Abstract

Polaschek and Ward's (2002) proposal that rape-supportive attitudes are partially fueled by an implicit theory of women as fundamentally unknowable beings was tested in survey data from Hispanic males (N=135). A simpler model than the above was preferred. Adding just world beliefs and *frustrated machismo* to the model clarified the utility of implicit theories as explanatory constructs in this area of research.

Introduction

Rape-supportive attitudes (RSAs) such as rape myth acceptance (RMA; Burt, 1980) and acceptance of sexual violence (ASV) predict sexual aggressiveness and coercion (Abbey et al., 2001; Chapleau et al., 2008; Edwards et al., 2011; Suárez & Gadalla, 2010; Zinzow & Thompson, 2010). Polaschek and Ward (2002) suggested that implicit theories (Dweck et al., 1995) are distal but critical precursors to RSAs. One implicit theory, a belief that women are fundamentally unknowable by men (WFU), is especially interesting, due to its apparent innocuousness. WFU is theorized to foment suspicion, hostility, and mistrust of women, leading to beliefs in inherently adversarial relationships and male victimhood; then to callous, impersonal sexual attitudes; and finally to rationalization of sexual coercion and abuse.

We applied the WFU model implied in Polaschek and Ward (2002; **P&W model**) to data from a sample of men from a cultural background with strong traditional gender roles. Our goals were to (1) verify the plausibility of the P&W model in this sample, and (2) further test the usefulness of implicit theories for explanatory and predictive value in this research domain by augmenting the P&W model with two other intuitive implicit theories—just world beliefs (JWB) and "frustrated machismo" (FM), a culture-specific manifestation of male gender role conflict (Anderson & Anderson, 2008; Jakupcak, 2003; McDermott & Lopez, 2013; Vandello & Bosson, 2013). See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theoretical model guiding analyses (P&W model in blue)



Method

<u>Participants</u>

Male college students (N=135, 94% Hispanic). Mean age: 24.1 (SD=4.9, median=22.5). Median annual household income: \$35,000 (mean: \$59,793, SD=\$114,898).

Procedures

Online surveys completed in on-campus computer laboratories in scheduled data collection sessions managed by researcher or assistants, for course extra credit.

Analysis Strategy

Structural equation models representing the original model, modifications of the model, and finally the modified model with JWB and FM, were fit to the data using the *lavaan* SEM package with **R** version 3.0.3, with latent variables (LVs) indicated in the models by the measures described below.



Materials

- DFJU

- NSD & MC-MCH

Just world beliefs

Figure 3.

Model 4: The two LVs noted above were combined, with the result still named ICH. This model showed good to excellent fit, like the others. BFSD and ICH were strongly correlated in the model (path coefficient=.75).

Model 5: BFSD and ICH were combined into a single LV (still provisionally called ICH). Fit was, again, good to excellent. ICH and RSA were still estimated to be quite strongly correlated (.78), but they were left as separate LVs in order to keep conceptual predictors and outcome variables separated. See Figure 6.

Implicit theories—women as fundamentally unknowable and just world beliefs—predict rape-supportive attitudes

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Discussion

Our results suggest that Polaschek and Ward's (2002) account of the relationship between implicit theories and rape-supportive cognitions might be too complex—These data suggested a much simpler model in which many different problematic thoughts and attitudes about women, sex, and relationships are simply associated with each other, with no discernible pattern or progression between "early" and "later" cognitions in a commonsense causal chain. This relatively undifferentiated bundle of cognitions strongly predicts rape-supportive attitudes—in fact, given the non-experimental nature of this study, it seemed plausible after Model 5 that RSA might simply be one more component of the "bundle."

The addition of JWB and FM to the P&W model, however, seemed to suggest differentiation—differential patterns of correlation between these new additions and the conceptual predictors versus conceptual outcome variables. JWB and FM (or perhaps gender role conflict more generally construed) seem to offer unique contributions to the prediction of RSA in men.

Limitations & Future Directions

The observational nature of these data limit causal explanations careful experimental research can clarify the implied causal relationships. It is also not clear whether self-report survey methods should be expected to tap implicit theories. Polaschek and Ward's research, based largely on such measures, implies this should be possible, but perhaps more sophisticated methods are required, such as reaction time measurements or implicit association tests for this type of implicit theory.

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