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The Relationship Between Hypergender Ideology and Rape Empathy Among Male and Female College Students

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The primary purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between hypergender ideology and rape empathy. A sample of 157 college students completed a questionnaire packet containing demographic variables, the Hypergender Ideology Scale (HGIS) and the Rape Empathy Scale (RES). It was predicted that those indicating stronger adherence to extreme stereotypic gender roles would report more empathy for the perpetrator rather than the victim of rape. It was also predicted that men would show stronger adherence to stereotypic gender roles and less victim empathy than women. Results show significant support for all predictions. Discussion involves implications that the link established between these constructs may contribute to the network of beliefs and attitudes that perpetuate rape in society.

Rape is a prevalent problem in our society today (U. S. Department of Justice, 2000; 2003). A constellation of interrelated attitudes and beliefs regarding rape are thought to contribute to the perpetuation of this crime and create a generally hostile climate for its victims (Burt, 1980). Therefore, it is important to continue to examine these attitudes and the relationships among them. The focus of the present study is to examine the relationship between two constructs thought to be related to the perpetuation of rape in our society: hypergender ideology and rape empathy. No researcher has examined this association in previous research. The secondary purpose of this study is to examine gender differences among these constructs.

It has been suggested that individuals socialized to hold highly sex-role stereotyped attitudes may view sexual coercion as accept-

able in role behavior, in which men are sexually aggressive and women are passive (Check & Malamuth, 1983; Collier & Resick, 1987; Murnen & Byrne, 1991; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002). The most extreme adherence to traditional beliefs regarding the roles of men and women in our society is called hypergender ideology (Hamburger, Hogben, McGowan, & Dawson, 1996). Hypergender ideology consists of both hypermasculine and hyperfeminine beliefs. Hypermasculinity includes having calloused sexual attitudes toward women, the belief that violent behavior is manly, and dangerous behavior is exciting. Men who adhere to this belief structure are thought to feel that having sex is their right and a necessity (Mosher and Sirkin, 1984). Hyperfemininity is characterized by the beliefs that female sexuality, seen as a woman's most important value in a heterosexual relations-

hip, can be used to obtain and keep a man, which defines her success in life (Murnen & Byrne, 1991). Hamburger et al. (1996) created a single, gender-neutral scale, the Hypergender Ideology Scale (HGIS), to assess adherence to these extreme stereotypic gender role beliefs in both men and women.

Hypergender beliefs, including hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity, have been found to correlate with other rape-related measures, such as Burt's (1980) Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale (ASB), Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMA), Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp's (1973) Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS), and Osman's (1998) Token Resistance to Sex Scale (TRSS). Specifically, those who reported stronger adherence to extreme stereotypical gender roles were more likely to view sexual relationships between men and women as inherently exploitative, accept rape myths, hold more traditional attitudes toward women and their roles in society, and believe that women sometimes say "no" to sex when they really mean "yes" (Hamburger et al., 1996; Murnen & Byrne, 1991; Osman & Davis, 1999). Hypergender beliefs have also been associated with less negative reactions to hypothetical rape scenes and placing more responsibility for the crime on the victim (Mosher & Anderson, 1986; Murnen & Byrne, 1991).

In addition to rape-related attitudes and judgments, hypergender beliefs have also been linked to sexually aggressive behaviors. It has been found that men with hypergender beliefs were more likely to report that they had sexually coerced others, whereas women with these beliefs were more likely to be targets of sexual aggression (Hamburger et al., 1996; Murnen et al., 2002). Furthermore, hyperfeminine women are more likely to engage in self-blame for being victimized than non-hyperfeminine women (Murnen, Perot, & Byrne, 1989).

Lack of rape empathy is another construct that may support sexual aggression. Rape empathy is the ability to take the perspective of a rape victim and show deep understanding for that victim's emotions and reactions to the rape. Deitz, Blackwell, Daley, and Bentley (1982) developed the Rape Empathy Scale (RES) to measure empathy toward a female rape victim and a male perpetrator in a heterosexual rape situation.

Certain attitudes that have been associated with hypergender ideology have also been related to rape empathy. For example, those with higher levels of victim empathy reported less traditional attitudes toward women, less acceptance of rape myths, and less victim blame and responsibility for the crime compared to those with lower levels of rape empathy (Deitz et al., 1982; Sinclair & Bourne, 1998; Smith & Frieze, 2003). Rape empathy has also been linked to other rape-related measures, such as rape-intolerant attitudes, longer prison sentences and more certainty of guilt for rapists, and having a personal experience with rape (Borden, Karr, & Caldwell-Colbert, 1988; Ching & Burke, 1999; Deitz et al., 1982; Smith & Frieze, 2003).

Past research has also found important gender differences in hypergender ideology and rape empathy. Specifically, men have reported more extreme adherence to stereotypical gender roles than women (Hamburger et al., 1996). Furthermore, men have indicated less empathy for rape victims and more empathy for perpetrators compared to women (Borden, Karr, & Caldwell-Colbert, 1988; Ching & Burke, 1999; Deitz et al., 1982; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Sinclair & Bourne, 1998; and Smith & Frieze, 2003). Therefore, gender differences on these two constructs will be examined in the present study as a secondary focus for replication purposes.

The primary purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between hypergender ideology and rape empathy. This has never been looked at in previous research, although both have been shown to have similar associations. For example, both constructs have been shown to be related to traditional attitudes toward women, rape myth acceptance, and victim responsibility (Deitz et al., 1982; Hamburger et al., 1996; Murnen & Byrne, 1991; Sinclair & Bourne, 1998). If hypergender ideology and rape empathy are each associated with other rape-supportive attitudes, then they may also be related to each other. It seems logical that if hypergender individuals believe that men need sex and may seek it aggressively and that women should embrace their sexuality as a way of pleasing men and act as subordinate to them, then rape may be viewed as a more acceptable behavior by these individuals as compared to those who do not endorse these extreme gender

stereotypic beliefs. Those who hold hypergender beliefs may be less able to understand or take the perspective of a sexually non-consenting female who is forced into intercourse because she is not playing her extreme traditional role. On the other hand, they may be more likely to relate to a sexually aggressive male perpetrator, who is viewed as simply playing out his rightful role. Therefore, it is hypothesized for this study that stronger adherence to hypergender ideology will be associated with less empathy towards rape victims and more empathy towards rape perpetrators. It is also predicted, based on previous research, that men will report less empathy towards victims and stronger adherence to hypergender ideology than women.

Method

Participants

Participants were 157 (73 male and 84 female) undergraduate students taking psychology courses at a public university. Age of students ranged from 17 to 44 years, with a mean age of 19.68 and the large majority (95.5%) falling within 17 to 22 years of age. The majority (84.1%) of participants were White/ European/ European-American, 8.9% were African/ African-American, 3.8% were Asian/ Asian-American, and 1.3% were Hispanic/ Hispanic-American. Forty percent of participants were Catholic, 13.4% were Methodist, 13.4% reported no religion, 8.3% were Baptist, 7.6% were Protestant, 5.1% were Lutheran, and 1.9% were Jewish. All participants agreed voluntarily to participate.

Materials

To measure adherence to hypergender ideology, participants filled out Hamburger et al.'s (1996) Hypergender Ideology Scale (HGIS), which is a gender neutral scale measuring adherence to extreme hypermasculine and hyperfeminine gender roles. The HGIS (Hamburger et al., 1996) was created using items from Murnen and Byrne's (1991) Hyperfemininity Scale (HFS) and Mosher and Sirkin's (1984) Hypermasculinity Inventory (HMI). The HGIS was shown to correlate highly with each, .76 for the HMI and .54 for the HFS (Hamburger et al., 1996). Participants responded to each item on the HGIS using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), and was scored so that higher scores indicated stronger adherence to stereotypic gender roles. Scores

could range from 57 to 342. Sample items include "Most women need a man in their lives," "It's okay for a man to be a little forceful to get sex," "A true man knows how to command others," "Any man who is a man can do without sex," "Women don't mind a little force in sex sometimes because they know it means they must be attractive," and "It is important that my partner and I are equally satisfied with our relationship." Hamburger et al. (1996) reported a Cronbach α of .96 for the HGIS, indicating a high internal consistency for this measure.

Participants also completed Deitz et al.'s (1982) Rape Empathy Scale (RES), which measures empathy toward female rape victims and male rape perpetrators. The original scale, created by Deitz et al. (1982), was a forced-choice format in which participants chose from 19 victim-empathic or perpetrator-empathic statements and then indicated on a 7-point Likert-type scale the strength of their preference. Deitz et al. (1982) reported a Cronbach α of .84 for the RES student sample, indicating high internal consistency. A modified version of the RES, as adapted by Borden, Karr, and Caldwell-Colbert (1988), was used in this study. This adapted scale included only the first item of every question, and was scored using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). It was scored so that higher scores indicated a greater amount of victim empathy, and scores could range from 19 to 133 (Borden et al. 1988). Sample items include "In general, I feel that rape is an act that is provoked by the rape victim," "I can really empathize with the helplessness a rapist might feel during a rape, since he's at the mercy of forces beyond his control," "After a rape has occurred, I think the woman would suffer more emotional torment in dealing with the police than the man would," and "I believe that it is impossible for a rape victim to enjoy being raped."

Procedure

Participation occurred during regularly scheduled class times in group settings. Students were told that the study would be examining their honest opinions about men, women, and sexual issues in our society today, assured confidentiality and anonymity, and asked to carefully read and sign an informed consent form if they chose to participate. After signing an informed consent, participants received a questionnaire packet

containing general demographic questions, the HGIS, and the RES. After responding to the questionnaires, participants quietly handed them in to the researcher, as instructed. There was no individual identifying information on any questionnaire.

Results

To test the primary hypothesis, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was calculated for the HGIS and RES, and was found to be statistically significant, $r(152) = -.71, p < .0001$. Significant negative correlations were also found for the female sample, $r(82) = -.58, p < .0001$, and for the male sample $r(70) = -.65, p < .0001$, separately. Therefore, a strong negative relationship between hypergender ideology and rape empathy was supported. Stronger adherence to extreme stereotypic gender roles and beliefs (hypergender ideology) was associated with less empathy for the victim of rape and more empathy for the perpetrator.

The secondary hypothesis was tested by performing separate t-tests comparing men and women on the HGIS and the RES scores. As expected, men scored significantly higher than women on the HGIS, $t(153) = 8.55, p < .0001$. Therefore, men reported stronger adherence to hypergender ideology ($M = 168.61, SD = 38.12$) than women ($M = 124.23, SD = 25.88$).

As predicted, women scored significantly higher than men on the RES, $t(153) = 5.94, p < .0001$. Therefore, women reported more empathy for the rape victim and less empathy for the rape perpetrator ($M = 113.20, SD = 11.74$), as compared to men ($M = 100.51, SD = 14.72$).

Discussion

The results of this study showed a strong correlation between hypergender ideology and rape empathy, thus adding to the constellation of interrelated attitudes and beliefs linked to sexual aggression. Stronger adherence to hypergender ideology is associated with less rape empathy for a female victim. Individuals who adhere to hypergender ideology may be less likely to view a situation as rape because their belief structure supports the ideas that real men need sex and they may act aggressively to obtain it, whereas women should provide sex to maintain relationships with men. Therefore, rape may be viewed by these individuals as acceptable role appropriate behavior. Hence, they may not be able to take the sexually non-consenting female

victim's perspective and be empathetic towards her because she is not playing out her scripted role. They are more likely to understand and be empathetic towards the male perpetrator because he may be seen as engaging in acceptable behavior in order to get the sex that he needs.

The results of this study also replicate previous research showing that men tend to show greater adherence to hypergender ideology and less empathy for rape victims than women. Males greater tendency toward hypergender ideology, as compared to women, may possibly be explained by society's socialization of masculinity and femininity. Masculine scripts are seemingly stricter than feminine scripts, so that if men deviate from what is prescribed by society to be masculine they may encounter more ridicule than women who deviate from the feminine script. Therefore, men may be socialized to more strongly adhere to extreme gender role ideology than women.

Adherence to this hypergender belief system may also contribute to the greater prevalence of male rape perpetrators and female victims than female rape perpetrators and male victims (Hamburger et al., 1996; U. S. Department of Justice, 2000). These prevalence rates can possibly explain the finding from the present study that women show more rape empathy for a victim than men. If men are more likely to be perpetrators of rape and women are more likely to be victims, then a woman may more easily be able than a man to imagine herself as and take the perspective of a victim and, thus, have more empathy for her. On the other hand, it may be more difficult for a man to identify and empathize with a female victim. This is also consistent with research showing that having personal experience with rape is associated with higher levels of victim empathy (Ching & Burke, 1999; Deitz et al., 1982; Smith & Frieze, 2003). Given the prevalence rates of female victimization, it is likely that more female than male participants have had victimization experiences.

It is also possible that the RES measure itself has influenced the finding that women show more victim rape empathy. The RES measures empathy in rape situations describing female victims and male perpetrators only. It would be interesting in future research to develop a rape empathy measure that includes male victims and

female perpetrators. Perhaps this would make it easier for men to take the perspective of and increase empathy for a victim, and for women to take the perspective of and increase empathy for a perpetrator.

Further research should also continue to look at additional correlates of rape empathy and hypergender ideology. Understanding how all of these constructs (including for example, adversarial sexual beliefs and rape myth acceptance) are inter-related and may support sexual aggression in our society is important for efforts directed at educating and unlearning potentially dangerous attitudes and beliefs that may lead to rape and influence rape judgments. It may be especially important to concentrate these efforts, not only on the general college population, but also on others who may be directly involved in rape cases, such as police officers, known rapists, crisis counselors and potential jurors. Future research samples should perhaps include more participants from these various populations.

As for the results of the present study, greater adherence to hypergender ideology is associated with less rape empathy for a victim and more empathy for a perpetrator. This relationship has never been examined in previous research. Thus, the primary contribution of the present study is the association between these two constructs, which may fit in to the socio-cultural network of attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate rape in our society. Consistent with previous studies, the present results also indicate that men have stronger hypergender beliefs and less rape empathy than women.

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