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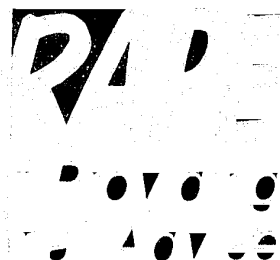
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RAPE: The Dangers of Providing Confrontational Advice

“Different motives operate in different offenders and, therefore, what might be successful in dissuading one type of assailant might, in fact, only aggravate the situation with a different type of offender.”

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Recently, while addressing an audience on the topic of rape, one of the authors was asked what advice he would offer to a woman confronted with a rape situation. All too familiar with this question, he replied that he could recommend a course of action only if the person asking the question would describe to him: first, the location of the confrontation; second, the personality of the hypothetical victim; and third, the type and motivation of the particular rapist.¹

This conditional response certainly disappointed the members of the audience, for they wanted an all-purpose answer that could be easily remembered and serve all situations. Unfortunately, our research and experience indicate strongly that no one piece of advice will prove valid in all or even a majority of sexual assault situations.

As faculty members of the Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) at the FBI Academy, we are experienced in the study of sexual violence and have worked with investigators from law enforcement communities throughout the Nation on over 1,000 rape cases. We have had the rare opportunity of personally interviewing serial rapists, and we have worked closely with professionals widely recognized for their research in, and their investigative and academic contributions to, the study of sexual violence—Dr. Ann Wolbert Burgess, University of Pennsylvania, who pioneered the identification of Rape Trauma Syndrome; Dr. Fred Berlin, Johns Hopkins Medical Center, who has led the field in treating sexual offenders with Depo-Provera; Dr. Park Elliott Dietz, University of Virginia, a recognized expert in forensic psychiatry; and Dr. A. Nicholas Groth, former director of the sex offenders' treatment program in Somers, CT, among others.

Our research and experiences indicate that there is no one specific way to deal with a rape situation. Groth and Birnbaum speak for the rapists themselves when they say, “Different motives operate in different offenders and, therefore, what might be successful in dissuading one type of assailant might, in fact, only aggravate the situation with a different type of offender.”² Consequently, we wish to first highlight the dangers of giving confrontational advice. To do so, we will report the highly conflicting advice offered by professed experts in the field and by convicted rapists, and we will analyze specific cases that demonstrate the predictability of sexual assault behavior. Second, we wish to discuss the three parameters of the sexual assault situation that might assist the potential victim in determining a reasonable course of action: 1) the confrontation environment, 2) the personality of the



Special Agent Hazelwood



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victim, and 3) the type and motivation of the rapist. We understand that reason is necessarily clouded in unexpected confrontational situations, but we believe that consideration of these factors will yield better results for the victim than if she trusts one arbitrary response that might work or that might goad the assailant to further violence.

Advice from the Rapists

Occasionally, one reads an article or observes a television program in which an individual interviews one or more rapists about what a potential victim should do when confronted with a rape situation. Such a representation has great impact on its audience because the advisors are *real* rapists! Who should know better than the offender what will deter his attack? To believe the advice, however, the audience must assume that all rapists are behaviorally like the one presented to it.

As part of an ongoing research project, members of the BSU ask this same question of many rapists, men who have raped 10 or more victims, and they have elicited widely divergent answers as to what would have successfully deterred each one. Some say, "Tell them to scream, fight, claw like hell." Some, "Tell them to give in because the guy is going to rape her regardless of what he has to do." Some, "Tell her to pretend that she wants him so he will finish and leave." And others, "Tell her to bribe him with money." Which rapist should the potential victim listen to? The individual who presents rapists (and their advice) to an audience has an obligation to explain that the information provided is relevant only to the rapist providing it and should not be generalized to all rape situations.

Experts in the Field

Over the years, programs and techniques have mushroomed that profess to provide potential victims with the key to deterring the rapist. These programs and techniques have grown out of a variety of professions, including law enforcement, criminology, sociology, mental health, and crisis intervention. They usually advocate one or some combination of the following methods of resistance:

- Physical Resistance*: Training the individual in self-defense tactics, including knowledge of various pressure points that are sensitive to attack.
- Verbal Resistance*: Sensitizing potential victims to the effects of their tone of voice, manner, and attitude, and training them to scream, negotiate, or assertively respond to the attacker's demands.
- Noisemaking Devices*: Acquainting and equipping individuals with whistles, miniature sirens, or other such devices.
- Use of Chemicals*: Providing individuals with containers of disabling gases, such as Mace, or with repugnant odor devices.
- Use of Weapons*: Training individuals in the use of guns, keys, clubs, or stickpins in the hostile situation.
- Pretext of Pregnancy or Venereal Disease*: Advising individuals to claim pregnancy or disease to the attacker in hopes that it will appeal to his sense of humanity or to his fears.
- Vomiting, Urinating, Defecating*: Advising the individual to repel the attacker by performing disgusting physical actions.

“Victims must tailor their type of resistance to the environment in which the attack is occurring.”

All of these techniques certainly have their place and can be highly effective in a particular situation. But they could also be worthless or even dangerous in particular situations.

Case Studies

We are certain that individuals who advocate the various methods of resistance presented above formulated them because they were employed successfully in one or more situations and present them as viable techniques with the very best of intentions. However, we are also certain that to generalize the success of one or more instances to all rape situations is not only potentially dangerous to the victim but is also irresponsible and unprofessional. The following four cases serve to illustrate the futility of providing potential victims with just one technique to deal with all rapists.

CASE NO. 1

One summer evening, a 20-year-old female was walking home after attending a movie when she noticed a car with four males inside following her. She became nervous and walked to a pay phone to call her parents. As she was explaining her fears, two of the males pulled her from the phone booth and forcibly placed her in the backseat of their car. She involuntarily defecated and urinated out of fear. This so enraged her captors that they began pummeling her and forced her to consume her own waste material. Following this, the four took turns assaulting her sexually. Finally, they tied her to the rear bumper of the car and dragged her behind the automobile before releasing her. As a result, she suffered numerous fractures and required extensive medical treatment and mental health care.

CASE NO. 2

The rapist, a white male in his late twenties or early thirties, entered the residence of a family of four. The husband and wife were out for the evening and had hired a 13-year-old girl to babysit. Brandishing a handgun, he subdued the babysitter and her young charges and forced the young girl to perform fellatio and to masturbate him. When the parents arrived home, he handcuffed the husband, forced the wife to disrobe, bound her hands behind her back, and vaginally assaulted her in the husband's presence. Up to this point, the rapist had not struck or physically harmed anyone in the home and had been emotionally calm. As the rape was occurring, the husband asked his wife if she was all right, and the wife replied, "Yes, he's being a gentleman." At this point, the rapist's attitude changed dramatically. He so brutally attacked the victim's chest with his hands that she later had to undergo a radical mastectomy of both breasts. He was later asked why he had reacted so violently to such an innocuous statement. He answered, "Who was she to tell me that I was being a gentleman? I wanted to show her who was in charge, and she found out."

CASE NO. 3

A serial murderer sexually assaulted and killed 17 women over a number of years. He had also raped and released several women during that same period. One of the released victims reported the assault to the local police department. Because she was a prostitute, little attention was given to her complaint.

Two years later, a State police agency located and interviewed the victim, and subsequently, the offender was identified, arrested, and convicted. He made a full confession, startling his interrogators when answering questions about why he did not kill all his victims. He told them that before he would kill a victim, three criteria had to be met. First, the victim must have approached him sexually (he frequented areas known for prostitutes). Second, the victim must exhibit some reluctance in performing various sexual acts, and third, the victim must make some attempt to escape. The prostitute victim mentioned earlier had met the first two criteria for death, but had made no attempt to escape even though the offender had tried to give her his weapon (unloaded). The victim had declined the weapon and stated that she didn't want to shoot anybody, she just wanted to go home.

CASE NO. 4

A 39-year-old white male sexually mistreated his wife over a number of years, even binding her and assaulting her with a hair brush. Additionally, he had raped several women and molested his two daughters, two nieces, and the daughter of a female acquaintance. During an interview about one of the rapes, he was asked what his reaction would have been had the victim resisted him either physically or verbally. He thought for several moments and replied, "I don't know, I might have left, but then again, I might have killed her. I just don't know."

These four case illustrations demonstrate dramatically that any one program on confrontational techniques would not have helped all the victims.

“... the success of resistance behavior depends largely on the victim’s ability to apply it.”

In Case No. 4, not even the rapist was prepared to state what his reaction to resistance would have been.

Three Critical Variables in Confrontations

This article opened with a statement that we would offer confrontational advice only if we had specific information about three critical variables: 1) the environment of the assault, 2) an understanding of certain personality characteristics of the victim, and 3) the type and motivation of the rapist involved. We believe that these three variables dictate the shape a confrontation will take, and we advise police, field experts, and potential victims themselves not to give or act on advice that does not take these factors into account. Below, we describe these three critical factors.

Location of Assault—The advice one would provide to a victim encountering a rapist in a shopping mall parking lot at 4:00 p.m. would certainly differ from the advice given for an encounter occurring at 4:00 a.m. on a deserted roadway. Use of a noise-maker would be futile in the latter situation, but may be successful in the former. To advise a person to fight, scream, defecate, or use disabling chemicals or gases is insufficient in itself. Victims must tailor their type of resistance to the environment in which the attack is occurring. Above all, potential victims should not be lulled into a false sense of security because they have a whistle or can of Mace in their pocket. Such confidence may actually increase their chance of becoming a victim.

Victim Personality—The personality of the victim strongly impacts on how she will react in a confrontation. A

passive and dependent personality will have extreme difficulty implementing advice to be assertive and physically aggressive in a confrontation where a physically larger male has awakened her from sleep. Conversely, an independent and assertive individual will be hard pressed to submit to a violation of her body without a struggle, even if she has been advised that passivity is her best course.

Anyone providing advice to an audience must remember that there are as many different personalities present as there are audience members. To influence effectively the decisionmaking process of an audience, one must consider these variations and must stress that the success of resistance behavior depends largely on the victim’s ability to apply it.

Type and Motivation of Rapist—In our opinion, the most important unknown variable to consider when giving advice to potential victims is the type of rapist they may confront and the motivation that underlies his sexual attack. Is the victim being confronted by an inadequate male who has fantasized a mutually acceptable relationship? By a sexual sadist who delights in the victim’s response to physical or emotional pain? Or by an offender who desires to punish or degrade women? In each case, the motivation is different, and the rapist’s reaction to the victim’s resistance is correspondingly different.

The spectrum of advice offered by serial rapists earlier in this article underlines how strongly the type and motivation of the rapist colors the dynamics of the confrontation. To assume that all rapists are alike in type and motivation demonstrates a lack of knowledge and experience. As Groth and Birnbaum note, “Physical resistance will discourage one type of rapist

but excite another. If his victim screams, one assailant will flee, but another will cut her throat.”³

The following case ironically illustrates the importance of recognizing and considering the different types of rapists.

CASE NO. 5

In a large metropolitan area, a series of rapes had plagued the police over a period of months. In each instance, the rapist had controlled his victim through threats and intimidation. One evening, a hospital orderly went off duty at midnight and happened upon a male beating a nurse in an attempt to rape her. The orderly went to her rescue and subdued the attacker until the police arrived. Predictably, he received much attention from the city. Shortly thereafter, the orderly was arrested for the series of rapes mentioned earlier. During interrogation, he was asked why he had rescued the nurse when he, in fact, was guilty of similar offenses. He became indignant and advised the officers that they were wrong. He would never “hurt” a woman.

This offender did not, clearly, consider the two offenses as similar; he equated “hurt” with nonsexual trauma and either failed to consider, or ignored, emotional and sexual trauma.⁴ His willingness to turn in another rapist shows how powerfully the motivations of a rapist affect his way of seeing and behaving in a confrontation.

To give advice to potential victims without consideration of these critical variables can be compared to a physician who would prescribe medication or recommend surgery without the patient's medical history and documenting the signs and symptoms that would warrant such medication or surgery. Individuals who profess to have expertise in criminal sexuality have an obligation similar to a physician—to advise on a case-by-case basis, and only with complete knowledge.

A Behaviorally Oriented Approach

Experts in the field take pains to broadcast valid crime prevention measures which individuals can take to minimize opportunities for the confrontation. They should also educate these same individuals in the variables involved in a rape confrontation so that they can prepare themselves in advance to handle the unexpected. While it may seem to be a cumbersome concept for one faced suddenly with a frightening situation, it removes the emphasis from one-dimensional techniques that may backfire and puts it where it should be—in advance preparation and training. In sports, athletes are trained to know their own strengths and weaknesses and to accustom themselves to different playing areas. On the day of their sports event, they are prepared to assess their competitors on the spot and adjust their final strategy accordingly. The same process holds true in many areas of life; to survive one must prepare himself for the unexpected. Similarly, potential victims have an excellent chance of surviving a rape confrontation if they are prepared in advance. They should be trained in assessing their personal

strengths and weaknesses. They should be taught techniques of manipulating the environment to the disadvantage of the assailant, and they should be educated about the various types of rapists, the motivations, and assaultive behavioral patterns.

To date, we know of no such comprehensive training program, but we know that one is possible and must involve the cooperative participation of law enforcement, mental health, and crisis intervention professionals. The more thoroughly researched the variables are, the better they will be understood and the more effectively they could be taught and manipulated to the victim's advantage.

Conclusion

Field experts in the area of criminal sexuality have an enormous responsibility to the people they advise in rape resistance. Individuals tend to be fascinated by discussions of criminal sexuality, but they are almost unexceptionally naive and uninformed. Usually they are looking for an easy solution to a difficult problem and will accept at face value whatever piece of advice is offered.

Law enforcement officers who speak at workshops or seminars on rape confrontation techniques have an obligation to refuse to provide an easy solution. They have a further obligation to keep current with the research and to provide information that will help deter rapists. Confrontational advice which considers the three-variables approach may lack the simplicity and comfort that providing a whistle may offer, but it is a realistic approach to a complex situation that may help a victim understand more appropriate options in dealing with such an encounter. In light of new research, law enforcement officers who publicly ad-

vised one all-purpose solution to a rape confrontation may well be increasing the risk of injury to potential victims, and may, as a result, find themselves and their departments called by a brutalized victim as defendants in civil litigation.

We believe strongly that research of an interdisciplinary nature is necessary to develop a viable training program for victims confronted by a rapist. We foresee that such a program would provide potential victims with information about the various types of rapists and their underlying motivations, would teach potential victims to assess their abilities to resist, and would train them to control the environment to their advantage. We suggest to those who speak publicly on the subject to avoid offering single solutions to their audiences and to start laying the groundwork for a truly effective training program.

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Footnotes

¹R.R. Hazelwood and A.W. Burgess, eds., *Practical Aspects of Rape Investigation; A Multidisciplinary Approach* (New York, NY: Elsevier Science Publishing Co., Inc., In Press).

²A. Nicholas Groth and H. Jean Birnbaum, *Men Who Rape* (New York, NY: Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1979).

³Ibid.

⁴R.R. Hazelwood, "The Behavioral-oriented Interview of Rape Victims: The Key to Profiling," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, vol. 52, No. 9, September 1983, pp. 8-15.