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Lies and imagined intent to lie: Personality, sexism beliefs and false claims of assault

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Abstract
Research on the issues surrounding false allegations of assault against men has been largely based on review of official documentation, not on questions asked of the women themselves. This limits what we know about variables that might contribute explanation as to why some women deliberately lie about having been assaulted. In our survey of 255 women (both college students and community members), 18 admitted they had fictitiously claimed to have been assaulted either to official investigators, or to friends and family members. Their stated motives included revenge, fear, and embarrassment. Our participants also rated the extent to which they could imagine a situation in which they would make a(nother) false claim in the future—101 (39.6%) of them rated this item positively to differing degrees. We also examined individual difference variables including the 'dark triad' traits and four measures of sexist beliefs. While Machiavellianism and psychopathy had positive relationships with how easily participants could imagine making a false claim, several of the sexism beliefs explained more variance in imagined intent to falsify a claim, particularly among the women who admitted having made one previously.

Keywords False claim · Dark triad · Hostile sexism · Benevolent sexism

Introduction

Few topics carry as much potential for heated discussion and debate as that surrounding women who untruthfully claim they have been assaulted. In addition to potential social consequences, such as damage to one's reputation, men who are falsely accused may wrongfully face formal charges and/or convictions (Hail-Jares et al., 2020). Current research on false allegations of assault is focused primarily on the frequency with which it is reported and/or investigated within the legal system—as a result, how commonly these lies are told within the personal friend/family/co-worker realm, without formal charges being made, is unknown. Almost exclusively, the types of assault studied in this context are those involving sexual violence[1] of men against women. While some research has been conducted on parents (generally in custody battles) who fictitiously claim a child was physically or sexually abused (e.g., Trocme & Bala, 2005; Grattagliano et al., 2014), little work has been done on false claims of physical assault, or of sexual violence in other relationships (see Mazeh & Widrig, 2016, for a discussion on this issue). Estimates for how frequently fictitious claims of sexual violence occur are derived from the evaluation of official police documentation after an allegation is made and later found to fit the criteria for "false" (e.g., Spohn et al., 2014). Many methodological problems arise from this process, including variability in the definition of false allegation from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, personal biases about the crime and its victims that may be held by investigators, and differences in information-gathering

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[1] The legal terms of 'rape' and 'sexual assault' are defined differently, but the precise definitions vary across jurisdictions (Planty et al., 2013). Additionally, these terms are often not specifically defined by researchers, or are used interchangeably. As such, we used the more general description of 'sexual violence' in this work to refer to both categories of crimes.

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techniques. These problems contribute to the resulting wide variability in the estimation of how commonly these fictitious accounts actually occur (see Lisak et al., 2010 for a review of some of these problems).

Estimates of Frequency

One consequence of the measurement error produced by methodological inconsistency is that (as always) it contributes to wide variability in the estimate of how often the event genuinely happens. For example, Rumney (2006) reviewed a selection of primary studies of false sexual violence allegations and found reported occurrence rates from 1.5% (Theilade & Thompsen, 1986) to 90% (Stewart, 1981). In an attempt to more accurately estimate the true rate, Lisak et al. (2010) and Ferguson and Malouff (2016) each reviewed the few studies where evidence indicated that the primary authors rigorously evaluated whether the reported claims were false. As would be expected, the final set of studies included by these two teams overlapped a great deal, and so report similar findings: a conservative false allegation rate between 2.1% (Heenan & Murray, 2006) and 13.7% (Spohn et al. 2014).

Many in the general public tend to believe that false allegations are fairly common. McMahon and Farmer (2011) and Vandiver and Dupalo (2013) each reported that approximately 20% of the college students in their studies agreed/strongly agreed that women are lying about rape. Gunby et al. (2012) found that 33.6% of their female and 47.7% of their male undergraduates agreed/strongly agreed that a significant number of rapes reported to the police did not actually happen. Moreover, members of the legal and judicial professions often estimate even higher rates than those found among college students (McMillan, 2018; Saunders, 2012). These perceptions affect the seriousness with which legitimate claims are investigated and adjudicated (see Venema, 2018), and are likely to critically impact women who are genuine victims of assault. These beliefs may produce skepticism of all claims among those in the general public, including friends, family members, and coworkers of the victims, as well as among jury members should a trial occur. In addition, genuine victims may fear that they will be prosecuted for falsifying a claim if they are not believed (Avalos, 2018). The question remains, why would a woman deliberately fabricate a set of circumstances in order to cast herself in the role of victim?

Motives to Lie

Claims of sexual violence that are legitimately classified as false may occur for reasons other than the purposeful construction of an event that did not happen (Engle & O'Donohue, 2012). For the purposes of this paper, we were interested only in those situations where women knowingly and intentionally constructed a lie about an assault event by a man, reporting this fabricated claim to either personal acquaintances (i.e., family and /or friends), or to legitimate authority figures such as the police. Studies investigating official reports of sexual violence that were determined to be false have interpreted overlapping motives among these women. Kanin (1994) found that over half of the false claims he reviewed appeared to serve an alibi function. These women needed plausible justifications for the embarrassing consequences resulting from illicit consensual sex (e.g., pregnancy). Revenge was the second most common motivation, based on a desire to punish the man for his behavior, his rejection of her advances, or his termination of their relationship. An attempt to garner attention or sympathy from others was the third motive identified. O'Neal et al. (2014) found attention or sympathy seeking as the most common motive in the files they reviewed, followed closely by the need for an alibi. They also documented additional motives, including mental illness (both diagnosed and inferred), guilt, and revenge. While motives can often be assessed through analysis of official reports of the criminal proceedings, those reports do not include measures that might explain why some women, but not others in similar circumstances, are willing to enact such purposefully extreme behavior that will likely have life altering consequences for those falsely accused.

Personality Influences

Individual difference measures have been evaluated among those using deception in other circumstances and so might provide a starting point for investigations into the trait differences among those who lie about an assault claim. Much of the work on personality characteristics and deception has focused on the three antisocial traits described by Paulhus and Williams (2002) as the 'dark triad': Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy. Briefly, Machiavellianism reflects the extent to which one seeks to achieve power and/or influence through manipulating others, narcissism the degree to which an individual believes they are entitled to special treatment, and psychopathy how impulsive and unempathetic the person is. Scores on these traits are consistently positively correlated with each other (see Muris et al., 2017 for a meta-analysis) and are therefore considered to represent a constellation of sub-clinical traits that describe "…a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity and aggressiveness" (p. 557; Paulhaus & Williams, 2002). Indeed, these traits have been positively associated with a wide variety of both hypothetical and genuine self-acknowledged deceptive and illegal behavior, including infidelity (Jonason et al., 2014), academic dishonesty (Baughman et al., 2014), revenge seeking (Brewer et al., 2015), violent behavior (Pailing et al., 2014), adult bullying (Baughman et al., 2012) and financial fraud (Harrison et al., 2018).

Sexism Influences

In addition to personality characteristics, gendered cultural beliefs may contribute to the explanation of why some women choose to construct a fictional account of assault. Sexist beliefs that reinforce what are considered to be 'traditional' roles are present among both men and women (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). These beliefs, that men are better suited for high paying, high status jobs, that they deserve better education, and that the decisions they make are more practical and rational, are related to a wide variety of negative consequences for women. Examples include more negative evaluations of, and lower hiring recommendations for, female managerial-job candidates (Masser & Abrams, 2004), and a higher likelihood of blaming women for instigating domestic abuse (Valor-Seguro et al., 2011), or date rape (Angelone et al., 2012). Abrams et al. (2003, Study 2) also found these kinds of sexist beliefs predicted higher self-reported probability of committing acquaintance rape among men. A history of encountering these views overtly, and experiencing their negative consequences, might contribute to a feeling of justification among women who manufacture a false claim—a sense of payback or retribution. In fact, Pennekamp et al. (2007) found a positive, medium sized relationship between women's ratings of the personal relevance of sexism and anger-related emotions like moral outrage. They also found that the stronger the woman's anger, the generally stronger her belief that she should personally do something about it. Chadoir and Quinn (2010) also found a strong positive relationship between the level of anger in women exposed to hostile forms of sexism and actions that they believed they would take—in this case confronting a man they overheard cat calling another woman.

Alternatively, one might suggest that women who support the idea of men's superiority in these culturally-traditional areas might feel betrayed if they think men have not lived up to their socially established expectations as bread-winners and decision makers. In other words, if men are given educational and monetary resources under the belief that they are uniquely qualified to accomplish these goals, failure to provide adequately or to control unanticipated consequences (such as pregnancy) might also result in a desire for retribution.

An additional form of sexism appears to benefit women by treating them as standards of virtue, needing the protection and provision befitting their standing as the 'better half' of men (benevolent sexism, Glick & Fiske, 1996; 2011). These more subtle beliefs, also held by both women and men, reinforce an idealized view of women as morally pure wives and mothers who need protection from life's difficulties. Among both genders, this type of sexism is also related to negative actions and attitudes, including more endorsement of restriction in pregnant women's actions (Sutton et al., 2011), less support for their abortion choices (including those to save the mother's life; Huang et al., 2014), higher levels of body shame experienced among women (Calogero & Jost, 2011), and lower assessment of women's competence in the workplace (Good & Rudman, 2010). Despite the surface framing of benevolent sexism as positive, it has been found to produce more negative effects on women than the more traditional "hostile" type. For example, using a simulated job interview scenario, Dardenne et al. (2007) found that because hostile sexist beliefs were more clearly attributable to others, they did not impair women's performance. Benevolent sexist attitudes were found to be more internally directed, resulting in more distracting preoccupations (like self-doubt) that did interfere with performance. In terms of contributing to false claim decisions, women who hold benevolent sexist beliefs themselves might be more likely to seek revenge if they think a man has not followed the rules by treating her with the veneration that is a cornerstone of benevolent sexism. It is also possible that women who subscribe to this ideology might believe that it is their responsibility to remain virtuous and worthy of a man's devotion. They therefore might fear losing that protection and attempt to cover up an indiscretion (e.g., an extramarital affair) with a lie. Finally, regardless of their personal attitudes, some women may see men who have these views as overly patronizing, and might seek retribution for attitudes they see as demeaning or condescending.

Any conclusions drawn about false reports based on data acquired through an intermediary (such as police investigators) is likely to include more error compared to that gathered first-hand. Thus, we decided to go directly to the source of these false reports: the women themselves. We believed that the same personality traits that might enable a woman to consciously fabricate such a malicious act might also make her more willing to admit it. In this exploratory study, we asked our female participants a series of questions about whether they had ever claimed they had been assaulted by a man when they had not, to whom they made this statement, why they did it, and then we asked them to rate how likely it was they could imagine a circumstance in which they would do this (again). We also asked whether they knew of other women who had made such claims. Finally, we administered several surveys of personality traits and beliefs about different forms of sexism.

Method

Participants

The participants were 105 female college students (M_{age} = 18.60; Range = 18–21) and 156 general community-living American women (M_{age} = 27.59; Range = 25–30) collected via Qualtrics community sampling panels. Seventy one percent of the community women had at least some education beyond high school, but we requested the sampling service

include none that were current college students. Across both samples, 72% of the women were either married or in a committed relationship. The students received credit toward their psychology classes, and the community participants a nominal payment.

Materials and Procedure

Because we were asking participants to admit to legally or morally questionable actions they had taken, we tried to encourage honest responding several ways (in addition to the IRB approved informed consent script addressing anonymity). In the introduction to the survey, we acknowledged the reasonable belief that information completed on-line or sent through email could be traced back to the sender, and reiterated that no identification of any kind would be collected. At the end of the survey, we asked the women to rate how honest they had been in their responses because they believed their results were anonymous, using a hidden 0 to 100 slider scale with anchors of "Little Honesty" to "Complete Honesty". Most of the women claimed a high level of honesty (M = 91.06; $Mode_{172}$ = 100; Range = 0–100).

All questionnaires were created using Qualtrics software, and were administered to participants through emailed links. The items were intermixed and rated by participants on a hidden 0–100 slider-type scale (Never True to Always True), with the starting point in the center. The instructions asked participants to evaluate each item about themselves, or based on what they personally believed, not on what they believed were reflected by cultural norms. The surveys included were a measure of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy—Short Dark Triad 3.1.1 (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) and three measures of sexism that cover a range of situations in which sexism might be encountered—the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1978), a measure of adherence to broad traditional sex roles, the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), delineating hostile and benevolent sexism specifically, and the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995), a more politically-focused measure of sexist beliefs.

Following these items, we explained that were were interested in information about situations where women lied about having been assaulted by a man. We asked our participants about false claims of assault they personally had made (not specifying any particular type), whether they were made to friends/family or to the police/other authority personnel, and for an explanation of why they had done this. Based on previous research we provided a selection of potential motives from which participants could choose, including fear, revenge, embarrassment, and excitement. Participants could also add additional motives in an open ended format if none of these applied, and were told they could choose more than one. We also asked how many other women the participant knew who had made similar fictitious claims. Finally, we asked all participants whether they could imagine a situation in which they would make a(nother) claim of assault against a man when it was not true, rated using a hidden 0–100 scale with anchors of "No, I would never do this" and "Absolutely I can imagine one". Demographic questions and the honesty in responding item completed the survey.

Results

Screening for invalid responses included analysis of the time it took the respondent to complete the survey and the variability in their ratings across the items. Total survey times that were faster than 50% of the mean (of 10.83 min) for the sample, and those with standard deviations of less than 5 or more than 45 points were evaluated. Based on this assessment, six respondents' data (2.3%) were removed as they indicated likely biased response patterns (extremes only, or very little deviation), likely driven by participants not having read the items. Analyses found similar patterns of results for each sample, so all participants' data (N = 255) are combined.

Scale scores were created for Machiavellianism (8 items, Cronbach's alpha = .75), Narcissism (7 items, Cronbach's alpha = .62), and Psychopathy (6 items, Cronbach's alpha = .79). Principal Components Analysis was done on the items from the three sexism scales using a Direct Oblimin rotation (Delta = 0), as it was expected that these measures would be related to each other. The pattern and structure matrices were similar, describing four interpretable components retaining 52% of the total variance. Cross-loadings in the structure matrix reflected correlations primarily between the first factor and each of the other three (rs = 0.24, 0.29, 0.30). This first factor, Oversensitivity (8 items; Cronbach's alpha = .88), we interpreted as describing the tendency for women to exaggerate their gender-based treatment by men (e.g., "Women are too easily offended" as the highest loading item). The second factor, Discrimination (7 items, Cronbach's alpha = .85) appeared to describe the belief that women continue to be limited (primarily in jobs) by social rules (e.g., "It is easy to understand the anger of women's groups in America" as the highest loading item). The third, Entitlement, (8 items, alpha = .86) reflected a sense that men should hold traditional positions of influence (e.g., "Women are (not) just as capable of thinking logically as men" was the highest loading item). Items loading on the final factor were those written by Glick and Fiske (1996) to measure benevolent sexism (5 items, alpha = .76; e.g., "Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores"). Factor loading weighted scale scores for all four components were calculated for each participant.

Across the seven personality and sexism measures, three outliers were found (2 Narcissism, 1 Entitlement) and all were truncated to the next lowest value. Both the Psychopathy and

Table 1 Means (Standard Deviations) and 95% Confidence Intervals of Personality and Sexism Measures

Variable	Total Sample (*N*=255) *M* (*SD*) 95% *CI*	False Claim (*N*= 18) *M* (*SD*) 95% *CI*	No False Claim (*N*=237) *M* (*SD*) 95% *CI*
Machiavellianism	50.75 (16.87)	59.78 (16.93)	50.06 (16.70)
	48.67–52.83	51.36–68.21	47.93–52.20
Narcissism	44.67 (15.38)	47.45 (16.93)	44.45 (15.64)
	42.77–46.56	41.73–53.18	42.45–46.46
Psychopathy	26.85 (15.38)	46.26 (18.64)	25.38 (17.74)
	24.56–29.14	36.99–55.53	23.10–27.65
Oversensitivity	32.33 (15.10)	35.87 (14.15)	32.06 (15.17)
	30.46–34.19	28.83–42.90	30.12–34.00
Discrimination	40.97 (13.41)	39.30 (9.41)	41.10 (13.67)
	39.32–42.63	34.62–43.98	39.35–42.85
Entitlement	13.70 (10.86)	23.06 (12.48)	12.99 (10.42)
	12.36–15.04	16.85–29.27	11.66–14.32
Benevolent Sexism	33.36 (13.90)	37.28 (13.18)	33.06 (13.94)
	31.64–35.07	30.73–43.84	31.27–34.84

Entitlement distributions were skewed, and were square root transformed to more closely represent symmetrical curves. No evidence of multicollinearity was found (all tolerance values > .39), and scatterplot inspection indicated that bivariate relationships did not violate linearity. Means, standard deviations, and 95% confidence intervals for the remaining 255 participants' scale scores can be seen in Table 1, also divided by sub-group as to whether they admitted making a false claim or not.

As can be seen in Table 1, a total of 18 (7.1%) of our participants admitted they had lied about having been assaulted to either friends/family (n = 14) or to an authority figure (n = 4). Seventy-eight (31%) of our participants stated that they knew someone else who had made a false claim to acquaintances or authority figures, with 16 of these women contending they knew two who had done so, and 10 claiming three or more. On average, participants who admitted making a false claim had higher scores in all three personality traits (most notably, Psychopathy), and in Oversensitivity, Entitlement, and Benevolent Sexism scores. In examining their own motives for making these claims (recall that they could describe more than one), embarrassment was the most common (8 women), followed by revenge (6), excitement (3), fear (2), and one each "other motives" of seeking attention and general confusion. The four women who reported a fictitious allegation to an authority figure all claimed revenge and excitement motives. Participants who indicated they had not already done so in the past had, on average, difficulty imagining a situation in which they would lie about being assaulted (M = 12.75; SD = 23.46). While the modal value was 0 (56%), 26 (11%) of these participants rated the item between 50 and 100. The data on this item for the sub-group of women who admitted to having already made a false claim was very different. Their mean rating was 52.17 (SD = 31.25), and individually, only one of these women endorsed this item as 0, and 56% rated it between 50 and 100.

Table 2 presents the correlations among the personality and sexism measures for each sub-group, as well as the measure of how easily our participants could imagine a situation in which they would say they had been assaulted when they had not (Imagined Intent). Variability in Imagined Intent was best explained differently in each sub-group. Among our women who indicated no false claims in their pasts, the degree to which they could imagine making one in the future was best predicted by higher psychopathy scores, and stronger beliefs that men are entitled to certain privileges. In our sub-group of women who admitted they had made false claims previously, the best predictors were stronger beliefs about women's oversensitivity to things men say and do, that society still discriminates against women, and that women deserve special treatment. It was also positively related to levels of Machiavellianism and psychopathy.

Table 3 presents the results of hierarchical multiple linear regression, using personality and sexism measures to predict Imagined Intent among our participants in each sub-group[2] In both, the three personality measures explained approximately the same amount of variance in participants' ability to imagine a future allegation of assault that was fabricated (R^2 = 16.3% and 16.6%). Adding Oversensitivity, Discrimination, Entitlement and Benevolent Sexism measures increased the total variance explained in our dependent

[2] Linear regression on such a small sample (n = 18) produces output that describes only that sample, and it's unwise to expect these results to generalize to others. While among the larger sub-group (n = 237) the Adjusted R2s were .15 for Block 1, and .19 for Block 2, the smaller group's Adjusted R2s = .05 and .45. In addition, the expected random relationship among 7 predictors with this sample size = .41 (R = k/N-1).

Table 2 Correlations Among Personality and Sexism Measures and Imagined Intent to Lie

	Machiavellianism	Narcissism	Psychopathy	Oversensitivity	Discrimination	Entitlement	Benevolent Sexism	Imagined Intent
Machiavellianism	–	.45	.69	.49	−.39	−.066	.23	.39
Narcissism	.30	–	.64	.29	−.064	.62	.45	.19
Psychopathy	.60	.35	–	.57	−.011	.50	.50	.35
Oversensitivity	.45	.11	.36	–	.047	.29	.37	.56
Discrimination	.023	.015	−.067	−.42	–	−.60	.24	.53
Entitlement	.21	.047	.45	.57	−.41	–	.35	.012
Benevolent Sexism	.14	.22	.15	.39	−.25	.40	–	.36
Imagined Intent	.17	.061	.39	.067	.068	.26	−.023	–

Note. Women admitting to false allegations are above the diagonal (n = 18), the remainder of the sample below. Entitlement and Psychopathy were square root transformed in the complete combined sample

measure to 20.8% among the women who stated they had not made a claim previously, but to 64.7% for the sub-group of women who had. The coefficients show that Psychopathy explained the most unique variance among the women who claimed never to have made a false allegation (β = .37), while Discrimination explained the most among those who had (β = .86).

Discussion

The goals of this research were to provide additional information on the frequency with which deliberately false allegations of assault occur, the motives women provide for their behavior, and individual differences that might describe women who had made such a claim as compared to those who had not. Finally, we asked participants about the extent to which they could imagine a situation in which they would make such a claim (again), and attempted to explain the variance in this measure using measures of personality traits and attitudes about sexism.

Frequency and Motives of False Reporting

Eighteen women (7.1%) in our study admitted that they had told someone they had been assaulted by a man when it was

Table 3 Multiple Regression Results Predicting Imagined Intent in Women Without (and With) False Allegation Histories

Predictor	Total R	R^2	B	Std Error	β	95% CI for B
Block 1	.40(.41)	16.3(16.6)				
Machiavellianism			−.12(.53)	.11(.62)	−.086(.29)	−.33–.089 (−.81–1.86)
Psychopathy			6.04(4.09)	.99(8.54)	.47(.19)	4.09–8.00 (−14.22–22.4)
Narcissism			−.12(−.15)	.097(.86)	−.077(−.056)	−.31–.075 (−1.99–1.69)
Block 2	.46(.80)	20.8(64.7)				
Machiavellianism			−.056(−.26)	.12(.80)	−.040(−.14)	−.29–.17 (−2.05–1.52)
Psychopathy			4.78(2.16)	1.09(9.34)	.37(.099)	2.63–6.93 (−18.65–22.96)
Narcissism			−.059(−.31)	.098(.95)	−.040(−.11)	−.25–.14 (−2.42–1.80)
Oversensitivity			−.15(1.07)	.13(.55)	−.095(.49)	−.40–.11 (−.16–2.31)
Discrimination			.24(2.95)	.12(1.10)	.14(.89)	.002–.47 (.50–5.40)
Entitlement			3.87(9.58)	1.26(9.67)	.26(.48)	1.38–6.35 (−11.96–31.10)
Benevolent Sexism			−.16(−.39)	.11(.65)	−.096(−.17)	−.39–.064 (−1.84–1.06)

Note. Entitlement and Psychopathy variables were square root transformed. Data from women with false allegation histories are presented in brackets

untrue (1.6% were to authority officers). While our estimate of reports made to authority figures is commensurate with the lower bound found by others, the 5.5% frequency of unofficial false claims is the only one that we know of. While unexamined in the research literature, the consequences of lying to acquaintances about having been assaulted are likely to incur a wide range of social, emotional, and financial costs for the men involved, including school suspension/expulsion, changes in child visitation or custody arrangements, and legal fees. This is certainly something that should receive more research attention in the future. Despite the fact that our participants who indicated never having made a claim in the past reported a high level of honesty about their responses, the wide variability in honesty reported may mean that this 7.1% is still an underestimate of the population value. While the finding that 31% of our participants claimed to know of false claims made by other women also may indicate that the 7.1% is low, this obviously rests on the ability of these women to accurately report what they have heard. The motives among our 18 women who admitted making a false claim were similar to those seen in other studies (e.g., Kanin, 1994). Revenge-seeking, fear, and embarrassment were the most common explanations, and while the claims made to friends and family covered the entire range of motives, of the four official reports made to police or other authority figures, three were revenge based.

The personality features of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism have been found to be related to the frequency or willingness with which people lie. For example, Baughman et al. (2014) found small positive relationships between each of the three dark triad traits and willingness to lie in two different situations. In their meta-analysis, Muris et al. (2017) reported that all three had small to medium negative relationships with the HEXACO factor of honesty, particularly the sub-trait of fairness (even after shared variance was removed). In our study, the group means for these three traits were higher among our participants who admitted already having lied about being assaulted. On average, these women also had higher ratings on the belief that women in general are oversensitive about men's comments and actions, and that men should make decisions, run businesses, and have more ready access to education. They also reported higher means on beliefs that women should be protected and cherished.

Imagined Intent to Lie

Our 18 participants who stated they had fabricated a claim about being assaulted in the past could (on average) much more easily imagine a situation in which they would do so again, compared to those who had not. In attempting to describe individual differences that might contribute to this imagined intent, we found that those who admitted to having already made a false accusation could better imagine making another one when they had stronger beliefs about women being oversensitive to potentially sexist behavior among men. This imagined intent was also higher among members of this sub-group who reported believing more strongly that society still discriminates against women, and that women should be cared for and protected by men. It is inadvisable (and psychometrically sketchy) to extend conclusions about these relationships to other women who have made false claims. Regression analyses indicated that, in both sub-groups, differences in Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy explained a medium amount of variance (about 16%) in how easily our participants could imagine a situation in which they would falsely accuse a man of assault. The difference between the two sub-groups emerged with the addition of the sexism scales. Oversensitivity, Discrimination, Entitlement, and Benevolent Sexism explained a great deal of additional variance in the ability of women who had already made a false claim to imagine making another (about 48%), but very little additional variance among women who had not (less than 5%).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations that should be noted as our results are interpreted by others. While more women than we expected confessed to having intentionally constructed an untrue accusation, 18 participants is such a limited sample that extrapolation of these findings to any other women is inadvisable. We regard this work as an initial exploration into the ways that women who make these accusations are different from those who don't. Despite our best efforts to encourage honest responding, and reported honesty by the majority of our participants, we expect that the number of false accusations we reported here are underestimates of the population values. We also did not specify the type of assault claimed, something that might be the result of, or influenced differently by, situational or personal characteristics. In this initial attempt to see if women would be willing to admit they had lied about being assaulted we admittedly cast a wide net, hoping that if it were successful, more focused follow up studies would improve the details and highlight the differences. Given that the research into false assault claims are largely limited to man on woman sexual violence, ample opportunities are available for further study, including physical and/or verbal assault claims, that occurring inside or outside of committed relationships, familial abuse allegations, those arising out of workplace relationships, and those occurring in same-sex relationships.

As it appears that at least some of the women who make these charges are willing to talk about it, perhaps future research will capitalize on this and look more closely at the personality factors and motivations of these women. Why did they feel this accusation was justified? Did the claim

accomplish this goal? Were there later consequences for the women making the claim? Were these women legitimate victims of assault (reported or unreported) in other situations? With the understanding that intent often does not equal action, it would be interesting to ask more detailed questions about the situations in which these women feel justified imagining themselves making such a claim.

Code Availability Not Applicable.

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Data Availability Available from first author.

Declarations

Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests Not Applicable.

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