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Hypergender Ideology and Social Norms Influence Attitudes Towards Bystander Intervention

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INTRODUCTION

- Bystander intervention can help prevent future cases of sexual assault that might otherwise go unreported without help to the victim and without justice against the perpetrator.
- However, according to Burn (2009) and Planty (2002), a bystander witnesses a third of all sexual assaults yet only intervenes a third of the time.
- Little is known about factors that may ultimately influence attitudes toward bystander intervention, but emerging evidence indicates that hypergender ideology and strong adherence to social norms may lead to a lesser likelihood of bystander intervention.
- For example, hypermasculinity has been linked to approval of sexual aggression (Gold, Fultz, Burke, Prisco, & Willett, 1992; Hamburger, Hogben, McGowan, & Dawson, 1996; Mosher & Sirkin, 1984), and studies have also shown that if peers are unsupportive of intervention then a bystander is less likely to act (Banyard et al., 2014).
- As such, there is reason to believe that these ideologies and norms are associated with inaction and apathy toward bystander intervention.

Hypothesis: Individuals endorsing greater levels of hypergender ideology and sexually aggressive social norms will be less likely to hold positive attitudes toward bystander intervention in sexual risk scenarios.

METHOD

Participants:

- Participants were 1,018 undergraduate students (67.8% female; $M_{age} = 20.11$, $SD = 2.56$). Approximately 35% were freshmen ($n = 357$), 23% sophomores ($n = 238$), 21% juniors ($n = 215$), 15% seniors ($n = 156$), and 5.1% in their fifth year or above ($n = 52$).
- Participants identified as White ($n = 805$; 79.1%), Black or African American ($n = 97$; 9.5%), Asian ($n = 98$; 9.6%), American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 15$; 1.5%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ($n = 4$; 0.4%), and/or Other ($n = 40$; 4.0%). Ninety-five participants (9.3%) identified as being of Latinx/Hispanic origin.

Procedures:

- Undergraduate students were invited to participate in a study related to "Perceptions of Everyday Life."
- Participants were recruited through an online advertisement in the Psychology Department subject pool or directly e-mailed by the research team from a randomized list of undergraduate students on campus.
- Following informed consent, participants completed a series of questionnaires via Qualtrics while seated at a private computer.

Measures:

- **Bystander Attitudes.** The Bystander Attitude Scale-Revised (BAS-R; McMahon, Allen, Postmus, McMahon, Peterson, & Hoffman, 2014) was included as a measure of how likely a participant would be to intervene in a sexual risk situation (e.g., "Confront a male friend who is hooking up with someone who was passed out"). Participants respond to 11 questions on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*). Items were summed for a total score, with higher scores indicating greater attitudes toward bystander behaviors ($\alpha = .84$).
- **Hypergender Ideology.** The Hypergender Ideology Scale (HIS; Hamburger, Hogben, McGowan, & Dawson, 1996) was included as a gender-neutral measure of adherence to extreme stereotypic gender beliefs (e.g., "A true man knows how to command others"). Participants respond to 19 questions on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Items were summed for a total score, with higher scores indicating greater adherence to extreme stereotypic gender beliefs ($\alpha = .91$).
- **Boeringer Social Norms.** The Boeringer Social Norms Measure (BSNM; Boeringer, Shehan, & Akers, 1991) is a 10-item assessment of attitudes and perceived peer group norms related to sexual aggression, administered only to men (e.g., "How many of your friends have gotten a woman drunk or high in order to have sex with her?"). Responses on each subscale were summed for a total score, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of association with other men who exhibit rape supportive attitudes and behaviors; greater perceived peer approval of sexually aggressive behavior; greater likelihood of modeling sexually aggressive behavior viewed in pornographic materials; and perceived likelihood to commit sexual assault (mean inter-item correlation = .16).

RESULTS

- In a regression analysis, hypergender ideology negatively predicted bystander attitudes: The greater subscription to hypergender ideology, the less supportive attitudes towards bystander intervention, $t(1007) = -17.535$, $p < .001$.
- A separate regression analysis was conducted across sexes to explore potential differences on ideology and attitudes: The same pattern was found. There was a significant negative association among males on our variables of interest, $r = -.414$, $t(324) = -8.193$, $p < .001$, and a slightly stronger negative association among females, $r = -.445$, $t(681) = -12.950$, $p < .001$.
- In a final regression analysis, we found that as compliance with sexually aggressive social norms increases, positive bystander attitudes decrease among males, $t(324) = -4.004$, $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

Main Findings:

- Findings suggest that, with greater adherence to extreme stereotypic gender beliefs, one might have poorer attitudes toward bystander intervention.
- Identification with sexually aggressive peer group norms might also negatively impact attitudes toward bystander intervention.

Limitations:

- An attempt was made to be more ethnically diverse in the current study, though limitations include the homogeneity of the current sample (e.g., mostly White, college-aged students).
- A second limitation is the sole use of self-report measures; we should aim to measure bystander behaviors based on direct actions through observation and/or interview methodology, as opposed to participant opinion.

Future Directions:

- These results demonstrate social norm implications only for males. In future studies, researchers should also aim to measure social norms in females to assess for any possible sex differences.
- Given that stronger adherence to hypergender ideology and sexually aggressive social norms are related to poor bystander intervention attitudes, future research should find variables that may lessen this association and ultimately increase positive attitudes toward intervention.
- In order to address our second limitation, we are beginning to research *in vivo* bystander intervention behaviors using virtual reality, and our future research will report on this outcome.