Attributions of Blame in Acquaintance Rape Scenarios: The Role of Blame Scale Presentation Order

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Three studies were conducted to examine the role of order effects in attributions of blame in cases of acquaintance rape. Participants were presented with a vignette describing an acquaintance rape and were then asked to respond to a victim blame scale and a perpetrator blame scale, the presentation order of which was manipulated. The results of Study 1 ($n = 129$) indicated that the participants who first responded to the perpetrator blame scale blamed the perpetrator less than the participants who first responded to the victim blame scale. This effect was replicated in Study 2 ($n = 120$) and Study 3 ($n = 70$), which was run 18 months after Study 2 and used a modified vignette. These findings suggest that order effects should be a methodological consideration in future studies on blame attribution.

Keywords: order effect; acquaintance rape; blame attribution; context effect.

Introduction

Sexual assault is most frequently committed by a person known to the victim. For example, recent estimates from Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom suggest that between 72% and 90% of sexual assaults are committed by a known person (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Berzofsky, Krebs, Langton, Planty, & Smiley-MacDonald, 2013; Ministry of Justice, Home Office & the Office for National Statistics, 2013). In cases of rape, it is common for victims to experience negative social reactions (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Victims of acquaintance rape are particularly vulnerable to negative social reactions, as they are more likely to be blamed than victims of stranger rape (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003). The current research examines the role of the order in which blame judgments are

solicited, which may affect judgments about victims and perpetrators in cases of acquaintance rape.

A high-profile example of victim blaming in a case of acquaintance rape was the 2013 Steubenville, OH case, in which two high school football players were accused of raping a 16-year-old girl at a party while others videoed and took photos of the assault, and were subsequently tried and found guilty of the crime. This case came to international attention partly due to media coverage, which was sympathetic to the perpetrators while failing to consider the victim. NBC's *The Today Show* aired an interview with the former guardians of one of the perpetrators in which they were given a platform to talk about his good character while childhood photos were shown onscreen ('Former guardians defend Steubenville rape suspect', 2013). Media outlets largely avoided

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discussing the blameworthiness of the perpetrators, and instead focused on the victim's intoxication and how a guilty verdict would negatively affect the perpetrators' lives (Estes, 2013). Such coverage was effectively a 'trial by media' for the victim, while the perpetrators were placed under no such scrutiny. The media's framing of the issue could potentially have contributed to the vitriolic victim-blaming and perpetrator-absolving attitudes that were expressed on social media.

Situations where individuals are prompted to make judgments about victims and perpetrators, such as in criminal trial proceedings or when exposed to trials or rape cases through the media, tend to focus attention on either the victim or the perpetrator (via presenting their side of the story, considering the long-term impact on one actor or the other, raising questions about responsibility and avoidability, etc.) before considering the other actor. This may cause a confound for these judgments due to order effects, whereby the order in which information is presented about each actor may have an effect on subsequent judgments. Furthermore, exposure via media to strongly supportive or critical attitudes towards victims or perpetrators in high-profile cases may have longer-term ramifications, including perspective-taking abilities, empathic responding, and subsequent blame judgments of jurors in similar cases (Greene, 1990). Clearly it is important to examine those factors which may reveal how subjective and easily manipulated blame judgments can be.

Most studies of victim blaming in cases of acquaintance rape have not measured the blame attributed to the perpetrator (e.g., Abrams et al., 2003; Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010; Scronce & Corcoran, 1995). The handful of studies assessing perpetrator blame have either used single-item measures (e.g., Kopper, 1996; Stormo, Lang, & Stritzke, 1997), or have not assessed both victim and perpetrator blame (e.g., Viki, Abrams, & Masser, 2004). It is important to measure both victim and perpetrator blame because

they are separate constructs that are not perfectly inversely related, although moderate to strong negative correlations have been found between victim and perpetrator blame (Cohn, Dupuis, & Brown, 2009).

Of the few studies that have assessed both victim and perpetrator blame, it appears that none counterbalanced the order in which these scales were presented (e.g., Cohn et al., 2009; Gerber, Cronin, & Steigman, 2004; Rye, Greatrix, & Enright, 2006; Strömwall, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2013; Trangsrud, 2010). Failure to use counterbalancing (and then test its efficacy) means that the role that order effects may play in blame judgments has been overlooked. Context effects, where answers to a survey question change as a function of the previous items in the questionnaire, may be a factor in judgment formation and in the measurement of these attitudes (Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988). This suggests that scale order should be considered as a potential predictor of victim and perpetrator blame when interpreting past results, and when developing methodologies for future studies into blame.

One mechanism by which scale order may predict blame attribution is perspective-taking. Scale order may result in perspective-taking with the target of one scale or another. Explicit perspective-taking with a defendant leads to increased empathy towards the defendant; likewise, explicit perspective-taking with a victim leads to greater empathy for the victim (Skorinko, Laurent, Bountress, Nyein, & Kuckuck, 2014). Empathy for a target often predicts subsequent judgments of the target's responsibility and appropriate punishment (Wood, James, & Ciardha, 2014). Skorinko et al. (2014) found that perspective-taking which results in empathy for the defendant predicts a lower probability of a guilty verdict, while perspective-taking that results in empathy for the victim predicts a higher probability of a guilty verdict. Similarly, Wood et al. (2014) found that empathy towards the offender positively predicts the leniency of judgments of offender responsibility and agreement with verdict decisions. Thus, if the

order of blame scales causes respondents to perspective-take or empathize with one actor over another, subsequent attributions of blame may differ as a function of scale order.

Furthermore, as blame scales are essentially measures of attitudes, responses to these scales are potentially subject to context effects (Tourangeau, Singer, & Presser, 2003). Context effects can affect cognitive processes during the accessing of an interpretive framework, retrieval and activation of stereotypes and norms, making judgments, and response selection (Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988). Clearly, there are many opportunities for order effects to appear in the process of responding to an attitude measurement questionnaire.

The aim of the current research was to examine whether manipulating the order of victim and perpetrator blame scales in a scenario of acquaintance rape results in differential blame attributions.

Study 1

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 132 first-year psychology students from a large university in Sydney participated in return for course credit, of which 1 was excluded for taking an excessively long time to complete the survey¹ and 2 were excluded for failing to indicate their gender. The final sample comprises 129 participants (76 females, 53 males, $M = 18.89$ years, $SD = 2.07$). The majority of participants identified as Anglo-Saxon or European (65.9%), and the second largest ethnic group is Asian (17.8%). Almost all (97.7%) were Australian citizens or permanent residents.² Participants were randomly allocated to one of two conditions which varied the order in which the participants responded to the blame scales. The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, Short Form (IRMA-S; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999), the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991), and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) were

included as a control, as these factors have been shown to predict victim-blaming attitudes in previous research (Sakallı-Uğurlu, Yalçın, & Glick, 2007; Trangsrud, 2010).

Materials

Rape Scenario Vignettes

Four vignettes, each approximately 260 words long, describe the victim, 'Kathy', who is raped by 'Jason' after meeting him at a party (see Appendix 1). The vignettes are based on materials from Abrams et al. (2003) and Masser et al. (2010). The vignettes vary the victim's level of intoxication and previous drinking behavior, as victim alcohol consumption has been shown to influence victim blame (e.g., Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Harrison, Howerton, Secarea, & Nguyen, 2008). However, for ease of interpretability, the results are reported collapsed over victim intoxication and previous drinking behavior.³

Blame Scales

The victim and perpetrator blame scales each comprise the same eight items derived from Harrison et al. (2008) and Abrams et al. (2003), differing only in the target's name in each item. The items include 'Kathy/Jason was to blame for the incident' and 'Kathy/Jason should feel guilty' (with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The victim blame scale has an additional item: 'How much do you agree Kathy should not have accepted Jason's invitation to go to his apartment if she did not want to have sex with him?'. Higher scores on each scale indicate greater blame attributed to the target of that scale.

Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – Short Form (IRMA-S)

The IRMA-S (Payne et al., 1999) was used to measure rape myth acceptance (RMA). It consists of 20 statements, including three filler

items, which represent common erroneous views about rape, for example: 'It is usually only women who dress suggestively that are raped' and 'A woman who "teases" men deserves anything that might happen' (with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of rape myths.

Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS)

The GBJWS (Lipkus, 1991) consists of seven items assessing the extent to which participants believe that the world is just. Items include 'I feel that people get what they deserve' and 'I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given' (with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate greater belief in a just world.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)

The ASI (Glick & Fiske, 1996) is a 22-item questionnaire comprised of two 11-item scales. One scale assesses benevolent sexism (BS), and includes items such as 'Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess' and 'A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man' (with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). The other scale assesses hostile sexism (HS), and includes items such as 'Women are too easily offended' and 'Women seek to gain power by getting control over men' (with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). In the current experiment, a programming error caused the exclusion of two HS questions. Each participant's average HS score was consequently calculated from the remaining nine questions. Higher scores indicate greater sexism.

Demographics

Participants were asked to report the following demographic information: gender, age, sexual orientation, whether or not English is their first language, ethnic/racial identity,

Australian citizenship status, and how many years they have lived in Australia.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted online through the Qualtrics website. Participants were informed that they were participating in a study about attitudes towards crime and that they would be randomly allocated to read and respond to questions about one of four scenarios depicting a robbery, a physical assault, an acquaintance rape, or a hit-and-run. However, in actual fact, all participants read a vignette about acquaintance rape.

After receiving general instructions on how to complete the survey, participants saw a screen that informed them of their allocation to 'Scenario 3: Acquaintance Rape'. They were then randomly allocated to one of the two order conditions and were asked to read the vignette. Participants then answered the victim blame and perpetrator blame scales, the presentation order of which was varied according to condition. Participants were then presented with the IRMA-S, the GBJWS, and finally the ASI. These questionnaires were presented after the vignettes and blame questions in order to reduce contamination of responses on the dependent measures. Participants then completed the demographic questions. Finally participants were thanked for their participation and presented with a debriefing document and instructions on how to obtain participation credit.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analysis of Control Variables

A chi-square test was carried out which indicates that there is no statistically-significant association between gender and condition, $\chi^2(1) < .01, p = .97$. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out which indicates that there are no significant differences in RMA, just world belief (JWB), HS or BS scores as function of condition, $F(4, 124)$

= 0.12, $p = .97$, Wilk's $\Lambda > .99$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$. Thus, these measures were used as control variables in subsequent analyses.

Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlational Analyses

Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates of the primary measures for each study are presented in Table 1. The means are similar to those reported in past research (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Masser et al., 2010; Sakalli-Ugurlu et al., 2007), and the alphas for each scale range from acceptable to excellent. The intercorrelations for Study 1 are presented in Table 2, the patterns of which are also similar to past research (Cohn et al., 2009; Masser et al., 2010).

Main Analysis

To test the effect of the presentation order of the dependent variables on the responses, two-step hierarchical regressions were run separately on victim and perpetrator blame, controlling for gender (coded 1 = female, 2 = male), JWB, RMA, BS, and HS in the first step, and entering presentation order (coded 0 = victim blame first, 1 = perpetrator blame first) in the second (Table 3). The regression on victim blame revealed that RMA is the only significant predictor in the model.

The regression on perpetrator blame revealed a significant effect of presentation order on perpetrator blame, $\beta = -.16$, $t(122) = -2.02$, $p < .05$, such that those who viewed the victim blame questions first ($M = 6.35$, $SD = 0.64$) tended to attribute more blame [or a greater degree of blame] to the perpetrator ($M = 6.16$, $SD = 0.63$). These results provide preliminary evidence that presentation order affects judgments of perpetrator blame, but not victim blame.

Study 2

A second study was run with the aim of replicating the effect found in Study 1. Additionally,

Table 1. Summary of descriptive statistics for Study 1 ($n = 129$), Study 2 ($n = 120$), and Study 3 ($n = 70$).

Measure (possible range)	Observed range			<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)			α		
	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Victim blame (1–7)	1.00–6.11	1.00–5.55	1.00–5.67	2.53 (1.25)	2.74 (1.24)	2.32 (1.32)	.92	.93	.95
Perpetrator blame (1–7)	4.38–7.00	3.75–7.00	4.00–7.00	6.25 (0.64)	6.09 (0.83)	6.28 (0.75)	.81	.86	.88
Benevolent sexism (1–6)	1.18–5.09	1.45–5.36	1.36–4.27	3.37 (0.72)	3.17 (0.85)	3.02 (0.74)	.78	.85	.76
Hostile sexism (1–6)	1.00–5.22	1.00–4.73	1.00–5.09	3.08 (0.85)	3.08 (0.86)	2.70 (0.90)	.85	.88	.89
Just world belief (1–6)	1.00–5.86	1.43–5.14	1.43–5.57	3.08 (0.78)	3.36 (0.73)	3.31 (0.90)	.83	.79	.86
Rape myth acceptance (1–7)	1.00–4.35	1.00–4.41	1.00–4.76	2.11 (0.86)	2.13 (0.85)	1.90 (0.90)	.90	.89	.92

Table 2. Intercorrelations for Study 1 ($n = 129$).

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Victim blame	—	-.58**	.68***	.31***	.30**	.40***
2 Perpetrator blame		—	-.46***	-.25**	-.12	-.24**
3 Rape myth acceptance			—	.40***	.28**	.64***
4 Just world belief				—	.24**	.39***
5 Benevolent sexism					—	.30**
6 Hostile sexism						—

Note. * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting victim and perpetrator blame for Study 1 ($n = 129$).

Predictor	Victim blame		Perpetrator blame	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.47***		.23***	
Gender		-.02		.06
Rape myth acceptance		.69***		-.52***
Just world belief		.04		-.10
Benevolent sexism		.12		.02
Hostile sexism		-.09		.12
Step 2	.01		.03*	
Presentation order		.11		-.16*

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

in Study 2, ambivalent sexism and belief in a just world scales were presented prior to the experimental manipulation, due to concerns that reading a vignette about rape and answering questions about blame may influence subsequent responses to these control variables. Furthermore, filler items purportedly assessing attitudes towards a range of crimes were presented before the manipulation in order to bolster the cover story, and to increase the temporal distance between the control variables and the manipulation.

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 124 first-year psychology students participated in the study, of which 1 was excluded for taking an excessively long time

to complete the survey. The other 3 were excluded for failing to identify their gender. The final sample comprised 120 participants (89 females, 31 males) with a mean age of 19.46 years ($SD = 3.70$). The majority of participants identified as Anglo-Saxon or European (61.6%), and 30% identified as Asian. As in Study 1, the participants were randomly allocated to one of two order conditions.

Materials

The materials from Study 1 were used in Study 2. However, the ASI was amended to include the two HS questions that had been omitted in Study 1. Eight filler items that referred to crimes of a non-sexual nature (e.g., 'Any person who is careless enough to walk through "dark alleys" at night is partly to be blamed if they are robbed') were also

added (with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). The purpose of these filler items was to bolster the study's cover story (which stated that the study was about attitudes toward crime) and to increase the temporal distance between the ASI and the manipulation.

Procedure

Study 2 followed the same procedure as Study 1, but the presentation order of the control variables differed and filler items were added. Four demographic questions which were considered unlikely to affect subsequent responses were presented first (age, English as the first language, Australian citizenship status, number of years lived in Australia). The GBJWS was presented, then the ASI, followed by the filler items. Participants were then informed that they had been randomly allocated to the acquaintance rape scenario and presented with a vignette, after which they were asked to complete the victim and perpetrator blame measures. The IRMA scale was presented after these measures, followed by the other three demographic questions (gender, sexual orientation, ethnic/racial identity). Participants were then thanked and debriefed.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analysis of Control Variables

A chi-square test was carried out which indicates that there is no statistically significant association between gender and condition, χ^2

(1) = .04, $p = .85$. A MANOVA was carried out which indicates that there are no significant differences in RMA, JWB, HS or BS scores as function of condition, $F(4, 115) = 0.87$, $p = .48$, Wilk's $\Lambda = .97$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$.

Correlational Analyses

The intercorrelations among the variables are largely consistent with those found in Study 1, and in previous research (Table 4).

Main Analysis

To test the effect of the presentation order of the dependent variables on the responses, separate two-step hierarchical regressions were run on victim and perpetrator blame, controlling for gender (coded as 1 = female, 2 = male), JWB, RMA, BS, and HS in the first step, and entering presentation order in the second (Table 5). The regression on victim blame revealed that RMA is the only significant predictor in the model.

The regression on perpetrator blame revealed that those who viewed the victim blame questions first ($M = 6.27$, $SD = 0.73$) tended to attribute more blame [or a greater degree of blame] to the perpetrator ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 0.90$). These results successfully replicate those of Study 1.

Study 3

In order to test the robustness of the effect, a third study was run 18 months after the second

Table 4. Intercorrelations for Study 2 ($n = 120$).

	Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Victim blame	—	-.58***	.70***	.37***	.30**	.45***
2	Perpetrator blame		—	-.53***	-.10	-.20*	-.39***
3	Rape myth acceptance			—	.36***	.42***	.55***
4	Just world belief				—	.34***	.35***
5	Benevolent sexism					—	.39**
6	Hostile sexism						—

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 5. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting victim and perpetrator blame for Study 2 ($n = 120$).

Predictor	Victim blame		Perpetrator blame	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.52***		.32***	
Gender		-.09		-.07
Rape myth acceptance		.65***		-.48***
Just world belief		.11		.13
Benevolent sexism		-.04		.04
Hostile sexism		.08		-.18
Step 2	<.01		.06**	
Presentation order		.08		-.24**

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

study. This was done to ensure that the effect was not due simply to a characteristic of the cohort of initial participants, or the social context in which the first two experiments were run. Studies 1 and 2 were run between May and August 2013, while there was significant media coverage of a number of high-profile rape cases. These included the September 2012 rape and murder of Jill Meagher in Melbourne, the December 2012 gang rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi, and the sentencing in March 2013 of the perpetrators of the previously mentioned Steubenville rape case. Study 3 was run in March and April of 2015, at a time when the media coverage of rape cases was less pronounced.

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 72 first-year psychology students participated in return for course credit, of which 1 was excluded for taking an excessively long time to complete the survey. The second participant was excluded for failing to identify their gender. The final sample comprises 70 participants (53 females, 17 males, $M = 19.29$ years, $SD = 2.96$ years, 71.4% Anglo-Saxon or European, 32.9% Asian).

Participants were randomly allocated to one of two conditions.

Materials and Procedure

This study followed the same procedure as Study 2, except all participants received the same vignette, which is a modified version of Abrams et al.'s (2003) vignette about an acquaintance rape. The vignette was similar in length and tone to the vignettes used in Studies 1 and 2 (see Appendix 1).

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analysis of the Control Variables

A chi-square test was carried out which indicates that there is no statistically significant association between gender and condition, $\chi^2(1) = .49$, $p = .48$. A MANOVA was carried out which indicates that there are no significant differences in RMA, JWB, HS or BS scores as a function of condition, $F(4, 65) = 1.11$, $p = .35$, Wilk's $\Lambda = .94$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$.

Correlational Analyses

The intercorrelations among variables are shown in Table 6. In accordance with both

Table 6. Intercorrelations for Study 3 ($n = 70$).

	Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Victim blame	—	-.73***	.64***	.36**	.41***	.48***
2	Perpetrator blame		—	-.66***	-.26*	-.29*	-.40**
3	Rape myth acceptance			—	.40**	.39**	.63***
4	Just world belief				—	.41***	.31**
5	Benevolent sexism					—	.42***
6	Hostile sexism						—

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Studies 1 and 2, and past research, there is significant intercorrelation in the expected direction between most variables.

Main Analyses

To test the effect of the presentation order of the dependent variables on the responses, two two-step hierarchical regressions were run on victim and perpetrator blame, controlling for gender (coded 1 = female, 2 = male), JWB, RMA, BS, and HS in the first step, and entering presentation order in the second (Table 7). Consistent with Studies 1 and 2, the regression on victim blame found only RMA to be a significant predictor.

Once again, the regression on perpetrator blame revealed that in addition to RMA being

a significant predictor, those who viewed victim blame questions first ($M = 6.45$, $SD = 0.60$) to attribute more blame [or a greater degree of blame] to the perpetrator ($M = 6.10$, $SD = 0.85$).

General Discussion

The findings indicate that the attribution of blame in an acquaintance rape scenario is significantly affected by the order in which the victim and perpetrator blame scales are presented. Interestingly, it appears that only perpetrator blame is affected by scale order, while levels of victim blame remain stable independent of whether the victim blame scale is presented before or after the perpetrator blame scale. Thus, these results have

Table 7. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting victim and perpetrator blame for Study 3 ($n = 70$).

Predictor	Victim blame		Perpetrator blame	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.45***		.44***	
Gender		-.07		-.02
Rape myth acceptance		.50***		-.68***
Just world belief		.08		.02
Benevolent sexism		.15		-.06
Hostile sexism		.10		.05
Step 2	<.01		.04*	
Presentation order		.04		-.20*

Note. * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

implications for studies that test perpetrator blame, which seems to be susceptible to order effects that may artificially increase or decrease the amount of blame attributed. It cannot be assumed that responding is independent of context.

There are a number of possible explanations for the findings. Respondents may spontaneously take the perspective of the subject of the scale they are presented with first, which means that the respondents who view the victim blame questions first will blame the perpetrator more than the respondents who view the perpetrator blame questions first. Viewing the victim blame scale first may cause participants to take the perspective of the victim and experience greater empathy for the victim as a result. In turn, this increased empathy with the victim may increase the blame attributed to the perpetrator, much like it increases the likelihood of a guilty verdict (Wood et al., 2014). No similar effect of order was found for victim blame, possibly because of recent social norms regarding victim blaming, whereby blaming rape victims is increasingly viewed as unacceptable regardless of circumstance. The fact that the current study found lower victim blame scores than those found by Harrison et al. (2008) and Masser et al. (2010) could be indicative of such a trend. Since those studies were conducted, a number of highly-publicized international events and cases of rape have drawn attention to the phenomenon of victim blaming. For example, in 2011, a Canadian police officer's advice to women 'not to dress like a slut' in order to avoid sexual assault (Church, 2011) sparked international 'SlutWalk' protests against blaming sexual assault victims. Public backlash against the media's blaming of the Steubenville victim (mentioned previously) may also have changed views about victim blaming. The horrific gang rape and subsequent death of a young woman in New Delhi in 2012, which received continuing media coverage in Australia (March, 2013), may have increased participants' sympathy for rape victims.

Media coverage and public controversy around high-profile cases of violence against women can educate the public about the seriousness of these issues, and engender attitude change (Flood & Pease, 2009).

Alternatively, the finding of an order effect on perpetrator blame may be due to context effects. Tourangeau and Rasinski (1988) proposed eight cognitive processes that underlie context effects in attitude measurement. A number (or combination) of these context effects may result in order effects in a blame-attribution situation. Firstly, context may act as an interpretive framework. As victim and perpetrator blame scales have different targets, it is possible that they differ in the attitudes they trigger, or the ease with which these are triggered. Furthermore, context is used for interpretation when the context items appear to relate to the same general issue (Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988), as victim and perpetrator blame clearly do. Additionally, context effects resulting from the interpretation of items are stronger when the context items are presented in a block immediately prior to the target item, as opposed to being scattered among unrelated items. Thus, prior items that participants respond to may form an interpretive framework for subsequent responding.

Consistency pressures are similarly more likely when related context items are presented in a block, but they are likely to involve familiar issues (Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988). As there have been increasingly high-profile movements condemning victim blaming, it is possible that respondents in the current context are familiar with prescriptions against victim blaming or against rape myths that result in victim blaming (Gaucher, Hunt, & Sinclair, 2015). By initially answering questions assessing victim blame, respondents may be committing themselves to a position where they assign little blame to the victim and, in order to appear consistent, subsequently increase the blame attributed to the perpetrator. Moderate to strong negative correlations ($r = -.37$ to

-.56; Cohn et al., 2009) have been established between victim and perpetrator blame, supporting the existence of an inverse relationship.

Future studies should test the robustness of this order effect using different vignettes and scenarios that manipulate different aspects of the crime being investigated. Additionally, different scales assessing blame, guilt, and sentencing should be used to determine if the effect generalizes beyond the specific questionnaires used in this study. While the present study focuses on identifying the existence of an order effect in the context of blame attributions, more research is needed into why such an effect might occur – whether it is due to empathy induction, latency or recency effects, spontaneous perspective-taking, context effects, or an as-yet-unidentified mechanism.

It is important to investigate factors that affect judgments of perpetrator and victim blame because the attribution of blame, particularly in cases of acquaintance rape, can have a deleterious effect on victims. That a small change such as altering the order of scales can affect participants' blame attribution demonstrates the ease with which attitudes and attributions can be manipulated. This has real-world ramifications, as the media's choices regarding what information they present – and the questions they ask their viewers (whether implicitly or explicitly) – will affect the victim-blaming attitudes that their viewers express.

Notes

1. In each study, 1 participant took an excessively long time to complete the survey (7–10 SDs above the median). Including all participants in the analysis produced the same pattern of results as reported in the main text. Specifically, in Study 1, the regression on victim blame found that rape myth acceptance (RMA) is the only significant predictor, $\beta = .68$, $t(128) = 7.50$, $p < .001$, and presentation order approaches significance, $\beta = .12$, $t(127) = 1.84$, $p = .07$. The regression on perpetrator blame found that RMA, $\beta = -.52$, $t(128) =$

-4.85 , $p < .001$, and presentation order, $\beta = -.16$, $t(127) = -2.00$, $p = .048$, are significant predictors. RMA is the only significant predictor of victim blame in Study 2, $\beta = .64$, $t(120) = 7.74$, $p < .001$, and Study 3, $\beta = .51$, $t(68) = 4.09$, $p < .001$. In terms of perpetrator blame, RMA, $\beta = -.48$, $t(120) = -4.84$, $p < .001$ in Study 2 and $\beta = -.68$, $t(68) = -5.40$, $p < .001$ in Study 3, and presentation order, $\beta = -.24$, $t(119) = -3.20$, $p = .002$ in Study 2 and $\beta = -.21$, $t(67) = -2.25$, $p = .03$ in Study 3, are significant predictors.

2. Analyses were conducted on the subset of participants ($n = 125$ in Study 1, $n = 116$ in Study 2, and $n = 64$ in Study 3) that excluded those who had lived in Australia for less than 5 years (because they may have different culturally-informed beliefs about rape and victim blame). These analyses produced the same pattern of results as reported in the main text. Specifically, in Study 1, only RMA, $\beta = .66$, $t(120) = 7.14$, $p < .001$, and presentation order, $\beta = .14$, $t(119) = 2.02$, $p = .045$, significantly predict victim blame. Regression on perpetrator blame found that RMA, $\beta = -.52$, $t(120) = -4.69$, $p < .001$, and presentation order, $\beta = -.18$, $t(119) = -2.23$, $p = .03$, are significant predictors. In Studies 2 and 3, regressions on victim blame found that RMA is the only significant predictor, $\beta = .64$, $t(112) = 7.64$, $p < .001$ in Study 2 and $\beta = .47$, $t(60) = 3.52$, $p = .001$ in Study 3. Regressions on perpetrator blame found that RMA is a significant predictor in both studies, $\beta = -.47$, $t(112) = -4.75$, $p < .001$ in Study 2 and $\beta = -.66$, $t(60) = -4.81$, $p < .001$ in Study 3. Presentation order is a significant predictor in both studies, $\beta = -.25$, $t(111) = -3.16$, $p = .002$ in Study 2 and $\beta = -.21$, $t(59) = -2.04$, $p = .046$ in Study 3.
3. For ease of interpretation, the results reported in the text for both Studies 1 and 2 is collapsed across general drinking behavior and level of intoxication. The inclusion of these factors in the analysis produced a similar pattern of results. Specifically, for both Studies 1 and 2, separate four-step hierarchical regressions were run on victim blame and perpetrator blame. Gender, benevolent sexism (BS), hostile sexism (HS), RMA and just world belief (JWB) were entered in the first step, and order, general drinking behavior, and level of intoxication were entered in the second step. Two-way interactions between the independent variables were entered next, and finally the three-way interaction was entered. In Study 1, the only significant predictors of

victim blame are RMA, $\beta = .68$, $p < .001$, and level of intoxication, $\beta = .20$, $p < .01$, and there is a significant interaction between general drinking behavior and order, $\beta = .23$, $p = .04$. In Study 2, the only significant predictor of victim blame is RMA, $\beta = .64$, $p < .001$. In Study 1, RMA significantly predicts perpetrator blame, $\beta = -.52$, $p < .001$, as does the interaction between order and level of intoxication, $\beta = -.40$, $p < .01$. Order approaches significance as a predictor of perpetrator blame, $\beta = -.14$, $p = .07$. In Study 2, the only significant predictors of perpetrator blame are RMA, $\beta = -.48$, $p < .001$, and order, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .01$.

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Appendix 1

Kathy is an outgoing person who likes to go to parties and have a good time. She enjoys socializing, having fun with her friends, and meeting new people.

One Friday night, Kathy went to a club with a group of friends and had a good time talking, dancing and drinking. By the time they left the club, she'd had more drinks than normal and couldn't walk home without falling over, so her friends put her in a taxi.

The next night, Kathy met and got acquainted with Jason at a party thrown by a mutual friend. Since they had a lot in common, they spent the night laughing, dancing, talking and flirting with each other. Kathy drank water and soft drinks throughout the night. At the end of the party, Jason invited Kathy over to his apartment to talk some more and have coffee. They walked back to Jason's apartment and when they got to his room, Kathy started kissing and caressing Jason. Jason then grabbed Kathy and tried to take her clothes off in order to have sex with her. At this point Kathy pushed him away and asked him to stop. However, Jason did not listen to her, and instead used force to hold her down and eventually penetrated her.

Kathy reported the incident to the police and told them she had been raped.