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Predicting Perceptions of Date Rape: An Examination of Perpetrator Motivation, Relationship Length, and Gender Role Beliefs

David J. Angelone, PhD,[1] Damon Mitchell, PhD,[2] and Lauren Lucente, BA[1]

Abstract

The purpose of the current study is to examine the influence of multiple offender motivations (including no indication of a motivation), relationship length, and gender role beliefs on perceptions of a male-on-female date rape. A sample of 348 U.S. college students read a brief vignette depicting a date rape and completed a questionnaire regarding their attributions about the victim (culpability, credibility, trauma, pleasure) and perpetrator (culpability, guilt, sentencing recommendations). Results indicate that providing observers with information about the perpetrator's motivation was associated with lower victim blame. Relationship length is not predictive of rape attributions. Egalitarian gender role attitudes are associated with lower levels of victim blame. Overall, gender role attitudes exert a more significant influence on rape attributions than participant gender. The findings suggest that knowledge of an offender's motivation as well as observers' gender role attitudes can influence attributions about the culpability of victims and perpetrators of date rape.

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rape perceptions, motivation, gender role beliefs, date rape

Rape victims may be scrutinized more closely and are held more responsible for their victimization than other kinds of crime victims. Furthermore, the opinions of potential jurors in rape cases may be influenced by a variety of factors tangential to the evidence of the case (Feild, 1979). In fact, a large volume of literature has explored these "extra legal" factors and has found that personal characteristics of the victim, perpetrator, and potential juror may influence the degree to which a potential juror holds the victim and the perpetrator responsible for the assault (see Pollard, 1992, and Ward, 1995, for a review). This research has generally focused on college student observers as a proxy for how potential jurors might react to and attribute blame and responsibility to a victim and perpetrator of a sexual assault. The literature summarizing the influences of perceptions of sexual victimization experiences appears to distinguish two broad categories of factors: situational and observer variables. Following suit, the purpose of the current study was to examine male and female college students' perceptions of a victim and a perpetrator of a date rape, with particular focus on how knowledge about the perpetrator's motivation and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator (both situational variables) might influence such perceptions over and above participant gender and participant gender role beliefs (observer variables).

Situational Variables

Situational variables in this study refer to the environmental contexts within which the sexual assault occurs, as well as the personal characteristics of the victim and the perpetrator portrayed in written or auditory sexual assault stimuli. In terms of context, the type of relationship between the victim and the perpetrator has been demonstrative of influencing rape attributions. In general, the closer the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator (e.g., marital vs. acquaintance vs. stranger) the more likely observers are to perceive the assault as consensual and the less likely they are to view the incident as a serious concern (Monson, Byrd, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1996). For example, compared to situations involving strangers, there is greater attribution of responsibility and blame assigned to the victim and less to the perpetrator for rapes that occur on dates (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Bridges & McGrail, 1989; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Rebeiz & Harb, 2010; Simonson & Subich, 1999). One explanation for this

bias against victims of acquaintance rape is the prototype of rape as an act that occurs between strangers. Thus, the better acquainted the victim and the perpetrator, the greater the violation of the prototype, and the greater the bias against the victim (Buddie & Miller, 2001). Also, because women are considered the "gatekeepers" of sexuality they are held accountable for the sexual behavior of both parties, especially with dates or spouses as compared to strangers (Abrams et al., 2003).

In regard to victim characteristics, women who are physically attractive (Deitz, Littman, & Bentley, 1984), dress provocatively (Whatley, 2005), are sexually promiscuous (L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Schuller & Hastings, 2002), are acquainted with the perpetrator (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Hammock & Richardson, 1997), or who are intoxicated at the time of the sexual assault (Hammock & Richardson, 1997; Johnson, Benson, Teasdale, Simmons, & Reed, 1997) are attributed more blame and responsibility (see also Pollard, 1992, for review). As for perpetrator characteristics, men who are physically unattractive (Deitz & Byrnes, 1981), hold less prestigious jobs (Deitz & Byrnes, 1981), or commit an interracial sexual assault (George & Martinez, 2002) are attributed more blame and responsibility.

The influence of perpetrator motivation on perceptions of the victim and the perpetrator has recently received attention in the literature (Mitchell, Angelone, Kohlberger, & Hirschman, 2009). Although there is much controversy about actual rape motivations, theoretical and empirical work examining the motivation of male rapists has noted both sexual and nonsexual motivations among offenders (Polaschek & Ward, 2002; Terry, 2006). However, although these motivations have been discussed in the theoretical and clinical literature, there is a lack of research detailing the prevalence of each motivation. Nonetheless, a summary of the perceived motivations suggests a number of consistently identified constructs.

Sexually driven offenders are characterized as experiencing high levels of arousal that lead to an immediate need to gratify themselves sexually without regard for a woman's consent (Barbaree & Marshall, 1991; Hall & Hirschman, 1991; Holmes, 1991; Malamuth, 2003). A number of different types of nonsexually driven offenders have been proposed; among these are (a) *power/control* (referring to offenders who experience sexual arousal from physically controlling their victim and asserting their authority over the victim; Brownmiller, 1975; Herman, 1990; Ward, 1995), (b) *anger* (referring to offenders who vent anger at women in general or a specific woman through rape; Knight & Prentky, 1990), (c) *vindictiveness* (referring to offenders who use rape as a means of seeking revenge for perceived injustice by women; Knight & Prentky, 1990), and (d) *entitlement* (referring to offenders who rape under the belief that they are

entitled to the sexual activity without regard for the victim's preferences or consent; Bouffard, 2010; Terry, 2006). Although the relevance of offender motivation in the assessment and treatment of sexual offenders has been long established, its relevance to observer perceptions of sexual assault has been relatively unexplored.

To date, two studies examining the influence of perpetrator motivation on victim blaming have appeared in the peer-reviewed literature. Selby and colleagues (Selby, Calhoun, & Cann, 1979) examined 82 female undergraduates and found that a violence-motivated offender was assigned more punishment than a sexually motivated offender. More recently, Mitchell and colleagues (2009) examined 171 male and female undergraduates and found that participants are more punitive toward the offender and more sensitive to a victim during a violence-motivated rape compared to a sex-motivated rape. In terms of gender differences, men were generally more likely than women to blame the victim and exculpate the perpetrator, especially in the sex-motivated rape. Although some consistency has been demonstrated, both studies utilized stranger rape vignettes and limited offender motivation to a dichotomous sexual versus violence variable. Thus, there is a paucity of research examining offender motivation in cases of a date rape. Furthermore, although previous research has examined different motivations to determine their relative influence on observer attributions, no study has examined whether providing observers with knowledge about the perpetrator's motivation influences attributions differentially from observers without this knowledge. In sum, although the aforementioned researchers have demonstrated that participants overall are more punitive to a violently motivated perpetrator compared to a sexually motivated perpetrator, it is unknown how knowledge about motivation compares to a neutral condition, wherein there is no information provided about perpetrator motivation.

Observer Variables

Observer variables, in this study, refer to the personal characteristics of the participants asked to provide their perceptions of the victim and the perpetrator of written or auditory sexual assault stimuli. By far, the most ubiquitous observer variable examined is participant gender. In general, compared to women, male observers attribute more responsibility to the victim, are more likely to perceive the victim's behavior as inviting the sexual activity and provoking the assault, and perceiving the victim as experiencing more pleasure from the assault. On the other hand, female observers view the crime more seriously, have more empathy for the victim, support prosecuting the

perpetrator, and recommend longer prison sentences than men (Bell et al., 1994; Brems & Wagner, 1994; Foley, Evancic, Karnik, King, & Parks, 1995; Schult & Schneider, 1991; Szymanski, Devlin, Chrisler, & Vyse, 1993; Thornton, Ryckman, & Robbins, 1982; Whatley, 2005).

More recently, researchers have suggested that gender role attitudes also can influence attributions of blame and perhaps even mediate the relationship between gender and perceptions of sexual assault situations (Abrams et al., 2003; Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997). Individuals who embrace traditional gender roles believe women are fragile, passive, and submissive. They perceive women as responsible for household chores, child rearing, and maintaining positive family relationships. On the other hand, individuals who embrace nontraditional gender roles believe that men and women are egalitarian and should share equally in the responsibilities of maintaining a household and embracing sexuality, including beliefs that women have control over their own bodies and lives (Bem, 1974; Simonson & Subich, 1999). Over the past few decades, research has demonstrated that observers who embrace traditional gender roles tend to accept rape myths and attribute more responsibility and blame to a victim of sexual assault. These individuals are also less likely to view unwanted sexual activity as traumatic and are more likely to rationalize the behavior of a perpetrator relative to individuals with nontraditional beliefs (Anderson et al., 1997) and lower rape myth acceptance (Basow & Minieri, 2011; Frese, Moya, & Megías, 2004).

One related and groundbreaking study that examined the influence of both situational and observer variables, including gender, gender role attitudes, and dating context, was conducted by Muehlenhard and colleagues (Muehlenhard, Friedman, & Thomas, 1985). In their study, male participants were exposed to vignettes portraying two students who go on a date, in order to identify the circumstances that increase rape justifiability in date rape. The vignettes describe the dates while manipulating three variables: (1) initiator of the date, (2) type of date activity, and (3) who paid for the date. Beliefs about women and gender roles also were assessed via the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS; Spence & Helmreich, 1972). In the end, justifiability of rape was greatest when the woman initiated the date, when the couple went to an apartment to talk, and when the man paid for the date. In addition, traditional beliefs were associated with greater rape justifiability. The findings suggest that for certain situations, such as when the man pays for the date and a woman agrees to go to his apartment, the expectation for individuals who adhere to traditional beliefs about gender roles is that sex will occur. Any resistance on the behalf of the woman would suggest she has "led him on,"

thus, increasing the level of victim blame and responsibility and simultaneously exculpating the perpetrator.

The Present Study

The present study builds on previous research by examining four offender motivations as well as no indication of a motivation on participants' reactions to a male perpetrator and a female victim in a date rape situation. Specific motivations were operationalized based on sex, entitlement, rejection, and power/control as these have been discussed in the motivational literature on rape (Terry, 2006). Also, given that Muehlenhard and colleagues (1985) found that levels of victim blame were maximized in the environmental contexts in which traditional gender roles were portrayed (i.e., the man asks for and subsequently pays for a date), as well as the implicit suggestion via location that the victim was inviting sexual activity (by going to his apartment on a first date), we developed a vignette that included these contextual features. Our goal was to examine the influence of relationship length and perpetrator motivation in traditional dating situations that presumably maximize the tendency for observers to view rape as justifiable.

Based on previous research, it was hypothesized that male participants would endorse more victim blame than female participants. However, we were also interested in whether gender role beliefs would exert a more powerful influence over participant gender on attributions, such that traditional beliefs would lead to more victim blame and responsibly for the assault over and above the influence of participant gender. Also, participants exposed to a dating couple were expected to endorse more victim blame than participants exposed to a couple experiencing a first date. We also expected that the motivations associated with perpetrator anger/violence (e.g., entitlement, rejection, and power/control) would be associated with lower levels of victim blame. However, given the exploratory nature of providing or withholding knowledge of the offender motivation as a relevant variable, no specific predictions were made in this regard.

Method

Participants

A total of 384 participants from a public university in the Northeastern United States were recruited through a psychology department participant pool. Data from 36 participants were excluded from analyses because they failed

a manipulation check, leaving a final sample of 348 participants. The group of participants excluded from data analyses was not significantly different from the final sample in age, percent male, and percent White. The final sample constituted 54% (n = 189) male participants, whose average age was 19.8 years (SD = 3.2). With respect to ethnic background, 74% (n = 259) of participants identified themselves as White, 14% (n = 49) as African American, 5% (n = 17) as Latino, 3% (n = 11) as Asian, and 3% (n = 12) of some other ethnic background.

Materials

Stimulus. Participants were randomly assigned to read 1 of 10 vignettes that described a male-on-female date rape. The vignettes were identical except in the information provided about the length of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim and the motivation of the perpetrator for the assault. The length of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator was systematically varied as either first date or 6 months. The motivation of the perpetrator was systematically varied as one of five conditions: (1) neutral (no information on the perpetrator's motivation provided), (2) entitlement (perpetrator indicates to the victim that he deserves to have sex as he bought her dinner), (3) rejection (perpetrator becomes angry at the victim for not wanting to have sex with him), (4) power/control (perpetrator indicates to the victim that he, rather than she, decides when they will and will not have sex), and (5) sex (perpetrator indicates to the victim that he is so aroused he cannot stop himself).

The victim (Jessica) was described as a 19-year-old undergraduate student enrolled in a 4-year university in the heart of a Northeastern city. She was said to live in an apartment near campus with three roommates. She served as the vice-president of a school organization and reportedly had many friends and acquaintances. The perpetrator (Mike) was described as a 21-year-old undergraduate student enrolled at the same 4-year university who asked Jessica to go out for dinner at a nearby restaurant. After Mike paid for dinner, Jessica invited him to her apartment where eventually the couple began kissing. As the kissing escalated, Mike reached for Jessica's breast and she physically removed his hand. After physically resisting a second time, she suggested that he leave; however, Mike allegedly continued to kiss Jessica and forced her to have sexual intercourse. The vignette concludes with a statement that Mike admitted to the police that he had a relationship and a sexual encounter with Jessica, but he insisted the sexual intercourse was consensual.

Attribution questionnaire. Attributions about the victim and the perpetrator were measured with a 29-item, 10-point, Likert-type questionnaire based on that used by George and Martinez (2002) and Angelone, Mitchell, and Pilafova (2007). The questionnaire assesses a variety of constructs potentially associated with attributions of blame, including victim culpability, victim credibility, victim pleasure, victim trauma, perpetrator culpability, perpetrator guilt, and sentencing recommendations.

Attributions regarding the victim. Four independent constructs were measured in association with the victim representing both multi- and individual-item variables. *Victim culpability* was measured by summing eight items concerning the victim's responsibility for the assault, intent to have sex with the perpetrator, fault for the assault, and capability to have changed the outcome, with higher scores reflecting increasing responsibility of the victim for the assault (α for the present study = .86). *Victim credibility* was measured by summing seven items that concern the definitiveness and genuineness of the victim's refusal, with higher scores reflecting increasing belief that the victim did not want to engage in sexual intercourse with the perpetrator (α for the present study = .73). *Victim pleasure* was measured by one item that asked respondents to estimate how much pleasure the victim experienced from the assault on a 10-point scale (1 = *none at all* to 10 = *very much*). *Victim trauma* was also measured by one item that asked respondents to estimate how much trauma the victim experienced from the assault on a 10-point scale (1 = *none at all* to 10 = *very much*).

Attributions regarding the perpetrator. Three independent constructs were measured in association with the perpetrator representing both multi- and individual-item variables. *Perpetrator culpability* was measured by summing eight items mirroring those used to measure victim culpability, with higher scores reflecting increasing responsibility of the perpetrator for the assault (α for the present study = .79). *Perpetrator guilt* was measured by summing three items that asked participants to rate how much they believed the incident constituted rape, how guilty they believed the perpetrator was of committing rape, and how likely they would be to convict the perpetrator of rape (α for the present study = .87). *Sentencing recommendations* was measured by one item that asked participants to rate how long the perpetrator should be incarcerated if convicted of rape on a 10-point scale (1 = *none at all* to 10 = *very much*).

Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). This 15-item Likert-type scale assesses attitudes regarding the role of women in society. Sample items include, "Women should worry less about their rights and worry more about being good wives and mothers," and "A woman should be as free as a man to propose marriage." Higher scores indicate egalitarian

attitudes, whereas lower scores indicate traditional sex role stereotypical attitudes (α for the present study = .78).

Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale (SDS; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). This 33-item true/false questionnaire was included to control for participants' tendencies to respond to the dependent variables in a socially desirable manner. Sample items include, "No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener," and "I am always willing to admit it when I make a mistake." Higher scores on the scale indicate greater socially desirable responding (α for the present study = .75).

Manipulation check. Because we were seeking to examine our variables in the context of a date rape in which the perpetrator paid for dinner and was invited afterward to the victim's home, we included two questions that tested participants' memory for these facts in a multiple-choice format. Thirty-six participants failed one or both of these items and their data were excluded from subsequent analyses.

Procedure

Participants reported to a dedicated computer lab in order to participate in this study. The computer lab consisted of 10 computers, each separated by a privacy screen to ensure confidentiality of responses. Upon arrival, participants were each assigned to a computer and instructed to read and sign a hard copy of the informed consent. Participants were told that they would be asked to read a "brief crime report" describing a case of an alleged sexual assault and that the researcher was interested in both their impressions of and memory for certain details about the case. Each participant was randomly assigned to 1 of 10 conditions in a 2 (*relationship length*: first date vs. dating 6 months) × 5 (*perpetrator motivation*: neutral vs. entitlement vs. power/control vs. rejection vs. sex) experimental design. The researcher then read aloud the instructions for the study. Participants were assured that the study was completely anonymous and withdrawing from the study at any time would not prevent them from receiving credit. After all questions and comments were addressed, students were asked to begin the study. After the participants had finished the study they were debriefed and thanked for participating.

Results

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among victim and perpetrator attributions, AWS scores, SDS scores, and participant gender. The pattern of correlations indicates higher scores on victim credibility,

Table 1. Intercorrelations Among Gender, Gender Role Attitudes, Social Desirability, and Attributions Regarding the Victim and the Perpetrator

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Participant gender	.39**	.09	.08	–.19**	.06	.07	.08	.10	.04
2. AWS	—	.02	.30**	–.31**	–.18**	.22**	.32**	.29**	.11
3. SDS		—	.08	–.04	–.01	–.01	.03	.03	.08
4. Victim credibility			—	–.59**	–.49**	.38**	.45**	.52**	.25**
5. Victim culpability				—	.45**	–.35**	–.43**	–.44**	–.20**
6. Victim pleasure					—	–.37**	–.35*	–.47**	–.19**
7. Victim trauma						—	.33**	.50**	.28**
8. Perpetrator culpability							—	.60**	.13*
9. Perpetrator guilt								—	.20**
10. Perpetrator sentencing									—
M	58.17	15.80	54.56	32.68	3.00	7.61	72.51	24.57	5.04
SD	8.63	4.95	10.64	13.19	2.37	2.39	7.99	5.66	2.11

Note: $N = 348$. Participant Gender: 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*; AWS = Attitude Toward Women Scale; SDS = Social Desirability Scale.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

victim trauma, perpetrator culpability, perpetrator guilt, and perpetrator sentencing were associated with lower scores on victim culpability and victim pleasure. Egalitarian gender attitudes, as assessed by the AWS, were more strongly correlated with victim and perpetrator attributions than was participant gender. Higher scores on the AWS were associated with higher scores on victim credibility, victim trauma, perpetrator culpability, and perpetrator guilt, as well as lower scores on victim culpability and victim trauma. The only significant association between participant gender and victim or perpetrator attributions was a weak correlation indicating that female participants tended to score lower on victim culpability than male participants. Scores on the SDS were not significantly correlated with victim or perpetrator attributions.

Next, a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to assess whether the independent variables were predictive of observer attributions. Nominal independent variables were dummy coded as follows: (a) participant gender: 0 = *male*, 1= *female*; (b) relationship length condition: 0 = *first date*, 1 = *6 months*; and (c) perpetrator motivation condition: 0 = *neutral*, 1 = *entitlement*, 2 = *power/control*, 3 = *rejection*, 4 = *sex*. For each regression, participant gender was entered on the first step, AWS and SDS scores were entered on the second step, relationship length was entered on the third step, and perpetrator motivation was entered on the fourth step. The significance of the change in R^2 was used to evaluate the significance of each step in the regression.

Attributions Regarding the Victim

Victim credibility. As summarized in Table 2, Step 2 added significantly to the prediction of victim credibility, F_{change} (2, 344) = 17.26, $p < .001$. The significant predictor on this step was AWS, with higher scores on the AWS being associated with higher scores on victim credibility. Step 4 also added significantly to the prediction of victim credibility, F_{change} (4, 339) = 2.66, $p < .05$, with all four motivational conditions yielding significant regression coefficients, indicating that each motivational condition increased scores on victim credibility compared the neutral condition.

Victim culpability. As summarized in Table 2, Step 1 added significantly to the prediction of victim culpability, F_{change} (1, 346) = 13.36, $p < .001$. The direction of the effect indicates that female participants scored lower on victim culpability than male participants. Step 2 also added significantly to the prediction of victim culpability, F_{change} (2, 344) = 12.14, $p < .001$. The significant predictor on this step was AWS, with higher scores on the AWS also associated with lower scores on victim culpability. The addition of relationship length on Step 3 approached significance, F_{change} (1, 343) = 3.77, $p = .053$, in the direction of lower scores on victim culpability occurring in first-date condition than in 6-month condition. Finally, Step 4 added significantly to the prediction of victim culpability, F_{change} (4, 339) = 2.51, $p < .05$. The only significant regression coefficient on this step was the entitlement condition, indicating that the entitlement condition yielded lower victim culpability scores than the neutral condition.

Victim pleasure. As summarized in Table 2, only Step 2 added significantly to the prediction of victim pleasure, F_{change} (2, 344) = 5.41, $p < .01$. The significant predictor on this step was AWS, with higher scores on the AWS associated with lower scores on victim pleasure.

Victim trauma. As summarized in Table 2, only Step 2 added significantly to the prediction of victim trauma, F_{change} (2, 344) = 8.13, $p < .001$. The significant predictor on this step was AWS, with higher scores on the AWS associated with higher scores on victim trauma.

Attributions Regarding the Perpetrator

Perpetrator culpability. As summarized in Table 3, only Step 2 added significantly to the prediction of perpetrator culpability, F_{change} (2, 344) = 19.00, $p < .001$. The significant predictor on this step was AWS, with higher scores on the AWS associated with higher scores on perpetrator culpability.

Table 2. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Attributions Regarding Victim Culpability, Credibility, Pleasure, and Trauma

	Victim Culpability				Victim Credibility				Victim Pleasure				Victim Trauma			
Predictor	β	*t*	R^2	ΔR^2	β	*t*	R^2	ΔR^2	β	*t*	R^2	ΔR^2	β	*t*	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				.04***				.01			0	0			0	0
Gender	−.19	−3.66***			.08	1.51			−.06	−1.07			.07	1.22		
Step 2			.10	.06***			.10	.09***			.03	.03**			.05	.05
AWS	−.27	−4.90***			.32	5.69***			−.19	−3.29**			.23	4.02***		
SDS	−.04	−0.75			.08	1.58			−.01	−0.14			−.01	−0.12		
Step 3			.11	.01			.10	0			.03	0			.05	0
Length	−.10	−1.94			.08	1.55			−.04	−0.73			−.05	−0.98		
Step 4			.14	.03*			.13	.03*			.06	.02			.05	0
Entitle	−.18	−2.79**			.17	2.76**			−.16	−2.35*			.03	0.52		
Power	−.07	−1.07			.13	2.07*			−.10	−1.51			.04	0.67		
Reject	−.08	−1.34			.12	1.98*			−.08	−1.23			.03	0.42		
Sexual	−.01	−0.11			.18	2.84**				−0.01	−.19		.04	0.58		

Note: AWS = Attitude Toward Women Scale; SDS = Social Desirability Scale; Length = relationship length condition; Entitle = entitlement condition; Power = power/control condition; Reject = rejection condition; Sexual = sex condition.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Attributions Regarding Perpetrator Culpability, Guilt, and Sentencing

	Perpetrator Culpability				Perpetrator Guilt				Sentencing Recommendation			
Predictor	β	*t*	R^2	ΔR^2	β	*t*	R^2	ΔR^2	β	*t*	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1			.01	.01			.01	.01			0	0
Gender	.08	1.41			.10	1.88			.04	0.69		
Step 2			.11	.10***			.09	.08***			.02	.02
AWS	.34	6.16***			.30	5.37***			.11	1.86		
SDS	.02	0.46			.02	0.45			.08	1.41		
Step 3			.11	0			.09	0			.02	0
Length	0	−0.07			.02	0.32			.03	0.54		
Step 4			.13	.02			.11	.03			.03	.01
Entitle	.12	1.94			.13	2.10*			−.02	−0.23		
Power	.19	2.91**			.18	2.71**			.02	0.30		
Reject	.09	1.31			.05	0.76			−.01	−0.10		
Sexual	.09	1.34			.12	1.91			.08	1.19		

Note: AWS = Attitude Toward Women Scale; SDS = Social Desirability Scale; Length = relationship length condition; Entitle = entitlement condition; Power = power/control condition; Reject = rejection condition; Sexual = sex condition.
*$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Perpetrator guilt. As summarized in Table 3, Step 2 added significantly to the prediction of perpetrator guilt, $F_{change}(2, 344) = 14.77$, $p < .001$. The significant predictor on this step was AWS, with higher scores on the AWS associated with higher scores on Perpetrator Culpability. Step 4 approached significance, $F_{change}(4, 339) = 2.36$, $p = .053$. Although this step only approached significance, two motivational condition regression coefficients were significant (entitlement, $p < .05$; power/control, $p < .01$), with the addition of either of these increasing perpetrator guilt over the neutral condition.

Perpetrator sentencing.The regression was not significant at predicting perpetrator sentencing.

Discussion

Situational Variables

We examined the ability of two situational variables (knowledge of perpetrator motivation and relationship length) to predict observer attributions about victim and perpetrator blame and responsibility for a date rape over and above two common observer variables (participant gender and participant gender role attitudes). Consistent with prior research, we found that offender motivation makes a difference in attributions. However, in contrast to some prior

studies that pitted sexual versus nonsexual motives against one another and found that violently motivated perpetrators were held more responsible for sexually assaulting a stranger than sexually motivated perpetrators, the present study's findings show that simply providing knowledge of the perpetrator's motivation was associated with decreased perceptions of the victim's culpability and increased perceptions of the victim's credibility in a case involving date rape. To a lesser extent, knowledge of the perpetrator's motivation was also associated with an increase in perceptions of perpetrator guilt. Knowledge about the perpetrator increased the victim's credibility over the neutral condition wherein no information about the perpetrator's motivation was provided. The nature of the information about the perpetrator's motivation (sexual vs. entitlement vs. power/control vs. rejection) provided to observers did not matter with respect to increasing the victim's credibility over a neutral condition. Decreases in victim culpability were only observed for the entitlement motivation, and increases in perpetrator culpability were only observed for entitlement and power/control motivations, relative to the neutral condition.

The consistent direction of the effects suggests that knowledge of the offender motivation legitimized the victim as the aggrieved party rather than excusing the perpetrator's behavior. For example, this knowledge about motivation provided less victim blame and more perpetrator responsibility and was never associated with greater insensitivity toward the victim or leniency toward the perpetrator. One implication of the findings related to motivation is that if observers know why a perpetrator committed a rape, it may enhance their sensitively to the victim and increase their condemnation of the perpetrator in cases of date rape.

The findings concerning relationship length indicated that attributions regarding the victim and the perpetrator were not significantly different for first-date versus 6-month relationships. Previous research comparing attributions based on the extent of the victim–perpetrator acquaintance has consistently demonstrated that as the intimacy level of the relationship decreases, victims are held less responsible and perpetrators more responsible. For example, relative to date rape, stranger rape is considered to have more serious consequences for the victim. Similarly, marital rape is considered to be less serious and the perpetrator is viewed as less responsible when compared to date rape or stranger rape scenarios (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Monson et al., 1996).

The findings from the present study suggest that once the victim and the perpetrator are portrayed in a romantic relationship, the relative length of the relationship may do little to influence observer attributions. In fact, one common myth about rape is that marriage somehow indicates enduring consent

for sexual relationships on behalf of the woman (Ewoldt, Monson, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000). Perhaps then, the status of the relationship (stranger vs. romantic) is the essential variable in highlighting differential attributions of blame and responsibility. Alternatively, it is possible that observers are now viewing rape as wrong regardless of the relationship time frame. One way of exploring these possibilities would be to manipulate relationship length (e.g., brief vs. long term) by relationship status (marital vs. significant other vs. causal dating). Interaction effects would indicate that relationship length is relevant but only within certain relationship contexts.

It may also be that the impact of relationship length is influenced by gender-related observer attitudes, such as benevolent sexism, which refers to having positive attitudes toward traditional patriarchal gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Given that the sexual behavior of the victim in the present study more clearly violated traditional gender roles in the first-date scenario, it would be expected that observers high in benevolent sexism would be more sympathetic to the victim in the 6-month vignette and less sympathetic in the first-date vignette. The association between relationship length and more sophisticated gender role attitudes that were measured in the present study is another possible area of future research.

Observer Variables

In the current study, two observer characteristics, participant gender and gender role attitudes, were used to predict observer attributions about victim and perpetrator responsibility for an alleged date rape. Unlike prior studies, participant gender was not a dominant predictor of victim and perpetrator attributions and only significantly associated with victim culpability. However, an examination of the literature has demonstrated several divergent findings, suggesting that participant gender is not necessarily a wholly consistent variable in this area. In fact, several researchers have demonstrated that gender is not relevant to attributions of blame and responsibility (Acock & Ireland, 1983; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982). It may be that the greater recognition of date rape, thanks to awareness and prevention programs on college campuses (including the campus on which this study was conducted), has made both genders more aware of the problems and less likely to blame the victim, equalizing the genders in this regard. In the current study, the influence of observer gender was eclipsed by that of gender role attitudes, which was predictive of all but one dependent variable. In each case where gender role attitudes were predictive of attributions, there was a consistent pattern

whereby more egalitarian views were associated with less victim responsibility and more perpetrator responsibility.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study adds to a growing body of literature on the importance of gender role beliefs as an influence on attributions of rape. Although we did not seek to specifically examine the mediating or moderating influence of these beliefs on the relationship between participant gender and attributions of blame, it is clear, based on the aforementioned inconsistency of the gender variable and the growing body of literature supporting gender role beliefs, that researchers should focus less on participant gender and more on participant beliefs about gender roles in understanding perceptions of sexual assault. Related, in keeping with the original Muehlenhard et al., (1985) study, we chose to use the AWS as a measure of gender role beliefs and this decision, rather than using relatively newer measures of this construct, may serve as a potential limitation of the present study. In fact, the AWS assesses overt or blatant forms of sexism, which are less commonly endorsed today than when the scale was first developed, and may have attenuated the relationship between sexist attitudes and victim–perpetrator attributions. Future research using a measure of sexism capable of assessing more subtle or covert forms of sexism such as the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim & Cohen, 1997) or Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) may yield larger effects. Another limitation is that we did not also examine the influence of participants' level of rape myth acceptance on their attributions about the victim and the perpetrator. Basow and Minieri (2011) found that higher levels of rape myth acceptance among participants was associated with greater attributions of victim blame and less perpetrator responsibility and that rape myth acceptance is a better predictor of attributions about a rape victim and perpetrator than participant gender is. Given that both of these individual difference variables may be able to predict victim and perpetrator attributions, a study examining their joint influence on attributions would be useful.

A final concern is the use of a college student population that consisted largely of freshman and sophomores and largely of students between 18 and 21 years of age. The use of a population with different features, in terms of education and age, for example, may have also allowed for a greater understanding of the extent to which our findings generalize to the treatment of victims by the medical and the criminal justice personnel who interact with them. The replication of this project with forensic nurses or law enforcement officers could shed light on the extent to which the attributions of these

groups are influenced positively or negatively toward the victim by such extralegal factors. In fact, it has been suggested that many rapes are unacknowledged and go unreported due the anticipated endorsement of rape stereotypes and negative perceptions of rape victims by such personnel (Buddie & Miller, 2001).

In the end, the findings from this study add to the growing literature on perpetrator motivation as an influence on perceptions of a victim and a perpetrator of a sexual assault. However, we did not explore the extent that attitudes toward women and knowledge of the perpetrator's motivation can influence the outcome of a prosecution of a perpetrator. Thus, an ideal follow-up study could involve a mock jury paradigm in which participants are screened about their gender role attitudes before being presented with prosecution and defense presentations of a date rape in which one group receives testimony on the perpetrator's motivation and the other group does not and the influence of motivation information on the outcome of the verdict is examined. Such a project could provide an analogue as to whether and how this information may directly influence juror decision making.

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