

Relation Between Rape Myth Acceptance and Gender Role-Related Predictors

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Abstract

Sexual violence is a pervasive social ill. Existing research on intimate partner violence and general aggression in men indicates that stress surrounding gender identity is predictive of hostile attitudes and aggressive behavior, especially directed toward women. The proposed research seeks to further clarify the link between gender and aggression by examining the link between gender-related predictors and rape myth acceptance, an existing accepted predictor of sexually aggressive behavior in men. One hundred eighty undergraduate college men will complete a series of scales assessing their levels of masculine gender role stress, placements in gender role journey, degrees of traditional gender role acceptance, and levels of rape myth acceptance. The proposed research will examine the relation between masculine gender role stress, gender role ambivalence, traditional gender role acceptance, and rape myth acceptance. Data will be displayed as a Pearson correlation. Results of this study will help future researchers, clinicians, and law enforcement officials understand predictive factors of sexual violence and develop appropriate interventions.

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Relation Between Rape Myth Acceptance and Gender-Role Related Predictors

Violence against women, in its many forms, is a pervasive social issue on both national and international levels. Researchers from a wide breadth of fields have dedicated their time and resources to understanding both the causes and effects of these violent acts, including intimate partner violence (IPV), rape (forcible and coercive), and other forms of harm and intimidation. One emerging theory regarding the motivation for violence perpetrated by men against women stems from theories relating to masculine gender identity: heightened gender role stress or feelings of gender role ambivalence may serve as predictors for aggressive behavior by men against women (McDermott, Schwartz, & Trevathan-Minnis, 2011; Moore & Stuart, 2004; Moore, Stuart, McNulty, Addis, & Cordova, 2008).

Historically, researchers have attributed attitudes of hostility toward women to societal norms. In her analysis of the issue, Burt (1980) examined the conditions or attitudes that interact to shape the degree of permissiveness of one's attitude toward rape. Her work, and the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale it subsequently produced, was central to the feminist perspective's understanding of rape. However, recent reexamination indicates rape myth acceptance, in and of itself, is not necessarily a consistent predictor of proclivity for sexually violent behavior (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010; Hill & Fischer, 2001; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995).

In their study, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) found that general hostility against women emerged as a key predictor of rape myth acceptance, not vice versa, indicating that acceptance of traditional sex roles and other aspects of Burt's Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, while certainly indicative of rape permissive attitudes, may not serve to predict violent behavior against women. Furthermore, Chapleau and Oswald (2010) found that rape myth acceptance often correlates with power-sex association. In a study examining the relation between masculine gender roles and

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rape-related attitudes and behavior, Hill and Fischer (2001) found that unhealthy entitlement often mediates the link between the two.

Synthesizing these ideas, although certain components of Burt's theory of rape myth acceptance do seem to play a role in predicting sexually aggressive behavior toward women, these components seem to be acting in conjunction with other phenomena; to put it simply, masculine gender identity, in and of itself, does not seem to be the primary predictor of violent behavior toward women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; McDermott et al., 2011). Rather, stress associated with the preservation of perceived masculine gender identity, otherwise known as masculine gender role stress, emerges as a consistent predictor of men's violent acts or hostile attitudes toward women (Begany & Millburn, 2002; Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Moore & Stuart, 2004; Moore et al., 2008).

Additionally, in their work on gender role journey theory, McDermott et al. (2011) found that men in the ambivalence stage of their gender role journey development expressed more hostility toward women. Gender role journey is an emerging theory that proposes five stages of gender role development: acceptance, ambivalence, anger and confusion, activism, and integration. In the first stage, acceptance, individuals accept traditional gender roles. In the second, ambivalence, they encounter information that challenges their ideals and experience dissonance regarding their socially constructed gender identity. In the third, the anger and confusion stage, individuals begin to experience anger directed at the systematic social construction of gender, which in turn leads to activism, the fourth stage, and ideally eventual healthy integration of traditional and individual ideals regarding gender role in the fifth stage. According to McDermott et al., the second stage of this process, gender role ambivalence, is often the result of exposure to new information, such as feminist theory. . . .

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Moore, T. M., & Stuart, G.L. (2004). Effects of masculine gender role stress on men's cognitive, affective, physiological, and aggressive response to intimate conflict situations.

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