Drama, Drama, Drama

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Drama, Drama, Drama: Perceived Aggression of Gender

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of aggression for males and females related to physical and relational aggression. Physical aggression is more common in males and relational aggression is more common in females. These differences have promoted stereotypes of what appropriate actions are for men and women. Identifying that the inequalities individuals have when judging between the sexes is important in trying to create equality and fairness within society. One hundred ninety-three individuals were given one of four scenarios involving either physical or relational aggression between two men or two women. Results generally indicated that women were rated more harshly than men regardless of aggression type and that of the two types of aggression, relational was also rated more harshly. We conclude that the societal expectation that women are more passive and the emphasis on reputation within society were the influencing factors in these results.

Introduction

Gender roles are not easily filled (Condry & Ross, 1993). Boys are often encouraged to rough and tumble play while girls are1 discouraged from it (Gould, 1983). Girls are trained in more subtle rules and are encouraged to act like ladies. These role expectations are prominent in many areas of society, the media, the family, and the peer group. While it is not an absolute gendered practice (e.g. make up or play softball), research has shown it to be the norm (Zachar, Perrett & Frye, 2003). Are women equally agitated? Does this matter? If societal and social interaction are all forms of aggression typically associated with women, then it is interesting to ask what is gendered aggression in terms of physically aggressive behavior (Zachar, Perrett, & Frye, 2003). For the purposes of this study, we define as an expected or relational attack on another person. Physical aggression “physically harms another person” (Lips, 2004). This form of aggression specifically refers to the type of aggression experienced. Relational aggression “hurts or threatens another person by altering their emotional state or causing harm” (Lips, 2004). The form of aggression used in this study is an emotional one and is coming from a perspective of a victim in a relationship. It is the same scenario that was portrayed in many physical aggression studies (e.g. Zachar, Perrett, & Frye, 2003). With this in mind, we should look at the perceptions of physical aggression and relational aggression.


Results

Each of the four scenarios profiled a participant who witnessed another participant in a scenario involving aggression. The participant was tasked with determining the type of aggression in each scenario and to rate the perceived aggression in that scenario on a Likert scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is not aggressive, 2 is slightly aggressive, 3 is moderate aggressive, and 4 is aggressive (Lips 2004). The dependent variables were the respective response conditions. The independent variables were the level of aggression (high or low). All conditions were run in equal proportions with 5 participants randomly assigned to each condition.

**Scenario 1**

Natalie is at a party with her boyfriend Tom. Stacy, who knows Natalie is dating Tom, comes up and puts her arm around Tom and invites him to leave the party with her. Natalie walks over to Stacy and shows her to the ground.

**Scenario 2**

Nate is at a party with his girlfriend Olivia. Brain, who knows Nate is dating Olivia, comes up and puts his arm around Olivia and invites her to leave the party with him. Nate walks over to Brain and shows him to the ground.

**Scenario 3**

Nate is at a party with his boyfriend Tom. Brain, who knows Nate is dating Olivia, comes up and puts his arm around Tom and invites him to leave the party with him. To get back at Stacy, Natalie tells everyone that the party that Stacy has a serious drug problem.

**Scenario 4**

Nate is at a party with his girlfriend Olivia. Brain, who knows Nate is dating Olivia, comes up and puts his arm around Olivia and invites her to leave the party with him. To get back at Brain, Natalie tells everyone that the party that Brain has a serious drug problem.

**Discussion**

When asked “How aggressive was the reaction,” individual rated women as significantly more aggressive regardless of the type of aggression. This was contrary to our hypotheses. As an expectation this result could be due to the socialization of many types of physically engaged, not relational aggression, would be sexual or more aggressive. The idea that men or women be portrayed as more aggressive is in general may be a result of the societal expectation that women be more passive, less assertive, and less aggressive.

The findings of this study allow for the potential to understand how and why aggression is viewed differently for men and women. Research has shown that these differences are in part due to the socialization of men typically engaging in physical, not relational aggression, would be sexual or more aggressive. The idea that men or women be portrayed as more aggressive is in general may be a result of the societal expectation that women be more passive, less assertive, and less aggressive.

Perceived Aggression of Gender: Sex of Perpetrator Effects


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References


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