

DARVO Beyond Sexual Misconduct: How Deny–Attack–Reverse Victim and Offender Operates in Fraud, Corruption, Corporate Crime, Politics, and the Workplace

What Is DARVO?

DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) describes a common defensive reaction when individuals are confronted with credible allegations. Although originally studied in cases of sexual misconduct, DARVO is a broader power-preserving communication strategy often used in situations involving reputational risk, financial stakes, hierarchical power differences, or institutional protection.

DARVO follows three steps:

1. Deny the behavior.
2. Attack the accuser.
3. Reverse the roles of victim and offender.

This pattern destabilizes accusers, manipulates observers, and helps preserve authority.

How DARVO Works Psychologically

1. Deny: The accused rejects the allegation outright, creating doubt and avoiding engagement with evidence.
2. Attack: Focus shifts from the allegation to the accuser's motives or character.
3. Reverse Victim and Offender: The accused portrays themselves as persecuted or unfairly targeted.

The psychological impact includes confusion among observers, defensive reactions from supporters, and the reframing of accountability as injustice.

Fraud (Financial Deception)

Scenario: A CEO is accused of running a Ponzi scheme.

Deny: 'There is no fraud.'

Attack: 'The whistleblower is disgruntled.'

Reverse: 'False accusations are harming innocent employees.'

In fraud cases, complexity helps create doubt, buying time and dividing public opinion.

Corruption in Public Office

Scenario: A public official is accused of accepting bribes.

Deny: 'I have never taken bribes.'

Attack: 'My opponents are spreading lies.'

Reverse: 'This is a smear campaign against me.'

Supporters may internalize accusations as attacks on their political identity.

Corporate Environmental Crime

Scenario: A corporation is accused of contaminating water sources.

Deny: 'There is no proven link.'

Attack: 'Activists are spreading misinformation.'

Reverse: 'We are being unfairly targeted despite supporting the community.'

Economic dependency can make communities defend the accused corporation.

Organized Crime and Criminal Prosecution

Scenario: A gang leader faces racketeering charges.

Deny: 'I've never been involved.'

Attack: 'Law enforcement is corrupt.'

Reverse: 'I am being harassed unfairly.'

The narrative shifts from evidence to alleged persecution.

Political Abuse of Power

Scenario: A political leader is accused of misusing public funds.

Deny: 'No funds were misused.'

Attack: 'The media is fabricating this.'

Reverse: 'This is an attack on democracy.'

Accountability becomes framed as aggression against supporters.

Managers Using DARVO Against Workers

Scenario: An employee reports harassment or unethical behavior.

Deny: 'That never happened.'

Attack: 'You are underperforming.'

Reverse: 'This accusation is harming team morale.'

Power imbalance and fear of retaliation make DARVO especially effective in workplaces.

Conclusion

DARVO is a universal defensive pattern of power preservation. It appears in financial crime, political corruption, corporate harm, organized crime, and workplace dynamics.

Recognizing the pattern helps maintain focus on evidence, avoid manipulation, and protect accountability.

