

## Factors Associated with Rape-Supportive Attitudes: Sociodemographic Variables, Aggressive Personality, and Sexist Attitudes

Juan Carlos Sierra<sup>1</sup>, Pablo Santos-Iglesias<sup>1</sup>, Ricardo Gutiérrez-Quintanilla<sup>2</sup>,  
María Paz Bermúdez<sup>1</sup>, and Gualberto Buena-Casal<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universidad de Granada (Spain)

<sup>2</sup> Universidad Tecnológica (El Salvador)

The objectives of this study were to determine the influence of various sociodemographic variables and estimate the impact of additional psychological factors (aggressive personality traits and the sexual double standard) on rape-supportive attitudes. A sample of 700 men and 800 women from El Salvador aged between 18 and 40 years completed the Social Desirability Scale, the Double Standard Scale, the Aggression Questionnaire, the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 and the Rape-Supportive Attitude Scale. Results show gender-based and age-based differences in rape-supportive attitudes, as well as an interaction between gender and age. They also highlight the importance of the sexual double standard and aggressive personality traits in explaining such attitudes.

*Keywords:* rape-supportive attitudes, sociodemographic variables, hostility, double standard, gender differences.

Los objetivos de este estudio fueron determinar la influencia de ciertas variables sociodemográficas y estimar el impacto de una serie de factores psicológicos adicionales (rasgos de personalidad agresiva y doble moral sexual) sobre las actitudes favorables hacia la violación. Una muestra comprendida por 700 hombres y 800 mujeres de El Salvador, con edades comprendidas entre los 18 y los 40 años, completaron la Escala de Deseabilidad Social, Escala de Doble Moral, Cuestionario de Agresión, Inventario de Expresión de la Ira Estado-Rasgo 2 y la Escala de Actitudes Favorables hacia la Violación. Los resultados mostraron diferencias en las actitudes favorables hacia la violación en función de la edad y el sexo, así como una interacción entre el sexo y la edad. También muestran la importancia de la doble moral sexual y los rasgos de personalidad agresiva en la explicación de dichas actitudes.

*Palabras clave:* actitudes favorables hacia la violación, variables sociodemográficas, hostilidad, doble moral, diferencias de género.

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Research funded by the Department of the Presidency of the Regional Government of Andalusia, Spain (Consejería de la Presidencia – Junta de Andalucía) through a project granted to the first author (Proyecto de Cooperación Universitaria AI33/04).

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Juan Carlos Sierra. Facultad de Psicología. Universidad de Granada. 18071 Granada. (Spain). E-mail: jcsierra@ugr.es

Attitudes and beliefs about rape are crucial factors that need to be considered to explain aggressive sexual behavior of men towards women (Bell et al., 1992; Echeburúa, Sarasua, Zubizarreta, & de Corral, 2009; Frese, Moya, & Megías, 2004; Heise, 1998; Osman, 2004). These attitudes include toleration of rape, which denies or justifies sexual aggression of men towards women. Lottes (1991) described the various types of such beliefs: women enjoy sexual violence, women are responsible for rape prevention, sex rather than power is the primary motivation for rape, rape happens only to certain kinds of women, a woman is less desirable after she has been raped, women falsely report many rape claims, and rape is justified in some situations. These beliefs cause two different kinds of effects; first, they promote various types of aggressive sexual behavior towards women, and second, they encourage tolerance of abuse. Moreover, they also extend the recovery time of rape victims (Burt, 1980), known as secondary victimization (Trujano Ruiz & Raich i Escursell, 2000). As regards the first effect, Lottes (1991) found a significant correlation between rape-supportive attitudes and sexual aggressiveness. In addition, Smith and Stewart (2003), who conducted a study on a sample of athletes, concluded that those with rape-supportive attitudes and hostile attitudes towards women had a high probability of being sexually aggressive. It has also been shown that a decrease in these attitudes reduces aggressive sexual behavior (Lanier, 2001; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). As regards the second effect, Malamuth (1989) showed that men who feel attracted to sexual aggression tend to perceive the experience of rape as something positive, as compared to men who do not feel attracted to sexual violence. Morry and Winkler (2001) showed that acceptance of rape increases acceptance of coercive behavior towards women. Thus, dysfunctional cognitions justify and maintain aggression and rape-supportive attitudes in a framework of false beliefs about rape, rapists and victims (Burt, 1980; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002).

Most studies have focused on socio-demographic and cultural variables to explain rape-supportive attitudes (i.e., gender, age, education, religion, ideology, or attitudes towards gender roles). Indeed, it has been systematically proven that men show more rape-supportive attitudes than women (Anderson & Swainson, 2001; Cowan, 2000; Ferrer Pérez, Bosch Fiol, Ramis Palmer, & Navarro Guzmán, 2006a; Lee, Busch, Kim, & Lim, 2007; Lee, Pomeroy, Yoo, & Rheinboldt, 2005; Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre, & Morrison, 2005; Nayak, Byrne, Martin, & Abraham, 2003). Greater rape myth acceptance has been reported in older people compared to younger people (Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997; Nagel et al., 2005); besides, these attitudes have been found more frequently in people with low educational level (Ferrer Pérez et al., 2006a; Ferrer Pérez, Bosch Fiol, Ramis Palmer, Torres Espinosa, & Navarro Guzmán, 2006b; Nagel et al. 2005; Yoshioka, DiNoia, &

Ullah, 2000) and people with orthodox religious beliefs (Sheldon & Parent, 2002). The meta-analysis conducted by Anderson et al. (1997) concluded that conservative ideologies are associated to rape-supportive attitudes. Finally, rape myth acceptance and the justification of rape have been related to traditional attitudes towards gender roles (Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004; Willis, Hallinan, & Melby, 1996).

However, very few studies have explored the role of aggressive personality in explaining rape-supportive attitudes. Even in these few studies, this was a secondary objective. Such studies have shown that hostility is characteristic in individuals with rape-supportive attitudes (Sherrod, 2003) as well as verbal aggression, which is associated with rape myth acceptance (Forbes, Adam-Curtis, & White, 2004); they have also shown that individuals who accept rape myths tend to accept domestic and military violence as well (Saldívar Hernández, Ramos Lira, & Saltijeral Méndez, 2004).

Thus, the objectives of our study were the following: a) determine the influence of various socio-demographic variables (gender, age, university, having a stable partner, hometown population, religious practice, and political ideology) on rape-supportive attitudes; and b) estimate the impact of additional psychological factors associated with rape-supportive attitudes (double standard, hostility, physical aggression and verbal aggression, and state anger, trait anger, anger expression, and anger control).

## Method

### *Participants*

A convenience sample of 1,500 university students (700 men and 800 women) was selected. Age ranged between 18 and 40 years in males ( $M = 22.39$ ;  $SD = 4.63$ ) and females ( $M = 21.89$ ;  $SD = 4.10$ ). All participants were university students from various private universities in San Salvador, El Salvador: Universidad Tecnológica de El Salvador (22.80%), Universidad Francisco Gavidia (20.40%), Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (19%), Universidad Modular Abierta (14.10%), Universidad Don Bosco (12.10%), Halteman and Universidad Evangélica (11.50%). The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (having a partner for the last three months, hometown population, religiousness and political ideology) are shown in Table 1.

### *Materials*

Socio-demographic questionnaire to collect information about socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, university, having a partner for the last three months, hometown population, religiousness and political ideology).

Table 1  
Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

		Total sample ( <i>N</i> = 1,500) <i>n</i> (%)	Males ( <i>n</i> = 700) <i>n</i> (%)	Females ( <i>n</i> = 800) <i>n</i> (%)
Partner	Yes	736 (51%)	346 (51%)	390 (51%)
	No	706 (49%)	332 (49%)	374 (49%)
Hometown population	Less than 15,000	443 (30.80%)	191 (28%)	252 (33.40%)
	15,000 to 50,000	508 (35.40%)	215 (31.60%)	293 (38.80%)
	More than 50,000	485 (33.80%)	275 (40.40%)	210 (27.80%)
Religious practice	Weekly	624 (41.70%)	250 (35.80%)	374 (46.90%)
	Daily	279 (18.60%)	126 (18%)	153 (19.20%)
	A few times a year	237 (15.80%)	112 (16%)	125 (15.70%)
	Monthly	181 (12.10%)	93 (13.30%)	88 (11%)
	No religious practice	176 (11.80%)	118 (16.90%)	58 (7.30%)
Political ideology	None	579 (39.10%)	212 (30.90%)	367 (46.20%)
	Right	396 (26.70%)	189 (27.60%)	207 (26%)
	Left	343 (23.20%)	192 (28%)	151 (19%)
	Centre	163 (11%)	93 (13.60%)	70 (8.80%)

Social Desirability Scale (SDS; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). We used the Spanish adaptation by Ferrando and Chico (2000), which consists of 33 items with a dichotomous answer format (*true-false*). In the study, the internal consistency coefficient of the total scale was .74.

Double Standard Scale (DSS; Caron, Davis, Halteman, & Stickle, 1993). This scale is formed by 10 items which are answered on a 5-point Likert scale and assess traditional double standard. The authors of the scale reported a Cronbach's alpha of .72. The Salvadorian version had an internal consistency coefficient of .78 (Sierra & Gutiérrez-Quintanilla, 2007a).

Aggression Questionnaire (AQ; Buss & Perry, 1992). It consists of 29 items which are answered on a 5-point Likert scale. They are grouped into four subscales (*Physical aggression*, *Verbal aggression*, *Anger*, and *Hostility*) with an internal consistency coefficient ranging between .72 and .85. In the Salvadorian version, the four subscales had reliability coefficients ranging between .73 and .80 (Sierra & Gutiérrez-Quintanilla, 2007b).

Spanish version of the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2; Miguel-Tobal, Casado, Cano-Vindel, & Spielberger, 2001). Only four dimensions were considered: *State anger*, *Trait anger*, *Anger expression*, and *Anger control*; they all showed adequate psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging between .74 (*Anger expression*) and .90 (*State anger*).

Rape-Supportive Attitude Scale (RSAS; Lottes, 1991). This scale consists of 20 items answered on a 5-point Likert scale. The original version had a reliability of .91. The Salvadorian version had an internal consistency greater

than .80 in samples of men and women (Sierra, Gutiérrez-Quintanilla, & Delgado-Domínguez, 2007).

### Procedure

First, we requested permission to carry out the study from the institutions where it was to be conducted. Two researchers administered the self-reports collectively in various lecture rooms of the universities. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study: evaluate aspects related to sexuality in a sample of Salvadorian university students. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Although participants did not receive any reward in exchange for their participation, they all participated voluntarily.

### Data analysis

First of all, we explored which socio-demographic variables (gender, age, university, having a stable partner, hometown population, religious practice and political ideology) had an effect on rape-supportive attitudes. We intended to use any such variables as predictors (Montero & León, 2007) at later stages of the study. Before performing the multiple regression analysis, we calculated the bivariate correlations between the possible predictors (social desirability, double standard, aggression, and anger), including socio-demographic variables and rape-supportive attitudes. We carried out a hierarchical multiple regression analysis on the criterion variable in two steps. In the first step, we assessed the

Table 2  
Differences in rape-supportive attitudes depending on gender and having a stable partner or not

Variables	Groups	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Gender	Males	48.54	12.68	1.297	-9.53	.000
	Females	42.17	11.39			
Partner	No	45.97	12.41	1.251	2.04	.041
	Yes	44.52	12.55			

Note. Only socio-demographic variables with an effect on rape-supportive attitudes are shown.

Table 3  
Bivariate correlations between the possible predictors and rape-supportive attitudes

Predictors	Rape-supportive attitudes	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Gender <sup>a</sup>	.25	.000
Partner <sup>a</sup>	-.06	.041
Age	-.09	.002
Social desirability	-.10	.001
Double standard	.49	.000
Physical aggression-AQ	.23	.000
Verbal aggression-AQ	.10	.000
Anger-AQ	.13	.000
Hostility-AQ	.24	.000
State anger	.13	.000
Trait anger	.12	.000
Anger expression	.08	.004
Anger control	-.01	.53

Note. <sup>a</sup> Point-biserial correlation.

contribution of variables that correlated with rape-supportive attitudes, and in the second step we analysed the interactions between gender and the variables that were found to be significant in the first step. We centred the variables previously to reduce multicollinearity (Jaccard, Turrisi & Wan, 1990). Finally, we produced a graphic representation of all the variables for which an interaction was found. For continuous variables, we used the groups that obtained standard deviations above and below the mean (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

## Results

The analysis of the socio demographic variables showed that only gender, having a stable partner, and age had an effect on rape-supportive attitudes. More specifically, males, people without a stable partner and younger participants ( $r = -.09$ ;  $p = .002$ ) showed more rape-supportive attitudes (see Table 2). However,

university ( $F_{5, 1294} = 1.54$ ;  $p = .17$ ), hometown population ( $F_{2, 1247} = .41$ ;  $p = .66$ ), frequency of religious practice ( $F_{4, 1296} = .14$ ;  $p = .96$ ), and political ideology ( $F_{3, 1284} = .17$ ;  $p = .91$ ) did not show any kind of effect.

Bivariate correlations were used to select variables for the first step of the hierarchical regression analysis. Given that gender, having a stable partner and age were found to be related to rape-supportive attitudes, these three variables were also included in the bivariate correlations (see Table 3). The results show that, except for anger control, all the variables were eligible for the first step of the multiple regression. We also found that all the variables referring to aggressive personality traits – except anger control – were positively correlated with rape-supportive attitudes, as happened with double standard. However, social desirability was negatively correlated with rape-supportive attitudes, which implies that people with high social desirability scores reported less favourable attitudes towards rape. This result suggested a possible bias in responses, although the relation observed was weak ( $r = -.10$ ;  $p = .001$ ). Thus, we decided to perform the regression analysis controlling the social desirability effect.

Table 4 shows the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis. In the first step, gender, age, double standard and hostility were the best predictors of rape-supportive attitudes ( $F_{12, 917} = 30.08$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The coefficient of determination of the model was .30, and the adjusted coefficient of determination was .29. The size of the effect of the predictors, assessed by partial correlation (in absolute values), was only very low for age ( $r_{\text{partial}} = .07$ ); the highest variance inflation factor was 2.11 (trait anger), which reflects the absence of multicollinearity problems. In the second step, we introduced the interactions between gender and all the variables that were found to be significant in the first stage. The results showed that only the interaction between gender and age was a statistically significant predictor of rape-supportive attitudes ( $F_{14, 915} = 28.83$ ;  $p < .001$ ). However, the contribution to the value of  $R^2$  was not significant compared to the previous step ( $\Delta R^2_{\text{adj}} = .001$ ,  $F_{\text{change}} = 1.83$ ;  $p = .14$ ). This may be due to the fact that age was left out of the predictive

Table 4  
Results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis

Predictors	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p	r partial	r semi-partial	FIV
Step 1								
Double standard	.80	.05	.42	13.92	.000	.41	.38	1.19
Hostility-AQ	.38	.06	.22	5.91	.000	.19	.16	1.81
Anger-AQ	-.03	.09	-.01	-.35	.72	-.01	-.01	1.96
Physical aggression-AQ	.008	.09	.003	.08	.93	.003	.002	1.94
Verbal aggression-AQ	-.04	.06	-.02	-.64	.51	-.02	-.01	1.19
State anger	.09	.06	.04	1.52	.12	.05	.04	1.31
Trait anger	.04	.08	.02	.56	.57	.01	.01	2.11
Anger expression	-.14	.08	-.07	-1.82	.07	.06	.05	1.95
Gender	3.76	.81	.15	4.64	.000	.15	.12	1.37
Age	-.17	.07	-.06	-2.18	.02	-.07	-.06	1.13
Partner	-.74	.72	-.03	-1.03	.30	-.03	-.02	1.08
Step 2								
Double standard	.81	.09	.42	9.07	.000	.28	.25	2.88
Hostility-AQ	.35	.08	.20	4.41	.000	.14	.12	2.81
Gender	3.77	.81	.15	4.62	.000	.15	.12	1.39
Age	.02	.11	.01	.23	.81	.008	.006	2.66
Gender x Double standard	-.12	.76	-.008	-.16	.86	-.006	-.005	2.71
Gender x Hostility-AQ	.40	.72	.02	.55	.58	.01	.01	2.07
Gender x Age	-1.54	.71	-.09	-2.17	.03	-.07	-.06	2.54

model when the interaction was introduced. The graphic representation shows that rape-supportive attitudes remain stable over time in females and decrease in males as they get older (see Figure 1).

### Discussion

Rape-supportive attitudes represent a risk factor of men's sexual aggression against women (Bell et al., 1992; Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 2009; Echeburúa et al., 2009; Frese et al., 2004; Heise, 1998; Osman, 2004). Studies exploring the influence of sociodemographic variables (Anderson et al., 1997) have highlighted gender as one of the main variables related to this kind of attitudes. This has led us to analyse the influence of a series of psychological variables on attitudes towards rape, giving special importance to the role of gender in this influence.

First, the results of the univariate analysis carried out with the socio-demographic variables showed that males have more rape-supportive attitudes, as pointed out by earlier studies (Anderson et al., 1997; Anderson & Swainson, 2001; Cowan, 2000; Ferrer Pérez et al., 2006a; Lee et al., 2005, 2007; Nagel et al., 2005; Nayak et al., 2003). As regards age, the results are contradictory, given that several studies have suggested that rape-supportive attitudes increase with age. An example is the meta-analysis carried out by Anderson et al. (1997), although its results showed a low association between both variables

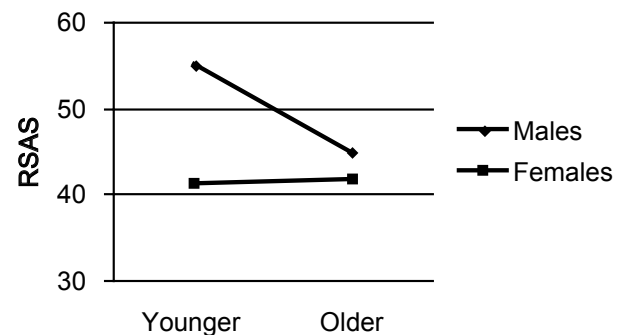


Figure 1. Interaction effect of gender and age on rape-supportive attitudes (RSAS).

( $r = .12$ ). Moreover, the age range and mean age of subjects in the studies included in the meta-analysis mentioned above were higher than those of our study, which may explain the differences we found. Besides, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994), and Johnson, Kuck, and Schander (1997) found differential effects of age depending on whether they assessed blaming the victim, excusing the offender or justifying acquaintance rape. In such a context, it is difficult to draw a clear conclusion: the negative relation between age and rape-supportive attitudes that we found may indeed be due to an inverse association between both variables; however, another possible explanation may



be that the RSAS is a one-dimensional instrument that mixes aspects related to the victim, the offender and the rape in the evaluation and therefore does not show which of these elements prevails in it. If the latter is true, it would be difficult to talk about a global generational effect in this type of attitudes. We also found an effect that depended on whether the participants had a stable partner or not, with more rape-supportive attitudes in people without a stable partner. Although this result may seem logical, we are not aware of any other studies that have analysed the influence of this variable and therefore highlight the need of further studies to explore this issue. As for religious practice, earlier studies have shown that people with orthodox religious beliefs have more rape-supportive attitudes (Sheldon & Parent, 2002). However, our study assessed the frequency of religious practice, so it is not recommended to make comparisons between both results. Few studies have explored the relation between political ideology and rape-supportive attitudes. Yet, it has been proven that rape myth acceptance is related to ultraconservative, racist and homophobic attitudes (Aosved & Long, 2006); along these same lines, a recent study by Sierra, Rojas, Ortega, and Martín Ortiz (2007) has associated rape-supportive attitudes with homophobia.

The univariate analysis performed on the psychological variables shows that, in general terms, anger and hostility are positively related to rape-supportive attitudes, as shown by the studies carried out by Spence, Losoff, and Robbins (1991), Sherrod (2003), and Forbes et al. (2004). According to them, hostility and verbal aggression are typical of people with rape-supportive attitudes or who accept rape myths. It is interesting to explore how the double standard is also related to these attitudes, as research has shown people with a traditional ideology on gender roles and sexual conservatism to be positively related to rape-supportive attitudes (Anderson et al., 1997; Berkel et al., 2004; Burt, 1980; Willis et al., 1996). Finally, social desirability was negatively related to rape-supportive attitudes. This is not surprising if we consider that people with high social desirability tend to report less rape-supportive attitudes, although some authors have found no relation between social desirability and gender ideology (Moya, Expósito, & Padilla, 2006). In fact, the association found in this study is low ( $r = -.10$ ) and may not have been statistically significant if the sample had not been so large. In any case, we decided to control the social desirability effect in the regression analyses. We found that, in spite of the negative relation, this variable did not affect the predictors of the regression model.

The results of the hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis showed that the most important variables in explaining rape-supportive attitudes are sexual double standard, hostility, gender, and age. We

also analysed interactions with gender because of the systematic differences found between males and females. In these analyses, age was no longer an important predictor variable and was replaced by the gender x age interaction. Taking effect size – in the form of partial correlation – as a reference, the sexual double standard was found to be the most important variable in predicting rape-supportive attitudes. As suggested by the meta-analysis carried out by Anderson et al. (1997), based on the results of several studies, acceptance of traditional sexual roles is one of the main predictors of such attitudes; likewise, Lottes (1991) explained 59% of insensitive attitude towards rape on the basis of variables associated to traditional sexual ideology. This relation is based on a traditionally feminist explanation (Anderson et al., 1997): patriarchal culture promotes sexual roles that uphold an unequal distribution of power between both sexes (Burt, 1980). It is also closely related to hypermasculinity and hostile masculinity constructs (Malamuth, Sockloski, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991; Murnen et al., 2002), according to which extreme adherence to the masculine sexual role implies acceptance of certain traits (e.g., aggressiveness, dominance, control) as being proper to males. Dominating women and aggression may be viewed as important masculine traits by some groups of men within a culture or by most men in some broader cultures (e.g., country, religious group), but not by all men. However, men who do not define dominating women as being important to their conception of a “true or real man” may be aggressive in other areas of their life (e.g., when playing sports or competing with other men) but not with women. Thus, aggressive attitudes related to rape-supportive beliefs may be specific to attitudes towards women. This is something that needs to be systematically assessed in future studies to extend the findings of this study.

The second variable with the highest predictive power is gender. As we explained earlier, males consistently showed more rape-supportive attitudes. However, it is worth noting that an interaction effect was found with age. Indeed, these attitudes remained stable in females but decreased in males as their age increased. In spite of this, the age range of our sample was not very broad, so future studies should analyse this effect to find out whether it is maintained in samples with broader age ranges. Moreover, we should underline that this inverse relation may be partly due to the one-dimensional nature of the instrument. Finally, hostility ranked third in explanatory power (it must be noted that the interaction between age and gender showed a lower partial correlation in absolute terms). This finding is not surprising, as earlier studies have shown that the personality of individuals who justify men’s sexual aggression against women has marked hostile traits (Anderson et al., 1997; Sherrod, 2003).

## Conclusions

The findings of this study show the influence of socio-demographic variables on rape-supportive attitudes. Results show gender-based and age-based differences in rape-supportive attitudes, as well as an interaction between gender and age. The study also highlights the importance of aggressive personality traits and sexual double standard in explaining rape-supportive attitudes. Yet, it is important to note that the sample used in this study – university students – only makes it possible to generalize the results to individuals with similar characteristics. It would also be useful to analyse the influence of hipermasculintiy and hostile masculinity traits in rape-supportive attitudes to explore whether they play a mediating role compared to hostile personality traits.

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Received June 9, 2008

Revision received May 6, 2009

Accepted May 23, 2009