

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF MEDIA ON BLAMING THE VICTIM OF ACQUAINTANCE
RAPE

By

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Abstract

Along with the trauma experienced by rape victims due to their assault, many victims also suffer secondary victimization due to the negative reactions of those around them. Among these negative reactions, perhaps the most damaging is the tendency to blame victims for their assault, particularly in cases of acquaintance rape. The current research explores the role of news media coverage in promoting a victim blaming culture in the United States. In Study 1, I content analyzed 179 articles reporting sexual assaults from two newspapers. These media over-reported stranger rapes and underreported acquaintance rape relative to actual frequencies, a tendency that may promote stranger rape as “real rape” and discount the victimization of acquaintance rapes. Articles were further evaluated for the presence/absence of victim blaming language and other attributes of victims, and comparisons were made based on political leaning of the news source, accompanying photography, journalist gender, and overall word count. These analyses provided some indications of objectivity (e.g., few differences based on political leaning of news source emerged), but there was a greater tendency to use victim-blaming language in reports of acquaintance rape than stranger rape. Study 2 explored the extent to which participants recognized differences in victim blame across high and low victim blaming articles and the influence of a positive or negative assailant photograph on evaluations of victim blame. Perceivers indeed recognized differences in victim blaming, such that high victim-blaming content led readers to blame the victim more. However, accompanying photography had no influence on these perceptions. In Study 3, I demonstrated that victim blaming tendencies in news articles have significant downstream consequences. Specifically, following exposure to a high blaming article, participants were more likely to blame the victim of an unrelated case of sexual assault, and to endorse rape myths. The findings of this research demonstrate the

importance of the media in shaping public perception of rape victims, particularly victims of acquaintance rape.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Sexual Assault.....	2
Blaming the Victim.....	3
Measuring Blame.....	5
Properties that Influence Victim Blaming.....	7
Summary.....	12
Media’s Influence on Victim Blaming.....	12
Media Depictions of Sexual Assault.....	15
Downstream Consequences of Media Framing.....	19
Purpose of the Current Research.....	20
Study 1 – What Do Rape Reports “Look Like” In Newspapers?.....	21
Method.....	23
Sample.....	23
Inclusion Criteria.....	23
Text Analyses.....	24
Photograph/Image Analyses.....	27
Article Characteristics.....	27
Results.....	27
Text Analyses.....	27
Article Characteristics.....	33
Discussion.....	35
Study 2 – Do Individuals “See” Differences in Victim Blaming in News Articles?.....	37
Method.....	37
Participants.....	38
Procedure and Design.....	38
Results.....	40
Blaming the Victim.....	40

Percent Blame	40
Rape Assessment	41
Discussion	41
Study 3- Do victim blaming articles in the media affect evaluations of novel sexual assaults? ..	43
Method	43
Participants.....	43
Procedure and Design	43
Stimulus Materials	44
Results.....	45
Perceptions of the Initial Article: Replication of Study 2.....	45
Effects of Earlier Exposure on Victim Blame in an Unrelated Ambiguous Case	46
Discussion	48
General Discussion	49
Implications.....	58
References.....	61
Appendix A.....	78
Appendix B.....	79
Appendix C.....	81
Appendix D.....	82
Appendix E	87
Appendix F.....	88
Appendix G.....	89

List of Tables

Table 1: Frequency of Assaults By News Source, Study 1.....	90
Table 2: Frequency of Assaults By Assault Type, Relative to Actual Rates, Study 1.....	91
Table 3: Proportion of Articles by Source and Assault Type – Overall Blame, Study 1.....	92
Table 4: Proportion of Articles by Source and Assault Type - Victim Characteristics, Study 1...93	93
Table 5: Proportion of Articles by Source and Assault Type - Assailant Characteristics, Study 1.....	94
Table 6: Proportion of Victim Positive Photographs by Source and Assault Type, Study 1.....	95
Table 7: Proportion of Articles by Source and Assault Type – Shared Assault Stories, Study 1..96	96
Table 8: Correlations Among All Variables by Victim Blame Condition, Study 2.....	97
Table 9: Correlations Among Blame Variables in Original Articles, by Victim Blame Condition, Study 3.....	98
Table 10: Correlations Among Primary Outcome Variables: Perceptions of the Unrelated Sexual Assault, by Condition, Study 3.....	99

Assessing the Impact of Media on Blaming the Victim of Acquaintance Rape

Introduction

For anybody whose once normal everyday life was suddenly shattered by an act of sexual violence– the trauma, the terror, can shatter you long after one horrible attack. It lingers. You don't know where to go or who to turn to...and people are more suspicious of what you were wearing or what you were drinking, as if it's your fault, not the fault of the person who assaulted you...We still don't condemn sexual assault as loudly as we should. We make excuses, we look the other way...[Laws] won't be enough unless we change the culture that allows assault to happen in the first place.

- President Barack Obama, September 2014

Sexual assault is a pressing and prevalent concern in our society, with estimates that nearly 1 in 5 women in the United States will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime. Of those women who have been sexually assaulted, 41% have been assaulted by a friend or casual acquaintance (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, Merrick, Chen, & Stevens, 2011). In the unveiling of the "It's On Us" campaign to end sexual assault on college campuses, President Barack Obama highlighted not only the trauma experienced by rape victims due to their assault, but also the secondary victimization many victims experience due to the negative reactions of those around them (see also Ulman, 1996; Williams, 1984). Of these negative reactions, perhaps the most harmful is the frequent tendency to blame the victim for his or her assault.

Unlike many other interpersonal crimes such as robberies or muggings, victims of sexual assault are particularly vulnerable to being blamed for their attack (Bieneck & Krahe, 2010; Gordon & Riger, 2011), and thus victim blaming in sexual assault cases has been the focus of many empirical investigations. However, despite the extensive amount of research performed on this topic, there is little consensus of when victim blaming will or will not occur in sexual assaults (see Grubb & Harrower, 2008, and Grubb & Turner, 2012, for a review). In the current

research, I examine how media, in particular newspapers, may (inadvertently) be perpetuating the tendency to blame victims of acquaintance rape. Specifically, I explore how subtle victim blaming content in newspaper reports of sexual assaults, particularly acquaintance rapes, may influence how a perceiver interprets a subsequent unrelated acquaintance rape case. Before describing this research in detail, I begin by briefly overviewing what we mean by sexual assault and victim blaming. I will then consider the role of media in perpetuating victim-blaming ideology broadly and discuss the importance of media in evaluations of sexual assault.

Sexual Assault

Current conceptions of rape and sexual assault typically include penetration, whether it be genital, oral, or anal, by part of the perpetrator's body or object through the use of force or without the victim's consent. While not discounting the victimization of men, sexual assault is a gendered crime, with women much more likely to be victimized than men (Black et al., 2011; Brownmiller, 1975; Hayes, Lorenz & Bell, 2013; Koss & Harvey, 1991). Indeed, compared to one in five American women, only one in 71 men will be assaulted in his lifetime (Black et al., 2011). For the purposes of the current work, I will therefore be focusing on the tendency to blame female victims of acquaintance rape.

Researchers investigating the prevalence and consequences of sexual assault typically distinguish among three primary types of sexual assault: stranger rape, date/acquaintance rape, and marital rape. Stranger rape refers to a sexual assault in which the victim and assailant have no prior relationship or acquaintance with one another. When an individual has been sexually assaulted by someone she knows – for instance a friend, neighbor, classmate, or someone she has gone on a few dates with – it is classified as an acquaintance or date rape (Calhoun, Selby & Warring, 1976; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Estrich, 1987; Johnson & Jackson, 1988;

Quackenbush, 1989). Finally, sexual assault that occurs within a marriage has been deemed a legal form of rape, with the first successful marital rape conviction occurring in the United States in 1979 (Pagelow, 1988). Of these three primary categories of sexual assault, the majority of rapes are committed by an acquaintance (Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Pfeiffer, 1990; Russell, 1984). Indeed, recent reports by the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Black et al., 2011) estimate that less than 14% of victims are assaulted by a stranger, with the remainder of victims being assaulted by an acquaintance (43.3%), intimate partner (51.1%) or family member (12.5%)¹.

The data on prevalence presented above suggest that sexual assault is a formidable concern in the United States, and elsewhere around the world. But these numbers are a gross underestimation given that sexual assaults are one of the most under-reported crimes (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Rennison, 2002). Perhaps one of the main reasons for the underreporting of sexual assault is the secondary victimization experienced by sexual assault victims caused by the negative reactions by those around them, particularly the tendency to blame the victim for his or her assault (Eigenburg & Garland, 2008; Ryan, 1971; Ulman, 1996; Williams, 1984).

Blaming the Victim

Blaming the victim refers to the tendency to hold victims of sexual assault responsible for the assault (Eigenberg & Garland, 2008; Ryan, 1971). As previously stated, while victim blaming can undoubtedly occur in a variety of situations, it appears to be particularly strong in evaluations of sexual assault (Bieneck & Krahé, 2010). In general, assailants are typically found as more culpable for sexual assault than victims (see Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Pollard, 1992),

¹ Due to the possibility of multiple perpetrators and multiple experiences of sexual assault, percentages exceed 100%. Acquaintance rape count includes assaults committed by individuals in a position of authority (e.g., doctor, professor, supervisor).

however the degree of blame ascribed to victims varies substantially throughout the research literature. Despite the extensive amount of research performed on this topic, there is little consensus about predictors of victim blaming (see Grubb & Turner, 2012, and Grubb & Harrower, 2008, for a review). In fact, the sexual assault literature appears to offer only one clear conclusion having to do with type of assault: as the victim and assailant become increasingly familiar and romantically involved, victim blame increases (Bieneck & Krahe, 2010; Bridges, 1991; Pederson & Strömwall, 2013; Simonson & Subich, 1999, but see McCaul, Veltum, Boyechko, & Crawford, 1990). A study by Bieneck & Krahe (2010), for instance, manipulated the relational status between a victim and her assailant as strangers, acquaintances, or former dating partners. As expected, the greatest victim blame occurred when the pair was described as former dating partners, and the least victim blaming when the two were depicted as strangers.

Direct comparisons between stranger rape and acquaintance rape typically indicate that victims of acquaintance rape are more likely to be blamed than victims of stranger rape (Amir, 1971; Bieneck & Krahe, 2011; Bridges & McGrail, 1989; Calhoun et al., 1976; Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981; Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Janoff-Bulman, Timko & Carli, 1985; Hammock & Richardson, 1997; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988; Pollard, 1992; Quackenbush, 1989; Sinclair & Bourne, 1998; Tetreault & Barnett, 1987). Additionally, Ferro and colleagues (Ferro, Cermele, & Saltzman, 2008) found that victims of acquaintance rape were held less accountable for their assault compared to victims of marital rape.

It is in the middle of the relational spectrum, acquaintance rape, where the literature is the most inconsistent in predicting when victim blaming will occur (Grubb & Turner, 2012, and Grubb & Harrower, 2008). Gaining a greater understanding of victim blaming in acquaintance rape is particularly important given that the majority of rapes are perpetrated by someone known

to the victim (Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Pfeiffer, 1990; Russell, 1984), and that acquaintance rape cases have a lower probability of conviction in the courts than those that fit with a stranger rape script (Estrich, 1987; Larcombe, 2002).

Measuring Blame

The measurement of “blaming the victim” may seem straightforward, but it varies substantially in the literature. For instance, some researchers assess *blame*, others assess perceived *responsibility*, others utilize a combination of both blame and responsibility, and still others use a battery of related constructs. *Blame* is typically defined as a value judgment of the extent to which one should be held accountable for the assault, and perhaps experience some future consequence as a result (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Calhoun & Townsley, 1991; Stormo, Lang, & Stritzke, 1997) and is typically measured using a rating scale (e.g. How much is the victim to blame for her assault?). Conversely, *responsibility*, defined as the extent to which victims’ choices or actions contributed to their assault (Stormo et al., 1997), is typically assessed by asking participants to assign a percentage of responsibility to the involved parties. Thus, blame may be a more harsh assessment than responsibility, with the victims perhaps deserving some future consequences from their actions. For this reason, perceivers may be more comfortable in attributing responsibility than blame.

Whether or not these measures can be used interchangeably in assessments of victim blaming in sexual assault has been minimally debated in the literature. While some researchers have argued that blame and responsibility measures can be used interchangeably (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Calhoun & Townsley, 1991; Shaver & Drown, 1986), others argue that they are distinct constructs and should be treated as such (Critchlow, 1985; Richardson & Campbell, 1980, 1982; Richardson & Hammock, 1991). The data are inconsistent on these points. For

example, Stormo and colleagues (1997) found their measures of responsibility and blame to be highly positively correlated (see also McCaul et al., 1990), and evaluations of the victim in their varying intoxication scenarios across these two measures produced the same effects. In contrast, also manipulating varying levels of victim intoxication, Richardson and Campbell (1982) found that victim blaming was unaffected by level of victim intoxication, while a drunk victim was viewed as more responsible for her assault than a sober victim.

Not only have many researchers used a combination of both blame and responsibility items, but many have also assessed victim blame using other related constructs. For instance, assessments of “fault” (Ford, Liwag-McLamb, & Foley, 1998; Jones & Aronson, 1973; Kahn, Gilbert, Latta, Deutsch, Hagen, Hill, McGaughey, Ryen, & Wilson, 1977) and the extent to which the victim is perceived to have “enjoyed” the experience have been used as indicators of blame (Simonson & Subich, 1999). Others claim that simply failing to label a rape as a rape is in itself a form of victim blaming (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Finally, other more general markers of victim blame that are not answered in response to a specific case include rape myth endorsement (the extent to which participants endorse rape myths, defined as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs” about sexual assault, victims, and assailants that are widely accepted to be true, p.217; Burt, 1980) and the Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale (Ward, 1988). Since these latter assessments reflect global attitudes toward rape, I view rape myth endorsement as a general indicator of victim blaming beliefs, but not as a measure of victim blame in a specific case of sexual assault. In the research reported here, I will use assessments of blame, responsibility and rape labeling as my primary markers of victim blaming. Further, to determine whether media influences global attitudes toward rape, I will also examine the role of rape myth endorsement following exposure to media reports on sexual

assault.

Properties that Influence Victim Blaming

Despite the extensive amount of research performed on victim blaming in acquaintance rape, there is relatively little consensus about when victim blaming will or will not occur (see Gravelin & Biernat, 2016; Grubb & Turner, 2012, and Grubb & Harrower, 2008, for reviews). Research on sexual assault and victim blame typically focuses on one of two perspectives. The first perspective considers features of the observer as they influence victim blaming tendencies, which I refer to as *individual factors*. Often discussed as the “rape perception framework”, the second perspective focuses on aspects of the victim, perpetrator or characteristics of the assault as they influence victim blame (Pollard, 1992). I will refer to these elements as *situational factors*. Below I briefly review the literature on victim blaming in acquaintance rape within each of these broader categories, highlighting the most widely researched variables within each category.

Individual-level factors. A variety of individual-level factors (i.e. characteristics of the participant or “perceiver”) have been assessed for the extent to which they influence the tendency to blame victims of acquaintance rape. Only a few of these factors, however, have produced consistent findings. Developing a demographic profile of what “type” of participant is most likely to blame victims is limited by a lack of research examining racial/ethnic and national differences, and a focus on college-aged students in Western settings (see Gravelin & Biernat, 2016, for a review). Despite these limitations, however, a large number of studies indicate that women are less likely to blame victims of acquaintance rape than men (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Black & Gold, 2008; Calhoun et al., 1976; Gerdes, Dammann, & Helig, 1988; Hammond, Berry, & Rodriguez, 2011; Johnson & Jackson, 1988; Johnson, Jackson, & Smith, 1989;

Lambert & Raichle, 2000; Selby, Calhoun, & Brock, 1977; Varelas & Foley, 1998; Yamawaki, Darby, & Queiroz, 2007). Relatedly, research indicates that men also endorse rape myths to a greater extent than women (Anderson, Cooper & Okamura, 1997; Hammond et al., 2011; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Further, research typically indicates that political conservatism predicts greater victim blaming (see Anderson et al., 1997 for a review).

Social power also appears to play an important role in evaluations of blame. Specifically, both benevolent sexism and the power relations subcomponent of the hostile sexism scale are concerned with maintaining an unequal power differential between men and women in society. Endorsement of these attitudes contributes to greater victim blaming (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Pederson & Strömwall, 2013; Viki & Abrams, 2002; Yamawaki et al., 2007). Manipulations of participants' feelings of power and powerlessness indicate an interesting interaction with participant gender such that powerless men blame victims less than men in a control condition and powerful women tend to blame the victim more than those in a control condition (Gravelin et al., 2016).

Despite many theoretical links, few studies have examined the role of Belief in a Just World (Lerner, 1970, 1980), on victim blaming in acquaintance rape. In fact, in the only study that found an effect, Belief in a Just World endorsement interacted with mindset: Only individuals who were primed to engage in effortful and deliberate processing and were high in belief in a just world blamed the victim to a greater extent than in the other conditions (van den Bos & Maas, 2009). This suggests a much more complex relationship between just world beliefs and victim blaming than asserted at a theoretical level.

Examinations of perceived similarity to the victim have also produced limited results, with

only one study finding that individuals who feel more similar to the victim blame her less for her assault (Bell et al., 1994), and no work currently establishing a link between prior victimization and subsequent difference in acquaintance rape victim blame (see Gravelin & Biernat, 2016, for a review).

Some of the inconsistencies in the literature may have to do with the large variety of sexual assault scenarios that have been used in the victim blaming literature. Much about victim blaming may have to do with the specifics of the scenario itself, as we know, for example, from the finding that blame is greater in acquaintance rape than stranger rape cases overall. And rather than main effects of demographic and attitudinal factors, these factors may differentially matter depending on the specifics of the scenarios or cases participants are asked to consider.

Situation-level factors. Studies of victim blaming in acquaintance rape typically assess participant evaluations of a provided vignette. These vignettes typically consist of a third-person written account of a sexual assault (but see Dupuis & Clay, 2013; Janoff-Bullman et al., 1985; Tetreault & Barnett, 1987; Willis, 1992). Regardless of format, these acquaintance rape accounts typically manipulate various components of the sexual assault situation, involving not only the description of the victim and assailant, but also components of the event itself. Given its frequency in actual cases of sexual assault (Black et al., 2011), it is unsurprising that alcohol use is a common feature in sexual assault vignettes (see Gravelin & Biernat, 2016 for a review). However, few studies have examined how changes in intoxication and alcohol use levels impact victim blame. Among those that have, the evidence largely suggests that alcohol use by the victim increases victim blaming, while alcohol use by the defendant reduces his level of blame (Bieneck & Krahe, 2010; Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Stormo et al., 1997; but see Girard & Senn, 2008).

Research considering physical characteristics of the victim clearly indicates that the more revealing the clothing worn by the victim and the more suggestive her behavior or occupation the more likely the victim is to be blamed for her assault (Cassidy & Hurrell, 1995; Kanekar & Seksaria, 1993; Loughnan et al., 2013; Muehlenhard & MacNaughton, 1988; Workman & Orr, 1996). Relatedly, victims with an apparently promiscuous sexual history are found to be more blameworthy (Pugh, 1983). Provocativeness may also interact with participant gender, such that men blame provocatively dressed victims more than conservatively dressed victims compared to their female counterparts (Whatley & Riggio, 1992). Many of these findings are consistent with the belief that physical enticement—based on dress, history, or sexual orientation — triggers assault, but one exception to this pattern is the finding that unattractive victims are blamed more than attractive victims (Gerdes et al., 1988). The latter finding may have more to do with a general halo effect favoring attractive individuals (e.g., Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972).

Another dominant factor considered in sexual assault vignettes used in the literature is the degree of force and resistance used by the perpetrator and victim. These appear to play an important role in perceptions of victim culpability. Victims who resist their attackers are seen as less blameworthy than those who do not (particularly when they resist early in the interaction; Black & Gold, 2008; Kanekar & Seskaria, 1993; Kopper, 1996; Shotland & Goodstein, 1983). Less victim blaming also appears to occur when the perpetrator is depicted as using a great degree of force (Bieneck and Krahe, 2010) and when the victim is portrayed as having been injured from the attack (Kanekar, Shaherwalla, Franco, Kunju, & Pinto, 1991).

Despite evidence that non-White women (except for Hispanic women) are more likely to be raped (Black et al., 2011), there is relatively little research on acquaintance rape victim blame that manipulates victim and perpetrator race. The work that has been done, however, indicates a

more complex interaction with other individual and situational factors. For instance, participant race has been found to interact with victims and assailant races, such that White participants blamed White victims assaulted by Black men less than Black victims assaulted by Black men, while Black participants attributed the most blame to a Black woman assaulted by a White man (Varelas & Foley, 1998). Also interacting with victim race is the respectability of the victim, particularly in the case of Black victims. Specifically, respectable Black victims are seen as less blameworthy than non-respectable Black victims and respectable White victims, while non-respectable Black victims are blamed more than comparable White victims. Further complicating this effect is the influence of the race of the perpetrator: regardless of victim race, the non-respectable victim was seen as more blameworthy than the respectable victim when the perpetrator was Black.

Finally, research on the role of socioeconomic status and power differences between victim and assailant is currently too limited and inconsistent to draw definitive conclusions. However some research points to the importance of power differentials in influencing blame (Kanekar et al., 1991), and participants' beliefs that women use sex to gain power from men (Yamawaki et al., 2007).

Despite many consistent findings, a problem with assessing the impact of situational factors on victim blame is that many published studies do not include full descriptions of the scenarios used. For instance, the sexual assault scenario used by Janoff-Bulman and colleagues (1985) is simply described as a "first person account of a rape and the events preceding it (pp. 164)." After having received the full scenario from Dr. Janoff-Bulman, I found that alcohol intoxication played a central role in this scenario ("I had more than I could handle. Bob got drunk too...I had a lot to drink...I insisted we stay until we had...something to get more sober").

Given the role alcohol plays in evaluations of sexual assault, it is important to be aware that this sexual assault scenario centers around a night of heavy drinking. Thus, before we can draw firm conclusions about the effects of various situational factors on victim blame, access to the full scenarios used in research is necessary. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the effects of individual level factors (demographics, attitudes) on victim blame may require systematically examining these individual level factors at different levels of important situational variables.

Summary

A variety of individual and situational factors have been examined in an attempt to understand when victim blaming in acquaintance rape will occur. Despite this extensive search, however, few factors have been found to consistently result in greater victim blaming. I believe that a full understanding of victim blame also requires that we take into account the broader institutional and societal level factors that may affect perceivers' views of any given sexual assault scenario. Indeed, it has been suggested that the only way to truly prevent rape is to address the problem of rape from a societal level (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993). In order to better understand and prevent the prevalence of sexual assaults and subsequent victim blaming, we must further examine the broader cultural factors that contribute to sexual assaults and promote rape myths and victim blaming. In this work I focus on one such societal influence – news media.

Media's Influence on Victim Blaming

Mass media are a central component of daily life (Livingstone & Bovill, 2001). Regardless of the preferred source, individuals rely on mass media to tell them what to know and be aware of. Media sources play an important role in shaping public perceptions of various issues and solutions (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2007), on a myriad of topics including political issues and

current events. Media, however, do not always provide individuals with solely factual evidence. Instead, media sources often offer individuals information on how to react to situations through the use of framing techniques (see Culley et al., 2010; Entman, 1993; Pietikaninen, 2003). Framing techniques are ways of shaping how information is presented to the audience. All presentations are “frames” in that they highlight certain aspects of information and obscure others, and therefore different framing choices make different kinds of information salient. Scholars studying the use of framing techniques distinguish it from biases, stating that framing is more complex than a simple pro or con position on an issue. Rather, framing techniques are designed to elicit a series of subtle emotional and cognitive responses, and have the ability to define the subject of interest as an issue, and assert the “correct” side of the debate, without the audience realizing it (Tankard, 2001).

The term “media” encompasses a wide range of sources of information. In the current work, I am focusing exclusively on the role of news media—newspaper in particular—in influencing perceptions of victims of sexual assault. In identifying framing in news media, researchers often explore several key framing mechanisms: headlines and subheadings, photography (including graphs, charts, and logos) and their accompanying captions, the beginning sentences of the news story, the selection of sources, affiliations, and quotes (including the quotes that are selected to be emphasized by appearing larger than the accompanying text), and the concluding remarks of articles (Tankard, 2001). The careful selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration of news content that is presented through these mechanisms can affect and bias people’s understanding of social issues and events (Iyengar, 1990; 1991; Keum, Hillback, Rojas, De Zuniga, Shah, & McLeod, 2005; Hannah & Cafferty, 2006; Pietikaninen, 2003; Schneider, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2010; Tankard, 2001). Thus

media cannot only facilitate understanding and support, but also may promote discrimination and ignorance (Entman, 1993; Loto, Hodgetts, Nikora, Chamberlain, Karapu, & Barnett, 2006; Schneider et al., 2010).

News media play an important role in public perception of events (see Glassner, 1999; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). For instance, Greenya (2006) found that the coverage of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina encouraged citizens to help via donations, with some individuals even offering their homes as a sanctuary. Others, however, noted subtle differences in how Black survivors were described compared to White survivors of the hurricane (“refugee” compared to “evacuee”; Nunberg, 2005; Sommers, Apfelbaum, Dukes, Toosi, & Wang, 2006). Black leaders including Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton criticized the use of “refugee” to describe Black survivors of the hurricane, arguing the term implies second-class citizenship (see Sommers et al., 2006). Relatedly, an examination of two photographs accompanying news coverage of the disaster further convey differential framing of Black and White survivors: While a Black male carrying items from a grocery store was described as “looting” the store, a similar picture of two White survivors were described as “finding” items from the local store (Kinney, 2005).

These subtle racialized differences in the language used to describe events may enhance stereotypical perceptions. For instance, in a content analysis of several newsmagazines from 1988 through 1992, Gilens (1996) found that media overwhelmingly portrayed the American poor to be Black. The proportion of Black faces accompanying stories of poverty was more than double the actual proportion of Blacks in poverty during that time frame. In another analysis of newsmagazine stories on poverty from 1993 through 1998, Clawson and Trice (2000) report a greater tendency for stories depicting Blacks in poverty to be negative. Furthermore, using data from the 1990 General Social Survey, Gilens (1996) found that White respondents’ estimates of

the proportion of Blacks in poverty negatively predicted support for welfare and public assistance. Thus, the media may have downstream consequences on policy support.

Specific to news media, Anastasio and Costa (2004) suggest that personalizing victims serves as an indicator of importance of the crime. In other words, failure to personalize a victim of an assault in media may communicate that the victim is not worthy of much coverage, which could translate as meaning the victim is to blame. In a content analysis of newspaper articles of victims of violent crime excluding sexual assaults, Anastasio and Costa (2004) found a greater tendency to personalize male victims compared to female victims, referring more often to male victims by their names rather than nouns or pronouns. In a second study, the authors manipulated the presence or absence of additional personal information aside from the victim's name about the victim of a deadly robbery (the specifics of the personal information included were not disclosed in the article). Additional personal information about victims decreased the tendency to blame them for their attacks. Thus, given the gendered nature of sexual assault and the lack of personal information about victims of sexual assault for privacy reasons, media reporting may increase the likelihood that victims of sexual assault will be blamed for their assault.

Media Depictions of Sexual Assault

To what extent can we extend this work to the domain of sexual assault? The current research explores the extent to which news media may over-represent stranger relative to acquaintance rapes, thereby perpetuating a stereotypical account of what constitutes a “real rape.” I also examine whether the extent to which media focus on stereotypical aspects of acquaintance rape may contribute to the tendency to blame victims. Similar to the media's depiction of poverty, how the media portray sexual assault may have detrimental downstream consequences for how individuals interpret sexual violence and victims of sexual assault. For

instance, film and advertising often reinforce rape myths that trivialize sexual assault as a pleasurable, even romantic, experience (Amir, 1971; Fischer, 1987; Geiger, Fischer, & Eshet, 2004; McCaul, Veltum, Boyechko, & Crawford, 1990; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Smith, 1976). Not only do media outlets often depict women as sexualized objects, but sexual aggression is portrayed as normative behavior in pornography (Longino, 1980; MacKinnon, 1984), film (Donnerstein & Linz, 1986), and music (Hooks, 1994; Schur, 1988). Interestingly, sexual aggression in the media is depicted quite differently from nonsexual aggression. While victims of nonsexual aggression are often shown as having suffered due to their assault, sexual assaults often depict women who initially refuse a man's sexual advances and then become aroused as he ignores her resistance (Malamuth & Check, 1981; Smith, 1976). For example, Warshaw (1994) references a scene in the classic film *Gone with the Wind* where, after fighting with one another, Rhett Butler sweeps Scarlett O'Hara up and carries her into the bedroom. O'Hara is next pictured as happy and smiling, conveying that women want to be overpowered. Eroticizing sexual dominance in the media legitimizes violence against women and therefore may contribute to victim blaming (see Schur, 1988).

News media also tend to focus on stranger rapes (Soothill, 1991), thereby influencing how perceivers determine what constitutes a "real rape." Rapists are portrayed as strangers with solely sexual motivations, assaulting attractive young females (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993). As a consequence, deviations from this image may be less likely to be seen as a sexual assault, resulting in greater victim blaming. Noting that what is reported in newspapers is at the discretion of the journalist and newspaper, Soothill (1991) documented changes in reporting on sexual assaults in major newspapers from 1973 to 1985. Despite an increase in the number of single assailant/single victim sexual assault crimes in the courts during this time frame, reporting

on these types of crimes decreased, with a shift in focus to multiple offender gang rapes instead (see also Carter, 1998, and Soothill & Walby, 1991). This may have increased readers' beliefs that gang rapes and stranger rapes are more prevalent and concerning than acquaintance rape. Due to the lack of media attention, perceivers may be less likely to recognize the pervasiveness and severity of acquaintance rape or to identify it as a crime, thereby increasing the likelihood of victim blame.

When media outlets do discuss acquaintance rape, *how* it is discussed can also contribute to victim blaming. For instance, in their qualitative analysis of newsmagazine coverage of ten high-profile sexual assaults that occurred between 1980 and 1996, Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-Macdonald (2002) found that reports covering acquaintance rape cases were more likely to blame the victim than those covering stranger rape cases. Stories that discuss acquaintance rape using rape myths and focus on ways that acquaintance rapes may resemble prototypical stranger rapes may contribute to negative consequences for victims of assaults that do not include these prototypical features. For instance, in examining the impact of newspaper headlines surrounding an acquaintance rape case against basketball star Kobe Bryant, Frankiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, and Vandello (2008) exposed participants to headlines endorsing rape myths modeled after actual headlines used in newspaper accounts of Bryant's case (e.g. "Defense attorneys in sexual assault case say accuser had motive to lie") compared to non-rape myth headlines ("Hearing set for man accused of sexual assault"). Following exposure to one of these conditions, participants rated Bryant's guilt (along with that of other celebrities accused of non-sexual assault charges). Participants tended to see Bryant as less guilty after reading headlines containing rape myths than neutral headlines, and this was particularly true among men. Not only were men in the rape myth headlines condition less likely to find Bryant blameworthy, but they also demonstrated

greater endorsement of rape-supportive attitudes than their male counterparts in the non-rape myth headlines condition.

Relatedly, Soothill and Walby (1991) point to a tendency for media to be preoccupied with the victim's prior sexual experience as an explanation for her assault. Indeed, a qualitative analyses of two high-profile rape cases in Israel found that the biggest predictor of blame across these two similar cases—one about a 13-year old victim and one about a 16-year old victim—was not the victim's age or knowledge of the assailant, but how promiscuous the victim was depicted to be (Korn & Efrat, 2014). Specifically, the 16-year old victim was portrayed as being highly promiscuous prior to the assault and was therefore cast as more blameworthy in media accounts of the trial compared to the sexually naïve 13-year old victim. Given the many confounds between these two accounts and a lack of a rigid coding scheme, however, it is difficult to draw strong conclusions from their results. However, in combination with the above work, it seems clear that the media may exacerbate endorsement of rape myths, which, in turn, may lead to greater victim blaming.

While the language content of articles is important to consider, news media may also communicate victim blame through the use of accompanying photography. Images accompanying stories serve as symbolic representations of the entire content of the article and thus can effectively frame the issue discussed, perhaps more effectively than the text itself (Clawson & Trice, 2004; Messaris & Abraham, 2001). In her work on the efficacy of audiovisual versus verbal information presented on television, for instance, Graber (1990) found that visual imagery was more memorable to viewers than the verbal information presented. The same may apply to print media. In fact, given that audiovisual information on television is dynamic in movement, print photography may be particularly effective at cuing meaning – the photographer

has already focused in on the important details for the audience. As reported above on the role of photography in media accounts of poor people in the US, the imagery accompanying news media can have an impact on people's understanding of social issues (Clawson & Trice, 2000; Gilens, 1996; Kinney, 2005).

Downstream Consequences of Media Framing

How the media discuss cases of sexual assault may not only influence blame of the specific victim of the assault being described but may also have downstream consequences for how perceivers interpret later unrelated cases of sexual assault. In addition to the work of Gilens (1996), which demonstrated that the racialization of the poor in the United States impacted how individuals interpreted poverty as a social issue, social psychological research on priming further supports the notion that victim-blaming articles may increase the tendency for individuals to seek out, or rely on, victim-blaming content when evaluating unrelated sexual assault cases. Generally speaking, *priming* refers to “how recent or current experiences passively (without an intervening act of will) creates internal readiness” (Bargh & Chartrand, 2014, pp 313). Priming has been found to influence individuals' downstream interpretations of other people and events. For instance, in a classic study by Higgins, Rholes, and Jones (1977), exposure to positive or negative traits affected perceivers' subsequent interpretations of an unrelated target's behavior. Specifically, all participants were first primed with positive or negative traits while completing a memory task. Participants were then asked to evaluate an unrelated target, Donald, and interpret his behavior. Those exposed to positive traits that could be easily extended to explain Donald's behavior evaluated him more positively, while those with matched negative traits evaluated Donald more negatively.

Important to the current research, stereotypic priming can also influence subsequent

evaluations of unrelated targets. For example, after being subliminally primed with common stereotypes of African Americans (e.g. lazy, athletic), participants were more likely to rate an unrelated target person with another common racial stereotype, hostility, compared to those that were not primed with stereotypic words (Devine, 1989). Similarly, Power, Murphy, and Coover (1996) explored the impact of stereotypic and counter-stereotypic priming on subsequent evaluations of blame of unrelated media events. After reading an autobiographical sketch of an individual (African American male in Study 1, female in Study 2) which contained either stereotypic or counter-stereotypic descriptions, participants were asked to evaluate recent media events. In the first study, participants were asked to report how responsible they found Rodney King to be for his assault and Magic Johnson for his HIV status. In the second, participants were reminded of the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill sexual harassment case and the acquittal of William Kennedy Smith for raping Patricia Bowman. Participants were asked to assess who in each case they believed more – the alleged victim or the alleged assailant. In both studies, participants previously exposed to stereotypic content blamed the victims significantly more than those exposed to counter-stereotypic content or no information (control). One possible extension of these findings is that news reports that focus blame for sexual assault on the victim may prime victim-blaming stereotypes, leading to greater blame in later-encountered unrelated sexual assault cases. To my knowledge, examining the influence of victim blaming in media on downstream cases of unrelated assaults has yet to be examined.

Purpose of the Current Research

The current research explores the influence of news media on interpretations of sexual assault victims, and how victim-blaming framing in news articles influences evaluations of unrelated cases of sexual assault. In Study 1, I add to prior research on the media's role in

perpetuating victim blaming in sexual assault by conducting a content analysis of two large-city newspapers and their reporting on sexual assault. This first study serves as a modern comparison to the qualitative analyses on sexual assault reporting in news media (Ardevini-Brooker & Caringella-Macdonald, 2002; Soothill, 1991). Study 1 will also examine features not included in these original studies on their potential contribution toward victim blaming, such as the role of political leaning of the news source, specific mention of victim and assailant characteristics typically used to communicate blame, accompanying photography, article word-count, and journalist gender.

The second and third study will explore how victim blaming in acquaintance rape articles impacts readers' tendency to victim blame. Specifically, in Study 2, I will demonstrate that the victim-blaming content found in acquaintance rape articles is indeed recognized by the average consumer and heightens victim blame. In Study 3, I make the important connection between victim blaming in news media and downstream victim blaming in evaluations of unrelated cases of sexual assault. Specifically, in Study 3 I examine how differential levels of victim blaming in a news report of acquaintance rape influences later evaluations of an unrelated sexual assault as well as endorsement of rape stereotypes (rape myths).

Study 1 – What Do Rape Reports “Look Like” In Newspapers?

Study 1 is a content analysis of newspaper coverage of sexual assault cases. It offers a quantitative analysis of news content, following in the steps of the earlier sexual assault qualitative analyses conducted by Soothill (1991) and Ardevini-Brooker & Caringella-Macdonald (2002). I compared differences in victim blaming content across cases of stranger and acquaintance rape. I also provide an account of how sexual assault in media compares to actual frequencies of assault in order to determine if the media over-report stranger rape relative

to acquaintance rape, as noted by Soothill (1991). Novel to the current work, I examined common features of victims and assailants that are discussed across differing sexual assault types.

Aside from an assessment of the language used in sexual assault articles, I also examined more physical properties of the news articles. First, I examined the role of photography in communicating victim blaming. Given the role of imagery in perpetuating racial stereotypes about poverty in the US (Gilens, 1996), for example, I evaluated the photographs accompanying sexual assault articles for their overall positive or negative portrayal of the alleged victims and assailants. Additionally, due to the differential tendency to blame victims as a function of an individual's political ideology (see Anderson et al., 1997), I examined whether the political leaning of the news source impacts how differing types of sexual assault and their victims are discussed. Specifically, I expected that conservative news sources may be more likely to blame victims of sexual assault, particularly victims of acquaintance rape, compared to more liberal news sources. Finally, as a potential marker of importance, which may therefore also influence victim blaming, I compared word-count across sexual assault types. Due to the lesser tendency to blame victims of stranger rape, I expected more physical space, as assessed via word count, to be allotted to stranger rape articles compared to acquaintance rape articles.

Finally, I also sought to examine the role of journalist's gender in victim blaming. In their content analysis of 194 news stories on Title IX, Hardin, Simpson, Whiteside, and Garris (2007) found that male journalists were more likely to use male sources and portray Title IX more negatively than female journalists. Thus, it is possible that another feminist issue, sexual assault, may be reported differentially across journalist gender, with female journalists victim blaming less than male journalists.

Method

Sample

One hundred seventy-nine newspaper articles that reported incidents of sexual assault involving a female victim and male assailant were collected. Within the 179 collected articles were 279 unique victims and 169 unique perpetrators². Articles were collected from two newspapers, *The New York Post* (N = 83), and *The Boston Globe* (N = 96) for the years 2010 and 2011. These numbers reflect every sexual assault story reported in those papers during the 2-year time frame. These papers were selected due to their similarity in location (Northeast United States) and due their widely-recognized differential political leaning. Specifically, *The New York Post* is consistently rated as a conservative news source, while *The Boston Globe* is assessed as a more liberal source (see Bias in periodicals, 2015; Rowse, 1957). These sources were also selected due to the existence of a digital, searchable archive for the specified time frame and due to similar numbers of print circulation (see Top 25 newspapers for March 2013, 2013).

Inclusion Criteria

Three female research assistants and the primary investigator compiled a list of fifteen key terms to search for within the digital archives to locate all newspaper articles on sexual assault (see Appendix A for list of key terms). To be considered eligible for the current study, collected articles had to report an attempted or completed sexual assault involving at least one female victim and at least one male assailant. The text and any accompanying photography for each article were then coded for a series of categories (detailed below). In instances in which articles discussed multiple assailants or multiple victims, research assistants coded the article for overall reporting (e.g. if the article mentioned the age of one victim but not the second victim,

² These numbers correspond to the most conservative count of unique victims and perpetrators discussed in the articles as articles that reported on multiple victims or assailants without specific details on these individuals were counted as 2 unique victims/assailants.

the *victim age* variable was coded as being present), except for when the reports contained within the article were markedly different sexual assaults (e.g. articles which reported on two sexual assaults that occurred in the same location by two different assailants were treated as distinct events). This strategy resulted in the distinct coding of 189 events (114 cases of stranger or acquaintance rape). Thus, unless otherwise noted, the unit of analysis below is 189 reported cases (124 of which were stranger or acquaintance rape) rather than 179 articles. Further, an examination of the specific cases of stranger and acquaintance rape revealed five sexual assault events that were reported in both news sources comprising a total of twenty articles (65% Boston Globe).

Text Analyses

Two female research assistants (different from those involved in the search term process and blind to the hypotheses) independently read each article and rated the text of each article using the coding scheme detailed below (see Appendix B). To remove the potential influence of images, research assistants received only the physical text for evaluation. Approximately one hour of training occurred, where the two raters and I reviewed a subset of articles and discussed the coding, prior to the coders independently coding articles on their own. One week later, I conducted inter-rater reliability analyses using the Kappa statistic on a subset of articles coded by the research assistants (approximately thirty articles). Discrepancies within coding were then discussed to establish agreement, and the coders were then finished the remainder of the coding. Following all coding, interrater reliability was again assessed to determine consistency among raters. At this time, discrepancies within coding were discussed between myself and the two coders to establish agreement for final analyses.

Rape type. Articles were first coded for rape type: (1) stranger rape, (2) date/acquaintance rape, (3) marital rape, (4) child rape, (5) gang rape, or (6) unknown. Research assistants were instructed to provide as many codes as necessary to properly identify the rape situation. For example, a minor who was sexually assaulted by his or her daycare worker would be coded as both a child rape and an acquaintance rape. To ensure consistency, raters were instructed to treat the first four categories as the primary rape type, with child rape accounts being treated as the primary code regardless of whether the assailant was a stranger or acquaintance. Secondary codes for child rape would thus include relational status. Assaults with multiple assailants also received an additional code for gang rape. Initial agreement between coders for the primary rape category was high ($\kappa = .89, p < .001$). Articles needing a secondary code ($n = 62$) for rape type also produced substantial agreement ($\kappa = .72, p < .001$).

Content victim blaming. Research assistants assessed the presence or absence of blaming language for the victim. For example, articles that depicted the victim as being intoxicated or promiscuous were coded as victim blaming. Research assistants coded blame as present or absent (0 = absent, 1 = present). Initial agreement between coders for the victim blaming category was high ($\kappa = .87, p < .001$).

Title victim Blaming. Coders assessed the title and subtitles for each article and coded for whether the title primarily communicated blame towards the assailant, victim, other (e.g., community/parent/institution), or no blame. For example, “Roman Polanski apologizes to sexual assault victim in new documentary” was coded as blaming the assailant, as Polanski is apologizing for the assault, thereby taking the blame. Conversely, “Charges rain down on ‘cry rape’ meteorologist Heidi Jones” was coded as blaming the victim, as it communicates that the victim is lying and therefore to be blamed. “Congress targets sexual assaults in the military”,

however, was coded as blaming some other institution, in this case, the military. Finally, article titles that were relatively ambiguous, or neutral, were coded as No Blame, for example, “Roethlisberger's future now in Goodell's hands” was coded as no blame, as it is unclear from the title that a sexual assault will even be mentioned in the article. Initial agreement between coders for the title victim blaming category was high ($\kappa = .83, p < .001$).

Victim characteristics. Research assistants also coded each article for a variety of victim characteristics. Specifically, for each article, research assistants were asked to code for the mention of (1) victim status (e.g., socio-economic status and/or occupation, $\kappa = .69, p < .001$), (2) appearance (e.g., what the victim was wearing, general appearance, $\kappa = .57, p < .01$), (3) sexual experience (e.g., mention of victim’s virginity or prior sexual assault history, $\kappa = .91, p < .001$), (4) intoxication/party (e.g., mention of the victim being at a party, intoxicated, or under the influence of drugs, $\kappa = .94, p < .001$), (5) dishonesty (e.g., victim portrayed as lying or exaggerating, $\kappa = .70, p < .001$), and (6) promiscuity (e.g. mention of victim having multiple sexual partners or is a prostitute, $\kappa = .66, p < .001$). All above categories were coded as either being present or absent in each article assessed (0 = not mentioned, 1 = mentioned).

Assailant characteristics. Similar to the coding performed for aspects of the victim, research assistants also coded each article for the presence or absence (0 = not mentioned, 1 = mentioned) of a variety of characteristics pertaining to the alleged assailant: (1) assailant status, $\kappa = .87, p < .001$, (2) appearance, $\kappa = .83, p < .001$, (3) intoxication/party, $\kappa = .77, p < .001$, (5) criminal history (e.g. assailant portrayed as having a criminal background aside from the current charge of sexual assault, $\kappa = .80, p < .001$), (6) mental health (e.g., assailant’s mental health called into question such as being socially isolated or depressed, $\kappa = .77, p < .001$), (7) serial offense (e.g., the assailant depicted a serial offender of sexual assaults, $\kappa = .84, p < .001$), and (8)

the use of violence (e.g., assaults characterized by violence such as broken bones or hospitalization for injuries endured during the attack, $\kappa = .76, p < .001$).

Photograph/Image Analyses

In addition to the text analyses, two research assistants (one who had participated in the text analyses, and one new assistant) coded the images that accompanied each article (images were coded independently, without connection to the article text). The number of images in each article was first counted, with 100% agreement on these counts across the two coders. Each image was then further categorized into one of three categories. Specifically, all images were categorized as either portraying the victim, assailant, or other (e.g., graphs, buildings). There was 100% agreement across raters on these counts for each of these three categories. Each image was subsequently coded for the extent to which it depicted the victim in a positive or negative light. For example, an image that depicted the assailant in professional clothing would be coded as negative/victim blaming, as it portrays the assailant in a positive manner. Conversely, an image of an assailant's mug shot would be considered positive/not victim blaming, as this negative portrayal of the assailant communicates the assailant is to be blamed, not the victim. All images were coded using a 0 (positive/not victim blaming) or 1 (negative/victim blaming) coding scheme (see Appendix C). Again, there was 100% agreement across the raters on the valence of the images in each of the three categories.

Article Characteristics

Finally, each article was also coded for author gender, $\kappa = .81, p < .001$ and word count of each article. Word counts served as an indicator of perceived importance of the story.

Results

Text Analyses

Rape type. Of the 189 cases, 40.2% reported on instances of stranger rape, 25.4% reported accounts of acquaintance rape, 28.6% detailed child rapes, and none depicted marital rape. Only 5.8% ($n=11$) of the articles could not be categorized due to lack of information (see Table 1). As discussed previously, 62 articles required a secondary rape type coding to further describe the assault featured. Among the assaults coded as stranger rapes, 6 were further categorized as gang rapes. Similarly, within the accounts of acquaintance rape, 4 were further categorized as gang rapes involving individuals known to the victim. Finally, among the child rape accounts, 9 were stranger rapes, 35 were acquaintance rapes, 2 were categorized as gang rapes, and 6 were coded as unknown. Given my primary interest in examining the differences in reporting and subsequent blaming between stranger and acquaintance rape, for the purposes of the current analyses, I will focus solely on the articles that were coded as stranger rape ($n=76$) and acquaintance rape ($n=48$).

Coverage by news source. A Pearson chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in coverage of sexual assault due to the news source. There were no significant differences in reporting stranger versus acquaintance rape cases across the two newspapers, $\chi^2(1, n = 124) = .64, p = .43$

Coverage relative to actual frequency. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was conducted to compare the observed proportion of acquaintance and stranger rape in my sample to the expected proportion of these assaults according to the most recent data provided by the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS; Black, 2011). As can be seen in Table 2, the observed proportions were significantly different from those expected from the NISVS data, $\chi^2(1, n = 124) = 109.54, p < .001$. In the two newspapers I examined, acquaintance rapes were

under-reported relative to their actual occurrence, while stranger rapes were over-reported relative to their actual occurrence.

Content victim blaming. A binary logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of article source (Boston Globe = 0, NY Post = 1) and sexual assault type (Stranger Rape = 0, Acquaintance Rape = 1), on the tendency to blame the victim (No = 0, Yes = 1; see Table 3)³. The main effects of article source and sexual assault type were entered into the model first, followed by the two-way interaction. There was no difference in victim blaming across the two article sources, $\beta = .43$, $SE = .55$, $p = .43$, but there was a main effect of sexual assault type, $\beta = 2.10$, $SE = .60$, $p < .001$. Holding source constant, acquaintance rape articles have approximately 2.10 times the odds of containing victim blaming content than stranger rape articles.

Title victim blaming. Of 179 article titles, the majority (60.9%) cast blame on the assailant, only 7.8% cast blame on the victim, and 5.0% blamed some other factor (e.g. an institution or location). An additional, 26.3% of the articles were coded as having neutral titles, with no blame cast in any recognizable direction. For the 114 article titles involving stranger or acquaintance rape, the comparable percentages were 57.9% blamed the assailant, 12.3% blamed the victim, 5.3% blamed some other factor, and 24.6% were coded as having neutral titles. Given the primary interest in the determining differences in the tendency to blame victims, and due to relatively small cell sizes, titles were re-coded as either victim blaming (coded as 1) or non-victim blaming (coded as 0). Thus, titles coded as blaming the assailant, other, or non-blaming were combined for analyses. A binary logistic regression was conducted to determine the effect of article sources (NY Post = 0, Boston Globe = 1) and sexual assault type (Stranger Rape = 0, Acquaintance Rape = 1) on the tendency for the article title to blame the victim. These main

³ Because the gender of the reporter could be determined in relatively few cases (see below), this variable could not be included in these analyses.

effects were entered first in to the model, followed by their interaction (see Table 3). There was no main effect by article source, $\beta = -.85$, $SE = .90$, $p = .35$, sexual assault type, $\beta = .76$, $SE = .74$, $p = .30$, or the interaction, $\beta = .18$, $SE = 1.21$, $p = .88$.

Victim characteristics. For each of the victim characteristics noted below, a binary logistic regression was performed with article source (NY Post = 0, Boston Globe = 1), sexual assault type (Stranger Rape = 0, Acquaintance Rape = 1), and their interaction, entered into the model as predictors. These main effects were entered first in to the model, followed by their interaction. Proportions of the presence of each victim characteristic by article source and sexual assault type can be found in Table 4.

Victim status mentioned. There was no main effect of article source, $\beta = -.44$, $SE = .49$, $p = .47$, or sexual assault type, $\beta = .40$, $SE = .53$, $p = .45$. There was, however a significant interaction, $\beta = 1.80$, $SE = .81$, $p = .03$, such that acquaintance rape articles by the Boston Globe were approximately 1.80 times more likely to mention the victim's socioeconomic status than acquaintance rape articles by the New York Post.

Victim appearance mentioned. There was a significant main effect of sexual assault type, $\beta = 1.83$, $SE = .85$, $p < .05$. Specifically, articles on acquaintance rape were approximately 1.83 times more likely to include mention of the victim's appearance compared to articles on stranger rape, controlling for source. There was no main effect of source type, $\beta = .52$, $SE = .90$, $p = .56$, or interaction, $\beta = -1.47$, $SE = 1.18$, $p = .21$.

Sexual experience mentioned. Sexual experience was never mentioned in the case of stranger rape, and only mentioned in 8 cases for acquaintance rape cases. A chi-square analysis indicated no difference between newspapers in mentions of victim sexual experience for acquaintance rape cases, $\chi^2(1, n = 48) = 2.02$, $p = .16$.

Intoxication/party mentioned. There was no main effect of sexual assault type, $\beta = .81$, $SE = .66$, $p = .22$, or source, $\beta = -.81$, $SE = .77$, $p = .30$; the interaction was also not significant, $\beta = 1.67$, $SE = .98$, $p = .09$.

Dishonesty mentioned. There was no main effect of article source, $\beta = -.66$, $SE = .94$, $p = .48$, however sexual assault type affected mentions of victim dishonesty, $\beta = 1.93$, $SE = .73$, $p < .01$. Specifically, acquaintance rape articles were approximately 1.9 times more likely to indicate that the victim was not being entirely honest about the assault compared to articles on stranger rape, controlling for source. The overall interaction was not significant, $\beta = .98$, $SE = 1.11$, $p = .38$.

Promiscuity mentioned. None of the effects was significant: sexual assault type, $\beta = 20.26$, $SE = 6893.04$, $p = 1.0$, source, $\beta = 17.49$, $SE = 6893.04$, $p = 1.0$, overall interaction, $\beta = -18.44$, $SE = 6893.04$, $p = 1.0$.

Assailant characteristics. Comparable logistic regressions were performed for each of the following assailant characteristics of interest. Proportions of the presence of each assailant characteristic by article source and sexual assault type can be found in Table 5.

Assailant status mentioned. There was no main effect of source type, $\beta = -.44$, $SE = .61$, $p = .47$, however, there was a significant main effect of sexual assault type, $\beta = 1.93$, $SE = .60$, $p < .001$, such that acquaintance rape were approximately 1.93 times more likely to include mention of the assailant's status/occupation compared to articles on stranger rape, controlling for source. The interaction between sexual assault type and article source was marginally significant, $\beta = 1.76$, $SE = .99$, $p = .07$, such that acquaintance rape articles by the Boston Globe were approximately 1.76 times more likely to include mention of the assailant's status compared to acquaintance rape articles by the New York Post.

Assailant appearance mentioned. The main effect of source type was significant, $\beta = 1.18$, $SE = .51$, $p < .05$, such that New York Post articles were approximately 1.18 times more likely to mention the assailant's appearance than articles in the Boston Globe, controlling for sexual assault type. There was also a marginal main effect of sexual assault type, $\beta = -1.99$, $SE = 1.10$, $p = .07$, such that acquaintance articles rape were approximately 1.99 times less likely to mention the assailant's appearance compared to articles on stranger rape. The source by assault type interaction was not significant, $\beta = -.35$, $SE = 1.36$, $p = .80$.

Intoxication/party mentioned. There was no main effect of source type $\beta = -.22$, $SE = 1.43$, $p = .88$, but the effect of sexual assault type was significant $\beta = 2.55$, $SE = 1.11$, $p < .05$. Articles depicting an acquaintance rape were approximately 1.11 times more likely to mention the assailant's drug/alcohol use, or presence at a party compared to articles on stranger rapes, controlling for news source. The source by assault interaction was not significant, $\beta = 1.25$, $SE = 1.56$, $p = .42$.

Criminal history mentioned. None of the effects was significant: source, $\beta = -.56$, $SE = .50$, $p = .26$, sexual assault type, $\beta = -.27$, $SE = .56$, $p = .62$, overall interaction, $\beta = -.59$, $SE = .90$, $p = .52$.

Mental health mentioned. None of the effects was significant: source, $\beta = 19.41$, $SE = 6893.04$, $p = 1.00$, sexual assault type, $\beta = 18.76$, $SE = 6893.04$, $p = 1.00$, interaction, $\beta = -38.17$, $SE = 10851.36$, $p = 1.00$.

Serial offender mentioned. None of the effects was significant: source, $\beta = .49$, $SE = .49$, $p = .32$, sexual assault type, $\beta = .12$, $SE = .57$, $p = .83$, interaction, $\beta = -.78$, $SE = .81$, $p = .34$.

Violence mentioned. None of the effects was significant: source, $\beta = -.57$, $SE = .48$, $p = .24$, sexual assault type, $\beta = -.92$, $SE = .58$, $p = .12$, interaction, $\beta = -.63$, $SE = 1.00$, $p = .53$.

Article Characteristics

Photography. Of the 179 total articles there were only 75 images; 117 of the articles contained no photography. Of these 75 images, 9 included the victim, 53 included the assailant(s), and 13 included images of other elements (e.g., location of the assault, courthouse, family members). Examining solely the articles on acquaintance and stranger rape yielded a total of 5 victim photographs, 26 assailant photographs, and three images of other elements. Due to lack of variability in article source and sexual assault type, binary logistic regressions could not be performed. Instead, I provide descriptive data below and, when appropriate, chi-square analyses. Proportions of positive (non-victim blaming) imagery of each image type by article source and sexual assault type can be found in Table 6.

Victim imagery. Of the five victim images, 4 of which appeared in the New York Post, three (60%) were rated to portray the victim positively (non-victim blaming). Of these three, only one accompanied a stranger rape article.

Assailant imagery. Of the 26 assailant images, 14 of which appeared in the New York Post, 15 (65.2%) portrayed the assailant negatively (e.g. mug shots or other unflattering photographs of the assailant). Fourteen (53.8%) of the assailant images accompanied stranger rape cases and were overwhelmingly negative (91.7%). Of the twelve assailant images accompanying acquaintance rape articles, they were predominantly positive (63.6%). Two separate chi-square analyses were run to determine differences in accompanying imagery as a function of article source or sexual assault type. There was a significant effect of assault type, $\chi^2(1, n = 26) = 10.12, p < .001$: Stranger rape articles were more likely to portray the assailant negatively (92.86%) than those accompanying acquaintance rape articles (33.33%). There were no differences in imagery as a function of article source, $\chi^2(1, n = 26) = .49, p = .48$.

Other imagery. All three (two from the Boston Globe) of the images of other elements were assessed as being positive towards the victim (non-victim blaming). Two of these three articles accompanied a stranger rape article.

Author gender. Of the 114 articles on stranger or acquaintance rape, 16 (14.0%) were written by a female journalist, 18 (15.80%) by a male journalist, and 80 (70.2%) were unable to be determined (e.g. ambiguously gendered names or an indiscernible group of reporters such as “Post Staff Reporters”). Due to the relatively small number of distinguishable author genders, a series of binary logistic regressions examining only author gender (0 = Female, 1 = Male) as the predictor were run. There were no differences in the tendency for male or female journalists to report on stranger versus acquaintance rape cases, $\beta = .41$, $SE = .76$, $p = .60$. Further, there were no differences in the tendency for male or female journalists to blame the victim in their reports $\beta = .41$, $SE = .76$, $p = .60$, or suggest victim blaming in the article titles, $\beta = -.98$, $SE = .95$, $p = .30$. None of the coded victim (all $ps > .17$) or assailant (all $ps > .33$) characteristics differed by author gender.

Word Count. A 2 (Source: New York Post v. Boston Globe) by 2 (Assault Type: Stranger Rape v. Acquaintance Rape) between-subjects ANOVA on the word count in each article revealed only a main effect of source, $F(1, 109) = 9.50$, $p < .01$. Boston Globe articles had higher word counts overall ($M = 416.47$, $SD = 315.99$) compared to New York Post articles ($M = 255.19$, $SD = 195.00$). There were no significant effects for sexual assault type, $F(1, 109) = 2.37$, $p = .13$, nor was there a significant interaction, $F(1, 109) = .32$, $p = .57$.

Coverage of the same cases

Finally, it could be argued that the relative lack of differences in victim blaming between newspapers is not due to similar reporting but a function of the different cases being covered. As

a cleaner examination of the role of ideological source on victim blaming, I focused on the 20 articles that described the same cases. Specifically, I identified five sexual assault cases that were reported across the two newspapers, resulting in 20 articles for comparison (65% Boston Globe). The majority of these shared cases covered instances of acquaintance rape (75%). A Pearson chi-square analysis indicated no difference in coverage of sexual assault type by news source, $\chi^2(1, n = 20) = 3.16, p = .06$. Comparing only acquaintance rape cases ($n = 20$) by newspaper type revealed no difference in content victim blaming, $\chi^2(1, n = 20) = 1.78, p = .18$, or title victim blaming, $\chi^2(1, n = 20) = 3.20, p = .07$. Examining the mention of various victim characteristics, NY post articles were more likely to discuss the victim's appearance (.75) in their acquaintance rape articles than Boston Globe articles (0), $\chi^2(1, n = 20) = 11.08, p < .001$. None of the remaining victim (all $ps > .06$) or assailant (all $ps > .35$) characteristics differed by news source (see Table 7).

Discussion

Study 1 demonstrated that there are indeed differences between how news media reports stranger rape compared to acquaintance rape. Replicating the findings by Soothill (1991), there was a tendency for news media to over-report stranger rapes and under-report acquaintance rapes relative to actual prevalence data provided by the NISVS (Black et al., 2011). Further, articles on acquaintance rape were significantly more likely to include victim-blaming content than articles on stranger rape. Despite this, there were no differences across assault type in terms of word count, a marker of importance. Further, while prior research found a tendency for victim-blaming to be communicated in article headlines (Frankiuk et al., 2008) I found no evidence for this pattern. The majority of articles, regardless of sexual assault type, either cast blame on the assailant or were relatively neutral.

In examining what characteristics of victims were discussed across both sexual assault types, victims of acquaintance rape were more likely to be described as dishonest compared to victims of stranger rape. An examination of the characteristics of assailants discussed across the two assault types found that when the assault was an acquaintance rape, articles were more likely to mention the socioeconomic status of the assailant and his drug/alcohol use, and less likely to mention his appearance. In general, however, given the long list of characteristics coded for, there appear to be no major differences across assault types in the kinds of victim and assailant characteristics journalists choose to include in their articles.

The majority of photographs accompanying articles were of the assailant. This is perhaps unsurprising as victims of sexual assault are rarely identified. Of the articles featuring a photograph of the assailant, the majority portrayed the assailant negatively, particularly in cases of stranger rape. In fact, assailant photographs accompanying acquaintance rape cases were predominately positive. This provides some indication that assailant imagery may be used to communicate who is to blame, and that this message differs depending on the type of sexual assault: Victims of stranger rape are not to be blamed, and therefore assailants are vilified, while victims of acquaintance rape are held at least somewhat responsible for their assault, and assailants are more likely to be pictured in a positive light.

Of the articles where author gender could be determined, gender appeared to have no impact on victim blaming tendencies. This is in contrast to related work that finds that male journalists tend to be more critical of feminist issues (Hardin et al., 2007). Relatedly, despite the link between political conservatism and victim blaming, comparisons across article source yielded no differences on the primary outcome of interest, victim blaming. When examining how source influences the characteristics mentioned, the only instance in which article source

influenced the characteristics was in relation to assailant appearance: New York Post articles were significantly more likely to mention the assailant's appearance in their articles compared to those written in the Boston Globe. Further, results indicate a tendency for victim status to be mentioned more often in Boston Globe acquaintance rape articles compared to acquaintance rape reports in the New York Post. These differences could be a function of the differing stories reported on in each newspaper, however. Supporting this assessment, when examining the effect of article source only among stories that were reported in both outlets, the difference did not emerge. In fact, the only difference across shared stories was a greater tendency for the NY post to discuss the victim's appearance in acquaintance rape cases compared to the Boston Globe. Caution should be given to this conclusion, however, given the limited sample size in these direct comparisons. In general, the current research suggests that while individual perceiver political ideology may influence interpretations of sexual assault victims, newspaper ideology had little effect on reporting content.

Study 2 – Do Individuals “See” Differences in Victim Blaming in News Articles?

An important next step was to determine whether the differences in victim blaming observed by trained coders in newspapers in Study 1 would also be recognized by consumers of news media. Given my overarching interest in gaining a better understanding of when victim blaming will occur in acquaintance rapes, Study 2 compared two accounts of acquaintance rape that varied in victim blaming content. I expected that, despite the relatively subtle differences across the two articles, participants exposed to the article higher in victim-blaming content would find the victim to be more responsible for her assault compared to those exposed to an article devoid of this content.

Method

Participants

One hundred sixty-two (50.0% female) participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk online service in exchange for a small financial incentive (\$0.50). The sample ranged in age from 18 to 70 ($M = 34.90$ $SD = 11.76$). Participants were primarily U.S. citizens (79.6%), and primarily Caucasian (66.0%). All participants first read a control article before being randomly assigned to read one of four articles reporting an acquaintance rape, described below. Following each article, participants responded to a variety of questions assessing their impressions of the individuals involved in each story. The initial/control article was included to bolster the cover story that I was interested in understanding how individuals evaluate others to whom they are exposed briefly, and responses to this story were not analyzed. Responses to questions following the second article, which manipulated victim blaming, served as my primary dependent measures.

Procedure and Design

Victim blaming manipulation. One acquaintance rape article from the *New York Post* that coders in Study 1 rated high in victim blaming content was selected to serve as priming material for Study 2. Specifically, this article described allegations of sexual assault against Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. The original served as the high victim blame article, and a modified version was created to serve as the low-victim blaming comparison (see Appendix D). I also chose photographs that had been rated by judges as positive versus negative toward the assailant. The negative assailant image depicted Roethlisberger at one of the nightspots he visited the night of the alleged incident, appearing intoxicated, with two women on either side of him, one of whom was the alleged victim, whose face was blurred. The positive

assailant image depicted Roethlisberger in his professional (football) uniform⁴. To enhance the manipulation, the positive assailant image was paired with the high victim blame text, and the negative assailant image was paired with modified (low victim blame) text. Finally, to assess whether accompanying photographs influence ratings of sexual assaults, each article version also appeared without any accompanying images (see Appendix D for materials). Thus, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (victim blame: high or low) X 2 (photo: present or absent) design: 1) Victim Blame and Positive Assailant Photograph, 2) Victim Blame and No Photograph, 3) Non-Victim Blame and Negative Assailant Photograph, 4) Non-Victim Blame and No Photograph.

Blaming the victim. Participants responded to 9 items created for the purpose of the current research (see Appendix E). All items were assessed on a 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*completely/totally*) response scale. For example, participants were asked “How much is the alleged victim to blame for what happened?”, “How much do you think Ben took advantage of the alleged victim?”(Reverse scored), and “How interested was the alleged victim in having sexual relations?” These 9 items formed a reliable measure of blaming the victim ($\alpha=.93$).

Percent blame. Participants were asked to divide blame between the alleged perpetrator and victim such that blame distributions added up to 100%. Specifically, participants were presented with two slider bars that they could drag up to 100% for each individual involved, however, the total percentage of blame across the two individuals could not exceed 100%. As the values are ipsative, the percent blame ascribed to the victim was used as our marker of victim blame.

⁴ Because the pro-assailant photograph was of low quality, a comparable color photograph, which depicted Roethlisberger in his uniform, was used in its place in Study 2.

Rape assessment. Participants were also asked “Do you think this incident would be considered rape?” with response options of “yes” or “no”.

Results

In order to determine the effect of the article and photograph manipulation, as well as the influence of participant gender on the tendency to blame the victim, a 2 (Blame Condition: Victim Blame v. No Victim Blame) by 2 (Picture: Present v. Absent) by 2 (Participant Gender: Male v. Female) between-subjects ANOVA was conducted on the blaming the victim and percent victim blame variables. For the dichotomous labeling variable (was this a rape?), a binary logistic regression was performed with article type (No Victim Blame = 0, Victim Blame = 1), picture (Absent = 0, Present = 1), Participant Gender: (Female = 1, Male = 0) and their interactions, entered into the model as predictors. These main effects were entered first in to the model, followed by their interaction. Correlations among all variables can be found in Table 8.

Blaming the Victim

A 2 (Blame Condition: Victim Blame v. No Victim Blame) by 2 (Picture: Present v. Absent) by 2 (Participant Gender: Male v. Female) between-subjects ANOVA on blaming the victim revealed the predicted main effect of condition, $F(1,154) = 13.48, p < .001, \eta^2=.07$, as well as a main effect of participant gender, $F(1, 154) = 14.98, p < .001, \eta^2=.08$. Participants exposed to the victim blaming article blamed the victim to a greater extent ($M = 3.49, SD = 1.57$) than those exposed to the non-victim blaming article ($M = 2.48, SD = 1.70$), and men ($M = 3.49, SD = 1.66$) blamed the victim to a greater extent than women ($M = 2.46, SD = 1.60$). None of the other effects was significant (all $ps > .19$).

Percent Blame

Similarly, a 2 (Blame Condition: Victim Blame v. No Victim Blame) by 2 (Picture: Present v. Absent) by 2 (Participant Gender: Male v. Female) between-subjects ANOVA on percent blame ascribed to the victim again revealed a main effect of condition, $F(1,154) = 4.39$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$, and of participant gender, $F(1, 154) = 8.01$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Participants exposed to the victim blaming article attributed more blame to the victim ($M = 22.25$, $SD = 22.99$) than those exposed to the non-victim blaming article ($M = 14.08$, $SD = 21.28$), and men ascribed a higher percentage of blame to victims ($M = 23.19$, $SD = 24.24$) compared to women ($M = 12.95$, $SD = 19.31$). All other effects were nonsignificant, $ps > .13$.

Rape Assessment

A binary logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of blame condition, picture condition, and participant gender on the likelihood that participants identified the scenario as rape⁵. The main effects of blame condition, picture condition and participant gender were entered into the model first, followed by their respective two-way and three-way interactions. There was a main effect of blame condition, $\beta = -2.20$, $SE = 1.13$, $p = .05$, such that individuals in the blame condition were approximately 2.2 times less likely to identify the case as rape compared to those in the no blame condition, controlling for photo condition and participant gender. None of the remaining effects were significant: picture condition, $\beta = .29$, $SE = 1.45$, $p = .84$, gender, $\beta = -1.10$, $SE = 1.20$, $p = .36$, blame condition \times picture condition, $\beta = 20.22$, $SE = 10048.24$, $p = 1.00$, blame condition \times gender, $\beta = 1.95$, $SE = 1.44$, $p = .18$, picture condition \times gender, $\beta = -.83$, $SE = 1.68$, $p = .62$, blame condition \times picture condition \times gender, $\beta = -19.28$, $SE = 10048.24$, $p = 1.00$.

Discussion

⁵ One participant failed to respond to this question, resulting in an analyses of 161 cases.

Study 2 suggests that media consumers' perceptions of assault victims are colored by the degree of victim-blaming content depicted in news reports. This was reflected in the greater tendency for individuals who read the high blame article to blame the victim more and to attribute a greater percentage of the responsibility for the assault to the victim, and a lesser tendency to recognize the assault as rape compared to those who read a matched article with victim blaming content removed.

While Study 1 found a tendency for acquaintance rape articles to contain positive assailant imagery--which I speculated could exacerbate the tendency to blame the victim--this did not seem to be the case. The presence or absence of assailant imagery, matched to correspond to the level of blame in the article, had no influence on any of the outcomes of interest. This indicates that the primary predictor of when victim blaming will occur depends solely on the text contained within the article. The photographs used, however, may be partially responsible for this nonsignificant effect. Specifically while the headshot of Roethlisberger in his football uniform was assessed to be a positive image, it likely conveys aggression and thus participants may evaluate him more negatively than anticipated. Further, the negative image not only portrayed Roethlisberger, but also the blurred-out victim, in an alcohol-imbued context. Thus, it is possible that not only was Roethlisberger portrayed negatively, but the victim was as well. More research is needed to draw conclusions about the impact of photography on victim blaming tendencies.

Study 2 also replicated the traditional gender effects found in the victim blaming literature: men blamed the victim more, and ascribed a greater percentage of responsibility for the assault to the victim, compared to women. There were no differences in the labeling of the

assault as rape as a function of gender. This nonsignificant effect is largely a function of the overwhelming tendency for both men (.84) and women (.89) to recognize the assault as rape.

Study 3- Do victim blaming articles in the media affect evaluations of novel sexual assaults?

Study 2 indicated that victim blame is affected by the degree of victim-blaming content in news articles reporting the assault case. A crucial next step is to determine if these high and low victim-blaming articles influence subsequent interpretations of an unrelated assault. Research on priming suggests that exposure to victim blaming news media should result in a greater tendency to blame the victim of an unrelated sexual assault. Additionally, Study 3 also explored whether victim-blaming news media influences more global attitudes toward rape. I suspect that exposure to high blaming versus low blaming articles will result in an increased acceptance of rape myths.

Method

Participants

One hundred fifty three (51.6% female) participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk online service in exchange for a small financial incentive (\$0.60). The sample ranged in age from 18 to 73 ($M = 35.21$, $SD = 12.65$). Participants were primarily U.S. citizens (96.1%), and primarily Caucasian (81%).

Procedure and Design

Participants were told the purpose of the study was to gain a "greater understanding of how individuals evaluate others to whom they are exposed only briefly" and that they would be asked to read various sources of information (e.g. newspaper articles, online blogs, police reports) and give us their opinions on the individuals involved. Following this introduction, participants were randomly assigned to read either a victim blaming ($n = 77$) or non-victim blaming ($n = 76$) article before reading the same neutral (not related to victim blame) article. The

articles and subsequent assessment questions used were the same as those in Study 2. Since the presence or absence of photographs was shown not to influence participant evaluations of victim blame, this factor was not examined in Study 3 and photographs were always included.

Following exposure to their respective conditions and the neutral article, all participants read the following sexual assault scenario involving a female victim and a male assailant. The scenario depicted an acquaintance/date rape and was created to assure difficulty/ambiguity in assignment of blame.

The victim stated that she and suspect James (last name redacted) are first introduced at a party by a mutual friend (name redacted). The two spend most of the night together laughing, talking, and flirting with each other. At the end of the party the two exchange numbers and agree to meet up again. The next night, James asks the victim over to his apartment. The victim and James both begin drinking and soon both are intoxicated. The victim states she started kissing James and soon James grabs her and throws her onto his bed. The victim states she begins to feel very dizzy and disoriented and James asks her if she is okay. The victim wakes up in the hospital and is told that her friends were concerned when she did not come home and came looking for her. They found her in James's bedroom and she was vomiting so they called 9-1-1. Later the victim is told that James admitted to the police that they were both very drunk and had sex but it was consensual (unconfirmed at time of report). The victim states that she did not consent and would like to file a rape report against James.

To align with the cover story, the scenario was mocked to resemble a police officer summary report of a victim statement (see Appendix F).

After reading this scenario, participants responded to a variety of measures assessing the degree of blame they assigned to the alleged victim and assailant, and their endorsement of rape myths. At the conclusion of the experiment, participants were first probed for suspicion utilizing a funnel debrief before finally being fully debriefed regarding the purpose of the research. Finally, due to the sensitive nature of the topic examined, participants were provided with information on sexual assault and contacts for more information regarding sexual assault.

Stimulus Materials

Blaming the victim. The 9 items used to evaluate victim blaming in Study 2 were modified to name the individuals involved in the police report scenario. The items were again assessed on a 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*completely/totally*) response scale and formed a reliable composite of victim blaming ($\alpha = .88$)

Percent blame. Participants were asked to divide blame between the alleged perpetrator and victim such that blame distributions added up to 100%, as in Study 2.

Rape assessment. Participants were also asked “Do you think this incident would be considered rape?” with response options of “yes” or “no”.

Rape myth endorsement. Participants also completed the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, Short Form (Payne, Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1999; see Appendix E). This 20-item measure was assessed on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely/totally*) scale and formed a reliable measure of rape-myth acceptance ($\alpha = .94$).

Results

Perceptions of the Initial Article: Replication of Study 2

To ensure the stimulus materials operated as they did in Study 2, ratings of victim blame and percent blame ascribed to the victim and assailant were compared across the two conditions. A 2 (Participant gender: Male v. Female) by 2 (Condition: Victim Blame v. Non-Victim Blame) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on Blaming the Victim and Percent Blame. A binary logistic regression was also performed to ascertain the effects of blame condition and participant gender on the likelihood that participants identified the scenario as rape. The main effects of blame condition and participant gender were entered into the model first, followed by their respective two-way interaction. Correlations, means, and standard deviations among all variables can be found in Table 9. For the victim blame index, the main effects of condition, F

(1,149) = 25.16, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$, and gender, $F(1,149) = 18.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$ were significant. Replicating the results of Study 2, individuals who read the victim blame article ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.73$) blamed the victim significantly more than those who read the non-victim blame article ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 1.39$). Further, women ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.26$) blamed the victim significantly less than men ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.90$). There was no interaction between gender and condition, $F(1,149) = 1.00$, $p = .32$, suggesting that the effect of article content on blaming did not differ by gender.

Similar to the analyses of blame evaluations, the ANOVA on percent blame ascribed to the victim versus assailant indicated a main effect of condition, $F(1,149) = 14.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$, and a main effect of gender $F(1,149) = 11.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Participants who read the victim blame article blamed the victim more ($M = 22.60$, $SD = 22.82$) than those who read the non-victim blame article ($M = 9.17$, $SD = 16.98$), and men ascribed more blame to the victim ($M = 22.36$, $SD = 25.24$) than women ($M = 9.90$, $SD = 14.17$). The interaction between gender and condition was not significant, $F(1,149) = .72$, $p = .40$.

A binary logistic regression was conducted to assess the impact of condition and participant gender on the likelihood that participants identified the scenario as rape. None of the effects were significant: condition, $\beta = -1.71$, $SE = 1.14$, $p = .13$, gender, $\beta = -1.82$, $SE = 1.14$, $p = .11$, condition \times gender, $\beta = .68$, $SE = 1.31$, $p = .60$.

Effects of Earlier Exposure on Victim Blame in an Unrelated Ambiguous Case

Given that participants read the news articles as intended, ascribing more blame to the victim in the story that emphasized victim blame, I focused next on whether this exposure to the victim blaming or non-victim blaming news article influenced evaluations in an unrelated sexual assault scenario. Separate 2 (Participant gender: Male v. Female) by 2 (Article Condition: Victim

Blame v. Non-Victim Blame) univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted on the primary dependent variables of interest (Blaming the Victim, Percent Blame). A binary logistic regression was conducted on the Rape Assessment variable with condition, gender, and their interaction as the predictor variables. Finally, to assess the extent to which exposure to victim blaming articles impacts global endorsements of rape myths a subsequent 2 (Participant gender: Male v. Female) by 2 (Article Condition: Victim Blame v. Non-Victim Blame) univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the Rape Myth Endorsement scale.

Correlations, means, and standard deviations among all variables can be found in Table 10.

Blaming the victim. In line with predictions, victim blame was affected by article condition, $F(1,149) = 4.59, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$, and gender, $F(1,149) = 9.13, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06$. Participants who were first exposed to a victim blaming article were more likely to blame the victim in an unrelated assault ($M = 4.60, SD = 1.37$) compared to those who had previously read a non-victim blaming article ($M = 4.08, SD = 1.26$), and women ($M = 4.01, SD = 1.25$) blamed the victim less than men ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.34$). The condition \times gender interaction was not significant, $F(1,149) = .88, p = .35$.

Percent blame. Also in line with predictions, the main effects of article condition, $F(1,149) = 4.34, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$, and gender, $F(1,149) = 5.96, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$, were significant, and the interaction was not, $F(1,149) = 2.08, p = .15$. Participants who were first exposed to a victim blaming article ascribed more blame to the victim ($M = 36.69, SD = 25.87$) than those that had previously read a non-victim blaming article ($M = 27.88, SD = 20.96$), and men ascribed greater blame to the victim ($M = 38.04, SD = 24.52$) than women ($M = 27.37, SD = 22.19$).

Rape assessment. Overall, 59.5% of participants labeled this ambiguous case a rape. A binary logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of blame condition and

participant gender on the likelihood that participants identified the scenario as rape. The main effects of blame condition and participant gender were entered into the model first, followed by their respective two-way interaction. None of the effects were significant: blame condition, $\beta = .09$, $SE = .47$, $p = .85$, gender, $\beta = .09$, $SE = .49$, $p = .86$, blame condition \times gender, $\beta = -.93$, $SE = .68$, $p = .17$.

Rape myth endorsement. To further assess the extent to which exposure to a victim-blaming article influenced subsequent evaluations of unrelated sexual assault, I examined effects on general rape myth endorsement. Once again, main effects emerged for article condition, $F(1,149) = 5.82$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$, and gender, $F(1,149) = 26.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Participants who were first exposed to a victim blaming article endorsed rape myths to a greater extent ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.26$) than those who had previously read a non-victim blaming article ($M = 1.89$, $SD = .86$), and women endorsed rape myths less ($M = 1.71$, $SD = .81$) than men ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.20$). The condition \times gender interaction was not significant, $F(1,149) = .94$, $p = .33$.

Discussion

Study 3 successfully demonstrated that victim-blaming articles influence subsequent evaluations of an unrelated case of sexual assault. Specifically, individuals who read an article high in victim blaming content were more likely to blame, and assign a higher percentage of responsibility for the assault to, the victim of an unrelated sexual assault. Thus it appears that victim blaming content primes perceivers to locate and attend to features of victim blame in their evaluations of subsequent assaults. This study also supported my hypothesis that victim-blaming articles would influence more global assessments of sexual assault: those in the high blame condition indicated greater endorsement of rape myths compared to those in the low blame condition. Given the strong positive relationship between rape myth endorsement and victim

blaming, victim-blaming articles may prime rape stereotypes which are then salient when assessing other cases of sexual assault, increasing the likelihood of victim blame.

As was the case in Study 2, Study 3 also replicated the typical gender effects in the literature, with men blaming the victim and ascribing a greater percentage of blame to the victim relative to women. Also replicating traditional effects in the literature, men were also significantly more likely to endorse rape myths relative to women. Unlike Study 2, however, there were no significant condition or gender effects on the tendency to recognize the assault as rape. Further, while in Study 2 the majority of individuals recognized the assault as rape, participants seemed less confident, with only 59.5% of the sample assessing the assault as rape. This may be due to the relative ambiguity of the case used. Unlike the news article, which was relatively rich in detail, the secondary case participants assessed (via the police report) was vague. Further, while the assailant in the news article denied the assault took place, the alleged assailant in the police case admitted to having sex with the alleged victim but stated that it was consensual. This may have contributed to participants' lesser likelihood of categorizing the assault as rape. Despite this, however, participants still differed in the amount of blame ascribed to the victim and general rape myth endorsement as a function of the level of victim blaming previously exposed to in the initial news article. And while men showed more victim blaming tendencies overall, the effect of article exposure was similar for women and men.

General Discussion

Mass media are powerful tools that not only inform consumers of current events including sexual assault but also, through the use of framing devices, may promote discrimination and ignorance (Entman, 1993; Loto et al, 2006; Schneider et al., 2010). By the very nature of news media consisting of primarily third-person accounts of crimes that lack

personalization of the victim, victims of sexual assault are at heightened risk of being blamed for their assault (Anastasio & Costa, 2010). In the current research, however, I provide evidence that all sexual assault victims are not disadvantaged equally. Across three studies, I demonstrate the influence of framing in the news media on the tendency to blame victims of sexual assault, particularly victims of acquaintance rape.

Replicating the work of Soothill (1991), Study 1 demonstrated that news outlets—at least the two newspapers that I considered in my research—continue to emphasize the occurrence of stranger rape and ignore the pervasiveness of acquaintance rape by over-reporting the former, and downplaying the occurrence of the latter. This is problematic in that it contributes to the social construction of stranger rape as “real rape,” thereby increasing the tendency to blame victims whose assaults do not match the stranger rape prototype (Estrich, 1987). Indeed, Study 1 established clear differences in the tendency for media to blame victims, in that acquaintance rape victims were depicted as more blameworthy than victims of stranger rape. I then provided evidence that observers not only recognized differences in victim blaming in news media (Study 2), but that exposure to high victim blaming articles resulted in more negative evaluations of victims of subsequent unrelated sexual assaults and influenced their tendency to endorse rape myths (Study 3).

It is important to note that the victim blaming articles utilized in Study 2 and 3 were not *explicitly* victim blaming. Rather, the victim blaming content consisted of very subtle victim blaming features. For instance, in the high blame article the victim is portrayed as slurring her words when reporting the assault to the police, insinuating that she was intoxicated during the assault. In the low blame article, I simply removed the mention of the state of her voice. Despite the small and subtle differences across the two articles, the results of these studies demonstrate

the strength in the tendency to victim blame in acquaintance rape. This further points to the power of framing in media – the subtle focus on seemingly small features of a sexual assault appear to play a role in interpretations of victim culpability.

The subtle differential framing in accounts of acquaintance rape compared to stranger rape is difficult to explicitly measure, as indicated by the general lack of significant differences across the myriad victim and assailant characteristics coded for in Study 1. For instance, empirical work on the tendency to blame victims of acquaintance rape finds that victims are seen as more responsible for their assault if they are dressed suggestively (Cassidy & Hurrell, 1995; Kanekar & Seksaria, 1993; Loughnan et al., 2013; Muehlenhard & MacNaughton, 1988; Workman & Orr, 1996), are described as sexually promiscuous or experienced (Monson et al., 2000; Pugh, 1983; Whatley & Riggio, 1992), or are intoxicated (Bieneck & Krahe, 2010; Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Stormo et al., 1997). I therefore expected to find differences in the tendency to mention these victim characteristics in news accounts of sexual assault – with greater attention to these features in acquaintance rape compared to stranger rape. This was not the case. What might matter, however, is *how* these characteristics are mentioned across acquaintance and stranger rape scenarios. For instance, while victims of acquaintance rape were no more likely to be described as having been intoxicated or at a party during her assault than a victim of stranger rape, it is possible that the acquaintance rape victim may be more likely to be described as too intoxicated to know whether or not she really “asked for it”, while the stranger rape victim might be described as having been accosted during a moment of vulnerability. This is a critical limitation of the current coding conducted in Study 1. Future work should not only assess whether the *mention* of various victim

and assailant characteristics differ as a function of assault type, but also the *valence* of the characteristics.

The few instances in which differences emerged by assault type in the mention of victim and assailant characteristics support rape stereotypes and victim blaming in acquaintance rape. Specifically, victims of acquaintance rape are particularly likely to be accused of lying about the assault as a way to either get back at their date, or for attention (Burt, 1991). Study 1 provided support that compared to stranger rape articles, victims of acquaintance rape were more likely to be described as dishonest about the nature of the assault. Further, experimental work on situation-level factors impacting victim blame finds that assailants are perceived as less blameworthy when they are intoxicated. In the current content analyses, acquaintance rape articles were more likely to mention assailant intoxication than stranger rape articles. In both instances, the media are affirming stereotypes about acquaintance rape, which may contribute to the overall greater tendency for victim blaming in these articles.

What is less clear, however, is the role of assailant status and appearance. Specifically, Study 1 found that assailant status/occupation was more likely to be mentioned in acquaintance rape articles, and assailant appearance was less likely to be discussed. I have only found one study that examines the role of assailant appearance on assessments of victim blame in acquaintance rape, and this work indicates that while victim attractiveness greatly influences perceptions, assailant appearance does not (Gerdes et al., 1988). In domains outside of sexual assault, however, researchers often find that attractive individuals are seen as more responsible for good outcomes than for bad, while unattractive individuals are seen as more responsible for bad outcomes (Dermer & Thiel, 1975; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Seligman, Paschall, & Takata, 1974; Stephan & Tully, 1977). It is possible that the lack of discussion of the assailant's

appearance leaves his attractiveness open, thus increasing the potential for victim blaming. Further, the literature on the role of assailant status in victim blaming is unclear, with some research indicating assailants in positions of power are more blameworthy (Yamawaki et al., 2007), while others have found the reverse (Black & Gold, 2008). The role of assailant status might matter more as a function of *relative* status to the victim. For instance, Kanekar and colleagues (1991) found a greater tendency to blame the victim when the assailant had higher status relative to the victim, but only if she did not file a complaint. This was qualified by an interaction with participant gender such that men were more likely to blame non-complaining victims who were assaulted by a man of the same or higher status than her compared to women. Thus, in both the case of assailant appearance and status, additional coding to assess the valence of these characteristics is necessary in order to draw definitive conclusions on the role of these elements in overall victim blaming tendencies.

One other situational feature that has been explored in the victim blaming literature is race of both the victim and assailant. For instance, in their analysis of ten cases of sexual assault (collapsing across assault type), Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-Macdonald (2002) found a greater tendency to blame minority victims when their assailant(s) were White compared to White victims assaulted by minority assailant(s). When examining same-race assaults, however, there was no effect of victim or assailant race. In the current content analysis, the majority of cases (65.7% of the 124 stranger and acquaintance rape articles) did not explicitly report on victim or assailant race, and thus I could not examine the effects of this variable. In future work, perhaps with a larger sample of articles, this may be worth exploring. The current lack of discussion of victim and assailant race is interesting, however. Research by Fiske (1998) concluded that, given no information about target race, individuals were likely to assume the

target was White, as this is the normative category in the United States. Thus, it is possible that by failing to provide information about the victim and assailant race/ethnicity, individuals are assuming all sexual assaults are intra-racial among White men and women. While it is true that most reported rapes are intra-racial (see Koch, 1995; Wheeler & George, 2005) newspapers may be perpetuating a stereotype that only White women are “real” victims of sexual assault, thereby increasing the already pervasive tendency to hold assailants more accountable when they assault a White victim compared to a Black victim (Foley, Evancic, Karnik, King, & Parks, 1995). It is also possible, however, in line with Fiske’s (1998) conclusion, that a normative stereotype may also be called to mind. That is, rather than assuming a White assailant and White victim, perceivers may invoke the stereotypical Black assailant accosting a White victim (Epstein & Langenbahn, 1994). Both are obviously problematic as they do not accurately portray sexual assaults and may perpetuate adherence to rape myths which delegitimize assaults that do not meet the prototype.

Surprisingly, inclusion of a photograph had no influence on perceptions of victim culpability. Prior research on news media has found that audiovisual information is more memorable than verbal information (Graber, 1990) and that photography promoting racial stereotypes after Hurricane Katrina and depictions of the US poor influenced evaluations of victim blame and responses to these social issues (Clawson & Trice, 2000; Gilens, 1996; Kinney, 2005). This was not replicated in the current research. I did note a tendency for assailant pictures accompanying acquaintance rape to be more positive than those accompanying stranger rape articles (thereby potentially communicating that the acquaintance rape victim is to blame), but Study 2 found no influence of picture on victim blaming tendencies. Perhaps this is a function of the case I selected and the specific photos I used. That is, despite selecting a photograph rated

negatively in Study 1, it depicted a famous athlete. Perhaps Roethlisberger's fame decreased negative attributions ascribed to him even when cast as an assailant. Alternatively, the very fact that Roethlisberger was depicted in his football uniform in the assailant-positive photograph may have triggered thoughts of aggression and decreased perceptions of favorability for him among participants. Finally, the assailant-negative photograph also depicted the victim. Thus it is possible that the negative attributions extended to Roethlisberger in this photograph were also extended to the victim. Future work should explore the impact of news articles on acquaintance rape with lesser-known assailants and with images that more clearly convey positive versus negative depictions of the assailant.

Other more physical properties of the articles (news source, author gender, and word-count) also appeared to have little impact on the overall tendency to blame acquaintance rape victims. This lack of significant effects may signify that news media and their journalists are attempting to be explicitly objective in their coverage of social issues, such that the political leaning of a paper and gender of the author do not affect reporting of sexual assault cases. However, this also demonstrates how subtle the effects of media framing techniques may be: Without being explicit or easily identifiable, the differential framing of acquaintance and stranger rape in news media still influenced reader perceptions of victim culpability. Future research should continue to explore other subtle physical features of newspapers that may convey importance, which may differ as a function of sexual assault type. For instance, in their work investigating the discussion of Title IX initiatives in the news, Hardin and colleagues (2007) found substantial differences in how the issue was discussed as a function of the physical location/section of the paper in which articles appeared. Specifically, stories that appeared in the news section of papers were more balanced in terms of reporting on Title IX compared to articles

that appeared in sports sections. In my research I examined word count as a physical marker of importance, but future work should gather information about article location; articles that are on the front page are likely to be viewed as more important and pressing than articles tucked away in the back pages of a newspaper. Unfortunately, the physical location of the articles analyzed in Study 1 was not available. Of course, with online readership of news becoming more popular, other placement features signaling importance (e.g., hyperlinks to relevant stories, reader commentary) should also be considered.

Finally, caution should be given in drawing broad conclusions from the current content analysis in Study 1. That is, Study 1 compared only two newspapers from one region in the United States. Future work should be conducted to compare sexual assault reporting across differing regions of the U.S. For instance, the U.S. South has been found to be more collectivistic compared to Northern regions (Vandello & Cohen, 1999). Given research that finds that individuals are held more responsible for the fate in individualistic cultures (e.g., Crandall, D'Anello, Sakalli, Lazarus, Nejtardt, & Feather, 2001) it is possible that victims of sexual assault may be found as more blameworthy in northern states compared to southern states. Alternatively, despite the lack of differences in political ideology of the two newspapers examined in Study 1, both papers were from the Northern U.S., and thus might not accurately reflect the more pervasive conservative attitudes held in the South (Genovese, 1994). That is, it is possible that a conservative newspaper in the south may be more victim blaming compared to a conservative northern paper. Future research could also compare newspapers within the same city, to better insure that the cases reported are identical. Of course, two-newspaper cities are rare these days, but some locations (e.g., Chicago) have comparably sized papers that differ in political leaning

(e.g., *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times*) and could be examined using methods similar to those reported here.

Study 3 supported my hypothesis that media has a direct influence on subsequent interpretations of unrelated sexual assaults. Interestingly, despite the limited information in the police report I provided, participants who had previously been exposed to a high victim blame article were more likely to blame the victim in the police report. This signifies the relative ease with which acquaintance rape victims are blamed. More work, however, needs to be conducted to establish the robustness of this finding. For instance, given a secondary scenario with more detail, participants may compare the victim blaming content across both articles. If the secondary assault, while detailed, lacks cues of victim blaming, prior exposure to a high blame article may result in *less* victim blaming in the subsequent case. Future work should include instances of stereotype-confirming and stereotype disconfirming information in secondary cases of sexual assault to gain a greater understanding of how media may prime perceiver's victim blaming tendencies. Further, the current study only assesses victim blaming across acquaintance rape scenarios. If media prime perceivers to blame victims in acquaintance, will this also extend to greater blaming in stranger rape scenarios as well? In future work, I would like to explore whether initial victim blaming content in a news article on acquaintance rape may also increase the tendency to find fault with victims of stranger rape.

The three studies reported here point to the need for news media to consciously avoid victim-blaming framing in acquaintance rape reports. However, this directive may not be enough to reduce victim blame. Priming stereotypic content is successful due to the cognitive accessibility of the stereotype (Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988; Devine, 1989; Higgins & Brendl, 1995). In other words, simply removing victim-blaming content from articles on

acquaintance rape may not be enough to reduce the tendency to blame victims since non-blaming content does not match the easily-accessible schema associated with rape victims. Rather, in order to combat the default tendency to fault acquaintance rape victims, news media might have to consciously direct consumers to stereotype-*inconsistent* features of the assault. For instance, Power and colleagues (1996) found that priming participants with a gender stereotype-confirming female target prior to evaluating unrelated report of sexual assault led to greater victim blaming, but that exposure to a stereotype-disconfirming target (or a control condition) reduced this effect.

Implications

The biased coverage of sexual assault in media encourages victim blaming in acquaintance rapes and acceptance of rape myths. Importantly, aside from delegitimizing the experiences of victims of acquaintance rape, media may also normalize and encourage sexual aggression. That is, by blaming victims of acquaintance rape and perpetuating rape myths, media may be promoting a rape-tolerant culture. For instance, Briere & Malamuth (1983) found a positive correlation between rape myth endorsement and self-reported rape proclivity and likelihood to use force in sexual encounters among men. Thus, exposure to articles that blame victims and promote rape myth acceptance may increase the occurrence of sexual assaults.

Aside from influencing how observers perceive culpability, media portrayals of sexual assault victims may also influence victims' interpretations of their *own* assaults. Compared to other violent crimes, rapes and sexual assaults are among the most under-reported (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner 2003; Koss, 1992). Victims are unwilling to report sexual assaults to the authorities if they don't believe doing so will be effective (Felson, 2002; Fisher et al., 2003). The current findings are relevant in the legal domain in which verdicts of guilt and the severity

of punishment often are guided by judgments of personal blame (Carroll, 1979). Mass media may be a contributing factor in the larger societal tendency to blame acquaintance rape victims, thereby reducing the tendency for these victims to come forward. For instance, in their study of “unacknowledged rape” (Koss, 1985), Peterson and Muehlenhard (2004) found that sexual assault victims who accepted certain rape myths, and whose own experiences did not match those myths, were less likely to label their assault as rape. Specifically, participants who agreed that women who “tease” men are responsible for their assault, and that it is not really rape if the victim does not forcefully fight back, were less likely to label their own experience as rape if their experiences didn’t align with these myths (if they thought their behavior might have been interpreted as sexually teasing or if they didn’t physically fight off the assault). A victim who does not consider her experience to be rape is unlikely to report the assault to police.

Perhaps more important than the reduced tendency to take legal action, media’s tendency to blame acquaintance rape victims for their assaults has important implications for victims’ emotional and physical well-being. Victims exposed to negative social reactions are more likely, in turn, to blame themselves for their assaults (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman, Filipas, Townsend, & Starzynski, 2007), and self-blame relates to poorer recovery from trauma (Ullman, 1999): Self-blame increases the tendency to abuse alcohol (Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman, 2015; Ullman et al., 2007; Ullman, Filipas, Townsend, & Starzynski, 2005; Ullman, Starzynski, Long, Mason, & Long, 2008;), and is related to greater psychological distress, poorer recovery, and an increased risk for re-victimization (Breitenbecher, 2006; Davis et al, 1991; Frazier 1990; Miller, Markman, & Handley, 2007; Ullman, 1996). The media’s tendency to blame victims of acquaintance rape may communicate to rape survivors, particularly acquaintance rape victims, that they are to blame, resulting in the negative emotional and

physical behaviors reported above. Relatedly, the cases that are pursued in the legal system are likely the same sort of cases deemed “newsworthy” by the media (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002). Not only does this influence how perceivers interpret what is considered a “real rape”, but it may also influence how victims of sexual assault interpret their own assault, particularly when their experience does not match those reported in the media.

Mass media are important, but they are only a part of the broader societal tendency to blame victims of sexual assault. It has been argued, for instance, that the United States as a whole views rape as a normative and condoned behavior, often referred to as a “rape culture” (Koss, Heise, & Russo, 1994; Rozee, 1993). This is reflected not only in media portrayals, but in the legal and empirical rhetoric surrounding sexual assault. Varying definitions of what constitutes rape at both the state and federal level means that what will be viewed as rape depends on the state in which the assault has occurred. This increases ambiguity and uncertainty both in the courts, among lay observers, and among victims themselves (see Allison & Wrightsman, 1993). It was not until 2012, for instance, that the FBI broadened the definition of rape to include non-forcible rape of men and women, thus beginning to recognize variability in the types of sexual assaults that occur. In 2014, both California and New York altered their definitions of sexual assault on college campuses receiving federal funding such that rape isn’t defined by the victim saying “no”, but by failing to say “yes”. Such a definition promotes a variant of the typical victim-focused perspective, potentially acknowledging the role of the assailant in obtaining affirmative consent. Indeed, Branscombe and colleagues (1996; see also Nario-Redmond & Branscombe, 1996) demonstrated that focusing participants on how the victim’s behavior could have altered a rape outcome resulted in the greatest amount of victim blame, while focusing on how the assailant’s behavior could have prevented an assault generally

increased the relative blame assigned to him. Despite these recent efforts to broaden the definition of rape and incorporate definitions more closely aligned with non-stranger rape, earlier constructions of rape promoted through rape myths remain deeply embedded in our culture. These myths and the varying definitions of rape they promote make it difficult for individuals to recognize rape, particularly non-stranger rape, and significantly impact perceivers' interpretations of victim blame, as well as victims own interpretations of their experience.

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Appendix A

Key Terms Searched, Study 1

Rape
Sexual Assault
Molestation
Sexual Harassment
Exploitation
Sexual Crime
Domestic Violence
Domestic Assault
Sexual Violence
Victimization
Blaming the Victim
Acquaintance Rape
Stranger Rape
Date Rape
Gang Rape

Appendix B

Text Coding Scheme, Study 1

Overall

Variable	Codes
Assault Type Note: Type1 should be 0 – 3 or 5. If it is also a gang rape, then note this in assault type 2 and the primary type of assault (0-2) in the Assault Type Variable.	0 = Stranger Rape 1 = Date/Acquaintance Rape 2 = Marital Rape 3= Child Rape 4 = Gang Rape 5 = Unknown
BTV Article blames the victim	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
TitleBlame Looking at JUST THE TITLE (and subtitles), does this communicate blame primarily to...?	0 = Blame Assailant 1 = Blame Victim 2 = Blame Other (parent, institution) 3 = No Blame
Race Mentioned Is the assailant or victim race mentioned? If yes, indicate who (or both), in column(s) below	0 = No 1 = Yes
Race	List the race mentioned (as mentioned in text)

VictimCharacteristics

Variable	Codes
VStatus Is the status of the victim mentioned (ex: SES, occupation)	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
VAppearance Does the article mention aspects of victims appearance (what vic was wearing, general appearance)	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
VSexualExperience Does the article mention victim's prior sexual experience (including virginity and previous sexual assaults)	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
VIntoxParty Does article mention if the victim was at a party/intoxicated./doing drugs?	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
RMpromis Is the victim a prostitute or portrayed as	0 = no 1 = yes

promiscuous?	
RMlie Is the victim portrayed as lying/exaggerating?	0 = no 1 = yes

Assailant Characteristics

Variable	Codes
AStatus Is the status of the assailant mentioned (ex: SES, occupation)	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
AVAppearance Does the article mention aspects of assailants appearance (wearing, general appearance)	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
AIntoxParty Does article mention if the assailant was at a party/intoxicated./doing drugs?	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
ACriminalHistory Is the assailant portrayed as having a criminal background (other than the current assault charge)?	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
RMmental Is the assailant's mental health called into question (discussing previous mental issues; schizophrenia, socially isolated, depressed)	0 = no 1 = yes
RMserial Is this assailant a serial offender of sexual assaults?	0 = no 1 = yes
Violence Is the assault portrayed as violent (broken bones/hospitalization, part of a larger violent attack)?	0 = no 1 = yes

Appendix C

Article Characteristics and Photo Coding Scheme, Study 1

Article Characteristics

Variable	Codes
AuthorGender Is the author of the article a man or woman?	0 = Woman (all women) 1 = Man (all men) 2 = Multiple Authors of Multiple Genders 3 = Unsure

Photo Coding

Variable	Codes
Pictures Vic COUNT of how many pictures there are of the victim	
PicturesVic_Valence# You will have a corresponding variable for EACH victim photo in the article, picture 1 becomes PicturesVic_Valence1..picture 2 becomes PicturesVic_Valence2, etc.	0 = Positive/Portrays victim in a positive light and is NOT victim blaming 1 = Negative/Portrays victim in a negative light and IS victim blaming
PicturesAssailant COUNT of how many pictures there are of the victim	
PicturesAssail_Valence# You will have a corresponding variable for EACH assailant photo in the article, picture 1 becomes PicturesAssail_Valence1..picture 2 becomes PicturesAssail_Valence2, etc.	0 = Positive/Portrays VICTIM in a positive light and is NOT victim blaming (In other words, portrays assailant in a negative fashion) 1 = Negative/Portrays VICTIM in a negative light and IS victim blaming(In other words, portrays assailant in a positive fashion)
PicturesOther COUNT of how many pictures there are of things other than the vict or assailant (institutions/family/friends/graphs) *tell me what the “other” is in the notes section	
PicturesOther_Valence# You will have a corresponding variable for EACH assailant photo in the article, picture 1 becomes PicturesAssail_Valence1..picture 2 becomes PicturesAssail_Valence2, etc.	0 = Positive/Portrays VICTIM in a positive light and is NOT victim blaming 1 = Negative/Portrays VICTIM in a negative light and IS victim blaming

For all valence variables, 2 = unknown/neutral

Appendix D

Manipulated Articles, Study 2 and 3

Victim blaming article with accompanying photograph.

Big Ben ‘rape’ tape



Star quarterback Ben Roethlisberger partied with his alleged rape victim in Georgia on March 5.⁶

For the first time yesterday, the world got to hear the cry of rape against Ben Roethlisberger that prosecutors said wasn't strong enough to bring charges against the Pittsburgh Steelers' superstar.⁷

Georgia authorities released startling videotapes of Roethlisberger's 5-foot-4, 145-pound accuser claiming⁸ she was raped in a pitch-dark nightclub bathroom by the 6-foot-5, 241-pound quarterback.

"He proceeded to have sex with⁹ me," the 20-year-old blond¹⁰ said in one of 50 videotaped witness interviews released yesterday. "The whole time I said, 'No, we really don't need to . . . I was like¹¹, 'No, this isn't OK,' and he was like, 'No, it's OK, I promise.' "

Wearing a navy-blue T-shirt and jeans, with her hair pulled back, the co-ed¹² described an unemotional, hurried assault that she didn't try to fend off because "I figured it wouldn't help anything . . ."¹³

"I'm a little girl, and he's a big boy . . . I didn't want him to hurt me anymore than he was going to," she claimed she was afraid of his temper.

"He kind of had like¹⁴ a short temper . . . like he would get really, like,¹⁵ defensive," she said.

"I wasn't forward in any way," she insisted, admitting she wore a sexually charged name tag from an earlier party.

⁶ Modified article replaces "Star quarterback" with "Dressed like the devil himself" and also includes referent to the alleged victim, also in the photograph with "(face obscured)" in caption.

⁷ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

⁸ "Claiming" replaced with "who says"

⁹ "Proceeded to have sex with" replaced with "raped"

¹⁰ "Blond" replaced with "victim"

¹¹ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

¹² Highlighted portion replaced with "The victim"

¹³ Highlighted portion replaced with "felt powerless to stop"

¹⁴ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

¹⁵ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

“It’s just this silly thing . . . we were all wearing,” she said, adding it drew a “very crude” response from Roethlisberger.¹⁶

The woman’s friend, Nicole Biancofiore, told investigators she, too, saw the football player’s temper flash when another woman hesitated to accept drinks from him.

“He said, ‘Forget it! You’re done! That’s it!’ ” Biancofiore said.

In a videotaped interview conducted a day after the alleged¹⁷ attack, the co-ed¹⁸ told cops she’d just left a friend’s birthday party on March 5 when she and some pals saw the double Super Bowl-winning star at the Milledgeville, Ga., club Velvet, and again at a club called Brick.

At a third¹⁹ night spot, Capitol City, she, her friends and the QB’s entourage went into a secluded area and downed shots²⁰. She said at one point, one of Roethlisberger’s bodyguards grabbed her and took her into an empty room.

“It was really weird how he did it . . . I was just like, OK²¹,” the accuser²² said.

“He, like,²³ had me sit at this stool. Then three seconds later, Ben comes back there, [his] penis was already out of his pants, and I was like no, this is not right. I don’t agree with this.

“I got up and I, like,²⁴ went to the first door that I saw, which happened to be, like,²⁵ a bathroom. And he, like,²⁶ followed me in and shut the door.

“That’s when he proceeded to have sex with me, and the whole time I said, ‘No we really don’t need to do this, this isn’t OK, we shouldn’t be doing this.’ Then he just got up and left, and I walked out, and that’s when my friends, like,²⁷ ran up to me, and we left and we went to the nearest cop car that we saw.”

In an audiotaped interview made the night of the alleged incident, the woman told cops in a slurred voice²⁸ that the attack “felt like it was three seconds, but I was drunk, so I don’t know²⁹.”

“There was definitely vaginal penetration,” she later said.

¹⁶ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

¹⁷ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

¹⁸ “co-ed” replaced with “victim”

¹⁹ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

²⁰ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

²¹ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

²² “accuser” replaced with “victim”

²³ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

²⁴ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

²⁵ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

²⁶ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

²⁷ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

²⁸ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

²⁹ Highlighted portion replaced with “lasted forever, but I don’t know how long it was”

In addition to the tapes, investigators released footage of Roethlisberger at a club with music blaring, asking a girl what her drink tastes like, and doling out high-fives, punching his fist in the air and flashing a huge grin for the camera.

Teammate Willie Colon, who accompanied Roethlisberger the evening of the alleged assault, told investigators he didn't even know anything had happened until he saw cops at the club. One investigator laughed congenially at some of the player's comments.

But Colon soberly noted, "I'm a player, too . . . We've got to be more cautious about putting [ourselves] in situations where people can harm us."³⁰

The accuser said her recollection of details of the sex were hazy;³¹ she didn't know if Roethlisberger used protection and only knew "he just pulled his penis out of the top of his pants . . . As soon as he was done, he left . . . It was just so scary, it happened so fast."

Roethlisberger, 28, has denied wrongdoing, and prosecutors declined to press charges against him after the woman asked that the case be dropped³². He has, however, been suspended by the NFL for up to six games.

In Pittsburgh yesterday, Roethlisberger took part in a practice session, but didn't talk with reporters. He was escorted off the field by a team spokesman.

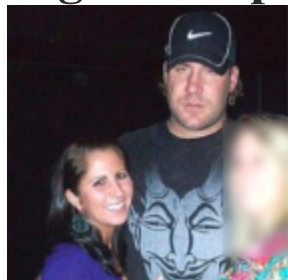
³⁰ Highlighted portion removed in modified article

³¹ Highlighted portion replaced with "The victim"

³² Highlighted portion removed in modified article

Non-victim blaming article with accompanying photograph.

Big Ben rape tape



Dressed like the devil himself, Ben Roethlisberger parties with his alleged rape victim (face obscured) in Georgia on March 5.

For the first time yesterday, the world got to hear the details of the rape case against Ben Roethlisberger.

Georgia authorities released startling videotapes of Roethlisberger's 5-foot-4, 145-pound accuser who says she was raped in a pitch-dark nightclub bathroom by the 6-foot-5, 241-pound quarterback.

"He raped me," the 20-year-old victim said in one of 50 videotaped witness interviews released yesterday. "The whole time I said, 'No, we really don't need to . . . 'No, this isn't OK,' and he was like, 'No, it's OK, I promise.' "

The victim described an unemotional, hurried assault that she felt powerless to stop, "I'm a little girl, and he's a big boy . . . I didn't want him to hurt me anymore than he was going to," she claimed

She said she was afraid of his temper.

"He had a short temper . . . like he would get really defensive," she said.

The woman's friend, Nicole Biancofiore, told investigators she, too, saw the football player's temper flash when another woman hesitated to accept drinks from him.

"He said, 'Forget it! You're done! That's it!' " Biancofiore said.

In a videotaped interview conducted a day after the attack, the victim told cops she'd just left a friend's birthday party on March 5 when she and some pals saw the double Super Bowl-winning star at a night spot, Capitol City. She said at one point, one of Roethlisberger's bodyguards grabbed her and took her into an empty room.

"It was really weird how he did it . . .," the victim said.

"He had me sit at this stool. Then three seconds later, Ben comes back there, [his] penis was already out of his pants, and I said no, this is not right. I don't agree with this.

"I got up and I went to the first door that I saw, which happened to be a bathroom. And he followed me in and shut the door.

“That’s when he proceeded to have sex with me, and the whole time I said, ‘No we really don’t need to do this, this isn’t OK, we shouldn’t be doing this.’ Then he just got up and left, and I walked out, and that’s when my friends ran up to me, and we left and we went to the nearest cop car that we saw.”

In an audiotaped interview made the night of the incident, the woman told cops that the attack “felt like it lasted forever, but I don’t know how long it was.”

“There was definitely vaginal penetration,” she later said.

In addition to the tapes, investigators released footage of Roethlisberger at a club with music blaring, asking a girl what her drink tastes like, and doling out high-fives, punching his fist in the air and flashing a huge grin for the camera.

Teammate Willie Colon, who accompanied Roethlisberger the evening of the alleged assault, told investigators he didn’t even know anything had happened until he saw cops at the club

The victim said she didn’t know if Roethlisberger used protection and only knew “he just pulled his penis out of the top of his pants . . . As soon as he was done, he left . . . It was just so scary, it happened so fast.”

Roethlisberger, 28, has denied wrongdoing. He has, however, been suspended by the NFL for up to six games.

In Pittsburgh yesterday, Roethlisberger took part in a practice session, but didn’t talk with reporters. He was escorted off the field by a team spokesman.

Appendix E

Blaming the Victim Scale, Study 2 (Ben) and 3 (Ben & James)

1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*completely/totally*)

1. How much is the alleged victim to blame for what happened?
2. The alleged victim had control over the situation.
3. How much is Ben/James to blame for what happened?
4. How much do you think Ben/James took advantage of the alleged victim?
5. How much do you think the alleged victim could have avoided this situation?
6. How interested was the alleged victim in having sexual relations?
7. How much control do you think Ben/James had over the situation?
8. How responsible is the alleged victim for what happened?
9. How responsible is Ben/James for what happened?

Appendix F

Police report, Study 3

Date of Report 12/07/2014 13:43
Case # 00-14-032587

██████████ Police Department

Incident Report

SEXUAL BATTERY – OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT =====

DISPATCH INFORMATION: 122 APT A, ██████████

OFFENSE/VICTIM'S ACCOUNT: The victim stated that she and suspect James ██████████ are first introduced at a party by a mutual friend (Marcus ██████████). The two spend most of the night together laughing, talking, and flirting with each other. At the end of the party the two exchange numbers and agree to meet up again. The next night, James asks the victim over to his apartment. The victim and James both begin drinking and soon both are intoxicated. The victim states she started kissing James and soon James grabs her and throws her onto his bed. The victim states she begins to feel very dizzy and disoriented and James asks her if she is okay. The victim wakes up in the hospital and is told that her friends were concerned when she did not come home and came looking for her. They found her in James's bedroom and she was vomiting so they called 9-1-1. Later the victim is told that James admitted to the police that they were both very drunk and had sex but it was consensual (unconfirmed at time of report). The victim states that she did not consent and would like to file a rape report against James.

Reporting Officer Officer ██████████	Department ██████████ Police Dept.	Report Status: Approved
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Appendix G

Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, Study 3

1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely/totally*)

1. If a woman is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.
2. Although most women wouldn't admit it, they generally find being physically forced into sex a real "turn-on."
3. If a woman is willing to "make out" with a guy, then it's no big deal if he goes a little further and has sex.
4. Many women secretly desire to be raped.
5. Most rapists are not caught by the police.
6. If a woman doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say that it was rape.
7. Men from nice middle-class homes almost never rape.
8. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at men.
9. All women should have access to self-defense classes.
10. It is usually only women who dress suggestively that are raped.
11. If the rapist doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it a rape.
12. Rape is unlikely to happen in the woman's own familiar neighborhood.
13. Women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them.
14. A lot of women lead a man on and then they cry rape.
15. It is preferable that a female police officer conduct the questioning when a woman reports a rape.
16. A woman who "teases" men deserves anything that might happen.
17. When women are raped, it's often because the way they say "no" was ambiguous.
18. Men don't usually intend to force sex on a woman, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.
19. A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex.
20. Rape happens when a man's sex drive gets out of control.

Tables**Table 1***Frequency of assaults by news source, Study 1*

	New York Post	Boston Globe
Acquaintance Rape	25	23
Stranger Rape	34	42
Child Rape	25	29
Unknown	3	8

Table 2*Frequency of assaults by assault type, relative to actual rates, Study 1*

	Acquaintance Rape	Stranger Rape
Observed Frequency (prop)	48 (.254)	76 (.402)
Expected Frequency (prop)	81.83 (.433)	26.08 (.138)

Note. $\chi^2 = 109.54^{***}$, $df = 1$. Numbers in parentheses are proportions; for observed, proportions are based on the original 189 articles, for expected, proportions are based on NISVS estimates.

*** $p < .001$

Table 3*Proportion of articles by source and assault type - overall blame, Study 1*

	New York Post		Boston Globe	
	Stranger Rape (n = 34)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 25)	Stranger Rape (n = 42)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 23)
Content Blaming the Victim	.21	.68	.29	.57
Title Blaming the Victim	.12	.20	.10	.13

Table 4*Proportion of articles by source and assault type - victim characteristics, Study 1*

	New York Post		Boston Globe	
	Stranger Rape (n = 34)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 25)	Stranger Rape (n = 42)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 23)
Status	.38	.48	.29	.78
Appearance	.06	.28	.10	.13
Sexual Experience	.00	.24	.00	.09
Intoxication/Party	.15	.28	.07	.48
Dishonesty	.09	.40	.05	.48
Promiscuity	.00	.20	.02	.13

Table 5*Proportion of articles by source and assault type - assailant characteristics, Study 1*

	New York Post		Boston Globe	
	Stranger Rape (n = 34)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 25)	Stranger Rape (n = 42)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 23)
Status	.21	.64	.14	.87
Appearance	.23	.04	.50	.09
Intoxication/Party	.03	.28	.02	.65
Criminal History	.38	.32	.26	.13
Mental Health	.00	.08	.14	.00
Serial Offender	.29	.32	.40	.26
Violence	.44	.24	.31	.09

Table 6*Proportion of victim positive photographs by source and assault type, Study 1*

	New York Post		Boston Globe	
	Stranger Rape (n = 10)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 8)	Stranger Rape (n = 15)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 8)
Victim Imagery	.00	1.00	1.00	.00
Assailant Imagery	1.00	.43	.57	.17
Other Imagery	1.00	.00	1.00	1.00

Table 7*Proportion of articles by source and assault type – shared assault stories, Study 1*

	New York Post		Boston Globe	
	Stranger Rape (n = 3)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 4)	Stranger Rape (n = 1)	Acquaintance Rape (n = 12)
Content victim blaming	.00	1.0	.00	.67
Title victim blaming	.00	.75	.00	.25
Victim status	1.0	.50	1.0	.92
Victim appearance	.00	.75	.00	.00
Victim sexual experience	.00	.25	.00	.08
Victim intoxication/party	.00	.50	.00	.75
Victim dishonesty	.00	1.0	.00	.58
Victim promiscuity	.00	.25	.00	.08
Assailant status	.33	1.0	.00	1.0
Assailant appearance	.00	.25	.00	.08
Assailant intoxication/party	.00	.50	.00	.75
Criminal History	.00	.25	.00	.08
Mental Health	.00	.00	.00	.00
Serial Offender	.00	.25	.00	.33
Violence	.67	.00	1.0	.00

Table 8

Correlations, means, and standard deviations among all variables by victim blame condition, Study 2

Condition		Mean (SD)	Percent Victim Blame	Rape Assessment
No Blame	Victim Blame	2.48 (1.70)	.86**	-.55**
	% Victim Blame	14.08 (21.28)		-.63**
	Rape Assessment	.89(.13)		
High Blame	Victim Blame	3.49 (1.57)	.75**	-.43**
	% Victim Blame	22.25 (22.99)		-.45**
	Rape Assessment	.83 (.38)		

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 9

Correlations, means, and standard deviations among blame variables in original articles, by victim blame condition, Study 3

Condition		Mean (SD)	Percent Victim Blame	Rape Assessment
No Blame	Victim Blame	2.04 (1.39)	.92**	-.67**
	% Victim Blame	9.17 (16.98)		-.70**
	Rape Assessment	.93 (.25)		
High Blame	Victim Blame	3.37 (1.73)	.80**	-.61**
	% Victim Blame	22.6 (22.82)		-.64**
	Rape Assessment	.79 (.41)		

Note. **p<.01

Table 10

Correlations, means, and standard deviations among primary outcome variables: Perceptions of the unrelated sexual assault, by condition, Study 3

Condition		Mean (SD)	Percent Victim Blame	Rape Assessment	Rape Myth Acceptance
No Blame	Victim Blame	4.08 (1.26)	.85**	-.55**	.63**
	% Victim Blame	27.88 (20.96)		-.70**	.48**
	Rape Assessment	.64 (.48)			-.30**
	Rape Myth Acceptance	1.89 (.86)			
High Blame	Victim Blame	4.60 (1.37)	.82**	-.57**	.66**
	% Victim Blame	36.69 (25.87)		-.64**	.51**
	Rape Assessment	.55 (.50)			-.38**
	Rape Myth Acceptance	2.38 (1.26)			

Note. **p<.01