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DEPARTMENT of PSYCHOLOGY

Hostile Sexism and The Acceptance of Rape Myths: The Role of Masculinity Threat in Two Salient Predictors of Sexual Violence

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Master's Thesis (30 hp)
Spring 2023

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my incredible supervisor, Una Tellhed. She provided invaluable insight and guidance throughout this project. I want to express my immense gratitude for her patience and support. Without it, this thesis would not have been possible. I could not have asked for a more inspiring mentor.

I would also like to acknowledge my wonderful friend, Dana Turner, as well as Zoltán Kekecs for generously offering their time and support throughout the data analysis portion of this thesis. Their kindness and pedagogical approach allowed me to dive deeper into this thesis, which I otherwise would not have been able to do. I thank them for their contribution to this thesis.

I thank my employers and colleagues at Purgatorio, who offered accommodation and emotional support throughout this thesis. Balancing work and studies would not have been possible without their flexibility and understanding.

Finally, I thank my wonderful friends (here in Lund and abroad), family, and partner. For your comradery and support, phone calls across oceans, long days in the library, countless days of fun, and everything in-between, I thank you dearly.

Abstract

This thesis aimed to investigate the association between masculinity threat and two salient predictors of sexual assault: hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. The thesis comprised two studies. Study 1 focused on the correlational relationships between three measures of masculinity threat (masculine contingency, gender role discrepancy stress, and status threat) and the two predictors of sexual assault. Two moderators, support for feminism and left/right political orientation were considered. Results from the correlational analysis indicated significant positive correlations between masculinity threat and both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. Building upon these findings, Study 2 employed an experimental manipulation of masculine status threat. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: masculine status threat induction, masculine status affirmation, or the control group. Contrary to expectations, neither threatening nor affirming masculine status yielded any significant direct effects on hostile sexism or rape myth acceptance. However, an exploratory analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of affirming masculine status on both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, whereby affirming masculine status led to a decrease in status threat, which in turn led to a decrease in both outcomes. These findings shed light on the role that masculinity threat may play in sexual assault perpetration. The implications of these results for understanding and addressing predictors of sexual assault are discussed, along with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Masculinity threat, precarious masculinity, social dominance, sexual violence, hostile sexism, rape myth acceptance

Hostile Sexism and The Acceptance of Rape Myths: The Role of Masculinity Threat in Two Salient Predictors of Sexual Violence

Sexual assault against women is a salient public health concern which, according to the World Health Organization, affects upwards of one in three women, globally (Sardinha et al., 2022). Further, the overwhelming majority of sexual assault is perpetrated by men. A 2010 national report of sexual violence statistics in the United States reported that 98.1% of female and 93.3% of male rape victims reported male perpetrators (Walters et al., 2012). As the perpetration of sexual assault is an overwhelmingly male phenomenon, what role do constructs of masculinity play? in two studies, one deploying correlational and the other experimental designs, I will test the connection between threatened masculinity, hostile sexism, and rape myth acceptance–both of which predict sexual assault perpetration (Agadullina et al., 2022; Murnen et al., 2002). I will primarily draw from Precarious Masculinity Theory (Vandello & Bosson, 2013), and will incorporate aspects of Social Dominance Theory to inform the discussion of masculinity threat and sexual assault predictive behaviors.

Masculinity in Context, and Its Connection to Sexual Assault Perpetration

Masculinity is defined in the current context as the culturally prescribed expectations of men in a given social context, or in other words, what it takes to be considered a "real man" (Eagly & Kite, 1987). As gender performance is a culturally bound phenomenon, there are many distinct ways that men express masculinity. Notwithstanding, robust findings suggesting that, across many cultures, there are some personality traits that are more normatively associated with men than women (often called "traditional masculine norms"), such as assertiveness, aggressiveness, and dominance (Costa et al., 2001; Williams et al., 1999).

As it relates to the perpetration of sexual assault, there is a body of research that ties strong adherence to these traditional masculine norms to perpetration (e.g., Hill & Fischer, 2001; Locke & Mahalik, 2005), especially as it relates to stereotypical masculine scripts which assume that sexual dominance asserts manliness (Smith et al., 2015; Thompson & Cracco, 2008). Despite the growing literature on this topic, there are many theoretical gaps due to the rarity of studies which specifically focus on men's *perception* of masculinity as it relates to sexual violence (McDermott et al., 2015). In light of this, meta-analyses have been conducted to determine which socially constructed masculine ideologies are the most predictive of perpetration. One such meta-analysis was conducted by Murnen et al. (2002), who identified several factors of masculinity that positively predict perpetration. Overall

themes from this report relate to beliefs in male superiority and ideology which seeks to undermine the legitimacy of women, such as endorsing hostility toward women and the justification of sexual violence. The current thesis will focus on two specific masculine ideologies: hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance.

Hostile Sexism, Rape Myth Acceptance, and Sexual Assault Perpetration

"Hostile sexism" is defined as the justification of gender inequality through antipathy toward women and is characterized by hostility toward women that question unequal power structures. It is one of two factors described in Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Glick & Fiske, 1997), which also includes benevolent sexism (a more covert type of sexism which considers women as weak and in need of protection from men). Although both types of sexism share connections to ideological and behavioral justifications of violence against women, hostile sexism predicts violence to a much greater degree (e.g., Agadullina et al., 2022). Many studies have linked hostile sexism to high likelihood of committing rape (e.g., Abrams et al., 2003) and aggressive sexual strategies (Hall & Canterberry, 2011). Recent meta-analysis established that hostile sexism is significantly predictive of perpetration of sexual violence and attitudes which encourage sexual violence (Agadullina et al., 2022).

"Rape myths" are false cultural scripts regarding sexual violence that shifts blame to the victims while justifying the actions of the perpetrator (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Rape myth acceptance is defined as the endorsement these cultural myths. The acceptance of rape myths has been a popular topic in sexual violence research. Murnen et al. (2002) showed through meta-analysis that rape myth acceptance was a significant predictor of sexual violence according to a compilation of data from twenty-one studies. Within this analysis, the largest effect size was found among studies that measured participants' self-reported likelihood of committing rape compared to studies that measured participants' self-reported history of committing rape, though significant effect sizes were found in both types of studies. In a more recent systematic literature review, Yapp and Quayle (2018) acknowledge that such studies, although they show a significant relationship, are often critiqued for a potential bi-directionality problem. In their review, they found significant effects in seven out of eight studies, including two longitudinal studies, which provided partial support for temporal precedence such that rape myth acceptance may precede perpetration.

In sum, adherence to both of these ideologies has shown strong connections to the perpetration of sexual violence. The question remains, however: who endorses these ideologies and under what circumstances? Murnen (2015) advocates for a constructive approach which views adherence to such ideologies as more of a state than a trait–a concept

which was demonstrated by Thompson and Cracco (2008), who showed that context was among the strongest predictors of men's harassment of women. Murnen (2015) further argues that the concept of *threatened* masculinity is a crucial context to consider as it relates to adherence to traditional masculine norms. Indeed, although adherence to traditional masculinity norms varies between countries (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010), and cultures vary greatly in the degree to which men and women are perceived as having distinct qualities at all (Williams et al., 1999), the belief that masculine status is tenuous and easily threatened transcends specific cultural expectations of men (Vandello et al., 2022).

Masculinity Threat and the Precarious Masculinity Hypothesis

I turn to Precarious Masculinity Theory, which posits that masculinity is a volatile social status that is difficult to achieve and easy to lose (Bosson & Vandello, 2011). This precarious nature leads to hypervigilance toward protecting masculine identity such that a threat state is induced when men perceive their masculinity to be threatened. This so-called "masculinity threat" is defined as the anxiety related to perceived threats to a man's status as a masculine man. In response to masculinity threat, men often engage in compensatory behaviors to "repair" or "prove" their manhood (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Critically, these compensatory behaviors tend to be exaggerated performances of stereotypical male behavior which, in order to assure reassertion of masculine identity, must be hard to feign and are often extreme behaviors, as masculine identity requires continuous external validation in order to be maintain the status of a "good man" (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). This was illustrated by Bosson and Vandello (2011), for example, who showed that men demonstrated higher levels of aggression after holding a woman's handbag to reassert their masculinity after performing an "effeminate" action.

Of note, masculinity threat is a broad term, and overlaps significantly with related theories and measures, such as "masculine discrepancy stress" and "masculine contingency". Masculine discrepancy stress is defined as the stress felt by men who perceive themselves as discrepant from cultural expectations of masculinity (Reidy et al., 2015) and masculine contingency is defined as the degree to which positive and negative emotions depend on one's personal belief that he is being perceived as masculine (Burkley et al., 2016). As these concepts significantly overlap, I will include studies which measure such concepts in the present theoretical background as they all portray a level of precarious and/or threatened masculinity.

Masculinity threat has seen an increase in attention in social psychology as more formal theoretical frameworks are established and consequences of masculinity threat have

been interrogated. Among the most researched responses to masculinity threat are transphobia (Harrison & Michelson, 2019; Konopka et al., 2021) and homonegativity (Konopka et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2017). Of note, this trend of homophobia is the strongest toward (and in some cases relates exclusively to) gay men who are perceived as feminine (Glick et al., 2007; Hunt et al., 2016; Wellman et al., 2021), suggesting that an underlying mechanism in these relationships may be more related to the disdain and avoidance of femininity.

Indeed, ample evidence in the extant literature suggests that, in response to masculinity threat, men tend to compensate by both adhering more strongly to masculine traits such as toughness (Fowler & Geers, 2017), muscularity (Hunt et al., 2013), and aggression (Braly et al., 2018; Cheryan et al., 2015; Vandello & Bosson, 2013), but also by avoiding activities which could been seen as feminine, such as relationship interdependence (Lamarche et al., 2021), and domestic labor such as housework and childcare (Kaplan & Offer, 2022). Further In-line with anti-femininity, threat has also been seen to boost misogyny (Scaptura, 2019), sexist humor (O'Connor et al., 2017), justification of gender inequality (Weaver & Vescio, 2015), and ideological dominance over women (Dahl et al., 2015). Masculinity threat has also been associated with endorsing more conservative political alignment that promotes aggressive politics, war, and the purchase of guns (Carian & Sobotka, 2018; Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2019; DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020; Willer et al., 2013).

Given these connections between masculinity threat and maladaptive outcomes, what can be said about threat and the perpetration of sexual assault? Poignantly, Reidy et al. (2015) found that masculine discrepancy stress was positively related to self-reported past perpetration of sexual assault among adolescent men. Furthermore, Reidy et al. (2014) found that masculinity threat was a predictor of intimate partner violence among men in the United States. A secondary analysis on the same dataset was conducted by Berke et al. (2019), who found that the direct relationship between masculine discrepancy stress and sexual coercion was significant even while controlling for emotional regulation. This connection has also been shown qualitatively by Peralta and Tuttle (2013), who conducted semi-structured interviews with perpetrators of intimate partner violence and found thematic links between perpetration and threatened masculinity as a result of unemployment. As acknowledged by Reidy et al. (2014), despite a rich literature that ties adherence to masculinity to intimate partner violence, *threats* to masculinity have been widely overlooked in the extant theoretical framework.

The Lens of Social Dominance

As theories surrounding precarious masculinity and masculinity threat develop, there is increasing need to overtly describe what type of threat is being measured or manipulated. The majority of manipulations and measures primarily focus on threats to individual masculine identity (i.e., being a "good man" compared to other men). Some scholars have expanded this train of thought by including measures of masculine *status threat*, or the anxiety associated with the perception that masculinity as a social status is losing potency (Scaptura, 2019; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020; Willer et al., 2013). As more dimensions of precarious masculinity become apparent, I pose the question: how can similar theories of status maintenance inform precarious masculinity theory?

Social Dominance Theory (SDT; Sidanius et al., 2004) asserts that inequality arises from both systematic and individual-level discrepancies in power allocation between groups, as well as the acceptance of ideologies that legitimize unequal power structures. Similar to the precarious masculinity theory, SDT predicts that members of dominant groups tend to exhibit more discriminatory behaviors when their in-group feels threatened. Given the persistent trend of gender inequality, SDT posits that men maintain social dominance over women (and men perceived as subordinate), through hierarchy-legitimizing myths, which are cultural scripts used to justify subordinating actions and discrimination, and by emphasizing intergroup differences (e.g., Sidanius et al., 2003). The degree to which members of dominant groups strive to maintain power imbalances is theorized to be determined by social dominance orientation–the degree to which an individual supports and advocates for societal power hierarchies (Sidanius et al., 1999).

As it relates to the current thesis, the acceptance of rape myths can be seen as ascribing to hierarchy-affirming myths. Indeed, rape myth acceptance has been shown to positively correlate with social dominance orientation (Manoussaki & Hayne, 2019; Łyś et al., 2023), and has been shown to be a strategic tool for justifying gender-based dominance hierarchies (Chapleau & Oswald, 2013). Hostile sexism, too, has been shown to positively correlate with social dominance orientation, and has been identified as a means of justification for intimate partner violence (Kiral Ucar & Özdemir, 2021).

I argue that considering the implications of masculine status threat (and how outcomes may differ compared to individual masculinity threat) diversifies and clarifies research under the umbrella of masculinity threat. This can be seen in previous studies that have concluded that there is no association between individual masculinity threat (measured by masculine contingency) and hostile sexism (e.g., Burkley et al., 2016; Patterson & Cole, 2021) compared to Scaptura (2019) who found a significant positive association between masculine status

threat and hostile sexism. This illustrates the problem with viewing masculinity threat as uni-dimensional and emphasizes the value of drawing from Social Dominance Theory in developing comprehensive measures of masculine status threat. I draw from SDT in the current study by including measures of both individual and status-related masculinity threat, which I argue will increase the explanatory value of any results found in the present thesis.

Masculinity Threat, Hostile Sexism, and Rape Myth Acceptance

To summarize, the two primary ideologies that will be my focus in this thesis are hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. Previous research provides some insight into the link between them and sexual assault perpetration, but gaps and inconsistencies beg further work. To illustrate, results for hostile sexism have been inconsistent. As aforementioned, Burkley et al. (2016) found no significant association between masculine contingency and hostile sexism. Likewise, Dahl et al. (2015) found evidence of a connection between induced masculinity threat and benevolent sexism, but not to hostile sexism. Scaptura (2019), however, found a significant positive correlation between both gender role stress and masculine status threat and hostile sexism. Therefore, it seems that there is some support for the idea that masculinity threat is related to hostile sexism, but that it may depend on which type of masculinity threat is being measured.

Burkley et al. (2016) reported a positive relationship between masculine contingency and rape myth acceptance–an effect that was replicated by Patterson and Cole (2021), who identified hope as a moderator. Although no experimental studies have specifically identified an effect of masculinity threat on rape myth acceptance, Munsch and Willer (2012) showed that inducing masculinity threat led to an increase in victim blaming–a key underpinning of rape myth acceptance–in response to rape vignettes.

Although these studies suggest a potential link, I seek to improve upon these studies in the current thesis by clarifying the inconsistent findings regarding hostile sexism and progress our understanding of how masculinity threat relates to rape myth acceptance. I will further include an experimental design using validated measures of hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, which have thus far been widely absent from the literature. An additional level of analysis that may add explanatory value is the inclusion of two additional control vairables, support for feminism and left/right political alignment; both of which have been shown to highly relate to both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance (de Geus et al., 2022; Manoussaki & Veitch, 2015; Łyś et al., 2023).

The Current Study

For the current thesis I conduct two studies to explore the overarching research question: "How does masculinity threat relate to factors that previous research has found to predict sexual assault perpetration among men?". In the first study, I will test the relationships between masculinity threat and two sexual assault predictive masculine factors: hostile sexism and the acceptance of rape myths. I operationalize "Masculinity threat" as both gender role discrepancy stress and masculine contingency, as well as masculine status threat. In Study 2, I will employ an experimental design to test if induced masculine status threat increases hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance in men, and if affirmed masculine status reduces hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance in men.

Significance

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of key predictors of sexual assault through the lens of transitions in gender-based power relations and masculinity norms, and their potential for informing the development of future interventions. Given the high global prevalence of sexual assault and the unignorable portion of assaults being perpetrated by men, understanding the role of both adherence and threats to masculine identity and status is paramount in developing useful theories to describe, understand, and intervene in sexual assault perpetration. This thesis contributes to the development of Precarious Masculinity Theory by approaching masculinity threat from a multi-dimensional stance, which progresses the current theoretical framework of masculinity threat by including aspects of both individual- and status-level threats and drawing from Social Dominance Theory in order to not only measure but begin to describe more fully the complex ways in which masculinity threat influences ideology surrounding sexual violence.

Hypotheses

Study 1 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Masculinity threat will positively correlate with hostile sexism.

Hypothesis 2: Masculinity threat will positively correlate with rape myth acceptance.

Hypothesis 3: Masculinity threat will significantly contribute to the prediction of hostile sexism, even after controlling for the influence of support for feminism and political orientation, such that that higher levels of status threat will be associated with increased levels of hostile sexism, independent of participants' levels of support for feminism and political orientation.

Hypothesis 4: Masculinity threat will significantly contribute to the prediction of rape myth acceptance, even after controlling for the influence of support for feminism and political orientation, such that that higher levels of status threat will be associated with increased levels

of hostile sexism, independent of participants' levels of support for feminism and political orientation.

Study 2 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Priming masculine status threat will lead to an increase in hostile sexism compared to a control group (H1a), while affirming masculine status will lead to a decrease in hostile sexism compared to a control group (H2b).

Hypothesis 2: Compared to a control group, priming masculinity threat will lead to an increase in rape myth acceptance (H2a), while affirming men's status in society will lead to a decrease in rape myth acceptance (H2b).

Study 1

Methods

Design

In study 1 I used a correlational approach. The independent variables were masculine contingency, gender role discrepancy stress, and status threat. The dependent variables were hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. I included two control variables: political orientation and support for feminism–for exploratory moderation analysis via multiple linear regression.

Participants and Procedure

Participants were sampled by convenience via forum-based social media (e.g. Reddit and Familjeliv). The link to the survey was posted along with a description of the general goals and inclusion criteria, which stated that participants must identify as a man (as some included measures have only been validated for men) and be at least 18 years old. A total of 186 men initiated the survey and 123 men completed the survey. After providing informed consent, participants reported demographic information regarding age (M = 29.24, SD = 10.65), and Nationality. The sample contained participants from 22 nations, with the majority coming from the United States (58%) and Canada (11.4%) (for a full list of nationalities included in the sample, see Appendix A). Participants were then presented with the Masculine Contingency Scale, Gender Role Discrepancy Stress Scale, Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (hostile factor), Hypermasculinity Index (Callous sex factor), and the Modern Myths of Sexual Aggression Scale. Once the participants completed all the measures, they were provided with a debriefing form which further described the aims of the study (Appendix C). All data was collected using the online data collection tool Qualtrics.

Measures

Masculinity Threat. I used three measures to operationalize masculinity threat. Firstly, The Masculine Contingency Scale (MCS; Burkley et al., 2016), which is a 10-item scale containing two factors: threat and boost. The former is a measure of the degree to which a man's negative emotions are contingent upon failing to fulfill cultural expectations of masculinity, while the latter is a measure of the degree to which a man's positive emotions are contingent upon successfully fulfilling cultural expectations of masculinity. Each factor consists of 5 questions, such as "I can't respect myself if I don't behave like a 'real man'" (masculine contingency threat) and "I feel proud when I am able to demonstrate my manliness" (masculine contingency boost). Participants respond using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Disagree completely" (1) to "Agree completely" (7). A Cronbach alpha of .894 was observed in the current sample.

Secondly, I used The Gender Role Discrepancy Stress Scale, which consists of 10 items and measures two factors: the degree of discrepancy an individual believes they are perceived as discrepant from cultural expectations of their given gender identity (GRD) and the stress that one feels regarding discrepancies between their gender identity and their expression of gender roles (DS). The scale contains items such as "Most guys I know would say that I am not as masculine as my friends" (GRD) and "I worry that people find me less attractive because I'm not as macho as other guys" (DS). Participants respond using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Disagree completely" (1) to "Agree completely" (2). A Cronbach alpha of .827 was observed in the current sample.

Finally, I measured masculine status threat using a single item wherein participants were asked to rate on a 4-point Likert scale the degree to which they agreed with the statement "Recent changes in our society often disadvantage men". The item was originally used by Willer et al. (2013), who considered this item a good indicator of threatened masculinity on a group/status level and has further been used in masculinity threat research as a measure of status threat (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020).

Hostile Sexism. I measured hostile sexism using a selection of 6 items from The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory's hostile factor (Glick & Fiske, 1997), which consists of two subscales: Hostile Sexism (11 items) and Benevolent Sexism (11 items). As the present research questions deal only with the hostile factor, only the hostile items were included in the present study. The scale originally consists of 6-point Likert items, such as "Women seek to gain power by getting control over men", with options ranging from "Disagree strongly" (1) to "Agree strongly" (2). The scale was scored by taking the average response across scale

items, with a higher score implying a higher degree of hostile sexism. Cronbach alpha was .72.

Rape Myth Acceptance. I selected 9 items from The Acceptance of Modern Myths of Sexual Aggression Scale (AMSA; Gerger et al., 2007) to measure rape myth acceptance. I adapted the scale for use in the current study due to its length (originally 30 items). Although short forms of this scale exist, none have been validated in English at the time of this data collection. I selected items for the current analysis by identifying conceptually similar items and items that were most poignantly related to sexual assault. The scale consists of 6-point Likert items ranging from "Completely disagree" (1) to "Completely agree" (2). Cronbach alpha was .80.

Callous Attitude Toward Sexuality (Hypermasculinity). I measured callous attitudes toward sex using The Hypermasculinity Index's callous sex factor (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). Given the age of the scale, four items were omitted due to dated and/or colloquial language and topics. The format of this scale is a sentence-completion task wherein participants are given the stem of a sentence and must select a phrase to complete the sentence based on their beliefs. For example, one item states, "Any man who is a man…" and participants are instructed to select between "...needs to have sex regularly" and "...can do without sex," with the former option implying a higher degree of callous sexuality. A modern scoring methodology was used which allowed for participants to choose intermediate selections which showed preference for one option, even if they did not fully support it (Peters et al., 2007). Given the low Cronbach alpha for this measure (a = .66), this measure was not included in the final analysis.

Control Variables. I included two control variables: support for feminism and left/right political alignment. To measure support for feminism I used a single item which stated "Do you support feminism?". Participants indicated their response ranging from "definitely not" (1) to "definitely yes" (5). I measured political attitudes according to left/right orientation, which is considered to be a reliable and informative measure of political alignment. Responses are measured on a 10-point, bipolar Likert scale ranging from "Completely left" (1) to "Completely right" (10) (Kroh, 2007).

Statistical Analysis

I conducted all analysis using R version 4.2.2 (R Core Team, 2022), utilizing the packages "psych" (Revelle, 2022) and "jtools" (Long, 2022).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive statistics for study 1 can be found in Table 1. Given the high skew and kurtosis of support for feminism, it was transformed exponentially for its inclusion in multiple linear regression, which reduced skew and kurtosis to acceptable levels. Overall, the sample was fairly left leaning, with high support for feminism. The implications of these demographics will be discussed in the general discussion. A full correlational matrix including all variables can be found in Appendix F.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics for Study1

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	Skew	Kurtosis
HS	2.18	1.10	0.10	0.69	–0.59
RMA	2.79	1.05	0.09	0.54	–0.31
MCT	2.4	1.31	0.12	0.73	–0.76
MCB	4.57	1.51	0.14	–0.51	-0.46
GRDS	2.99	1.51	0.14	0.49	–0.76
ST	2.18	0.98	0.09	0.17	–1.17
Fem	4.37	0.91	0.08	–1.69	2.72
Poli	3.42	2.06	0.19	0.91	0.28

Note: $N = 123$; SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error; HS = hostile sexism; RMA = rape myth acceptance; MCT = masculine contingency threat; MCB = masculine contingency boost; GRDS = gender role discrepancy stress; ST = status threat; Fem = support for feminism; Poli = left/right political orientation

Pearson Correlations

To examine the relationship between measures of masculinity threat, hostile sexism, and rape myth acceptance, I conducted a series of one-way Pearson correlation tests between the three measures of masculinity threat and both outcome variables.

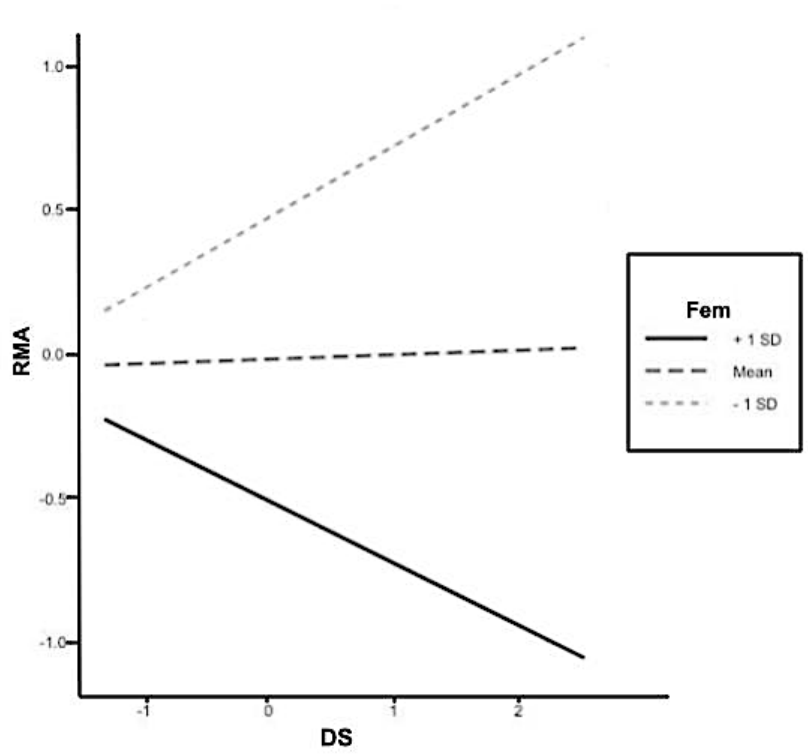
In partial support of Hypothesis 1, I found moderate, positive correlations between hostile sexism and masculine contingency threat, $r = .47$, $p < .001$, as well as status threat, $r = .60$, $p < .001$. I further found a weak, positive relationship between hostile sexism and masculine contingency boost, $r = .25$, $p = .003$. However, I found no significant correlation between hostile sexism and gender role discrepancy stress.

Similarly, in partial support of Hypothesis 2, I found significant, moderate, positive correlations between rape myth acceptance and masculine contingency threat, $r = .39$, $p < .001$, as well as status threat, $r = .47$, $p < .001$. I further found a significant, weak, positive relationship between rape myth acceptance and masculine contingency boost, $r = .20$, $p = .015$.

I found no significant correlation between rape myth acceptance and gender role discrepancy stress; however, an exploratory moderation analysis via multiple linear regression revealed that support for feminism significantly moderated the relationship, $R^2_{Adj} = .30$, $\beta = -0.23$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -3.19$, $p = .002$, such that there was a stronger positive association between gender role discrepancy stress and rape myth acceptance for men who had lower support for feminism compared to those who had high support for feminism. The overall model was significant, $F(3, 119) = 18.70$, $SE = 0.83$, $p < .001$, and showed that discrepancy stress was not a significant predictor of rape myth acceptance alone, while support for feminism significantly predicted rape myth acceptance, $\beta = -0.49$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -6.48$, $p < .001$, such that an increase in support for feminism predicted a decrease in rape myth acceptance. Further probing of this interaction revealed a significant relationship between gender role discrepancy stress and rape myth acceptance among men who were one standard below the mean of support for feminism, $\beta = 0.25$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 2.50$, $p = .011$, but not among those who were at the mean, or one standard above the mean. The interaction model explained significantly more variance than a model that did not include the interaction term ($\Delta R^2_{Adj} = .05$). This interaction is visualized in figure 1. No other moderating effects of the two control variables were found.

Figure 1.

Masculine Discrepancy Stress Regressed on Rape Myth Acceptance With Support for Feminism As a Moderator



Note: SD = standard deviation; RMA = rape myth acceptance; DS = Masculine Discrepancy Stress.

The Unique Variance Explained by Masculinity Threat

To explore the unique amount of variance in hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance explained by masculinity threat while controlling for support for feminism and political orientation, I used hierarchical multiple linear regression, separately exploring masculine contingency threat and status threat. I selected these measures for the analysis due to their clear, direct relationships to the dependent variables, whereas the associations for gender role discrepancy stress were less clear.

In the first series of block analyses, Step 1 served as a baseline and predicted hostile sexism from support for feminism and political orientation. Step 2 predicted hostile sexism from support for feminism, political orientation, and masculine contingency threat. Step 3 predicted hostile sexism from support for feminism, political orientation, and status threat. Evaluation of Step 2 and Step 3 were both in comparison to Step 1

In the second series of block analyses, Step 1served as a baseline and predicted rape myth acceptance from support for feminism and political orientations. Step 2 predicted rape myth acceptance from support for feminism, political orientation, and masculine contingency threat. Step 3 predicted rape myth acceptance from support for feminism, political orientation, and status threat. As in the first series of block analyses, evaluation of Step 2 and Step 3 were in comparison to Step 1. A table containing standardized coefficients for these block analyses can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Standardized Regression Coefficients of a Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Variable	Hostile sexism				Rape myth acceptance			
	β *(SE)*	*t*	*p*	ΔR^2	β *(SE)*	*t*	*p*	ΔR^2
				Step 1				
poli	0.44 (0.08)	5.78	<.001***		0.34 (0.09)	3.67	<.001***	
fem	–0.40 (0.08)	–5.22	<.001***		–0.30 (0.09)	–3.24	.002**	
				Step 2				
				.04				.04
MCT	0.23 (0.06)	3.57	<.001***		0.22 (0.08)	2.78	.006**	
poli	0.34 (0.08)	4.42	<.001***		0.26 (0.09)	2.77	.006**	
fem	–0.40 (0.07)	–5.50	<.001***		–0.30 (0.09)	–3.26	.001**	
				Step 3				
				.04				.03
ST	0.25 (0.07)	3.45	<.001***		0.20 (0.09)	2.29	.024*	
poli	0.33 (0.08)	4.13	<.001***		0.26 (0.10)	2.70	.008**	
fem	–0.34 (0.07)	–4.63	<.001***		–.25 (0.09)	–2.68	.008**	

Note: N = 123

Poli = left/right political orientation; fem = support for feminism; MCT = masculine contingency threat; ST = status threat. $p < .001$ = ***; $p < .01$ = **; $p < .05$ = *

Masculinity Threat and Hostile Sexism

Step 1 was significant, $R^2_{Adj} = .56$, $F(2,120) = 76.19$, $SE = .67$, $p < .001$, and revealed that both political orientation and support for feminism are significant predictors of hostile sexism. Specifically, those with more right-leaning political orientation and less support for feminism were more likely to endorse hostile sexism.

Step 2 was significant, $R^2_{Adj} = .59$, $F(3,120) = 60.02$, $SE = .64$, $p < .001$, and revealed that masculine contingency threat was a significant predictor of hostile sexism such that the more an individual associated negative emotions with threatened masculinity, the more likely they were to endorse hostile sexism. Political orientation and support for feminism were also significant predictors of hostile sexism in step 2, following the same trend as in step 1. The addition of masculine contingency threat explained 4% more variance in hostile sexism than step 1. According to Akaike Information Criteria (AIC), step 2 (AIC = 244.70) had a significantly lower AIC than step l (AIC = 255.23), indicating that adding masculine contingency threat was a significant improvement to step 1.

Step 3 was also significant, R^2_{Adj} = .59, F(3, 119) = 59.38, SE = .64, p = < .001, and revealed that status threat was a significant predictor of hostile sexism such that the more men believed that societal changes increasingly disadvantage men, the more likely they were to endorse hostile sexism. Political orientation and support for feminism were also significant predictors of hostile sexism in step 3, following the same trend as in step 1. The addition of status threat explained 4% more variance than step 1. Step 3 had a significantly smaller AIC (AIC = 245.50) than step 1 (AIC = 255.23), indicating that the addition of status threat was a significant improvement to step 1.

Masculinity Threat and Rape Myth Acceptance

Following a similar trend as the first series of block analyses, step 1 was significant, R^2_{Adj} = .32, F(2, 120) = 30.19, SE = .82, p < .001, and showed that political orientation and support for feminism were both significant predictors of rape myth acceptance. Specifically, more right-leaning participants were more likely to endorese rape myths, while those with more support for feminism were less likey to endorse rape myths.

Step 2 was significant, R^2_{Adj} = .56, F(3, 119) = 23.82, p < .001, and showed that masculine contingency stress was a significant predictor of rape myth acceptance such that the more an individual associated negative emotions with threatened masculinity, the more likely they were to endorse rape myths. Political orientation and support for feminism were both significant predictors of rape myth acceptance, following the same trend as in step 1. The addition of masculine contingency threat explained 4% more variance than step 1. Step 2 (AIC = 300.29) had a significantly lower AIC than step 1 (AIC = 305.93), implying that adding status threat was a significant improvement to step 1.

Step 3 was also significant, R^2_{Adj} = .35, F(3, 119) = 22.57, SE = .81, p < .001, and revealed that status threat was a significant predictor of rape myth acceptance such that the more men believed that societal changes increasingly disadvantage men, the more likely they were to endorse rape myths. Political orientation and support for feminism were also significant predicted rape myth acceptance, following the same trend as in step 1. The addition of status threat explained 3% more variance than step 1. Step 3 (AIC = 300.21) had a significantly lower AIC than step 1 (AIC = 305.93), implying that adding status threat was a significant improvement to step 1.

Overall, these block analyses support hypotheses 3 and 4, and show that the inclusion of both masculine contingency threat and status threat significantly improve regression models containing only political orientation and support for feminism to predict hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance; that both measures significantly positively predict hostile

sexism and rape myth acceptance even while controlling for both control variables; and that both measures separately explain a significant amount of variance in hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance while controlling for the variance explained by both control variables.

Discussion

The present study sought to elucidate the correlational relationships between three measures of masculinity threat (gender role discrepancy stress, masculine contingency, and status threat) and both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. The results showed that an increase in masculinity threat (both operationalized by masculine contingency threat and masculinity threat) was moderately associated with an increase in both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, partially supporting hypotheses 1 and 2.

An exploratory moderation analysis revealed that Masculine discrepancy stress was only positively correlated with rape myth acceptance among men with low support for feminism. Taken together, these results partially support hypotheses 1 and 2. Further, masculinity threat explained a significant amount of unique variance in both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance while controlling for both control variables (support for feminism and political orientation), supporting hypotheses 3 and 4.

These results tentatively support a link between masculinity threat, hostile sexism, and rape myth acceptance. Further, showing that masculinity threat explains a significant amount of variance while controlling for the variance explained by both control variables supports the idea that masculinity threat is related to hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance independently from other highly predictive ideologies such as right-wing ideology or anti-feminism, rather than being an engrained part of these ideologies.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study are limited, however, due to the conditional relationship of masculine discrepancy stress on hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, which may imply more complex relationships than the current analysis allows for, as well as the lack of directionality inherent to the correlational design. In study 2 I will expand on these findings by testing the causal relationships between masculinity threat, hostile sexism, and rape myth acceptance.

Study 2

Methods

Design

In Study 2 I used an experimental design, wherein the independent variable was an experimental manipulation that presented two opposing political stances: that men's social status is diminishing (masculine status threat), and that gender inequality favoring men is

stable (masculine status affirmation), as well as a control group. The dependent variables were hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. Support for feminism and left/right political orientation were used as control variables. I used the status threat measure proposed by Willer et al. (2013) as a manipulation check in order to test the efficacy of both experimental conditions.

Participants and Procedure

Participants were initially sampled by convenience through social media websites such as Reddit. To achieve a sample size large enough for the chosen analyses, I further sampled from Prolific, where a compensation of 7.60 GBP per hour was offered for participation (the median completion time for the study was 7 minutes and 38 seconds). A total of 507 individuals initiated the study, but 90 participants were dropped from the final sample due to incomplete data or insincere responses (i.e., impossible age), resulting in an initial sample of 406 participants, with 81.3% men, 11.3% women, and 7.1% who reported non-binary/other. Only data for men were used in the current thesis, which resulted in a final sample size of 330 with a mean age of 36 years (*SD* = 12.43). The sample contained 24 nationalities, with the majority coming from the United States (78%) and Sweden (12%). For a complete list of nationalities in the current sample, see Appendix A.

After providing informed consent, reporting demographic information, and indicating their degree of support for feminism and left/right political orientation, participants were randomly separated into one of three groups: masculine status threat (*n* = 132), masculine status affirmation (*n* = 115), or a control group (*n* = 83), followed by the battery of measures for status threat, hostile sexism, rape myth acceptance, and hypermasculinity. After completing all measures, participants were presented with a debriefing letter that explained the study's goals and clarified that, although the information presented in the stimuli was truthful in nature, only one perspective was presented to each group.

Experimental Manipulation

The experimental design consisted of random assignment into one of three groups: masculinity threat, masculine status affirmation, and a control group. Specifically, we presented participants with two different stances on gender inequality: one suggesting that women are surpassing men in terms of education and employability (masculine status threat condition), and another, suggesting that gender inequality will remain unchanged, favoring men (masculine status affirmation condition). A third condition served as a control, in which participants did not receive any information. The stimuli were developed by accessing statistics from the World Health Organization and Pew Research Center, as well as narratives

from news articles that dealt with inequality trajectories. Previous studies (e.g., Dover et al., 2016; Morton et al., 2009) have shown that exposing men to information suggesting a change in gender equality (decreasing men's social dominance) reliably induces masculine status threat, but our study differs in that the information used was all publicly sourced and did not involve any aspects of deception. A copy of both stimuli can be found in Appendix G and Appendix H.

Measures

I measured status threat, hostile sexism, rape myth acceptance, and hypermasculinity as response variables, using the same scales and procedure describe in Study 1. Among this sample, I found Cronbach alphas of .92 for hostile sexism, .89 for rape myth acceptance, and .66 for hypermasculinity. As in study 1, hypermasculinity was excluded from the final analysis due to low Cronbach alpha.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent after being provided with information regarding the study, including a content warning regarding themes of politically-charged and sexual content. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence and assured of their complete anonymity. Participants were debriefed with further clarifications of the aim of the experiment, including being informed that the informational articles presented in the study contained true information, but that they only expressed one stance of an ongoing social debate. Both stances were acknowledged in the debriefing form (Appendix E).

The most commonly used method for inducing masculinity threat involves providing participants with false feedback regarding their score on a personality test, indicating that they scored low in masculinity. However, due to ethical concerns surrounding the use of deception, I developed a more ethical method of inducing masculine status threat which, unlike most conventional means of induction, does not include deception or challenges to one's gender identity. All information presented to participants had been reported publicly from news reports and statistics outlets whose primary function is to report such information and stances to the public. The function of our manipulation was to elucidate how participants may differentially react when reminded of polarized stances on current social issues. Given the salience of social issues such as gender inequality, and the availability of information surrounding such topics, I argue that presenting this information did not affect participants psychologically more than a naturalistic setting wherein participants are likely to encounter

such information in their daily life, such as on social media and/or directly from the sources from which the stimuli were developed.

Statistical Analysis

I conducted all analysis using R version 4.2.2 (R Core Team, 2022) and utilized the packages "psych" (Revelle, 2022), "jtools" (Long, 2022), and "lavaan" (Rosseel, 2012).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive statistics for study 2 can be found in Table 3. A correlational matrix containing all continuous variables can be found in Appendix I.

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics for Study 2

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	Skew	Kurtosis
HS	2.61	1.34	0.07	0.46	–0.84
RMA	3.13	1.25	0.07	0.34	–0.61
ST	2.24	0.94	0.05	0.20	–0.92
Fem	3.78	1.27	0.07	–0.82	–0.39
Poli	4.39	2.48	0.14	0.32	–0.76

Note: $N = 330$; SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error; HS = hostile sexism; RMA = rape myth acceptance; ST = status threat; Fem = support for feminism; Poli = left/right political orientation

Experimental Manipulation

To examine the hypothesis that both inducing and affirming masculine status would lead to changes in hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, I performed two separate one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The experimental manipulation was treated as a three-level factor, representing the two experimental conditions and the control group. The dependent variables in these analyses were hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance.

The outcomes of both ANOVAs indicated that there were no significant direct effects of the experimental manipulation on either hostile sexism or rape myth acceptance. These results provide evidence that hypotheses 1a to 2b were not supported.

Manipulation Check

To evaluate the effectiveness of the manipulation in modulating levels of masculine status threat, I conducted a one-way ANOVA to examine the effect of both experimental conditions on status threat, compared to a control group. The analysis revealed that the experimental condition had a significant main effect on status threat, $F(1, 196) = 4.521$, $p =$

.035. However, a Bonferroni-corrected post hoc test revealed that only the status affirmation condition influenced participants' level of status threat, with a mean difference –0.273, η^2 = .02, p = 0.035, whereas there was no significant effect of the threat condition, suggesting that only the status affirmation condition passed the manipulation check.

Exploring Indirect Effects of Masculine Status Affirmation

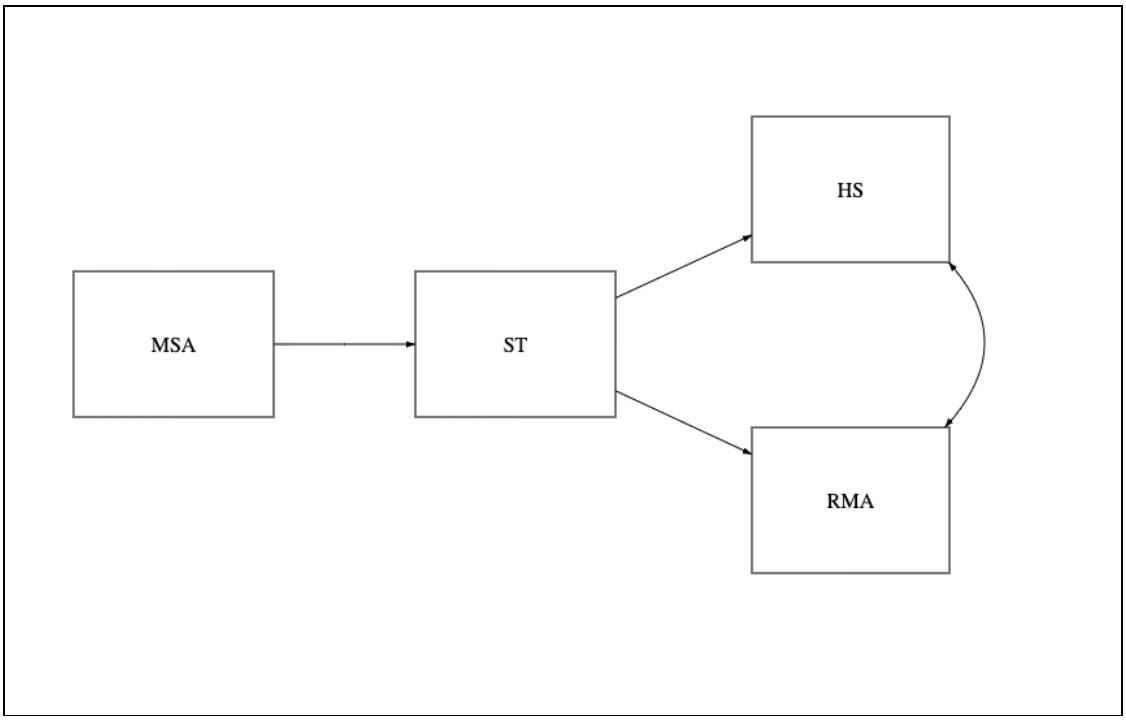
Given the significant main effect of masculine status affirmation on status threat, taken together with the significant correlations between status threat and both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance in both studies, I conducted an exploratory analysis using the "total manipulation check" procedure proposed by Lench et al. (2014), who advocates for treating a manipulation check as a mediating variable in cases where the manipulation targets a particular mental state, such as masculine status threat in the present study. Aligned with Preacher and Hayes (2004) and Zhao et al. (2010), I examined the potential indirect effects of affirming masculine status on hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, treating status threat as an indirect-only mediator[1].

To test these indirect paths, I constructed a structural equation model. All endogenous variables in the models were observed and were mean-centered and standardized prior to constructing the model. The sample used in this analysis (n = 198) was sufficient (Ding et al., 1995) and multivariate normality was satisfactory among the observed variables. The model contained bivariate regressions for all model components, and the two primary parameters of the model were defined as the indirect relationships from masculine status affirmation to hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, through status threat. A conceptual path diagram to visualize the model can be found in Figure 2, and a table containing standardized path coefficients, bootstrapped confidence intervals, and p-values can be found in Table 4.

[1] For a full discussion of indirect-only mediation, refer to the general discussion.

Figure 2.

Conceptual Structural Equation Model Diagram



Note: MSA = masculine status affirmation; ST = status threat; HS = hostile sexism; RMA = rape myth acceptance.

Table 4.

Standardized Path Coefficients and Confidence Intervals for a Structural Equation Model

Path	Std. Estimate	*SE*	95% CI		*p*
			LB	UB	
		Regressions			
MSA -> ST	–.15	.14	–0.29	–0.01	.034*
ST -> RMA	.54	.06	0.43	0.64	<.001***
ST -> HS	.62	.06	0.52	0.72	<.001***
		Defined Parameters			
MSA -> ST -> HS	–.09	.09	–0.18	–0.01	.035*
MSA -> ST -> RMA	–.08	.08	–0.16	–0.01	.037*
		Covariances			
HS ~ RMA	.77	.24	0.72	0.83	<.001**

Note. SE = standar error; CI = standardized confidence interval; MSA = masculine status affirmation; ST = status threat; HS = hostile sexism; RMA = rape myth acceptance.

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Relative fit indexes according to Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .995), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = .985), and an insignificant Chi-Square test, $X2(2) = 3.75$, $p < .001$, showed that the model demonstrated good fit compared to a null model. Similarly, acceptable model fit was shown by absolute fit indexes such as Root Mean Square of Approximation (RMSEA = .07) and Standardized Root Mean Squared (SRMR = .04). Specifically, this model shows that all included regressions were significant: masculine status affirmation negatively predicted status threat, and status threat positively predicted both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. Further, this model shows that the expected indirect paths from masculine status affirmation to hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance were both significant with status threat as a mediator in both cases, implying that status affirmation led to a lower level of status threat, which in turn led to a decrease in hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. Although these paths were significant, it should be noted that, although this model shows relatively good model fit, these results do not speak to the preferability of this model compared to other models which could be constructed with variables that were not measured in the current analysis. The model serves only as one statistically valid model which serves to illustrate two significant indirect relationships.

Discussion

Study 2 aimed to investigate the effects of experimentally induced masculine status threat versus affirmation (and controls) on SA-predictive masculine factors. Contrary to Hypotheses 1a and 2a, inducing masculinity threat did not have a significant effect on hostile sexism or rape myth acceptance.

As it relates to affirming masculine status, the experimental manipulation did not directly affect hostile sexism or rape myth acceptance, disconfirming Hypotheses 1b and 2b. However, exploratory analysis revealed that there was evidence supporting a significant indirect effect of status affirmation on both outcomes through the factor status threat. The results suggest that the masculine status affirmation stimulus reduced the participants' level of status threat, which in turn related to a decrease in both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, although the present study is not sufficient to make strong claims regarding the external validity of these findings.

I conclude that the current analysis does not support my hypotheses that inducing masculinity threat would lead to a change in hostile sexism or rape myth acceptance, but that this may be due to a poorly designed manipulation, as evidenced by the condition not passing the manipulation check. I further conclude that affirming masculine status may slightly reduce endorsement of hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance when considering the indirect path

through status threat (although future studies should test this assumption in comparison with more comprehensive models). In combination, this may suggest that some level of masculinity status threat (e.g., "women's progress threatens the status of men") may be a chronically activated belief in some men. It is possible that men who have a chronic activation of masculinity status threat may have been relieved by the status affirming condition (e.g., "gender inequality is persisting"), which then indirectly reduced their levels of hostile sexism and rape myth expectance, while men in the threat condition may have had a level of ambient status threat before commencing the study, rendering the threat condition moot.

General Discussion

This thesis sought to examine the relationship between masculinity threat and two salient predictors of sexual assault perpetration: hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. The results in study 1 showed significant correlations between measures of masculinity threat and both outcomes and suggest that masculinity threat explains significant variance in both outcomes while controlling for left/right political orientation and support for feminism. The results from study 2 did not support the notion that either threatening or affirming men's status led to a change in hostile sexism or rape myth acceptance. Exploratory results do suggest, however, that affirming masculine status may lead to a decrease in hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance among men when considering the indirect path through status threat.

Masculine Contingency

I hypothesized that both factors of the masculine contingency would positively correlate with hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. Aligned with my expectations, all of these correlations were significant. Masculine contingency threat was moderately positively correlated with both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, while masculine contingency boost was weakly positively correlated to both. These results partially confirm and expand on the findings of Burkley et al. (2016), who found similar results for the connection to rape myth acceptance during the development of the scale but concluded that there was no significant association with hostile sexism. This discrepancy could be due to a difference in sample demographics. The samples in both Burkley et al. (2016) and (Dahl et al., 2015) comprised mostly young university students from the United States. The present study was more internationally diverse and had a much wider range of ages represented.

Notably, there was a difference in strengths of associations between the Masculine Contingency Scale's boost and threat factors such, such that the threat factor was a more strongly correlated with both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, implying that the

avoidance of negative emotions associated with a loss of masculine reputation is a more salient motivator than adhering to masculine norms for the reward of positive emotions. This supports the Precarious Masculinity Theory's assumption of compensatory behavior in response to threat, as well as highlights the call from Murnen (2015) to observe both state and trait factors of masculine adherence, which may vary according to the context of masculinity threat.

Masculine Discrepancy Stress

Contrary to my expectations, discrepancy stress was not directly associated with hostile sexism or rape myth acceptance. Moderation analysis revealed, however, that men who felt stress due to a perceived departure from masculine norms were more likely to endorse rape myth acceptance if they also reported low support for feminism. This is logical, as low support of feminism may indicate greater support for traditional gender hierarchies–which, according to social dominance theory, may relate to a relationship between perceived threats to masculine legitimacy and subordinating behavior, such as the acceptance of rape myths.

Curiously, the same moderation effect was not found to be relevant in the case of masculine contingency. This may be related to the nuances between masculine contingency and gender role discrepancy, such that masculine contingency relates more to a personal ideology surrounding masculinity, independent from specific conceptualizations of manhood (Burkley et al., 2016). This may also be related to the specific wording between the two scales, which seem to imply a more active experience of stress in the case of discrepancy stress (i.e. "I worry that women find me less attractive because I'm not as macho as other guys") versus a more ideological or hypothetical stance in the case of masculine contingency (i.e. "My self-respect would be threatened if I didn't consider myself macho").

Masculine Status Threat

Aligned with my hypotheses in study 1, masculine status stress was positively correlated with both hostile sexism–supporting the preliminary findings from Scaptura (2019)–as well as rape myth acceptance. Of note, status threat was more strongly correlated with both outcomes than either of the other measures of threat in the current study. These results suggest that it is not just threats to masculine identity which may relate to SA-related ideology, but also threats to masculine status, such as the belief that the progress of women poses a threat to men, as was seen in the current study. Future research would benefit from including such measures as well as continuing to draw from Social Dominance Theory in both generation of hypotheses and interpretations of results as it relates to masculinity threat.

Contrary to my hypotheses, however, there was no evidence that experimentally manipulating masculine status threat affected hostile sexism or rape myth acceptance. I speculate that this may be due to a weak manipulation, as evidenced by a failed manipulation check in the case of threat, and the small effect size in the case of affirmation. The most common methods of inducing masculinity threat (on either a status-level or an individual-level) include deception–either through false feedback in response to gender-related personality tests, or deceptive information regarding inequality trajectories. The lack of deception in the current study, and instead relying on stimuli that participants may have already been exposed to in naturalistic settings, may have weakened the effect of the manipulation. Alternatively, it may be that a level of status threat was chronically activated among participants in the current sample, which would suggest that attempting to induce status threat was redundant. The latter speculation may be supported by the significant main effect of the affirmation condition on status threat, which implies that some level of ambient status threat was present in the sample at baseline, which was modestly reduced when participants were reminded of a political stance which supports male dominance.

Despite the lack of a direct effect of the status affirmation condition on either outcome, an exploratory analysis revealed significant indirect effects of affirming masculine status on hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance while considering status threat an indirect-only mediator. This indirect path suggests that affirming masculine status led to a reduced belief that men are disadvantaged by the progress of women, which in turn was related to decreased endorsement of both hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance. Although this effect was significant and showed good model fit, it should be noted that the model does not suggest that status affirmation is the best predictor of the outcome variables in this thesis; rather, the model serves to illustrate two theoretically-sound, statistically significant paths which may inform future research regarding masculine status threat, as studying the effects of affirming masculine status has been widely absent from the extant literature. I argue that including affirmation in masculinity threat studies offers a unique approach to studying masculinity which may be more resistant to social desirability as participants may be reluctant to report high levels on scales that measure socially taboo beliefs, as well as provides insight into possible levels of ambient, chronically activated masculinity threat. Thus, approaching masculine threats from the other side, so to speak, may reveal effects that are otherwise difficult to measure accurately.

Regarding the inclusion of an indirect effect without a significant direct effect in the current analysis, it is important to note that there is an active and ongoing discussion

regarding "indirect-only" mediation. Baron and Kenny's (1986) "causal steps approach" states that a direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables is prerequisite to conducting mediation analysis. Many scholars have criticized this prerequisite as arbitrary, including Hayes (2009), who proposed a more modern approach to evaluating indirect causal pathways on the grounds that an independent variable must somehow affect the dependent variable if a significant indirect relationship is found through a mediator. Zhao et al. (2010) also criticizes the causal steps approach and further offers an alternative approach to defining mediation typology, which includes "indirect-only" mediation, which they assert is sufficient to argue that the mediation is in-line with the hypothesized theoretical framework. This has been demonstrated using simulation studies (e.g. MacKinnon et al., 2007), which demonstrate how Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal steps approach can lead to the premature termination of mediation analysis in cases where there is no direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The current analysis aligns with this modern approach to mediation analysis. In the same breath, the lack of a direct relationship is not inconsequential. It is possible that another, unmeasured variable is interacting with the hypothesized direct effects, which may inform future models better than the measures used in the present studies. Further, it is a possibility that, although this path of significant relationships was found, the conclusion that my experimental manipulation simply was not effective is not out of the question.

Limitations

Neither study was without limitations. As discussed, the experimental manipulation used in study 2 differed from the most established methodology of threat induction such as using false-feedback. Given the timeframe required to complete the current thesis, it was impractical to apply for ethical clearance to use these methods, thus leading to the development of the ethically benign design that I employed, which used non-deceptive information in the stimuli. This lack of deception (which mitigates the available information to include in stimuli) relied more on reminding participants of established political stances, which introduces the concern of low construct validity. Study 2 likely yielded different results than a design which includes established methods would have found.

The sample in study 1, although it included a broader range of ages and nationalities than many previous studies, comprised mostly left-leaning participants with high support of feminism on average. As this study relates to antipathy toward women and femininity, as well as ideology that is more in-line with traditional gender roles more commonly associated with

conservative political views, external validity may be low compared to studies with a more politically diverse sample.

Methodological choices regarding scale adaptation also limited the scope of this thesis. The adaptation used in the present thesis to measure hypermasculinity was found to have poor internal consistency, which led to its exclusion from the final analysis. As hypermasculinity is a strong predictor of sexual assault perpetration (Murnen et al., 2002), and lends itself to both precarious masculinity theory and SDT, the exclusion of this measure reduces the salience of the claims that can be made in the current thesis regarding the role of masculinity threat in sexual assault perpetration. Further, although measures of hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance showed good internal consistency, future studies should consider using the full, validated version of the available scales to strengthen the claims that can be made in their connections to masculinity threat.

In the present thesis I used two control variables: support for feminism and left/right political alignment. Worthy of note, although the item I used to measure support for feminism yielded significant results, future studies should consider using more in-depth measures of feminist attitudes, as feminism is a complex, multi-dimensional ideology which may not be appropriately represented in the present thesis. Similarly, although left/right orientation has been shown to be a powerful tool in estimating political stances (Kroh, 2007), there are some drawbacks; notably, ideologies such as libertarianism, for example, can present as both left- and right-leaning political expressions depending on the context. Future studies should consider using measures that target specific sets of ideologies. such as right-wing authoritarianism or other more tangible measures of ideology.

Implications and Conclusion

the finding that affirming masculine status may indirectly relate to a reduction in hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance may help inform future interventions seeking to mitigate sexual assault perpetration. The results suggested that two predictors of sexual assault (hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance) related to an affirmation that men still dominate society. However, the solution to this cannot be that men should be assured that they dominate society. Rather, I recommend that future interventions could seek to detach the association of masculine self-worth from status maintenance. Including status threat as a mediator emphasizes this point: perhaps diminishing the belief that gender equality is a zero-sum game may reduce the affective reactivity associated with women's progress, thus decreasing the likelihood of compensatory subordinating behavior, such as ideology that promotes sexual violence.

The inclusion of multiple measures of masculinity threat in a single analysis further progresses precarious masculinity research by emphasizing the benefit of viewing masculinity threat as multidimensional. This is especially true as it relates to the inclusion of threats to masculine status and drawing insights from Social Dominance theory. I posit that future research under the umbrella of precarious masculinity would do well to establish clear vocabulary for describing different types of threat, which would serve to elucidate how different facets of masculinity are adhered to under different circumstances–supporting Murnen's (2015) call for a state-based, constructivist approach to understanding masculine performance.

Given the persisting global impact of sexual violence and considering that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators of sexual violence are men, I posit that continuing to fill the gaps in the present research with modern, constructionist approaches to the adherence of traditional masculine ideologies that predict sexual violence. Critically, I argue that threats to masculine identity and status should be included in future models of sexual assault prediction in order to progress our ability to describe, understand, and intervene in sexual assault perpetration.

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Appendix A

List of Nationalities and Frequencies by Study

	Study 1	Study 2
Nationality	*n*	*n*
Albania	0	1
Argentina	0	1
Armenia	1	0
Australia	3	1
Belgium	2	0
Brazil	0	1
Canada	14	6
Denmark	1	0
Finland	1	1
France	3	4
Germany	7	3
Haiti	0	1
Hungary	1	0
Indonesia	1	0
India	0	1
Israel	1	0
Mexico	3	2
Netherlands	2	1
New Zealand	2	0
Nigeria	0	1
Norway	0	3
Pakistan	0	1
Poland	3	4
Portugal	1	0
Romania	1	0
Russian Federation	0	2
South Korea	0	1
Sweden	7	38
Switzerland	1	1
Syrian Arab Republic	0	1
Turkey	0	1
United Kingdom	9	11
United States of America	58	243

Note: $N_{\text{Study 1}} = 123$; $N_{\text{Study 2}} = 330$.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form from Study 1

Study information
The present study is part of a Master's Thesis work at Lund University. It concerns self-concepts among men, and attitudes toward topics that some may find uncomfortable or distressing, including themes of sexual violence. Participants must be 18 years of age to participate. Participation is voluntary and you are free to stop participating at any moment without giving a reason for doing so. No personal data is collected. Please be aware that your complete anonymity is guaranteed and that none of the collected data will be traceable under any circumstances. The survey is in English.

Contact information
For questions about this study, please contact the responsible researcher, Everett Christensen, at ev8586ch-s@student.lu.se

Before you proceed please indicate that you understand the instructions provided above and that you give consent for participation in this study.

Appendix C

Debriefing Material from Study 1

What was this study about?
This study seeks to measure two aspects of masculine self-concept known as Gender Role Discrepancy Stress, and Masculinity Contingency. The former relates to stress that can be felt if one perceives or is made to perceive themselves as outside the culturally prescribed norms of their gender identity. The latter relates to how much one's self-worth is contingent upon their masculine identity. The present study aims to interrogate the relationship between these two measures and the endorsement of ideology that promotes sexual violence. All measures used in this study are validated scales developed by researchers external to the current project.

Why is this research important?
This study gives us insights into how certain social constructions of masculine identity relate to ideologies that support violence against women. Previous research has shown that certain constructs of masculinity may lead to an increase in negative attitudes and behavior toward women, in some (though not all) people. This study seeks to expand these findings into the realm of sexual assault, with the intention of working toward interventions that may prevent gender-based violence in the future.

Questions? Concerns?
You are welcome to reach out to the author of this study at ev8586ch-s@student.lu.se with any questions or concerns regarding the study. Once again, we thank you for your time and contribution to this research project!

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form from Study 2

Study information
The present study is part of a Master's Thesis work at Lund University. It concerns attitudes toward politically charged topics that some may find uncomfortable or distressing, including themes of sexual violence. Participants must be 18 years of age to participate. Participation is voluntary and you are free to stop participating at any moment without giving a reason for doing so. No personal data is collected. Please be aware that your complete anonymity is guaranteed and that none of the collected data will be traceable under any circumstances. The survey is in English.

Contact information
For questions about this study, please contact the responsible researcher at ev8586ch-s@student.lu.se

Before you proceed please indicate that you understand the instructions provided above and that you give consent for participation in this study.

Appendix E

Debriefing Material from Study 2

Thank you for your participation!

What was this study about?

This study seeks to measure individual differences in responses to reading a politically charged article. Each participant was randomly sorted into reading one out of two articles that either stated that gender inequality is slow to change, or that women are surpassing men in many domains. Some were randomized to a control group that received no informational article. Both articles only contained truthful information, but only highlighted specific stances while ignoring alternative views. The articles contained information collected from published news articles and organizational webpages, such as the Pew Research Center.

Why is this research important?

The study gives us insights into how people react to politically charged articles on the topic of gender inequality, which are commonly found on social media, in the news, or elsewhere on the internet. Previous research has found that exposure to information that gender equality increases may lead to increases in negative attitudes and behavior towards women, in some people. This study seeks to expand these findings into the realm of sexual assault, with the intention of working toward interventions that may prevent gender-based violence in the future.

Questions? Concerns?

You are welcome to reach out to the author of this study at ev8586ch-s@student.lu.se with any questions or concerns regarding the study. Once again, we thank you for your time and contribution to this research project!

Appendix F

Correlational Matrix of All Variables in Study 1

Variable	HS	RMA	MCT	MCB	GRDS	ST	Fem	Poli
HS	-							
RMA	.77***	-						
MCT	.47***	.39***	-					
MCB	.25**	.20*	.50***	-				
GRDS	.12	.09	.47***	.40***	-			
ST	.60***	.47***	.26**	.11	–.03	-		
Fem	.63***	.48***	–.27**	–.19*	–.10	.50***.	-	
Poli	.68***	.53***	.42***	.18*	–.02*	.57***	.63***	-

Note: *N* = 123; HS = hostile sexism; RMA = rape myth acceptance; MCT = masculine contingency threat; MCB = masculine contingency boost; GRDS = gender role discrepancy stress; ST = status threat; Fem = support for feminism; Poli = left/right political orientation

Appendix G

Experimental Stimulus 1: Masculine status threat

The Future is Female: Areas Where Women are Surpassing Men

According to Statistica, women are consistently more educated than men. In their 2020 survey, women outperformed men in educational completion in every country surveyed. In Sweden, 28% of women attained post-secondary education compared to only 18% of men. In the United States, women first surpassed men in terms of educational attainment in 2013 and have consistently increased their lead ever since. Not only that, women have been shown to receive significantly higher grades than men.

What difference does this make?

This difference in education occurs at the same time that women seem to be outperforming men in terms of employability. According to the Pew Research Center, Women have overtaken men in the college-educated labor force in the United States, and their lead is expected to increase. This shift comes around four decades after women surpassed men in the number of Americans earning a bachelor's degree each year.

This development may be due to the fact that Women are perceived by their managers — particularly male managers — to be slightly more effective than men **at every hierarchical level** and in virtually every functional area of the organization. That includes the traditional male bastions of IT, operations, and law.

How might this impact men?

As women continue to surpass men in terms of educational performance and employment aptitude, this introduces a challenge to men in these spheres. This challenge to men's potential success may even affect their ability to be fathers. Several studies show that men with less educational attainment have children less often. Although women have become more similar to men, education seems to have an even stronger influence on whether men have children, according to experts in this field.

They say this is partially because women today have more education than men, but it may also be due to a discrepancy in income, according to Lommerlud, a professor who specializes on childless men

"I think a number of men end up being left over," The professor remarks, calling them "low-status men."

"It seems that women aren't interested in certain types of men."

Appendix H

Experimental Stimulus 2: Masculine Status Affirmation

The "Stalled Revolution": Global Gender Inequality Remains Unchanged

Despite the long-standing legislature which grants women equal rights in all areas of employment, we still seem to be experiencing a "stalled gender revolution". Although women make up 40% of the workforce, over 96.5% of the world's CEOs are men. Even among jobs of equal rank, wage gaps are slow to change. In the last two decades, the wage gap has only shrunk by a few percentage points and women still make an average of .82 USD for every dollar earned by men. This year's "Equal Pay Day" will occur on the 24th of March–83 days into the year. This day symbolizes the 83 additional days of work per-year that the average woman would need to work in order to equal the wage of the average man.

What does the future of gender inequality look like?

It appears that inequality will continue to exist. Women will continue to be more disadvantaged than men for centuries to come, according to a 2022 press release by the United Nations. Specifically, at the current rate, it will take 286 years to close gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws, and 140 years for women to be represented equally in positions of power and leadership in the workplace.

A professor at the University of Technology Sydney recently wrote that the current state of feminism is not working. She quotes the prominent author Germain Greer who says feminism's current push against gender inequality "will change nothing… as far as I'm concerned, it's the wrong way. We're getting nowhere."

Appendix I

Correlational Matrix of all Continuous Variables in Study 2

Variable	HS	RMA	ST	Poli	Fem
HS	-				
RMA	.77***	-			
ST	.65***	.60***	-		
Poli	.55***	.52***	.44***	-	
Fem	−.69***	−.66***	−.55***	−.56***	-

Note: HS = hostile sexism; RMA = rape myth acceptance; ST = status threat; Poli = political orientation; Fem = support for feminism

$p < .001$ = ***; $p < .01$ = **; $p < .05$ = *