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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship of social influence to attributions of responsibility for rape. Subjects, 86 male and female college students, the majority of whom were 18-22 years old, read a scenario describing an incident of rape at a fraternity party. Situations of varying presence and absence of modeling were portrayed, although in all scenarios the woman was raped by her partner and three fraternity brothers. Several measures were used to assess attributions of responsibility. Subjects were asked to rate the extent to which the perpetrator and the brothers were guilty of rape. Taken together the findings suggest that when rape occurs after the modeling of the same behavior toward the same victim by others, the perpetrator is judged to be more guilty, more callous toward the victim, and more deserving of punishment than when the same behavior occurs without such social influence. The fact that allowing oneself to be influenced by peer pressure does not result in the perception of greater guilt, callousness, and punishability suggests that these assessments are not elicited by the perpetrator's malleability in the face of social influence. In addition, results reveal that changes in the level of social influence acting upon the perpetrator can affect the perceptions of the victim's role in the incident even when the victim's own behavior is held constant.

(ABL)

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The Effect of Peer Pressure & Modeling upon Attributions
of Responsibility for Rape

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In 1977 Barnett and Feild noted that "In recent years rape has been one of the fastest growing crimes in the United States" (p. 93). Ten years later, Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987) reported the results of a survey involving over 6,000 students on 32 college campuses that shocked the nation. Victimization rates derived from this study have been characterized as 10 to 15 times greater than the rates based upon National Crime Statistics (Herman, 1990; Koss, 1989). Koss (1989) has explained that discrepancies in estimates exist because of cases of 'hidden rape' involving persons who have no contact with the criminal justice system. While precise levels of victimization remain difficult to pinpoint, scholars (Lindberg-Love & Geffner, 1989) have pointed out that "regardless of the precise magnitude, rape is much more prevalent than previously believed" (p. 169).

Diane Herman (1990) observed that "one of the most overlooked aspects of rape is that it is a group phenomenon" (p. 302). MacKellar (1975) concluded that "It [group rape] accounts for one fourth of all the reported rapes in the United States" (p. 105). Finally, Sanday's 1990 book, Fraternity Gang Rape, has attested to the significance of group rape on college campuses. In light of the previous work, we chose to investigate responses

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to rape in a college setting in which individual and group behavior was involved.

The present study was undertaken to examine the relationship of social influence to attributions of responsibility for rape and recommendations for remedial action. A 2 X 2 X 2 design with the independent variables of peer pressure (weak versus strong), modeling (present versus absent), and subject gender (male and female) was employed. Some studies have suggested that there are important gender differences in perceptions of rape. Calhoun, Selby & Warring (1976) found that males tended toward viewing the rape victim as playing a greater role in causing the rape incident than females. Malamuth, Haber, & Feshbach (1980) reported similar results with males judging the rapist to be more justified than females.

These studies highlight the fact that gender roles are related to attributions of responsibility for rape. We were also interested in examining the impact of other forms of social influence upon attributions of responsibility for rape. Work in the area of social learning theory has demonstrated that observing models leads to the tendency to imitate their behavior (Bandura, 1977) as well as to view the modeled behavior as appropriate, acceptable, and expected (Drabman & Thomas, 1974, 1975, 1976). Evidence from work in social influence has shown that those who conform to the behavior of a group tend to be liked and viewed as well adjusted compared to those who deviate from the group (Schachter, 1951).

The current study was undertaken in an exploratory fashion to investigate whether social influence in the form of peer pressure to rape and modeling of rape would serve to encourage the acceptance of the perpetrator's behavior and diminish attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator or would increase the attribution of responsibility to the perpetrator because the modeling of the rape behavior includes the modeling of the impact of this behavior upon the victim.

Method

Subjects. Subjects were 86 (31 male and 55 female) college students enrolled in Introductory Psychology at SUNY-Fredonia. Subjects chose to participate as one of several options for fulfilling the research requirement of Introductory Psychology. The majority of subjects were 18-22 years old.

Procedure. Subjects read a scenario describing an incident of rape in which a couple, Michael and Tracy, met at a fraternity party, went to a private room to be alone, and became sexually involved. The victim, however, eventually began to struggle, resisted continuing, and refused to have intercourse. The perpetrator then raped her. The scenarios varied, however, in the degree to which the fraternity brothers present verbally encouraged the perpetrator to rape her. This was done to create situations varying in level of peer pressure (strong versus weak). In addition, in some scenarios the victim was raped by her partner initially and then by three fraternity brothers. In other scenarios, she was raped by the three brothers and then by

her partner. This was done to create situations varying in the presence versus absence of modeling. The victim was raped by all four men in each scenario to keep the severity and consequences of the sexual assault constant across conditions.

Several measures were used to assess attributions of responsibility. Subjects were asked to rate the extent to which the perpetrator and the brothers were guilty of rape. In addition, subjects were asked to divide 100% of the responsibility for the partner's decision to rape the victim between the contributing factors of the perpetrator, the victim, the brothers, and circumstances. Subjects were also asked to indicate levels of agreement on a scale of 1 to 7 with specific causal statements regarding the incident and with recommendations for remedial action.

Results

A 2 (modeling) X 2 (peer pressure) X 2 (subject gender) anova on ratings of peer pressure served as a manipulation check. Subjects perceived significantly more peer pressure in the strong peer pressure condition ($\bar{M} = 6.56$) than the weak peer pressure condition ($\bar{M} = 5.69$), $F(1,78) = 14.61$, $p < .01$. A parallel 2 X 2 X 2 anova on ratings of agreement with the statement that "Michael would have raped the victim without the brothers' influence" also served as a manipulation check. Subjects in the modeling present condition were significantly less certain of this ($\bar{M} = 3.15$) than subjects in the modeling absent condition ($\bar{M} = 5.27$), suggesting that subjects judged the modeling to have

resulted in social influence, $F(1,78) = 23.07, p < .01$.

A 2 (modeling) X 2 (peer pressure) X 2 (subject gender) manova was used to examine ratings of agreement with statements that the partner was guilty of rape and the brothers were guilty of rape. A multivariate main effect for modeling, $F(9,70) = 4.34, p < .02$, was accompanied by a univariate effect for the statement that the partner was guilty of rape, $F(1,78) = 3.68, p = .05$. Subjects judged the partner to be more guilty of rape when the rape followed the modeling of the other brothers ($M = 6.14$) than when it did not ($M = 5.42$). This indicates that the presence of social influence, while recognized as having an impact, is not seen as mitigating the individual's personal responsibility for his behavior.

A 2 (modeling) X 2 (peer pressure) X 2 (subject gender) manova was used to examine causal attributions for the rape. This produced a pattern of results consistent with that described above. A multivariate main effect for modeling, $F(9,70) = 6.22, p < .001$ was accompanied by a univariate effect for the causal attribution that the partner raped the victim out of a callous disregard for human suffering, $F(1,78) = 15.80, p < .001$. Subjects felt that the partner showed a greater callousness with modeling present ($M = 4.63$) than with modeling absent ($M = 2.70$).

The 2 X 2 X 2 manova on causal attributions and the multivariate main effect for modeling described above also contained a significant effect for the statement that the partner raped the victim to gain the brothers' approval, $F(1,78) = 5.11,$

$p < .03$, and a marginal effect for the statement that the partner raped the victim because he believed she wanted it, $F(1,78) = 3.55$, $p = .06$. This involved a stronger belief that he raped to gain the brothers' approval in the modeling present condition ($M = 5.63$) than in the modeling absent condition ($M = 4.83$). This also involved a trend toward greater agreement with the idea that he raped the victim because he believed she wanted it in the modeling absent case ($M = 4.44$) than in the modeling present case ($M = 3.70$).

The same manova discussed above also produced a significant multivariate effect for peer pressure, $F(9,70) = 3.77$, $P < .01$. This multivariate effect contained univariate effects paralleling those of the modeling variable. A significant effect for the statement that he raped to gain the brothers' approval, $F(1,78) = 20.70$, $p < .001$, involved the greater endorsement of this causal factor under the influence of strong peer pressure ($M = 5.79$) than weak peer pressure ($M = 4.33$) and a marginal effect similar to that described above for the causal attribution that the assailant raped the victim because he believed she wanted it, $F(1,78) = 3.13$, $p = .08$ with a trend toward greater agreement in the case in which there was weak peer pressure ($M = 4.54$) than that in which there was strong peer pressure ($M = 3.85$).

Finally, the multivariate main effect for peer pressure noted above had additional univariate effects for the following causal attributions: the partner raped the victim to show his commitment to the fraternity, $F(1,78) = 28.31$, $p < .001$; the

partner raped the victim because he was afraid he would not get invited to join the fraternity if he didn't, $F(1,78) = 25.69$, $p < .01$; the partner raped the victim because of peer pressure, $F(1,78) = 13.93$, $p < .01$. The statements were agreed with more strongly in the case of strong peer pressure than weak peer pressure (see Table 1).

Further evidence for a tendency to see the victim as playing less of a role when social influence is present involved attributions of responsibility for the partner's decision to rape the victim. Subjects apportioned 100% of the responsibility for the rape, the partner's decision to rape the victim, and the victim's suffering between the contributing factors of the partner himself, the brothers, the victim, and circumstances. Four separate 2 (modeling) X 2 (peer pressure) X 2 (subject gender) manovas were used to assess the perceived contribution of each of the four factors to the three outcomes of the incident. A multivariate main effect for pressure, $F(3,76) = 2.90$, $p < .05$, and a multivariate trend for modeling, $F(3,76) = 2.36$, $p = .08$, included univariate effects for dependent measures involving the victim's responsibility for the partner's decision to rape her. Subjects held the victim more responsible for the partner's decision to rape her in the presence of weak peer pressure ($M = 11.83$) than in the presence of strong peer pressure ($M = 7.81$), $F(1,78) = 4.31$, $p < .05$. Subjects also held the victim more responsible for her partner's decision to rape her when he had not been influenced by modeling ($M = 11.51$) than when he had ($M =$

6.00), $F(1,78) = 6.30, p < .02$.

In addition, a multivariate effect for modeling, $F(3,76) = 3.39, p < .03$, contained univariate effects for measures involving the contribution of circumstances to the partner's decision to rape the victim and to the victim's suffering. Subjects saw circumstances as contributing more to the partner's decision to rape the victim when modeling was absent ($M = 17.73$) than when modeling was present ($M = 9.37$). Subjects saw circumstances as contributing more to the victim's suffering when modeling was absent ($M = 16.57$) than when present ($M = 7.48$).

Finally, a 2 (modeling) X 2 (peer pressure) X 2 (subject gender) manova examining recommendations for punishment of the partner resulted in a related multivariate effect for modeling, $F = 2.65, p < .03$, according to which subjects recommended more strongly that the partner be: punished, held liable, fined, and jailed when modeling was present than when modeling was absent (see Table 2).

Discussion

Taken together these findings suggest that when rape occurs after the modeling of the same behavior toward the same victim by others, the perpetrator is judged to be more guilty, more callous toward the victim, and more deserving of punishment than when the same behavior occurs without such social influence. The fact that allowing oneself to be influenced by peer pressure does not result in the perception of greater guilt, callousness, and punishability suggests that these assessments are not elicited by

the perpetrator's malleability in the face of social influence.

This may be because observers judge the perpetrator to be more aware of the victim's suffering or because the perpetrator has violated an implicit social contract to protect his date from harm. While observers may interpret a rape episode between the partners as stemming from a misunderstanding, it is much more difficult to attribute the behavior of all of those involved in group rape to misunderstanding.

In addition, results reveal that changes in the level of social influence acting upon the perpetrator can affect the perceptions of the victim's role in the incident even when the victim's own behavior is held constant. Recognition of social forces contributing to the perpetrator's decision to rape corresponds to diminishing attributions of responsibility to the victim for the decision to rape her and diminishing adherence to the belief that rape occurred because the perpetrator believed she wanted it.

Further research needs to be done to investigate responses to social influence in the case of the modeling of rape behavior toward a different victim and how this compares to the situation examined above.

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Table 1

Significant Differences in Mean Ratings for Causal Attributions
as a Function of Modeling & Peer Pressure

	PP Weak	PP Strong	- Modeling	+ Modeling
callousness			2.70	4.63***
victim wanted it	4.54	3.85 ^t	4.44	3.70 ^t
to gain approval	4.33	5.79***	4.83	5.63*
show commitment	3.64	5.41***		
to join frat	3.64	5.45**		
peer pressure	5.07	6.09**		

Multivariate F for Modeling = 6.22, $p < .001$

Multivariate F for Peer Pressure = 3.77, $p < .01$

* = $p < .05$

** = $p < .01$

*** = $p < .001$

^t = trend

Table 2

Recommendations for Punishment as a Function of Modeling

Recommendation	- Modeling	+ Modeling	F, p
Punish	5.54	6.36	5.26, <.03
Hold Liable	4.00	4.82	3.96, <.05
Fine	4.82	5.74	7.09, <.01
Jail	3.67	5.06	7.29, <.01

Multivariate F for Modeling = 2.63, p<.03