

Masculine Discrepancy Stress, Teen Dating Violence, and Sexual Violence Perpetration Among Adolescent Boys

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Literature Summary

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Introduction:

“Discrepancy stress is a form of gender role stress that occurs when boys and men fail to live up to the traditional gender norms set by society. Failure to live up to these gender role expectations may precipitate this experience of psychological distress in some males which, in turn, may increase the risk to engage in physically and sexually violent behaviors as a means of demonstrating masculinity.”

A survey conducted in 13 middle and high schools in Michigan aimed to depict adolescent males’ perceptions of masculine discrepancy and the stress that goes along with it, as well as how that discrepancy corresponds with physical and sexual dating violence.

It was found that boys who worried about not being seen as masculine were more likely to engage in violent behaviors to prove their masculinity. These results urge prevention efforts to look more closely at gender socialization to reduce rates of violence amongst adolescents.

Background:

The rates of sexual and physical violence amongst adolescent girls are alarming and indicative of the violence that these girls will potentially face in adulthood. Through the lens of public health, identifying key risk and protective factors is crucial for moving ahead in prevention. A pivotal component of this is gender socialization which determines what male and female behavior is considered acceptable and favorable.

The gender norm experienced by boys includes pressure to be tough, strong, and dominant which are often associated with using force, aggression and violence to prove their masculinity. This norm is often identified as a risk factor for perpetration. When boys fear that they are not living up to this standard, it creates a sense of stress and need to validate their masculinity in ways that are out of character.

“We expected that boys who endorse self-perceptions of gender role discrepancy and experience distress about this discrepancy would (1) endorse greater likelihood of using physical violence in a hypothetical dating context; (2) report more historical instances of physical dating violence; and (3) report more historical instances of sexual violence within and outside dating relationships.”

Survey:

The survey asked questions broken into 4 categories: gender role discrepancy and discrepancy stress, likelihood of physical teen dating violence, physical teen dating violence, and sexual violence. For the second category, 'likelihood of physical teen dating violence,' this was measuring boys' perceptions of whether or not they would engage in rather than measuring a history of violence. This is because many of the respondents were too young to have an extensive dating history.

Conclusions:

In total, 71.4% of participants claimed to have had some sort of history of an intimate relationship with varying degrees of what that relationship entailed. Of that 71.4%, 31.5% reported having perpetrated at least one act of physical violence and 7.5% had endorsed perpetration of at least one act of sexual violence.

There was partial success in the hypotheses that gender norms correlate to perpetration, being that there wasn't a significant correlation in teens who had perpetrated violence but there was a correlation in teens who reported a higher likelihood of perpetrating violence in an intimate relationship. There was a significant relationship between gender role discrepancy, high discrepancy stress and general sexual violence.