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Gender Differences in Emotional and Behavioral Responses to being Rendered Socially Invisible
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Stigma, a mark of shame or discredit, can negatively affect people's psychological well-being. Weight stigma, for example, has been shown to hinder youth's social, emotional, and academic development (Puhl & Latner, 2007). Race can produce another type of stigma. When people experience racism, their race is being judged as inadequate, and the stigma could become more conspicuous to the victim (Crocker & Major 1989). Stigma is more about being rejected and excluded overtly, where as invisibility is about being ignored as a different kind of social exclusion that could result from race prejudice. Racism could also be experienced in a way of being rendered socially "invisible." Invisibility is defined as being ignored, slighted and overlooked by others, and in a way invisible in others' eyes. It produces an inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice (Franklin, 1999).

This thesis considers how men and women may have different emotional behavioral reactions to the experience of being rendered socially invisible. I predicted that men and women might have different emotional and behavioral experiences for several reasons. First, women may have more experience of stigma, and therefore have different kinds of emotions than men, for whom the experience may be more novel. Secondly, men may experience different emotions because they feel more entitled than women to being given social attention and respect even when they are mistreated. Third, women display less aggressiveness than men emotionally and behaviorally due to social pressures. I will address each of these reasons and the more specific predictions in turn.

There is already a large amount of research on gender and stigma, and I am interested in finding out how gender affects the experience of invisibility. It is helpful to consider how stigma and

invisibility are very closely related, but are also different from each other. Stigma and invisibility are related in a sense that repeated experiences of invisibility could result in forming a sense of stigma or/and intensifying the perceived impact of (an) existing stigma(s) (such stigmas could be race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc). Despite the similarities between stigma and invisibility, invisibility is different from stigma in a sense that stigma is a character of a person perceived by one or others, and invisibility is an incident of being mistreated.

Mistreatment could exist in many forms. Park (2006) studied a form of mistreatment: rejection, and he found that repeated rejection based on physical appearance can cause an increase of rejection sensitivity (one expects to be rejected) and cause negative consequences for mental and physical health. Based on this study, I reason that the experience of invisibility could be perceived as an experience of being rejected, and physical appearance could be perceived as a type of stigma. Over repeated experience of being ignored or overlooked, the stigma of physical appearance could become more salient, and people could expect to be invisible, which could consequently harm their self-esteem and mental capacity

In a patriarchal society such as the United States, men perceive themselves to be more powerful than women do (Crawford, 1992, p. 11). In everyday life, men may be mistreated less frequently than women may, so men may have different emotions in reaction compared with women. This difference in frequency of mistreatment may lead women to feel more sadness than men. Furthermore, I predict that even when men and women are mistreated in a same or similar way, they may attribute to different stigma(s) and have different emotions. I hypothesize that men in general expect to be more respected than women do. When men experience invisibility, I expect them to feel more surprised than women. Men may be less used to being mistreated than women

may, so men's emotions after being rendered invisible may reflect a larger gap between their expectations and reality. They may feel, for example, confused, disappointed, frustrated, shocked and insulted. All of these words express a feeling that an expectation was not satisfied.

Studies also show that women are more reluctant than men to confront mistreatment, because confronting mistreatment may be seen as violating the norms governing politeness and produce retaliation (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). Thus, I hypothesize that the emotional responses of men and women will be significantly different. Women will be more likely to turn such a negative experience inward, have internal outburst (being sad), and blame themselves as the cause of being mistreated. On the other hand, men will be more likely to turn it outward (being angry), blame the render(s) or blame forces at large (i.e., society, media) more often. The emotions women experience overall will have a more vulnerable and submissive tone compared to men's emotions, which will be more aggressive. For instance, women may feel being resented by others, which denotes a suspected defect of self. Men may feel resentful for the mistreatment, and blame others rather than themselves. Women may also feel ashamed, depressed, helpless, and hurt, which all have a denotation of accepting the mistreatment without fighting back. Men may also feel sorry for the renderer (i.e., for behaving impolitely), where again blaming is turned outward instead of toward the self.

In addition, besides emotional differences, women and men may also respond behaviorally differently. Studies showed that the way women and men express the same emotion could be very different. Women express anger, for example, usually verbally, whereas men respond with physical violence. The different way of men and women expressing anger are underlying structures of power and subordination (Crawford, 1992, p. 5). It provokes my interests to look at

how men and women behave differently when both are rendered invisible and may have different emotions: anger versus sadness, for example. Based on this argument, I also hypothesize that men may engage in direct and aggressive behaviors more often than women may. They may be more likely to call the render out on it, or engage in argument immediately.

In this study, I assessed people's experience of being rendered invisible with open-ended surveys, primarily because there is little known about invisibility, and it is hard to predict what people will report. I used surveys, instead of conducting an experiment, because I was only interested in the experiences of people who had been rendered "invisible." In another word, I was not interested in comparing those who were invisible and those who were not. In addition, I felt that a survey is an effective way of communication where people could report their emotions and coping behaviors clearly.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited in multiple ways: fliers were posted on many bulletin boards on campus, and emails were sent out through organizations. Participants were diverse in many features. There were 26 participants, including 20 females and 6 males. The age of participants ranged from 24 to 61, the median age was 36.6 (SD=10.96).

Procedure and Survey Questions

On the fliers we posted and emails we sent, we asked if participants have been ignored, slighted, or overlooked, and invited them to a web-based survey to share their experiences of being rendered invisible. Participants answered the survey on their own time with their computers. They were asked to describe the context/situation of the incident, how the experience made them

feel, why they thought they were ignored or overlooked, and what they did to address it, if they did address it. The questions were open ended; the variables were measured by content coding. Because participants could give information about their “invisibility” experience in response to any of several questions, we coded variables from such questions in their entirety rather than question by question. We coded emotional and behavioral responses of the participants to the experience of being rendered invisible.

Measures:

Emotions that coders noted presence of included ambivalent, angry, ashamed, resentful, confused, depressed, disappointed, embarrassed, emotionally depleted, frustrated, helpless, humiliated, hurt, inadequate, incredulous/shocked, insecure, insulted, irritated, lonely, raw, regretful, rejected, resented, sad, sensitive, sorry, stupid and others. We coded a “1” indicating “present” for each emotional response participant reported, and a “0” indicating “absent” for each emotional response participants did not report. Emotions are coded as “present” for the appropriate category if the participant used synonymous terms to describe them. For example, “indifferent” was coded as “ambivalent,” “furious” was coded as “angry,” “upset” was coded as “frustrated,” “unskilled” was coded as “inadequate,” and “annoyed” was coded as “irritated.”

We also coded how the participants reported that they behaved in response to a situation of being rendered invisible. The behavioral responses coders observed presence of included “directly and immediately called renderer out on it,” “addressed the renderer in calm, reasonable manner,” “addressed/asserted self ‘hotheadedly’: knee-jerk reaction by making a scene,” and “resignation.” We coded a “1” indicating “present” for each behavioral response participant reported, and a “0” indicating “absent” for each behavioral response participants did not report.

Each response was coded by three different coders, who were undergraduate research assistants. The three coders went through three hours of training session that was led by a graduate student before they started coding. Most of the disagreements among the three coders were solved by weekly discussions that were led by the graduate student. Each of us reviewed our reasoning for our codes, and we made unanimous decisions as a group. If we failed to make a unanimous decision, we left it as a disagreement. Results to be reported here are based on the author's coding.

Data analysis

The relevant measures include three categories: explanation for treatment, emotions, and coping behaviors. Explanation for treatment include blaming the society and blaming the media, emotions include feeling an internal outburst, feeling angry, resentful, confused, disappointed, frustrated, shocked, insulted, sorry, sad, resented, ashamed, depressed, helpless and hurt. Coping behaviors include directly addressing the situation, or talk to the renderer immediately, indirectly address the situation (appeal to hierarchy), use a calm manner to address the situation, and use a jerky manner to address the situation. The independent variable was gender. It was compared with all of the dependent measures listed above.

Results

There was no participant who reported feeling resentful, confused, disappointed, sorry, or attribute their experience to the media, so there were no gender differences for these emotions. Students't-tests were performed to compare emotional experiences of men and women. We expected the following measures to be higher in women than in men: sad, internal outburst, ashamed, depressed, helpless hurt, indirect address, and used a calm manner to address the situation. None of these results was significant. Students' t-tests were performed, the following

measures were expected to be higher in men than in women: angry, frustrated, shocked, insulted, blaming the society of being mistreated, and direct address, and use jerky manner to address. Most of these results were not significant.

A t-test was conducted to compare gender and ways of addressing the situation, namely whether the participant directly addressed the situation by talking to the renderer, or indirectly addressed the situation by appealing to someone in the hierarchy (write a complain letter to the manager). A marginally significant effect of gender was obtained on directly address the situation by talking to the renderer, $t(13) = 1.78, p = 0.098$; female participants engaged in more indirect addressing behavior (appealing to hierarchy) than male participants did. The mean for male reporting appeal to hierarchy was 0.25 (SD=.50), the mean for the female was 0.00 (SD=.00). This result may imply that women are more likely than men to rely on the method of appealing to hierarchy to address a situation of being rendered invisible. The logic behind it might be that women perceive themselves generally not as powerful as men, so women look for outside powerful sources to support them.

Correlations were conducted to see which emotions were related to which other emotions. Depressed and ashamed were significantly correlated, $r(26) = 0.70, p = 0.01$. Helpless and ashamed were perfectly positively correlated, $r(26) = 1.00, p = 0.01$. Helpless and depressed were significantly correlated, $r(26) = 0.70, p = 0.01$. Resented and ashamed were perfectly positively correlated, $r(26) = 1.00, p = 0.01$. Resented and depressed were significantly correlated, $r(26) = 0.70, p = 0.01$. Resented and helpless were perfectly positively correlated, $r(26) = 1.00, p = 0.01$. Sad and ashamed were significantly correlated, $r(26) = 0.70, p = 0.01$. Sad and depressed were significantly correlated, $r(30) = 0.46, p = 0.01$. Sad and helpless were significantly correlated, $r(26)$

=0.70, $p=0.01$. Sad and resented were significantly correlated, $r(26) = 0.70$, $p=0.01$. These correlations are compatible with my hypothesis, because every one of these emotions was hypothesized to be dominantly reported by female. It made sense for them to be correlated with each other. On the other hand, the following correlations did not go along with my hypothesis. Insulted and ashamed were perfectly positively correlated, $r(26) = 1.00$, $p=0.01$. Insulted and depressed were significantly correlated, $r(26) = 0.70$, $p=0.01$. Insulted and helpless were perfectly positively correlated, $r(26) = 1.00$, $p=0.01$. Sad and insulted were significantly correlated, $r(26) = 1.00$, $p=0.01$. Insulted, hypothesized as an emotion men would report more, was correlated with four emotions that were hypothesized women would report more. These correlations have an indication that maybe women are more likely to feel insulted than men. In addition, sad and frustrated were significantly correlated, $r(26) = 0.46$, $p=0.01$. Again, Sad was hypothesized to be more characteristic of women, and frustrated was hypothesized as a male emotion. This correlation may imply that sadness and frustration are very similar emotions and are very likely to occur at the same time, regardless of gender. With the relatively small sample, it seems like there might be some people who just were more emotional overall, and others who did not express these. Thus, there are many strong correlations among many of the emotions.

The emotions that were perfectly or highly correlated with each other were summed, and t-tests were performed to compare gender and summed emotions. Frustrated, angry, shocked, and insulted were summed to form the group of male emotions, namely Group A. Ashamed, sad, resented, depressed, helpless, and hurt were summed to form the group of female emotions, namely Group B. There were no significant results found. For Group A, the mean for men was 0 (SD=0), the mean for female was 0.20 (SD=0.41). For Group B, the mean for men was 0.17

(SD=0.41), the mean for female was 0.30 (SD=0.93)

Discussion

Although the sample size of this study was relatively small, it still gave us some indication in terms of gender stigma. As shown by the result, women are more likely to appeal to hierarchy when addressing an experience of mistreatment. Appealing to hierarchy is contrast with directly talk to the renderer. It might be considered as more polite and decent to write a letter to the manager or file an office complain than yell to the renderer face to face. Moreover, women might be pressured more to keep their behaviors polite and decent, where men may have less of these social restrictions. To put it in another way, women might be discredited more than men when engaged in an argument with the renderer. A different interpretation is that women have more experience with being invisible, so they know how to call attention to the problem. In other words, they are more effective or cope better. With less experience, men may not have learned this strategy.

The results also show significant difference between invisibility and stigma. Invisibility stands for participants felt their presence or existence did not elicit the expected treatment. When their presence or existence did not matter, they felt they are being rendered invisible. Stigma served as a factor that the participants could attribute to as a reason for the mistreatment. For example, two out of eleven women reported they are being treated as invisible because they were women. Although this number is not large, this attribution should receive some attention. It may indicate that more study should be performed to test if gender is a stigma for women. Beyond that, stigma also affected the coping behaviors of men and women. Gender stigma, for instance, restricted women from addressing the situation directly with the renderer.

Limitations of this study might include using an open-ended survey, where participants reported their emotions and behaviors merely by recalling from their memory. Therefore, they may have experienced one emotion, but failed to remember it when filling the survey. In another possibility, they may remember it, but could not describe it, and in consequence did not report it. To avoid these problems, in future studies, close ended questions may be adopted. Participants could check each emotion they felt from a list of emotions. Different results might be obtained when the question is asked in this way.

This study was important in several ways. First of all, it indicated that men and women had similar emotions in reaction of being treated invisible. They only differ in a specific behavioral response, namely whether or not address the situation immediately to the renderer. Secondly, it also suggested that the experience of invisibility was unpleasant to both men and women, and that men and women have same emotional responses. The behavioral response, thus, could be a result of social expectations. Women might be expected to be submissive, so the behavior of publicly complain was less associated with women. One could speculate that the group of disabled people might react as what women did since they are often perceived as weak and often need help from others.

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