

Utilizing Research Methods to Evaluate and Assess Sexual Aggression and Gender Roles

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Following the process to conduct a thesis allows one to follow basic research methods to understand a problem or issue and conduct research to find potential solutions to that specific issue. A quantitative study performed at a midsize, midwestern university was conducted to understand the relationship between hyper-gender roles and sexual aggression while also examining the role of fraternity and sorority membership. Hypermasculinity, hyperfemininity, and sexual aggression were measured using the Koss and Gidycz (1985) Sexual Experience Survey (SES), Mosher and Sirkin's (1984) Hypermasculinity Inventory (HMI), and Murne and Byrne's (1991) Hyperfemininity Scale (HFS). The question examined throughout the research was whether hyper-gender roles have a significant relationship to an individual's sexual experience and whether fraternity and sorority membership has a relationship with more self-reports of hyper-gender roles.

Sexual violence and aggression occur in a variety of situations and environments. It is critical to first understand the nature, purpose, and context in which acts of sexual aggression take place (Harkins & Dixon, 2009). The university and college environment tends to be a specific place in which sexual aggression occurs and where there are high numbers of individuals with a moderate extent of rape supportive attitudes (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007).

Hypermasculinity is the exaggeration of male stereotypical behavior and influences men to behave aggressively towards women as a way to express their strength and power (Harkins & Dixon, 2009). Hypermasculinity has a relationship to sexual aggression and can vary in how it is displayed depending upon the context and environment in which the acts occur.

Similar to hypermasculinity, hyperfemininity is an extreme level of gender role behavior. Hyperfemininity is characterized by an emphasis on the importance of relationships with men. According to data, women who score high on the HFS are more likely to accept and reinforce hypermasculinity behaviors in men (Macapagal, Rupp, & Heiman, 2011).

Sorority women tend to view members of fraternities as friends and brothers even when they do not know much about specific members (Minow & Einolf, 2009). Once a member within the sorority community, women become part of a unique campus culture promoting its own traditions, values, and norms. Some traditions and rituals may include bonds with fraternities implying that the women must interact with members of a specific group, and this behavior is normalized within the fraternity and sorority culture as a whole (Berkowitz & Padavic, 1998).

Findings

Statistical analysis tested the strength of relationships within the data, where a total of 430 surveys were completed, which consisted of 138 males and 292 females.

Principal component analysis was conducted to reduce the variables in the SES, and the components were used to test the relationship between sexual experiences and hyper-gender roles. The three components for the male SES data were labeled *communication misperceptions*, *threat of force*, and *passion into force*. The female SES components were labeled *threat of force*, *passion into force*, and *miscommunication perception*.

To test the relationship between hypermasculinity and sexual aggression, Pearson product moment correlations were conducted between total HMI scores and each SES component. HMI, according to these three tests, has a moderate relationship with participants' sexual aggression experiences (Table 1).

Table 1
Hypermasculinity Inventory and Sexual Aggression Correlations

Instrument/Components		Threat of Force	Passion into force	Miscommunication Perception
Total HMI	Pearson Correlation	.554**	.509**	.600**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	138	138	138

** $p < .05$

To test the relationship between sorority membership and being victims of sexual aggression, correlation analysis was conducted, but there were no significant relationships. The same test was conducted to examine if fraternity membership has a relationship with committing acts of sexual aggression. Fraternity membership had a significant relationship with sexual aggression.

Independent *t*-tests were conducted utilizing HMI and HFS to test the relationship of fraternity and sorority membership with hyper-gender roles (Table 2). In the case of this study, the mean scores were significantly higher in sorority and fraternity members.

Table 2
Mean Scores for Hyper-Gender Roles (HMI and HFS)

	N	M	SD
Sorority Members	105	8.18	4.76
Non-Sorority Members	187	6.40	3.63
Fraternity Members	62	11.66	6.75
Non-Fraternity Members	76	7.83	6.10

Conclusions and Takeaways

The study indicated there was a relationship between hypermasculinity and sexual aggression; thus, males who reported more sexually aggressive experiences had higher levels of hypermasculinity. The results supported that there is a relationship between hyper-gender roles and sexual aggressive experiences. The *communication misperceptions* (males) and *miscommunication perceptions* (females) were the most frequent components of sexual aggression among participants of this study on the SES instrument. This SES component may be difficult for some to perceive as aggression since it is not a physical act. This concept raised the question about why these *communication misperceptions* and *miscommunication perceptions* were occurring. Is it because society revolves around Facebook, Twitter, and text messaging? Are students unaware of verbal cues? This finding provides a baseline for future assessment.

This study indicated that sorority women were more likely to report higher levels of hyperfemininity than non-sorority women. Sorority women reported more traditional dating behaviors such as playing hard to get to lead a man on, changing plans with friends to hang out with a man, and saying no to sex even when they mean yes. In these areas, sorority women significantly reported higher frequencies. This could be influencing the miscommunication with their male counterparts.

The fact that sorority women are not more-likely than non-sorority women to be victims of sexual aggression reveals there is something occurring to this group. Some sorority groups have national programs designed to promote women's empowerment concerning sexual aggression. For groups that have established programs, there should be more open communication with campus-based fraternity and sorority professionals as a way to provide local support. This research finding stresses the need for the campus environment to form stronger partnerships with external stakeholders to understand what is at play and to utilize resources.

This study provides data concerning the issue of communication misperception as an area of sexual aggression in need of further research and programming. Communication and sexual bargaining are topics that need to be talked about on college campuses as a way to raise awareness about sexual aggression and misperceptions. Campus and organizational networks concerning fraternity and sorority groups need to continue to normalize discussion and conversation about sexual aggression, communication misperceptions, and hyper-gender roles.

This initial study provided framework to further research on the campus environment and the topics of sexual aggression and hyper-gender roles as they relate specifically to fraternities and sororities. This one project raises further questions and suggests another research project is waiting to be done.

References

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