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Social Psychological Issues in the Study of Rape

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ABSTRACT

The chapter presents a social psychological approach to the study of rape and sexual assault. Two issues are at the core of this approach: identifying the critical variables that affect attributions of responsibility to victims of rape, and exploring people's subjective definitions of rape, which may differ markedly from legal definitions. Following a review of the American evidence, a series of studies conducted in two European countries is presented to address these issues.

INTRODUCTION

Until the emergence of the women's rights movement in the early 1970s, rape featured largely as a non-issue, both in public awareness and in psychological research. In line with the increasing momentum of the women's movement, the outlook on rape and sexual violence began to change gradually over the following years (Heilbrun & Heilbrun, 1986; Rose, 1977). The impact of Susan Brownmiller's book *Against our Will*, published in 1975, can be seen as epitomizing this development. She highlighted not only the prevalence of sexual violence against women but also the way in which society and its institutions systematically put raped women at a disadvantage in their efforts

to become acknowledged as victims of a criminal act. Since then, both the reports of raped women and a growing body of research have corroborated the need for a more adequate treatment of rape victims within the legal system (e.g. Abel, 1988; Temkin, 1987), and changes to traditional procedures are beginning to be implemented (e.g. Blair, 1985; Tetreault, 1989). On the other hand, despite a generally more sympathetic climate towards victims of rape, public attitudes continue to be influenced by the familiar stereotype of the "willing victim" and other preconceived ideas about rape linked to the derogation of rape victims. What, then, makes the plight of rape victims so different from that of victims of other criminal offences, and explains the anomalies in judgments of rape both at a societal and an individual level?

As a criminal act, rape is characterized by two distinctive features. First, it typically involves an attack carried out by a man on a woman, so that the roles of victim and offender are divided along gender lines. This has implications for the way in which men and women identify with the victim and the offender in their perceptions of a rape incident. Secondly, rapes rarely occur in the presence of witnesses who would later be able to confirm either the man's or the woman's account of events. Thus, most rape complaints contain an element of doubt as to the truth of the victim's allegations. To resolve this ambiguity and assess the veridicality of the victim's claim, observers refer to their intuitive ideas about rape.

As soon as a rape experience is brought to the attention of others, it becomes a "social fact" over and above its nature as a criminal offence. Whether the victim confides in her partner, friends or relatives, seeks help from medical or psychological professionals, or decides to report the assault to the police, she will interact with people whose intuitive understanding of rape invariably comes to bear upon their reactions towards her fate.

The aim of exploring the processes which affect people's responses to and evaluations of victims of rape is at the core of the social psychological perspective presented in this chapter. Such a perspective is regarded as a necessary complement to the efforts of clinical psychologists in investigating the traumatizing effect of rape on the victim. Central to the social psychological analysis of sexual violence is the proposition that consensually accepted attitudes and stereotypes about rape provide a frame of reference that critically affects people's judgments of victims in specific rape incidents. Further, it is argued that rape-related attitudes themselves are embedded in the wider context of social attitudes about male-female relationships, patterns of courtship, and role prescriptions as to what is considered "proper" behaviour for men and women.

Following a summary of previous evidence accumulated almost exclusively in the United States, the focus of this chapter will be on a series of studies conducted in the UK and West Germany. These studies were designed to

examine different aspects of social judgments about rape incidents and, in particular, the perception of the victim's responsibility for the attack. Thus, a major aim was to explore the replicability, i.e. cross-national generality, of findings from the American literature. This was complemented, however, by a second, equally important objective, i.e. to provide a new methodological strategy for the social psychological analysis of rape.

ATTRIBUTING RESPONSIBILITY TO VICTIMS OF RAPE

Considering the devastating effects of a rape experience, it is not surprising that psychologists' interest in the study of rape was prompted initially by the aim of understanding the emotional consequences of the assault for the victim. Among the insights gained from this research is the now widely accepted symptomatology of the "rape trauma syndrome" that affects the majority of victims and seriously impairs their psychological functioning for a long time after the assault (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974, 1985).

Social psychologists soon recognized that they could offer an equally valuable perspective on the problem. The emergence of a distinctly social psychological interest in the study of rape and sexual assault was facilitated by the availability of a conceptual framework, namely attribution theory, that suggested itself almost naturally for the analysis of social judgments about rape. After all, attributing responsibility to the perpetrator and the victim is a key process in forming an impression about a rape incident. As a basic theoretical orientation, investigators in this area share the view that responsibility attributions can be conceived of as the end product of a judgmental process that is influenced to a significant extent by factors beyond the specific incident in question. Such factors are rooted in more general social beliefs about, for example, sexual violence, respectability, and gender roles, reflecting the prevalent values of a society at any historical point. Thus, judgments about rape are inextricably linked with their more general cultural background, precluding straightforward generalizations across different societies. With this in mind, the next section provides an overview of the main findings from the North American literature before data are presented from two European countries on the perception and evaluation of rape victims.

Determinants of Responsibility Judgments: Evidence from the American Literature

Beginning with the study by Jones and Aronson (1973), a large body of evidence has been accumulated by North American authors exploring the

variables that affect responsibility attributions to victims of rape (cf. Krahe, 1985a, 1989 for reviews). These studies reveal a widespread tendency to attribute some degree of responsibility to the victim. The level of responsibility judgments was shown to be affected by a number of critical variables that can be grouped into three broad categories: information pertaining to the victim (e.g. social status, social respectability, provocativeness), characteristics of the assailant (e.g. social status, physical attractiveness), and the characteristics of the observer who makes the judgment (e.g. sex role orientation, rape myth acceptance). The following discussion summarizes the major findings from each of the three categories.

Victim Characteristics

Jones and Aronson (1973) were the first to examine the impact of social stereotypes on perceptions of victim responsibility in a rape case. They explored the impact of information about the "respectability" of a rape victim on the assessment of victim responsibility. Social respectability was defined in terms of the victim's marital status, whereby the respectable victim was described as either a virgin or a married woman whereas the less respectable victim was introduced as a divorcee. In line with the concept of "belief in a just world" (Lerner, 1970), they predicted (and found) that the more respectable a rape victim, the more responsible she would be held for the attack. Subsequent studies, however, have been by and large unsuccessful in replicating this finding. While some failed to find any influence of victim respectability on attributions of responsibility (e.g. Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1977; Kerr & Kurtz, 1977; Paulsen, 1979), the majority found support for the reverse relationship, with more responsibility being attributed to the less respectable victim (e.g. Alexander, 1980; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Luginbuhl & Mullin, 1981). A conclusive interpretation of this evidence, however, is hampered by the fact that a wide range of operational definitions of victim respectability has been used from marital status to occupation and dress to past sexual history.

A second important victim characteristic affecting ratings of responsibility is the victim's physical attractiveness. According to a widely accepted stereotype, attractive women are more likely targets of rapists. This has led to the prediction that more responsibility should be assigned to unattractive victims because they would be seen as having encouraged or provoked the attack. Overall, empirical support for this prediction is inconclusive. While a number of studies found the expected relationship (Seligman, Paschal & Takata, 1974; Thornton & Ryckman, 1983; Tieger, 1981), others could not detect any influence of victim attractiveness on perceived victim responsibility (Best & Demmin, 1982; Ferguson, Duthie & Graf, 1987; Jacobson, 1981; Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1980, *inter alia*). Ferguson *et al.*, however, found that more blame

was attributed to the rapist of an attractive woman than to the assailant who raped an unattractive victim.

Victim resistance during the attack also influences attributional judgments, but its effect was shown to be mediated by the sex of the subject. Krulewitz (1981) found that evidence of physical resistance was a critical factor in male subjects' readiness to interpret a given account as rape, whereas it had no effect on the female subjects. According to findings by Krulewitz and Nash (1979) and Scroggs (1976), male subjects demanded less severe punishment for the assailant and attributed more blame to a rape victim the less she physically resisted the attacker. In contrast, women demanded longer sentences for the assailant and attributed less responsibility to the victim who showed no resistance. In parallel fashion, men in the Scroggs study attributed greater intelligence to the victim who showed resistance, while women considered the non-resisting victim to be more intelligent.

Assailant Characteristics

The number of studies looking at information about the assailant is small compared to those concerned with either victim or observer variables. Social status of the assailant has also been found to have an influence on responsibility attributions. Observers were shown to be less certain about the guilt of a high status compared to a low status assailant (Deitz & Byrnes, 1981) and to recommend more lenient sentences for high status defendants (Feild & Barnett, 1978). The physical attractiveness of an alleged rapist was shown to exert a parallel influence (Jacobson, 1981). In a study by Yarmey (1985) comparing attributional judgments of older and younger adults, young people were found to attribute greater responsibility to a woman who resisted the assault of a well-dressed attacker than when she resisted a poorly dressed one. Information about the attacker's physical attractiveness was found to have a different impact on male and female observers' sentencing decision: women demand longer prison sentences for attractive assailants while men recommend more severe punishment for less attractive assailants (Deitz & Byrnes, 1981).

Observer Characteristics

The most obvious and widely explored variable on the part of the observer is that of sex difference. Here, the overall pattern of findings suggests that men attribute more responsibility to rape victims than women (e.g. Calhoun *et al.*, 1978; Jenkins & Dambrot, 1987; Thornton, Robbins & Johnson, 1981; Thornton & Ryckman, 1983). However, a number of studies failed to obtain sex differences (e.g. Acock & Ireland, 1983; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982) or demonstrated a stronger tendency for women to blame the victim (Howard,

1984a), as well as greater leniency by female probation officers in recommending sentences for rapists (Walsh, 1984).

As a more specific gender-related variable, sex role orientation was shown to be a strong predictor of responsibility attributions to rape victims: people holding pro-feminist attitudes are more ready to believe in the victim's credibility and are less willing to blame her for being raped. Subjects holding a more traditional sex role orientation regard evidence of physical violence as a necessary feature of rape, while people with more liberal sex role attitudes define as rape any kind of physical or psychological coercion (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Weidner & Griffitt, 1983).

Other studies point to the importance of attitudes about rape, such as "rape myth acceptance", as facilitating a more fine-grained analysis of the gender-related aspects of responsibility judgments. There is conclusive evidence that attitudes, most notably rape myth acceptance, determine individuals' responses to specific rape incidents (e.g. Bunting & Reeves, 1983; Burt, 1980; Quackenbush, 1989). People who endorse rape myths (i.e. negative statements about rape victims that are either factually wrong or unsupported by empirical evidence) tend to attribute more blame to a victim of rape and less to the assailant than people rejecting such statements. As Burt and Albin (1981) showed, rape myth acceptance also affects a person's definition of rape: high rape myth acceptance is associated with more restrictive rape definitions that imply greater likelihood of victim precipitation.

Supporting the conceptual validity of rape myth acceptance, Burt (1980) demonstrated that endorsement of rape myths was significantly correlated with attitudes related to sexuality, such as:

- sexual conservatism, reflecting a person's restrictive views on the acceptability of specific sexual acts;
- sex role stereotyping, referring to the person's definition of appropriate conduct and behaviour for men and women; and
- acceptance of interpersonal violence, i.e. consideration of force and coercion as legitimate ways of ensuring compliance in sexual relationships.

In this context, the work of Neil Malamuth and his co-workers (Check & Malamuth, 1983; Malamuth, 1981; Malamuth & Check, 1985; Malamuth, Haber & Feshbach, 1980) on the rape proclivity of males is of central importance. Arguing that the use of pressure and coercion in sexual relationships is part of male sex role socialization, they asked male subjects (mostly psychology undergraduates) to indicate the likelihood that they would rape a woman if assured that they would not be caught and punished. In the Check and Malamuth (1983) study, about 30% of the respondents indicated at least some likelihood that they might rape a woman under these circumstances. This figure has been replicated by other authors (e.g. Demaré, Briere & Lips, 1987;

Grendlinger & Byrne, 1987), suggesting that an alarmingly high number of men would consider committing a rape provided they were certain of not being prosecuted. Although these studies did not specifically ask for attributions, they are directly relevant to the social psychological analysis of rape because they reflect the general social climate in which judgments about the victim's role in rape take place.

Altogether, the research summarized in this section is unanimous in highlighting the impact of social attitudes and stereotypes on judgments of specific rape incidents. There is ample evidence of a tendency among both observers and victims themselves (cf. Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Meyer & Taylor, 1986) to attribute a certain amount of responsibility to a raped woman, thereby questioning her status as victim of a criminal assault. As the social psychological perspective on rape would predict, the extent to which a victim is held responsible is critically influenced by prevailing ideas about female decency as well as definitions of "normal" patterns of interaction between the sexes.

However, identifying a coherent picture of the factors that influence the perception of rape victims is made difficult by the terminological inconsistency that characterizes much of the research on this issue. At least four different concepts are used to denote the main dependent variable of interest: "responsibility", "blame", "fault", and "causality"—a number of studies even used different terms in the hypotheses and in the instructions to the subjects.

The importance of distinguishing between different types of attributional judgments was demonstrated by Krulewitz and Nash (1979), who asked their subjects to indicate a rape victim's responsibility, fault, and blame on separate rating scales. They found that the amount of responsibility attributed to the victim was significantly higher than the amount of either fault or blame. Janoff-Bulman (Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Janoff-Bulman, Timko & Carli, 1985) introduced a distinction between two types of blame, labelled behavioural and characterological blame. Behavioural blame focuses on specific behaviours that are relatively controllable and modifiable. Characterological blame, on the other hand, refers to relatively unchangeable, uncontrollable aspects of individuals which account for their victimization. What Janoff-Bulman demonstrated was that subjects attributed significantly more behavioural than characterological blame to the victim, and she suggests that this finding is indicative of subjects' belief that certain types of behaviour rather than certain types of persons are more likely to precipitate a sexual assault (cf., however, Shaver & Drown, 1986, for a critical discussion of this distinction). Thus, in comparing results from different studies, it is important to consider the precise nature of the attributional judgments provided by the respondents.

From a European point of view, another limitation of the evidence currently available on the perception of rape victims lies in its overwhelming reliance on North American samples. Considering the intimacy of the link between societal beliefs about male-female relationships and prevalent views

on rape, exploring the cross-national or even cross-cultural generality of this evidence must be seen as a vital task. Therefore, a series of studies was conducted by the present author in two European countries, West Germany and the UK, with a view to examining the generalizability of findings in different cultural settings.

Replicating the Dynamics of Attributional Judgments: Some European Data

In stark contrast to the prolific research tradition in the United States, the social perception and evaluation of rape victims has received only little attention from social psychologists in Europe (e.g. Hassebrauck, 1986; Howells *et al.*, 1984; Mazelan, 1980; Smith, Tritt & Zollmann, 1982) and Asia (e.g. Kanekar, Pinto & Mazumdar, 1985; Shaalan, El-Akabaoui & El-Kott, 1983; Ward, 1988). As a first step towards addressing this deficit, two studies will be reported in this section that were aimed at replicating some of the findings from the American literature in West Germany and Great Britain. In the first of these studies (reported in detail in Krahé, 1985b), three of the previously most conclusive variables were selected to examine their impact on responsibility attributions to victims and assailants obtained from a German sample: (1) the victim's social status, (2) the assailant's social status, and (3) the sex of the subject. In line with the findings quoted above, it was predicted that high status victims would be attributed less responsibility than low status victims. Similarly, high status assailants were expected to be judged less responsible than low status assailants. Finally, male subjects were expected to attribute more responsibility to the victim and less responsibility to the assailant than female subjects.

In order to examine these predictions, a total of 69 undergraduates (42 females and 27 males) were shown a brief videotaped sequence from a popular TV programme aimed at investigating crimes with the support of the audience. In the sequence, a woman described how she had been raped by a hitch-hiker. Subsequently, subjects received a booklet with further information about the case, which portrayed the victim either as a schoolteacher or a shop assistant (high vs low victim status) and the assailant either as a medical student or an unskilled worker (high vs low assailant status).¹

Responsibility attributions to the victim and the assailant constituted the dependent variables. In measuring the responsibility attributed to the victim, the study introduced a change in the predominant strategy used by previous research. There, the magnitude of responsibility attributions to victims and

¹ Copies of all materials can be obtained from the author on request.

assailants has typically been assessed by providing respondents with two identical percentage scales on which to indicate responsibility. The problem with this procedure is that it implicitly places the victim and the assailant along the same continuum of responsibility, suggesting that there is only a quantitative, not a qualitative difference between the two judgments. By blurring the division between the victim and the offender roles in this way, attribution research tacitly adopts a widely accepted social stereotype about rape, challenging, *a priori*, any raped woman's claim to the victim role.

To avoid this fallacy, the present study measured attribution of responsibility to the victim in two steps. Subjects were first asked to make a dichotomous "yes/no" judgment of victim responsibility to allow them to forthrightly reject the idea that the woman had done anything to precipitate the attack. Those subjects who thought the victim bore some responsibility were then asked to indicate the perceived percentage of responsibility on a scale ranging from 0% to 100%. All other subjects automatically received a score of 0 on the percentage scale. Ratings of the second dependent variable, assailant responsibility, were obtained on an independent scale of the same format.

Separate analyses of variance were computed for victim and assailant responsibility, with victim status, assailant status, and sex of subject as independent variables. For victim responsibility, the predicted effect of victim status was obtained: the high status victim was attributed less responsibility ($M = 5.2\%$) than the low status victim ($M = 10.2\%$). None of the remaining effects approached statistical significance. For the dependent variable of assailant responsibility, only the main effect for assailant social status was significant. However, the direction of this effect was contrary to expectation, with the high status assailant being attributed greater responsibility ($M = 94.2\%$) than the low status assailant ($M = 87.8\%$).

Thus, it may be concluded that the findings from this study lend only partial support to the hypotheses derived from the American literature. Neither the sex of the subject nor the social status of the assailant had an influence on the perception of the victim's responsibility for the assault. However, information about a rape victim's social status was found to affect observers' perceptions of responsibility in line with the majority of previous findings: victims of comparatively lower social status are attributed greater responsibility for being raped than victims of higher status. It should be noted that the two occupations selected in the present study (schoolteacher vs shop assistant) did not differ dramatically in terms of the social status attached to them compared to some of the earlier studies using more drastic manipulations such as "topless dancer vs nun" (e.g. Smith *et al.*, 1976). The fact that even this relatively weak manipulation of the victim's social status produced an effect on responsibility attributions underlines the firm roots of perceptions of rape in the wider context of social stereotypes.

This conclusion receives further backing from the findings of the second study, conducted in the UK and reported in detail in Krahe (1988; study 2). As noted above, there is conclusive evidence that a person's readiness to endorse stereotypical beliefs about rape, i.e. "rape myths" (Burt, 1980), is a powerful determinant of his or her responsibility attributions. This study explored the proposition that rape myth acceptance not only has a direct effect on judgments of responsibility but interacts in a complex way with other relevant variables. More specifically, it was predicted that subjects high on rape myth acceptance would pay special attention to information about the victim's behaviour prior to—but causally unlinked to—the assault when that behaviour was either in line or at odds with female role prescriptions. Best and Demmin (1982) reported that rape victims who engaged in provocative or role-discrepant behaviour prior to the assault were attributed greater responsibility than victims who engaged in role-conforming behaviour. The rapist, on the other hand, was attributed significantly less responsibility if the victim's pre-rape behaviour had been role-discrepant than when it had been role-conforming.

Apart from attempting to replicate this finding with a British sample, this study included the concept of rape myth acceptance to test the idea that persons endorsing rape myths should be particularly susceptible to information about a rape victim's role-conforming versus role-discrepant behaviour prior to the attack. Accordingly, two alternative hypotheses were examined in the study. The first hypothesis, adapted from Best and Demmin, proposes a straightforward relationship between victim's role conformity and responsibility attributions: the victim who is engaged in role-discrepant behaviour prior to the rape should be attributed greater responsibility than the victim who is engaged in role-conforming behaviour. In contrast, the second hypothesis, advocated here, proposes a more complex relationship, taking subjects' rape-related attitudes into account: high rape myth acceptance should lead to greater responsibility attributed to the victim, especially to the victim engaging in role-discrepant behaviour. Sex of the subject was again included as an independent variable to see whether the lack of sex effects in the German study would be replicated with an independent sample from a different country.

Participants in this study were members of the general public in Brighton (36 men and 37 women), aged between 20 and 35, who were approached at a number of public places. They were asked to complete a questionnaire that contained a brief description of a rape incident based on an authentic case reported by Saunders (1980). The first sentence contained the manipulation of the victim's pre-rape behaviour. In the role-conforming condition, it read "After having finished work in her office, the victim was on her way to the car park where her car was parked". This was replaced in the role-discrepant condition by "After having had a drink on her own in a pub, the victim was on

her way to the car park where her car was parked". The remainder of the vignette described how the woman was forced by the attacker to drive to an isolated spot where he raped her. The vignette made it clear that the assailant was a complete stranger to the victim and had been hiding in the car park before the attack. Thus, no connection was implied between the victim's pre-rape behaviour and the subsequent attack.

Following the rape vignette, subjects were presented with the two-step measure of victim responsibility described above. First, they indicated, in a forced-choice format, whether or not they thought the victim had any responsibility at all for the attack. Those who answered "yes" were then asked to make a percentage rating of victim responsibility. The remaining subjects were assigned a score of 0 on the percentage scale. Finally, all subjects rated the assailant's responsibility on the same scale.

In the second part of the questionnaire, subjects completed the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS) developed by Burt (1980). The RMAS consists of 19 items tapping respondents' agreement with a number of stereotypical beliefs about rape, such as "In the majority of rapes the victim is promiscuous and has a bad reputation". The reliability and validity of the RMAS for use with a British sample had been established in a previous study (Krahé, 1988, study 1).

On the basis of their responses to the RMAS, subjects were classified as either high or low on rape myth acceptance by median split. Separate analyses of variance were then performed for victim and assailant responsibility with subject gender, rape myth acceptance, and victim's role conformity as independent variables. The mean ratings of victim responsibility are presented in Table 10.1.

The analysis of variance produced a highly significant main effect for rape myth acceptance. More importantly, a significant interaction emerged between victim's role conformity and subjects' rape myth acceptance, indicating that differential information about victim's pre-rape behaviour only affected the attributions of subjects scoring high on rape myth acceptance. None of the remaining main effects and interactions were significant. The mean ratings of assailant responsibility are presented in Table 10.2.

The only significant effect that emerged from this analysis was the

Table 10.1 Mean ratings of victim responsibility

	Male		Female	
	High	Rape myth acceptance Low	High	Low
<i>Victim's pre-rape behaviour</i>				
Role-conforming	6.25	0.00	3.75	1.67
Role-discrepant	15.45	0.00	17.00	0.00

Table 10.2 Mean ratings of assailant responsibility

	Male		Female	
	High	Rape myth acceptance Low	High	Low
<i>Victim's pre-rape behaviour</i>				
Role-conforming	94.38	86.25	96.25	93.33
Role-discrepant	84.55	97.78	73.00	97.86

interaction between victim's role conformity and subjects' rape myth acceptance. Subjects high on rape myth acceptance attributed more responsibility to the assailant when the victim had engaged in role-conforming behaviour prior to the rape. The reverse pattern was obtained when the victim had behaved in a role-discrepant fashion prior to the attack.

Thus, the findings support the proposed interaction between victim's role conformity and subject's rape myth acceptance. People who accept stereotypical ideas about rape are prepared to interpret the victim's role-discrepant behaviour as an aggravating factor in their attributions of victim responsibility and, correspondingly, as an attenuating factor in their attributions of assailant responsibility. As in the German study, the sex of the subject did not have an effect on responsibility attributions.

In conclusion, results from this study confirm American evidence in demonstrating that rape myth acceptance is a critical determinant of responsibility attributions to rape victims and assailants. At the same time, a person who believes in rape myth is also more likely to draw upon general stereotypes of gender-appropriate behaviour when asked to evaluate a rape incident. Although the rape vignettes used in this study did not imply that victim pre-rape behaviour was causally related to the subsequent attack, subjects high on rape myth acceptance did utilize this information in their responsibility attributions. For these individuals, a victim's credibility concerning a claim of rape seems to be seriously undermined by her engaging in behaviour that is discordant with female role prescriptions.

The generality of the link between rape myth acceptance and perceived victim precipitation was explored in a subsequent set of parallel studies conducted in West Germany and Great Britain using a different measure of negative attitudes towards rape victims. In line with the findings from the previous study, it was predicted that subjects with a negative attitude towards rape victims would assign greater responsibility to the victim of a specific rape incident than those holding more positive attitudes. Two further aspects of potential victim derogation were included: the perceived likelihood that the defendant is guilty of the rape and the likelihood that the victim is telling the truth. Here, high rape myth acceptance was expected to be related to lower likelihood ratings of both the defendant's guilt and the veridicality of the

victim's claims. Finally, sex of subject was considered as an additional variable to see whether the absence of sex differences in the first two studies would be confirmed with two further samples.

Two parallel samples were recruited in Great Britain and West Germany to participate in this study. The British sample consisted of 101 male and 100 female undergraduates at the University of Sussex. The West German sample comprised 99 male and 96 female students from the Universities of Mannheim and Karlsruhe. In both cases, respondents were enrolled in a wide range of different subjects.

Subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of two parts. In the first part, they were presented with the Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS) developed by Ward (1988). The ARVS is a Likert-type instrument containing 25 items tapping either favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards raped women. Subjects respond to each item on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). To be used with the German sample, the items were translated into German by the present author. The accuracy of the translation was subsequently confirmed through a back-translation into English by a native speaker. Reliability analyses performed on both the German and British data suggest that both versions of the ARVS were sufficiently reliable to be used for testing the hypotheses of the present study.² In addition, one-way analyses of variance confirmed that male respondents in both samples held significantly more negative attitudes towards rape victims than female respondents. It should be noted, however, that means for all groups were well below the midpoint of the response scale. Accordingly, the ARVS scores of the two male groups cannot be interpreted as evidence of negative attitudes in absolute terms but only as being more negative than the scores of the female members of the two samples.

In the second part of the questionnaire, subjects received a slightly modified version of the rape vignette used in the previous study. It was presented as being taken from a press release about a court hearing, stating that the defendant denied the allegations. Information about the victim's pre-rape behaviour was replaced by the words "After having been dropped off by friends, the victim was on her way to the car park where her car was parked". Following the rape vignette, subjects were asked, in a forced-choice format, whether the vignette had provided sufficient information for them to form an impression about the case. The purpose of this forced-choice item was to ensure that subjects proceeding to rate the victim and the assailant on the critical dependent variables felt sufficiently informed to judge the case. (A more detailed discussion of this aspect referring to the validity of the vignette format in

² For the English version of the ARVS, this analysis yielded a Cronbach α of 0.89 and a mean corrected item-total correlation of $r = 0.48$. For the German version, a Cronbach α of 0.82 was obtained along with a mean corrected item-total correlation of $r = 0.37$.

eliciting judgments about rape incidents will be presented in the following section.)

In the British sample, 119 of the 201 respondents (53 men and 66 women) indicated that they had sufficient information about the incident to form a judgment. In the German sample, this was true for 78 of the 195 respondents (39 men and 39 women). They were asked to respond to three items assessing their perception of the incident. On a five-point scale, they judged the likelihood:

1. that the defendant was guilty of the offence;
2. that the woman was telling the truth; and finally
3. that the woman had somehow precipitated the attack.

To examine the influence of their rape-related attitudes on judgments of victim and assailant in the rape vignette, respondents had to be categorized as holding either a positive or negative attitude towards raped women. Since male and female subjects were found to differ significantly in terms of their ARVS score, all subsequent analyses were carried out separately for the two sexes. First, median ARVS scores were computed, yielding a median of 1.56 for the UK males, 1.52 for the UK females, 1.84 for the FRG males, and 1.60 for the FRG females. Subjects in each of these four subgroups were then divided into a positive and a negative attitude group on the basis of their respective medians.

One-way analyses of variance on the three likelihood ratings were subsequently performed with positive versus negative attitudes towards raped women as independent variables. Subjects' perception of the likelihood of defendant guilt and the likelihood of the women telling the truth were both found to be unaffected by ARVS scores in three of the four subgroups. Even though all mean differences were in the expected direction, i.e. subjects holding more negative attitudes towards raped women gave lower likelihood ratings, these differences only reached significance for the male subgroup of the UK sample. In contrast, perceptions of the likelihood of victim precipitation were influenced by ARVS scores in each of the subgroups. Subjects with negative attitudes towards rape victims considered the victim to be significantly more likely to have precipitated the attack in one way or another than did subjects with positive attitudes. The results pertaining to this variable are displayed in Table 10.3.

Thus, while the two judgments referring specifically to the legal aspects of the case failed to reveal an influence of rape-related attitudes, subjects' assessment of the less well-defined, more general aspect of victim precipitation did vary according to their general attitudes towards rape victims.

Considered in combination, the studies reported in this section provide conclusive evidence that people's perceptions of a victim's responsibility for

Table 10.3 Perceived likelihood of victim precipitation

	FRG sample, ARVS			UK sample, ARVS		
	Positive	Negative		Positive	Negative	
Male subjects	0.21 (19)	0.94 (16)	< 0.03	0.21 (24)	0.78 (23)	< 0.04
Female subjects	0.25 (16)	0.82 (15)	< 0.04	0.25 (32)	0.67 (30)	< 0.04

Note: Scores range from 0 = highly unlikely to 4 = highly likely.

rape are guided by an implicit, socially shared image of the “ideal” victim, who is a respectable, i.e. high status, person and whose behaviour is generally in accordance with female role prescriptions. The greater tendency to attribute responsibility to the victim shown by individuals holding negative views about raped women is clearly in line with the pattern of North American findings. As the evidence on the victim’s role-conforming versus role-discrepant behaviour prior to the attack demonstrated, negative attitudes about rape do not only manifest themselves in the extent to which a woman is held responsible for the attack. They also have an indirect effect on responsibility judgments by predisposing a person to attach significance to information that is factually irrelevant to the case but pertinent to the stereotype of the ideal victim.

IMPLICIT RAPE THEORIES

The evidence presented in the previous sections suggests that judgments of the victim and assailant involved in a specific rape incident are deeply rooted in more general intuitive notions about gender relations. There seems to be a general consensus about the kind of victim, assailant, and situational context involved in the “real”, i.e. credible, rape, with individual attitudes, such as rape myth acceptance, acting as mediating variables. By implication, deviations from the “real” rape stereotype increase the extent to which observers hold rape victims responsible for their fate.

From a methodological point of view, it should be noted that the majority of studies furnishing these conclusions rely on rape vignettes as a format for eliciting subjects’ responses to a specific rape case. These vignettes are tailored by the investigators to facilitate the manipulation of their respective critical variables (e.g. Burt & Albin, 1981; Carli & Leonard, 1989). Typically, they provide only limited information about a case, concentrating on the events immediately prior to and during the attack. While it may be argued that this method has high face validity due to its close resemblance to newspaper and other media coverage of rape incidents, this has generally been an implicit assumption, and we are unaware of any explicit examination of the validity of the vignette format.

Two tasks follow from these considerations for future analyses of the dynamics of social judgments about rape. The first is to provide an empirical examination of the validity of the vignette format. The second task consists in broadening the range of available methods by exploring alternative methodological strategies that should (a) be linked explicitly to a theoretical frame of reference and (b) place greater emphasis on respondents' own ways of defining a rape situation. These two issues will be addressed in turn in the remainder of this chapter.

Beyond the Use of Rape Vignettes: A Methodological Critique

Eliciting subjects' responses to a rape incident presented to them in the form of a rape vignette is undoubtedly a parsimonious research strategy, enabling the investigator to explore the effects of different critical variables on the perception of rape. However, it is equally true to say that rape vignettes are necessarily limited in terms of the informational basis they provide to the respondents. This raises the question whether or not respondents exposed to a rape vignette can be assumed to be sufficiently well informed to make the type of judgments they are asked to provide.

There is conclusive evidence from studies on the role of subjects in psychological research (e.g. Orne, 1962) to suggest that participants rarely refuse to follow the instructions of an investigator, no matter how little sense they may make to them. The fact that they dutifully deliver the responses they are asked to give does not mean, however, that those responses can be regarded at face value as representing meaningful psychological information (cf. Krahé, 1984, for an elaboration of this criticism with respect to attribution theory). Thus, subjects' readiness to provide ratings about victim and assailant responsibility as well as other aspects of a rape incident cannot be regarded as straightforward evidence in favour of the use of rape vignettes.

Subjects' satisfaction with the amount of information provided by a rape vignette was addressed empirically as part of the parallel set of studies introduced earlier on. As described in the previous section, two samples of undergraduates, recruited in West Germany and the UK, first completed the Attitudes towards Rape Victims Scale and then read a rape vignette presented as an authentic press release about a rape trial. Following the vignette and prior to any further judgments, respondents were asked whether or not they found the description in the vignette to be sufficiently detailed for them to form an impression about the incident. Those who said they had enough information then went on to rate the victim and assailant on the measures described in the previous section. In the present context, the focus is on those respondents who did not feel sufficiently informed to obtain an impression about the case.

Altogether, 82 of the 201 British subjects (48 men and 34 women) indicated the need for more information about the case before feeling able to make a judgment. In the German sample, 117 of the 195 subjects (60 men and 57 women) responded in this way.³ In proportional terms, this means that 40.8% of the UK subjects and 60% of the German subjects felt unable to form a judgment about the case on the basis of the information provided in the rape vignette. Even if one accepts the possibility that these figures could have been inflated to some extent by self-presentational concerns, i.e. the unwillingness to be seen as making unsubstantiated judgments or “jumping to conclusions”, the percentage of “no” responses must be considered alarmingly high in view of the prominence of this strategy for eliciting judgments about rape. It appears safe to assume that if they had not been asked the “sufficiency of information” question, all the subjects in this group would have tacitly gone along with the instruction to make the ratings described above, thereby introducing a considerable but undetected threat to the validity of any conclusions derived from such a database.

At the very least, these figures suggest that investigators should become more aware of the validity problems associated with the vignette format and try to establish whether or not their subjects feel sufficiently well informed to make a confident judgment about the incident.

Over and above this cautionary note, the design of this study facilitates a constructive contribution towards exploring alternative methodological strategies in the social psychological analysis of rape. By denying the “sufficiency of information” question, subjects clearly expressed the need for additional information about the incident. Therefore, this group suggests itself for a further analysis aimed at uncovering the type of information people consider relevant for the assessment of a rape charge.

What are the crucial pieces of information for people trying to form an impression about a rape incident? Previous research has addressed this issue mainly through manipulating a number of variables, such as the victim’s reputation or physical attractiveness, thought by investigators to be pertinent to the evaluation of rape cases. An alternative strategy would be to leave it to the subjects to provide their own lists of questions about a rape incident as a first step towards exploring implicit theories about rape.

In a sense, the questions people ask about a rape incident can be interpreted as reflecting their implicit or intuitive theories of rape. Accordingly, as a first step towards exploring implicit rape theories, those respondents who thought the rape vignette to be insufficient were subsequently asked to indicate what further information they would require to make an informed

³ Subjects’ rape-related attitudes as reflected in their ARVS scores failed to produce a significant effect on their responses to this item.

judgment about the case. Three broad categories, i.e. questions about the woman, the man, and the circumstances, were provided to structure this task.

In the German sample, this procedure led to a total of 651 questions, of which 189 referred to the woman, 295 to the man, and 167 to the circumstances. In the British sample, the total number of questions was 396. One hundred and eleven were concerned with the woman, 148 with the man, and 137 with the circumstances of the attack. The means across categories were 5.56 and 4.82 questions for the German and British samples, respectively. These figures suggest that the participants who thought the vignette to be lacking in detail were prepared to think seriously about the case presented in the vignette. They also argue against the assumption that respondents may have answered "no" to the "sufficiency of information" question simply to avoid negative self-presentation. If that had been their prime motive, then they could have chosen to spend less effort, i.e. generate fewer questions, on the subsequent task than they actually did. Neither subjects' sex nor their ARVS scores had a significant effect on the number of questions provided for each of the three categories.

Beyond this quantitative inspection, the questions generated by the two samples were content analysed by two independent raters (the present author as well as another rater from Germany and one from the UK, respectively). In both analyses, discrepancies between the raters were minimal and were resolved through discussion. The results from the content analyses revealed a striking similarity between the categories resulting for the UK and the German sample. As could be expected from the higher number of questions, the range of categories derived from the German data is slightly more comprehensive. Table 10.4 presents a list of the categories that were used by at least five respondents.

Table 10.4 Categories resulting from the content analysis of questions about the victim, the assailant, and the circumstances of the alleged rape

Victim	Assailant	Circumstances
Resistance (21/27)	Psychological state (26/7)	Victim/assailant
Injuries (15/9)	Use of weapons (25/25)	acquaintance (44/67)
Age* (13)	Criminal record (19/17)	Time of day (24/18)
Dress* (11)	Age* (17)	Witnesses (17/27)
Alcohol (9/6)	Use of threats (9/8)	Place of attack (14/7)
Escape attempt (8/5)	Physical build (9/5)	Identification of accused
Communication with	Alcohol (9/8)	(6/5)
assailant (6/5)	Sexual experience* (8)	
Psychological	Marital status* (7)	
consequences (14/11)		

* FRG data only.

Note: The frequency of listings is given in parentheses (FRG/UK). Categories with fewer than five nominations are not included.

By far the most prominent single question referred to the existence of any prior relationship between the man and the woman, followed by questions concerning the presence of witnesses and the events during the attack itself, i.e. the use of violence by the attacker and the amount of resistance by the victim. Altogether, the data in Table 10.4 reveal that, even after eliminating questions named by fewer than five participants, a broad range of 22 questions remains, which highlights subjects' desire for information well beyond what is typically provided in studies using the vignette format.

Altogether, the questions listed about the incident can be interpreted as reflections of the respondents' intuitive theories about rape, prompting them to look for specific information that appears crucial to them in the light of those theories.

While these questions provide a first clue to what persons consider to be important aspects in the evaluation of a rape incident, a more thorough investigation of intuitive or implicit theories about rape needs to consider the answers given to those questions. For instance, if a person wants to know whether or not the woman had been drinking prior to the assault, what impact would either confirmation or disconfirmation have on the person's assessment of the case? Similarly, if individuals ask for information about the prior acquaintance of the victim and the attacker, how does this information enter into their perceptions of the case? In the following section, a methodological strategy for eliciting subjective definitions of rape is presented. This strategy adopts the concept of cognitive prototypes as its theoretical basis.

Understanding Subjective Definitions of Rape: A Prototype Approach

Ideally, there should be no ambiguity as to what constitutes rape. In any legal system, explicit and binding definitions of rape are provided which delineate the conditions and circumstances under which the term applies. However, as shown conclusively by the evidence reviewed so far, well-defined legal definitions of rape are superseded in everyday language by more ambiguous definitions reflecting the operation of social stereotypes and normative beliefs that define the "real" rape.

Drawing upon theorizing in cognitive social psychology, some authors (e.g. Howard, 1984b; Jackson, 1978) suggest that social knowledge about crime is cognitively organized in terms of scripts specifying the typical features and events that characterize the "normal" crime. In this sense, the "normal" rape script can be seen as providing a standard for evaluating a specific case, whereby the more a case deviates from the script the more a woman's claim to the role of rape victim is likely to be rejected.

Based on a similar social cognitive approach, the data presented in this

section are part of another comparative investigation currently being conducted in the UK and Germany. It relies on the concept of "cognitive prototypes" (Cantor & Mischel, 1979) to investigate the subjective definitions of rape held by three social groups: university students, police officers, and nurses.

Since data collection is still in progress, only findings concerning the sample of UK students can be reported at this stage. This evidence illustrates how the prototype concept can be used as a framework for tapping people's intuitive theories of rape by asking them to provide a profile of features they associate with a particular rape situation. More specifically, it provides both qualitative and quantitative information about students' perceptions of different rape situations.

At the core of the prototype concept is the idea that the categories used in natural language to classify objects, persons, and situations have fuzzy boundaries rather than being mutually exclusive. This means that each category contains both highly typical and less typical members, with the less typical members sharing a number of characteristics with those of adjacent categories. The meaning of a category is best captured by its "prototype", defined in terms of those features that are consensually assigned to the category in question. The prototype is conceived of as a cognitive schema that is readily accessible in information processing, facilitating faster and more confident handling of prototype-consistent information.

In the present study, the prototype concept is used as a framework for eliciting and comparing the characteristic features of different rape situations. In line with the proposition that in everyday discourse rape has multiple meanings, each associated with a different set of characteristics, six different situations were distinguished:

1. The typical, i.e. most common, rape situation
2. The credible rape complaint where there is no doubt about the truth of the victim's allegations
3. The dubious rape complaint where there are serious doubts about the truth of the victim's allegations
4. The rape experience that is particularly hard for the victim to cope with
5. The rape experience that is comparatively easy for the victim to cope with
6. The false rape complaint

In the absence of an established typology of rape situations, these six situations were selected on the basis of the available literature to cover a representative range of rape experiences.

One hundred and ten students (56 men and 54 women) at the University of Sussex participated in this study on an unpaid voluntary basis. The average age was 22 years, and respondents were evenly distributed across arts and science subjects.

Subjects received a questionnaire containing a random combination of three of the six rape situations listed above. Following each situation, they were presented with a list of 27 characteristics potentially relevant to the description of a rape situation. These characteristics were selected on the basis of the categories that emerged from the content analysis of questions generated by the respondents of the previous study (cf. Table 10.4). Subjects were instructed to tick all the features they thought to be characteristic of the situation in question, thus generating a profile of defining features for each situation.

To establish the prototypical "profile" of each of the six rape situations, frequencies of the different response options within each feature category were computed. If no response option was ticked by the subject for a particular feature, then the response was coded as "irrelevant". Those options which had been named most frequently were included in the consensual feature list defining the prototype of the respective situation. For example, the distribution of frequencies for the "victim injuries" feature in the "typical rape" situation was as follows. Of the 59 respondents who looked at this situation, five (7.7%) selected the "no injuries" option, 31 (47.7%) thought the victim in this situation to be likely to suffer "minor injuries", 13 (20.0%) selected the "serious injuries" option, and one respondent (1.5%) considered "critical injuries" to be a characteristic feature of this situation. Finally, 15 respondents (23.1%) did not tick any response option, and their responses were coded as reflecting the irrelevance of the feature of "victim injuries" in describing the typical rape situation. On the basis of these data, the feature of "minor injuries" was selected for the consensual feature list, i.e. the prototype, for the typical rape situation. In the same way, the characteristic features to be included in the prototype were determined for the remaining categories of victim, assailant, and circumstance characteristics.

The prototypes obtained for each of the six situations are displayed in Table 10.5. Since each respondent received only three of the six situations and not all questionnaires were returned, sample sizes differ slightly across the situations.

The characteristics listed in Table 10.5 reflect the respondents' understanding of the features that distinguish a particular kind of rape situation. In terms of the prototype approach, they represent a set of consensual features that define the prototypical example of a given category. The frequency analyses showed that "marital status" and "nationality" of both victim and assailant along with the features of assailant sexual experience and alcohol had been regarded as irrelevant with respect to all six situations. Even though this is an interesting finding, these aspects fail to differentiate between the situations and were therefore dropped from any further analysis. In two further categories, namely the presence of witnesses ("none") and the woman's confidence in identifying the attacker ("yes"), the same options were named for all

Table 10.5 Prototypes of the six rape situations

Situations	Typical S1	Credible S2	Dubious S3	Hard S4	Easy S5	False S6
<i>Victim</i>						
Age	20-40				20-40	
Dress	Non- distinctive					
Sexual experience				None	Regular	
Resistance	Physical	Physical	None	Physical	Physical	None
Psychological consequences	Serious	Serious	Slight	Therapy	Slight	Slight
Alcohol	None	None	Heavy			
Injuries	Minor	Serious	None	Critical	None	None
Escape attempt	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Communication with assailant	Yes					Yes
<i>Assailant</i>						
Age	20-40					
Psychological disturbance	Not disturbed			Disturbed	Not disturbed	
Criminal record	None		None		None	None
Threats	Of violence	Of violence	None	Death threat	None	None
Weapons	Threat with	Threat with	None	Use of	None	None
Physical build	Average			Strong		
<i>Circumstances</i>						
Place			Man's/ woman's	Man's/ woman's		
Witnesses	None	None	None	None	None	None
Acquaintance	Unknown	Unknown	Friends		Ex- partners	
Time	Night		Night			
No. of attackers	One	One	One	Several	One	One
Identification	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	59	51	54	59	48	51

Note: Blank cells indicate that the respective feature was considered to be irrelevant by the majority of respondents.

situations and thus also failed to discriminate between them. However, they were retained in the analysis because unlike the irrelevance judgments they contribute positive information to the prototypes. The following discussion will highlight only a few important differences between the prototypes of the six situations, taking the typical rape situation as a point of reference.

In characterizing the *typical* rape situation, respondents confirm some of the stereotypical notions about rape as a crime happening at night between complete strangers and involving physical resistance by the victim. At the same time, they perceive the psychological consequences for the victim to be severe, even though they think of the victim in a typical rape situation as suffering only minor physical injuries. The assailant is described very much as a "normal" person, without any history of psychological problems or criminal offences. The *credible* rape situation is characterized by similar, yet fewer features. The main difference compared to the typical rape lies in the greater severity of the injuries suffered by the victim.

In contrast, the prototype of the *dubious* rape complaint is substantially different from the typical rape. Here, respondents think that the victim is heavily drunk and does not show any resistance. The fact that the assailant does not threaten to use violence and does not have a weapon also contributes to the perceived dubious nature of a rape complaint, as do previous friendly relations between the man and the woman and the fact that the attack occurred at either the man's or the woman's place. These findings are noteworthy in that they reflect the same restrictive understanding of rape that is prevalent in society at large and show little of the more liberal, feminist understanding that any form of psychological pressure on a woman to coerce her into sexual contacts should be regarded as rape.

Compared to the first three situations, the profile of the rape that is *particularly hard for the victim to cope with* contains a number of new features. A victim's lack of sexual experience is regarded as a crucial factor, along with her physically resisting the attack and suffering critical injuries. Not surprisingly, the severity of threat used in the situation is an outstanding factor on the assailant side, but being raped by a mentally disturbed man of strong physical build is also perceived as contributing to the traumatic nature of a rape experience. Finally, being raped by several attackers is an essential feature associated with particularly hard coping.

Prototypes of the last two situations, i.e. the *false rape complaint* and the rape experience that is *comparatively easy for the victim to cope with*, share a number of features both with each other and with the dubious rape complaint. For the easy to cope with situation, a victim's regular sex life is seen as a critical feature. As expected, psychological consequences for the victim in this type of situation are perceived as being only slightly negative. Interestingly, being raped by an ex-partner is also considered to be a typical feature of a less traumatic rape experience. Finally, the lack of any form of resistance as well

as signs of physical injuries distinguishes the false rape complaint, as does the failure to try and escape from the situation.

The findings in Table 10.5 already give some indication of the similarities between the prototypes. However, a quantitative analysis of feature overlap was conducted to obtain more precise evidence. In accordance with previous work on cognitive prototypes, the following formula was used (cf. Eckes, 1986):

$$S(A,B) = \frac{f(A \cap B)}{f(A \cap B) + f(A-B) + f(B-A)}$$

where $S(A,B)$ is the similarity between the prototypes of situations A and B, $f(A \cap B)$ is the number of shared features in A and B, $f(A-B)$ is the number of features contained in A but not in B, and $f(B-A)$ is the number of features contained in B but not in A. $S(A,B)$ can range from 0 to 1, with a score of 0 reflecting complete dissimilarity (i.e. no shared features at all) and a score of 1 complete similarity (i.e. no distinctive features at all). The resulting pattern of similarity between the six rape prototypes is presented in Table 10.6.

The findings show that the highest similarity exists between the prototypes of the dubious and the false rape complaint. The greatest dissimilarities emerge between the rape situation that is particularly hard to cope with and the typical and easy to cope with rape situations, respectively. It should be pointed out, however, that the meaning of these quantitative measures of prototype similarity can only be fully appreciated in conjunction with the qualitative findings reported in Table 10.5. So, for instance, the prototype of the hard to cope with rape is equally dissimilar from the most common and the easy to cope with situations, yet the nature of the dissimilarities differs greatly with regard to the two situations. Interestingly, there was no more than a medium level of similarity between the typical and the credible rape complaint. This finding is due almost exclusively to the fact that the typical rape complaint contains a higher number of features than the credible complaint. Thus, while acknowledging that rape is typically characterized by features such as victim and assailant being between 20 and 40 years of age or the

Table 10.6 Similarity between rape prototypes

Situations	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Typical	S1					
Credible	S2	0.50				
Dubious	S3	0.18	0.14			
Hard to cope	S4	0.13	0.20	0.13		
Easy to cope	S5	0.29	0.19	0.47	0.13	
False complaint	S6	0.20	0.16	0.64	0.10	0.56

attack happening at night, not all of these characteristics are required in order to lend credibility to a rape complaint.

Altogether, the findings reveal that respondents in this study perceive rape as a serious criminal offence with lasting consequences for the victim. This is reflected most clearly in the prototype of the typical rape situation that is characterized as involving long-term psychological problems for the victim as well as threats of violence by the assailant. At the same time, however, they also corroborate the tendency, implied in the evidence discussed previously, for observers to become suspicious if a rape complaint contains certain critical features. Previous encounters between the victim and the assailant are perceived as typical features of the dubious complaint. Similarly, a rape complaint is likely to be treated with suspicion if the alleged assailant does not use violence or even a weapon. This evidence suggests that the credibility of a rape victim is likely to be called into question whenever her account includes features that are consensually perceived as characterizing the dubious or false rape complaint.

From a methodological point of view, the prototype approach developed in the present study proved to be a feasible strategy for obtaining detailed and fine-grained information about a person's intuitive understanding of the term of rape. This information includes descriptive evidence referring to the contents of different rape prototypes as well as an appraisal of their cognitive organization in terms of similarity and difference. By linking the evidence presented in this section to parallel sets of data currently collected from samples of police officers and nurses, the final database will facilitate a comparative appraisal of the similarities and differences inherent in the subjective definitions of rape prevalent among these groups.

CONCLUSION

The work reported in this chapter originated from a social psychological perspective on the issue of sexual violence against women. Central to this perspective is the proposition that sexual victimization is typically followed by social victimization and often stigmatization, depending on the extent to which the victim's case departs from the commonly accepted definition of the "real rape". This definition, along with its underlying normative standards of appropriate female behaviour, affects both the victim's perception of her own role in the attack and the willingness of other people to accept her claim to the victim status.

Against the background of previous evidence, obtained largely in North America, the studies reported in this chapter were aimed at illuminating the social dynamics of judgments about rape in a series of studies conducted in two European countries, West Germany and the UK. The work described in

the first part of the chapter was located within the framework of attribution theory, using the rape vignette format to explore the impact of different victim, assailant, and observer variables on the extent to which a raped woman is held responsible for her fate. The findings from these studies confirm earlier evidence suggesting an inverse relationship between information about the social status of a raped woman and judgments of her responsibility, while failing to replicate the parallel effect of assailant social status on his perceived responsibility for the attack. The failure to obtain any sex differences in subjects' attributions of responsibility is also noteworthy in that it corroborates the claim, made by other authors, that more specific rape-related attitudes are more important than biological sex in accounting for individual difference in judging rape victims. Going beyond previous evidence, the second study described in this chapter provides evidence for the interaction between specific information about a victim's behaviour prior to the attack (role-conforming vs role-discrepant) and the observer's acceptance of stereotypical beliefs about rape. Thus, it is shown that observers' general attitudes towards rape predispose them to selectively attend to information about a rape victim's conformity or non-conformity to female role prescriptions. The impact of rape-related attitudes is confirmed in another study where subjects holding negative attitudes towards raped women assigned significantly greater responsibility to the victim of a specific case across both gender and national boundaries. Altogether, these European data join the American findings in suggesting that the scope of what is considered to be a "legitimate rape claim" is defined in rather narrow terms, especially by those individuals who show a high acceptance of rape myths.

In illuminating the range of variables that affect responsibility judgments towards victims of rape, research within the attributional framework has relied on a limited range of methodological strategies. The standard procedure in this area involves the use of rape vignettes, manipulating the critical variables, in combination with straightforward rating scales of victim and assailant responsibility. Despite the obvious advantages of this procedure, there is a need for alternative, more qualitatively oriented methodological strategies. Rape vignettes require subjects to judge a situation on the basis of very limited information. It is in such cases that people are most likely to refer to their stereotypical notions as a basis from which to derive their conclusions.¹ In fact, when given the opportunity, a substantial number of respondents in two independent samples expressed the need for additional information before feeling able to judge a rape incident.

Therefore, the work presented in the second part of the chapter addressed the task of developing a strategy for exploring the kind of information people would like to have in judging a rape incident. Based on the proposition that in everyday language people implicitly associate different meanings with the term of rape, the concept of "cognitive prototypes" was invoked to explore

the characteristic elements of different types of rape situations. By asking individuals to generate their own profiles of characteristic features for different rape situations that are then compared in terms of overall similarity or difference, the prototype approach combines both qualitative and quantitative information about subjective definitions of rape. Furthermore, the prototypical profiles obtained for different situations contribute a new perspective on the attributional evidence. So, for instance, the feature of the victim being heavily drunk in the prototype of the dubious rape situation ties in with findings from one of the earlier studies on the victim's role-discrepant behaviour (i.e. drinking in a pub) prior to the attack. In suggesting that a victim's alcohol consumption is a distinctive feature of a dubious rape claim, the prototype strategy facilitates a better understanding of the process whereby judgments about victim responsibility are inferred from information about a rape incident. Therefore, the present findings illustrate the benefits of creating a more diverse range of methodological strategies to capture the social meaning of rape.

Altogether, the work presented in this chapter supports the view that, despite a general consensus nowadays that rape is unacceptable and rapists should receive severe punishment, the woman's role in the offence remains contentious. The idea of victim precipitation allows a broad network of gender-related stereotypes to be brought to bear upon the assessment of the victim's responsibility. By highlighting the judgmental processes that lead to the derogation of rape victims, social psychology may ultimately be able to contribute to a more sympathetic and supportive treatment of victims of rape.

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