The Double Jeopardy of Male Sexual Assault: Why Intergroup and Interpersonal Associations Perpetuate Victim Blaming

Samantha Cima
Simon Fraser University

This paper provides explanations for the victim blaming associated with adult male sexual assault. Research suggests that sexual assault should be viewed as an intergroup instead of an interpersonal crime (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014), but this paper provides an overview to why both intergroup and interpersonal conceptualizations might increase blame, stigma, and backlash against male victims. The main reason provided recognizes the attention intergroup and interpersonal characterizations call to societal gender norms, increasing the perceived inconsistency between stereotypical definitions of being male and being sexually assaulted (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Thus, male victims are blamed more for the sexual assault as they are seen as acting against masculine constructs of assertion and dominance (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014). The black sheep effect and just world belief are also presented as explanations for the victim blaming against male victims and for why males blame male victims more than females. Finally, this paper suggests two main recommendations (i.e., ad campaigns and education programs), that might lower victim blaming and increase support services, based on changing public perceptions of sexual assault.

Keywords: male sexual assault, victim blaming, intergroup, black sheep effect, just

Sexual assault has notoriously been associated with victim blaming, a phenomenon where individual contributions of the victim are analyzed as a cause of the crime (Davies, Pollard, & Archer, 2006). It has been suggested (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014) that viewing sexual assault as an intergroup crime (i.e., a crime committed between groups) lowers levels of victim blaming for female victims. However, this paper argues that in the context of male sexual assault, both intergroup and interpersonal associations of sexual assault may actually increase victim blaming. Gender norms, the normative behaviour that characterizes the male gender, and the subsequent socialization of males in line with these norms, are salient at both the intergroup and interpersonal level. At the intergroup level, group normative attributions might cause ingroup members to reject male victims as an atypical threat to the group status, a concept known as the black sheep effect (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). Thus, due to the potential for rejection, male victims may be more likely to experience victim blaming (Marques et al., 1988). Yet, characterizing sexual assault as an interpersonal crime also highlights individual characteristics that might have led to the event, creating a double jeopardy dynamic for male victims of sexual assault. Further, the desire for individuals to believe in a just world may make male counterparts more likely to blame male victims, as this blame can restore

individuals' sense of security (Landstrom, Stromwall, & Alfredsson, 2016). This paper analyzes the current research on interpersonal versus intergroup associations, the black sheep effect, and the just world hypothesis to provide an explanation for the victim blaming associated with male sexual assault, and introduces recommendations to lower levels of victim blaming.

Prevalence of Male Sexual Assault

In 2008, an analysis into police-reported crimes in Canada revealed that female sexual assault occurred more than 10 times the rate of male sexual assault (68 versus 6 per 100,000 population, respectively) (Statistics Canada, 2010). Yet, this number is confounded by willingness to report, where male victims are less likely than their female counterparts to enter the criminal justice system based on "a fear of being disbelieved, blamed, exposed to other forms of negative treatment and/or concern that such disclosure might interfere with one's masculine self-identity" (Lowe & Rogers, 2017, p. 40). Unfortunately, prevalence rates of sexual assault have relied too heavily on police-reported data, making individuals, agencies, and the government drastically underestimate the number of male victims (Statistics Canada, 2010). Researchers (e.g., Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Peterson, Voller, Polusny, & Murdoch, 2011) investigating true prevalence rates of adult male sexual assault have captured this underreporting and have produced prevalence rates as high as 73% when sexual assault is defined as any form of unwanted sexual activity. This broader definition is used for the purposes of this paper, thus incorporating a range of severity and escalation of acts, such as forced touching to penetration (Hammond, Ioannou, & Fewster, 2016).

Rape Myths and Victim Blaming

The lack of acknowledgement of male victims of sexual assault perpetuates the development and maintenance of rape myths and victim blaming. Rape myths are false views and prejudicial beliefs about the perpetrators and the victims of sexual assault (Hammond et al., 2016). These beliefs are heavily influenced by societal gender norms surrounding masculinity (Lowe & Rogers, 2017). The masculine identity taught to children, which continues into adulthood (Kassing, Beesley, & Frey, 2005), stereotypically assumes males to be sexually dominant, assertive and forceful (Lowe & Rogers, 2017, p. 41). Thus, these norms create the notion that males are implausible sexual assault victims, as these traits are more characteristic of offenders (Javaid, 2016). Female gender norms, on the other hand, such as weak and submissive, are more in line with victimization, contributing to the illusion of sexual assault being a female-only crime (Javaid, 2016). The persistence of these gender norms can be found in the rape myths surrounding male sexual assault, where a literary analysis by Turchik and Edwards (2012) found the following to be the most consistently cited myths:

(a) men cannot be raped; (b) "real men" can defend themselves against rape; (c) only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape; (d) men are not affected by rape (or not as much as women); (e) a woman cannot sexually assault a man; (f) male rape only happens in prisons; (g) sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality; (h) homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant; and (i) if a victim physically responds to an assault he must have wanted it (pp. 211-212).

Strict adherence to these gender norms

and rape myths create a culture of victim blaming against male victims, as males are seen as possessing the necessary qualities (such as strength) to fight off any attack (Kassing et al., 2005). Thus, if the sexual assault occurred, individual characteristics of the male are scrutinized as the cause of the sexual assault (Bullock & Beckson, 2011).

These rape myths impact public perceptions of male sexual assault on the micro-, meso-, and macro-level, constraining men's willingness to report, as well as resources allocated to and support for male victims (McLean, 2013). The micro-level deals with individual thoughts and cognitions and rape myths can lead individuals to believe that male sexual assault does not and cannot happen (Davies et al., 2006). However, these myths are not immune to the male victims themselves, triggering an internalization that male sexual assault is a myth, which may interfere with their ability to see themselves as victims or contact support networks (Davies, 2002). Rape myths at the meso-level (i.e., interpersonal contact), can shape interactions between male victims, family members, friends, or police officers, where deeply held beliefs that male sexual assault does not exist causes skepticism of the male victim's disclosure, resulting in the male victims being rejected and blamed by the individuals disclosed to (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996). Finally, the macro-level concerns societal interactions, and these rape myths permeate into government responses, where resource allocation fails to provide adequate services and support for male victims (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996). The existence of these rape myths solidifies the experience of sexual assault as a purely female experience, stigmatizing male victims of sexual assault who come forward with allegations, and increasing the level of blame these individuals receive (Davies, 2002). Therefore, rape myths institutionalize and normalize victim blaming.

Victim blaming is motivated by status quo maintenance, where individuals are determined to protect the current status quo (O'Brien & Crandall, 2005). O'Brien and Crandall (2005) found that individuals were more likely to reject persuasive arguments when they were in conflict with the status quo, as it threatens their conceptualization of societal norms and practices. Such divergences unsettle individuals, leading counter-arguments to be attributed to individual biases as a viable defense mechanism to the threat of changing the status quo (O'Brien & Crandall, 2005). Within the context of male sexual assault, society is more likely to blame male victims as their presence is in direct disagreement with the current status quo that genders sexual assault as a female experience (Davies et al., 2006). When male victims come forward, they challenge what society knows surrounding the dynamics of sexual assault (including rape myths), and ignoring and victim blaming these individuals becomes a way to maintain the status quo (O'Brien & Crandall, 2005).

Initial studies into victim blaming (e.g., Howard, 1984) found differences in the way male versus female victims were blamed. Howard (1984) asked participants to rate levels of blame to a scenario in which a jogger (either female or male) was sexually assaulted and did not fight back. This study discovered differences between character and behavioural blame, where females were more likely to be blamed for their assault when character dimensions (e.g., carelessness) were relevant, and males when behaviour attributions (e.g., failing to fight back) were salient. While more current research (Davies & Rogers, 2006) has shown that such a dichotomous distinction is not applicable in all cases, as the behavioural versus character divisions are not necessarily pertinent

when blame is assigned, behavioural blame still persists within discussions of male sexual assault. Male victims are further blamed for their sexual assault when the victim is believed to have failed to try to escape or fight back, with even more blame assigned when the individual is perceived to look scared or frightened (Davies & Rogers, 2006; Howard, 1984). This finding is precisely related to discussions of gender norms, as mentioned above, as these behavioural characteristics are in direct conflict with societal male norms of strength, assertiveness, and dominance (Anderson & Lyons, 2005). Given that research, (e.g., Anderson & Lyons, 2005; Perrott & Webber, 1996) has found that male victims experience high levels of victim blaming, an analysis into why such high rates of victim blaming occur become particularly important.

Intergroup Versus Interpersonal Associations of Sexual Assault

In order to reduce the victim blaming associated with sexual assault, Droogendyk and Wright (2014) have suggested a shift in focus, switching from interpreting sexual assault as an interpersonal to an intergroup crime. In their study, Droogendyk and Wright (2014) evaluated how public conceptualizations of sexual assault impacted the level of blame that female victims experienced. Traditionally, sexual assault has been viewed as an interpersonal crime, where attention is unduly on the victim and perpetrator of the sexual assault (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014). This interpersonal level makes salient individuating circumstances and characteristics of the victim and the perpetrator conducive to victim blaming (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014). In the case of female sexual assault, interpersonal dynamics allow rape myths to permeate into evaluations of the crime, concentrating on aspects such as the female's clothing or alcohol level, and therefore increases victim blaming (Droogedyk & Wright, 2014). Viewing sexual assault as an intergroup crime, where the crime is committed by and against members of a group (i.e., a man raped a woman), removes these individuating characteristics by focusing on group-based dynamics (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014). Thus, by having an intergroup lens, female victims are less likely to be victim blamed, as the character and behavioural choices are no longer relevant at the group level (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014).

While such findings are motivating and inspiring within the realm of female sexual assault, these results might not be generalizable to male victims (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014). In fact, whether sexual assault is defined as an interpersonal or an intergroup crime may have no effect in reducing the victim blaming experienced by male victims. This represents a double jeopardy for male victims coming forward with allegations of sexual assault, where irrespective of how sexual assault is defined, male victims are likely to be blamed. In order to explain this double jeopardy, both intergroup and interpersonal associations of male sexual assault will be explicated and contextualized with the black sheep effect and the just world belief.

Intergroup Associations

Looking at male sexual assault from an intergroup lens might increase victim blaming, as it calls focus to societal gender norms and the various rape myths surrounding this crime. As mentioned previously, gender norms and socialization define what it means to be a "man," including traits such as strength, dominance, and independence (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996). This creates the expectation that men will be able to protect themselves against an attack, but

further, that men only have the qualities and traits necessary to commit sexual assault, not become victims (Hammond et al., 2016). Therefore, characterizing sexual assault on the intergroup level can explain how male victims of sexual assault are further blamed for their attack as they are held up to male gender norms, and this group membership makes salient that the individual should possess the necessary attributes and qualities (i.e., aggressiveness) that would prevent sexual assault (Davies, 2002). Hence, male victims of sexual assault are seen as violating gender norms and constructs of masculinity, which might increase the blame associated with the attack (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Social identity theory proposes that emphasizing gender as an intergroup dynamic should increase identification with the given group (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014). This is more likely to occur for female victims, as the ingroup status encourages the protection of the ingroup as a whole (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014). However, the opposite effect may be exhibited for male victims, as research (e.g., Anderson & Lyons, 2005; Mitchell, Hirschman, & Nagayama Hall, 1999; Turchik & Edwards, 2012) has consistently found that males are much more likely than females to blame male victims of sexual assault. This finding can be explained by the black sheep effect.

The black sheep effect concerns evaluations of ingroup members. When an ingroup member is likeable, for example, they promote the image of the group by adhering to favourable stereotypical qualities, such as assertiveness, they are evaluated positively and are subsequently accepted by the ingroup (Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010). However, the ingroup will make negative associations and downgrade the status of unfavourable ingroup members, even compared to outgroups (Zouhri & Rateau, 2015). Thus, the black sheep effect presents a unique form of ingroup favouritism, where atypical threats to the ingroup's image are exiled and removed from the group (Marques et al., 1988). This ingroup favouritism, according to social identity theory, arises out of the need for the ingroup to uphold and maintain a beneficial image (Marques et al., 1988). Hence, prescriptive norms, "the requirements that ingroup members must meet in order to promote a positive social identity," dominate the black sheep effect (Pinto et al., 2010, p. 108).

Due to the negative perceptions society holds regarding male victims of sexual assault, these individuals threaten the identity and image of the male ingroup (Zouhri & Rateau, 2015). Hence, male victims are further evaluated negatively by their ingroup and are rejected by way of the perceived identity threat (Pinto et al., 2010). Essentially, male victims threaten the stereotypical definition and prescriptive norms of the male ingroup, such as strength and dominance, and because of this threat, they become destructive to the male ingroup as a whole (Pinto et al., 2010). Therefore, because of the deemed unfavourable nature of male victims of sexual assault, the male ingroup attributes more negative evaluations towards the victims, such as "they are not real men" that lead to victim blaming (Coxell & King, 2010; Marques et al., 1988). Under the black sheep effect, rejecting male victims becomes an important protective factor for the positive male ingroup's image, explaining why males are more likely than females to blame male victims (Pinto et al. 2010; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Interestingly, however, the black sheep effect only transpires when cues to group membership are made salient, and as mentioned, this happens through the awareness of gender norms that occurs at the intergroup level, increasing the persistence of the black sheep effect (Marques et al., 1988).

Interpersonal Associations

Unfortunately, viewing male sexual assault on the interpersonal level might increase victim blaming as well. Consistent with research on female victims, the interpersonal level makes salient individual circumstances that may have contributed to the assault (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014). Of particular relevance becomes gender dynamics, as well as the sexual orientation of the victim (Davies et al., 2006). Male gender norms are also applicable at the interpersonal level, as individuals are not exempt from those standards and stereotypes (Bullock & Beckson, 2011). This can cause more blame at the interpersonal level, as the individual actions that contributed to the inconsistency between the gender norms and the sexual assault are scrutinized (Bullock & Beckson, 2011). Yet, the interpersonal level also directs attention to the sexual orientation of the victim. Male victims are blamed more for the sexual assault if the gender of the perpetrator is the same gender the victim is sexually attracted to (Davies et al., 2006). As such, heterosexual male victims are blamed more when the perpetrator is a female, and homosexual male victims when the perpetrator is also male (Davies et al., 2006). Such blame has roots in rape myths regarding the sexual prowess and hunting of men, where it is assumed that men are always searching for sexual contact and activity (McLean, 2013). Thus, because the assailant is a member of the group the victim is sexually attracted to, they are seen as wanting the sexual assault and are subsequently attributed more blame (Bullock & Beckson, 2011).

The just world belief states that individuals tend to believe that people get what they deserve, where the good get rewarded, and the bad get punished (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013). Thus, the just world belief represents a desire to live in and contribute to a fair society (Landstrom et al., 2016). Holding such a view "allows people to feel a sense of safety, as they have control over their own actions/behaviour. This in turn makes the world around them a predictable, manageable, and safe place" (Hayes et al., 2013). The just world belief has been applied to female victims of sexual assault (e.g., Hayes et al., 2013; Landstrom et al., 2016), but is equally applicable within the contexts of male sexual assault. Victim blaming becomes a defense mechanism to the potential threat of an individual's just world belief (Landstrom et al., 2016). Blaming sexual assault victims becomes a way to protect the view of "everyone gets what they deserve," as sexual assault is a particularly heinous crime that stands to jeopardize such a belief (Landstrom et al., 2016, p. 3). Therefore, the victim is scrutinized for their role in the sexual assault, as some action or characteristic must have caused the crime (Hayes et al., 2013). By blaming the victim, the just world belief is restored as a "cause" (for example, the victim deserved it because he did not fight back) is found for the sexual assault (Hayes et al., 2013).

The just world belief can also explain why males are more likely to blame male victims than females. By admitting that men can be raped, and forgoing such rape myths, males are opening the possibility of their own victimization (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996). Thus, because their belief in a just world prevents them from realizing that horrible events happen to "good" people (i.e., themselves), men blame male victims more for their assault as reassurance that such a crime would never happen to them (Landstrom et al., 2016). As such, the acknowledgement that males can be victimized threatens the security that goes along with believing in a just world, mobilizing the male ingroup to blame

these victims in order to restore a sense of safety (Hayes et al., 2013).

Recommendations to Lower Victim Blaming

Due to the victim blaming found within male sexual assault, male victims are unlikely to report sexual assault, seek help, or disclose their assault to friends and family (Coxell & King, 2010; Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Monk-Turner & Light, 2010). Thus, the psychological consequences of the assault may worsen over time, making intervention extremely necessary (Monk-Turner & Light, 2010). Since both interpersonal and intergroup characterizations of sexual assault increase victim blaming for male victims, recommendations need to first address the way society views male sexual assault before any difference at the interpersonal or intergroup level can be made. Therefore, this paper suggests ad campaigns and educational programs to alter public perceptions of male sexual assault and reduce levels of victim blaming for males.

Ad Campaigns

Given the permeated extent of victim blaming within society, ad campaigns become an important medium to reach a large and vast population. These campaigns can work to decrease victim blaming by creating a unified social identity on two levels (Subasic, Schmitt, & Reynolds, 2011). First, ad campaigns can establish a shared social identity between the male ingroup and male victims. This is done through subverting the stereotypical identity of the male ingroup by not only dispelling rape myths but also by providing men with new defining characteristics (Zouhri & Rateau, 2015). Thus, shifting the narrow view of men to a more broad and inclusive definition becomes important. A prime example of this is the Survivor UK (2012) ad campaign that featured the slogan, "real men get raped and talking about it takes real strength." The goal is to lessen the extent that the male ingroup bases their identification on stereotypical concepts, or to change those concepts, so that male victims are not viewed as unlikeable and subsequently rejected (the black sheep effect) (Zouhri & Rateau, 2015). By changing the social identity of men, the black sheep effect could be counteracted, lowering victim blaming, as this crime no longer clashes with male gender norms and identification (Zouhri & Rateau, 2015).

Second, shared social identities have the potential to be established between male victims and females as a group. Shared social identities are more likely to form between groups or individuals who have experienced victimization, particularly the same type, such as sexual assault (Hopkins et al., 2016). Since sexual assault is perceived as a gendered crime, typically committed against females, ad campaigns can be utilized to humanize the experience of male sexual assault, such as those campaigns that share male victims' personal stories, in order to create a shared social identity between male victims and the female group (Hopkins et al., 2016; Subasic et al., 2011). Thus, ad campaigns can show the female group that male victims face similar struggles and trauma as female victims, encouraging advocates for male victims and lowering blame, as the male victims are seen as more in line with the female group's identity and cause (Hopkins et al., 2016). However, care and attention must be taken so as not to portray the male victims as purely an extension of the female group, as this could lead to the black sheep effect, where the male victims are viewed as feminine and subsequently rejected.

Education Programs

Education programs present an important way to change and alter rape myths surrounding male sexual assault, teaching individuals that men are not exempt from sexual victimization. While current systems and programs are in place to teach young children, teenagers, and adults the facts surrounding sexual assault and consent, such programs are geared only to female victims, providing men with a false sense of security, as well as encouraging societal rape myths, such as men cannot be raped (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). By using education, such as classroom seminars in varying levels of schooling, as a mechanism to create a dialogue surrounding male sexual assault, rape myths can eventually be dispelled and victim blaming lowered, as this crime will become less taboo. A study by Fox and Cook (2011) showed the effectiveness of education in reducing victim blaming, where college students enrolled in a victimology course significantly lowered the extent to which they blamed victims of a variety of crimes, compared to students who did not take such a course. Extended to male sexual assault, education does not need to be a separate entity from female sexual assault programs, but instead a broad program geared towards everyone, including specific gender dynamics, could be appropriate and effective in decreasing victim blaming (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Fox & Cook, 2011).

Conclusion

Rape myths and victim blaming prevent most male victims from reporting their assaults and accessing support services (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996). This can lead to increased psychological consequences, such as PTSD, and given the overwhelming unreported prevalence rates, male sexual assault is a serious societal issue (McLean, 2013). Thus, as a first step, this paper analyzed various explanations for why victim blaming occurs against male victims, touching on interpersonal versus intergroup explanations, the black sheep effect, and the just world belief. While viewing sexual assault as an intergroup crime works to lower victim blaming for female victims, the same results are not generalizable to male victims (Droogendyk & Wright, 2014). This is because both interpersonal and intergroup associations of sexual assault call attention to various gender norms and socialization processes that require men to be strong and capable of defending themselves against any form of unwanted sexual activity (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Thus, whether male sexual assault is viewed as an interpersonal or an intergroup crime makes no difference in lowering levels of victim blaming against male victims, as both may actually work to increase levels instead, creating a double jeopardy for male victims. The black sheep effect and the just world belief can explain why males are more likely than females to blame male victims of sexual assault. In the case of the black sheep effect, the male ingroup views male victims as contradicting the positive image of the male ingroup, and as such, male victims are evaluated negatively and blamed more for their assault (Pinto et al., 2010). The just world belief concerns individuals' evaluations of male victims, as men are more likely to victim blame male victims because they represent a threat to individuals' personal safety (Landstrom et al., 2016).

Systemic intervention is needed within the micro- to macro-levels, focusing on changes in cognitions and practices. As a starting point, two main suggestions were made in order to induce the necessary change and lower rates of victim blaming. First, ad cam-

paigns can become a powerful tool to create shared social identities between the male ingroup and females, in order to decrease victim blaming. Education programs are also important, used to dispel rape myths and teach society that male sexual assault is a prevalent issue, and that sexual victimization is not a gendered phenomenon.

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