



Relative Disadvantage Affects Attitudes Towards Rape

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Introduction:

- In ancestral environments, physically strong, wealthy, intelligent men would have been able to offer greater protection and support to mates and offspring and, thus, would have had a competitive advantage over other men with regards to the quality and quantity of potential sexual partners (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).
- Evolutionary theorists have argued that perceived competitive disadvantage may lead to more positive evaluation of, and greater likelihood of engaging in, sexual coercion and other risky behaviour (Mishra & Lalumière, 2008).
- Some researchers have found support for a link between low social status and sexual coercion (Lalumièrè & Quinsey, 1996) and attitudes towards sexual coercion (Anderson et al., 1997).

Purpose:

The purpose of the current study was to experimentally manipulate competitive status to observe its effect on beliefs and attitudes regarding rape. We hypothesized that perceived competitive disadvantage would lead to less negative attitudes and beliefs about rape.

Method:

Participants

120 heterosexual male undergraduate students, Median age: 20-21

Procedure and materials

- Delivered through online survey (Survey Console)
- Pseudorandom assignment (assignment alternated between consecutive participants)
 - The Rape Outcome Expectancy (ROE) Scale: designed to measure outcome expectancies for rape.
 - ROE Evaluation Scale: a subscale of the ROE that was found to correlate with self-reported likelihood to rape (Nunes et al., 2011).
 - Rape Semantic Differential Scale: designed to measure the participants' evaluation of rape on six bipolar scales.
 - The Bumby Rape Scale: a self-report measure of justifications and excuses for rape.
 - Competitive Status Manipulation: Participants were presented with information which, depending on manipulation condition (assignment to either disadvantage or advantage condition) would make one feel either disadvantaged or advantaged compared to peers in terms of financial, physical and intellectual power.

Results:

- Participants did not differ significantly between experimental conditions on any demographic variables with the exception of height. Participants in the advantage condition were significantly taller than those in the disadvantage condition. Height was not significantly correlated with any of the measures of beliefs about rape ($r_s = -.02$ to $-.11$).
- A series of Mann-Whitney U tests on the manipulation check questions suggested the manipulation was effective.
- A series of Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to compare conditions (Scales did not meet assumptions of t -tests or ANOVA). Those in the disadvantage condition had significantly less negative attitudes towards rape as measured by the ROE Evaluation Scale ($p = .02$) and the Rape Semantic Differential scale ($p = .02$).
- The differences for the ROE Scale and the Bumby RAPE Scale were not statistically significant, although they were in the expected direction.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics by Experimental Condition for Ordinal or Continuous Variables

Scale	Advantage ^a				Disadvantage ^b				U	z
	M	SD	Mdn	Mean rank	M	SD	Mdn	Mean rank		
ROE Scale	-38.00	20.60	-45.00	56.94	-33.51	23.01	-37.00	63.52	1591.50	-1.03
ROE Evaluation	-7.33	2.78	-9.00	53.03	-6.15	3.70	-8.00	66.82	1376.50	-2.26*
Rape SD	-17.55	1.50	-18.00	54.90	-16.52	2.92	-18.00	65.24	1479.50	-2.25*
RAPE Scale	62.69	14.52	62.00	55.55	66.20	12.69	65.00	64.69	1515.00	-1.44

Note. ROE Scale = Rape Outcome Expectancies Scale; ROE Evaluation = Evaluation of expected outcomes on the ROE Scale; Rape SD = summed semantic differential ratings of rape; RAPE Scale = Bumby RAPE Scale.

^a $n = 55$ ^b $n = 65$ * $p < .05$

Discussion:

- Compared to perceived competitive advantage, perceived disadvantage led to less negative attitudes towards rape.
- The findings are generally supportive of evolutionary explanations of rape. Specifically, competitive disadvantage affects evaluation of sexual aggression, making it less negative, which may in turn lead to engaging in sexual aggression.

Future directions

- Findings may also reflect more proximal influences on sexual aggression.
- Future research should explore whether potentially relevant proximal factors mediate the effects of relative competitive disadvantage on attitudes towards rape.
- Future research should also attempt to replicate the current findings, extend them to other samples, explore the effects of competitive disadvantage on sexually coercive behaviour, as well as the extent to which attitudes towards rape mediate the relationship between competitive disadvantage and behaviour.
- If the findings were replicated and competitive disadvantage was shown to reliably contribute to sexually aggressive behaviour, this would suggest that facilitating increased relative status through legitimate means may be an effective intervention for many young men.

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