The percentage of women who falsely report rape"; Pregnant = Refers to the following RMAS item: "The percentage of women who report rape after becoming pregnant to protect their own reputation."

* Indicates that the RW and RS-RW confidence intervals are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

differences for LSRP F2 scores ($p = 0.13$; $d = 0.11$). With regards to gender differences in the relations between personality pathology and rape attitudes, 16 zero-order correlations between psychopathy and RMA, 7 were significantly moderated by gender (denoted in Table 1). Broadly, the relations between the callous and antagonistic psychopathy features and RMA were often moderated by gender, and there was one instance in which disinhibition and RMA were moderated by gender.

More specifically, the relations between (a) PPI C, TriPM Meanness, and TriPM Disinhibition, and (b) both RMA indices (i.e., ARVS and RMAS), were stronger for females. For instance, whereas the relation between PPI C and ARVS was small and nonsignificant for males ($r = 0.10$, $p = 0.25$), the relation was moderate and significant for females ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that women who endorsed higher levels of RMA were more coldhearted and mean, and potentially more disinhibited although the lone effect did not replicate across psychopathy measures, than their male counterparts.

Indeed, of the significant gender moderation effects, there was only one instance in which the relation was stronger for males (i.e., TriPM Boldness predicting RMAS); this relation was not significant for either gender. Furthermore, the addition of the psychopathy-by-gender interaction term accounted for a small but significant amount of the variance in RMA above and beyond psychopathy and RMA main effects ($R^2 \Delta$ s for all moderation analyses ranged from 0.00 to 0.02). Taken together, there was consistent support for gender differences in the relations between psychopathy and RMA in the domain of coldheartedness and meanness; in contrast, gender differences in this association did not emerge for other psychopathy features.

4. Discussion

Consistent with our predictions, most psychopathy features significantly predicted RMA in two large undergraduate samples. This was particularly the case for the psychopathy features that reflect callousness, lack of empathy, and antagonism; it was also true but to a lesser extent for the disinhibitory features of psychopathy. These results were consistent with the existing literature (e.g., Debowska et al., 2014; Mouilso & Calhoun, 2013), albeit with one important exception; we included multiple psychopathy measures that included both the adaptive and maladaptive aspects of psychopathy, and found that only the traditionally maladaptive psychopathy features predicted RMA.

As predicted, although both the meanness-related and disinhibited psychopathy features significantly predicted RMA, relative importance analyses revealed that the meanness-related features accounted for the overwhelming majority of the predicted variance in these attitudes. In contrast, boldness features were essentially unrelated to RMA, consistent with the view that they reflect largely interpersonally adaptive features, such as venturesomeness and immunity to stress. Taken together, the callous and antagonistic features of psychopathy best predicted RMA. Counter to our expectations, however, psychopathy subdimensions did not typically discriminate in terms of their relations with specific aspects of RMA, although psychopathy was typically unrelated to rape attitudes that suggest that the perpetrator did not intend to commit rape.

Although most of our gender moderation analyses were nonsignificant and consistent with the existing literature (Miller et al., 2011), they yielded an interesting and unpredicted pattern of results. Namely, the relations between (a) coldheartedness and meanness, both of which reflect callousness, and (b) RMA, were stronger among females than males. These findings suggest that women who harbor negative attitudes toward rape victims, most of whom are themselves female (CDC, 2012), may be particularly callous in their attitudes regarding sexual assault relative to males. Furthermore, these findings are of importance because the literature typically focuses on exclusively or predominantly male samples, and perhaps incorrectly assumes that these relations are most relevant for males compared with females.

5. Conclusion

Despite its strengths, our study was characterized by several limitations. First, although widespread claims that the validity of self-reported psychopathy is diminished by social desirability response styles appear to be largely unsupported (Watts, Smith, & Lilienfeld, 2015), our exclusive reliance on self-reported measures renders our findings susceptible to mono-method bias. Future research should examine informant reports of our target constructs in addition to self-reports to provide stronger corroboration of the findings. Second, we relied exclusively on undergraduate samples to examine these relations. Further research should examine the generalizability of our findings in other samples, such as community or prison samples. Lastly, we were only able to assess how psychopathy relates to rape myth attitudes and beliefs. Future

studies should examine how these constructs relate to behavior, including sexually aggressive acts and rape perpetration.

The finding that certain psychopathic traits relate to rape attitudes can be situated within Malamuth's Confluence Model (Malamuth, 2003). According to this model, certain distal factors, such as psychopathic traits, may combine with proximal factors, such as negative attitudes toward rape victims, to place individuals at increased risk for committing sexual assault. Given that psychopathic traits are associated with both hostile attitudes toward women and impersonal sexual encounters, psychopathic traits may be one important predictor of the perpetration of sexual assault in part via attitudinal variables.

Although our results do not speak to this issue directly, they raise the possibility that RMA is one possible mechanism by which psychopathic features – particularly the mean and disinhibited features – relate to sexual assault. This possibility is supported by a substantial body of research. For instance, Burt (1980) argued that RMA acts as a “psychological neutralizer” (p. 134) that supports sexual violence by means of justification on the part of the perpetrator and Ward, Polaschek, and Beech (2006) posited that RMA was one of the most – if not the most – likely constructs to give rise to sexual aggression or sexual offending. In the same vein, Walters and Geyer (2004) well-validated measure of criminal thinking styles contains content assessing blame externalization and denial of harm to victims, both of which are present in measures of rape attitudes, suggesting that these are widespread cognitive distortions among people prone to engaging in criminal behavior.

The possibility that psychopathy relates to sexual assault by means of RMA highlights the potential need for prevention and intervention programs targeted at individuals who endorse high levels of RMA. If this hypothesis is borne out by strong tests of mediation, prevention programs may ultimately wish to focus restructuring attitudes toward women, who are most at-risk for being victims of sexual assault, as well as attitudes toward romantic and sexual relationships (see Abbey et al., 2011, for a discussion). More broadly, future research should continue to better understand psychopathic individuals' attitudes toward coercive sexuality and sexual aggression, and how these attitudes translate into damaging, even dangerous, real-world behaviors.

References

- Abbey, A., Jacques-Tiura, A. J., & LeBreton, J. M. (2011). Risk factors for sexual aggression in young men: An expansion of the confluence model. *Aggressive Behavior, 37*, 450–464.
- Burt, M. R. (1980). Cultural myths and supports for rape. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 38*, 217–230.
- Chapleau, K. M., Oswald, D. L., & Russell, B. L. (2008). Male rape myths: The role of gender, violence, and sexism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0886260507313529>.
- Debowska, A., Boduszek, D., Dhingra, K., Kola, S., & Meller-Pruncka, A. (2014). The role of psychopathy and exposure to violence in rape myth acceptance. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 30*, 2751–2770.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation Criminal Justice Information Services Division (2014n). 2014 Crime in the United States uniform crime report, rape. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/offenses-known-to-law-enforcement/rape>
- Greendlinger, V., & Byrne, D. (1987). Coercive sexual fantasies of college men as predictors of self-reported likelihood to rape and overt sexual aggression. *Journal of Sex Research, 23*, 1–11.
- Hare, R. D. (2003). *Manual for the revised psychopathy checklist* (2nd ed.). Toronto, Ontario: Multihealth Systems Inc.
- Harpur, T. J., Hare, R. D., & Hakstian, A. R. (1989). Two-factor conceptualization of psychopathy: Construct validity and assessment implications. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1*, 6–17.
- Hayes, A. F. (2012). “PROCESS: A Versatile Computational Tool for Observed Variable Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Modeling,” white paper, The Ohio State University. (accessed January 18, 2013) [available at <http://www.afhayes.com/public/process2012.pdf>].
- Hecht, L. K., Berg, J. M., Lilienfeld, S. O., & Latzman, R. D. (2016). Parsing the heterogeneity of psychopathy and aggression: Differential associations across dimensions and gender. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment, 7*, 2–14.
- Hersh, K., & Gray-Little, B. (1998). Psychopathic traits and attitudes associated with self-reported sexual aggression in college men. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 13*, 456–471.
- Kosson, D., Kelly, J., & White, J. (1997). Psychopathy-related traits predict self-reported sexual aggression among college men. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 12*, 241–254.
- Levenson, M. R., Kiehl, K. A., & Fitzpatrick, C. M. (1995). Assessing psychopathic attributes in a noninstitutionalized population. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68*, 151–158.
- Lilienfeld, S. O., & Widows, M. R. (2005). *Psychopathic personality inventory – Revised*. Lutz, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Lilienfeld, S. O., Watts, A. L., Smith, F. S., Berg, J. M., & Latzman, R. D. (2015). Psychopathy deconstructed and reconstructed: Identifying and assembling the personality building blocks of Cleckley's chimera. *Journal of Personality, 83*, 593–610.
- Malamuth, N. (1986). Predictors of naturalistic sexual aggression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50*, 953–962.
- Malamuth, N. (2003). Criminal and noncriminal sexual aggressors: Integrating psychopathy in a hierarchical mediational confluence model. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 989*, 33–58.
- Miller, J., Watts, A., & Jones, S. (2011). Does psychopathy manifest divergent relations with components of its nomological network depending on gender? *Personality and Individual Differences, 50*, 564–569.
- Mouilso, E., & Calhoun, K. (2013). The role of rape myth acceptance and psychopathy in sexual assault perpetration. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 22*, 159–174.
- O'Connell, D., & Marcus, D. (2016). Psychopathic personality traits predict positive attitudes toward sexually predatory behaviors in college men and women. *Personality and Individual Differences, 94*, 372–376.
- Patrick, C. J. (2010). Triarchic psychopathy measure. Retrieved from <https://www.phenxtoolkit.org/index.php?pageLink=browse.protocoldetails&id=121601>
- Patrick, C. J., Fowles, D. C., & Krueger, R. F. (2009). Triarchic conceptualization of psychopathy: Developmental origins of disinhibition, boldness, and meanness. *Development and Psychopathology, 21*, 913–938.
- Paulhus, D.L., Neumann, C.S., & Hare, R.D. Manual for the self-report psychopathy scale. Toronto: Multi-Health Systems (in press).
- Payne, D. L., Lonsway, K. A., & Fitzgerald, L. F. (1999). Rape myth acceptance: Exploration of its structure and its measurement using the Illinois rape myth acceptance scale. *Journal of Research in Personality, 33*, 27–68.
- Sable, M. R., Danis, F., Mauzy, D. L., & Gallagher, S. K. (2006). Barriers to reporting sexual assault for women and men: Perspectives of college students. *Journal of American College Health, 55*, 157–162.
- Seto, M. C., & Lalumière, M. L. (2010). What is so special about male adolescent sexual offending? A review and test of explanations through meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*, 526–575.
- Sinozich, S., & Langton, L. (2014). *Rape and sexual assault victimization among college-aged females, 1995–2013 (NCJ 248471)*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Stewart, A. L. (2014). The Men's project: A sexual assault prevention program targeting college men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 15*, 481–485.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012). Sexual violence: facts at a glance. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-datashet-a.pdf>
- Tonidandel, S., & LeBreton, J. M. (2014). RAW-Web – A free, comprehensive, web-based, and user-friendly tool for relative weight analysis. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 35*, 1–11.
- Verona, E., & Vitale, J. (2006). Psychopathy in women: Assessment, manifestations, and etiology. In C. J. Patrick (Ed.), *Handbook of psychopathy* (pp. 415–436). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Voller, E. K., & Long, P. J. (2009). Sexual assault and rape perpetration by college men: The role of the Big Five personality traits. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 25*, 457–480.
- Walters, G. D., & Geyer, M. D. (2004). Criminal thinking and identity in male white-collar offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 31*, 263–281.
- Ward, C. (1988). The attitudes toward rape victims scale. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 12*, 127–146.
- Ward, T., Polaschek, D., & Beech, A. (2006). In C. Hollin, & M. McMurrin (Eds.), *Theories of sexual offending*. West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Watts, A., Smith, S., & Lilienfeld, S. (2015). Illusory correlation. *The Encyclopedia of Clinical Psychology, Vol. III*. (pp. 1–8). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.