

Guilty or Not? A Path Model of Women's Sexual Force Fantasies

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This study estimated a path model of women's forceful sexual fantasies. Constructs examined were childhood sexual abuse, feminist beliefs, sexual guilt, erotophilia, and sexual experience. The study clarifies how these factors mediate one another in relationship to forceful sexual fantasies and is first to examine the effects of feminist beliefs on forceful sexual fantasy. Adult women (N = 261) participated by completing an online survey. A path from sex guilt to forceful sexual fantasy, mediated by erotophilia, was found, wherein low levels of sex guilt and high levels of erotophilia were found to predict forceful sexual fantasy. A direct path between childhood sexual abuse and forceful sexual fantasy was also found. The resulting model is discussed in relation to previously-proposed theories on the role of force in women's sexual fantasies.

The majority of women engage in some form of sexual fantasizing (Cado & Leitenberg, 1990; Jones & Barlow, 1990; Strassberg & Lockerd, 1998). Moreover, sexual fantasies appear to play a role in women's sexual functioning and satisfaction (Alfonso, Allison, & Dunn, 1992; Cado & Leitenberg; Nutter & Condon, 1983). For instance, greater frequency of sexual fantasy among women has been found to be associated with greater sexual satisfaction (Alfonso et al., 1992) as well as lower levels of sexual guilt (Pelletier & Herold, 1988). Unlike other aspects of sexuality, sexual fantasies are a private experience about which others are typically unaware and, because of this private nature, women can engage in them freely without threat of discovery. These fantasies can serve as a means to imagine "sexual experiences that are never likely to occur due to legal, ethical, or other constraints" (Chick & Gold, 1987-1988, p. 61). As such, they may be outlets for women to explore and embody their sexualities free from restraint. Given that women experience sexual difficulty often stemming in part from sexual anxiety or embarrassment (Daniluk, 1998; Tiefer, Hall, & Tavris, 2002), the freedom accompanying an active sexual fantasy life may occupy a beneficial role in the sexual lives of women.

Robinson and Calhoun (1982-1983) found that women believe that they are less entitled to fantasize about various sex acts than men. As such, women may experience guilt, shame, or sexual dissatisfaction when they believe that they should not be entertaining sexual fantasies (Cado & Leitenberg, 1990; Chick & Gold, 1987-1988; Pelletier & Herold, 1988). It is possible, then, that holding the belief that they are not entitled to such sexual freedom may prevent women from unreserved engagement in sexual fantasies.

Forceful Sexual Fantasy Among Women

Force is a particularly common theme in sexual fantasies (Hariton, 1973; Hariton & Singer, 1974; Knafo & Jaffe,

1984; Marcus, 1981; Pelletier & Herold, 1988; Strassberg & Lockerd, 1998). In their study on women's sexual fantasies during intercourse, Hariton and Singer found submission fantasies to be very common, second in occurrence only to the theme of an "imaginary lover." In more recent studies of women's sexuality, more than half of the participants reported having force fantasies (Pelletier & Herold; Strassberg & Lockerd). In Knafo and Jaffe's study, the most common sexual fantasy entertained among women during intercourse was that of being overpowered.

An important difference exists between a desired forceful sexual fantasy and an undesired actual rape. Beyond the obvious difference that, in the former, no actual violation of body and will is experienced, the fantasist also has complete control, while a lack of control characterizes rape. Moreover, rape is fraught with the possibility of bodily harm or death of the victim. Research corroborates that women engage in these fantasies for the purpose of sexual arousal and pleasure, not out of desire for an actual rape or force experience (Bond & Mosher, 1986; Kanin, 1982). For example, Zurbriggen and Yost (2004) argued that there appears to be no relationship between submission fantasy and real-world behavior (e.g., desiring to be raped), given their findings that there was no connection between women's submission fantasies and various attitudinal measures assessing rape acceptance, negativity toward women, and belief in hostility between men and women.

Competing Views on Sex Guilt

Despite the difference in forceful sexual fantasy and actual forceful sex, it is unknown why women entertain exploitive and often violent, albeit controllable, fantasies in which they are the recipients of sexual force. One explanation, the "guilt-reduction theory" (Knafo & Jaffe, 1984), posits that women engage in force fantasies to avoid the guilt that would be experienced if they were to assume responsibility for their sexual desires. By averting the responsibility for their sexual desires, they are able to

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enjoy the sexual experience. In describing the apparently “guilt-ridden” women she had interviewed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Friday (1991) said, “The most popular guilt-avoiding device was the so-called rape fantasy . . . Saying that she was ‘raped’ was the most expedient way of getting past the big No to sex that had been imprinted on her mind since childhood” (pp. 4-5).

According to the guilt-reduction theory, women with higher sex guilt would entertain more frequent force fantasies than those with lower sex guilt because they would need to reduce such guilt in order to enjoy their sexual desires. Moreault and Follingstad (1978) found that women with higher sex guilt reported more sexual fantasies, as well as more explicit and varied types of fantasy themes.

Other research, however, calls into question the guilt-reduction theory, reporting opposite or neutral findings on sex guilt and force fantasies. Pelletier and Herold (1988) found no relationship between force fantasies and sex guilt among single college women. Others have found that women with low sex guilt are more likely to experience force in their sexual fantasies than those women with high sex guilt (Bond & Mosher, 1986; Strassberg & Lockerd, 1998). These findings are typically interpreted as evidence for an alternative possibility (Gold, Balzano, & Stamey, 1991; Pelletier & Herold; Strassberg & Lockerd), that women with low sex guilt are more open to a variety of sexual experiences and stimuli than women with high sex guilt; this openness allows women to experiment with different sexual thoughts and acts, and so they are more likely to entertain, among other fantasies, those involving force. According to this theory, women with low sex guilt would not only report more force fantasies, but they would also report more varied and frequent sexual experiences and greater enjoyment of sex overall.

Sexual Experience, Erotophilia, and Forceful Sexual Fantasy

Sexual experience has been found to be positively associated with forceful sexual fantasy (Gold et al., 1991; Pelletier & Herold, 1988; Strassberg & Lockerd, 1998). Women in Strassberg and Lockerd’s study who had entertained at least one force fantasy reported more total partners with whom they had experienced a greater variety of sexual experiences than those who had never engaged in force fantasies. In fact, sexual experience may mediate the connection between sex guilt and force fantasy; women who feel less guilt regarding sexuality are more likely to engage in more frequent and varied sexual experiences, which may broaden their scope of sexual fantasies, including force fantasies.

Erotophilia-erotophobia is defined as a “disposition to respond to sexual cues along a positive-negative dimension of affect and evaluation” (Fisher, Byrne, White, & Kelley, 1988, p. 123). The positive end of this construct, erotophilia, has been found to be related to greater sexual experience (Strassberg & Lockerd, 1998), as well as to

force fantasies (Gold et al., 1991; Strassberg & Lockerd). In addition to this positive relationship between erotophilia and force fantasy, it seems likely that women with low sex guilt are more likely to score higher on erotophilia, as suggested by studies that have found women lower on sex guilt to be more open to sexual experiences and more interested in sexual experiences (Gold et al.; Pelletier & Herold, 1988; Strassberg & Lockerd). As such, women low on sexual guilt may be more likely to have positive associations with sex (erotophilia), which may, in turn, mediate the relationship between sex guilt and force fantasy. Based on this research, we predicted that sexual experience and erotophilia would be positively related to forceful sexual fantasy.

History of Sexual Assault and Abuse

Pelletier and Herold (1988) found a connection between specific sexual acts and similar sexual fantasies, wherein women were more likely to engage in sexual fantasies about something that they had actually experienced. Research investigating this association specific to unwanted or abusive sexual acts has been mixed. Briere, Smiljanich, and Henschel (1994) and Gold (1991) found a strong positive relationship between force fantasies and childhood sexual abuse histories among women. However, others found no relationship between a history of adult sexual victimization and forceful sexual fantasies (Gold & Clegg, 1990; Gold et al., 1991; Pihlgren, Gidycz, & Lynn, 1992-1993; Strassberg & Lockerd, 1998). Developmental explanations may account for the differences in the findings on abuse and force fantasies. Early sexual trauma may teach a young person to associate sex with force (Corney, Briere, & Esses, 1992; Gold; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995), while adult sexual victimization may not impact a fully developed and established sexual schema.

Research has also found significant differences in sexual behaviors and attitudes between women who were victims of childhood sexual abuse and those who were not (Messman-Moore & Long, 2003; Noll, Trickett, & Putnam, 2003). Women with abuse histories tend to engage in earlier and riskier sexual behaviors, appear to be more sexually preoccupied, and are at greater risk for adolescent pregnancy. Noll et al. (2003) pointed out that such sexual preoccupation may indicate internalized sexual compulsions. Given these unique sexual trajectories, it seems likely that women with sexual abuse histories from their childhood might engage sexual fantasies that are more varied and that possibly contain forceful content.

Feminist Beliefs and Force Fantasies

Feminist beliefs have not been empirically studied in relation to force fantasies. Feminist-identified women may experience particular struggles over force fantasies because of values that are likely to come into conflict, such as the tension between dominant/submissive sexual relations inherent in force fantasies and the feminist principle of equality and power-sharing in relationships. This is not to

say, however, that feminist women do not necessarily entertain forceful sexual fantasies. Bartky (1994) queries, "What to do, for example, when the structure of desire is at war with one's principles? This is a difficult question for any person of conscience, but it has a particular poignancy for feminists" (p. 519). Certainly, fantasizing about force, which is embedded within a context of subordination, may be disturbing for feminists. Nevertheless, whether this ideological conflict prevents women from entertaining, and presumably gaining pleasure from, such fantasies is unknown.

Although few feminists have written explicitly about forceful sexual fantasies, and have done so purely theoretically (Bartky, 1994), there has been significant feminist writing about pornography and sexual freedom, in general (Bartky; Russo, 1987; Willis, 1994). Russo elaborated on two primary feminist positions regarding sexual freedom: those who view pornography as exploitive and oppressive of women and those who see its control as repressive of women's sexual desire and expression. Essentially, she argued, the debate focuses on the problems of women's sexual victimization on the one hand and of women's sexual repression on the other. A similar tension can be conjectured with forceful sexual fantasies.

Some feminists have suggested that, due to the ubiquitous sociocultural trope for women's and men's actual sexual relations, with the male in the aggressor role and the female in the submissive role, many women do entertain force or rape fantasies (Brownmiller, 1975; Russell, 1998). Brownmiller specifically argued that "given the pervasive male ideology of rape . . . a mirror-image female victim ideology could not help but arise" (p. 359). According to this argument, feminist women would be expected to entertain force fantasies with the same frequency as non-feminist women. Feminists have heightened awareness of the intimate connections between the personal and political as well as the overarching subordination of women perpetuated by the power differential in male-female sexual relations. Despite such awareness, however, this theory proposes that feminists, like other women, are still exposed to media and are part of a larger system that has served to socialize women and men to eroticize domination and submission (Corne et al., 1992; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995). Feminist women, therefore, may not differ from women as a general group.

Alternatively, it seems possible that those with stronger feminist beliefs may have even more force fantasies than those less feminist-minded. To date, this relationship has not been investigated. In their review of sexual fantasy, Chick and Gold (1987-1988) discussed that women with more frequent and varied sexual fantasies tended to be more politically liberal. This association between political liberalism with increased fantasies could suggest that endorsement of feminist beliefs, which have been historically liberal, (Cowan, Mestlin, & Masek, 1992; Henley, Meng, O'Brien, McCarthy, & Sockloskie, 1998), also may be related to more varied sex fantasies. Moreover, women who have more liberal attitudes and who are more inde-

pendent and non-conforming have been found to engage in more frequent general sexual fantasizing compared to less liberal and more traditional women (Brown & Hart, 1977; Hariton, 1973). Given that non-traditionality is commonly linked to feminist beliefs (Twenge & Zucker, 1999), women who hold more feminist beliefs also may entertain more frequent and more varied sexual fantasies than women who do not hold feminist beliefs. It is unclear, however, whether this relationship holds true for the specific fantasy involving force.

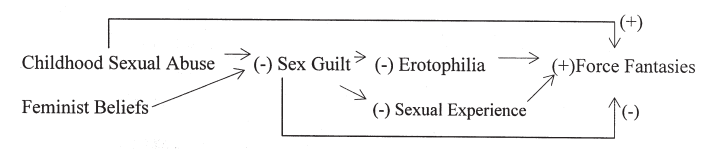
In this study, we explored the direct and indirect influences of childhood sexual abuse, feminist beliefs, sex guilt, erotophilia, and sexual experience on force fantasies among women through a path model analysis. We researched the following eight hypotheses: Childhood sexual abuse (1), erotophilia (2), and sexual experience (3) will have direct positive impacts on forceful sexual fantasies. Childhood sexual abuse will have a direct positive impact on sexual experience (4). Feminist beliefs (5) and childhood sexual abuse (6) will have a negative, direct impact on sexual guilt. Sex guilt, in turn, will negatively impact forceful sexual fantasy, both directly (7) and indirectly, through erotophilia and sexual experience (8). See Figure 1 for full statistical model.

METHOD

Participants

Participants included 261 adult women who were invited to complete an internet survey. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 66, with a median age of 26 and a mean age of 27.9 ($SD = 8.8$). In contrast, the median age for women in the general population is 37.4 (Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005); therefore, this sample overall was younger and perhaps more reflective of women who are more comfortable with internet technology. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (77.6%); 7.2% were African American; 4.4% were Latina; 0.8% were Asian American; 1.4% were biracial/multiracial; and 6.4% were not identified or other, which suggests an overrepresentation of Caucasian women and an under-representation of women of color in the sample when compared to the general U.S. population of women (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Participants reported educational background: college degree or more (49.1%), some college education (41.7%), high school degree, (5.2%), and some high school (2.5%). This sample has a much higher level of education than the general U.S. population of women above the age of 25, about 15% of whom have a college

Figure 1. Statistical model.



degree or higher level of education (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

Participants described a range of sexual orientations: exclusively heterosexual (57.5%), between exclusively heterosexual and bisexual (28.4%), bisexual (5.8%), between bisexual and exclusively lesbian (3.6%), and lesbian (3.3%). The representativeness of this sample with respect to sexual orientation is difficult to determine, since much debate exists over the breakdown of sexual orientation in the general population, as well as the inherent difficulty in assessing this variable, given that many people do not disclose their sexual orientation (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). However, recent studies suggest that between 1-5% of women are homosexual (Alm, Badgett, & Whittington, 1998). Forty-six percent of the participants identified themselves as feminist; 52.2% did not identify as feminist, a similar rate to the approximately 51% who self-identified as feminist according to the National Women's Equality Poll by Louis Harris and Peter Harris Research Group (Feminist Majority Foundation, 1995).

Instruments

Forceful Sexual Fantasy, sexual suffering subscale. Participants completed an adapted form of the sexual suffering subscale of Meuwissen and Over's (1991) Female Sexual Fantasy Questionnaire (FSFQ). For this study, only the 6-item sexual suffering subscale was used to assess force fantasies. With permission from the authors, we altered the wording of the questionnaire to be appropriate for women of all sexual orientations and to assess on a 7-point likert scale, from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*daily*), the frequency with which they had entertained each fantasy over the last year. A reliability analysis with the full sample ($N = 261$) yielded a reliability coefficient of .91 for the sexual suffering subscale, indicating that the revised subscale maintained sufficient reliability for use in the study.

Cowart-Pollack Scale of Sexual Experience. The Cowart-Pollack Scale of Sexual Experience (Cowart-Steckler & Pollack, 1998) consists of two checklists of sexual activities, one for women and one for men. An adapted version of the 30-item female version was used in this study. We altered the items to be appropriate for women of all sexual orientations and summed items to calculate a total number of different sexual acts each participant reported having experienced. A reliability analysis with the full sample ($N = 261$) yielded a reliability coefficient of .92, indicating that the scale maintained sufficient reliability for use in the study.

Revised Guilt Inventory, sex-guilt subscale. The Mosher guilt inventories measure three discrete aspects of guilt: sex-guilt, hostility-guilt, and morality-conscience, for which evidence has provided discriminant validity (Mosher, 1998). For the current study, only the 50-item sex-guilt subscale was used. Participants rated the degree to which each item was true or not true for them on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*extremely true*). An overall sex-guilt mean

score ranging from 1 to 7 is yielded. Higher scores indicated higher levels of guilt. In this study, a reliability analysis yielded an alpha coefficient of .93.

Sexual Opinion Survey. Fisher's (1998) Sexual Opinion Survey (SOS) is a 21-item scale used to assess erotophilia-erotophobia, defined as "the learned disposition to respond to sexual stimuli with positive-to-negative affect and evaluation and is believed to determine avoidance or approach responses to sexual stimuli" (p. 218). Using the formula developed by the authors of the scale, total scores may range from 0, indicating less erotophilia, to 126, indicating more erotophilia. Fisher et al. (1988) found the female version of the scale to have high internal consistency, $\alpha = .90$. In the current study, the internal consistency reliability was .85.

Sexual Experiences Survey-2001 Revision. Koss and Bachars' (2001) Sexual Experience Survey is a "self-report instrument that is designed to reflect various degrees of sexual aggression and victimization and is capable of identifying hidden rape victims" (Koss & Gidycz, 1985, p. 422). This instrument was developed to assess sexual victimization on a continuum, with rape characterizing the extreme end. The instrument assesses for incidents of actual as well as attempted sexual abuse, and includes "double counting" (personal communication, M. P. Koss, July 19, 2001), which conceptualizes each type of abuse or attempted abuse as a separate act. If, for example, a person was kidnapped and forced to have oral sex, anal sex, and vaginal sex, the SES score would indicate three counts of abuse. An adapted version was used in the current study, with the 26 items assessing frequency of various types of sexual victimization retained; however, to ascertain childhood sexual abuse histories, these items were tailored specifically and solely to incidents occurring prior to 14 years of age. A reliability analysis with the full sample ($N = 261$) yielded an adequate reliability coefficient of .88. Additionally, participants in the full sample reported a mean of 8.8 ($SD = 11.9$) incidents of childhood sexual abuse, with 30% reporting never having experienced any form of attempted or perpetrated childhood sexual abuse.

Feminist Perspectives Scale. Henley et al.'s (1998) Feminist Perspectives Scale measures attitudes toward women and includes items that assess conservative beliefs about women as well as five distinct feminist perspectives: liberal, radical, socialist, cultural, and womanist feminisms. The 50 items comprising the composite feminist scale were used, which has been found to yield reliability coefficients of 0.91 for internal consistency and 0.86-0.91 for test-retest reliability. In this study, the internal consistency coefficient for the composite feminist scale was .93. Additionally, the scale was found to be moderately correlated to participants' self-identification as feminist ($r = .48, p < .01$).

Procedure

Data were collected by placing an advertisement for the study, entitled *Women and Sexuality*, on bulletin boards, listservs, and links on relevant websites. Caution was taken in advertising the study only on woman-centered websites,

and the advertisement explicitly requested that only adult women participate. All questionnaires were completed on and submitted via the internet. Internet research has been found to result in data that are comparable to traditionally collected data and to be useful in collecting data on sensitive topics such as sexuality (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004; Kraut, Olson, Banaji, Cohen & Couper, 2004).

Analysis

The relationships among the variables implied by the model were estimated with ordinary least squares procedures using GEMINI (Wolfe & Ethington, 1985), a FORTRAN program based on the work of Sobel (1982) that computes indirect effects and their standard errors in addition to regression results. Three types of effects are available: direct, indirect, and total. The direct effects are represented by regression coefficients, standardized beta weights (β). The indirect effects (*Indirect*) were estimated by the sums of the products of direct effects through intervening variables in the model. These effects represent possible influences on the dependent variable that derive from links among other variables in the model.

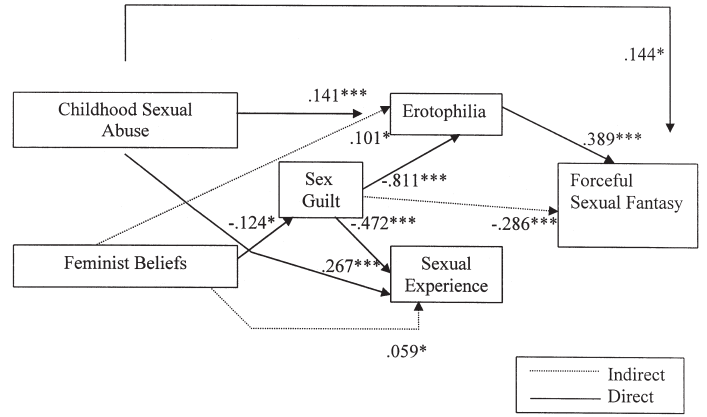
RESULTS

Table 1 shows the correlation matrix, means, and standard deviations for each of the six variables in the working model. Significant paths in the model are presented in Figure 2.

Childhood Sexual Abuse

As hypothesized, there was a significant, direct, positive connection ($\beta = .144$) between childhood sexual abuse and forceful sexual fantasy. These results support the literature that demonstrates a positive association between a history of childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual fantasies involving force (Briere et al., 1994; Gold, 1991). However, contrary to expectations, childhood sexual abuse was not directly related to sex guilt. Other significant paths included a direct positive effect of childhood sexual abuse on erotophilia and a direct positive effect of childhood sexual abuse on sexual experience. These findings fit with the literature, suggesting that adult women with sexually abusive

Figure 2. Tested path model.



* $p < .5$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

histories often become more sexually active and tend to be more sexually preoccupied than non-abused adult women (Beitchman et al., 1992; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Fergusson, Horwood, & Lynskey, 1997; Messman-Moore & Long, 2003; Noll et al., 2003), and lends further evidence that women with sexually abusive histories may also engage in a more varied set of sexual behaviors.

Feminist Beliefs

As hypothesized, there was a significant direct negative link ($\beta = -.124$) between feminist beliefs and sex guilt. This finding is the first to show that greater endorsement of feminist beliefs is directly associated with decreased sex guilt; this result is consistent with the feminist standpoint on women's sexual repression. Contrary to the hypothesis that feminist beliefs would have an indirect positive connection with forceful sexual fantasy, there were not any statistically significant indirect relationships found in this model between feminist beliefs and forceful sexual fantasy.

Sex guilt did mediate a significant positive indirect effect (*Indirect* = .101) of feminist beliefs on erotophilia. This finding, along with the direct negative relationship found between feminist beliefs and sex guilt, suggests that women with greater endorsement of feminist beliefs as

Table 1. Correlation Matrix, Means, Standard Deviations, and Scale Reliabilities

	Childhood Sex Abuse	Feminist Beliefs	Sex Guilt	Erotophilia	Sexual Experience	Forceful Sex Fantasy
CSA	1.000					
Feminist	-.052	1.000				
Guilt	.062	-.127*	1.000			
Erotophilia	.091	.103	-.803***	1.000		
Experience	.241***	-.013	-.448***	.490***	1.000	
Fantasy	.161**	.120*	-.266***	.364***	.152*	1.000
Means	8.81	157.81	2.37	87.04	25.12	1.71
Std. Dev.	12.16	43.75	.85	22.50	5.36	1.01
Alpha	.88	.93	.93	.80	.92	.91

Note. $N = 261$.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

well as lower levels of reported sex guilt enjoy greater levels of erotophilia. Also, sex guilt mediated a significant positive indirect effect (*Indirect* = .059) of feminist beliefs on sexual experience. This finding suggests that women with stronger feminist beliefs and lower levels of sex guilt report more sexual experience.

Sex Guilt to Force Fantasies

As hypothesized, there was a significant direct negative effect ($\beta = -.811$) of sex guilt on erotophilia, supporting the literature that has found an inverse relationship between sex guilt and erotophilia. As hypothesized, there was a significant direct negative effect ($\beta = -.472$) of sex guilt on sexual experience, supporting the literature that suggests women with lower sex guilt tend to have more sexual experience. However, there was no statistically significant direct relationship found between sex guilt and forceful sexual fantasy.

Erotophilia, Sexual Experience, and Force Fantasies

As hypothesized, erotophilia mediated a significant indirect negative effect (*Indirect* = -.286) of sex guilt on forceful sexual fantasy. This finding suggests that women with lower levels of sex guilt and higher levels of erotophilia are more likely to engage in forceful sexual fantasy. Finally, there was a significant direct positive effect ($\beta = .389$) of erotophilia on forceful sexual fantasy. This finding also lends support to the underlying theory for this hypothesis, that an affinity toward sex leads women to entertain forceful sexual fantasies, possibly among many other sexual fantasies. The model did not show support for the hypothesis that sexual experience would have a direct positive effect on forceful sexual fantasy.

In summary, the prediction (hypothesis 1) that childhood sexual abuse would have a positive and direct effect on forceful sexual fantasy was confirmed. Hypothesis 2 stated that erotophilia would have a direct and positive effect on forceful sexual fantasy, which was also upheld in this model. Contrary to prediction, sexual experience was not found to have a direct and positive effect on forceful sexual fantasy (hypothesis 3). Hypothesis 4 predicted a positive and direct effect of childhood sexual abuse on sexual experience. Feminist beliefs were found to have a direct and negative effect on sexual guilt, as hypothesized (5). However, no effect was found between childhood sexual abuse and sexual guilt, as predicted in hypothesis 6. Hypothesis 7 predicted that sexual guilt would have a direct and negative effect on forceful sexual fantasy, which was not supported by the model. However, hypothesis 8, which predicted an indirect and negative effect of sexual guilt on forceful sexual fantasy, was supported in this model. All of the direct, indirect, and total effects can be found in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

Paths to Force Fantasy

Findings from this study suggest that two distinct paths contribute to forceful sexual fantasy among women.

Specifically, the resulting model supports the theory that a general openness to sexuality, as indicated by lower levels of sexual guilt and greater erotophilia, is associated with more forceful sexual fantasy. Previous studies have revealed both positive and negative effects of sexual guilt on force fantasy, providing variable support for the sex-guilt reduction theory of forceful sexual fantasy. In this investigation, an openness-to-sexuality theory better explains the interplay among the variables. Within such a model, it is not sexual guilt per se that is directly connected to women's likelihood to engage in force fantasy. Rather, lower sexual guilt may allow women greater erotophilic pleasure, which may increase the usage of forceful sexual fantasies among women. This study extends research on force fantasies to include a low sex guilt-high erotophilia model wherein low levels of sexual guilt may contribute to a greater level of erotophilia, which in turn may increase the likelihood of engaging in forceful sexual fantasy.

Research has suggested a clear connection between childhood sexual abuse and entertainment of forceful sexual fantasy. In this study, the model confirmed that a history of childhood sexual abuse had a direct and positive relationship with forceful sexual fantasy. It seems likely that the experience of being sexually abused during one's early development or prior to one's sexual maturation may have an impact on the sexual fantasy life of the abuse survivor. Not only does childhood sexual abuse have numerous and far-reaching effects on the sexual and intimate life of a woman (DiLillo, 2001; Schaaf & McCanne, 1998; Sigmon, Greene, Rohan, & Nichols, 1996), but these findings also indicate that her fantasy life may be impacted.

It is unknown, however, how forceful fantasies are experienced among women who have histories of childhood sexual abuse. For instance, intrusive thoughts, as part of a constellation of post-traumatic stress disorder symptomatology, are often experienced among childhood sexual abuse survivors (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Briggs & Joyce, 1997). The potential complexity in the experience of forceful sexual fantasies is exemplified by the fact that women who have survived sexual abuse may feel sexually aroused by intrusive sexual thoughts (Byers, Purdon, & Clark, 1998). It is beyond the scope of this study, however, to uncover the nature of forceful sexual fantasies or to determine what, if any, differences in these fantasies are present for women who were and were not sexually abused as children.

Mediating Variables

The literature has shown that, in addition to history of childhood sexual abuse and erotophilia, sexual experience and sexual guilt are also commonly associated with forceful sexual fantasies (Gold et al., 1991; Pelletier & Herold, 1988; Strassberg & Lockerd, 1998). In this study, however, neither was found to have a direct link to forceful fantasy. Together with Gold and Clegg's (1990) findings that also revealed no relationship between sexual experience

Table 2. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects for the Path Model

<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
Forceful Sexual Fantasy	$R^2 = .160^{***}$		
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
Sexual Experience	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Erotophilia	-.063	—	-.063
Sex Guilt	.389 ^{***}	—	.389 ^{***}
Feminist Beliefs	.021	-.286 ^{***}	-.265 ^{***}
Childhood Sexual Abuse	.089	.040	.129*
	.144*	.024	.167**
<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
Sexual Experience	$R^2 = .276^{***}$		
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
Sex Guilt	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Feminist Beliefs	-.472 ^{***}	—	-.472 ^{***}
Childhood Sexual Abuse	-.060	.059*	-.015
	.267 ^{***}	-.026	.240 ^{***}
<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
Erotophilia	$R^2 = .665^{***}$		
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
Sex Guilt	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Feminist Beliefs	-.811 ^{***}	—	-.811 ^{***}
Childhood Sexual Abuse	.007	.101*	.106
	.141 ^{***}	-.045	.093
<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
Sex Guilt	$R^2 = .019$		
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
Feminist Beliefs	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Childhood Sexual Abuse	-.124*	—	-.124*
	.055	—	.055

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

and forceful sexual fantasies, the current findings further suggest that the range of sexual encounters a woman has may not impact her entertainment of forceful fantasies.

The Role of Sexual Guilt

A central finding of this study was the role played by the absence of sexual guilt. Instead of a direct path, sexual guilt was found to have an indirect negative link to forceful sexual fantasy, mediated by erotophilia. As previously suggested by Gold et al. (1991), Pelletier and Herold (1988), and Strassberg and Lockerd (1998), women who experience less sexual guilt are more open to sexual experimentation with different sexual thoughts and behaviors; therefore, they are more likely to entertain, among other fantasies, those involving force. It would be anticipated that women with low sexual guilt would not only have more force fantasies, but would also have more varied and frequent sexual experiences as well as a greater general affinity toward sex. In this study, sexual guilt was negatively linked to sexual experience and erotophilia, providing additional support for this openness-to-sexuality theory.

Feminist Beliefs

As hypothesized, feminist beliefs had a direct negative path to sexual guilt. One might expect women with greater levels of feminist beliefs to have lower levels of sexual guilt, because feminist movements focus on freeing women from the sexually repressive mores deeply embedded in many cultures. Throughout history, women's sexuality has been

viewed as secondary to men's (Baber, 2000; Wine, 1985). Women largely have been socialized to view themselves as objects of men's desire, not as sexual beings in their own right (Shulman & Horne, 2003). As such, women often experience shame about their sexual desire (Baber; Tolman, 1991). Feminist beliefs may help to counter the shame that women often feel about sexual desire.

Sexual guilt also mediated an indirect positive effect of feminist beliefs on erotophilia. This finding adds to the literature on sexual guilt, suggesting that women with higher levels of feminist beliefs are more likely to maintain positive feelings toward sexuality because of their tendency toward lower levels of sex guilt. Despite divergent feminist views on sexuality, one area of convergence is the desire for women to embrace and enjoy, rather than ignore or experience shame about, their sexuality (Johnson, 2002; Tiefer et al., 2002; Wine, 1985). The more feminist-minded these women were, the less sexual guilt they experienced, seemingly allowing them more sexual pride and enjoyment.

No direct link was found between feminist beliefs and forceful sexual fantasy, suggesting that the connection is accounted for through other (still statistically insignificant) variables in the model. That the women in this sample did report engaging in some forceful sexual fantasies ($M = 1.7$, where 1 is never having entertained and 2 is having entertained such fantasies once or twice in the past year) lends some support to Brownmiller's (1975) assertion that all women are subject to the same images and ideology that normalizes, even eroticizes, female submission.

However, that the women in this sample reported entertaining forceful sexual fantasies less frequently than has been found in other studies suggests that this practice may be less common than previous research indicates (Pelletier & Herold, 1988; Strassberg & Lockerd, 1998).

Alternately, the absence of either a direct or indirect path between feminist beliefs and forceful sexual fantasy may reflect variation in feminist beliefs among the women in this sample. The potential existence of different feminist positions toward forceful sexual fantasy may have diluted any effect of feminist beliefs on force fantasy. There is a substantial body of literature that discusses opposing feminist standpoints regarding sexuality. Examining variations in feminist beliefs about sexuality may reveal feminist heterogeneity in relation to forceful sexual fantasy, which could explain these findings.

Given the complexities of sexual fantasy, additional research is needed to clarify the role of feminist beliefs in the entertainment of forceful sexual fantasies. Qualitative research grounded in women's experiences would be particularly useful to shed light on this seemingly complex relationship. Additionally, future research that explores the meanings associated with forceful sexual fantasies is critical to understanding the influence of forceful sexual fantasy on women's lives. The frequency of forceful sexual fantasies was elicited from the participants in the current study via a survey, but the use of a more open-ended format might allow researchers to elucidate more intricacies of the fantasizing process.

Limitations

These findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. Self-report and web-based data survey methods made it difficult to ascertain the intricacies inherent to such a complex process as sexual fantasy. However, given the potentially sensitive subject matter of the study, using an anonymous and private response format may have elicited more honest responses from participants. The format also enabled me to access a wide range of participants who may have otherwise been hard to access (Gosling et al., 2004; Kraut et al., 2004).

By utilizing the web-based format, we attempted to access participants who might otherwise be uncomfortable with the prospect of participating in sexuality research (women who might score lower on erotophilia, for example) and women of varying ethnicities and from differing educational backgrounds. The former aim was achieved insofar as the participants seemed to express varying levels of affect and evaluation related to sexual stimuli. For example, with a possible range of 0 (indicating less erotophilic) to 126 (indicating more erotophilic), the mean score for this sample was 87, with a standard deviation of 22.5, suggesting that women with diverse comfort levels with sex were included in the current sample. Moreover, as most women who volunteer for sex research tend to hold less traditional sexual attitudes and be less religious than non-volunteers (Catania, Binson, Van der Straten, &

Stone, 1995; Plaud, Gaither, Hegstad, Rowan, & Devitt, 1999; Wiederman, 1999), the fact that only 17% of the participants in the current sample reported that religion was not at all important to them suggests that an otherwise unrepresented sample of women was obtained in contrast to traditional sex research. Additionally, the participants comprise a roughly equal representation of feminist- and nonfeminist-identified women, a particular strength given the central role that feminist beliefs played in the model.

However, there is a lack of representation in this sample across ethnicity and education level, limiting the generalizability of the results. The majority (77.6%) of the women reported their ethnicity as European-American. Moreover, nearly half of the participants reported their highest level of education as at least finishing college, and a significant minority (17%) reported having a graduate degree. Future research might focus more upon the fantasies of women of color as well as less educated women. Finally, a broad measure of abusive acts that may have been experienced as a child was used to assess childhood sexual abuse, resulting in nearly 70% reporting some type of childhood sexual abuse attempted or experienced, much higher than the prevalence rates reported in the general population (approximately 20 percent of women; Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 2005).

Additionally, path analysis is designed to examine models, such as the one suggested in this study, in which there are several dependent variables and in which there are possible chains of influence. It can determine whether the data are consistent with the proposed model. However, path analysis does not establish causality or determine if a proposed model is accurate. These findings should be considered in light of this limitation. In addition, in line with all statistical models, the analyses are limited in that they only provide an opportunity to examine how the present data fit the proposed model; it is possible that an alternative model would have better represented the relationships among the variables. The statistical model is further limited in that it does not account for other potential pathways to force fantasy, including possible social, cultural, biological, or personality-based factors.

By exploring their interplay, this study contributes to the clarification of the constructs associated with force in women's sexual fantasies. In addition to corroborating previous, tentative findings that suggest that women who are more open sexually are more likely to engage in forceful sexual fantasies, this study further suggests that various paths lead to forceful fantasy, among them the salient link between low levels of sexual guilt and high levels of erotophilia. This study is also the first to examine the role of feminist beliefs in relation to forceful sexual fantasy and its correlates, pointing to more detailed research on the potential for feminist beliefs to influence women's sexual fantasies. Although feminist beliefs did not directly relate to force fantasies, they appear to be connected to lower sex guilt, which may free women to engage in erotic experimentation that for some women may be expressed through forceful sexual fantasy.

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