

Counterintuitive Victim Behavior

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Counterintuitive Victim Behavior

- What do you think of when you hear the term “counterintuitive victim behavior”?

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Counterintuitive Victim Behavior

- Behaviors that do **not** align with the public’s expectations of victim behavior

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What Drives These Perceptions?

- The public’s perception of how a victim of interpersonal violence should behave are based on *myths*
- One such myth is the “rape myth” which is still commonly held in society

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Myths About Interpersonal Violence

- Victims provoke violence
- Violence is caused by drugs or alcohol
- Violence is out-of-control behavior
- Violence is caused by stress
- Women exaggerate the problem of interpersonal violence

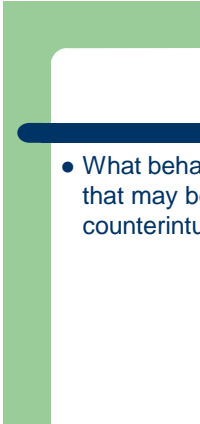


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Commonly Accepted “Victim” Behaviors

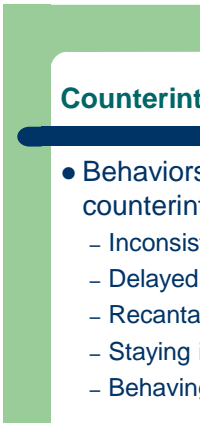
- “Real” victims report promptly
- “Real” victims scream or forcibly resist
- “Real” victims act like victims
- If an alleged victim recants, that means he/she was lying
- If it was really that bad they would leave

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- What behaviors have you observed that may be interpreted as counterintuitive?

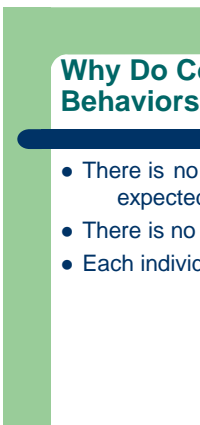
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Counterintuitive Behaviors

- Behaviors that may seem counterintuitive:
 - Inconsistent statements
 - Delayed reporting
 - Recantation
 - Staying in an abusive relationship
 - Behaving calmly

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Why Do Counterintuitive Behaviors Happen?

- There is no "common", typical, or expected response to a trauma
- There is no single presentation of a victim
- Each individual responds individually!

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What Shapes a Victim's Response?

- Many factors, both internal and external, influence how a victim might respond to interpersonal violence

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Internal Factors:

- Cultural/religious beliefs
- Gender
- Previous life experiences

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External Factors:

- Access to support system
- Fear of consequences to the offender
- Fear of further harm
- Type of interpersonal violence
- Controlling factors

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Factors That Make Counter-intuitive Behaviors More Likely

- Junior and senior military personnel or an otherwise prohibited relationship or status differential
- Intimate partners - Intra--familial sexual assault or exploitation
- Non--strangers

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Understanding Victim Responses

- Initial response
- Short term response
- Disclosure
- Reason for recanting
- Why do they stay?
- Long term response

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Initial Response

- Fight-Flight-Freeze
 - Freeze is very common
 - Ultimate goal is survival
 - Both in the moment and following the incident of violence

Fight

- Irritability
- Loss of Temper
- Defensiveness

Flight

- Avoidance
- Anxiety
- Fear

Freeze

- Numbing
- Detachment
- Giving Up Easily

- Not resisting does not equal consent!

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Short Term Response

- Emotional: denial, guilt, shame, embarrassment, numb, anxious, self blame, depression, disorganization, trust
- Behavioral – emotional, substance use, irritable, appetite, sleep

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Disclosure

- Episodes are often unreported
- Reasons for non-disclosure vary
- Many want to normalize their experience
- Not reporting immediately does not mean it was no big deal



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Reasons for Recanting



- The investigation process
- Life changes
- Publicity
- Feeling shame or disbelieved

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Why Do They Stay?

- Assumption of agency
- Freeze response
- Belief they are unable to leave
- Threats
- Relationship history
- Support system



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Long Term Response

- Maintenance of influencing factors
- Situational changes
- Increase in severity of interpersonal violence
- Potential changes after separation/divorce

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Impact of Counterintuitive Behaviors

- Cause others to question victim's statements
- Conclusions of fact finders



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How Does This Impact Our Role as Providers?

- Variety of Mental Health presentations
- Psychoeducation
- Self blame
- Cognitive distortions
- Self-esteem and assertiveness
- Treating all aspects of the trauma

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Forensic Impact of Counterintuitive Behaviors

- Fact-finders more likely to find an offender innocent if the victim's behavior seems confusing or "off"
 - Can tarnish a victim's credibility

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Expert Testimony

- Used to explain counterintuitive behaviors to fact finders
- Our job is to put the behaviors that have been observed into context
- It is not our job to prove abuse occurred

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References

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