

Hostile Masculinity, Sexual Aggression, and Gender-Biased Domineeringness in Conversations

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This study assessed the ability of certain variables to predict which men would be more domineering in conversations with a woman and/or with a man. The variables included men's self-reported sexually aggressive behavior and several components comprising a personality profile labeled "Hostile Masculinity." As expected, these variables successfully predicted domineering behavior toward the female but not toward the male. These findings supported theories hypothesizing that men's desire to control women and men's antisocial behavior toward them are due to specific rather than to general factors (i.e., evolutionary and feminist theorizing). © 1994 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been considerable research on men's antisocial behavior against women, particularly aggression. One facet of this work focuses on the question: What is the profile of men who are most likely to commit such aggression? In addressing this question using national representative samples of students in higher education [Malamuth et al., 1991] as well as a Canadian sample of students and non-students [Malamuth et al., 1993a,b], it has been shown that a personality profile labeled "Hostile Masculinity" or "Hostile Dominance" is an important characteristic of men who commit acts of sexual and/or non-sexual aggression against women. The other major component has been labeled "Sexual Promiscuity" or "Impersonal Sexual Orientation." The findings by Malamuth and colleagues [1991] suggest that the most common pro-

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file of sexually aggressive men in the general population consists of those who are relatively high on both Hostile Masculinity and Impersonal Sexual Orientation.

The Hostile Masculinity personality profile has been described as combining 1) a desire to be in control, to be dominating, particularly in relations to women, and 2) an insecure, defensive, and distrustful orientation to women. A byproduct of this combination is a hypersensitivity to perceived threats to one's sense of self-worth, which is strongly tied to feeling dominant and thereby in control.

Hostile Masculinity has been typically operationalized by scales measuring a constellation of three components: hostility toward women, dominance in sexual relations, and attitudes accepting of violence against women. Other scales measuring characteristics such as sexual arousal to aggression, negative masculinity, and psychoticism also appear (in the factor analytical sense) to "load" statistically on this dimension [see Malamuth et al., 1991, 1993b]. Interestingly, in separate research, Gurtman [1992] found that a similar profile, characterized by relatively high hostility and dominance, was associated with interpersonal problems, particularly in intimate relations.

General Vs. Specific Mechanisms

Although the relationship between such a personality profile and acts of aggression and/or dominance toward women has now been well established, an important question concerns the degree to which the associations found may be better explained by general or specific causal mechanisms [e.g., Mills, 1990]. We briefly illustrate these two types of theories by noting some examples. A model emphasizing general causal mechanisms is well illustrated in the work of Elliott et al. [1985] and Ageton [1983]. Focusing particularly on youth, Elliott et al. [1985] argue in favor of a common etiology for various forms of delinquency and other related behaviors, such as illegal drug use. Their model is guided by social control theory, which suggests [e.g., Ageton, 1983] that sexual aggression is primarily caused by the same factors as other forms of delinquent behavior (e.g., delinquent peers). More recently, however, Elliott et al. [1989] found some differences in the etiology of delinquency and related behaviors, such as drug use. Nevertheless, they continued to encompass a variety of antisocial behaviors, including sexual assault, within general categories (e.g., assault) rather than examining possible different etiological paths leading to sexual vs. non-sexual aggression.

In contrast, the following are examples of two models emphasizing specific factors. The first is feminist theory. (Implicitly, feminist theory posits general mechanisms. However, it predicts specificity with regard to target of male aggression. For full discussion, see below.) Fundamental to feminist theory is the view that men's desire to maintain power over women causes sexual and non-sexual aggression against them. Such a desire is also expected to be manifested in other ways, such as in domineering, controlling acts [e.g., Malamuth and Briere 1986]. The origin of this desire is viewed within a framework that emphasizes group conflict over power, whereby males have constructed a patriarchal (male-dominated) social system and engage in various behaviors designed (consciously or unconsciously) to maintain that system and control [Brownmiller, 1975; Clark and Lewis, 1977; Sanday, 1981].

Feminists contend that in order to maintain a hierarchical system women and men in such societies are taught roles or "scripts" that are based on female powerlessness, dependency, and submission, while requiring men to be aggressive, domineering, and lacking in such areas as tenderness, empathy, and sensitivity [e.g., Weis and Borges,

1975]. The need to conform to traditional "masculine" self-concepts and fear of one's own "feminine" side results in males' devaluation of women, hostility toward them, and the motivation to control females. Individual differences among men in their need to control women have been hypothesized to result from relatively high levels of conforming to stereotyped masculine roles [e.g., Check and Malamuth, 1983] as well as from insecurity about their masculine identity [e.g., Lisak, 1991].

Another theory emphasizing specificity is evolutionary psychology [e.g., Buss and Schmitt, 1993]. An important concept encompassed here concerns psychological mechanisms. These are adaptations designed by natural selection to process environmental information and to provide solutions to problems that impinged upon the survival and reproductive performance of our ancestors. Given that selective pressures have been essentially the same for all humans in evolutionary environments (i.e., the phylogenetic history of humans is, of course, uniform), psychological mechanisms are generally the same (i.e., they are species-typical) [e.g., Tooby and Cosmides, 1992]. However there are some areas where differences existed in the problems faced in evolutionary environments by males and females. One of these is in sexuality, where the natural selection processes differed somewhat for males and females, resulting in sexual dimorphism in relevant psychological mechanisms [Buss and Schmitt, 1993].

An aspect of this sexual dimorphism is hypothesized to relate to differences in parental certainty. Since females have been more assured of who are their offspring, natural selection operated on male characteristics affecting interest in behaviors of their mates which impinged on the likelihood that the men are investing in their own offspring. Pursuant to the such divergent interests of the sexes, it follows that a psychology differentiated on the basis of sex evolved and that this psychology produced proprietary feelings that are different between the sexes. Men are predicted to be more likely to dominate, monopolize, control, and otherwise manipulate the sexuality of women. The degree to which men try to accomplish this and the methods they use vary, depending on social conditions, but the underlying psychological mechanisms are the same (i.e., they are universal) and resident in male minds (i.e., they are sex-related) [Daly and Wilson, 1987; Symons, 1979; Thornhill and Thornhill, 1983; 1992; Wilson and Daly, 1992].

With respect to individual differences among men, evolutionary psychology focuses on the particular developmental environments experienced by each man (the ontogenetic histories of humans are not uniform). Because psychological mechanisms (universal though they are) process environmental information (e.g., the likely consequences of various behaviors), their expression (in behavior) is expected to vary with the nature of the environment, both developmentally and currently. That is, such behaviors are not invariant or "fixed." In regards to the focus of this paper, evolutionary psychology would predict that the expression of domineeringness in conversations will covary with other characteristics of men, which primarily reflect differences in developmental environments (e.g., reinforcement history, role models, etc.).

Previous Research Examining Specificity

In earlier research focusing on sex of target, Malamuth [1988] assessed the ability of several predictor variables to predict men's laboratory aggression against female and male victims. These included attitudes accepting of violence against women, dominance as a motive for sex, psychoticism, and sexual arousal in response to aggression

against women. (All of these characteristics appear to “load” on the Hostile Masculinity constellation as described by Malamuth et al. [1993a]). The data revealed that these factors predicted levels of aggression against a female but not against a male victim.

The Present Study

The present study uses a similar approach to that of Malamuth [1988], but examines a more “naturally occurring” behavior than laboratory aggression. We examined whether men’s individual differences factors that are part of the Hostile Masculinity constellation, as well as their self-reported levels of sexual aggression, predict domineeringness in conversations against a female and/or against a male. If domineering/controlling behavior is guided by a domain-general mechanism, then no differentiation on the basis of the target’s (i.e., victim’s) sex is expected. If, on the other hand, the Hostile Masculinity construct reflects some degree of specificity, then it should be activated differentially depending on the target’s sex.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects and Procedure

Sixty-seven introductory psychology males participated in the study. Subjects were led to believe that they were participating in two totally unrelated studies conducted several days apart. In the first study, they completed a questionnaire assessing sexual aggression and the other “predictor” variables. They were led to believe that the second study focused on extra sensory perception (ESP). In fact, the ESP study was a “Buss paradigm” in which subjects had been randomly assigned to interact with either a male or female confederate (i.e., an accomplice of the experimenter) pretending to be a “real” subject. The subject and confederate were informed that previous research pointed to the importance of similarity in attitudes to the performance of ESP tasks. Each person was then asked to indicate on a questionnaire his or her attitudes about various issues. Both then evaluated each other’s attitudes. The confederate (male or female) ostensibly wrote a very negative evaluation of the subject, which was in fact prewritten and was identical for all subjects. Attitude evaluations were then exchanged between the two participants.

Using a “rigged” assignment procedure, the “real” subject was then assigned to be the transmitter whereas the confederate was the receiver in the ESP. Whenever the confederate made mistakes, the subject could deliver different levels of aversive noise as punishment, whereas for correct responses he could deliver rewards [for more information about this procedure see Malamuth, 1988].

Following this paradigm, the subject participated in an unstructured conversation with the confederate, in which they were told to get to know each other in a 5-min period. Allegedly, this was designed for “pilot work” for a different study. Subjects were informed that their conversation was being tape-recorded. All subjects were fully debriefed about the procedures before leaving the research setting.

Thirty-eight of the subjects interacted with the female confederate and 29 interacted with the male confederate. A multivariate analysis (MANOVA) comparing these two groups of men on their levels of sexual aggression, dominance, attitudes accepting of violence, and hostility toward women showed no overall effect ($F = 0.54$, $P =$ not significant) nor were there any univariate effects. These data support the success of the random assignment to confederate conditions.

Predictor Variables

Sexually Aggressive Behavior. Sexually aggressive behavior was measured by a self-report instrument developed by Koss and Oros [1982]. It assesses a continuum of sexual aggression including psychological pressure, physical coercion, attempted rape, and rape. Subjects responded to 10 descriptions of different levels of sexual coercion using a true-false format. An example of an item is “I have had sexual intercourse with a woman when she didn’t want to because I used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.)” Koss and Oros [1982] and Koss et al. [1987] presented data regarding the reliability and validity of this scale.

Attitudes Supporting Aggression Against Women. Burt [1980] theorized that the scales she developed measure certain attitudes that are widely accepted in Western culture but are particularly held by rapists and potential rapists. She argues that such attitudes play an important role in contributing to sexual aggression. In keeping with our previous research in this area [e.g., Malamuth and Check, 1981], we used three of her scales. These were the 19-item Rape Myth Acceptance scale, the 6-item Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence scale, and the 9-item Adversarial Sexual Beliefs scale. In the present research, for the purposes of creating a composite score these three scales were first standardized by transformation to Z-scores and then added together to form the composite. The Z-score transformation ensures that each scale is given equal weight in the composite.

Sexual Dominance. A widely expressed view is that the desire to dominate women sexually is an important motive for aggression against them [e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Groth, 1979]. The present study measured dominance as a motive for sex by using a subscale of an instrument developed by Nelson [1979]. This instrument asks respondents to indicate the degree to which various feelings and sensations are important to them as motivations for engaging in sexual acts. Nelson [1979] presents data concerning the reliability and validity of this scale, which yields scores on several functions. The dominance function refers to the degree to which feelings of control over one’s partner motivate sexuality. Examples of items are “I enjoy the feeling of having someone in my grasp” and “I enjoy the conquest.”

Hostility Toward Women. We also used the 30-item Hostility Toward Women scale [Check, 1985]; data concerning its reliability and validity were presented by Check [1985]. Examples of items are “I feel upset even by slight criticism by a woman” and “I rarely become suspicious with women who are more friendly than expected.”

Hostile Masculinity. In keeping with the work of Malamuth et al. [1991, 1993a], a composite score for the construct of Hostile Masculinity was created by summing the scores (after first converting them to Z-scores) for the following three measures: Dominance to Sex, Attitudes Accepting of Violence Against Women, and Hostility Toward Women.

Dependent Variable: Ratings of Domineeringness

Communicative styles have been studied by a variety of investigators as a means of analyzing characteristics of individuals and of relationships [e.g., Rogers and Farace, 1975]. Particularly relevant to the present focus is the work of Courtright et al. [1979]. They defined domineeringness as an aspect of individual behavior in which “one up” messages are transmitted. Such messages were further defined as moving toward “gaining control of the exchange.” They found that domineeringness was inversely related to

marital satisfaction. This operational definition of "domineeringness" has considerable similarity to the scoring of "power" motives in Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) stories and other written material [e.g., Crowley, 1990; Winter, 1988]. Such imagery is indexed by six basic forms of Power Imagery: 1) strong, forceful actions, such as attacks, insults, gaining the upper hand, 2) exerting control, 3) attempts to influence or argue, 4) giving help, advice, or support that is not explicitly solicited, 5) impressing others or the world at large, and 6) any action which arouses a strong (positive or negative) emotional reaction in another person.

In the present study, the concept of domineeringness was operationally defined in a similar manner to those used in the studies noted above, but was geared more specifically to the context of this study. A male and a female independently and "blindly" rated the transcripts of the audiotaped conversations. The raters were instructed to give a score ranging from 1 (not at all) to 8 (very high). This score was to be judged on the basis of their overall impression of the degree to which this person was a controlling, domineering individual. The raters were instructed that any of the following should be included as examples of such "domineering" behavior:

1. Denigrating or criticizing the other person or what they do, think, etc.
2. Bragging about oneself.
3. Verbally aggressing, arguing, or negatively challenging the other person.
4. Reminding the person that they could have used the aversive stimulus to hurt them.

RESULTS

Reliability

The two raters' classifications of subjects' domineeringness correlated highly, $r(67) = .76, P < .0001$. Separately examining the reliability of these ratings for the interactions with each of the confederates did not reveal significant differences. Based on these data, a composite score was created for each subject by summing the two raters' judgments.

Correlations With Predictors

Table I shows the correlations between 1) the composite conversation domineeringness scores (as determined by the "blind" raters) toward the male and female confederates, and 2) the levels of subjects' self-reported sexual aggression and Hostile Masculinity. The data show that ratings of domineeringness in the conversation with the male confederate were not significantly related to either sexual aggression or to Hostile Masculinity. In contrast, the comparable correlations with the female confederate were statistically significant and in the expected direction.

Table I also shows the correlations between the domineeringness ratings and the individual components used to create the Hostile Masculinity composite. Both Dominance to Sex and Attitudes Supporting Violence Against Women showed significant positive associations with domineeringness toward the female confederate but no correlation with domineeringness toward the male confederate.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with the specificity models, levels of self-reported sexual aggression and Hostile Masculinity predicted domineeringness in conversations with the female con-

TABLE I. Correlations Between the Predictors and Conversational Domineeringness Toward the Male and Female Confederates

Predictor*	Male confederate (n = 29)	Female confederate (n = 38)
Sexual Aggression	0.13	0.43***
Hostile Masculinity	-0.20	0.32**
Sexual Dominance	-0.12	0.39**
Hostility Toward Women	-0.13	0.09
Attitudes Supporting Aggression Against Women	-0.24	0.27*

*Sexual Aggression = Sexual Aggression scale; Hostile Masculinity = composite of Sexual Dominance, Hostility, and Attitudes; Sexual Dominance = dominance sexuality motive; Hostility Toward Women = Hostility Toward Women scale; Attitudes = Composite of three scales measuring attitudes supporting violence against women.

* $P < .10$.

** $P < .05$.

*** $P < .01$.

federate. In contrast, these variables did not predict domineeringness in conversations with the male confederate, and there was actually a non-significant tendency for Hostile Masculinity to be inversely associated with domineeringness toward the male.

Feminist theorists will likely not find this a surprising result. Feminists argue that men are uniquely socialized to dominate and be aggressive toward women in a manner that differs from their socialization vis-à-vis other men (like evolutionary psychologists, they propose target specificity). This may be the result of learning that women are "safer targets" due to their size and physical strength [Brownmiller, 1975]. But implicit in feminist theory is a domain-general model of mind. That is, feminists propose that the cause of aggression against women is a socially learned and culturally inculcated system of patriarchy. Presumably, this system could be neutralized or even reversed if social or cultural practices changed. This view posits a mind that is constructed of general, not specific, learning mechanisms, even though one can learn to aggress selectively against or be domineering toward specific targets.

Although the evolutionary psychology model also predicts the type of specificity found in this study, it differs from the feminist approach. This evolutionary model of mind suggests that it is not general mind mechanisms becoming focused on a particular target, but that there are also specific mind mechanisms operating here. For example, we do *not* expect from this approach that given the same developmental histories and in the same circumstances, women would be as likely as men to aggress sexually or even to have as domineering conversational styles in similar circumstances. However, the present data do not enable a test of the "mind specificity" vs. "target specificity" distinctions that are relevant to the evolutionary as compared to the feminist models.

We can speculate about the function of domineeringness in conversations. It is an intrinsically aggressive act that is meant to convey authority and dominance. Responses of the recipient should be important to the sender. If the recipient is unimpressed by and unresponsive to the domineering style denoted in conversation, that person is less likely to be viewed by the sender as a prospective candidate for subordination. For sexually aggressive men, this may be an important test. A woman who is resistant to and disdainful of dominance in conversation is more likely to impose costs to a sexually ag-

gressive man than is a woman who responds in a subordinate way. That is, domineeringness in conversational style may be one method by which sexually aggressive men test the vulnerability of their potential targets.

The nature of the developmental environment that produces hostile dominant men is not well known. There may be certain cultural [e.g., Gilmore, 1990; Sanday, 1981] and individual home [e.g., Lisak, 1991] environments that are particularly likely to activate men's motives to be dominant, such as those that define dominance as intrinsic to male identity. Hostile masculinity may be more likely to emerge in such environments in men who have feelings of social subordination toward other male competitors. That this might be true is suggested by our finding that hostile dominant men actually tended to be relatively subordinate with other men, as indicated by non-significant inverse correlations between Hostile Dominance and domineeringness in the face-to-face conversation with a man.

Domineeringness in conversations with women might at times reflect men's attempts to readjust their value in the eyes of others (e.g., women) and in their own eyes to match an idealized self-concept, such as what it means to be "a man" [e.g., Bradac and Street, 1990]. Particularly in the present study, where the subjects were mildly rejected and insulted by the confederates, asserting dominance via domineering acts may be an attempt to maintain or regain self-esteem. It may be particularly crucial to counteracting "gender ambiguity" or "dominance ambiguity" [Henley, 1977]. Future research should examine the extent to which pressures to maintain a stereotypical male role may be one of the factors contributing to Hostile Masculinity and its behavioral manifestations.

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