



The relative importance of psychopathy-related traits in predicting impersonal sex and hostile masculinity

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the relative contributions of several facets of subclinical psychopathy (i.e., callous affect, erratic lifestyle, interpersonal manipulation), subclinical narcissism (i.e., entitlement, exploitation), and trait aggression (i.e., anger) to the prediction of four enduring attitudes towards women and sexual assault (i.e., hostility towards women, negative attitudes regarding women, sexual dominance, impersonal sex) and a behavioral indicator of an impersonal sexual behavior (i.e., number of one-night stands). Survey data were collected from 470 single men living in the Detroit Metropolitan area. The importance of personality traits varied as a function of the outcome with anger most predictive of hostility toward women; erratic lifestyle most predictive of impersonal sexual attitudes and behavior, and entitlement most predictive of sexual dominance and negative attitudes toward women. These outcome-specific findings are interpreted and directions for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The prevalence of sexual assault is alarmingly high, with 25% to 50% of women reporting some form of sexual victimization (Black et al., 2011; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Most sexual assaults remain unreported and occur within the context of a relationship. Malamuth's confluence model is the most commonly used etiologic model of sexual aggression in nonincarcerated populations (Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991). As described below, Malamuth and colleagues argued that hostile masculinity and impersonal sex are critical, proximal predictors of sexual aggression. Their original model included distal predictors of sexual aggression (e.g., exposure to violence, delinquency); however, it did not emphasize personality traits.

Although there have been some attempts to integrate psychopathy-related traits into the confluence model (Abbey, Jacques-Tiura, & LeBreton, 2011; Malamuth, 2003), this has not been a major focus of research. Thus, the current paper extends prior research by examining a unique set of aversive traits that form the components of a broader psychopathic personality and examining the relative importance of these components in the pre-

diction of specific indicators of impersonal sex and hostile masculinity. Although the goal of this study is to provide new directions for etiologic research, it does not include sexual aggression as an outcome measure.¹ Instead, our focus is on understanding how psychopathy-related traits are differentially related to the critical, proximal predictors of sexual aggression identified by Malamuth and colleagues.

1.1. Impersonal sex and hostile masculinity as proximal antecedents of sexual assault

Hostile masculinity reflects antagonistic, distrustful, and insecure attitudes towards women (Malamuth et al., 1991, 1995). Individuals characterized by this construct use sex as a means of demonstrating their power and dominance over their partners. *Impersonal sex* reflects a detached, promiscuous, and non-committal orientation towards sexual relations (Malamuth et al., 1991, 1995). Individuals characterized by this construct are more likely "to engage in sexual relationships without closeness or commitment" (p. 354; Malamuth et al., 1995). Empirical research supports the importance of both these constructs individually and in combination as critical predictors of sexual aggression in community and college samples of

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¹ Data used in the current paper were collected as part of a large multi-year study. Abbey et al. (2011) reported results based on a subset of those data. The current paper uses a different analytic approach and tests different relationships than the 2011 article.

young men (Abbey et al., 2001; Abbey, Parkhill, BeShears, Clinton-Sherrod, & Zawacki, 2006; Malamuth et al., 1991, 1995).

1.2. Subclinical psychopathy and its relationship to impersonal sex and hostile masculinity

Psychopathy refers to a cluster of traits including arrogance, deceitfulness, impulsivity, and deficient affective experiences (Hare, 1993). One popular model of psychopathy focuses on callous affect, erratic lifestyle, interpersonal manipulation, and criminal tendencies (Mahmut, Menictas, Stevenson, & Homewood, 2011). Psychopaths are self-interested and use their manipulative skills to achieve their own egocentric goals. Although only 1% of the population likely meets the clinical criteria for psychopathy, many exhibit subclinical tendencies (cf. Hare, 1993; LeBreton, Binning, & Adorno, 2006). Such individuals may appear charming to potential romantic partners, despite being egocentrically focused on their own needs. Concomitantly, these individuals cannot empathize with others, thus they often act without regard for others' well-being. Psychopathy is also associated with a lack of planning, self-control, or concern for social norms (Hare, 1993; Jonason & Tost, 2010; LeBreton et al., 2006; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Wu & LeBreton, 2011). Thus, it is not surprising that psychopathy-related traits have been linked with attitudes related to hostile masculinity (Hunter, Figueredo, & Malamuth, 2010). In addition, a focus on short-term egocentric interests also predisposes individuals with psychopathy-related traits to prefer short-term, permissive sexual relationships (Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012).

1.3. Narcissism and its relationship to impersonal sex and hostile masculinity

Narcissism refers to feelings of superiority, entitlement, and vanity, coupled with inflated and unstable self-views; the construct has also been linked to the broader psychopathic personality (cf. Hare, 1993; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Elevated levels of narcissism are related to self-enhancement (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), aggressive responses to ego threats (Twenge & Campbell, 2003), seeking to dominate others (Carroll, 1987), and hostility against women who reject sexual advances (Baumeister, Catanese, & Wallace, 2002).

Previous research has linked global measures of narcissism to rape-supportive beliefs, a lack of empathy for rape victims, sexually coercive behavior, and preferences for short-term relationships (Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011; Jonason et al., 2012; Kosson, Kelly, & White, 1997). However, two specific dimensions of narcissism, entitlement and exploitation, have been shown to be especially relevant for predicting sexual assault (Zeigler-Hill, Enjaian, & Essa, 2013); and thus, we predict they will also emerge as particularly relevant as predictors of hostile masculinity and impersonal sex. *Narcissistic entitlement* reflects pervasive beliefs that one is deserving of (sexual) gratification, and thus may lead some men to feel justified in having impersonal, promiscuous sexual relationships and when necessary, coercing others into sexual activity. Similarly, *narcissistic exploitation* reflects tendencies to manipulate others. Such tendencies may lead some men to be less sensitive to social constraints against such behavior in general, and more specifically, disinhibited with respect to enacting sexually coercive behaviors (Lisak & Roth, 1988). We expect that men with higher levels of entitlement and exploitation will be inclined to depersonalize women, framing them as mere sex objects and thus more likely to engage in short-term and promiscuous relationships. Entitlement and exploitation are also emblematic of the narcissistic tendencies associated with psychopathy (Hare, 1993; LeBreton et al., 2006).

1.4. Trait anger and its relationship to impersonal sex and hostile masculinity

Buss and Perry (1992) define trait anger as the affective component of aggression that is associated with high arousal which prepares individuals to behave aggressively. They also suggest that anger serves as a bridge between hostile cognitions and aggressive behavior. Thus, when rejected by a potential sexual partner, men who are high in trait anger may be more likely to experience animosity and suspicion, which may then be used to justify sexual aggression (cf. James & LeBreton, 2010; Ryan, 2004). Like narcissism, trait anger and aggression are often considered important aspects of a broader psychopathic personality (Lynam & Widiger, 2007; Seibert, Miller, Few, Zeichner, & Lynam, 2011).

1.5. Distinctiveness of psychopathy-related traits

Despite subtle differences among these traits, it is not uncommon to group psychopathy, narcissism, and anger together, because they all reflect common components of a broader psychopathic personality (Kosson et al., 1997; Lynam & Widiger, 2007; Malamuth, 2003). Although these traits are moderately correlated, they are not redundant (cf. Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Seibert et al., 2011). Consequently, these traits likely differ in their relative importance for predicting specific aspects of hostile masculinity and impersonal sex.

1.6. Hypotheses

We assessed three facets of hostile masculinity (hostility toward women, negative attitudes regarding women, sexual dominance) and two facets of impersonal sex (impersonal sex attitudes, impersonal sexual behavior). These facets were selected based on prior research demonstrating their relationships with sexual aggression (cf. Abbey et al., 2011; Malamuth, 2003; Malamuth et al., 1995). We generated a set of tentative hypotheses linking the various personality facets to hostile masculinity and impersonal sex.

Given the emotive nature of the hostility towards women outcome, we predicted that trait anger would emerge as the most important predictor of this outcome. With respect to negative attitudes concerning women we anticipated that narcissistic entitlement and to a lesser degree callous affect would emerge as the most important predictors of this outcome. We expected that the predicted variance in sexual dominance would be driven primarily by narcissistic entitlement and to a lesser degree interpersonal manipulation. Finally, the impersonal sexual orientation construct reflects high levels of impulsive and promiscuous behavior. Thus, we predict the erratic lifestyle facet of psychopathy followed by narcissistic exploitation would emerge as the most important predictors of impersonal sex. Stated formally:

Hypothesis 1. Trait anger will emerge as the most important predictor of hostility towards women.

Hypothesis 2. (a) Narcissistic entitlement and (b) callous affect will emerge as the most important predictors of negative attitudes regarding women.

Hypothesis 3. (a) Narcissistic entitlement and (b) interpersonal manipulation will emerge as the most important predictors of sexual dominance.

Hypothesis 4. (a) Erratic lifestyle and (b) narcissistic exploitation will emerge as the most important predictors of impersonal sex attitudes.

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