

THE EFFECTS OF VIEWING R-RATED MOVIE SCENES THAT OBJECTIFY WOMEN ON PERCEPTIONS OF DATE RAPE

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Although there has been a fair amount of research examining the impact of viewing X-rated videos (and magazines) and perceptions of date rape, there is limited research on the impact of viewing R-rated movies. R-rated movies, particularly those targeting the youth demographics, often have themes, sub-plots or the entire point of the movie is displaying women in degrading or objectifying positions. This research project specifically examined the effects of viewing scenes for popular R-rated movies on perceptions of female responsibility for and enjoyment of either date or stranger rape.

The author examined the issues of attribution of responsibility from a “social script” perspective. This perspective argues that each person, in various aspects of their lives – including sexual – learns a package of norms, mores, roles and behaviors that becomes their “script.” This script helps each person to understand how to act and interact in different social situations.

The author argues that our cultural scripts about female resistance to (heterosexual) sexual encounters is not viewed by men as a genuine protest, but merely a part of her expected script. According to his script, if a woman consents “to a situation where sexual relations could occur (i.e., a date), then she has implicitly consented to sexual relations because it is only at the initial stage, when solicitation of a date occurs, that a woman may legitimately refuse.” From this perspective, the role of scripts is then more applicable to a date rape than to a stranger rape situation because sexual scripts are highly applicable on a date.

Borrowing liberally from feminist theory, the author argues that pornography defines women’s sexual pleasure as subordinated to men’s sexual pleasure and defines the role of women to serve the sexual desires of men. The author continues by describing the research that has been done on pornography and rape. According to the author, viewing of “nonviolent pornography as been shown to cause: a) increased acceptance of rape myths, b) aggressive reactions towards women in a laboratory setting, c) an increased likelihood to commit rape, and d) a diminished perception of the suffering of rape victims” (citing, Zillman, 1984). Throughout this section, the author further explores the research that has been done over the past 20 years.

Method

For the current research project, the author recruited 137 students from an undergraduate college campus. 53% were female, 61% were European American and 18% were African American. The project specifically examined two variables: 1) exposure to objectifying images of women

and 2) exposure to a fictitious magazine account of a date or stranger rape. These two variables were examined at different parts of the study.

The video clips of the R-rated movie contained degrading scenes of male dominance, female availability and female objectification. Three scenes were shown to the participants. Prior to the study, these three scenes were shown to 10 independent judges who measured each scene on a scale from 1 – 10 (1 = not at all objectifying, and 10 = extremely objectifying) on the degree to which the scenes were "...demeaning, degrading, dehumanizing, and exploitive of women and then presents women as mere sexual objects to be exploited and manipulated sexually."

The scenes shown were the Kim Basinger striptease scene from *9½ Weeks* (which was found to be moderately objectifying – a mean of 6.0), the striptease/lap-dancing scene from *Showgirls* (which was found to be extremely objectifying – a mean of 9.6), and the scene in *9½ Weeks* in which Basinger is shown blindfolded and caresses by a prostitute (which was also judged as extremely objectifying – a mean of 9.3).

The magazine rape account was a fictitious article detailed to look like a real article from a popular news magazine. Two scenes were depicted, one describing a woman and man who met at a bar and both had "a lot to drink" and ending with the man "forcing himself on her and completing the act of intercourse. The second scene described a woman (same age and name) also drunk and a man who walked up on her, "forced himself on her and completed the act of intercourse." Thus the only variable between the two scenes was the relationship between the parties.

Results

With regards to the impact of watching the video clips on the attribution of responsibility for the rape, there were significant differences found. None of the participants perceived the victim in the stranger rape "story" to have gotten what she deserved or to have derived pleasure. Males who saw the objectifying video were significantly more likely to agree that the acquaintance rape victim derived pleasure from the rape and got what she wanted.

On the average, males who read the stranger-rape scene stated that there was a 5% chance of them acting like the perpetrator, and an 8% chance that they would act like the acquaintance rape perpetrator. After seeing the objectifying video, males estimated that there was a 17%, or a 2-fold increase, in the likelihood of their acting like the acquaintance rape perpetrator.

Watching the objectifying video resulted in participants, especially males, believing that women being raped received pleasure and "got what they wanted," regardless of their gender-role attitudes and their attitudes towards sexually explicit materials. Thus, men who held more traditional views of gender roles and men who did not hold such views were equally as likely to attribute blame to the victim for the rape as well as receiving pleasure. Similarly men who defined themselves as "anti-pornography" had similar effects as men who described themselves as "liberal" with regards to sexually explicit materials.

These results have important implications not only for developing anti-rape educational materials, but also how those programs are offered to men, and for working with men in general about the issues of sexual violence and the media. It clearly suggests that there is a need for advocates to add an analysis and a component critiquing R-rated movies into educational programming. Assisting men to more critically view what they are watching would also seem to be an important component to decrease the risk of women being sexually assaulted. In addition, given that some portion of men watch objectifying movies on dates with women, the women who join men likely are seen as also agreeing with the attitudinal shift that men experience as demonstrated in this project. If this is the case, then the women who go with men to objectifying movies may be at increased risk for sexual assault as well. This too has implications for anti-rape educational programming.