

B

Bodyguard Hypothesis, Rape, and Coercion



Rebecka K. Hahnel-Peeters
Department of Psychology, University of Texas at
Austin, Austin, TX, USA

Synonyms

Rape defenses; Sexual violence defense; Social allies

Definition

The bodyguard hypothesis posits that women cultivate and use bodyguards to provide protection against sexual violence. Bodyguards are defined as individuals in social relationships with the target who provide protection by deterring would-be sexual assaulters, physically intervening during an attempted assault, or seeking revenge against a perpetrator to deter future assaults.

Victims of sexual violence experience many costs including unwanted pregnancies by a man they have not chosen, contracting sexually transmitted infections, suffering psychological pain and physical damage, and circumvention of the woman's mate choice (reviewed in Buss, 2021). Due to these costs, women are hypothesized to have evolved psychological defenses against

sexual violence (Buss, 2021). One hypothesized defense includes the cultivation and use of bodyguards.

The Bodyguard Hypothesis

Originally, the bodyguard hypothesis posited that one benefit of sexually reproducing species in forming heterosexual pair bonds includes the protection against sexual violence from other males (Wilson & Mesnick, 1997). This original conception limited a woman's bodyguards to romantic partners. For this entry, bodyguards are defined as individuals in social relationships with the target who provide protection by deterring would-be sexual assaulters, intervening during an attempted assault, or seeking revenge against a perpetrator to deter future assaults. This broadens the conception of bodyguards to include not only romantic partners, but also kin, female friends, and male friends.

Much research on the bodyguard hypothesis is limited to correlational work. For instance, women who are more fearful of crime tend to prefer more aggressive and formidable romantic partners and friends (Meskelyte & Lyons, 2020; Snyder et al., 2011). Less work has been done, however, on women's active use of this protection, contextual variation in their use, and how perpetrators bypass women's bodyguard psychology.

© This is a U.S. Government work and not under copyright protection in the U.S.; foreign copyright protection may apply 2023

T. K. Shackelford (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Sexual Psychology and Behavior*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08956-5_295-1

Sexual violence occurs in contexts where women's defenses are bypassed. Two broad forms of bypassing women's evolved defenses include (1) environmental features (e.g., limited visibility) or (2) perpetrators' intentional circumvention of women's defenses (e.g., purposefully isolating the victim from her social allies). The current entry focuses on five contexts in which women's use of social allies as bodyguards is either minimized or circumvented, creating environments for opportunistic rape. The selected contexts include wartime, men in positions of power, sexual slavery, intoxication, and international travel.

Wartime

When suffering the ravages of war, potential victims are highly vulnerable when mates, male kin, and nonkin allies are away fighting or have been vanquished. With one of women's main sources of protections minimized, wartime creates an opportunistic environment of which perpetrators may take advantage.

Wartime rape is prevalent. For example, the rape of women during the Vietnam War by US troops was so frequent that the US Army established official brothels on military base camps (Denvir, 2013). While the staffing of these brothels was left to the province chief in Vietnam, the US Army regulated the health of the so-called comfort women (Denvir, 2013). After implementation of government-sanctioned brothels and providing soldiers with less costly sexual opportunities, forcible rapes of Vietnamese citizens decreased.

Refugees fleeing war also experience sexual violence. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, 3.6 million Ukrainians fled their country (Reis, 2022). Most refugees were women and children since men aged 18 to 60 were required to stay in Ukraine and defend their country. The ongoing separation of female Ukrainian refugees from their male kin, romantic partners, and social allies created opportunities for potential sexual violence perpetrated by those providing housing. Instances of sexual violence experienced by Ukrainian refugees portrayed in the media include the following: (1) a Polish man

arrested in March for the alleged rape of a 19 year-old after promising help and shelter to the solo traveler and (2) two German men allegedly assaulted a Ukrainian teenager housed on a hotel boat (Reis, 2022). An attempted rape was thwarted when one Ukrainian refugee declined a potential housing sponsor who used his status and luxury home to offer her an "arrangement" (a euphemism for sex; Bradley, 2022). It was only after the refugee mentioned she was traveling with her mother that the would-be perpetrator refused help (Bradley, 2022). Although these are single instances, they add to a large body of evidence (e.g., Brownmiller, 1993) that rape is prevalent in warfare when women are deprived of the protection provided by bodyguards.

Men in Positions of Power

Below are three examples of men in positions of power who either specifically isolated women from their bodyguard's protection or targeted women with a lack of bodyguards.

First, Harvey Weinstein, the former Hollywood magnate, has become the epitome of a perpetrator of sexual harassment, assault, and rape in Hollywood. Weinstein was accused of harassing, assaulting, or raping a total of 87 women in 2017 (Moniuszko & Kelly, 2017). Weinstein would isolate young actresses and models by holding business meetings at hotels – either at the bar or in a hotel room – late at night (Farrow, 2017). To give these women a false sense of comfort and weaken their psychological defenses, Weinstein would ask a female executive or assistant of the Weinstein Company to start the meetings with him. However, these business meetings were described as "thin pretexts for sexual advances" (Farrow, 2017). Over the course of several decades, Weinstein silenced his victims with the immense power he held through threats of sabotaging the victims' careers (Farrow, 2017). Weinstein created environments for opportunistic rape by circumventing young women's bodyguard defenses by using female representatives of the Weinstein Company to lure young women into isolated meetings.

Second, while sexual abuse of minors in the Catholic Church is heavily documented, sexual

abuse of nuns by priests also occurs. The structure of the Catholic Church and nuns' servitude dismantle several of nuns' psychological defenses. Nuns are silenced by the Church since they have no trade, support group, or family around (Livesay, 2019). By providing religious leaders with women devoid of autonomy and separated from their families, the Church's environment is one where women lack bodyguards. This environment supports opportunistic rape through the reduction of women's evolved defenses and reduced punishment and retaliation against perpetrators in power.

Third, cult leadership often involves sexual exploitation of female cult followers. Cult leaders actively target isolated individuals and manipulate these individuals into further isolation. Isolation circumvents the female followers' cultivation and use of her bodyguards. Three notable examples of sexual exploitation implemented by cult leaders include David Koresh, leader of the Branch Davidians; "Reverend" Jim Jones of the People's Temple Cult; and Keith Raniere, leader of the sex cult NXIVM. David Koresh coerced his male followers into abstinence and slept with their wives (Shupe et al., 2000). "Reverend" Jim Jones purposefully used sexual relationships to increase commitment and loyalty to the cult's movement (Abbott, 2015). Keith Raniere isolated women through gathering incriminating information on them, had them cut ties with their family, and treated them as sex prisoners (Moghe, 2021).

Sexual Slavery

Sexual slavery offers another circumstance undermining women's use of bodyguards as protection against sexual violence. Two examples illustrate different forms of sexual slavery associated with explicit separation of victims from bodyguards.

Historically, African American women were forced into marriages with enslaved African American men to reproduce since breeding enslaved peoples was cheaper than purchasing additional workers. During the early to mid-1800s, women did not control their own fertility, and masters controlled the sexual behavior of their bondwomen. If bondwomen were noncompliant,

they risked beatings, starvation, or rape. In a content analysis of interviews with 514 ex-slaves who were 12- or 13 years old at the time of emancipation, 205 (40%) made comments about sexual enslavement (Jennings, 1990). Thirty-six (18%) noted their masters were directly guilty of the perpetration. The remaining 169 women were either forced to marry and have sex with enslaved males or served as comfort women. These numbers are expected to be underreported because of the relationship emancipated slaves had with white individuals at the time of these interviews. The rape of enslaved women was not considered a crime since their bodies were the property of their owners. Notably, owners of enslaved peoples often separated nuclear family members through purchase, forced marriage, or gambling and mortgages.

Sex-trafficking is the most common form of modern-day slavery (Walker-Rodriguez & Hill, 2011). Using the same tactics as various cult leaders, young female runaways or homeless – and lacking bodyguards – are trafficked. Sex traffickers, while providing these women a "home" and often a supply of drugs, become increasingly violent. Traffickers often lock victims in rooms, drug victims, and rape victims repeatedly (Walker-Rodriguez & Hill, 2011). Traffickers also abduct young women between the ages of 12 to 14, travel far from their homes, and provide victims with counterfeit identification (Walker-Rodriguez & Hill, 2011). This tactic ensures the severance of the victims' social ties. Without her social ties, retaliation from the victims' bodyguards is less likely to occur.

Intoxication

A common context of rape includes intoxication of both the perpetrator and the victim under the influence of either drugs or alcohol. University campuses constitute one modern environment where intoxication of perpetrators and victims is frequent. Additionally, female college students are most likely to experience sexual assaults during their first year of University (e.g., Mellins et al., 2017). The increased likelihood of sexual assaults during the first year of university may be

partly attributable to fewer established social allies.

University campuses host several fraternities and sororities commonly associated with a culture of heavy drug and alcohol consumption. While not all fraternity members are rapists, men who join fraternities are three times more likely to rape compared to men who do not join fraternities (Foubert et al., 2007). Many instances in the media describe the tactics used by those fraternity members. Tactics are often shared with fraternity brothers. For example, one fraternity member of the Georgia Tech chapter of Phi Kappa Tau circulated an email titled “Luring Your Rapebait” (CNN, 2013). This email instructed its readers on successful strategies to identify targets, weaken their defenses with alcohol, and sexually assault them. Perpetrators intentionally intoxicate victims and separate them from their social allies.

International Travel

A final example including a modern environment where women’s defenses are minimized includes foreign travel. The European Institute of Studies on Prevention conducted a survey of over 6000 travelers returning from vacation in Southern Europe aged between 16 and 35 years old (Kennedy & Flaherty, 2015). Ninety participants (1.5%) reported a rape during their trips averaging only nine days – a rate of 10 rapes per day. Additionally, a review of forensic medical services for adult victims of sexual assault reported 4% of sexual assaults happened overseas (Kennedy & Flaherty, 2015). Women’s risk of sexual violence while traveling internationally increased when they are young and unaccompanied by bodyguards.

Conclusion

Women’s psychology is hypothesized to contain many defenses against sexual exploitation. One such defense is the cultivation and use of social allies as bodyguards. The above examples highlight the importance of understanding women’s evolved psychological protections. Future work on women’s bodyguard psychology should

examine with greater granularity women’s cultivation and context-specific use of bodyguards (e.g., who, how many, and what environments women bring others for deterrence or active protection). While it is never a victim’s fault if her psychological defenses are circumvented, understanding what contexts lead to the reduction of a woman’s protection may lead to decreasing the rates of sexual violence.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Acquaintance Rape](#)
- ▶ [Big Five Personality Traits: Rape and Coercion Defenses](#)
- ▶ [Environmental Factors: Rape and Coercion Defenses](#)
- ▶ [Indirect Aggression: Rape and Coercion Defenses](#)
- ▶ [Intimate Partner Rape](#)
- ▶ [Parental Investment: Rape Avoidance](#)
- ▶ [Personality/Individual Differences: Rape and Coercion Defenses](#)
- ▶ [Rape and Coercion: Avoidance by Females](#)
- ▶ [Stranger Rape](#)
- ▶ [War, Rape in the Context of](#)

References

- Abbott, C. B. (2015). *The reverend Jim Jones and religious, political, and racial radicalism in peoples temple*. <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/1037>
- Bradley, J. (2022). *Ukraine-Russia: Homes for Ukraine scheme exploited by men offering shelter in return for sex, Scots charity warns*. The Scotsman. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/world/ukraine-russia-homes-for-ukraine-scheme-exploited-by-men-offering-shelter-in-return-for-sex-scots-charity-warns-3636557>
- Brownmiller, S. (1993). *Against our will: Men, women, and rape*. Ballantine Books.
- Buss, D. M. (2021). *When men behave badly: The hidden roots of sexual deception, harassment, and assault*. Little, Brown Spark.
- CNN, J. F., Special to. (2013). “Rapebait” e-mail reveals dark side of frat culture. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2013/10/09/opinion/foubert-fraternities-rape/index.html>
- Denvir, D. (2013). The secret history of the Vietnam war. *Vice*. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/5gwx98/vietnam-and-the-mere-gook-rule>

- Farrow, R. (2017). From aggressive overtures to sexual assault: Harvey Weinstein's accusers tell their stories. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/from-aggressive-overtures-to-sexual-assault-harvey-weinsteins-accusers-tell-their-stories>
- Foubert, J. D., Newberry, J. T., & Tatum, J. L. (2007). Behavioral differences seven months later: Effects of a rape prevention program. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 44(4), 728–749.
- Jennings, T. (1990). "Us colored women had to go through a plenty": Sexual exploitation of African-American slave women. *Journal of Women's History*, 1(3), 45–74. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0050>
- Kennedy, K. M., & Flaherty, G. T. (2015). The risk of sexual assault and rape during international travel: Implications for the practice of travel medicine. *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 22(4), 282–284. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jtm.12201>
- Livesay, C. (2019). *Abused nuns reveal stories of rape, forced abortions*. PBS NewsHour. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/abused-nuns-reveal-stories-of-rape-forced-abortions>
- Mellins, C. A., Walsh, K., Sarvet, A. L., Wall, M., Gilbert, L., Santelli, J. S., Thompson, M., Wilson, P. A., Khan, S., Benson, S., Bah, K., Kaufman, K. A., Reardon, L., & Hirsch, J. S. (2017). Sexual assault incidents among college undergraduates: Prevalence and factors associated with risk. *PLoS One*, 12(11), e0186471.
- Meskelyte, J., & Lyons, M. (2020). Fear of crime and preference for aggressive-formidable same-sex and opposite-sex friends. *Current Psychology*, 41, 1434–1439. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-00679-3>
- Moghe, S. (2021). *Nxivm founder Keith Raniere to pay 21 victims a total of \$3.46 million in restitution*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/20/us/nxivm-keith-raniere-restitution/index.html>
- Moniuszko, S. M., & Kelly, C. (2017). Harvey Weinstein scandal: A complete list of the 87 accusers. *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2017/10/27/weinstein-scandal-complete-list-accusers/804663001/>
- Reis, C. (2022). *Ukrainian female refugees are fleeing a war, but in some cases more violence awaits them where they find shelter*. The Conversation. <http://theconversation.com/ukrainian-female-refugees-are-fleeing-a-war-but-in-some-cases-more-violence-awaits-them-where-they-find-shelter-179754>
- Shupe, A. D., Stacey, W. A., & Darnell, S. E. (2000). *Bad Pastors: Clergy misconduct in modern America*. NYU Press. <https://nyupress.org/9780814781463/bad-pastors>
- Snyder, J. K., Fessler, D. M. T., Tiokhin, L., Frederick, D. A., Lee, S. W., & Navarrete, C. D. (2011). Trade-offs in a dangerous world: Women's fear of crime predicts preferences for aggressive and formidable mates. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 42, 543–551.
- Walker-Rodriguez, A., & Hill, R. (2011). *Human sex trafficking*. FBI: Law enforcement bulletin. <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/human-sex-trafficking>
- Wilson, M., & Mesnick, S. L. (1997). An empirical test of the bodyguard hypothesis. In *Feminism and evolutionary biology* (pp. 505–511). Springer.