

The Mediating Effect of Alterations in Mood and Cognition on Academic Performance Following Campus Sexual Assault

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Introduction

- Community violence exposure is linked to lower GPAs (Borofsky et al., 2013) and academic distress (Merkley, 2018).
- SA has been shown to negatively affect academic performance (Boyratz et al., 2016; Mengo & Black, 2015; Baker et al., 2016)
- College students who have experienced SA often take time off from school, transfer or drop out (Boyratz et al. 2016)

- PTSD symptoms may explain decreases in academic performance
- PTSD may develop in individuals who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event (Sharkansky, 2019)
- Symptoms of intrusion, avoidance, alterations of cognition and mood, and alterations in arousal and/or reactivity (Sharkansky, 2019)

- Sexual assault is more likely than other traumatic events to lead to PTSD (Sharkansky, 2019; Torres, 2020)
- The negative effects of SA on academic performance have been linked to the development of PTSD symptoms (Merkley, 2018; Borofsky, 2013; Boyraz, 2016)
- Negative effects of SA on academic performance may be the result of difficulty finding motivation and higher rates of academic distress (Boyraz et al., 2016, Merkley, 2018)
- Rationale:
- The development of PTSD symptoms has been linked to decreases in motivation (Boyraz et al., 2016) likely due to negative thoughts about oneself and a disinterest in activities.
- The expectancy-value theory suggests these symptoms of alteration in cognition and mood may lead to poorer academic performance following SA.

Hypothesis

- 1) Campus SA would predict PTSD symptoms and lower GPAs
- 2) PTSD symptom cluster related to cognitive and mood symptoms would mediate and explain more variance in GPA compared with the other symptom clusters: avoidance, intrusion or alteration in arousal, and reactivity.

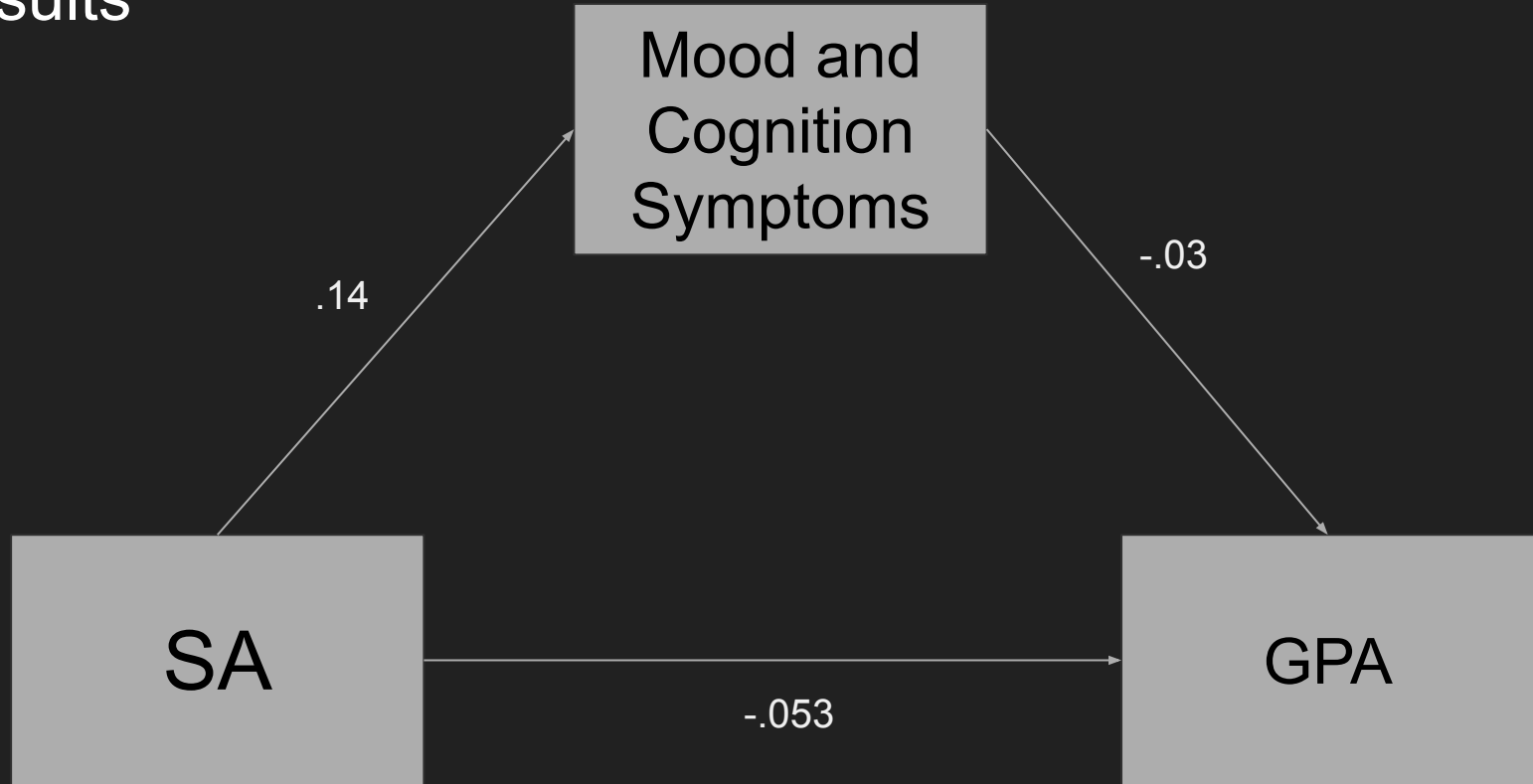
Study Aims

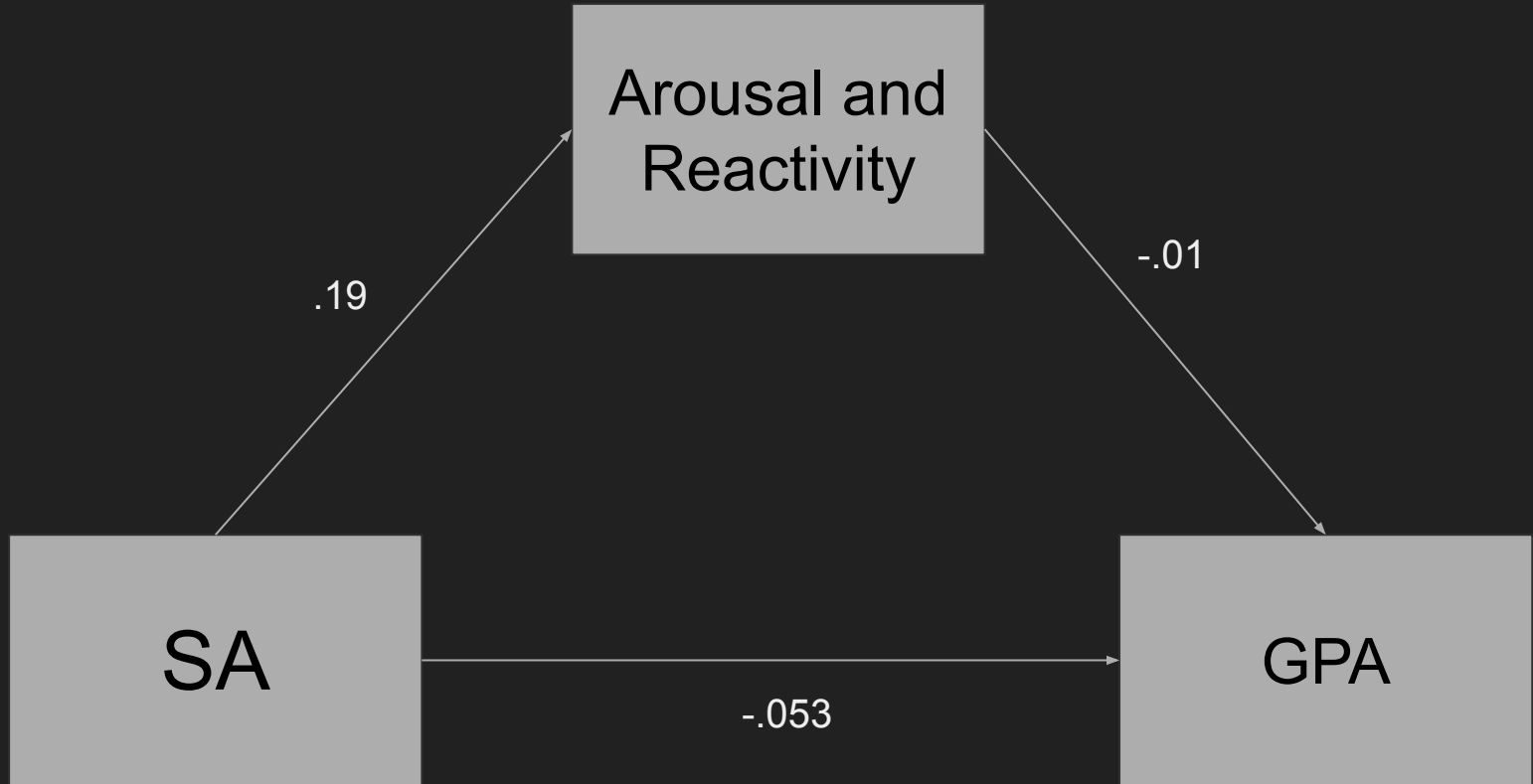
- 1) Investigate the impact of SA and PTSD symptoms on academic performance
- 2) Discover what symptoms are negatively impacting academic performance

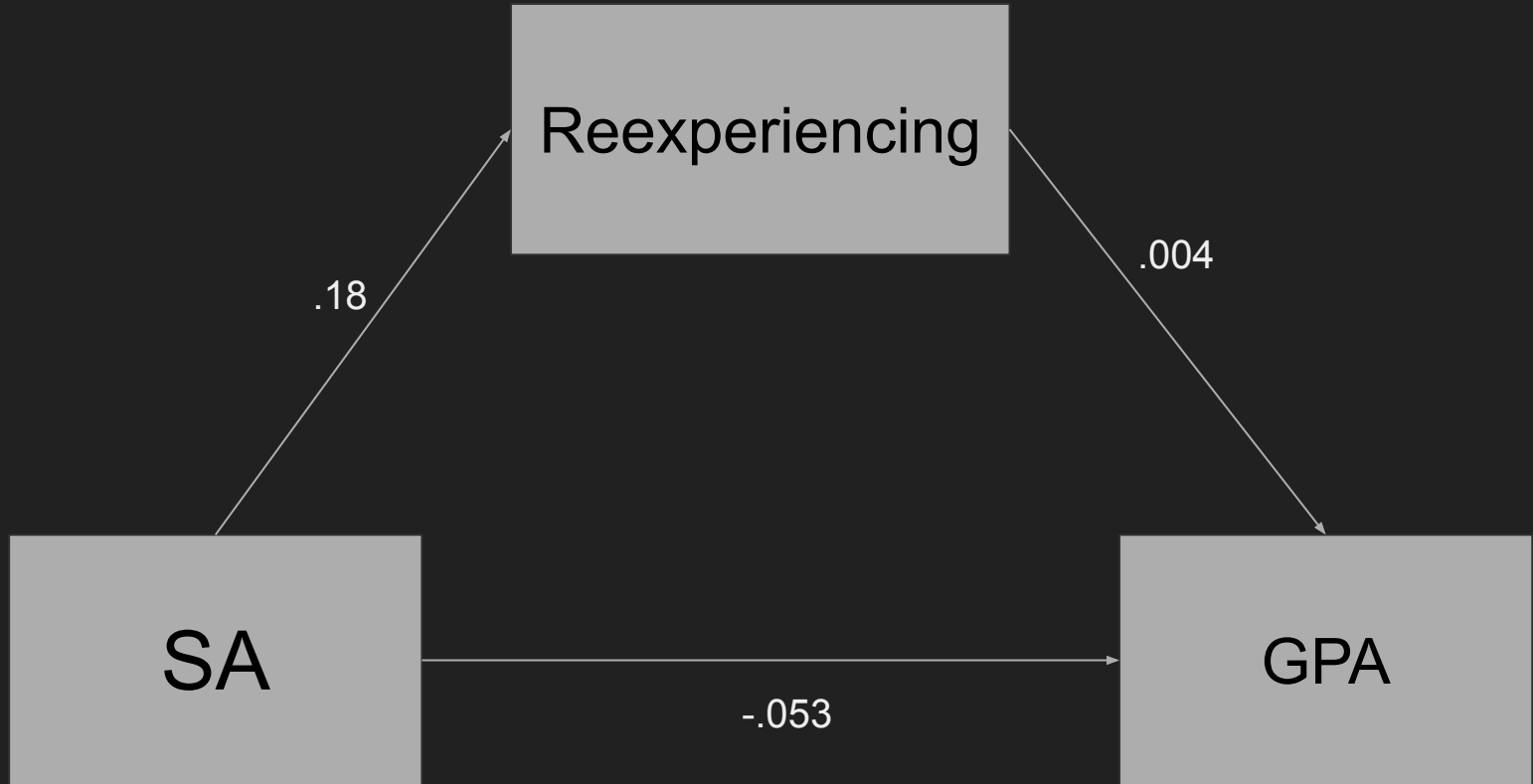
Method

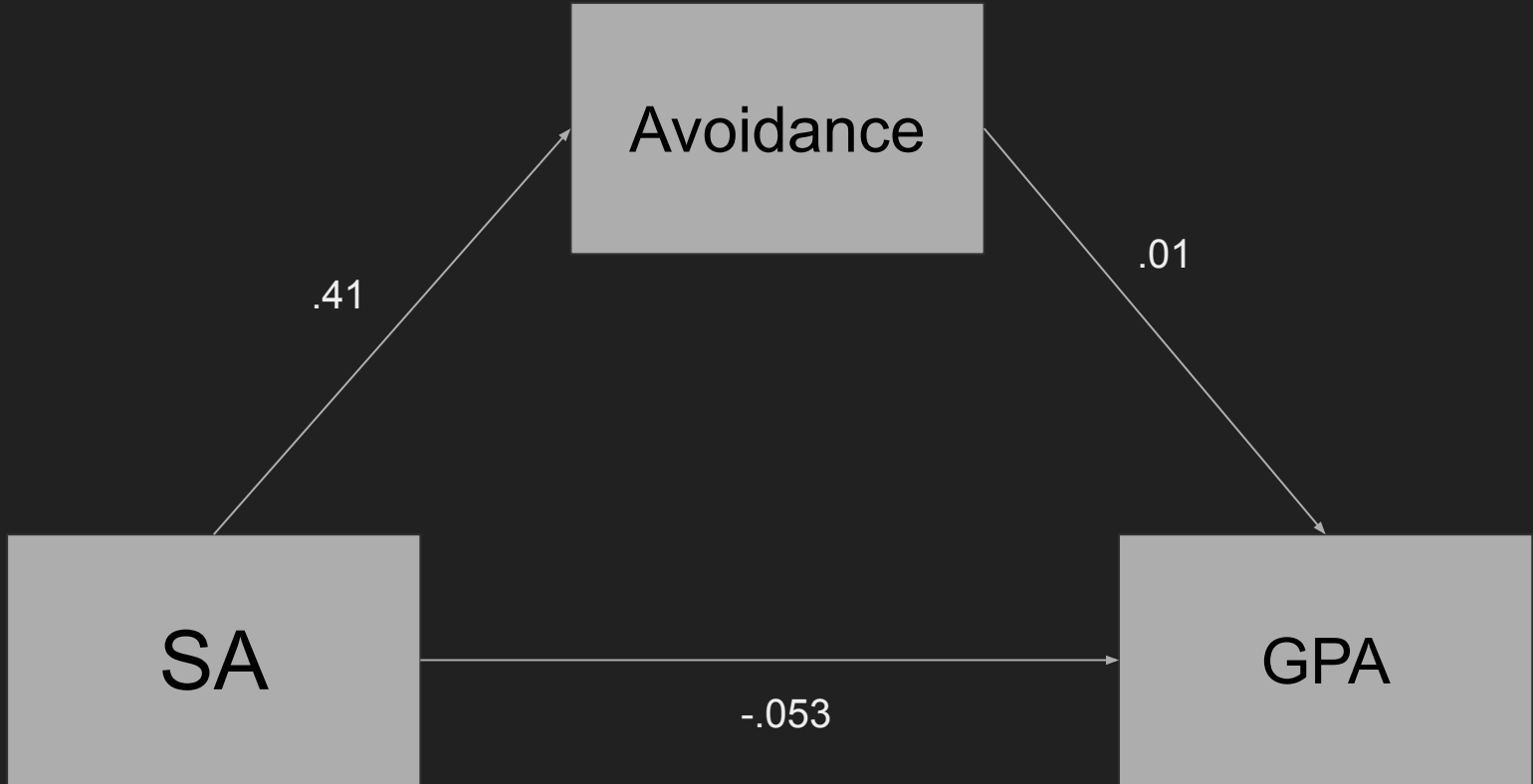
- Recruitment of TCNJ students and Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk)
- 1200 randomly selected TCNJ undergraduate students received an email to participate in a survey study
- Measures
 - Demographics
 - Sexual Contact Scale: sexual contact experiences while on campus
 - Checklist from the DSM-5
- Participants were given three weeks of the semester to complete the survey and were reminded twice within that time
- Raffle to win a \$30 Amazon Gift card for completion of the survey
- Regression analysis Process Model 4: the mediation of symptom clusters

Results









Discussion

- 1) Campus SA did not predict PTSD symptoms and lower GPAs
 - Unlike the literature
 - Negative relationship between trauma, specifically SA, and academic performance was present but not significant
 - No significant relationship between CSA and Mood and Cognition PTSD symptoms
- 2) PTSD mood and cognition symptom cluster did not mediate or explain more variance in GPA compared to other symptom clusters
 - No one PTSD symptom cluster can be said to mediate the relationship PTSD and poor academic performance
 - Perceived ability and interest did not mediate this relationship as suggested by expectancy value theory
 - Our hypothesis was not supported

Implications and Limitations

- Further research is needed to determine what mediates the relationship between PTSD symptomology and poorer academic performance
- Further evidence for the effect of mood/cognition symptoms on academic performance would suggest the need to target this symptom cluster in interventions for victims of CSA
- Limitations
 - Subset of a study looking at effects of SA
 - Focus on the detrimental effects of SA, not trauma in general
 - Measured mood and cognition symptoms - perceived ability and interest were within this measure

Thank you!

Any questions?

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