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Irina Anderson

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# CHARACTEROLOGICAL AND BEHAVIORAL BLAME IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FEMALE AND MALE RAPE

IRINA ANDERSON
*University of East London*

*This study investigated the spontaneous occurrence of characterological and behavioral blame in talk about rape. Although participants are willing to attribute both types of blame to rape survivors when prompted to do so by preexisting categories on questionnaires, little is known about the naturalistic aspect of these concepts as they might occur during the course of conversation. The present study also examined how participant and survivor gender influence these attributions. Findings showed that observers attributed both characterological and behavioral blame to rape survivors spontaneously during the course of conversation and in similar proportions to the self-blame observed in rape survivors. Also, both men and women blamed female and male survivors differently. Both men and women attributed more behavioral blame to the female than to the male survivor. Men also attributed more characterological blame to the female than to the male survivor, whereas female participants attributed equal amounts of characterological blame to both survivors.*

Studies have revealed many similarities in survivors' reactions to rape. Rape survivors typically experience a variety of reactions following their rape such as the shame of disclosure and safety fears (Ruch, Gartrell, Amedeo, & Coyne, 1991), and many of these experiences impede recovery. However, the attribution made by the survivor about the cause of his or her rape, usually in the form of self-blame, is thought to be particularly closely associated with postrape distress and recovery. One of the most widely researched theories of self-blame hypothesizes a twofold distinction between characterological and behavioral self-blame. First introduced by Janoff-Bulman (1979) in her research on counselors' views of self-blame in rape survivors, the theory has gained prominence because of the contentious hypothesis that some self-blame in the form of behavioral self-blame can actually be

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adaptive for the survivor in the aftermath of rape. According to this perspective, behavioral self-blame, attributed to specific behaviors that can be controlled and thus changed in the future such as, "I shouldn't have walked down there on my own" can be more adaptive than characterological self-blame where the cause of the rape is attributed to stable personality factors that cannot so easily be changed such as, "I am too naive and trusting." Furthermore, behavioral and characterological blame attributions have been found to occur in different proportions, with behavioral blame being a more common response than characterological self-blame (Katz & Burt, 1988; Meyer & Taylor, 1986).

Not surprisingly, this theory has generated a large volume of research predominantly exploring the maladaptive nature of engaging in *any* type of self-blame, whether characterological or behavioral (Frazier, 1990, 1991; Frazier & Schauben, 1994; Katz & Burt, 1988; Meyer & Taylor, 1986; Pitts & Schwartz, 1993; Ruch et al., 1991; Ward, 1995; Wyatt, Notgrass, & Newcombe, 1990). These studies have shown how the trauma and distress caused by self-blame often leads to the onset of prolonged negative cognitive, affective, behavioral, and physiological responses in the survivor such as psychological distress, major depression, substance abuse/dependence, generalized anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Davis & Breslau, 1994; Frazier, 1991; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997; Ward, 1995).

Given that the majority of researchers now believe in the debilitating, rather than adaptive, nature of self-blame for the rape survivor, attention has turned to identifying the origins of this response. Researchers now agree that cultural, rather than individual, factors are at work, whereby self-blame mirrors the blame allocated to the rape survivor by others in society (Katz & Burt, 1988; Pitts & Schwartz, 1993). For example, Wyatt et al. (1990) found that survivor self-blame increased in proportion to unsupportive and negative responses from others. This has been confirmed by other studies (Atkeson, Calhoun, Resick, & Ellis, 1982; Frazier, 1990, 1991; Frazier & Schauben, 1994; Pitts & Schwartz, 1993, 1997; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Many studies within the rape perception framework have revealed the pervasive nature of blame attributed to a rape survivor (Pollard, 1992). These studies have shown that rape survivors are frequently blamed in response to the presence in a rape incident of factors as diverse as the survivor's clothing, whether she knew the assailant, and whether alcohol had been consumed. In particular, research has confirmed that observers frequently attribute both behavioral and characterological blame to the rape survivor when asked to judge an incident of rape (Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976; Karuza & Carey, 1984; Luginbuhl & Mullin, 1981).

However, although it is known that respondents are willing to make both behavioral and characterological attributions to the rape survivor, these judgments are invariably made in response to questionnaires. Thus, it is not known whether people engage in characterological and behavioral blame spontaneously, during the course of ordinary conversations regarding rape. Questionnaire-based rape perception and attributional research has been extensively critiqued (Anderson & Beattie, 1995, 1996; Anderson & Doherty, 1997; Coates, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Hilton, 1990), and there have been calls to extend both rape perception and attribution theory research into a naturalistic domain. For example, Kelley and Michela (1984) have suggested that

> work is needed on such topics as . . . how attribution unfolds in dyads, close relationships, groups and other complex social systems, and how to understand and measure naturalistic attributions such as those presented in accounts and archival records. (p. 454)

Given the shortcomings of previous research and the need for naturalistic attributional data, the present study examines the spontaneous nature of behavioral and characterological attributions in men's and women's ordinary talk about rape.

In addition, although it is known that characterological and behavioral blame is routinely ascribed to female rape survivors when prompted by questionnaires, we do not know if male rape survivors are blamed in a similar way. Research to date has primarily focused on the rape of women rather than men because it is assumed that more women than men are attacked. More recently, however, attention has turned toward the issue of male rape, or sexual assault of men by other men. Contrary to the popular belief that male rape is rare (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996), a substantial number of men are raped each year. Although estimates of the rape and attempted rape of university women have ranged between 15% and 25% (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997), some American rape crisis centers have documented that between 6% and 20% of rape survivors treated by them are male (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Welfare organizations, however, estimate the real figure to be considerably higher, implying that a significant number of men are hidden survivors of rape with many more incidents not formally reported. Studies have demonstrated that male rape survivors also become targets for blame attributions in much the same way as female survivors and, in some cases, even more so (Smith, Pine, & Hawley, 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). Several studies have observed that male rape survivors are regarded more negatively than female survivors particularly by men (Smith et al., 1988; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). Despite several recent studies, there remains a paucity of research on male rape and none on the attribution of characterological and behavioral blame to a male rape survivor.

The present study also investigates the influence of participant gender on attributions of characterological and behavioral blame. The majority of studies to date have shown that men hold more punitive attitudes toward female survivors of rape than women (Kleinke & Meyer, 1990; Luginbuhl & Mullin, 1981; Pollard, 1992), although some studies have reported no such comparable gender differences (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Calhoun, Cann, Selby, & Magee 1981; Krahé, 1988). Generally, however, women are considered to hold more pro-survivor judgments than men. With respect to male rape, the few studies that have been conducted in this field have shown that men also tend to be more punitive toward male rape survivors than women (Whatley & Riggio, 1993). As such, gender of the participant is likely to exert an influence on the attributions ascribed and is a factor worthy of investigation.

In summary, this study had two primary purposes. The first was to examine whether the two classifications of characterological and behavioral blame attributions would emerge spontaneously during the course of conversations about rape. Empirical evidence suggests that characterological and behavioral blame attributions are common responses to rape survivors; however, this evidence is primarily derived from questionnaire data and there are little or no empirical data regarding the spontaneous occurrence of these concepts in ordinary talk. Nevertheless, it is hypothesized here that characterological and behavioral blame attributions will occur spontaneously in talk and, based on previous research, it is predicted that behavioral blame will feature more frequently in people's talk than characterological blame. The second purpose of this study was to assess the impact of participant and victim gender on the occurrence of characterological and behavioral blame. Previous research has demonstrated that men tend to hold more punitive judgments about both female and male rape survivors than women (Pollard, 1992; Smith et al., 1988; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). These results are primarily derived from questionnaire responses, and it is not known how participants will respond when given the opportunity to engage in spontaneous conversation. It is anticipated that male participants will respond more negatively than female participants, particularly toward the male survivor who is predicted to incur more overall blame than the female survivor in terms of both characterological and behavioral attributions.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

The study included 120 participants. Men and women, in pairs, were asked to discuss incidents of either female or male rape. Thus, 60

female/male dyads discussed the female rape incident and 60 female/male dyads discussed the male rape incident.[1] Cross-sex dyads were used because previous research has shown that the observed differences between men's and women's blaming strategies in rape are greatest when men and women face each other in a conversation as opposed to when two women or two men are asked to discuss a rape incident (Anderson & Beattie, 1996). Because rape is a sensitive topic for most people, it was decided to use participants who already knew each other and who would thus feel comfortable in each other's company while discussing this issue. It should be noted that conversations on sensitive topics such as rape do usually occur between people who are familiar with each other rather than between strangers. Women and men walking together on the street outside the psychology departments at Sheffield and Birmingham universities in the United Kingdom were asked to participate in research concerning opinions on rape. No other instructions were issued at this stage. Full anonymity was guaranteed and the participants were informed that they were free to leave at their discretion.

## INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS

Participants were shown to a room with a tape recorder set up and ready for use. They were asked to read a vignette description of a rape incident, which they were then asked to discuss.[2] The participants were requested to reach a conclusion although the exact nature of the conclusion was not specified. This functioned as an effective way of curtailing participants' discussions to a reasonable length as well as focusing their discussions on the vignette at hand rather than on unrelated issues.

## MATERIALS

To increase the realism of the task for the participants, the vignette that the participants were asked to discuss paralleled the details of two incidents that occurred in the West Midlands, United Kingdom, in 1997, which were widely reported in the local media. A vignette of 184 words was constructed that described a student who was returning home from an exercise class at about 9:30 p.m. when she (he) was accosted and raped. The victim was walking along a footpath when she (he) was assaulted by a stranger and dragged into a nearby alley. A passer heard shouts from the attack, investigated, and chased the attacker away. The vignettes presented to the participants were identical in all respects apart from manipulating the gender of the survivor (female or male).[3]

## ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

### TRANSCRIPTION

The conversations were transcribed according to the speaker exchange system devised by Beattie (1983). Features of talk such as interruptions and back channels (such as "yeah" and "mm") were recorded, but the latter were excluded from analysis on the grounds that they are generally not considered to function as constitutive parts of turn taking. For example, rather than an attempt to gain the floor (as in the case of "butting-in interruptions," which are unsuccessful attempts at doing this), they in fact have the opposite function of facilitating the current speaker's turn at talk (Duncan, 1972).

### EXTRACTION OF CHARACTEROLOGICAL
### AND BEHAVIORAL BLAME ATTRIBUTIONS

A scheme was devised that extracted and coded characterological and behavioral blame attributions in the talk. The scheme took account of several features. One of the difficulties of researching attributions in spontaneous conversation as opposed to questionnaires is that, occasionally, two or more interlocutors may jointly produce an attribution over a series of turns at talk. For example:

1      F: You'd think she'd be
       M: a bit more wary

In this example, the difficulty lies in establishing which of the interlocutors produced the attribution, the man or the woman. For this reason, characterological and behavioral attributions that were jointly produced over a number of turns were excluded from the analysis. Included in the final sample were characterological and behavioral attributions that were produced by a single speaker within a single turn at talk. Also, in the flow of talk, it is often difficult to establish where an attribution begins and ends, particularly when the overall turn at talk appears to contain mixed attributions such as positive and negative. For example:

2      M: I mean, she might have been dumped in the middle of nowhere with
       no money, in the middle of the night with no way of getting home, I
       mean I don't know but I mean, just on this basic bit of evidence you'd
       think well she shouldn't have walked down there, obviously she
       shouldn't do now

The boundaries of characterological and behavioral attributions occurring in the flow of talk were established using the concept of "discourse markers" (Schiffrin, 1987). According to Schiffrin, these primarily function as natural conceptual units in spontaneous discourse to conjoin, contrast, and orientate "idea units" in discourse (although they may also have a variety of other functions). Discourse markers include such connectives and contrasts between utterances as "and," "but," "you know," and "I mean." Characterological and behavioral blame attributions were extracted from talk in relation to conversational boundaries signaled by these discourse markers as well as attending to pauses, pitch contours, and other speech characteristics such as falling intonation. The latter frequently (but not exclusively) signify completion in talk (Beattie, 1983). In Example 2 above, the attributional idea unit signaled by the discourse marker, the final "I mean," would be identified as a behavioral blame attribution and extracted from the rest of the turn.

> M: but I mean, just on this basic bit of evidence you'd think well she shouldn't have walked down there, obviously she shouldn't do now

It was also necessary for the coding scheme to account for instances of repetition of characterological or behavioral blame attributions. Unless the observed repetition was obviously self-correction by the speaker, each repeated instance of characterological or behavioral blame was counted as an individual occurrence of that attribution. In talk, repetition often serves many functions other than self-correction. For example, repetition can be used to intensify or enhance the significance of an utterance (Potter, 1996). For example:

> 3    F: I think he was extremely stupid and because he was so stupid, maybe it was deliberate

One interpretation of the function of the repeated attribution "so stupid" is that it serves to justify the negative attribution to the survivor and to increase the intensity of the overall attribution to him. Thus, each instance can be seen to play a function in the ascription of characterological blame to the survivor and this is recognized here by identifying each repetition as a single instance of occurrence of the concept.

## CODING OF CHARACTEROLOGICAL AND BEHAVIORAL BLAME ATTRIBUTIONS

The coding scheme of behavioral and characterological attributions was developed as follows.

## Characterological Attributions

Characterological attributions focus on aspects of the survivor's character, personality or disposition often referring to the survivor's "naiveté" and "stupidity." This category also included references to the survivor as an "irresponsible person" or a "silly person." In the majority of cases (but not all), these attributions were identified by means of their reference in the present tense. The following are some examples of characterological attributions:

*Female Rape Characterological Attributions*

4    F: yeah, she is very stupid, it's erm . . .
5    M: well, she should have some degree of intelligence if she is a full time student but you never know
6    M: well, she can't be very clever can she
7    F: but I think she was very naive don't you. I think that's all we can say about it really

*Male Rape Characterological Attributions*

8    F: but I mean yes, I just think he's a bit stupid to have done it
9    M: yes it is, it is very odd, I mean either he's very naive or he's making something up or he wants to be raped, I mean I don't know, I mean
10    F: ah, I think that's pretty harsh, um. I think he was extremely stupid and maybe naive.
11    F: I think he was extremely stupid and because he was so stupid, maybe it was deliberate

## Behavioral Attributions

Behavioral attributions to the survivor focus on instances that suggest that the survivor should have taken precautions such as carrying a rape alarm or avoiding the area, as well as suggestions that she or he should have been more aware of their current situation. For example:

*Female Rape Behavioral Attributions*

12    F: generally, she should have taken more er more care
13    F: she should've carried, they should carry alarms or something at that time on their own
14    M: but, I think it was, the woman should have been more aware that her attacker was behind her
15    M: or, no, not a weapon but just had someone with her, and then the attack probably wouldn't have took place

*Male Rape Behavioral Attributions*

16    F: yeah, he should have been more aware of the situation, erm
17    F: yeah but he's not being very sensible, it's nine thirty, I would no way walk through campus by myself at nine-thirty at night

18    F: yeah so is he, he doesn't seem to be very careful about what he does
      'cos I know a lot of, well, especially girls are very wary about that
19    M: yeah, fair enough and you would have expected him to be walking
      with someone else, it's fairly common sense

The adequacy of the coding scheme for the present analysis was assessed by calculating interrater reliability. Two independent judges were trained in the location, extraction, and coding of characterological and behavioral attributions using written rules of analysis. Each judge coded a 20% randomly selected sample of each type of rape scenario (male rape or female rape). Any discrepancies between the judges that occurred in the coding of behavioral and characterological attributions were resolved through discussion with the author. In coding the behavioral and characterological attribution categories, the two judges reached a substantial level of agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977): Cohen's kappa = 0.78. Once reliability of the scheme was confirmed, the author then coded the remaining attributions alone.

## RESULTS

Table 1 illustrates the number of turns at talk for each rape scenario. It shows that the participants' discussions about female rape were longer than they were about male rape, lasting on average 12 and 10 minutes, respectively, although this difference failed to reach statistical significance (Mann-Whitney test, $U = 75.5$, $n = 30$, $p = ns$).

A series of Mann-Whitney tests for independent groups and Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks tests for related samples were carried out on the nonparametric data. Given that the data were subjected to multiple comparisons, the Bonferroni correction (Allison, Gorman, & Primavera, 1993) was used to protect the familywise alpha rate, the new alpha level being set at < .004. Table 2 summarizes these findings. Table 2 illustrates that the female rape survivor was viewed more negatively than the male rape survivor by the male participants, who made nine times as many blaming attributions (behavioral and characterological combined) to the female than to the male rape survivor. The female participants also viewed the female survivor more negatively than the male survivor as they attributed twice as much characterological and behavioral blame combined to the female than to the male survivor. In separate analyses of characterological and behavioral attributions, both men and women made more behavioral attributions to the female (men, $M = 2.5$, $SD = 2.9$; women, $M = 1.8$, $SD = 1.3$) than to the male rape survivor (men, $M = 0.3$, $SD = 0.7$; women, $M = 0.7$, $SD = 1.3$; Mann-Whitney tests: men, $U = 196.5$, $n = 30$, $p < .001$; women, $U = 226.5$, $n = 30$, $p < .001$). In addition, both men (Wilcoxon

Table 1

*Total and Mean (per subject) Number of Conversational Turns Taken*
*by Men and Women in Discussions of Male and Female Victimization*

|  | Male Rape | | Female Rape | |
|  | Total | Mean | Total | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Men | 631 | 21.1 | 415 | 13.8 |
| Women | 631 | 21.1 | 419 | 13.9 |

tests: $T = 23.5$, $n = 20$, $p < .002$) and women ($T = 52$, $n = 24$, $p < .001$) made more behavioral than characterological attributions to the female rape survivor. In discussions of male rape, however, they each ascribed behavioral and characterological attributions equally to the male rape survivor (men, $T = 1.5$, $n = 4$, $p = ns$, and women, $T = 9.5$, $n = 10$, $p = ns$). Male participants made significantly more characterological attributions to the female rape survivor ($M = 0.8$, $SD = 1.1$) than to the male rape survivor in their discussions ($M = 0.1$, $SD = 0.4$; $U = 255$, $n = 30$, $p < .003$), whereas the female participants did not (female survivor: $M = 0.3$, $SD = 0.9$; male survivor: $M = 0.3$, $SD = 1.5$; Mann-Whitney tests: $U = 406.5$, $n = 30$, $p = ns$).

Finally, men and women did not differ from each other in the frequency of behavioral attributions that they ascribed to the female rape survivor (Wilcoxon tests: $T = 96$, $n = 22$, $p = ns$) and to the male rape survivor ($T = 22$, $n = 12$, $p = ns$), and they also ascribed characterological attributions equally to both the female rape survivor (Wilcoxon tests, $T = 9$, $n = 12$, $p = ns$) and to the male rape survivor ($T = 1.5$, $n = 3$, $p = ns$).

## DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the spontaneous occurrence of characterological and behavioral blame attributions in talk about rape. Although it is well known that participants are willing to attribute both behavioral and characterological blame to rape survivors when prompted to do so by preexisting categories on questionnaires, little is known about the naturalistic aspect of these concepts as they might occur during the course of conversation. In addition, the present study sought to examine how the gender of the participant and gender of the rape survivor influence these attributions.

Several important findings emerged from the conversational data. First, the participants blamed both female and male rape survivors in a remarkably similar way to how rape survivors blame themselves. Participants spontaneously blamed the survivors according to the

Table 2
*Total Frequencies of Characterological and Behavioral Attributions Made by Female and Male Participants When Discussing Female and Male Rape Incidents*

|  | Male Rape | | Female Rape | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| Characterological attributions | 3 (27%) | 9 (30%) | 25 (25%) | 10 (16%) |
| Behavioral attributions | 8 (73%) | 21 (70%) | 74 (75%) | 54 (84%) |

*Note*. The percentage figure documents the proportion of characterological and behavioral attributions out of the total number of characterological and behavioral attributions combined.

distinctions introduced by Janoff-Bulman (1979), that is, they attributed both behavioral and characterological blame when discussing an incident of rape and the proportions of these attributions closely matched the self-blame routinely observed in rape survivors. In Janoff-Bulman's study, counselors indicated that of those seeking therapeutic intervention, approximately 70% attributed blame to their behavior, whereas approximately 20% ascribed blame to their character for the rape. Other research has confirmed this ratio of characterological to behavioral self-blame (Katz & Burt, 1988; Meyer & Taylor, 1986), although there is a degree of variability in reported frequencies that may be due to differences in research methodology and the blame alternatives provided. The present findings of observer attributions observed during the course of spontaneous conversation are similar to those of previous studies of self-blame, with behavioral blame predominating over characterological blame by approximately 3:1. Both men and women attributed 70%-80% of the total blame to behavior and 20%-30% of the total blame to character, and this was observed for both female and male survivors.

Although the design of the present study does not permit a direct causal link to be made between observer blame and self-blame in rape, the present data lend support to the hypothesis that self-blame in the rape survivor may develop as a result of a reflection or transference of blame from observer to survivor. To date, research has focused mainly on identifying self-blame as a mediating variable between social support and post-rape distress (Frazier, 1991). Future research should now attempt to establish conclusively whether self and other blame are causally related. Investigative strategies could include interviewing female and male rape survivors to discover whether they feel that they are blamed by others and, if so, whether they actually internalize this blame. The discovery of a direct causal association between observers and survivors of rape would be instrumental in changing the way society responds to rape survivors. Education and therapeutic service providers will be able to devise training programs, which can

alert observers to the negative effects of their judgments and encourage a more positive and supportive attitude toward rape survivors.

However, future research should also take into account the possibility that although observers may blame rape survivors in the company of others or in private, they may withhold these judgments when talking to an actual rape survivor. Reasons for this could include feeling accountable to concerns of political correctness or self-presentation. However, the survivor may still be blamed but through nonverbal means, an aspect of communication not examined here. It is clear that attitudes and attributions, including perceptions of blameworthiness, are conveyed nonverbally as well as verbally, communicative acts that become particularly significant when interaction involves important processes such as judicial hearings or police interviews. Such communication is likely to be missed by an examination of speech alone. Future research should begin to explore the full range of communicative acts that contribute to blaming the rape survivor, particularly in contexts where what is talked about and how that talk is conveyed is of fundamental importance to postrape outcomes.

The second major finding of this study was that, contrary to predictions, the female rape survivor was attributed more blame than the male rape survivor, particularly by the male participants. First, she was attributed more blame in terms of the frequency of blame attributions ascribed to her relative to the male survivor. Male participants ascribed nine times as many blame attributions (behavioral and characterological combined) to the female than to the male survivor, whereas the female participants ascribed twice as many blame attributions to her than to him. Second, the distribution of blame attributed to the female survivor differed markedly from that which was attributed to the male rape survivor. Of considerable interest are the two distinct attributional patterns that men and women deployed in the male and female rape incidents. Although the men viewed the female survivor as consistently to blame more than the male survivor, both behaviorally (e.g., "she should have taken more care," "she should have had a rape alarm") and characterologically ("well, she can't be very clever can she," "I think she was very naive don't you"), the women appeared to differentiate between the types of blame they attributed to each rape survivor. Although they also attributed more behavioral blame to the female than to the male survivor, they attributed characterological blame equally to both survivors.

There are several explanations for these patterns of attribution. The men may blame the female survivor more than the male survivor, first, for defensive reasons. The men's pattern of attribution is consistent with the defensive attribution hypothesis (Hillier & Foddy, 1993; Shaver, 1970) whereby the similarity between the victim of an unfortunate event and the observer serves to reduce blame to that victim.

The same-sex affiliation indicated here seems to act as a defense mechanism, preserving the male participants' self-esteem against future blame should it be directed at them in the event of a similar instance of victimization befalling them. One reason for the use of this attributional style by the men here may be that given the recent media attention and public scrutiny devoted to the issue of male rape, men may have become aware of the possibility of their own victimization and, as a result, are adjusting their attributions accordingly.

Second, the men's pattern of attribution may indicate that they are adhering to judgments or rape myths about women that are long-established in our culture but that do not operate as frequently around male rape. *Rape myths* can be defined as "prejudicial, stereotyped and false beliefs about rape, rape victims and perpetrators" (Burt, 1980). These beliefs tend to blame the rape survivor while exonerating the perpetrator of rape. Judgments that blame a rape survivor's character or behavior in an incident of rape are typical examples of rape myths that operate within a range of professional and everyday contexts. Although for many people rape myths provide a "common sense" resource (Doherty & Anderson, 1998) for making sense of rape incidents, research suggests that these beliefs are essentially mythical. For example, although many people believe that only certain types of women get raped, such as young, naive, or "stupid" women, studies indicate that any woman can be, and often is, a victim of rape (Ward, 1995). Another common rape myth is that women precipitate rape by their behavior, that if they fail to take precautionary measures against rape and are then raped, they only have themselves to blame. By contrast, despite recent media and public attention devoted to male rape in the United Kingdom and in the United States (Isely, 1998) male rape remains an issue that people have relatively little knowledge about. Thus, although the men in the present study may have found beliefs about female rape accessible enough to reproduce in their conversations, they may simply not know how to respond to male rape. For example:

  M: I don't know anything about male rape
  M: Well it's pretty odd really. I've never really heard of an incident of male rape before
  M: Yeah, it's weird, you usually don't hear about it. I mean it's quite sad that you hear about women getting raped quite often
  M: It's quite spooky cause you don't get much stuff about male raping in the news, er, you don't see that much of it on the media

By contrast, women's reasoning about rape may be guided by practical considerations and lived experience. It has often been suggested that the fear of rape figures relentlessly as a "daily part of every

woman's consciousness" (Griffin, 1971, p. 27), a fear that often expresses itself in behavioral avoidance strategies. Thus, although blaming men and women equally in terms of their characters, where this response may be indicative of their rejection of the belief that only women are capable of precipitating rape by their naiveté or stupidity, the female participants may nevertheless subscribe to the view that, realistically, women more than men should protect themselves behaviorally against rape.

These different patterns of blame have a number of implications. First, the female rape survivor is likely to be considered a much more appropriate target for rape prevention strategies than the male survivor. If these findings are also replicated in other contexts, such as court proceedings or police interviews, then the outcome is bleak for the female rape survivor who, through having her behavior and character targeted more than the male rape survivor, may be treated less sympathetically or have less access to services. However, the male rape survivor may also experience reduced support and sympathy through being blamed in ways not investigated in the present study. Although people may have relatively less knowledge about male rape than female rape, they may nevertheless draw on a limited repertoire of beliefs and stereotypes to make sense of a male rape incident. This repertoire may be very different in nature to the one that operates around female rape. Thus, although observers may be less inclined to target the male survivor's character or behavior than the female survivor's, they may instead focus on his physical size or derogate his masculinity. Previous research has found support for the operation of a limited range of rape myths about male rape such as "getting raped doesn't really upset men" and "male rape cannot happen" (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). However, this research is limited because it constrained participants' responses to a predetermined set of myths. An important issue for future research to address is the need to explore the full repertoire of beliefs or myths about male rape as they become increasingly ingrained in public consciousness. For this to be done successfully, research should move away from questionnaire-based studies and into an arena where myths about male rape are allowed to occur spontaneously, in ordinary conversation.

The usefulness of examining psychological theory in spontaneously occurring conversations is demonstrated clearly in this study. The study has confirmed empirically the validity of the theoretical concepts of characterological and behavioral blame in rape and their usage in ordinary talk as well as on predetermined questionnaires. Another advantage of examining attributional reasoning in spontaneous conversation instead of on questionnaires is that the management of accountability and blame can be examined in their usual venue—

ordinary conversation. For example, the nonnegotiable, straightforward, and explicit attribution statements on questionnaires that require a constrained response such as the level of agreement bear little resemblance to the spontaneous, flexible, and subtle way in which attributional and evaluative claims are made in ordinary discourse. In this way, the present study may be viewed as more ecologically valid than questionnaire research through having highlighted both the existence and form that characterological and behavioral blame might take in routine conversations between survivors and significant others such as friends and peers.

However, although this study expanded on previous research, it is also limited in several respects. Despite the fact that the present findings may provide more information about how people respond to survivors of rape in real-life discussions rather than questionnaires, the respondents were still somewhat constrained in several ways in their talk, a feature of the present method necessitated by the experimental situation. First, the findings are based on men and women making attributions about a rape scenario that may have scant significance for them and are therefore not a direct indication of whether men and women will exhibit the same behaviors toward actual rape survivors (although the findings may provide an insight into how ordinary citizens, in this case students who may also be friends and relatives of rape survivors, may view female and male survivors of rape). Second, the present findings are derived from cross-sex dyads of people acquainted with each other but not with the rape survivor, although in everyday contexts it is conceivable that such discussions may also take place between same-sex people, both in dyads and larger groups, who may also be acquainted with the survivor. Future research must move toward examining increasingly real situations and contexts in which talk about rape occurs. Ultimately, the dynamics of how observers behave toward survivors and the effects that these behaviors have in the postrape context can only be understood by studying real life situations.

To summarize, the present findings are important for at least two reasons. First, intervention programs can begin to educate others of the possible link between people's responses toward rape survivors and survivors' subsequent feelings about themselves, although more research is required in this area. However, the present study has provided a significant foundation for identifying the possible links between others' and the survivor's own response to their rape. Second, by identifying the spontaneous occurrence of the concepts of characterological and behavioral blame in ordinary conversation, the present study has moved a step closer toward highlighting how observers may respond to rape survivors in everyday real-life discussions about rape.

## NOTES

1. The conversational data used here were initially collected for a doctoral thesis that examined gender differences in uses of covariation information in spontaneous talk (Anderson, 1996). The conversations were generated by presenting male-female dyads with a rape vignette that had two versions of covariation information embedded in a more general description of the incident of rape. One scenario contained the covariation information that the victim had been raped once before prior to the assault and that no other rapes had occurred in the area. The second scenario contained the information that the victim had been raped before and that other rapes had occurred in the area. The two scenarios also manipulated gender of the victim. The covariation statements were then extracted from men's and women's talk and analyzed for their frequency of occurrence and function. For the purposes of the present study, the different scenarios were combined to produce 60 male-female discussions about female rape and 60 male/female discussions about male rape.

2. The vignettes are available from the author on request.

3 Before the data could be combined, it was important to ensure that the attributional outcomes of characterological and behavioral blame are represented with equal frequency in the two scenarios, namely the "raped before, other rapes" and the "raped before, no other rapes" scenarios. Statistical tests showed no significant differences between the two scenarios in the frequency of occurrence of characterological and behavioral blame attributions in either the female rape (Mann-Whitney tests: men characterological, $U = 72$, $N1 = 15$, $N2 = 15$, *ns*; men behavioral, $U = 65$, $N1 = 15$, $N2 = 15$, *ns*; women characterological, $U = 91$, $N1 = 15$, $N2 = 15$, *ns*; women behavioral, $U = 82.5$, $N1 = 15$, $N2 = 15$, *ns*) or the male rape episodes (Mann-Whitney tests: men characterological, $U = 112$, $N1 = 15$, $N2 = 15$, *ns*; men behavioral, $U = 96$, $N1 = 15$, $N2 = 15$, *ns*; women characterological, $U = 97.5$, $N1 = 15$, $N2 = 15$, *ns*; women behavioral, $U = 100$, $N1 = 15$, $N2 = 15$, *ns*).

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