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Kevin M. Stubbs
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Match-and-Motivation Model Applied: Factors Preventing Nontraditional Victims from Reporting Rape

Kevin M. Stubbs*

This paper explores the possibility that rape incidence in populations other than heterosexual females (traditional victims) may be significantly higher than generally tends to be acknowledged. Specific consideration is given to rape victims who are referred to as nontraditional victims, which include homosexual females, homosexual males, heterosexual males, transsexual females, and transsexual males. An overview of research on nontraditional-victim rape is presented to illuminate possible factors that moderate whether nontraditional victims conceptualize their experience as a rape and whether they subsequently report the event. These factors are then applied within the framework of Peterson and Muehlenhard's (2011) Match-and-Motivation model to support the possibility that nontraditional victims are less likely to label events as rape and less likely to report events when they are labeled as rape. Discussion concludes with comments on a potential reevaluation of the focus of rape research away from exclusively heterosexual females in favor of research that addresses both traditional and nontraditional victims.

Rape is an unfortunate and widespread reality, which has prompted numerous studies focused on understanding, responding to, and preventing the rape of heterosexual females. Research concerning rape with other victims has, however, been extremely limited until recent years (Davies, 2002). Mezely and King (1992) have suggested that this neglect of the non-female victims of rape by both the research community and the wider public is likely a result of the attention rape receives as a feminist issue, the higher reporting rates of rapes with female victims, and a number of widely held false stereotypes and myths (i.e., males are exclusively perpetrators of rape). Rogers (1998) estimated that research, help, and support for male victims of rape are more than twenty years behind that for female victims.

This paper will provide an overview of prior research, theoretical and experimental, pertaining to the rape of individuals who are not heterosexual females. These victims who are not heterosexual females will be referred to as nontraditional victims and will include homosexual females, homosexual males, heterosexual males, transsexual females, and transsexual males. There has not been sufficient research concerning rape involving bisexual

individuals to include in the current discussion. Heterosexual female victims will be referred to as traditional victims. The focus of this paper will be on a novel application of Peterson and Muehlenhard's (2011) Match-and-Motivation Model, a simple framework that has been very successfully applied to the labeling of events as "sex" in heterosexual females. This review will apply the Match-and-Motivation Model to the labeling of nonconsensual sexual experiences as rape and the subsequent reporting of these events by nontraditional victims. Emphasis will be on the unique barriers to labeling and reporting rapes by nontraditional victims, especially increased victim blame and decreased perceived severity. This paper will provide support for the possibility that nontraditional victims are less likely than traditional victims to apply the label of rape to nonconsensual sexual experiences and are thereby less likely to report rapes that have occurred.

Defining Rape

There is no single definition of rape that is universally endorsed. In fact, definitions of rape vary considerably between individuals as well as within individuals across time (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011). Nonetheless, there are

*Initially submitted for Psychology 4791F at the University of Western Ontario. For inquiries regarding the article, please email the author at kmstubbs@gmail.com.

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some agreements on the essential elements of what rape is, to which is captured by the U.S Department of Justice's legal definition, and used by many researchers as their operational definition. The U.S Department of Justice (2010) defines rape as:

nonconsensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration of the victim by body parts or objects using force, threats of bodily harm, or by taking advantage of a victim who is incapacitated or otherwise incapable of giving consent. Incapacitation may include mental or cognitive disability, self-induced or forced intoxication, status as minor, or any other condition defined by law that voids an individual's ability to give consent.

Rape Involving Nontraditional Victims

Before the Match-and-Motivation Model can be discussed, it is vital that myths pertaining to rapes involving nontraditional victims be addressed. Additionally, an overview of the prior research on this topic will be presented. This overview will include the findings on social perceptions towards nontraditional victims as compared to traditional victims, as well as findings on the reporting of rapes with nontraditional victims.

Incidence Myths

The first incidence myth is the notion that rape victims are exclusively female. Whether endorsement of this myth is due to a lack of non-female rape victims in the media, a physiological misunderstanding (for example, a belief that a male could not be physically aroused while being sexually assaulted), a social factor, or an unlisted cause that is not yet fully understood (Davies, 2002; White & Yamawaki, 2009). Unfortunately, the reality is that males can be and are raped. Davies' (2002) meta-analysis suggested that the incidence of forced sexual events with male victims may be nearly two-thirds that of forced sexual events with female victims. Incidence with homosexual

male victims was notably higher than that with heterosexual male victims. The average age of male victims at the time of rape was 24 when only adults (age 16 and older), were considered (Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005a). In 1988, Strickman-Johnson studied male sexual victimization in a college population and found that 16% of college males had been victims of at least one forced sex episode. It is important to note that these statistics, like those for females, are based on rapes that have been reported and on responses from participants in studies who are willing to admit that such an event as is described in the study has occurred.

The second incidence myth consists of the belief that when a male is raped by a male, homosexuality of both the victim and perpetrator is implied. Hodge and Canter (1998) found that half of male victims of male-perpetrated rape identified themselves as heterosexual. Further, Groth and Burgess (1980) found that half of males who committed acts of rape against other males identified themselves as heterosexual. Although both of these studies have rather small sample sizes (50 and 16 respectively), they are still sufficient to suggest that homosexuality of the victim and perpetrator is not implied when male-male rape occurs. However, it does appear that the incidence of homosexuality among male-male rape victims is higher than that of the general population. As a result of this high proportion of homosexual victims, it has been suggested that males, heterosexual and homosexual, may underreport rape more so than females due to a fear of being stigmatized as homosexual (White & Yamawaki, 2009).

General Myths

Wakelin and Long (2003) suggested that many of the same rape myths surrounding female rape victims may be present in perceptions regarding male rape victims. The main female rape myths involve the belief that the victim enjoys the event and the belief that the event was caused by the victim's indiscreet behavior. Both beliefs are associated with more negative perceptions towards the victim, which

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may prevent victims from choosing to label themselves as a victim of rape and prevent the subsequent reporting of the event. Walkin and Long's research suggests that these myths negatively influence perceptions towards male victims and so males should, similarly to females, refrain from self-identifying as rape victims and from reporting these events to avoid the stigma that results from these false beliefs.

Reporting the Event

Very few male victims of rape report the crime to authorities (Hodge & Canter, 1998). In one study by Walker et al. (2005a), only 5 out of 40 males who identified as victims of rape had reported the crime, a rate that is notably lower than that of female victims. Braun, Schmidt, Gavey, and Fenaughty (2009) interviewed homosexual and bisexual men who had experienced rape and found that male rape victims have tremendous difficulty convincing authorities that the sexual event was nonconsensual. Through these interviews, Braun et al. were additionally able to discern five main methods by which males are raped: physical overpowering, drugs and alcohol, exploitation of inexperience, power differentials, and social obligation (for example, meeting an individual with the presumed purpose of sexual relations and thereby feeling as though one has no choice but to proceed with the agreed-upon sexual event). It is because so few male-victim rapes are reported that researchers must often interview individuals rather than consult legal databases, which impedes the research process and has limited the availability of information on rapes involving male victims and other nontraditional victims.

Negative Outcomes

Walker et al. (2005b) investigated the long-term psychological effects on male rape victims and found the same negative outcomes that are known to occur in females. The negative outcomes include increased incidence of depression and anxiety disorders, increased incidence of alcohol and drug misuse, lower self-worth and self-esteem, social avoidance,

self-harming behaviors, and related negative outcomes. A second study by Walker et al. (2005a) found that male rape victims who did not seek support were more likely to attempt suicide than those who did seek support. The tragic reality of male rape appears to be unintuitively common and highly devastating.

Social Perceptions

Howard (1984a; 1984b) was the first to consider social perceptions of nontraditional rape victims and, in fact, did so well before this field of study had begun to gain momentum. Howard had participants read depicted stranger rape scenarios in which the victim was either male or female, and then had participants complete a questionnaire measuring victim blame. This experiment yielded a higher amount of victim blame for male victims than for female victims. Furthermore, male victims were generally behaviorally blamed – blamed for their victimization due to action or inaction (typically, failure to escape or defend themselves) – whereas female victims were generally characterologically blamed – blamed due to a trait possessed (typically, carelessness). Fifteen years later, Anderson (1999) reproduced Howard's research and found that most participants did not distinguish between the subtypes of blame, behavioral and characterological. Research after Anderson's study has typically considered victim blame as a single combined measure, and has used this single measure along with a perceived crime severity measure to study anti-victim perceptions.

Over the last decade, numerous studies have used victim blame measures and perceived severity measures to investigate anti-victim perceptions specifically towards nontraditional victims (Davies & Hudson, 2011; Davies & Rogers, 2006; Davies, Pollard, & Archer, 2001). The work of Davies and her colleagues in these years has indicated three main findings: (a) more anti-victim perceptions are directed towards nontraditional victims than traditional victims, (b) heterosexual male participants have more severe anti-victim perceptions than other

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participants, and (c) heterosexual male participants direct significantly more anti-victim perceptions at homosexual male victims than any other type of victim (male transvestite victims may be an exception to this, but the research pertaining to these victims is not yet adequate to make any definitive conclusions).

Davies and Hudson (2011) have suggested three main theories as to why heterosexual male participants view homosexual male rape victims so negatively. These theories are:

Traditional gender roles and belief systems. Heterosexual males may view homosexual males as similar to heterosexual females due to their similar sexual preferences and the stereotypes pertaining to female-like behavior. If this is the case, it is quite possible that similar rape myths as are endorsed with female victims (victim's enjoyment of rape and indiscreet behaviors that lead to the rape) influence heterosexual males' perceptions of homosexual male victims. This theory is consistent with previously discussed findings of Wakelin and Long (2003) and, when compounded with the factors discussed below, may explain why homosexual male victims are viewed more negatively than heterosexual female victims.

Homophobia. A general negative attitude towards homosexual males such as that commonly present in heterosexual males as a result of homophobia may also produce the severe anti-victim perceptions in question. This theory is supported by the findings of Anderson (2004), which identified a significant correlation between homophobia and severity of anti-victim perceptions of homosexual male rape victims. The possibility of a similar correlation between transphobia and anti-victim views towards transsexual victims is currently under study (Davies & Hudson, 2011). Transphobia and homophobia may also be correlated with rape myth acceptance (Nagoshi et al., 2008), which would complicate Davies and colleagues' explanation of traditional gender roles and belief

systems with their explanation of victim blame as a function of homophobia.

Defensive-Attribution Theory. Davies and Hudson (2011) proposed that Shaver's (1970) hypothesis of defensive-attribution may apply if heterosexual male participants exaggerate the dissimilarity between themselves and homosexual victims, and view these victims more negatively, as result of a defensive response to distance themselves from the unfortunate reality of rape and the possibility that males such as themselves could be victims of rape. There is not yet sufficient experimental research on this topic to support or refute this possibility.

Summary

There is evidence that the rape of nontraditional victims does occur and at a rate of incidence that is cause for concern. It has been demonstrated that rape has similarly catastrophic effects for nontraditional victims as for traditional victims. Nontraditional victims have been shown to have particular difficulty reporting rape and often chose not to do so, even when they have chosen to identify themselves as victims of rape. Finally, while the mechanism is not yet clear, it has been suggested that nontraditional victims of rape are perceived more negatively with respect to victim blame and perceived crime severity than traditional victims.

Match-and-Motivation Model

The Match-and-Motivational Model is a simple framework used in research concerning factors that influence an individual's conceptualization of an experience as either consistent or non-consistent with a particular label such as sex. The Match-and-Motivational Model was selected for this review due to its parsimony and because it has already proven useful in research pertaining to the labeling of events, such as rape (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). The model describes two types of factors which may be thought of as acting in a series: (a) match factors, whether the event is consistent with the individual's operational

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definition of the label (referred to as their script), and (b) motivational factors, the sum of perceived consequences of applying or not applying the label (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011). This approach is not novel and has been used in such research as that of Fisher, Cullen, and Turner (2000), which examined factors contributing to the labeling or non-labeling of events as rape, as well as in an earlier study by Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007), which examined factors contributing to the labeling or non-labeling of events as sex.

Application with Traditional Victims

Peterson and Muehlenhard (2011) conducted open-ended questionnaires and interviews with female victims of rape in an effort to better understand why individuals label their experiences as rape immediately, years after the event, or not at all. They were able to identify several factors which act as barriers in the labeling process specific to a rape label, as follows:

Match Barriers. Four primary match factors were associated with non-labeling of an event as rape: (a) the perpetrator did not fit the individual's personal idea of a rapist (i.e., a friend), (b) the victim was intoxicated, (c) no excessive force was employed by the perpetrator, and (d) the victim did not resist to an extent that she felt to be consistent with rape.

Motivational Barriers. Five primary motivational factors were associated with non-labeling of an event as a rape: desire to avoid (a) labeling the perpetrator as a rapist, (b) distrusting all members of the perpetrator's sex, (c) using such a potent word as rape, (d) feeling worse about the event, (e) having to talk about or report the event.

While the above barriers have only been investigated in traditional victims, it seems reasonable that most if not all of these barriers should also be present and roughly equivalent in the labeling process for nontraditional victims.

Application with Nontraditional Victims

Additional Match Barriers. One match factor that is unique to nontraditional victims is the possibility that the gender or sexual orientation of the victim or perpetrator may not be consistent with the victim's rape script. For example, a heterosexual male may not believe that he can be raped by a female. The possibility of this barrier is supported by the endorsement of myths including the first incidence myth discussed previously, which consisted of the belief that all rape victims are female and all rapists are male (Davies, 2002; White & Yamawaki, 2009). A second match factor unique to nontraditional victims pertains to first labeling the event as sex. It is likely that, for example, many heterosexual males may not consider sexual events involving another man to be sex, and so would be further unlikely to consider the event as rape (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). It is also possible that oral sexual events may not be considered sex by both traditional and nontraditional victims, especially by homosexual males as they are known to very frequently engage in male-male oral sexual events (Johnson, Wadsworth, Wellings, & Field, 1994). For more discussion on the labeling of events as sex in the context of the Match-and-Motivational Model, see Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007).

Additional Motivational Barriers. Perhaps the most important motivational barrier to consider in rape labeling and reporting with nontraditional victims is the desire to avoid being identified as a rape victim. The desire not to be perceived or treated as a rape victim is not unique to nontraditional victims, but there is adequate reason to suspect that this barrier may be more severe in nontraditional victims: (a) being identified as a male rape victim may result in stigmatization of being labeled as a homosexual (White & Yamawaki, 2009), and (b) nontraditional rape victims are generally perceived more negatively than traditional rape victims (Davies & Hudson, 2011). The research of Braun et al. (2009) supports the idea of a

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perpetrator-centered motivational barrier that is specific to homosexual males where the victim desires to avoid labeling the perpetrator as a rapist due to gay culture social norms in which the coerciveness of male-male rape perpetrators is normalized.

If nontraditional victims are less likely to label and report rape, this would imply that the true incidence of such rapes is notably higher than the current estimates, which supports advocacy that research concerning rape (prevention strategies, support, etc.) should shift to be more inclusive of nontraditional victims.

Research Limitations

The study of nontraditional-victim rape is a recent phenomenon and even more recent was the formation of the Match-and-Motivation Model. Consequently, existing research evidence is subject to numerous limitations and challenges which are described below.

Investigating Unreported Rape

This review focused on a behavior, unreported rape, which is not adequately captured in reports or statistics. This review had to draw upon theoretical research with limited empirical backing. Research on transsexual victims of rape is particularly lacking at this point in time. A moderate amount of research on homosexual female rape victims has been conducted, but has been largely unable to arrive at consistent conclusions with regard to incidence rate and barriers to labeling and reporting of rapes (Balsam, Lehavot, & Beadnell, 2011; Porter & Williams, 2011). The present review limited all considerations of victims to those who are above sixteen years of age due, in part, to a lack of appropriately relevant research on minors.

The Meaning of Rape

Inconsistencies in the definition of rape in victims' scripts as well as in researchers' operational definitions complicate any research pertaining to rape. This challenge was partially addressed by utilizing a broad legal definition of rape and by commenting on the inherent

variance in rape scripts, matching, and motivation between individuals.

The Relation between Labeling and Reporting

While research has supported the common requirement of labeling an experience as a rape before the event can be reported (Layman et al., 1996; Littleton et al., 2009), labeling and reporting should not be thought of as completely entwined. Following the labeling of an experience as rape, it is likely that there are additional, victim-specific barriers which must be overcome in order to proceed with the support-seeking process. This relation has not yet been studied and should be the subject of future study.

Future Research

Prevention Research

This review posits that rape of nontraditional victims may be more common than was once thought and so it follows that research should include efforts that may help to prevent such rapes. Research concerning such prevention strategies could, for example, examine the benefits of more general (gender neutral and sexual orientation neutral) discussions of rape in schools.

Replication with Nontraditional Victims and Rape Reporting

The best way to evaluate the posits of the present review would be to reproduce the Match-and-Motivation Model study by Peterson and Muehlenhard (2011) with nontraditional victims, and with a focus on match and motivation factors contributing not only to labeling of rape, but to reporting of rape. The proposed study would consist of open-ended questionnaires and interviews with nontraditional victims who have experienced events that are consistent with a common operational definition of rape. The specific questions and measures would mirror those of Peterson and Muehlenhard (2011) as closely as possible, but would also include questions

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specific to the reporting or non-reporting of the event and any other factors found to be involved. This research would be extremely useful in future decisions regarding the scope of research on rape as a whole.

Conclusion

The present review has provided clear evidence that, counter to a number of myths, rapes involving nontraditional victims do occur and these rapes have similar negative outcomes as traditional-victim rapes. Not only do these rapes occur, but research supports the claim that these nontraditional victims are viewed more negatively than traditional victims. It has been suggested that this harsh stigmatization introduces unique match-related and motivation-related barriers to the labeling and reporting of rape in nontraditional victims. Consequently, it follows that rape involving nontraditional victims is likely to be underreported in comparison to traditional victims. If this is the case, nontraditional-victim rape may be an issue of comparable severity and commonality as traditional-victim rape. With this possibility in mind, the research community should continue this research and consider shifting the focus of research away from heterosexual-female-victim-specific study to a more general population study.

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