

1995

Acquaintance rape

Thomas A. Paulsen
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1995 Thomas A. Paulsen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Paulsen, Thomas A., "Acquaintance rape" (1995). *Graduate Research Papers*. 3053.
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/3053>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

Acquaintance rape

Abstract

Most people associate rape with strangers. More women fear being raped by a stranger than by an acquaintance and authorities are more likely to respond to reports of stranger rape than acquaintance rape (Abbey, 1991). Sexual aggression in dating situations, commonly called date rape or acquaintance rape, is more common and more serious than is often realized. Acquaintance rape occurs when the assailant and the victim know one another and is four times more likely to occur than stranger rape (Warshaw, 1988).

Acquaintance Rape

A Research Paper
Presented To
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts
Masters of Arts in Education

by
Thomas A. Paulsen
August 1995

This Research Paper by: Thomas A. Paulsen
Entitled: Acquaintance Rape
has been approved as meeting the research paper
requirement for the Degree of Masters of Arts in
Education.

Florence Guido-DiBrito

7-5-95

Date Approved

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Michael D. Waggoner

7.5.95

Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Michael D. Waggoner

7.5.95

Date Approved

Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling

Most people associate rape with strangers. More women fear being raped by a stranger than by an acquaintance and authorities are more likely to respond to reports of stranger rape than acquaintance rape (Abbey, 1991). Sexual aggression in dating situations, commonly called date rape or acquaintance rape, is more common and more serious than is often realized. Acquaintance rape occurs when the assailant and the victim know one another and is four times more likely to occur than stranger rape (Warshaw, 1988).

It has been well documented that the traditional-aged college student is most susceptible to acquaintance rape. A study, with a national sample of 6,159 students enrolled in 32 institutions of higher education across the United States found that more than 27% of the women surveyed were victims of rape or attempted rape (Koss, 1988). Eighty four percent of the victims were acquainted with their assailants and 57% of the assaults occurred on dates. Researchers contend that the victimization rates for women ages 16 to 24 are three times higher than the average rates for all women (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987).

Research suggests that acquaintance rape is very

common on college campuses. Miller and Marshall (1987) found that 25% of the women in their study had engaged in nonconsensual intercourse while attending college. These numbers are very high, although it is difficult to obtain realistic estimates of the actual numbers of acquaintance rapes that occur on college campuses due to vast under-reporting. Other researchers say that only 29% of the women in their study who had been raped reported their assault to the police (Kilpatrick, Best, Veronen, Amick, Villeponteaux, & Ruff 1985). In a like manner, Russell (1984) found that only nine-point-five percent of the women surveyed, who had previously experienced rape, reported their experience to the police.

It is clear that acquaintance rape is a problem on college campuses. The following paper will address the problem of acquaintance rape and some of the issues surrounding it: 1) how alcohol consumption affects acquaintance rape, 2) rape myths and sex role stereotypes, and 3) communication problems which are related to acquaintance rape and sexual assault on college campuses. In addition, the paper will discuss issues that should be included in developing higher

education acquaintance rape prevention programs.

Alcohol Consumption

One of the most prevalent factors contributing to the high numbers of acquaintance rape on college campuses is alcohol consumption. Many surveys have documented that alcohol consumption on college campuses across the country is quite high. Berkowitz and Perkins (1986) state that the rate of problem drinkers on college campuses ranges from six percent to 72% depending on the location and type of school. Many studies have reported an association between alcohol and acquaintance rape. According to Barbaree, Marshall, Yates, and Lightfoot (1983) alcohol increases aggressive behavior and reduces male inhibitions toward sexual violence. In addition, men report feeling more powerful, sexual, and aggressive after consuming alcohol (Brown, Goldman, Inn, & Anderson 1980). In addition, men may perceive a woman's consumption of alcohol as an indication that she is willing to have sexual intercourse. In a study conducted by George, Gournic, and McAfee (1988), both male and female college students perceived a woman who consumed alcohol as more receptive to sexual advances,

more interested in being seduced, and more likely to engage in sexual intercourse than a woman who consumed "soft drinks." Alcohol consumption, at least in part, may cause the man to interpret any friendly cue from the woman as a sign that she is willing to have sex. Thus, a misperception might occur and lead to sexual assault.

Alcohol consumption often affects perceptions and is often used as a justification for sexual assault. Scully and Marolla (1984) contend that rapists report the use of alcohol as a justification for their behavior. In a study conducted by Richardson and Campbell (1982), a male offender accused of sexual assault was attributed less blame when he was intoxicated than when he was sober. The victim was considered to be more responsible when she was intoxicated rather than when she was sober. Thus, a double standard exists between men and women in regards to attribution of blame and alcohol consumption.

Alcohol consumption tends to affect a woman's ability to send and receive cues as well as their ability to resist sexual assault. The more alcohol a woman consumes the more her attention span narrows

which may inhibit her from realizing that her friendly behavior is being perceived as seduction. Koss and Dinero (1989) suggest that one of the most effective avoidance strategies to rape is immediate verbal and physical resistance such as screaming, kicking or running. Alcohol impairs motor skills which decreases the likelihood that a woman could resist an assault.

It is clear that there is a relationship between alcohol consumption and acquaintance rape. Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987) report that approximately 75% of acquaintance rapes involve alcohol consumption by either the victim, the assailant or both. Clearly, alcohol consumption plays a major role in the sexual violence that occurs on college campuses.

Rape Myths and Sex Role Stereotypes

It has been suggested that Americans live in a culture that supports the occurrence of rape through the socially accepted stereotypes and myths regarding the behavior between men and women. Rape myths focus on the victim and her behavior rather than on the assailant and the violence. Malamuth (1981) states that these beliefs include the following myths: when women say "no" they really mean "yes;" no woman

can be raped against her will; some women provoke rape; only certain types of women get raped; women falsely cry rape; women are responsible for preventing rape; and rape is sometimes justifiable. Myths such as these provide a substantial number of excuses for rapists, and are more applicable to acquaintance rape than to stranger rape.

Rape myths are strongly related to sex role stereotypes and distrust of women which are both factors contributing to the occurrence of rape (Burt, 1980). The acceptance of traditional sex role stereotypes occurs when females are socialized to believe that they are not supposed to indicate their sexual interests but rather be passive targets controlling the extent of sexual activity. Whereas males tend to be socialized to be sexual aggressors in which they initiate sex and persist even when women resist. This traditional view contends that women never admit that they want sex and men are supposed to overcome this token resistance (Check, & Malamuth 1983).

Sex role socialization has created a culture in which college students view date rape as an extension

of traditional male-female sexual interactions and in which people accept beliefs that are conducive to an assault within a relationship. One study found that 39% of the men agreed that sometimes a woman will pretend she does not want to have sex, but she is really hoping that a man will force her. The researcher states that 17% of the men agreed that at times the only way to get a woman sexually excited is to use force (Burt, 1980). Both of these statements, and people who agree with them, accept this type of behavior as an extreme form of traditional male-female sexual interaction.

Miscommunication

Another major factor contributing to the occurrence of acquaintance rape on college campuses is the miscommunication between men and women about sex and sexual intent. Men often perceive women's behavior as more sexual than do women which is likely to cause some degree of miscommunication. Men may interpret a number of things a female does, such as going to a secluded dating location, consuming alcohol, and wearing revealing clothing, as a sign that the woman is interested in having sex. Men, more often than women,

perceive women as more seductive and more interested in sex (Abbey & Melby, 1986). There are a number of ways in which a man might misinterpret a woman's actions which may lead to rape. For example, if a woman resists a man's sexual advances, he may believe that she really wants to have sexual intercourse but is only offering token resistance so she will not seem promiscuous (Check & Malamuth, 1983). If he does believe her, he may feel led on and some people feel that leading a man on justifies rape. Miscommunication often leads to different understandings of what happened.

There is evidence that some men do appear to misinterpret a woman's consent cues. However, there is evidence that other men do not care if a woman wants to have sex or not, and if given the chance would intentionally commit an act of rape. For example, Malamuth (1981) reported that approximately 35% of the male subjects surveyed indicated that they would rape a woman if they were assured anonymity.

Acquaintance Rape Prevention Programs

Acquaintance rape is a complicated problem. Many factors associated with date rape are present to a

larger degree on college campuses than in society in general (i.e., alcohol use, student's age, and cultural diversity). It is very important that institutions of higher education confront the problem and admit that violence does exist in relationships of students of the opposite sex, particularly acquaintance rape. Colleges and universities need to make serious commitments to educate the entire campus community and prevent acquaintance rape.

There are several points that may be included in acquaintance rape prevention programming. First, in order to reduce acquaintance rape on college campuses student affairs administrators need to coordinate education, prevention, and victim support. Education is a tool that can be used to raise student's awareness about the problem of date rape and acquaintance violence. According to a national study of sexual victimization on college campuses, Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski (1987) found that approximately 55% of the women surveyed experienced some form of sexual aggression, including 27% who experienced a rape or attempted rape. Many students do not know what constitutes a rape and may not recognize a situation as

rape if it does not fit the stranger rape stereotype. Koss and Oros (1982) contend that many women who have been raped do not label the incident as rape. Education can increase awareness, of both men and women, regarding what constitutes a rape. If a rape does occur, increased awareness might encourage a woman to seek counseling rather than blaming herself.

Second, it would also be beneficial to educate students about the relationship between alcohol consumption and acquaintance rape. Information about the prevalence of alcohol consumption in correlation with the incidence of acquaintance rape should be included in the prevention program. Examples of acquaintance rape can be given in which the offender and the victim have been consuming alcohol. In addition, all students need to be aware that alcohol consumption is not justification for sexual assault. Acquaintance rape prevention programs can be coordinated with alcohol abuse programs in an attempt to work together to reduce acquaintance rape as well as alcohol consumption.

Third, in addition to alcohol awareness, it would be beneficial for women to become more aware of the

situations in which date rape might occur. Female students should be aware that the person who initiates or pays for the date may be sending a message that they are interested in sex. Additionally, men may perceive women's actions in more of a sexual context than women do. Male students should be educated that if they pay for a date, it does not necessarily mean that they are entitled to sex. Also, if a woman initiates a date, it does not necessarily mean that she is interested in sex. This type of information can be beneficial to students in recognizing situations that are conducive to rape. Bart and O'Brien (1985) contend that rape avoiders recognize situations early that are conducive to rape.

Fourth, both male and female students need to share the perceptions they hold and communicate their expectations and attitudes about sexual intimacy. Student affairs administrators creating acquaintance rape prevention programs should encourage direct communication between students about sex. If both male and female students express their perceptions, then there will be less ambiguity and less miscommunication which might occur and lead to sexual assault.

Fifth, in addition to addressing perceptions of sex willingness, student affairs educators need to address personal attitudes towards the acceptance of forced intercourse, sex role stereotypes, and rape myths. Programming efforts need to dispel the expectations that women should be passive and men should be dominant. Socialization is often cited as the source for many of these attitudes. Programming needs to challenge these beliefs in an attempt to change attitudes regarding traditional sex roles, sexual aggression, adversial sexual beliefs and rape myths. Changes in these attitudes may decrease the likelihood of sexual assault by men and encourage women to feel more entitled to stop unwanted sexual advances.

Sixth, challenging attitudes and beliefs towards sexual assault is very important, although it can be a very time consuming process. Finley and Corty (1993) contend that acquaintance rape seems to occur early in a woman's college career. Thus, it is crucial to introduce rape prevention as early as freshman orientation. These programs could continue and be presented as seminars and could also be incorporated into course material. Information about issues

surrounding rape could be distributed through articles in college newspapers, in residence hall programming, and through campus athletic organizations.

Coeducational programs for fraternities and sororities would also be good forums to get more individuals involved in an attempt to lower the incidence of sexual assault on campus.

These programs need to be campus wide, including both men and women students, faculty, and staff. Student affairs administrators such as advisors, counselors, residence hall staff, and health center personnel should be trained and be able to recognize symptoms of sexual violence. All college constituents need to be sensitive to the issue of acquaintance rape and must work with and support one another in an attempt to coordinate activities as well as share information and prevention strategies.

Seventh, it is also important that all persons on campus understand what to do when dealing with acquaintance rape. There should be written guidelines in place for dealing with and assisting victims of sexual assault. In addition, there should be a protocol explaining how to refer a victim of sexual

assault to the appropriate support service such as crisis intervention, counseling, or the student health center. There should also be procedures in place to deal with assailants both internally and externally.

In conclusion, acquaintance rape is a very serious problem. It is imperative that student affairs administrators confront the problem of acquaintance rape and take appropriate measures to prevent this act of sexual violence from occurring.

References

- Abbey, A. (1991). Acquaintance rape and alcohol consumption on college campuses: How are they linked? Journal of American College Health, 39(4), 165-169.
- Abbey, A., & Melby, C. (1986). The effects of nonverbal cues on gender differences in perceptions of sexual intent. Sex Roles, 15, 283-298.
- Barbaree, H. E., Marshall, W. L., Yates, E., & Lightfoot, L. O. (1983). Alcohol intoxication and deviant sexual arousal in male social drinkers. Behavior Research and Therapy, 21, 365-373.
- Bart, P. B., & O'Brien, P. H. (1985). Stopping rape: Successful survival strategies. New York: Plenum Press.
- Berkowitz, A. D., & Perkins, H. W. (1986). Problem drinking among college students: A review of recent research. Journal of American College Health, 35, 21-28.
- Brown, S. A., Goldman, M. S., Inn, A., & Anderson, L. (1980). Expectations of reinforcement from alcohol: Their domain and relationship to drinking patterns. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 48, 419-426.

- Burt, M. R. (1980), Cultural myths and support for rape. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 11, 212-230.
- Check, J. V. P., & Malamuth, N. M. (1983). Sex role stereotyping and reactions to depictions of stranger versus acquaintance rape. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45, 344-356.
- Finley, C., & Corty, E. (1993). Rape on campus: The prevalence of sexual assault while enrolled in college. Journal of College Student Development, 34, 113-117.
- George, W. H., Gournic, S. J., & McAfee, M. P. (1988). Perceptions of postdrinking female sexuality: Effects of gender, beverage choice, and drink payment. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 18, 1295-1317.
- Kilpatrick, D. G., Best, C. L., Veronen, L. J., Amick, A. E., Villeponteau, L. A., & Ruff, G. A. (1985). Mental health correlates of criminal victimization: A random community survey. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 53, 866-873.
- Koss, M. P. (1988). Hidden rape: Sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample in higher

education. In A. W. Burgess (Ed.) Rape and Sexual Assault II (pp. 3-25). New York: Garland.

Koss, M. P. & Dinero, T. E. (1989). Discriminant analysis of risk factors for sexual victimization among a national sample of college women. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 57, 242-250.

Koss, M. P., Gidycz, C. A., & Wisniewski, N. (1987). The scope of rape: Incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of high education students. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 55(2), 162-170.

Koss, M. P., & Oros, C. J. (1982). Sexual experiences survey: A research instrument investigating sexual aggression and victimization. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 50, 455-457.

Malamuth, N. M. (1981). Rape proclivity among males. Journal of Social Issues, 37, 138-157.

Miller, B., & Marshall, J. (1987). Coercive sex: A problem on university campuses. Journal of College Student Personnel, 28, 38-47.

Richardson, D., & Campbell J. L. (1982). The effect of alcohol on attributions of blame for rape. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 8, 468-

476.

Russell, D. E. H. (1984). Sexual exploitation, rape, child sexual abuse and workplace harassment.

Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Scully, D. & Marolla, J. (1984). Convicted rapists' vocabulary of motive: Excuses and justifications. Social Problems, 31, 530-544.

Warshaw, R. (1988). I never called it rape. New York: Harper & Row.