

Summary

Social Hierarchy: Understanding of Sexual Aggression Myths

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Sexual violence, a kind of violence women are exposed to in daily life in different ways, includes any sexual act, unwanted sexual expressions, attempts and offerings of sexual act and commercial sexual exploitation (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). Statistics regarding sexual aggression experiences of women reveals that 47 % of women in the world have experienced coercive sex for their first sex experience (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, cited in Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). In Turkey, it was reported that 15.3% of women have experienced sexual violence (The Status of Women in The Prime Minister's Headquarters, 2008). These reports, displaying how prevalent sexual violence is, are just the tip of the iceberg. One of the primary factors preventing women from reporting their sexual violence experiences to judicial authorities is the society's viewpoint regarding sexual violence. The present study investigates the standpoint of the society related to sexual violence in view of the Ambivalence Sexism and Social Dominance Theory.

Social Psychological Perspective of Rape

Studies investigating social and individual aspects of rape from the social psychology perspective deal with explaining how observers and actors make sense of what they experience. Attitudes regarding how intersex relationships should be in the society and which types of sexual acts are appropriate in this kind of relationship and specific pre-admissions about how the actors of the relationship should act, play important roles in the process of rape attitudes formation (Krahé, 1991; 2000).

Another important factor regarding rape related evaluations is stereotypical beliefs about the rape, the victim, and the perpetrator. These misbeliefs legitimate sexual violence against women by men, put the women at disadvantage in the social hierarchy, and called as "rape myths". There are many rape myths such as "Women provoke sexual violence", "Any women can-

not be raped without their consent", and "Perpetrator is a stranger" (Bohner, Weisbord, Raymond, Barzvi, & Schwarz, 1993; Brownmiller, 1984; Godenzi, 1992; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999; Scully, 1994).

Ambivalent Sexism Theory

Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996; 1997) asserts that, different from relationships among other social groups, women and men are dependent each other in terms of reproduction and sex, so sexism against women represents conflicting prejudice including both negatively and relatively positively perceived attitudes. That is; on one hand, men conceive the woman to be not competent in various tasks and belong to lower status, on the other hand, they interact with women as a wife, mother, and romantic partner, and satisfy their need for closeness in this way. That kind of need of men provides women dyadic power in dyadic relationships, however, it is maintained women to be lower status and men to be higher status due to the fact that men's social, political, and economic control provide them with higher structural power (Sakalli-Uğurlu, 2003a).

Glick and Fiske (1999) argue that, like the observed conflict of men's attitudes towards, women have conflicting attitudes towards men. To put it more plainly, women conceive men to be superior and resent this superiority but they are also dependent on men in terms of romantic relationship, marriage, and family bonds, so they display conflicting attitudes regarding men.

Social Dominance Theory

Social Dominance Theory, asserts that all societies have a tendency to be organized into group-based social hierarchies in which at least one group has higher social status and more power, and at least one disadvantaged group which has to tolerate unfavorable situations like lower status works and social constraints (Sidanus, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996).

According to this theory, societies are formed through having a consensus over ideologies favoring the superiority of one group over other groups, so inter-group conflicts are reduced in this way. In this process, individuals' values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, formation of new social practices, and operation of institutions are shaped by legitimizing myths. These legitimizing myths show how to share individuals' or social institutions' positive or negative social values (Pratto, Sidanus, & Levin, 2006; Pratto, Sidanus, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Thus, people can direct their actions, legitimate their behaviors, and predict which acts of others can be legitimized through legitimizing myths (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

One of the significant factors of Social Dominance Theory is a general attitudinal orientation to accept group-based social hierarchies and inequalities, called social dominance orientation (SDO). Those with higher on SDO support certain ideologies such as sexism (Bates & Haven, 2001; Sibley, Wilson, & Duckitt, 2007), conservatism (Pratto, Sidanus, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2002), hostility against homosexuality (Whitley & Egisdóttir, 2000), believe that some groups are more valuable than others, and that social status of groups in the social hierarchy is deserved (Pratto et al., 2000; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Method

Participants

The sample is composed of 302 participants including 153 women, 149 men from various districts of Izmir. The mean age of the participants was 36.29 (range = 18-68, $SD = 9.81$). The proportion of participants was 8.3% for primary school graduates, 8.3% for secondary school graduates, 31.8% for high-school graduates, 43% for university graduates, 8.6% for those with master's/doctorate degree.

Measures

Acceptance of Modern Myths About Sexual Aggression Scale (AMMSA; Gerger et al., 2007). The measure consists of 30 items and assesses sexual aggression attitudes. It is a one-dimensional measure and evaluated with 7-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree) with higher scores indicating higher sexual aggression myths acceptance. Some examples of items are: "Alcohol is often the culprit when a man rapes a woman" and "When a single woman invites a single man to her flat she signals that she is not averse to having sex".

Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO; Pratto, Sidanus, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). This scale measures general attitudes regarding inequality and hi-

erarchies among social groups. It consists of 16 items measured with a 7-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7). Statements include "It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom" and "All groups should be given an equal chance in life".

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996). The measure assesses sexist attitudes against women which are expressed in a more hidden way due to some social and economic changes. It consists of two sub-components, benevolent sexism (BS) and hostile sexism (HS), and 22 items in total. Example items include "Women seek power by gaining control over men" and "Despite accomplishment, men are incomplete without women".

Ambivalence Toward Men Inventory (AIM; Glick & Fiske, 1999). This inventory is used to assess attitudes toward men and consists of 19 items and two dimensions (Hostility toward Men and Benevolence toward Men). Example items include "Even if both work, woman should take care of man at home" and "Men will always fight for greater control in society".

Demographic Form. Participants are asked to indicate their socio-demographic information such as gender, age, marital status, education level, monthly income, district of residence, where they have spent most of their life, and job.

Procedure

Residents of different districts of Izmir are asked to participate in a study about intersexual relationships. Those who accepted to participate in the study were given an envelope including mentioned measures.

Results

Psychometric Properties of Measures

It was found that Cronbach's alpha values, which were calculated to evaluate the reliability of the measures of the present study, ranged from .79 to .89 (see Table 1). Pearson correlations among measures indicated that all measures are positively correlated with each other.

The Mediating Role of Social Psychological Variables in the Relationship between Social Dominance Orientation and Sexual Aggression Myths Acceptance

It was investigated whether hostile sexism against women, benevolent sexism against women, hostility toward men and benevolence toward men mediate the relationship between social dominance orientation and sexual aggression myths acceptance with a set of linear regression analyses with three steps as Baron and Kenny (1986) suggested. Separate analyses were performed for female and male participants. In the first step, a simple

regression analysis was executed to find out the effect of “social dominance orientation” on “sexual aggression myths acceptance”. In the second step, separate simple regression analyses for each mediating variables were performed to investigate the effect of “social dominance orientation” on mediating variables which are “hostile sexism against women”, “benevolent sexism against women”, “hostility toward men”, and “benevolence toward men”. If both steps indicated significant relationship between related variables, a multiple regression analysis was executed to investigate the effect of “social dominance orientation” and the mediating variables on “rape myth acceptance” as the third step. The suggested mediating model is presented in Figure 1.

The results of linear regression analyses;

- For women, both benevolent ($z = 2.48, p = .01$) and hostile sexism against women ($z = 3.27, p = .001$) partially mediated the relationship between social dominance orientation and sexual aggression myths acceptance.

- Similarly, for men, both benevolent ($z = 3.17, p = .002$) and hostile sexism against women ($z = 3.63, p = .0003$) partially mediated the relationship between social dominance orientation and sexual aggression myths acceptance.

- However, for women, since social dominance orientation did not predict benevolence toward men ($\beta = .15, t = 1.84, p = .067$), it did not mediate the relationship between social dominance orientation and sexual aggression myths acceptance.

- Also, for women, since social dominance orientation did not predict hostility toward men ($\beta = .15, t = 1.86, p = .065$), it did not mediate the relationship between social dominance orientation and sexual aggression myths acceptance.

- For men, both benevolence toward men ($z = 4.99, p < .001$) and hostility toward men ($z = 2.53, p = .012$) mediated the relationship between social dominance orientation and sexual aggression myths acceptance.

The Relationship between Rape Myth Acceptance and Demographic Features

The results of “independent samples t-test” and “one-way ANOVA” analyses showed that:

- Men ($M = 113.05, SD = 23.48$) compared to women ($M = 98.95, SD = 25.80$) had higher endorsement of sexual aggression myths acceptance ($t_{299} = -4.958, p < .001$).

- Low-income participants ($M = 114.93, SD = 22.59$) compared to middle-income participants ($M = 102.60, SD = 26.30$) and high-income participants ($M = 100.34, SD = 25.76$) had higher endorsement of sexual aggression myths acceptance ($F_{2,300} = 10.634, p < .001$).

- Those with low education levels ($M = 114.27, SD = 21.71$) compared to those with high education levels ($M = 98.07, SD = 26.60$) had higher endorsement of sexual aggression myths acceptance ($t_{293.13} = 5.803, p < .001$).

Discussion

The present study revealed that there is a strong association between sexual aggression myths acceptance and social dominance orientation, and among benevolent sexism against women, hostile sexism against women, benevolence toward men, and hostility toward men. To investigate these relationships in more detail, different sets of analyses were conducted for women and men separately. Results indicated that, for men, both benevolent and hostile attitudes against men and women mediate the relationship between sexual aggression myths and social dominance orientation. For women, both hostile and benevolent attitudes towards women mediate the same relationship, but there was no effect of benevolent and hostile attitudes towards men.

For both women and men, the mediating role of benevolent attitudes towards women in the relationship between sexual aggression myths acceptance and social dominance orientation is an expected outcome. That is, those with benevolent sexism towards women, expect women to act according to stereotypical social roles in their social relationships, especially the ones with men. However, women victims of rape who do not act according to traditional sex roles are thought as they do not behave morally, do not deserve protection anymore and are blamed for the situation. This finding parallels with the literature (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2007; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010; Viki, Abrams, & Masser, 2004), taken into account its relation with social dominance orientation, indicates that benevolent sexist tendencies against women which serves to sustain sexist hierarchies, contribute to maintenance of the group-based social hierarchy through legitimating of rape.

For both women and men, hostile attitudes against women mediated the relationship between sexual aggression myths acceptance and social dominance orientation. Individuals with hostile attitudes against women believe that women strive to gain power and control over men through their sexuality and sexual attractiveness and ridicule men. Therefore, they do not take the rape seriously and underestimate the negative effects of rape on the victim (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Turgut, 2007; Yamawaki, 2007). In other words, individuals demanding the maintenance of social hierarchy -especially men in the advantageous position in terms of social sexist hierarchies- legitimate the rape by positing that women,

evaluated as incompetent in many ways and believed to be controlled by men, exaggerate the rape.

Regression analyses in the present study showed that benevolence toward men mediate the relationship between sexual aggression myths acceptance and sexual dominance orientation only for male participants. Therefore, based on the literature, it can be argued that by trivializing sexual aggression, men attempt to maintain their advantaged status and social hierarchy based on the benevolence toward men serving to justify social hierarchy. Hostility toward men mediated the relationship between sexual aggression myths acceptance and social dominance orientation only for male participants. This finding indicates that men who want to maintain their advantaged status, trivialize sexual aggression against women through hostile attitudes against men reinforcing men's power and status in the society.

For women, neither benevolent nor hostile attitudes

against men mediated the relationship between sexual aggression myths acceptance and social dominance orientation. Based on this result, it can be argued that, for women, supporting the unequal relationships of the hierarchy, it may not be so simple to justify and legitimate the system of male dominance although they blamed the "other" woman who is victim of the rape.

Moreover, the findings of the present study point out that individuals' sexist tendencies and social dominance orientation plays a crucial role in the legitimation of sexual violence. Hence, they emphasize that not only sexist prejudices but also the desire to maintain social hierarchy in the society should be attended in the elimination of misbeliefs about sexual aggression. In other words, it is crucial to deal with the values of male-dominant system in the process of the struggle against sexual aggression myths used by men as a control mechanism of women.