Manufacturing Gender Hierarchy and Sexual Violence in Dating Relationships

A Qualitative Study of University Men in Vietnam

Kathryn M. Yount, Patricia Lewis, Irina Bergenfeld, Trang Thu Quach, Tran Hung Minh, Jessica Sales
Problem and research question

**Problem**: Sexual violence is a global problem for adolescent girls. For girls 15-19:
  - Forced sexual debut (15%)
  - Partner sexual violence (2-7%)

**Research question**: How do Vietnamese college men’s perceptions of gender norms influence their understanding of sexual consent and coercion in dating relationships?
Background

Manufactured age and gender hierarchies within families

Normalized violence within families

Legal efforts to reduce gender-based violence

Gendered ambivalence about sexual consent in dating relationships
# Study sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIVERSITY 1</th>
<th>UNIVERSITY 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>100 year-old public university</td>
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<td>Health professions</td>
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<td>1000 enrolled students per year</td>
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<td>40% men</td>
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<td>24-year-old private university</td>
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<td>Diverse programs of study</td>
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<td>7000 enrolled students per year</td>
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<td>45-50% men</td>
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Data collection

Eligibility
- 18+ years
- Current, prior dating relationship
- Able to give consent

Recruitment
- Conducted through student affairs personnel
- Interested students selected for diversity in living situation, major, year of study, sexual experience

Interview guide
- Gender roles
- Dating/sexual relationships
- Negotiating consent in dating relationships
- Perspectives on rape and sexual violence
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Data analysis

Thorough reading of transcripts
Team discussions
Inductive coding
Thematic analysis
Matrices
Deductive coding

Modified Grounded Theory
Norms of Masculinity and Femininity

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<tr>
<th>SUB-THEME</th>
<th>QUOTE</th>
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| He is independent; she is obedient | My parents expect me to be independent. Men should have capacity to manage their own life.  
- Danh, 3rd year social sciences student |
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<tr>
<td>He is a financial provider; she is a suitable wife</td>
<td><em>I understand that my mom doesn’t have high expectations [of a] daughter such as having good-paid job or something. She often told us that it is important for a woman to find a suitable partner in her life, who loves and cares about her. She expects her daughter to be a dutiful (hiếu thào) child who will have a good life.</em></td>
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<td>-Chi, 3rd year marketing student</td>
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## Hierarchies in Dating Relationships

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<td>Men ‘Lay the Bait’ / Women Respond</td>
<td>There is no any specific signal to know it, we just follow our instinct. Just do the next steps. We stop if the girls swipe our hands off and fierce resist. It is so simple. If I kiss a girl and she dislikes it, she will definitely stop it. If I sexually touch her and she doesn’t want to have sex, she will swipe my hands off.</td>
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<td>-Phuc, 1st year tourism student</td>
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## Hierarchies in Dating Relationships

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<td>Men are sexually free</td>
<td>[Friends-with-benefits have] no string attached...If I consider it a lover, I will publicly introduce her. But regarding a sexual partner, it should be more secretive to avoid problems.</td>
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<td>-Ngai, 3rd year social work student</td>
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| Women face sexual restrictions | *I think for girls in my school it’s [one night stand] probably not too common; and usually they rarely talk about it, they’d feel shy because the stereotype is that girls have to keep their virginity.*  
-Khan, 2nd year social work student |
## Implications for consent and sexual violence

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| Dismissing non-consent and normalizing coercion | *She might say “I don’t want it” but she says it very softly, and if we keep doing it she won’t say anything, or say it very softly. Then it means she agrees...Because they are girls. They always says “no” even when they actually mean yes.*  
  - Vien, 2nd year dental student |
## Implications for consent and sexual violence

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<td>Narrowly defining sexual violence</td>
<td>‘Forced sex’ is when two people have had sex with each other before, it’s only that one doesn’t want to but the other one still does it. “Forced sex” sounds lower than “rape” in intensity., “Rape” is between two people who don’t know each other. For “forced sex” they know each other before.</td>
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<td>- Tuan, 1st year medical student</td>
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Conceptual framework

**Norms of Masculinity**
- Independent/decisive
- Career-oriented to honor family
- Future family provider

**Norms of Femininity**
- Obedient/passive
- Family-oriented
- Career is secondary

**Manufactured gender hierarchies in dating relationships**
- Freedom for Men/Control of Women
- Men initiate/’good’ women are passive

**Implications for Conceptualizing Consent for Sex and Sexual Violence**
- Dismissal of women’s non-consent
- Narrowly defining sexual violence
Implications

Interventions to reduce sexual violence in college students should:

- Address harmful gender norms and rape myths
- Define and build skills to support active consent
## Limitations

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<th>LIMITATIONS</th>
<th>MITIGATION STRATEGY</th>
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<td>Purposive sample</td>
<td>Recruitment of a diverse sample</td>
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<td>Social desirability bias affecting reports of sexual/violent behavior</td>
<td>Interviewer experience and rapport building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of translated data</td>
<td>Verification against original transcripts</td>
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Acknowledgements

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Dang Hong Linh of CCIHP and Ilyssa Tamler of Emory University for comments

Study participants, without whom this research would not have been possible
Thank you

Questions?