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Coping With Rape: A Social Psychological Perspective¹

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When an individual experiences a negative life event, such as an accident, illness, or bereavement, others typically respond with compassion and sympathy to his or her plight. For a woman who has been raped, the situation is often dramatically different. Rather than receiving the comfort and support dearly needed after a traumatizing experience such as rape, she may find that many people around her treat her claim with suspicion and challenge her status as victim of a sexual assault. The idea that many, if not most, rape victims precipitate the attack through their behavior or appearance and thus have to accept at least part of the responsibility for what happened is firmly ingrained in the common stereotype about the crime and its victims (Katz & Mazur, 1979). For a raped woman this means that she has to come to terms not only with the psychological aftermath of the attack itself but also with "the reactions of people, especially the negative subjective reactions based on the myth and stereotypes that surround the subject of rape" (Burgess, 1987, p. 3).

Over the last ten years or so, a growing body of evidence has become available demonstrating the long-term psychological consequences of rape and sexual assault. For the most part, this research has been located in the field of clinical psychology, concentrating on the impact of the victimization experience on various aspects of psychological functioning, such as depression, sexual problems, anxiety, and changes in life style subsequent to the assault (e.g., Burgess & Holmstrom, 1985; Cohen & Roth, 1987; Kilpatrick, Veronen, & Best, 1985; Myers, Templer, & Brown, 1984; Whiston, 1981).

¹ The present chapter was prepared when the author was a Visiting Fellow at the University of Sussex, Brighton, UK. This stay was facilitated by a Heisenberg Fellowship awarded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Kr 972/1-1).

In contrast, the work reported in this chapter is based on a social psychological perspective. This perspective highlights the victim's confrontation with the negative attitudes and stereotypical beliefs about rape held in her social environment as a central factor in the coping process. By investigating the determinants and consequences of what is often described by rape victims as a "second assault" (Williams & Holmes, 1981), the social psychological approach addresses an important aspect of sexual victimization. To illustrate the scope of this approach, let us consider Burt's (1983) outline of a conceptual framework for victimological research in which she distinguishes four stages in the victimization process:

In Stage 1, the person experiences harm, suffering, or injury caused by another person or institution.

If the person experiences the harm as unjust, then self-labeling as "victim" occurs in Stage 2.

Following the self-labeling, the person will then claim to be acknowledged as victim by others in Stage 3.

Finally, Stage 4 of the victimization process involves the recognition of the victim's role claim and thus the attainment of "real victim status" in the eyes of society.

Applying this framework to sexual victimization, it is clear that social attitudes and stereotypes bear upon each of Stages 2, 3, and 4. Cultural beliefs related to rape, sexuality, and male-female relations in general have a decisive impact on whether or not a raped woman perceives herself as an innocent victim, whether she attempts to claim victim status from significant others and/or members of relevant institutions, and whether those other people are prepared to acknowledge the legitimacy of her claim.

The present chapter examines some of the social psychological variables involved in the perception and evaluation of rape victims. Following a summary of the main findings from previous research, the first part of the chapter will focus on a series of empirical studies examining the factors that influence people's attributions of responsibility to victims of rape. In the second part, evidence will be presented on police officers' subjective definitions of rape that convey their implicit theories about the crime and its victims. Whilst the vast majority of research on these issues has been conducted in the United States, the studies reported in this chapter were carried out in Great Britain and Germany, thus allowing an examination of the cross-national replicability of some of the major findings.

SOCIAL STEREOTYPES AND RESPONSIBILITY ATTRIBUTIONS TO VICTIMS OF RAPE

The much cited study by Jones and Aronson (1973) marks the beginning of a prolific research tradition in social psychology directed at the issue of responsibility attributions to victims of rape. Attributing responsibility is a central aspect of evaluating a rape incident both within and outside the criminal justice system and has been found to be prevalent not just among third persons but also among rape victims themselves (Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Meyer & Taylor, 1986). Holding a raped woman at least partly responsible for the assault is tantamount to questioning her status as victim of a criminal act. Thus, it is essential to identify the variables that affect the attribution of responsibility to victims of rape. Evidence from a diverse range of studies suggests that in forming an impression about a specific rape incident, people typically go beyond the information given and draw upon general social stereotypes to assess the roles of victim and offender. Such stereotypical notions about, e.g., a woman's social respectability or acceptable patterns of female behavior, provide a powerful basis for inferring the credibility of a rape claim and the responsibility of the victim.

The variety of background variables that have been examined in terms of their impact on judgments of responsibility can be classified broadly into three categories: information regarding (a) the victim and (b) the assailant involved in a sexual attack and (c) the personal characteristics and attitudes of the observer/subject judging the event. The following paragraphs illustrate this evidence by discussing one variable from each of the three categories: victim respectability, assailant social status, and sex of observer.

Jones and Aronson (1973) examined the impact of information about the "respectability" of a rape victim on the assessment of victim responsibility. 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. Based on Lerner's (1970) concept of "belief in a just world," it was predicted that more responsibility would be attributed to the more respectable victims. According to Lerner, there is a general human desire to believe in the world being a just place. This belief, it is argued, serves a self-protective function by suggesting that negative events happen only to those people who deserve them in one way or another. Learning that a respectable woman has become a victim of rape threatens the validity of the belief in a just world. To restore it, some reason has to be found why she deserved the misfortune after all. Attributing responsibility to a respectable rape victim, i.e. suggesting that she did something to precipitate the attack, is one way of upholding one's belief in a just world. In line with this reasoning, Jones and Aronson showed that the two respectable victims were attributed more responsibility for the attack than the less respectable divorcee.

Subsequent studies, however, have failed to replicate this finding. While some failed to find any influence of victim respectability on attributions of responsibility (e.g., Kahn et al., 1977; Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1977; Kerr & Kurtz, 1977), others 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; Smith, Keating, Hester, & Mitchell, 1976). A conclusive interpretation of this evidence, however, is hampered by the fact that no consistent operational definition of victim respectability has been used, with examples ranging from marital status over occupation and dress to past sexual history.

Social status has also been found to be a critical variable on the part of the assailant influencing responsibility attributions. Observers were shown to be less certain about the guilt of a high status assailant than of 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 (Deitz & Byrnes, 1981; Jacobson, 1981). In a study by Yarmey (1985) comparing attributional judgments of older and younger adults, young people were found to attribute greater responsibility for an assault to a woman who resisted a well-dressed attacker than when she resisted a poorly dressed attacker. Altogether, however, the number of studies looking at information about the assailant is small compared to those concerned with either victim or observer variables.

Among the observer variables, the most obvious and most widely explored aspect is that of sex differences. Here, the overall pattern of findings suggests that males attribute more responsibility to rape victims than females (e.g., Calhoun, Selby, Cann, & Keller, 1978; Thornton, Robbins, & Johnson, 1981; Thornton & Ryckman, 1983). However, a number of studies either failed to obtain sex differences (e.g., Acock & Ireland, 1983; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982) or demonstrated a stronger tendency for females to blame the victim (Howard, 1984) as well as greater leniency by female probation officers in recommending sentences for rapists (Walsh, 1984). Recent studies point to the importance of rape-related attitudes, such as "rape myth acceptance," as facilitating a more fine-grained analysis of the gender-related aspects of responsibility judgments (Bunting & Reeves, 1983; Burt, 1980; Quackenbush, 1989).

As mentioned earlier on, the information currently available on the social judgment of rape victims and assailants has been collected almost exclusively in North America. Thus, very little is known about the cross-national or indeed cross-cultural generality of the findings summarized above. Therefore, the first study to be reported below was conducted with a view to replicating some of the findings obtained in previous research with a West German sample.

Attributing Responsibility to Rape Victims: A German Study

This study (Krahé, 1985) was designed to examine the impact of three variables on ratings of responsibility to the victim and the assailant in a rape case: the victim's social status, the assailant's social status, and the sex of the subject. On the basis of previous evidence, it was predicted that

1. High status victims would be attributed less responsibility than low status victims;
2. High status assailants would also be attributed less responsibility than low status assailants; and finally
3. Male subjects would attribute more responsibility to the victim and less to the assailant than female subjects.

Procedure

A total of 69 undergraduates (42 females and 27 males) from a small West German university participated in the study. They were shown a brief passage from a popular TV program calling upon the support of the audience in investigating crimes. In the videotaped scene, a woman stood with her back to the camera and told the audience how she had picked up a hitch-hiker who had then forced her to drive into an isolated copse where he raped her. Following the videotape, subjects received a booklet with further information about the case which contained the manipulation of victim and assailant social status. The high status victim was introduced as a school teacher, while the low status victim was described as a shop assistant. The assailant was described as a medical student in the high status condition and as an unskilled worker in the low status condition. Two dependent measures were employed. The first, attribution of responsibility to the victim, was obtained in two steps: Subjects were first asked to make a dichotomous "yes/no" judgment of victim responsibility to allow them a forthright rejection of the idea that the woman had done anything to precipitate the attack. Those subjects who thought the victim had some responsibility were then asked to rate that responsibility on a percentage scale ranging from "0%" to "100%" with decimal subdivisions. The remaining subjects were assigned a score of "0" on the percentage scale. Ratings of the second dependent variable, assailant responsibility, were obtained on an independent percentage scale also ranging from "0%" to "100%."

Results and Discussion

Separate $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Victim Status \times Assailant Status \times Sex of Subject) analyses of variance were computed for the two dependent variables. For the ratings of victim responsibility, the analysis yielded a marginally significant effect of victim status as predicted in Hypothesis 1 ($F(1,61) = 3.65, p < .07$). 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, the only significant effect was the main effect for assailant social status ($F(1,61) = 6.02, p < .02$). However, the direction of this effect ran counter to Hypothesis 2, 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 body of evidence generated in North America. Neither the sex of the subject nor the social status of the assailant had an influence on the perception of the victim's causal role in 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 (school teacher 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 versus 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 reveals how firmly the perception of rape is embedded in the social values and stereotypes of society.

This conclusion receives further backing from the findings of the next study to be reported that examined the link between subjects' rape-related attitudes and their processing of information about a rape victim's role-conforming vs. role-discrepant behavior prior to the assault.

Rape Myth Acceptance and Responsibility Judgments: A British Study

As noted above, a number of studies have shown 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. Rape myths are conceptualized in terms of a set of general beliefs about rape for which there is no factual basis and which predispose an individual to adopt a negative, unsympathetic view toward the victims of specific rape incidents. This view is reflected, not least, in the person's appraisal of the victim's responsibility for the attack. The extent to which people accept such rape myths to be true is thought to be directly related to the amount of responsibility they attribute to a victim of rape.

Going beyond this straightforward hypothesis, the study reported in this section explored the proposition that rape myth acceptance not only exerts a direct influence on judgments of responsibility but also affects the way people treat information that is causally irrelevant to the rape incident. The starting point for the

study was provided by a previous investigation (Best & Demmin, 1982) showing that victims who engaged in provocative or role-discrepant behavior (i.e., "drinking alone in a bar") prior to the assault were attributed greater responsibility than victims who engaged in role-conforming behavior (i.e., "studying alone in the library"). The rapist, on the other hand, was attributed significantly less responsibility if the victim's prerape behavior had been role-discrepant than when it had been role-conforming.

Apart from attempting to replicate this finding with a British sample, the present study includes the concept of rape myth acceptance to test the idea that persons showing a high acceptance of rape myths should be particularly susceptible to information about a rape victim's role-conforming vs. role-discrepant behavior prior to the attack in their assessments of victim responsibility. Accordingly, two hypotheses were advanced in this study:

1. The victim who is engaged in role-discrepant behavior prior to the rape is attributed greater responsibility than the victim who is engaged in role-conforming behavior.
2. High rape myth acceptance leads to greater responsibility attributed to the victim, especially to the victim engaging in role-discrepant behavior.

The sex of the subject was again included as an independent variable to examine whether the lack of sex effects in Study 1 was replicated with an independent sample in a different country.

Procedure

Thirty-six males and 37 females volunteered to participate in the study. The study was conducted in Brighton, UK. All participants were members of the general public in the age range of 20 to 35 who were approached at various public places. The average age was 26.4 years.

Subjects were presented with a questionnaire containing a brief rape vignette. The vignette described how a woman was attacked when she walked across a car park to get to her car. It focused solely on the course of events in the situation and did not contain any background information about the victim and the assailant except for the manipulation of the victim's prerape behavior which was contained in the introductory sentence of the vignette. In the role-conforming condition, this sentence read "After having finished work in her office, the victim was on her way to the car park where her car was parked." In the role-discrepant condition, the first sentence read "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 text then described the rape incident. Following the rape vignette, subjects were asked to give three responses: (a) to indicate, in a forced choice format, whether or not they thought the victim had any responsibility at all for the attack; (b) those who answered "yes" to the first question were then asked to rate the extent of victim responsibility on a percentage scale ranging from "0%" to "100%." The remaining subjects were assigned a score

of "0" on the percentage rating; (c) finally, all subjects rated the assailant's responsibility on another percentage scale.

In the second part of the questionnaire, subjects were asked to complete 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).

Results and Discussion

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 $2 \times 2 \times 2$ analyses of variance were performed for victim and assailant responsibility with sex of subject, rape myth acceptance, and victim's role conformity as independent variables. The cell means for ratings of victim responsibility are presented in Table 24.1.

The analysis of variance produces a highly significant main effect for rape myth acceptance, ($F(1,65) = 12.32, p < .001$), and a significant interaction between victim's role conformity and subjects' rape myth acceptance, ($F(1,65) = 4.26, p < .05$), indicating that differential information about victim's prerape behavior only affected the attributions of subjects scoring high on rape myth acceptance. None of the remaining main effects and interactions were significant.

The means for the ratings of assailant responsibility are presented in Table 24.2.

The only significant effect that emerged from this analysis was the interaction between victim's role conformity and subjects' rape myth acceptance, ($F(1,65) =$

TABLE 24.1
Mean Ratings of Victim Responsibility

<i>Subject Gender</i>	<i>M</i>		<i>F</i>	
	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>Rape Myth Accept.</i>				
Role-Conf.	6.25	0.00	3.75	1.67
<i>Victim's Pre-Rape Behavior</i>				
Role-Discr.	15.45	0.00	17.00	0.00

Note. The response scales for these ratings ranged from 0% to 100%.

6.31, $p < .02$): Subjects high on rape myth acceptance attributed more responsibility to the assailant than those low on rape myth acceptance when the victim had engaged in role-conforming behavior prior to the rape. The reverse pattern was obtained when the victim had behaved in a role-discrepant fashion prior to the attack.

Thus, no support was obtained for the first hypothesis stating that information about a victim's role-conforming vs. role-discrepant behavior affects the perception of victim responsibility in terms of higher responsibility being attributed to the role-discrepant victim. However, there was support for the second hypothesis postulating an interaction between victim's role conformity and subject's rape myth acceptance: People who accept stereotypic ideas about rape are more ready to take victim's behavior into account as an aggravating or attenuating factor in assessing both victim and assailant responsibility. As in Study 1, the sex of the subject did not have an effect on responsibility attributions.

In conclusion, results from this study confirm earlier evidence in demonstrating that rape myth acceptance is a critical determinant of responsibility attributions to rape victims and assailants. A person's general attitude about what constitutes rape and under what circumstances it can occur at all systematically influences his or her evaluation of a specific rape incident. At the same time, a person who believes in rape myth is also more likely to draw upon general stereotypes of gender-appropriate behavior when asked to evaluate a rape incident. Although the rape vignettes used in this study did not imply in any way that victim prerape behavior was causally related to the subsequent attack, subjects high on rape myth acceptance did utilize this information in their responsibility attributions.

TABLE 24.2
Mean Ratings of Assailant Responsibility

<i>Subject Gender</i>	<i>M</i>		<i>F</i>	
	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>Rape Myth Accept.</i>				
Role-Conf.	94.38	86.25	96.25	93.33
<i>Victim's Pre-Rape Behavior</i>				
Role-Discr.	84.55	97.78	73.00	97.86

Note. The response scales for these ratings ranged from 0% to 100%.

Considered in combination, the two studies reported so far provide conclusive evidence that people's perceptions of a victim's causal role in rape are guided by an implicit, socially shared image of the "ideal" victim who is a respectable, that is high status, person and whose behavior is generally in accordance with female role-prescriptions. Whether or not a raped woman is acknowledged as victim rather than precipitator of a sexual attack depends on the extent to which she approximates the image of the ideal victim as well as on the extent to which the context of the attack conforms to the general stereotype of the "classic" rape situation as occurring between strangers, outdoors, and at night (e.g., Burt & Albin, 1981; Gilmartin-Zena, 1983; J. E. Williams, 1984). L. S. Williams (1984) has shown that this stereotype of the classic rape even affects the victims' own perceptions of the assault and their causal role in it, with victims raped under less typical circumstances questioning their role and responsibility in the attack and being less likely to report it to the police.

POLICE OFFICERS' DEFINITIONS OF RAPE

The tendency to be suspicious of rape claims by women whose lifestyle and social background is at odds with societal conceptions of female decency is not limited to those subject populations, i.e., university students, that are most widely represented in the existing body of research. There is evidence that jurors in rape and sexual assault cases are equally affected by such social background information in their perceptions of rape cases (e.g., Feild & Bienen, 1980; LaFree, Reskin, & Visher, 1985). Even before a rape complaint comes to court, the handling of rape cases by members of the criminal justice system, most notably the police, was shown to reflect the impact of social stereotypes and normative beliefs on defining the "real rape" (e.g., Feild, 1978; Feldman-Summers & Palmer, 1980; LaFree, 1980; Rose & Randall, 1982). What these studies suggest is that well-defined legal definitions of rape become blurred by the simultaneous operation of more ambiguous common sense conceptions of the crime and its victims that critically affect the collection, evaluation, and further processing of information concerning a rape complaint. One way of looking at these common sense conceptions is to conceptualize them as cognitive schemata that facilitate a quick and parsimonious assessment of a specific rape incident. In this vein, some authors (e.g., Howard, 1984; 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 victim role is likely to be rejected.

A Study on Cognitive Prototypes of Rape

The final study to be reported in this chapter also adopts a social cognitive perspective to explore common sense notions about rape. More specifically, it refers to the concept of "cognitive prototypes" to explore the subjective definitions of rape held by police officers. 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 (e.g., Cantor & Mischel, 1979). 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.

In the present study, the prototype concept is used as basis for eliciting and comparing the characteristic features of different rape situations as defined by police officers. In line with the proposition that rape has multiple meanings, each associated with a different set of characteristics, a total of six different situations was examined:

1. The typical, i.e. most common rape situation.
2. The credible rape complaint where there is no doubt about the truth of the victims' allegations.
3. The dubious rape complaint where there are serious doubts about the truth of the victims' 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.

Procedure

One-hundred-and-fifty police officers from the West Berlin police force participated in this study. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents at police stations in different parts of the city to ensure a representative coverage of inner city and suburban areas. One-hundred-and-eight completed questionnaires were returned, leading to a final sample of 85 males and 23 females. Their average age was 35.7 years, while the average number of years in the police was 17.1. Ninety-two (85.2%) of the respondents reported that they had to deal with rape cases as part of their duties, with the average number of cases being estimated at 4.2 per year.

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 a previous study² asking an independent sample to generate lists of questions about the victim, the assailant, and the circumstances of a rape incident that they considered to be relevant to the evaluation of a specific case. Subjects were instructed to tick all those features they thought to be characteristic of the situation in question, thus providing a descriptive profile for each situation. For example, they were asked to consider the age of the victim as a potentially relevant feature in each situation. For this feature, four response options, i.e., age ranges, were presented: under 20 years of age, between 20 and 40, between 40 and 60, and over 60. If, for any situation, subjects thought that victim would predominantly belong to one (or more) of the age groups provided, then they would tick the appropriate option(s). If they considered victim age to be irrelevant, none of the options was ticked.

Results and Discussion

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 age" feature in the "typical rape" situation was as follows: Of the 51 respondents who looked at this situation, 11 (18.6%) selected the "under 20" age group, 38 (64.4%) regarded the "20-40" age range as typically characterizing this situation, and 2 (3.4%) selected the "40-60" age range. Finally, 8 respondents (13.6%) did not tick any response option, and their responses were coded as reflecting the irrelevance of the feature of "victim age" in describing the typical rape situation. On the basis of these data, the feature of "victim age between 20 and 40" was included into 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 24.3. Since each respondent received only three situations and not all questionnaires were returned sample sizes differ slightly across the situations.

The characteristics listed in Table 24.3 reflect the police officers' understanding of the features that distinguish a particular kind of rape situation. Blank cells indicate that none of the response options was regarded as distinctive for the situation in question. In terms of the prototype approach, each column of Table 24.3 represents a set of consensual features that define the prototypical example of a

²Krahé, B. (1990). *Police officer's definitions of rape: A prototype study*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

TABLE 24.3
 Prototypes of the Six Rape Situations

		<i>Typical</i>	<i>Credible</i>	<i>Dubious</i>	<i>Hard</i>	<i>Easy</i>	<i>False</i>
		<i>S1</i>	<i>S2</i>	<i>S3</i>	<i>S4</i>	<i>S5</i>	<i>S6</i>
Victim	Age	20-40	20-40	over 40	under 40	20-40	20-40
	Dress		nondist.	nondist.			
	Sexual Exp.	occas.			none	regular	occas.
	Resistance	verbal	physical	none	physical	none	none
	Psych. Conseq.	serious	serious	slight	serious	slight	slight
	Alcohol	slight	none	heavy	none	none	slight
	Injuries	minor	minor	none	serious	none	none
	Escape Attempt		yes	no	yes	no	no
	Communication with A.	yes	yes	yes			yes
Attacker	Age	20-40	20-40	20-40		20-40	20-40
	Sexual Exp.	occas.	occas.			occas.	occas.
	Psych. Dist.	dist.	dist.	not dist.		not dist.	not dist.
	Crim. Record			none		none	
	Alcohol	slight	slight	heavy		slight	slight
	Threat	viol.	viol.	no thr.	death t.	no thr.	viol.
	Use of Weapons	thrat	threat	none	threat	none	none
	Physical Constit.	average	average	weak		average	average
Circumstances	Place	outdoors	outdoors	man's/ woman's		man's/ woman's	man's/ woman's
	Witnesses	none	none	none	none	none	none
	Acquaintance	unknown	unknown	friends	unknown	unknown	met br.
	Time	night	night	night		night	night
	N of Attackers	one	one	one	several	one	one
	Identification	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
N		51	50	54	57	54	54

given category. These data lend themselves to both qualitative and quantitative interpretation. The former perspective leads to a comprehensive description of the exact nature of respondents' prototypes of each situation, while the latter provides a numerical index of the similarity between prototypes. The frequency analyses showed that marital status and nationality of both victim and assailant 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 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 findings in Table 24.3 can be interpreted in two complementary ways. Comparing the feature profiles for different situations illustrates how two or more situations differ in terms of the pattern of characteristics that are peculiar to them. At the same time, one can look at each feature individually to determine its significance across the total range of situations.

In characterizing the *typical* rape situation, the police officers in the present sample confirm some of the stereotypical notions about rape as a crime involving an attack, out in the open, after dark, by a stranger, who is psychologically disturbed. 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 being slightly drunk and suffering only minor physical injuries. It is interesting to note that the typical rape situation is described by very much the same features as the *credible* rape situation except that in the latter situation the victim is perceived as having made an attempt to escape and not being intoxicated.

In contrast, the prototype of the *dubious* rape complaint is substantially different from the typical rape. Here, respondents think that the victim is generally older, heavily drunk, and does not show any resistance or attempt to escape. The assailant, at the same time, is also regarded as being heavily drunk, yet not psychologically disturbed. A dubious rape complaint is further characterized by the feature that the man and the woman involved used to be friends and by typically occurring at either the man's or the woman's place.

Compared to the first three situations, the rape that is *particularly hard for the victim to cope with* is characterized by a smaller number of features. Victim age is crucial, with victims under 20 years of age being regarded as most likely to find the rape experience particularly hard to cope with. Other distinctive features in this prototype are the physical resistance shown by the victim, her lack of previous sexual experience, and the suffering of serious injuries, while on the assailant side the severity of threat used in the situation is an outstanding factor. Finally, being raped by several attackers is an essential feature associated with this type of rape experience.

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* show a high degree of feature overlap both amongst 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. The false rape complaint differs from the previous situations in that, by definition, it refers to a victim's account of events that did not actually happen. So respondents had to think of characteristics that a woman pretending to have been raped would put forward to tell a convincing story. This may explain, at least in part, why a relatively high degree of overlap was found between the false complaint and the typical rape situation. However, it is interesting to note where the two prototypes differ. In the false rape complaint, the place of the alleged attack is typically seen as being either the man's or the woman's home, with both parties having met briefly in the past. While respondents think it most likely for the woman to report she had been threatened, she is considered unlikely to claim that a weapon was involved.

The findings in Table 24.3 already give some indication of the similarities between the prototypes. To obtain more precise evidence of prototype similarity, a quantitative analysis of feature overlap was conducted³. Each pair of situations was compared in terms of their shared and distinctive features, whereby the greater the number of shared features, the greater the overall similarity between two situations. The resulting pattern of similarity between the six rape prototypes is presented in Table 24.4.

The findings show that by far the highest similarity exists between the prototypes of the typical and the credible rape situation. The greatest dissimilarities emerge between the rape situation that is particularly hard to cope with and the dubious and false complaints, respectively. Medium levels of similarity were found between the dubious rape complaint on the one hand and the easy to cope with and false complaint situations on the other. It should be pointed out, however, that the meaning of these quantitative measures of prototype similarity can only be fully understood in conjunction with the qualitative findings reported in Table 24.3. So, for instance, the prototype of the most common rape situation is equally dissimilar from those of the dubious and the hard to cope with situations, yet the nature of the dissimilarities differs greatly with regard to the two situations.

³In accordance with previous work on cognitive prototypes, the following formula was used to arrive at a quantitative index of similarity between rape situations (cf. Eckes, 1986):

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

whereby $S(A,B)$ 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 in contained 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 reflecting complete similarity (i.e., no distinctive features at all).

TABLE 24.4
Similarity between Situation Prototypes

<i>Situations</i>		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
Typical	S1					
Credible	S2	.78				
Dubious	S3	.17	.20			
Hard to cope	S4	.18	.25	.06		
Easy to cope	S5	.32	.35	.50	.14	
False complaint	S6	.46	.35	.45	.06	.62

Altogether, the findings show that the police officers participating 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 by the majority of respondents as involving long-term psychological problems for the victim as well as the use of threat by the assailant. The high degree of overlap between the prototypes of the typical and the credible rape situation also fails to support the predominantly negative public image of the police in dealing with rape victims. Thus, the present findings join research by Holmstrom and Burgess (1978) and LeDoux and Hazelwood (1985) in demonstrating that police officers generally adopt a view of rape that acknowledges the severe effects of the assault on the victim. At the same time, however, they also corroborate the tendency found by these authors for police officers to become suspicious if a rape complaint contains certain critical features. As Table 24.3 reveals, previous encounters between the victim and the assailant are perceived as typical features of the dubious and false rape complaints. Similarly, a rape complaint is likely to be treated with suspicion if the alleged assailant does not have a history of psychological disturbance and the attack took place at either the man's or the woman's place. This evidence suggests that the credibility of a rape victim is likely to be called in question whenever her account includes features that are consensually perceived as characterizing the dubious or false rape complaint.

CONCLUSION

The work reported in this chapter originated from a social psychological perspective on the problem of coping with rape. Central to this perspective is the proposition that a victim's confrontation with societal beliefs about rape makes her attempts at overcoming the crisis of sexual victimization even more difficult. Stereotypical conceptions about the "real rape" as well as normative standards of appropriate female behavior affect 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.

The three studies presented above addressed different facets of the influence of rape-related stereotypes on the evaluation of rape victims. While the first study demonstrated the impact of information about a victim's social status on observers' perceptions of victim precipitation, the second study illustrated how observers' general attitudes toward rape predispose them to selectively attend to information about a rape victim's conformity or nonconformity to female role prescriptions. Both sets of data reveal that the scope of what is considered to be a "legitimate rape claim" is defined in rather narrow terms, especially by those persons who show a high acceptance of rape myths. The third study further extended this perspective by looking at the subjective definitions of different rape situations held by police officers. While the present findings fail to support the negative image of the police as being generally unsympathetic to victims of rape, it became clear that police officers share a number of the common sense conceptions of rape, and it is reasonable to assume that these conceptions also influence the way they approach specific rape complaints.

In conclusion, the work reported in this chapter joins a large body of evidence in the social psychological literature on rape in showing that sexual victimization is not limited to the rape attack itself. It continues in the form of social processes in the victim's network of interpersonal relationships as well as in the criminal justice system. At the core of these processes is the explicit or implicit negotiation of her role as "victim" which is inextricably linked to the wider framework of normative beliefs and values prevalent in a society. Exploring when and why this negotiation process is likely to preclude a fair and sympathetic treatment of a victim of rape and thus add to her distress is a prime task for a social psychology of sexual violence.

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