

## **Attribution of Responsibility for Rape: The Influence of Observer Empathy, Victim Resistance, and Victim Attractiveness<sup>1</sup>**

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*The purpose of the present study was to investigate the influence of a rape victim's physical attractiveness and resistance to rape on subjects' attributions of responsibility for the crime, certainty of the defendant's guilt, and social perceptions of the rape victim and defendant. Subjects' pretrial empathy toward rape victims and rapists was assessed by scores on the Rape Empathy Scale (RES). In addition to significant sex differences in attributions of responsibility for the incident, subjects' pretrial empathy toward rape victims and rapists was predictive of their perceptions of the rape victim, the defendant, and the rape incident. Victim resistance and attractiveness effects were significant in that subjects responded least favorably to the unattractive rape victim, particularly when she resisted the rape by fighting with her attacker. Male subjects and subjects who exhibited low empathy toward the rape victim were more responsive to subtle manipulations of victim resistance and attractiveness than were females and high RES subjects. Several explanations for these results focus on the cognitive and affective responses of subjects. The implications of the study are discussed in relation to societal attitudes toward rape and the role of sex-role stereotyping, which fosters these attitudes.*

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Since the publication of Jones and Aronson's (1973) provocative article, which reported that observers viewed "respectable" rape victims as more responsible for their victimization than less "respectable" victims, a major focus in the rape literature has concerned extraevidential characteristics of rape victims that may influence observers' perception of the incident. Investigations have included the influence of a rape victim's "respectability" (Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Fulero & DeLara, 1976; Kahn, Gilbert, Latta, Deutsch, Hagen, Hill, McGaughey, Ryen, & Wilson, 1977; Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1977; Kerr & Kurtz, 1977; Luginbuhl & Mullin, 1981), social role (Smith, Keating, Hester, & Mitchell, 1976), "vulnerability" (Howitt, 1977), and prior acquaintance with the rapist (Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976; Smith et al., 1976). A second group of studies has examined the role of legally relevant aspects of rape incidents and has included the influence of probability of victim consent (Borgida, 1980; Borgida & White, 1978), victim provocation (Ellison, 1976; Penhallow, 1978; Scroggs, 1976), and damage to the victim resulting from the rape (Davis, Kerr, Stasser, Meek, & Holt, 1977; Kerr & Kurtz, 1977; Scroggs, 1976).

Considering the importance assigned to the rape victim's resistance by the judicial system in this country (Wood, 1975) and the consistent finding that an individual's physical attractiveness affects observers' perceptions of the individual (Berscheid & Walster, 1974), it is revealing that the psychological literature contains few empirical investigations of the impact of a rape victim's physical attractiveness and resistance style on others' perceptions of her responsibility for the crime. Deitz (1980) reported that a rape victim's resistance style affected Colorado jurors' ratings of the seriousness and aftermath of a rape incident. Jurors rated the psychological impact of rape and the seriousness of the crime as greater when the rape victim was described as passive than when she was described as either verbally or physically resisting the rape. Scroggs (1976) reported that male subjects were more lenient in sentencing the rapist of a passive rape victim than the rapist of a victim who physically resisted the assault, but female subjects imposed harsher penalties for the rapist of a passive rape victim. Scroggs (1976) interpreted these findings as providing evidence that females may identify readily with a victim who is so terrified that she cannot resist, but males may view a rape victim's passivity as implicit consent to the crime. Krulowitz and Nash (1979), providing evidence that females may not always identify readily with rape victims, reported that female subjects attributed greater responsibility for a rape incident to the rape victim and less blame to the assailant than did male subjects. In accord with Scroggs' (1976) study, however, Krulowitz and Nash (1979) also found that males attributed greater fault to a passive rape victim than to a victim who verbally or

physically resisted the assault; in contrast, females attributed greater fault to the victim who resisted than to the passive rape victim. These results illustrate the existence of important sex differences in perceptions of victim resistance to sexual assault and suggest the need for further investigation into the variables which increase or decrease identification with rape victims.

Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) noted that a physical attractiveness stereotype exists in our society, a stereotype that associates "good" personal qualities with physically attractive individuals. In support of this notion, Seligman, Paschall, and Takata (1974) reported that physically attractive individuals were perceived to be more responsible for good outcomes than for bad ones, while physically unattractive individuals were attributed less responsibility for good outcomes with which they were associated, Dermer and Thiel (1975) argued, however, that in some social settings, physical attractiveness may not be advantageous. In their research, a physically attractive woman was perceived not only as sociable, heterosexually alluring, and professionally competent but also as conceited, adulterous, and bourgeois. Dermer and Thiel (1975) noted that these latter qualities might place a physically attractive rape victim at a disadvantage in successfully prosecuting her assailant. In support of this contention, Calhoun, Selby, Cann, and Keller (1978) reported that a physically attractive victim was perceived by subjects as "playing a greater role in her own rape" (p. 191)—using a combined rating of the victim's contributory behavior, character, and appearance—than was a less attractive victim. On the other hand, Thornton (1977) found that subjects' assessments of the victim's responsibility for a rape incident were not affected by the victim's attractiveness; and Seligman, Brickman, and Koulack (1977) reported that an unattractive rape victim was perceived as more responsible for provoking a rape incident than was an attractive victim.

The conflicting results are intriguing in light of the findings reported for victims of crimes other than rape (e.g., Landy & Aronson, 1969; Shaw, 1972; Stephan & Tully, 1977), in which mock jurors consistently responded more favorably to the physically attractive victim than to the unattractive one. The lack of comparability of victim attractiveness results across studies may reflect the fact that rape is a unique crime, which, by definition, includes both violence and sexual contact. Sigall and Ostrove (1975) presented evidence supporting the differential effects of attractiveness across crimes, reporting that defendant attractiveness interacted with the type of crime committed (burglary vs. swindle) in determining the penalties assigned by subjects to the defendant. When the crime was perceived to be attractiveness related (swindle), the attractive defendant was assigned a harsher sentence than was the unattractive defendant. When the crime was unrelated to attractiveness, subjects assigned more lenient sentences to the

attractive defendant than to the unattractive one. In view of societal assumptions that link rape with sexuality, and sexuality with attractiveness (see Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1974), observers may attribute special significance to the rape victim's appearance in determining responsibility for the crime. As suggested by the results of Calhoun et al. (1978) and Seligman et al. (1978) and Seligman et al. (1977), subjects may perceive rape as an "attractiveness-related" crime in which the victim's physical appearance contributes to her victimization. Under some circumstances, a physically attractive rape victim may be judged as a more likely target for the assailant's aggression and, thus, as more responsible for the rape; in other contexts, a less attractive victim may be perceived as seducing or provoking the assailant.

Contributing to the complex role of victim attractiveness in rape cases is the possibility that attractiveness may not always operate as a main effect (see Berscheid & Walster, 1974); rather, it may interact with other victim characteristics to determine observers' judgments about rape incidents. Kerr (1978) reported that victim attractiveness and victim "precautiousness" interacted in influencing the likelihood that subjects would convict a defendant charged with auto theft. He discovered that subjects were more likely to convict the defendant when the victim was presented as physically attractive, but only when the victim was perceived as both attractive and as relatively blameless for the offense against her. Within the context of rape, legal standards have traditionally required that the victim prove her "blamelessness" (nonconsent) by evidence indicating that she actively resisted the crime against her. Kerr's (1978) "beautiful and blameless" findings suggest the possibility that the physical attractiveness and resistance style of a rape victim may interact in determining mock jurors' perceptions of the victim and defendant in the case. However, these relationships remain to be investigated empirically.

In addition to victim characteristics, research has revealed that characteristics of observers (mock jurors) may influence their perceptions of rape victims and defendants. Investigators have reported that subjects' attitudes toward rape (Feild, 1978), attitudes toward feminism (Krulowitz & Payne, 1978), belief in a "just world" (Kerr & Kurtz, 1977), and gender (Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976; Kerr & Kurtz, 1977; Rumsey & Rumsey, 1977; Selby, Calhoun, & Brock, 1977; Seligman et al., 1977; Smith et al., 1976) may influence their judgments in a rape case. In addition, Deitz (1980) identified an important predictor of jurors' responses to rape cases—their pretrial empathy toward rape victims and rapists. She reported that jurors who scored high on the Rape Empathy Scale (RES)—indicating relatively greater empathy for a rape victim—sentenced the defendant in a hypothetical rape case to a longer prison sentence, expressed greater certainty about the

defendant's guilt, perceived the victim as less responsible for the assault, viewed the victim as less likely to have encouraged the rape, and expressed more positive feelings toward the rape victim than did jurors who scored low on the RES. Moreover, high RES jurors rated the defendant as more responsible for the rape, expressed less positive feelings about the defendant, identified less with him, and rated the psychological impact of the rape and seriousness of the crime as greater than did low RES jurors. In addition, Deitz (1980) reported significant interactions between juror empathy and victim resistance on three dependent measures, the extent to which the defendant was responsible for the rape, jurors' certainty about the guilt of the defendant, and their ratings of the seriousness of the crime. In each case, jurors who scored high on the RES were consistently supportive of the rape victim, regardless of her resistance or nonresistance to the assault; in contrast, low-scoring RES jurors differentiated among the three victim resistance conditions (passive, assertive, and aggressive). In all three interactions, low-scoring RES jurors responded least positively to the rape victim who attempted to verbally resist the assault against her.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the influence of subjects' pretrial empathy toward rape victims and rapists, and the physical attractiveness and resistance style of the rape victim on mock jurors' attributions of responsibility for the crime, as well as these jurors' social perceptions of the rape victim and defendant. Using the results of earlier studies (Deitz, 1980; Deitz & Byrnes, 1981), the authors hypothesized that subjects' pretrial empathy toward rape victims and rapists would be predictive of their perceptions of the victim and defendant in a specific sexual assault case. It was predicted that subjects who exhibited greater pretrial empathy toward rape victims would attribute less responsibility for the specific incident to the victim and would perceive her more positively than would subjects who exhibited less pretrial empathy toward rape victims.

In accordance with the attractiveness literature cited, it was further hypothesized that subjects would express more positive feelings toward, and greater identification with, the attractive rape victim than the unattractive victim. Moreover, as suggested by the results of Kerr's (1978) study, it was predicted that the physical attractiveness and resistance style of the rape victim would interact in influencing observers' judgments about the victim and defendant in the case. In contrast to Kerr's (1978) crime description, it was noted that both victim "blamelessness" (resistance) and attractiveness might have different implications for subjects presented with a rape incident than for subjects judging an automobile theft case. Therefore, specific predictions about the nature of these interactions between victim attractiveness and resistance were not advanced. Finally, using the results reported by Krulewitz and Nash (1979) and Scroggs (1976), the authors predicted that male and

female subjects would differ in their reactions to the rape victim's resistance style; therefore, interactions between victim resistance and subject gender were predicted.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

Subjects were 97 female and 93 male undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology courses at Colorado State University. All subjects received credit toward a course requirement in exchange for their participation in the study.

### *Experimenters*

All subjects were tested by one male and one female experimenter, both graduate students in psychology who were familiar with the general experimental design of the study, but unaware of any specific hypotheses. The two experimenters were present at both testing sessions and shared equally in distributing test materials, presenting instructions to subjects, answering questions, and providing debriefing information.

### *Instruments*

*The Rape Empathy Scale (RES)*. In order to assess subjects' pretrial empathy toward rapists and rape victims, the Rape Empathy Scale (RES; Deitz, Blackwell, Daley, & Bentley, 1982) was used in this study. The RES is a 20-item scale, with each item consisting of two statements designed to represent empathy with either the rape victim's position or that of the rapist. Sample items follow:

6. a. In a court of law, I feel that the rapist must be held accountable for his behavior during the rape.  
b. In a court of law, I feel that the rape victim must be held accountable for her behavior during the rape.
16. a. I feel it is impossible for a man to rape a woman unless she is willing.  
b. I feel it is possible for a man to rape a woman against her will.

Subjects were instructed to read each set of statements, to choose the one statement from each pair that they preferred, and to indicate their degree of preference for one statement over the other (ranging from strong preference to no preference for either statement). Subjects' responses were

coded on a 7-point scale, resulting in a potential range of RES scores from 20, indicating extreme empathy toward the rapist, to 140, indicating extreme empathy toward the rape victim.

Alpha coefficients for the RES, calculated for five samples of undergraduates at Colorado State University (total  $N = 769$  males and 716 females), have ranged from .80 to .86. Alpha coefficients calculated for two samples of prospective jurors in Larimer County, Colorado (total  $N = 174$  males and 202 females) ranged from .86 to .89. Validity data (Deitz et al., 1982) revealed that the RES differentiated between male and female subjects' empathy toward rape victims and rapists; between women who have either been raped or successfully resisted rape and those who have had no exposure to rape; and between subjects who imposed a harsh sentence for the defendant in a hypothetical rape case and those who imposed a more lenient sentence. In addition, subjects' RES scores correlated significantly ( $r = .28$  to  $.43$ ) with their scores on the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973), but not significantly ( $r = .08$  for males and  $-.10$  for females) with their scores on the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). Furthermore, Deitz et al. (1982) reported that jurors who scored high on the RES, indicating greater empathy toward rape victims, expressed greater support for the enactment of a marital rape law in Colorado, as well as greater support for the Equal Rights Amendment and the Women's Movement, than did jurors whose RES scores indicated a greater tendency to empathize with the rapist.

*The Rape Responsibility Questionnaire (RRQ).* Based upon the previous attribution research dealing with responsibility for sexual assault (Calhoun et al., 1976; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Jones & Aronson, 1973; Smith et al., 1976), 12 dependent measures were selected to assess subjects' responses to a hypothetical rape case. The 12 items were scored on 11-point Likert scales and included the sentence (in years) subjects would impose for the defendant (ranging, in accordance with Colorado law, from less than 1 year to greater than 40 years); the certainty subjects felt about the guilt of the defendant (ranging from "not at all sure" to "very sure"); the degree of identification subjects felt with the rape victim and defendant (ranging from "none at all" to "very much"); and the personal feelings subjects held for both parties (ranging from "very negative" to "very positive"). Additional items assessed the degree of responsibility attributed to the defendant and rape victim (ranging from "not at all responsible" to "very responsible"); the extent to which the victim's involvement was due to chance (ranging from "not at all due to chance" to "totally due to chance"); the likelihood that the victim did something which encouraged the rape (ranging from "highly unlikely" to "highly likely"); the severity of the psychological impact of the rape for the victim (ranging from "not at all severe" to "very severe"); and the seriousness of the crime of rape (ranging from "not at all serious" to "very serious").

### *Procedure*

All subjects attended one of two experimental sessions, during which they received the following questionnaires: the Rape Empathy Scale, one of six written rape vignettes, and the Rape Responsibility Questionnaire. The physical attractiveness and resistance style of the rape victim were varied across the rape vignettes, resulting in descriptions of the rape victim as an attractive or unattractive rape victim who responded passively, assertively, or aggressively. The description of the rape victim was varied as follows:

The victim is a physically (attractive/unattractive) 20-year old Caucasian female, 5 feet 4 inches in height, and weighing 125 pounds. She has brown hair, brown eyes, and was wearing a tailored denim pantsuit at the time of the attack. The victim was extremely frightened during the attack, (and was unable to either verbally or physically resist the sexual assault against her/but tried to talk the rapist out of sexually assaulting her/but tried to physically resist the sexual assault by kicking the rapist in the shins and punching him in the face).

The description of the defendant was held constant across conditions. In each case, he was described as a 25-year-old Caucasian male, 5 feet 10 inches in height, and weighing 175 pounds. Similarly, the description of the rape incident remained constant across variations of victim attractiveness and resistance. In each description, the incident was depicted as having occurred on the campus of Colorado State University, following a night class, when the victim walked from a classroom building to her car, which was parked in a nearby parking lot. Subjects were informed that less than a block from the victim's car, a man accosted the victim, and a struggle resulted in which the victim was stripped and forced to engage in sexual intercourse with her assailant. In addition, subjects were told that a passerby had phoned the police, who arrived and apprehended the defendant minutes after the sexual assault had been completed. Finally, subjects were informed that the defendant had been arrested and charged with forcible rape and were asked to put themselves in the place of jurors hearing the case in responding to the 12 items of the RRQ.

## **RESULTS**

### *Manipulation Checks*

Manipulation checks obtained from an independent sample of 95 student subjects indicated that both the Attractiveness and Resistance manipulations were successful. As noted in Table I, the attractive victim was rated as significantly more beautiful, more attractive, more sociable,



**Table I.** Mean Values for Manipulation Checks on the Levels of Victim Attractiveness and Victim Resistance

Victim Attractiveness	Attractive	Unattractive	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> <	
Ugly-beautiful	5.19	3.52	64.71	.0001	
Attractive-unattractive	2.45	4.73	83.92	.0001	
Unpleasant-pleasant	5.15	4.46	8.79	.005	
Sociable-unsociable	4.79	4.25	5.36	.05	
Seductive-not seductive	3.81	4.60	10.53	.005	
Warm-cold	3.11	3.63	5.51	.05	
Victim Resistance	Passive	Assertive	Aggressive	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> <
Aggressive-passive	5.39	4.59	3.72	13.14	.0001
Passive-active	2.90	3.94	4.69	13.23	.0001

more pleasant, and warmer than was the unattractive rape victim. Interestingly, the attractive rape victim was also rated as more seductive than was the unattractive rape victim. This result provides support for Dermer and Thiel's (1975) contention that physical attractiveness may be disadvantageous for a rape victim in court, in that jurors may view a "seductive" victim as lacking credibility.

### *Data Analyses*

Two separate  $2 \times 3 \times 2$  analyses of variance, with regression solution to correct for unequal cell *ns*, were used to analyze the data. In the first ANOVA, the Attractiveness of the Victim, Resistance Style of the Victim, and Sex of Subject served as independent variables; in the second analysis of variance, high and low levels of Rape Empathy replaced the Sex of Subject variable. The two levels of Rape Empathy were formed by selecting subjects in the upper and lower thirds of the RES distribution within each sex. *F* tests for simple main effects (Kirk, 1968) and Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Tests (at the .05 level) were used in post hoc comparisons in interactions and main effects, respectively.

### *Victim Resistance and Attractiveness*

Main effects for victim attractiveness were found for the degree of identification subjects felt with the victim, and subjects' feelings about the victim. As predicted, subjects identified more with the physically attractive rape victim and expressed more positive feelings about her than they did about the unattractive victim. These results are reported in Table II.

A main effect for the victim's resistance style was found for subjects' feelings about the defendant. Subjects expressed more positive feelings

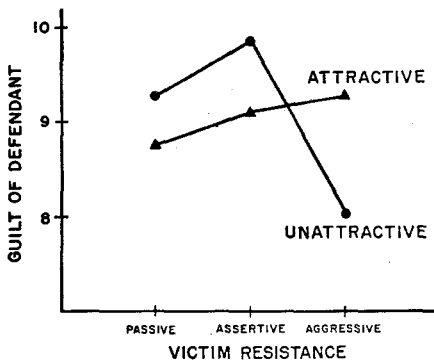
**Table II.** Main Effects for Victim Attractiveness and Victim Resistance

Victim Attractiveness	Attractive	Unattractive	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> <	
Identification with victim	6.68	5.72	5.30	.05	
Feelings about victim	8.38	7.12	17.70	.001	
Victim Resistance	Passive	Assertive	Aggressive	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> <
Feelings about defendant	2.38	1.68	2.47	3.54	.05

about the defendant who was charged with raping either a passive or aggressive rape victim than about the defendant accused of raping a woman who resisted by attempting to talk the assailant out of raping her (see Table II).

An Attractiveness  $\times$  Victim Resistance interaction was revealed for subjects' certainty about the guilt of the defendant,  $F(2, 178) = 3.21, p < .05$ . Post hoc tests indicated the presence of a simple main effect for Attractiveness when the victim physically resisted her assailant,  $F(1, 178) = 4.49, p < .05$  and a simple main effect for Resistance when the victim was described as unattractive,  $F(2, 178) < .01$ . Thus, subjects were more certain that the defendant charged with raping an attractive aggressive victim was guilty than was the defendant charged with raping an unattractive aggressive victim. Although subjects did not differentiate among the three resistance levels when the victim was described as attractive, they did so when the victim was described as unattractive. These data are presented in Figure 1.

A second Attractiveness  $\times$  Victim Resistance interaction was found for subjects' feelings about the rape victim,  $F(2, 178) = 3.44, p < .05$ . Post hoc analyses revealed simple main effects for attractiveness in both the



**Fig. 1.** Victim Attractiveness  $\times$  Victim Resistance interaction for subjects' certainty about the guilt of the defendant.

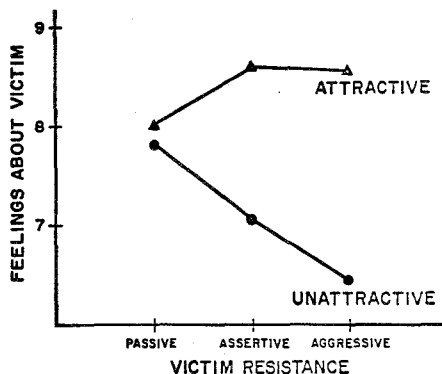


Fig. 2. Victim Attractiveness  $\times$  Victim Resistance interaction for subjects' expressed feelings about the rape victim.

assertive and aggressive resistance conditions,  $F(1, 178) = 3.34$  and  $16.09$ , respectively,  $p < .01$ . Subjects expressed more positive feelings about the attractive rape victim who exhibited some form of resistance than about her unattractive counterpart. This effect was particularly striking when the victim was described as physically resisting the rape, a finding that is supported by the presence of a simple main effect for Resistance in the unattractive victim condition,  $F(2, 178) = 3.27$ ,  $p < .05$ . These data are depicted in Figure 2.

An Attractiveness  $\times$  Subject Sex interaction was found for subjects' ratings of the psychological impact of the rape for the victim,  $F(1, 178) = 4.69$ ,  $p < .05$ . A simple main effect for attractiveness for male subjects ( $F(1, 178) = 4.87$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and a simple main effect for subject sex in the unattractive victim condition ( $F(1, 178) = 14.06$ ,  $p < .01$ ) indicated that male subjects rated the psychological impact of the rape for the victim as greater when the victim was described as attractive than when she was described as unattractive; and female subjects rated the psychological impact of the rape as greater for the unattractive victim than did the males. Female subjects did not differ in their ratings of the psychological impact of the rape for attractive and unattractive rape victims.

Marginal support for the predicted Victim Resistance  $\times$  Subject Sex interactions was revealed. On two dependent measures, subjects' attributions of responsibility to the defendant and their ratings of the psychological impact of the rape for the victim, Resistance  $\times$  Subject Sex interactions approached significance ( $p < .06$ ) (see Figures 3 and 4). In both cases, female subjects were consistent across levels of victim resistance in their ratings of the defendant's responsibility for the crime and the psychological impact of the rape for the victim, but male subjects differentiated among the three levels of victim resistance.

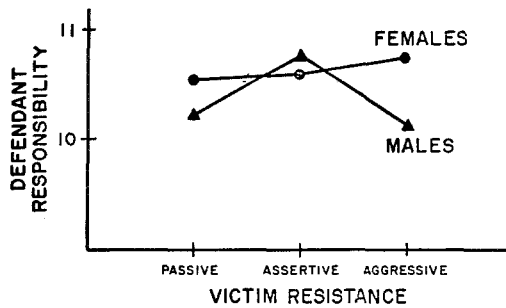


Fig. 3. Victim Resistance  $\times$  Subject Sex interaction for subjects' attributions of responsibility to the defendant.

### *Main Effects for Sex of Subject*

Consistent with the results of earlier attribution studies (e.g., Calhoun et al., 1976; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Smith et al., 1976), main effects for subject sex were found for 7 of the 12 dependent variables. Male subjects believed that the victim was more likely to have done something to encourage the rape, identified less with the victim, identified more with the defendant, and had less positive feelings about the rape victim than did female subjects. In addition, male subjects felt that the psychological impact of the rape was less severe, perceived rape as a less serious crime, and were less certain about the guilt of the defendant than were the females in the present study. These data are presented in Table III.

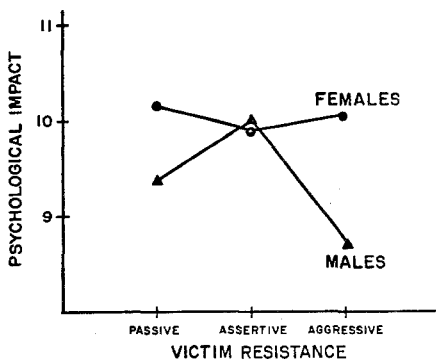


Fig. 4. Victim Resistance  $\times$  Subject Sex interaction for subjects' ratings of the psychological impact of the rape on the victim.

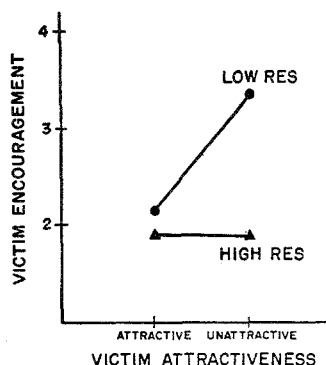


Fig. 5. Victim Attractiveness  $\times$  Rape Empathy (RES) interaction for subjects' ratings of the extent to which the rape victim encouraged the sexual assault.

### *Main Effects and Interactions for Rape Empathy*

As predicted, main effects for rape empathy were revealed on 10 of the 12 dependent variables. Subjects who scored high on the RES, indicating greater pretrial empathy with the rape victim, expressed greater certainty about the defendant's guilt and attributed greater responsibility to him for the rape, expressed more negative feelings about the defendant, and identified less with him than did subjects who scored in the lower third of the RES distribution. Similarly, high-scoring subjects expressed more positive feelings about the rape victim and greater identification with her, felt that the victim was less likely to have done something to encourage the rape, felt that

**Table III.** Main Effects for Sex of Subject

RRQ item	Males ( $\bar{X}$ )	Females ( $\bar{X}$ )	$F$	$p <$
Victim encouragement	2.89	2.04	10.85	.001
Feelings about victim	7.40	8.10	5.52	.02
Psychological impact of rape	9.34	10.04	9.11	.005
Seriousness of rape	9.91	10.67	10.50	.001
Identification with victim	5.41	6.97	14.06	.001
Identification with defendant	2.60	1.36	11.35	.001
Certainty about defendant guilt	8.66	9.43	5.27	.05

Table IV. Main Effects for Rape Empathy

RRQ item	High RES ( $\bar{X}$ )	Low RES ( $\bar{X}$ )	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> <
Victim encouragement	1.89	2.73	6.60	.02
Feelings about victim	8.20	7.39	5.75	.02
Identification with victim	6.59	5.62	3.92	.05
Attribution to chance	9.65	8.77	5.63	.02
Psychological impact of rape	10.35	8.98	22.52	.001
Seriousness of rape	10.80	9.59	19.23	.001
Feelings about defendant	1.61	2.81	9.27	.005
Identification with defendant	1.47	2.56	11.39	.001
Defendant responsibility	10.79	10.16	10.68	.001
Certainty about defendant guilt	9.74	8.53	7.95	.01

her involvement in the rape was more likely to be due to chance factors, and rated the psychological impact and seriousness of the rape as greater than did low-scoring subjects. These data are presented in Table IV.

Two significant interactions between Rape Empathy and Victim Attractiveness and Resistance were revealed. An Attractiveness  $\times$  Rape Empathy interaction for subjects' ratings of victim encouragement indicated that although subjects who empathized with the rape victim did not differentiate between levels of victim attractiveness, subjects who scored low on the RES rated the unattractive victim as more likely to have encouraged the rape than the attractive rape victim,  $F(1, 118) = 4.68, p < .05$ . These data are depicted in Figure 5.

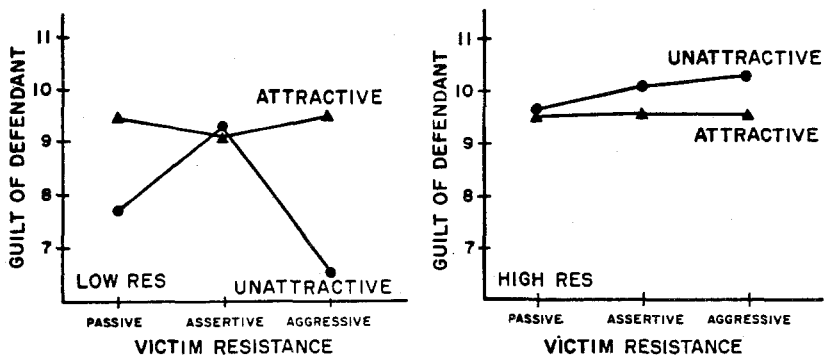


Fig. 6. Victim Attractiveness  $\times$  Victim Resistance  $\times$  Rape Empathy interaction for low and high RES subjects' certainty about the guilt of the defendant.

A three-way interaction between Victim Attractiveness, Victim Resistance, and Rape Empathy was revealed for subjects' certainty about the guilt of the defendant,  $F(2, 118) = 3.47, p < .05$ . Once again, subjects who scored high on the RES did not differentiate between levels of Victim Attractiveness or Victim Resistance, while low-scoring subjects were less certain that the defendant charged with raping an unattractive aggressive rape victim was guilty than the defendant charged with raping an attractive aggressive victim. Furthermore, high RES subjects were more certain that the defendant charged with raping an unattractive aggressive victim was guilty than were low RES subjects judging the same defendant. These findings are supported by post hoc tests which indicated the presence of a significant simple main effect for victim attractiveness in the low empathy/aggressive victim condition ( $F(1, 118) = 8.31, p < .01$ ) and a simple main effect for rape empathy in the unattractive/aggressive victim condition ( $F(1, 118) = 13.11, p < .01$ ). These data are presented in Figure 6.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the present study reveal that, in general, subjects exhibited considerable sympathy toward the rape victim and were quite certain that the defendant in the case was guilty. The extreme means on several dependent variables support this assertion. Although subjects were informed that the rape victim was "extremely frightened during the attack," they responded differentially to both the victim and defendant on the basis of the victim's resistance style and physical attractiveness. Legal standards for consent would dictate that the victim who physically resisted her assailant was exhibiting clear nonconsent to the crime, but subjects applied different standards to attractive and unattractive nonconsenting victims. Subjects expressed the least positive feelings about the unattractive rape victim who physically fought with her assailant, and they were least certain about the guilt of the defendant charged with raping her. Rather than consistently supporting the "beautiful and blameless" victim, as suggested by the findings of Kerr (1978), subjects appeared to discriminate against the unattractive "blameless" (aggressive) victim.

Several explanations for these intriguing results, focusing on subjects' cognitive judgments and affective reactions, are possible. Supporting the cognition that rape is an attractiveness-related crime, subjects may have found it difficult to believe that an assailant would persist in attacking an unattractive victim who physically resisted the assault (see Figure 1). They may have viewed the unattractive aggressive rape victim as contributing to her own victimization and, thus, may have been less certain that her alleged assailant was guilty. On the other hand, as suggested by Figure 2, subjects

may have perceived the unattractive rape victim who actively resisted her assailant as violating sex-role stereotypes associated with femininity. When the victim was described as physically unattractive, subjects expressed increasingly negative feelings toward her as her resistance to the rape increased. In the present study, subjects may have perceived the unattractive aggressive rape victim as being farthest from the subjects' ideal of femininity. As a result of this assessment, subjects might have been less positive in their evaluations of her and more lenient in judging her alleged assailant. In support of this explanation, Costrich, Feinstein, Kidder, Maracek, and Pascale (1975) reported that subjects penalized aggressive women confederates for violating traditional stereotypic expectations, with male subjects penalizing sex-role norm violations to a greater extent than females.

Further support for a cognitive sex-role stereotyping explanation is provided by the marginally significant Sex of Subject  $\times$  Victim Resistance interactions, which suggest the existence of important subject sex differences in perceptions of victim resistance. Female observers appeared to be unaffected by subtle manipulations of the victim's reaction to the assault, but males tended to rate the defendant as less responsible and to rate the psychological impact of the rape as less when the victim was described as physically resisting her assailant than when she was described as resisting less actively. These results reveal a pattern opposite to that reported by Krulewitz and Nash (1979), who discovered more positive judgments of the victim by males when the victim actively resisted her assailant, and by Scroggs (1976), who found that males assigned harsher penalties to the defendant when the victim exhibited active resistance. One explanation for these conflicting results can be found in the contrasting definitions of high resistance in the present and previous studies. The high victim resistance manipulations in both the Krulewitz and Nash (1979) and Scroggs (1976) studies included not only physical resistance (i.e., kicking and struggling) but also screaming on the part of the victim. In the present study, the absence of screaming in the description of high victim resistance may well have caused subjects to focus on the physical elements of her resistance and to judge the victim as less "feminine" than they might have judged a victim who also screamed for help.

An alternative explanation for the present findings focuses on the affective reactions of subjects to the rape victim. Several writers (Feldman-Summers & Linder, 1976; Fulero & DeLara, 1976; Metzger, 1976; Russell, 1975) have hypothesized that an observer's ability to empathize or identify with a rape victim can substantially affect the individual's decisions concerning the guilt or innocence of the defendant in a rape case, as well as his or her perceptions of the victim, the defendant, and the rape incident. As sug-



gested by Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, and the main effects for rape empathy and subject sex, subjects who most strongly empathized or identified with the rape victim (female and high RES Ss) may have felt greater sympathy and concern for her than did male and low RES subjects. The former group of subjects was consistently positive in their ratings of the rape victim and certain of her alleged assailant's guilt, regardless of her resistance style or physical attractiveness. In contrast, subjects who exhibited less identification with and empathy toward the rape victim may have scrutinized the victim for evidence that she encouraged or consented to sexual relations. Further support for an affective explanation is suggested by Figures 1 and 2. Overall, subjects expressed the least positive feelings toward the aggressive unattractive victim and were least certain that the defendant charged with raping her was guilty. Perhaps the subjects' negative emotional reactions toward the unattractive victim who fought with her assailant mediated their certainty of the defendant's guilt or innocence. Further research, designed to clarify the mechanisms underlying subjects' reactions to rape victims of varying physical attractiveness and resistance style, is clearly in order. Such research might focus on (1) subjects' perceptions of the rape victim's "femininity"; (2) subjects' attitudes toward passivity, assertiveness, and physical aggression as "acceptable" reactions of rape victims; and (3) assessment and manipulation of subjects' emotional involvement with rape victims and defendants.

The present findings suggest that subject characteristics, as well as those of the victim and defendant, may be predictive of the outcome of a rape trial. The sex differences reported are consistent with those of previous investigators (Calhoun et al., 1976; Deitz, 1980; Deitz & Byrnes, 1981; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Smith et al., 1976) in that female subjects consistently responded more positively toward the rape victim and were more certain that the defendant was guilty than were males. Moreover, the main effects for rape empathy provide initial support for Feild's (1978) contention that objective measurements of subjects' perceptions of rape might be useful in screening potential jurors for a rape case. In the present study, high and low RES scores differentiated subjects' certainty about the guilt of the defendant—perhaps the most important consideration in obtaining a guilty verdict in a court of law. RES scores were also predictive of subjects' ratings of defendant responsibility, victim encouragement, and seriousness and psychological impact of the crime, as well as of subjects' social perceptions of rape victims and defendants. Because college students were used as subjects in this investigation and they were presented with only a short written description of a rape case, as opposed to an entire trial, care must be taken in generalizing the results of this study to jurors hearing an

actual rape case. Additional research, incorporating more realistic trial materials presented to eligible jurors, will address the utility of the RES in predicting jurors' decisions in sexual assault cases.

Both Hilberman (1976) and Russell (1975) have advocated the need for extensive restructuring of societal values and attitudes, and ultimately the elimination of stereotypic sex roles as a means of abolishing sexual assault in our society. The present study, in highlighting the importance of victim resistance and attractiveness, as well as the subject variables of gender and rape empathy, lends support to this assertion. Perhaps, as Hilberman (1976) stated, "only when the sex roles of both men and women are defined by individual needs and talents rather than by stereotypic expectations based on sex and power motives will there be an end to rape" (p. 437).

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