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The effect of victim's social support on attributions of blame in female and male rape

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### Abstract

The effects of perceived social support of the victim, victim gender and participant gender on attributions of blame in rape were examined. The impact of Attitudes Toward Gender Roles were also investigated for their mediational role between participant gender and blame. One hundred and twenty-one participants read a report of an incident of rape and evaluated the victim and the perpetrator. Two ANOVAs showed that social support and participant gender influenced blame attributed to the victim, while victim gender influenced blame attributed to the perpetrator. Socially supported victims were blamed less than unsupported victims. Men were more blaming of rape victims than women, but further analyses showed this was mediated by attitudes towards gender roles. Men held significantly more traditional attitudes toward gender roles than women, and this accounted for the effect of participant gender on victim perceptions. The perpetrator of male rape was blamed less than the perpetrator of female rape. Findings are discussed in terms of the differential attributional mechanisms that may underpin men's and women's reasoning about different types of rape.

Keywords: rape perception, attributions, attitudes, female rape, male rape, gender differences

## The effect of victim's social support on attributions of blame in female and male rape

### Introduction

Although researchers have long attempted to change negative perceptions of rape victims, these judgements continue to pervade both individual and institutional settings (Anderson, 1999; Ward, 1995). There is much evidence to suggest that despite years of campaigning, debate and education about their deleterious effects, misconceptions about rape and negative social responses to victims such as attributions of blame are still a common part of the rape victim's experience following disclosures of sexual violence to social network members. The consequences of negative social responses for the victim are significant. They create a culture, which supports the attribution of punitive judgements to already traumatized victims, resulting in what is termed 'secondary victimization' (Williams, 1984). Blaming attributions and attitudes directed at rape victims have also been linked with the under-reporting of rape to authorities due to fear of being disbelieved, ridiculed or shamed (Ward, 1995), the exacerbation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other profoundly negative health consequences (Davis & Breslau, 1994; Kimerling & Calhoun, 1994; Ullman, 1996). They have also been linked to the 'global health burden of rape' (Koss, Heise & Russo, 1994), impinging on the health services that the victim may seek in the aftermath of rape. Thus, the identification and examination of factors which contribute to this burden on individuals and society, is of major social concern.

Social psychologists have examined a number of factors, which may impact on victim blame and other negative attributions. Findings from this 'rape perception program' of research (for reviews see Pollard, 1992; Ward, 1995) have revealed that most people's rape-related judgments are affected by a number of factors extraneous to the actual rape incident such as the

victim's occupational status (Luginbuhl & Mullin, 1981), physical appearance (Deitz, Littman & Bentley, 1984; Tieger, 1981), prior sexual experience (Borgida & White, 1978; Cann, Calhoun & Selby, 1979; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982), degree of resistance (Van Wie & Gross, 1995; Wyer, Bodenhausen & Gorman, 1985; Yescavage, 1999), intoxication (Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Stormo & Lang, 1997) and dress at the time of the rape (Edmonds & Cahoon, 1986; Workman & Freeburg, 1999). It is typical for victims who were, for example, "drunk" or "high" at the time of their rape not to report the incident, especially not to official agencies such as the police, for fear of reprisal and blame (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). However, a further factor, which has not been investigated previously, but which may have a significant effect on attributions of blame directed at the victim is the *perceived social support* of the victim, where ~~unsupportive~~ attitudes and actions include blame attributions, trivialization of the incident, denigration of the victim's character or behavior and even the ending of close relationships with the victim by partners or spouses. Such attitudes often extend to a wide variety of individuals and agencies such as family, friends, police and therapists, and even whole communities (Lees, 1997; Ward, 1995). Whilst it is generally accepted that social support has a great impact on victims' recovery from rape, where socially supported victims fare considerably better than their unsupported counterparts (Atkeson, Calhoun, Resick & Ellis, 1982; Davis & Brickman, 1996; Frazier, 1990, 1991; Frazier & Schauben, 1994; Pitts & Schwartz, 1993), the effect that social support may have on others' responses to the victim is unknown. Yet, this factor may have wider applicability than many of the factors investigated in rape perception studies such as the degree of victim intoxication, which may only be present in a subset of incidents. Whether the victim is supported or not by their social network members such as their family and friends will become apparent to people dealing with the victim such as the police, health professionals and even juries, and may in turn influence their perceptions of the victim. We speculate that the victim may be attributed less blame by individuals if they observe that the victim is *already*

supported by a network of people such as family and friends. Concomitantly, blame to the victim may increase if perceivers are told that the victim does not have the support of their social network.

The present study also examines male, as well as female rape. A small but growing literature on male rape has recently appeared (Anderson, 1999; Anderson, Beattie & Spencer, 2001; Isely & Gehrenbeck-Shim, 1997; Kaufman, DiVasto, Jackson, Voorhees & Christy, 1980; Mitchell, Hirschman & Nagayama Hall, 1999), representing a shift in focus from solely female to male rape, which can be attributed to the increasing public realisation that men can also be victims of rape. Until recently, it has generally been assumed by researchers and the lay population that male rape is rare, primarily occurring in incarcerated settings (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Stermac, Sheridan, Davidson & Dunn, 1996; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). However, a significant number of men are raped each year in the general population although it is extremely difficult to obtain accurate incidence figures. Several recent studies have attempted to measure the prevalence of male rape. Lifetime prevalence estimates of non-consensual sex amongst adult males in the general population have recently been calculated at, for example, 3% in the United Kingdom (Coxell, King, Mezey & Gordon, 1999) and as high as 7% in the United States (Sorenson, Stein, Siegel, Golding & Burnham, 1987). According to official American crime statistics, since 1995, 19390 males above the age of 12 were the victims of rape or attempted rape (United States Department of Justice, 1997, cited in Mitchell et al., 1999). In Europe, recent data show that in 1995, 3142 indecent assaults and 227 rapes of men (the latter figure representing an increase of 51% from 1994) were recorded (Coxell et al., 1999). Some American rape crisis centres have documented that between 6 and 20 per cent of treated rape victims are male (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992) although many welfare organizations estimate the real figure of male

rape to be considerably higher, implying that a significant number of men are 'hidden' survivors of rape with many more incidents not formally reported.

Studies on social reactions to male victims have shown that they are often blamed as intensely or even more so than female victims (Perrott & Webber, 1996; Smith, Pine & Hawley, 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Whatley & Riggio, 1993) although some studies have shown the opposite effect (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Schneider, Soh-Chiew Ee and Aronson, 1994). Several reasons, such as the greater deviation from expected sexual script and gender roles of male as opposed to female victims (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996), the supposition of homosexuality in male rape (Mitchell et al., 1999), as well as individual differences such as the perceiver's generalized beliefs in a 'just world' (Perrott & Webber, 1996) may contribute to harsher perceptions of male than female victims. In particular, perceiver's gender seems to play a major role in judgements about male rape, with men appearing to be more punitive than women not only in relation to female victims (Ward, 1995) but also in relation to male rape victims (Mitchell et al., 1999; Smith, Pine & Hawley, 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). It is hypothesised in this study that male participants will judge male victims more harshly than female participants.

As well as the above variables, underlying attitudes toward gender roles were also examined in the present study. Although a generalized attitude toward gender roles, incorporating beliefs about both men and women and their roles has not been investigated previously, attitudes toward women and women's social roles have often been used in rape perception studies to predict victim blame attributions. Studies have found that the more traditional the attitudes held by participants toward women, the more blame they are likely to ascribe to rape victims. Conversely, the more liberal the attitude, the less blame is attributed to a rape victim (Ward, 1995). In addition, this measure has served as an important qualification to a wholly gendered interpretation of victim blame judgements. Most studies have found a tendency

for men to be more punitive toward rape victims than women (Pollard, 1992; Ward, 1995), although it should be noted that several studies have reported no differences between men and women (e.g., Calhoun, Cann, Selby & Magee, 1981) or even women exhibiting more punitive judgements than men, in an effort to allay their own feelings of vulnerability (Feldman, Ullman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1998). However, researchers have suggested, in relation to this gender difference research, that it is the attitude that a participant displays, rather than gender *per se*, that is the important determinant of rape victim blame (Coller & Resick, 1987). For example, Howells, Shaw, Greasley, Robertson, Gloster and Metcalfe (1984) found that females' judgements tended to be nearly equivalent to those of less traditional males, but that both groups attributed less blame to the victim on several measures than did traditional males. Other studies have found differences between groups on the basis of attitudinal measures such as sex-role attitudes, but interestingly, not sex differences, when these are compared in the same study (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Krahe, 1988). These findings have led some researchers to conclude that "attitudinal factors, rather than gender *per se*, are the more important mediators of rape judgements" (Pollard, 1992: 320). Here, we examine the possibility that attitudes toward gender roles (ATGR) may mediate the relationship between participant gender and rape judgements.

### Aims and Hypotheses

The primary aim of the study was to examine the effects of perceived social support, participant gender and rape victim gender on blame attributions. In addition to perceptions of the victim, the effects of these variables on perceptions of the perpetrator were also investigated. Several hypotheses are proposed based on the review of the literature and previous findings:

### Victim blame attributions

1. Socially unsupported rape victims will be blamed more than supported victims



2. Male victims will be blamed more than female victims
3. Compared to women, men will attribute more blame to both female and male rape victims.
4. Men will hold more traditional attitudes towards gender roles than women, and this will mediate the relationship between participant gender and victim blame judgments.

#### Perpetrator blame attributions

5. Perpetrators will be blamed more if their victim is supported than if their victim is unsupported.
6. Perpetrators of female rape will be blamed more than perpetrators of male rape.

### Method

#### Participants

One hundred and twenty-one undergraduate students at the University of Birmingham, UK, volunteered to take part in the study, 74 of whom were women (61%) and 47 were men (39%). Nine participants did not provide information about their gender. Their ages ranged from 18 - 40 years (mean = 20.6, *sd* = 3.8).

#### Design and Procedure

The study employed a 2x2x2 independent factorial design, with two levels on each factor (male vs female participant x male vs female rape victim x supported vs unsupported victim).

Volunteers were asked to participate in a social issues questionnaire study at the end of a lecture period. They were presented with a booklet containing all experimental materials, and informed that all responses would be treated anonymously and that they were free to leave the study at any point. The questionnaire required approximately 15 minutes to complete. At the

end of the questionnaire participants were given telephone numbers of personnel who could be contacted if they wished to discuss further the issues raised in the study.

### Materials

The experimental booklet contained a description of a rape incident, an instruction sheet, a questionnaire and a mark sheet on which the students were asked to record their answers.

Answer sheets were returned to the researcher and scanned through a computer for coding.

There were four different descriptions of the rape incident to correspond with the four conditions in the study (e.g. male rape, high support; male rape, low support; etc.). Participants were randomly assigned to one of these conditions through the distribution of the questionnaires. In an effort to increase the ecological validity of rape perception studies, participants are often presented with a mock newspaper article (Anderson & Beattie, 2001; Pollard, 1992) outlining the incident, in 100-150 words (Pollard, 1992), on which they are asked to comment in the form of questions measuring blame, responsibility etc. The rape description used in the present study was derived from an actual newspaper article of an incident of rape, which occurred in the West Midlands, United Kingdom in 1998 and reported in the local media. No facts were changed, including the unsupportive reaction from family, friends and the community, which provided a natural manipulation of the social support variable. Participants read the following written instructions prior to reading the description of the incident: "Thank you for participating in this research. Please read the description of a reported incident below and complete the attached questionnaire. Please answer as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers, only opinions. All questionnaires will remain anonymous and you have the right to refuse to answer any specific question if you wish".

The description of the incident is provided below, with square brackets indicating where wording was changed across the different conditions (male/female rape; high support/low support):

**A man [woman] has testified in court that he [she] was raped while being given a lift home from work by a friend and colleague. Sam White (not his real name) testified today that the alleged rape occurred in the summer of 1993 when he gave Carl Smith (not his real name), whom he knew as a neighbor and a friend, a lift home from their place of work. "The journey began well, and they were chatting, discussing the weather and mutual acquaintances as they drove home. Then, just as they were nearing their street, Smith turned on him. He raped him, beat him and threatened to kill him," the prosecuting counsel told the packed court. Smith has denied the allegations. White added that since his ordeal, he has been reassured by his family, friends and his local community. He has received much comfort and support and does not feel that he is being blamed for the attack [White added that since his ordeal, he has been shunned by his family, friends and his local community. He has received no comfort or support and feels that he is being blamed for the attack]. The case continues.**

### Measures

There were two dependent measures to assess blame attributed to the victim and the perpetrator.

To assess *perceptions of the victim*, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they endorsed the following statement on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (completely):

How much do you think the victim (victim's name was presented to the participants in the questionnaire) was to blame for the incident?

To assess *perceptions of the perpetrator*, participants were again asked for their degree of endorsement of the following statement (on a seven-point scale, as above):

How much do you think the perpetrator (perpetrator's name was presented to the participants in the questionnaire) was to blame for the incident?

### Attitudes Toward Gender Roles

To assess attitudes towards gender roles, a modified version of the Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS)<sup>1</sup> was employed (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1973). The original AWS contains items such as, "Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of women than men", "A modern girl is entitled to the same freedom from regulation and control that is given to the modern boy" and "Under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and doing the laundry". The scale is scored 1-4, ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 4 (agree strongly). Given that in the present study, male rape as well as female rape is examined, a scale measuring attitudes toward women only would conceivably only be appropriate for measuring these attitudes toward female but not male victims. Rather than administer two different, and perhaps differentially valid scales, the existing scale was modified. Supporting this decision was the observation that most of the items on the AWS, which claims to examine women's rights and social roles, actually examine men's rights and social roles as well. For example, items such as "Sons in the family should be given more encouragement to go to college than daughters" or "In general, the father should have greater authority than the mother in the bringing up of children" refer as much to men's social roles and behavioural possibilities as women's. Consequently, the original scale

was modified by the exclusion of items examining only women's rights and social roles, and leaving items, which referred to both men's and women's behaviour, rights and roles. This resulted in seven items focusing on men's behaviour in relation to women's (e.g., "There are many jobs in which men should be given preference over women in being hired or promoted"), seven items focusing on women's behaviour in relation to men's (e.g., "Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man"), and three items with equal emphasis on men's and women's behaviour (e.g., "Both husband and wife should be allowed the same grounds for divorce"). This new scale is more reflective of attitudes toward *gender roles* rather than attitudes toward *women*, focusing as it does on both men's and women's rights, roles and behaviours. The modified Attitudes Toward Gender Roles scale (ATGR) consisted of 17 items, with Cronbach's alpha of .81.

## Results

### Manipulation Check

To ensure that the social support independent variable would be perceived as intended, prior to commencing the study, 40 participants (20 men and 20 women) were asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale the extent to which they thought the victim was shown sympathy by the people around him/her and the extent to which they thought the victim was treated compassionately. The scores were summed and t-tests showed a reliable difference between supported ( $M = 6.30$ ) and unsupported ( $M = 1.25$ ) conditions in the expected direction ( $t = 33.8$ ,  $df = 38$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but no gender difference.

### Descriptive Analyses

All variables were screened for normality of distribution. Age was severely skewed and therefore was dichotomised at the median into those aged 19 and below and those aged over 19

years. To examine whether any differences existed between the two groups in rape perception, a series of t-tests were conducted. There were no differences in the extent to which the incident was viewed as rape between those who were 19 and younger, and those older than 19 ( $t = 0.41$ ,  $df = 119$ ,  $p > .05$ ). These groups also did not differ in any of their perceptions of the perpetrator or victim ( $t$ s ranged from 0.48 to 1.08,  $p$ s  $> .05$ ). Table 1 shows the relationships among the blame variables, participant gender and attitudes towards gender roles. Extent of victim blame was negatively related to the extent the perpetrator was blamed, attitudes to gender roles, and weakly related to participant gender, with men attributing more blame than women. Extent of perpetrator blame was positively related to attitudes to gender roles, but not to participant gender. Finally, attitudes towards gender roles were related to participant gender, with men scoring higher on this measure than women.

#### Do Perceived Social Support, Participant Gender and Victim Gender Affect Victim Blame Attributions?

A 2X2X2 full-factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine whether victim blame attributions were affected by perceived social support, participant gender and victim gender. There were no univariate or multivariate outliers. The SPSS ANOVA programme was employed with sequential adjustment for unequal cell Ns, and Pillai's criterion was used to ensure robustness against violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices.

The ANOVA showed two main effects and one significant two-way interaction. Victim blame was significantly affected by both participant gender ( $F(1, 103) = 9.62$ ,  $p = .002$ , Partial Eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.085) and social support ( $F(1, 103) = 4.9$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ ). Men ( $M(SD) = 2.31(2.10)$ ) attributed significantly more blame to rape victims than women ( $M(SD) = 1.55(1.07)$ ). The socially supported victim was blamed less ( $M(SD) = 1.66(1.16)$ ) than the

unsupported victim ( $M(SD) = 2.20 (1.15)$ ). A significant two-way interaction between participant gender and social support ( $F(1, 103) = 6.95, p = .03, \eta^2 = 0.05$ ) showed that men appeared to be affected by variations in social support more than women, attributing greater blame to socially supported ( $M(SD) = 2.85 (1.61)$ ) than unsupported ( $M(SD) = 1.76 (1.00)$ ) victims. Women's blame attributions remained similar in both conditions (supported victims  $M(SD) = 1.56 (1.25)$ ; unsupported victims  $M(SD) = 1.55 (0.71)$ ).

#### Do perceived social support, participant gender and victim gender affect perpetrator blame attributions?

As previously, a 2X2X2 between-subjects ANOVA was performed to examine whether perpetrator blame attributions were affected by perceived social support, participant gender victim gender. There were no univariate or multivariate outliers. One main effect was observed but no interactions. Victim gender affected the perpetrator blame variable ( $F(1,103) = 7.78, p = .006, \eta^2 = 0.07$ ). Perpetrators of female rape ( $M(SD) = 6.60 (0.76)$ ) were attributed significantly more blame than perpetrators of male rape ( $M(SD) = 5.86 (1.65)$ ).

#### Do attitudes toward gender roles mediate the relationship between participant gender and victim blame attributions?

Men were more likely to blame the victim than women, as predicted. To examine whether this was due to underlying differences in participants' attitudes toward gender relations, a set of mediational analyses were undertaken. According to Baron & Kenny (1986), in order to establish mediation, three relationships must be shown: (1) between the independent and dependent variables; (2) between the independent and proposed mediating variable; and (3) between the mediating variable and the dependent variable. Further, when relationships (2) and

(3) are controlled, the previous significant relation between the IV and DV should no longer be significant, or should be substantially reduced.

As shown in Table 1 (and previously), participant gender was significantly associated with victim blame attributions (evidence for (1)). Table 1 also shows that participant gender was significantly associated with ATGR, with men reporting significantly less liberal attitudes toward gender roles than women ( $M (SD) = 40.16 (6.89)$  and  $46.19 (3.55)$  respectively,  $t = 5.81$ ,  $df = 99$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (evidence for (2)). Finally, Table 1 also shows that ATGR was negatively related to the extent the victim was blamed, such that participants holding more liberal attitudes toward gender roles were less likely to blame the victim (evidence for (3)). .

Therefore, an additional ANOVA was carried out, as previously, examining the effects of participant gender on victim perception (with victim gender and social support also in the model), while statistically controlling for attitudes towards gender roles. Results showed that with attitudes towards gender roles entered as a covariate in the model, participant gender no longer had a significant effect on victim blame attributions ( $F (1, 92) = .21$ , n.s.), and no longer interacted with social support to affect victim blame. This shows that although men and women differed in their perceptions of victim blame, this was primarily due to their attitudes towards gender roles.

## Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the effects of perceived social support of the victim, participant gender and whether the victim was male or female on judgements about rape. Results indicate that all of the variables investigated affected participants' rape judgements, but in different ways. Attributions of blame ascribed to the *victim* were significantly predicted by whether or not the victim was seen as socially supported, and whether the person attributing blame was a man or a woman, and more specifically, the beliefs that men



and women hold about gender roles. Conversely, attributions of blame ascribed to the *perpetrator* were only affected by the sex of the victim. The perpetrator of the female rape was blamed more than the perpetrator of the male rape.

### Blaming rape victims

Firstly, and as predicted, rape victims, who were reported to be socially supported by those around them were blamed less than victims who were not socially supported, irrespective of whether the victim was male or female. Thus, in addition to previously investigated factors, such as victim intoxication or victim dress, perceived social support also seems to play an important role in victim blame attributions. However, unlike victims who are blamed in response to factors such as victim dress or intoxication, victims who are blamed because of a lack of social support are doubly disadvantaged – firstly because they are not supported after an attack and secondly, because of the blame directed at them *due to the lack of social support*. Writing about female rape, Lees (1997) states that “What becomes clear is the importance of other people’s reactions towards women who have been raped - how much difference a clear, supportive, positive response could make to a woman’s self-image and the way she views her experience” (pg. 78). It is undoubtedly the case that this reasoning can be extended to male rape victims as well. The possibility of a double disadvantage that victims may encounter when judgements are made about them and their role in the rape with respect to social support is an important one, although more studies would need to be conducted to confirm the robustness of the present findings.

There are implications if the victim’s social support consistently affects perceptions. For example, supportive responses from organizations such as the police may be particularly important as they are often considered independent and impartial, and may in turn influence subsequent support provided by others such as healthcare workers or families of victims. This

preliminary study suggests that perceived social support of the victim is worthy of further investigation, which should be conducted in a variety of settings, such as in family, friend and peer group networks, as well as among the various agencies that the victim encounters in the post-rape period.

Secondly, the effect of perceived social support on attributions of victim blame was stronger for male participants than female participants. Men also blamed the rape victim more than women. However, these effects were mediated by attitudes towards gender roles. Men reported more traditional attitudes toward gender roles than women, and these attitudes accounted for men's increased blaming of the victim compared to women. Thus, it is these underlying beliefs, rather than gender *per se*, that are the more important factor in reactions to rape victims. Interestingly, this mediation relationship extended to male rape victims, suggesting that a more general factor other than attitudes specifically about male-female relations may be responsible for the effect. For example, generally conservative attitudes on major issues such as politics, drug use etc. may be associated with victim blame. Future research should examine this possibility further.

Finally, it should be noted that although we have assumed that the support condition led to reduced victim blame, it is equally possible that the 'shunned' support condition produced the effect (and led to increased victim blame). There may be no difference between social support and no social support (a neutral condition), a possibility that requires investigation in future research.

### Blaming the perpetrator

Contrary to expectations, perceived social support of the victim did not significantly affect attributions of perpetrator blame. As predicted, however, participants blamed the perpetrators of female rape more than the perpetrators of male rape. There may be several

reasons for this. Firstly, participants may find male rape more difficult to accept ('the impossibility of male rape'), thus blaming the perpetrator less than in female rape. Participants may also perceive the male victim to play a more active role in their own rape (e.g., 'he asked for it) or exhibit a generalised lack of sympathy toward men in a non-dominant role than female victims, a reaction possibly borne out of a homophobic response to male rape victims (Mitchell et al., 1999), all leading to reduced blame to the perpetrator. Participants may also fail to judge male rape as seriously as female rape, hence judging the perpetrator of male rape not as blameworthy as the perpetrator of female rape. The present findings may also be indicative of a 'cultural lag' of male rape in relation to female rape (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996). Also, the perception that males may be more willing than females to engage in casual and indiscriminate sex (Scarce, 1997; West, 2000) may be influential, thus allowing for less blameworthy judgements of perpetrators of male, rather than female rape. This factor is particularly salient in the male-on-male rape condition, where some respondents may assume that the victim and/or perpetrator are gay. A future study could include the sexual orientation of victims and perpetrators in the vignette in order to examine this possibility in the context of victim/perpetrator blame (although if the design contains male-on-female rape, as is the case in this study, then sexual orientation of the victim/perpetrator would also need to be specified. If this is heterosexual, then participants may query the purpose of including this information).

#### Victim versus perpetrator blame attributions

In the present study, victim blame was affected by participant gender, attitudes toward gender roles and perceived social support of the victim, while perpetrator blame was affected solely by victim gender. The notion of internal/external factors could help to understand these results. Factors that are external to the perceiver, such as the victim's gender, dress etc., may influence blame attributed to the perpetrator. Conversely, factors that are both external *and*

internal (e.g. attitudes towards gender role) to the perceiver may influence blame attributed to the victim. It may be that judgements about victims are more difficult to form than judgements about perpetrators, thus requiring co-reference between different sources of information. Alternatively, participants may have greater knowledge and/or experience of judging perpetrators than victims, and as such need only rely on one informational source in order to do so. Although more research is needed, the present findings offer an interesting insight into the variations in judgements about victims and perpetrators, and the possible differential mechanisms that may give rise to them.

### Conclusions and Limitations

Although these results represent several new findings there were some shortcomings to the present study. Firstly, the study was conducted among a student population, who are often described as being acutely aware of social issues and who have absorbed egalitarian tenets (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Also, they form only a subset of the people that rape victims may come into contact with in the post rape period. Future research could examine the effects of perceived social support, victim gender and participant gender among formal social networks such as the police, medical personnel and the judiciary. Furthermore, researchers should consider the types of stimulus materials that are used in rape perception studies. A relatively short vignette, such as that used here, may well cause participants to ask certain questions such as “Had the victim been given a lift before?”, “How dark was it at the time of the rape?” or “Were there any people about?”, the answers to which are not provided in the vignette. However, to use a more detailed scenario would be detrimental to the purpose of rape perception research in its attempts to recreate the attributional processes that occur outside of an experiment, which are made on partial and incomplete information typical of accounts of rape in the media. Furthermore, even an extremely detailed vignette will not provide enough information for all

participants, requiring some to supplement the detail provided with their own inferences. While researchers have examined the types of information that participants interpolate of their own accord in incomplete attribution theory models such as Kelley's ANOVA model and its extensions (Cheng & Novick, 1990), the same has not been done in rape perception research. Future rape perception studies should focus on the inferences that participants make in addition to the information provided when judging incidents of rape.

Present findings, and future studies in this area, have implications for social change. They can be used in rape education interventions, as well as in other contexts such as jury selection. A dual strategy may be required in rape education, which targets the perceiver's internal and external factors when attempting to change their attitudes about victims, but external factors only when attempting to change attitudes toward perpetrators. In addition, researchers may need to identify which factors are salient and why these are important to some perceivers but not others when asked to make rape-related judgements.

Despite these issues, the results presented clearly highlight the importance of victim support on perceptions of rape, as well as the effects of gender of participant through attitudes towards gender roles. They also demonstrate the importance of investigating male rape alongside female rape in order to gain further understanding of current social responses to both types of rape.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although devised a number of years ago, this scale remains the most frequently utilised measure of attitudes toward women's roles (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, Pollard, 1992) today. For example, in a meta-analysis of studies using the AWS, Twenge (1997) shows that the AWS

was still in use as recently as 1996. Twenge also argues for the continued use of older scales such as the AWS because it provides a valuable measure of social change.

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**Table 1 : Correlations between Attributions of Victim & Perpetrator Blame, Attitudes Towards Gender Role and Gender (Ns range from 101-120)**

Variables	Extent perpetrator to blame	Attitudes towards gender roles	Participant gender	Mean	SD
Extent victim to blame	-.73**	-.42**	.24*	1.82	1.32
Extent perpetrator to blame		.23*	.01	6.19	1.40
Attitudes towards gender role			-.50**	44.10	5.85

\*  $p < .01$     \*\*  $p < .001$