

ATTITUDES TOWARD PROSTITUTION AND ACCEPTANCE OF RAPE MYTHS

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The authors examine the relationship between attitudes towards prostitution and acceptance of rape myths. They suggest that both rape and prostitution myths are part of a cultural milieu that normalizes violence against women. Prostitution myths are those which justify the existence of prostitution, promote misinformation about prostitution and prostituted women, and contribute to a social climate that exploits and harms not only prostituted women but all women. This study explores the relationship between the acceptance of prostitution myths and rape myths amongst college undergraduate students in several states (California, Iowa, Oregon and Texas).

These authors begin by asserting that violence against women is “associated with culturally supported attitudes that encourage men to feel entitled to sexual access to women, to feel superior to women, or to feel that they have license as sexual aggressors” (p. 1790). Both rape and prostitution myths are seen as specific components of the culturally supported attitudes that normalize rape. The authors briefly describe the rich literature that has suggested a link between acceptance of rape myth with lowered support for rape victims and an increased likelihood of men to self-define as potentially raping.

The authors also describe the ways that rape myths might also expose prostitution myths – specifically that all women are prostitutes. They refer to a Miller and Schwartz article (1995) the views of johns, polices and others regarding prostituted women. Miller and Schwartz found the following prejudicial beliefs were common: a) prostituted women are unrapable, b) no harm is done to prostituted women when they are assaulted or harassed, c) prostituted women deserve to be raped, and d) all prostituted women are the same. Farley and Kelly (2000) found these and other rape myths have been endorsed by judicial decisions when prostituted women were raped.

Method

The authors used a 6-item “Prostitution Behavior Questionnaire” that explores a person’s attitudes about prostitution and prostituted women through the questions which are answered on a 4-point scale. Rape myth acceptance was measured by the short form of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – which consists of 7 subscales.

The questionnaires were distributed to undergraduate students. The 783 participants were predominately female (65%), with a mean age of 19.5, and most were also European American (67%).

Results

59% of those who completed the survey disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “prostitutes are victims of pimps” and 45% agreed or strongly agreed that “women are prostitutes because they want to be; it’s their choice.” The survey uncovered gender differences in prostitution and rape myth acceptance. More college men than college women endorsed prostitution and rape myths. Specifically, there were gender differences found in the following prostitution myths: There is nothing wrong with prostitution; prostitutes enjoy their work; prostitutes genuinely like men. The authors also found a positive correlation between acceptance of prostitution myths and acceptance of rape myths. “Overall prostitution myth endorsement was significantly correlated with overall rape myth endorsement” ($r = .27, p < .0001$). In other words, the degree to which the students believed in prostitution myths was relatively strongly correlated with their belief in rape myths.

Discussion

College men were found to be significantly more accepting of prostitution myths than were college women. The findings here are consistent with other research that consistently finds college men (and men in general) are more accepting of rape myth acceptance than are women. Significantly, of the 276 college men who participated in this study, 17 disclosed having used prostituted women. Although seemingly small, this number may suggest something about the rate of use of prostituted women by college men. Further, the 17 men in this study who reported using prostituted women endorsed prostitution myths at lower rate than the men who had not used prostituted women on four of the six items (make a lot of money, it’s their choice, enjoy their work and genuinely like men). Although these differences are small, they may suggest that men’s use of prostituted women have direct experience that contradicts the myths. These findings also counter earlier findings of arrested johns who had purchased prostituted women at least once a week (Monto and Hotaling, 1998).

This research suggests a relatively strong correlation (especially of men) between acceptance of prostitution myths and acceptance of rape myths. The implications for developing and expanding anti-rape educational programs are self-evident –there is some value in including factual information about prostituted women and prostitution in general in educational programs.

References

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