

Victim Blaming

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We are long past a time when female rape victims could be interrogated on the stand about what they were wearing at the time of a rape, which was once court admissible evidence. But we have not yet reached the point where a female rape victim is insulated from judgments of blame: not in the court system, should she choose to prosecute her assailant; not amongst her peers, should she disclose her experience; and not in her treatment experience, should she choose to seek assistance.

This research project examines societal factors which, I will argue, contribute to a prevalent tendency in our society to blame rape victims. My study focuses on how people are educated about rape, as well as on the role of their gender and education level, their academic field of study, and other things they choose to disclose in an interview related to factors that might affect their likelihood to blame a victim. My aim is to determine the extent to which attributes commonly associated with rape victims – e.g., drug use, drinking, reputation, location, and seductive behavior or clothing – serve to motivate a victim-blaming attitude.

The cause of victim-blaming is surely riddled in the culture. Gender and sexual stereotypes and myths dominate how we perceive sexual activity. Lack of viable education and resources impede the necessary growth of individuals and inhibit transitions in societal norms and attitudes. My intention with this study is to investigate why people blame victims of rape (which I define to be a crime in which the victim had no responsibility). Related to this are questions about how people are educated on the matter of rape, and about any factors that might influence the formation of attitudes about rape in a person who does *not* show a tendency to blame rape victims.

My project aims to identify ways in which one's attitudes towards sexual coercion are socially influenced. I will do this by evaluating responses to a questionnaire to gauge participant attitudes toward rape, rape victims, and rape perpetrators, and responses to interviews with CSU Stanislaus students, through which I was able to engage in conversations about their feelings toward rape and fault, especially as it varies with attributes associated with the victim. The victim attributes I examined include age, race, behaviors (e.g., attire, flirting, drinking or drug use), and profession (e.g., whether they are exotic dancers or in the sex industry).

My approach has been to develop and conduct a survey to gather information relating to the formation of attitudes about rape and rape victims. I am collecting relevant demographic information, and looking to see which factors attributed to a rape victim, perpetrator or society are likely to be viewed as contributing to the frequency of rape.

My survey also poses a series of true-false questions which collectively serve to gauge a participant's understanding of laws pertaining to rape. Survey participants are given the opportunity to indicate what they think could stop rape from occurring in society, and to identify what they consider to be the primary intention in rape. I pose a frequency question to identify opinions on why accusations of rape are made, and another to gauge how often participants believe false accusations are made. I also ask my survey participants to indicate how they learned about rape (the questionnaire is attached).

I am also conducting interviews involving ten scenarios and the following questions: *Did a rape occur? Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred? Who is responsible for the outcome of the situation? What could have changed the outcome of this*

situation? This interview also includes a section of demographic questions, and an opportunity for participants to divulge personal experiences they feel might have contributed to their perceptions of rape, as well as an opportunity for them to discuss media and societal influences. Participants come from two different groups. The first are CSU Stanislaus students over the age of eighteen who either volunteered to participate or participated through one of their classes. The second is a Spring 2007 cohort of the Haven Women Center's volunteer and staff-training program, whom I will survey and interview before and after a seventy-two hour training course to gauge how the course impacts their views on rape. After calculating, quantifying, and evaluating the results of the surveys and interviews, I plan to conduct some content analysis of television programs, movies, educational materials, and news stories to evaluate rape education tools and their influence on victim blaming.

There are several potential limitations to my research. One possible limitation concerns the sensitive nature of the material and its impact on the researcher and participant relationship. My hope is that participants will feel comfortable enough in my research environment to openly disclose personal experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and biases towards rape. Another possible limitation concerns the pitfalls of both quantitative and qualitative research, though I will endeavor to achieve a balance. Quantitative research is beneficial in that it lends itself to numeric precision, organization, and analysis, but is limited in the sense that a participant is limited to the proposed questions and suggested responses. Qualitative research allows participants to respond to stimuli openly rather than choosing predetermined answers, but privileges our ability to communicate over our possession of information. I shall use both a questionnaire and an interview in an attempt to gain

valuable information through the use of both forms of research.

Similar studies have been conducted in the past, employing a variety of methodologies, instruments, and approaches for analyzing individuals' tendency to blame rape victims. However, I see a need for expanded and continuous research for several reasons. One, the research conducted thus far is primarily centered on the psychological explanations for victim blame, rather than on the socio-cultural causes. Second, the research overwhelmingly uses only quantitative data, and I believe that it is more compelling to allow participants to speak from their own paradigm and experiences rather than to impose options and answers on them. And, third, though a variety of studies have been conducted throughout the United States (one was even conducted in 2000 at CSU Stanislaus), this issue is both volatile and evolving. I am curious to examine the ways in which my findings about local students and rape crisis advocates will compare with similar studies.

One study closely linked to mine was conducted in 2000 by Pamela Kyles at CSU Stanislaus. She presented her results in her MA thesis, entitled *Attribution of Fault in a Rape*. In her study, Kyles examined three independent variables and their effect on attributing fault to a victim of rape. Her independent variables were the gender and the education level of the survey participant and the way in which the victim of the rape was dressed. She surveyed 126 students and professors from CSU Stanislaus. In her discussion, she explained that other studies echoed her finding that women who were dressed provocatively were more likely to have fault associated with them for crimes committed against them, including rape and robbery. Many other similar studies have been conducted, including ones that gauge a participant's likelihood to victim blame paralleled with some other factor, such as

their religious beliefs (Writes), their views and values about marriage (Whatley, 2005), whether they have ever been victimized (Mason and Riger), their sexuality and the sexuality of the victim (Wakelin and Long 2003), and their likelihood of adhering to rape myths (Frese, Megias, Moya, 2004).

Another interesting study was presented in *The Politics of Rape: The Victim's Perspective* (Russell 1975). This studied analyzed interviews conducted with women who were rape survivors. The interview consisted of their story, as told to the interviewer, followed by a response to questions probing for whether victims felt any blame, responsibility or fault in their victimization. Their response to that question opened the conversation to factors that may have influenced their self-blame and feelings of responsibility. Most victims who blamed themselves did so because of behaviors they had chosen to engage in prior to being victimized, including hitchhiking, drug use, the company they chose to be in, and their location. Those who blamed themselves also identified factors in their socialization and victimization that contributed to their feelings of responsibility. These factors included mis-education about rape, adherence to rape myths, and blame addressed to them by their support people.

Victim blaming has its roots in the advent of American history, was present in the England from which American culture developed, and has had a place in all Western and non-Western societies. There have been many stigmas attached to the rape victim, and many inequities that accompany the victimization of rape. Culture, religion, and sexuality contribute to the way in which a victim is viewed and treated. The history of the treatment of the victim is parallel to the history of the "false accuser" phenomenon, which has its beginnings in the 17th century. In one such episode, Margarey Evans, a young woman who was returning home

through the woods from a Midsummer's Festival, was raped by two men, and when she went to report the crime, she faced hostility from the law enforcement and courts, who were heavily influenced by the perpetrators themselves.

With this case of disbelief and distrust, a precedent was set in the arena of sexual assault advocacy, often calling on the prosecution to pay special attention to the victim, with a generalized attitude that the victim could be lying or exhibiting suspicious intentions in reporting a rape. The result was that a rape victim's intentions and motives could be questioned just as rigorously as those of the alleged perpetrator. From this case came a warning from a judge that continued to be read to jurors in rape trials well into the 1970s (when the feminist movement finally succeeded in challenging its legitimacy):

"Rape is a most detestable crime, and therefore ought severely and impartially to be punished with death; but it must be remembered that it is an accusation easy to be made, hard to be proved, but harder to be defended by the party accused, though innocent" (Block 11).

Setting up rape trials in this manner indicated from the beginning that it was the accuser who was on trial, she was doubted from the beginning and forced to first prove her innocence, and then prove the guilt of the one she has accused. Through the fierce advocacy of anti-violence activism and feminist reform in the 1960s and 1970s, this warning was removed from the courtroom.

Several other ideological frameworks have contributed to victim blaming. In the early 20th century, Freud coined the terms 'female hysteria' and 'pathological liar' in his practice of psychoanalysis (Sanday, 1996, 122-123). These terms, in addition to the work of Freud, had negative consequences for women's sexuality, and especially for female rape victims, as the terms worked their way into courts to describe women deemed

uncontrollable or incapable of telling the truth. Following Freud's developments came the advent of sexology and sexual Darwinism. Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing developed a theory that coincided with Darwin's notion of sexual selection. Their theory asserted that men pursue women whom they believe would make good mates, and both partners put forth effort to express their desire to mate with each other. Men were said to do this by means of aggressive pursuit and women were said to contribute by means of avoiding and resisting sex, which Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing interpreted as weeding out their mates by determining which ones were willing to struggle to be their mate. The sexual selection theory was dangerous to rape victims who argued that they had resisted the rape, for the theory claimed that resistance was just a part of the natural game (Sanday, 1996, 123-124).

Many cultural elements shape how ideologically-based prejudice toward victims develops. My research is intended to gauge how participants have been informed on the issue of rape and should serve to correlate different forms of educational frameworks with different attitudes and prejudices. The identification of a participant's source of rape education is crucial to understanding victim blaming because many ideas prejudicial to rape victims continue to be propagated.

My hypothesis is that those people who learned about rape from their families and religious institutions will be the most likely to victim blame because research shows these agents of socialization attribute considerable responsibility to the individual rather than societal structures when it comes to issues of sexual violence. I hypothesize that participants who receive their education from Sexual Assault or Rape Crisis agencies are better educated on rape and less likely to blame victims. Though my research will not necessarily delve into this question, it would be very interesting to examine the philosophy and pedagogical tools of the agencies from

which participants learned about rape issues and to compare these with their resulting attitudes and ideas about rape, as not all sexual assault agencies operate under identical philosophies.

There are two key psychological explanations for why people tend to blame rape victims. The first is the Invulnerability theory (André and Velazquez, 1990). This theory asserts that people would like to believe they are safe from harmful and heinous acts against them. Therefore, they formulate ideas of what someone in displeasing circumstances, such as a rape victim, must have done to invite the rape. Creating ideas of "victim fault" contributes to a sense of invulnerability because people tend to feel they can identify behaviors that would make them vulnerable, and can practice prevention by simply avoiding these attributes. People who subscribe to the Invulnerability Theory are likely to be harsh in their accusations of blame and fault because it is crucial to this framework that victims must have done something to make them vulnerable. Parallel to Invulnerability theory is the Just World theory, which asserts that the world is surely a just place, and therefore, people reap what they sow. If something bad happens to someone, they must have exhibited some fault to precipitate the crisis.

A multitude of sociocultural factors influence the reasons for perceptions of rape and rape victims. One factor is media portrayal. Research indicates that most rapes portrayed in television or movie scenarios are perpetrated by strangers, even though only a very small fraction of actual rapes fall into this category. This clearly skews the way in which people view the crime of rape. Television and movie portrayals also tend to highlight the supposed mistakes or flaws of the victims in order to portray the story as avoidable fantasy rather than to present an accurate picture. The aim of the content

analysis portion of my research is to identify the content of portrayals of rape in news stories, television shows and movies, and to compare this focus to the reality of rape crimes. This comparison should create a sense of why perceptions about rape are so easily skewed from the reality of the crime, and why learning about rape through such means can contribute to a person's development of victim-blaming tendencies. Other factors include various forms of socialization, including the influence of elementary and secondary education, families, and religious institutions. The interview portion of my research should be central to exploring the ways in which individuals are socialized and educated concerning rape and how this might contribute to victim-blaming biases, beliefs and attitudes.

The notion of shifting the blame from the rape victim to the perpetrator is a product of the advocacy and determination of the

feminist movement initiated in the 1960s. In my research concerning how these revolutionary ideas have evolved, become embedded in, and affected rape culture, several crucial matters are at stake. For one thing, I risk discovering that the idea of a blame-free victim advocated by the feminists of the 1960s is a trend that subsided with the conclusion of the second wave of feminist action. I may find through my research that only fragments of notions propagated by the initial feminist push for rape law reform and victim services remain in place, or worse yet, are completely gone. Another risk is the continuing threat to the existence of these ideas as they compete with other theories of sexuality and victimization, such as sexual Darwinism. Also at stake is the threatening conclusion that even the service providers at the local rape crisis center might not embody the ideals of the philosophy on which their practice stands.

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Survey Regarding Rape Knowledge and Beliefs

Please answer the following survey questions to the best of your ability to assist my research project regarding CSU Stanislaus student beliefs and knowledge about rape. Participation in this survey is strictly voluntary. Your responses will not be subject to inappropriate disclosure. This survey is for research purposes only. Should you have any questions or concerns please contact me at elizabethconaway@yahoo.com or my research mentor at rmacdonald@csustan.edu.

Demographics:

Age: _____

Gender: (Circle one) Female Male Androgynous Other Declined to State

Marital Status: (Circle One) Single Married Divorced Widowed Separated
Domestic Partnership

Class Standing: (Circle One) Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Other

Are you involved in a Sorority or Fraternity? (Circle One) Yes No

Are you involved in other clubs or organizations? Yes (Answer next question)
No (Skip next question)

If yes, what is the nature of the clubs or organizations? Circle all that apply:

Political Social Service Academic Religious

Major _____

Concentration _____ (Write none if you do not have one)

Minor _____ (Write none if you do not have one)

Beliefs about Sexual Assault

Which of the following, if any, do you believe contributes to the frequency of rape in the United States? (Place an X next to all that apply)

Victim Behavior:

Drinking

Drug Use

Seduction

Clothing Style

Attractiveness

Location (being in dangerous areas)

Solitude (being alone)

Demeanor (if the victim appears soft or passive)

Company (being with somebody she knows wants to have sex with her)

Naiveté

Flirtatiousness

Engaging in foreplay

Other (identify all you can think of)

Perpetrator Behavior:

- Drinking
- Drug Use
- Violent Tendencies
- Sexual Desire
- Sexual Need
- Other (identify all you can think of)

Societal Factors:

- Gender Socialization
- Lack of education
- Lack of prosecution for perpetrators
- Income Disparity
- Lack of education for victims
- Lack of effective treatment for perpetrators
- Societal tendencies toward war and conflict
- Perpetrators ability to get away with it
- Other (identify all you can think of):

Circle whether each statement is true or false:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| It is possible for a man to rape his wife | True / False |
| It is possible for a prostitute to be raped | True / False |
| A drunk person can consent to sex | True / False |
| A mentally retarded person can consent to sex | True / False |
| If a woman does not try to fight him off,
then it is ok for a man to have sex with her. | True / False |

Which of the following, if any, do you believe might stop rape from occurring?

(Place an X next to all that apply)

- If women stopped wearing seductive clothing
- If women did not get drunk in public or at parties
- If women did not walk home alone
- If women were not out late at night
- If society at large were more educated on the issue of rape
- If fewer violent stimuli were present in our media culture
- If men chose not to rape
- If men did not get drunk
- If men had their needs satisfied more readily by willing women
- Other (list all relevant factors):

The most common primary intention behind rape is:

- Sexual Gratification
- Control/ Dominance
- Recreation
- Other
- Rebellion from norms
- To satisfy uncontrollable urges

Circle (n) never/ (s) sometimes/ (u) undecided/ (o) often/ or (a) always/:

Women invite rape	n/s/u/o/a
Women provoke rape	n/s/u/o/a
Rape is justified	n/s/u/o/a
Women accuse men of rape if they are angry	n/s/u/o/a
Women accuse men of rape if they feel guilty for having sex with them	n/s/u/o/a
Women accuse men of rape if they have cheated on a significant other	n/s/u/o/a
Women accuse men of rape if they become pregnant	n/s/u/o/a
Women accuse men of rape if they feel their reputation will be damaged	n/s/u/o/a
Women accuse men of rape if the man no longer wants to have sex with them	n/s/u/o/a
Women accuse men of rape if they do not want to admit they are a prostitute	n/s/u/o/a
Rape is deserved	n/s/u/o/a
Rape is requested	n/s/u/o/a

What percentage of complaints do you believe involve a false accusation of rape?

- 0- 10%
- 11-20%
- 21-30%
- 31- 40%
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 71-80
- 81-90
- 91-100

By what means were you educated about rape? Put an X next to all that apply:

- Rape Crisis Center or Sexual Assault agency
- School- elementary education
- School- secondary education
- Family
- Religious Institution
- Internet
- Research Materials
- Friends or Peers
- Television
- Movies
- Other (specify)

Further Comments: Since I cannot personally speak with each of you, please feel free to write me a note reflecting any thoughts you might have about rape or related issues.

Rape Knowledge and Beliefs (Interview Q's)

This interview is for research purposes only. Your responses shall remain anonymous. If you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop the interview at anytime, you can let me know by saying stop. I will end the interview immediately. If you decide you do not wish for your responses to be included in my research paper, please contact me immediately via email: elizabethconaway@yahoo.com

Have the following influenced your beliefs about or knowledge of rape:

Movies? If yes, which movies, and how?

Music? If yes, what music and how?

By what means were you educated on rape?

Do you believe that rape is a problem in our society?

What do you believe contributes to the frequency of rape in our society?

I am going to read several scenarios and then ask you for your opinions and insight on what occurred and who is responsible. I will also give you a copy of the questions.

1. A married couple has been fighting for the last several months. They have stopped having sex. One day, the husband insists that his wife have sex with him. She refuses and he threatens to kick her out of the house if she does not have sex with him. At that point, she complies.

A. Did a rape occur?

B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?

C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?

D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

2. A prostitute has several regular customers and one of them approaches her on the street one night. She does not feel like working and refuses him service, but she does accept a ride across town. Before taking her to her destination, he pulls the car over and forces her to have sex with him. He then drives her the rest of the way to her destination and gives her \$40, the amount that she usually charges him. She accepts the money.

A. Did a rape occur?

B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?

C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?

D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

3. A woman dresses up in very sexy attire to go to a frat party. Once there, she consumes several drinks very quickly and becomes intoxicated. A man who she has been sleeping with casually approaches her and, after flirting with her, leads her into a room where he has sex with her.

A. Did a rape occur?

B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?

C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?

D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

4. A woman works at a convenient store in an urban area. She gets off work at 2 am one morning, and walks through an alley on her way home. She is held at knife point by a man who forces her to have sex with him.

- A. Did a rape occur?
- B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?
- C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?
- D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

5. Jill, a 25 year old woman with mental retardation, is under the care of her mother due to her disability. Her male nurse finds her very attractive and seeks her permission to have sex with her. She says yes, so they do.

- A. Did a rape occur?
- B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?
- C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?
- D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

6. An 18 year old college student is failing one of her required classes. The instructor propositions her with the arrangement that if she has sex with him, he will gladly pass her.

- A. Did a rape occur?
- B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?
- C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?
- D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

7. A woman works at a strip club that has a reputation for being a pick up location for prostitutes as well as exotic dancing. A woman is hanging out in the back after she dances, at a location that is known to be a pick-up point. A man approaches her, offers her money, and requests sex from her. She refuses. He then demands that she have sex with him, or he will expose the prostitution to Law Enforcement. Many of her friends are involved with the prostitution. She still refuses, so he threatens her with a weapon and forces her to have sex with him.

- A. Did a rape occur?
- B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?
- C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?
- D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

8. A woman has a male friend over for dinner and a movie with herself and her 6 year old child. The child falls asleep on the living room floor. The man begins to make advances at the woman by putting his arm around her and kissing her. She whispers for him to stop, and he continues to make advances. She keeps whispering for him to stop because she does not want to wake or scare her sleeping child. He forces her to have sex with him.

- A. Did a rape occur?
- B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?
- C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?
- D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

9. A gay man is hanging out at a popular local bar. He is usually not afraid to share his sexual orientation if asked, but the atmosphere at this bar is making him a little uncomfortable. He does end up sharing his orientation with a woman who hits on him. Within a few minutes, many of the patrons at the bar know. He leaves right then, but is followed out to his car by a man who proceeds to have sex with him despite his pleas for it to stop.

- A. Did a rape occur?
- B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?
- C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?
- D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

10. A woman goes to a fraternity party and finds herself incredibly intoxicated after only one drink. She then becomes sluggish, and passes out on the floor, where she wakes up the next morning to find that her pants are ripped, her underwear is missing, and she has bruises on her thighs.

- A. Did a rape occur?
- B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?
- C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?
- D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

11. A man has recently had oral surgery and is taking a prescribed drug for the pain. This alleviates his pain, but he is unable to speak coherently, hold a conversation, or make rational decisions while he is on it. One night, after he has taken the painkiller, his wife has sex with him.

- A. Did a rape occur?
- B. Why or why not? What factors determined whether a rape occurred?
- C. Who is responsible for the outcome of this situation?
- D. What could have been changed in this situation in order to change the outcome?

Demographics:

- 1. Age
- 2. Major
- 3. Year in school
- 4. Gender
- 5. Marital status
- 6. Please share any personal experiences that you have had that you believe contribute to your attitudes toward rape, victims, and perpetrators
- 7. Do you think that a person's attitudes toward rape, rape victims, and perpetrators are affected if they know someone who has been raped?
- 8. Do you think that a person's attitudes toward rape, rape victims, and perpetrators are affected by whether or not they have ever been raped?

Content Analysis

Name of Program or Headline of Story:

Source: TV Show Movie Magazine Article Newspaper TV News Story

Date of Source: ___/___/___

Victim Demographics (if mentioned):

Age: ___

Sex: ___

Behaviors exhibited or described:

Drinking

Drug use

Prostitution

Location

Naiveté

Blame Association: Yes / No

How?

Perpetrator:

Age: ___

Sex: ___

Behaviors Exhibited:

Drinking

Drug use

Prostitution

Location

Naiveté

Blame Association: Yes / No

How?

Language Use:

Headline or sound bite: Passive / Assertive

Phrases describing the Victim:

Phrases describing the Perpetrator: