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Article

Predicting Date Rape Perceptions: The Effects of Gender, Gender Role Attitudes, and Victim Resistance

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Abstract

The effects of participant gender and victim resistance on date rape perceptions have been inconsistent. Participant gender role attitudes may contribute to these inconsistencies. We found women with traditional gender role attitudes were least likely to agree that the perpetrator was guilty of rape. Participants were less convinced of the perpetrator's guilt when the victim resisted verbally than when she resisted verbally and physically, and participants with traditional gender role attitudes were less convinced of the negative impact on the victim when she resisted verbally than when she resisted verbally and physically. Perhaps previous inconsistencies resulted from varying proportions of men and women with traditional versus liberal gender role attitudes in the samples.

Keywords

date rape, gender, gender role attitudes, sexual violence, victim resistance

Several factors have been shown to influence people's judgments about responsibility in incidents of sexual violence, including the perpetrator's race and socioeconomic status (e.g., Bagby, Parker, Rector, & Kalemba, 1994; Black & Gold, 2003, 2008; Deitz & Byrnes, 1981; Klein & Creech, 1982). In the current study, we focused on the person making the judgment and the victim's behavior. More specifically, we

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examined the effects of participants' gender and gender role attitudes, as well as the victim's resistance, on judgments about responsibility, impact, and punishment in heterosexual date rape scenarios.

Findings regarding the effects of participant gender and victim resistance on rape perceptions have been inconsistent. We suspected that participant gender role attitudes might be contributing to these inconsistencies. Because gender and gender role attitudes may be conflated, previous studies that either examined only one of these variables or examined the two variables in separate analyses may have masked important effects. In addition, at least two models suggest attitude measures may be more powerful predictors of socially-relevant judgments than are global variables, such as gender or race (Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005; White, 2009). As such, the current study expanded on previous work by examining gender and gender role attitudes, separately and then in combination, to determine their relative and cumulative effects. Furthermore, we suspected that the effects of victim resistance might vary depending on participant gender role attitudes. Because those with traditional gender role attitudes may be more likely to subscribe to traditional gender role scripts (e.g., beliefs that women engage in token resistance even when they intend to have sex), participants with traditional attitudes may be more influenced by the level of victim resistance than would those with liberal attitudes. Only one study has examined the interaction between gender role attitudes and victim resistance, but the comparison was between the victim not resisting at all and the victim aggressively punching and kicking the perpetrator (Ong & Ward, 1999). In our study, the victims in both scenarios resisted; in one case the resistance was verbal, and in the other the resistance was verbal and physical. We examined how participants with traditional versus liberal gender role attitudes varied in their responses based on this more subtle resistance manipulation.

Gender

In studies of rape perceptions, some researchers have found that men are more likely than women to endorse rape myths, blame rape victims, and exonerate perpetrators (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Gray, 2006; Grubb & Harrower, 2008, 2009; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; B. E. Johnson, Kuck, & Schander, 1997; McDonald & Kline, 2004; Schneider, Mori, Lambert, & Wong, 2009). However, other researchers have failed to find differences between men and women in rape myth acceptance, victim blame, or the punishment they would recommend for the perpetrator (e.g., Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Buddie & Miller, 2001; Grubb & Harrower, 2008, 2009; Schneider et al., 2009; Sims, Noel, & Maisto, 2007; Viki, Abrams, & Masser, 2004). As described in recent reviews; yet other studies have found that women are more likely than men to blame rape victims (Grubb & Harrower, 2008, 2009).

These inconsistent findings suggest that participant gender does not fully explain date rape perceptions. According to White (2009), researchers seem to treat gender as a causal characteristic when they examine gender differences in sexual violence. She suggests a social ecological model may be more appropriate, whereby gender is not