

The Impact of Defendant Gender and Attractiveness on Juror Decision-Making in a Sexual

Offense Case

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Abstract

Instances of sexual assault against students committed by teachers have received significant media coverage in the last several years. Female teachers in particular have seized the public's attention, as they are often shown to be young and attractive which impacts the way in which the crime is portrayed in the media. Currently, it is unclear whether this perception impacts the prosecution and sentencing of these cases. Thus, the current study examined the impact of gender and attractiveness of a teacher, as well as gender of the student, on juror decision-making in a student/teacher sexual assault case. Using a 2 (Teacher Gender: Male/Female) by 2 (Student Gender: Male /Female) by 3 (Attractiveness Level: Attractive/Unattractive/No Photo) experimental design, we examined juror's decisions regarding guilt, sentencing, and perceptions of the teacher and student. Overall, results in the study suggest that the gender of the teacher may impact juror decision-making; however, the level of attractiveness of the teacher and gender of the student had minimal effects. The study contributes to our understanding of how educators who commit sexual acts against students are perceived and treated in the court system and what variables may impact those perceptions. Overall, the present study has important theoretical and practical implications for criminal justice professionals, treatment providers, and the community at large.

Keywords: sexual assault, teacher sexual assault, jury-decision making