

CALLING IT RAPE: DIFFERENCES IN EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WHO DO OR DO NOT LABEL THEIR SEXUAL ASSAULT AS RAPE

Arnold S. Kahn, Jennifer Jackson, Christine Kully, Kelly Badger, and Jessica Halvorsen
James Madison University

Past research had found that one-half or more of all women who have had an experience that might meet the definition of rape do not label themselves rape victims. The present study examined the actual rape experiences of 33 women who labeled their assault experience as rape and 56 women who did not label their assault experience as rape through questionnaires and open-ended descriptions of what happened during their assault. Quantitative findings replicated past research, finding that acknowledged victims, compared to unacknowledged victims, were older, knew their assailant less well, experienced more forceful assaults, and had stronger negative emotional reactions to the experience. Qualitative analysis revealed that women were mostly likely to acknowledge their experience as rape when the assailant was not their boyfriend and they woke up with a man penetrating them or the assailant used force and dominated them to obtain intercourse. Women assaulted as children also acknowledged their experience as rape. However, when the assault involved a boyfriend, or if the woman was severely impaired by alcohol or drugs, or if the act involved oral or digital sex, the women were unlikely to label their situations as constituting rape.

Research has consistently found that a large percentage of women—typically over 50%—who have experienced vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse against their will label their experience as something other than rape¹ (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn, Mathie, & Torgler, 1994; Kahn & Mathie, 2000; Koss, 1985; Pitts & Schwartz, 1993; Schwartz & Leggett, 1999). Labeling one's experience as rape is important: If a woman does not recognize her situation as such she will not report the incident and the assailant will not be identified or punished. Burt and Estep (1981) noted that a rape victim has "the right to claim assistance, sympathy, temporary relief from other role responsibilities, legal recourse, and other similar advantages" (p. 16), rights that cannot

be claimed if a woman does not label her experience as rape. Although there have been a number of studies attempting to differentiate women who label their experience as rape from those who do not in terms of personality and situational factors, few clear-cut relationships have emerged.

Reasons for Labeling a Sexual Assault as Rape

One area of research that has consistently found differences between women who do and do not label their experience as rape has been their rape script, whether a woman considers a typical rape to be a violent encounter with a stranger or a less violent struggle with an acquaintance. Bondurant (2001) and Kahn, Mathie, and Torgler (1994) both found that women who believe a typical rape involved an acquaintance rape as opposed to a violent stranger rape were more likely to call their experience rape if they had a script of a violent stranger rape instead of an acquaintance rape. We did not further explore rape scripts in this study, nor did we explore differences between women who do and do not define their situation as rape in terms of personality, attitudes, or non-rape behaviors, since past research has consistently failed to uncover differences in these areas (Bondurant, 2001; and Kahn, Mathie, & Torgler 1994; Koss, 1985).

Researchers have found mixed results when they examined other variables associated with labeling an experience as rape. By having participants write out the details of what

Arnold S. Kahn, Jennifer Jackson, Christine Kully, Kelly Badger, and Jessica Halvorsen, Department of Psychology, James Madison University.

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Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Arnold Kahn, Department of Psychology, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA 22807. E-mail: kahnas@jmu.edu

happened during their assault as well as answering specific questions about their assault we hoped to clarify the impact of these variables on and our understanding of calling what happened rape.

Characteristics of the assailant. A woman might be less likely to label her experience as rape if she knew her assailant well, was in love with him, and had previous consensual sexual relations with him compared to a stranger assailant or someone she had just met. After all, rape is not supposed to happen between loved ones. Consistent with this reasoning, Koss (1985) found that women who did not label their experience as rape knew their assailant better and had a higher level of intimacy with him prior to the attack when compared with those women who called their situation rape. However, subsequent research by Layman, Gidycz, and Lynn (1996) and Bondurant (2001) have not replicated this finding, although the percentages in Layman et al. (1996) were in the same direction as Koss (1985) but not statistically significant. We expected to replicate Koss (1985) and hypothesized women who do not label their experience as rape would report a more intimate relationship with their assailant than women who called their situation rape.

Characteristics of the assault. Past research suggests both assailant force and victim alcohol use can impact whether a woman calls the experience rape. With two exceptions (Koss, 1985; Levine-MacCombie & Koss, 1986), research has found that women who labeled their experience as rape reported greater assailant force (Bondurant, 2001; Emmers-Sommer & Allen, 1999; Kahn et al., 1994; Layman et al., 1996; Schwartz & Leggett, 1999). We expected to replicate this finding.

Alcohol consumption appears to increase the risk for sexual assault (Abbey, 1991; Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, & McAuslan, 1996; Emmers-Sommer & Allen, 1999; Koss & Dinero, 1989; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Norris, Nurius, & Dimeff, 1996). As Schwartz (Schwartz & Pitts, 1995; Schwartz & Leggett, 1999) noted, case law for many decades has concluded that rape occurred if a woman was too intoxicated to give her consent to sexual acts. However, women who are highly intoxicated may also blame themselves for their intoxication, for what happened as a result, and therefore call their experience something other than rape. Consistent with this reasoning, Schwartz and Leggett (1999) found that women were less likely to call their experience rape if it occurred while they were too intoxicated to resist than if the man used physical force. Similarly, Kahn and Mathie (2000) reported impairment by alcohol or drugs to be positively associated with not labeling the situation as rape. Layman et al. (1996) found no difference in alcohol and drug use between women who did and did not label their experience as rape, but they did not distinguish between social drinking and intoxication. We hypothesized that high levels of intoxication would be associated with a reluctance to call the situation rape.

Victim emotional reactions during the assault. People often react very differently to the same experience. If a woman blames herself, at least in part, for what happened she might be less likely to label her experience as rape than a woman who blames her assailant; however, the research on self-blame and labeling an experience as rape has been contradictory. Two studies, Frazier and Seales (1993) and Pitts and Schwartz (1993), found greater self-blame by those who did not label the experience as rape; however, Bondurant (2001) found just the opposite. Finally, two studies, Kahn and Mathie (2000) and Layman et al. (1996) found no differences in self-blame between those who labeled their experience as rape and those who did not. Interestingly, past research has not investigated perceptions of assailant blame and use of the rape label. We hypothesized that those women who labeled their experience as rape would be more likely to mention assailant blame than those who did not, but that women who did not label their experience as rape would be more likely to mention self-blame than those who did.

Researchers have documented the negative mental and physical health consequences of rape (for a summary see Koss & Kilpatrick, 2001). To the extent a woman has strong negative emotional experiences following her assault she may be more likely to label what happened as rape than a woman who experienced fewer negative emotional reactions. Only one unpublished study, summarized by Kahn and Mathie (2000), has examined this relationship and found that women who labeled their experience as rape felt more victimized (e.g., degraded, violated, betrayed) and experienced more negative affect (e.g., sad, dirty, shock) than those who did not. We anticipated replicating that finding.

Unacknowledged or Uncertain?

It may be that some women are uncertain as to whether they experienced rape. In the research reviewed thus far the investigators have given participants only two response alternatives, *yes* or *no*, to a question such as, "have you ever been raped by a man?" Botta and Pingree (1997) explored this possibility by providing *yes*, *no*, or *maybe* alternatives to the question, "have you ever been sexually assaulted." They found that 22% of their assault victims responded *maybe* (28% responded *no* and 50% responded *yes*). Botta and Pingree (1997) concluded that the women who responded *maybe* appeared more like women who labeled their experience as rape than those who did not and suggested that these women could be in a transition period to labeling themselves rape victims. In a study similar to Botta and Pingree (1997) and Milin, Kahn, Sims, and McDonald (2000) substituted *raped* for *sexually assaulted* and included *uncertain* as the third response category. Milin et al. (2000) found that of their 57 likely rape victims, only 7% used the *uncertain* option (70% responded *no* and 23% answered *yes*). The differences in frequencies of use of these

intermediate options in these two studies could have been due to differences between the terms sexual assault and rape, differences between the terms uncertain and maybe, or both. In the present study we retained the word rape but used the passive voice, asking, "Have you ever been raped by a man?" As our intermediate response category we used a combination of the two terms, *uncertain or maybe*.

Present Study

By having women describe their rape experience in their own words, in addition to their responses to closed-ended questions about their experience, we hoped to gain insight into why some women label their assault experience as rape and others do not. We hypothesized that women would be more likely to label their assault situation as rape the less intimate their relationship to the assailant, the greater the assailant force, the less victim alcohol use, the greater the assailant blame, the less the self blame, and the greater the negative affect following the assault. In addition to shedding light on these factors, for which past research has produced inconclusive results, we hoped that descriptions of the women's experiences would allow us to develop prototypes that would allow one to identify situations likely to be labeled as rape by the assault victim. Although we had no clear preconceptions of the nature of these situations, we anticipated, for example, that a situation such as one where an acquaintance not a boyfriend uses superior weight to hold a woman down, might be more characteristic of the self-label of rape, whereas a situation such as one where a woman was very drunk and unable to stop her boyfriend's advances, might be more characteristic of labeling the situation as something other than rape. Finally, we sought to determine the extent to which some sexual assault victims might in fact be uncertain as to whether their experience was one of rape, and would use an uncertain or maybe option if available.

METHOD

Participants

Five hundred four female college students from a mid-sized, southeastern, public university volunteered for this research in return for course credit or sorority community service. The women ranged in age from 17 to 41 ($M = 18.8$). Ninety percent of the participants identified their ethnic composition as Caucasian, 2% as African American, 1.5% as Hispanic, 0.5% as Native American, 3.5% as Asian, and 2.5% as other. The sample consisted of approximately 51% first-year students, 31% sophomores, 13% juniors, and 5% seniors.

Materials and Procedure

We tested participants in groups of 4-25 and told them that the research involved how people form perceptions of a stressful event. Experimenters, pairs of college women

trained to deal with issues of sexual assault, informed participants that their responses would be anonymous and confidential, and that they need not answer any questions about which they felt uncomfortable. All participants signed an informed consent form.

We first administered a questionnaire in which participants indicated yes, uncertain or maybe, or no to 16 questions regarding their attitudes and experiences. Fifteen of these items were filler questions about criminal/aggressive acts or beliefs (e.g., "Have you ever had your purse stolen?" "Do you think marijuana should be legalized?"). However, one of these questions was the critical, "Have you ever been raped by a man?"

Participants then completed a modified, 16-item version of the Sexual Experience Survey (SES; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987) used to determine whether the women had a potential rape experience. Koss and Gidycz (1985) reported a test-retest agreement rate between administrations a week apart of 93%. We considered seven of 16 questions to be indicative of rape. The instructions stated, "Please mark (A) for YES or (B) for NO to the following questions regarding sexual intercourse. By 'sexual intercourse' we mean penetration of a woman's vagina no matter how slight, whether or not ejaculation occurred. Have you ever..." We provided no age limit for the woman or the man. The questions indicative of rape included having sexual intercourse with a man when: he threatened to harm someone you cared about, you were drinking or using drugs and unable to resist, you felt threatened or intimidated by him, he threatened to use physical force, he used physical force, you genuinely stated you didn't want to,² and he performed anal or oral intercourse because of threats or physical force. If a participant indicated yes to any one of these items, she was then asked to turn the page where she found the following instructions:

Please take a few moments to describe in detail the circumstances of this experience. If there was more than one experience, respond about the one you remember best. How did this experience come about? What occurred during the experience? What did he do? What did you do? Remember that this survey is anonymous, and there is no way to match your survey or this description with you. Therefore, be as candid as you feel comfortable. Please write your response on the two sheets of blank paper provided and then continue on the next printed page.

We considered a woman to have labeled her experience as rape if she answered yes to the question about having been raped and yes to one or more of the seven critical experience questions. We considered a woman not to have labeled her experience as rape if she answered no to the question about having been raped and yes to one or more of the seven critical experience questions. We labeled women uncertain who responded maybe/uncertain to the question about having been raped and yes to one or more of the seven

critical experience questions. We considered "nonvictims" to be women who answered no to the question about having been raped and no to all seven critical experience questions. The actual experiences of these women may or may not be considered rape under a given state law; our interest was to examine the determinants of what leads a woman to perceive her experience as involving rape, not whether rape, in fact, occurred.

We next asked participants to respond to a series of questions on 5-point scales regarding her age at the time of the experience (1 = 16 or under, 2 = 17, 3 = 18, 4 = 19, 5 = 20+), how well she knew the man (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very well*), and her and his drug and alcohol use (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *a whole lot*). This was followed by questions regarding their emotional experiences (angry, dirty, confused, in control, sad, responsible, detached from reality, and guilt) after the experience, responded to on 5-point scales anchored by *very* and *not at all*.

To mask whether or not a participant had a potential rape experience, we asked women who answered no to all of the critical experience questions on the SES to turn to a different page of the survey, which asked if another woman had disclosed her sexual assault experience to them. If the participant answered affirmatively, she was directed to write about this experience. If the participant had neither been raped nor been disclosed to by another rape victim, the instructions said to turn to a different page where she was asked to write about the extent to which she believed sexual assault was a problem on college campuses. Thus, whether a woman had been the victim of sexual assault could not be determined by the length of time she spent completing the questionnaire.

After participants completed the survey, experimenters distributed resource lists and other information regarding sexual assault services available on campus and in the community, and answered any questions. At no time did the

experimenters use the term rape in their instructions or response to questions.

RESULTS

Of the 504 participants, 13 chose not to complete the survey. Of the 491 remaining women, 33 (6.5%) called their experience rape, 56 (11.4%) did not label it rape, 8 (1.6%) were uncertain whether they were rape victims, and 394 (80.2%) were nonvictims of sexual assault. Because not all participants completed all items, the number of participants varies from analysis to analysis. Only eight women chose the maybe or uncertain alternative, and thus we do not report results from these participants.

One-way ANOVAs and follow-up comparisons showed that women who labeled their experience as rape ($M = 19.42$, $SD = 1.06$) were significantly older than nonvictims ($M = 18.73$, $SD = 0.90$), but not different from women who did not label their experience as rape ($M = 18.96$, $SD = 2.56$), $F(3, 463) = 3.20$, $p = .025$, and that women who called their experience rape had more years in college ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.14$) than either those who did not use that label ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 0.80$) or nonvictims of sexual assault, ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.86$); $F(3, 464) = 5.91$, $p < .001$.

Quantitative Differences Between Women Who Did or Did Not Label Their Assault as Rape

We asked participants who responded yes to one of the potential rape questions to respond to a number of specific questions about their assault. A MANOVA revealed significant differences between women who did and did not call their experience rape, $F(12, 68) = 2.12$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2 = .274$. Table 1 presents the means for each individual question. As hypothesized, women who labeled their experience as rape were less familiar with their assailant and reported more negative affect, expressing greater feelings of dirty,

Table 1
Quantitative Differences Between Women Who Did and Did Not Label Their Experience as Rape

Question	Mean (SD) Labeled Rape (n = 31)	Mean (SD) Not Labeled Rape (n = 50)	F-value Partial (df = 1, 79)	η^2
Familiar with man	3.35 (1.52)	4.14 (1.23)	6.51*	.076
Assailant alcohol/drug	2.42 (1.54)	3.14 (1.59)	4.01*	.048
Victim alcohol/drug	3.10 (1.74)	3.10 (1.75)	0.00	.000
Anger after experience	4.06 (1.15)	3.76 (1.15)	1.34	.017
Dirty after the experience	4.55 (0.99)	3.80 (1.44)	6.43*	.075
Confused after the experience	4.52 (0.81)	3.70 (1.34)	9.30**	.105
Experienced loss of control	4.35 (1.02)	4.02 (1.10)	1.80	.022
Sad after the experience	4.32 (1.01)	3.68 (1.28)	5.59*	.066
Responsible for the situation	3.68 (1.25)	3.44 (1.26)	1.08	.009
Detached from reality	4.00 (0.97)	2.92 (1.37)	14.73***	.157
Guilty	4.03 (1.22)	3.66 (1.52)	1.32	.016

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

Table 2
Percentage of Women Responding Yes to Sexual Experience Scale Items

SES Item	Labeled Rape (n = 33)	Not Labeled Rape (n = 56)	$\chi^2(1)$
Consensual sex	97.0	87.5	2.28
Man misinterpret desired intimacy	100.0	83.9	5.90*
Man so aroused useless to stop him	45.5	58.9	1.52
Sex because he threatened end relationship	12.1	8.9	0.23
Sex because of his continual arguments	36.4	33.9	0.05
Sex because he lied	39.4	41.1	0.02
Man used force to kiss or pet	57.6	33.9	4.75*
Man threatened force; sex didn't happen	12.1	5.4	1.31
Man used force but sex didn't happen	27.3	12.5	3.07
Sex after you genuinely said no ¹	72.7	37.5	10.31**
Sex when man threatened harm loved one ¹	0.0	0.0	0.00
Unable to resist because alcohol/drugs ¹	63.6	62.5	0.01
Sex because felt threatened/intimidated ¹	57.6	23.2	10.65***
Sex because he threatened force ¹	12.1	1.8	4.18
Sex because he used force ¹	39.4	1.8	22.16***
Anal/oral sex because he used force ¹	21.2	21.4	0.00

¹A response of yes to this item is suggestive of rape.

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

confusion, sadness, and detachment from reality after the experience than women who did not call their experience rape. (See Table 1.) We should note that for women who did label their experience as rape, all the mean negative emotion scores except for responsibility were 4.0 or higher on 5-point scales, suggesting extremely negative reactions to their experiences. Although we predicted greater victim alcohol and drug use would be associated with not labeling the situation as rape, we found no differences. However, although not hypothesized, greater assailant alcohol and drug use was associated with calling the experience something other than rape.

Differences in Sexual Experiences of Women Who Did and Did Not Label Their Experience as Rape

We used the SES to differentiate women who had an experience that might qualify them as a rape victim from those women who had not. The SES provided information regarding both possible rape experiences and nonrape sexual experiences. We hypothesized those women who labeled their experience as rape would report more forceful experiences than those who did not. Table 2 provides the percentages of women who called their experience rape and the percentages of women who did not label their experience as rape to each SES item. Of the five items for which we found significant differences in the predicted direction, three of them involved intimidation or force (force to kiss or pet, sex because of intimidation, and sex because he used force). In addition, a higher percentage of women said yes to the item, sex because he threatened force, but the difference fell short of statistical significance ($p = .06$). Women

who labeled their situation as rape also were significantly more likely to have a man misinterpret their desired level of intimacy and to have had unwanted sex with a man after genuinely saying no.

Differences Between Women Who Labeled Their Experience as Rape and Those Who Did Not in Their Reports of Their Experiences

Unique to this research was the provision of written responses by participants describing their assault experiences. Out of the 491 participants, 97 (19.76%) answered yes to one of the seven critical questions on the SES, indicating that their experience might be considered rape. The written responses of 9 of the 97 participants could not be analyzed: three women did not answer yes to any of the critical SES questions, but answered yes when asked whether or not she had been raped, and four women answered yes to one or more of the critical SES questions but chose not to write about their experience or provided descriptions too short to categorize. This resulted in written descriptions from 87 victims: 31 who called their experience rape, 50 who did not label their experience as rape, and six maybe/uncertain victims. Written descriptions of the assault experience ranged from as little as three or four sentences to as long as two complete pages. Most descriptions ranged from one-half to two-thirds of a page.

Coding of Assault Descriptions

We categorized the written descriptions into 12 dimensions: relationship with the assailant (e.g., stranger, boyfriend),

setting (e.g., party, dorm room), assailant behavior (e.g., seduction, removing clothing), victim behavior (e.g., says no, passed out), aftermath (cried, woke up naked), victim alcohol/drug use (e.g., drinking not drunk, drunk/wasted), assailant alcohol/drug use, emotional reactions (confused, shock), phrases used in description (e.g., "This is not rape," "Lost my virginity," "I would never have done this sober"), later interaction with the man (e.g., still friends, never saw him again), reaction of the assailant (e.g., apologetic, denies it was rape), and presence of self- and assailant-blame. Not all dimensions could be completed for each description because of ambiguous or missing information. In addition, most dimensions could be multiply coded. For example, assailant behavior could include threatening, says she wants it, and holds her down.

Four coders, unaware whether the woman who wrote the description labeled her experience as rape or not, read and coded the assault descriptions. Two different coders independently read and coded each description. The four coders were paired six times in order to match each rater with every other one. Each pair coded a different set of 16 descriptions. The mean inter-rater agreement for each pair ranged from 76.15% to 78.30%, with an average agreement across all raters and categories of 76.97%. The highest percentages of agreement were for victim blame (91.92%), relationship with the assailant (90.12%), and assailant blame (89.89%). The most unreliable categories were later interaction with the assailant (58.82%), reaction of the assailant (62.55%), and victim behavior (64.79%). When a pair of raters disagreed, a third rater resolved the disagreement.

Most of these analyses proved to be uninformative. Frequently, too few descriptions mentioned a given behavior to provide for statistical analyses. We report here only the three analyses for which we had both the highest frequencies and the highest inter-rater reliabilities.

Relationship to the assailant. The quantitative data, reported earlier, supported the hypothesis that women who label their encounter as rape would have had a less intimate relationship with their assailant than women who do not label their encounter as rape. We categorized the relationship with the assailant into ten categories: stranger, acquaintance, friend, friend of a friend, a date, dating awhile, boyfriend, family member, ex-boyfriend, and other. Relationship information could be coded for 25 of the women who called their experience rape and 42 of the women who did not so label their experience. We combined the categories date, dating awhile, boyfriend, and ex-boyfriend into a romantic category, and combined the remaining categories into a nonromantic category. Almost three-fourths (72.0%) of the women who called their situation rape reported that their assailant was a nonromantic partner, whereas slightly over one-half of those who did not use the label of rape (54.76%) reported that their assailant was a romantic partner, $\chi^2(1) = 4.52, p < .05$.

Self- and assailant-blame. For each description coders noted whether self- and assailant-blame were mentioned, implied, or not mentioned. We considered self-blame to be implied if the participant noted she could have acted otherwise, suggested she "might" have been responsible, or indicated she "shouldn't" have been so drunk. We considered assailant-blame to be implied if she noted that he made her do something, he put up some barrier to her leaving, or she attributed the experience to his inebriation.

Most participants did not mention self-blame (82.8% acknowledged and 68.2% unacknowledged, $\chi^2[1] = 4.49, p > .05$). However, we found significant differences in assailant blame as a function of whether a woman labeled her experience as rape. As predicted, women who used the rape label were more likely than women who did not to either explicitly mention that he was to blame (41.4% vs. 15.9%) or to imply that he was to blame (34.5% vs. 15.9%), whereas women who did not use the rape label were more likely not to mention assailant blame at all (68.2% vs. 24.1%), $\chi^2[1] = 13.64, p < .001$.

Classification of Assault Situations

Four individuals previously unassociated with this research each read all the descriptions and independently classified them into sexual assault situations. The four then met together and agreed upon the assault situations and provided criteria for differentiating each situation. We then gave the women's descriptions of their assaults and the assault situations and criteria to three other people not previously involved, and asked each of them to independently categorize each description into one of the situations. Based on disagreements by these categorizers, we again reviewed and modified the situations and their criteria, producing a final eight sexual assault situations, with an additional ninth "other" category. We gave the women's descriptions and the revised situations and their criteria to three different people who had not previously been involved in this research, and asked them to place each description into one of the nine situations. The situations are described in Table 3. The three judges agreed with our placement of the descriptions into situations an average of 83.5% of the time, with the individual agreement levels of each judge being 85.7%, 81.2%, and 83.5%. Complete agreement was impossible because an occasional description could reasonably fit more than one situation (e.g., a boyfriend who forced the woman to perform oral sex when she was severely impaired by alcohol might be placed in "forced sex acts," "severe impairment," or "dominating boyfriend").

Table 4 displays the frequencies with which women who labeled their situations as rape and those that did not fall into each assault situation. Severe impairment ($n = 18$), submit ($n = 18$), and forced sex acts ($n = 16$) constituted the most frequent assault situations and accounted for 52 (65%) of the 80 classifiable descriptions. Three situations, asleep or tricked ($n = 12$), forceful acquaintance ($n = 8$), and childhood ($n = 3$), accounted for 23 (76.67%) of the 30

Table 3
Rape Situations

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Description</i>
Submit	After repeated no's the woman gave in to her boyfriend's continued begging, whining, or arguing. She didn't want sex, but wanted to please him, keep peace, or she feared he might become violent. Many of these descriptions would not legally be construed as rape.
Childhood	A relative or close family friend or babysitter assaulted the woman when she was a child (middle school or younger). He used at least some force and was much older than she.
Forced Sex Acts	The man, a boyfriend or acquaintance, used force (usually holding head down) to obtain or perform oral or digital sex.
Emotionally Needy	The woman, emotionally unstable and needy, often following the breakup of a relationship, wanted someone to care for her, but did not want to have intercourse. Many of these situations would not legally be construed as rape.
Dominating Boyfriend	A boyfriend, older and larger than the woman, used threats or force to obtain sexual intercourse. The woman unsuccessfully tried to resist.
Forceful Acquaintance	A nonboyfriend acquaintance would not yield to woman's pleas to stop, using force, threats, or coercion to obtain sexual intercourse. The woman was not impaired by alcohol or drugs.
Asleep or Tricked	The woman, asleep, awoke to find a man performing sexual acts on her. Or a man promised no penile penetration, but did so and the woman was not immediately aware of it, unfamiliar with the "feel" of penetration.
Severe Impairment	The woman was conscious, but severely impaired by alcohol or drugs. She had neither the presence of mind nor the ability to resist and the man had intercourse with her.
Other	The situation was unique and would have required a category of its own.

classifiable descriptions provided by women who labeled their situation as rape; only 4 of these descriptions (8.89%) were provided by women who did not consider their situation to be rape. Four situations, severe impairment ($n = 14$), submit ($n = 13$), forced sex acts ($n = 7$), and dominating boyfriend ($n = 4$), accounted for 38 (86.36%) of the 44 classifiable descriptions provided by women who did not consider their experience to be rape; only 6 (20%) of these descriptions were provided by women who labeled their experience as rape.

DISCUSSION

Like other research on labeling a situation as rape, this study was based on the responses of predominately White,

middle-class college women who relied on retrospective reports of their experiences, some of which had occurred years previous. Young women who were severely traumatized by their rape experience may never make it to college or drop out of college soon after their rape experience. Noncollege students, women above college age, married women, and women from other ethnic groups may interpret their experiences differently from the relatively privileged college women who composed our sample. In addition, since most women have not been sexually assaulted, the sample sizes of our women who did and did not label their experience as rape were relatively small. Finally, we had a crude and imperfect classification of rape situations. However, as Phillips (2000) noted, unlike the stereotypes of what constitutes rape, most situations involving sexual assault are highly contextualized, complicated, and murky, and it may be impossible to create discrete, nonoverlapping categories of rape situations. Despite these limitations the present study provided additional knowledge about the conditions under which women are likely to label their assault situation as rape.

Table 4

Frequencies of Each Assault Situation as a Function of Whether the Woman Labeled Her Experience as Rape

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Labeled Rape</i>	<i>Not Labeled Rape</i>
Submit	3	13
Childhood	3	0
Forced Sex Acts	0	7
Emotionally Needy	1	2
Dominating Boyfriend	0	4
Forceful Acquaintance	8	0
Asleep or Tricked	12	4
Severe Impairment	3	14
Other	0	5
Total	30	49

Our quantitative data revealed that, compared to women who did not label their situation as rape, women who called their situations rape were (a) more likely to have been assaulted by a nonromantic partner, (b) more likely to have experienced extremely high negative affect after the experience, (c) less likely to be assaulted by an assailant who had been intoxicated, and (d) more likely to have experienced forceful male aggression in potential rape and nonrape situations. In addition, qualitative data replicated the relationship between labeling a situation as rape and lack of a romantic relationship with the assailant and revealed that

(e) women who labeled their situation as rape were more likely than those who did not to explicitly or implicitly blame the assailant when describing their experience. These findings replicate past research that suggests that women are more likely to call a situation one of rape when they were forcefully assaulted by a nonromantic partner, they experienced the situation as a highly traumatic one, and blamed their assailant for what happened (Bondurant, 2001; Layman et al., 1996; Kahn & Mathie, 2000; Koss, 1985; Schwartz & Leggett, 1999).

From their written descriptions we were able to identify eight different assault situations experienced by these women. Over three-fourths of those women who labeled their experience as rape experienced one of the following situations: (a) they were asleep and woke up to their assailant performing sexual acts on them or they were tricked into believing sexual intercourse would not occur when it in fact happened, (b) someone other than a boyfriend used threats or force to obtain sexual intercourse and the woman was not intoxicated and she pleaded for him to stop, or (c) the assault occurred in childhood by a man who used some force and was much older than the victim. These situations all involve a lack of power or agency on the part of the woman—she was unable to stop her assailant because she had been asleep or tricked, because her pleas were ignored, or because she was a child. These findings, although based on a small sample, are consistent with the quantitative data findings that women use the label rape to describe a forceful, traumatic assault by a nonromantic partner, and highlight the importance of perceived lack of control to prevent the rape. Less than 10% of women who called their experience something other than rape experienced one of these three situations.

Four different assault situations accounted for over 85% of the women who did not label their situation as rape: (a) the woman was so impaired by alcohol or drugs she had neither the presence of mind nor the ability to resist the man; (b) after repeated refusals the woman gave in to her boyfriend's whining, pleading, arguing, or begging; (c) the man used force to perform oral or digital sex; or (d) a boyfriend, older and larger than the woman, used threats or force to obtain intercourse even though the woman tried to resist. Only 20% of the women who labeled their experience as rape experienced one of these four situations.

One factor that seems to lead a woman to not label the situation as rape is when the assailant is her boyfriend. Although giving in to a boyfriend's whining, pleading, or arguing would probably not be considered rape under most state laws, the use of force or threats by a boyfriend coupled with attempted resistance by the woman would likely constitute rape. Yet, the four times in the current study this pattern occurred, the women did not label their experience as rape. Women were also unlikely to label what happened to them as rape when they gave in to their boyfriend's pleading for sex. From their descriptions of what happened

to them, many of these women appear not to have been rape victims as defined by most state laws, but to have experienced what might be better labeled *unwanted sex* (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1988; Sprecher, Hatfield, Cortese, Potapova, & Levitskaya, 1994; Walker, 1997). From their descriptions, it was clear that these women did not want to have sexual intercourse with the man at that time, and they made that very clear to the man, often resisting for some time. The man did not use physical force or the threat of it; rather, he begged, pleaded, pouted, and argued until the women stopped resisting and gave in to the man's pressure.

It was with my boyfriend. I was in a bad mood and I didn't feel like having sex. But eventually I just gave in because he kept whining about wanting to. So we had sex.

He was my boyfriend. It only happened a few times. If he was really in the mood and I wasn't, he couldn't take no for an answer. We would just argue and argue about it until I gave in. . . .

Although we did not find differences in reported intoxication between women who did and did not label their experience as rape, 14 of the 17 women who experienced severe impairment did not label their experience as rape. Why did women who were clearly too intoxicated to successfully resist the man not label their experiences as rape? Past literature shows that heavy alcohol consumption is associated with sexual victimization (e.g., Koss et al., 1987; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987), that people do not view acquaintance rape as severely when the participants have both been drinking alcohol (e.g., Norris & Cubbins, 1992), that college women, although aware of the potential risks of intoxication for rape, nonetheless believe they, personally, can avoid such risk (e.g., Norris et al., 1996) and that alcohol consumption by the woman can lead to misperceptions by the man of the woman's sexual intent (Abbey et al., 1996). The written descriptions provided by these women show support for past research. The women did not believe they were personally at risk and they attributed their undesired sex not to the man's pressure or force but to their own lack of ability to think clearly or resist—the alcohol took away their options to act otherwise. These women seem to have presumed that men are going to have sex with a woman unless the woman forcefully resists, and her inability to resist meant, to her, that what happened was not rape. Below are some extracts from descriptions provided by women who said they were too intoxicated to resist but did not call their experiences rape:

He took me to his bedroom and I layed down because I was tired but then he got on top of me and started kissing me. . . . Then he started going a little farther, and before I knew it he was taking my clothes off. I remember thinking that I didn't really didn't want to continue, but I couldn't really do anything to stop

him. I was so drunk it just seemed pointless to argue, or put up any fight. . . .

I only answered yes to the question about having sexual intercourse even though I did not want to b/c alcohol was involved, and I could not resist. This has happened to me twice, where I have been extremely drunk and have had sex with someone, when I would never think of it, had alcohol not been involved. . . .

We were drunk. I didn't have control over myself & I didn't have the cognitive ability to say NO. I can't remember everything, but I know we had sex and if I were sober it would not have happened. I just could not control myself at all.

In reading these and similar descriptions it appears that women who were too intoxicated to resist did not experience the trauma found in the descriptions by women who labeled their experience as rape and has been associated with rape (Layman et al., 1996; Koss & Kilpatrick, 2001). Although we did not probe to the extent she did, Phillips (2000) provides insight into these women from her interviews with other young women who also did not label their experience as rape. She concluded that these women denied their victimization, in part, to preserve a view of themselves as mature adults who possess agency and can behave otherwise in the future to prevent further assaults, and in part, because their experiences did not match the simplistic cultural view of rape as a stranger using brutal force. Phillips suggests that if these women were to consider themselves rape victims it would imply they were not mature, "together," and in control, qualities greatly admired by themselves and their peers. In addition, as Gavey (1999) suggested, although rape is frequently traumatic, "not all women are traumatized by rape" (p. 70). It may be that the women who were too intoxicated to resist labeled their experience as something other than rape because they were not as traumatized as women who tried to resist and they were adapting the best they could to an unpleasant experience, attempting to "get over it" and gain control in similar situations in the future.

We also found that forced oral or digital sex was not considered rape; indeed, none of the seven women who had this experience called it rape. College women appear likely to label their situation as something other than rape if the act did not involve penile/vaginal intercourse; the intercourse, however forceful, occurred with a boyfriend; or if the woman became so intoxicated she was unable to stop the man.

Uncertain Victims

Botta and Pingree (1997) suggested that unacknowledged victims might actually be uncertain whether or not they had been raped. When they provided participants with a maybe alternative to the question, "Have you ever been sexually assaulted?" they found that 22% of their victims used that alternative. In contrast, two studies, Milin et al.

(2000) and the present study, substituting rape for sexually assaulted, have found fewer than 10% of women choose the uncertain/maybe alternative. These numbers are too small to derive conclusions about them other than that most women do not question whether or not they have been raped, although more women might question whether or not they had been sexually assaulted.

A Final Thought

Is it important for a woman to acknowledge rape when it occurs? At the individual level it would appear that each woman is attempting, as best she can, to cope with what has happened to her. Under some conditions, such as awaking to a man performing sexual acts on her, most women appear to cope best by calling their situation one of rape. Under other conditions, such as being unable to resist because of severe intoxication, most women appear to cope best by labeling what happened to them as something other than rape. Should efforts be made to get all women who have had an experience that would legally qualify as rape to label their experience as such? Women as a group, and likely women in the future, might be better off if all women who experienced rape labeled it as such. Such widespread acknowledgment of rape might highlight the tremendous problem of rape in our society, lead to greater enforcement of rape statutes, greater prosecution for rape, and ultimately reduce the frequency of rape. But at what cost to individual women who can better cope with what happened to them by not calling their experience rape? Are these women better off by having someone else defining their experience for them? Perhaps the best answer for now has been provided by Gavey (1999), who says of women who do not label their experience as rape:

Feminist accounts of rape need to be able to take account of such women's experiences without, in effect, dismissing them as the result of false consciousness. Carefully listening to and theorizing such ambivalent and confusing experiences may illuminate the complex relationship between heterosexuality and rape. Moreover, it may produce feminist analyses of rape that are sympathetic to all women who are raped, no matter how they experience it. (pp. 69-70)

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NOTES

1. Most past research on this topic has used the terms *acknowledged* and *unacknowledged* rape victims. These terms, however, suggest that rape had in fact occurred. Since the actual experiences of these women may or may not have fit the legal definition of rape, we have substituted *labeled her experience as rape* instead of *acknowledged* and *not labeled her experience as rape* in place of *unacknowledged*.

2. Although this item does not appear on most SES questionnaires, we included it because discussions with women students informed us that many of them consider this to be rape.

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