

Attributions of Blame Towards Assailants and Victims of Rape

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The intent of the research is to look at attributions in various rape situations in the presence or absence of alcohol consumption. Prior research has examined levels of relationships (i.e., stranger, acquaintance, friend, date, lover) between the assailant and victim in rape situations and the extent to which these levels affect attributions made by participants (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Bridges, 1991; Sheldon-Keller, Lloyd-McGarvey, West, & Canterbury, 1994; and Snell & Godwin, 1993). These studies have shown that participants blame both the assailant and the victim more in long-term dating relationships than first-time dating partners when a rape had occurred. Although more blame was attributed to the individuals involved in long-term relationships, participants indicated that these same individuals were less deserving of what happened to them (i.e. the outcome) in the situation, than those in a less serious relationship (Bell et al., 1994; Snell & Godwin, 1993).

Other research has tried to ascertain how the presence or absence of alcohol affects attributions toward individuals involved in various rape situations (Richardson & Campbell, 1992; Snell & Godwin, 1993). This research has manipulated situations in which alcohol consumption by either the assailant, victim, or both occurred. However, research regarding the relationship between alcohol consumption and attributions of blame have shown mixed results.

Regarding the assailant, studies have found that participants were less likely to believe that a rape had occurred and attributed less blame when the assailant had been drinking than when he was sober. Furthermore, participants believed that for long-term dating partners, alcohol intoxication contributed more to the behavior of the assailant than to his long-term dating victim (Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Snell & Godwin, 1993). Regarding the victim, Richardson & Campbell (1982) reported that in the first-time dating situations, victims' intoxication had no effect on participants' attributions of blame. Moreover, when the assailant and victim had consumed alcohol, participants held both equally at fault for the rape in a first-time dating situation.

Differences in attributions due to the participant's gender were also assessed throughout the preceding literature (Bell et al., 1994; Bridges, 1991; Richardson & Campbell, 1992; Sheldon-Keller et al., 1994; and Snell & Godwin, 1993). Male and female participants' ratings of rape scenarios differ depending on the level of the relationship. Female participants rated all rape situations in a similar fashion, whereas male participants rated the forced intercourse by a steady-dating partner less strongly as rape, than to rape by a first-time dating partner (Bridges, 1991). Richardson & Campbell (1982) found gender differences in attributions dependent upon intoxication of assailant and victim. Male participants thought sober assailants would be more likely to be found guilty than intoxicated

ed assailants. Also, female participants were less likely than male participants to consider the assailants' degree of intoxication as a relevant factor in an outcome regarding rape.

Based on prior research, the present study further examined factors which may lead to differences in attributions regarding the presence or absence of alcohol in conjunction with different relationships between the assailant and victim (i.e., stranger, acquaintance, long-term). The current study also assessed gender differences in participants' perceptions of rape. Contemplated issues in this study were (a) how does the intensity of relationship between the assailant and the victim affect attributions of blame; (b) how does the presence or absence of the victims' alcohol consumption affect attributions of blame; and (c) how does the gender of participant affect attributions ascribed to assailant and victims involved in various rape depictions. In accordance with previous research, the hypotheses were 1) more blame would be attributed to victims of rape involved in long-term relationships; and 2) over all rape situations, female participants would attribute less blame to victims while male participants would attribute more blame towards victims. Given the inconsistent previous results regarding the impact of victim intoxication, no hypotheses were formulated for that factor.

Relationship Characteristics

Within the past 15 years, numerous studies have tried to determine factors which influence observer perception regarding various social situations. More specifically, research has tried to assess how attributions are ascribed toward individuals who have been involved in a rape situation. The multitude of findings have shown that there are many factors involved in the formation of attributions toward persons involved with rape. Prior research has examined the level of relationship (i.e. stranger, acquaintance, friend, date, lover) between the assailant and the victim prior to the occurrence of the rape as one possible factor involved when forming attributions (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Bridges, 1991; Sheldon-Keller, Lloyd-McGarvey, West, & Canterbury, 1994; and Snell & Godwin, 1993).

Sheldon & West (1989, cited in Keller 1994) investigated attachment suggesting that relationships are formed primarily to provide safety and comfort. They found that participants ascribe different characteristics to a relationship dependent upon the role of the assailant (i.e. stranger, acquaintance, friend, date, lover). In opposition to this statement, Keller et al. (1994) suggested that serious relationships, may actually hinder safety and security. In other words, certain "rights" are assumed as the level of relationship is increased between the dyad.

The assumption that as the level of the relationship intensifies, the more sexual possession is involved, may be held by observers outside of the dyad. This may explain how attributions are assigned to the assailant and the victim dependent upon the intensity of relationships. When a rape has occurred, Snell & Godwin (1993) found that observers blamed both the assailant and the victim more in a long-term dating relationship than first-time dating partners. Even though more blame was attributed to those in long-term relationships, the participants indicated that individuals in the long-term relationships were less deserving of what happened to them. Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes (1994) found similar results. The research revealed that participants attributed more blame to the victim in the date rape than to victims in the stranger rape situations.

Two other factors that have been measured are attributions of responsibility and the

degree to which the rape could have been prevented. Snell & Godwin (1993) found that over all levels of assailant-victim relationships, participants attributed more responsibility to the assailant than the rape victim. Furthermore, a greater amount of responsibility was also attributed to rapists who were acquaintances over rapists who were steady daters. Lastly, participants were more likely to believe that the rape could have been prevented between first-time daters in comparison to long-term dating partners. Participants also believed that males could have prevented both first-time and long-term rape. However, participants believed that the victim was more capable of preventing the rape by the first-time dating partner than the rape of a long-term dating partner.

Presence of Absence or Alcohol

Prior studies have assessed whether the presence or absence of alcohol affects the extent to which participants attribute blame and responsibility to the victim and/or assailant. To address these issues, studies have manipulated situational information which affected participants' perception upon the crime committed. The research has dealt with alcohol consumption of either the assailant, victim, or both.

Research regarding the relationship between alcohol consumption and attributions of blame has shown mixed results. When the assailant was depicted as intoxicated, participants were less likely to believe that a rape occurred and attributed less blame to the assailant than when he was sober (Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Snell & Godwin 1993). Victims' intoxication, however, had no effect on participants' attributions of blame. Although, the opposite pattern occurred when participants were asked about responsibility. Specifically, assailants were held less responsible and victims were held more responsible when intoxicated than when sober (Richardson & Campbell, 1982). When both assailant and victim had consumed alcohol, participants held both assailant and victim equally at fault for the rape in the first-time dating scenario. Furthermore, participants believed that for long-term dating partners, alcohol intoxication contributed more to the behavior of the assailant than to his long-term dating victim (Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Snell & Godwin, 1993).

Participant's Gender

Male and female participants tend to respond differently to rape scenarios. Bell et al. (1994) found that male participants attributed blame to a greater extent than female participants.

Regarding the level of relationships between the assailant and victim, females characterized the three types of rape scenarios similarly; whereas males characterized the forced intercourse by the steady-dating partner less strongly as rape, compared to the rape by the first-time dating partner (Bridges, 1991). Also, Bridges (1991) determined that males, compared to females, were overall less likely to characterize the forced intercourse as rape. Even so, male participants seemed to expect that the assailant would meet a more severe outcome (with charges, etc.) than did female participants (Richardson & Campbell, 1982).

Regarding the presence or absence of alcohol consumed by the assailant and/or victim, female participants were less likely than male participants to consider the assailants degree of intoxication as a relevant factor (Richardson & Campbell, 1982). Male participants thought that sober assailants would be more likely than intoxicated assailants to be

found guilty. Female participants' judgments were not effected by the assailant's intoxication, but that female participants took into account the victim's degree of intoxication. When the victim was intoxicated, female participants were more likely to perceive her as guilty than when she was sober.

The present study further examines factors which may lead to differences in attributions regarding the presence or absence of alcohol within three levels of relationships (met that night, acquaintance from class, and long-term dating relationship). This study also investigated gender differences in participants' perceptions of the rape scenarios. Three issues addressed were: (a) How does the intensity of relationship affect attributions of blame? Based on the literature we expected to find more blame attributed to those victims of rape who were in a more intense relationship. (b) How does the presence or absence of the victim's alcohol consumption affect attributions of blame towards the assailants and the victims on the occurrence of a rape scenario? Expectations involving alcohol consumption are difficult to propose given the mixed results found by many researchers. (c) How does the gender of the participant affect attributions made toward the assailants and the victims involved in rape depictions? It is expected that females would attribute less blame to the victim than males.

RESEARCH METHODS

Participants

Participants were 180 (91 female, 89 male) undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology courses from a medium sized midwestern university. Participants were asked to read a scenario (see Appendix A) and to complete a questionnaire dealing with interpersonal relationships. Scenarios varied in terms of level of relationship (stranger, acquaintance, long-term) and by intoxication of victim (sober, intoxicated).

Instruments

The Social Issues Inventory (Enns, 1987), measured attitudes toward feminism. The scale consisted of 32 items: 10 items measured attitudes towards feminism and 22 masking items. Participants responded to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored at strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5). Wilson VanVoorhis (1995) found a coefficient alpha of .91 with female college students using the Social Issues Inventory. Coefficient alpha based on the current data was .78.

One scale was developed for the purpose of this study to measure attributions toward rape victims depicted in the scenario. The Rape Attributions Scale consisted of 14 items: 9 items measured victim rape responsibility, and four measured attitudes toward rape. The final item of the scale asked participants to rate the extent to which they considered the incident as rape. Participants were instructed to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement regarding the scenario specifically. Participants responded to each item on a five point Likert-type scale anchored at strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5). This instrument was comprised of questions from various researchers. Four items were taken from Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes (1994); four items were taken from Bridges (1991); and six items were taken from Snell & Godwin (1993). Coefficient alpha for those 14 items was .82.

The Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS) was given to the participants after reading the scenario. This scale consisted of 8 positive and 17 negative statements about

rape victims in general, and encompassed issues of blame, denigration, credibility, responsibility, deservingness, and trivialization. Participants were instructed to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement in general, not regarding the scenario. Questions were answered on a five point Likert-type scale anchored at strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5). The ARVS has achieved coefficient alphas of .83 and .86 with college student samples. In addition, a test-retest reliability coefficient over a 6 week interval was .80 (Ward, 1988). Coefficient alpha based on the current data was .81.

Construct validity evidence includes group comparisons by occupation and gender. Ward (1988) found that as expected, psychologists and social workers demonstrated more favorable attitudes towards victims and police officers demonstrated less favorable attitudes toward victims. In addition, as expected women demonstrated more favorable attitudes than men. Finally, the ARVS correlated significantly at a $-.61$, ($p < .0005$) with the attitudes toward rape victims were associated with conservative dispositions toward women's roles.

Procedure

A female researcher randomly administered the various scenarios to students enrolled in an introductory psychology course. Upon arriving at the session, participants were informed that the study involved reading a description of an interpersonal interaction, and responding to several questionnaires related to that interaction. After providing written consent, participants responded to the SII, then read one of the scenarios, and responded to questions on the RAS, the ARVS, and finally the questions regarding demographic information. The SII was administered before the scenario to prevent the scenario from affecting scores. The specific measure, RAS, was administered before the general measure, ARVS, to prevent general attitudes from influencing specific perceptions regarding the scenario. The 6 scenarios were ordered randomly and distributed to participants as they entered the room. After completing all materials, participants were given a short debriefing statement describing the purpose of the study. The debriefing statement also provided brief information about various types of date rape, and identified resources available to students who had experienced a rape situation or who were concerned about someone else who had been in a rape situation.

Thus, the experiment was a $2 \times 2 \times 3$ between subjects factorial. Gender of participant (male vs. female), alcohol (victim drinking vs. victim not drinking), and level of relationship (stranger vs. acquaintances on a first date vs. long-term dating partners) were the independent variables.

ANALYSES

Means, standard deviations, and coefficient alphas were calculated for all measures. The mean response and standard deviation were calculated for the question asking about rape (see Table 1). It was expected that attitudes toward feminism, as measured by the SII, would act as a covariate for attributions of rape. While the correlations between the SII and both the RAS and ARVS were significant ($r = .26$, $p = .00$; $r = .41$, $p = .00$, respectively), the pattern of results did not change when SII was used as a covariable. Therefore, in the interest of parsimony, only the results of the simple, three-way ANOVAs will be presented.

The ANOVA, with the ARVS as the dependent variable, indicated a main effect for

participant gender ($F = 8.73, p = .004$). Main effects of level or relationship and intoxication failed to reach significance. Additionally, none of the interactions reached significance. Analysis of Variance with the RAS as the dependent variable indicated a main effect in the presence or absence of alcohol ($F = 21.24, p = .000$). Main effects of level of relationship and gender of participant failed to reach significance. Again, none of the interactions were significant. The ANOVA with the one question asking about rape as a dependent variable indicated all main effects and interactions failed to reach significance. (see Table 2)

Table 1. Summary Statistics for the Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale, the Rape Attribution Scale, the Social Issues Inventory, and a question from the Rape Attribution Scale^a

	Possible		Actual		mean	sd	coef α
	min	max	min	max			
ARV (n=180) ^a	1.00	5.00	1.00	3.44	2.02	.46	.81
RAS (n=180) ^a	1.00	5.00	1.00	3.50	1.94	.61	.82
SII (n=180) ^b	1.00	5.00	1.50	4.60	2.86	.57	.78
Rape Question	1.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	4.86	.47	na

^a lower scores are indicative of "pro-victim" attitudes

^b lower scored are indicative of traditional attitudes toward sex-roles

^c asked participants whether they considered the incident as rape

Table 2: Summary of Analysis of Variance using the Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale, and the Rape Attribution Scale as dependent variables

Effect	ARVS	RAS
Gender of Participant	8.73**	4.79 _{ns}
Relationship Status	.42 _{ns}	2.28 _{ns}
Presence or Absence of Alcohol	.47 _{ns}	21.24***
Interactions		
Gender* Alcohol	2.02 _{ns}	.16 _{ns}
Gender* Relationship	.31 _{ns}	.44 _{ns}
Alcohol* Relationship	2.16 _{ns}	.16 _{ns}
Gender* Alcohol* Relationship	.83 _{ns}	1.28 _{ns}

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

Overall, mean scores on the RAS and ARVS indicated that approximately 85% of research participants did not blame the victim in the scenario, or victims in general, across all manipulations. Encouragingly, the results also revealed that all but three research participants labeled the incident depicted in the scenario as rape. Results of the analysis of variance with the ARVS as the dependent variable suggested that when asked about rape in general, males attributed more blame and responsibility to the victim than did females. These results are consistent with the previous literature (Bell et al., 1994; Bridges, 1991; Pollard, 1992; and Richardson & Campbell, 1992). The significant difference in the ways that males and females attribute blame could be explained by traditional

gender roles. In fact, Pollard (1992) suggests that attitudinal factors, rather than gender of participant may be more relevant mediators on rape judgments. This conceptualization is supported by Snell and Godwin (1993) who found that participants who endorsed traditional gender roles also attributed the greatest responsibility to the victim. Individuals with traditional gender roles often think that the victim is at fault regardless of the situation or crime, as they feel that it is the responsibility of the victim to take preventative measures. Therefore, individuals who hold traditional sex-role views tend to blame the victim for her actions such as what she was wearing, what she was drinking, and other factors that might attribute to her behavior.

Similarity to the victim may also influence the degree of blame attributed by male and female participants. It has been suggested that since women, by virtue of their gender, are more similar to the victims, that they will attribute less blame and responsibility to the victim. It has been further hypothesized that males may misperceive verbal and nonverbal behaviors exhibited by females as sexual interest. Females, on the other hand, may view the intent of those behaviors quite differently (Bell, et al., 1994).

A different pattern of results was obtained when the RAS was entered as the dependent variable. The RAS measured attitudes regarding the scenario specifically by using the name of the woman depicted in the scenario in the questions. Contrary to previous research, results failed to find a significant effect of gender of participant. Overall, neither males nor females were attributing blame or responsibility to the victim. Apparently, as the situation becomes more specific, males and females become more unified in their views. It may be that the specific situation allows participants to imagine themselves in that situation, and that familiarity influences the judgments they make.

The results of the ANOVA with the ARVS as the dependent variable did not indicate main effects for intoxication of victim, a result similar to previous research (e.g. Fischer, 1995; Norris & Cubbins, 1992). This is not surprising given participants were instructed to answer the questions in general, not in response to the scenario. The analysis with the RAS as the dependent variable, however, did indicate a main effect for intoxication of victim. Since the RAS mentions the woman in the scenario by name, her intoxication level became influential.

In addition, we believe that the effects of victim intoxication were significant when using the RAS was that participants were able to place themselves more easily in the situation because the RAS asked questions about the scenario specifically. Due to the context depicted in the scenario, participants would be able to visualize how the alcohol affected the victims behavior, therefore influencing their judgments to a greater degree.

Contrary to previous research, we failed to detect a significant effect of level of relationship with either the ARVS or RAS as the dependent variable. One somewhat promising explanation, given all but three participants described the situation as a rape, is that college students have learned enough about non-consensual sex to realize that the level of relationship is not a defining factor in whether or not a situation is a rape. As much as we would like to believe this explanation, it is imperative that these results be replicated, possibly using a knowledge about rape measure as a covariate, to ensure this result is more than just an anomaly.

As this study only assessed college students' attitudes, it would be difficult to generalize these results to the public domain. Specifically, the current research is unable to suggest how jurors would attribute blame in cases involving rape. Furthermore, the cur-

rent research is unable to determine how other individuals (i.e., other age cohorts, police officers, teachers, social workers, etc.) in the community would attribute blame toward assailants and victims involved in rape.

Further research should also investigate whether or not males view with crime as both morally and legally wrong. For example, if males were provided the opportunity to commit this crime without receiving legal consequences would they neglect their moral values and commit the rape. Finally, future research should investigate the differences in participant responses to specific versus general situations. Research should focus on disentangling the effects of similarity to the victim and the assailant, and the familiarity with the situation.

The results of this study could be used in multiple arenas. First, campus-wide alcohol programs could use role-playing to illustrate the influence of how alcohol increases ones vulnerability in becoming involved in a rape situation.

Second, this research could provide rape crisis centers with a program for the friends and family of rape victims in helping them to adjust their perceptions of the victims due to the circumstances in which the rape took place. Informational meetings could be implemented city-wide to encourage social support for the victims of rape regardless of the situation in which the rape had occurred. These meetings could also provide males with education in the understanding that the level of relationship does not determine the amount of rights one assumes over another.

Third, this research may be used to inform women that they have the right to "say no" when they are involved in a long-term dating relationship. Women could be taught that they are the only person who holds the rights to their body and that they have no obligation to a long-term dating partner in regard to intercourse.

In closing, the fact that rape victims often feel that they are responsible for what happened to them could possibly be due to other individual who place an emphasis on preventative measures rather than giving social support. We hope that others will consider extraneous variables the next time a friend disclosed that she has been raped, as reactions could determine how the victims handle the situation.

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APPENDIX A

Level of Relationship Manipulation

Jane and three of her friends go to the local campus pub one Thursday evening. After arriving at the pub, they pick a table and sit down. A waitress brings Jane a beer and indicates that the man at the bar sent this with his compliments. Jane goes over to thank him and sits down with him at the bar. He introduces himself as John.

Jane has been talking with a classmate, John, the first three weeks of the semester. After class one Thursday, he asks if she would like to go for a beer that evening. Jane agrees and they go to the local campus pub and sit down at the bar. John orders them both a beer.

Jane has been dating John for six months. After class one Thursday, they decide to go for a beer that evening. They go to the local campus pub and sit down at the bar. John orders them both a beer.

Alcohol Manipulation

Jane thanks John for the beer, and proceeds to drink it as they talk. Jane and John continue to talk, laugh and drink for the remainder of the evening. They see a poster for an upcoming concert by Nicolas Bacon at the union. They talk about his music and possible going to the concert together. John tells Jane that her sweater and jeans make her look stunning. They have another beer. About 1:00, they decide to leave the bar and John offers to walk Jane home. She says she would be delighted to have him do so as she is feeling somewhat intoxicated.

Jane thanks John for the beer, but explains that she has an exam in her 7:45 am class tomorrow, and therefore has decided not to drink this evening. Jane and John continue to talk, and laugh for the remainder of the evening, Jane drinking soda and John drinking beer. They see a poster for a upcoming concert by Nicolas Bacon at the union. They talk about his music and possibly going to the concert together. John tells Jane that her sweater and jeans make her look stunning. John has another beer; Jane has another soda. About 1:00, they decide to leave the bar and John offers to walk Jane home. She says she would be delighted to have him do so.

Final Paragraph (for all scenarios)

When they arrive at her apartment, he asks if he can come in to use her bathroom. She hesitates because of the lateness of the hour, but eventually agrees. Once in the apartment, John kisses Jane and she kisses him back. He then begins to caress her back under her sweater. At first, Jane does nothing, but after he tries to unzip her pants, she asks him to stop. John continues to remove her pants. Jane tells John she does not want to go any further, and would like him to leave. John did not stop, but proceeded to have sex with her despite her resistance.