The Reverse Double Standard Among Relationships With A Power Disparity
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Overview and Hypotheses

The research was a 3 (setting: high school, college, or a business) x 2 (gender of the authority figure: Greg or Amelia) x 2 (initiator of the physical relationship: Authority or Subordinate) design, giving the research a total of 12 different conditions. The following were hypothesized:

• H1: A main effect of authority gender: We predict more negative evaluations of the male authority than the female authority (i.e., viewing the relationship as more inappropriate, more likely to report the incident).
• H2: A main effect of setting: We predicted more negative evaluations of the situation (i.e., viewing the relationship as more inappropriate, more likely to report the incident) and those involved when the setting is high school compared to college and business.
• H3: A main effect of participant gender: We predicted that female participants would react more sensitively to the situation, (i.e., viewing the relationship as more inappropriate, more likely to report the incident).
• H4: A two-way interaction between authority gender and setting: We predicted that when the authority figure is a male in a high school setting, the situation and the authority figure would be perceived most negatively (i.e., viewing the relationship as more inappropriate, more likely to report the incident).
• H5: A two-way interaction between authority gender and initiator of physical relationship: We predicted more negative evaluations of the situation and the authority (i.e., viewing the relationship as more inappropriate, more likely to report the incident) when the authority figure is male and initiates the physical relationship.
• H6: A two-way interaction between setting and initiator of physical relationship: We predicted more negative evaluations of the situation and the authority (i.e., viewing the relationship as more inappropriate, more likely to report the incident) when Amelia is the authority figure, participants perceived the authority figure's behavior more seriously, and felt greater anger towards him, compared to when Amelia was the authority figure; supporting H1.
• H7: A three-way interaction between authority gender and initiator of physical relationship: We predicted more negative evaluations of the situation and the authority (i.e., viewing the relationship as more inappropriate, more likely to report the incident) when the authority figure is male in a high school setting, the situation and the authority figure would be perceived most negatively (i.e., viewing the relationship as more inappropriate, more likely to report the incident).

Method

Participants (N = 574) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were presented with a vignette containing a letter from Human Resources. The vignettes introduced the gender of the person in power (Greg or Amelia), the setting of the letter (High School, College, or a Business), and who initiated the sexual relationship (Authority or Subordinate). After reading the vignette about a “workplace incident,” the participants answered questions about Greg and Amelia, as well as specific questions about the individual in power and the potential punishments they recommend them to receive. Participants also rated the exploitation, seriousness and harmfulness of both individuals that the letter involved. We also collected participants endorsement of the sexual double standard as well as their social desirability.

Results/Conclusion

A MANCOVA was performed and the following effects were found:
• There was a main effect of gender of the authority. When Greg was the authority figure, participants perceived the authority figure’s behavior was more serious, and felt greater anger towards him, compared to when Amelia was the authority figure; supporting H1.
• There was a main effect of setting: The high school setting scenario resulted in higher ratings of inappropriateness of relationship, higher intention to report the incident and higher punishment for the authority figure; supporting H2.
• There was a main effect of participant gender: Female participants were more likely to view the relationship as more inappropriate, and recommend higher punishment for the authority figure, compared to male participants; supporting H3.
• There was a two-way interaction between authority gender and setting: Male authority in high school setting resulted in highest perceptions of seriousness of Greg’s behavior and the greatest anger towards Greg; supporting H4.
• There was a two-way interaction between authority gender and initiator of physical relationship: Participants had higher perception of exploitation by Greg when Greg was the authority and initiated the physical relationship; supporting H5.
• Hypotheses 6 and 7 were not supported.

In conclusion, there is, in fact, support for a reverse-double standard in relationships with a power disparity. Based on previous research by Howell et al. (2011), it was found that the RDS occurs in relationships with a power disparity, though we found evidence that not only does power play a role but the location of where the relationship takes place as well. Although the RDS exists strongly in a high school setting, it also seems to occur in a college setting. It does not seem to be as pronounced in a business setting.