

ON WATCHING A RAPIST'S ACCOUNT OF HIS APOLOGY TO THE WOMAN HE RAPED:

PERCEPTIONS OF UCT RAPE COUNSELLORS & HIV AND GENDER PEER EDUCATORS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING

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BACKGROUND

Building on the work by Gobodo- Madikizela (2008) and colleagues around the value of the public witnessing apologies following mass violence, we proposed researching the perceptions of UCT rape counsellors and HIV and gender peer educators upon witnessing a video of a rapist's account of his apology to the woman he raped. The purpose of conducting this research was to understand the implications for training this group and other groups who do similar work.

METHOD

We showed a video of a confession of a rapist to two groups of University of Cape Town student volunteers- rape counsellors and HIV and gender peer educators. After screening the video, we asked the students to complete an individual questionnaire and we held focus group discussion thereafter.

In total, two groups of 30 students took part in the study. There were more female students (23) than males (7). Most of the students (28) were Black and only 2 students were Coloured. Of the 30 students, 19 were South African and 11 were International students. The data obtained was analysed using grounded theory and recommendations were made about using the videos in diversity training and education programmes around apologies and transformation.

RESULTS

Respondents were asked to give key messages from watching the video. Some of the key messages given normalised the rape:

"He might be a good person who found himself in company with the wrong people at the wrong place and time"; Another participant believed that "when he raped at the time, he was not doing anything wrong; hence his action was considered normal".

A non-normative response was "Society needs to be more open about what's unacceptable and stop excusing it by saying its part of culture".

When asked to state what made up the perception of an effective apology, one participant said that "He (Dumisani) understands that what he did was wrong"

However, another student stated that "I am not convinced that he is sorry for raping the woman. I could not see any emotions in his eyes. It means nothing to me".

The participants commented that discussing the apology from various perspectives was worthwhile for their education in their roles.

RECOMMENDATIONS & WAY FORWARD

- Preventing gender based violence (GBV) among Students through Education is Critical and Supporting students who have experienced gender based violence is critical. Their education should continually be strengthened.
- Apologising for GBV that has happened from the perspectives of both the perpetrator and survivor and bystanders and understanding various implications is important in education for this group.
- Legal Perspectives as well as Empathy are both important to explore for educators.
- It is valuable to show such apologies to broader audiences in curriculum and co-curriculum workshops as well, where people can discuss the extent of blame and contextual complexity of perpetrators even if they disagree with the representation of the violence or the apology (or with each other)

Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2008). *Empathic Repair after Mass Trauma: When Vengeance is Arrested*. *Social Theory*, 11, 331-3350. doi:10.1177/1368431008092566

