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Influence of gender stereotypes on the attributions of gravity, responsibility and sanction



INTRODUCTION

If male accused are more subject to be convicted and to receive longer sentences than women (Mazzella & Feingold, 1994), it is more difficult for male victims to be taken into consideration by the authorities (Whatley & Riggio, 1993). **According to the INSEE (2017), women represent 10% of those convicted but receive half the imprisonment.** Their presence in a court appears to be abnormal because they do not correspond to the typical offender profile (Wilczynski, 1997). **Women have always been seen, in the collective unconscious, as more victims than responsible** (Parent, 2012).

Ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), namely benevolent or hostile, would reinforce the Belief of Just World (Lerner, 1980). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) have suggested that **hostile sexist people are more likely to blame the rape victim and legitimize violence.** Expósito and Herrera (2009) attributes **benevolent sexism to a greater perceived seriousness**, considering the victim as fragile and to be protected (Chapleau, Oswald & Russel, 2008).

OBJECTIVES

What could be the influence of the hypothetical sexism of jurors on their attributions of severity, responsibility and sanction?

- We postulated that :

- Benevolent sexist attitudes would predict greater perceived gravity and heavier sanctions towards the perpetrator, especially when he is male (H1).
- Hostile sexist attitudes would predict greater responsibility to victims, especially feminine (H2).

METHOD

- **Participants:**

- 160 women and 160 men ($M_{age} = 35,43$; $SD_{age} = 15,92$)

- **Design:**

- Between-subjects design with participant's ambivalent sexism * participant's gender * perpetrator's gender * victim's gender * context (marital or professional)

- **Material:**

- **Aggression scenario** (perpetrator's gender * victim's gender * context)

Box 1: example of a scenario

"Louis is in divorce proceedings. While he was coming home for the separation as to property, his ex-wife Marie began to insult him and beat him. Louis will be prescribed 14 days of Temporary Incapacity for Work (ITT) for multiple wounds and fractures."

- **Four questions with an open ten-centimetre scale for judgements**

Box 2: example of a question with a suggested answer on a ten-centimeter scale

1) According to you, this act is:
Not at all serious _____ Totally serious

- **French version of the « Ambivalent Sexism Inventory » (ASI)** (Glick & Fiske, 1996) by Dardenne, Delacollette, Grégoire & Lecocq (2006)
- Gender, age and profession → control variables

- **Measures:**

- Judgement of act's seriousness, perpetrator's responsibility, of victim's responsibility and perpetrator's sanction

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RESULTS

- **Perception of the act severity**

- Aggressions are perceived to be more serious by women [$F(1, 304) = 8,0390$; $p < .05$].
- More seriousness is attributed to the facts by participants who have a low level benevolent sexism [$F(1, 304) = 16,86$; $p < .05$] or a low hostile sexism [$F(1, 304) = 4,0994$; $p < .05$].

- **Attribution of responsibility to the perpetrator**

- More responsibility is attributed to the aggressor by those who have a low level of benevolent sexism [$F(1, 304) = 20,350$; $p < .05$] or a low hostile sexism [$F(1, 304) = 10,434$; $p < .05$].
- The responsibility of the female abuser is lower when the respondent is a woman with a high level of hostile sexism and when the victim is also a woman (figure 1).

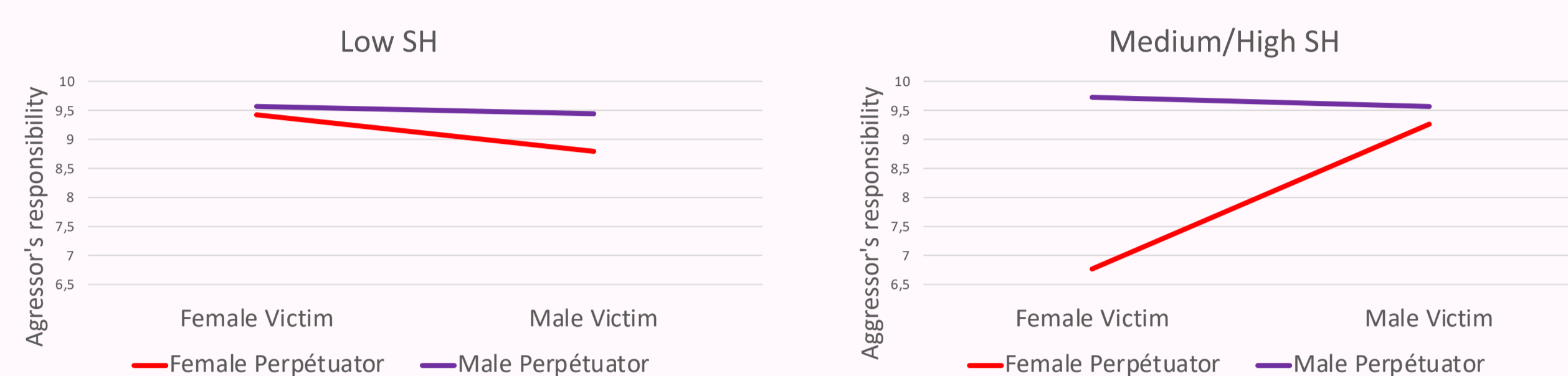


Figure 1: Interaction between the respondent's sex, that of the perpetrator, of the victim and the level of hostile sexism of the female respondent on the responsibility attributed to the perpetrator

- **Attribution of responsibility to the victim**

- A male victim is considered more responsible [$F(1, 304) = 14,136$; $p < .05$].
- Participants with a high hostile sexism blame the victim more [$F(1, 304) = 7,0666$; $p < .05$].
- Female victims are judged more responsible by respondents with a high level of benevolent sexism when the perpetrator is a female (figure 2).
- Male victims are considered more responsible by respondents with low levels of benevolent sexism who had to judge an assault committed by a woman (figure 2).



Figure 2: Interaction between the aggressor's sex, that of the victim and the level of benevolent sexism of the respondents on the attribution of responsibility to the victim

- **Attribution of sanction to the abuser**

- The less benevolent the participants are, [$F(1, 304) = 8,838$; $p < .05$] or when the aggressor is a man [$F(1, 304) = 18,615$; $p < .05$] or when the context is public [$F(1, 304) = 5,6866$; $p < .05$], the more punishment they have given to the abuser.
- Nevertheless, a high level of benevolent sexism is a predictor of greater punishment attributed to a male perpetrator [$F(1, 304) = 24,5046$; $p < .05$].
- Respondents with high benevolent sexism are more severe, in the case of a female victim, towards male perpetrators rather than female [$F(1,34) = 11,15$; $p < .05$].

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Contrary to our expectations (H1), the benevolent sexist participants show more leniency towards the aggressor (Soto-Quevedo, 2012) and blame the male victims. Conversely, the more they are hostile sexists, the more severe they are with the perpetrator and disempower the victim, except when the latter is a man (Viki & Abrams, 2002) which validates H2.

We cautiously concluded that sexism predicts victimization of women and penalization of men, but more researches are needed.

Indeed, the ASI measures sexism against women when half of the perpetrators and victims were men. In addition, the ASI items embody a vision that has not necessarily taken into account the gradual, albeit slow, evolution of mentalities. Some proposals are no longer socially acceptable as they once were.

We identified other limitations such as the inadequacy of the ten-centimetre scale or **the need to interview a panel of justice professionals who would participate in the maintenance of sexist speeches and behaviours** (Léonard & Soubiran, 2011).

→ Our study could serve as a basis and argument for raising the awareness of citizen jurors before the opening of the trial as well as continuing formation for legal professionals.

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