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An Examination of the Gender Inclusiveness of Current Theories of Sexual Violence in Adulthood: Recognizing Male Victims, Female Perpetrators, and Same-Sex Violence

Jessica A. Turchik^{1,2}, Claire L. Hebenstreit^{1,3}, and Stephanie S. Judson⁴

Abstract

Although the majority of adulthood sexual violence involves a male perpetrator and a female victim, there is also substantial evidence that members of both genders can be victims and perpetrators of sexual violence. As an alternative to viewing sexual violence within gender-specific terms, we advocate for the use of a gender inclusive conceptualization of sexual aggression that takes into account the factors that contribute to sexual victimization of, and victimization by, both men and women. The goal of the current review is to examine the need and importance of a gender inclusive conceptualization of sexual violence and to discuss how compatible our current theories are with this conceptualization. First, we examine evidence of how a gender-specific conceptualization of sexual violence aids in obscuring assault experiences that are not male to female and how this impacts victims of such violence. We specifically discuss this impact regarding research, law, public awareness, advocacy, and available victim treatment and resources. Next, we provide an overview of a number of major sexual violence theories that are relevant for adult perpetrators and adult victims, including neurobiological and integrated biological theories, evolutionary psychology theory, routine activity theory, feminist theory, social learning and related theories, typology approaches, and integrated theories. We critically examine these theories' applicability to thinking about sexual violence through a gender inclusive lens. Finally, we discuss further directions for research, clinical interventions, and advocacy in this area. Specifically, we encourage sexual violence researchers and clinicians to identify and utilize appropriate theoretical frameworks and to apply these frameworks in ways that incorporate a full range of sexual violence.

Keywords

sexual violence, gender, theories of sexual violence, sexual assault

Historically, sexual violence has generally been viewed as a form of aggression perpetrated by men against women. Although the majority of adulthood sexual violence does involve a male perpetrator and a female victim, there is substantial evidence that members of all genders can be victims and perpetrators of sexual violence. For instance, it is estimated that 1% to 4% of American men experience sexual assault in adulthood (Peterson, Voller, Polusny, & Murdoch, 2011) and 1% to 11% experience sexual assault in their lifetime (Black et al., 2011). Self-reported rates of female sexual perpetration generally range between 2% and 24% (e.g., Fisher & Pina, 2013; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, & Anderson, 2003). Sexual violence is also not restricted to heterosexual men and women, with the median rates of adulthood sexual violence perpetrated against nonheterosexual adults estimated to be higher than those among heterosexuals (see Rothman, Exner, & Baughman, 2011 for a review; Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013). A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control found that 13.1% of lesbians and 46.1%

of bisexual women report experiencing rape during their lifetime and 46.4% of lesbians, 74.9% of bisexual women, 40.2% of gay men, and 47.4% of bisexual men experienced other forms of sexual violence (Walters et al., 2013). High rates of violence have also been reported in understudied transgender populations (Stotzer, 2009).

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Despite this evidence, current conceptualizations of sexual assault have focused predominantly on the notion that sexual assault equals a male perpetrator and a female victim. We do not suggest that rates of female and male sexual victimization are similar or that male to female violence is not a serious problem; rather, we believe that male victims and those of same-gender violence also deserve to be recognized in discussions of sexual violence. We believe a useful theory of sexual violence should be able to not only guide our understanding of why male to female sexual violence is so prevalent but also explain the occurrence of sexual violence among same-sex couples (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2009), women who report sexually assaulting men (Fisher & Pina, 2013), and why some studies suggest that rates of female to female sexual assault are statistically higher than male to male among inmates in prison settings (Beck & Johnson, 2012; Wolff, Blitz, Shi, Bachman, & Siegel, 2006). The goal of the current review is to examine the need and importance of a gender inclusive conceptualization of sexual violence, to discuss how compatible current theories are with this conceptualization, and to explore further directions for research, clinical interventions, and advocacy.

An Incomplete Picture: Impact of Viewing Sexual Violence in Adulthood in Gender-Specific Terms

First, we argue that our current conceptualizations, definitions, and assessment measures of sexual assault, which generally assume male perpetrators, female victims, and heterosexuality (e.g., Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1998), discourage research on female to male and same-gender victimization. Over the past two decades, relatively few studies have focused on female to male and same-gender sexual violence compared to male to female sexual violence, limiting our knowledge of these issues (e.g., Davies, 2002; Ratner et al., 2003). Further, despite the importance of theory in moving research forward in the area of sexual violence, most studies have been largely a theoretical (Weis, 2002). One might correctly argue that by focusing on male perpetrators and female victims, we are capturing the majority of sexual assault offenders and victims; however, in doing so, we also limit our understanding and support to only the majority, despite evidence that victims of sexual violence, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, may experience a wide range of deleterious physical and psychological sequelae (Heidt, Marx, & Gold, 2005; Peterson et al., 2011). As an alternative to viewing sexual violence within gender-specific terms, we advocate for the use of a gender inclusive conceptualization of sexual aggression, which takes into account the factors that contribute to sexual victimization of, and victimization by, both men and women.

Focusing our research on female victims and male perpetrators limits our scientific understanding of sexual violence and also influences public understanding and awareness, advocacy efforts, and allocated treatment resources for victims.

Illustrative examples of the influence of scholarship in the field of sexual violence are the impact of Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975), which brought sexual violence to the public's and scholars' attention, and research by psychologist Dr. Mary Koss, which brought the issue of "acquaintance rape" into widespread public awareness in the 1980s (Rutherford, 2011). Research and advocacy efforts by feminists and members of the women's movement have led to increased awareness of sexual violence against women, legal reform, prevention and risk reduction programming on college campuses, and a greater number of treatment services for female sexual assault victims. However, there has been much less research and advocacy focused on male victims or gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) sexual violence. Rape myths such as "men cannot be sexually assaulted" and "rape can only happen between a man and a woman" are common not only among the public but are also pervasive within our social institutions, including medicine, law, and the media (Todahl, Linville, Bustin, Wheeler, & Gau, 2009; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). It is therefore not surprising that male victims report being less likely to disclose unwanted sexual contact or seek services than women (Banyard et al., 2007; Turchik, Pavao, Hyun, Mark, & Kimerling, 2012), have difficulty receiving services (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996), and infrequently report sexual assault to police or to medical personnel (Isely & Gehrenbeck-Shim, 1997; King & Woollett, 1997). Similarly, GLBT individuals report that sexual violence is not generally being discussed or addressed in the GLBT community and that there are many barriers to receiving sexual violence treatment and services (Potter, Fountain, & Stapleton, 2012; Todahl et al., 2009).

We further argue that given that neither the scientific community nor the public have given much attention to sexual violence that is not male to female, this has limited the advocacy for political and legal reform for these victims. Many countries still retain consensual sodomy laws (e.g., Joshi, 2010) that make it difficult for victims of same-gender assault to report assaults. Although gender-inclusive sexual assault laws—laws where both men and women can be the potential victim and/or perpetrator—have recently been adopted by many countries and U.S. states (Rumney, 2008), there still exists a number of ways in which male victims and victims of same-gender violence are not protected. For instance, the rape of men is often not defined by law under the same terminology or degree of offense as the rape of women, may have different legal consequences, or may not be acknowledged as a prosecutable type of sexual aggression (see Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Sivakumaran (2005) notes that for lobbying and legal reform to take place, organizations must be set up and the general public must be aware of the issue to contribute support and resources and that if there "is no awareness of any issue by decision makers, then there is little, if any, chance that the issue will be considered" (p. 1284). Although members of the women's movement have been very successful in garnering media attention, research, treatment resources, and legal reform in the area of male to female sexual violence, both the women's movement

and the GLBT movement have largely been silent on the issues of female to male and same-gender sexual violence, despite the relevance of this issue to both groups (see Sivakumaran, 2005 for a discussion of these issues).

In summary, sexual violence that does not include male to female violence has received little attention and is often not included in definitions and conceptualization of sexual violence. Consequently, there is less public awareness of these issues and victims of these forms of sexual violence face more stigma and barriers to finding information and accessing treatment resources. The goal of the remainder of this article is to explore ways that existing theories may inform a more nuanced view of sexual violence rather than simply noting that male victims and female perpetrators are rare exceptions. Research has found that there are a number of differences, such as in sociodemographic, motivational, and criminal history factors, between sexual offenders who prefer child victims and those who offend against adults (e.g., Ahlmeyer, Kleinsasser, Stoner, & Retzlaff, 2003; Dickey, Nussbaum, Chevolleau, & Davidson, 2002; Langton & Marshall, 2001; Smallbone, Wheaton, & Hourigan, 2003), and researchers have advocated for studying sexual offenders based on victim's age and relationship with the victim (see Firestone et al., 1999; Porter et al., 2000). Therefore, given this information and the fact that some theories are specific only to sexual violence perpetrated against either adults or children, we focus only on theories of sexual violence relevant for adult perpetrators and adult victims as a full review of theories of child sexual abuse is beyond the scope of this article. Specifically, this article reviews the major theories put forth to explain sexual violence (Ellis, 1989; Gannon, Collie, Ward, & Thakker, 2008; Ward, Polaschek, & Beech, 2006), including neurobiological and integrated biological theories, evolutionary psychology theory, routine activity theory, feminist theory, social learning and related theories, typology approaches, and integrated theories. For each theory, the basic tenets and the relevant empirical literature are reviewed followed by a critical evaluation of how it might account for a more broad definition of sexual violence. We purport to offer neither an extensive coverage of the tenets of each theory (although we do provide references that offer such information) nor do we believe that all those ascribing to a theory ascribe to the same set of beliefs. Our aim is to simply cover the basics for those who may be unfamiliar with a particular theory.

Theories of Sexual Violence

Biological Theories

Neurobiological and biological models. Although few researchers or theorists advocate for a purely genetic or biological model, several factors that are believed to be linked to increased risk of sexual offending, such as attachment style, processing of emotional stimuli, and aggression have been linked to biological and neurological factors (see Mitchell & Beech, 2011). Mitchell and Beech's (2011) neurobiological model posits that

poor attachment and deprivation during development leads to impaired functioning of the social corticolimbic brain which leads to problems with emotion and motivation (e.g., difficulty recognizing fear in others, difficulty with aversive conditioning) and a dismissive attachment style, increasing one's risk of sexual offending. Mitchell and Beech also discuss the potential importance of neurochemicals oxytocin and vasopressin in predicting sexual offending. This theory has been expanded in order to integrate sexual reoffending, suggesting a positive feedback loop in which sexual offending itself can strengthen the variables contributing to the initial perpetration (e.g., general antisociality, deviant sexual arousal, problematic attitudes and beliefs, intimacy deficits, and problems with self-regulation), making reoffense more likely (Thakker & Ward, 2012). Another model with a strong biological basis is the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending (ITSO; Ward & Beech, 2006), which will be discussed later as an Integrated theory.

Empirical evidence. Although evidence suggests that sexual offenders may have neurobiological and neuropsychological impairments (Fabian, 2010; Mitchell & Beech, 2011), the theory itself has not been empirically tested. It should be noted that several studies have examined sexual aggression in relation to individual biological and neurobiological factors such as the role of gonadotrophic (e.g., luteinizing hormones; Giotakos, Markianos, Vaidakis, & Christodoulou, 2003; Kingston et al., 2012) and androgen hormones (e.g., testosterone; Barbaree & Marshall, 2008; Giotakos et al., 2003; Studer, Aylwin, & Reddon, 2005), but this research has almost exclusively been conducted with men, and results have been mixed and inconclusive. Further research is needed to provide a better understanding of the biological basis of sexual offending.

Explanation of gender inclusive violence. The neurobiological model does not appear to assume the gender of the offender or victim. However, it should be noted that the majority of studies examining neurobiological, neuropsychological, and social impairments in sexual offenders cited by the theory's authors were conducted mainly on male offenders and may not be reflective of female offenders. Although the theory appears to be gender inclusive, there is no available evidence on its utility.

Evolutionary psychology theory. Although there are several ways of applying evolutionary theory to human behavior (see Durrant & Ward, 2011; Laland & Brown, 2002), most of the research and discussion on sexual offending have focused on the evolutionary psychology theory of sexual offending (see Durrant & Ward, 2011). Evolutionary psychologists believe that humans developed various cognitive mechanisms to solve adaptive problems necessary for survival in ancestral environments, such as finding food, communicating, and selecting suitable mates, and that humans who possessed these adaptations were more likely to survive and reproduce to pass down genes for these mechanisms through the generations (see Buss, 2004 for an overview). Sexual coercion tactics, including rape,

are believed to be one such set of evolved mechanisms through an evolutionary lens.

Among evolutionary explanations for sexual violence, much attention has been given to Thornhill and Palmer's (2000, p. 59) controversial book *A Natural History of Rape*, which posited that rape is either an evolved adaptation "that was directly favored by selection because it increased male reproductive success by way of increasing mate number" or as "a by-product of other psychological adaptations, especially those that function to produce the sexual desire of males for multiple partners without commitment" (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000, p. 60). Others have similarly suggested that sexual coercion may be a by-product of other mechanisms, such as ones designed to control a woman's reproductive capacity or to maximize men's number of casual sexual encounters (Lalumière, Chalmers, Quinsey, & Seto, 1996; Palmer, 1991), or that rape may be used as an immediate mating opportunity in some cases, while sexual and nonsexual aggression is used to increase future mating opportunities and/or decrease the opportunity for a woman to mate with other men (Smuts & Smuts, 1993). In all of these hypotheses, aggressive copulatory tactics are a characteristic of human males (and other animals) that is directly or indirectly related to genetic traits that evolved through natural selection to increase greater reproductive success among future generations.

Empirical evidence. Support for the evolutionary theory of sexual offending mainly rests on (1) empirical research demonstrating gender differences in mating and relationship strategies as supported by evolutionary psychology hypotheses (e.g., Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001; Buss, 1994, 2004), (2) that rape occurs across human societies (Palmer, 1989a), and (3) that sexual coercion and violence have been documented across many different species (Clutton-Brock & Parker, 1995; Muller, Kahlenberg, & Wrangham, 2009). Ward and Durrant (2011, p. 206) observe that in contrast to many criminology theories, evolutionary perspectives "have considerable external coherence and open up points of contact with theories and research from other scientific domains" and are easily integrated into other types of theory such as evolutionary behavioral science. However, evolutionary psychology theory has received a lot of critique from researchers, the public, and feminists (see Ward & Siegert, 2002 for in-depth critique). Specific critical feedback about the evolutionary hypotheses about rape, especially the rape as an adaption hypothesis, includes that it lacks adequate scientific support (Begley, 2009; Ward & Siegert, 2002), may be used by men to justify sexual crimes and the oppression of women (Begley, 2009; Tang-Martinez, 1997), lacks an explicit model and mechanisms (Ward et al., 2006; Ward & Siegert, 2002), and ignores the influence of sociocultural factors (Sanday, 2003).

Explanation of gender inclusive violence. The evolutionary psychology viewpoint of rape assumes that rape is used to increase the fitness of men through increasing the number of offspring and that rape is, whether consciously or unconsciously, at least

partially sexually motivated. This assumption seems to be incompatible with same-sex sexual assaults, assaults of children or the elderly, or rapes that result in murder, which do not produce offspring but are clearly documented in the literature. As noted by Ward and Siegert (2002, p. 161), many proponents of the evolutionary psychology view of rape generally define rape as nonconsensual penile-vaginal penetration and assume a male perpetrator and a female victim, and such narrow explanations of sexual violence are not consistent with recent legal reforms and are "ignoring important examples of sexual aggression." Maletzky (1995) noted that evolutionary models of sexual aggression do not account for male victims and female perpetrators, and Shields and Shields (1983, p. 116) noted that they ignore "relatively infrequent or apparently nonadaptive" forms of assault. Overall, the end goal of increasing one's fitness based on reproduction does not appear to readily fit with sexual violence that cannot directly result in reproduction.

Psychological and Social Theories

Routine activity theory. Routine activity theory was put forth to guide the prediction of criminal acts by positing that a direct-contact criminal opportunity requires the following three elements that must converge in time and space: (1) a motivated offender, (2) a suitable target or victim (e.g., vulnerable, fits offender's preferences), and (3) the lack of a capable guardian (Felson & Cohen, 1980). The theory therefore assumes that criminal victimization is not randomly distributed in the population. Routine activity theory is not specific to sexual violence but is meant to predict both perpetration and vulnerability to victimization for all types of crime, involving contact with a person or personal property (e.g., murder, burglary, and rape). An extended version of the routine activity theory includes a variable from the general theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) which states that low levels of self-control lead to increased risk to commit criminal offenses as well as increasing one's vulnerability and exposure to crime (Schreck, 1999).

Empirical evidence. A number of empirical studies examining routine activity theory for multiple types of crimes generally provide support for the theory, and the theory has been applied to a number of studies of sexual violence. Studies have found relationships between routine theory activity variables and sexual victimization among both female (Franklin, Franklin, Nobles, & Kercher, 2012; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002) and male college students (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2001). Routine activity theory has also been applied to same-gender violence, although an examined model of sexual victimization was not significant (Waldner & Berg, 2008). Studies have also applied routine activity theory in studies of sexual offenders, examining factors related to self-reported sexual perpetration of women by college men (Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait, & Alvi, 2001) and in analyzing male sexual offenders' scripts for victim selection (Deslauriers-Varin & Beauregard, 2010).

Although a number of studies generally support routine activity theory in predicting crime, one major critique of the

routine activity theory is that the definitions of variables, measurement of variables, and specific findings are not consistent across the studies (see Spano & Freilich, 2009 for a review). Other problems have been noted, such as a lack of explanation for the theory's underlying assumption that individuals are motivated to sexually offend if given the opportunity (Cass, 2007). Cass (2007) also notes that a capable guardian and offender may be the same person in many instances of sexual assault, meaning that routine activity theory may be more applicable to crime committed by strangers rather than by people known to the victim and that results of studies using this theory may be construed to blame victims for not changing their routines and lifestyles to reduce their risk of victimization.

Explanation of gender inclusive violence. Routine activity theory does not assume the gender of the perpetrator or victim and can be applied in a gender inclusive manner. In fact, studies using this theory have examined female victimization, male victimization, same-gender violence, and male perpetration. The variety of types of sexual violence explored with this theoretical perspective supports the notion that simply having a gender inclusive theory allows and encourages a wider range of research on sexual violence.

Feminist theory. Brownmiller's (1975, p. 15) best-selling *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* states that rape is "a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" in order to maintain the patriarchal status quo, which clashed with the early 20th century belief that sexual violence was due to an unbridled and uncontrollable male sexual drive (Donat & D'Emilio, 1992). Brownmiller and other feminists posit that this subordination of women through rape and other forms of violence maintains a patriarchal cultural system in which men are able to control power in social, political, and economic realms. Although there is no singular feminist theory of sexual violence, some commonalities exist across many of the feminist perspectives (Ellis, 1989; Ward et al., 2006). Ellis (1989) articulated some of the following assumptions: (1) rape is primarily associated with power and not primarily motivated by sexual desire; (2) rape should be associated with gender disparities in social status and power; (3) exposure to violence against women (i.e., pornography and prostitution) increases male tendency to rape; (4) sexual egalitarianism should be associated with decreases in incidents of rape; and (5) men who rape should hold less egalitarian and more rape-supportive views compared to men who do not rape.

Empirical support. Empirical support for feminist theory rests on corroboration of hypotheses consistent with the general assertion that social, political, and economical egalitarianism between the sexes should be related to decreases in sexual violence and early feminist work found inconsistent support for the tenets of feminist theory (Check & Malamuth, 1985; Cohen & Felson, 1979). Other research has supported the concept that societal and cultural norms that condone violence against women (i.e., domination, control, and traditional gender role

attitudes) lead to increased acceptance toward interpersonal violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Herzog, 2007; Hester & Donovan, 2009). Therefore, because of this linkage between sexual violence and cultural norms, support of feminist theory is seen through empirical connections between violence against women and societal beliefs (Johnson & Sigler, 1997). Evidence supporting these basic tenets of feminist theory has been found through observations at the macro level, such as patterns among geographic areas and their incidents of rape, and economic and power disparities among men and women (see Gannon et al., 2008 for a review). However, the evidence for more individual-level assumptions of feminist theory is mixed, with some literature finding support for connections between patriarchal beliefs and rape myth acceptance (Womersley & Maw, 2009) and other research failing to support the tenet that sexual violence is primarily driven by a desire for power and control (Polaschek & Gannon, 2004).

Explanation of gender inclusive violence. It can be argued that the feminist conceptualization of sexual violence has created a politically correct means of understanding sexual violence, one in which men act solely as perpetrators and women only as victims (Pretorius, 2009). Pretorius (2009, p. 576) argues that feminist viewpoints have established a "female-centric notion of rape" and subsequently a set of rape vocabulary that silences male victims. Following this line of thought, the inherently gendered assumptions that underlie feminist theory provide a clear drawback regarding feminist theory's ability to inform more nuanced views of sexual violence. Brownmiller (1975) provided an early discussion of men's sexual violence against men in incarcerated settings, asserting that the feminist assumption that rape is motivated by power still holds in male to male sexual violence. More recent research indicates that perceived vulnerability is a predictor of being targeted for sexual assault by male inmates in prison settings (Hensley, Koscheski, & Tewksbury, 2005), which supports the idea that power and dominance are motivators for sexual violence. However, some have argued that this conceptualization of feminist theory is limiting and fails to explain other variations in sexual violence. On a broader scale, authors have addressed ways in which feminist theory can be strengthened by the inclusion of female aggression. For example, White and Kowalski (1994) argue that ignoring or denying aggression in women, including aggression within the context of intimate relationships, serves to sustain male power. They add that the cultural perception of women as being nonaggressive leads to the over-pathologizing of female aggression. Rather than suggesting a separate theory to explain violence committed by women, the authors advocate the use of a unified theory of aggression that includes gender as a socially defined construct.

Social learning and related theories. Social learning theory has roots in the work of Bandura (1979), with the overarching premise that cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants reciprocally interact with one another to produce a multitude of behaviors, both prosocial and deviant, through the

mechanism of observations and imitation. Social learning theory has been applied to the understanding of deviant and criminal behavior (Cullen, Wright, & Blevins, 2006), including sexual violence. Through this lens, individuals who witness sexual violence committed by role models or caregivers form favorable attitudes toward sexual violence through childhood socialization and anticipate pleasurable consequences that lead to an increased propensity to imitate and commit sexual violence (e.g., Akers & Sellers, 2009). A closely related hypothesis is the intergenerational transmission of violence hypothesis (Curtis, 1963; Widom, 1989), which posits that witnessing or experiencing aversive interpersonal behavior in one's family of origin is functionally reinforcing and increases risk of offending. In other words, "violence breeds violence."

Many theories based on social learning theory, such as Riggs, Murphy, and O'Leary's (1989) background-situational model and a number of theories of social cognition have been applied to understanding interpersonal violence (see Gannon et al., 2008; Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008). The background-situational model draws upon the intergenerational transmission of violence hypothesis as well as conflict theory and postulates that a number of background factors (i.e., interparental aggression, child abuse, and prior aggression) and situational factors (i.e., alcohol use and relationship distress) influence the acceptance and subsequent use of aggressive tactics in intimate relationships (Riggs, Murphy, & O'Leary, 1989). A number of theories of social cognitions (see Gannon et al., 2008 for review) view dysfunctional schemas developed in childhood and adolescence as providing support for deviant behavior. For example, Mann and Beech's (2003) schema model of sexual assault incorporates developmental experiences into a model of factors leading to dysfunctional schemas that influence proclivity to commit sexual violence.

Empirical support. The social learning variables in the social learning theory postulated by Akers and Sellers (2009; i.e., attitudes, modeling, and reinforcement) have been found to be significantly related to likelihood of rape, sexual aggression, and rape proclivity among college populations (Boeringer, Shehan, & Akers, 1991). Support for the intergenerational transmission of violence has been found in both male and female children exposed to violence in their family of origin (Dumas, Margolin, & John, 1994; Follette & Alexander, 1992). A theoretical strength of the background-situational model is that it includes factors other than childhood exposure to aggression, and research has supported the notion that both background and situational factors may be of great importance in understanding abuse perpetration (Riggs & O'Leary, 1996). However, critics have observed that the intergenerational model, although parsimonious, is overly simplistic and does not account for all factors predicting aggression (Follette & Alexander, 1992). In comparing the predictive ability of the background-situational model between male and female perpetrators, one study found it was more accurate in classifying female perpetrators of dating violence (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006), and another study found the model to be more accurate in predicting dating violence

perpetration among men (Riggs & O'Leary, 1996). Additionally, support for the background-situational model (Riggs et al., 1989), which has been applied to dating violence but not specifically to sexual violence, has been mixed, and the model does not sufficiently account for violence committed in adulthood. Finally, Mann and Beech's schema model of sexual assault has yet to be tested and thus currently lacks empirical support (Ward et al., 2006). Overall, evidence for support of these theories is mixed and more research is needed as much of the empirical literature has focused on dating and marital violence rather than specifically on sexual violence.

Explanation of gender inclusive violence. Social learning theories are not inherently gendered in their understanding of sexual violence; however, these theories have been primarily applied to male to female sexual violence (Akers & Sellers, 2009), although some social learning theories have been applied to female perpetrators of dating violence and have found support (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006; Riggs & O'Leary, 1996). Social learning models such as the background-situational model have been applied to gender variations in dating violence, as the model "does not propose any specific gender differences, the potential for understanding the differential impact of variables on men and women is testable within the framework of the model" (Riggs et al., 1989, p. 68). This potential for broad application shows promise that gender inclusive social learning theories may offer a means of understanding various gender variations in sexual violence; however, research on the background-situational model has been primarily limited to examining dating violence among heterosexual couples.

Typology approaches. Although not actual theories, typology approaches attempt to classify perpetrators based on various characteristics (i.e., demographic, individual differences, motivations for offending, and offense type) with the hope of reducing recidivism along with predicting and reducing future sexual violence (Robertiello & Terry, 2007). This post hoc approach investigates characteristics of those who have already offended, and hypotheses about the motivations of offenders are developed from those characteristics. Well-constructed typologies can identify patterns of offending such that prevention and rehabilitation services are developed; however, typology approaches remain descriptive in nature (Woessner, 2010). Many attempts to classify sexual offenders begin by broadly focusing on the motivations for sexual violence. Groth (1979) was the first to develop a typology approach based on aggression and motivation along with other antisocial behaviors, and others have expanded on this framework with additional subtypes, such as Knight and Prentsky's (1990) Massachusetts Treatment Center Rapist Typology Version Three (MTC: R3; i.e., opportunistic, pervasively angry, vindictive, and sexual).

Empirical support. Typology approaches have been applied mainly to classifying male perpetrators based on motivation (Barnard, Fuller, Robbins, & Shaw, 1989; Brown & Forth,

1997; McCabe & Wauchope, 2005); however, typologies have been developed and examined with female offenders (Mathews, Matthews, & Speltz, 1989), including women who perpetrate against men (Syed & Williams, 1996) and lesbian offenders (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Demonstrating empirical support for taxonomic classification has included replication of classification systems in new samples as well as establishing concurrent and predictive validity (Knight, 1999). Early models focusing on male perpetrators, such as those used by Criminal Investigative Analysis, generated descriptive categories based on crime scene data; however, these models demonstrated poor empirical support and have been critiqued as failing to capture offender heterogeneity as well as being limited in their clinical utility (Gannon et al., 2008; Knight, Warren, Reboussin, & Soley, 1998). Generally, those taxonomical systems that have been empirically tested, such as Knight and Prentky's (1990) MTC:R3, have found mixed support in replication studies (Gannon et al., 2008) and have not been shown to be very useful in terms of predictive accuracy (Goodwill, Alison, & Beech, 2009). Gannon notes that typology approaches generally struggle to show replication and although they may be useful in informing clinical treatment services, they do not appear to be very generalizable. The results of both replication efforts of male and female typology systems suggest offenders are a heterogeneous group, and stable and broad classification attempts have yet to be successful (Robertiello & Terry, 2007; Sandler & Freeman, 2007).

Explanation of gender inclusive violence. Although typologies have been mainly applied to male perpetrators, they are not inherently gendered which has allowed for the investigation of various gender combinations of perpetrator and victims (Monson & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2002; Swan & Snow, 2002). However, given that typologies are used to describe characteristics of the specific offender group, the typologies of one group often do not generalize to another. Although this allows for gender inclusiveness and the ability to account for individual differences, these descriptive characteristics have not yet been found to be very useful for explanatory or predictive purposes.

Integrated Theories

In addition to theories that focus on a primary underlying assumption, some researchers have integrated components of multiple existing theories to develop integrated theories of sexual violence. Five theories of sexual offending that incorporate elements of separate theories are Ellis' synthesized theory of rape (Ellis, 1989, 1991), Marshall and Barbaree's integrated theory (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990), Hall and Hirschman's quadripartite model of sexual abuse (Hall & Hirschman, 1991), Malamuth's confluence model of sexual aggression (Malamuth, 1996), and the ITSO (Ward & Beech, 2006). Ellis' (1989, 1991) synthesized theory of rape captures the strengths of previous models (evolutionary, social learning, and feminist) while incorporating some key neurohormonal concepts. There are four major tenets to the synthesized theory of rape, namely,

(1) there are two driving forces underlying most rapes (the sex drive and the drive to possess and control); (2) the actual techniques involved in committing rape are learned; (3) males have been favored by natural selection for learning the methods for acquiring multiple sexual partners (e.g., force and deception); and (4) varying tendencies to rape result from exposing the brain to varying levels of sex hormones (e.g., high levels of androgen). The proposition of the theory describing the driving forces of rape generalizes the need for sex and to possess and control others to both men and women—the two sexes being equal in terms of their drive to possess and control; however, the means used for expressing and satiating the drive may be quite different.

Marshall and Barbaree's integrated theory focuses on biological, ecological, and social learning factors in the development of male adolescents and the struggles of distinguishing aggression from sexual impulses. The task of discriminating these impulses is further complicated if the individual is insecurely attached, has low self-esteem, a poor coping style, or inadequate interpersonal skills. In addition to these psychological vulnerabilities, other salient causal factors resulting in offending are "developmental experiences, biological processes (i.e., influx of male hormones at puberty), and cultural norms and attitudes about sex and gender roles" (Ward et al., 2006, p. 34).

Hall and Hirschman's quadripartite model of sexual offending identifies four factors that can work independently or in combination with increased risk of perpetration, namely, inappropriate physiological sexual arousal, distorted cognition, affective dyscontrol, and problematic personality factors. In this model, individuals are characterized by the affective dyscontrol subtype are characterized by opportunistic offenses, high levels of violence, a tendency to engage in both nonsexual and sexual violence, and depression (Hall & Hirschman, 1991). Problematic personality factors typically develop as a result of adverse developmental experiences, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, or parental divorce (Ward et al., 2006). According to Hall and Hirschman, a person is most likely to offend when the presence of vulnerability factors are paired with an opportunity to offend. This combination of factors is hypothesized to result in the sexual offending; however, according to the theory, the offender is specified to be male, where no specification of sexual orientation is made.

Malamuth's confluence model of sexual aggression (Malamuth, 1996) incorporates factors from feminist, social learning, evolutionary, and personality theories to explain sexual violence. In this theory, heterosexual males are the focus of perpetration, as they experience anger in the face of sexual denial by women and anxiety about paternity, leading to hostile and controlling behaviors toward women (Ward et al., 2006). Proximate causes of offending include four central elements, that is, (1) a convergence of risk factors contribute to sexual aggression, (2) the proposed causes of sexual aggression against women are distinct from causes of aggression against men, and yet (3) are similar to the causes of other controlling and coercive behavior toward women, and (4) environmental

factors are important in explaining variations in actual behavior (Ward et al., 2006).

The ITSO (Ward & Beech, 2006) assumes that sexual offending can be explained by an interaction of biological factors that affect brain development (evolution, genetic variation, and neurobiological variables) and ecological factors (cultural variables, physical and social environment, and personal circumstances). In brief, this theory assumes that these biological and ecological factors, which impact individuals' biological functioning and social learning, affect neuropsychological functioning. It is the impairment of these neuropsychological functions that leads to clinical symptoms (e.g., emotional and social difficulties) that increases one's odds of sexual offending.

Empirical support. Although Ellis' synthesized theory represented a relatively early step toward integrating multiple theoretical constructs in order to explain sexual aggression, the theory itself has yet to be fully empirically tested. Marshall and Barbaree's integrated theory focuses on adult males who offend against women or female children (Marshall, Marshall, Sachdev, & Kruger, 2003; Smallbone & Dadds, 1998) and has been the subject of empirical refinement and support. Ward, Polaschek, and Beech (2006, p. 37) note that although this model of sexual offending provides "evidence that societies characterized by high levels of interpersonal violence, male domination, and disparaging attitudes toward females have higher rates of sexual crimes," the theory lacks some external consistency and does not fully account for several factors, including offenders who do not exhibit aggressive behavior until adulthood. The theory also assumes that sexual aggression stems from a failure to control deviant sexual impulses, which is inconsistent with literature demonstrating that many perpetrators are able to carefully plan their offenses in advance in order to maximize their ability to offend (Yates & Kingston, 2006).

Malamuth's model has received some empirical support in the study of adult male offenders (Abbey, Jacques-Tiura, & LeBreton, 2011; Wheeler, George, & Dahl, 2002). The model has been successfully expanded to an examination of the association between pornography use and male attitudes supporting sexual violence against women (Malamuth, Hald, & Koss, 2012). However, the model does not fully account for offense heterogeneity and requires further study in order to fully detail the interactions among variables.

In contrast to the theories put forth by Malamuth and by Marshall and Barbaree, Hall and Hirschman's (1991) quadripartite model benefits from its apparent ability to explain offense heterogeneity, since the theory takes into account individual variance in terms of predisposing factors as well as the interaction between individual and situational characteristics. Additionally, by incorporating inhibitory thresholds, the model accounts for individuals who possess risk factors for sexual offending but who do not offend. However, the model has been noted to lack sufficient conceptual and explanatory clarity in regard to the core constructs, which may account for the fact

that it has not been extensively tested and requires further validation (Ward et al., 2006). Similarly, while the ITSO shows clinical potential for the assessment, formulation, and treatment of sexual offenders, it has not yet been fully empirically investigated. Additionally, the ITSO model is weakened by a lack of capacity to explain the mechanisms by which neuropsychological systems become impaired.

Explanation of gender inclusive violence. It should be noted that the majority of integrated theory studies examining multiple factors, including biological, social learning, evolutionary, and hormonal variables, were conducted mainly on male offenders and may not be reflective of female offenders. With the exception of Ellis' synthesized theory, which specifically predicts that rape should not be an exclusively male phenomenon, the integrated theories addressed in this article have generally focused on male offenders. For example, Marshall and Barbaree's model addresses factors leading to offending, several of which apply only to male perpetrators (e.g., male pubertal hormones). Given that the developmental precursors leading to aggression in young boys, such as parental violence or physical abuse of children, which lead to negative relationships with women, can also be found in the developmental trajectory of young girls, further study has the potential to expand this theory to include female perpetrators. Malamuth's confluence model focuses on heterosexual male perpetrators and emphasizes that the stated causes of sexual aggression toward females (e.g., anger in the face of sexual denial by women and anxiety about paternity) are not similarly indicative of aggression toward males. The ITSO does not appear to assume the gender of the offender or victim, but the majority of studies were conducted with male offenders and may not be reflective of female offenders. Although the theory appears to be gender inclusive, there is no available evidence on its utility. Hall and Hirschmann's quadripartite model does not specify the offender's sexual orientation but does assume that the offender is male; however, the described developmental experiences which are likely to lead to future offense can be found in both male and female adolescents, and, thus, could lead a person of either gender down the path of potential sexual offense, especially if the developmental experiences were viewed as "normal." Although the integrated theories have the potential to be expanded upon in ways that are gender inclusive, there is no available evidence on whether they would be useful for explaining all forms of sexual violence.

Discussion

The overall goals of this article were to first highlight the extent to which our current conceptualizations of sexual assault in adulthood are focused on male perpetrators and female victims. Although other gender combinations are represented less frequently in sexual assaults, we argue that even this small percentage of the population should be included in our conceptualization of sexual offending and that a gender-limited conceptualization of violence allows for a number of sexual

Table 1. Overview of Sexual Violence Theories.

Model	Theory	Central Explanation	Theory Has Traditionally Been Gender Inclusive	Studies Conducted Beyond Male to Female Assault
Biological	Mitchell and Beech (2011) neurobiological model	Risk of sexual offending is affected by neurobiological, neuropsychological, and genetic variables	Yes	No empirical studies of which we are aware
	Evolutionary psychology	Sexual assault is a mechanism for increasing fitness of males through increased reproduction	No	None, all male to female
Psychological and social	Routine activity theory	Criminal victimization is not randomly distributed, and occurs in the presence of a motivated offender, suitable target, and lack of capable guardian	Yes	Studies include full range of sexual violence
	Feminist theory	Sexual violence is associated with sex disparities in power and social status, patriarchy, and desire for control	Limited	Primarily male to female
	Social learning and related theories	Favorable attitudes toward sexual violence are developed through socialization and learning	Generally	Primarily limited to heterosexual dating violence, but includes male and female perpetrators
	Typology approaches	Patterns of offending can be generated through examination of specific offender characteristics	Generally	Primarily male to female, but some studies focus on female perpetrators
Integrated	Several integrated theories have been developed	Sexual assault is driven by multiple factors, including biological, social learning, evolutionary, and hormonal variables	Limited	Limited empirical study, primarily male to female

assault victims to remain unacknowledged and perpetrators to remain hidden. Sexual violence may be influenced by many factors, including neurobiological factors, power, resources, social norms, and dominance, but we argue that it is not inherently gendered as evidenced by the fairly high rates of same-sex violence reported in predominately same-sex settings such as prisons. Therefore, a comprehensive theory of sexual assault must be applicable to the study of violence perpetrated by, as well as against, all genders. We believe that research and clinical intervention development in the area of sexual violence needs to move toward being not only more theoretically driven but also needs to be gender inclusive in order to fully capture the full range of sexual violence. In examining the most widely known theories of sexual aggression, we sought not to denote the best theory or to make evaluations based on all the empirical evidence but to provide an overview of each theory and discuss it in terms of its applicability to thinking about sexual violence through a gender inclusive lens (see Table 1).

Although all of the theories described in the article have the potential to be utilized in a gender inclusive way, they differ widely on how much they have been applied in a gender inclusive manner and how much adapting may be needed to use them in a more gender inclusive way. For example, routine activity theory provides a framework that does not make assumptions regarding the gender of the perpetrator or victim, and studies using this framework have examined female victimization, male victimization, same-gender violence, and male perpetration. Other theories appear to be gender inclusive but have either not been widely tested outside male to female

violence (e.g., social learning theories) or have received little or no empirical testing (e.g., Mitchell & Beech's neurobiological model). In contrast, theories such as feminist theory, evolutionary theory, and Malamuth's confluence model, which have traditionally included gendered components, may require additional considerations in applying them in a gender inclusive manner. For instance, feminist theory emphasizes the subordination of women through rape and other forms of violence as a method of maintaining a patriarchal cultural system. Although this may explain why male to female sexual violence is more prevalent, future gender inclusive research could continue to focus on important aspects of equality, power, and control without the assumption that these constructs are inherently gendered. Evolutionary psychology may be the most difficult and least flexible, given its strong emphasis on reproductive fitness; however, there may be ways to tailor the theory to be more gender inclusive. For instance, one might hypothesize that male to male sexual violence is a form of aggression used to reduce the status of other men during intrasexual competition (i.e., research could therefore test whether male victims fitness is subsequently decreased and/or offenders' fitness is increased). Perhaps female to male sexual violence occurs primarily between women of lower status and men of higher status with access to resources, when a woman is afraid of losing an invested mate, and/or when there is a low ratio of men to women.

Clearly, our review suggests that some theories may be more easily compatible with a gender inclusive conceptualization than others; however, the choice of a theory should not simply be based on gender inclusivity. One must still carefully

evaluate prospective theories based on (1) how well they fit with the purposes of the intended clinical or research endeavor and (2) their scientific merit. In selecting a theory that guides gender inclusive work, researchers, clinicians, and advocates should examine the theory using suggested guidelines for the evaluation of scientific theories (Gannon et al., 2008; Newton-Smith, 2002; Ward et al., 2006). These guidelines have included evaluating a theory based on (1) its consistency with existing research findings, (2) its ability to address logical gaps or contradictions within a theory, (3) the extent to which it brings together prior theoretical research, (4) whether it provides theoretical possibilities for novel research predictions or clinical interventions, and (5) the extent to which it accounts for the full depth of mechanisms and processes.

Synthesis of Theories

Much of the existing theoretical research has focused on a single theory (e.g., feminist, social learning, and typology); however, a number of theories have integrated elements from a number of existing theories (e.g., Malamuth's confluence model) and increasingly theories have included a focus on biological factors (e.g., ITSO). Although it is likely that each theory has the potential to contribute to our understanding of the factors that underlie sexual assault, and each may be able to do this in a gender inclusive manner, it is unlikely that any one of these theories is able to *fully* explain sexual violence. Ward et al. (2006) argue that the field needs a more united theory and one that covers all types of sexual offending. The authors suggest a strategy of "theory knitting" by which the strongest features of relevant theories are identified and integrated within a new framework. This approach seems to lend itself easily to a gender inclusive conceptualization of sexual violence and reflects the fact that a number of researchers and theorists have already combined theories in their own work to more fully understand sexual violence. The existing integrated theories notwithstanding several other researchers have also advocated for synthesizing and combining elements of existing theories to extend their explanatory power and inclusivity. For instance, it has been suggested that feminist theory could be combined with routine activity theory to increase its flexibility by including additional variables and to be able to more adequately explain sexual victimization of both men and women (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Schwartz et al., 2001). Smuts (1995) uses evolutionary theory to help explain the origins of patriarchy from a feminist standpoint. Although many of the proposed integrated theories have largely been empirically untested as a whole, they have chosen parts of existing theories that have shown empirical support and/or clinical utility using some of the theories as lenses more than definitive guides.

Theory knitting has the potential to add explanatory power to our understanding of sexual violence as well as enhancing gender inclusivity. We suggest that in addition to evaluating potential theories based on the scientific evaluation criteria discussed earlier, those wanting to use theory knitting themselves should consider a few key questions, namely, (1) Does the

Table 2. Critical Findings and Implications for Practice and Research.

Historically, sexual violence has generally been viewed as a form of aggression perpetrated by men against women; however, members of all genders can be victims and perpetrators of sexual violence
Viewing only men as perpetrators and women as victims overlooks sexual violence that is not male to female, which limits the research, clinical intervention, and advocacy for political and legal reform for these survivors
As an alternative to viewing sexual violence within sex-specific terms, we advocate for the use of a gender inclusive conceptualization of sexual aggression, which we define as a conceptualization that takes into account the factors that contribute to sexual victimization of, and victimization by, both men and women
Although a number of theories have been put forth to explain sexual violence, these theories vary widely in their empirical support, use in research of sexual violence other than male to female, and their ability to be gender inclusive
We encourage sexual violence researchers to identify and utilize appropriate theoretical frameworks, and to apply these frameworks in ways that incorporate a full range of victimization, including male and female perpetration and victimization as well as same-sex violence
Theory knitting, or combining relevant components of empirically supported theories, has the potential to add explanatory power to our understanding of sexual violence as well as enhancing gender inclusivity
A comprehensive theoretical model of sexual offender heterogeneity has the potential to improve existing assessment and treatment by highlighting the risk factors for assault as well as the factors that enhance treatment effectiveness
Providers are encouraged to develop knowledge and skills that are relevant to the full range of victim/perpetrator combinations

proposed integrated theory account for both men and women as perpetrators and victims of sexual violence, as well as cross-gender and same-gender violence?; (2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the individual theories and what are the strengths and weaknesses when integrated in terms of gender inclusiveness?; and (3) How might these theories be best integrated in order to strengthen both their gender inclusiveness and practical application? Researchers should carefully consider the empirical and theoretical implications in relation to theory knitting and also be thoughtful about how to best define terminology and assess these constructs in order to best ensure they strengthen existing theories and fully allow for gender inclusivity.

Clinical Practice and Advocacy Implications

Broadening gender inclusivity is important to our theoretical understanding of sexual violence and is also of critical importance to clinical practice (see Table 2). Thus far, prevention, treatment, and risk reduction interventions in the area of sexual violence have focused almost exclusively on male perpetrators and female victims. Although this may serve the needs of the majority, such approaches to sexual violence may overlook and minimize the clinical needs of the minority. Available research suggests that male victims and GLBT victims face less public and provider understanding of issues related to sexual violence

that is not male to female, more barriers to care, fewer available treatment resources, and less advocacy (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Draucker & Martsolf, 2010; Potter et al., 2012; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Similarly, much of the discussion around violence against GLBT victims has focused on hate crimes and has not yet fully incorporated GLBT individuals into the broader study of violent crime, including sexual assault. (Cramer, McNeil, Holley, Shumway, & Boccellari, 2012). Clinicians who wish to become more gender inclusive should be attuned to the possibility that male victims and victims of same-gender assault may face additional barriers to seeking clinical services. Coxell and King (2002) suggest that providers and other members of helping agencies should develop knowledge and skills that are relevant to the full range of sexual violence.

There are a number of ways that adopting a gender inclusive conceptualization can help influence gender inclusive clinical practices. Such a conceptualization can help guide everything from the choice of psychoeducation materials for waiting rooms, the use of gender-neutral language when speaking to patients, and the selection of treatment approaches and outcomes measures. For instance, many interpersonal violence posters and brochures are designed with only female victims and male perpetrators in mind and may not feel welcoming to a male victim or victim of a female perpetrator. Selected sexual violence screening instruments, measures, and clinical interview questions should be gender inclusive and not make assumptions related to the gender or sexual orientation of the victim or perpetrator. Treatment and intervention approaches can be chosen that are appropriate not only for the specific problem and patient but also that have an empirical basis and fit within a gender inclusive theoretical framework. In terms of treating sexual offenders in order to reduce recidivism, it is especially important for clinicians to be receptive to the possibility that different treatment approaches may be effective for offenders of differing genders and sexual orientations. Lalumiere et al. (2005) observe that there is a striking lack of evidence that any one treatment approach has been effective in deterring or even reducing sexual violence; although they note that it is possible that existing treatments are simply ineffective, they add the more likely explanation that treatment effects exist but have not yet been demonstrated. Specifically, they speculate that existing treatments may not be universally successful but may be effective within subgroups of offenders that have yet to be identified. A comprehensive theoretical model of sexual offender heterogeneity has the potential to improve existing assessment and treatment by highlighting the risk factors for assault as well as the factors that enhance treatment effectiveness.

In addition to research and clinical work, advocacy efforts are also needed in order to promote awareness of a broader conceptualization of sexual violence and to ensure that all victims have access to needed medical, psychological, and legal services. As noted, although the women's movements and advocacy efforts of feminists have done much to bring awareness to the issue of male aggression and female victimization, very

little attention within the United States or internationally has focused on other forms of sexual violence and therefore fewer resources are available for these victims (e.g., Sivakumaran, 2005). By adopting a broader conceptualization of sexual violence, efforts to combat sexual violence can push for legal and political reform to not only assist female victims but also assist all victims of sexual violence. Recent advocacy reforms have included changes to the Federal Bureau of Investigation definition/law of rape—revisions initially prompted by advocacy from the Women's Law Project—to be gender neutral, and coalition efforts that included women's rights and GLBT rights groups in supporting the repeal of India's consensual sodomy law and efforts to create a gender inclusive sexual assault law (Joshi, 2010).

In summary, a focus only on male to female sexual violence fails to acknowledge the full scope of sexual violence, and we believe that a gender inclusive lens provides a more comprehensive understanding of sexual violence. Specifically, we encourage sexual violence researchers to identify and utilize appropriate theoretical frameworks and to apply these frameworks in ways that incorporate the full range of sexual violence. We believe that adopting a gender inclusive framework and using theory to guide future research and clinical intervention are important pieces of the complex puzzle needed in ongoing efforts to eliminate sexual violence again both men and women.

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