

## Abstract

Associations between measures of a belief in the fundamental unknowability of women (WFU) and of men (MFU) with sexual aggressiveness/coerciveness (SAC) was assessed from surveys administered to a sample of undergraduate students. Neither WFU nor MFU was directly associated with SAC. However, WFU predicted problematic attitudes and cognitions about men and sex (for female Ss), which in turn predicted SAC.

## Introduction

Implicit theories (ITs; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995; Beech, Fisher, & Ward, 2005) have been postulated as “deep” cognitive structures. Polaschek and Ward (2002) proposed several ITs, including the belief that women are fundamentally unknowable (WFU), as underlying mechanisms for rape-supportive beliefs and precursors to sexual aggression. This strong version of “men are from Mars, women are from Venus” (Gray, 2012) implies a belief that women are inherently different from men, and these differences cannot be readily understood. This impasse can lead to mistrust, hostility, and sexual aggression toward women (Polaschek & Ward, 2002).

Although WFU has been inferred through analysis of psychometric scales assessing sexual-aggression-specific cognitive distortions and interviews with rapists (Fisher & Beech, 2009; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004), this approach may ignore variability in WFU in non-convicted populations, bypassing opportunities to investigate the etiology of sexual aggression.

Direct self-report measures of this implicit theory, and of its logical counterpart in women—Men as Fundamentally Unknowable (MFU) were created (Belz, Kinney, & Rogers, 2016) to test Polaschek and Ward’s proposed relationships between these constructs and sexual aggression. In this study we hypothesized that WFU and MFU would be indirectly related to SA and SC by way of the framework specified by Polaschek and Ward (2002).

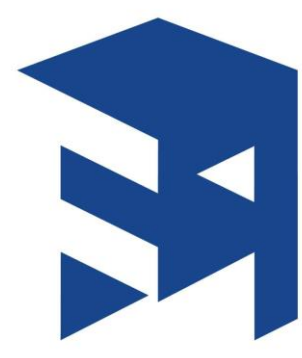
Table 1. Correlations between SAC indicators, WFU, and other scales.

		SAC-1	p	FDR	SAC-2	p	FDR
Men (N=43)	WFU	-.10			.00		
	IRMA-SF	.02			.06		
	C-SEX-M <sup>1</sup>	.17			.28		
	NSD	.54 *			.37		
	BFSD-S	.23			.16		
	AHBS	.19			.08		
	MOSI	.29			.11		
Women (N=154)	MFU	.02			.10		
	M-RMA	.07			.25** *		
	C-SEX-F	.19 *			.20 *		
	NSD	.37 **	*		.41 ***	**	
	AHBS	.22 **	*		.37 ***	***	
	MOSI	.21 *	*		.10		

\* p < .05. \*\* p < .01. \*\*\* p < .001. <sup>1</sup>log-transformed. FDR=p-value corrected for false discovery rate across multiple tests.

# Belief in the unknowability of the opposite sex: Associations with sexual coerciveness

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## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 261 volunteer undergraduate participants from a public university in the Northeastern United States. 20.7% of participants were male, 77.0% female, and 2.3% of unknown or unspecified sex, or not defined in male/female terms. Participant ages ranged from 18 to over 32 (mean = 2.5 years, SD = 2.72). The sample was 81.8% White, 7.7% Black, 5.8% Hispanic/Latino, with 4.7% indicating another race/ethnicity.

Due to the nature of the variables involved, participants were only included in analyses if they identified as male or female, as straight/heterosexual, and reported that their attraction, experiences, and romantic interests involved members of the opposite sex exclusively or mostly. The final sample consisted of 43 males and 154 females.

MFU and WFU scales were scored from item pools, as well as a male rape myth endorsement scale and two SAC scales, to assess potential sexual coerciveness.

### Procedures & Measures

Participants recruited from undergraduate psychology courses responded to an anonymous online survey including pools of 18 items each for constructing WFU and MFU scales, and other scales hypothesized to correlate with WFU/MFU and sexual coerciveness.

- **MFU**: 8 items,  $\alpha=.74$ ; **WFU**: 6 items,  $\alpha=.82$ . Example items: “I’ve lived around [women/men] all my life, but I still don’t understand them at all”, “A woman/man could never truly know how a [man/woman] feels.”
- **SAC-1**: based on Malamuth (1989), asked about participants’ thoughts, fantasies, conditional intentions, and past incidence of sixteen sexually aggressive actions (e.g., using handcuffs, manipulating, choking sexual partner). Scoring weighted by severity on the *agonistic continuum* (Knight, Sims-Knight, & Guay, 2013).
- **SAC-2**: Similar to SAC-1, based on strategies in the sexual experiences survey (Koss & Gidycz, 1985).
- Illinois rape myth acceptance scale--short form (**IRMA-SF**; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999)
- Acceptance of rape myths about males (**M-RMA**; Research team)
- Hypermasculinity inventory--revised; callous sexual attitudes subscale (**C-SEX-M**; Peters, Nason, & Turner, 2007)
- Callous sexual attitudes of women (**C-SEX-F**): created by research team from items written to be parallel to C-SEX-M items
- Need for sexual dominance (**NSD**; Nelson, 1979)
- Belief in female sexual deceptiveness--short form (**BFSD-S**; Rogers, Cervantes, & Espinosa, 2015)
- Adversarial heterosexual beliefs scale (**AHBS**; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995)
- Misperception of others’ sexual intentions (**MOSI**; based on Abbey, 1987)

### Analysis Procedure

Zero-order correlations (see Table 1) and structural equation modeling (see Figures 1 and 2) were used to assess relationships hypothesized above.

## Results

Although WFU and MFU were not correlated directly with SAC indices (see Table 1), they were correlated with correlates of SAC. Thus, the model implied by Polaschek and Ward (2002) was found to be plausible in the female sample (see Figure 1), and potentially plausible in the male sample (see Figure 2). The low N in the male sample resulted in low power for hypothesis tests, though effects of interest were in the hypothesized direction. Despite the low N in the male sample, the specified model fit the data well. The best-fitting model following Polaschek and Ward’s implied theory did not appear to fit as well in the female sample, despite a much larger sample size.

Figure 1. Structural model of Polaschek and Ward’s (2004) hypothesized relationships in female participants (N=154,  $X^2_{24 df} = 39.5$ ,  $p = .02$ , RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .07, CFI = .92).

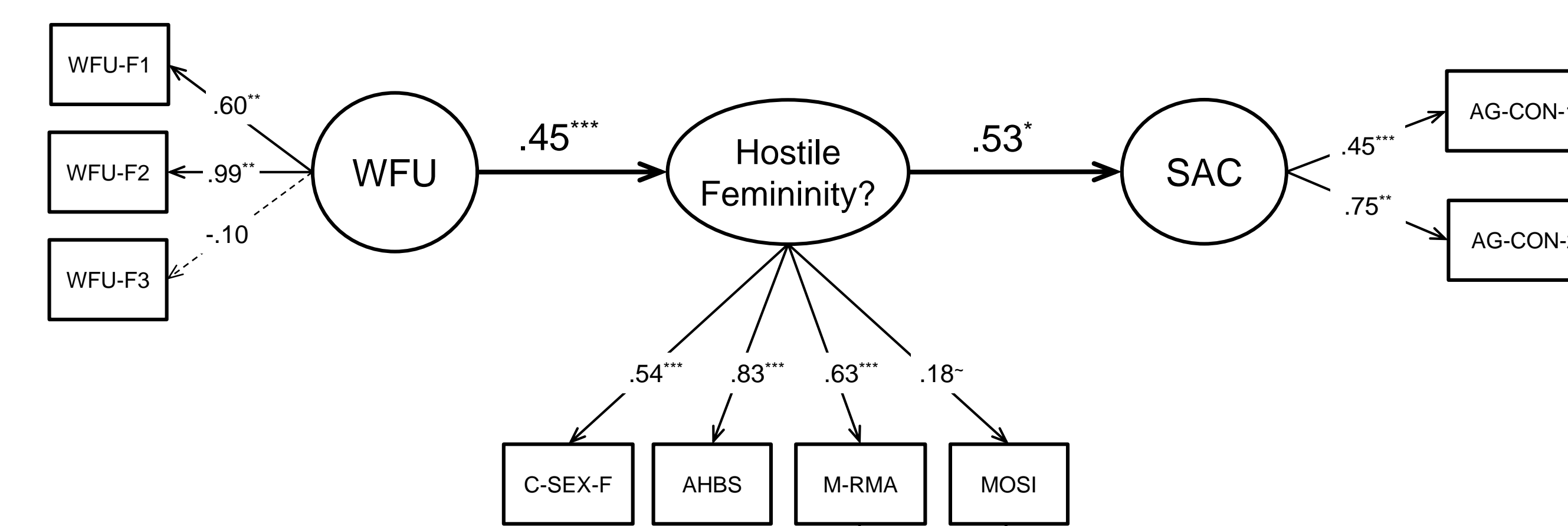
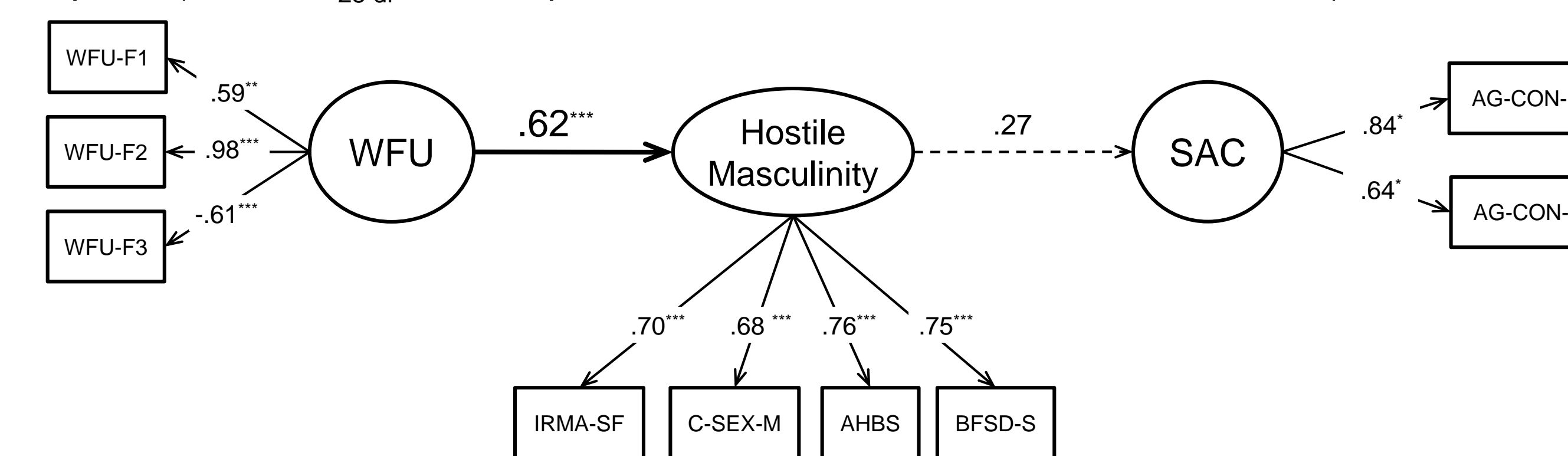


Figure 2. Structural model of Polaschek and Ward’s (2004) hypothesized relationships in male participants (N=43,  $X^2_{25 df} = 27.29$ ,  $p = .34$ , RMSEA = .045, SRMR = .08, CFI = .98).



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## Discussion

WFU/MFU may be implicated in the formation or maintenance of sexually aggressive attitudes and/or behavior, as suggested by Polaschek and Ward (2002). However, this study does not suggest they are *directly* connected to those outcomes.

The weak path between Hostile Masculinity and sexual aggressiveness and coerciveness might easily be explained by the low sample size in the male group. Alternatively, it might be that “hostile” masculine attitudes are not as important for sexual aggression as their counterparts are in women. It seems plausible that, due to common gender role norms related to sexual coercion and aggression, males acquire and act on sexually aggressive cognitions with little “prompting” from attitudinal precursors. In other words, for males, sexual aggressiveness might be “built in” by cultural norms and culturally-shaped situations to a greater extent than is the case for females. Females, by contrast, do not share these expectations of sexually aggressive behavior and attitudes; therefore, those women who have higher levels of such attitudes might be more likely to acquire and/or act on sexually aggressive cognitions. In a very simplified sense, perhaps women more often “need a specific reason”—e.g., unusually harsh “hostile femininity” attitudes—to be sexually aggressive, whereas men need less of a reason. Future research will be required to answer these questions, including experimental designs and studies with greater statistical power.

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