Myths About Male Sexuality
How Misperceptions Feed Misconduct

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What’s going on?

- **Cognitive biases**
  - **Attentional bias**
    - emotionally dominant stimuli
  - **Availability heuristic**
    - what is more available in memory
  - **Base rate neglect**
    - specific details over statistics
  - **Confirmation bias**
    - seek out info consistent with preconceptions
  - **Negativity bias**
    - more weight to neg than pos events
Behavior influenced by perception of how other members of our social group behave (Berkowitz, 2003; Haines, 1997)

- We misperceive, i.e., exaggerate, negative behaviors of peers
- If we think problematic behavior is typical, we are more likely to engage in that type of behavior
More on social norms theory

- **Pluralistic ignorance**
  - Belief you are in minority when in majority
    - e.g., an adolescent boy who is not sexually active may believe that most boys are, when they are not
  - Suppress own attitudes incorrectly assumed are in minority

- **False consensus**
  - Belief you are in majority when in minority
    - e.g., college high-risk drinkers may believe that most other college students engage in similar drinking patterns, when they do not
  - Engage in behavior unaware it is non-normative and maybe dangerous for self and/or others

Can we change it?

- Identify actual and misperceived norms
  - Baseline

- Intensive exposure to actual norm messages
  - Intervention

- Less exaggerated misperceptions
  - Reduction in stereotyping & behaviors
  - Predicted Outcome

- Two studies of undergraduate men
  - Others in room much higher on sexism than self
  - Others more comfortable with it than they reported
  - But...social norming intervention group eliminated that difference at three-week follow-up

The Mars-Venus Problem

- Three studies tested the notion of gender differences for behaviors women and men want and receive from romantic partners in a sample of 375 university students.
- Across three studies, only one stable and robust gender difference emerged:
  - Gender-role identity significantly accounted for half of variance for one stable gender difference.

**Measure**

- **Desired Loving Behaviors Scale**
  1. Scripting subscale ("I enjoy spending time with you" and "You mean so much to me")
  2. Relationship-Support subscale ("Create a feeling of security between us" and "Remember my birthday")
  3. Sex subscale ("Telling me what he/she likes in bed" and "Oral sex")
  4. Caring-Actions subscale ("Leave a rose on my pillow" and "Do my laundry every once in a while")

Results

• Study 1: Desired behaviors
  – Women reported greater desire on Relationship Support scale
  – No difference for caring actions, scripting, or sex
• Study 2: Actual behaviors
  – No significant gender differences for any subscale (i.e., women and men were similarly effective in providing what their romantic partners wanted, in order to feel loved)
• Study 3: Gender role identity, relationship satisfaction, and desired vs. received behaviors
  – Men reported largest discrepancy between amount of sex desired vs. received...but...so did women
  – Stronger scores on feminine gender role measure → more they desired relationship support

Based on research by Buss and Schmitt (1993), SST posits that men desire more short-term partners than women.

- Based on International Sexuality Description Project from 100 (mostly undergraduate) men and 100 women in each of 52 different countries (Schmitt & the ISDP team, 2003; Schmitt et al., 2004)

Challenges to the data

- Minority of global sample (25% of males and 5% of females), desired more than one partner in next 30 days (Schmitt et al., 2003)
  - What about the median and mode?
    - One partner for both men and women
- Using similar questions w/ American undergraduates, median and mode = one partner across all intervals for both men and women (McBurney et al., 2005; Miller & Fishkin, 1997)
- Pattern holds for actual (or reported) number of partners
  - Regardless of age group, most men have few partners (e.g., Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953; Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Offer et al., 2004; Smiler, 2008)

More challenges?

- Alexander and Fisher (2003) used “bogus pipeline” technique to facilitate more truthful responses
  - Some connected to (nonfunctional) polygraph machine and informed that untruthful responses would be detected
- As expected, participants not attached to polygraph displayed typical gender differences—men reported more sexual partners
- What about the polygraph condition?
  - Gender differences in reported sexual partners disappeared!

Men expected to prefer female partners who are fertile and attractive; women predicted to prefer resources and high status (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Buss et al., 2001; Meston & Buss, 2007)


- In set of 18 characteristics desired in a long-term mate
  - Men placed more value on physical attractiveness and less value on good financial prospects than did women
  - Men also tended to favor female chastity and women tended to favor male sociability

SST Revisited

• In 1977, men’s desire for physically attractive women ranked in bottom half of characteristics (still in 7th to 9th place in recent samples)
  – Women’s desire for a man with good financial prospects ranked 11th–13th for any period
• But...data indicated substantial similarity
• Top four criteria for MEN and WOMEN across time, place, and gender?
  1. Dependable character
  2. Emotional stability/maturity
  3. Pleasing disposition
  4. Mutual attraction/love

More on Attractiveness & Earning Potential

• When you change question from ideal to actual, gender differences disappear
  – Attractiveness and status equally important to men and women when considering actual dating partners (in initial speed-dating encounters and one month after those encounters (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008)
  – Although physical attractiveness, good earning prospects, and personable characteristics were all positively and significantly associated with romantic interest, data revealed no evidence of differences

• Gender differences in preferences also absent in judgments of current romantic partners (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011)

Gay & Lesbian Relationships

- More similar to heterosexual relationships than they are different (Kurdek, 2004; Peplau, Veniegas, & Campbell, 1996; Ridge & Feeney, 1998)
  - When differences occur, they align with traditional gender socialization (e.g., desire for sex higher in men)
  - Engage in more harmonious conflict interactions, a finding attributable to similar gender roles (Gottman et al., 2003)
Cheating...not the test kind

- Robust findings that males commit more acts of infidelity (intercourse)
  - Differences appear regardless of type of relationship and whether measured in terms of what individuals “want to” do or “have” done (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Schmitt, 2003)

- But...when definitions of cheating include non-intercourse behaviors such as kissing or dating, gender differences attenuated or disappear (Drigotas et al., 1999; Glass & Wright, 1985; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999)

Cheating on Campus

• Study 1: 561 undergrads in Pacific Northwest
  – Cheating defined as “any form of romantic and/or sexual involvement, short or long-term, including kissing, while the individual is in a relationship with another person.”
  – 28% reported cheating
    • No differences b/w men (24%) and women (31%)

• Study 2: 546 undergrads in Midwest
  – 43% reported cheating (50% of women and 39% of men)
    • 19% of women and 21% of men reporting intercourse cheating
    • Men averaged more episodes of cheating (6.6 vs. 2.7)

Men and masturbation

- 80-100% of college men and 45-90% of women have masturbated (Davidson & Moore, 1994; Kimmel, 2012; Leiblum, Rosen, Platt, Cross, & Black, 1993; Miller & Lief, 1976; Smith, Rosenthal, & Reichler, 1996)

- College men reported masturbating an average of 12 times per month, while women reported an average of 4.7 times per month (Pinkerton et al., 2002)
  - Normative attitudes about masturbation strongest predictor of freq for both men and women

Undergraduates used counters to record # of times they thought about sex, food, or sleep in 7-day period

Results
- Yes, men thought about sex modestly more frequently than women did (median of 19 vs 10 times per day, ranging from 1 to 388 for men and 1 to 140 for women)
- However, men also thought about both food (18 vs 15) and sleep (11 vs 8) significantly more often than women
- Best predictor was comfort with sexuality—not gender

Explanation?
- Researchers suggested that men are more attentive to their own needs than women are
- Consistent with objectification theory, which suggests that women’s focus on others’ perceptions reduces women’s attention to their own physical needs (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Prentice & Carranza, 2002)
Sexual Contact

• Nearly half (46%) of all high school students report ever having had sexual intercourse in 2009, a decline from 54% in 1991. Males are no more likely than females to report having had sex (46%).
• Among 18- and 19-year-olds, about one-quarter of men and women said they hadn't had sexual contact with another person, up from 17% of women and 22% of men in 2002 (NCHS, 2009)
Among couples in first two years of relationships, 67% of gay couples, 45% of heterosexual couples, and 33% of lesbian couples had sex three times a week or more. Drops off with time. For couples who had been together 10 years or longer, 11% of gay couples, 18% of heterosexual couples, and 1% of lesbian couples were having sex that often (Baumeister, 2001).
Orgasm

• 85% of straight and gay men, and 78% of bisexual men; 62% of straight women, 75% of lesbian women, and 58% of bisexual women (study of 2,850 non-married adults by Kinsey Institute in August 2014)

• Kimmel’s study of college students
Sexual Assault & Rape Culture

• “Rape-supportive cultural messages”
  1. Femiphobia and misogyny
     • E.g., apparel, music, magazines, etc.
  2. Rape myths
     • E.g., false accusations; men can’t be victims, etc.
  3. Performance and quantification over experience
     • E.g., locker room lies and bogus pipeline research; the term “hookup”
  4. Poor relational and sexual communication
     • E.g., sex is everywhere but in conversation (Axe Effect)
  5. Two exceptions of traditional masculinity and emotional control
     • Anger and sexual feelings considered to be out of the man’s control
     • Expectation/encouragement for men to act out
Pornography: Buyer Beware

- Those who watch highest amounts of porn:
  - Lower self-esteem, higher depression, more controlling
  - Bored with partner
  - Higher sexism and belief in rape myths
  - More erectile dysfunction

- Reinforces lies/stereotypes
  - Women = don’t say no; don’t get pregnant; live to please men
  - Men = soulless; entitled to use women; no empathy, respect, or love for their partner

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Recent research on gender differences in porn use and impact for hetero couples

User statistics from pornhub.com

• What can men do?
  – Stop accepting that being “a nice guy” is enough
  – Reflect on how some of your activities support problematic views
  – Challenge (or opt out of) hurtful humor
• What can women do?
  – Expect and ASK more of men in your life (with compassion for barriers)
  – Reflect on how some of your activities support problematic views
• What can we all do?
  – Learn/teach the language of consent
  – Watch our own language
  – Work with children (your own or others’)
  – Work with your tribe before strangers
  – Practice compassionate social media use
  – Give your time or money to the cause
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