Heterosexual and Homosexual Coercion, Sexual Orientation and Sexual Roles in Medical Students

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Rape has been conceptualized on a dimension of normal male behavior. The Koss and Oros (1982) study used a questionnaire that allowed men to respond only as sexual aggressors of women, and women only as victims of men. Medical students' responses to a modified questionnaire, in which both sexes reported being aggressors and/or victims, revealed that relatively comparable proportions of men and women were victims of coercive experiences: 35% of women and 30% of men experiencing constant physical attempts to have sexual activity. Forms of coercion not involving threat or use of force were more common, more exclusively heterosexual, and carried out by more equivalent percentages of men and women. 15% of women and 12% of men felt initially coerced into sexual activity but then enjoyed it. Threat or use of force to attempt to or to obtain intercourse were employed by 4% of men and 2% of women and experienced by 5% of both sexes. Half the male victims and female aggressors and a quarter of the male aggressors and female victims who reported such coercion stated it was homosexual. The ratio of homosexual/heterosexual feelings reported by male, but not female, students correlated with the degree of the homosexual coercion they both carried out and experienced. The degree of sexual coercion carried out by men and women correlated with their masculine sex role scores, suggesting, if the dimensional concept of rape is valid, that rape is on a continuum with masculine rather than male behaviors.

KEY WORDS: heterosexual coercion; homosexual coercion; male coercion; female coercion; sexual roles.

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INTRODUCTION

Koss and Oros (1982) pointed out that whereas most rape research had been based on a typological approach, several writers had recently suggested that a dimensional view of rape be adopted. They stated that "in this framework, rape represents an extreme behavior but one that is on a continuum with normal male behavior within the culture" (p. 455). This continuum was of coerced sexual activity ranging from that achieved by verbal coercion to that achieved by physical force (rape). Koss and Oros stated they developed the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) both to collect data to support this dimensional view and to reflect the large number of unreported incidences of rape and sexual aggression that occur in the United States. The SES was written in two parallel versions and consisted of 12 yes-no questions that referred to sexual acts associated with varying degrees of coercion, threat, and force. In one version women were asked if they had been the victims of the acts carried out by men; in the other, men were asked if they had been the aggressors of the acts with women. Koss and Oros justified this apparent gender bias on the basis that women represented virtually 100% of rape victims in U.S. Department of Justice victimization studies. Data concerning the reliability and validity of the SES were subsequently reported (Koss and Gidycz, 1985).

Kaufman et al. (1980) considered that the absence of rape of men in U.S. Department of Justice surveys was because men failed to report it, rather than its rarity or lack of significance. Groth and Burgess (1980) believed the impact of rape on male victims was similar to that on female victims and it remained one of the most unaddressed issues in our society. In the Los Angeles Epidemiological Catchment Area Project (Sorenson et al., 1987) 13.5% of the 1645 women and 7.2% of the 1400 men investigated reported having been sexually assaulted after the age of 15 years. Sexual assault was defined as any pressured or forced touching of the victim's or offender's sexual parts, or sexual intercourse. Seventy-five percent of the most recent assaults were carried out by men. The outcome was some form of intercourse in 50% of female and 39% of male victims. Muehlenhard and Cook (1988) investigated the incidence of unwanted sexual activity with or without pressure from the other person. In their sample of introductory psychology students more men (63% of 507) than women (46% of 486) reported having experienced unwanted sexual intercourse. Subjects were not questioned as to the sex of the partner, though as most of the men were heterosexual and most of the unwanted sex was nonviolent, the authors concluded that the majority of the men's partners were women. If this conclusion is soundly based it would also apply to the findings of Sorenson et al. (1987), who also did not report the sex of the assailants of the women and men but harm or threat of harm was employed in only 9% of the assaults of men. Struckman-Johnson (1988) pointed out the little information available concerning the incidence of the sexual coercion of men by female dating partners. She administered questionnaires to psychology students and reported that 22% of the 355 women and 16% of the 268 men reported being forced at least once to engage in sexual intercourse while on a date. The sex of the partner was not reported. Struckman-Johnson concluded that both men and women engage in a continuum of sexually exploitive behaviors. The failure of these studies to investigate or report the prevalence of homosexual as compared with heterosexual coercion and assault is of interest but was corrected in a recent study by Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1994) in which 204 male psychology students were asked to report any experiences of any pressured or forced touching of the victim's or offender's sexual parts, or sexual intercourse, since age 16. Thirty-four percent indicated they had: 24% from women, 4% from men, and 6% from both sexes.

In advancing a feminist perspective concerning sexually coercive acts, Herman (1990) stated that every major study found that the majority of offenders were male. This is clearly true of sexual offenses reported to authorities which usually involve the use of physical force by the offender (McConaghy, 1993). However the data from the few studies discussing investigating men as victims of coercion suggest that of the continuum of sexually coercive behaviors not necessarily involving the use of severe force, some may be carried out by a sufficient percentage of women to need to be taken into account in theories of the etiology of sexual coercion. The feminist perspective discussed by Herman was that rape was normative male behavior and rapists conformed to a socially encouraged perception of male sex-role expectations. The additional perspective investigated by Koss and Oros (1982) that rape was on a continuum with normal male behavior within the culture seems to require modification if a meaningful percentage of women carry out sexually coercive behaviors similar to those on the continuum Koss and Oros regarded as characterizing the normal male.

In an earlier study (McConaghy et al., 1993) data comparing the sexual coercive experiences of men and women as both aggressors and victims were obtained by modifying the yes-no questions of the SES (Koss and Oros, 1982). Men and women were asked if they had ever been victims and aggressors in regard to the sexually coercive acts investigated. In addition an attempt was made to determine the sex of the victims and aggressors by referring to them as "man/woman" in the individual items describing the forms of sexual coercion investigated, e.g.,

(Have you ever) Been in a situation where you became so sexually aroused that you could not stop yourself even though the man/woman didn't want to have sexual intercourse?

YES NO

The instruction at the top of the questionnaire requested the subjects to circle the sex of the person, that is, either or both "man" or "woman" as appropriate, in addition to circling Yes or No. Apart from these alterations the questions were identical with those in the SES (Koss and Oros, 1982).

The questionnaire was administered anonymously to 111 second-year medical students at the University of New South Wales. The students circled the Yes or No response as requested, but most omitted to circle the sex of the victim or aggressor. In answer to the question in the example above, 6% of the women and 11% of the men reported being sexually coercive: 13% of the men and 14% of the women answered affirmatively the parallel question of having been in situations where a man/woman became so sexually aroused that they felt it was useless to stop him/her even though they did not want to have sexual intercourse. From a quarter to the same percentage of women as men reported being aggressors in forms of coercion such as threatening and using physical force. It was therefore considered worthwhile to attempt to replicate these findings and in addition to further modify the SES to attempt to obtain information concerning the sex of the partners involved as aggressors and victims. It was considered likely that the reason most subjects in the previous study failed to identify the sex of their victim or aggressor was that the request to do so was in the instruction at the top of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered with a number of others and the majority of students probably did not read the instruction but proceeded immediately to answer the items by circling the Yes or No that followed them. In the present study the SES was further modified in that separate items were included for male and for female victims and aggressors, as summarized in Table I. To aid in interpreting the resulting data concerning heterosexual and homosexual coercion, the subjects' ratios of homosexual/heterosexual interest were also investigated.

The perspective that the sex roles of men and women can be both male and female was supported by findings with scales such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974) on which subjects obtain independent scores for Masculinity and Femininity. In the earlier study (McConaghy *et al.*, 1993) students' Masculinity scores on this inventory correlated with scores of their degree of sexual aggressiveness derived from the modified SES. To attempt

Table I. Number of Subjects Responding Affirmatively to the Modified Sexual Experience Survey Questions

		$Men \atop (n = 101)$		Women $(n = 81)$	
		n	%	n	%
1	Had sexual intercourse (s/i) with a woman when you both wanted to	31	31	3	4
2 3	Had s/i with a man when you both wanted to You initially felt coerced into sexual activity but then enjoyed	4 12	4 12	18 12	22 15
	it				
4 5	Woman misinterpreted the level of sexual intimacy you desired Man misinterpreted the level of sexual intimacy you desired	33 4	33 4	1 25	1 31
6	You became so sexually aroused could not stop yourself; woman did not want sexual intercourse	4	4	0	31
7	You became so sexually aroused could not stop yourself; man did not want sexual intercourse	2	2.	0	
8	Woman became so sexually aroused you felt it useless to stop her; you did not want sexual intercourse	17	17	1.	1
9	Man became so sexually aroused you felt it useless to stop	0		7	9
10	him; you did not want sexual intercourse Had s/i when woman did not really want to; you threatened	3	3	0	
11	to end relationship otherwise Had s/i when man did not really want to; you threatened to	0		0	
12	end relationship otherwise Had s/i when you did not really want to; woman threatened	2	2	0	
13	to end the relationship otherwise Had s/i when you did not really want to; man threatened to	2	2	1	1
14	end the relationship otherwise Had s/i when woman did not really want to; she felt	5	5	1	1
15	pressured by your continual arguments Had s/i when man did not really want to; he felt pressured	2	2	0	
16	by your continual arguments Had s/i when you did not really want to; you felt pressured	3	3	1	1
17	by woman's continual arguments Had s/i when you did not really want to; you felt pressured	2	. 2	3	4
18	by man's continual arguments Obtained s/i with a woman by saying things you did not	11	11	1	1
19	really mean Obtained s/i with a man by saying things you did not really	1	1	0	
20	mean Found out a woman had obtained s/i with you by saying	5	5	2	2
21	things she did not really mean Found out a man had obtained s/i with you by saying things	3	3	5	6
	he did not really mean				
22	You made constant physical attempts to have sexual activity with a woman	20	20	1	1
23	You made constant physical attempts to have sexual activity with a man	0		11	14

Table I. continued

		$Men \over (n = 101)$		Women $(n = 81)$	
		n	%	n	%
24	A woman made constant physical attempts to have sexual activity with you	26	26	3	4
25	A man made constant physical (phys) attempts to have sexual activity with you	4	4	25	31
26	You used some phys force (twist arm, hold down) to try to make a woman kiss or pet	4	4	1	1
27	You used some phys force (twist arm, hold down) to try to make a man kiss or pet	1	1	1	1
28	A woman used some phys force (twist arm, hold down) to try to make you kiss or pet	5	5	2	2
29	A man used some phys force (twist arm, hold down) to try to make you kiss or pet	2	2	11	14
30	You tried, failed to get s/i with a woman by threatening to use physical force	3	3	0	
31	You tried, failed to get s/i with a man by threatening to use physical force	0		0	
32	A woman tried, failed to get s/i with you by threatening to use physical force	1	1 .	0	
33	A man tried, failed to get s/i with you by threatening to use physical force	2	2	1	1
34	You used some physical force to get s/i with a woman but failed	3	3	1	1
35	You used some physical force to get s/i with a man but failed	1	1	1	1
36	A woman used some physical force to get s/i with you but failed	3	3	1	1
37	A man used some physical force to get s/i with you but failed	2	2	4	5
38	You had s/i with a woman by threatening to use physical force	1	1	0	
39	You had s/i with a man by threatening to use physical force	1	1	0	
40	Woman had s/i with you by threatening to use physical force	$\frac{1}{0}$	1	1 0	1
41 42	Man had s/i with you by threatening to use physical force You had s/i with a woman by using some physical force	1	1	0	
42	You had s/i with a man by using some physical force	0	1	0	
44	A woman had s/i with you by using some physical force	0		0	
45	A man had s/i with a woman by using some physical force	2	2	2	2
46	You obtained anal, oral i/c with a woman by using threats or physical force	1	1	0	2
47	You obtained anal, oral i/c with a man by using threats or physical force	1	1	0	
48	A woman obtained anal, oral i/c with you by using threats or physical force	1	1	0	
49	A man obtained anal, oral i/c with you by using threats or physical force	1	1	0	
50	Have you ever raped a woman?	0		0	
51	Have you ever raped a man?	ő		ŏ	
52	Have you been raped by a woman?	1	1	0	
53	Have you been raped by a man?	0		1	1

to replicate this finding, this inventory was also administered in the present study.

Additional items were added to the modified SES to investigate issues concerning sexual coercion raised in the recent literature. Christopher (1988) found the most common form of sexual coercion reported by female students was persistent physical attempts, a form not included in the original SES. Items were added to determine its prevalence in the present study. A major reason for investigating sexual coercion has been to obtain data for inclusion in rape prevention programs, an important component of which is changing men's behavior by challenging rape myths (Berkowitz, 1992; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Berkowitz cited the definition of a rape myth as "prejudice, stereotyped or false belief about rape, rape victims, and rapists" and gave as an example men's belief in the "token no" hypothesis, that no does not mean no. He did not refer to the finding of Muehlenhard and Hollabaugh (1988) that 39% of 610 female introductory psychology students reported they had indicated no and meant yes when with a male who wanted to engage in sexual intercourse; 69% reported saying no when they meant maybe. The issue does not seem to have been raised whether rape myths can be successfully challenged in rape prevention programs such as the all-male workshops discussed by Berkowitz if it is not acknowledged that under certain circumstances some of the myths reflect reality. If this is not done many of the men in the group will be under pressure to act as if they are accepting as mythical the behaviors they have encountered in their experience. It seems preferable to discuss the reality of their experience and decide how such situations of potential sexual coercion can best be negotiated between partners. Muehlenhard and Linton (1987), in an investigation of sexual aggression of women by men in dating situations, rejected as examples of sexual aggression situations in which the man persuaded the woman to engage in unwanted sexual activity and the woman eventually consented. Such situations were reported by 34 of 380 women and 34 of 368 men enrolled in introductory psychology classes. As this situation seems to be another rape myth, its prevalence in the continuum of sexual coercion was also investigated in the modified SES.

The items in the original SES and in the modified form used in the previous study were preceded by the phrase: "Have you ever." This left open the possibility that some of the experiences reported were forms of childhood sexual abuse or pedophilia. To avoid this, conforming to the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1993) definition of pedophilia, the items in the present modification were preceded by the phrase: "SINCE PUBERTY have you ever."

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 182 of the total of 195 second-year medical students of the University of New South Wales; 101 were men, mean age 19.9 years (SD = 2.2) and 81 were women, mean age 19.5 years (SD = 1.5). They were given the series of questionnaires to complete anonymously in private and return, having been told that the group's responses would be reported to them later in the year at a workshop on sexuality in the Human Behavior course. In tutorials that followed the return of the questionnaires, students were informed that the investigators did not agree with the implied differentiation in the SES between a number of sexually coercive acts and rape but that the response of previous subjects to such surveys indicated that many did; discussion of this and any other issues related to the study was encouraged.

Measures

Modified Sexual Experience Survey. The phrase SINCE PUBERTY have you ever: was followed by 53 items. Forty-eight were expanded from the 13 Yes-No items of the original SES to produce identical forms to be completed by men and women, asking whether the subject was an aggressor and/or a victim and whether the partner was a man and/or a woman. The items were otherwise identical with those in the original SES and are summarized in Table I as Items, 1, 2, 4-21, and 26-53.

Five additional items were added, one being:

3. Been in a situation where you initially felt coerced into sexual activity but then enjoyed it?

YES NO

The other 4 are summarized in Table I as Items 22-25, the first being:

22. Been in a situation where you made constant physical attempts to have sexual activity with a woman?

YES NO

In the original SES there was no attempt to develop scores for the degree of sexual coerciveness shown by individual males respondents. To investigate the possibility that such scores might be validly obtained, in the earlier study advantage was taken of the fact that in the questionnaire items are arranged in order of increasing severity of coercive and assaultive behaviors. To obtain an objective score quantifying this increasing severity of each subject's coercive behaviors, a Yes answer to the item equivalent to Items 6 and/or 7 of the current form was given a score of 1; to that equivalent to Items 10 and/or 11 a score of 2; to that equivalent to Items 14 and/or 15, a score of 3; and so on. The scores obtained in this way were added for each subject as a Sexual Aggression Score. Separate scores were obtained for Sexual Aggression against Females from Items 6, 10, 14, and so on, and for Sexual Aggression against Males from Items 7, 11, 15, and so on. Scores of Sexual Victimization from Females and from Males were similarly obtained for each subject from Items 8, 12, 16 and so on, and from Items 9, 13, 17, and so on, respectively.

Sex-Linked Behaviors Questionnaire. This questionnaire has been reported in full with evidence of its reliability and validity (McConaghy, 1988). As one item, subjects rate the degree to which they currently feel sexually attracted to members of the same as compared to those of the opposite sex on the following scale:

and other ratios intermediate between these extremes.

Bem Sex-Role Inventory. Subjects rate on this questionnaire how well each of 20 masculine, 20 feminine, and 20 neutral personality traits describe themselves. The masculine and feminine traits were those previously judged by undergraduates to be more desirable for one sex than for the other. It was shown to provide reliable and independent measures of Masculinity and Femininity (Bem, 1974).

RESULTS

The number and percentage of male and female students responding positively to the items of the modified SES are reported in Table I. In general comparable numbers of male and female medical students had similar experiences of being sexually coerced, including experiences involving the threat or use of force to attempt to or to obtain intercourse. The only marked discrepancy from this was that 16% of women but only 7% of men reported being in a situation where the partner used some degree of physical force (twisting their arm, holding them down, etc.) to try to make them engage in kissing or petting when they did not want to. More men (17%) than women (10%) reported experiencing their partners being so aroused they felt it was useless to stop the partners even though they did not want to have sexual intercourse. Consistent with Christopher's (1988) finding, constant physical attempts to have sexual activity was the most common form of sexual coercion experienced. Twenty-six percent of men and 31% of women were victims of this coercion with aggressors of the opposite sex; 4% of men and women were victims of this coercion with aggressors of the same sex.

Forms of coercion reported by victims which were predominantly heterosexual were the aggressors being so aroused the victims felt it was useless to stop them, the aggressors making constant physical attempts, and in the case of women victims, the aggressors using force to try and make them kiss or pet. About half of male and a quarter of female victims of the remaining forms of coercion including those involving threat or use of force to attempt to or to obtain sexual intercourse reported the aggressor was of the same sex.

The percentages of men and women who reported being sexually coercive in the present study were most comparable for the most common form of sexual coercion. Twenty percent of men and 15% of women reported making constant physical attempts to have sexual activity with a partner, usually of the opposite sex. Only up to 2% of women reported carrying out any of the other forms of coercion. Twelve percent of men reported obtaining sexual intercourse by saying things they did not mean. Up to 4% of men and 2% of women reported threatening or using force to attempt to or to obtain intercourse. Approximately a quarter of the men and half the women who reported using one of these forms of coercion stated their victims were of the same sex. The percentage of subjects who reported carrying out any of the forms of homosexual coercion in comparison to those experiencing them was about a half in the case of both women and men.

Twenty-two percent of the male and 23% of the female medical students reported current awareness of some degree of sexual attraction to members of the same sex. Eight-two percent of the males and 65% of the females with this awareness reported predominant attraction to members of the opposite sex. The ratio of homosexual/heterosexual feelings currently experienced by the male students correlated significantly with their Sexual Aggression against Males scores (r = .24, p < 0.05) but not their Sexual

Aggression against Females scores (r=-.10). The ratio of these feelings experienced by the men also correlated significantly with their Sexual Victimization by Males scores (r=.50, p<0.01) but not with their Sexual Victimization by Females scores (r=.16). The ratio of homosexual/heterosexual feelings currently experienced by the female students did not correlate significantly with either their sexual coercion of or their sexual victimization by male or female. The individual students' Sexual Aggression scores correlated significantly with their Masculinity scores (r=.27, p<0.05) for males, and r=.20, p=0.05 for females).

DISCUSSION

As the findings of the present study are with medical students they cannot be regarded as representative of sexual coercion in the total population. The percentage of female students in the present study who reported experiencing forms of sexual coercion by men was almost invariably less than half the equivalent percentage of Kent State female university students (Koss and Oros, 1982). A similar trend was evident in the previous study (McConaghy et al., 1993). Also in both studies of medical students, in general a somewhat lower percentage of men reported carrying out sexually coercive acts particularly those not involving threat or use of force, compared to the Kent State men. In the present study, 31% of the male and 22% of the female students reported having had sexual intercourse with a person of the opposite sex when both wanted to; these percentages are in the same range as the figures in the previous study (McConaghy et al., 1993) and are much below the equivalent figures for the Kent State students of 81 and 75%, respectively. Though the Kent State students had a mean age of 21 years (that for male and female was not given), and the mean ages of the students in the present study were 19.9 years for the men and 19.5 years for the women, it is probable this age difference was not the major factor determining the greater number of students with experience of consenting sexual intercourse in Kent State university. In the United States 60% of white males and females have had intercourse by the ages of 18 and 19 years, respectively (Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg, 1989). Gavey (1991) reported the responses of 347 female and 176 male students at Auckland University, New Zealand, who made up 90% of introductory psychology students requested to complete an unmodified form of the SES. The mean age of the women was 22 years, and of the men 20.5 years; 63% of the men and 67% of the women reported having had mutually consenting sexual intercourse. It seems that second-year medical students at the University of New South Wales are less sexually experienced than the students at Kent State university and the psychology students investigated by Gavey. Gavey reported that the percentage of women psychology students reporting sexual coercion corresponded highly with the equivalent percentage in the data obtained by Koss and her colleagues, whereas the percentage of men acknowledging carrying out sexual coercion was much lower than the equivalent percentage in that data. The lower percentage of women who reported having been sexually coerced in the present study compared to the Kent State and New Zealand students may reflect their relative lack of sexual experience.

The finding of the present study that comparable numbers of male and female medical students had similar experiences of being sexually coerced cannot of course be generalized to other groups. However 7.2% of a representative community sample of men reported having been sexually assaulted and 25% of the most recent assaults were carried out by women (Sorenson et al., 1987), indicating that a meaningful percentage of men are victims and women are aggressors of forceful sexual coercion. It appears necessary that future research aimed at understanding sexual coercion as dimensional should follow the methodology of the present study and investigate the experiences of both men and women as victims and as aggressors.

The significant correlations (r = .5) found in the present study between male subjects' reported ratio of homosexual to heterosexual feelings and their being sexually coerced by men is consistent with the finding of Duncan (1990) that gay students were two to three times as likely to report having sex against their will as their heterosexual colleagues. Duncan reported a similar finding with lesbian students. No relationship between experiencing sexual coercion and ratio of homosexual to heterosexual feelings was found in the female medical students. The relationships found to be significant in the present study (r = .24, p < 0.05) between men's ratio of homosexual to heterosexual feelings and their sexual coercion of men does not appear to have been investigated previously.

The finding that approximately half the male victims and female aggressors and a quarter of the male aggressors and female victims who reported involvement in coercion involving threat or use of force to attempt to or obtain intercourse stated the partner was of the same sex was unexpected. Homosexual coercion has rarely been investigated, being excluded from investigation in studies using the unmodified SES. Like the other findings it requires replication in a representative community sample to establish its significance, but indicates that future studies of the dimensional theory of rape investigate not only women and men as both aggressors and victims but also the sex of the aggressors in relation to that of the victims.

The fact that 12% of the men and 15% of the women in the relatively sexually inexperienced sample of students in the present study reported

being in situations where they initially felt coerced into sexual activity but then enjoyed it suggests some sexually coercive men and women could observe this response in some of their victims. This possibility needs to be investigated and discussed in rape prevention programs aimed at altering the behavior of coercive subjects, rather than simply labeling the response a rape myth.

The significant Spearman's correlations between individual subjects' Sexual Coercion and Sex-Role Masculinity scores in both men (r=.27) and women (r=.20) were comparable with those found in McConaghy *et al.* (1993), which were r=.22 and .26, respectively. If these relationships are replicated in studies of representative community samples using the dimensional measure of sexual coercion, the theory that rape is on a continuum with normal male behavior requires modification. Rape would need to be regarded as on a continuum with masculine behavior in both men and women. The finding that half the women but only a quarter of men who reported threatening or using forceful coercion to obtain intercourse chose victims of the same sex suggests that the physical strength of the aggressor in relation to that of the victim may be important along with his or her motivation in determining the occurrence and form of sexual coercion.

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