The Effects of Victim and Perpetrator Reputation on Physical Distance: Do Individual Differences Matter?

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Presentation Outline

- **Background information**—Attributing blame in acquaintance rape situations
- **Defining the problem**: Reputation of victims and/or perpetrators of acquaintance rape & the attribution process
- **Method**
- **Results**
- **Discussion**: Attributing blame in acquaintance rape situations is affected by reputation and participant/observer sex
Introduction

- Attributing blame is difficult in acquaintance rape situations because acquaintance rape is often not acknowledged as rape by the victim\(^1, 2, 3, 4\)
- Various factors that contribute to attributing blame include:
  1. Sex of participant/observer
  2. Traditional sex role stereotyping
  3. Victim behaviors
  4. Reputation

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Men are more likely than women to …

- attribute blame to the victim
- blame attractive victims more than unattractive victims
- endorse more rape tolerant attitudes
- perceive that victims derive sexual pleasure from attacks

6 McCaul, Veltum, Boyechko, & Crawford, 1990
7 Holcomb, Holcomb, Sondag, & Williams, 1991
Introduction—Traditional sex role stereotyping

- Individuals with more traditional attitudes toward women are:
  - more likely to accept perpetrators’ behaviors\(^8\)
  - more likely to believe that rape is justifiable\(^9\)

- Date rape is seen as an “extension” of traditional sex role interactions\(^{10}\)

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\(^8\) Fischer, 1986; Coller & Resick, 1987; Snell & Godwin, 1993  
\(^9\) Muehlenhard, 1988  
\(^{10}\) Bridges, 1991
Introduction—Victim behavior

- Victim behaviors are considered when attributing blame to the victim

- Behaviors such as:
  - Foreseeability\(^{11}\)
  - Initiation of a date\(^{12}\)
  - Prior sexual experience\(^{13}\)
  - Intimacy levels\(^{14}\)

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11 McCaul et al., 1990  12 Muchlenhard, 1988; Muchlenhard, Friedman, & Thomas, 1985  
13 Shotland & Goodstein, 1992  14 Kanekar et al., 1991
Introduction—Reputation

- Victims with less respectable reputations are attributed more blame than victims with more respectable reputations\(^{15}\)

- Some contradicting evidence:
  - Victims with more respectable reputations are attributed more blame than victims with less respectable reputations\(^{16}\)
  - Victim manipulations found to have no effect on male participants\(^{17}\)
  - Responsibility did not increase with increased respectability\(^{18}\)

\(^{15}\) Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Kahn, Gilbert, Latta, Deutsch, Hagen, Hill, McGaughey, Ryan, & Wilson, 1977; Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1977; McCaul et al., 1990
\(^{16}\) Jones & Aronson, 1973
\(^{17}\) Fulero & Delara, 1976
\(^{18}\) Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1977
## Introduction—Reputation qualified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Respectable” Reputations</th>
<th>Less “Respectable” Reputations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virgin</td>
<td>Young divorcee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Prostitute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young married</td>
<td>Norm violating behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Married and pregnant</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Defining the Problem—Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to investigate reputation for both victims and perpetrators of acquaintance rape and how reputation affects attribution.

- Why was reputation the focus of the study?
  - inconsistent results
  - scarcity of studies investigating both victim and perpetrator reputation
Defining the Problem—Purpose

- Reputation was defined as either “good” or “bad” and characterized by:
  - dating behavior (number of partners)
  - academic and/or partying behavior (alluding to frequency of alcohol use)\(^{19}\)

- Attribution was operationalized by the physical distance participants placed between themselves and the interviewee with good, bad, or neutral reputation (rape victim, perpetrator, control)

\(^{19}\) Koss et al., 1987
Defining the Problem—Hypotheses

1) Participants will place more physical distance between themselves and victims of acquaintance rape based upon the reputation of the victims.

2) Participants will place more physical distance between themselves and perpetrators of acquaintance rape based upon the reputation of the perpetrators.

3) Participant sex will affect the distance participants place between themselves and the interviewees.
Method

- Participants: 102 (male 95, female 97) undergraduates

- Conditions—victims and perpetrators (good, bad, or neither) and control (male or female)

  → For example: A good reputation was characterized by an honors student who had had only one or two serious boy/girl-friends
Method—Procedure

- Each participants was led to believe that he/she was meeting a person for an interview

- The participant was given information about this person’s reputation (one of the eight conditions)

- The participant was asked to arrange two chairs as he/she “felt comfortable”²⁰

- While the participant was waiting for the interviewee, he/she was administered a survey

²⁰ Mooney, Cohn, & Swift, 1988
### Results

Table 1: Mean Distance (in inches) by Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Mean Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim no reputation</td>
<td>26.44a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female control</td>
<td>26.99a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male control</td>
<td>28.67ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim good reputation</td>
<td>29.42ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator good reputation</td>
<td>30.71ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim bad reputation</td>
<td>32.37bc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator no reputation</td>
<td>34.29bc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator bad reputation</td>
<td>37.65c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

- Participants placed chairs significantly farther away from victims with good reputation than victims with no reputation.
- Participants placed chairs significantly farther away from perpetrators with a bad reputation than perpetrators with good reputations.
- Participants placed chairs significantly farther away from perpetrators with no reputation than perpetrators with good reputations.
Results

Figure 1: Mean Distance by Sex
Discussion

- Participants attributed significantly more blame to victims with good reputations than victims with no reputation

- Possible Explanations

  → victims’ ability to foresee dangerous situation
  → participants’ acceptance of rape myths/traditional roles
Participants attributed significantly more blame to a perpetrator with no reputation than perpetrators with a good reputation.

Possible Explanations:

→ perpetrator good reputation has the “benefit of the doubt”
Discussion—Limitations

- Reliability of unobtrusive measure to operationalize attribution
- Homogenous sample size
- Reputation inconsistencies between conditions
  - Good reputation characterized by academic behavior and no partying
  - versus
  - bad reputation characterized by partying behavior and no academic behavior
Future studies should investigate defining reputation as good or bad in the context of...

- social behaviors (frequent partying versus no partying)
- academic performance (honors student versus below “average” student)
- dating behavior (high/low partners)
Discussion—Implications

- Reputation is a determinant when attributing blame in acquaintance situations, which could have detrimental effects in situations involving:

  → Juror decisions

  → Victims’ decisions to report and/or their level of self blame\(^{21}\)

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\(^{21}\) Amick & Calhoun, 1987; Koss, 1985; Koss et al., 1987; Esacove, 1998; Regehr &, Glancy, 1993