

Attribution of Blame in Rape Cases: The Impact of Norm Violation, Gender, And Sex-Role Attitude¹

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The present study compares the importance of the characteristics of the rape victims to the characteristics of observers in the attribution of blame in rape cases. Both blame of the victim and blame of the rapist are considered, along with seriousness of the crime, perceived norm violation, respectability, behavioral intentions toward the victim, and behavioral intentions toward the rapist. A factorial design is applied to data collected from 389 college students. Rape is found to be rated serious independently of any factors. Gender relates only to behavioral intentions, while sex-role attitude relates to respectability of the victim, blame of the victim, and blame of the rapist. No substantial statistical interaction effects are found. The findings of the research suggest the need to consider observer characteristics in order to understand the attribution of blame and social perceptions in rape cases.

An expanding area in rape research concerns social perceptions and attributions about the rape victim and, to a more limited extent, social perceptions and attributions about the rapist. Because most of these social perception studies have been exploratory (e.g., Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976; Scroggs, 1976), theoretical frameworks within which social attitudes about rape can be analyzed are

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in a rudimentary stage of development (e.g., Jones & Aronson, 1973; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Miller, Smith, Ferree, & Taylor, 1976).

Explaining the social perceptions about the rape victim and rapist is the purpose of this study. We are concerned with the relative impact of the behavior of the victim, that of the rapist, and the characteristics of the observer. We address three questions: (1) When and to what extent are attributions based on the actual behavior of the victim? (2) When and to what extent are attributions based on the actual behavior of the rapist? (3) When and to what extent are attributions based on the characteristics of the observer?

BACKGROUND

Jones and Aronson (1973) report that a highly respectable woman is blamed more for a rape than a less respectable woman. This counterintuitive finding is based on Lerner's "just world" theory (Lerner, 1965; Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Lerner posits that the intrinsic character of a good person cannot be faulted. Hence, this individual's actions are blamed so that the perceiver of these actions may hold to a belief in a just world.

Jones and Aronson have since come under heavy attack. Some replications find no relationship between respectability and attribution of fault (Kahn, Gilbert, Latta, Deutsch, Hagen, Hill, McCaughey, Ryen, & Wilson, 1977; Kanekar & Kolswalla, 1977). Other studies find that the less respectable the victim, the more she is perceived to be at fault (Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976). Balance theory is cited by Feldman-Summers and Lindner as predicting that a respectable woman is believed to involve herself in respectable actions. Thus, responsibility for rape is less likely to be attributed to her. The less respectable woman is believed to involve herself in less respectable actions. As a result, she will be held more responsible for a rape, since this is consistent with her character.

Perhaps one resolution of the conflicting findings regarding blame in rape cases is offered by attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Shaver, 1975). Heider (1976) argues that information about the actor's intention is necessary before most observers will attribute responsibility or blame to the actor. However, Heider acknowledges that causal attribution may be made if the observer concludes that the actor could have foreseen the result (i.e., the victim was "asking for it") or, indeed, if the actor (the rape victim) was even associated with the action.

Shaver (1975) argues that the process of making a dispositional attribution can be influenced by the *characteristics of the perceiver* as well as characteristics of the actor or the situation. Hence, he argues that observers can make a dispositional attribution without believing that the actor behaved intentionally. On the other hand, other attribution theorists feel that dispositional attributions are

made only when the actor's behavior is seen as amenable to self-control, rather than beyond self-control (Snyder, 1976).

We feel it is appropriate to pursue the study of blame in rape cases in terms of dispositional attributions. We consider three sources that may account for a social perception about a rape case. First, the simple fact of a rape provides a social stimulus which may be evaluated independently of the victim's actions, the rapist's actions, or characteristics of the observer. Second, actions on the part of the victim or actions on the part of the rapist may be used to justify attribution. For example, a woman who is clearly violating traditional sex-role norms for women may be judged responsible for the rape regardless of her intentions (e.g., hitchhiking alone at night). Third, characteristics of the observer may be important. For example, persons who strongly identify with traditional sex roles may be more likely to blame the victim either because of their general view of women or because they are more likely to judge harshly even the slightest deviation from traditional sex roles.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From this background we believe a series of research questions are worthy of investigation. Two related sets of questions are involved. The first set focuses on the characteristics of the victim and observer as they affect the attribution process:

1. Does the behavior of the victim and/or the rapist affect social perception or attribution?
2. Does the gender of the observer affect the social perception or attribution?
3. Does the sex-role attitude of the observer affect the social perception or attribution?
4. Do statistical interactions of these three variables affect the social perception or attribution?

The first question reflects the traditional approach to social perception of rape and attribution of responsibility, as discussed. The locus of cause for the attribution is typically placed in the behavior or character of the victim (Jones & Aronson, 1973). In the present study we are concerned with victim behavior that violates traditional sex-role norms (i.e., behavior normally regarded as socially acceptable for males, but not for females). Whether or not the victim violates traditional sex-role behavior may have an important effect on the attribution of blame both on her and on the rapist. The rapist's behavior may be attributed to his environment (i.e., the deviance of the victim) rather than to his own disposition because the observer assumes that he is responding differentially to the situation. The statement that the woman who violates traditional norms is

“asking for it” implies that the rapist would not act consistently over time and modalities in which a woman did not “ask for it.” On this basis, attribution theory would predict (cf. Kelley, 1967) that observers would blame the rapist less when the victim violated sex-based norms than when she did not. By a similar logic we might expect observers to blame the victim more when she violates the norms.

Questions 2 addresses an observer characteristic. Several studies have used gender of the observer as an independent variable with inconsistent results. Jones and Aronson (1973) found no gender differences. More responsibility is attributed to the woman by male subjects in the research of Feild (1978), Barnett and Feild (1977), Kanekar and Kolswalla (1977), and Calhoun et al. (1976). Feldman-Summers and Lindner (1976) find that females believe the crime to be more serious and to recommend longer jail sentences for the rapist. Thus, although the gender of the observer may be important in some cases, the strength of its effect seems to vary according to the specific social perception or attribution examined. We expect men to judge the victim more harshly than women, and women to judge the rapist more harshly than men.

Question 3 focuses on the sex-role attitude of the observer. This is consistent with Shaver's (1975) suggestion that the attitude of the observer may be the critical factor in predicting dispositional judgments. Observers holding a more traditional sex-role attitude are expected to respond to the rape victim less favorably than those exhibiting a more liberal sex-role attitude. In terms of cognitive consistency, we would expect those with a more liberal sex-role attitude to view the crime of rape as more serious, but to perceive the violation of traditional sex-based norms as less serious. Similarly, those with a more traditional sex-role attitude would have less respect for the victim, blame her more, and blame the rapist less. Cognitive consistency theory also predicts that those with a more liberal sex-role attitude would have more positive behavioral intentions toward the victim, but harsher behavioral intentions toward the rapist.

The fourth question concerns possible interaction effects. Significant statistical interactions indicate that the impact of one variable hinges on the level of another variable. For example, we might expect those who have traditional sex-role attitudes to respond most harshly to victims who violate sex-based norms (“she was asking for it”), but least harshly to victims whose behavior conforms to traditional sex-role expectations (“poor thing”). Such a differential effect would involve interaction. Kelly's theory of external attribution (1967) suggests that to expect such an interaction is reasonable. It may be simpler for an observer who has a traditional attitude to attribute the rapist's behavior externally when the victim violates the expected behavior of a traditional woman. However, such an external attribution may be unlikely when the victim's behavior conforms to a traditional sex role.

The absence of significant interactions would also have conceptual significance. Following the example above, if the sex-role attitude of the observer had

a significant main effect, but not a significant interaction with the degree of norm violation (scenario), this would mean that observers adhering to a traditional sex-role attitude judge the victim more severely (assuming this is the direction), regardless of the victim's behavior. Three interactions are two way (scenario by gender, scenario by sex-role attitude, and gender by sex-role attitude) and one interaction is three way.

The second set of research questions is an extension of the first set. The second set concerns how the attributions discussed above may vary from one issue to another. That is, some combination of our three independent variables may be more or less important depending on whether we are predicting the observers' rating of the seriousness of the crime, the extent of norm violation, the respectability of the victim, the responsibility or blame of the victim and rapist, or the behavioral intentions toward the victim and rapist. Set 2 asks the following questions:

5. What explains how people judge the seriousness of the crime?
6. What explains how people judge the extent of norm violation on the part of the victim prior to the assault?
7. What explains how people judge the respectability of a rape victim?
8. What explains how people judge the responsibility or blame of (a) the victim and (b) the rapist?
9. What explains the behavioral intentions of the observer toward (a) the victim and (b) the rapist?

The judgment of the seriousness of the crime may be based on the act of rape *per se*, without regard to the extent of norm violation by the rape victim, the gender of the observer, or the sex-role attitude of the observer. Rape is a crime that is currently receiving much public attention. Consequently, variable actions by and/or characteristics of the victim, the rapist, and the observer may not override a general recognition of rape as a heinous act of violence, regardless of the circumstances. In contrast, the rating of the extent of norm violation by the rape victim should largely reflect the actual norm violation (i.e., we expect a high degree of congruence between perceptions of and the extent of the victim's "inappropriate" behavior). Perceived respectability of the victim should depend for the most part on the extent of the norm violation committed by the victim. To a lesser extent, sex-role attitudes and perhaps gender characteristics of the observer may influence this assessment. While blame and responsibility for the rape assessed to the victim and to the rapist should depend on the degree of the victim's norm violation, such attributions may also depend on characteristics of the observer. Previous research has focused on gender as the major observer characteristic, but we emphasize that sex-role attitudes may also influence the degree of blame attributed to both the victim and the rapist. Finally, the behavioral intentions the observer has toward the victim and the rapist should depend substantially on characteristics of the observer. Since such behavioral intentions

involve the observer personally, specific characteristics of the observer should be significant.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Sample

The data for this study come from 411 volunteer undergraduate students attending two southwestern universities. Twelve subjects who failed to complete the questionnaire were eliminated, resulting in a total sample of 399 subjects. Approximately half the subjects ($N = 201$) were male and half female ($N = 198$). The majority ($N = 354$) were aged 17 to 24. The racial composition was largely White ($N = 364$). The subjects included 72 science and engineering majors, 155 business and marketing majors, 20 humanities majors, 29 social science majors, and 122 "other" or "undecided" majors. Because of missing data on specific items the final sample size was 389.

Operationalization of Variables

The subjects were asked to read one of two rape scenarios. The scenario described either no norm violation of the traditional female role by the rape victim ($N = 198$) or a severe norm violation of the traditional female (although not the traditional male) role by the rape victim ($N = 201$). Pretesting 12 initial scenarios indicated that the 2 eventually selected reflected opposite (although not the extreme) ends of a no norm violation/severe norm violation continuum. In the no violation condition, the rape victim was described as a young female college student who was assaulted on the way home from the library around dusk. In the violation condition, the rape victim was described as a young woman employed at a service station who in the middle of the night voluntarily provided a man with a ride to his car which had run out of gas instead of requesting her male co-worker attend to this task. Her actions could thus be described as violating traditional norms in American society for appropriate female behavior, though not traditional norms for appropriate male behavior.³

³The no norm violation scenario read as follows: "Carol is a 20-year-old college student. When she finished researching a term paper, she left the library at dusk. While walking back to the dorm, she became aware that someone was following her. When she quickened her steps, the man following her, Bob, grabbed her. Bob then dragged her into some bushes and informed her that if she didn't stop screaming and provide him with sex, he would beat her until she did. Since Bob was twice Carol's size and appeared to be in good physical shape, she gave in to his demands."

After one of the two scenarios, each subject was asked to answer a series of questions regarding the rape. Subscales of three to six items were used to measure the subjects' assessment of the seriousness of the crime (six items), their subjective perception of the seriousness of the norm violation of the rape victim (three items), how respectable they believed her to be (three items), how much blame they attributed to the woman who was raped (three items), how much blame they attributed to the rapist (three items), the favorability of their behavioral intentions toward the woman (four items), and the favorability of their behavioral intentions toward the rapist (five items). Sex-role attitudes of the subjects were also measured using a nine-item Likert-type scale. Subjects were then dichotomized into two groups, those having a more traditional sex-role attitude ($N = 204$) and those having a more liberal sex-role attitude ($N = 195$).

Factor analysis was performed on a large set of items during pretesting as an aid to ascertain which items would provide the most appropriate indicators of the underlying concepts. Items reflecting low factor loadings on the principal component of each subscale were omitted from the final survey. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability of the final summated Likert-type scales. Most of the variables reflect fairly high reliability coefficients. The reliability for seriousness of the crime is .676, perceived norm violation by the rape victim is .877, respectability of the rape victim is .615, blame of the victim is .871, blame of the rapist is .842, behavioral intentions toward the victim is .522, and behavioral intentions toward the rapist is .720. An overall reliability coefficient of .852 is revealed for the nine-item sex-role attitudes scale. Consequently, all variables are measured with reliability above .50.

Research Design

The analysis involved a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design enabling us to study both the main and interaction effects of the type of scenario, gender, and sex-role attitude on our seven dependent variables. Without randomization of subjects we had an unequal number of cases in each of the eight cells of the factorial design (see Table I). Gender is correlated with sex-role attitude ($r = .30$) inasmuch as women tend to be less traditional than men. There is also a slight and

The norm violation scenario read as follows: "Sandra is 20 and works as a night attendant at an all-night gas station located on the interstate highway. One night a man named Jim caught a ride with a guy, got out of the fellow's car, and told Sandra his car ran out of gas a few miles up the road. Since it was almost midnight and the station was not busy, Sandra volunteered to drive Jim back to his car with enough gas to get him to the station. Her co-worker, Tom, agreed to stay to run the station by himself. Jim directed Sandra to a side road, yanked the keys from the ignition, dragged her into some bushes and informed her that if she didn't stop screaming and provide him with sex, he would beat her until she did. Since Jim was twice Sandra's size and appeared to be in good physical shape, she gave in to his demands."

Table I. Number of Subjects per Cell

Scenario and gender	Sex-role attitude	<i>N</i>
No norm violation		
Male	Traditional	67
	Liberal	27
Female	Traditional	37
	Liberal	62
Norm violation		
Male	Traditional	61
	Liberal	40
Female	Traditional	32
	Liberal	63

coincidental correlation between sex-role attitude and the scenario the subjects read ($r = .06$), with those rating themselves as liberal being more likely to read the high norm violation scenario.

Because there was an unequal number of cases in each cell, we used a "classical" design based on SPSS (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975). The classical design is conservative in crediting each effect only with the increment it contributes to the sum of squares after the combined effects of the other factors have been included.

It should be noted that the seven dependent variables are correlated with one another. Because we are interested in how the three independent variables affect each of the dependent variables, we have chosen to do a series of seven three-way analyses of variance. We recognize that it would be possible to conduct a multivariate analysis of variance incorporating all three independent variables and all seven dependent variables into a single analysis. We do not feel the information gained by such a procedure would justify the increased complexity in the statistical analysis.⁴

RESULTS

Table II reports the results of the analysis of variance on the impact of the behavior of the victim (scenario), the gender of the observer, and the sex-role

⁴Some readers may be interested in the relationship between the seven dependent variables. They are moderately correlated. Four of the 21 correlations are .4 or larger in absolute value. Specifically, perceived norm violation is negatively correlated with respectability (-.46), blaming the victim (.62), and blaming the rapist (-.40). Not surprisingly, blaming the rapist is inversely correlated with blaming the victim (-.58). Another four correlations are between .3 and .4, namely, seriousness of the crime and behavioral intentions toward the rapist (-.32), and victim (.34); respectability and blame of the rapist (.30) and victim (-.35).

Table II. Selected Results from the Analysis of Variance

Dependent variable	<i>F</i> ratios for main effects ^a		
	Scenario	Gender	Sex-role attitude
Seriousness of the crime	.00	1.68	1.72
Perceived norm violation	151.51 ^b	1.20	2.34
Respectability of victim as a person	23.82 ^b	.16	4.11 ^c
Blame of the victim for the rape	79.34 ^b	1.74	12.83 ^b
Blame of the rapist for the rape	13.98 ^b	.02	4.80 ^c
Behavioral intent toward victim	1.45	2.85 ^d	3.01 ^d
Behavioral intent toward rapist	.67	4.36 ^c	.33

^a Each *F* ratio has 1 and 381 degrees of freedom.

^b $p < .001$.

^c $.05 > p > .01$.

^d $.10 > p > .05$.

attitude of the observer on each of the seven dependent variables. Table I does not include the *F* ratios for any of the interaction, since none of these were significant at the .05 level.

The first set of research questions concerns the effect of the three independent variables and their statistical interactions on the seven distinct dependent variables. We have indicated that the behavior of the victim is at the center of much research dealing with attribution processes (Jones & Aronson, 1973). The victim who behaves contrary to the conventionally accepted sex-role behavior of a woman is seen as clearly violating norms (perceived norm violation) by our subjects ($F = 151.51$; $p < .001$). The lack of significant statistical interactions means that this perception is not contingent on whether the observer is a male or a female, nor on whether the observer has a liberal or traditional sex-role attitude. Although the victim's behavior in the norm violation scenario would be acceptable behavior were she a male, she is seen as deserving less respect ($F = 23.82$; $p < .001$) and being partly to blame for the rape ($F = 79.34$; $p < .001$). Not only do observers blame the norm-violating victim more, they also blame the rapist less ($F = 13.98$; $p < .001$) than when the victim's behavior is consistent with traditional sex-based norms.

Although the behavior of the victim as described in the scenario is important in these dispositional judgments, there are two respects in which the behavior of the victim is not important to the attribution process. First, there is absolutely no difference in how serious the observers rate the crime whether the victim violates sex roles or not. Second, there is no significant difference in the behavioral intentions observers express toward either the victim or the rapist.

The observer's gender was not relevant to how seriously she/he rated the crime, nor to any of the dispositional attributions. The only significant difference between female and male observers is that male observers had a more positive behavioral intention toward the rapist ($F = 4.36; p < .05$). Females expressed only a slightly more positive behavioral intention toward the victim ($F = 2.85; p < .10$), but this was not significant at the .05 level.

The subject's gender did not significantly interact with her/his perception of the degree of norm violation nor with her/his sex-role attitude. The lack of such statistically significant interactions makes the overall absence of gender differences on the dispositional attributions (perceived norm violation, respectability, blame of victim, and blame of rapist) and on the rating of seriousness of the crime all the more notable.⁵

The third research question concerns the role of the subject's own sex-role attitude. Our expectation was that observers who held a more traditional sex-role attitude would respond more negatively to the victim of the crime. Three statistically significant results emerged. Those with a traditional sex-role attitude view the victim as less respectable ($F = 4.11; p < .05$), blame her more ($F = 12.83; p < .001$), and blame the rapist less ($F = 4.80; p < .05$). Thus, the sex-role attitude of the observer emerges as an important factor in the attribution of blame.

Although the observer's attitude is important, equally important is the absence of significant interactions between the sex-role attitude of the observer and the actual degree of norm violation (scenario). We speculated that those with a traditional sex-role attitude might regard the woman who violates sex-role norms as particularly deviant and therefore deserving blame and disrepute. There is no support for this speculation in the results.

The sex-role attitude of the observer was insignificant in accounting for the observer's rating of the seriousness of the crime, the perceived norm violation, and the behavioral intent toward the rapist. Thus, although those with a traditional sex-role orientation may have a lower regard for the victim of rape, they are united with those of a liberal sex-role orientation in how seriously they regard the crime and the behavioral intentions they express toward the rapist.

The second set of research questions moves our focus to the social perceptions. Question 5 (the first in the second set) concerns our ability to explain the attribution of seriousness of the crime of rape. Which, if any, of our independent variables explain the seriousness with which people view the crime itself? None of the independent variables differentiated the extent to which an observer rates the crime of rape as serious. This judgment is not mitigated by "deviant" behavior on the part of the victim; both men and women rate the crime as

⁵ A table of means is available on request.

serious, and the sex-role attitude of the observer has nothing to do with the perceived seriousness of the crime.

In explaining the perceived extent of norm violation by the victim, neither gender nor sex-role attitude is relevant. The only significant factor is the degree of sex-role norm violation ($F = 151.51; p < .001$). In contrast, in predicting the respectability of the victim as well as the relative blame of the victim and the rapist, both the scenario ($F = 28.82; p < .001$) and the observer's sex-role attitude are relevant ($F = 4.11; p < .05$). Thus, the explanation of the negative attitude toward the victim requires knowledge of both the conduct of the victim and rapist and the orientations of the observer. These three dispositional judgments (respectability of victim, blame of victim, and blame of rapist) require both knowledge of what happened and knowledge of the attitude of the observer. In contrast, to explain the general attitudes toward the act requires only knowledge of the conduct of the victim and rapist.

The final research question concerns behavioral intentions regarding the victim and the rapist. Nothing explains the behavioral intentions toward the victim. However, gender has a statistically significant impact on the behavioral intentions toward the rapist ($F = 4.36; p < .05$), with males significantly more positive in their behavioral intentions toward the rapist.

DISCUSSION

Our first set of research questions involves the sources of the social perception or attribution in rape cases. Three sources are investigated. These are the degree of norm violation on the part of the rape victim, gender of the observer, and sex-role attitude held by the observer. All three factors are significant for one or more of the dependent variables. This indicates that characteristics of the observer must be considered along with characteristics of the victim in understanding the attribution process. This is consistent with a central theme of attribution research that both actual situational and dispositional determinants are important (Snyder, 1976).

The conduct of the victim is important. Highly significant effects are revealed for the degree of norm violation (scenario). Those exposed to the norm violation scenario perceive more of a norm violation by the victim, rate her somewhat less respectable, blame her more for the rape, and blame the rapist slightly less than those reading the no norm violation scenario.

Although much of the research on attribution theory has been based on observing behavior across several circumstances or individuals, many socially significant attributions are made on the basis of a single exposure to an individual's behavior. Our findings indicate that observers make significantly different dispositional attributions when the victim violates norms than when she does

not. This is consistent with attribution research, which focuses on the perceptions of whether an actor's behavior is amenable to self-control or beyond self-control (cf. Snyder, 1976). Apparently, a woman's behavior is held to be amenable to self-control when she violates traditional sex-role behavior.

We have discussed some of the research on the effect of gender on the attribution process. The results are inconsistent. We find little support for the findings of Feild (1978) or Calhoun et al. (1976), who argue that male subjects ascribe greater responsibility to the victim. In fact, the effects of gender are very weak. As expected, females report slightly more favorable behavioral intentions toward the rape victim than males. Males, in turn, are somewhat more favorable in their expression of behavioral intention toward the rapist. While noting these results, we must stress that no other significant gender differences are found. Men rate the crime just as serious as women, perceive no more norm violation on the part of the victim, do not blame the victim more, and blame the rapist just as much as women. While this lack of gender differences is a "positive" result, the use of a college sample may limit its generalizability. However, at least for the present, it is clear that gender has little effect on attitudinal responses or dispositional judgments regarding rape and only a slight effect on behavioral intentions regarding the victim and the rapist.

The sex-role attitude of the observer proves to be a significant factor in accounting for judgments of respectability, blame of both the victim and the rapist, and behavioral intentions regarding the victim. Those expressing traditional attitudes about appropriate sex roles tend to be significantly more harsh toward rape victims and slightly less harsh toward rapists.

None of the interactions were statistically significant at the .05 level. We conclude from this that the main effects are sufficient to account for the impact of the three factors on each of the seven dependent variables. The lack of significant statistical interaction is important in interpreting the meaning of the three factors for attribution of blame. This is especially clear in the case of sex-role attitude. Those with a traditional sex-role attitude respond more harshly to victims of rape, regardless of whether the observer is male or female and regardless of the behavior of the victim. We speculated initially that traditionally oriented males might "take pity" on a victim when there is no norm violation, but respond harshly when the victim is "asking for it." The lack of a significant interaction, however, indicates that traditionally oriented males (and females) simply respond more harshly to the victim, regardless of the victim's conduct. Perhaps the victim's mere association with the act of rape is enough for those with traditional attitudes toward sex roles to respond negatively.

Our second set of research questions involves the differences between one social perception or attribution and another in terms of the importance of the three factors. The seriousness of the crime variable stands by itself as the only dependent variable that has no dependency on any of the factors. Apparently,

sufficient progress has been made in rape education for all to consider it a serious crime. At the very least, an observer evaluates the crime of rape independently of her/his gender, personal attitude toward sex roles, or even the behavior of the victim.

The attribution of a norm violation to the victim depends solely on the actual norm violation. While it is hardly surprising that the actual norm violation is a significant factor in explaining the perceived norm violation, we must stress that the gender of the observer and the observer's sex-role attitude do not explain the perception. This means that men are no more likely than women to perceive the victim as violating appropriate behavior. Since there is no interaction, this comparability applies whether the victim is a college student going home from the library or a service station attendant who goes in a car with the stranger. Furthermore, while we expected those holding a traditional sex-role attitude to perceive greater norm violation than those with more liberal sex-role attitudes, this is not the case. Indeed, the traditionally oriented observers are no more likely to see the victim in either scenario as deviating from appropriate behavior.

Three dispositional attribution variables – namely, respectability of the victim, blame of the victim, and blame of the rapist – depend on both the degree of actual norm violation (the conduct of the victim) and the sex-role attitude of the observer, but not on the gender of the observer. Thus, these dispositional attributions regarding those involved in the rape depend on both situational and dispositional characteristics.

Finally, we come to the two indicators of behavioral intentions. In discussing these two variables we are not addressing attributions or social perception, but indicators of behavior. Moreover, in accounting for these behavioral indicators different factors are relevant. Although the behavior of the victim is highly significant for all variables discussed to this point (except seriousness of crime, for which nothing was significant), what the victim did has nothing to do with behavioral intentions toward either the victim or the rapist. In contrast, behavioral intentions depend exclusively on observer characteristics.

SUMMARY

The results of this study suggest that substantial progress has been made in some respects, but that further understanding of rape is still critically needed. The college students in our sample consider rape a serious crime, and express positive behavioral intentions toward the victim and negative behavioral intentions toward the rapist. This is true regardless of whether the victim is "asking for it." However, if the victim is "asking for it" (i.e., the female service station attendant), the dispositional attributions remain problematic. Even without the

usual information in attribution research concerning the behavior of the actor in other contexts, our observers were ready to blame her more and the rapist less when she violated traditional sex-based norms. This inconsistency between the observers' attitudes and their behavioral intentions is an area that needs further study.

The absence of a significant difference between females and males, with the notable exception of the behavioral intention variables, is interesting. A perplexing result of this study is that males are just as likely as females to rate the crime as serious, perceive the same degree of norm violation, respect the victim, not blame the victim, and blame the rapist; but these males still express more positive behavioral intentions toward the rapist and somewhat less positive behavioral intentions toward the victim than do females. We might speculate that these results involve same-sex identification in some complex way, but they do not appear to fit a simple rational model.

While gender influences behavioral intentions, but not attitudes, the sex-role attitude of the observer appears to work in the opposite fashion. Traditionalists blame the rape victim more than nontraditionalists regardless of her behavior, but there is only a slight tendency for traditionalists to express less positive behavioral intentions toward her. Traditionalists blame the rapist less than nontraditionalists, but the same traditionalists have no less harsh behavioral intentions toward the rapist.

This research strongly supports the need to consider both the characteristics of the actors and the characteristics of the observers in the attribution process. While much work on attribution has focused on actor-victim characteristics, we show that observer characteristics may be just as important and in some cases more important factors.

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