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THE EFFECTS OF THE DANGEROUSNESS OF THE ENVIRONMENT  
IN ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY TO THE VICTIM  
IN THE INCIDENCE OF RAPE

A Thesis  
by  
KATHY D. SAIN

Submitted to the Graduate School  
Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

June 1983

Major Department: Psychology

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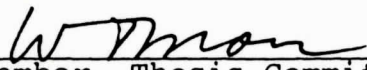
Kathy D. Sain


June 1983

APPROVED BY:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Member, Thesis Committee

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Member, Thesis Committee

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson, Department of  
Psychology

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of the Graduate School

ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF THE DANGEROUSNESS OF THE ENVIRONMENT  
IN ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY TO THE VICTIM  
IN THE INCIDENCE OF RAPE. (June 1983)

Kathy D. Sain

B. A., University of North Carolina-Charlotte

M. A., Appalachian State University

Thesis Chairperson: Susan D. Moss

The purpose of the present study was to assess the attribution of responsibility to the rape victim as a function of the dangerousness of the environment. It was hypothesized that victims raped in an environment which was perceived as dangerous would be attributed more responsibility for the rape incident than those victims who were raped in an environment which was perceived as nondangerous. The secondary aim of the study was to explore the relationship of sex of respondent to the attribution of responsibility to the rape victim. It was hypothesized that if sex differences did emerge they would reflect a greater attribution of responsibility to the victim by males than by females. A series of ten hypothetical rape settings which were rated

individually on a scale from 1 (least dangerous) to 10 (most dangerous) were used to determine the experimental conditions for the actual research. Fifty-two male and 47 female students were used, ranging in age from 18-30. An analysis of variance for a 2(dangerous versus non-dangerous) x 2(male versus female) factorial design was conducted. Results of the 2 x 2 factorial analysis of variance supported both hypotheses with main effects of environment ( $F(1, 95) = 66.0, p < .001$ ) and gender ( $F(1,95) = 4.95, p < .05$ ). One can conclude from these results that victims raped in a setting which was perceived to be dangerous were attributed more responsibility for the incident than victims raped in a setting which was perceived as nondangerous. With regard to gender, males attributed more responsibility to the victim than females. In addition, a main effect of gender ( $F(1,95) = 4.30, p < .05$ ) emerged with females perceiving the victim as needing psychological treatment as a result of the incident to a greater extent than did males.

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I would also like to thank my family, friends and fiancée for putting up with me, understanding, and supporting my efforts as I wrote and rewrote drafts for this thesis. I needed them all to lean on and they were always there.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, an increasing amount of attention has been given to the crime of rape and the impact of the assault on the victim. Research has shown that certain characteristics of rape victims and observers' characteristics influence the attribution of responsibility in the incident of rape (Jones & Aronson, 1973; Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976). The research clearly indicates that observers' evaluations of the rape incident and the raped victim are based on a variety of variables. These include a wide range with everything from characteristics of the victim to the observers' own attitudes and locus of control.

One variable, as yet unexamined, which would seem likely to affect observers' evaluation is the context or environment in which the rape occurred or, more specifically, the dangerousness of the environment. The primary purpose of the present study was to assess the attribution of responsibility to the victim as a function of the dangerousness of the environment in hypothetical rape incidences. It was hypothesized that

victims raped in an environment which was perceived as dangerous would be attributed more responsibility for the rape incident than those victims who were raped in an environment which was perceived as nondangerous.

The secondary aim of the present study was to explore the relation of sex of respondent to the attribution of responsibility to the rape victim. Current findings are contradictory (Jones & Aronson, 1973; Calhoun et al., 1976). It was hypothesized that if sex differences did emerge in the present study, they would reflect a greater attribution of responsibility to the victim by males than by females.

A thorough review of the literature reveals many variables which affect observers' evaluations of the rape incident and the rape victim. Among those variables are: (a) respectability of the victim, (b) completed or attempted rape, (c) amount of victim's resistance to attack, (d) sexual experience of the victim, (e) victim's history of having been raped before, (f) number of rapes in a given area, (g) victim acquaintance with rapist, (h) physical attractiveness of victim, (i) emotional response of victim, (j) locus of control of respondent, (k) Personal vs. Environmental locus of control of respondent, and (l) sex of respondent. The word "rape" takes on many definitions. For the purpose of this study and the following literature

review, rape will be defined as, "sexual penetration of a woman against her will..." (Hibey, 1973).

Respectability of the Victim/Completed or Attempted Rape

Jones and Aronson (1973) looked at how the respectability of the rape victim influenced attribution of responsibility. The study was based upon the "just world" notion developed by Melvin Lerner and colleagues (Lerner, 1965; Lerner & Simmons, 1966). The basic idea is, "people are inclined to believe in a just world--a place where individuals get what they deserve and deserve what they get." According to this notion, if something pleasant (or unpleasant) happens, the person is seen as deserving it for one of two reasons: the person (a) is intrinsically good (or evil) or, (b) behaved in a specific way to bring about the good/bad outcome.

Jones and Aronson (1973) extended the "just world" reasoning to make the prediction that if a disaster befalls an individual, more fault is attributed to that victim if he/she is a respectable person than if he/she is less respectable. For example, if a street bum crosses the street and is hit by a car, an observer may say, "Ah, he got what he deserved," but, if a doctor or nurse walks across the street and is hit, according to the just world idea, an observer would think, "Well,

he/she had something on his/her mind, or was not looking, etc." More responsibility is attributed to the more respectable person because his/her character did not deserve it, so their actions were responsible.

In their study, Jones and Aronson (1973) presented written case accounts of a rape. Three descriptions of the victim in the rape case were used: she was married, a virgin, or a divorcee. In this culture, married women and virgins are assumed to be more socially respectable than divorcees. To assess this assumption, a set of 19-point rating scales were administered to 90 undergraduates (45 males and 45 females). The subjects were requested to rate the respectability of a number of people in a variety of occupations and circumstances. Buried among those rating scales were the crucial ones for the purpose of the study: a female undergraduate, age 20, divorcee; a married female undergraduate, age 20; and a female undergraduate, age 20, who was a virgin. In addition to rating the respectability of the people, the subjects also rated how respectable they thought most people would regard each of the people described. Results indicated a significant difference of respectability between the virgin and the divorcee, with the virgin being viewed as more respectable: the difference between the married woman and the divorcee was significant, with the married woman being viewed as

more respectable. The difference between the virgin and married woman was not significant. In response to the question, "How respectable do you think most people consider this person?", each pair (virgin-divorcee, married woman-divorcee, virgin-married woman) of differences for this question reached the .001 level of significance. It was hypothesized, that if the victim were married or a virgin, subjects would attribute greater responsibility to her than if she were a divorcee.

The experiment was also aimed at replicating the research of Landy and Aronson (1969) and Walster (1966). Landy and Aronson (1969) demonstrated that characteristics of the victim of a crime influence how much punishment is assigned to the accused. They found that a defendant was sentenced to a longer imprisonment when his victim was described as a respectable citizen than when the victim was described as socially unrespectable. Similarly, Walster (1966) found that people attributed more responsibility for an accident to a negligent person if the consequences of the accident were severe than if they were trivial. If married women and virgins are considered to be more respectable than divorcees, it should follow that the sexual violation of the married or virgin victim would be viewed as a more serious or severe consequence than the sexual violation of the

latter. Therefore, Jones and Aronson (1973) expected that subjects would suggest a more severe punishment for the rapist if his victim were married or a virgin than if she were a divorcee. Finally, Jones and Aronson assumed that people would consider an actual rape to be more severe than an attempted rape; therefore, they would have a greater need to "justify" or explain the crime when it was completed than when merely attempted. They predicted that the defendant would be assigned a longer imprisonment for an actual (completed) rape than for an attempted rape.

Subjects read case accounts which varied in terms of whether the victim were married, virgin, or divorced and whether the crime was a completed or an attempted rape. After reading the written case accounts of the rape incident, subjects were asked to recommend a prison term using a scale marked "less than 1" to "more than 40" with five year intervals marked, for the defendant and also answer a questionnaire in which they rated the extent to which the victim herself may have been at fault. The questionnaire consisted of five questions. Four of the questions were filler items in which the subjects were asked to rate the validity of the evidence. The crucial item was, "How much do you consider the crime to be the victim's fault?" The subjects answered by circling a number on a 21-point scale from -10 to +10.

When the victim was a divorcee, the mean attribution of fault to the victim was less than when she was either a virgin or married. There was no significant difference between the virgin condition and the married condition. There were no significant differences between males and females assignment of responsibility to the victim.

These findings indicated that the respectability of the victim did influence the attribution of responsibility. Also, the results supported Lerner's notion of "just world" where the more respectable person was attributed more responsibility for his/her own misfortune because he/she did not deserve the misfortune as a function of his/her intrinsic characteristics.

Jones and Aronson (1973) also found that the assailant of the married victim was assigned a longer prison sentence than the assailant of the divorcee. Although the difference between the divorcee and the virgin condition were in the expected direction, (with assailant of the virgin victim assigned a longer prison sentence than the divorcee victim) the difference was not significant. There was no significant difference between the virgin and married conditions. Again, there were no sex differences. It seems that injuring a highly respectable person can be viewed as a more serious outcome than injuring a less respectable person.

The defendant was assigned a mean imprisonment sentence for 16.17 years for an actual rape which was significantly greater than the mean sentence of 10.40 years given for an attempted rape. The interaction between the variable married-virgin-divorcee and the conditions of actual and attempted rape were nonsignificant. There were no significant differences between the actual and the attempt condition in the amount of fault attributed to the victim.

Feldman-Summers and Linder (1976) examined how the respectability of the rape victim influenced attribution of responsibility. They felt the results found by Jones and Aronson (1973) were puzzling. First, if the married woman were attributed more responsibility for the rape than the divorced woman, the subjects should have assigned shorter jail terms to the rapist who attacked the married woman. The results reported by Jones and Aronson were just the opposite.

Feldman-Summers and Linder (1976) systematically varied the respectability of the victim, type of crime committed and sex of subject. Each subject was told they would be given a written description of an actual crime which had been committed and had eventually been brought to trial. They were then asked to read the description of what happened between the victim and



defendant and to answer a few questions based on their impressions of the case account.

Unlike findings reported by Jones and Aronson (1973), the results indicated that the responsibility assigned to the prostitute (less respectable) was significantly greater than the responsibility assigned to the married woman, the single virgin, and the single nonvirgin, but not significantly different from responsibility assigned to the divorced woman. Overall, as the respectability of the victim decreased, her perceived responsibility for the rape increased.

The victim responsibility findings were consistent with the length of the jail sentence assigned to the defendant. Specifically, there was a tendency for the length of the sentence to increase as the respectability of the victim increased.

Although the findings about recommended length of the jail sentence were consistent with the results of Jones and Aronson (1973), the results obtained concerning perceived responsibility were radically different. Feldman-Summers and Linder (1976) suggest one plausible explanation for the discrepancy: their study included a condition involving highly "unrespectable" victim (the prostitute), whereas Jones and Aronson did not. Possibly, Feldman-Summers and Linder did not include a sufficiently wide range of respectability conditions.

Also, there were minor differences in the two experiments: (a) location of the crime (university parking lot versus a shopping center parking lot); (b) participants were different (different colleges); (c) year in which the studies took place (1971 versus 1974); (d) number and sex of experimenters (1 female experimenter in Jones and Aronson (1973) study versus 2 male and female experimenters in Feldman-Summers and Linder (1976) study); and (e) the scales used to measure responsibility were different (-10 to +10 versus 0 to 9).

Although the explanation for the discrepancy in findings is purely speculation, one point remains clear. Both studies indicated that what should be irrelevant characteristics of the victim (her respectability) influenced judgments about her responsibility for the crime.

Other findings (Feldman-Summers & Linder, 1976) indicated that rape was perceived as having a significantly greater impact on the victim than physical assault and attempted rape was perceived as having a significantly greater impact on the victim than assault. Second, the respectability of the victim influenced the perception of how much the woman was affected by the assault. Overall, a significant difference was found between males and females in their perceptions of impact on the victim, with, women feeling that the

incident had a greater impact than the male subjects. The females also perceived the crime as a more serious event than did the males. It seems evident that differences in judgments are related to sexual identity and potential threat.

#### Amount of Resistance

Kruelewitz and Nash (1979) found that the outcome of the rape attempt with regards to the amount of resistance of the victim influenced attribution of responsibility. Kruelewitz and Nash suggest that attitudes about rape can best be understood in terms of the "societal sex-role stereotyping." Within this framework, the aggressive, dominant behavior of rapists is consistent with the stereotype of "masculinity" and the passive, helpless submission of the rape victim is characteristic of the "feminine" female role (Bem, 1974; Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970; Heilbrun, 1976). Although rape is usually defined as sexual penetration of a woman against her will, the legal definition of rape "typically requires proof both of forced sexual intercourse, as is not the case for violent crimes, that she was not a willing participant, e.g., through evidence of strong 'resistance' or subsequent trauma (Hibey, 1973). Kruelewitz and Nash maintain that the role components of many rape situations might be "misconstrued" for traditional heterosexual behavior,

e.g., males sexually aggressing to women and women showing "token" resistance; then "submitting" to the males' "dominance." Support for the sex-role position is provided within the context of the assailant's behavior in a study reported by Kruehwitz and Payne (1978) who varied assailant force and found that "the certainty that a woman had been raped was greatest when the assailant clearly violated the bounds of the male-aggressiveness norm by using excessive force against the victim prior to intercourse." Kruehwitz and Nash suggest that the victim's behavior should follow complementary patterns--to the extent that a victim of sexual attack shows physical or forceful resistance sufficient to exceed sex-role expectations of 'token resistance', and that forceful resistance should indicate that the situation differs from sex with consent.

Kruehwitz and Nash (1979) hypothesized that subjects would believe that a woman who offers none or only minimal forceful physical resistance to an assailant before intercourse has willingly consented to sex. Moreover, they hypothesized that subjects' attributions about the victim's responsibility and behavior would vary as a function of the victim's ability to thwart a rape attempt. More specifically, the expectation was that the victim would be held more responsible for the

assault when she was raped than when the rape attempt failed.

Results supported both hypotheses. Subjects considered the incident as rape to the extent that the victim physically resisted. The victim was also viewed as relatively more responsible for a completed rape than for an attempted rape. The assailant was perceived as more responsible only when the rape was not completed than when it was. These results imply that an incomplete attack was taken as evidence that the victim did not act in a manner to encourage rape (but, she forcefully resisted); therefore, the rapist must have been acting entirely without provocation. Also, by forcefully resisting, the victim was not "willfully consenting."

Generally, men attribute more responsibility to the victim than do women. However, results in Kruelewitz and Nash (1979) study found that the women attributed more responsibility to the victim than did the male subjects. The authors suggest that males may have viewed the victim who is raped as hurt in spite of her resistance; while females blame the resisting victim for the rape because she resisted. The results also indicated that males attributed more intelligence to the victim as she resisted with greater force and females attributed less intelligence to her. There were

no sex differences in attribution of responsibility to the assailant.

#### Sexual Experience of the Victim

Attribution theory predicts that an actor will be assigned less of a personal causal role if the qualities of the entity (in this case, the rape victim) acted toward also can explain the action (Kelley, 1973). Extending this to the rape interaction, an accused rapist might be judged as less responsible if the victim is perceived by those evaluating the crime as possessing qualities which might explain the assault. Cann, Calhoun, and Selby (1979) examined one such characteristic, sexual experience of the victim, which suggests itself as potentially important in influencing observers' judgments. It seems that sexual experience is considered an important variable and is evident from the observation that a woman's past sexual experience is brought out in court whether it is relevant or not (Wallace, 1976). Cann et al presented information regarding a rape victim's past sexual behaviors to college students in specially constructed newspaper stories describing testimony at a trial. The design involved five levels of information concerning a rape victim's past sexual activities. Two represented cases of a sexually very active and a sexually less active victim. Two other levels involved the explicit withholding of

the sexual activity information. The difference was in whether the judge or the victim was the one who refused to provide (or allowed) the information as testimony. Finally, a no-information condition was included in which past sexual activity was not mentioned.

The results indicated that the sexually inactive victim received a significantly lower rating than any other victim on the questionnaire which assessed the victims' behavior, type of person she is, any suggestive behavior immediately before the rape, an unconscious desire to be raped, victim fault, and believability of the testimony. The sexually active and victim refuses groups were rated equivalently and significantly higher than the other victims. There was also a main effect for sex differences. Males saw the victim as the type of person who gets herself into those situations and as more likely to have caused the rape through her suggestive behaviors.

These results indicated that the victim who refused to testify is held more responsible for the rape. From the available data, the basis for this conclusion would seem to be that she is seen as the type of person who gets herself into these situations and that she engaged in suggestive behaviors. The sexually active victim is also seen as the type of person that gets herself into these situations, but did not engage in suggestive

behaviors and therefore was not held more responsible. When the judge intervenes and prevents the testimony, the victim is held less responsible than the sexually inactive and no-information victims. Although only speculative, Cann et al. (1979) suggest that the judge prohibiting the testimony leads subjects to conclude that past sexual activity is not relevant to their decision, while in the other conditions they (subjects) attempted to use this information, even against the sexually inactive victim.

Victim's History of Rape, Number of Rapes in Given Area and Victim Acquaintance with Rapist

The victim's history of rape (having been raped before), number of rapes in an area and the victim's acquaintance with the rapist also influence the attribution of responsibility. Calhoun, Selby, and Warring (1976) presented a video tape of a 25-year old white female (the role was played by a student) who was described as having been the victim of a rape. The taped segment was made in such a way that the "victim's" back was to the camera. The interview focused on the content of the victim's reaction to the rape. The script was prepared so that although she expressed significant distress over the incident, her behavior in the interview was not disoriented or confused.



After seeing the video, each subject was given a case description of the rape incident and of the rape victim. The description was similar for subjects in all conditions except the information about the victim's previous acquaintance with the rapist, whether or not she had been raped before, and number of rapes in the area where the rape occurred were systematically varied. The resulting design was a 2(male vs. female respondent) X 2(raped before vs. not raped before) X 2(none vs. seven other rapes in area) X 2(acquainted vs. not acquainted with rapist) factorial. After reading the case description, subjects rated the victim on a series of scales. Each of the ratings was done on 6-point scales anchored at the extremes (1 = not at all...6 = to a great extent) with higher ratings indicating greater endorsement of particular condition.

Analysis of the ratings of the degree to which the rape was caused by the victim's behavior on the night of the rape revealed that the victim's behavior was seen as a cause more by males than by females. Her behavior was seen as a cause to a greater degree when she had been raped before than when she was acquainted with the rapist. The analysis of the three-way interaction (sex X number of rapes X raped before or not) revealed that for females there was no difference in the ratings of victims raped before and not raped before, when

there were no other rapes in the area, but when there were seven other rapes in the area, females saw the rape as due to the victim's behavior more when she had been raped before than when she had not. For males, there was no difference in ratings of the victims raped before and not raped before when there were seven other rapes in the area, but when there were no other rapes in the area, males saw the rape as due more to the victim's behavior when she had been raped before than when she had not. To a greater extent than females, males saw the victim as the "kind of person that gets herself in those situations" and she was seen as that kind of a person to a greater extent when she had been raped before than when she had not.

Analysis of variance of the responses to the item indicating the extent to which the rape was the victim's fault revealed that males saw the rape as the victim's fault to a greater degree than females. The victim was seen as at fault to a greater extent when she had been raped before than when she had not. Analysis of the three-way interaction (sex X number of rapes in area X raped before or not) indicated that for females there was no difference in the ratings of victims raped before and not raped before when there were no other rapes in the area. When there were seven other rapes in the area, females saw the rape as the

victim's fault to a greater extent when she had been raped before than when she had not. For males, there was no reliable difference in ratings of victim raped before and not raped before when there were seven other rapes in the area. When there were no other rapes in the area, males saw the rape as more the victim's fault when she had been raped before than when she had not. The results of the study also indicated that when the victim was described as unacquainted with the rapist, her behavior was seen as contributing more to the rape than when she was described as acquainted with the rapist.

#### Physical Attractiveness of Victim

Physical attractiveness has been one of the most widely studied variables in the attribution of responsibility. Seligman, Paschall, and Takata (1974) looked at the interaction between physical attractiveness and the outcome of an event (good or bad). For example, a business agreement having a good outcome versus the same agreement having a bad outcome. The results indicated that physically attractive women were seen as more responsible for a good outcome than unattractive women, while unattractive females were seen as more responsible for a bad outcome than attractive females. Seligman, Paschall, and Takata suggest that not only what is "beautiful is good" (a stereotype found by

Dion, Berschield, and Walster (1972), what is beautiful is responsible for what is good, and what is not beautiful is responsible for what is not good). However, Calhoun, Selby, Cann, and Keller (1978) did not find this to be true in the incidence of rape. They found a main effect for physical attractiveness close to traditional levels of statistical significance, (.06), with the physically attractive victim perceived as playing a somewhat greater role in her own rape than the less attractive victim. There was also a significant main effect for sex of the respondent, with males to a greater extent than females seeing the victim as playing more of a role in her own rape.

However, Seligman, Brickman, and Koulack (1977) found in their study, that the physically unattractive victim was given more responsibility for the rape incident than the physically attractive victim. The results were explained in terms of the attribution theory. Since a victim's physical attractiveness may be construed as a cause of her being raped (the implication here being that physical attractiveness is what triggers the rapist's behavior), one perspective predicts that the attractive woman would be held more responsible than the unattractive woman. However, attribution theory suggests that the physically unattractive woman (less likely victim) would be seen as more responsible

than the physically attractive woman (the more likely victim). More simply stated, the physically unattractive woman was perceived somehow to have provoked the rape (through her behavior or actions) more than the attractive woman.

Billy Thorton (1977) looked at the effects of a rape victim's attractiveness in a jury simulation. Although he found no advantage afforded to the victim for being attractive, he did find that harsher sentence was handed down to the defendant when the victim was an attractive woman compared to when the victim was relatively unattractive.

Although the findings of the previous cited studies have contradictory results, the implications of the results suggest that although physical attractiveness is a factor in observer's judgments, it does not imply that attractiveness is a concern of the rapist (Seligman et al., 1977). And, secondly, physical attractiveness is an important characteristic of the victim which is used to judge the rape victim and attribution of responsibility in the incident.

#### Emotional Response of Victim

In the rape research concerning the attribution of responsibility and observers' characteristics, there are several variables that have received minimal attention. Among these variables are the victim's emotional

response, and the observer's locus of control (internal versus external). Burgess and Holstrom (1973) noted that the actual rape victims' overt emotional behavior response patterns tend to fall into two general categories. The "controlled" victim is outwardly calm, without obvious signs of emotional distress. On the other hand, the "expressed" victim clearly exhibits her emotional distress about the rape. Calhoun, Cann, Selby, and Magee (1981) looked at the emotional response of the rape victim after the incident as a likely characteristic that would affect an observer's evaluation of the victim. Calhoun et al. suggests that emotional style would seem to be an element in determining the social reactions others would have to the rape victim and the rape incident.

Calhoun et al. (1981) examined the effects of the victim's emotional style on social reactions to the rape victim. Of particular interest were the perceptions of the victim's credibility, and the degree to which she would be socially accepted, and the degree to which observers believed the victim found the rape unpleasant.

Two studies were conducted. In the first study, the effects of the victim's emotional response were assessed using a written description of the response, (expressive versus calm). In the second study, the

victim's emotional response was manipulated using videotape. In the first study, (written description), the perceived credibility of the victim was significantly affected by the style of her emotional response. When the victim was described as expressive, she was viewed as significantly more credible than when described as calm. Although non-significant, a trend was apparent on the perceived motivation factor, with the expressed victim rated as having more motivation to avoid the rape than the controlled victim. The emotional style of the victim did not significantly affect the perceived causal role of the victim, the perceived role of factors external to the victim, or the liking for the victim.

In the second study, on the perceived motivation factor, subjects rated the expressed victim as having greater motivation to avoid the rape than the controlled victim. Also, when the victim was controlled, she was rated as less credible than when she was expressed. A borderline significant effect on liking for the victim factor suggested that when the victim was expressive, she was liked significantly more than when she was controlled. Again, the perceived causal role of the victim and the perceived causal role of the factors external to the victim were not affected by the victim's emotional style.

### Respondent's Locus of Control

The locus of control of the respondent is also a factor that affects observers' evaluations of rape victims. Paulsen (1979) attempted to replicate Jones and Aronson's (1973) study of the socially respectable rape victim with the added variable of locus of control. The author hypothesized that subjects having an internal locus of control would attribute greater fault to a rape victim than subjects having an external locus of control.

The Rotter's Internal-External Locus Scale (I-E) was administered to 32 undergraduate psychology students to assess and classify the subjects as internally or externally controlled. Subjects were classified as to internality-externality on the I-E Scale by means of the median split. The median score for internals was 8.9 and for externals, 15.9. Subjects answered two-irrelevant questionnaires, read Jones and Aronson's (1973) rape report, and answered the questionnaire designed by Jones and Aronson (1973) which assessed the attribution of responsibility to the rape victim. Although the results failed to replicate Jones and Aronson's findings that greater fault is attributed to more respectable rape victims, Paulsen (1979) did find that internal locus of control attributed greater fault to the rape victim, regardless of sexual status, than



external locus of control. Paulsen's results indicate that observers' characteristics do affect the attribution of responsibility.

#### Personal vs. Environmentals

Paulsen's (1979) results are similar to those found by Thorton, Robbins, and Johnson (1981). Thorton et al. divided subjects according to the Personal-Environmental Causal Attribution Scale. The PECA scale is a 26-item measure designed to assess an individual's tendency to rely on external, environmental causes or personal, internal ones in attributing causality for the outcomes or events in other people's lives (Lowe, Medway, & Beers, 1978). Personals consider one to be controlling of their own actions and responsible for their own behavioral outcomes. Environmentals believe external or environmental influences (and not others) are responsible for behavioral outcomes.

With regard to rape, the environmental or external reasons for the victim's plight could be credited to the rapist, while personal, internal causal factors could be attributed to the victim. Thorton et al. (1981) hypothesized that personals would tend to perceive greater victim precipitation and/or responsibility than environmentals. Results supported the hypothesis, indicating that personals indeed attributed more of a causal role to the victim in her own

victimization than did environmentals. Females alone did not significantly differ on personal and environmental distinction; even though the general trend was in accordance with more responsibility to the victim by personals than environmentals. Male personals compared with male environmentals assigned more responsibility to victims to a significant degree. Overall, males perceived the victim to be in much more of a causal role than did female participants. These results have important implications considering that these factors bear on juridic decisions and imply attributions for the rape victim's responsibility.

#### Dangerousness of Environment

One variable, as yet unexamined which would seem likely to affect observers' evaluations is the context or environment in which the rape occurred. What is the relationship between the dangerousness of the environment in which the rape occurred and the attribution of responsibility to the victim? The primary purpose of the present study was to examine this relationship.

Lerner's notion of a "just world" would apply here (Lerner, 1965; Lerner & Simmons, 1966). The basic idea is, "people are inclined to believe in a just world--a place where individuals get what they deserve and deserve what they get. According to this notion, if something pleasant (or unpleasant) happens, the person

is seen as deserving it for one of two reasons: the person (a) is intrinsically good (or evil) or, (b) behaved in a specific way to bring about the good/bad outcome.

Extending the "just world" reasoning, one can make the prediction that if a disaster befalls an individual, more fault would be attributed to that victim if he/she placed him/herself in an environment which was perceived as dangerous than if he/she were in an environment which was perceived as less dangerous. For example, if a man were hit by a car while walking across the Indianapolis 500 speedway during a race, an observer may say, "he got what he deserved," but if a man were hit while walking across a desolate country road, an observer would attribute less responsibility to the victim, because he had not intentionally placed himself in an environment where the incident would be likely to occur. More responsibility would be attributed to the victim who placed herself in an environment which was perceived as dangerous than the victim in an environment which was perceived as nondangerous.

It was hypothesized that victims raped in an environment which was perceived as dangerous would be attributed more responsibility for the rape incident than those victims who were raped in an environment which was perceived as nondangerous. The secondary aim

of the present study was to explore the relationship of sex of respondent to the attribution of responsibility to the rape victim. Past research is contradictory (Jones & Aronson, 1973; Calhoun et al., 1976). It was hypothesized that if sex differences did emerge, they would reflect a greater attribution of responsibility to the victim by males than by females.

## METHOD

### Formulation of Environment Variable

Thirteen male and 22 female students ranging in age from 18-23 were obtained from introductory psychology classes at Appalachian State University. The students were used to rate the perceived dangerousness of settings for rape potential. The study was conducted in classroom settings with groups ranging in size of 10-20. All subjects participated on a voluntary basis.

A series of 10 hypothetical rape settings which were rated individually on a scale from 1 (least dangerous) to 10 (most dangerous) were used to determine the experimental conditions for the actual research. The hypothetical rape settings included places such as the laundry mat, walking home alone, in an apartment, and walking across campus at night (see Appendix A). The hypothetical rape setting of: downtown at 3:00 a.m. alone was determined to be the most dangerous environment with a mean score of 8.82, and being in an apartment was determined to be the least dangerous environment with a mean score of 3.37.

### Subjects

Fifty-two male and 47 female students from introductory psychology classes at Appalachian State University were used for the actual research. They ranged in age from 18-30, with most of the subjects in their late teens and early twenties. Thirty-two of the 99 subjects indicated personal knowledge of a rape victim. See Table 1 for a summary of subjects. All subjects participated on a voluntary basis.

### Materials

The materials for the actual research were compiled and stapled together (see Appendix B). Each handout consisted of a letter of intent which briefly explained the research and provided instructions for completing the materials. The hypothetical rape case followed. The two rape cases were identical, except for the manipulation of the dangerousness of environment variable. Either the dangerous or the nondangerous hypothetical rape case was presented, but not both. (Refer to Appendix B for a complete description of the hypothetical rape case which was presented.)

A series of rating scales were used to assess the victim's role or responsibility in the assault and the psychological consequences for the victim. The scales included three 5-point Likert scaled items to assess the victim's perceived role or responsibility in the

TABLE 1  
SUMMARY OF SUBJECTS  
DANGEROUSNESS OF ENVIRONMENT

	Dangerous	Nondangerous
Male	N = 26 Number that knew victim = 5	N = 26 Number that knew victim = 7
Gender		
Female	N = 24 Number that knew victim = 12	N = 23 Number that knew victim = 8

assault, and two 5-point Likert scaled items of the psychological consequences of the rape for the victim. Although the psychological consequences of the rape were not of direct interest in this study, the items were included on the questionnaire as a point of interest and also as filler items to prevent subjects from keying directly in on the responsibility issue.

The research materials were completed with a demographic information sheet which assessed age, sex, classification, major and career goal of each subject. The information sheet also asked if subjects knew any rape victims personally and, if so, what their relationship to the victim was.

#### Procedure

Before the actual research was administered, the materials were arranged so the packets alternated between dangerous and non-dangerous conditions. In order to assure randomization of groups, the packets were then distributed in the order arranged by the researcher. The study was conducted in classroom settings with groups ranging in size of 25-40. Each participant was instructed to complete the materials individually and without discussion. Upon completion of the materials, the subjects turned in their packet and were then briefed with regards to the nature of the research.



Subjects were thanked for participating in the study and encouraged not to discuss the research with anyone.

An Analysis of Variance for a 2(dangerous versus nondangerous) X 2(male versus female) factorial design was conducted to assess the main effects and interactions for the combined score of items 1, 2, and 5 as a measure of responsibility; and the combination of items 3 and 4 as a measure of psychological consequences as a result of the rape.

## RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the group mean rating of the combined scores of questions 1, 2, and 5 which tap perceived responsibility of the victim, as a function of the gender of the subjects and the dangerousness of the environment in which the rape occurred. It appears there is a main effect of environment with victims being attributed more responsibility for the rape incident when the rape occurred in an environment which was perceived as dangerous versus an environment which was perceived as nondangerous. There also appears to be a main effect of gender with males attributing more responsibility to the victim than did females. Results of a 2 x 2 factor variance analysis supported the graphical impression of main effects of environment ( $F(1,95) = 66.9, p < .001$ ) and gender ( $F(1,95) = 4.95, p < .05$ ). The interaction; however, was not significant ( $F(1,95) = .73, p > .05$ ). (See Table 2.)

Figure 2 shows the group mean rating of the combined scores of questions 3 and 4 which tap the psychological consequences of the rape on the victim, as a function of the gender of the subjects and the dangerousness of the environment in which the rape occurred.

FIGURE 1

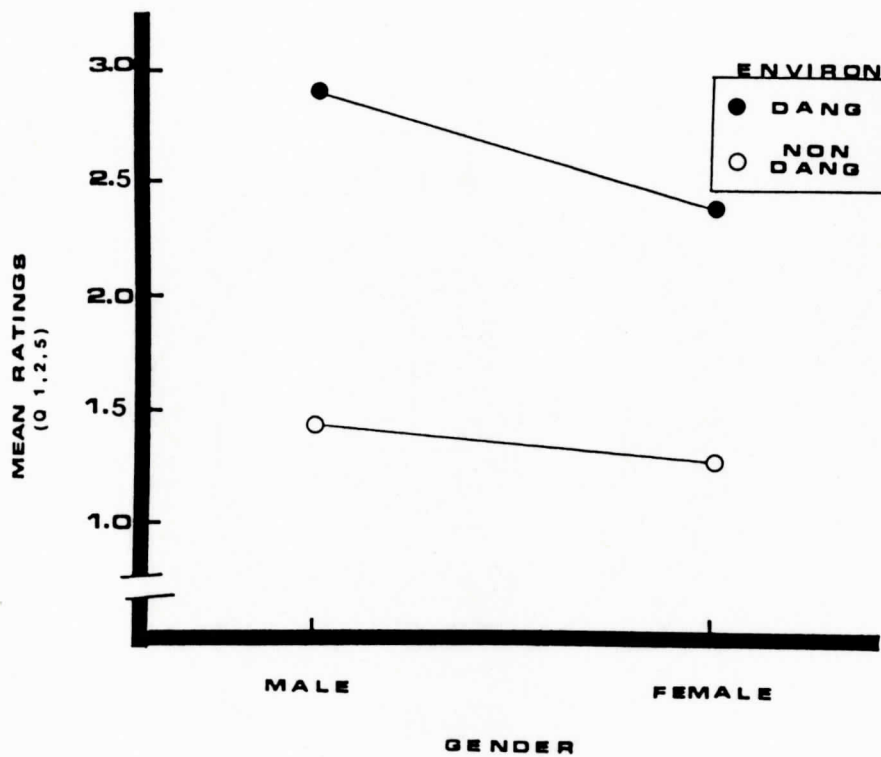


Figure 1. Mean ratings of questions one, two and five as a function of gender of subjects and dangerousness of environment.

TABLE 2  
 SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE  
 RESPONSIBILITY ISSUE

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Main Effects	391.53	2	195.76	35.75	0.00
Sex	27.08	1	27.08	4.95	0.02
Environment	366.5	1	366.5	66.94	0.00
Two-Way Interaction					
Sex/Environment	3.99	1	3.99	0.73	0.39
Explained	395.5	3	131.8	24.08	0.00
Residual	520.0	95	5.47		
Total	915.6	98	9.34		

FIGURE 2

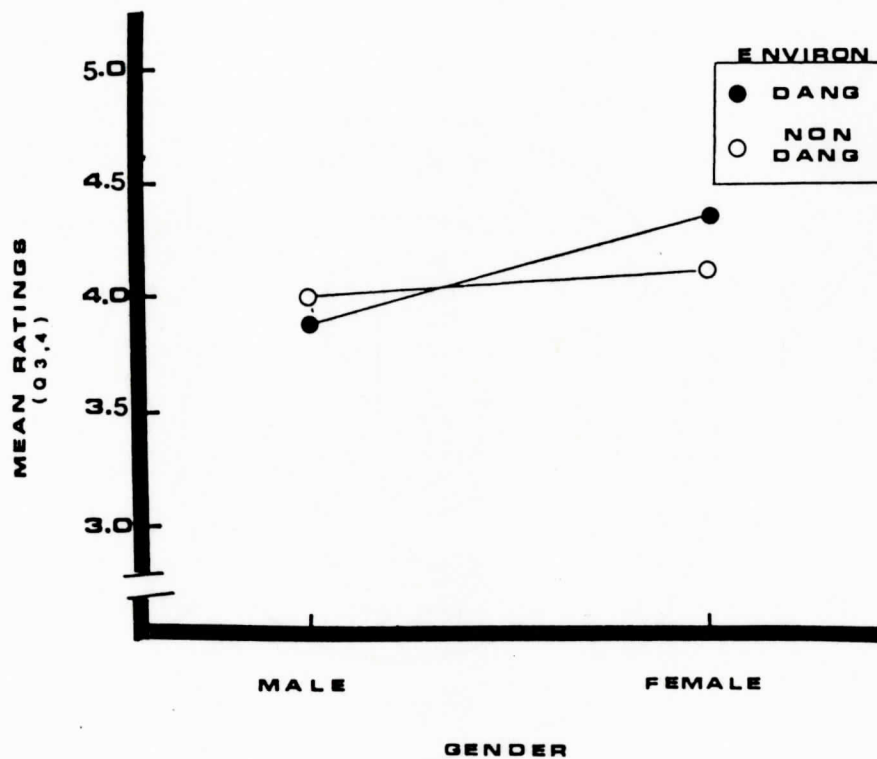


Figure 2. Mean ratings of questions three and four as a function of gender of subjects and dangerousness of environment.

It appears there is a main effect of gender with females perceiving the victim as requiring more psychological treatment as a result of the incident than males. There also appears to be an interaction effect, with females perceiving the victim as requiring more psychological treatment when the environment was a dangerous one; while males perceived the victim as requiring less psychological treatment when the environment was dangerous. The 2 x 2 factor analysis of variance supported the graphical impression of a main effect of gender ( $F(1,95) = 4.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The interaction; however, was not significant ( $F(1,95) = 1.22$ ,  $p > .05$ ). There was no main effect of environment ( $F(1,95) = 0.02$ ,  $p > .05$ ). (See Table 3.)

TABLE 3  
SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance of F
Main Effects	10.82	2	5.41	2.15	0.12
Sex	10.78	1	10.78	4.29	0.04
Environment	0.06	1	0.06	0.02	0.87
Two-Way Interaction					
Sex/Environment	3.069	1	3.069	1.22	0.27
Explained	13.89	3	4.63	1.84	0.14
Residual	238.64	95	2.51		
Total	252.54	98	2.57		

## DISCUSSION

Both hypotheses were supported. Victims raped in an environment which was perceived as dangerous were attributed more responsibility for the incident than victims raped in an environment which was perceived as nondangerous. Secondly, sex differences did emerge with males attributing more responsibility to the victim for the incident than did females. There were no interactions. In addition, females perceived the victim as requiring psychological treatment as a result of the rape incident to a greater extent than did males.

Published research which addressed the dangerousness of environment variable was not available; however, the results of this study were consistent with Lerner's notion of a "just world." The results supported the notion of "just world" where the victim raped in a dangerous environment was attributed more responsibility for her own misfortune because she deserved the misfortune as a function of her behavior (placing oneself in a high risk situation, the dangerous environment).

Present findings are in agreement with other data showing sex differences in social reactions to victims of rape (Calhoun et al., 1978; Thorton et al., 1981).



Males were more likely than females to perceive the victim as more responsible. Females, on the other hand, were more likely than males to perceive the victim as requiring psychological treatment as a result of the rape incident.

The results of the present study have important implications. It seems that knowledge of where the rape occurred does influence observers' evaluations. Extending this finding, it would seem that as more responsibility was attributed to the victim in an incident, then less responsibility would be attributed to the assailant. If this were true, it would seem that information of this type would affect juridic decisions and imply attribution of responsibility to the victim, therefore relieving the assailant of his responsibility in the incident. Future study in this area might attempt to look at the relationship between the attributed responsibility to the victim and the assailant with regards to the dangerousness of environment in which the rape occurred.

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APPENDIX A

Formulation of Environment Variable

Research Packet

Participation in the following research is strictly voluntary and anonymous. The research is designed to study the attitudes toward rape.

After reading the following information, please complete the two questionnaires. Thank you for your participation.

Lori was downtown at 3:00 a.m., alone, when she was accosted by a large man wearing a mask. He demanded her cooperation by threatening physical harm. He raped her, and then fled. He has not yet been apprehended.

Lori was in her apartment when she was accosted by a large man wearing a mask. He demanded her cooperation by threatening physical harm. He raped her, and then fled. He has not yet been apprehended.

1. To what extent did the victim's behavior precipitate the assault?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				To a great extent

2. To what extent is she "the kind of person who gets herself into these situations?"

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				To a great extent

3. To what extent will the victim require psychological treatment as a result of the rape?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				To a great extent

4. How long will it take the victim to overcome the psychological effects of the rape?

1	2	3	4	5
Not long at all				A very long time

5. To what degree is the victim responsible for the rape?

0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
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Demographic Information

AGE \_\_\_\_\_

SEX \_\_\_\_\_

CLASS \_\_\_\_\_

MAJOR \_\_\_\_\_

CAREER GOAL (profession) \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever known anyone that has been raped?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

If so, what was your relationship with that person?

Friend \_\_\_\_\_

Co-worker \_\_\_\_\_

Classmate \_\_\_\_\_

Relative \_\_\_\_\_

What relation? \_\_\_\_\_

Self \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

The author was born in Morganton, North Carolina on March 17, 1959 to Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Burl Sain. She resided in Burke County, attended the public schools and was graduated from Freedom High School in June of 1977. The author attended the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and was graduated with a B. A. in Psychology in May of 1981. During attendance at UNC-C, she attained academic recognition on the dean's list during her entire enrollment. The author will be graduated from Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina in August of 1983 with an M. A. degree in Clinical Psychology. While enrolled at ASU, she was an active member of the Psi Chi honorary society. Upon graduation the author will be employed at the Piedmont Area Mental Health Center in Concord. Currently, she resides at 5911-A Quail Hollow Road, Charlotte, North Carolina 28210.