Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical Psychology

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Psychological Correlates of Diverse Coerced Sexual Experiences:
Clarifying Classes and Severity Continuums of Sexual Act and Coercive Tactic

Date: June 28th, 2019
Time: 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Place: Benton Hall 228

Abstract
Although different coerced sexual experiences have been associated with different levels of psychological correlates, a number of conceptual and methodological limitations have plagued previous classification systems and severity continuums of coerced sexual experiences. The present study aimed to uncover meaningful differences across classes of coerced sexual experiences for the dimensions of sexual act and coercive tactic to inform future classification systems and severity continuums. Participants with a history of coerced sexual experiences (N = 402) completed an online survey in which they provided information about their worst or only coerced sexual experience, identifying the worst (or only) sexual act and the worst (or only) coercive tactic that occurred. They completed a battery of measures addressing psychological correlates of the coerced sexual experience of interest. Coercive experiences were grouped into classes derived from the SES-SFV according to the worst (or only) reported sexual act and coercive tactic. Psychological correlates were compared across classes to examine between-group differences in severity. The results of the present study demonstrated a pattern of severity for sexual act that is partially consistent with previous research, such that the class comprised of fondling, kissing, and clothes removal was associated with fewer psychological symptoms than other classes of sexual acts. Results also demonstrated that the coercive tactic classes of anger/criticism and physical force were associated with higher levels of psychological symptoms, and not having a chance to say “no” was associated with lower levels of psychological symptoms compared to other classes of coercive tactics. Furthermore, more sexual acts and more coercive tactics during a single coerced sexual experience was positively associated with psychological symptoms. The results of this study have a number of implications. Given that the pattern of severity for coercive tactics differed from what is suggested by existing measures of severity, current measures may require revision to depict more accurate severity continuums. Further research is needed utilizing a larger and more diverse sample to establish a more accurate measure. Moreover, results can inform sexual education and sexual assault prevention program curriculum, as well as mental health treatment for individuals with a history of coerced sexual experiences.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Emily Gerstein, Ph.D., Dissertation Chair
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Kristen Jozkowski, Ph.D., Committee Faculty Member