Attitudes Toward Victims of Rape
Effects of Gender, Race, Religion, and Social Class

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Although previous literature focusing on perceptions of victims of rape has examined how gender, race, and culture influence the attitudes one holds toward victims, these studies have yielded mixed results. This study compared perceptions of victims of rape across a wide range of ages, educational backgrounds, religions, and income levels, while focusing on gender and racial differences. Results indicate (N = 220) that victims of rape are generally viewed more sympathetically by females than by males and by Whites than by African Americans. However, the effect of race disappears when socioeconomic variables are controlled, suggesting a more complex relationship. Also, a hierarchical regression indicates that age, sex, education, and income are significant predictors of attitudes toward victims. This study builds on existing research that examines such attitudes from a cultural perspective and extends this literature by examining the interactive effects of several demographic variables within a community sample.

Keywords: victims of rape; attitudes; demographic variables; gender; race; educational background; religion; income level

Despite increased public awareness of violence against women during the past 20 years, the incidence of rape has remained at a high level in the United States. The National Crime Victimization Survey reported that 246,180 women experienced rape or sexual assault in the year 2000 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). It has also been estimated that one of every eight adult women in America has experienced forcible rape at some time in her life (National Victim Center and Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, 1992). An extensive body of research has examined the social and psychological outcomes of a woman who was a victim of rape. This literature has consistently shown that individuals who were raped are more likely to expe-
perience depression, anxiety, and traumatic symptoms compared to nonvictims (Thompson & West, 1992). However, the impact of rape on a woman is not limited to the act itself. Instead, so-called secondary victimization may result from negative experiences within one’s social group or with authorities who may hold negative attitudes toward victims of rape (Campbell & Raja, 1999; George & Martinez, 2002; Ullman, 1996; White & Robinson Kurpius, 1999). Examples of such attitudes include those that blame the victim, question the victim’s credibility, imply that the victim deserved being raped, denigrate the victim, and trivialize the rape experience (Ward, 1988).

One important issue regarding the perception of victims of rape is how these individuals are perceived across racial, cultural, and gender groups. The United States is becoming a more pluralistic society, and as such, considerations of race and ethnicity have become especially important. The high incidence of rape coupled with increasing cultural pluralism demands a greater understanding of how victims of rape are perceived across racial, cultural, and gender groups. However, previous research examining the relationship between demographic characteristics and attitudes toward victims of rape has yielded ambiguous and inconclusive results. The current study builds on and extends the current literature that examines perceptions of victims of rape from a cultural perspective, analyzing the interactive effects of race, gender, age, education, income, and religious affiliation.

**ASSESSING ATTITUDES TOWARD VICTIMS OF RAPE**

Although several studies focusing on individuals’ perceptions of victims of rape have been published, often the assessment of these perceptions is embedded in a larger questionnaire (e.g., Feild, 1978; Kalof & Wade, 1995; Sheldon & Parent, 2002) or scenario (George & Martinez, 2002; Gerdes, Dammann, & Heilig, 1988; Kopper, 1996; Varelas & Foley, 1998), with attitudes toward victims of rape seldom the main focus of the instrument or investigation. For example, Feild’s (1978) Attitudes Toward Rape (ATR) Scale measures eight factors related to rape; however, only one half of these factors address the perception of victims of rape (Ward, 1988). Similarly, Burt’s (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) Scale measures three factors related to rape myths; however, only one of these factors assesses myths about victims of rape (Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997). Interpreting results from studies that employ these scales is difficult in that group differences might be due to differences in attitudes toward rape, acceptance of rape myths, attitudes toward victims of rape, or some other confounding factor.
Unfortunately, the vast majority of research on attitudes toward victims of rape has employed either the ATR or the RMA (see Anderson et al., 1997). As a result, it is difficult to make conclusions regarding how cultural variables affect perceptions of victims of rape based on the prior literature.

Considering this limitation of the previous literature, Ward (1988) argued for the development of a single, psychometrically valid, instrument designed specifically for the assessment of attitudes toward victims of rape. Subsequently, Ward developed the Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS), a 25-item Likert-type scale designed to measure favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward victims of rape (rather than toward rape in general). Within the rape literature, a relatively small number of studies have employed the ARVS (see Anderson et al., 1997). Of these studies, only a few have provided information regarding the relationship between demographic variables and attitudes toward victims of rape. With respect to gender differences, females have been consistently shown to hold more favorable attitudes toward victims of rape than males (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Lee & Cheung, 1991; Ward, 1988; White & Robinson Kurpius, 1999; Xenos & Smith, 2001). In addition to gender differences, several studies have examined ethnic differences. In a comparison of Whites and Latinos, Whites were shown to hold more favorable attitudes toward victims of rape than Latinos (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003). Similarly, Asian Americans have been shown to endorse more negative attitudes toward victims of rape, compared to Whites (Lee & Cheung, 1991; Mori, Bernat, Glenn, Selle, & Zarate, 1995). Finally, evidence exists to suggest that individuals with more fundamentalist religious convictions hold more negative attitudes toward victims of rape (Sheldon & Parent, 2002).

A further limitation of the previous research examining attitudes toward victims of rape has been an excessive dependency on college student samples. As a result, it is difficult to make generalized conclusions based on these studies (Anderson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). This is especially problematic when examining demographic relationships, considering that there is typically little variance in many demographic variables (age, race, education) within college populations (Anderson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Of the studies that have assessed demographic relationships with attitudes toward victims of rape using samples of community residents, none has employed the ARVS, making conclusions based on these studies difficult for the reasons highlighted previously.

The current study accounts for these limitations by examining the interactive effects of several demographic variables including race, sex, age, education, income, and religious affiliation, using an instrument designed solely for the measurement of attitudes toward victims of rape. The current study
also uses data from a randomly selected sample of community residents, instead of college students, thus increasing the generalizability of the results.

METHOD

Data Collection

The sampling frame for the current study was limited to individuals residing in St. Louis, Missouri. Demographic information (racial composition and income levels) by zip code was obtained from St. Louis City and County census data (Missouri State Census Data Center, 1993). Using these data, St. Louis County was divided into four regions: north, central, south, and suburbs to ensure adequate racial and economic variance within the sample. Two zip codes were then randomly selected from within each of these four regions, yielding a total of eight zip codes within the sampling frame. Selected zip codes were then given to Americanist, a company that provides lists of names, addresses, and telephone numbers based on criteria specified by the purchaser. Within each of the eight zip codes, 125 addresses were randomly selected (for a total of 1,000) and sent a packet containing the study materials. Of the 1,000 individuals contacted, 220 people responded, yielding a response rate of 22%. To ensure anonymity of responses for participants, follow-up techniques designed to improve the response rate were not employed.

Instrumentation

*Attitudes Toward Rape Victim Scale.* Participants completed the Attitude Toward Rape Victim Scale (ARVS; Ward, 1988), which is a 25-item Likert-type scale designed to measure favorable versus unfavorable attitudes toward victims of rape (rather than toward rape in general). Scale items were developed with an emphasis on victim blame, significance of victim experiences, victim deservedness, and disbelief in victim stories. All items are written in simple and succinct language, suitable for participants of varying educational backgrounds. Responses indicate participant’s levels of agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Attitude scores are calculated by summing participant responses (Items 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15, 19, and 22 are reversed scored) and, therefore, the range of possible scores extends from 25 to 125. Higher total
scores indicate more negative attitudes toward victims of rape. Since the development of the ARVS, it has been used in 15 countries throughout the world, with most studies reporting Cronbach’s alpha scores greater than .80.

**Demographics questionnaire.** Participants indicated their sex, race, age, marital status, income, education, occupation, and religious affiliation by answering standard demographic questions.

### RESULTS

**Demographic Characteristics**

The sample consisted of 104 males (47.3%) and 101 females (45.9%) with 15 participants not reporting their gender ($N = 220$). Of the 220 respondents, 171 (77.7%) were White, and 49 (23.3%) were African American. The sample comprised individuals across the life span with 31 (14.1%) between the ages 18 and 30 years, 39 (17.7%) between ages 31 and 40 years, 56 (25.5%) between ages 41 and 50 years, 36 (16.4%) between ages 51 and 60 years, 19 (8.6%) between ages 61 and 70 years, 33 (15%) between ages 71 and 80 years, and 6 (2.7%) older than age 80 years. The sample also represented a wide range of religious affiliations including 57 (25.9%) Catholics, 30 (13.6%) of Jewish faith, 74 (33.6%) Protestants, 31 (14.1%) from other religions, and 23 (10.5%) reported having no religious affiliation. No participants reported being Muslim.

Overall, the sample was highly educated; however, there was some variability on this dimension. Of the total sample, 29% completed graduate school, with an additional 10% completing some graduate work. Furthermore, 23% of the sample had a bachelor’s degree, and 12% completed junior college. In addition, 19 (9%) participants had no college training, and of this group six (3%) had less than a high school education.

Finally, the sample comprised a diverse array of socioeconomic backgrounds. Fifty-four (24%) participants had a total yearly family income of less than U.S. $30,000, with 88 (40%) earning between $30,000 and $80,000, and 72 (33%) making more than $80,000. A substantial portion of the sample (56.8%) held professional or managerial occupations, whereas others reported occupations in transportation (2.3%), service (4.5%), technical specialties (5.5%), and administrative support (3.6%). Two participants (1%) were unemployed.
Group Differences

A 2 (sex: male or female) × 2 (race: White or African American) ANOVA on the total ARVS score revealed two significant main effects and a significant interaction effect. Note that for these analyses, and the subsequent regression analyses, the mode response was entered for all missing values. First, there was a main effect of sex, $F(1, 201) = 17.09, p < .001$. Analysis of cell means indicates that males ($M = 54.047$) scored significantly higher on the ARVS than females ($M = 45.573$). This suggests that males are less sympathetic toward victims of rape than females. Second, there was a main effect of race, $F(1, 201) = 5.458, p < .05$. African American respondents ($M = 52.204$) scored significantly higher on the ARVS than White respondents ($M = 47.416$), suggesting that African Americans hold less sympathetic views of victims of rape than Whites. Finally, a Sex × Race interaction effect was significant, $F(1, 201) = 4.72, p < .05$ (see Table 1). An examination of the marginal means reveals that African American males hold the least sympathetic views toward victims of rape ($M = 58.667$), followed by White males ($M = 49.427$), African American females ($M = 45.741$), and White females ($M = 45.405$). Follow-up comparison analyses reveal that African American males hold significantly less sympathetic views toward victims of rape than White males, White females, and African American females. However, White males did not differ significantly from either White or African American females.

A one-way ANOVA was also performed comparing the different religious affiliations on ARVS scores. No significant differences emerged (all $p$’s > .05). Similarly, no differences were found in a comparison of religious versus nonreligious participants.

Regression Analyses

To examine the factors that predict whether individuals will have sympathetic attitudes toward victims of rape, we conducted a series of hierarchical regressions. Demographic characteristics (age, sex, and race) were included in Model 1. Model 2 consisted of the variables in Model 1, plus socioeconomic indicators (income and education). To analyze the interactive effects of sex and race on attitudes toward victims of rape, separate hierarchical regressions were performed for the complete sample, males only, females only, Whites only, and African Americans only.

Table 2 shows the results of these analyses, using total score on the ARVS as the dependent variable. Overall, Model 1 of the complete sample analysis was significant, accounting for 14.2% of the total variance, $F(3, 197) =$
10.781, \( p < .001 \) in ARVS scores. Of the variables in Model 1 of the complete sample, all three predictors were statistically significant, with age having the strongest relationship with ARVS scores (\( \beta = .278, p < .001 \)). The sign associated with this standardized beta coefficient suggests that increases in ARVS scores (i.e., less sympathetic attitudes) were associated with being older. In other words, older respondents held less sympathetic attitudes toward victims of rape than younger participants. Sex also significantly predicted scores on the ARVS (\( \beta = .215, p < .01 \)), with males being associated with higher scores on the ARVS, indicating that they held less sympathetic views of victims of rape than females. Finally, race was a significant predictor of ARVS scores (\( \beta = .180; \) coded White = 0, African American = 1). Examination of the beta coefficient suggests that African American respondents reported less sympathetic attitudes toward victims of rape than White respondents.

Model 2 included respondents’ education levels and income levels, along with the three variables in Model 1. Overall, Model 2 accounted for 21.4\% of the variance in ARVS scores, a significant increase from Model 1, \( F(5, 197) = 10.463, p < .001 \). Education (\( \beta = -.159, p < .05 \)) and income (\( \beta = -.206, p < .05 \)) were significant predictors of changes in attitudes toward victims of rape. Examination of the beta coefficients for these variables indicates that respondents with higher education and higher income held more sympathetic views of victims of rape. Model 2 also shows that the relationship of race with ARVS score is eliminated when education and income are included in the model, suggesting that the variance in attitudes of victims of rape is better explained by education and income than by race. Age (\( p < .01 \)) and sex (\( p < .001 \)) remained significant predictors in Model 2 and indicate that younger respondents and females held more sympathetic attitudes toward victims of rape than older participants and males.

### Table 1: Mean ARVS Scores With Standard Deviations by Race and Sex (\( N = 220 \))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>African American</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(( n = 163 ))</td>
<td>49.43(^{a})</td>
<td>(11.23)</td>
<td>58.67(^{b})</td>
<td>(12.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong> (( n = 101 ))</td>
<td>45.40(^{a})</td>
<td>(11.55)</td>
<td>45.74(^{a})</td>
<td>(10.86)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** ARVS = Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale. Higher scores indicate less sympathetic views toward victims of rape. Values not sharing a similar superscript are significantly different.
| TABLE 2: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Attitudes Toward Victims of Rape |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
|                                                   | Complete Sample                                  | Males Only                                      | Females Only                                     | Whites Only                                      | Blacks Only                                      |
|                                                   | (N = 220)                                        | (n = 104)                                       | (n = 101)                                        | (n = 171)                                        | (n = 49)                                         |
| Age                                               | 1.907***                                        | 1.362**                                        | 1.766**                                         | 1.388*                                          | 2.900***                                        | 1.983***                                         | –723                                              | –1.027                                           |
|                                                   | .278                                            | .270                                           | .289                                            | .227                                            | .379                                            | .301                                            | –0.90                                             | –1.129                                           |
|                                                   | .215                                            | .261                                           | .139                                            | .175                                            | .492                                            | .535                                            | .139                                              | .175                                             |
| Race                                               | 5.143**                                         | 4.924                                          | –1.623                                          | –8.36                                           | .188                                            | .535                                            | .188                                              | .535                                             |
|                                                   | .180                                            | .149                                           | .066                                            | –.034                                           | .042                                            | .198                                           | .042                                              | .198                                             |
| Education                                          | –1.089*                                         | –1.002                                         | –1.047                                          | –1.299*                                         | –1.94                                           | –0.934                                         | –1.94                                             | –0.934                                           |
|                                                   | –1.159                                          | –1.40                                          | –1.65                                           | –1.94                                           | –1.548                                          | –1.548                                         | –1.548                                            | –1.548                                           |
| Income                                             | –.767*                                          | –1.121*                                        | –.438                                           | –.593*                                          | –.206                                           | –.157                                          | –.206                                             | –.157                                             |
|                                                   | –2.06                                           | –2.85                                          | –1.25                                           | –.157                                           | –2.06                                           | –2.85                                          | –2.06                                             | –2.85                                             |
| Constant                                           | 36.019                                          | 52.091+                                        | 39.771***                                       | 59.598***                                       | 37.570***                                       | 50.838***                                       | 34.369***                                         | 50.838***                                         |
|                                                   | .142                                            | .214                                           | .159                                            | .263                                            | .082                                            | .131                                           | .170                                              | .253                                             |
| R²                                                 | .142                                            | .214                                           | .159                                            | .263                                            | .082                                            | .131                                           | .170                                              | .253                                             |

NOTE: First line of data is the unstandardized beta coefficients, the second line of data is the standardized beta coefficients. Sex was coded female = 0, male = 1. Race was coded White = 0, African American = 1. +p < .06, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
In comparison to the complete sample, an analysis of males-only respondents yielded similar results. Overall, this analysis was significant, $F(4, 99) = 8.472, p < .001$, and accounted for 26.3% of the variance. However, unlike the complete sample, Model 1 of the males-only sample indicated that race was a stronger predictor of ARVS scores ($\beta = .316$) than age ($\beta = .270$). Yet the effect of race disappears in Model 2, when socioeconomic variables are controlled.

The results of the hierarchical regression for the females-only sample highlight the interactive relationships between the predictor variables. At no time was race a significant predictor of ARVS scores for the female sample. Similarly, Model 2 for the females-only sample indicates that only age is a significant predictor ($\beta = .227, p < .05$) of ARVS scores, with younger participants reporting more favorable attitudes toward victims of rape.

The results of the hierarchical regression for the Whites-only sample were very similar to that of the complete sample. Overall, this analysis was highly significant, $F(4, 155) = 12.529, p < .001$, and accounted for 25.3% of the variance in ARVS scores. In Model 1, age was the strongest predictor of ARVS scores ($\beta = .379$), whereas sex was moderately significant ($\beta = .139, p < .06$). Similar to the complete sample analysis, age, sex, education, and income were significant in Model 2 of this analysis.

Finally, in comparison to the results of the Whites-only sample and the complete sample, an analysis of only African Americans yielded disparate results compared to the other analyses. Although overall the analysis was significant, $F(4, 41) = 3.684, p < .05$, and accounted for a relatively large proportion of the variance (29.3%), only sex was a significant predictor of attitudes toward victims of rape in Model 1 and 2 ($p < .001$), such that African American females held more favorable attitudes toward victims of rape than African American males.

**DISCUSSION**

The current study builds on prior literature examining attitudes toward victims of rape by using a scale designed specifically for this purpose and by using a community sample. The results of the current study also highlight the importance of examining the interactive effects of demographic variables when examining the complex relationships that predict such attitudes.

The results of the ANOVA analysis and the hierarchical regression suggest that there is a significant relationship between sex and attitudes toward victims of rape. However, a more acute analysis of the ANOVA results indicates that only African American males significantly differ from White and
African American females, whereas White males do not differ in attitude from the latter two groups. Furthermore, the results of the hierarchical regression indicate that sex is a strong predictor of attitudes for African Americans, regardless of socioeconomic status (SES).

However, the hierarchical regression analyses demonstrate that the relationship between race and attitude toward victims of rape is not a simple one. Whereas race is a significant predictor of attitudes in Model 1 of the complete sample hierarchical regression, this variable becomes insignificant when education and income are added to the model. This finding suggests that the variance in perception of victims of rape due to race is better explained by differences in SES and education. This finding may help explain the mixed results reported in prior literature regarding the impact of race. Specifically, research with samples who are less educated and have lower incomes may result in a significant relationship between race and participant attitudes, whereas research with participants who are more educated and have higher incomes may result in an insignificant relationship between the two variables.

The results of the current study provide support for the relationship between age and attitudes toward victims of rape. Across the hierarchical regression models, age was one of the strongest predictors of attitudes, except for African Americans. The results indicate that younger participants expressed more favorable attitudes toward victims of rape than older participants. Although the reason for this relationship is unclear, it is most likely the result of cohort effects, with younger individuals having been raised in a culture that is more aware of violence against women. The results also provide support for the relationship between educational attainment and attitudes toward victims of rape. Specifically, participants who are more educated reported more favorable perceptions of victims of rape than participants who are less educated. In addition, the results suggest that a relationship exists between income and attitude toward victims of rape. Having a greater income is associated with holding more sympathetic attitudes toward victims of rape, although there is not a clear explanation for this relationship suggested by this analysis. Finally, the results of a one-way ANOVA indicate that religious affiliation does not seem to explain variance in scores.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of the current study. First, although individuals of varying educational backgrounds responded to the survey instrument, the population consisted mostly of individuals who were highly educated. Most of the respondents had col-
lege educations, and many had postgraduate experience. In addition, the sample of respondents may be problematic with regards to self-selection. Although the total population of individuals contacted was randomly selected, only 22% of these individuals responded. For the sake of ensuring the anonymity of respondents, no follow-up techniques were employed that could have increased the response rate, and therefore, the representativeness of the sample. For this reason, it is appropriate to question whether the characteristics of responding individuals were representative of the general population. For example, it is possible that individuals who have been raped, or family members of individuals who have been raped, responded more frequently than other individuals. Similarly, individuals holding exceptionally negative attitudes toward victims of rape were probably not motivated to respond for a variety of reasons. Despite these problems with the response rate, there seemed to be adequate variance in the sample characteristics to suggest that the sample was representative. Individuals of varying genders, ages, races, education levels, religious affiliations, and incomes constituted the study sample, and for this reason, the results of the current study offer considerable insight into the relationships between demographic characteristics and attitudes toward victims of rape despite this limitation.

Overall, the results of the current study provide evidence for relationships between demographic variables that are associated with holding favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward victims of rape. However, although many of these variables may be significantly associated with changes in attitudes, this does not mean that they explain why these attitudes occur. Earning more money or attending school for longer periods of time does not necessitate one holding a more sympathetic view of victims of rape. Thus, future research should examine these relationships in a more theoretical and causal manner, focusing on explaining the differences between groups in addition to identifying the differences. In addition, although research on group differences of attitudes toward victims of rape has examined whether such differences exist, future research needs to address the conditions under which these attitudes develop and change. For example, whereas the present research demonstrates that older respondents were more likely to hold less sympathetic views of victims of rape, it does not demonstrate whether this is a development change or a cohort effect. Explaining how perceptions of victims of rape form and change may help identify ways to dispel the negative stereotypes that individuals hold toward victims of rape, thereby reducing the stigmatization that occurs as a result of rape.
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