



Perceptions of male victims in depicted sexual assaults: A review of the literature

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Abstract

In recent years there has been a steady increase in the amount of literature on perceptions of male victim of sexual assault. Much of this research focuses around the concept of victim blame. This paper reviews the research on perceptions of male victims of sexual assault, with particular reference to victim blame for male rape. The paper considers the conceptual differences in types of blame in relation to male rape. It also offers to extend the traditional feminist interpretation of victim blame to explain blame toward male as well as female victims. Perceptions of male victims of male and female perpetrators are considered, as are both adult and child victims. The paper concludes by outlining some suggestions for future work and implications for treatment of male victims of sexual assault.

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Keywords: Sexual assault; Male rape; Victim blame

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In the last thirty years, a wealth of experimental research has accumulated on the judgments that people hold about female rape victims. Much of this research has focussed on the fact that some sexual assault victims are held responsible for their assault (Pollard, 1992). A variety of factors, including the characteristics of the victim and the

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perpetrator, and the nature of the assault situation, have been shown to influence judgments towards the victim. In most experimental studies that investigate judgments towards sexual assault victims, respondents are required to respond to hypothetical vignettes, which vary from brief summaries of the situation, to very detailed realistic accounts of 1000 words or more. While written vignette studies comprise the bulk of the work in this area, some researchers employ other types of experimental materials, such as tape recordings of statements given by actors pretending to be rape victims, or even video-taped mock rape trials (Pollard, 1992). Variables of interest to the study are varied between different versions of the vignette. Respondents are required to complete a series of questions pertaining to the vignette, usually relating to victim blame and related concepts, and differences in responses between vignettes are statistically compared.

Until relatively recently, the experimental approach to the study of rape has focused largely on female victims of male perpetrators. Ironically, publicity that rape has received as a feminist issue has meant that male victims of sexual assault have been neglected both by research and by the wider public (Mezey & King, 1992). It is estimated that research, help, and support for male victims is still more than 20 years behind that for female victims (Rogers, 1998). Surveys of male sexual assault in the community reveal that its incidence is quite common, with figures varying from 14% (compared with a sexual victimization rate of 22% for females in this sample; Davies, Pollard, & Archer, 2001) to over 26% (Hickson et al., 1994) in adult samples, depending on the type of assault and the sample investigated (see Davies, 2002 for a review of prevalence studies). Male sexual victimization appears most likely to occur throughout adolescence and young adulthood. Walker, Archer, and Davies (2005) investigated the rape of adult men who had been anally raped since the age of 16. The average age of the assault was 24 years, although the range was quite large and one man was raped in his 50s.

The study by Walker et al. (2005) however, did not include males who had been assaulted before the age of 16. Research on child victimization shows that the risk of sexual victimization increases for both boys and girls as the child gets older, although actual prevalence figures vary enormously depending on factors such as the type of sample, the method of assessment, and the precise definition of abuse (Fergusson & Mullen, 1999). Fergusson and Mullen (1999) reviewed studies investigating prevalence of child sexual abuse in the 1990s and found that if a broad definition of sexual abuse was used (including non-contact abuse), rates varied between 8% and 62.1% for females, and between 3% and 29% for males. If a narrow definition of only penetrative sexual abuse was used figures varied between 1.3% and 28.7% for females, and 1.1% and 14.1% for males.

From such figures on the prevalence of sexual victimization, it is shown that although more females are sexually victimised than males, the rate of sexual assault amongst males is still a notable problem. However, very few male rapes or sexual assaults appear on police files or other official records, due to the fact that only a minority of male victims ever report their assault to the authorities (Hodge & Canter, 1998; King & Woollett, 1997; Walker et al., 2005). For example, only five out of the 40 male rape victims in the study by Walker et al. (2005) had contacted the police after their rape. Only one out of these five cases resulted in a criminal conviction.

As with female victims, the effects of rape and sexual assault on males are often severe, with lasting long term psychological problems, including depression, alcohol or drug misuse, and a range of other mental health problems in adult victims (Walker et al., 2005). Child victims also suffer serious negative effects after sexual abuse both in the short term and in their later adult life. Fergusson and Mullen (1999) reviewed the literature on the effects of sexual abuse on male and female children and found that anxiety, depression, sexualized behavior, and other behavioral problems were common. Fergusson and Mullen cited research from Friedrich et al. (1986) and Sirles et al. (1989) that showed behavioral problems to be more severe in sexually abused children when the sexual abuse was of a lengthy duration, involved physical violence or coercive behaviors.

Considering the frequency of male sexual assault in both childhood and adulthood, and the serious negative effects of such victimization, investigating experimentally the factors that contribute to victim blame and other negative judgments towards sexual assault victims are important in order to understand the secondary victimization that victims encounter (Williams, 1984). Being blamed for the assault is detrimental to the victim's recovery (Frazier & Schauben, 1994) and some victims are blamed for their assault from those to whom they disclose (Walker et al., 2005). It is the case that victims do not report their assaults to the authorities or disclose to family and friends because they feel they will be blamed or disbelieved (Hodge & Cantor, 1998; Walker et al., 2005). Attitudes towards victims have a direct influence on whether or not the victim reports the assault to the police or medical services (Pollard, 1992). This means that most perpetrators of such assault go unpunished, and many victims do not seek the help that they need to recover from the assault (Davies, 2002).

Studies investigating negative perceptions of male victims of sexual assault are still few relative to the wealth of literature on female victims of rape. However, there are sufficient experimental studies to show several consistent findings that make a review article on experimental literature on male victims assault timely. This paper will review the literature on perceptions of both adult and child male victims of sexual assault, and judgments towards victims of male and female perpetrators will be considered. Finally, suggestions for future research will be proposed.

1. Types of blame and victim resistance in male rape

Howard (1984a,b) was the first to apply theoretical aspects of the victim blame literature to perceptions of male rape. Howard used the conceptual differences between behavioral and characterological blame to explain differences in judgments between male and female rape victims. According to Janoff-Bulman (1979) behavioral blame is attributed when something the victim did, i.e. their behavior, could be seen as a causal influence on the event. Characterological blame occurs when something about the victim's character, i.e. the type of person they were, can be seen as a cause of the event.

Howard (1984a,b) showed that there were differences in the way that male and female rape victims were blamed for a stranger rape, based on the distinctions between behavioral and characterological blame. Howard used a scenario in which the victim was raped while out jogging in the countryside, in which the victim submitted to the assault without fighting back. The gender differences in blame attributions were based on the sex role expectations of the behavior and characteristics of men and women. Male victims were blamed for their assault when their behavior, namely, not fighting back, appearing scared, failing to escape, or not resisting could be seen as a causal factor of the assault. Because women are not expected to be able to protect themselves physically, are not expected to be able to fight back or escape from an attacker, female victims are not likely to be blamed in such circumstances (although female victims might be blamed behaviorally for other reasons). Female victims, however, were blamed for the type of person they were — i.e. their character, for example, for being careless or not cautious enough about going out alone.

More recent research pertaining to how people attribute blame to male and female rape victims has shown that people do not necessarily make distinctions between behavioral and characterological blame when attributing blame for rape. In addition, where the two types of blame are distinguishable the distinction is sometimes vague. Anderson (1999) asked participants to make spontaneous attributions of blame towards hypothetical male and female victims of stranger rape in conversation. Anderson found that men and women made both behavioral and characterological blame attributions, which closely matched how rape victims blame themselves for their assault. Furthermore, Anderson found that both men and women's blame was more likely to be behavioral than characterological blame (with about 80% of total blame attributions made to the victim's behavior).

One concept, that of victim physical resistance, did come up regularly in the conversations that Anderson recorded, and though the concepts of behavioral and characterological blame might be problematic, the findings that the degree to which the victim is perceived to resist, does indeed influence judgments towards him or her. Several experimental studies have investigated the role of victim physical resistance in attributions towards female victims, and overall studies have shown that victims tend to be blamed more if they do not resist (Pollard, 1992). However, Howard (1984a,b) reasoned that the role of physical resistance during rape of males would be even more important to judging whether the victim was blameworthy or not, due to societal stereotypes about men being strong, assertive and able to escape from confrontational situations (Archer, 1992; Herek, 1986; Thompson & Pleck, 1986).

Two further studies investigated the effect of victim physical resistance on blame attributions and found that the perceived ability to physically resist a rape attack influences victim blame attributions. Perrott and Webber (1996), in a study where the victim was portrayed as not offering resistance during rape by either a stranger or acquaintance, found similar results to those of Howard (1984a,b) in that male victims were behaviorally blamed, because their ability to physically resist was called into question. Female victims were blamed characterologically, when they were, for example, considered to be too trusting of their attacker. Further, Kassing and Prieto (2003), in one of the few studies in the area that has not used student samples, studied judgments of male and female trainee counselors. Unlike Howard and Perrott and Webber, who did not vary the degree of physical resistance and portrayed victims as not resisting, they manipulated the degree of physical resistance a male victim gave during rape. The victim was portrayed as either not fighting back at all, or portrayed as struggling and attempting to fend off the attacker. It was found that a victim who did not resist was blamed more than a victim who did physically resist his attacker. No research to date has assessed whether the amount of actual physical injuries the victim received during the assault affects attributions in male rape

cases, although this might assert an influence on attributions towards the victim, perpetrator, and the severity of the sexual assault situation.

2. Feminism, gender, and male victims

Feminist explanations for blame for rape focus around societal hatred of women and the existence of a rape supportive, patriarchal culture (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980). Burt (1980) asserted that rape myths – prejudicial and false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists – were prevalent in society. Rape myths are related empirically to victim blame (Krahé, 1988), with traditional negative views about women and heterosexual relationships (Burt, 1980), and with hostile aggression in men (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Findings that male victims are also blamed for rape are difficult to account for within the traditional feminist explanations of rape, which emphasise negative gender stereotypes pertaining to women as being a source of blame attributions. However, myths are also prevalent in society that refer to male victims of rape and sexual assault (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992) and that are associated with victim blame for male rape (Davies & McCartney, 2003).

A considerable amount of research into perceptions of female sexual assault victims has found that women make more pro-victim judgments than men do (see Pollard, 1992 for a detailed review). The fact that men generally blame female victims more than women do has furthered the feminist argument that blame for rape is a result of a patriarchal rape supportive culture (Pollard, 1992). However, it is the case that men also blame male rape victims more than women do, regardless of the rape situation. Davies et al. (2001), Howard (1984a,b), McCaul, Veltrum, Boyechko, and Crawford (1990), and Perrott and Webber (1996) used stranger rape depictions, Whatley and Riggio (1993) used a prison rape depiction, and Perrott and Webber (1996) used an acquaintance rape depiction, all with the same findings.

The majority of experimental work on attributions towards the sexual assault of both women and men has utilized depictions of rape, rather than other forms of sexual assault, such as forced genital touching. In some studies, the term “rape” is not stated within the scenario, rather the act is described using words such as “forced intercourse” or “had sex against his/her will.” Using the term, “rape,” has been considered by some researchers to lead the respondent into making more extreme judgments (see Pollard, 1992). A few studies pertaining to male victims of sexual assaults have investigated judgments towards other forms of sexual assault than rape, but with similar results in that men blame the victim more than women do. For example, an unpublished study by Davies et al. showed that men are also more likely to blame male victims when the assault is a forced fellatio situation (Davies, Pollard & Archer, submitted for publication). In a further unpublished study, Davies, Archer, and Pollard (submitted for publication) used a scenario that depicted a drug-related sexual assault in which the victim was unconscious at the time of the assault. Even when the victim was unconscious, men were still more blaming than women were. Further to studies looking specifically at blame judgments, men also have less sympathy with male victims (Burczyk & Standing, 1989; Davies et al., 2001), and consider the assault less severe (Davies et al., 2001) than women do. Even after viewing scenes of male rape (from the film, *Deliverance*) men are less sympathetic than women to rape victims than when they have not viewed a film depicting male rape (Weisz & Earls, 1995).

Moreover, in some situations, men blame male rape victims more than they do female victims. This is not consistent with the feminist explanation of blame for rape. Nevertheless, men’s greater blaming of male rape victims is consistent with the sex role expectation hypothesis. Men endorse traditional views about masculinity to a greater extent than women do (e.g., Archer, 1992; Thompson & Pleck, 1986), which contribute directly to the negative view of male victims. However, not all studies have shown that male victims are blamed more than female victims. Howard (1984a, b) noted that when general blame items are used as measures, there were no differences between how male and female victims were blamed. The term “general blame” in this instance refers to items that do not specify the type of blame, such as “How much do you blame Steven for what happened?” rather than “How much do you think Steven’s behavior is to blame for what happened?” (behavioral blame), or “How much do you think Steven’s character could be blamed for what happened?” (characterological blame). McCaul et al. (1990) and Schneider, Soh-Chiew Ee, and Aronson (1994) both used general blame items as measures and showed that female victims were blamed more than male victims. Both of these situations were stranger assaults, where the female victim could be seen as violating sex role expectations more than male victims. Thus, these findings are actually consistent with the previous explanation of blame for rape. In the study by Schneider et al., even though the male victim was blamed less than the female victim, the attacker of the male victim was considered less guilty and assigned a lower prison sentence to the attacker of the female victim. Schneider et al. explained this finding in terms of societal stereotypes that as men are meant to be strong

and assertive the fact that they may be psychologically affected by rape is more difficult to grasp than it is when the victim is female.

3. Homophobia and victim blame

All of the most recent studies on judgments towards male rape have used sexual orientation manipulations within their designs. Several studies (Anderson, 2004; Burt & DeMello, 2002; Davies, Archer et al., submitted for publication; Davies & McCartney, 2003; Davies et al., 2001; Davies, Pollard et al., submitted for publication; Ford, Liwag-McLamb & Foley, 1998; Kassing & Prieto, 2003; Mitchell, Hirschman & Hall, 1999; Wakelin & Long, 2003; White & Robinson Kurpius, 2002) have investigated the effects of sexual orientation on attributions toward male victims of a male perpetrator in a variety of assault situations. All, without exception, and regardless of the assault situation, have found that gay victims are judged to be more at fault or to blame than heterosexual victims are. It is reasoned that the homosexual (albeit non-consensual) nature of male rape inspires homophobic attributions that result in victim blame and other negative attributions towards male victims. The fact that men are more blaming towards male rape victims supports this idea. Heterosexual men, on average, are more homophobic than women (Davies, 2004; Kite & Whitley, 1996). This shows in specific situations where they are able to negatively evaluate gay men, not only in rape situations, but also in cases such as domestic violence (Harris & Cook, 1994) and in consenting sexual situations (Davies & McCarthy, 2004).

In addition to victim blame, gay male victims are more negatively evaluated on a number of different concepts. For example, Mitchell et al. (1999) found the assault was considered to be a more pleasurable event for a gay victim, and he was seen to have suffered less trauma than a heterosexual victim did. Davies et al. (2001) found that anal rape was considered less severe for gay male victims than heterosexual ones. Davies et al. suggested, in line with Shaver's (1970) defensive attribution hypothesis, that heterosexual men would not blame heterosexual victims due to perceiving personal similarity (thus sympathizing) with them. Moreover, Doherty and Anderson (2004) found that in conversations about male rape men and women conceptualised the suffering of male rape victims to be layered in which heterosexual victims suffer more than gay victims do.

Although all of these studies have discussed homophobic attitudes as a reason for increased blame attributions towards gay male rape victims, most have done so without the use of direct empirical evidence. However, two studies have found that blame towards the victim correlates with homophobic attitudes (Burt & DeMello, 2002; Davies, Pollard et al., submitted for publication), and two have found that attitudes about traditional gender roles relate to victim blame (Davies, Pollard et al., submitted for publication; White & Robinson Kurpius, 2003). Burt and DeMello (2002) found that homophobic participants were more likely to attribute blame and responsibility judgments to gay male victims than they did towards heterosexual male victims. Further, Davies, Pollard et al. (submitted for publication) found that homophobia was strongly correlated with blame towards gay male victims in male participants ($r=0.7$) but not towards heterosexual male victim (0.01). White and Kurpius (2003) showed that attitudes towards male roles, a scale that measured anti-feminism, and attitudes towards women all predicted blame towards gay victims. Davies, Pollard et al. (submitted for publication), using similar attitude scales to those used by White and Kurpius, found that attitudes towards male role norms and hostile sexism were correlated with blame towards gay male victims, but not towards heterosexual victims.

All of the above research pertains to heterosexual men's judgments towards male rape victims. Only one study – Davies and McCartney (2003) – has investigated gay men's judgments towards male rape. Investigating gay men's judgments is pertinent for several reasons. First, it can be assumed that gay men are less homophobic than heterosexual men are. Second, gay men would perceive themselves more similar to a gay male rape victim than heterosexual men do, thus in line with Shaver's (1970) defensive attribution hypothesis, should not blame him. Finally, although no studies have investigated gay men's awareness of male rape, it could be that gay men are more aware of male rape issues than heterosexual men are. If this is the case, gay men should not endorse male rape myths as much as heterosexual men do. Thus, they should not resort to using false beliefs about male rape in order to make negative attributions about a victim. Indeed, Davies and McCartney found that only heterosexual men in a general population sample of young people in the North West of England blamed a gay male rape victim, or endorsed myths about male rape. Gay men and heterosexual women did not express negative views about a gay male rape victim.

All of these studies relate to the blame for male sexual assault victims who have been abused by male perpetrators. We now turn to the perceptions of male sexual assault victims who have been assaulted by female perpetrators.

4. Male victims of female perpetrators

Most people, including many psychologists, view the sexual assault of men by women as somewhat implausible. Indeed, it is commonly believed that a woman cannot force a man to have sex (Sarrel & Masters, 1982). Because people are socialised to believe that women are sexually passive and men are sexual initiators, it is difficult to imagine a dominant woman coercing an unwilling man to have sex (Smith, Pine, & Hawley, 1988; Struckman-Johnson, 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994), or for the man to be unwilling if the opportunity for sex occurred.

One experimental study in the 1980s investigated people's attributions of blame towards male victims of sexual assault when the sex of the perpetrator is varied (Smith et al., 1988). They found that male victims of sexual assault by female perpetrators were considered more likely to have encouraged the episode and to have derived sexual pleasure from it than was the case for men who were victims of other males. This difference was particularly pronounced for male respondents (47% said that the sexual assault of a man by a woman was pleasurable for the victim, compared with a figure of 9% for the female respondents). Smith et al. asserted that men's relatively positive views about sexual assaults carried out by female perpetrators were due to their endorsement of stereotypic views about male sexuality, such as men should always be ready for, and enjoy sex, with a willing woman.

In a follow up to the study by Smith et al. (1988), Davies, Archer et al. (submitted for publication) showed that the victim's sexual orientation also affects reactions towards male victims of female perpetrators. Davies et al., found that in sexual assaults by a female perpetrator, men blamed heterosexual male victims more than they blamed gay male victims. According to Davies et al., men will deride male victims in the belief that men should always take, rather than resist, any opportunity of sex with a woman. Gender role beliefs, such as men should always be sexually available to women, serve to minimise the perceived effects that sexual assault has on men assaulted by women (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994).

In a set of studies in the 1990s, using a slightly different design to the usual hypothetical scenario paradigm, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson, investigated a number of factors that influenced people's judgments towards unwanted sexual touches in hypothetical situations. Rather than asking participants to read a story written in the third person about a hypothetical victim, they asked college students to imagine that they were in a situation where either a man or a woman unexpectedly touched them on the genitals. In their 1993 study male and female respondents were asked to indicate how they thought they would feel if they became the victim of a sexual assault by a person who was either the same or the opposite sex as themselves (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1993). Women said that they would respond with a strong negative reaction to a man's uninvited genital touch. The women reported that they would feel a sense of physical violation and fear of physical harm. However men considered that they would find the same genital touch by a female initiator to be only minimally negative. However, both men and women felt that a genital touch from a same sex person would be very negative. In a follow-up to this study, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1994) asked college men to rate their reactions on a number of variables, including feelings of pleasure and violation to an uninvited sexual advance from a female acquaintance. They found that men were more negative towards this situation if the female used a high level of force, or if she was portrayed as unattractive. Men felt positively towards the advance if the level of force was low and the female was portrayed as attractive. Their next study in 1996 furthered these findings by showing that men were more negative towards forceful sexual advances when the female was a stranger than when she was a romantic date (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1996). Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson explained these findings in terms of gender role socialisation that has encouraged men to be dominant and to initiate sexual behavior while the same behavior by women is discouraged, or is not expected. Historically, women were seen not to have sexual autonomy and to be the property of men (Donat & D'Emilio, 1992). It could still be argued that women have fewer sexual rights than men, but in some cases it is more acceptable for a woman to deny sexual access to a man than for a man to deny sexual access to a woman. Even in situations involving minor sexual violations (such as non-consensual kissing), participants regarded it as more acceptable for a woman to violate a man's sexual consent than the other way around (Margolin, 1990). One explanation for this is that a man's sexual initiation is seen as more threatening and thus more serious, than that of a woman. Male subjects were less tolerant than female subjects of this male refusal. Some were scathing: One said "Don't be a wuss," another said that he would love a woman to do that to him, although others labeled her as "forward" or "pushy."

So far all of the research discussed has concerned adult victims of rape or sexual assault. We now turn to the literature on child victims to consider the similarities in attributions between adult and child victims of male sexual assault.

5. Child victims

There have been a number of studies since the 1980s that have assessed perceptions of child sexual abuse when male victims are concerned. In some studies, similar results to those of adult sexual assault have been found. The first study to investigate attributions of fault to male child victims of sexual abuse was that of [Waterman and Foss-Goodman \(1984\)](#). Waterman and Foss-Goodman manipulated both the gender and the age of the child, who was portrayed as being 7, 11 or 15 years of age, and abused by an adult male perpetrator. As with studies on adult victims, male students attributed more fault to a male than a female victim, but only when the victim was a 15 year-old. The major reason for blame judgments being made was that the victim should have resisted, again consistent with studies on adult male rape victims.

The role of victim resistance in a child victimization situation was also researched by another early study on this subject. [Broussard and Wagner \(1988\)](#) manipulated perpetrator gender, victim gender, and victim response (resisting, passive or encouraging) in a student sample, and found that a child aged 15 years who resisted during a sexual assault by an adult, was considered less responsible than a child who behaved in a passive or encouraging manner. Interestingly, Broussard and Wagner found that while the perpetrator was considered more responsible than the victim in all conditions, less responsibility was attributed to the perpetrator when the child was encouraging, male, and assaulted by a female. Broussard and Wagner showed that child victims were attributed some responsibility where the abuse is seen as non-detrimental (in that the victim was judged as having no negative effects of the abuse), or even seen as a positive or “educational” experience for the victim (where no negative effects of the abuse were perceived). As with the adult studies, male respondents were more blaming than females were. Wagner, Aucoin and Johnson replicated [Broussard and Wagner’s \(1988\)](#) study in 1993. They sampled American psychologists and found them subject to the same attributional biases as students, namely that 15 year-old male victims of female perpetrators were more negatively evaluated than younger children, female victims, or those assaulted by males.

Therefore, it appears that children approaching adulthood are subjected to the same negative evaluations with regard to gender role stereotypes as adult males are. Even professionals who are trained to work with children consider some types of sexual abuse non-damaging, particularly where the sexual abuse of boys or female perpetration of abuse was concerned ([Eisenberg, Owens, & Dewey, 1987](#)). Eisenberg et al., investigated attitudes towards child victims of incestuous abuse by an adult family member amongst health professionals (health visitors, nurses and medical students), and found that 33% of the sample believed girls would be more seriously affected by incest than boys. Respondents also felt that abuse that did not involve sexual intercourse was less damaging to victims of either sex and that abuse which involved female perpetrators, such as mother-on-son, or sister-on-sister abuse was less serious than abuse involving a male perpetrator.

Other recent studies have shown that the attributional biases that were in operation in the 1980s and early 1990s have not changed over time. [Back and Lips \(1998\)](#), [Maynard and Weiderman \(1997\)](#) and [Quas, Bottoms, Haegerich and Nysse-Carris \(2002\)](#) in United States samples, [Davies and Rogers \(2004\)](#) with a United Kingdom sample, and [Mellott, Wagner, and Broussard \(1997\)](#) with an Indian sample, have all shown that when the victim is a 15 year-old male, and the perpetrator an adult female, the victim is considered more responsible than are younger children, or those assaulted by male perpetrators.

Although children of ages below the age of puberty do not tend to be attributed responsibility for their assault, in one study by [Rogers and Davies \(submitted for publication\)](#) even a 10 year-old male victim was attributed negative evaluations when he was assaulted by a woman. Rogers and Davies found although men deemed a 10 year-old victim too young to be judged blameworthy, the victim was seen as having a causal role in their assault, despite being six years below the legal age of consent in the country the study was conducted (the United Kingdom). Although men had as much sympathy with the victim’s plight as women did, and felt that the police should take the assault very seriously, men still saw the assault as having only a moderately negative impact on the victim’s life. Female perpetrators were considered less responsible, less blameworthy (particularly by men), and less guilty than male perpetrators. Thus, even though respondents were just as pro-victim towards victims of female versus male perpetrators – for example, by treating the assault as very severe and attributing victims little causal role in it – they still perceived female perpetrators less negatively than male perpetrators. It seems that even when the victim is a child under the age of puberty, the same type of attribution is forthcoming. This is worrying when we consider that up to a fifth of all child sexual abusers are female ([Ferguson & Mullen, 1999](#)).

All of the above research pertains to the sexual assault of children whereby the perpetrator was portrayed as an adult. In this research the age of the perpetrator is sometimes stated. For example, [Rogers and Davies \(submitted for](#)

publication) and Broussard and Wagner (1988) stated that the perpetrator was 35 years old. However, we are not aware of any published research pertaining to male sexual victimization where the perpetrator's age has been varied or where the perpetrator has been specifically portrayed as a child. Such research would be useful as perpetrator age may affect judgments towards the victim. In particular, assessing judgments towards child on abuse sexual abuse would be useful, considering that this does occur in real cases (Fergusson & Mullen, 1999).

6. Discussion and summary

This paper has highlighted consistent findings within the experimental study of judgments toward male sexual assault victims, which can be summarized as follows. First, male rape victims tend to be blamed more than female victims on behavioral blame measures, due to societal stereotypes that a man should be able to escape or fight his way out of a confrontational situation (Davies et al., 2001; Howard, 1984a,b; Perrott & Webber, 1996).

Second, sex role expectations of gendered behavior relate closely to victim blame towards male and female rape victims. Traditional views about masculinity and gender roles relate to homophobia (Davies, 2004), and both contribute to the negative evaluation of male rape victims. The way that homophobia contributes to victim blame for male rape has been supported in different avenues of research. Studies have consistently shown that male victims portrayed as gay are more negatively evaluated than heterosexual victims (Anderson, 2004; Burt & DeMello, 2002; Davies, Archer et al., submitted for publication; Davies & McCartney, 2003; Davies et al., 2001; Davies, Pollard et al., submitted for publication; Ford et al., 1998; Kassing & Prieto, 2003; Mitchell et al., 1999; Wakelin & Long, 2003; White & Robinson Kurpius, 2002). Men are more homophobic than women (Davies, 2004; Kite & Whitley, 1996) and it is the case that men blame victims more than women do (Davies, Archer et al., submitted for publication; Davies et al., 2001; Davies, Pollard et al., submitted for publication; Howard, 1984a,b; McCaul et al., 1990; Perrott & Webber, 1996; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). To further the argument that traditional gender stereotypes contribute to victim blame, only the most homophobic people blame the victim (Burt & DeMello, 2002; Davies et al., submitted for publication). Finally, the homophobia argument can be supported as only heterosexual men blame gay male rape victims (Davies & McCartney, 2003).

Third, male victims of female perpetrators tend to be more negatively evaluated than those assaulted by male perpetrators (Davies, Archer et al., submitted for publication; Davies, Pollard et al., submitted for publication; Smith et al., 1988). Again, this can be explained in terms of the endorsement of traditional views about masculinity, in this instance, the endorsement of the view that men should be ready for sex with a willing woman at any time. Fourthly and finally, even child victims are subject to the same myths and biases when approaching adulthood, and especially when the perpetrator is female (Back & Lips, 1998; Broussard & Wagner, 1988; Davies & Rogers, 2004; Eisenberg et al., 1987; Maynard & Weideman, 1997; Mellott et al., 1997; Quas et al., 2002). These findings extend the traditional theoretical feminist analysis of rape to show that not only do negative views about gender roles contribute to negative judgments towards female victims, but they also influence negative evaluations of male victims.

Findings from experimental studies are also important on a practical level. Treatment services need to be aware of the negative attributional biases that the victim might have been subjected to from people to whom they have disclosed, and should be prepared to counter these attributions throughout treatment. In addition, findings from experimental research, such as this, also guide the treatment of perpetrators. For example, it is imperative that treatment services not assume the same biases as the public regarding female perpetration of sexual offenses. Training for individuals treating female perpetrators should encourage workers to consider their own biases that could affect work with female perpetrators, such as the fact that they might consider offenses by women to be less severe than those by men (Davies & Rogers, 2004).

Although experimental research is useful for guiding treatments of victims and perpetrators, it must be borne in mind that studies of this type use hypothetical situations that may lack ecological validity of working with real cases. Another limitation that should be acknowledged is the use of student samples. Most studies of this type use students, largely for convenience, and the limitations of using such samples are highlighted elsewhere (Pollard, 1992). It is important for future studies to use broader samples, such as the general public, or specific samples from applied settings, such as the police or medical services. The few studies of male victims that have used samples other than students have shown consistent findings with those of students (Davies & McCartney, 2003; Eisenberg et al., 1987; Wagner et al., 1993), but it is still important not to assume that all findings from narrow samples can be generalized to the wider population.

Although the current research-base shows interesting and informative findings, there is still a lot of work to do in the experimental study of male sexual assault. Issues such as victim attractiveness and attire have been investigated with regard to female victims, but it is yet unknown how relevant such variables would be in making judgments towards male victims. Although it is clear that gay male victims are blamed more than heterosexual victims by homophobic heterosexual males, it is unknown what specific characteristics of the victim would produce the highest level of negative attributions. It could be speculated that gay male victims portrayed as looking “camp¹” would be blamed more than those who are straight-acting. Research should also consider reactions towards transgendered victims. Transgendered individuals including cross-dressing men, and male-to-female (MTF) and female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals face a lot of violence in society. Some of that violence is in the form of sexual assault (Davies, 2002). Therefore investigating perceptions of transgendered individuals is important on a practical as well as theoretical level. Davies and Hudson (submitted for publication), in a currently unpublished study, have begun to investigate perceptions of transgendered victims of rape by comparing reactions toward those who were portrayed as transgendered (a cross-dresser, a MTF, and a FTM transsexual) with gay or heterosexual male victims. They found that transgendered victims (particularly the cross-dresser) were blamed more for their rape than were either the gay or the heterosexual male victims (though the heterosexual victim was blamed the least of all of the victims).

Studies on gay male victims should also be extended to cover adolescent male victims. Studies have shown that 15 year-old males are more negatively evaluated when they are assaulted by a female perpetrator, but no studies have investigated how negative people might be towards young gay male victims, despite the fact that many gay men identify as being gay in early adolescence and well before the legal age of consent (Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990). In this type of situation it could be that people would be more negative towards those assaulted by males, in line with the literature on adult victims (Davies, Archer et al., submitted for publication). Research into mental health problems in gay men show that young or adolescent gay men are very vulnerable (Garnets et al., 1990). It is therefore important to investigate reactions towards young sexual assault victims.

In conclusion, recent research interest in male rape is encouraging. More is now known about the nature of the blame attributions and other negative judgments towards male sexual assault victims, such as how certain attitudes relate to those judgments. This knowledge informs educators about what attitudes and concepts to focus on in order to attempt to reduce negative evaluations towards male victims. Nevertheless, more education is needed for the general public to encourage victims to come forward, and more publicity is needed to dispel the myths about male sexual assault. It is important for research into male sexual assault to continue to further the understanding of the negative judgments into this type of violent behavior.

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¹ “Camp” is a style of homosexual behavior that is effeminate and often exaggerated for effect (Swannell, 1986).

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