



The Perceptions of Date Rape in Thai Patriarchal Society: A Case Study of Female University Students in Bangkok

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Abstract

This study analyzes female Thai university students' perceptions of date rape and the cultural factors that shape them. An integrated theoretical framework is used to connect peace and conflict theories with a sociological paradigm to examine the various cultural aspects involved in formulating date rape perceptions and their implications. The study examines the perspectives of female university students through focus groups, individual interviews, and in-depth interviews with key informants. This qualitative study produced four key findings. First, the students failed to perceive date rape as *real* rape because of the patriarchal values inherent in sexual interactions that determine cultural scripts. These scripts and perceptions of date rape justify sexual violence in relationships. Second, entertainment media reproduces and reinforces patriarchal sexual values by portraying *legitimate* and *romantic* rape scripts. Third, sex-education promotes and embeds inequality in sexual interactions and behaviors, leading to intense victim-blaming and widespread subscription to rape myths. Finally, rape language is the manifestation and a carrier of cultural violence. Domains of cultural violence establish date rape *scripts* that force individuals to not perceive date rape as *real* rape, effectively justifying sexual violence in the context of a relationship.

Keywords

Date rape, Patriarchy, Galtung's violence triangle, Perceptions, Scripts

Background

I think the girl should be aware that forced sex might happen sometimes. I think it's okay, but I know it's not a good thing, but the reality makes me feel it's okay.

4th student respondent

If you don't open your legs for the guy, then you wouldn't get pregnant, you wouldn't get raped, and you wouldn't get anything that would be at your disadvantage. So it's your fault to open your legs for the guy.

3rd student respondent

No, it's not that they accept the rape. They don't even know that it is rape. They think that it is their responsibility to do that.

Chinlumprasert, key informant

Rape that occurs whether on a date or in other circumstances is an objectifying violation with many resultant harmful effects. However, continuous ambiguity surrounds the issue of date rape in Thailand. In most cases, date rape is the sexual assault of a female by a male within the context of dating or a potential romantic relationship (Englander, 2007). It is also one of the most prevalent forms of unreported sexual violence (Warshaw, 1988). In Thai society there is no direct translation for this term, which is unsurprising given the cultural blind spot on this issue. The absence of language for date rape limits awareness of its impact and resultant choices for women by creating a reality where date rape simply does not exist. As a social practice, the seriousness of sexual assault is determined based on the relationship status of the perpetrator and the victim. There is an evident lack of cognizance on the issue of date rape in Thailand. Addressing these issues, the objectives of this study are to determine contemporary date rape perceptions in Thailand and the cultural factors that shape them through an in-depth examination of students' and key informants' perspectives on entertainment media, sex education, and rape in language.

Sexual violence threatens women's mental and physical health and stifles development, causing lasting problems. It is the product of a culture of unequal power between men and women. Some forms of daily violence have become normal and unexceptional (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Rapists are motivated by power and control (Krug et al., 2002). Moreover, patriarchy, the imbalance of power in romantic relationships, and gendered socialization are contextual factors promoting the use of force and sexual violence in relationships (Lloyd & Emery, 2000). For men, the main motivation for the rape of a partner or non-partner is a sense of entitlement to sexual intercourse (Fulu et al., 2013). It is also a tool to maintain men's social dominance over

women (Brownmiller, 1975). The Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (United Nations General Assembly, 1993) pointed to the visible causes of violence against women, but the hidden causes of violence against women must also be identified and scrutinized. Culture is the main driving force of sexual violence. It is culture that determines values, attitudes, and behaviors while concluding the normality of various acts and situations, including sexual violence. It also dictates how individuals experience and construct meaning, understanding, and perceptions of phenomena, including sexual violence. Thus, the definition of sexual violence, rape, and coercion can vary across different cultures. While acts of sexual violence may be largely condemned in some societies, the same acts may be bearable to some extent in others (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). Such acceptance of sexual violence results from cultural legitimization and under the Thai criminal justice law for rape, specification regarding dating relationships is omitted, reflecting the lack of concern for, or recognition of, the issue.

Rape culture pervasively defends, hides, and justifies sexual violence. Thailand's societal, cultural, and legal characteristics enable rape culture (Ekachai, 2013). Cultural norms and values create a system where rape is accepted and normalized. This hidden cultural phenomenon is prevalent and reinforced by the patriarchy in the Thai context. There is a lack of understanding of patriarchy and its contradictory applications in different fields (Uberoi, 1995). Patriarchy may be defined as a system that embodies structural violence, cultural violence, and direct violence through the domination of men over women (Galtung, 1996). It is a system that exploits, undermines, marginalizes, and oppresses women. In parallel, Bem (1993, p. 5) argues that "the hidden assumptions about sex and gender remain embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions, and individual psyches that invisibly and systematically reproduce male power in generation after generation." Thai cultural DNA is encoded with patriarchal values, particularly in the realm of sexual interaction. Patriarchal structures condition women to accept their inequitable situations, especially in terms of male-female sexual interactions, which stems from embedded traditional values and attitudes.

The lack of research and discussion on the existence of rape culture in Thailand is itself a product of it, and further solidifies rape culture. In comparison, Koss (1988) uncovered a date rape epidemic on university campuses in the United States and found that women victims of rape did not perceive their experiences as rape. The study found that 57 percent of rapists were the dating partners of the victims. Acts that were previously considered the women's fault were justifiably called "date rape" (Heise et al., 1995, p. 18). The heightened awareness of and dialogue around this pervasive problem has led to more reported cases and an improved environment for reporting in the United

States. What is considered normal courtship and intimate relationship behavior in Thailand could be classified as sexual assault based on the legal definitions in the international sphere. The failure to recognize and study this issue reflects the legitimizing force created by cultural violence.

Empirical studies have determined that sexual violence is often unreported, and more young women have been sexually assaulted by their boyfriends or dates than by strangers (Russell, 1984). In the Thai context, general society believes that date rape is either nonexistent or not a major problem. However, Skinnider et al. (2017) revealed that date rape accounts for a considerable number of rape cases in Thailand. In a review of 169 rapes, 26 % were found to have been committed by a current or former partner. Thus, an explicit disconnect exists between the reality of date rape as a legitimate threat and societal perceptions. The failure to recognize the existence of a problem and to effectively challenge the current system essentially translates to the acceptance and perpetuation of a status quo conducive to sexual violence in the form of date rape.

Deeply anchored patriarchal rules and expectations govern sexuality in Thailand. In order to maintain respectability, Thai women must suppress their sexuality (Barmé, 2002). Women's sexual desires, behaviors, and sexuality are subject to patriarchal values, which form the dominant socio-cultural norms. Culture and power relations fueled by patriarchal values determine appropriate or inappropriate behaviors in the realm of sexuality as sexuality is one of the "most malleable of human characteristics, and societies have always made use of this fact to harness it to their ends, sometimes at the cost of enormous damage" (Mernissi, 1982, p. 185). Sexuality is, in fact, a societal and cultural construction, a product of history rather than biologically innate desires (Foucault, 1978). There has been a shift in sexual norms as more young people accept premarital intercourse and have more sexual partners than in the past (Techasrivichien et al., 2016). Given the new sexual liberties in Thailand, the threat of date rape has become more pronounced as opportunities for date rape have increased and Thai society still believes that the mere act of being alone with a male equates to giving consent. Accelerating changes in sexual practices have not been met with a parallel shift in thinking that enables protection and security for women (Techasrivichien et al., 2016). Entrenched traditional attitudes and values remain immutable as greater sexual freedom for women clashes with patriarchal norms and expectations. Ingrained expectations and values continue to chain women in a new era of sexual practices.

Entertainment media is a cultural production of patriarchal structures that promotes *legitimate* and *romantic* rape. This rape culture is endorsed by subscription to rape myths exhibited through the innumerable film and television scenes that

repeatedly present sexual assault as entertainment. The Thai Health Promotion Foundation (cited in Roxburgh, 2016) found that in 2014, 80 percent of Thai soap operas portrayed scenes of sexual violence. The first type of sexual violence represented by Thai entertainment media is the commonplace rape of the female protagonist by the male protagonist, often with varying intensity of physical violence. This type of rape is unique to Thai entertainment. In these scenes, the male protagonist forces himself onto the lead female character who often slaps him to show her refusal. Afterward, the male forcibly kisses and rapes her, hence the term *slap and kiss* genre. The two inevitably fall in love and live happily ever after. Thus, the rapist is rewarded with the victim's love and submission, while the victim is rewarded with love for accepting the sexual assault. Not only are there no repercussions for the sexual coercion but the offender receives positive reinforcement. Portraying sexual violence this way legitimizes it as a way to punish a romantic partner (Panyalimpanun, 2016). Because the male protagonist *loves* the female protagonist, this act is deemed acceptable and justifiable. In the absence of discourse and education on appropriate and inappropriate sexual conduct, society relies on the media and other cultural cues to form its sexual norms and behaviors.

In Thai society, traditional patriarchal gender roles still govern the behavior of women in the realm of sexuality despite changing values and increasing sexual freedom. This reflects the inequality embedded in sexual interactions and behavior between men and women. From an early age, females are taught to control both romantic and sexual situations and carry the responsibility for their experiences by acting as gatekeepers to prevent or avoid intercourse. In this role, women must maintain propriety to prevent inappropriate and unwanted sexual encounters. Sex-education instructors, parents, and society teach women to avoid actions or scenarios that may lead to sexual intercourse, including staying alone with a partner, flirting with men, and getting drunk.

Students in Thailand receive sexuality education as mandated by the Ministry of Education with the support of Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. Comprehensive sexuality education is offered in most secondary schools; however, the focus continues to be on promoting abstinence, anatomy, and the avoidance of teen pregnancy with an evident disregard for gender, sexuality, critical thinking skills, communication and negotiation skills, and sexuality rights (Center for Health Policy Studies, 2017). Sex-education in Thailand also embeds patriarchal values in its perspective and normalizes behavior conducive to sexual violence. A 2017 Review of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Thailand by the Center for Health Policy Studies at Mahidol University highlighted the flaws and

absence of information about sexual violence in sex-education. Many young people reach adulthood with contradictory messages about sexuality and gender which is “exacerbated by embarrassment, silence and disapproval of open discussion of sexual matters by adults, including parents and teachers, at the very time when it is most needed” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009, p. 2). Critical problems stemming from the lack of proper sex-education are prevalent in Thai society. In a traditionally conservative country like Thailand, young people grow up with limited exposure to topics deemed inappropriate that could, nevertheless, have lifelong and adverse impacts.

Language is a powerful cultural tool to express and give meaning to experiences. In the Thai context, various terms are used for rape and the absence of specific legal and vernacular language for date rape serves to legitimize this form of sexual violence. As a result, the concept of date rape is virtually unknown in Thai society, and the absence of appropriate terminology to describe date rape epitomizes the privation of cultural consciousness of this issue. As language shapes our perceptions and creates certain realities and simultaneously eliminates possibilities (Confortini, 2006), this linguistic cultural tool is used to legitimize acts of sexual violence within a relationship. Regarding sexual violence, two primary Thai terms are used to describe different types of sexual assault: *bplum* and *khom-kheun*.

- *Khom-kheun* signifies criminal rape in alignment with Western terminology which describes a violent act. *Khom* means to intimidate and *kheun* means to go against one’s will, which often involves physical and emotional harm.
- *Bplum* denotes a playful act, which can be translated to wrestling. This term is often used in the media to refer to forceful sexual acts by a partner. The connotation of the term is softer than *khom-kheun*.

Thus, language reflects a reality where date rape is not recognized by society and is also not perceived as constitutive of reality.

Chinlumprasert’s (2001) research on the perceptions of date rape in Thailand indicate that females find it difficult to perceive date rape as sexual violence and instead tend to accept such situations as part of a relationship, because they lack an understanding of what constitutes sexual violence in the dating context.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Galtung’s violence triangle (see Figure 1) (Galtung, 1996) and the sociological theory of “scripts” (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986). In the field of peace studies, Galtung (1996, p. 196) asserts that cultural violence

legitimizes direct violence and structural violence by changing the “moral color” of violence from “red to yellow, or even green.” To explore the cultural violence that constitutes date rape “scripts,” this study assessed the date rape perceptions of female Thai university students through various symbols of cultural violence to determine the cultural variables promotive of date rape. The phrase *date rape script* is used in this study to describe the attitudinal perceptions of females and their responses to their experiences. It must be established that sexual scripts are needed to make actions and behaviors possible (Gagnon & Simon, 1973).

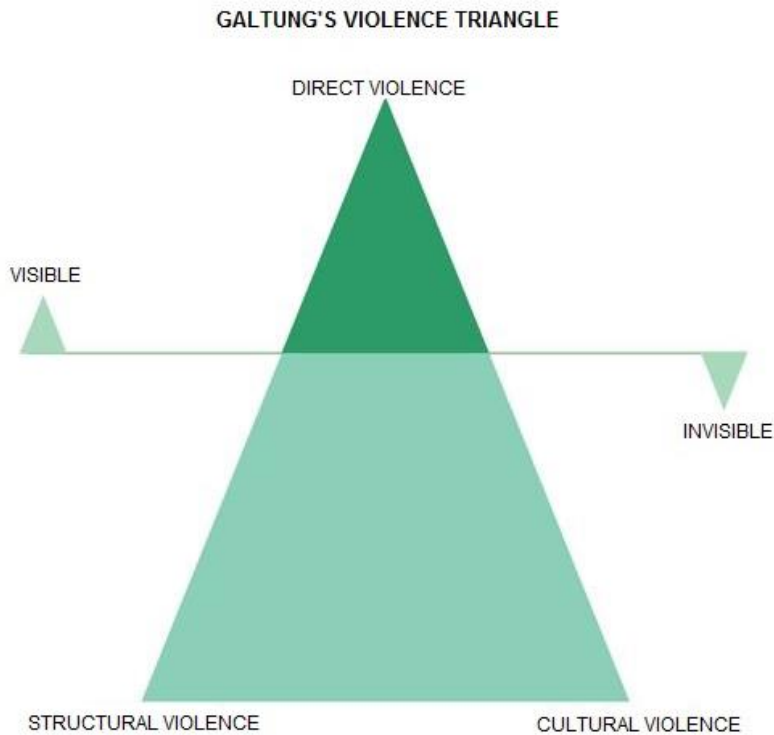


Figure 1 Galtung's Violence Triangle

Note: Direct violence includes physical harm to life/causing death; Structural violence includes rules, laws, regulations, economics; Cultural violence includes language, history, sexuality education, traditions education, norms, expectations, media portrayal.

In a departure from earlier research, the present study employs Galtung's (1996) theory of violence as a major element of the theoretical framework, which serves to emphasize how cultural violence shapes date rape perceptions through cultural domains. This study focuses on three domains of cultural violence, namely, sex

education, entertainment media, and language, as shown in Figure 2. The data are categorized in each of the carriers that influence date rape perceptions and are conducive to date rape.

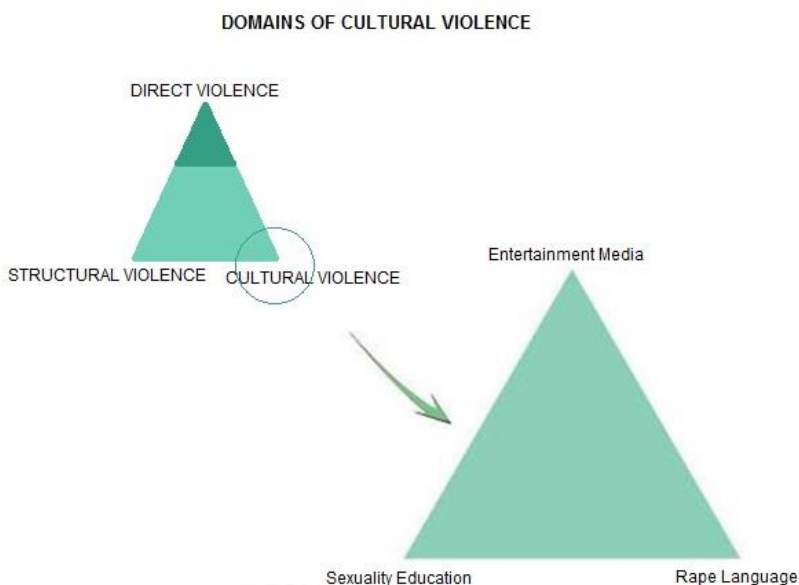


Figure 2 Domains of Cultural Violence

The data are presented in a linear causal manner where each of the carriers contributes to the date rape perceptions of the participating Thai female university students.

Design and Sample

This study employed a qualitative approach, consisting of seven focus groups with six female university students each and 13 in-depth individual interviews with students in addition to 10 in-depth individual interviews with key informants conducted from 2017 to 2018. The qualitative exploratory component was conducted with students from four universities in Thailand. These students were recruited using snowball sampling as participants referred other individuals to take part in the interviews. The participants provided verbal informed consent prior to the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The focus group interviews consisted of open-ended questions regarding the cultural factors conducive to sexual violence. The second set of individual interviews consisted of students selected from the focus groups. Other individual

interview candidates were recruited through referrals from other participants. The third set of qualitative interviews were with key informants in various fields, including a program officer from the Asia Foundation, a Peace and Conflict Studies professor, a Gender Studies professor, the Dean of Nursing Science at Assumption University, the Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Thailand, the director of a women's advocacy group, the Director of the Foundation for Women, the Director of Gender and Development Research, a Thai Language professor, and a renowned social commentator. All of the key informants provided verbal consent for the researcher to use identifying information in the study. The qualitative assessments served to delve into the "spheres of implicit and even unconscious aspects of a social phenomenon" by analyzing individual responses in relation to the cultural context (Flick, 2013, p. 6). The qualitative data from these three groups of participants provide a balance of in-depth personal perspectives, expert views, and academic insights.

Data Analysis

After analyzing and rereading the transcriptions, key themes were identified and organized with some themes formulated under subheadings. Effective qualitative data analyses included the exploration of various cultural factors as part of the attempt to understand the phenomenon of how date rape perceptions are formulated, and how they are conducive to sexual violence. In addition, verbatim quotes served to strengthen and add genuine voices to the study. These illustrate participants' understanding and how they "made sense of their lives" (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006, p. 12). These quotes were interpreted in relation to the social and cultural context (Bachman & Schutt, 2014).

Ethical Approval

The proposal for this study was approved by the Office of the IPSR-IRB, Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University on June 27, 2017 (Certificate of approval no. 2017/01-007).

Findings

Most participants had an expectation that the female in a romantic couple should engage in sexual intercourse regardless of consent, indicating that they lacked a concept of date rape. One of the themes that surfaced in the focus groups and individual interviews was the difficulty in understanding the concept of sexual consent within a relationship. The participants found it difficult to comprehend date rape and some were unable to conceive of the notion that an intimate partner can commit sexual violence, which indicates a lack of awareness of this issue.

Most respondents conveyed the perception that date rape does not constitute *real* rape. In general, there was a lack of recognition of the term “date rape.” After a brief explanation of the issue, various justifications and explanations were given for sexual violence in romantic relationships, with students overwhelmingly indicating that they were more likely to perceive date rape as consensual or understandable in a relationship context. One student respondent explicitly disclosed thinking that “date rape” is “more acceptable” than rape, calling rape by strangers “actual rape.”

I think because it's naturally or culturally accepted that a woman, if she is already in a relationship with a man, she has to, maybe, accept the intercourse no matter what, or maybe no one tells her that it is wrong. It is wrong to accept the intercourse even though she is not ready for it.

11th student respondent

Dating and having sex is normal, not raping. Because I guess that's probably the only reason why there are no terms for date rape. We don't think it's weird, or that there is going to be a term 'date rape' because if I were to translate date rape in Thai, I couldn't even translate it.

9th student respondent

Some students verbalized thinking that it is a female’s obligation to provide intercourse for their partner. Accordingly, one student labeled rape by a partner as “having sex” to recharacterize and trivialize rape as normal behavior in a relationship.

In my perspective and how Thai society taught me, I feel like date rape is more common and more acceptable than actual rape. Even though I know it's bad, this is how I actually feel. They are couples. If they have sex, then it feels more okay than actual rape [rape by strangers], even though it is rape.

11th student respondent

In another in-depth interview, one student echoed the perception that women are responsible for preventing rape by their romantic partner. She stated:

I think the girl should be aware that forced sex might happen sometimes. I feel if she was told beforehand that the guy wants to have sex then if she didn't want it she should have just broken up with him. I think it's okay, but I know it's not a good thing, but the reality makes me feel it's okay.

4th student respondent

Several students expressed doubt that date rape can possibly occur given the relationship status of a couple, indubitably implying that girls automatically consent to sexual intercourse in every romantic relationship. The following statement illustrates students’ perceptions of date rape and how it occurs in Thailand:

But I think it's even allowed if the boy wants this girl to be his girlfriend. Just try to take her out sometimes, watch a movie, or something that puts her in a situation and then try to not rape, but yes a kind of rape but not that dangerous. Not that extreme rape but just try to and if he completed, that means you're my girlfriend.

8th student respondent

One participant classified date rape as *real* rape if it involves violence.

If it [date rape] does not involve other forms of violence, it's not a crime

11th student respondent

Many student respondents placed partial blame on the victim for failing to maintain the role of gatekeeper of her sexuality. This view parallels the Thai social perspective that women must be in control of intimate situations and prevent unwanted sexual advances.

Two student respondents explained why date rape is acceptable in society:

Maybe, 'you deserve it.' I mean, not deserve it. I cannot use the term 'deserve' it, but as you are a girlfriend, it's not the boyfriend's fault to rape you because you are already in a relationship, so these actions may be acceptable to society.

11th student respondent

You would have said yes to let him have that moment of thinking that he can do this to her. People would view that they are a couple, it's okay.

7th student respondent

Entertainment Media as Patriarchy Scriptwriters

For a considerable number of students, date rape scenes on television were considered “romantic.” The depictions of *legitimate* rape, or date rape in the media parallel the date rape perceptions of the student participants detailed here. Some students emphasized that love is a legitimate reason for committing rape in the TV shows. Some members of the focus groups rationalized that this type of scene had no negative impact on them. Only a limited number of students questioned the messages behind these date rape scenes. One student participant stated:

I think that's because the producer would just try to send a message that it's [...] I wouldn't say it's normal, but I guess they are trying to make it look better. Make rape look better in a way.

9th student respondent

Some students and a key informant articulated that the entertainment media is a cultural factor that endorses sexual violence against women. A few individuals communicated that entertainment media encourages date rape.

Guys get influenced [by the media], that it's okay to rape someone. Maybe if you like a girl and then you rape her, in the end, she will finally be in love with you.

6th student respondent

Thai dramas portray that this is alright to do. Some people might think it is a good thing to do if you want a good relationship like what happened in the drama. But some people who see what's actually happening. Maybe they could get out of it, but it's encouraging that [date rape]. It sends some messages that it's alright to have sex. They call it having sex. They didn't say rape. They just have sex because they thought or assume that the girl would like to do it.

10th student respondent

People tend to promote [...] when the guy, the lead actor rapes the actress, they see that it's love for the girl. But instead, society keeps saying that the action that the guy does is not a bad thing, because he rapes her because he loves her.

7th student respondent

Several key informants highlighted the subversive cultural messages of the entertainment industry. They argued that the media makes females believe that date rape could happen to them and men have the right to it. The forces of "soft power" embed these messages in society without people realizing it.

This guy can do whatever, he can even force a lady to have sex and everyone watches the movie and says it's okay because both of them finally end up together. The rapist never goes to jail. No, never. So they accept it. It's a script of a relationship. I think you watch movies from other countries. They don't have this. But in Thai culture, they watch movies this way.

Chinlumprasert, key informant

The media makes it normal for men to show their desires and their power to force women who may not like the men. The women eventually give in.

Lerdsrisuntad, key informant

It impacts the perception of women to look at the situation as the right of a man to do that. That's why, when it comes up, women blame themselves and the men never face the problem.

Chinlumprasert, key informant

The Asia Foundation's Senior Program Coordinator asserted that patriarchy is the root of continual violence in the realm of sexuality.

The patriarchal system is a big driver that triggers violence as we inherit violence from one generation to the next generation.

Pichaikul, key informant

Sex-Education

The findings of this study indicate the difference in gender roles and expectations instilled by sex-education instructors. There was a complete absence of discussion of date rape in the curriculum. Talk about sexual violence revolved around the duty of females to prevent sexual violence and uphold their role as the gatekeeper to sexual intercourse. One student revealed the lack of education about sexual violence:

No. Not at all. Even here. So how can people know about it if you're not actually teaching in the actual course because I have been studying here for four years and none of the lecturers mentioned sexual violence at all.

10th student respondent

Sex-education instructors attempt to embed patriarchal values and norms through their work. Students in this study shared narratives that exemplify the traditional mindset and expectation of girls in the realm of sexuality. Although contemporary norms of Thai sexuality have transformed some of these traditional beliefs, the notion that women are sexual gatekeepers remains a prominent expectation as discussed by the participants.

They'd think then why would you go and have sex with him? You can't clap with one hand. They apply that logic to sexual violence as well. If you didn't go with your boyfriend and let him...

3rd student respondent

I went to a school and they stopped me. They don't want me to talk and they said, this one is not good. It is not appropriate so they don't want me to talk about it [date rape].

Chinlumprasert, key informant

Actually, sexual violence originates from school. The teacher told us that cutting your hair a certain way makes the boys aroused. Everything was the girl's fault.

1st student respondent

Participants communicated that girls are taught to act *properly* to prevent sexual violence. In accordance, they are also blamed when sexual violence occurs, which extends to date rape.

My old school really emphasized that if you are a lady, you have to be proper. The reason that they blame you is that they told you not to have sex. They have the right to blame the victim because the victim broke the traditional rule of engaging in sexual activity.

10th student respondent

One student reaffirmed the common belief among the interviewees that girls are at least partly responsible for sexual violence when dating:

That's your fault for trusting them too much. I don't know how they make the rape happen but then you have to agree to go with them a little.

6th student respondent

Sex-education results in some students noting that members of society would likely automatically blame the date rape victim.

If there's a case that a girl who was raped by her boyfriend came out to speak for herself and got judged badly, I think others wouldn't want to come out and be judged again. That's just how Thai people view women. It's like they should just have kept quiet even though they got raped.

9th student respondent

Cultural Violence in Rape Language

The individual interviewees and most focus group participants were unable to recognize the term date rape, partly due to the lack of Thai terminology to describe it. In addition, some key informants were also unaware of the term, which was expected given the lack of terminology describing it in the Thai vernacular. One participant described why there are different terms for rape and date rape.

I think it's just to make the situation look a different way. If you got raped by your boyfriend and you came to tell your friends that I got 'bplum,' I think the friend would actually view it as something not that serious as being 'khom-kheun.' You wouldn't say the boyfriend 'khom-kheun.' No, no, no.

9th student respondent

In response to whether *khom-kheun* could describe date rape, one student exclaimed:

No. I would use the word 'bplum.' I feel like 'bplum' shows me that they have some sort of relationship. Either they have it in the beginning or after the sex. I think 'bplum' is more, it better explains the boyfriend raping the girlfriend situation than 'khom-kheun.'

2nd student respondent

They only have one term for sexual violence that I heard a lot, 'khom-kheun.' When they say that it means like a wide range of crimes, and 'khom-kheun' is rape and yes, it means rape.

12th student respondent

A student for whom date rape was an entirely new concept found it surprising, which illustrates the lack of understanding and awareness of date rape.

She definitely wouldn't know that if she's not ready to have sex with her boyfriend and the boyfriend raped her, that this is called rape. She wouldn't realize that because there's no term describing that kind of action in Thailand. I never heard of that term. The only term I heard was rape.

9th student respondent

There are clear distinctions in the usage of *bplum* and *khom-kheun*. The term *bplum* is a euphemism that describes sexual coercion in a sanitized way and can be used to describe rape in an intimate context. In stark contrast, *khom-kheun* refers to rape as acknowledged by the Thai legal system. The participants used this term to describe “stranger” rape as indicated by the following table.

Table 1 Usages of rape language as quoted from the focus groups and interviews.

Bplum	Khom-kheun
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In the media, if the good guy, the main character, rapes the female one, it’s still okay” • “<i>Bplum</i> is, in English is like rape. Both of these are rape. But <i>bplum</i> is more like in the end, they will get together” • “Playful” • “Not intercourse” • “Very cute” • “Cute” • “Polite” • “Informal” • “Uses force” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If the villain rapes the female, it’s not okay. That’s <i>khom-kheun</i>” • “When the bad guy <i>khom-kheun</i> the nang aek (female protagonist)” • “<i>Khom-kheun</i> is stronger than <i>bplum</i>” • “<i>Khom-kheun</i> is not okay (referring to the Thai TV series)” • “Use <i>khom kheun</i> in the news” • “You wouldn’t say the boyfriend <i>khom-kheun</i>” • “Against the law” • “Formal” • “Impolite” • “More serious”

Several students contended that *khom-kheun* is the only permissible term for sexual violence while using the more sanitized term, *bplum* for date rape situations.

One Thai language professor described the nuances and conventions of rape language.

The use of the word 'bplum' has evolved over time and has become colloquial. And people, even kids, often use 'bplum' in a playful and light-hearted manner in various contexts whereas 'khom-kheun' is used in a very serious situation to mean rape.

Kramjantuk, key informant

The terminology of the word rape is not as clear-cut as the Western concept, and victims are reluctant to use the word 'rape' to define unwanted intercourse.

Boonpakdee, key informant

Discussion

This study contends that date rape is a design of patriarchy. Patriarchy has written the scripts for sexual interaction that enables date rape. This patriarchal design is manifested and reinforced in the domains or carriers of cultural violence. Cultural violence normalizes and neutralizes direct violence in the form of date rape by “making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent” (Galtung, 1996, p. 197). The perceptions of date rape among Thai females are products of disseminated and reproduced cultural aspects as patriarchal values and insidious cultural conditions that shape date rape perceptions are conducive to the prevalence of date rape. These cultural facets are legitimized by cultural violence, making date rape a cultural blind spot. These beliefs also cause vulnerabilities because they present individuals with sanitized scenarios that are statistically less likely to occur, while disregarding potentially dangerous circumstances (Fonow et al., 1992). Girls and women identify with readily available date rape scripts defined by cultural norms and attitudes and reinforced by education, entertainment media, and gender expectations.

These findings indicate that cultural violence is so ingrained that girls, women, and other individuals in society are unable to perceive date rape as *real rape*, creating a context where date rape is not truly possible in a relationship given its cultural definition, thus endangering and posing continual hidden risks for females. When there is no available cultural and sexual script for date rape, people find scripts that fit their perceptions and understanding of these situations, often minimizing the severity of sexual coercion by their partners. These cultural scripts also allow perpetrators to manage their guilt (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Guilt can be *managed* if the society, victim, and offender's scripts allow date rape to occur without consequences. In Thai society,

both the rape script and the legal definition of rape fail to include sexual coercion within an intimate relationship. A woman who is raped in a manner that fails to fit the rape script would likely not view her victimization as rape at all (Russell, 1984). Without this script, such actions and behaviors are not possible (Gagnon & Simon, 1973).

Most of the participating students felt that women may have to accept coerced sexual intercourse in a relationship. The date rape scripts that are perpetuated for female Thai university students make them unable to recognize sexual violence in a relationship as violence, because date rape does not fit the cultural definition of *real* rape. Accordingly, “if the discourse of courtship does not recognize physical and sexual aggression within intimate relationships, how can she speak of it” (Lloyd & Emery, 2000, p. 135). While some sexual behaviors are simply wrong and stigmatized, others are taught, allowed, and even desired as people learn from the contextual appropriateness of these actions (Wiederman, 2015). The concept of date rape is not defined as culturally wrong, or even at all, in Thailand, leading both females and males to accept cultural guidelines and rationalize rape. In this cultural scenario, society judges the date rape situation as understandable. Accordingly, there are multiple cultural factors in the domain of entertainment media, sex education, and language that influence many Thai females not to perceive date rape as rape at all.

Patriarchal structures of cultural production continue to promote date rape by reproducing expectations and values of sexual relations by ingraining scripts of *legitimate* rape through entertainment. Cultural media is an agent of cultural violence. It depicts sexual violence in plain sight without recognition by the audience. The focus group discussions and individual interviews about the portrayal of sexual violence in the media illustrate acceptance of the representations of sexual violence as normal, while a limited number of students found that these date rape scenes influence society and create date rape scripts. Such scripts make social choices available (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Rape culture is deeply reinforced by imagery in which men overpower women, while women accept and tolerate their rape. This pattern or rape script is cemented in the Thai belief system and perceptions of the audience, as indicated by the student participants. Consequently, the media portrays the circumstances of date rape as having minimal risks and high rewards.

The lack of discourse in sex education about sexual violence reflects a deep cultural inhibition to discuss *sensitive* issues and leads to conditions conducive to sexual violence in the form of date rape. This traditional but common way of thinking is reflected in the sex-education curriculum, which strengthens the hidden rape culture by

systematically disseminating misinformation and culturally suppressing the capacity to recognize date rape, while teaching victims to blame themselves.

The sanitation of the language of rape to downplay its severity is also a product of cultural violence. When individuals are exposed to different forms of rape as defined by the terminologies that differentiate them, females define reality accordingly, perceiving rape according to the cultural sources of information and language available. The dualistic terms denoting rape in Thailand signal the existence of a culture of rape legitimized by language. This is, again, the design of patriarchy normalized by rape language as a “carrier” of cultural violence. As stated by Confortini (2006, p. 352), language serves to “allow people to think the unthinkable,” to minimize and make comfortable highly destructive and violent acts, which also applies to sexual violence in the context of dating and intimate relationships. Usage of the word *bplum* makes it possible to enact rape. What is thought of as *real rape* or *khom-kheun* is determined by an interplay of factors including who committed the rape, who is the victim, their behavior, and the general context of the rape. The starting point for dealing with the issue of date rape lies in addressing the missing terminology. Terms such as sexual assault, criminal sexual conduct, date rape, and acquaintance rape need to be defined and distinguished legally.

Conclusion

The participants’ perceptions of date rape are of utmost importance in raising awareness about the subject and women’s right to demand alternatives rather than accepting date rape situations. The perceptions described here have real-life consequences as females are exposed to the risks of date rape while society culturally deems it an acceptable event in a relationship. Therefore, cultural violence acts to normalize and hide the human rights violations of Thai women, making the problem culturally unrecognized and therefore, tolerated by changing the “moral color” of date rape to yellow or green. Calling rape what it is raises necessary awareness that is crucial in providing protection and promoting prevention (Koss, 1998). The conditions contributing to and permissive of date rape are protected and legitimized by traditions and culture, but heightened awareness of and dialogue around this pervasive problem, along with cultural change, can lead to more reported cases and an improved environment for reporting. Through education, cultural beliefs and practices can be challenged (Merry, 2006). Only cultural changes can alter the perception of date rape; “as long as cultural norms allow perpetrators of violence to assault women with impunity, such violence will continue” (Fontes & McCloskey, 2011, p. 163).

The absence of discourse on date rape is cemented by Thai society's aversion to discussing sensitive topics. This allows conditions conducive to rape to continue to exist. To address the challenges and cultural aspects that promote sexual violence, awareness of date rape needs to be raised. We need to identify and challenge each cultural agent that contributes to sexual violence. Presently, the cost of committing date rape is nonexistent as cultural violence excuses the perpetrators while shaping the perceptions of women to minimize and downplay the severity of such acts. Bringing date rape to the forefront of national and legal consciousness, overcoming the barriers imposed by Thailand's rape culture, sharing information rather than sweeping the topic under the rug, talking about date rape in mainstream media, making it a mandatory part of sex-education, informing women of their rights, providing sensitive channels to report rape, and rewriting the cultural scripts for date rape would all serve to undermine the deeply permissive culture surrounding this act.

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