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Shame, Masculine Identity Threat, and Acceptance of Emotions Predicting Sexual Aggression: An Application of the I3 Model

Carolyn Brennan

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PREDICTING SEXUAL AGGRESSION: AN APPLICATION OF THE I^3 MODEL

by

CAROLYN L. BRENNAN

Under the Direction of Kevin M. Swartout, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Framed in the I^3 model of aggression, which states that aggression results from the combination of predisposition toward aggression, an instigation, and inhibiting factors, the current dissertation explored the relationships among shame proneness, masculine identity threat, and emotional acceptance predicting sexual aggression. I hypothesized that men who were prone to shame (impelling factor) and were less accepting of emotions (inhibiting factor) would be more likely to engage in sexually aggressive responding following a threat to their masculinity (instigation). Participants were 299 men recruited from a university research pool and Amazon Mechanical Turk. This study used a web-based analogue of sexual aggression, in which participants were led to believe they were interacting with a fictional partner who dislikes sexual content in media. After completing self-report measures and receiving fictional feedback that

their responses were typical of women (masculinity threat) or typical of men (no threat), participants were asked to choose between a sexually explicit video and a neutral video to send to their partner, and they selected the number of seconds that their fictional partner would watch the video. The choice to send sexual content to an unwilling partner was considered sexually aggressive responding. The results indicated that men who were less accepting of emotions and exposed to the masculinity threat chose a longer duration of the sexually explicit video for their partner to watch. Contrary to hypotheses, shame proneness did not increase the likelihood of sexual aggression or moderate the effect of the masculinity threat on sexual aggression. Furthermore, the hypothesized three-way interaction in which men who were prone to shame, reported low acceptance of emotions, and exposed to the masculinity threat would be more sexually aggressive was not supported. Further exploratory analyses revealed that proneness to guilt, but not shame protected against sexual aggression, and a tendency to externalize blame significantly interacted with the masculinity threat to predict sexual aggression. Although the original hypotheses were only partially supported, the findings indicate that the way in which emotions are processed (e.g., accepting the emotion or externalizing blame) and masculinity threats play a role in sexual aggression. Implications and future directions are discussed.

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CAROLYN L. BRENNAN

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CAROLYN L. BRENNAN

Committee Chair: Kevin Swartout

Committee: Sarah Cook

Dominic Parrott

Erin Tone

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my friends and family who provided unwavering support throughout this process.

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1 INTRODUCTION

An estimated 44% of women experience some form of sexual aggression in their lifetime, and sexual victimization has been associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes (Basile, Smith, Breiding, Black, & Mahendra, 2014). As most instances of sexual aggression are cases of men perpetrating against women (Basile et al., 2014), researchers and practitioners have sought to understand the problematic gender norms that contribute to sexual aggression and other forms of gender-based violence. For example, masculine gender role stress, which refers to distress regarding how one compares to an ideal masculine standard, has been used to explain men's aggressive behavior toward women (for a review, see Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015). Furthermore, the link between masculine gender role norms and aggression may be related to deficits in emotion regulation, including difficulties accepting negative emotions (Cohn, Jakupcak, Seiber, Hildebrandt, & Zeichner, 2010; Jakupcak, 2003; McDermott, Naylor, McKelvey, & Kantra, 2017). In particular, efforts to avoid experiences of shame, including shame associated with masculine gender role stress, may contribute to aggression (Gebhard, Cattaneo, Tangney, Hardgrove, & Shore, 2018). Nevertheless, few studies have examined the role of masculine gender role stress, shame, and acceptance of emotions on sexual aggression. Consequently, efforts to prevent sexual aggression by challenging gender norms may be hindered by inattention to emotional experiences that contribute to or interact with masculine gender role stress to predict sexual aggression. The current dissertation addresses this gap in the literature by examining the effects of shame proneness, emotional acceptance, and masculinity threats on sexual aggression.

Models of sexual aggression have long theorized a connection between men's hostile attitudes toward women and insecurity or low self-esteem (Burt, 1980; Malamuth, Linz, Heavey,

Barnes, & Acker, 1995). Burt (1980) hypothesized that adherence to rape myths, which are

inaccurate cultural beliefs about rape that tend to place blame on the victim, and other cultural

norms that contribute to gender-based violence may be a defensive reaction among men who are

less secure in themselves. Likewise, Malamuth and colleagues' (1995) confluence model of

sexual aggression proposed that one of the pathways that gives rise to sexual aggression, the

"hostile masculinity" pathway, derives from exposure to cultural norms that are permissive of

violence against women and insecurity or over-sensitivity that leads to defensive and hostile

behavior toward women. (Malamuth et al., 1995). Shame and self-esteem are conceptually

linked, as both relate to negative self-evaluation, and shame proneness has been found to predict

low self-esteem (Velotti, Garofalo, Bottazzi, Caretti, 2017).

Despite increased attention to the relationship between shame proneness and aggression

(see Velotti, Elison, & Garofalo, 2014, for a review), little is known about how shame proneness

intersects with masculine gender role stress to predict sexual aggression. The current dissertation

addresses this gap in the literature by examining whether shame proneness and lack of

acceptance of emotions affect the likelihood that men respond to a situation that is threatening to

their masculinity using sexually aggressive behavior. Given the guiding questions of the current

dissertation, which examines the factors that interact with a masculinity threat to predict SA

perpetration against women, the focus of the proposed dissertation is specifically on male to

female SA perpetration.

1.1 I^3 Model of Aggression

The current dissertation fits within the I^3 theory of aggression (Finkel, 2007; Finkel et al.,

2012). As a metatheory of aggression, I^3 theory provides a broad framework for understanding

the causal mechanisms that contribute to a wide range of aggressive behaviors. In this way, the I^3

model sets up a singular framework to encompass the wide array of risk and protective factors that have been identified by aggression researchers. According to this model, the decision to act aggressively is influenced by three general factors: disposition or "impelling" factors, provocation or "instigation", and inhibiting influences (or lack thereof; Finkel et al., 2012). A person will act aggressively if factors that impel him or her to violence outweigh the factors that inhibit a violence response (Finkel, 2007). Additionally, the strength of the factors that impel him or her to violence can translate to the severity of the aggression (Finkel, 2007). For example, greater dispositional anger is associated with more severe intimate partner violence perpetration (Norlander & Eckhardt, 2005).

The premise of the I^3 model of aggression is that those with a predisposition to aggressive behavior are likely to act aggressively in situations with provocation and weak internal or external inhibiting factors. This combination of high impellance, an instigation, and low inhibition is referred to as "Perfect Storm Theory" (Finkel & Hall, 2018). Examples of impelling factors include high trait anger, childhood history of witnessing or experiencing violence, hormone imbalance, and attitudes that are accepting of aggression (Li, Nie, Boardley, Dou, & Situ, 2015; Finkel, 2007). Instigators are typically distressing situations, such as painful noise blasts or an argument with a romantic partner (Sherrill, Magliano, Rosenbaum, Bell, & Wallace, 2016; Watkins, DiLillo, Hoffman, & Templin, 2015). Factors that have an inhibiting or disinhibiting effect can include perceived social disapproval of aggression, relationship commitment, self-control, and substance use (Finkel, 2007; Finkel et al., 2012; Slotter et al., 2012). I^3 as a metatheory of aggression has been used to explain processes involved in aggression toward intimate partners or strangers (Finkel et al., 2012; Li et al., 2015; Slotter et al., 2012). The

proposed dissertation extends the field of I[3] research by applying this framework to the sexual aggression literature as well.

1.2 Impelling Factor: Proneness to Shame

The relationships among shame, guilt, and aggression has been studied extensively. While guilt and shame are closely related, and the two terms are often used interchangeably in everyday language, the two constructs have been found to influence aggression in opposing directions. Guilt—defined as a negative evaluation of one's actions without damage to one's self-concept—is considered more adaptive than shame and motivates pro-social behavior (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). For example, guilt, but not shame is associated with forgiveness seeking (Riek, Root Luna, & Schnabelrauch, 2014). In contrast, shame involves a more global negative self-appraisal (Lewis, 1971; Tangney, 1995; Tangney et al., 2007), rooted in the perception that others view the individual negatively (Velotti et al., 2014). As such, shame is thought to involve the perception that one falls short of some socially prescribed standard (Lewis, 1971; Nathanson, 1993). This definition of shame is relevant to the proposed study, which aims to look at shame proneness and the perception that one falls short of masculine ideals in relation to sexual aggression.

Several studies with diverse populations have found that people who are prone to experiencing shame are more likely to perpetrate physical, verbal, and sexual aggression (Harper, Austin, Cercone, & Arias, 2005; Hosser, Windzio & Greve, 2008; Hundt & Holohan, 2012; Kivisto, Kivisto, Moore, & Rhatigan, 2011). Furthermore, shame has been found to mediate the relationship between certain psychiatric disorders and aggression. Most of the empirical findings on psychopathology, shame, and aggression, focus on patients with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Crocker, Haller, Norman, & Angkaw, 2016; Hundt &

Holohan, 2012; Schoenleber, Sippel, Jakupcak, & Tull, 2014; Sippel & Marshall, 2011). For example, in a study of combat veterans seeking treatment for PTSD, shame proneness emerged as the strongest predictor of intimate partner violence, over PTSD severity, depression, or guilt (Hundt & Holohan, 2012). In a civilian sample of patients with PTSD, biased processing of shame related words on a Stroop Task mediated the relationship between PTSD severity and IPV (Sippel & Marshall, 2011). Furthermore, Schoenleber and Berenbaum (2012a) have proposed that shame mediates the relationship between personality disorders and aggressive behavior.

Because shame is characterized by intense self-focus, with attention to one's own shortcomings, it is associated with lower empathy for others, which may increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Additionally, shame is believed to relate to aggression because it activates a defensive process (Shanahan, Jones, & Thomas-Peter, 2011; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996). Specifically, people prone to shame find the experience especially aversive and may try to protect themselves from this experience by externalizing blame or by converting shame into anger (Schoenleber & Berenbaum, 2012a; Tangney & Dearing, 2002), which may then lead to aggressive behavior. Consequently, efforts to avoid shame by externalizing blame have been found to be more closely linked to aggression than the experience of shame itself (Stuewig, Tangney, Heigel, Harty, & McCloskey, 2010; Tangney, Stuewig, & Martinez, 2014). For men in particular, aggression is considered a socially acceptable response to shame (Gebhard et al., 2018)

Nathanson (1992) outlined a model of four coping strategies for shame: attacking the self (e.g., internalization, self-harm), attacking the other (e.g., aggression, externalizing blame), social withdrawal, and emotional avoidance. Those who cope with shame by externalizing blame

or becoming angry may be more likely to perpetrate aggression. For example, in a longitudinal study with incarcerated offenders convicted of a felony (violent and non-violent), shame proneness predicted recidivism indirectly through externalizing blame (Tangney et al., 2014). Likewise, externalizing blame has been found to mediate the relationship between shame proneness and aggression among college students and adolescents (Stuewig et al., 2010).

Additionally, prior research has found that shame proneness predicts anger and maladaptive responses to anger (Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996), and anger has been found to mediate the relationship between shame and psychological abuse (Harper et al., 2005). However, there is evidence that not all forms of anger are related to shame proneness. Rather, shame proneness is associated specifically with a tendency to become angry in response to criticism (Hejdenberg & Andrews, 2011). Aggression in response to real or perceived criticism has been identified in patients with borderline personality disorder, which is in part characterized by frequent experiences of shame (Schoenleber & Berenbaum, 2012b; Scott et al., 2017). Scott and colleagues (2017) found that perceived rejection predicted aggression in patients with borderline personality disorder indirectly via anger. This finding is particularly relevant for the proposed dissertation, which examines responses to a masculine identity threat, a situation that may be interpreted as a form of criticism.

As indicated by theory and empirical findings reviewed above, the link between shame and aggression appears to derive in part from rejection of the experience of shame. That is, an inability or unwillingness to tolerate shame leads one to externalize blame and express anger toward others, which may then contribute to aggression. Therefore, shame proneness in itself may not necessarily lead to aggression, and attention should instead be drawn to maladaptive coping or avoidance of shame. Both shame proneness and nonacceptance of shame are

predisposing traits or impelling factors, which will not necessarily result in aggression if there is no instigator, such as perceived rejection or criticism, or if there are sufficient resources to inhibit aggressive impulses.

1.2.1 *Shame and sexual aggression.*

Despite the vast literature on shame proneness and physical or psychological aggression, few studies have examined sexual aggression as an outcome variable. Therefore, it is not clear whether findings that connect shame and aggression through emotional avoidance or maladaptive coping would apply to sexual aggression as well. Nevertheless, a study on the relationship between antisociality and intimate partner violence found that antisocial personality traits were related to physical, psychological, and sexual aggression, but only for men high in shame proneness (Kivisto et al., 2011). This finding supports Schoenleber and Berembaum's (2012a) assertion that inappropriate regulation of shame contributes to aggressive behavior associated with personality disorders. Furthermore, Kivisto et al. (2012) found a main effect of shame proneness on sexual and psychological aggression after controlling for guilt suggesting that the relationship between shame proneness and aggression may also generalize to sexual aggression.

Further research is needed to understand the relationship between shame proneness, and sexual aggression, and if this relationship is influenced by emotion regulation abilities, specifically nonacceptance of emotions. There is some qualitative evidence from retrospective perpetrator narratives that the experience of shame following sexual aggression is associated with blame externalization, including the perpetrators' tendency to highlight their own intoxication at the time of the assault and their confusion regarding whether consent was given (Brennan et al., 2016). As sexual aggression presumably occurs following some form of rejection

by the victim (Burgess, Burgess, & Ressler, 2006), those prone to experience shame may be more sensitive to rejection of sexual advances and more likely to respond with sexual aggression.

1.3   Instigating Factor: Masculine Gender Role Threat

Culturally bound norms that prescribe social roles for men and women have long been thought to influence sexual aggression and violence against women generally (Baron & Straus, 1987; Brannon, 1976; Burt 1980; Martin, Vieraitis, & Britto, 2006; Murnen, Wright & Kaluzny, 2002). Cultural schemas regarding gender role norms associate masculinity with demonstrations of dominance, and femininity with submissiveness (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Furthermore, within most Western cultures, these cultural gender role norms for men place value on toughness, anti-femininity, and achievement or status (Brannon, 1976; Thompson & Pleck, 1986). These components of masculine gender norms have been tied to violence against women. For example, adherence to the norms of anti-femininity and sexual dominance contribute to sexual aggression (Smith, Parrott, Swartout, & Tharp, 2015).

In addition to norms of physical toughness, masculine gender role norms promote emotional toughness and discourage men's expressions of vulnerable emotions (O'Neil, 2008; Tager, Good, & Brammer, 2010; Thompson & Pleck, 1986). The restriction of emotional expression may eventually cause some men to become less aware of their emotional states (Levant & Pollack, 1995; Wong, Pituch, & Rochlen, 2006), making it difficult to appropriately regulate emotions. This may in turn contribute to aggressive behavior. For example, one study found that college men who report high levels of restricted emotionality are more accepting of partner physical and sexual violence (McDermott, Naylor, McKelvey, & Kantra, 2017). This is consistent with Jakupcak's (2003) findings that fear of emotion partially mediates the relationship between masculine gender role stress and self-reported intimate partner violence.

Not only do gender norms that value toughness and discourage emotional expression contribute to violence against women, but perceived failure to measure up to masculine norms has also been associated with violence, anger, and anxiety (Copenhaver, Lash, & Eisler, 2000; Jakupcak, 2003; Eisler, Skidmore, & Ward, 1988). Masculine gender role stress can occur when men who adhere strongly to socially constructed norms of masculinity judge themselves to fall short of these norms (Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015). Pleck (1995) used the term "discrepancy strain" to describe men's perception of not meeting idealized masculine standards and argued that discrepancy strain could lead to low self-esteem and other negative psychological outcomes. Masculine gender role stress has been associated with IPV perpetration and has been used to explain the relationship between masculine gender role norms and violence (Jakupcak, Lisak, & Roemer, 2002). For example, men who strongly adhere to masculine gender role norms have higher rates of IPV perpetration only when they also report high levels of masculine gender role stress (Jakupcak et al., 2003). Additionally, masculine gender role stress has been found to mediate the relationship between adherence to masculine gender role norms and hostility toward women (Gallagher & Parrott, 2011), which is predictive of sexual aggression (e.g., Malamuth et al., 1995).

Reactivity in response to masculinity threats has also been investigated in relation to the construct of "precarious manhood." According to the idea of precarious manhood, cultural norms of masculinity dictate that manhood is something to be performed or achieved, rather than a natural consequence of being male. Therefore, this status can be easily threatened (Bosson & Vandello, 2011). For example, compared to women, men who receive false feedback that they performed poorly on a task compared to others of their gender are more likely to experience anxiety (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008).

For those who perceive a threat to their masculinity, aggression can serve to affirm or restore one's "manhood," and aggression can even be seen as an expected response to someone threatening this status (Weaver, Vandello, Bosson, & Burnaford, 2010). Cultural norms of masculinity are believed to promote or sanction aggression, in part because aggression is viewed as a status-protecting action (Vandello et al., 2008). When college men are given scenarios in which a man acts aggressively when his masculinity is questioned, the behavior is explained by placing responsibility on external factors, implying that his aggression was an expected and appropriate response to the masculinity threatening scenario (Vandello et al., 2008). Furthermore, aggressive behavior following a situation that is threatening to one's masculinity has been found to reduce anxious cognitions (Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti, 2009), indicating that aggression is regulating negative emotions associated with masculine gender role stress. Not surprisingly, in experiments that include a perceived threat to one's masculinity, men who endorse higher gender role stress are more likely to act aggressively (Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015).

Although there is strong evidence that masculinity threats can provoke some men to act aggressively, less is known about impelling factors that makes one more likely to react aggressively following the masculinity threat. Greater gender identification and masculine gender role stress have been identified as vulnerability factors for reacting negatively to a perceived masculinity threat (Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015; Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003). Yet, little is known about emotional factors that may also make one more likely to act aggressively. For example, masculine gender role stress correlates with shame proneness, and as noted above, shame proneness has also been found to predict aggressive behavior (Harper et al., 2005; Hosser et al., 2008; Hundt & Holohan, 2012; Kivisto et al., 2011). However, to date,

no study has examined in an experimental paradigm whether shame prone men are more reactive to perceived threats to their masculinity. Research regarding this potential association would provide insight into the relationship between emotional proclivities and masculine gender threats in predicting sexual aggression. A recently developed measure of masculinity threat related shame (The Masculinity and Shame Questionnaire; Gebhard et al., 2018), which unlike the masculine gender role stress scale, assesses for specific self-conscious emotions in response to masculinity threats, has found that men who are prone to shame generally are more likely to report that they would experience shame following a masculinity threat. Further, compared to general shame proneness, masculinity threat shame proneness was more closely related to a tendency to externalize blame (Gebhard et al., 2018).

1.4   Inhibiting Factor: Acceptance of Emotions

Emotion regulation is a multifaceted construct consisting of multiple interrelated processes that allow a person to appropriately respond to emotional experience in a way that is consistent with that person's goals (Gross, 2013). First, emotion regulation requires awareness of the emotion and clarity regarding factors that may be contributing to the emotion (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Furthermore, in the case of negative emotions, finding ways to effectively respond to emotions depends on accepting the emotion itself without developing negative secondary emotional experiences like shame or embarrassment. In the proposed model, acceptance of emotions, a component of emotion regulation defined as an ability to tolerate distressing emotions without negatively evaluating the emotion or developing negative secondary emotions (Gratz & Roemer, 2004), is explored as an inhibiting factor.

The processes involved in emotion regulation can be either conscious (e.g., intentionally trying to appear calm before an interview), or unconscious and automatic (Gross, 2013).

Although people are often motivated to increase positive emotions and decrease negative emotions, these attempts to regulate or alter emotions can have the desired immediate effect but may on occasion lead to negative psychological or long-term outcomes. For instance, substance use disorders have been associated with efforts to avoid negative emotions (Shaver, Veilleux, & Ham, 2013). Thus, attempts to modify or alter emotional states in order to avoid unwanted experiences at the expense of longer-term goals is associated with psychopathology (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006). Furthermore, one study found that acceptance of emotions was more protective against psychopathology than self-reported emotion regulation strategies (Kashdan, Barrios, Forsyth, & Steger, 2006).

Trait emotion dysregulation has been found to predict psychological, physical, and sexual aggression (Finkel, DeWall, Slotter, Oaten, & Foshee, 2009; Shorey, Brasfied, Febres, & Stuart, 2011). Emotion dysregulation is defined as weakness in one or more of the underlying domains of emotion regulation. Given the prior research that highlights the effect of emotional avoidance on relationship between shame and aggression, the current dissertation focuses specifically on acceptance of emotions as an inhibitor of sexual aggression. Lack of emotional acceptance can be thought of as *over*-regulation of emotional experience, whereby negative outcomes arise from attempts to suppress the emotional experience. When efforts to control or avoid negative emotions are in conflict with valued behavior, this can have potentially negative consequences. Research has found men incarcerated for a violent offense reported less acceptance of emotions compared to a community sample (Garofalo, Holden, Zeigler-Hill, & Velotti, 2016; Garofalo, Velotti, Zavattini, 2018). Additionally, low emotional acceptance predicts anger and hostility among both incarcerated and non-incarcerated samples (Garofalo et al., 2018).

Experiential avoidance, considered the opposite of acceptance, is defined as an attempt to avoid or alter emotional experiences despite potentially negative consequences resulting from the avoidance (Kashdan et al., 2006; Hayes et al., 2006; Hayes, Strohsahl, Wilson, et al., 2004), and expressive suppression focuses on efforts to inhibit the experience or expression of unwanted emotions (Gross, 2002). Experiential avoidance has been found to predict violent behavior, including intimate partner violence perpetration (Reddy, Meis, Erbes, Polusny, & Compton, 2011; Shorey et al., 2014; Tull, Jakupcak, Paulson, & Gratz, 2007). Further, Shorey et al. (2014) found that experiential avoidance predicted psychological and sexual aggression in college students. Additionally, prior research has found that the relationship between men's restrictive emotionality and aggression is mediated by difficulty tolerating or accepting emotions (Cohn et al., 2010). In line with previous research that has linked experiential avoidance with aggression, in the current dissertation, higher reported nonacceptance of emotions will be explored as a disinhibiting factor that contributes to aggressive behavior.

1.5   Proposed Interactions among Mechanisms

Acceptance of emotions is relevant to both trait shame and masculine gender role stress in predicting aggression. Just as gender roles are shaped by cultural norms, so too is emotion regulation influenced by social and cultural factors (Mesquita, De Leersnyder, & Albert, 2013). We are motivated to modify our emotional experiences so that they are in line with cultural norms regarding which emotions are more desirable or acceptable to express. Thus, we may be more reluctant to accept emotions that we see as at odds with cultural expectations. As noted above, men's expression of vulnerable emotions is discouraged, and as a result, men who adhere strongly to masculine gender norms are motivated to avoid certain emotional experiences. This

restrictive emotionality is an important predictor of aggression (Cohn et al., 2010; McDermott et al., 2017).

Additionally, shame has been found to predict aggression indirectly through externalizing blame (Stuewig et al., 2010), and this pattern of transforming shame to anger or blame may reflect an unwillingness or inability to tolerate shame. Mesquita and colleagues (2013) argued that there is a cultural norm within the United States to avoid the experience of shame. When people describe feeling shame to their peers, they receive feedback from others that directs them to focus instead on external factors to reduce the individual's shameful feelings (Mesquita et al., 2013). The motivation to avoid shame may be especially strong for those who adhere to masculine gender role norms, as shame is considered a vulnerable emotion (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005; Reilly, Rochlen, Awad, 2014). Thus, the transition from shame to externalizing blame may be well practiced and socially condoned in some instances. To this point, there is evidence that masculine gender role stress is associated with a tendency to experience shame and to externalize blame in college men (Thompkins & Rando, 2003; Efthim, Kenny, & Mahalik, 2001). Specifically, Efthim and colleagues (2001) found that the component of masculine gender role stress concerned with discomfort with expressing emotions was associated with proneness to shame and blame externalization.

In one of the few studies to directly examine the relationships among masculinity threat, fear of emotion, shame, and aggression, shame predicted aggression after accounting for masculinity threat (Jakupcak et al., 2005). However, the effect of shame was null when fear of emotion (specifically sadness or anxiety) was included in the regression model. These findings raise the possibility that aggression protects against the experience of vulnerable emotions. However, this study was based on cross-sectional survey data, and it was not possible to

determine the direction of this relationship. Furthermore, the authors did not examine whether this relationship held true for sexually aggressive behaviors specifically. Nevertheless, these findings point to the importance of including acceptance of emotions in models of the effect of shame proneness or masculine gender role stress on aggression.

1.6   Sexual Aggression Outcome: Sexual Imposition Paradigm

The outcome measure is a web-based analogue of sexual aggression (Bosson et al., 2015). In the original implementation of this paradigm, developed by Hall and Hirschman (1994), male participants were brought into a laboratory where they watched 2-minute film clips depicting neutral, sexually violent, and violent scenes. They were then instructed choose one of the films to show to a female confederate and watched the film clip with the confederate in the room. This procedure was later adapted so that participants were first informed that the confederate disliked sexual content. Thus, the choice to impose sexual content onto a female confederate, believing that she does not wish to view this content, was considered indicative of sexual aggression (Hall, DeGarmo, Eap, Teten, & Sue, 2006). Support for the validity of this paradigm comes from the finding that men who reported prior sexually aggressive behavior were more likely to choose the sexually aggressive video to show the confederate compared to men who reported no prior sexual aggression (Hall & Hirschman, 1994; Hall et al., 2006).

This paradigm has since been adapted to be used in a male peer setting to explore bystander intervention (Parrott et al., 2012), and in an online context (Bosson et al., 2015). Using the online version, participants are informed that they have been paired with a female participant who is also completing the online study, and they are given the choice of sharing a neutral or sexually explicit video with their partner (see Procedures section below for additional details). Although this sexual aggression paradigm is similar to laboratory-based harassment paradigms

(Maass et al., 2003), a critical distinction is that in this sexual imposition paradigm, participants are told that their partner dislikes sexually explicit content (Hall et al., 2006; Parrott et al., 2012). Therefore, the choice to impose a sexual experience on her against her explicit wishes is in line with definitions of sexual aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 1997; Parrott et al., 2012).

1.7   The Current Study

This dissertation builds upon previous research to clarify the nature of the relationships among shame proneness, masculine gender role stress, nonacceptance of emotions, and sexually aggressive behavior. As O'Neil (2008) pointed out, shame, emotional restriction or avoidance, and masculine gender role stress share empirical and conceptual links; yet, the nature of these relationships and how these relationships contribute to sexual aggression have yet to be tested. To explore these relationships, the current dissertation used an experimental paradigm in which half of participants were exposed to masculinity threatening feedback and were told that they were more similar to women than men based on their responses on self-report measures. The remaining half were assigned to a comparison condition and were told that their responses were typical of other men.

Although masculine gender role stress has been studied as a predictor of sexual aggression, few studies have examined the effect of shame proneness on sexual aggression, or the relationship between a masculine gender role threat and shame proneness in predicting sexual aggression. This dissertation sought to first explore whether men who are prone to shame are more likely than men with low shame proneness to engage in sexually aggressive behavior after receiving information that is threatening to their masculinity. This could help clarify whether shame or low self-esteem is the result of masculine gender role stress, as suggested by O'Neil (2008), or whether shame proneness predisposes one to experience masculine gender role stress.

Within the I^3 framework, shame proneness was examined as the impelling (i.e., predisposing) factor, and the masculine identity threat was the instigating factor contributing to sexual aggression. Acceptance of emotions was explored as an inhibiting factor that may reduce the probability of sexually aggressive responding in men who are prone to shame and exposed to a gender threat.

I hypothesized that men in the masculinity threat condition would be more likely to demonstrate sexually aggressive behavior than men in the comparison condition and that this effect would be moderated by shame proneness and acceptance of emotions. Specifically, based on the previous literature on shame and aggression, I predicted that shame prone men would be more likely to react aggressively to the gender role threat than men low in shame proneness. Additionally, I hypothesized that the effect of the instigating (masculinity threat) and impelling factors (shame proneness) on sexually aggressive behavior would be reduced for men who reported greater acceptance of emotions. The findings from the current dissertation could further our understanding of the emotional and interpersonal processes that give rise to sexual aggression and how sexual aggression relates to self-conscious emotions, specific emotion regulation processes, and masculine gender role threats. By exploring the impact of shame and emotional acceptance, the findings from the current dissertation could point to possible intervention targets when treating perpetrators.

2   METHODS

2.1   Participants

To determine the number of participants needed for this study, a power analysis was performed using the software G*Power: Version 3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). A moderate effect-size was hypothesized, based on findings by Mescher and Rudman (2014), who

used a similar masculinity threat paradigm and sexual aggression analogue as an outcome. With an alpha of 0.05 and power of 0.80, the projected number of participants needed to detect a significant three-way interaction was 128. To allow for comparisons between SONA and MTurk, and to account for participants excluded from analyses because they were not deceived by the manipulation, a total of 336 participants were recruited. Men between the ages of 18 and 50 residing within the United States were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk; www.mturk.com), an online recruitment website, and from SONA, the Georgia State University online site for participant recruitment.

Of the 336 men enrolled in this study, 14 participants were excluded due to missing data, 13 were excluded because they indicated suspicions about the gender feedback or their partner, nine participants were excluded for failing the effort check, and one participant was excluded because his stated age (77 years) was substantially outside the limits for this study. The final sample consisted of 299 men (88 from GSU SONA and 211 from MTurk). Roughly half of the participants in the final sample (N = 158, 52.8%) were assigned to the experimental condition. Although participants were not excluded on the basis of sexual orientation, the possible impact of sexual orientation on the results was carefully examined. As discussed in more detail below in the Results section, excluding participants who identified as exclusively gay did not meaningfully alter the results; therefore, participants of all sexual orientations were included in the final analyses.

Participant demographics by data source (MTurk or SONA) are presented in Table 1. The average age was 20.15 years (SD = 4.0) for SONA participants, 36.23 years (SD = 7.61) for MTurk participants, and 31.92 years (SD = 9.97) for the combined sample. The racial/ethnic makeup of the combined sample was as follows: White or European American (60.9%), Black or

African American (15.7%), Latino or Hispanic (10.7%), Asian American or Pacific Islander

(13.4%), Native American (0.7%), Arabic or Middle Eastern (0.7%), Bi-racial (4.4%), or other

(3.7%). Racial/ethnic background by data source is presented in Table 1. Overall, the SONA

sample was more ethnically diverse, whereas approximately three quarters (75.1%) of

participants in the MTurk sample identified as White or European American. Similar to previous

reports of MTurk participant demographics (Ross, Irani, Silberman, Zaldivar, & Tomlinson,

2010), participants recruited from MTurk for this study reported high levels of educational

attainment, with 90.5% reporting at least some college education.

2.2   Recruitment and Informed Consent

Participants were recruited through Georgia State University's SONA website or through

a job posting on MTurk. The study was advertised as examining "personality, gender, and movie

preferences" offering .75 credits for participation for SONA participants, and $1.00 for MTurk

participants. Due to feedback from MTurk participants, the compensation was later raised to

$1.50. Potential participants were directed to the survey link, hosted through Qualtrics, where

they first read the informed consent document. To begin the study, participants clicked a button

to affirm their consent.

2.3   Measures

2.3.1   *Masculine gender role stress.*

To control for individual differences in masculine gender role stress, participants were

administered the Abbreviated Masculine Gender Role Stress (MGRS) Scale (Swartout, Parrot,

Cohn, Hagman, & Gallagher, 2015). This is a 15-item scale, which is a shortened version of the

40-item Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale (Eisler & Skidmore, 1987). Participants were asked

to rate on a 6-point scale from 0 ("not at all stressful") to 5 ("extremely stressful") how stressful

they would find different scenarios related to masculine identity norms, and the sum of all items was computed. Example scenarios include "being perceived as having feminine traits" or "having others say that you are too emotional." The abbreviated measure has strong internal consistency in the current study (Cronbach's α = .92), which was comparable to internal consistency reported in past research (Cronbach's α = .90; Swartout et al., 2015).

2.3.2   *Shame and guilt.*

Shame and guilt were measured using the Test of Self-Conscious Affect-Version 3 (TOSCA-3; Tangney, Dearing, Wagner, & Gramzow, 2000). The TOSCA-3 is a widely used measure of self-conscious emotions, including proneness to shame, guilt, and externalizing blame. In the current study, this scale had adequate internal reliability for shame (Cronbach's α = .84), guilt (Cronbach's α = .88), and externalizing blame (Cronbach's α = .84), slightly above reliability statistics reported in prior studies (Schoenleber & Berenbaum, 2012; Tangney et al., 1996). The abbreviated form of the TOSCA-3 includes 16 scenarios in which respondents imagine that they committed some social transgression and indicate the likelihood that they would react in a particular way, on a scale from 1 (not likely at all) to 5 (very likely). For each scenario, there are four possible reactions that represent shame proneness, guilt proneness, externalization, and detachment. Reactions representing detachment were not included in the current dissertation, as they were not directly relevant to the research questions. For each subscale used in this study, a total score for the 16 scenarios was computed, ranging from 16 to 80.

An example scenario is: "You walk out of an exam thinking you did extremely well. Then you find out you did poorly." The respondent then rates how likely they would react in the following ways: 1) "You would think, 'well, it's just a test'" (detachment); 2) "You would think,

'the instructor doesn't like me'" (externalization); 3) "You would think, 'I should have studied harder'" (guilt proneness); 4) "You would feel stupid" (shame proneness). The current dissertation focused primarily on the effect of shame proneness, controlling for guilt proneness.

2.3.3 *Emotion regulation and acceptance of emotional experiences.*

Acceptance of emotions and emotion regulation more broadly were measured using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004). This is one of the most widely used measures of emotion regulation and is comprised of six subscales that assess for different areas of difficulty in emotion regulation: nonacceptance of emotional responses, difficulty engaging in goal-directed behavior, impulse control difficulties, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation strategies, and lack of emotional clarity. The scale includes 36 items, and participants responded on a scale of 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Scores for the full scale and each subscale were computed by adding responses to each item. One item from the emotion regulation strategies subscale ("When I'm upset, I believe that I will end up feeling very depressed") was unintentionally omitted for approximately one third of participants; therefore, this item was removed from the total DERS scale and the emotion regulation strategies subscale. Cronbach's alpha demonstrated high internal reliability ($\alpha = .95$) for the 35-item DERS, which is similar to the internal reliability reported by the scale authors (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

The subscale of particular focus in this study was the nonacceptance of emotional experiences subscale, which includes six items that describe a tendency to negatively evaluate or reject emotional experiences (e.g., "When I'm upset, I feel angry at myself for feeling that way" or "When I'm upset, I become embarrassed for feeling that way"). Higher scores on the

nonacceptance of emotional experiences subscale were interpreted as lower acceptance of emotions. Internal reliability for this subscale was also strong (Cronbach's α = .91).

2.3.4 Manipulation checks and suspicion probes.

To ensure that the manipulation had the intended effect, participants were asked a series of questions to determine their experience of distress after receiving the gender feedback. Participants were informed that the researchers were seeking participants' opinions on the gender feedback to improve participant experience. The following questions came from a study by Schmitt and Branscombe (2001), which also involved similar masculinity threat as the experimental manipulation: "I am pleased with my score from the assessments," "I feel good about myself after seeing my results," "Seeing my scores was a fun experience," "I am disappointed in my results," "The results put me in a good mood," and "I feel kind of down after seeing my results." The sum of the six items was computed, and the measure had good internal reliability (Cronbach's α = .89), comparable to the internal reliability reported by Schmitt and Branscombe (2001; α = .82). Three filler questions were included that did not factor into their total score but were instead used to mask the purpose of the questionnaire (e.g., "Showing participants their scores is a good idea.")

Participants were asked several open-ended items to probe for suspicions about this study: 1) "Again, we know that you do not have much information at all about your partner. Given what little you do know about your partner, what sort of personality do you think he/she has?" 2)"Please briefly jot down some of your impressions of what sort of person your partner is." 3)"At this point, we are wondering if you have any thoughts this task you'd like to share." "Did you know anything about this study before beginning? If so, please explain." Responses to

these questions were inspected to see if participants expressed doubt that their partner was a real person or to see if they suspected the gender feedback was manipulated.

2.3.5 Demographics.

A series of demographics questions were included that asked about participants' race, ethnicity, level of education, primary language(s), state of residence in the U.S., U.S. state or country of origin, and sexual orientation. Participants reported their sexual orientation on a 7-point scale from 1 (exclusively heterosexual) to 7 (exclusively gay).

2.3.6 Sexual aggression.

2.3.6.1 Sexual aggression analogue.

The outcome variable was a web-based version of a sexual aggression laboratory analogue that has been found to correlate with self-reported sexual aggression (Parrott et al., 2012; Bosson et al., 2015). Participants were informed that they would be communicating virtually with another participant, "Jessica9", and they were provided with the following information about this fictional partner:

> Based on Jessica9's responses, it seems that Jessica9 generally does not like sexual content in the media. Jessica9 typically does not watch movies or television programs that contain sexual content. For example, on the statement "If a movie has a lot of nudity or sex, I won't watch it," Jessica9 indicated a strong level of agreement. Jessica9's responses did not indicate significant like or dislike for other types or media content (e.g., comedies, action, suspense, etc.).

Participants then saw images and synopses from two films: one including sexually explicit content and one without sexual content (see Appendix B). The order of presentation across participants was counterbalanced. Participants were asked to select a video to send to

Jessica, and the number of seconds they would like her to view the video. Participants were told

that Jessica would see 120 seconds of film clips, and they could elect for her to view up to 120

seconds of the film they chose. If they elected for her to watch less than 120 seconds of their

video selection, for the remaining time, she would be shown the other of the two videos. For

participants who chose to show her the sexually explicit video, greater time selected indicated

more sexually aggressive responding. For those who chose the non-sexually explicit video, the

number of seconds chosen was reverse coded, as greater time selected for Jessica to watch the

non-sexual video meant that she would spend less time watching the sexually explicit video.

This sexual imposition paradigm was modified to also look at persistent or continued

sexual aggression. Specifically, participants who selected for Jessica to watch the sexually

explicit video were later told that she rejected their choice. These participants were asked to

resubmit their choice of video and given the option of sending the sexually explicit video a

second time or sending the neutral video. The choice to send the sexually explicit video for a

second time despite their fictional partner's rejection of this choice was interpreted as an

indicator of persistent sexual aggression in this context.

2.3.6.2   *Self-reported sexual aggression perpetration.*

Self-reported past sexual aggression was measured using the revised Sexual Experiences

Survey – Short Form Perpetration (SES-SFP; Koss et al., 2007), a 35-item self-report survey that

asks about prior perpetration of sexually aggressive acts (from unwanted touching to rape) using

a range of tactics (from verbal coercion to physical force). For each item on the survey,

participants reported on the number of times they engaged in each behavior, from 0 to 3 or more

times, in the last 12 months. They also reported on the number of times they engaged in the same

35-items (0 to 3 or more times) since age 14. For each time frame, a total score was calculated.

The SES-SFP was included to evaluate the extent to which the sexual aggression analogue used in this study predicted self-reported perpetration. The SES-SFP has been found to have good predictive validity and test-retest reliability (Johnson, Murphy, & Gidycz, 2017).

2.4   Procedure

After providing consent, participants were informed that they would be completing measures of personality and a media rating survey prior to communicating virtually with an unknown female partner. Participants then completed the TOSCA-3, DERS, MGRS scale, and the 15-item media rating survey. The media-rating survey asked participants to rate their preference of various types of films or television shows and was included primarily to facilitate the appearance that the study aimed to explore gender and media preferences. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental (masculinity threat) condition or the comparison condition. The manipulation used in this dissertation was variation of the methods used by Schmitt and Branscombe (2001) and Maass et al., (2003). Following completion of self-report measures, men in the experimental condition were provided with fictitious feedback regarding how their responses on the self-report measures compared to others, indicating a masculinity score that was closer to women's scores than men's scores. Specifically, their screen displayed a fictional distribution of scores for male and female participants. Their "score" was shown along this distribution, falling clearly in the range for female participants. The following interpretation guideline was provided: "Based on your survey results, your profile indicates that you are at Level 3. This profile is typical of women, and less typical of men." In the control condition, participants were told, "Based on your survey results, your profile indicates that you are at Level 8. This profile is average compared to other men." See Appendix A for screenshots of the gender feedback for each condition.

Following the gender feedback, participants completed the questionnaire on their response to the feedback that was used as a manipulation check. They were then informed they had been partnered with Jessica9 and were told that their media preferences and their gender feedback would be shared with her. They were also informed that they would receive their partner's media preferences and gender feedback. Participants saw that Jessica9 was in the average range compared to other women. They were given the opportunity to share something about themselves with their partner in an open-ended text box. Participants then received the following intentionally ambiguous message from Jessica9: "It looks like we're both average, but I guess that means different things for each of us. lol." Afterward, as described in greater detail above, participants were assigned the task of choosing between the neutral or sexually explicit video to send to their partner and selecting the duration she would watch the video. Following the video selection paradigm, participants completed the SES-SFP, demographics questions, and suspicion probes.

2.5   Analysis Strategy

All continuous variables were standardized prior to analyses to reduce the possibility of biased estimates in interaction terms of correlated variables (Aiken & West, 1991). Experimental condition (masculinity threat vs. comparison), and video choice were dummy coded. Data were analyzed in two regression models using SPSS, Version 25.0. In the current dissertation, experimental condition was treated as the predictor variable. The two moderating variables, shame proneness and emotional nonacceptance, were treated as continuous variables. As trait masculine gender role stress and shame proneness have been found to correlate (Thompkins & Rando, 2003; Efthim et al., 2001), the MGRS scale was entered as a control variable in the regression analyses. Additionally, past research on shame and guilt has emphasized the

importance of controlling for guilt to understand the unique contribution of shame proneness

(e.g. Tangney et al., 2014); therefore, guilt was also controlled for in the regression analyses.

One regression was performed for each of the outcome indicators (i.e., movie choice and

length of time selected for the sexually-explicit movie). Assumptions of linear regression were

examined prior to conducting the regression analyses. Data were visually inspected for normal

distribution using P-P plots and histograms. Levene's test revealed that the assumption of

homogeneity of variance had not been violated for any of the predictor variables ($ps > .05$).

A logistic regression was used to examine film choice as the outcome variable. The other

outcome variable, number of seconds of the sex video assigned to Jessica 9, was treated as a

count variable, as responses could only be positive integers. An examination of the frequency

across participants for number of seconds chosen indicated that this variable was positively

skewed. Over half of all participants (154 of 299) selected 0 seconds of exposure to the sex

video. Due to the high frequency of 0 for this outcome measure, a negative binomial regression

was performed to predict the sex video duration. Negative binomial regression is based on a

Poisson distribution, and it allows for overdispersion, as is the case with data that has a large

proportion of zeros (Gardner, Mulvey, & Shaw, 1995; Swartout et al., 2014).

3   RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for key study variables are presented in Table 2. Of the 299

participants, 60 (20.1%) selected the sexually-explicit video to send to their partner. The mean

number of seconds that participants chose to show their partner the sex video was 38.65 ($SD =$

46.86). Data source (MTurk or GSU SONA) did not significantly predict video selection ($p =$

.14) or duration ($p = .47$); therefore, data source was not controlled for in further analyses. From

the overall sample, 12.4% reported perpetrating some form of sexual aggression in the past 12

months on the SES, from unwanted touching to rape. Although fewer participants reported on their sexual aggression perpetration since age 14 (254 of 299 participants completed SES-SFP since age 14), 17.3% of those who completed these items reported sexual aggression perpetration since age 14.

To explore whether the inclusion of participants who did not identify as heterosexual affected the results, first negative binomial and logistic regression analyses were performed with sexual orientation predicting video selection and video duration, and results indicated that sexual orientation did not significantly predict sex video choice ($p =.97$) or duration ($p =.85$). Both regression models for the primary analyses were then run with all participants and excluding those who identified as exclusively gay. Exclusion based on sexual orientation did not meaningfully alter any of the model results or parameter estimates. Therefore, participants of all sexual orientations were included in the final analyses.

Bivariate correlations for all study variables are presented in Table 3. Sexually-explicit video selection positively correlated with sexual aggression perpetration in the past 12 months, impulsivity, and tendency to externalize blame (see Table 3). The length of exposure to the sexually-explicit video positively correlated with sexual aggression perpetration in the past 12 months and since age 14, masculine gender role stress, impulsivity, and tendency to externalize blame. Both outcome measures (film choice and length of exposure) negatively correlated with guilt proneness, so that higher guilt proneness was associated with lower rates of sex video selection and shorter duration of the sex video shared.

3.1   Manipulation Check

In the six-item questionnaire used to measure participant distress following the gender feedback (e.g., "I feel kind of down after seeing my results"), men in the masculinity threat

group reported significantly higher distress than men in the comparison condition, $t(276.43) =$ 8.03, $p < .001$. This finding suggests that participants believed the gender feedback, and the manipulation had the intended effect as a masculinity threat. Levene's test indicated unequal variances between groups ($F = 18.91$, $p < .01$), and the degrees of freedom were adjusted from 298 to 276.43.

3.2   Validation of Video Selection

To evaluate the construct validity of the video selection paradigm, I examined the relationship between participant video choice and self-reported past sexual aggression. Participant responses on the SES-SFP were dichotomized (perpetrator versus non-perpetrator). Participants who perpetrated sexual aggression in the past 12-months were roughly two and half times more likely to select the sex video to send to their partner, χ2 (1, $N = 299$) = 5.70, $p = .02$, $OR = 2.48$. They also chose to display the sex video for approximately 1.6 times as many seconds compared to non-perpetrators ($b = .49$, p = .005, $IRR = 1.64$). However, SV perpetration since age 14 did not significantly predict either video choice or duration of the sex video, suggesting that the outcome measure is indicative of current or recent propensity to perpetrate sexual aggression, rather than stable or lifetime tendency toward sexual aggression.

3.3   Sexual Aggression Persistence

The 60 participants who selected the sexually-explicit video were later told that their partner had rejected their choice and were given the choice to send her the neutral video or send her the sexually explicit video again. Of the 60 participants who initially selected the explicit video, 25 (41.67%) selected the sex video a second time after they were told that their first choice was rejected. A series of t-tests were performed to evaluate whether those who persisted in sexually aggressive responding (i.e., chose the sexually explicit video twice) differed from

those who changed their responses. Results revealed that the two groups did not differ significantly in any component of emotion regulation measured by the DERS (nonacceptance of emotional experiences, difficulty engaging in goal directed behaviors, impulse control difficulties, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation strategies, and lack of emotional clarity; $ps > .05$). The two groups also did not differ in shame proneness, externalization of blame, or SV perpetration since age 14. However, those who demonstrated sexual aggression persistence in the interaction with Jessica9 reported higher rates of sexual aggression in the past 12-months ($t(24.42) = -2.62$, $p = .02$) and were significantly less prone to experiencing guilt ($t(58) = 2.86$, $p < .01$).

3.4 Masculinity Threat, Shame, and Acceptance of Emotions

3.4.1 *Choice of video.*

I first predicted that men exposed to the masculinity threat would be more likely to select the sex video compared to men in the comparison condition. Although a slightly higher proportion of men in the masculinity threat condition (22.8%) selected the sex video compared to men in the comparison group (17.0%), this difference was not statistically significant, $\chi2$ (1) = 1.54, $p = .21$.

Next, I predicted the effect of the masculinity threat condition on sex video selection would be moderated by shame proneness and acceptance of emotions. Results from the hierarchical logistic regression predicting video choice are presented in Table 4. Masculine gender role stress and guilt proneness were entered as covariates in the first step, and there was a significant main effect for guilt proneness, $b = -.63$, $p = .001$, $OR = .53$. Higher guilt proneness was associated with a lower likelihood of selecting the sex video. Main effects for experimental condition (masculinity threat or comparison group), shame proneness, and acceptance of

emotions were non-significant. Although there was a significant two-way interaction between shame proneness and acceptance of emotions, this two-way interaction was no longer significant once the three-way interaction term was entered in the last step. In the final model, none of the predicted interactions reached statistical significance (see Table 3).

Despite the nonsignificant interaction terms, I examined possible trends in the hypothesized direction by comparing probabilities of selecting the sex video for participants at different levels of predictor variables. The same logistic regression model was performed using Process Macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013), which calculates the conditional effect of the independent variable at each level of the moderator and produces log odds at one standard deviation above and below the mean for each continuous variable. Next, probabilities were calculated from the log odds. As shown in Figure 1, men who were in the masculinity threat condition and reported low shame proneness and low acceptance of emotions had the highest probability of selecting the sex video, at 48%. Although the difference was not statistically significant, probabilities for the remaining combinations of predictor variables were substantially lower, ranging from 7.6% probability of selecting the sex video (comparison group, high shame, low acceptance of emotions) to 26.7% probability of selecting the sex video (masculinity threat group, high shame, high acceptance of emotions). Although it was hypothesized that men in the masculinity threat condition who were high in shame proneness and low in acceptance of emotions would have the highest likelihood of selecting the sex video, these men had 17.5% probability of selecting the sex video, whereas men in the masculinity threat condition who were low in acceptance of emotions and low in shame proneness were more than twice as likely to select the sex video.[1]

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[1] Higher scores on DERS Nonacceptance of Emotional Experiences subscale (Gratz & Roemer, 2004) are interpreted as lower acceptance of emotions

3.4.2 Video duration.

The same moderation model was tested with video duration as the outcome using a negative binomial regression, and the results are presented in Table 5. The overall model significantly predicted sex video duration, $\chi2$ (9) = 51.73, $p < .001$. Again, masculine gender role stress and proneness to guilt were included as covariates, and both variables significantly predicted video duration in opposing directions: higher masculine gender role stress and lower guilt proneness were associated with longer sex video duration (ps < .01). Again, there was no main effect of experimental condition, shame proneness, or acceptance of emotions. The interaction between masculinity threat condition and acceptance of emotional experiences was significant, $b = -.40$, $p = .02$; however, the other interaction terms did not reach statistical significance (ps > .05).

The two-way interaction between masculinity threat condition and acceptance of emotional experiences was further probed and depicted in Figure 2. Lower self-reported acceptance of emotions predicted sex video duration for men in the masculinity threat group but not for men in the comparison group.

3.5 Sensitivity Analyses

Although acceptance of emotions was the emotion regulation subscale of focus in the current dissertation, separate analyses were performed that replaced acceptance of emotions with the total DERS scale. This was done to explore whether a global measure of emotion regulation functioned similarly as an inhibiting factor in the model, interacting with shame proneness and masculinity threat. Logistic and negative binomial regressions were performed predicting video choice and duration, respectively. Interactions among the global emotion regulation, masculinity threat, and shame proneness were examined. From the logistic regression, global emotion

regulation did not significantly predict sex video choice ($p = .77$), nor did it interact with masculinity threat ($p = .54$) or shame proneness ($p = .61$). The three-way interaction predicting video choice was also non-significant ($p = .20$).

Tests of model effects for the negative binomial regression revealed a significant main effect of global emotion regulation on video duration, Wald $\chi^2 = 3.74$, $p = .05$, and significant emotion regulation by shame proneness interaction, Wald $\chi^2 = 4.60$, $p = .03$. Global emotion regulation did not significantly moderate the effect of the masculinity threat ($p = .15$), and the three-way interaction was not significant ($p = .90$). When comparing by the model fit statistics (Akaike Information Criterion; AIC) between the hypothesized model with acceptance of emotions as a predictor (AIC = 2749.33) to the alternative model with global emotion regulation as a predictor (AIC = 2746.78), the differences were negligible. Therefore, the alternative model with global emotion regulation instead of acceptance of emotions did not meaningfully improve model fit.[2]

3.6 Externalizing Blame and Masculinity Threat

To further explore ways in which self-conscious affect and masculinity threat may predict sex video selection and duration in this paradigm, the effect of externalizing blame on video selection was examined. These analyses were exploratory and not specifically hypothesized. However, as noted in the Introduction, a tendency to externalize blame onto others can reflect efforts to avoid shame and is associated with aggression (Nathanson, 1992; Stuewig et al., 2010; Tangney et al., 2014).

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[2] Although not specifically hypothesized, each subscale of the DERS was included in place of nonacceptance of emotional experiences subscale to explore the possible effect of other specific emotion regulation components in the model. The only significant results that emerged at a level of $p < .05$ was that the difficulties engaging in goal directed behavior subscale significantly interacted with experimental condition to predict sex video duration, and clarity of emotions interacted with shame proneness to predict video duration.

3.6.1   *Video choice.*

Using a hierarchical logistic regression, masculine gender role stress was entered in the first step as a covariate, externalizing blame and experimental condition (comparison or masculinity threat) were entered in the second step, and the interaction term for externalizing blame by experimental condition was entered in the third step. The overall model significantly predicted video choice, $\chi2$ (4) = 10.21, p = .04. Main effects for masculine gender role stress, externalizing blame, and experimental condition did not reach statistical significance (ps > .05). However, there was a significant masculinity threat by externalizing blame interaction, b = 61, p = .04, OR = 1.85. Full model results are presented in Table 6.

The nature of this interaction was further explored by comparing relative probabilities of selecting the sex video and examining the conditional effect of the experimental condition (masculinity threat or comparison) at high and low levels of externalizing blame (+/- 1 standard deviation from the mean). Results indicated that externalizing blame significantly predicted video choice for men in the masculinity threat group, b = .55, p = .01, but not for men in the comparison group, b = -.07, p = .77. For men in the comparison group, the probability of selecting the sexually-explicit video did not vary by self-reported high or low externalization (16% and 18% probability, respectively). The probability of selecting the sex video was also relatively low (13% probability) for men in the masculinity threat condition who endorsed low levels of externalizing blame. In contrast, men in the masculinity threat condition who reported a greater tendency to externalize blame had a 31% probability of selecting the sexually explicit video. Probabilities of selecting the sex video by experimental group and externalizing blame are presented in Figure 3.

3.6.2 *Video duration.*

The moderation model examining the effects of externalizing blame and experimental condition on sex video duration was performed using a negative binomial regression, and the overall model significantly predicted sex video duration, $\chi 2$ (4) = 25.81, $p < .001$. The regression results are presented in Table 7. In the final model, masculine gender role stress significantly predicted sex video duration, $b = .14$, $p = .04$, $IRR = 1.15$. Similar to the logistic regression predicting video selection, in this model, there was no main effect for experimental group, $p = .20$. However, tests of model effects revealed a main effect of externalizing blame, Wald $\chi^2 = 4.56$, $p = .03$. There was also a significant externalizing blame by experimental condition interaction, Wald $\chi^2 = 10.31$, $p = .001$. As shown in Figure 4, for men in the masculinity threat condition, greater tendency to externalize blame was associated with longer sex video duration, $b = .34$, $IRR = 1.41$, $p < .001$. The effect of externalizing blame on sex video duration for men in the comparison group was not significant, $b = -.05$, $IRR = .95$, $p = 61$.

4   DISCUSSION

Despite the rapidly-expanding literature on predictors of sexual aggression, little is currently known about how dispositional traits may interact with immediate environmental stressors to contribute to perpetration. The purpose of the current dissertation was to explore how shame proneness and emotion regulation, specifically acceptance of emotions, interact with a masculinity threat condition to predict sexual aggression. In the experimental paradigm, sexual aggression was measured as 1) the choice to send a sexually explicit video to an unwilling partner, and 2) the number of seconds that participants elected to share the sexually explicit video with their partner. The study was framed within the I^3 model of aggression, which proposes that aggression results from the interplay of three factors: impellance (i.e., predisposing

factor), instigation, and inhibition (Finkel et al., 2012). In the current dissertation, shame proneness was examined as the impelling factor, masculinity threat as the instigation factor, and acceptance of emotions as an inhibiting factor. The results revealed that greater acceptance of emotions inhibited sexual aggression following a masculinity threat. However, shame was not associated with sexually aggressive responding in this study.

4.1   Impelling Factor: Shame Proneness

Shame proneness has been associated with perpetration of aggressive behavior after controlling for guilt proneness (Harper et al., 2005; Hosser et al., 2008; Hundt & Holohan, 2012; Kivisto et al., 2011). Specifically, given theory on the relationship between shame and aggression, which suggests that efforts to avoid shame can lead to anger and aggression, it was hypothesized that men who were high in shame proneness would be predisposed to engage in sexual aggression if they experienced a masculinity threat. To date, there have been few studies that explored shame proneness predicting sexual aggression specifically, although research by Kivisto and colleagues (2011) suggested a positive relationship between shame proneness and sexual aggression. Nevertheless, in the current study, shame proneness did not predict sex video choice or duration after controlling for guilt proneness. Further, shame proneness did not significantly interact with masculinity threat or acceptance of emotions to predict sexual aggression. Although prior research suggests shame proneness predisposes one to engage in physical violence (Hundt & Holohan, 2012; Schoenleber et al., 2015; Stuewig et al., 2010; Tangney et al., 1996), findings from the current study suggest that shame proneness may not impel one to engage in sexual aggression.

4.2   Instigation: Masculinity Threat

I hypothesized that men in the experimental condition who experienced a masculinity threat (receiving feedback that their profile was more typical of women than men) would be more likely to assign their female partner to watch the sexually explicit video compared to men in the comparison condition. However, men who were in the masculinity threat condition were not significantly more likely to select the sexually explicit video, nor did they choose a longer duration of the sex video compared to men in the comparison condition. This finding is in contrast to previous research that masculinity threats predict sexual harassment (Maass et al., 2003), aggressive cognitions (Vandello et al., 2008), and aggressive behaviors (Bosson et al., 2009). However, there was a trend in the predicted direction. Furthermore, according to I^3 theory, an instigation alone will not necessarily predict aggressive behavior, as the decision to act aggressively also depends on the impelling and inhibiting factors (Finkel, 2007; Finkel et al., 2012). Although the masculinity threat itself did not significantly predict sexual aggression, it still influenced sexually aggressive responses. In fact, the masculinity threat was an instigator for men who were less accepting of emotions, resulting in longer sex video duration assigned to the fictional partner.

4.3   Inhibition: Acceptance of Emotions

In line with hypotheses, the findings from the current dissertation support acceptance of emotions, a critical component of emotion regulation (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Roberton, Daffern, & Bucks, 2012), as an inhibiting factor. Emotional acceptance on its own was not associated with significantly lower sexually aggressive responding. However, acceptance of emotions significantly moderated the effect of the experimental condition on sexual aggression. Specifically, men who reported lower acceptance of emotions assigned a longer sex video

duration after being exposed to a masculinity threat compared to men who were more accepting of emotions or men who were not exposed to a masculinity threat. In other words, acceptance of emotions inhibited sexual aggression following a masculinity threat. This finding is in line with previous findings that nonacceptance of emotions or avoidance of emotional experiences contributes to violent behavior (Cohn et al., 2010; Garofalo et al., 2018; Reddy et al., 2011; Shorey et al., 2014; Tull et al., 2007).

The fact that acceptance of emotions protected against sexual aggression following an instigation provides further evidence that the ability to appropriately respond to stressful situations depends on an ability and willingness to first tolerate the negative emotions that arise in response to stress (Roberton et al., 2012). A sensitivity analysis was conducted to explore whether global emotion regulation (total DERS score; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) also worked as an inhibitor in the model. Although the two models fit the data roughly equally well, global emotion regulation did not interact with the masculinity threat. The differences between the two models highlight the importance of looking at specific components of emotion regulation and suggest that acceptance of emotions has an important role for inhibiting maladaptive responses to an instigator, in this case a masculinity threat. Although acceptance of emotions was conceptualized as an inhibiting factor in this dissertation, it is also possible to conceptualize nonacceptance of emotions as an impellor, increasing the likelihood of sexual aggression when there is a provocation. Conceptualizing nonacceptance of emotions as an impelling factor increasing the risk for sexual aggression would also be consistent with literature on emotion regulation and aggression (Reddy et al., 2011; Shorey et al., 2014; Tull et al., 2007).

Finally, in line with the I^3 model of aggression and the Perfect Storm Theory (Finkel & Hall, 2018), I hypothesized that the masculinity threat would lead to greater sexually aggressive

responding for men that were high in the impelling factor (shame proneness) and low in the inhibiting factor (acceptance of emotions). The three-way interaction was not significant for either video choice or video duration. However, an interesting pattern emerged upon examination of the relative probabilities of selecting the sex video at different levels of each predictor. Men exposed to the masculinity threat who were less accepting of emotions (one standard deviation above the mean for nonacceptance of emotional experiences) and less prone to shame (one standard deviation below the mean) had the highest probability of selecting the sex video, at nearly 50%. In contrast, men exposed to the masculinity threat who were less accepting of emotions and high in shame proneness (one standard deviation above the mean) had a substantially lower probability of selecting the sex video, at 17.5%. This pattern is at odds with the expectation that the combination of high shame and low emotional acceptance would be associated with the highest probability of selecting the sex video. Because the interaction terms were not statistically significant, and this pattern of results was not hypothesized, this discrepancy should be interpreted with extreme caution. However, if replicated in future studies, this would suggest that the combination of high self-reported shame and avoidance of negative emotions does not necessarily lead to sexual aggression, despite theoretical explanations for the causal link between shame and aggression. Shame is believed to contribute to aggressive behavior because efforts to avoid the painful experience of shame lead to anger and externalization (Hejdenberg & Andrews, 2011; Stuewig et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, the findings from this dissertation do not necessarily contradict the premise that efforts to avoid shame lead to aggression. There is an inherent paradox when using self-report data to measure experiences of shame among those who tend to reject or avoid emotional experiences. Those who are likely to suppress negative emotions may have difficulty or an

unwillingness to accurately report on vulnerable emotions such as shame. Therefore, it is possible that the group of men who reported less acceptance of emotions and low levels of shame proneness tend to suppress emotions. As noted above, men's emotional restriction or suppression is linked to aggressive behavior (Cohn et al., 2010; Garofalo et al., 2016; Reddy et al., 2011; Shorey et al., 2014; Tull et al., 2007). However, the evidence from this dissertation cannot directly evaluate this hypothesis that some participants who reported low shame proneness may have engaged in emotional suppression. It is also possible that a low shame proneness may predict sexual aggression when there is low emotional acceptance and an instigator. As this is the first study to explore the relationships among shame, acceptance of emotions, and masculinity threat predicting sexual aggression in an experimental paradigm, further research is needed to clarify the relationships among these variables.

4.4 Externalizing Blame, Guilt, and Sexual Aggression

Additional analyses were conducted that explored the effect of externalizing blame on sexual aggression. As prior research has found that shame predicts aggression through externalizing blame (Stuewig et al., 2010), I examined whether externalizing blame would predict sexual aggression, despite the fact that shame was not found to predict sexual aggression in this study. People who are unable or unwilling to tolerate shame may attempt to reduce shame through externalization (Hejdenberg & Andrews, 2011; Schoenleber & Berenbaum, 2012b; Stuewig et al., 2010). The results from this dissertation provided further evidence that the tendency externalize blame in situations that often elicit guilt or shame predicted sexual aggression among men exposed to a masculinity threat. Therefore, a predisposition to externalize blame and the presence of an instigator that may induce negative self-beliefs—in this case that the participant is less masculine than other men—appears to contribute to sexual

aggression. Furthermore, following a masculinity threat, externalization and aggression may be a method to cope with distress that is in line with masculine gender norms, and therefore functions to reaffirm one's masculine identity (Weaver et al., 2010).

Additionally, men who tend to externalize blame may have been more likely to interpret the woman's ambiguous comment ("It looks like we're both average, but I guess that means different things for each of us. Lol.") as more hostile. Hostile attribution and externalizing blame both entail ascribing negative behavior or intent to others (Tangney et al., 1996; Thomas & Weston, 2019). Prior research using a simulated dating scenario found that men whose sexual advances were rejected responded more aggressively if they perceived their partner to be hostile (Woerner, Abbey, Helmers, Pegram, & Jilani, 2018). Furthermore, hostile attribution bias has been associated with sexual aggression among college students (Thomas & Weston, 2019).

Other important findings emerged that were not specifically hypothesized, but nevertheless have important implications for treatment and further research. First, despite the nonsignificant main effect of the masculinity threat for video choice and video duration, there was a significant main effect of masculine gender role stress on sex video duration. Men who reported being generally more upset by situations that may be threatening to their masculinity (e.g., being outperformed in a game by a woman; Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; Swartout et al., 2015), assigned their partner to watch the sexually explicit video for a longer duration. This finding is consistent with previous research that has found a link between masculine gender role stress and aggression or hostility toward women (Gallagher & Parrott, 2011; Jakupcak et al., 2002; Jakupcak, 2003). Therefore, a general tendency to experience masculinity stress may be considered an additional impelling factor contributing to sexual aggression.

Second, as mentioned above, guilt proneness emerged as a robust protective factor against sexual aggression in all analyses. Furthermore, guilt proneness was the one predisposing factor, in addition to past year sexual aggression, that differentiated between those who selected the sex video once and those who selected the sex video twice. This finding suggests that proneness to guilt not only protects against sexual aggression, but also contributes to positive behavior change among those who were initially sexually aggressive (i.e., changing from a sexually aggressive response to a non-sexually aggressive response following interpersonal feedback).

The protective effects of guilt have been studied extensively, and guilt proneness has been found to protect against a range of negative behavioral outcomes, including physical violence perpetration (Stuewig et al., 2010), self-injury (VanDerhei, Rojahn, Stuewig, & McKnight, 2014), substance use (Stuewig Treeby, Rice, Cocker, Peacock, & Bruno, 2018), and criminal recidivism (Hosser et al., 2008; Tangney et al., 2014). Nevertheless, to date, the effect of guilt proneness in protecting against sexual aggression has received little attention. A qualitative analysis of perpetrator narratives found some evidence that perpetrators who expressed guilt about their past sexual aggression tended to also express motivation to change their behavior (Brennan et al., 2016). The finding that guilt, unlike shame, may lower the risk for initial and repeat sexual aggression perpetration supports assertions that guilt is a more prosocial emotion that motivates individuals toward reparative action such as forgiveness seeking following a transgression (Riek et al., 2014; Tangney et al., 2007). Furthermore, people who are prone to guilt tend to report greater empathy and cognitive perspective taking abilities (Joireman, 2004; Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Silfver & Helkama, 2007). Because empathy is associated with lower rates of sexual aggression (Hudson-Flege, Grover, Meçe, Ramos, & Thompson, 2018; Wheeler,

George, & Dahl, 2002) and less acceptance of sexual harassment (Diehl, Glaser, Bohner, 2014), guilt-prone individuals may be less likely to perpetrate sexual aggression in part because they may be more empathic. However, future research is needed to explore empathy as a possible mechanism explaining the protective effect of guilt proneness on sexual aggression.

Finally, results from this study provides further validation of an online experimental analogue of sexual aggression (Bosson et al., 2015). Men who reported perpetrating sexual aggression in the past 12 months were significantly more likely to select the sex video, and they chose a longer duration for their partner to view the sex video. Furthermore, this study included an extension of this paradigm that looked at sexual aggression persistence in the interaction with the fictional partner. Participants who selected the sex video (approximately 20% of all participants) received a message that their partner had rejected their choice. Among participants who selected the sex video, approximately 42% chose to send the sex video a second time and their behavior was classified as persistent sexual aggression. These men reported a higher rate of past-year sexual aggression compared to participants who changed their choice to the neutral video after their partner rejected their first choice. The addition to the sexual aggression paradigm that involves indication of the partner's resistance to the sexually aggressive response (i.e. video choice) may help to identify a more sexually aggressive group.

4.5   Implications

The results from this dissertation point to possible areas of intervention to prevent sexual aggression. First, the finding that the masculinity threat was more likely to lead to sexual aggression in participants less accepting of emotions suggests that programs to facilitate awareness and acceptance of emotions may help reduce sexual aggression. Prevention programs that rely solely on education about sexual aggression may not adequately address situational and

emotional factors. Although multifaceted prevention programming that challenges social norms supportive of violence is important for preventing sexual aggression (DeGue et al., 2014), the results from this study indicate that it is also important to address social norms around emotions, particularly in men. Thus, prevention programs could work to challenge social norms that vulnerable emotions are bad and should be suppressed, thereby facilitating greater acceptance of emotions. As the results from this dissertation indicate, greater tolerance or acceptance of emotions could help protect against sexually-aggressive responses to situations in which one's masculinity is threatened, potentially including incidents when sexual advances are rejected. Those who are more accepting of negative emotions like shame may also be less likely to externalize blame or anger onto others.

The finding that greater self-reported guilt proneness protected against sexual aggression, and the past research linking guilt to empathy and perspective taking, may provide support for interventions that aim to increase awareness and empathy for the experiences of victims. For instance, prior research has found that education about negative outcomes for victims can lead to less acceptance of sexual harassment (Diehl et al., 2014). Thus, ensuring that primary prevention programs include education about victim experiences could help foster empathy for victims, thereby reducing sexual aggression. While education based primary prevention programming may unintentionally increase aggression in high-risk individuals (Malamuth, Huppin, & Linz, 2018), empathy training with those high at risk for sexual aggression has been shown to reduce risk of perpetration (Malamuth et al., 2018; Schewe & O'Donohue, 1993). Furthermore, because this dissertation found that shame did not have the same protective effects as guilt, this suggests that efforts to shame perpetrators may be a less effective approach than drawing attention to the specific problematic behaviors (Tangney, Stuewig, & Hafez, 2011).

There are also important clinical implications for the treatment of perpetrators that stem from this dissertation. First, the theoretic basis for distinguishing shame, guilt, and externalization, suggests that these emotions arise from adaptive or maladaptive appraisal of a moral transgression (Tangney et al., 2007). For example, with shame, unlike guilt, the transgression is interpreted as evidence of a flawed self. With externalizing blame, the other person is perceived in some way as the cause of the negative event or the individual's distress. Because the results from this study suggest that one's tendency to blame others contributes to sexually aggressive behavior following an instigation, treatment involving cognitive reappraisal strategies may help reduce recidivism for perpetrators. Support for the use of cognitive reappraisal techniques comes from previous research that has found brief instructions to reappraise an anger inducing scenario led to reduced verbal aggression (Maldonado et al., 2014).

Furthermore, as acceptance of emotions was found to protect against sexual aggression following a masculinity threat, treatments that focus on increasing mindfulness and nonjudgmental acceptance of emotions, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) or Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993), may be beneficial for treating perpetrators. Both ACT and DBT focus on strengthening awareness and tolerance of unpleasant emotions. Finally, interventions that focus on strengthening social connections may also be beneficial for treating perpetrators, as perceived social support predicted guilt proneness in a sample of incarcerated offenders (Culda, Opre, & Miu, 2016), and findings from this dissertation indicate that guilt proneness protects against sexual aggression. Nevertheless, further research is needed on the mechanisms through which guilt proneness may protect against sexual aggression, including the possible role of social support.

4.6 Limitations and Future Directions

As with all self-report data, there is the possibility of inaccurate responding due to memory errors, careless responses, or social desirability. Additionally, as noted above, some participants may have difficulty accurately reporting on their emotional experiences if they tend to suppress emotions or have deficits in emotional awareness. In particular, those who are motivated to suppress or avoid vulnerable emotions, like shame, may have difficulty accurately reflecting on their experiences of these emotions or may be motivated to underreport these emotions.

The use of a laboratory paradigm to assess for sexual aggression may overcome some of the limitations of using self-report data of past sexual aggression. This web-based analogue of sexual aggression was found to correlate with self-reported sexually aggressive behaviors in this dissertation and prior research (Bosson et al., 2015). Nevertheless, it is important to note that participants who imposed a sexually explicit video on an unwilling partner may not necessarily engage in sexual aggression outside of the laboratory. Future research should continue to explore how video selection in this experimental paradigm relates to real-life sexually aggressive behavior and the ability of this paradigm to distinguish sexual violence perpetrators from those who engage in related but distinct behaviors such as physical violence or sexual harassment.

Furthermore, despite the extensive research examining shame as a predictor of physical aggression (Harper et al., 2005; Hosser et al., 2008; Hundt & Holohan, 2012; Kivisto et al., 2011), research exploring shame as a predictor of sexual aggression has been virtually absent from the literature. Although shame proneness did not predict sexual aggression in this study as hypothesized, the null findings from this study are at odds with a previous finding that shame proneness predicts self-reported sexual aggression (Kivisto et al., 2011). Therefore, further

research is warranted to explore the relationship between shame and sexual aggression and whether mechanisms through which shame predicts physical aggression also apply to sexual aggression.

Additionally, future research could explore the impact of additional components of emotion regulation and how those may relate to sexual aggression. In the sensitivity analysis global emotion regulation was found to have a different effect compared to acceptance of emotions in the model, and global emotion regulation moderated shame proneness but not the experimental condition. Although this dissertation focused specifically on acceptance of emotions, further research could provide insight into the relative contribution of different aspects of emotion regulation on sexual aggression and how these components of emotion regulation may interact with a masculinity threat or shame proneness.

Another limitation of this study relates to the relatively low proportion of participants who chose the sexually explicit video. Although it can generally be considered a positive outcome that relatively few participants chose to share a sexually explicit video with an unwilling partner, the fact that only about 20% of participants chose the sex video made it difficult to detect statistically significant findings from a three-way interaction, despite the large discrepancies in probability of selecting the sex video at different levels of the predictor variables. Future research could recruit a larger sample to see if a significant three-way interaction emerged among shame proneness, acceptance of emotions, and masculinity threat.

Additionally, it is important to note that the predictors examined in the current study may not be the most central motivating factors for all subtypes of perpetrators or for perpetrators outside of the U.S. Early typologies of sexual offenders asserted that perpetrators can be differentiated by primary motivation to offend, including power, anger, or sexual gratification

(Groth & Burgess, 1977; Hall & Hirschman, 1991; Prentky & Knight, 1991). More recent research has provided further evidence for the existence of multiple types of sexual aggressors, who differ in personality traits, attitudes toward women, substance use and other risky behaviors, and trajectories of offending over time (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011; DeGue, DiLillo, & Scalora, 2010; Swartout, Swartout, Brennan, & White, 2015; Thompson, Swartout, & Koss, 2013; Zinzow & Thompson, 2015). Thus, although a tendency to externalize blame combined with a masculinity threat may motivate some toward sexual aggression, it is unlikely that these findings explain the motivational processes for all perpetrators. Therefore, it is important that researchers continue to identify specific processes that contribute to sexual aggression using an experimental paradigm and incorporating other possible risk factors for sexual aggression. For example, future research could look at how attitudes towards women, perceived peer attitudes, or alcohol intoxication may affect how one responds to a masculinity threat.

Finally, although participants were intentionally restricted to men residing in the United States so there would be relative consistency in exposure to cultural norms of masculinity and emotions, these cultural templates for understanding masculinity and emotions likely influenced the results. For example, responses to shame are believed to be influenced by cultural norms, with shame more often leading to externalization and aggression in individualistic cultures compared to in collectivistic cultures (Sheikh, 2014). Future research could explore whether the model proposed in this study applies across cultures. Additionally, future research could explore the extent to which the effect of the gender threat on sexually aggressive behavior varies across cultures. For example, men from cultures who may adhere more strongly to traditional gender roles may be more affected by the masculinity threat in this experiment. Exploring the influence

of culture would help clarify whether these findings generalize to other populations, which would have important implications for prevention and treatment of perpetrators.

4.7   Conclusions

Sexual aggression is a significant public health problem causing negative physical and psychological outcomes for victims. While there is an abundance of research looking at predictors of sexual aggression, fewer studies utilize an experimental paradigm, which may clarify causal mechanisms that lead to sexual aggression. The current dissertation used a web-based experimental paradigm to look at men's sexually aggressive responding in interactions with a fictional female partner. Specifically, the decision to send a sexually explicit video to their partner after being told she dislikes sexual content in medial was interpreted as an indicator of sexual aggression. The study was framed within the I^3 theory of aggression (Finkel, 2007; Finkel et al., 2012), and examined interactions among shame proneness (impellance), acceptance of emotions (inhibition), and a masculinity threat (instigation) predicting sexual aggression. I hypothesized that men who were prone to shame and less accepting of emotions would be more likely to engage in sexual aggression following a masculinity threat. In contrast to predictions, shame proneness did not predict sexual aggression for men who experienced a masculinity threat, nor did shame proneness interact with acceptance of emotions to predict sexual aggression. The results indicated that greater acceptance of emotions was protective against sexually aggressive responding among men who were exposed to the masculinity threat. These findings suggest that the ability to accept or tolerate unpleasant emotions helps protect against sexual aggression when faced with a masculinity threat. This result lends support for incorporating techniques to increase acceptance of emotions in prevention programming and treatment with perpetrators.

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Table 1

Participant demographics by data source

	SONA (N = 88)	MTURK (N = 211)	Total (N = 299)
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Education			
High School or Vocational School	43 (48.9%)	19 (9.0%)	62 (20.74%)
Some College	40 (45.5%)	51 (24.3%)	91 (30.5%)
Finished College	4 (4.5%)	102 (48.6%)	106 (35.6%)
Graduate Degree	0 (0%)	38 (18.0%)	38 (12.71%)
Race/Ethnicity			
White/European American	25 (28.4%)	157 (75.1%)	182 (61.3%)
Black/African American	26 (29.5%)	21 (10.0%)	47 (15.8%)
Latino/Hispanic	12 (13.6%)	20 (9.7%)	32 (10.8%)
Asian or Pacific Islander	21 (23.9%)	19 (9.1%)	40 (13.5%)
Native American	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	2 (0.7%)
Arabic/Middle Eastern	1 (1.1%)	1 (0.5%)	2 (0.7%)
Biracial	8 (9.1%)	5 (2.4%)	13 (4.4%)
Other	7 (8.0%)	4 (1.9%)	11 (3.7%)
Age[a]	20.15 (4.0)	36.23 (7.61)	31.52 (9.97)
Sexual orientation[b]			
Heterosexual	71 (80.7%)	189 (89.6%)	263 (88.0%)
Bisexual	5 (5.7%)	7 (3.3%)	12 (8.7%)
Gay	11 (12.5)	16 (7.6%)	27 (9.0%)

Note. [a] Mean age presented with standard deviation in parentheses. [b] Participants rated sexual orientation on a 7-point scale from 1 (exclusively heterosexual) to 7 (exclusively gay). In this table, ratings of 1-2 were classified as heterosexual, 3-5 were classified as bisexual, and 6-7 as gay.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for study variables by data source.

	SONA	MTURK	Total
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*
MGRS	23.98 (15.72)	22.03(15.24)	22.61 (15.39)
Shame	43.70 (10.92)	44.96 (11.26)	44.59 (11.15)
Guilt	60.61 (11.25)	61.21 (10.91)	61.03 (10.99)
Externalizing	34.90 (7.95)	36.99 (11.22)	36.37 (10.39)
DERS	76.91 (21.58)	72.85 (22.73)	74.05 (22.44)
Acceptance[*]	13.13 (6.45)	12.85 (5.54)	12.93 (5.82)
Sex video duration	36.15 (42.86)	39.69 (46.86)	38.65 (46.86)
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Sex video choice	13 (14.8%)	47 (22.3%)	60 (20.1%)
SES-SFP 12 mo.	8 (9.1%)	29 (13.7%)	37 (12.4%)
SES-SFP age 14[a]	7 (9.6%)	37 (20.4%)	44 (17.3%)

Note. MGRS = Masculine Gender Role Stress; Shame = TOSCA-3 Shame; Guilt = TOSCA-3 Guilt; Externalizing = TOSCA-3 Externalizing Blame; DERS = Difficulties in Emotion Scale (total score); Acceptance = DERS – Nonacceptance of Emotional Responses; Sex video Duration = number of seconds explicit video shown; SES- SFP age 14 = Total SV perpetration since age 14; SES-SFP 12mo = Total SV perpetration in past 12 months.
 *High scores indicate low acceptance of emotions.

Table 3

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	15	16	17
1. Age	-															
2. Mood	-.04															
3. MGRS	-.03	.06	-													
4. Shame	.08	-.04	.33**	-												
5. Guilt	.22**	.08	-.06	.40**	-											
6. Externalizing	-.09	.09	.35**	.37**	-.11	-										
7. DERS Total[a]	-.14*	-.23**	.38**	.44**	-.22**	.31**										
8. Acceptance[a]	-.05	-.13*	.33**	.44**	-.06	.30**	.84**	-								
9. Goals[a]	-.17**	-.15*	.32**	.43**	.01	.18**	.74**	.60**	-							
10. Impulse[a]	-.21**	-.10	.30**	.23**	-.30**	.38**	.76**	.56**	.47**							
11. Awareness[a]	.02	-.27**	.17**	.13*	-.33**	.04	.59**	.29**	.21**	.27**	-					
12. Clarity[a]	-.25**	.20**	.24**	.31**	-.27**	.20**	.78**	.57**	.47**	.49**	.57**	-				
13. Strategies[a]	-.05	-.23**	.33**	.43**	-.16**	.31**	.88**	.73**	.62**	.67**	.41**	.56**	-			
15. Film choice	-.03	.11	.08	-.11	-.30**	.12*	.07	.03	-.05	.15*	.10	.07	.04	-		
16. Video Duration	-.10	.09	.16**	-.10	-.28**	.16**	.04	-.01	-.06	.15*	.04	.03	.03	.59	-	
17. SES age 14	.01	-.02	.23**	.02	-.21**	.17**	.17**	.14*	.08	.22**	.05	.10	.17**	.07	.14*	
18. SES 12mo	-.08	-.06	.14*	-.02	-.25**	.11	.18**	.15*	.07	.22**	.08	.15**	.18**	.13*	.14*	.89**

Bivariate correlations among study variables

Note. $* p < .05$, $**p < .01$. Mood = pre-survey mood rating; MGRS = Masculine Gender Role Stress; Shame = TOSCA-3 Shame; Guilt = TOSCA-3 Guilt; Externalizing = TOSCA-3 Externalizing Blame; DERS = Difficulties in Emotion Scale; Nonacceptance = DERS – Nonacceptance of Emotional Responses; Goals = DERS – Difficulty Engaging in Goal-Directed Behavior; Impulse = DERS – Impulse control difficulties; Awareness = DERS – Lack of Emotional Awareness; Clarity = DERS – Lack of Emotional Clarity; Strategies = DERS – Lack of Emotion Regulation Strategies; Video Duration = number of seconds explicit video shown; SES lifetime = Total SV perpetration since age 14; SES 12mo = Total SV perpetration in past 12 months. [a]For all DERS subscales, higher scores indicate greater dysregulation.

Table 4

Hierarchical logistic regression predicting sex video choice

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			Step 4		
	B	*SE*	Exp(*b*)	*b*	*SE*	Exp(*b*)	*b*	*SE*	Exp(*b*)	*b*	*SE*	Exp(*b*)
Guilt	-.72**	.15	.48	-.70**	.18	.50	-.63	.19	.53	-.62**	.19	.54
MGRS	.19	.15	1.21	.19	.17	1.21	.16	.18	1.20	.16	.18	1.17
Group				.31	.31	1.36	.42	.33	1.52	.47	.34	1.60
Shame				-.05	.22	.83	-.46	.33	.63	-.34	.34	.71
Acceptance[a]				-.01	.19	.99	-.26	.30	.77	-.20	.29	.82
Group x Shame							.43	.39	1.21	.27	.42	1.32
Group x Acceptance							.60	.40	1.82	.60	.39	1.83
Shame x Acceptance							-.50*	.23	.61	-.26	.33	.77
Group x Shame x Acceptance										-.41	.45	.67

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Guilt = TOSCA-3 Guilt; MGRS = Masculine Gender Role Stress; Group = experimental condition; Shame = TOSCA-3 Shame; Nonacceptance = DERS – Nonacceptance of Emotional Responses. [a]Higher scores indicate less acceptance of emotions.

Table 5

Model effects for negative binomial regression with shame, emotional acceptance, and experimental group predicting video duration.

	B	SE	Exp(b)	Wald[a] χ^2	P
Guilt	-.29**	.07	.75	15.83	.00
MGRS	.21**	.07	1.23	9.69	.00
Group	.05	.13	.72	.13	.72
Shame	-.06	.12	.94	.71	.40
Acceptance[a]	.08	.12	1.08	1.74	.19
Group x Shame	-.02	.14	.98	.02	.90
Group x Acceptance	-.40*	.16	.67	5.97	.02
Shame x Acceptance	-.11	.10	.89	3.13	.08
Group x Shame x Acceptance	.03	.13	.98	.04	.85
Goodness of Fit					
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	51.73**				< .001
Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC)	2749.33				
Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)	2796.34				

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. MGRS = Masculine Gender Role Stress; Group = experimental condition; Shame = TOSCA-3 Shame; Nonacceptance = DERS – Nonacceptance of Emotional Responses. Parameter estimates reported are for gender threat condition as reference group. [a] Wald Chi-Square and significance values are test of model effects. [a] Higher scores indicate less acceptance of emotions.

Table 6

Hierarchical logistic regression of group and externalizing blame predicting sex video choice

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	b	*SE*	Exp(*b*)	*B*	*SE*	Exp(*b*)	*b*	*SE*	Exp(*b*)
MGRS	.20	.14	1.23	.10	.15	1.10	.10	.16	1.10
Group				.31	.30	1.36	.22	.31	1.25
Externalizing				.26	.15	1.29	-.07	.23	.94
Group x Externalizing							.61*	.23	.21

*Note. * *p* < .05. MGRS = Masculine Gender Role Stress; Group = experimental condition; Externalizing = TOSCA-3 Externalizing Blame.

Table 7

Negative binomial regression results for externalizing blame and experimental group predicting video duration.

	b	SE	Exp(b)	Wald[a] χ^2	p
MGRS	.14*	.07	1.15	4.13	.04
Group	.15	.12	1.17	1.65	.20
Externalizing Blame	.34*	.09	1.41	4.56	.03
Group x Externalizing Blame	-.39**	.12	.68	10.31	.001
Goodness of Fit					
Likelihood Ratio χ2	25.81**				< .001
Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC)	2775.47				
Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)	2793.77				

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. MGRS = Masculine Gender Role Stress; Group = experimental condition; Externalizing = TOSCA-3 Externalizing Blame. Parameter estimates reported are for gender threat condition as reference group.
[a]Wald Chi-Square and significance values are test of model effects.

Probability of Selecting Sex Video
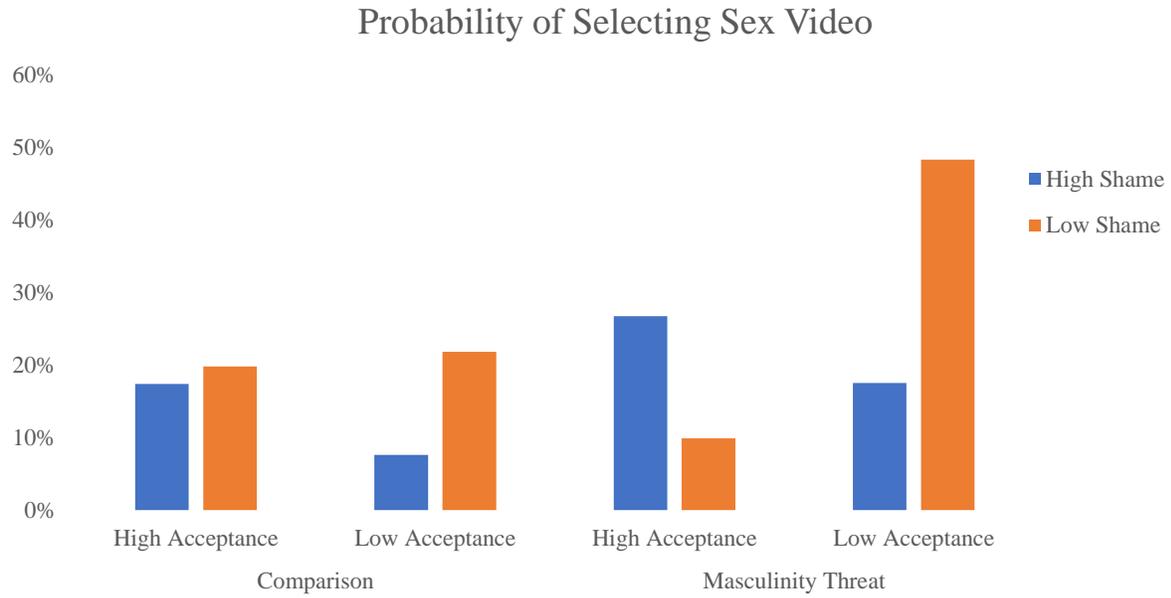
Figure 1. Probability of selecting sex video by nonacceptance of emotions, shame proneness, and gender threat. High and low values for continuous variables represent +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean.
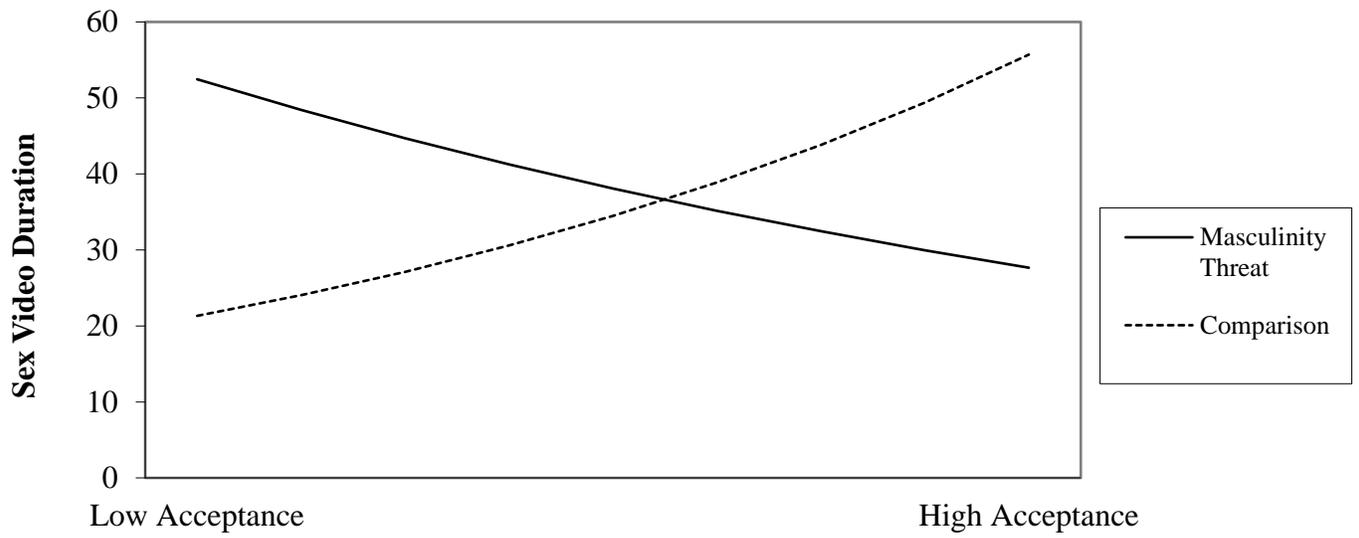
Figure 2. Acceptance of emotions and gender threat predicting sex video duration. High and low values for continuous variables plotted at +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean.

Probability of Selecting Sex Video
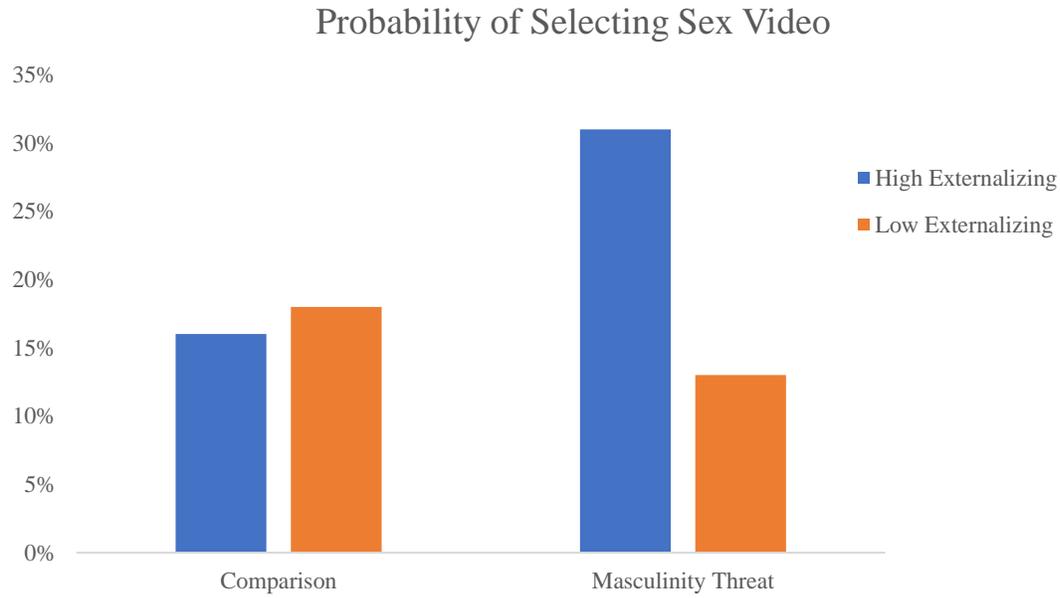
Figure 3. Probability of selecting sex video by gender threat and externalization of blame. High and low values for continuous variables represent +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean.
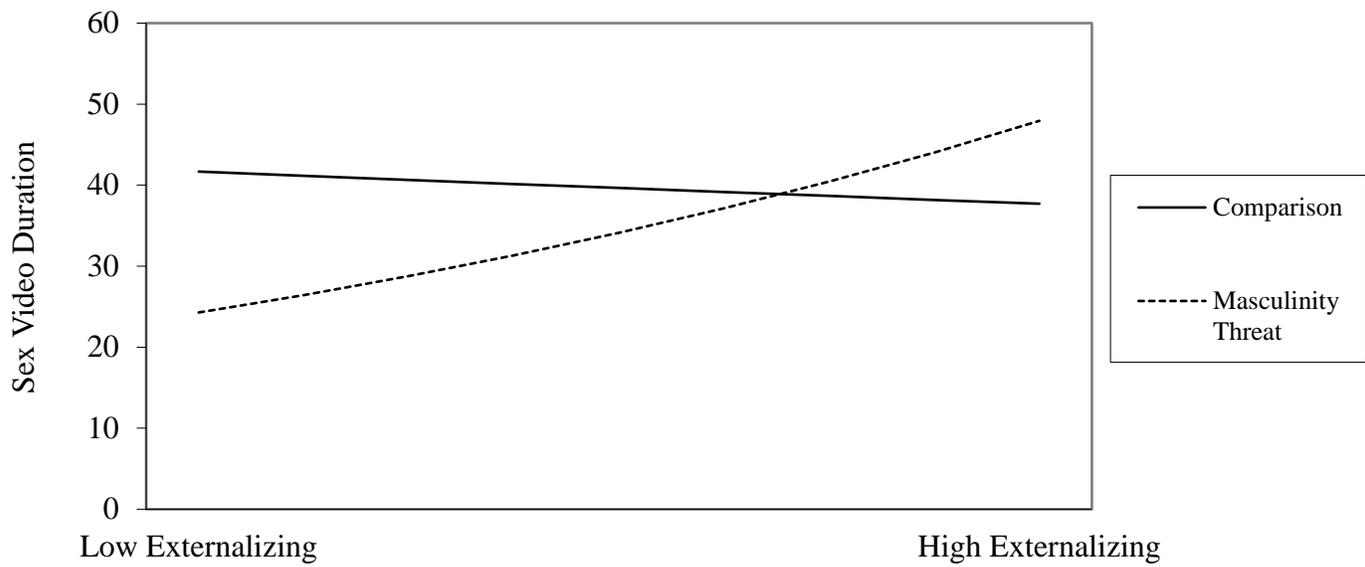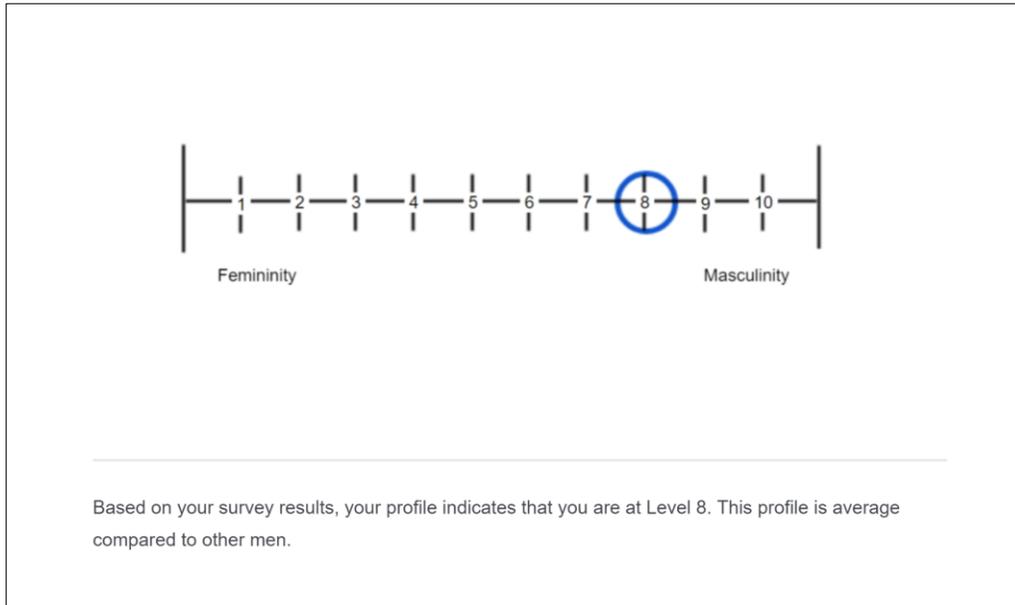
Figure 4. *Externalizing blame and gender threat predicting sex video duration. High and low values for continuous variables plotted at +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean.*
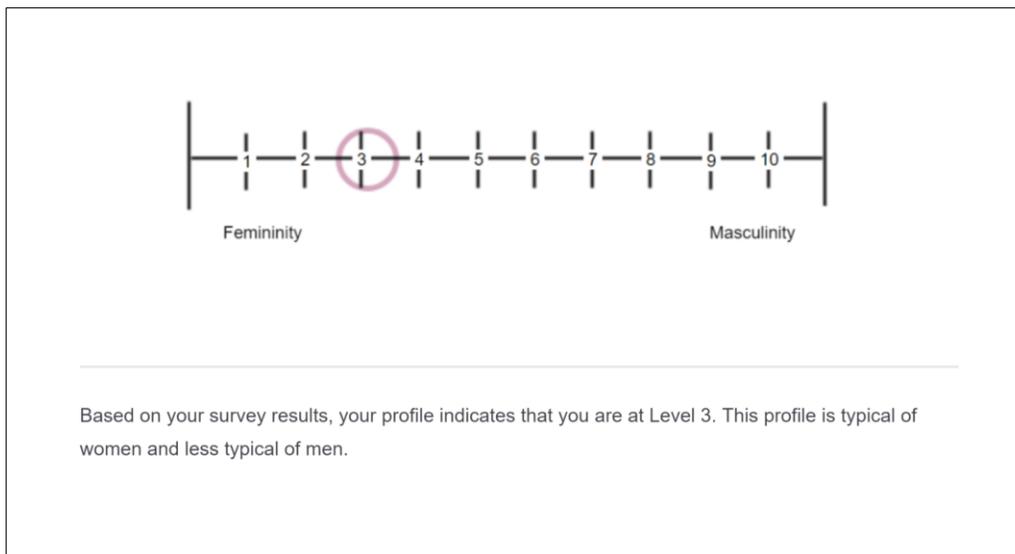
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Gender Feedback

Appendix A.1: Comparison condition

Based on your survey results, your profile indicates that you are at Level 8. This profile is average compared to other men.

Appendix A.2: Masculinity threat condition

Based on your survey results, your profile indicates that you are at Level 3. This profile is typical of women and less typical of men.

Appendix B: Video Selection Synopses

Participants see sets of three images and descriptions for each film clip. Only one image from each option is provided below. The order of presentation of the two sets of images is counterbalanced across participants.

Film Clip 1 Synopsis:
In the first ten seconds of this clip, a man and a woman meet inside a hotel. The man, a chef, quickly recognizes the female as a well known food critic, and invites her to cook with him in the hotel kitchen. The remainder of the clip involves the two sharing their favorite recipes while they share stories and cook.

Film Clip 2 Synopsis:
In the first ten seconds of this clip, a man and a woman meet at a friend's house. The man recognizes the female as a well-known author and they escape to a nearby hotel. The remainder of the clip involves very brief foreplay that quickly leads into a long extended period of mutual oral sex and intercourse in multiple positions.