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Donita A. Phipps

Missouri Southern State College

Christine M. Szekeres

Missouri Southern State College

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Perceptions of Date Rape on a College Campus

Donita A. Phipps
and Christine M. Szekeres

Missouri Southern State College

ABSTRACT

The occurrences and attitudes about date rape were surveyed at a small Midwestern college campus. They were measured through a vignette in which a date rape occurred, and a survey which contained demographic questions, true/false and Likert scale items. The Likert items were divided into three types: 1) nine questions a date rapist would strongly agree with (male initiator items); 2) nine questions someone sophisticated about rape would strongly agree with (egalitarian items); and 3) three neutral questions (bystander items). From these items a male-initiator and egalitarian score was derived for each S. T-test results indicate that male Ss had a higher male-initiator score than female Ss, $t(329) = 2.04$, $p < .001$, while female Ss had a higher egalitarian score than male Ss, $t(328) = 1.18$, $p < .001$. Pearson correlations also revealed a significant negative relationship between male-initiator and egalitarian scores, $r = -.61$, $p < .001$; and a significant positive relationship between the age of the Ss and their egalitarian score, $r = .14$, $p = .006$. This study advocates the need to dispel traditional myths concerning sex-roles and date rape through rape awareness and open communication.

INTRODUCTION

Date rape has become an increasing concern in society. This is especially true on college campuses because people between ages 18 and 24 are involved in most sexual violence (Meyer, 1984). Date rape has been defined as, "an interaction that begins between a man and a woman in the context of a social event or gathering and ends with one participant forcing the other to participate in sexual activity against his or her will" (Miller & Marshall, 1987).

Malamuth found that 35% of college men sampled indicated they were likely to rape if they could be guaranteed not to get caught. This may suggest that our culture supports rape myths and that the acceptance of these myths tends to include interpersonal violence (Burt, 1980; Quackenbush, 1981; Sandberg, Jackson & Petric-Jackson, 1987; Miller, 1988; Warshaw, 1991). Furthermore, because the social nature of the interaction has set the stage for intimacy and trust, date or acquaintance rape is not always perceived as rape by either the assailant or the victim (Warshaw, 1988). According to Aizenman & Kelley (1988), if a relationship is perceived as abusive, it is more likely to be recognized by women than by men, who tend to define abuse in more violent terms. This misperception is consistent with traditional sex roles, where women are viewed as objects to be aggressively pursued and overcome by men (Sandberg et al., 1987). Hence, males may misinterpret friendly female behavior as sexually solicitous regardless of intention (Abbey, 1982).

Often people look for confirmation that sexual advances were unwanted by looking at the circumstances of the assault, such as verbal and physical protest, onset of protest, and degree of force used by the man, in determining guilt or blame (Shotland & Goodstein, 1983). Other factors considered include where the date took place and what activities were involved. Parking and, in some cases going to movies are associated with consenting to sexual encounters (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987).

Several studies (Miller & Marshall, 1987; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Aizenman & Kelley, 1988; Miller, 1988; Warshaw, 1988) link the consumption of alcohol or other drugs with the incidence of date rape. According to Muehlenhard & Linton (1987), the consumption of alcohol reduced men's inhibitions against sexual violence. In these situations, men were perceived as not responsible for their actions or their inebriation, whereas women were responsible for both. The purpose of this research was two fold: a) to discover the extent of the occurrence of

date rape at a local college campus; and b) to illuminate the attitudes behind date rape.

METHOD

Survey Development

First, an open-ended questionnaire was given to an upper division psychology class concerning their definition of and attitudes about date rape. On the basis of the responses, a preliminary questionnaire was developed including demographic questions, true/false items, a vignette (see Table 1), and Likert scale items about the vignette. The Likert items were based on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree") and divided into three types: 1) nine questions a date rapist would strongly agree with (male initiator items); 2) nine questions that someone sophisticated about date rape would strongly agree with (egalitarian items); and 3) three neutral questions (bystander items). From these items a male-initiator score and an egalitarian score were derived for each S. The term male-initiator refers to the idea that males should be the aggressive initiators of sexual intimacy, whereas egalitarian refers to sexual initiation by either the male and/or female. The preliminary questionnaire was then administered to a general psychology class. After revising the true/false items and adding an operational definition of date rape, the final survey was developed.

Table 1
Vignette Used In Final Survey

Angelica and Bob had been out together several times. On this particular evening, they had attended a pot-luck dinner at their church. Afterwards, Bob invited several friends, including Angelica over to his house to watch a movie. During the movie, Angelica and Bob held hands while sitting together on the floor. After the movie, everyone else left. Bob was planning to take Angelica home, but before they left, Bob reached over and gave Angelica a kiss. This kissing developed into French kissing. Then, he nonchalantly slipped his hand under her shirt. Angelica pushed his hand away and said, "Please take me home now."
He kissed her again and pinned her to the floor. She screamed, "Stop it, you're hurting me." Bob didn't listen and became more and more aggressive while Angelica struggled.
In the meantime, one of their friends, Joe, returned to get his coat. He heard their struggle. When he went to check it out, he saw Bob and Angelica engaged in intercourse with Angelica sobbing and pleading for Bob to stop. Embarrassed, Joe immediately grabbed his coat and left without saying a word.

Subjects

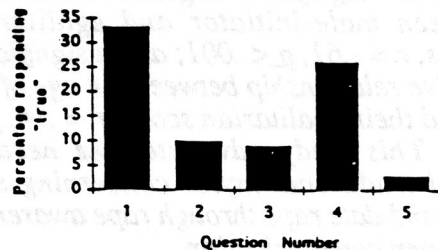
The final survey was administered to 125 male and 216 female college students enrolled in lower and upper-division Psychology classes.

Procedure

The survey was administered in-class. The researchers explained the purpose of the survey by reading the first two paragraphs, which consisted of the general purpose and the definition of date rape. The Ss were informed of their right to withdraw at anytime as well as when the results would be made available. Lastly, the Ss were reminded to complete each page before going on to the next one. After explaining the survey, it was distributed to the class and was completed by most Ss within fifteen minutes. Upon completion, the survey was collected and the Ss were thanked for their cooperation.

RESULTS

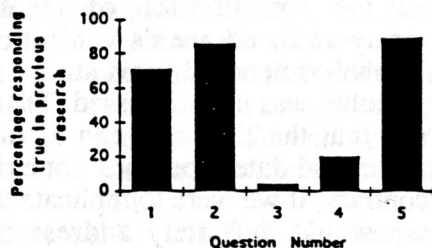
Ss response to demographic questions concerning involvement with date rape are shown in Figure 1. For corresponding national data see Figure 2.



1. I know someone who has been raped.
2. I was involved in a rape.
3. I know students at this college who have been raped while in attendance.
4. I have come close to being raped.
5. I have been accused of raping someone.

Figure 1. Percentage of Ss who responded true to each question.

Those Ss who said they had been close to being involved in a date rape were more likely to strongly disagree with male initiator items than those who had not been in a date rape situation, $t(328) = 2.01, p < .05$. Ss who had experienced date rape were more likely to strongly disagree with, "Angelica should have avoided this



1. Rapes that are planned.
2. Rapes in which force is used.
3. Reported rapes that are false.
4. College women who are date raped.
5. Victims who knew their assailant (i.e. boyfriend, friend's brother, spouse, etc.).

Figure 2. National percentages pertaining to date rape.

situation if she didn't really want sex", $t(336) = 2.14, p < .05$. The Ss who had been involved in a date rape tended to be older students ($M = 25.38$ vs. $M = 21.72$), $t(332) = 2.94, p = .003$, and had attended for more semesters ($M = 3.73$ vs. $M = 2.58$), $t(334) = 2.74, p < .01$. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in the egalitarian or male-initiator scores of those Ss who had been involved in a date rape and those who had not. T-test results indicated that male Ss were more likely to have a higher male initiator score than female Ss, $t(329) = 2.04, p < .001$, while female Ss were more likely to have a higher egalitarian score than male Ss, $t(328) = 1.18, p < .001$. A Pearson product moment correlation yielded a significant negative relationship between male-initiator and egalitarian scores, $r(318) = -.61, p < .001$, and a significant positive relationship between the age of the Ss and their egalitarian score, $r(325) = .14, p = .006$.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that the higher the male-initiator score a person has the lower the egalitarian score they will have, while the higher the egalitarian score the lower the male initiator score. It was also revealed that males were more likely to have a high male-initiator score and a low egalitarian score, while females were more likely to have a high egalitarian score and a low male-initiator score. This may be due to the fact that the male attitude toward date rape strongly agrees with Bob's position in

the vignette, while strongly disagreeing with Angelica's position; conversely, female attitudes about date rape are just the opposite.

Moreover, the female Ss are more likely to be attacked in their lifetime, and male Ss are more likely to commit date rape. This may imply that women more easily identify with the victim. However, some research has shown that women tend to blame the victim more than men because it makes them feel less vulnerable. They tend to believe that they could have done something to avoid being raped (Shotland & Goodstein, 1983). Conversely, in a study by Luginbuhl & Mullin (as cited by Miller, 1988) women placed blame on chance, while men blamed the victim more and looked at her respectability as a gauge for the assailant's guilt.

In our research, those who reported involvement with date rape placed less blame on the victim for being in that situation than those who have not been involved with a date rape. Sometimes even those who have been involved in a date rape don't always recognize it for what it was: rape. Responses to the item, "Angelica should have avoided the situation if she really didn't want sex", indicated strong disagreement from Ss who had experienced date rape. Since these Ss have been in a similar situation, they have most likely moved away from the traditional "blame the woman" attitude.

In the study by Shotland & Goodstein (1983), the factors that affected people's perceptions about date rape were type of protest (verbal, or verbal and physical), when the victim began to protest (after kissing, after touching erogenous areas outside clothing, etc.), and degree of force used by the man (verbal, or verbal and physical). The latter identifies a common misperception about rape, that is, if the assailant did not physically abuse the victim then it couldn't be rape. This type of attitude tends to ignore the effects of our socialization process, where men are taught that aggressiveness is not only acceptable but probably expected from them, and women are taught to be passive and nonassertive (Aizenman & Kelley, 1988).

Similarly, in this study, the older Ss were, the higher their egalitarian score, which would seem to reinforce the idea of rape being an offshoot of traditional sex-roles and values, i.e. women play hard to get and men initiate sexual encounters (Abbey, 1982). This type of mentality encourages men to underrate a woman's no and leads them to believe she is declining out of guilt, rather than because she truly does not wish to engage in sexual intercourse. It was found that those Ss who answered true to the true/false question, "If I were a victim, I would seek counseling," are more likely to strongly disagree with the male-initiator items. This is logical because people who have been date raped or who believe that it occurs are going to: 1) disagree with Bob, who is a rapist, and 2) answer true to a question about counseling date rape victims.

Furthermore, those Ss who indicated they had been involved in a date rape were older and had attended college longer. These Ss have been on their own longer and lived longer, thus increasing their chances of being attacked.

All of these results have been influenced to some degree by our cultural myths. One possible origin of date rape could be these myths. Some of the myths include: "women mean yes when they say no," "nice girl's don't get raped," "women ask for it," "any healthy woman can resist a rapist if she really wants to," and "she let him spend all that money on her, what did she expect," (Burt, 1980; Sandberg et al., 1987; Quackenbush, 1991; Warshaw, 1991;). These myths stem from the notion that a woman is a thing. The theory is that as the financial investment in the social interaction increases, so does the expected amount of sexual intimacy. This is expected by men and, in some of these studies, women have indicated that they engaged in sexual intercourse for that reason.

Several studies cite a link between the consumption of alcohol and the instance of date rapes (Marshall, 1987; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Miller, 1988; Miller & Aizenman & Kelley, 1988; Warshaw, 1988;). According to Muehlenhard & Linton (1987), in those

instances the consumption of alcohol significantly reduced men's inhibitions against sexual violence. In this study, the issue of alcohol was not addressed. That is not to say that the link between alcohol consumption and date rape does not exist. On the contrary, if we were to replicate this study, we would definitely address this issue. In addition, it is interesting to note that several of the answers to the open-ended questionnaire and the survey made direct reference to the consumption of alcohol in the episodes Ss reported.

Some possible improvements for this study might be: 1) using either a simple random sample or a stratified random sample in order to get a more complete idea of the attitudes of the entire campus; 2) manipulating alcohol consumption as a variable in the vignette; 3) manipulating the presentation of the definition of date rape and/or any direct mention of the word or concept of date rape. It would be interesting to examine how each Ss would interpret the situation without those prompts there; 4) adding more neutral questions to the Likert items to allow the items to be funneled; and 5) changing the demographic section to allow the items to be filtered. This filtering would allow a better picture of the extent of their personal experiences with date or acquaintance rape.

This study was an attempt to discover if traditional attitudes and myths were still influencing people's attributions of date rape. It was clear that the old stereotypes still prevail.

The problem of date rape on college campuses cannot be ignored. Without increasing public awareness and opening communication between the sexes, myths and stereotypes surrounding rape will be perpetuated.

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Correspondence concerning this research should be addressed to Donita Phipps and Christine Szekeres, c/o Missouri Southern State College, Psychology Department, Joplin, MO 64801.