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Abstract

Two studies investigated the effects of information related to rape myths on Spanish college students' perceptions of sexual assault. In Study 1, 92 participants read a vignette about a nonconsensual sexual encounter and rated whether it was a sexual assault and how much the woman was to blame. In the scenario, the man either used physical force or offered alcohol to the woman to overcome her resistance. Rape myth acceptance (RMA) was measured as an individual difference variable. Participants were more convinced that the incident was a sexual assault and blamed the woman less when the man had used force rather than offering her alcohol. In Study 2, 164 college students read a scenario in which the woman rejected a man's sexual advances after having either accepted or turned down his offer of alcohol. In addition, the woman was either portrayed as being sexually attracted to him or there was no mention of her sexual interest. Participants' RMA was again included. High RMA participants blamed the victim more than low RMA participants and were less certain that the incident was a sexual assault, especially when the victim had accepted alcohol

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and was described as being sexually attracted to the man. The findings are discussed in terms of their implications for the prevention and legal prosecution of sexual assault.

Keywords

sexual assault, rape myth acceptance, alcohol, victim blame, token resistance

Sexual aggression against women, particularly in social or dating situations, is a widespread problem in university populations (e.g., Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001; Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss, & Wechsler, 2004). Starting university has been described as moving into a “red zone” in which young women are at an increased risk of experiencing unwanted sexual contacts (Flack et al., 2008). Sexual aggression on college campuses happens against the backdrop of shared social constructions that define whether or not a particular interaction qualifies as a sexual assault. For example, trying to get a woman drunk so as to overcome her resistance against sexual interactions may be seen by students as a normal part of the dating script and the woman’s own fault rather than a case of sexual assault. Similarly, threatening to use force against a woman who has previously shown signs of attraction may be regarded as excusable (Krahé, Bieneck, & Scheinberger-Olwig, 2007), also leading to victim blame. The widely shared “real rape” stereotype restricts the definition of sexual assault to stranger attacks involving physical force, excluding incidents that do not fit the stereotype from the category of sexual assault (Krahé & Berger, 2009).

Therefore, studying the conditions under which nonconsensual sexual interactions are interpreted as sexual assaults or elicit some degree of victim blame is important for understanding the cognitive representation of sexual aggression that may guide sexual behavior. Identifying features of sexual assault scenarios that precipitate attributions of blame to the victim is also relevant with respect to the problem of “secondary victimization,” that is, derogatory responses to victims by their social environment (Krahé, 1991). Being blamed by others for what happened to them promotes attributions of self-blame and feelings of guilt in victims of sexual assault, which in turn predict higher depression, fear, and problem drinking (Meyer & Taylor, 1986; Ullman, Starzynski, Long, Mason, & Long, 2008). Self-blame has been associated with a lower probability of reporting the assault to the police for fear of not being believed (Koss 1992; Ward, 1995), and to a higher rate of sexual revictimization (Miller, Markman, & Handley, 2007).

The two studies presented in this article addressed the cognitive representation of sexual assault in Spanish university students. We investigated their perceptions of whether a nonconsensual sexual interaction qualified as sexual assault and their tendency to blame the victim, taking into account individual differences in “rape myth acceptance,” that is adherence to common misconceptions about sexual assault (Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007).

Several studies have reported substantial prevalence rates for sexual aggression and victimization in Spanish student samples. Sipsma, Carrobes, Montorio, and Everaerd (2000) found that 33.2% of female university students had experienced some form of sexual victimization, and 24.3% of male students admitted having engaged in sexually aggressive behavior. Studies by Fuertes and colleagues established that 30.9% of female students had been coerced into sexual acts by a male acquaintance (Fuertes, Ramos, Martínez, Palenzuela, & Tabernero, 2006), and 15% of male students admitted having had sex with a woman against her will (Fuertes, Ramos, De la Orden, Del Campo, & Lázaro, 2005). Hernández and González (2009) reported that 12.6% of their female sample had been forced into sexual intercourse by a former or present partner. Recently, Romero-Sánchez and Megías (2010) found that 36% of female students had experienced some form of sexual contact without consent.

Alcohol is involved in many cases of sexual assault (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004; Horvath & Brown, 2006; Ullman, 2003), especially in the context of casual relations and dating situations (Lovett & Horvath, 2009). In a sample of Spanish college students, 28% of men reported that they had tried to get a woman to drink alcohol to have sexual contact with her, and 44% of women said they had experienced such behavior from a man (Romero-Sánchez & Megías, 2010). In a study by Calafat, Juan, Becoña, Mantecón, and Ramón (2009), 17.5% of participants between the ages of 14 and 25 reported sexual relations under the influence of alcohol or drugs in the last 12 months that they had subsequently regretted.

Information about alcohol use critically affects people’s perception of nonconsensual sexual encounters, with traditional gender roles suggesting a double standard in evaluating men and women. There is evidence that drunken female victims are judged more harshly than sober victims (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Maurer & Robinson, 2008). When a victim is known to have been under the influence of alcohol during a rape, she is seen as less credible and more to blame as she has “put herself in danger” (Jordan, 2004; Wenger & Bornstein, 2006). By contrast, male aggressors who are drunk are considered less guilty than sober aggressors (Stormo, Lang, & Stritzke, 1997). Research by Krahe and collaborators has shown that the perpetrator of

a sexual assault is blamed less and the victim more when she is unable to resist due to the effects of alcohol, compared to incidents where the aggressor uses force to overcome her resistance (Krahé, Temkin, & Bieneck, 2007, Study 2; Krahé, Temkin, Bieneck, & Berger, 2008), and that this effect is not found for robbery cases (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011). However, the picture becomes more complex when victim and aggressor intoxication are considered in combination. When the aggressor was presented as less intoxicated than his victim, this increased the perceived blameworthiness of his behavior (Stormo et al., 1997).

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that some people are more responsive than others to information about victim intoxication in their social perceptions of sexual assault. Two perceiver variables associated with differences in the perception of rape incidents are rape myth acceptance (RMA) and gender. Gerger et al. (2007) defined rape myths as “descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about sexual aggression (i.e., about its scope, causes, context, and consequences) that serve to deny, downplay or justify sexually aggressive behavior that men commit against women” (p. 425). Several studies have demonstrated a link between RMA and attributions of blame to the victim (e.g., Check & Malamuth, 1985; Mason, Riger, & Foley, 2004). The more individuals endorse rape myths, the less likely they are to regard a sexual assault vignette as rape and to hold the assailant responsible (Girard & Senn, 2008; see Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009, for a review). Regarding the link between RMA and perceptions of alcohol-related rape, Krahé et al. (2008; Study 1) found that the tendency to blame an intoxicated victim was particularly pronounced among participants high on rape myth acceptance. In a recent study with Spanish university students, Romero-Sánchez and Megías (2010) presented participants with a scenario in which the girl turns down the advances of a boy she had just met at a party. After talking and having a good time for a while, she explicitly rejects his sexual advances. Participants were asked to indicate their approval of different behavioral options the boy could pursue next, including the option of buying her several drinks to have sexual contact with her. Among male participants, those with high RMA scores were more approving of this strategy than those with low RMA scores. Women showed less approval of this option compared to men, regardless of their RMA.

Concerning the role of gender in the perception of sexual assault, a large body of research has found that men are more inclined to blame the victim and less likely to interpret a nonconsensual sexual interaction as sexual assault (e.g., Basow & Minieri 2011; Grubb & Harrower, 2009). However, other studies failed to obtain gender differences in attributions of blame (e.g.,

Newcombe, van den Eynde, Hafner, & Jolly, 2008; Temkin & Krahé, 2008, Study 3). To further clarify the role of gender in perceptions of sexual assault, potential gender differences were examined in our studies.

The present research was designed to further investigate the social perception of alcohol-related sexual assaults and to relate it to individual differences in RMA in two samples of Spanish college students. Utilizing the scenario method, participants were presented with hypothetical cases of a nonconsensual sexual interaction in which the aggressor and victim had not known each other before, taking place in a party setting. Study 1 extended previous research about the role of victim intoxication on perceivers' appraisals of the incident as sexual assault and on attributions of victim blame to nonrape sexual aggression. In Study 2, we further examined the significance of alcohol-related information in shaping perceptions of sexual assault by exploring the impact of the victim's acceptance or rejection of alcohol offered by the perpetrator. In addition, we examined the hypothesis that when the victim was said to have been sexually attracted to the man, participants would tend to interpret her rejection of his sexual advances as "token resistance."

Study 1

As mentioned above, the research of Krahé and her collaborators (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011; Krahé, Temkin, et al., 2007, 2008) demonstrated that victim blame in rape cases committed by strangers or acquaintances was greater when the perpetrator exploited the victim's intoxicated state than when he used physical force. A within-subjects manipulation was employed in these studies that required the various scenarios to differ not only in terms of alcohol versus use of force but also in other details. To overcome this problem, the present study was designed to replicate Krahé et al.'s (2008, Study 1) results in a Spanish sample, using a between-subjects design. This enabled us to use scenarios identical in content except for the manipulation of the coercive strategy used by the aggressor. In addition, we sought to replicate the findings by Krahé et al. for nonconsensual sexual acts other than rape, such as kissing and sexual touching. These forms of sexual coercion are far more common than rape in university samples (Romero-Sánchez & Megías, 2010). In addition to manipulating the coercive strategy used by the perpetrator, participants' rape myth acceptance was measured using a Spanish version of the "Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression" scale (AMMSA; Gerger et al., 2007) adapted and validated by Megías, Romero-Sánchez, Durán, Moya, and Bohner (2011). Specifically, we aimed to study how judgments of victim blame and perceptions of the

incident as a sexual assault were affected by (a) information about the perpetrator's coercive strategy (alcohol vs. physical force) and (b) participants' RMA.

Hypotheses

We hypothesized that the scenario would be perceived more as a sexual assault if the perpetrator used physical force than if he offered the woman alcohol to obtain sexual contact (*Hypothesis 1*).

We also hypothesized that the victim would be blamed more when the perpetrator exploited her intoxicated state than when he used physical force (*Hypothesis 2*).

Based on previous research, we hypothesized that Participants scoring high on RMA would be less likely to regard the incident as a sexual assault and more likely to blame the victim than participants scoring low on RMA (*Hypothesis 3*).

Finally, we hypothesized an interaction between RMA and coercive strategy such that differences in RMA would affect participants' ratings of assault and victim blame more in the alcohol-related assault than in the forcible assault scenario (*Hypothesis 4*).

Method

Participants

Ninety-two college students (53 women and 39 men) at the University of Granada, Spain, participated on a voluntary basis. Ages ranged from 18 to 28 years (women: $M = 20.55$, $SD = 1.92$; men: $M = 21.03$, $SD = 2.65$).

Instruments

Rape myth acceptance. The Spanish version of the Acceptance of Modern Myths About Sexual Aggression Scale (AMMSA; Gerger et al., 2007) by Megías et al. (2011) was used to measure rape myth acceptance. The AMMSA is a self-report measure designed to assess "modern" myths regarding sexual violence with more subtlety than "traditional" RMA measures (e.g., Burt, 1980; Costin, 1985; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). In this study, a 16-item short form was used (which has adequate psychometric properties similar to the 30-item long version), based on research by Eyssel, Bohner, and Siebler (2006). It includes items such as "Women often accuse their

husbands of marital rape just to retaliate for a failed relationship,” “Women like to play coy. This does not mean they do not want sex,” “Many women tend to misinterpret a well-meaning gesture as a sexual assault,” or “The discussion about sexual harassment on the job has mainly resulted in many a harmless behavior being misinterpreted as harassment.” Responses were made on a scale ranging from (1) *completely disagree* to (7) *completely agree*.

Sexual assault scenarios. Two sexual aggression scenarios were created to incorporate the experimental manipulation. Each described an interaction between a girl, Alicia, and a boy, Juan, in a casual dating situation (a party in a bar). After a while, Juan makes sexual advances to Alicia, but she turns him down. He then either uses physical force or buys her several alcoholic drinks before kissing and sexually touching her. The scenarios varied in terms of the coercive strategy used by the perpetrator (alcohol vs. physical force) but contained a clear statement of the victim’s nonconsent. The English translation of the scenario is presented in Appendix A; the original text of the scenarios can be obtained from the first author.

Dependent measures. Six questions were presented to measure victim blame: “Do you believe Alicia should feel guilty for what happened at the end of this story,” “Do you believe Alicia incited Juan to act like he did at the end of this story,” “Do you believe Alicia could have behaved differently to change the outcome of this story,” “Do you believe Alicia got what she deserved,” “Do you believe Alicia could have prevented what happened at the end of this story,” and “Do you believe Alicia should blame herself for what happened at the end of this story.” Each question was answered on a 7-point, Likert-type rating scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Higher scores indicated more blame attributed to the victim. One item was included to evaluate participants’ perceptions of the event (“The outcome of the evening is a sexual assault”). This item was accompanied by a 7-point response scale ranging from (1) *completely disagree* to (7) *completely agree*.

Two additional items were included as manipulation checks. For the coercive strategy used by the perpetrator, we asked “Does Juan physically force Alicia to kiss him and touch her sexually” and “Does Juan buy Alicia several whisky drinks so that he can kiss her and touch her sexually.” The two questions were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) *totally disagree* to (5) *totally agree*.

Procedure

Participants were approached at several libraries at the University of Granada and asked if they would volunteer to participate in a study about young

people's attitudes toward several current topics. They were ensured that their responses would be anonymous and confidential, and used only for research purposes. Of those approached, only 5 students declined to participate. Students who agreed to participate were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions (alcohol or physical force). They completed the Spanish short-form version of the AMMSA, the hypothetical sexual aggression scenario with the manipulation of coercive strategy, the manipulation check items, the item measuring participants' judgment of the incident as a sexual assault and the questions designed to assess victim blame. Half of the participants completed the measures in this order; for the other half, the AMMSA was presented at the end. No order effects were found. In addition, participants were asked to indicate their age, sex, and sexual orientation. Finally, participants were thanked and given summarized information about the aims of the study and how to access its final results.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

First, the dimensionality and internal consistency of the six questions addressing victim blame were analyzed. They had adequate corrected item-total correlations, ranging from .23 to .67. The principal components factor analysis yielded a KMO of .736 and a statistically significant Bartlett index, $\chi^2(15) = 124.54$, $p < .001$, and revealed only one main factor with an eigenvalue of 2.65, accounting for 44.18% of the variance. The saturation of the items in this factor ranged from .26 to .84. Accordingly, the items were averaged into an overall victim blame score for each participant. This aggregate measure of victim blame showed an adequate internal consistency of $\alpha = .73$.

Table 1 presents the correlations between the measures of RMA, victim blame, and the perception of the incident as sexual assault. It also contains the means and *SDs* for the total sample and for men and women separately. As expected, a significant positive correlation was found between RMA and victim blame, and a negative correlation was found between victim blame and perception of the incident as a sexual assault. However, the correlation between RMA and considering the incident as a sexual assault was nonsignificant. As shown in Table 1, there were no sex differences on any of the three variables. Therefore, participant sex was not included in the further analyses.

The manipulation checks revealed that the variation of coercive strategy was successful. Perceptions that Juan physically forces Alicia to kiss him and

Table 1. Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	Total	SD	Men	Women	F	P	(2)	(3)
(1) Rape myth acceptance	3.60	.84	3.78	3.47	3.06	.08	-.11	.35**
(2) Sexual assault	3.86	2.04	4.28	3.55	2.95	.09	—	-.45**
(3) Victim blame	3.55	1.19	3.32	3.71	2.42	.12	—	—

Scale range: 1-7.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

touches her sexually were significantly higher in the force condition ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.35$) than in the alcohol condition ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.08$), $F(1, 89) = 48.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .35$. Conversely, perceptions that Juan buys Alicia several whisky drinks so that he can kiss her and touch her sexually were significantly higher in the alcohol condition ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.06$) than in the force condition ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.51$), $F(1, 89) = 67.14$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .43$. Based on this clear difference in means, all participants were retained in the sample.

Perceptions of the Incident as Sexual Assault and Attributions of Victim Blame

A 2×2 MANOVA was performed with coercive strategy and participants' RMA (high vs. low, median split) as the independent variables and participants' evaluations of the incident as a sexual assault and victim blame as the dependent variables. The analysis yielded a significant multivariate effect for both coercive strategy, $F(2, 87) = 12.76$, $p > .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$, and RMA, $F(2, 87) = 5.82$, $p > .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$, and both univariate effects were significant. Regarding coercive strategy, participants were more certain that the incident was a sexual assault when the perpetrator used physical force ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 2.0$) than when he used alcohol to overcome the woman's refusal ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.78$), $F(1, 88) = 14.08$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. This finding supports Hypothesis 1. As predicted in Hypothesis 2, victim blame was higher when the aggressor used alcohol ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.07$) than when he used force ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.14$), $F(1, 88) = 19.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$.

The univariate effect of RMA on perceptions of the incident as a sexual assault was nonsignificant, $F(1, 88) = .04$, $p = .91$, but the univariate effect on victim blame was significant, $F(1, 88) = 10.05$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$. In line with Hypothesis 3, participants with high RMA scores blamed the victim more ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.07$) than did participants with low scores ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.23$). The multivariate interaction of coercive strategy and RMA was nonsignificant, disconfirming Hypothesis 4.

Discussion

This study examined the perception of sexual assaults between strangers during a casual encounter at a party as a function of two different coercive strategies used by the aggressor to overcome the victim's resistance: (a) giving her alcohol or (b) using physical force. A between-subjects manipulation was employed so that the scenarios would be identical in content except for the aggressor's strategy to corroborate earlier research that used a within-subjects manipulation (e.g., Krahé, Temkin, et al., 2007, 2008). The results replicated those reported by other studies (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011; Krahé, Temkin, et al., 2007, 2008) in a different cultural context and with regard to sexual assaults less severe than rape. Participants were less convinced that the incident was a sexual assault and they blamed the victim more when alcohol played a role than when the aggressor used force. Finally, individual differences in RMA were significantly associated with victim blaming such that the victim was judged as more blameworthy by participants holding stereotypical beliefs about sexual aggression. However, contrary to our prediction, differences in RMA did not moderate the impact of the aggressor's coercive strategies on attributions of victim blame.

Study 2

In Study 1, participants were less inclined to consider the incident as an assault and assigned more blame to the victim when alcohol rather than physical force was used by the aggressor to overcome her resistance. The experimental manipulation in this study referred to the aggressor's coercive strategy. However, perceptions of the incident and victim blame are also affected by the woman's alcohol-related behavior prior to the sexual assault. Past research showed that the victim was seen as less credible and blamed more if she was said to have drunk before the assault (Jordan, 2004; Maurer & Robinson, 2008; Wenger & Bornstein, 2006). Building on these findings, Study 2 analyzed how information that the woman accepted or rejected the man's offers to buy her alcohol prior to the sexual assault affected participants' perception of the incident and attributions of victim blame. As noted earlier, the "real rape" stereotype suggests only assaults by a stranger using physical force and assaulting an unsuspecting victim in a dark alleyway represent genuine rape cases (Temkin & Krahé, 2008). Therefore, information that the victim had accepted alcohol from the aggressor should undermine the perception of the case as a "real sexual assault" and promote attributions of blame to the victim. Study 2 was designed to examine this proposition. We

predicted that victim blame would be higher if the woman had accepted rather than rejected the man's offer of alcohol because her behavior would be seen as an indication that she was sexually attracted to him.

In addition to manipulating the victim's acceptance or rejection of alcohol as an implicit cue of sexual attraction, we included an explicit statement of the victim's sexual attraction in our experimental design. We expected that the rejection of the man's sexual advances would more likely be seen as "token resistance" if the woman was said to have felt sexually attracted to the man than in the absence of such information. Token resistance refers to the rejection of sexual advances despite being willing to engage in sexual contact, that is "saying no when you mean yes" (Muehlenhard & Hollabough, 1988). As in Study 1, participants' rape myth acceptance was included as an individual difference variable expected to affect the perception of the incident as an assault and the attribution of victim blame.

Hypotheses

We hypothesized that participants would be less likely to consider the incident a sexual assault if the woman accepted the man's offer of alcohol, if she was said to have been sexually interested in him, and if they scored high on RMA (*Hypothesis 1*). This hypothesis predicted main effects of acceptance of alcohol, information about of sexual interest, and perceiver RMA on perceptions of the incident as a sexual assault.

Based on previous research, we hypothesized that individual differences in RMA would have a greater impact on perceptions of the incident as assault if the woman behaved in a way that deviated from the stereotype of a "real" sexual assault, specifically, if she accepted alcohol or said "no" to the man's advances despite being sexually interested (*Hypothesis 2*). This hypothesis predicted interactions of RMA with acceptance of alcohol and information about sexual interest, respectively.

We also hypothesized that participants would attribute more blame to the woman when she accepted the man's offer of alcohol, when she was said to have been sexually interested in him, and if they scored high on RMA (*Hypothesis 3*). This hypothesis predicted main effects of acceptance of alcohol, information about of sexual interest, and perceiver RMA on ratings of victim blame.

We expected that individual differences in RMA would have a greater impact on victim blame in the scenarios in which the woman accepted alcohol or said "no" to the man's advances despite being sexually interested (*Hypothesis 4*). This hypothesis predicted interactions of RMA with

acceptance of alcohol and display of sexual interest, respectively, on perceived victim blame.

It was further expected that participants would be more likely to see the woman's behavior as "token resistance" if they scored high on RMA and if she was portrayed as sexually interested in the man (*Hypothesis 5*).

Finally, we hypothesized that individual differences in RMA would have a greater impact on ratings of perceived "token resistance" in the scenario in which the woman was said to be sexually interested in the man than in the absence of information about her sexual interest (*Hypothesis 6*).

Method

Participants

A total of 164 college students (84 men and 80 women) from the University of Granada, Spain, participated in this study. Participants ranged in age between 18 and 28 years (men: $M = 20.0$, $SD = 2.50$; women: $M = 20.3$, $SD = 1.86$).

Instruments

Sexual aggression scenarios. Four different sexual aggression scenarios were created to incorporate the experimental manipulations. Each scenario described an interaction, similar to the one in Study 1, between a girl, Alicia, and a boy, Juan, in a casual dating situation in which, after the boy tries unsuccessfully to have sexual relations with the girl and she rejects him, he ends up sexually assaulting her. The scenarios varied in terms of the victim's acceptance or rejection of the man's offer of alcohol (acceptance or rejection) and information about the woman's sexual interest (stated or not stated). The format of the scenarios is presented in Appendix B.

Token resistance. Perceived "token resistance" was measured by the following five items developed by Masser, Viki, and Power (2006), translated into Spanish: "At first, Alicia pretended to resist Juan so that he would not think she is too 'easy,'" "Even though Alicia said 'no,' in reality, she wanted to have sexual contact with Juan," "Alicia ultimately enjoyed having sexual contact with Juan," "Alicia really wanted Juan to overcome her initial resistance," and "Alicia really wanted Juan to make her his." Responses were made on a 7-point, Likert-type rating scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Higher scores indicated higher levels of perceived token resistance.

Rape myth acceptance, perception of the incident as sexual assault, and victim blame. The measures of rape myth acceptance, perception of the incident as a sexual assault, and victim blame were the same as in Study 1.

In addition, three questions were incorporated as manipulation checks: "Did Alicia accept Juan's offer of alcohol (whisky)?" "At the beginning of the story, how sexually attracted does Alicia feel toward Juan?" and "How drunk/tipsy is Alicia at the end of the night?" The three questions were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) *totally disagree/not at all* to (5) *totally agree/very much*.

Procedure

The procedure was the same as in Study 1. Of those approached, only seven students declined to participate. Once students agreed to participate, they were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions (sexual interest not stated-acceptance of alcohol/sexual interest not stated-refusal of alcohol/sexual interest stated-acceptance of alcohol/sexual interest stated-refusal of alcohol). They completed the AMMSA rape myth acceptance measure, the sexual aggression scenario, the manipulation check items, the token resistance items, an item to measure the perception of assault, and the questions designed to assess victim blame. As in Study 1, half of the participants answered the questionnaires in this order and the other half answered the AMMSA at the end. Again, no order effects were found. In addition, participants were asked to indicate their age, sex, and sexual orientation. Students were then thanked for their participation and told about the aims of the study and how to access a summary of the results.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

First, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to determine the factor structure of the five items comprising the *token resistance* measure. The results of Bartlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2 = 341.65$, $df = 10$, $p < .001$, and a value of .82 on the KMO index confirmed that the matrix of correlations was suitable for performing this analysis. Next, a principal components analysis was conducted, yielding one common factor with an eigenvalue of 3.15 that explained 60.03% of the variance. On this basis, the five items were averaged into an overall token resistance score for each participant.

Table 2. Study 2: Means, Zero-order Correlations, and Internal Consistencies

	Total (SD)	Men (SD)	Women (SD)	(2)	(3)	(4)	α
(1) Rape myth acceptance	3.54 (.92)	3.76 (.91)	3.31 (.90)	.38***	.40***	-.18*	.83
(2) Token resistance	2.51 (1.35)	2.57 (1.35)	2.46 (1.36)	—	.49***	-.46***	.86
(3) Victim blame	3.17 (1.31)	3.34 (1.36)	2.99 (1.23)		—	-.28***	.85
(4) Sexual assault	4.95 (1.98)	5.2 (1.79)	4.7 (2.15)			—	

Note: Scale range: 1-7.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Mean scores were also calculated for the AMMSA scale and the victim blame measure. A multivariate analysis of variance using participant sex as the independent variable and AMMSA, perception of assault, victim blame, and token resistance as dependent variables yielded a significant multivariate effect, $F(4, 159) = 4.18, p < .01, \eta^2 = .09$. An inspection of the univariate effects revealed that men scored higher than women on the AMMSA scale, $F(1, 162) = 10.11, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$. Based on this finding, gender was included in the subsequent test of the hypotheses. No gender differences were found on the three dependent variables. The means, internal consistencies, and zero-order correlations are shown in Table 2. All measures showed good levels of reliability.

All variables were significantly intercorrelated. Victim blame was positively correlated with RMA and token resistance, and negatively with perceptions of the incident as a sexual assault. Token resistance correlated positively with RMA and negatively with the perception of the incident as a sexual assault. Finally, RMA and perception of assault were negatively correlated.

The analysis of participants' scores on the manipulation check questions confirmed the validity of the experimental manipulation. Agreement that Alicia accepted Juan's offer of alcohol (whisky) was significantly higher in the two groups who were presented with scenarios in which the woman accepted alcohol ($M = 4.20, SD = 1.06$) than in groups where participants were told she had refused his offer of alcohol ($M = 1.32, SD = .88$), $F(1, 162) = 355.78, p < .001, \eta^2 = .68$. As for the "sexual interest" variable, participants agreed significantly more that at the beginning of this story, Alicia was said to be sexually attracted to Juan in the two groups that had learned the woman was sexually interested than in the two groups where no information about her sexual interest was provided, $F(1, 162) = 291.647, p < .001, \eta^2 = .64$

(sexual interest stated: $M = 4.21$, $SD = .95$; sexual interest not stated: $M = 1.98$, $SD = .70$). Finally, Alicia was perceived to be more drunk/tipsy at the end of the night when she accepted the aggressor's offer to buy her alcohol ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .88$) than when she turned it down ($M = 1.10$, $SD = .33$), $F(1, 162) = 617.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .79$. Because of the high effect sizes, none of the participants was screened out.

Perception of the Incident as Sexual Assault

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, we conducted a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Participant Sex \times RMA \times Alcohol acceptance \times Sexual interest) ANOVA with perceptions of the incident as a sexual assault as dependent variable. Participants were categorized as high vs. low on RMA based on median split. As predicted, participants with lower RMA scores more strongly agreed with the statement that the incident was a sexual assault, $F(1, 148) = 8.48$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$ (low RMA: $M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.89$; high RMA: $M = 4.60$, $SD = 2.01$). However, there were no main effects of the alcohol acceptance/rejection or sexual interest manipulations. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was only partially supported by the data. One unexpected result was that men saw the event more as an assault than did women, $F(1, 148) = 5.84$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$ (men: $M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.78$; women: $M = 4.7$, $SD = 2.15$).

As predicted in Hypothesis 2, a significant interaction was observed between RMA and acceptance vs. rejection of alcohol, $F(1, 148) = 4.78$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Figure 1 shows that RMA had a greater effect on ratings of the incident as assault when the woman accepted rather than rejected the man's offer of alcohol. Follow-up analyses confirmed that there were no differences between high and low RMA participants, $t(80) = .30$, $p = .76$ when the woman refused the alcohol, but high RMA individuals were less likely to see the incident as a sexual assault when the woman accepted alcohol, $t(80) = 3.30$, $p < .001$ (low RMA, $M = 4.34$, $SD = 2.00$; high RMA: $M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.51$).

Also in line with Hypothesis 2, a significant interaction emerged between RMA and sexual interest, $F(1, 148) = 4.88$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. RMA did not affect perceptions of the sexual assault in the absence of cues about victim sexual interest. However, when the victim was stated to feel sexually attracted to the man, high RMA participants were less inclined to see the incident as a sexual assault ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 2.17$) than were low RMA participants ($M = 5.62$, $SD = 1.86$) (see Figure 2).

These second-order interactions were qualified by the third-order interaction between RMA \times Alcohol Acceptance/Refusal \times Sexual Interest, $F(1,$

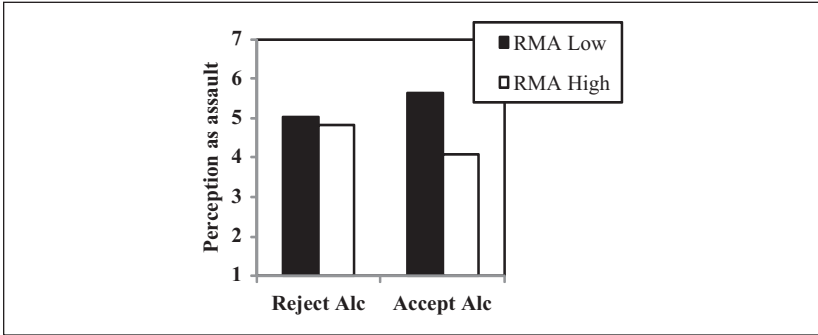


Figure 1. Study 2: Perception of the incident as assault as a function of participants' rape myth acceptance and victim's acceptance of alcohol

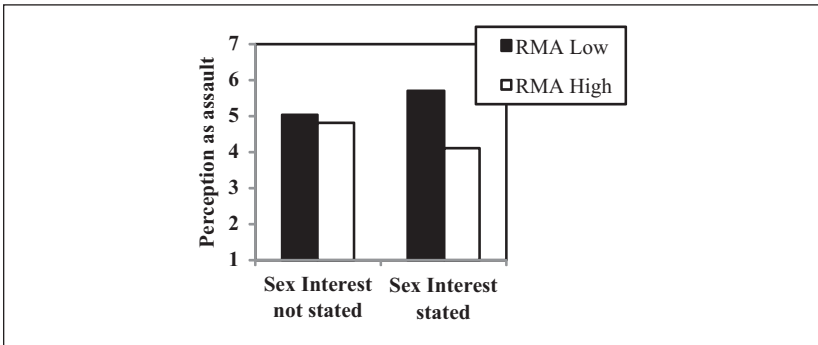


Figure 2. Study 2: Perception of the incident as assault as a function of sexual interest information and participants' rape myth acceptance

148) = 4.60, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Follow-up analyses revealed that for low RMA participants, there were no main effects or interactions between the alcohol acceptance and the sexual interest conditions. For high RMA individuals on the other hand, the incident was considered more as an assault only when the woman rejected the offer of alcohol *and* was not said to be sexually interested, $F(1, 75) = 4.39$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$ (see Figure 3). In other words, it seems that high RMA individuals were only prepared to see the incident as an assault if the woman behaved in a manner consistent with the “real rape” stereotype.

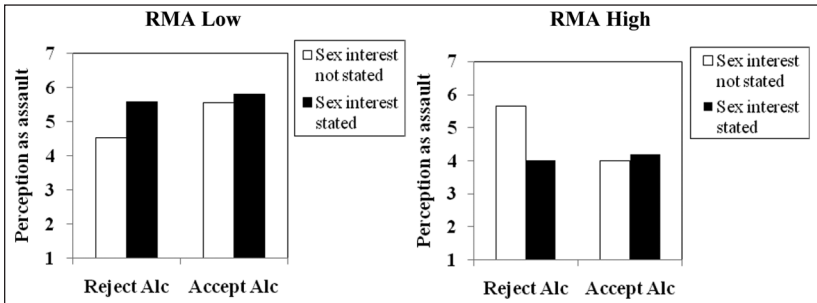


Figure 3. Study 2: Perception of the incident as assault as a function of RMA, alcohol acceptance and sexual interest information

Victim Blame

To examine Hypotheses 3 and 4, a parallel $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA was conducted with victim blame as the dependent variable and participant sex and RMA (high vs. low), victim's acceptance of alcohol (acceptance vs. rejection), and information about victim sexual interest (stated vs. not stated) as independent variables. As predicted in Hypothesis 3, participants blamed the victim more when she accepted rather than rejected alcoholic drinks from the aggressor, $F(1, 148) = 17.28, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$; refusal ($M = 2.71, SD = 1.22$); acceptance ($M = 3.54, SD = 1.28$). Furthermore, participants with high RMA scores blamed the victim more than did those with low RMA scores, $F(1, 148) = 10.33, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06$ (low RMA: $M = 2.81, SD = 1.23$; high RMA: $M = 3.44, SD = 1.28$). However, information about the woman's sexual interest had no effect on victim blame ($F < 1$). The main effect of participant sex was also nonsignificant, $F(1, 148) = 1.127, p = .30$. In combination, the results partially supported Hypothesis 3.

Of the interactions predicted in Hypothesis 4, only the two-way interaction between Sexual Interest and participant sex reached significance, $F(1, 148) = 4.86, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$. Men blamed the victim more than did women, but only when there was no information about her sexual interest, $t(80) = 2.55, p < .01$ (see Figure 4). Finally, no interaction was found between RMA and the alcohol acceptance and sexual interest variables, contrary to the predictions in Hypothesis 4.

Perceived Token Resistance

To test Hypotheses 5 and 6, a further $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA (Sex \times RMA \times Alcohol Acceptance \times Sexual Interest) was performed with token resistance

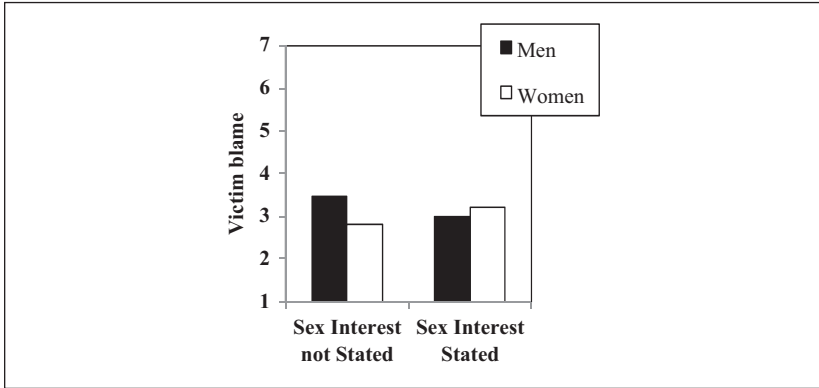


Figure 4. Victim blame as a function of victim’s sexual interest and participant sex

as the dependent variable. As predicted in Hypothesis 5, a main effect of Sexual Interest was found, $F(1, 148) = 10.40, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06$, such that evaluations of the woman’s behavior as token resistance were higher when she was said to have been sexually interested in the man than when no sexual interest information was provided (sexual interest stated: $M = 2.83, SD = 1.45$, sexual interest not stated: $M = 2.17, SD = 1.17$). Also, token resistance ratings were higher among high RMA participants ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.37$) than among low RMA participants ($M = 2.09, SD = 1.21$), $F(1, 148) = 15.81, p < .01, \eta^2 = .09$. These results fully support Hypothesis 5. The main effect of participant sex was nonsignificant.

In support of Hypothesis 6, a marginally significant interaction was observed between RMA and sexual interest information, $F(1, 148) = 3.56, p = .06, \eta^2 = .02$. Post hoc analyses revealed that participants’ RMA influenced their perceptions of “token resistance” only when the woman was said to be sexually interested and not in the absence of sexual interest information (see Figure 5).

Finally, a three-way interaction was found between Sex \times Alcohol Acceptance \times Sexual Interest, $F(1, 148) = 5.14, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$. Follow-up analyses showed when the woman refused alcohol, women, but not men, were sensitive to the information about her sexual interest. In the alcohol refusal condition, women were more likely to see their behavior as token resistance, when the woman was said to be sexually attracted to the man (M sex interest stated = 3.27, $SD = 1.75$, vs. M sex interest not stated = 1.74, $SD = .99$). In the alcohol acceptance condition, information about victim sexual interest made no difference to women’s ratings of her behavior as token resistance. Men’s perception of token resistance was unaffected by

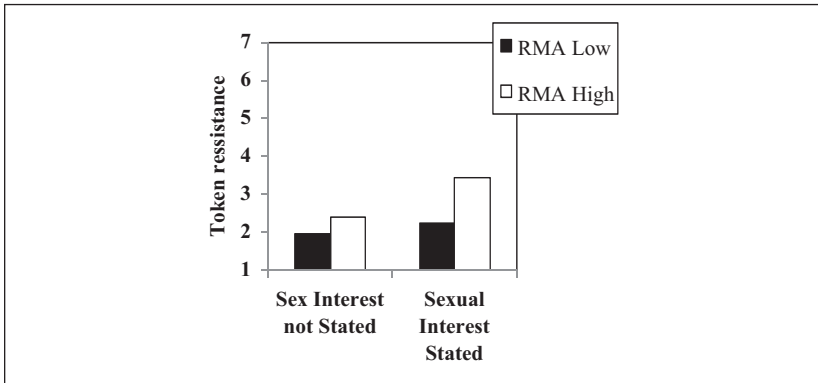


Figure 5. “Perceived token resistance” as a function of victim’s sexual interest and participants’ RMA

information about sexual interest regardless of whether she accepted or refused the aggressor’s offer of alcohol.

Discussion

This study was designed to show that a woman’s behavior prior to a sexual assault influenced participants’ evaluations of the incident as sexual assault and victim blame in a casual dating situation where alcohol is involved. The results showed that the degree to which participants subscribed to rape myths affected their judgments about the scenarios depicting nonconsensual sexual contacts. Participants with high RMA were less inclined to see the scenario as a sexual assault, more likely to blame the victim, and more likely to perceive her behavior as token resistance. The situational manipulations of the woman’s acceptance versus rejection of alcohol offered by the aggressor and of the information regarding her sexual attraction to him had little effect on their own, but they did affect the conclusions reached by those high in RMA. Participants scoring high on RMA were less likely to see the scenario as a sexual assault when the woman had accepted alcohol from the aggressor and when she was said to feel sexually attracted to him, whereas low RMA participants did not respond to this information in their perceptions of the scenario.

Few significant sex differences were observed in the data and did not follow a consistent pattern. For example, a main effect of sex on perceptions of the incident as assault was found such that contrary to the findings of previous research, women were less likely than men to view the incident as assault. The other effect involving participant sex was the three-way interaction of sex, sexual interest, and acceptance of alcohol on ratings of the victim’s token

resistance. Overall, it can be concluded that individual differences in RMA were more influential than biological sex in predicting differences in perceptions of the sexual aggression scenarios.

General Discussion

Alcohol plays a role in many incidents of men's sexual aggression against women, and it also affects the social perception of nonconsensual sexual interactions (Wenger & Bornstein, 2006). The studies found evidence from Spanish samples showing that alcohol-related information in a sexual assault situation significantly affected participants' evaluations, both when it was presented as a coercive strategy used by the aggressor and when it was voluntarily accepted by the victim. Although levels of victim blame were in the lower range of the response scale, participants high on rape myth acceptance were found to be responsive to this information and were led to blame the victim more and downplay the severity of a sexual transgression by seeing it less as a sexual assault or interpreting the victim's refusal as token resistance.

Study 1 replicated and extended the scope of previous findings in the international literature regarding the use of alcohol as a coercive strategy. Specifically, along the lines of the work of Krahé, Temkin, et al. (2007, 2008; also Bieneck & Krahé, 2011) participants were less inclined to see nonconsensual kissing and touching of a girl by a boy in a party setting as a sexual assault when the aggressor used alcohol as opposed to force to overcome the victim's refusal. At the same time, victim blame was higher when alcohol rather than force was used by the aggressor. Furthermore, individuals more accepting of myths about sexual assault took the incident less seriously and blamed the victim more than those rejecting these myths.

The finding that alcohol use as a coercive strategy diminished the perceived severity of the incident relative to the use of force and increased victim blame can be explained by the "real rape" stereotype referring to an assault by a stranger involving physical force and active victim resistance. As shown consistently in previous research (e.g., Emmers-Sommer & Allen, 1999; Frese, Moya, & Megías, 2004), the more the circumstances of a sexual assault differ from those implied in the stereotype, the less credibility is granted to the victim, the more she is blamed for what happened, and the less severe the incident is perceived to be. Using alcohol instead of force as a coercive strategy moves the incident away from the stereotype. Similarly, in the present scenarios the victim had only just met the aggressor, so participants may have blamed her for accepting alcohol from the man, considering it "imprudent" of her to drink alcohol with a stranger with unknown intentions. In fact, Krahé, Temkin, et al. (2007, 2008) found that victim blame was

higher when the perpetrator exploited the victim's intoxicated state rather than using physical force, but only when the aggressor was described as a stranger or acquaintance. When he was described as a former romantic partner, victim blame was reduced.

The results of Study 2 demonstrated that alcohol affected judgments about sexual assault scenarios beyond its use as a coercive strategy by the aggressor. Information that the victim had accepted or rejected the aggressor's offer of alcohol influenced perceptions of nonconsensual sexual interactions, particularly among people subscribing to rape myths. Earlier studies showed that when the woman had been drinking before a sexual assault, she was seen as less credible and blamed more (Jordan, 2004; Wenger & Bornstein, 2006). However, previous research did not investigate how people would respond to information that the victim voluntarily accepted alcohol from her aggressor prior to the assault. Acceptance of alcohol by the woman may provide implicit cues about her sexual interest and promote misperceptions of her sexual intentions (Farris, Treat, Viken, & McFall, 2008). The results of Study 2 confirmed this line of reasoning. The victim was blamed more when she accepted rather than refused the aggressor's offer of alcohol regardless of participants' RMA. High RMA participants were inclined to see the incident as sexual assault when the woman had rejected alcohol and when there was no indication of her sexual attraction to the man.

Information that the woman felt sexually attracted to the aggressor prior to the sexual assault promoted the interpretation that her rejection of his sexual advances was not more than token resistance, concealing her true sexual intentions. Perceived token resistance is a risk factor for sexual assault as it legitimizes the use of coercion to overcome a woman's rejection (Krahé, Scheinberger-Olwig, & Kolpin, 2000). Including this dependent variable, Study 2 showed that participants were more inclined to see the woman's rejection of the man's sexual advances as token resistance when the scenario contained the information that she had felt sexually attracted to him at the beginning of the encounter. As expected, this effect was moderated by individual differences in RMA such that only high RMA participants interpreted the woman's refusal in this scenario as token resistance. It is important to note that there was no mention in the scenario of behavioral cues that would have signaled her sexual interest to the man; it was simply stated that she *felt* sexually attracted to him. Nonetheless, high RMA participants paid attention to this information, qualifying the incident as less of a sexual assault and interpreting the woman's rejection of the sexual advances as token resistance.

Altogether, the results of Study 2 showed once again that information about the victim influences the social perception of sexual assault. A woman who had earlier accepted alcohol was blamed more and the scenario seen less as a sexual

assault, especially by participants high on RMA. The alcohol-related scenarios were at odds with the “real rape” stereotype of a forcible assault on an unsuspecting victim and therefore created a more ambiguous stimulus situation for the participants. Such ambiguity leads to a predominance of top-down, schematic processing over data-driven, bottom-up processing (e.g., Dunning & Sherman, 1997; Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993). When the database is limited or the information is inconsistent, people rely on cognitive schemas, such as rape myths (Bohner et al., 2009), as demonstrated by the consistent impact of RMA on judgments about the case scenarios in the two studies.

The findings from our studies have practical implications both for the prevention of sexual aggression in college students and for addressing the problem of secondary victimization. By revealing Spanish students’ understanding of what constitutes a sexual assault, to what extent women are to blame for sexual victimization, and what constitutes genuine rather than token resistance, the findings provide a starting point for challenging these cognitive representations. Research with German adolescents has shown that the cognitive representations of sexual encounters in the form of sexual scripts were significantly correlated with sexual behavior (Krahé, Bieneck et al., 2007). Gaining a better understanding of how students define a sexual assault and condone sexual transgressions that fall outside the “real rape” stereotype is a prerequisite for designing prevention programs addressing these conceptions. On the basis of the present findings, the message to be transported by prevention efforts would be that coercing a woman into sexual acts by getting her drunk is no more acceptable than using physical force and that the acceptance of alcohol by a woman does not constitute a license to disregard her refusal. Highlighting the role of RMA as an individual difference variable, it would also follow from the present findings to tailor prevention efforts to participants’ preexisting attitudes about sexual assault, particularly challenging misconceptions about sexual assault in people with high RMA. For example, using a social norms approach, Bohner, Siebler, and Schmelcher (2006) reduced men’s rape proclivity by providing normative feedback that acceptance of rape myths in their reference group was lower than participants’ own score, which was particularly effective in men with high levels of RMA (see Bohner et al., 2009, for a review).

In addition, the findings are relevant to the legal prosecution of sexual assaults. There is consistent evidence across the Western world of high attrition rates for rape complaints from reporting to convictions, with cases not conforming to the real rape stereotype being more likely to be dropped in the process (Lovett & Kelly, 2009). Acceptance of rape myths has been shown to play a significant role in influencing decision making by police officers, judges, and members of the public eligible for jury service (Temkin & Krahé,

2008), but evidence from Spain on these issues is scarce. The present findings join this body of research by showing that acceptance of rape myths is a particular problem with respect to cases that disconfirm the real rape stereotype, for example by involving an intoxicated victim or a victim who has signaled sexual interest at an earlier stage. Therefore, strategies are needed for reducing the impact of rape myths on decision making on sexual assault cases. Potential approaches discussed in the literature include (a) developing screening tools for jurors with high levels of RMA, (b) introducing expert testimony to dispel police or jurors' misconceptions, and (c) designing interventions for challenging rape myths and replacing them with more accurate views of rape (Temkin & Krahé, 2008).

There are some limitations that should be noted about the two studies. First, the studies are subject to general criticisms of the external validity of the scenario method. However, even though scenarios cannot capture the full amount of detail available in more realistic contexts, such as court hearings, this method offers a degree of control over potentially confounding variables that is impossible to achieve in real-life cases that differ in a multitude of factors (Bieneck, 2009). Second, the samples in the two studies were relatively small and represented ad hoc convenience samples. The small sample size may explain the failure to find the predicted interactions of coercive strategy and RMA in Study 1. Third, we cannot conclusively explain the finding in Study 2 that women perceived the incident as less of a sexual assault than men. This result, not previously reported in the literature, should also be explored in future studies. Fourth, the scores on the measures of RMA, victim blame, and perceived token resistance were below the midpoint of the respective scales. We cannot rule out social desirability concerns here. However, significant differences in line with our theoretical predictions were found despite the relatively low overall means. Fifth, participants' experiences of sexual victimization were not assessed although studies suggest that having been a victim of sexual assault may influence attributions of blame (Mason et al., 2004; Miller, Amacker, & King, 2011). Finally, more research is needed to show the generalizability of our findings to other types of sexual assault (e.g., rapes), committed by assailants closer to the victim (e.g., acquaintances, romantic partners, or former romantic partners).

Despite these limitations, the two studies contribute to the growing international literature on the social perception of sexual assault by providing evidence from a Spanish context on college students' evaluations of nonconsensual sexual encounters involving alcohol. Against the background of substantial prevalence rates of sexual assault among Spanish students, it was demonstrated that alcohol used as a coercive strategy by the aggressor or

accepted by the victim promotes the tendency to blame the victim and to trivialize sexual transgressions, particularly among people subscribing to stereotypical myths about sexual aggression. The findings reflect social norms defining what is—and what is not—sexual assault that are relevant for understanding sexual scripts as well as sexual behavior.

Appendix A

Study 1: Use of Alcohol Versus Use of Force to Obtain Sexual Contacts

Juan is out with some friends in a bar in the city. He has been watching a girl for a while that he really likes but until now he has not decided to approach her. She is dancing with some friends and also seems to be interested in him because she has glanced at him several times. Juan decides to approach her and he introduces himself. She responds by saying that her name is Alicia, and the two begin to talk as they laugh and dance. The night goes on and the two continue flirting and having a good time together. Juan is very attracted to Alicia and he would like to “take it to the next level” with her, but Alicia turns him down several times. Juan, despite her constant rejection, grabs her strongly (alcohol condition: he decides to buy her shots of whisky so that he can go further with her). Finally, (alcohol condition: after Alicia has had several whiskies) Juan ends up kissing her and touching her sexually.

Note: English translation, original in Spanish.

Appendix B

Study 2: Victim's Sexual Interest Information and Acceptance Versus Rejection of Alcohol

Alicia goes out with her group of girlfriends to their favorite pub in the city. Minutes after arriving, a guy approaches Alicia and introduces himself as Juan. The two start to talk and the night passes by with laughter and conversation. (Sexual interest info: Alicia thinks Juan is rather attractive and feels very sexually attracted to him, she even imagines “taking it to the next level” with him). Suddenly, Juan gets close to Alicia and kisses her, meanwhile offering to buy her a whisky. She accepts his offer and the night continues with Juan buying her more whisky, and with laughter and conversation. (Alcohol rejection: She rejects his offer to drink whisky but accepts drink coca-cola). At some point in the night, Juan approaches Alicia more intimately and starts to passionately kiss and touch her. Alicia protests and tells him she doesn't want to go too far with him, but Juan pays no attention to her refusal and protest, and continues kissing her and touching her sexually.

Note: English Translation.

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