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Attribution of blame in rape cases: A review of the impact of rape myth acceptance, gender role conformity and substance use on victim blaming

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews research literature examining the effects of key factors that influence individual's attitudes towards victims of rape. The impact of rape myths, gender roles and substance use on attributions of blame in cases of rape are discussed. The phenomenon of victim-blaming within such cases is explored with reference to the attribution theory to help explain why rape victims are sometimes seen as deserving of their misfortune. Findings indicate that men demonstrate higher rape myth acceptance than women and attribute higher levels of blame to victims than women; women who violate traditional gender roles are attributed more blame than those women who do not; and women who consume alcohol prior to their attack are attributed higher levels of blame than those who are not intoxicated. The findings are discussed with reference to the implications for the Criminal Justice System and future interventions for both victims and perpetrators of rape.

Contents

1. Introduction and theoretical background

1.1. Rape: the nature and extent of the phenomenon

The phenomenon of sexual assault, including rape, has been discussed quite thoroughly since the 1980s (Girard & Senn, 2008). The subject has achieved vigorous academic attention as a result of its widespread occurrence and impact. Rape is a widely occurring phenomenon which exists internationally and shows no cultural boundaries. The act of rape is seen within a variety of cultures and is a behavior which appears to be engrained within modern society. Figures taken from HOSB (2009) indicates that approximately 4.2% of women in the UK have been raped at least once since the age of 16 and that 19.5% of all women have suffered some form of sexual victimization since the same age (HOSB, 2009). These figures are, however, misleading, and are likely to represent only the 'tip of the iceberg' with regard to the actual true figure of rapes that occur every year. Rape and sexual assault are thought to be two of the most under-reported crimes within the UK, as a result of both the stigma attached to the victims and the way the crime has been socially constructed within our society.

Rape is a pervasive crime within modern society and it is one which is wrongly but tacitly condoned (Grubb & Harrower, 2008, 2009). The under-reported nature of the crime results in a gross misperception of its impact upon victims. Both the crimes of rape and sexual assault have notoriously low reporting rates (Epstein &

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Lagenbahn, 1994; Gilmore & Pittman, 1993; Gregory & Lees, 1999; Kelly, 2002; Mack, 1998). Research relating to reporting rates for rape varies, however, some research suggests that the rate is as low as 6% (Rape Crisis Federation (RCF), 2004). Extrapolation of this figure to current UK rape statistics would indicate that there are actually 200,000 rapes occurring per year, as opposed to the reported 12,165 rapes of a female (Walker, Flatley, Kershaw, & Moon, 2009). Similar statistics are observed within the United States, with early research by Koss (1988) finding a report rate of only 5% among college women who had been raped. Attrition of rape cases within the system therefore starts even before the Criminal Justice System becomes involved, as a result of the victim's reluctance to report the crime. Attrition is an issue which has been researched thoroughly within the sexual assault literature and research indicates that individuals drop out of the criminal justice system at a variety of stages throughout the legal process, resulting in a very low conviction rate for the crime (7.2% conviction rate in 2009; HOSB, 2009). Attrition is thought to be influenced by a variety of factors relating to both victim self-perception and observer attitudes. Research indicates that victims fail to report rape for a number of reasons, including fear of degradation and being disbelieved by those in the Criminal Justice System (Gunn & Linden, 1997). Victims are further deterred by a belief that the legal system will fail to punish the perpetrators, even if they do report the crime (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008).

Understanding the reasons why rape is not reported and why cases that are reported do not result in conviction is vital to improving the legal and criminal justice response to both the victims and perpetrators of the crime. Research indicates that observer attitudes and perceptions held towards the victims of rape can play an important role in the victim's treatment and recovery (Yamawaki, 2007). Provision of good emotional support by others, for example, has been associated with better recovery of victims, whereas negative social reactions, including victim blaming, have been significantly associated with increased psychological distress and delayed recovery (Ullman, 1996). Research also identifies that insensitive treatment by members of the criminal justice system may magnify feelings of powerlessness and shame for the rape victim, produce feelings of guilt, and lower self-esteem (e.g., Flynn, 1974; Griffin, 1973; Medea & Thompson, 1974; Russell, 1974). Such negative responses from criminal justice workers have been described as a form of secondary victimization, whereby victims begin to blame themselves for the rape. It is widely accepted among the rape literature that criminal justice responses to victims of rape are vastly inadequate; and some researchers claim that not only does justice for female sexual assault victims fail to punish the perpetrator, but this process is often derailed and exacerbated further by unsympathetic authorities (Campbell & Johnson, 1997).

1.2. The culture of victim blaming: the role of attribution theory and just world theory

The phenomenon of victim blaming is well established in the literature on individual's judgments of female victims of rape (Whatley, 1996). A large body of literature has examined attributions of rape victims by others and revealed that individuals who have become the victims of crime are often judged by outsiders as being responsible for their own fate. This counterintuitive response to the victims of crime is thought to be explained within the realms of the *attribution theory* (Heider, 1958). Attribution theory relates to the way that individuals allocate or attribute responsibility to individual actors within a scenario. Research has indicated that such processes are malleable and can be influenced by a vast plethora of cognitive and motivational biases which results in a less than factual interpretation of the event (e.g., Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Kelley, 1967; Wegner & Vallacher, 1977). Observers are also subject to biases as a result of their personality disposition and will therefore view and interpret the same outcomes from uniquely biased perspectives. Cultural and personal differences are also thought to influence attribution making (Maddux & Yuki, 2006). It therefore follows that, the way people assign responsibility for events consists of a complex amalgamation of personal, psychological, and situational factors.

Attribution theory has provided researchers with a basis for investigating how the victims of crime are perceived. According to Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 23), "attribution theory deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it is combined to form causal judgment." Therefore, attribution theory describes people as information processors who search for facets to explain what is happening or has happened (Kim, Johnson, & Workman, 1994). Attribution theory proposes that people are active in interpreting the events in their lives and use logical modes of sense making when interpreting events (Heider, 1958). This is thought to serve the purpose of helping individuals to understand and control the world around them. Heider (1958) differentiates between two forms of attribution: 1) *internal attribution* (the person behaves in such a way because of something about them) and 2) *external attribution* (the person is behaving in a certain way because of something about the situation they are in). When applying this dichotomy to a rape scenario, victims could therefore be considered to be to blame if internal attribution is utilized, whereas less blame would be attributed to them if external attribution is utilized, by placing more emphasis on the situation rather than the individual themselves (Rotter, 1996).

Several theories have been proposed to explain the phenomenon of victim blaming. One theory which is central to the literature is the *defensive attribution hypothesis* (Cann, Calhoun, & Selby, 1979; Kanekar & Vaz, 1983; Muller, Caldwell, & Hunter, 1994; Shaver, 1970; Thornton, Ryckman, & Robbins, 1982). According to this hypothesis, people increase or reduce blame depending on their perceived similarity with the victim and the perceived likelihood of similar future victimization befalling them. Defensive attributions predict negative victim perception to decrease as the similarity of the observer to the victim increases, this being a defense mechanism to protect the observer from being blamed themselves if a similar fate should befall him or her in the future. The second theory which is commonly cited throughout the literature relating to sexual violence is referred to as the *just world theory* (Kleinke & Meyer, 1990; Lerner & Matthews, 1967). This theory states that negative rape victim perception occurs as a result of overcompensation for a seemingly undeserved act. According to this perspective, one has a motivational need to believe that the world is a fair place and that behavioral outcomes are deserved ("people get what they deserve and deserve what they get"), thus maintaining a sense of control and efficacy over the environment. To believe that unfortunate things happen to people without any apparent reason would prove chaotic and would subsequently threaten one's sense of control. Consequently, to perceive the victim as deserving of the misfortune helps to restore the comfortable view of the world as being ordered, fair, and just.

Research indicates that victim blaming is a phenomenon which is observed consistently within rape scenarios. Rape victims, despite being "victims" of a crime are often blamed and denigrated for their role in the rape, even to the extent whereby the victim is held responsible for the assault (Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976; Cann et al., 1979; Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981; Janoff-Bulman, Timko, & Carli, 1985; Muehlenhard, 1988; Muehlenhard & Rogers, 1993). There are a number of variables which have been found to influence the degree to which blame is allocated to the victim of a crime, including perceiver's beliefs, victim characteristics and situational aspects (Horgan & Reeder, 1986). Attribution of blame by observers of rape cases is therefore subject to an infinite number of fluctuating variables which are likely to influence every situation in a unique and unpredictable manner. In order to help understand why individuals

attribute blame in the way they do and account for victim blaming, it is vital to identify the contributing factors and variables which may result in the propagated social milieu of rape victim denigration and blame.

This paper explores the role of rape myth acceptance, gender role attitudes, and victim substance use on the allocation of rape blame attribution, and tentatively examines how attribution theory and just world beliefs can be utilized to account for the phenomenon of victim blaming in cases of rape. These aspects have been selected on the basis of a strong empirical research literature base, which demonstrates the impact of these variables on attribution of blame in rape cases. The current review provides a coherent synthesis of these findings in order to summarize how certain observer characteristics (rape myth acceptance, gender role conformity) and victim/perpetrator characteristics (substance use) influence the way in which individuals allocate blame to individuals within rape cases. The impact of both observer and victim characteristics on attributive decision making has immense implications for decision-making within the criminal justice system. It is therefore vital for us to understand which inherent variables influence the way in which we attribute blame within scenarios and the directional influence that these variables exert on the attributive process, in order to identify inherent biases which may adversely affect the decisions made within the criminal justice system (e.g. jury decision making).

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Rape myth acceptance

The concept of rape mythology was introduced in the 1970s (Brownmiller, 1975) by the feminist movement. Rape myths are described as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists" (Burt, 1980, p. 217). They are considered to be "attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 134). Essentially, rape myths are consistently held beliefs which are thought to sustain male sexual violence against women within society and perpetuate the social milieu of victim blaming. Rape myths are thought to also be used as a cognitive tool to turn off social prohibitions (Burt, 1980, p. 282), trivialize and justify the sexual aggression of men against women, thereby allowing potential rapists to minimize the seriousness of their offense (Bohner, Siebler, & Schmelcher, 2006, p. 286). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994, p. 134) identify rape myths as "attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women", again identifying the role of such cognitive distortions in the justification and propagation of male violence against women within our society.

Rape myths vary among societies and cultures. However, they consistently follow a pattern whereby, they *blame the victim for their rape*, *express a disbelief in claims of rape*, *exonerate the perpetrator* and *allude that only certain types of women are raped* (Bohner et al., 1998; Briere, Malamuth, & Check, 1985; Burt, 1980, 1991; Costin, 1985; Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, 1995). Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999) further subcategorized these types into seven main domains of female rape myth: 1) "she asked for it"; 2) "it wasn't really rape"; 3) "he didn't mean to"; 4) "she wanted it"; 5) "she liked it"; 6) "rape is a trivial event"; and 7) "rape is a deviant event". Identification of such commonly held and inaccurate beliefs has helped to explain partly why sexual violence against women is still propagated within our society today.

Rape myth acceptance is measured by a variety of psychometric tools, including the Attitudes Towards Rape Scale (ATR) (Field, 1978a); the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS) (Burt, 1980), the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS) (Payne et al., 1999), the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression Scale (AMMSA) (Gerger et al., 2007), the Perceived Causes of Rape Scale (PCRS) (Cowan & Quinton, 1997), and the R Scale (Costin, 1985). These scales typically assess the degree to which rape myths are endorsed by individuals and provide an insight into the way individuals view the victims and perpetrators of rape.

Rape myth acceptance is no longer considered to be a benign issue within the rape literature. Research has identified a consistent and devastating impact of rape myth acceptance within a variety of settings (Abbey, McAuslan, & Ross, 1998; Allison & Wrightsman, 1993; Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Bohner et al., 1998; Field, 1978a; Frohmann, 1991; Koralewski & Conger, 1992; Lambert & Raichle, 2000; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Malamuth, 1981; Malamuth & Check, 1985; Mynatt & Allgeier, 1990; Tieger, 1981). Rape myth acceptance/endorsement impacts on a variety of real world issues. First, endorsement of rape myths such as "she lied" results in an inaccurate portrayal and perception of the number of false rape allegations that are made by women. This figure is consistently over-estimated by observers, including those working within the Criminal Justice System, whereas research indicates that the actual number of false allegations falls at approximately 2% (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Rape myths which are congruent with the concept that the victim is lying about the assault foster and propagate the perception that victims are not true victims of rape.

Second, research indicates that high rape myth acceptance in men is associated with a higher rape proclivity and therefore a higher likelihood of being a perpetrator of rape (Bohner et al., 1998; Briere & Malamuth, 1983; Malamuth, 1981; Malamuth & Check, 1985; Tieger, 1981). This finding is also supported by research conducted with convicted and self-confessed rapists, who reported higher levels of rape myth acceptance than control participants (Field, 1978a; Koralewski & Conger, 1992). It has been suggested that rape myths may act as "psychological neutralizers" that allow men to turn off social prohibitions against hurting others when they want to use force in sexual interactions — indicating that rape myths can be utilized as a dangerous weapon for potential rapists to justify their violent tendencies.

Third, rape myth acceptance encourages a culture of victim blaming. Rape myths typically feed into the belief that the victim was to blame for the rape and minimize and justify the actions of the rapist. Research confirms this assertion, showing that high levels of rape myth acceptance are consistently associated with high levels of victim blaming (Abbey et al., 1998; Lambert & Raichle, 2000; Mynatt & Allgeier, 1990). Such victim blaming ideologies are so pervasive that they also factor into the discretionary decisions made by police or prosecutors and as such have an enormous impact on conviction rates and prosecution of cases. Frohmann (1991), for example, found that prosecutors were less likely to take on rape cases when a victim admitted to having *flirted with an offender prior to an incident*, *allowed him to take her home*, *consented to some sexual acts*, or *was intoxicated* at the time of the assault. This is likely to be a result of rape myth ideologies and schemas linking to victim blaming being highlighted or reinforced by the victim's behavior. Ben-David and Schneider (2005) have created an interesting triadic representation to describe how rape myths feed into the phenomenon of victim blaming. They state that within the context of rape myth acceptance victim blame is expressed in three ways: *victim masochism* (i.e., women enjoy being raped), *victim precipitation* (women are responsible for their victimization) and *victim fabrication* (women lie about having been raped). Rape myth acceptance is therefore synonymous with the concepts of victim blaming and each serves to propagate one another.

It is clear, therefore, that acceptance or endorsement of rape myths has a significant impact on: 1) *the way victims of rape are*

perceived, 2) *the way victims of rape are treated*, and 3) *the propagation of a cultural acceptance of rape and a rape-supportive society*. Research supports this assertion, showing that rape myths are a primary social force in the maltreatment of female rape victims (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Campbell & Johnson, 1997; Du Mont, Miller, & Myhr, 2003). Belief in rape myths, therefore, not only affects the labeling and reporting of the crime, but it also affects people's reactions to and perceptions of both the victim and the offender (Blumberg & Lester, 1991); ergo attribution of blame is likely to be heavily influenced by an individual's level of rape myth acceptance or endorsement.

Rape myth acceptance has been described as a form of general cognitive schema which serves to unconsciously influence the way blame is attributed within rape scenarios. Research exploring the impact of rape myth acceptance has revealed that rape myth acceptance influences a variety of aspects within the attribution process (e.g., Jones & Aronson, 1973; Krahe, 1991; Pollard, 1992). A core finding revealed that those individuals with high rape myth acceptance are more likely to attribute the victim with a greater level of responsibility for the rape and a lesser level of responsibility to the perpetrator. Similarly, individuals with high rape myth acceptance are more likely to perceive the trauma as less severe and less likely to suggest that victims report the rape to the police (Frese, Moya, & Megı´as, 2004; Krahe, 1988). These findings demonstrate the cognitive bias which is inflicted when observers process information about a rape scenario, in the form of cognitive schemas which influence and guide the way information is processed and causal attributions are made.

Rape myth acceptance as a cognitive schema may also serve to self-perpetuate a more general and more encompassing cognitive motive, referred to as the 'belief in a just world' (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009). It has been suggested that adherence to the cognitive schema suggesting that the victim is more to blame, provides congruence with the already held belief that people generally get what they deserve. So in the case of sexual violence, rape myths offer an explanation as to why rape victims "get what they deserve" (e.g., they did not do enough to protect themselves, or they precipitated their own victimization). To believe that rape victims are innocent and not deserving of their fate is incongruous with the general belief in a just world; therefore in order to avoid cognitive dissonance, rape myths serve to protect an individual's belief in a just world. These suggestions are supported with research evidence which demonstrate that individuals with high rape myth acceptance also display high levels of belief in a just world (Bohner, 1998; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Gender differences within rape myth acceptance have also been observed. Research utilizing both student and non-student samples has consistently demonstrated that men are more accepting of rape myths than women (Ashton, 1982; Blumberg & Lester, 1991; Field, 1978a, 1978b; Fonnow, Richardson, & Wemmerus, 1992; Jenkins & Dambrot, 1987; Margolin, Miller, & Moran, 1989; Reilly, Lott, Caldwell, & DeLuca, 1992; Ward, 1988) and the small number of studies that have contradicted this finding indicate that there is no significant difference between the endorsement of RMA in males and females rather than females scoring more highly than males on measures of rape myth acceptance (Burt & Albin, 1981; Edmonds, Cahoon, & Shipman, 1991; Krahe, 1988). Research indicates that men tend to have less supportive attitudes towards rape victims (Ward, 1988), are more tolerant of rape (Hall, Howard, & Boezio, 1986), have less empathy towards victims (Brady, Chrisler, Hosdale, Osowiecki, & Veal, 1991; Dietz, Tiemann-Blackwell, Daley, & Bentley, 1982), are less intensely concerned about rape (Young & Thiessen, 1992), and are more blaming and denigrating of sexual assault victims (Field, 1978a). Men are also less likely to interpret a situation of forced sexual intercourse as rape, more likely to view the situation as less violent and are more likely to perceive the victim as wanting sexual intercourse (Bridges, 1991; Carr & VanDeusen, 2004; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Such gender differences are likely to demonstrate a form of self-serving bias, whereby individuals identify with members of their in-group and hold less favorable attitudes towards members of their out-group. Therefore, men are more likely to demonstrate an affinity for the perpetrators of rape, whereas women are more likely to empathize with the victims and this is translated into higher or lower levels of rape myth acceptance, respectively.

Although research typically demonstrates that women are less endorsing of rape myths and less victim blaming than men (Burt, 1983; Check & Malamuth, 1985; Fischer, 1986; Krahe, 1988; Linz, Donnerstein, & Adams, 1989; Muehlenhard & MacNaughton, 1988; Quackenbush, 1989), some early research reports a lack of gender differences in RMA and victim blame scores (e.g., Burt, 1980; Krahe, 1988; Wiener, Wiener, & Grisso, 1989). Such findings can be explained within the realms of the attribution theory. Women are likely to feel more personally similar to the victim of a rape scenario and as such will employ defensive attribution as a means of protecting themselves from a similar fate. If individuals can dissociate themselves from a similar victim and ergo scenario, they can reduce the cognitive dissonance that is produced by the possibility of also becoming a victim of rape. It is suggested that defensive attribution modulates the effect of victim blaming by using the endorsement of rape myths to reassert the belief that the victim is "different" to them. This proposition is supported by the findings indicating a positive correlation between rape myth acceptance and victim blame (Jones & Aronson, 1973; Krahe, 1991; Pollard, 1992), and may help to explain why some research has found a lack of gender differences in the attribution of rape blame with women often blaming the victim of the rape to the same degree as men (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Burt, 1980; Krahe, 1988). It is, therefore, suggested that "belief in a just world" and defensive attribution may operate independently but exert influence in the same direction by increasing levels of attributed victim blame, and that this is a process that is moderated by the schemas that are reinforced by rape myth acceptance.

2.2. Gender roles

From very early on in life men and women are socialized very differently. Gender roles are assigned during the socialization process, and these roles impact upon our behavior and our beliefs about ourselves and others. Anderson and Doherty (1997, p. 303) describe this process by stating that "men and women are shaped almost entirely by the society and the institution in which they live in; this is the socialization process." Gender role socialization influences numerous types of human behavior, including that of sexual behavior. Males are generally socialized to be the initiators of sexual interactions, more dominant and initiate sexual overtures; women on the other hand are socialized to be more passive (Bridges, 1991; Jenkins & Dambrot, 1987). Sex role socialization theory suggests that rape between dating partners should be viewed less as rape and more as part of normal sexual interactions (Littleton, 2001) as forced intercourse supports the role of the male as the dominant party who initiates sexual overtures. As such, sex role socialization provides some form of explanation for why men are sexually aggressive and why the act of rape is normalized within society.

Attitudes towards rape seem to be linked to traditional gender role stereotypes, in particular those related to sexual behavior (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Willis, 1992). The sex role socialization analysis of rape (Burt, 1980) suggests that rape is seen as an extension of traditional gender roles. The theory proposes that men and women develop expectations of gender role behaviors during sexual interaction as a result of developmental processes and social prescriptions. Society views men as powerful, dominant, and aggressive and women as weak, feeble, and fragile. Burt further asserted that sexually aggressive behavior is supported through cultural attitudes that promote false beliefs about rape and a hostile environment

towards rape victims. Traditional gender roles were found by Burt (1980) to be a significant predictor of rape myth acceptance and, in turn, are responsible for individuals harboring negative blaming attitudes towards victims of rape.

Research has identified a significant link between gender role stereotypes and attitudes towards rape (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997; Burt, 1980; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995; Willis, 1992). In line with feminist theorizing, gender role stereotyping has been found to be predictive of prejudicial attitudes towards the victims of rape. Early research demonstrated a significant link between traditional gender role attitudes and rape myth acceptance (Check & Malamuth, 1983, 1985; Costin, 1985; Costin & Schwarz, 1987; Field, 1978a; Hall et al., 1986; Mayerson & Taylor, 1987; Schwartz & Brand, 1983). The majority of research shows an association between unfavorable attitudes towards rape victims and acceptance of adversarial sexual beliefs and traditional attitudes towards women's roles.

Gender role attitudes have also been linked to observer evaluation of fault in rape scenarios, whereby endorsement of traditional gender role stereotypes typically results in higher levels of victim blaming (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Kopper, 1996; Simonson & Subich, 1999; Willis, 1992). Generally, research has found that people with more traditional attitudes are harsher on the victim and more lenient towards the perpetrator than people with feminist attitudes (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Kruelwitz & Payne, 1978; Williams, 1979). More specifically, beliefs in traditional gender role stereotyping, sexual conservatism and sex role orientation have been linked to negative rape victim perception (Burt, 1980; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973) with those exhibiting more sexually conservative views blaming the victim to a greater extent. Traditional sex role beliefs, therefore, appear to translate into a less positive appraisal of rape victims, with those who hold less traditional sex role beliefs typically attributing less responsibility or blame to the rape victim (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Jensen & Gutek, 1982).

Interestingly, research indicates that sex role attitudes significantly impact upon causal attributions, independently of gender. Simms, Noel, and Maisto (2007), for example, found that the more participants endorsed traditional attitudes about women's places in society the more likely they were to blame the rape on the female. This finding was consistent, regardless of participant gender, thereby indicating that conservative traditional values about women and their role within society is a key determining factor for attributing blame in cases of rape. Gender role stereotyping has also been linked to self-confessed propensity of sexual coercion and ergo rape proclivity. Muehlenhard and Falcon (1990), for example, found that men who accepted traditional roles or believed in male domination were more likely than other men to have engaged in verbal sexual coercion and forceful rape. It is clear, therefore, that gender role stereotyping plays a key role within the schemata that drive causal attributions and assignment of blame.

Research has also implicated the role of sexism within causal attributions and victim blaming. The Attitudes Toward Women Scale (ATWS) developed by Spence and Helmreich (1978) has been utilized within rape blame research and has consistently demonstrated an association between male sexism, negative attitudes towards women, and higher rape myth acceptance (Dietz et al., 1982; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Sexism can be constructed in a variety of formats. Glick and Fiske (1996), for example, differentiate between two forms of sexism: *hostile sexism* (HS) and *benevolent sexism* (BS). HS is characterized by the attitude that women should be punished for defying traditional sexual roles. For example a women who goes out wearing provocative clothes, or drinks excessively goes against what is considered to be the traditional gender role and these women may be responded to with a form of hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, is characterized by the attitude that women who are traditionally feminine should be rewarded. Benevolent sexists, therefore, feel the need to protect women and view women as innocent and pure beings. In this respect, women who challenge or go against the expectations of benevolent sexism will no longer be considered worthy of protection by men. This is likely to translate into higher levels of victim blaming as a result of high hostile and benevolent sexism in men. Research by Glick and Fiske tested this assumption and found that HS attitudes correlated with Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, whereby high levels of rape myth acceptance were positively correlated with high levels of displayed hostile sexism. It is suggested that men who hold sexist attitudes portray women as either "good girls" or "bad girls". Therefore, women who do not behave in a manner consistent with the cultural stereotypes of a "good girl" will be more likely to be blamed for leading their partners on and will be regarded as deserving to be raped (Burt, 1980; Forbes & Adam-Curtis, 2001). In line with these findings, Abrams, Viki, Masser, and Bohner (2003) also found that participants who had high BS values blamed the victim more in cases of acquaintance rape than those participants with low BS values. Interestingly, this finding was not consistent across rape type, with no correlation between BS levels and victim blaming in cases considering stranger rape. This suggests some form of moderating action between sexism and stereotypical sexual relationships, whereby the rules of BS do not apply to rape between individuals who are not previously acquainted. Viki, Abrams, and Masser (2004) also found a predictive effect for BS on victim blame, but interestingly found no such effect for HS, suggesting that these two constructs act separately in terms of their impact on attitude formation and causal attributions.

Research has consistently demonstrated a relationship between traditional gender role attitudes and rape myth acceptance (Check & Malamuth, 1983, 1985; Costin, 1985; Costin & Schwarz, 1987; Field, 1978a; Hall et al., 1986; Mayerson & Taylor, 1987; Schwartz & Brand, 1983). The exact relationship between gender role conformity, rape myth acceptance and victim blaming is unclear. However, previous theorists have drawn upon the attribution theory and its components to account for the correlation between RMA and victim blaming (Kenig & Ryan, 1986). It is, therefore, proposed that gender role conformity enhances RMA and ergo victim blaming by reinforcing cognitive schema that support the traditional stereotypical notion that rape victims are deserving of their misfortune.

It is clear that gender role stereotyping and conformity plays a key role within the formation of causal attributions about rape scenarios. The degree to which an observer adheres to traditional gender role beliefs is, therefore, a key factor when assigning levels of responsibility and blame to individuals involved in a rape scenario. This finding has immense implications within the criminal justice process and the courtroom, whereby individual decision-making and attribution formation may be influenced sub-consciously by pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. Continued academic investigation is therefore warranted in order to help us understand the processes involved in attribution formation in cases of sexual violence.

2.3. Substance use

2.3.1. Drug and alcohol assisted rape: facts and figures

Drug and alcohol-facilitated rape is shrouded in a wealth of misperception. In the case of "drug-facilitated" or "alcohol-facilitated" rape, the perpetrator deliberately gives the victim drugs (without her permission) or alcohol in order to orchestrate the rape (Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007). Victims may also be at risk of "incapacitation rape", whereby victims who use drugs and or alcohol voluntarily are targeted (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Despite popular misconception, drugs play a lesser role within such rapes, with the link between alcohol and sexual assault well established within the rape literature internationally (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2001; Horvath & Brown, 2006, 2007; Kelly, Lovett, & Regan, 2005; Ullman, Karabastos, & Koss, 1999; Walby & Allen, 2004). Alcohol is the most common drug associated with

allegations of drug facilitated sexual assaults and many studies contribute to our knowledge about the relationship between "date rape" and alcohol (Girard & Senn, 2008). Scott-Ham and Burton (2005) analyzed 1014 cases of suspected drug-assisted rape in the UK and found alcohol to be the most common substance, being detected in 46% of cases. Despite the prominence of alcohol as a means to facilitate sexual violence, other substances are also utilized, including benzodiazepines, anesthetics, muscle relaxants, and amphetamines. According to Weir (2001), any substance that is administered to lower sexual inhibition and enhances the possibility of unwanted sexual intercourse is potentially a date rape drug. It has been argued that the use of Rohypnol, GHB, and Ketamine for the purpose of inducing amnesia and rapid sedation of the victim is becoming more common (Hensley, 2002; Pope & Shouldice, 2001). However, recent research challenges this assertion and highlights the fact that such cases are grossly over-estimated and exaggerated in the public eye. Scott-Ham and Burton (2005), for example, found that the deliberate use of drugs in order to sedate or disinhibit the victim was evident in approximately 2% of the cases that they analyzed. These figures also support findings from the US and Canada, implicating the prominent role of alcohol and the lesser role of drugs within sexual assault and rape cases (Hindmarch, Elsholy, Gambles, & Salamone, 2001; Seifert, 1999; Slaughter, 2000).

Since the late 1990s, there has been a growing concern about the use of drugs in sexual assaults (Hensley, 2002); and there has been a significant increase in reporting of drug-assisted sexual assaults in countries around the world in the last 5 years (UK — Roofie Foundation, 2004; New Zealand — Devereux, 2002; Australia — Morton & Bedford, 2002). This may, of course not be directly caused by an increase in prevalence, but may instead reflect an increased awareness and ergo increased reporting of the crime. Common drugs reported in association with drug assisted rape are Rohypnol (Flunitrazepam), GHB (gamma hydroxybutyric acid), Ketamine, and MDMA (LeBeau et al., 1999). In the case of drug-assisted rape, a substance is typically added to a victim's drink without her knowledge (Smith, 1999), and the effects of the substance are used in order to overpower the victim and facilitate a sexual assault. Despite considerable research evidence to the contrary (e.g., Hindmarch & Brinkmann, 1999; Seifert, 1999), the myth that men are regularly using drugs, such as Rohypnol, in order to incapacitate and rape women still prevails. As a result of this, the prevalence of *true* drug-assisted rape cases is lower than predicted by the general public and some have challenged this perception by asserting that drug assisted rape is a particularly rare subset of a larger group of rapes where alcohol or drugs are implicated (Horvath & Brown, 2006). It has been argued that the social acceptance and norms surrounding alcohol and drug consumption are leading to a new discourse in victim blaming based on the belief that a woman who has consumed alcohol or drugs is guilty of contributory negligence and, therefore, blameworthy for her own victimization (Horvath & Brown, 2006). This implication alone justifies the need for continued empirical attention in order to establish and identify the potential impact of drug use (voluntary or involuntary) on observer causal attributions in cases of rape and sexual assault.

Consumption of alcohol by both victim and perpetrator has consistently been linked within the sexual violence literature. Although figures vary in accordance with methodology and location, research has shown that more than 75% of the perpetrators and more than 50% of the victims had been consuming alcohol before an assault (Koss, 1985; Koss & Dinero, 1989; LeBeau et al., 1998). In a more recent analysis, Horvath (2006) found that alcohol was the most frequently consumed substance for both victims and perpetrators with 62.8% of victims and 48% of perpetrators having consumed alcohol prior to the attack. Conversely, figures implicating drug use and combined drug and alcohol use were low, again highlighting the misnomer associated with the prevalence of "drug-assisted" rape. This ratio is also supported by Walby and Allen (2004), who reported that 5% of rape victims had been drugged, whereas 15% of the victims were intoxicated at the time of the assault.

2.3.2. The influence of alcohol and drug use on observer rape blame attributions

Research has attempted to ascertain how the presence of alcohol affects attributions towards individuals involved in various rape situations (Richardson & Campbell, 1982). Studies indicate that stereotypical judgments about female sexuality, including those relating to alcohol, impact on both the behavior of perpetrators and the attributional processes of observers, including that of criminal justice agencies and the general public towards sexual assault (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Finch & Munro, 2005; Lees, 2002). Alcohol has been consistently reported by convicted rapists to act as a disinhibitor for the crime, and empirical research supports this assertion, whereby perpetrators often report having consumed alcohol prior to the rape. Grubin and Gunn (1990), for example, found that 58% of a sample of 142 convicted rapists reported having consumed alcohol prior to the rape, and an additional 12% of these men reported having a combination of both alcohol and drugs. Similarly, in a study utilizing a much larger sample of 10,000 convicted rapists, Martin (1992) found that 57% of them had reported drinking alcohol prior to the offense. Although these findings indicate a clear correlation between the use of alcohol and sexual violence, it is important to note that in self-reporting studies participants may over-report drinking in order to minimize personal responsibility and, as such, the results should be interpreted with care.

The role that alcohol plays for the perpetrators of sexual violence is not clear cut. Research indicates that alcohol is often utilized as a scapegoat, whereby sexually violent perpetrators blame alcohol for their actions and are likely to use alcohol intake as a post-offense excuse (Abbey et al., 2001). Kanin (1984), for example, found that 62% of men convicted for date rape felt that they were committed to rape because of alcohol consumption. In this sense, alcohol is used as an excuse for their behavior, which serves to reduce feelings of guilt which may be associated with the act. In addition, men may feel more comfortable forcing sex when drunk because they can later justify to themselves that alcohol made them behave in that manner (Kanin, 1984). In direct and stark contrast to this cognitive process, whereby men diminish or abolish a sense of responsibility for their actions by blaming external influences such as alcohol, women may in fact feel more responsible and resort to victim blaming to a greater degree because they believe that their drunkenness caused or facilitated the rape (Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2008).

It has been suggested that perpetrator intoxication may act to disinhibit sexual and physical aggression and decrease their ability to understand victim's non consensual signals (Collins & Messerschmidt, 1993). As a result, it is purported that men may be more likely to misinterpret friendly or ambiguous cues as signals for sexual interest, therefore, facilitating sexual violence. Furthermore, men who are intoxicated are more willing to dismiss women's cues of unwillingness, which further exacerbates the likelihood of sexual violence occurring (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004; Adam-Curtis & Forbes, 2004; Rickert & Weinmann, 1998). Such an assertion is supported by Norris and Kerr (1993) who found that college students were more likely to report that they would force sex on a date if they were drunk. It is likely that this observation occurs as a result of the disinhibiting effect of alcohol, whereby social norms can be less strictly adhered to as a result of the intoxication process.

Research has shown that attributions vary widely when alcohol is involved in sexual assaults (Adam-Curtis & Forbes, 2004). It appears to work in a variety of formats, whereby either more blame is attributed to the perpetrator for taking advantage of the victim's intoxication or more blame is attributed to the victim for placing/putting themselves at risk by becoming intoxicated; however, the literature tends to support the latter assertion with more vigor. Research has

demonstrated that it is apparent that observers perceive victims who consume alcohol prior to being assaulted as more responsible for the attack than they do to non-intoxicated victims (Richardson & Campbell, 1982). Simms et al.'s (2007) research found that if the female target had been drinking, she was judged as more responsible for the assault than if she had not been drinking. Similarly, Wild, Graham, and Rehm (1998) found that perpetrators are deemed to be less blameworthy when the victim is drunk, regardless of whether the perpetrator has consumed alcohol or not. Scronce and Corcoran (1991) found that a date rape victim who had consumed alcohol prior to a sexual attack was perceived by participants as more promiscuous, seductive, flirtatious, and sexually provocative than a victim who had not consumed alcohol prior to the attack. In line with this, participants were also more likely to blame the victim for the rape if she had consumed alcohol prior to the attack.

Research in support of the initial assertion exists, but in less abundance. Wall and Schuller (2000), for example, found that intoxicated victims were not deemed as more responsible when assaulted by a sober perpetrator. In the same vein, Norris and Cubbins (1992) found that males and females were less likely to interpret a sexually violent scenario as a "rape" if only the female had been drinking, and more likely to think a rape had occurred when both parties were intoxicated. Wall and Schuller (2000) account for this finding by suggesting that voluntary consumption of alcohol together may be misinterpreted by both the perpetrator and observers as a sign of sexual intent. It is clear from these findings, that the existence of alcohol within any rape scenario is likely to impact upon the attributions which are made by observers. It is, therefore, vital to understand how alcohol impacts upon the decision-making processes of those involved with the prosecution of rape cases and the support of victims of sexual violence. There are significant implications for a large percentage of the victims of sexual assault, whereby the derogation of alcohol consuming individuals may make them reluctant to seek legal and social support for the assault because of fear of being blamed for the attack or their veracity and credibility being questioned.

When exploring research relating to perpetrator intoxication, the literature reveals a counterintuitive double standard which renders intoxicated perpetrators of rape as less responsible for their actions than sober perpetrators (Richardson & Campbell, 1982). This is, of course, in stark contrast to the attributional effect observed with victim intoxication, whereby victims of rape who are intoxicated are held more responsible and more to blame for the rape (Richardson & Campbell, 1982). Stormo, Lang, and Stritzke (1997, p. 303) state that "the females intoxication is as sufficient grounds for her partial condemnation, while for the male perpetrator intoxication is regarded as a mitigating circumstance warranting at least some form of clemency in judging his behavior." Men are somehow granted intoxication as an excuse for their behavior and judged more leniently on this basis, whereas women are afforded the opposite response and judged more harshly. This type of bias in terms of attribution formation is likely to impact upon decision making throughout the criminal justice process, and is, therefore, likely to adversely affect the responses to the victims of rape at every stage of the process. Formulations which are influenced by stereotypical judgments, such as the demonizing of women who consume alcohol, are likely to provide some explanation for the high attrition rate observed within rape cases.

There is limited research on attitudes and attributions towards victims and perpetrators in drug related rape in comparison to the plethora of alcohol related rape literature. Girard and Senn (2008) suggest that drug-assisted rape may be viewed differently as a result of the legal implications and stigma associated with illicit drug use. Their research supports this assertion whereby they found that when women are drugged or deliberately provided with large amounts alcohol without their knowledge the perpetrators are held to be more responsible and more blameworthy than when no alcohol or drugs were involved in the situation. This suggests that individuals may be more punitive to offenders and blame victims less in cases where drugs and alcohol are used as a weapon of rape. Rape which has occurred following recreational or voluntary drug use by the victim, is, however, viewed very differently. Girard and Senn (2008), for example, found that women who engage in recreational drug use are judged more harshly by observers and the perpetrators of the sexual assault are marginally excused. In their research, female victims were judged to be most blameworthy when they had taken drugs voluntarily, as opposed to when they were sober, or their drink had been "spiked" with GHB. These findings suggest that when a woman willingly intoxicates herself with drugs, she is more likely to be judged more harshly and attributed with higher levels of blame. The implications of this suggestion are immense, in terms of the way observers are likely to make causal attributions about parties involved in rape cases. Such observers constitute members of the jury, who may in turn make inaccurate or ill-informed decisions on the basis of such prejudicial and stereotypical responses to victims of drug assisted rape.

3. Conclusion and future directions

This literature review has drawn upon several aspects that influence an individual's beliefs about rape blame attribution. Rape myths, gender roles, and the consumption of alcohol and/or drugs have all been shown to affect the way in which individuals attribute levels of blame in rape cases. One area which has not been covered within the remit of this review is the impact of the type of relationship between the victim and perpetrator on attributions of blame in rape cases. This is an area that has received extensive academic attention, with key findings demonstrating that the victims of stranger rape are allocated more blame than those who are acquainted with their attacker (see Grubb & Harrower, 2008 for a review). It is worth noting that the majority of the studies included within this review focus on the impact of observer/victim characteristics on rape blame attribution in cases of stranger rape. In light of the extensive literature supporting the impact of type of rape on rape blame attribution, it would, therefore, be prudent to suggest the need for further academic exploration of these variables on depictions of date and acquaintance rape in order to verify and triangulate the findings of the current review.

In summary, research demonstrates that rape myth acceptance is linked to attributions of blame in rape cases, with high levels of rape myth acceptance translating into higher levels of victim blame. This finding, although demonstrated mainly within artificial experimental manipulations, is far from benign. Research indicates that this relationship is a meaningful correlation as attributions of blame often form reliable indicators of final verdict (Burt & Albin, 1981). Fischer (1995) found, for example, that within the context of intoxicated sexual consent scenarios, 89% of participants who attributed some level of blame to the complainant/victim and less than complete blame to the defendant/perpetrator voted not guilty. Such a meaningful link between attributions of blame and final verdict is therefore potentially damaging to the prosecution of rape cases and may go some way to explaining the low conviction rate observed within rape cases. Further research is, therefore, warranted in order to clearly dissect the involvement of rape myth acceptance and attributions and their combined impact on decision making, especially within the court/trial process.

The literature supports the assertion that gender role conformity and attitudes about traditional gender role stereotyping play a role within the formation of attributions about rape victims. The majority of the research supports the finding that those individuals who possess more traditional gender role attitudes are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of victim blame, in line with the contention that women who deviate slightly from what is perceived as the traditional

female role are therefore responsible to some extent for their victimization (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Burt, 1980; Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Kopper, 1996; Kruelwitz & Payne, 1978; Simonson & Subich, 1999; Spence et al., 1973; Williams, 1979; Willis, 1992). Again, this finding has significant implications for the potential influence of internal biases which may skew the decision-making processes of individuals involved in the prosecution of rape cases. It may be advantageous for individuals involved in trials, particularly jurors, to be made aware of the potential impact of their own gender role attitudes on their decision-making processes, in order to prevent internal attributional biases.

There is a large body of research examining the role of substance abuse on attributions of blame within cases of rape. Research highlights the significant role of alcohol within rape cases and identifies the impact of alcohol consumption on causal attributions formed about sexual violence. Despite popular misconception, alcohol is the prominent drug utilized within "drug-assisted rape", whereby it is used to facilitate sexual intercourse by means of incapacitation of the victim. Alcohol is also utilized by the perpetrators of rape in order to disinhibit social morality and justify actions after the event. The key finding of this review demonstrates the significant impact of alcohol consumption on the formation of attributions of blame about rape victims. Victims are typically blamed to a greater extent when they have consumed alcohol prior to the rape (Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Scronce & Corcoran, 1991; Simms et al., 2007; Wild et al., 1998), although some research reports an opposite effect (Norris & Cubbins, 1992; Wall & Schuller, 2000). It is suggested that observers resort to just world theorizing in order to form attributions about rape cases, whereby victims who place themselves at risk by becoming intoxicated are blamed to some extent for precipitating their own victimization. Defensive attribution may also play a role, whereby observers do not want to believe that a similar fate could befall them and therefore distance themselves from this possibility by blaming the victim and concluding that they would never put themselves in the same situation, therefore the victim must be to blame. In light of these findings, it may be prudent to educate authorities in order to make them aware that attributions about alcohol consumption can affect the way in which victims are perceived, and therefore, treated.

While the findings of this review contribute to the rape attribution literature and have implications for criminal justice settings, it is worth noting that there are a number of methodological limitations which detract from the impact of such findings. A large majority of the empirical research relating to both rape myth acceptance and gender role conformity has been conducted within the 1980s and early 1990s and there is, therefore, a lack of contemporary research focusing on the impact of these factors on rape blame attribution. This is an area which would benefit from current academic investigation to explore whether the impact of these factors is still valid within our society today. In addition, there are a number of pragmatic methodological considerations which also warrant discussion. The use of a variety of paradigms to measure rape blame attribution is a commonly discussed methodological limitation within the literature, whereby it becomes difficult to make a credible comparison and conclusion on the basis of different methodological formats utilized across studies. The majority of studies tend to utilize a scenario/vignette based design whereby observers are exposed to vignettes depicting rape scenarios with a number of variables manipulated in order to assess whether such variables influence the degree to which a rape victim is blamed for the rape. There are, however, methodological limitations within this format alone. For example, the artificiality created by such a methodological paradigm, compounded by the high level of demand characteristics introduced by experimental conditions, limits the generalizability of these findings in terms of real-life rape perception required during legal rape cases. There is also a common use of undergraduate university students as participants within such research which introduces further limitations with respect to homogeneity of participants. Such methodological limitations must be borne in mind when assessing the impact of such findings on real world decision making.

This present review selects three aspects from the vast body of rape blame attribution literature which have been demonstrated to influence the way in which individuals attribute blame within rape scenarios and produces a coherent synopsis of the research pertaining to each factor. As such, this review helps to clarify the overall impact of these factors on the attribution formation process by synthesizing vast quantities of research which independently focus on rape myth acceptance, gender role conformity, and substance use, respectively. This review has highlighted the malleability of attribution formation and the potential for biased cognitions to impact upon the decision-making of individuals involved in the prosecution of rape cases. Further empirical attention into the actual cognitive processes involved in attribution formation may help to identify how such biases influence blame attributions and ergo prospective ways to avoid such biased attributions being formed. This would undoubtedly affect the way juries make their decisions, and therefore, may have an impact upon the outcome of rape cases, with a potential to increase the low conviction rate observed internationally.

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