

ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE: EFFECT OF TYPE OF TACTIC, GENDER AND BENEVOLENT SEXISM

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EXTENDED SUMMARY

Introduction

Sexual violence is one of the most humiliating and devastating forms of violence against women. Within the couple relationship, the main objective is to obtain sex with a person who is unwilling by using different types of tactics that can vary according to their degree of severity. Firstly, sexual aggression appears to be the most severe, including the use of direct and invasive physical force to obtain sex (DeGue & DiLillo, 2005; Katz & Tirone, 2009; McGregor, 2005). Secondly, sexual coercion is less severe than sexual aggression, because it includes the use of verbal and psychological manipulation as a means of obtaining sex (Black et al., 2011; DeGue & DiLillo, 2005).

Finally, sexual coaxing tactics are located at the other extreme to sexual aggression, including the use of more subtle tactics that are more charming and benign (Camilleari, Quinsey, & Tapscott, 2009). Sexual violence has immeasurable consequences for the affected women, such as physical (sleep alterations, sexual dysfunction, etc.), psychological (anxiety, depression, etc.), and behavioural (substance abuse, eating disorders, etc.) problems (Postma, Bicanic, van der Vaart, & Laan, 2013; Ullman, Relyea, Peter-Hagene, & Vasquez, 2013; Zinzow et al., 2012). Further, it has been demonstrated that less severe violence is highly prevalent in couple relationships (Katz & Tirone, 2010; Salwen & O'Leary,

2013) being more commonly used than severe violence (Rubio-Garay, López-González, Saúl, & Sánchez-Elvira-Paniagua, 2012). For instance, Vannier and O'Sullivan (2010) showed that 59% of women have been involved in undesired sex with their partners, and Sorenson, Joshi and Sivitz (2014) noted that 64.5% know one or more women that have been victims of sexual coercion.

Although sexual violence has high prevalence and multiple consequences for the affected women, relatively few studies have investigated the subtlest forms of violence (Katz & Tirone, 2010; Salwen & O'Leary, 2013). This could be due to the fact that sexual violence can occasionally be normalised, particularly in couple relationships that have a history of consensual sex and in which there is the belief that they must continue to accept sex in future encounters (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Lazar, 2010). Moreover, both sexual coercion and sexual coaxing have received little attention in the legal context because, unlike sexual aggression, they do not fall under any legally recognized category of offense. In fact, in the legal context, these types of victims are perceived as being subject to persuasion under psychological pressure, implying that they are partially responsible and have control over the situation (McGregor, 2005).

Given these current perceptions regarding sexual violence when it coexists with the use of physical force – both in modern society in general and the legal context in particular – this study is concerned with determining how the type of tactics, gender, and benevolent sexism could

have an impact on the responsibility attributed to the aggressor.

Firstly, with respect to the type of tactic, research has shown that people attribute more responsibility to the victim when they have suffered less severe violence than sexual violence with the use of physical force (Katz, Moore, & Tkachuk, 2007). Moreover, the behaviour of the aggressor is more likely to be perceived as unacceptable and negative when he uses more violent sexual tactics than when he does not use aggression (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008a; Capezza & Arriaga, 2008b).

Secondly, some studies on gender differences have found that men attribute less responsibility to the aggressor than women (Basow & Minieri, 2011; Byers & Glenn, 2012; Davies & Rogers, 2009), whilst others have not found significant differences (Herrera, Pina, Herrera, & Expósito, 2014; Tamborra, Dutton, & Terry, 2014). Some researchers have analysed the interaction between the type of tactic and gender on the attribution of responsibility. They have shown that men attribute more responsibility to victims of subtle sexual violence than victims of severe sexual violence, whereas women do not differ in the responsibility attributed depending on the type of tactic (Katz et al., 2007; Rogers, Davies, & Cotnam, 2010).

Finally, benevolent sexism has a negative influence on both the understanding and perception of gender violence (Durán, Campos-Romero, & Martínez-Pecino, 2014; Herrera, Herrera, & Expósito, 2014; Herrera, Herrera, & Expósito, in press) and the reaction to more subtle sexual violence (Yamawaki, 2007). The literature has shown that assuming traditional gender roles has an influence on the attribution of responsibility to the aggressor (Soto-Quevedo, 2012). Thus, people with higher benevolent sexism place more blame on the victim and less on the aggressor when the victim's behaviour is incompatible with traditional gender roles (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008a; Masser, Lee, & Mckimmie, 2010; Pedersen & Strömwall, 2013; Soto-Quevedo, 2012; Valor-Segura et al., 2011; Vidal-Fernández & Megías, 2014).

In summary, this study focuses on analysing the effect of the type of sexual tactic and gender on the re-

sponsibility attributed to the aggressor, as well as demonstrating the influence of benevolent sexism on this perception. Thus, we expected to find higher attribution of responsibility to the aggressor when the sexual tactics are more severe compared with the case in which more subtle tactics are employed (Hypothesis 1). Further, it is expected that women attribute more responsibility to the aggressor than men (Hypothesis 2). Finally, it is anticipated that benevolent sexism will have an impact on attributed responsibility depending on the type of tactic and gender; in particular, higher benevolent sexism will lead to a lower attribution of responsibility to the aggressor when the type of sexual tactic used is coaxing, but only in men (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 305 students from the university of Granada, and was composed of 115 males (37.7 %) and 190 females (62.3 %), with an age range between 18 and 35 years ($M = 21.53$, $SD = 3.23$).

Procedure and design

The study adopted a factorial design 3 (type of tactic: neutral, coaxing or coercion) x 2 (gender: masculine vs. feminine) with the responsibility attributed to the aggressor as the dependent variable. Further, a stepwise regression was conducted too, using benevolent sexism, type of tactic and gender as the independent variables; and the responsibility attributed to the aggressor as the dependent variable. An incidental sampling method was used to select the participants from some of the libraries in the University of Granada. All the participants were volunteers, and their information was kept confidential and anonymous, thereby complying with the university research ethics committee.

Instruments

An instrument was designed to include the target measures. To introduce the experimental manipulation, the participants were presented with the description of a scenario in which a sexual relation occurred, manipulating the type of tactic used (neutral, coaxing, or coercion). The participants were randomly allocated to one of the three conditions, after which they were required to answer a series of questions related to the situation described (perception of sexual violence and responsibility attributed to the aggressor) as well as the subscale of benevolent sexism.

Results

Effect of the type of tactic on the attribution of responsibility

To test Hypothesis 1 an ANOVA was conducted on the data. This analysis revealed an effect of tactic on the attribution of responsibility, $F(2, 302) = 5.07, p = .007, \eta^2_p = .032$, that is, following Tukey's test, differences were found between the neutral and coercion conditions ($p = .006$), and also between neutral and coaxing ($p = .036$). Thus, more responsibility is attributed to the aggressor when the type of tactic used is coaxing or coercion compared with the case in which the aggressor does not use sexual violence (neutral condition).

Gender differences in responsibility of the aggressor

In order to test Hypothesis 2 a Student's t-test was conducted using gender as the independent variable and attribution of responsibility to the aggressor as the dependent variable. This analysis revealed no gender differences in the responsibility attributed to the aggressor $t(303) = 0.23, p = .822$.

Effect of benevolent sexism on responsibility of the aggressor as a function of type of tactic and gender

A moderated multiple regression analysis was employed to test Hypothesis 3. The independent variables were Benevolent Sexism (BS), type of tactic (0 = neutral vs. 1 = coaxing vs. 2 = coercion), and gender (0 = men vs. 1 = women). The dependent variable was the responsibility attributed to the aggressor. The results showed a significant three-way interaction between benevolent sexism, type of tactic, and gender. As expected, a simple effect test revealed that benevolent sexism predicted responsibility attributed to the aggressor only when the tactic used was sexual coaxing and only in the case of men, ($b = -.35, SE = .18, p = .054$). Benevolent sexism was not a significant predictor of responsibility in the case of men when the tactic used was sexual coercion ($b = .08, SE = .19, p = .667$) or neutral ($b = -.03, SE = .56, p = .965$), or in the case of women when the tactic used was neutral ($b = .42, SE = .27, p = .126$); sexual coaxing ($b = -.08, SE = .14, p = .544$); or sexual coercion ($b = -.22, SE = .13, p = .093$).

Discussion

This study set out to explore how, in a scenario of sexual violence, the type of tactic employed, gender, and benevolent sexism can all have an impact on the level of responsibility attributed to the aggressor.

First, the present findings demonstrate that people tend to attribute less responsibility to the aggressor when the tactics used to perform sexual violence in the couple relationship do not include violence (neutral) in comparison with the case in sexual coaxing or sexual coercion are used. However, there are no differences in the responsibility attributed to the aggressor when sexual coaxing and sexual coercion are compared, and thus Hypothesis 1 can only be partially accepted. These findings suggest that, although previous studies have demonstrated that more responsibility is attributed to the aggressor when more severe tactics are used in comparison with the use of more subtle tactics (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008a; 2008b; Katz et al., 2007), people generally tend

to blame the aggressor equally when he uses any type of tactics that do not involve the use of physical force, even though they differ in severity (sexual coaxing vs. sexual coercion).

Second, although some studies have found gender differences in the responsibility attributed to the aggressor (Bascow & Minieri, 2010; Byers & Glenn, 2012; Davies & Rogers, 2009), results of the present study lead us to reject Hypothesis 2, since no gender differences have been found, which is in agreement with the results of previous studies (Herrera et al., 2014; Tamborra et al., 2014). This finding could be due to the fact both men and women are embedded in a culture whose belief system could directly or indirectly legitimize the use of physical violence in relationships (Valor-Segura et al., 2011). Thus, sexist attitudes toward women are not only maintained by men, but also by women (Soto-Quevedo, 2012).

Finally, regarding the influence of benevolent sexism on the responsibility attributed to the aggressor, the results show that people with higher benevolent sexism place less blame on the aggressor (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008a; Pedersen & Strömwall, 2013; Yamawaki, 2007) but only when the type of tactic used is sexual coaxing

and only in the case of men. These findings support Hypothesis 3 and they agree with previous research demonstrating that men blame the victim more when subtle violence occurs (vs. severe violence), whereas women do not vary in their attribution of responsibility to the aggressor according to the type of violence (Katz et al., 2007; Rogers et al., 2010).

Sexual violence, in spite of being described as one of the most humiliating and devastating experiences that a person can suffer (Bourke, 2007; Mackinnon, 2006), has received relatively less attention than physical or psychological violence. Moreover, it is difficult to understand and to measure the experiences of sexual violence, particularly when these acts occur within the context of a romantic relationship (Logan, Walker & Cole, 2015). In this regard, understanding how the blame or responsibility is assigned to the aggressor by external observers has important implications in the context of forensic psychology, since this could be an important factor in the decisions made by the police, judges, and fiscal authorities that work together on cases of gender violence (Weiss, 2009).