Assessing the seriousness of rape

The effect of prior victim-perpetrator relationship, alcohol, and injuries on perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm

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Declaration of authorship

I, Anna Christine Saw, declare that this thesis comprises only my original work, except when due acknowledgement has been made to other materials used.

Signature     Date
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Abstract

The prevalence of partner and acquaintance rape has given rise to an increasing amount of research into the effects on the victims from the 1970s and 80s onwards. Around the same time, researchers in the area of sexual assault began to investigate whether individuals perceive these types of rape as equally serious as stranger rapes. Substantial research has suggested that this is not the case, however the prevalence of rape supportive attitudes in current society is not definitively known. The current study aimed to isolate the factors of prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries within the context of rape, and investigate how these factors influenced perceived incident severity, perpetrator responsibility, and harm done to the victim.

The methodology utilised extended from previous research which made use of text-based vignettes. Participants from two Victorian universities were asked to rate 12 descriptions of hypothetical incidents of sexual assault in terms of severity, responsibility, and harm. A subsample of participants responded to 6 descriptions of hypothetical incidents of sexual assault, and were asked to respond to a number of scales which assessed factors related to victim precipitation and perpetrator premeditation.

The results showed minimal differences in ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm, regardless of situational factors such as prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries. However, within these small differences, interesting patterns were observed. Although differences were small, it appears that the factor of sexual precedence might be an influential factor on perceptions of severity and harm. Alcohol and injuries, too, showed small although still important patterns. The presence of a prior sexual history, the involvement of alcohol, and a lack of injuries resulting from the attack tend to mitigate perceptions of severity and
harm. Responsibility ratings, however, were the least influenced by any of these 
factors, and it is likely that individuals are reluctant to absolve offenders of 
responsibility regardless of how serious or harmful they believe the specific rape 
to be in comparison to other types of rape.

Gender differences do seem to prevail, with males giving lower ratings overall 
and appearing to be more influenced by situational factors such as prior 
relationship, alcohol, and injuries. Educational background in terms of specific 
types of courses suggest that exposure to gender issues may be related to victim 
supportive attitudes.

The implications for policy in terms of the social demographic group differences 
are concerned are that education should not be ignored as an influential tool in 
terms of increasing public awareness.
Section 1:

Introduction

The prevalence of acquaintance and partner rape motivated researchers in the late 1970s and early 1980s to begin to investigate the effects of these types of offences on victims and, importantly, how they were perceived in terms of severity by the general public. Acquaintance and partner rapes were shown to be incredibly harmful to victims and alarmingly common, however legislation and public awareness did not reflect these issues. The development of the concept of rape myths, being stereotypical misconceptions about the true nature of rape and its effects, was fundamental to much research into perceptions of offence seriousness and perpetrator responsibility. These rape myths were thought to develop as a result of the influence of gender stereotypes and expectations of male and female behaviour and interactions. Rape myth prevalence in society was shown to be particularly detrimental to sexual assault prevention and community support for victims. The existence of a prior victim-perpetrator relationship as central to stereotypical assumptions about victims of acquaintance and partner rape was isolated as a factor that needed to be addressed by researchers. Three decades on, some research still suggests that individuals maintain these misconceptions about victim precipitation in rape, however the extent to which these attitudes prevail in society has not been addressed in much detail recently. Progressive attitudes with respect to increasing support for gender issues suggest that individuals should be less likely to maintain rape myths, however research is somewhat contradictory.

A second factor which is often associated with rape myths and acquaintance and partner rape is the influence of alcohol on perceptions of perpetrator responsibility. Alcohol is often seen as a factor contributing to victimisation, and
is perceived as careless behaviour on the part of the victim and serves as justification on the part of the offender. This factor is frequently linked to rape research with respect to partner and acquaintance rape, since just as the existence of a relationship between victim and offender is more often the norm than the exception, alcohol is often involved on the part of both victim and offender prior to the attack in the case of all types of rape.

Section 2 outlines rape myths and conceptions of the classic rape, and the implications of this for acquaintance and partner rapes. The concept of proportionality is introduced with respect to offence seriousness as comprising of perpetrator culpability and harm done to the victim, and research into the effect of a prior relationship on attitudes towards rape is discussed. The involvement of alcohol and whether or not injuries result from the attack are introduced as subsequent factors to be addressed, and research into these areas is outlined. Sex role socialisation as a developmental theory that attempts to explain how stereotypical attitudes to rape such as rape myths develop is introduced, and the types of relationship rape to be investigated in the current study are explained and justified. The relevance of victim precipitation factors and research into social demographic group differences are introduced, and specific predictions for the current study are outlined.

Section 3 introduces and justifies the sample used for the current study, the design of the main sample and subsample questionnaires, and the limitations associated with textual depictions of sexual assault. Results of the pilot study and their implications are outlined briefly, and the operationalisation of the independent variables of prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries is explained. Dependent variables of incident severity, perpetrator responsibility, and psychological harm done to the victim are introduced, and the measures taken to control extraneous factors as well as the implications of factors that could not be accounted for are discussed. The procedure adopted is explained thoroughly,
and ethical issues relating to the sensitivity of the topic and measures taken to account for this are outlined.

Section 4 outlines the main effect results of prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries, followed by findings as to the interaction of these factors. Social demographic group differences with respect to sex, educational background, and social class are discussed. Section 5 briefly examines the results of the subsample in terms of assumptions about victim precipitation and perpetrator premeditation.

Section 6 provides an overall summary of the results, and then goes on to analyse these results and highlight important issues and key findings. Important findings as relates to the existence of a prior sexual history as influencing perceptions of severity and harm are discussed, followed by a brief analysis of effect of factors of alcohol and injuries. The relevance of perceptions of perpetrator responsibility and the reluctance of individuals in the current study to absolve offenders of culpability is explored. The methodological limitations imposed on the current study and the implications on the results are discussed, followed by possible implications of the results on policy.

The current study aims to establish the extent to which the existence of a prior victim-perpetrator relationship, whether sexual or non-sexual, influences perceptions of incident severity, perpetrator responsibility, and harm done to the victim. Additionally, the effect of alcohol and injuries on the same factors is also of interest. Perceptions of victim precipitation and perpetrator premeditation will also be examined as a subsidiary aim. The next section will introduce the background to these issues, the theory behind explanations of different attitudes towards types of rape, and empirical research in the area.
Section 2:

Literature Review

The current study aims to establish to what extent a prior victim-perpetrator relationship influences individual perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm with respect to sexual assault. Additionally, it aims to address the influence of alcohol and injuries on these factors. The following section will outline literature on conceptualisations of the effect and prevalence of stereotypical attitudes towards rape in society, and the sentencing principle of proportionality, which argues that offence seriousness is comprised of perpetrator responsibility and harm done to the victim. Empirical work relating to the effect of prior victim-perpetrator relationship, alcohol use, and the presence of injuries on perceptions of seriousness and responsibility will be discussed, along with a brief introduction to the developmental theory of sex role socialisation. Divisions of relationship rape and factors relating to victim precipitation will be outlined, and certain social demographic group differences associated with sex, class, and education will be introduced. Methodological improvements and the current study predictions will be presented.

Acquaintance and partner rapes have been shown to be substantially more prevalent than stranger rapes\(^1\), and whilst estimates differ depending on the source, research has consistently supported the premise that rapes by known assailants need continued attention in the area of victim support and prevention (Department of Justice, 1996). Moreover, victims of acquaintance and partner rapes are significantly less likely to report an attack and seek counselling than victims of stranger rape (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003). This has been shown to be

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\(^1\) Department of Justice (1996) research into rape law reform and found that only 16.2% of sexual assault victims interviewed were assaulted by a stranger. Frazier and Seales (1997) found that 11.1% of victims were assaulted by a stranger.
particularly problematic to victim support and recovery, and empirical research from the 1980s and 90s has suggested that individuals continue to consider acquaintance and partner rapes as less serious and inciting less responsibility than stereotypical stranger rapes. The extent to which these attitudes still prevail should continue to be researched, and the current study aims to extend previous research with methodological improvements, as will be discussed. Additionally, slightly altered divisions of relationship rape will be explored in order to further investigate the effect of a prior sexual history between victim and offender.

**Classic rape vs. simple rape**

It has been proposed that there is a certain combination of circumstances that increase the probability that a rape will be defined as such and be reported by the victim (Frazier & Seales, 1997; Klemmack & Klemmack, 1977). These characteristics have been defined as the criteria for the ‘classic’ or ‘real’ rape (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Ward, 1995; Estrich, 1987). The classic rape is thought to involve an unknown offender, takes place in an unfamiliar and deserted location, and results in obvious and sustained physical harm to the victim (Fisher et al, 2003). Stranger rapes are more likely to conform to these characteristics than acquaintance or partner rapes.

Estrich (1987) defined a second category of rape as the ‘simple’ rape. These incidents are those where a prior relationship exists between victim and offender, there is a lack of force or resistance, and a lack of corroborating evidence of the victim’s account. Classic rapes are more frequently reported, more likely to be accepted by both victims and observers as a legitimate rape, and generally considered more serious than simple rapes (Hollifield, 2003; Frazier & Seales, 1997; Bridges, 1991; L’Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Klemmack & Klemmack, 1977).
Whilst some people consider rapes committed by strangers as more serious than those committed by acquaintances or partners, when relevant factors\textsuperscript{2} are held constant, evidence suggests that rapes committed by known offenders in reality do not differ in objective qualities of seriousness. Victims of acquaintance and partner rape experience similar levels of depression, hostility, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder as compared to victims of stranger rape (Koss, Dinero & Seibel, 1988; Frazier & Seales, 1997). Victims of acquaintance and partner rape are less likely to seek support or counselling, and are more likely to blame themselves for the incident\textsuperscript{3} (Frazier & Seales, 1997; Allison & Wrightsman, 1993). The existence of a prior relationship increases the likelihood that the incident will occur in situations previously associated with safety and privacy, and will involve a breach of trust of some kind. Consequently, the trauma experienced by the victim of an assault committed by a known assailant can be long-standing and unresolved.

**Rape myths**

Currently, rape myths are conceptualised as widely held rape-supportive attitudes\textsuperscript{4} (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), and individuals who subscribe to these beliefs tend to engage in perpetrator justification and victim blaming, based on the assumptions that aggressors are not responsible for their actions and victims precipitate the behaviour (Sawyer, Thompson & Chicorelli, 2002; Johnson, Kuck & Schander, 1997).

\textsuperscript{2} Relevant factors here refers to factors related to the incident itself which are frequently taken into account by sentencing judges when determining an appropriate punishment, such as the duration of the incident, the amount of physical injury caused, whether or not a weapon was used during the incident, prior sexual or violent offences on the part of the perpetrator, and the level of planning involved.

\textsuperscript{3} Victims of known assailant assaults often question their judgement in relation to the incident, and often find it more difficult to conceptualise their own victimisation as a random and impersonal event (Katz, 1991).

\textsuperscript{4} Burt (1980) was first to introduce the concept of rape myths, which he describes as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (pg. 217).
The theme of victim precipitation, which is a theme within rape myth literature (Buddie & Miller, 2001) relates directly to victim blaming (Cowan, 2000), and is particularly relevant when addressing the issue of individual perceptions of acquaintance and partner rape. Risk-taking behaviour on the part of the victim is often seen as contributing to the rape, and as such reducing the amount of responsibility attributed to the offender\(^5\) (Hollifield, 2003).

An element of Lonsway and Fitzgerald’s (1994) interpretation of rape myths is that these beliefs are widely and persistently held in the community. It has been shown that rape myths are still present in many individuals (Johnson, Kuck & Shander, 1997). An Australian study by Davis and Lee (1996) demonstrated that rape myths are significant in both male and female adolescents from a relatively young age, and that victim precipitation continues to influence individual attributions of responsibility and seriousness\(^6\).

However, there is some evidence to suggest that individuals do not subscribe to rape myths to the same extent as was once thought. Easteal (1993) conducted a national survey to assess adherence to rape myths by the Australian public. Those findings suggested that most people rejected traditional rape myths, although a substantial portion of the sample still viewed the victim as responsible in some way for the incident. This research had a number of methodological flaws related to the mode of distribution of surveys (primarily through a chain of

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\(^5\) Hans von Hentig and Beniamin Medelsohn were amongst the first to address the issue of victim precipitation, and Amir (1971) approached the significance of risk-taking behaviours with respect to sexual assault. These pre-defined behaviours (such as consuming alcohol with the perpetrator or failing to take preventative measures) were seen as factors contributing towards the rape and were used to shift responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim (Tang, Wong & Cheung, 2002).

\(^6\) A number of American studies have also shown that individuals continue to subscribe to traditional rape myths, which in turn influence their opinions of victims of attacks by acquaintances or partners, attributions of responsibility, and perceptions of seriousness (Buddie & Miller, 2002; Sawyer, Thompson & Chicorelli, 2002; Cowan, 2000).
newspapers), and the adoption of overseas research instruments which were altered due to ambiguity\(^7\).

Much of the research into public acceptance of rape myths is flawed by unrepresentative samples, and as has been shown, can be contradictory and inconclusive. The extent to which these attitudes influence perceptions of seriousness and responsibility in partner, acquaintance, and stranger rape incidents depends on the prevalence of rape myths in the community. In turn, the extent to which rape myths are accepted and endorsed by the community and used to justify sexual aggression will determine, in part, differences in sexual assault rates in that community\(^8\) (Muir, Lonsway and Payne, 1996). Easteal (1993) argues that the prevention of rape lies in altering public perceptions about gendered violence and attitudes towards men and women. In this respect, the importance of accurate public information and a rejection of rape myths is central to the social denunciation of rape.

Societal stereotypes in the form of rape myths are also thought to affect reporting rates for sexual assault because victims of certain types of rape are less likely to define themselves as such (Buddie & Miller, 2001; Koss, Dinero, Seibel & Cox, 1988) and because victims often develop feelings of self-blame and guilt based on community reactions to rape\(^9\). In sum, adherence to rape myths makes the

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\(^7\) Additionally, the survey was printed immediately following a television broadcast relating to sexual assault, and it is likely that many of the views and attitudes presented in the survey were influenced by the media coverage of the topic.

\(^8\) Lanier (2001) found a relationship between rape-supportive attitudes and forced sexual activity by adolescent males, which suggests that combating rape myths in males is a necessary step to reduce levels of sexual violence.

\(^9\) Warshaw (1988) found that 73% of women whose descriptions of their experiences were legally classified as rape did not recognize themselves as rape victims. Similarly, 84% of men who described incidents of behaviours they had engaged in that were legally classified as rape did not define them as such. It should be noted, however, that victims frequently do not define incidents of sexual assault as such and often believe that they are not legally defined as rape.
eradication of the crime more difficult as it removes the likelihood of reporting\textsuperscript{10} and reduces public denunciation (Frese, Moya & Megias, 2004).

**Proportionality**

Perpetrator responsibility and harm done to the victim are the two elements thought to make up an intuitive sense of offence seriousness. For the purposes of sentencing, a principle known as proportionality is used by sentencing judges to establish a punishment that directly reflects the overall severity of the crime. Harm done and responsibility are thought to reflect our instinctive sense of fairness, which in turn is a product the process of blaming (von Hirsch, 1990). Despite extensive research into the long-lasting psychological effects of both known offender and unknown offender rapes, there is some evidence to suggest that individuals still perceive stranger rapes as more traumatic than acquaintance and partner rapes (Wiehe & Richards, 1995; L’Armand & Pepitone, 1982). As such, the factors of overall severity, perpetrator responsibility, and harm done to the victim develop as important concepts to investigate with respect to stranger, acquaintance, and partner rape.

**The effect of prior relationship**

L’Armand and Pepitone’s (1982) study was the first to directly address the effect of a prior victim-perpetrator relationship on perceptions of seriousness, responsibility, and harm with respect to acquaintance rape. Using fictional newspaper articles describing incidents of rape, they found that the existence of a prior victim-perpetrator relationship significantly affected all judgements of rape

\textsuperscript{10} Low reporting rates limit the deterrent and incapacitative effects of the criminal justice system, as well as reducing the likelihood that the victim will seek professional support and counselling (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003).
by reducing the perceived seriousness and perpetrator culpability, and increasing victim blame.

In a more recent study, McCormick, Maric, Seto and Barbaree (1998) examined 204 clinical files of incarcerated rapists at a medium-security prison in order to establish what factors were most correlated with sentence length as a measure of offence seriousness\textsuperscript{11}. They found that out of the factors investigated\textsuperscript{12}, only excessiveness of force used and victim offender relationship were significant predictors of sentence length. However, the sample used for McCormick et al.’s (1998) study consisted of convicted offenders only. Stranger rapes are more likely to be reported and result in a conviction than other categories of rape (reference), which mean that these types of rape would have been overrepresented in the sample as compared to acquaintance and partner rapes.

With respect to the issue of prior victim-perpetrator contact, the relevance of a history of consensual sexual contact between victim and assailant is important to consider. Whilst the research described has focused on the effect of victim-perpetrator contact on perceptions of seriousness, few studies have directly addressed the effect of the existence of a sexual history between victim and offender in a situation where that relationship was terminated some time prior to the offence. Shotland and Goodstein (1992) investigated the extent to which individuals perceive rape in the context of an ongoing sexual relationship as an expression of the perpetrator’s sexual rights over the victim. The study showed that, with respect to dating relationships, prior sexual involvement limits the perceived authenticity of sexual refusal on the part of the victim. However Shotland and Goodstein’s (1992) study only addressed the issue of sexual

\textsuperscript{11} However, there are limitations associated with the use of sentence length as a measure of seriousness. A number of factors are taken into account when sentencing, such as the age of the offender, the age and vulnerability of the victim, conditions under which the offence took place, prior convictions and the aims prioritized by the sentencing judge in making his decision (Ashworth, 1995).

\textsuperscript{12} The factors included were the degree of force used, physical injury to victim, instrumentality of force used, victim resistance, and prior victim-perpetrator relationship.
precedence\textsuperscript{13} in the context of a continuing relationship. Differences in perceptions of seriousness, responsibility and harm based on the existence of a prior sexual history in the context of an ex-partner relationship should also be investigated.

A number of studies have addressed the factor of responsibility in the context of acquaintance and stranger rapes, with findings suggesting that perceived perpetrator responsibility decreases with increasing prior contact between victim and assailant (Frese, Moya & Megias, 2004; Willis, 1992; Bridges & McGrail, 1989). Recently, a study by Frese, Moya and Megias (2004) demonstrated that rapes that fell into the more stereotypical category were less likely to be associated with increased victim blame and, in turn, decreased perpetrator responsibility.

**Alcohol**

Alcohol use as a factor which influences perceptions of responsibility is particularly relevant when addressing the issue of acquaintance and partner rapes. As alcohol use is a prevalent factor in the wider society (REFERENCE), it is unsurprising that alcohol consumption is often associated with known assailant rapes\textsuperscript{14}. An Australian study by Cameron and Stritzke (2003) illustrated the effects of alcohol use by victim and offender on perceptions of responsibility.

\textsuperscript{13} ‘Sexual precedence’ here refers to the existence of previous consensual sexual contact between victim and perpetrator, either in the context of an ongoing relationship or one that has ended prior to the attack. Shotland and Goodstein (1992) explain the phenomenon as occurring when a man has a sexual history with a woman, he has established sexual precedence and therefore he has some legal and legitimate claim on her future sexual behaviour towards him.

\textsuperscript{14} Muehlenhard & Linton (1987) surveyed college students in the United States about sexual misconduct. Self-report surveys demonstrated that 55% of men who reported having engaged in sexual aggression in a dating situation were under the influence of alcohol at the time. Similarly, 53% of women who reported having experienced sexual aggression in a dating situations were under the influence of alcohol at the time. The reliability of self-report surveys relating to criminal behaviour and victimization should be kept in mind when interpreting these statistics, as underreporting still often occurs and the validity of earlier self-report scales has been described as at best, questionable (Thornberry & Krohn, 2000). However, Muehlenhard and Linton’s study nevertheless demonstrates an association between sexual assault and alcohol use.
Based on a substantial amount of previous empirical research (Stormo, Lang & Stritzke, 1997; Seto & Barbaree, 1996; Richardson & Campbell, 1982), the study sought to extend the understanding of the influence of alcohol use with respect to victims and perpetrators. The study gave support to previous findings which demonstrate that alcohol use on the part of the perpetrator serves to mitigate amount of responsibility attributed to the offender, whereas the opposite effect is seen when the victim is portrayed as having consumed alcohol\textsuperscript{15}.

Two theories have been proposed in order to explain the influence of alcohol use on attributions of responsibility for victims and perpetrators of sexual assault. With respect to the effect of alcohol use as increasing victim blaming, the ‘just world’ hypothesis has been raised as a possible explanation. The main premise for the just world theory is that most individuals need to understand the world as a predictable and fair place, on the belief that bad things do not happen to good, or careful, people (Lerner, 1970; Cameron & Stritzke, 2003). In this way, individuals perceive victims who consumed alcohol prior to an incident of sexual assault as reckless and in some way responsible for the attack.

As the opposite pattern has been observed with respect to perpetrator responsibility, a separate theory has been proposed. Alcohol-induced narrowing of attention is associated with selective prioritisation of cues given by the victim (for example positive reactions from the victim) over potential indications of rejection (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003). The ‘discounting’ theory of alcohol use is based on the assumption that individuals understand the perpetrator to have been limited in his ability to accurately interpret signals from the victim, thus misconstruing her actions as encouragement. More intuitively, individuals are

\textsuperscript{15} The effect of alcohol has been shown to mitigate the amount of responsibility attributed to the perpetrator when both victim and perpetrator had consumed similar amounts of alcohol prior to the incident. If the level of intoxication on the part of the victim was higher than that for the perpetrator, alcohol use does not reduce perceptions of perpetrator responsibility to the same extent. Similarly, alcohol only acts as a mitigating factor with respect to perceived perpetrator culpability when both victim and offender consumed alcohol prior to the incident.
also likely assume that reduced judgement and careless behaviour contribute to an offender's decision to assault his victim.

Injuries

The presence of visible physical injuries sustained as a direct result of a rape often increases the likelihood that observers will define the attack as such and attribute more responsibility to the perpetrator. A rape that results in significant physical injuries to the victim is generally associated with less ambiguity of consent, and more easily conforms to the stereotype of the classic rape. Victims are more likely to be absolved of responsibility for the attack if there is physical corroborating evidence on nonconsent. Whilst injuries to the victim is a direct component of incident seriousness and harm, limited research has been carried out to specifically isolate the effect of physical injuries on perceptions of perpetrator responsibility.

Schneider, Soh-Chiew Ee, & Aronson (1994) investigated the effect of physical versus psychological injuries on perceptions of victim blame and perpetrator guilt. They found that although there was no difference in perceptions of victim blame depending on the type of trauma inflicted, individuals were more likely to assign higher levels of guilt when physical assault was inflicted on a victim of the same sex as the observer. This suggests that individuals perceive physical injury to a victim of their own gender as more serious than psychological injury in the context of rape.

Sex role socialisation

Sex role socialisation theory is frequently discussed in the empirical studies reviewed above as an explanation of rape myth acceptance and its effects on
victim blaming and perpetrator justification. Sex role socialisation theory suggests that the developmental influences on males and females relate to learning the appropriate behaviours as expected by society (Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, & Binderup, 2000). Men and women develop expectations with respect to acceptable sexual interactions (Bridges, 1991), and those who adhere to traditional sex role socialisation beliefs (such as rape myths) are more likely to view acquaintance rape and partner rape as extreme versions of male-female interactions (Ewoldt, Monson & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000).

Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling and Binderup (2000) investigated sex role socialisation theory and its effects on rape myth endorsement along a continuum of victim-perpetrator relationships (stranger, early date, late date, partner). They also explored the relevance the significance of prior sexual contact with respect to date rape incidents where victim and perpetrator had engaged in consensual sexual activity. The study found that the perceived seriousness of the incident and attributions of perpetrator responsibility were decreased by the existence of prior sexual contact.

The importance of exploring a continuum of victim-perpetrator relationships when investigating differences in individual perceptions of rape raised by Monson et al (2000) is central to a comprehensive understanding of the area (Simonson and Subich, 1999). The element of a prior sexual history between victim and perpetrator that develops out of Monson et al.’s (2000) study, and can be applied directly to divisions of rape.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{16}\) The presence or absence of a prior sexual history between victim and offender significantly changes the category of relationship rape into which the incident will fall. For instance, studies aimed at investigating different perceptions of seriousness, responsibility, and harm with respect to ‘early date’ versus ‘late date’ relationships often suggest that the defining factor between the two categories is the absence (early date) or presence (late date) of a prior sexual relationship. With respect to studies which focus on acquaintance rape versus partner rape, the defining factor is again the absence (acquaintance) or presence (partner) of a prior sexual history.
Divisions of relationship rape

The over-riding factor which develops out of empirical and theoretical approaches to stranger, acquaintance, and partner rape is the relevance of the prior victim-perpetrator relationship. The existence of a non-sexual prior relationship in the context of a casual acquaintance has been shown to decrease individual perceptions of seriousness, responsibility, and harm, and the existence of a prior consensual sexual relationship is thought to have a significant effect on attributions of responsibility and perceptions of seriousness. The current study, therefore, will address three categories of rape with respect to prior relationship – stranger rape, acquaintance (no prior relationship) rape, and acquaintance (prior relationship) rape. Stranger rape incidents will refer to assaults committed by an assailant who is completely unknown to the victim; acquaintance (no prior relationship) rape incidents will refer to assaults committed by an assailant who is known to the victim in some way but where no prior sexual relationship exists; and acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents will refer to assaults committed by an assailant where a sexual relationship existed previous to (but ended prior to) the incident. These categories were selected in order to provide a continuum of relationship-determined rapes specific enough to isolate factors of sexual and non-sexual prior contact.

17 It should be noted that when selecting specific divisions for investigation from a continuum of types of relationship rape, it is inevitable that some categories will not be explored. The current study does not address the issue of incidents of rape which take place between close friends, current partners, or individuals in a dependent relationship (eg. Employer/employee; teacher/student). The current study does not explore incidents of sexual assault committed by adults on children, or between children. Additionally, the relationships explored in the study are exclusively heterosexual, primarily because sex role socialization theory necessarily relates to male/female interactions. The above categories of rape are extremely important and should be researched further, however it is beyond the scope of the current study to explore those areas.
Factors related to victim precipitation and the element of perpetrator premeditation

A number of victim specific factors have been investigated with respect to attributions of responsibility and victim blaming for incidents of sexual assault. For the current study, individual assumptions about the victim’s mode of dress and pre-assault behaviour and how they are influenced by prior victim perpetrator relationship and the presence of alcohol have been isolated for an additional analysis. Workman and Freeburg (1999) found that both men and women attribute more responsibility to victims of sexual assault who were presented dressed in a short skirt than victims presented as conservatively dressed\textsuperscript{18}. Whilst the methodology of the above study might have been problematised by the use of visual stimuli and additional factors related to the appearance of the victim\textsuperscript{19}, it nevertheless provides support for the premise that victim attire is relevant to victim blaming and perpetrator justification.

With respect to the victim’s pre-assault behaviour as a factor influencing attributions of responsibility, Muehlenhard and Linton (1987) argue that miscommunication between victim and offender can often become a risk factor for sexual assault. Behaviours and actions in situations where a prior relationship (either sexual or non sexual) exists have the potential to involve a higher level of miscommunication between victim and offender. The effect of alcohol on the assailant’s interpretation of signals given by the victim has already been discussed, and this is also related to the factor of victim pre-assault behaviour.

\textsuperscript{18} Similarly, Cassidy and Hurrell (1995) found that observers were more likely to blame the victim for the attack and indicate that the assailant’s behaviour was justified if the victim was presented as provocatively dressed as opposed to conservatively dressed.

\textsuperscript{19} Studies have shown that victim attractiveness also influences perceptions of perpetrator and victim responsibility (Calhoun, Selby, Cann & Keller, 1978), and as both Workman and Freeburg’s (1999) and Cassidy and Hurrell’s (1995) studies involved visual representations of the victim, the effect of victim attractiveness would need to be accounted for.
A factor which serves to counteract the effects of victim blaming and perpetrator justification is that of assailant premeditation. Ward (1995) argues that evidence of assailant premeditation enhances positive evaluations of victims of sexual assault and the level of premeditation contributes to incident severity and perpetrator culpability in sentencing (Ashworth, 1995; Victorian Sentencing Committee, 1988). As such, the current study also provides a preliminary investigation into individual assumptions about the level of premeditation associated with each incident of rape.

**Social demographic group differences**

Research into sex differences with respect to perceptions of seriousness, responsibility, and harm in sexual assault has produced inconclusive and contradictory findings. With respect to prior victim-perpetrator relationship, with some researchers arguing that males judge victims of acquaintance rape more severely and perpetrators more leniently than females\(^\text{20}\) (Thornton & Ryckman, 1983), and others suggesting that victim blame does not vary depending on the sex of the observer\(^\text{21}\) (L’Armand & Pepitone, 1982). Based on these inconclusive findings, it is useful to further investigate the possibility of differences in male and female perceptions of rape.

Educational differences have been shown to be particularly relevant to the area of sexual assault, as it is argued that awareness and sympathy for gender issues develops through this influence\(^\text{22}\) (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1999). Specific knowledge about the nature of sexual assault has been linked to victim-supportive attitudes (Ward, 1995), and the liberalising effect of education alone

\(^{20}\) Giacopassi and Dull (1986) argue that individuals are less likely to accept myths that reflect negatively on their group, and Syzmanski, Devlin, Chrisler and Vyse (1993) found that gender emerged as a significant indicator of attitudes toward rape.

\(^{21}\) Contrary to research presented above, Buddie and Miller (2001) did not find gender differences with respect to rape myth acceptance.

\(^{22}\) Henderson-King and Stewart (1999) found that women exposed to feminist ideals and issues through education developed an increased interest and awareness of gender issues.
combined with the fact that younger adults are arguably more concerned with progressing social attitudes (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004) mean that a sample of university students would be much more likely to sympathise with rape victims rather than engage in perpetrator justification exercises (Ward, 1995).

Specific educational background is also relevant when selecting a sample group with respect to particular domains of interest. Much of the research presented has sampled exclusively psychology undergraduate students from a single university. Those involved in more psychological, sociological or community-based courses are more likely to be exposed to feminist ideals and beliefs through the inclusion of these topics in their courses. The current study recruited participants from more than one university and selected more than one type of course in order to give some insight into educational differences and effects of social class and geographical differences.

**Methodological improvements**

The convenience of sampling from university students can be much appreciated in the context of experimental research, however the limitations of focusing exclusively on this demographic must be recognised. University students by definition do not consist of a representative sample, and generally fall into specific margins of age, class, and education. One method of minimising these effects is to sample from more than one university and more than one course from within those universities. Whilst the issues of only obtaining participants of a particular age group and a certain level of educational background still remain to a certain extent, including participants from a less metropolitan university as well as a central urban university accounts to some degree for the effects of class. Comparing results obtained from students enrolled in community-based courses with those enrolled in more practical, skills-based courses potentially gives an insight into the effects of specific educational background on
perceptions of rape. The current study improves on those presented by adopting this sampling strategy.

In the context of sentencing, offence seriousness is made up of the elements of perpetrator responsibility as well as harm done to the victim, and as punishment in the form of sentencing is theoretically part of the intuitive process of blaming, it is important to address the issue of harm as well as perpetrator responsibility. Whilst many studies have neglected the aspect of harm, it has been shown that perceptions of harm based on the existence of a prior relationship can differ, and as such the current study aims to investigate this factor as a component of overall seriousness.

The current study also aims to isolate the factor of a prior sexual history between victim and offender in the context of a discontinued relationship. Whilst sexual precedence in the context of partner and dating relationships has been addressed by some researchers, the existence of a prior sexual relationship outside of the context of an ongoing relationship has not been extensively explored.

Finally, whilst a substantial amount of research has been carried out with respect to perceptions of seriousness and perpetrator responsibility in sexual assault, much of this research was initiated in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the context of what is arguably now a more progressive and gender-aware western society, the importance of assessing current attitudes should not be ignored. The extent to which rape myths still prevail in society has not been conclusively established.
Predictions

With respect to the existence of a prior relationship, it is predicted that individual perceptions of incident severity, perpetrator responsibility, and harm done to victim will decrease with increasing prior victim-perpetrator contact. Specifically, hypothesis one predicts that ratings of severity, responsibility and harm will be highest for stranger rape incidents, and lowest for acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents.

Alcohol is also predicted to influence perceptions of perpetrator responsibility in that incidents where both victim and perpetrator were intoxicated at the time will be associated with lower ratings of perpetrator responsibility. Hypothesis two predicts that ratings of severity and responsibility will be higher for incidents not involving alcohol, and lower for incidents involving alcohol.

The presence of injuries as a direct result of the attack is predicted to influence perceptions of severity, responsibility and harm. Physical injury to victim is a direct component of harm done, and is also associated with increased perceptions of perpetrator responsibility as it conforms more readily to the concept of a classic rape. As such, hypothesis three predicts that incidents in which the victim receives physical injuries as a result of the attack will be associated with higher ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm.

In addition to the main effects of prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries, it is predicted that these factors will interact to produce more noticeable differences in perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm.

Certain group differences will also be investigated, and hypothesis five predicts that individual ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm will be more affected

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23 As responsibility is theorised to be a component of overall offence seriousness, alcohol is predicted to affect perceptions of severity in the same way.
by the existence of a prior relationship, the presence of alcohol, and injuries resulting from the attack for males than females. Male ratings are also predicted to be lower overall as compared to female ratings. With respect to the effect of education, it is suggested those enrolled in more sociological and community based courses (ie. Social Work or Health and Community Studies courses) may be more sympathetic to victims and less likely to justify perpetrator behaviour than those enrolled in less sociological and community based courses (ie. Engineering courses). Thus, hypothesis five also predicts that ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm will be more affected by the factors of prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries for Mechanical and Manufacturing students than Social Work or Health and Community Studies students.

With respect to the factors of victim dress, victim pre-assault behaviour and perpetrator premeditation, no specific predictions are made as these make up a subgroup of investigations relating to victim blaming which are secondary to the main analysis as to the effects of prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries on ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm. The extent to which prior victim-perpetrator relationship and alcohol influence individual assumptions about victim dress, pre-assault behaviour, and perpetrator premeditation will be examined briefly.
Section 3: Methodology

The current study took the form of a quantitative survey-based approach to assessing the effect of prior victim-perpetrator relationship, alcohol use and injuries on individual perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm. Two groups were designated, being the main sample which made up 75% of the sample, and the subsample which consisted of the remaining 25%. Participants in the main sample completed questionnaires containing a number of brief hypothetical descriptions of incidents of rape, and were asked to indicate their perceptions of incident severity, perpetrator responsibility and the harm done to the victim in each case. A second group of participants made up the subsample, and completed a similar questionnaire containing fewer hypotheticals, but participants were also asked to respond to scales which tested assumptions about the victim’s mode of dress, her behaviour, and the level of planning involved as well as perceptions of responsibility and harm.

Sample

Table 1. Number and demographics (sex, mean age, age range) of participants in overall sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Mean age</th>
<th>Age range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20 - 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne (Mechanical man.)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20 - 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMIT (Health and comm.)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21 - 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMIT (Mechanical man.)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20 - 33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 presents the overall number of participants (N=58) and demographic information such as the number of males and females, the mean age, and the age range in the sample. This information is also presented for the three groups within the overall sample, being the University of Melbourne Mechanical and Manufacturing students, NMIT Health and Community Studies students, and NMIT Mechanical and Manufacturing students.

Participants for the current study were sampled from the University of Melbourne, Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing and the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, Departments of Mechanical and Manufacturing and Health and Community Studies. Participants were selected from the University of Melbourne and NMIT due to the convenience of sampling university students but also in order to obtain participants from different social classes and geographic locations. Health and Community courses were selected as they represent a more community-based course as compared to Mechanical and Manufacturing which is a practical engineering degree.

**Sampling issues**
Participants were sampled from two different Victorian universities. University students are a commonly-used group for survey-based research, particularly with respect to student research. However, the limitations of using only university students as participants must be recognized. University students by definition do not consist of a representative sample, and generally fall into specific margins of age, class, and education. The relevance of demographic factors such as these was outlined in Section 2 with respect to perceptions of severity, responsibility and harm when dealing with sexual assault.

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24 It was hoped that participants would also be recruited from the University of Melbourne, Department of Social Work, however this was not possible. The reasons for this will be discussed in the ‘Procedure’ section, which outlines how participants were recruited.
Design\textsuperscript{25}

**Main Sample**

The main design of the study took the form of a $3 \times 2 \times 2$ experimental design with repeated measures\textsuperscript{26}. The independent variables for the main sample were prior victim-perpetrator relationship (stranger, acquaintance (no prior relationship), acquaintance (prior relationship)), alcohol (alcohol present, no alcohol present), and injuries (injuries caused, no injuries caused). The dependent variables for the main sample were overall severity, perpetrator responsibility, and harm done to victim.

**Subsample**

The subsample independent variables were the same as for the main sample, with relationship again consisting of three levels (stranger, acquaintance (no prior relationship), and acquaintance (prior relationship)) and alcohol consisting of two levels (alcohol present, no alcohol present). However, the factor of injuries was not included in the subsample for reasons relating to time restrictions\textsuperscript{27}. As such, the subsample questionnaire took the form of a $3 \times 2$ experimental design with repeated measures. The dependent variables for this sample were victim mode of dress, victim pre-assault behaviour, level of perpetrator premeditation,

\textsuperscript{25}In order to maintain the brevity of the current section, a number of issues and limitations have been elaborated on in the Methodology addendum (Appendix C). These relate to the design of the study, limitations associated with certain aspects, measures taken to account for these elements, and justifications.

\textsuperscript{26}The application of a repeated measures design allows the researcher to avoid confounding individual differences, however specific issues such as order effects and threats to internal validity should be recognized (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003). For an overview of advantages and limitations of repeated measures experimental designs, see Appendix C.

\textsuperscript{27}The factor of injuries was not included as an independent variable for the subsample as it was necessary to include additional dependent variables whilst maintaining the brevity of the questionnaire. Injuries have been shown to affect attributions of perpetrator responsibility but not differences in victim blaming, whilst the factor of alcohol has been shown to affect both (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003). As the subsample was designed to test assumptions about factors relating to victim blaming and precipitation, such as the victim’s mode of dress and pre-assault behaviour, it was decided that the factor of injuries would be less likely to influence individual perceptions than the factor of alcohol.
perpetrator responsibility, and harm done to victim. For both main sample and subsample questionnaires, the independent factors were operationalised using hypothetical scenarios and the dependent factors were operationalised either through scales ranging from 1 to 11, or “high”, “medium”, “low” ratings.

**Questionnaire**

**Main Sample**
The main sample questionnaire (Appendix A) consisted of twelve hypothetical descriptions of rape, providing a brief context for each incident. The names and ages of the victim and perpetrator, the approximate time of day, the location of the incident, a brief description of what the victim and perpetrator had been doing prior to the incident or their reasons for being in the location of the incident were described in each incident. A brief description of the interaction between victim and perpetrator and the initiation of the rape was also included in each incident, along with information relevant to the factors of prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries. Details of the rapes themselves were not provided in order to avoid distressing participants, and each scenario was kept short in order to ensure that responses were based on immediate reactions to the relevant details provided. Each scenario was one paragraph, or approximately ten to fifteen lines, in length.

**Subsample**
The subsample (Appendix B) consisted of six of the twelve hypothetical descriptions included in the main sample. The same information was provided in each of these descriptions as for the main sample incidents.

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28. It is recognized that whilst the brevity of the incidents ensured that individuals were more likely to remember the factors of interest and respond to them accordingly, there are a number of issues associated with selective presentation of information which will be discussed further.

29. The six incidents in the main sample were those incidents in which the victim did not receive physical injuries.
**Limitations of and justifications for experimental research and text-based representations**

The application of experimental survey research to assessing individual attitudes and perceptions enables researchers to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the factors that affect judgements (Ward, 1995). However, the external validity of this type of research has been much criticized. The benefits of survey-based studies to researchers who are subject to practical limitations such as financial or time restraints are widely appreciated, but it has been argued that results of survey research have only limited value when attempting to generalize as to how individuals would respond to a particular real-life case (Ward, 1995). For an explanation of the limitations and advantages of using text-based representations in sexual assault research, see Appendix C.

In the context of other experimental research using similar methodological approaches to assessing individual attitudes towards sexual assault, the textual representations of incidents of rape used in the current study were more simplistic than most. This was done mainly in order to isolate the factors that were of interest to the researcher, being the effect of factors such as prior victim-perpetrator relationship, alcohol use, and injuries on perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm. The priority of avoiding unnecessary distress to participants combined with the desire isolate these factors whilst maintaining the brevity of the questionnaires meant that each incident had to be brief, simplistic, and primarily context-based in providing information relevant to prior relationship, the involvement of alcohol, and whether injuries resulted from the attack.

For the current study, the use of vignettes was also conducive to the financial and time restraints imposed on the research. As participation was entirely voluntary and no incentives were provided to participants, it was necessary to ensure that the questionnaires could be realistically and thoroughly completed in a short amount of time. Additionally, the use of vignettes ensured that all participants were responding to each of the combinations of factors contained in
the same stimulus. This helps to maximize the uniformity of the results (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Finally, due to the sensitivity of the topic being explored, the use of written vignettes minimized the amount of distress to participants. More explicit and detailed formed of stimulus would have undoubtedly been unpleasant and potentially traumatic to individuals. In order to account for those effects, more extensive counselling provisions and individual debriefing sessions would have been required.

With respect to the current study, the upper and lower limits of each factor varied to a certain extent. As mentioned, the discrepancy between incidents involving alcohol and incidents not involving alcohol was clear. However, with respect to the factors of prior relationship and injuries, the divisions between each level were less extreme. Between the levels of stranger and acquaintance (no prior relationship), the main defining factor was simply prior non-sexual contact. Between the levels of acquaintance (no prior relationship) and acquaintance (prior relationship), the main defining factor was prior sexual contact in the context of a relationship that had ended prior to the incident. The lack of elaboration on the extent of the injury done in incidents involving injuries meant that the upper and lower limits with respect to that factor were not necessarily particularly far apart. Whilst information relating to prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries was underlined in order to ensure participants took note of the relevance of those factors, that the distinction between the levels of prior relationship and injuries was not extreme may be problematic to the effect of those factors on perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm.

It should also be mentioned that by underlining information relevant to the dependent variables of prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries, this method may have made it obvious to the participants what the aim of the study was. Whilst this may have influenced participants’ responses to the scales, pilot participants (to be introduced in the following section) did not perceive this as problematic and did not assume that severity, responsibility, and harm ratings would necessarily be affected by the factors in any particular direction. Individuals without detailed knowledge of sexual assault and empirical research on the effects of these factors would not know what response patterns were expected of them.
Pilot

Before administering the questionnaires, a draft of each of the two questionnaires (the main sample and the subsample questionnaire) was piloted on five individuals between the ages of 22 and 24. The responses to these trials were used to address and highlight any problems perceived on the part of the pilot participants. Specific questions were posed with respect to the extent to which each incident was believable and realistic, assumptions made about each incident, and the format of the descriptions and questionnaires overall. Questions were asked about whether either victim or perpetrator was described in more negative terms, and whether individuals felt the descriptions were more or less favourable towards either victim or perpetrator. General comments and feedback were also requested. For a brief explanation of the results of the pilot, see Appendix C.

Independent variables

Prior victim-perpetrator relationship

 Stranger incidents involved two people who had neither met nor seen each other prior to the incident being described. Acquaintance (no prior relationship) involved two people who had no prior physical contact and no significant relationship (either sexual or friendship-based) but had either become acquainted immediately prior to the incident or had known each other in some way previously\(^{31}\). Acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents involved two people who

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\(^{31}\) The contact between victim and perpetrator prior to the incident in scenarios of acquaintance (no prior relationship) incidents was not to be interpreted as goal-oriented on the part of the perpetrator. The assumption that the interaction described between victim and perpetrator was entirely planned in terms of the ultimate end of the rape itself on the part of the perpetrator was not a desired association. This relates to factors of premeditation and planning, and risks developing an unbalanced description of the perpetrator.
had previously been involved in a romantic (and implicitly sexual\textsuperscript{32}) relationship, which had ended on amicable terms some time prior to the incident.

**Alcohol**

The factor of alcohol consisted of two levels – alcohol present and no alcohol present. Incidents in which alcohol was used related to situations where both victim and perpetrator were intoxicated. This was made explicit, with victim and perpetrator being described as “reasonably” or “relatively” intoxicated in those incidents that did involve alcohol\textsuperscript{33}. It was important for both individuals to be described as drunk as empirical evidence suggests that the effect of alcohol on perceptions of perpetrator responsibility are only experienced when both victim and perpetrator were described as equally intoxicated (Stormo, Lang & Stritzke, 1997). Incidents in which alcohol was not used related to situations where both victim and perpetrator were sober. Each of these incidents described the victim and perpetrator as not having consumed any alcohol during the time described or prior to the incident.

**Injuries**

Incidents in which injuries were present related to scenarios in which the victim was physically hurt as a direct result of the attack. At the end of these incidents, a phrase was included stating that the victim was “physically hurt” or “received physical injuries” as a result of the incident. The amount of injuries caused was

\textsuperscript{32} Pilot participants assumed that the relationships described in the acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents involved a past sexual history. The sexual relationship was not explicitly stated in these incidents due to concerns relating to priming the existence of a prior consensual sexual relationship. The risk of explicitly mentioning that the victim and perpetrator had previously engaged in consensual sex relates to priming the issue of consent. Whilst each incident made it clear that the victim was not consenting, explicitly mentioning previous consensual contact may confuse the issue or suggest that acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents may have involved a level of consent that the stranger and acquaintance (no prior relationship) rape incidents did not.

\textsuperscript{33} Victims and perpetrators were described as being “reasonably” or “relatively” drunk in order to ensure that the factor of alcohol was central enough to have the potential to influence individual perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm, whilst at the same time avoiding the assumption that either victim or perpetrator were not conscious of their actions. A certain level of alcohol had to be involved for individuals to assume that victim and perpetrator may have been affected by the drug, however it was undesirable to present individuals as being intoxicated to a point that implied a lack of awareness about their actions and behaviours.
not made explicit in order to avoid distressing participants, and the standardized phrasing was aimed at ensuring that participants assumed the same amount of physical harm done in each of these incidents\textsuperscript{34}. Incidents in which injuries were absent related to scenarios in which the victim was not physically hurt as a result of the attack. At the end of these incidents, a phrase was included stating that the victim was “not physically hurt” or “did not receive physical injuries” as a result of the incident.

**Dependent variables**

**Main sample questionnaire**

**Severity**

The main sample questionnaire required participants to indicate their perceptions of the overall severity of each of the twelve incidents using an ordinal scale in the form of an 11 point likert scale as used by Sparks, Genn and Dodd in their study aimed at measuring attitudes to specific crimes (Sparks, Genn & Dodd, 1977). This 11 point category or ordinal scale was designed to reflect respondents’ ordering of incident seriousness, with a score of 1 representing the lowest level of seriousness, and a score of 11 representing the highest level of seriousness\textsuperscript{35}.

\textsuperscript{34} However, it cannot be assumed that participants necessarily assumed the same level of physical injuries. Individuals may assume different levels of violence when considering incidents of sexual assault based on general awareness, prior knowledge, or personal beliefs. Whilst one participant may assume that ‘injuries’ refers to a few bruises or cuts, another may assume that ‘injuries’ refers to more extreme harm such as broken bones or more permanent damage. This potentially influences the reliability of the scales, however it was decided that to make the level of injuries more explicit might be distressing to individuals. Additionally, Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Binderup (2000) suggest that explicitly stating the level of violence used has the potential to draw on participants’ beliefs about physical assault rather than sexual violence.

\textsuperscript{35} It should be noted that whilst mean values were calculated from the 11 point ordinal scales, the ultimate analysis related to categorical high/low response tendencies and as such the issues with
Responsibility
The second scale in the main sample questionnaire required participants to rate perpetrator responsibility as low (1), medium (2), or high (3). This smaller scale was used for the main sample in order to minimize the amount of time needed for each of the twelve incidents. This was not done for the scale of severity as ratings of incident seriousness were the main focus, with responsibility and harm ratings included as components of severity.

For the subsample, as there were fewer incidents to which participants were asked to respond, responsibility scales took the form of the 11 point likert scale described above. These scales were reversed with respect to the 11 point severity scale, in that a score of 1 for responsibility in the subsample represented a high level of perpetrator responsibility rather than a low level of perpetrator responsibility. This was done in part to ensure that participants were responding accurately to the questions asked, in that participants would have to read the scales and descriptions relatively carefully in order to respond correctly.36

Harm
The scale of harm required participants to rate the psychological harm done to the victim as low (1), medium (2), or high (3). As with the responsibility scale, this smaller scale was used in order to maintain the brevity of the questionnaire as harm is conceptually a component of overall seriousness.

Again, with the subsample, the extended 11 point likert scale was used for trauma/harm done to the victim. As with the responsibility scale, a score of 1 represented the highest level of harm done to the victim, whilst a score of 11 represented the lowest level of harm done to the victim.

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36 It was found that ultimately, participants read the questionnaires carefully and responded to the scales accurately and correctly.
Subsample questionnaire

In addition to the factors of perpetrator responsibility and harm done to victim, three factors were included in the subsample that were designed to provide some insight into participants’ assumptions about the level of precipitation on the part of the victim and the level of planning on the part of the perpetrator. The factors of ‘victim mode of dress’ and ‘victim pre-assault behaviour’ relate to perceptions of victim precipitation, whilst the factor of ‘premeditation’ relates to the level on planning on the part of the perpetrator, and is an element which increases perpetrator culpability.

Mode of dress
The factor of mode of dress was included in the subsample only, and required participants to indicate their assumptions about the victim’s appearance and attire. The scale for mode of dress again took the form of an 11 point likert scale, with a score of 1 indicating that the participant assumed the victim to be conservatively-dressed, and a score of 11 indicating that the participant assumed the victim to be unconservatively-dressed. Details of the victim’s attire were not included in any of the incidents, and the appearance of each victim was described using similar phrasing, as will be discussed in the section detailing ‘extraneous factors’.

Pre-assault behaviour
The scale relating to the victim’s pre-assault behaviour required participants to indicate how ‘friendly’ or ‘unfriendly’ they assumed the victim’s behaviour to have

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37 Pilot participants interpreted the term ‘unconservative’ as suggesting potentially provocative in appearance or ‘scantily-clad’, and ‘conservative’ as suggesting unprovocative in appearance or not attracting attention.
been in response to the perpetrator in each incident\textsuperscript{38}. The scale for pre-assault behaviour also took the form of an 11 point likert scale, with a score of 1 indicating that the participant assumed the victim’s behaviour to have been unfriendly, and a score of 11 indicating that the participant assumed the victim’s behaviour to have been friendly. As will be outlined in the following section, descriptions of each victim’s behaviour towards the perpetrator depended on the prior victim-perpetrator relationship, and were designed to reflect socially acceptable levels of behaviour depending on that relationship.

**Premeditation**

The third scale included in the subsample related to the level of planning or premeditation on the part of the perpetrator that was assumed for each incident. Participants were required to indicate how premeditated they felt the incident was, with a score of 1 indicating a high level of premeditation, and a score of 11 indicating a low level of premeditation. The following section relates to extraneous factors, and will describe the measures taken to ensure that perpetrators were not described in an unbalanced manner, and that participants were not given reason to believe that one particular incident was necessarily more premeditated than another. The scale of premeditation was included to provide an insight into what assumptions participants make about the level of planning involved in stranger rape, acquaintance (no prior relationship) rape, and acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents and incidents with alcohol present and absent.

\textsuperscript{38} Pilot participants interpreted the term ‘friendly’ to indicate sociable and polite, and ‘unfriendly’ as indicating reserved or impolite. It is recognized that the ambiguity of the terms used in this scale may be problematic, as interpretations of what constitutes friendly behaviour in different situations may differ from person to person. What might be considered appropriate behaviour by one individual may be interpreted as overly inviting or friendly by another. However, the consistent responses given by pilot participants combined with comments and questions raised by subsample participants serve to increase the construct validity of this scale.
Extraneous factors

Selective presentation of information relating to a complex real-life situation, as is the case when designing text-based vignettes, necessarily means that the participant viewing the description will make certain assumptions based on preconceived ideas and previous knowledge about factors that are not made explicit. In order to control for extraneous factors related to assumptions made by participants which may influence perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm, a number of elements were controlled in the design of the questionnaire. These are related to the level of planning that might be assumed, pre-assault behaviour and mode of dress on the part of the victim which might have incited the attack, and elements related to the amount of force used and victim resistance. For a detailed explanation of factors which were controlled in the main and subsample questionnaires, see Appendix C.

Procedure

The current study was approved by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee before commencement.

Organisation of data collection – University of Melbourne

For data collection on-site at the University of Melbourne, contact was made with head lecturers from the Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing in order to obtain permission to recruit participants from their lectures. As it was necessary to arrange for a classroom to be available for data collection for University of Melbourne participants, it was decided that lectures taking place before lunchtime (12pm – 1pm) for Mechanical and Manufacturing and Social Work subjects would be selected\(^{39}\), and the lecture theatres would be reserved for data collection.
collection following the lecture. Announcements were made in two Mechanical
and Manufacturing lectures. It was not possible to make announcements in
Social Work classes, and as such advertisements were placed in the Social Work
common room and elevators inviting students to participate in pre-assigned
sessions, or to contact the researcher to arrange a separate time. Due to the
difficulty in recruiting, no participants were obtained from the Department of
Social Work.

Organisation of data collection - NMIT
Permission was obtained from the Departments of Health and Community
Studies and Mechanical and Manufacturing at NMIT before data collection was
commenced. Contact was initiated via phone and e-mail, and session times
were coordinated with NMIT departments and lecturers. Announcements were
made in three classes for the Department of Health and Community Studies and
in two classes for the Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing.

Administering the questionnaires
Response rates for each of the three groups (NMIT Mechanical and
Manufacturing and Health and Community Studies, University of Melbourne
Mechanical and Manufacturing) were relatively high. Between a third and a half
of the students who were invited to participate from NMIT stayed on to complete
the questionnaires, and around a fifth of those from the University of Melbourne
stayed on. Questionnaires were administered in classrooms and lecture
theatres with the supervision of the researcher. This ensured that the process
could be monitored and if individuals had any queries or became distressed at

with respect to NMIT, Health and Community Studies lectures were selected in order to obtain a
sample of participants with some degree of sociological or community-based education.
40 The two lectures in which announcements were made for the Mechanical and Manufacturing
group were the only lectures within that department which were held immediately before lunch
and for which either the same lecture theatre, or one nearby, was available.
41 The classes from which participants were recruited for the NMIT groups were decided by
lecturers and administrative staff from within the Departments of Health and Community Studies
and Mechanical and Manufacturing.
42 The issues with respect to the generalisability of results obtained through voluntary
participation will be discussed in the following section.
any time, the researcher could respond immediately. Plain language statements providing some background to the study and an overview of what would be expected of participants were given to each individual before commencing the survey (Appendix D). All participants signed a standard consent form (Appendix E) before being given the questionnaire.

As the main results of interest would be obtained from the main questionnaire, it was decided in advance that 75% of the sample would complete the standard main sample questionnaire (Appendix A), and the remaining 25% would complete the subsample (Appendix B). As such, every fourth participant was given a subsample questionnaire, whereas the remaining participants were given a main sample questionnaire. Participants took between 10 and 20 minutes to complete the questionnaires. Immediate responses were important to the researchers as ratings of severity, responsibility and harm would then result from automatic emotional reactions rather than cognitive appraisals, which might be more subject to social desirability response biases.

After completing the questionnaire, each participant individually returned the booklet to the researcher. Once the participant had returned the questionnaire, he/she was given a debriefing statement (Appendix F) which they were told they could keep and read it immediately or in their own time. The debriefing statement provided further details of the study, what factors were being isolated and why the area was of interest to the researcher. Approximately half of the participants stayed on and read through the debriefing statement immediately, and half left before having read the statement.

**Voluntary participation**

A sampling issue which should be addressed is the effect of voluntary participation. Any study that involves voluntary participation will not generally be

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43 Social desirability refers to an individual’s tendency to present themselves in a positive manner relative to social norms (Myung-Soo, 2000). This requires a cognitive appraisal of social attitudes and expectations as well as self-reflection on the part of the individual.
obtaining a representative sample, as certain individuals are more likely than others to participate (De Vaus, 2002). For the current study, not only was participation voluntary, but certain ethical requirements meant that the environment in which the questionnaires were completed was relatively artificial and controlled\textsuperscript{44}. Questionnaires had to be completed at a given time in the presence of the researcher, and, as already mentioned, individuals were not given incentives to participate. Organisational requirements meant that only a small number of lectures and classes could be targeted for recruitment\textsuperscript{45}. As such, there was a slightly lower response rate as compared to what would be expected if questionnaires were handed out in bulk for participants to complete in their own time and in privacy\textsuperscript{46}. As participation necessarily involved considerable inconvenience to individuals, it is likely that those who did choose to participate did so for reasons relating to personal interest in the topic, or student research in general. Those individuals who had a personal interest in the topic may also have had a higher level of awareness with respect to sexual assault. Individuals who are interested in sexual assault and rape may be more inclined to read relevant articles and books.

**Supervised sessions**

A common problem with survey-based research stems from a lack of understanding on the part of the participants with respect to the terms chosen and used in the surveys (Hall, 2001). For this study, the researcher was present during the entire process and remained in the room with participants. An advantage of this method was that participants were able to raise questions or

\textsuperscript{44} In order to avoid the issue of non-consenting individuals becoming exposed to the content of the questionnaires, and in order to ensure that participants could raise any concerns or queries during the course of the session, surveys were administered under the supervision of the researcher in a controlled environment. This was done in order to ensure that harm done to others (both participating individuals and those not participating) was kept to a minimum in light of the sensitive material being presented.

\textsuperscript{45} As only a small number of lectures and classes were targeting, repeating the study using participants from other classes from within the same departments might not give the same results.

\textsuperscript{46} However, in light of the lack of incentives provided to participants, response rates remained relatively high in the context of the method of recruitment adopted.
concerns, and ask for clarification at any stage of the process. Participants directed questions towards the researcher on a number of occasions in order to clarify minor issues such as definitions of terms and dependent variables. These questions enabled participants to complete the questionnaires confidently and correctly, and this method ensures that the quality and accuracy of the responses was maintained as much as possible\textsuperscript{47}.

The supervised sessions were advantageous with respect to ensuring each participant responded to the sections of the questionnaire accurately and in full. However, responses to severity ratings, harm ratings, and responsibility ratings for each incident may have been affected by social desirability biases. More personalized methods of questionnaire administration increase the likelihood that participants will respond to sensitive or controversial issues and questions in a manner which they believe to be more socially acceptable (De Vaus, 2002). Much psychological research has demonstrated that people alter or distort their responses to questionnaires in order to present themselves in a positive manner\textsuperscript{48} (Myung-Soo, 2000; Ward, 1995). Having said this, whilst the supervised sessions used a more personalized manner of questionnaire administration than unsupervised and unmonitored survey research, the effect of social desirability would be less influential as compared to phone surveys or other individually administered questionnaires (De Vaus, 2002). Each participant was aware of their anonymity and the presence of the researcher would not be expected to significantly influence responses. Social desirability response biases are more frequently observed in situations where the individual has motivation to influence his/her responses in line with socially accepted norms (Myung-Soo, 2000). Elements such as anonymity and a minimal direct interaction between participant and researcher would minimize the effects of social desirability.

\textsuperscript{47} It was noted that questionnaires were consistently completed in full, despite the number of incidents (12 for the main sample, 6 for the subsample) and number of scales each participant was asked to respond to (3 for the main sample, 5 for the subsample).

\textsuperscript{48} The converse bias effect of the desire to shock others should also be mentioned as a possible influence, however in the context of the current findings this was not relevant.
Ethics

When approaching individuals to participate in a research project that involves a topic of a sensitive nature that might potentially cause psychological or emotional distress to participants, researchers must take the necessary precautions to ensure that others are not harmed in the process and account for any unexpected outcomes. The current study involved students, and bearing in mind the prevalence of acquaintance rape amongst university students (Koss, Gidycz & Wisniewski, 1987), a number of measures were taken to ensure that students were made aware of the topic and the risks associated with it beforehand.

During initial announcements, participants were warned of the nature of the questionnaires, and advised not to participate if they had personally experienced sexual assault in the past. The warning suggested that anyone who had been a victim of sexual assault who still wanted to participate should do so only if they could contact a counsellor who had helped them in the past. A similar warning was included in the plain language statement, and a debriefing statement was given to each participant individually on completion of the questionnaire. In the debriefing statement, participants were once again reminded of the sensitive nature of the questionnaires, and contact numbers for both the supervising researcher and nearby Centres for Sexual Assault were provided. The debriefing statement was designed to ensure that any distress experienced following completion of the questionnaires was addressed through providing participants with access to the relevant counselling agencies.

In order to ensure that non-consenting individuals were not exposed to the information in the questionnaires, the sessions were fully supervised and all questionnaires were returned to the researcher upon completion. The researcher remained in the classroom with participants for the duration of the session.
In terms of the issues of anonymity and privacy, names were not taken at any point in time from participants. The only demographics collected were the sex and age of each participant, and the course in which they were enrolled. Information about anonymity and each participant’s right to withdraw without explanation was included in the plain language statement.
Section 4:

Main sample results

Prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries

Hypothesis one: Prior relationship

Hypothesis one predicts that individual ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm will decrease with increasing prior victim-perpetrator contact, such that stranger rape incidents will elicit higher ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm, and acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents will be given lower ratings.

Mean ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm were calculated for each of the three types of relationship incidents (stranger, acquaintance no prior relationship, acquaintance prior relationship). These ratings were then compared across relationship categories to establish whether the pattern predicted by hypothesis one was upheld. The tables of means for severity, responsibility, and harm by the factors of relationship, alcohol, and injuries can be viewed in Appendix G.

The mean severity ratings seemed to decrease with increasing victim-perpetrator contact, with acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents given lower severity ratings overall. Acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents also tended to be given lower responsibility ratings as compared to stranger and acquaintance (no prior relationship) incidents. Harm ratings followed the same pattern as observed

49 With respect to the mean ratings of severity, it should be noted that although individuals may intuitively designate equal changes in seriousness for each increase on the 11 point likert scale, there is no way of ensuring that a difference between a score of 2 and a score of 3 is equivalent to the difference between a score of 5 and a score of 6 (Sparks, Genn, and Dodd, 1977). However, as the results will primarily focus on the categorical high/low responses which will be introduced, this issue will be less problematic than if findings were based directly on mean ratings.
for severity ratings, with acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents given lower harm ratings overall.

Observed differences for severity, harm, and particularly responsibility were small, and an investigation of the distribution of scores showed that they were extremely skewed (Appendix H). One consequence of this is that the means would be overwhelmed by the extreme skew of the distributions. Because of this, it was not possible to use t-tests to investigate the patterns observed with respect to the mean ratings. However, the differences observed in terms of the effect of prior relationship on ratings of severity and harm may still be significant.

In order to investigate this, ratings of responsibility, and harm, ratings were split into two categories – ‘high’ and ‘low’. For severity ratings, high scores consisted of ratings of 11 or above, and low scores consisted of ratings of 10 or below. For responsibility and harm ratings, high scores consisted of ‘high’ (3 or 4) ratings, and low scores consisted of ratings of ‘medium’ (2) and ‘low’ (1). These divisions were based on the distributions of scores, as more than 70% of severity scores overall were 11 or above, more than 95% of responsibility scores and 90% of harm scores were ‘high’. For each category of rape (stranger, acquaintance no prior relationship, acquaintance prior relationship), the percentage of participants that gave ‘high’ ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm were calculated for comparison.

50 The scales provided ranged from 1 to 11, however a number of participants (2) altered the severity ratings to include an extra score on the high end of the scale, extending severity ratings to 12.
51 Similarly, a small number of participants (2) altered harm scales to include a fourth category of ‘very high’, which was included in the analysis as representing an equivalent score of 4.
52 The danger of dividing responses into categorical high/low tendencies is that any effect being investigated will be maximised, and the relevance of this must be kept in mind when considering the differences observed in the following section. Whilst patterns may still be relevant, it should be recognised that the effect of each incident will be ostensibly increased when splitting the range of possible scores into two categorical divisions. Additionally, the use of categorical high/low response analyses capitalises on the effects of chance, and in order to maximise the reliability of the results, the study would need to be repeated. However, the benefit of categorical high/low
Figure 1. Percentage of participants who gave ‘high’ ratings for severity, responsibility, and harm by factor of relationship.

Figure 1 presents the percentage of participants that gave ratings of 11 or more for severity, and ratings of 3 or more for responsibility and harm for stranger, acquaintance (no prior relationship), and acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents. With respect to severity ratings, the pattern observed with respect to the mean ratings has been preserved in the categorical high/low response analysis. A higher percentage of participants assigned severity ratings of 11 or more for stranger rape (76%) and acquaintance (no prior relationship) rape (74%) incidents as compared to acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents (64%). A similar pattern can be observed for responsibility ratings, however the difference between categories of prior relationship are less substantial (98% for stranger rape incidents, 97% for acquaintance no prior relationship rape

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analysis for the current study stems from the minimal differences in mean scores and the extreme skew of the distributions.

53 The influence of error variance should be recognized when considering small differences such as those presented, and with the sample size used it cannot be guaranteed that the effects would be observed to the same extent if the experiment was repeated.
incidents, 94% for acquaintance prior relationship rape incidents). Harm ratings convey a more noticeable effect of relationship, with stranger rape (93%) and acquaintance (no prior relationship) rape (92%) incidents more frequently given high ratings of harm as compared to acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents (77%).

**Hypothesis two: Alcohol**

Hypothesis two predicts that the involvement of alcohol in an incident of rape will affect ratings of severity and responsibility, such that ratings will be higher for incidents not involving alcohol, and lower for incidents involving alcohol. Perceptions of harm should not differ as a result of the involvement of alcohol in an incident of rape.

Mean ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm were calculated for incidents involving alcohol and incidents not involving alcohol in order to establish whether the pattern predicted by hypothesis two was upheld. See Appendix G for tables of means.

Incidents involving alcohol were perceived as less severe and less harmful to the victim overall. The difference with respect to ratings of harm was unexpected, as it was not predicted that the factor of alcohol would influence perceptions of harm to victim. Perpetrators were assigned lower ratings of responsibility for incidents involving alcohol as compared to those where the victim and perpetrator were both sober. As the differences are again minute, the categorical high/low tendencies for each type of incident (alcohol, no alcohol) are presented in Figure 2 to investigate these trends further.
Figure 2. Percentage of participants who gave ‘high’ ratings for severity, responsibility, and harm by factor of alcohol.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of participants who assigned severity ratings of 11 or more and ratings of 3 or more for responsibility and harm for incidents involving alcohol and incidents involving no alcohol. The pattern demonstrated by the mean severity, responsibility, and harm ratings was also observed with respect to the categorical high/low response analysis. A higher percentage of participants assigned severity ratings of 11 or more for incidents involving no alcohol (76%) as compared to incidents involving alcohol (69%). This same trend was associated with responsibility ratings, with a higher percentage of participants attributing high responsibility ratings to incidents involving no alcohol (98%) as compared to incidents involving alcohol (94%). Similarly, a higher percentage of participants assigned high ratings of harm to incidents involving no alcohol (90%) as compared to incidents involving alcohol (84%)\textsuperscript{54}.

\textsuperscript{54} With respect to the categorical high/low tendencies, the effect of sample size on percentages should be recognized when considering the differences observed. The effect of a change of one participant moving from the category of a rating of ‘high’ to ‘low’ would be to alter the percentage of participants who gave high ratings by 2.3\%.
Hypothesis three: Injuries

Hypothesis three predicts that incidents in which the victim receives physical injuries as a result of the attack will be associated with higher ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm than incidents in which the victim does not receive physical injuries.

Mean ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm were calculated for incidents involving injuries and incidents not involving injuries in order to establish whether the pattern predicted by hypothesis three was upheld. See Appendix G for tables of means.

Mean severity ratings were higher for incidents involving injuries as compared to incidents that did not involve injuries. Responsibility ratings did not show a pattern with respect to injuries, however harm ratings were higher for incidents involving injuries as compared to those involving no injuries. The categorical high/low response analysis is presented in Figure 3 to investigate these trends further.
Figure 3. Percentage of participants who gave ‘high’ ratings for severity, responsibility, and harm by factor of injuries.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of participants who gave severity scores of 11 or more and ratings of 3 or more for responsibility and harm for incidents involving injuries and incidents not involving injuries. Severity ratings were substantially influenced by the factor of injuries, with 81% of participants giving high severity scores for incidents involving injuries and only 62% of participants giving high severity scores for incidents not involving injuries. Responsibility ratings were not substantially affected by the factor of injuries, but some effect of injuries was seen with respect to harm ratings. 91% of participants gave high harm ratings for incidents involving injuries, as compared to 83% for incidents not involving injuries.

**Hypothesis four: Interaction effects**

Based on empirical evidence and main effect results outlined earlier, it was predicted that stranger rape incidents that did not involve alcohol would be
perceived as more severe and more harmful to the victim than acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents that did involve alcohol. It was also predicted that stranger rape incidents that did involve injuries would be perceived as more severe and more harmful to the victim than acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents that did not involve injuries.

Although no substantial main effects were noted with respect to responsibility, these ratings were also included to establish whether any combination of factors affects attributions of responsibility. Categorical high/low response patterns were investigated in order to establish whether predictions of interaction effects were upheld. As with the main effect categorical high/low analyses, high ratings of severity consisted of scores of 11 or above, and high ratings of responsibility and harm consisted of scores of 3 or above.

**Severity**

With respect to severity ratings, the combining of factors of relationship and alcohol did not produce an interaction. A slight interaction was observed with respect to the combination of factors of relationship and injuries, however this was only observed with respect to the category of acquaintance (prior relationship). For severity interaction graphs, see Appendix I.

**Responsibility**

The combination of the factors of relationship and alcohol produced a slight interaction with respect to responsibility ratings, such that adding the factor of alcohol served to amplify the decrease in responsibility ratings over the categories of stranger, acquaintance (npr) and acquaintance (pr). However, the differences in responsibility ratings were still minimal. Similarly, combining the factors of relationship and injuries also produced a slight interaction. For responsibility interaction graphs, see Appendix I.
**Harm**

With respect to harm ratings, the combination of the factors of relationship and injuries produced a slight interaction, such that adding the factors of alcohol served to amplify the increase in harm ratings over the categories of acquaintance (pr), acquaintance (npr) and stranger. For harm interaction graphs, see Appendix I.
Hypothesis five: Social demographic differences

Empirical evidence suggests that demographic factors such as gender and class affect perceptions of severity, responsibility and harm with respect to rape incidents. Based on these studies, students enrolled in social and community-based degrees might be less likely to engage in perpetrator justification and victim blaming as compared to students enrolled in engineering degrees as they are more likely to be exposed to gender issues through education. As such, it is predicted that students enrolled in Health and Community Studies courses will give higher ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm overall and will show less noticeable differences with respect to the influence of situational factors such as prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries as compared to students enrolled in Mechanical and Manufacturing courses.

With respect to the effect of gender, empirical evidence is somewhat inconclusive however sex role socialisation suggests that females will be more supportive of victims of sexual assault and less likely to be affected by situational factors such as prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries as compared to males. Thus, it is predicted that female participants will give higher ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm overall and will show less noticeable differences with respect to prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries than male participants.

Whilst no specific predictions were made with respect to university differences, ratings for participants from the two universities selected (the University of Melbourne and NMIT) were compared in order to establish whether any geographical or social class differences might exist. The University of Melbourne represents a more metropolitan and expensive institution, whilst NMIT could be

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55 The disproportionality of the groups must be kept in mind when considering the social demographic group differences discussed. Males (N=31), mechanical and manufacturing students (N=29), and NMIT students (N=30) were overrepresented in the sample as compared to females (N=13), health and community studies students (N=15), and University of Melbourne students (N=14).
considered a less urban or central university. Higher income has been shown to be associated with more sympathetic views towards rape victims.

**Overall social demographic differences for severity, responsibility, and harm**

Categorical high/low response patterns were investigated with respect to overall ratings of incident severity, perpetrator responsibility, and harm to victim for each of the six groups (males versus females; Health and Community Studies students versus Mechanical and Manufacturing students; University of Melbourne students versus NMIT students). Tables with specific categorical high/low response patterns can be viewed in Appendix J.

In the main sample, males were overrepresented as compared to females. Due to the failure to recruit participants from the University of Melbourne, Department of Social Work, the sample consisted of more Mechanical and Manufacturing students as compared to Health and Community Studies students, and more participants from NMIT as compared to the University of Melbourne.

Severity scores for males, Mechanical and Manufacturing students, and participants from the University of Melbourne tended to be lower, with between 60% and 66% of participants from these groups assigned severity ratings of 11 or more overall. By comparison, between 76% and 84% of females, Health and Community Studies participants, and participants from NMIT assigned severity ratings of 11 or more overall. Responsibility ratings did not seem to differ substantially between groups. A higher percentage of females (98%) gave high harm ratings overall as compared to males (83%). Health and Community Studies participants also tended to give higher harm ratings (93%) as compared to Mechanical and Manufacturing participants (84%). There was a slight difference between harm ratings by University, with 89% of NMIT participants assigning high ratings of harm overall as compared to 84% of University of Melbourne participants.
Social demographic group differences for severity and harm by factor of relationship

The interactions of group differences (gender, course, university) were investigated with respect to the factor of relationship. Categorical high/low response patterns were calculated with respect to ratings of incident severity and harm to victim for each of the three categories of rape by factor of relationship (stranger; acquaintance no prior relationship; acquaintance prior relationship) for each of the six groups. Responsibility ratings were not addressed as the effect of each factor on these ratings for any of the six groups was not substantial as compared to the effect on ratings of severity and harm. Tables with specific categorical high/low response patterns can be viewed in Appendix J.

Severity

Male severity scores were more affected by the factor of relationship, with 73% of males assigning high severity scores for stranger rape incidents as compared to 57% for acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents. Female severity scores were only affected by the factor of relationship with respect to acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents.

Mechanical and Manufacturing participants showed the effect of relationship between stranger and acquaintance (no prior relationship) more than Health and Community Studies participants, however Health and Community Studies participants showed more of a difference between acquaintance (no prior relationship) and acquaintance (prior relationship) than Mechanical and Manufacturing participants. For both groups, the effect of relationship was strongest when dealing with acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents.

Severity scores for participants from NMIT were higher overall but more affected in terms of severity ratings by the factor of relationship, but only with respect to
acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents. The percentage of NMIT students that gave high severity ratings dropped substantially from 81% for stranger rape incidents and 80% for acquaintance (no prior relationship) incidents to 63% for acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents.

Harm
Whilst females did not show a pattern for harm ratings with respect to relationship, male harm ratings appeared to be affected by prior relationship, particularly for acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents. The percentage of males that assigned high harm ratings for stranger incidents and acquaintance (no prior relationship) incidents dropped substantially as compared to acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents.

Mechanical and Manufacturing harm ratings were only affected by relationship with respect to acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents. This difference was larger than for Health and Community Studies participants, 95.0% of which assigned high harm ratings for stranger rape incidents, 96.7% for acquaintance (no prior relationship) incidents, and 90.0% for acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents.

Harm ratings for participants from the University of Melbourne were more affected by relationship, the effect of which was particularly noticeable for acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents. The effect of relationship was less but still noticeable for NMIT participants.

Social demographic group differences for severity and harm by factor of alcohol
As with the previous section, categorical high/low response patterns were investigated with respect to ratings of incident severity and harm to victim for each of the two categories of incident by factor of alcohol (alcohol involved; no alcohol involved) for each of the six groups. Responsibility ratings were not
addressed as the effect of each factor on these ratings for any of the six groups was not substantial as compared to the effect on ratings of severity and harm. Tables with specific categorical high/low response patterns can be viewed in Appendix J.

**Severity**
In terms of severity ratings, male and female participants were similarly affected by the factor of alcohol, with incidents involving alcohol less frequently given high ratings of severity by both groups. Severity ratings for Mechanical and Manufacturing students were more influenced by the factor of alcohol than Health and Community Studies students, and severity ratings for NMIT students were more influenced by the factor of alcohol than University of Melbourne students.

**Harm**
Male harm ratings were more influenced by the factor of alcohol than female harm ratings, whereas Mechanical and Manufacturing students and Health and Community Studies students were similarly affected by the factor of alcohol with respect to harm ratings. University of Melbourne students were slightly more affected than NMIT students by the factor of alcohol with respect to harm ratings.

**Social demographic group differences for severity and harm by factor of injuries**
Categorical high/low response patterns were again investigated with respect to ratings of incident severity and harm to victim for each of the two categories of incident by factor of injuries (injuries; no injuries) for each of the six groups. Responsibility ratings were not addressed as the effect of each factor on these ratings for any of the six groups was not substantial as compared to the effect on ratings of severity and harm. Tables with specific categorical high/low response patterns can be viewed in Appendix J.
Severity
Male severity ratings were more affected by the factor of injuries than female severity ratings, and Mechanical and Manufacturing severity ratings were substantially more affected by the factor of injuries than Health and Community Studies severity ratings. Severity ratings for University of Melbourne students were considerably more affected by the factor of injuries than NMIT students.

Harm
Male harm ratings were more affected by the factor of injuries than female harm ratings, whilst harm ratings for Health and Community Studies students were more influenced by the factor of injuries than Mechanical and Manufacturing students. Harm ratings for University of Melbourne students were slightly more influenced by the factor of injuries than NMIT students.
Section 5:

Subsample results

Victim precipitation and perpetrator premeditation

The following section presents the findings from the subsample, which investigated the influence of prior victim perpetrator relationship and alcohol on individual assumptions about victim dress and pre-assault behaviour, and perpetrator premeditation as well as the factors of harm/trauma to victim and perpetrator responsibility. No specific predictions were made with respect to victim dress, pre-assault behaviour and perpetrator premeditation. However, as victim dress and pre-assault behaviour are victim blaming factors and perpetrator premeditation is thought to directly affect perceptions of responsibility, the effect of prior relationship and alcohol on assumptions about these variables was investigated.

When interpreting these results, it should be recognised that as participants of the subsample consisted of only approximately 25% of the overall sample of 58 participants, the sample size remained very small (N=14). Whilst the findings still provide a useful insight into individual assumptions about the factors in question, the generalisability and validity of the results is not ideal. As such, the subsample results will be presented briefly however will serve only to provide some preliminary insight into individual assumptions about victim precipitation and perpetrator premeditation.

The mean ratings overall and for each of the five factors (victim mode of dress, victim pre-assault behaviour, perpetrator premeditation, trauma/harm done to victim, perpetrator responsibility) were calculated for initial analysis (Appendix K). However, in order to investigate the trends observed using the same method as
the main sample, distributions of scores were plotted and categorical high/low response analyses were carried out.

**Categorical high/low responses**

As with the main sample, following the calculation of means (Appendix K) the distribution of scores for each factor were plotted in order to establish an appropriate level for division so as to enable a categorical high/low response analysis. Distributions of scores for mode of dress, behaviour, and premeditation were less skewed than for trauma/harm and responsibility.

The scale for mode of dress ranged from 1 (conservative) to 11 (unconservative); behaviour ranged from 1 (unfriendly) to 11 (friendly); premeditation ranged from 1 (premeditated) to 11 (unpremeditated); trauma/harm ranged from 1 (traumatic) to 11 (untraumatic); and responsibility ranged from 1 (high responsibility) to 11 (low responsibility). Based on approximations of what scores would be higher than average for each factor, ‘high’ scores for mode of dress and premeditation consisted of ratings of 6 or above, whilst ‘high’ scores for behaviour consisted of ratings of 7 or above. For the factors of trauma and responsibility, ‘high’ scores consisted of ratings of 3 and above. As ‘low’ ratings for each factor represented low victim precipitation and high perpetrator responsibility, the percentage of participants who gave low ratings for each factor were calculated overall and for each category of relationship and alcohol.

**Table 23.** Percentage of participants that gave ‘low’ ratings for dress, behaviour, premeditation, trauma, and responsibility by factor of relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Stranger</th>
<th>Acquaintance (npr)</th>
<th>Acquaintance (pr)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dress</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With respect to the factor of mode of dress, a higher percentage of participants assumed the victim to be conservatively-dressed in the stranger rape scenarios, followed by acquaintance (no prior relationship) rape incidents and acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents.

In terms of the factor of premeditation, more participants assuming the acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents to involve a higher level of premeditation as compared to acquaintance (no prior relationship) and stranger rape incidents.

No clear pattern was observed with respect to behaviour, although participants were more likely to assume victims in stranger rape scenarios to have been less friendly towards the perpetrator than for the two acquaintance rape scenarios. No clear pattern was observed for the factors of trauma/harm or responsibility.

Table 24. Percentage of participants that gave ‘low’ ratings for dress, behaviour, premeditation, trauma, and responsibility by factor of alcohol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>No alcohol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dress</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premeditation</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma/harm</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With respect to the factor of alcohol on assumptions about victim’s mode of dress, behaviour, perpetrator premeditation, trauma/harm to victim and perpetrator responsibility, a number of findings were observed. For incidents involving alcohol, a higher percentage of participants assumed the victim to be more conservatively-dressed than for incidents where no alcohol was involved. Participants also tended to assume that a higher level of premeditation was involved for incidents in which victim and perpetrator were sober as compared to incidents in which victim and perpetrator were intoxicated. A higher percentage of participants assumed incidents that did not involve alcohol were more traumatic than incidents that did involve alcohol.

Interestingly, participants tended to assume perpetrators to be more responsible for incidents in which alcohol was involved as compared to incidents in which no alcohol was involved. No pattern was observed with respect to victim behaviour.
Section 6:  
Discussion

Within the wider context of rape myth acceptance as relates to victim blaming and perpetrator justification, the primary aim of the current study was to investigate the effects of prior victim-perpetrator relationship and alcohol use on individual perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm. Sex role socialisation argues that individuals develop expectations of male-female behaviours and interactions, and are more likely to judge acquaintance and partner rapes as less serious and perpetrators as less culpable than as compared to stranger rapes as a result. This theory, combined with the substantial amount of empirical research from the 1980s and 90s, produced the hypothesis that as prior victim-perpetrator contact increased, perceptions of incident severity, perpetrator responsibility and harm to victim would decrease. It was also predicted that incidents in which victim and perpetrator were both presented as being intoxicated would elicit lower ratings of perpetrator responsibility. Incidents in which the victim received physical injuries were expected to be given higher ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm. Group differences with respect to gender and education were also investigated, with males predicted to show increased effects of prior relationship and alcohol as compared to females, and participants enrolled in Mechanical and Manufacturing predicted to show increased effects of prior relationship and alcohol as compared to participants enrolled in health and community studies.

Summary of findings

The differences discussed below should be considered in the context of the fact that overall means showed minimal differences, and even categorical high/low
response patterns were relatively small. The effect of prior victim-perpetrator relationship, alcohol, and injuries can thus be seen to have only a small effect overall on perceptions of seriousness and harm, and particularly responsibility, however these differences are not negligible and should still be discussed.

Hypothesis one predicted that stranger rapes should elicit higher ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm than acquaintance (no prior relationship) rape incidents, which in turn would elicit higher ratings than acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents. Indeed, with respect to severity, stranger rape incidents tended to elicit higher ratings than both categories of acquaintance rape incidents. The most noticeable difference was observed with respect to acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents, which elicited high ratings of severity much less frequently than either stranger or acquaintance (no prior relationship) incidents. Responsibility ratings displayed a similar pattern, however differences between divisions of relationship were minimal. Harm ratings were more affected by the factor of relationship, and again acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents elicited high ratings of harm much less frequently than either stranger or acquaintance (no prior relationship) incidents.

With respect to the effect of alcohol, hypothesis two predicted that incidents involving alcohol should elicit higher ratings of responsibility, and in turn, severity, than incidents not involving alcohol. This prediction was supported in the current findings. Again, the difference in responsibility ratings between incidents involving alcohol and incidents not involving alcohol was minimal.

Hypothesis three predicted that incidents in which the victim received injuries would be given higher ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm than incidents in which the victim did not receive injuries. The presence of injuries as a direct result of the attack influenced perceptions of severity and, to a lesser extent, harm, however this factor did not have an effect on attributions of perpetrator responsibility. This was an unexpected result based on the expectation that the
presence of injuries would increase the likelihood that the incident would conform to conceptions of a classic rape, and in turn would increase ratings of perpetrator responsibility.

Despite the general predictions that factors of alcohol and injuries would interact with the factor of relationship, only certain combinations of factors produced interaction effects with respect to ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm. With respect to severity, the combination of relationship and injuries interacted such that severity ratings for acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents involving injuries were substantially more likely to be given high severity ratings than stranger and acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents not involving injuries. Interestingly, whilst the main effects for responsibility were minimal, the factors of both alcohol and injuries interacted with that of relationship to slightly increase the differences in responsibility ratings. With respect to harm ratings, the combination of factors of relationship and injuries interacted slightly.

In terms of social demographic group differences, as predicted, female participants, students enrolled in Health and Community Studies, and students from NMIT tended to give higher ratings of severity and, to a lesser extent, harm, than male participants, students enrolled in Mechanical and Manufacturing and students from the University of Melbourne. For all groups, differences in severity and harm ratings were most noticeable between acquaintance (no prior relationship) and acquaintance (prior relationship), as well as between stranger and acquaintance (prior relationship) incidents. Severity ratings for males, Mechanical and Manufacturing students and participants from NMIT were more affected by the factor of alcohol than severity ratings for the other three groups. Harm ratings for males and participants from the University of Melbourne were more affected by the factor of alcohol than for the other groups. Severity ratings for males, Mechanical Manufacturing students and University of Melbourne students were more affected by the factor of injuries, however with respect to
harm ratings, Health and Community Studies students were more affected by injuries than Mechanical and Manufacturing students.

In terms of subsample results relating to individual assumptions about victim precipitation and perpetrator premeditation, there was some evidence to suggest that individuals assume victims of stranger rape to be dressed more conservatively than victims of acquaintance (prior relationship) rape.

Interestingly, stranger rape incidents were less likely to be associated with high levels of perpetrator premeditation and planning, as compared to acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents which were more likely to be associated with high levels of premeditation. Findings for other factors in the subsample (behaviour, trauma/harm, responsibility) were somewhat inconclusive with respect to the effect of prior relationship.

Although differences observed for the factors of dress and responsibility were minimal with respect to the effect of alcohol, individuals tended to assume that incidents involving alcohol were less premeditated as compared to incidents not involving alcohol. Additionally, incidents involving alcohol were less likely to be given high ratings of trauma/harm as compared to incidents where alcohol was not involved.

**Prior relationship and relevance of past sexual history**

Some support can be drawn from the current study findings for previous research into the effect of prior victim-perpetrator relationship on perceptions of seriousness and responsibility. Past studies and sex role socialization theory have suggested that perceptions of seriousness and responsibility decrease with increasing victim-perpetrator contact (Frese, Moya & Megias, 2004; McCormick, Maric, Seto & Barbaree, 1998; Bridges & McGrail, 1989; L'Armand & Pepitone,
However, the theory of sex role socialisation is most frequently applied to acquaintance rape and partner rape rather than ex-partner rape. As sex role socialisation is based on the premise that acquaintance and partner rape are likely to be seen as extreme versions of male-female interactions by those who subscribe to rape myths (Ewoldt, Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000), the application to ex-partner rapes may be slightly less appropriate. Whilst partner rapes are often conceptualized in the context of relationship rights and marital duties, these concepts do not continue to apply with respect to ex-partner rapes. As the most notable effect of relationship was observed with respect to acquaintance (prior relationship) rape incidents (ex-partner rapes), the current study findings are less supportive of sex role socialization specifically than the effect of a prior sexual relationship on perceptions of seriousness and harm.

Stronger support can be drawn from the current findings for studies based on the existence of a prior consensual sexual relationship (Shotland & Gootstein, 1992). It would seem that the existence of a prior relationship may not be sufficient to elicit different perceptions of severity, responsibility and harm. The overriding factor which develops out of the current study is the existence of a prior sexual relationship. This element consistently influenced perceptions of severity and harm, a finding which was pre-empted to a certain extent by Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Binderup (2000). However, whilst Monson et al.’s (2000) study only addressed the issue of prior sexual contact in the context of early and late dating relationships, the current study removed this factor from the context of an ongoing relationship. The presence of a prior sexual history in this context still reduced perceptions of seriousness and harm. This suggests that whilst conceptualizations of the classic rape as necessarily involving two individuals with no prior contact may not be as persistently upheld as was once thought, the existence of prior sexual contact is a mitigating factor in perceptions.

56 Although it might be argued that relationship rights and expectations continue to influence perceptions of rape in the context of ex-partner incidents in some way. The relevance of perceived relationship rights in the context of ex-partner contexts would be useful to explore and might provide some insight into different perceptions of seriousness and harm with respect to ex-partner rapes.
of severity and harm. Taking the factor of a prior sexual relationship out of the context of an ongoing relationship removes the issue of perceptions of relationship ‘rights’ and provides an alternative interpretation of the relevance of the prior sexual contact as influential in itself.

An additional finding which develops out of the current results is that perceptions of perpetrator responsibility are not strongly influenced by factors such as prior relationship, alcohol use, or even injuries. Attributions of responsibility were the least consistently influenced by these factors, suggesting that individuals are not as likely as was once thought to engage in processes of victim blaming or perpetrator justification. This finding tends not to support developmental explanations provided by sex role socialization theory which argue that individuals develop preconceptions about behaviour expected of males and females which result in perceptions of reduced perpetrator justification. Whilst perceptions of harm and overall severity differed with respect to each of the three factors in question (prior relationship, alcohol, injuries), individuals did not consider the attack to be justified or the perpetrator to be less responsible in most cases.

**Alcohol and injuries**

With respect to empirical research and theories of victim blaming and perpetrator justification as relates to alcohol use and sexual assault, the current study lends some support to previous findings which suggest that the involvement of alcohol in an incident of sexual assault tends to lower ratings of responsibility, and as such, overall seriousness. However, the effect of alcohol predicted by past studies relates primarily to attributions of perpetrator responsibility, with studies suggesting that when both victim and perpetrator are presented as being intoxicated at the time of the incident, the perpetrator is perceived as less culpable than when both individuals are presented as being sober (Cameron &
Stritzke, 2003; Stormo, Lang & Stritzke, 1997; Seto & Barbaree, 1996; Richardson & Campbell, 1982). The current study found that the factor of alcohol influenced perceptions of overall severity and harm to victim more than responsibility. Individuals seem to perceive incidents in which the victim was intoxicated as less harmful, however do not associate these with less culpability on the part of the offender. Individuals may assume that the effect of alcohol serves to dull the impact of the assault, in some way minimising the psychological harm caused.

As expected, perceptions of overall severity and harm were influenced by the presence of injuries as a direct result of the rape. However, the factor of injuries did not substantially affect attributions of perpetrator responsibility. Individuals consistently perceive perpetrators of rape as highly culpable regardless of whether additional physical harm resulted from the attack, suggesting that the attack itself and the psychological consequences are sufficient for observers to condemn the attack and hold the perpetrator responsible.

**Perpetrator responsibility and perceptions of harm**

The findings of the current study suggest that whilst individuals perceive different divisions of rape with respect to prior relationship as less serious and less harmful to the victim, these factors do not influence perceptions of the perpetrator’s culpability. Despite differences in assumptions about the psychological or emotional harm caused as a result of the rape, individuals still seem to denounce the act in itself and condemn the perpetrator for his actions.

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57 The differences in perceptions of overall severity seem to be a product of the effect of alcohol on individual perceptions of harm done to the victim.
58 The effect of injuries on perceptions of harm is fairly intuitive, as physical harm comprises one component of overall harm. The effect of injuries on perceptions of severity may represent the element of harm as one component of an individual’s intuitive sense of fairness, as defined by the principle of proportionality.
Similarly, the factors of alcohol and injuries were shown to affect perceptions of overall severity and harm, however minimal effect was noted with respect to perceptions of perpetrator responsibility.

A number of tentative conclusions can be drawn from these findings. Individuals seem to perceive perpetrators of sexual assault as similarly culpable regardless of situational factors such as the involvement of alcohol in the incident or the existence of a prior victim-perpetrator relationship. This is indicative of a move away from victim blaming and perpetrator justification as described by sex role socialisation theory, which argues that individuals develop expectations of males and females in terms of sexual behaviour as dictated by societal beliefs, as well as counteracting concepts of the classic rape as involving prescribed elements including situational factors. Whilst these attitudes do not seem to apply to the same extent to perceptions of severity and particularly harm\(^{59}\), the apparent move away from victim blaming and perpetrator justification might be a result of education and general public awareness of gender issues such as sexual assault.

**Gender and education**

Overall, predictions outlined by sex role socialisation theory that suggest that males would give lower ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm and would also be more influenced by the factors of relationship, alcohol, and injuries than females were supported. Although these findings must be considered in the context of the unmatched groups\(^{60}\), it would seem that females judge incidents of rape overall as more severe and more harmful than males. However, as

\(^{59}\) However, the findings must again be taken in the context of the size of the differences observed, which were relatively small even when analysing categorical high/low patterns.

\(^{60}\) Females tended to be slightly older (M=29) than males (M=26), and research into the possible effect of age on perceptions of rape victims has been outlined. Mechanical and Manufacturing students, which represented participants with a less community-based education, were also overrepresented in the group of males as compared to Health and Community Studies students, and vice versa with respect to females.
differences in responsibility ratings for males and females did not show a strong pattern, this may suggest that victim blaming and perpetrator justification explanations arising out of sex role socialisation theory are less relevant for males as well as females than they once were. With respect to different categories of rape by factor of relationship, male perceptions of seriousness and harm did reflect the effect of prior relationship more strongly than females. Findings as to the effect of alcohol on female and male perceptions of severity and harm were somewhat inconsistent. This may result from the unbalanced groups in that males tended to be younger than females, as well as the small sample size which may have affected the reliability of the findings, particularly with respect to females. Whilst there was no apparent difference between the effect of alcohol on male and female perceptions of overall severity, males ratings of harm were more influenced by the factor of alcohol than females in that male harm ratings were more likely to be higher for incidents not involving alcohol than those involving alcohol than were female harm ratings. This seems to reflect differences in attitudes as to situational factors which might serve to mediate the subsequent trauma resulting from an attack. Males may consider alcohol to have a numbing effect on the victim, whereas females may tend not to believe this to be the case.

With respect to educational differences, individuals enrolled in more community-based courses seemed to judge incidents of rape as more severe and more harmful, and were less influenced by situational factors such as prior relationship and alcohol than individuals enrolled in less community-based courses.\textsuperscript{61}

In terms of differences with respect to social class as represented by the two universities used, findings were somewhat inconsistent. The University of Melbourne as a more expensive institution represents individuals from a higher

\textsuperscript{61} Again, whilst disproportionate numbers of males and females as well as age differences should be considered with respect to these findings, this provides some support for the premise that exposure to gender issues through education has the potential to influence individual perceptions of overall seriousness and harm.
socio-economic class as compared to NMIT. Some research has suggested that higher income is associated with more sympathetic attitudes towards victims of rape (Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre & Morrison, 2005; Canter & Ageton, 1984), however the current findings did not support the premise that social class affects perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm.

**Limitations**

When considering the above conclusions, limitations imposed by the methodology and sample size should be recognized. The sample of participants used for the main sample (N=44) was considerably smaller than expected, and whilst participants were selected from two different Universities and two different courses in order to obtain a more representative sample, the external validity and generalisability of the results is somewhat limited. The limitations of using university students as participants in experimental research has already been discussed in Section 2, and effects of age and general education should be kept in mind when approaching the results. Additionally, as the specific groups within the sample were unbalanced due to problems with recruiting from the University of Melbourne, there were more males, Mechanical Manufacturing students and students from NMIT overall. Additionally, the NMIT Health and Community Studies group had a higher mean age (M=33) than the other two groups (M=22; M=25). This must be kept in mind when considering group differences discussed and the results of the overall sample, as age has been shown to be related to rape myth endorsement. Results from the smaller groups (females, Health and Community Studies students, University of Melbourne students) might also be less reliable than for the remaining groups, and the

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62 General education has been shown to be related to more favourable perceptions of victims of rape (Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre & Morrison, 2005), whilst studies addressing the association between age and rape myth acceptance are less conclusive. Some research suggests rape myth acceptance decreases with age (Anderson, Simpson-Taylor & Herrmann, 2004) whilst others have found that younger individuals are less likely to support rape myths than older individuals (Nagel et al., 2005).
overall results are more influenced by the male participants, Mechanical and Manufacturing students and students from NMIT. As males tended to be overrepresented in the Mechanical and Manufacturing courses and underrepresented in Health and Community Studies, and vice versa with respect to females, the effect of gender should be kept in mind when comparing those two groups.

A second limitation that must be addressed is that of order effects with respect to the order of presentation of incidents. Due to the large number of incidents (12) presented to each participants, it was not possible to ensure that order effects were accounted for completely. Whilst the order of presentation of types of incidents (stranger rape incidents, acquaintance,npr incidents etc.) was randomized in the original design of the questionnaire, the same questionnaire was given to all participants. This meant that each participant first read a stranger rape incident with alcohol but no injuries, followed by an ex-partner rape incident with alcohol but no injuries, and so on. As order effects were not addressed, it is possible that ratings given by participants for particular incidents were influenced by the incidents they had read before. For example, with respect to the current study results, the ex-partner rape may have seemed less serious in comparison to the stranger rape presented previously. Ideally, each type of incident would have been presented at different stages in different questionnaires, however this was not possible due to the large number of incidents and relatively small scale of the current study.

Additionally, using categorical high/low response analysis to account for skewed distributions effectively magnifies any effect of the factors of prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries. As this approach also capitalises on the on the effect of chance, the findings would have to be replicated through repeating the study in order to maximise the reliability of the results. This is not to say that the current findings may have occurred by chance, however as with any experimental study,
repeating the research with a second sample would provide substantial support for the results.

The use of text-based vignettes as representations of real-life situations designed to elicit individual reactions must also be considered in the context of behavioural studies. An individual’s reactions to a written depiction of an incident of sexual assault such as those used in the current study may not be influenced to the same extent by factors that would be involved in a real-life situation. Textual descriptions rely on the individual’s prior experiences and conceptions of sexual assault, and as such may elicit different responses depending on the individual. Whether the current study findings can be extended to real cases is debatable. It is possible that whilst the factors discussed had minimal effect on perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm with respect to fictional, text-based depictions of sexual assault, individuals may show more of an affect when considering real cases.

The current study used non-graphic textual descriptions of incidents of rape. Graphic depictions of sexual assault are more likely to evoke more extreme emotional responses and be influenced by stimuli from other modes of perception such as sight and sound. However, in light of the results of the current study, the use of text-based vignettes as a potentially less stimulating representation of sexual assault may not be particularly problematic. Individual perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm were consistently skewed towards extremely high ratings, suggesting that despite the artificial and less emotional mode of representation, individuals still perceived the incidents of sexual assault as extremely serious.

The methodological issues discussed may have affected the results, and it should be considered that the scales used may have been in some way flawed.

63 On the other hand, it could also be argued that as written depictions of rape highlight particular factors, the effect of these factors might be more noticeable than if the incident was presented visually (ie. using video-audio taped reenactments).
The construct validity of each scale is relatively sound, as the concepts of incident severity, perpetrator responsibility, and psychological harm done to the victim were described at the start of each questionnaire. However, it is possible that sub-factors related to these main factors might have elicited different responses. Whilst the sample used was similar to those used in past research, the scales incorporated in the current study were arguably more simplistic. A number of studies incorporated Field’s (1978) Attitudes Towards Rape (ATR) Scale or Burt’s (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) Scale to measure differing perceptions of rape. These scales are more in-depth, and address a number of different attitudes towards rape victims and perpetrator rather than focusing on perceptions of the incident itself. The current study scales were based around sentencing principles, and focused on elements of the offence (severity, responsibility, harm). In this way, the different findings of the current study may be related to the different choice of scales.

**Future directions and policy implications**

Research from the 1980s onwards has suggested that factors such as prior victim-perpetrator relationship, the involvement of alcohol in an incident, and injuries resulting from the attack substantially influence perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm with respect to rape. The prevalence of rape myths in society is an underlying cause of this, however the extent to which these rape myths are still endorsed by individuals is not known. There has been some suggestion that rape myths are no longer incorporated into individual attitudes to the same extent as in the 1970s and 80s, and that the factors of relationship, alcohol, and injuries should be less influential on perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm. The current study found that attitudes are less consistently influenced by situational factors such as prior relationship, alcohol,

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64 For example, perpetrator responsibility consists of the element of blame and accountability, and some researchers have argued for a more detailed investigation of the effect of prior relationship and alcohol on these factors (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003).
and even injuries, and that individuals perceive incidents of rape as extremely serious regardless of these factors. In particular, individuals perceive perpetrators of rape as highly culpable despite these factors.

Whilst a substantial amount of empirical work has been carried out with respect to the effect of prior relationship on perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm, the extent to which these attitudes are still maintained should continue to be researched. The current study provides some preliminary suggestion that now, as compared to 20 or 30 years ago, individuals are less likely to engage in victim blaming and perpetrator justification in terms of perceptions of culpability in different categories of rape. Regardless of situational factors such as the victim’s relationship with the perpetrator, whether or not alcohol was involved in the incident, or even whether or not the victim was physically injured as a result of the attack, individuals still seem to perceive perpetrators of rape as highly culpable. Whether this apparent change is a result of exposure through education, the media, or empirical research permeating public knowledge, it would seem that individuals are less likely to justify rape through concepts of victim precipitation as was once thought. However, this finding needs to be investigated further, using larger sample sizes from a variety of demographic divisions.

Future research might also investigate the extent to which individual perceptions of victim and perpetrator responsibility are influenced by situational factors such as prior relationship in more depth. Specific constructs within and related to that of responsibility, such as blame and risk-taking behaviours, could be assessed in more detail using more extensive descriptions of incidents and a larger number of dependent variables such as perpetrator accountability and blame as opposed to using one construct of perpetrator responsibility. The concept of risk-taking behaviour was thought to contribute to victim blaming, however in light of the current findings which suggest that individuals are less willing to justify
perpetrator behaviour and engage in victim blaming, the extent to which this phenomenon still applies might also have changed.

With respect to the existence of a prior sexual history between victim and perpetrator, it would be useful to determine the extent to which the effect of this depends on whether the sexual contact exists in the context of a continuing relationship or a previous relationship. The current study included a division of relationship where victim and perpetrator had implicitly engaged in prior sexual contact, however the incident of rape took place once the sexual relationship had ended. The existence of a prior sexual relationship was shown to substantially affect judgements of severity and harm to victim, however this effect might be magnified even more if the incident took place in the context of an ongoing relationship. Examining the effect of a prior sexual relationship in different contexts (continuing relationship, relationship recently ended, past relationship) would be an important factor to investigate.

The implications in terms of policy for the current study relate in part to the suggestion that education can be a powerful tool with respect to influencing gender awareness and that some effects of prior relationship and alcohol continue to influence, if to a lesser extent, individual perceptions of severity and harm. Whilst the findings overall are positive in the sense that individuals consistently rated all incidents of rape as extremely serious and harmful and perpetrators as highly culpable regardless of situational factors such as relationship, alcohol, and even injuries, there is still some evidence to suggest that these factors do influence perceptions to a certain extent. However, the tentative findings of the current study with respect to course differences (community-based versus non community-based) combined with previous empirical research provide support for the use of education as a means of influencing public awareness and understanding. Exposure to accurate information about the effects of all types of rape, regardless of the relationship
between victim and offender or the involvement of alcohol, should serve as a powerful tool to increase support for victims and to denounce rape in general. Moving the focus away from physical injuries and towards the psychological effects in the context of a variety of types of rape would help to reiterate the need for victim support.
Section 7:

Conclusion

The findings of the current study suggest that whilst the existence of a prior relationship, the involvement of alcohol, and a lack of injuries resulting from the attack tend to mitigate perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm with respect to incidents of rape, these differences are minimal as compared to previous empirical research. Whilst differences were small, within these differences were some interesting patterns which are still worth discussing. The over-riding factor that develops out of the current findings is that whilst differences observed due to the effects of relationship overall were minimal, individuals seem to perceive the existence of a prior sexual relationship as mitigating the seriousness and harm caused by the incident, and, to a lesser extent, the perpetrator’s responsibility. However, responsibility ratings were consistently the least affected by all three factors, suggesting that individuals are reluctant to justify a perpetrator’s behaviour regardless of the existence of a prior relationship, the involvement of alcohol, or whether or not injuries resulted from the attack.

Methodological issues are inherent in any research that makes use of text-based depictions of sexual assault, and whilst there are many benefits to this type of stimulus, the extent to which conclusions based on these results can be extended to real life must be questioned. Whether or not individuals would react in a similar manner to a real life case presented using an audio-visual based stimulus should be tested in order to provide some indication of the extent to which vignette-based findings can be assumed to replicate individuals’ responses to real-life situations. Additionally, gender and educational differences such as those addressed in the current study should be further investigated with comparison groups matched on the factors of age, education, and socio-
economic background. This would increase the reliability of the current study, which investigated group differences without using matched groups, which was not possible as a result of the sample size.

The current study provides some positive findings with respect to examining the extent to which stereotypical and inaccurate beliefs about rape and its effects still permeate public opinion. Research from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s suggested that many individuals subscribe to rape myths, and that perceptions of incident severity and perpetrator responsibility were affected as a result of these misconceptions. Adherence to rape myths is problematic to the prevention of all types of rape, however particularly with respect to acquaintance and partner rape. Public denunciation of sexual assault through sentencing is based on perceptions of incident seriousness overall, and perpetrator responsibility and harm done to the victim specifically.

The reluctance of individuals to perceive perpetrators of rape as less culpable despite the existence of a prior relationship, the involvement of alcohol, or a lack of injuries resulting from the attack is an encouraging finding and an indication that rape myths are less prevalent in Australian society than in the 1980s and 90s. However it is important to recognise that, based on the current findings, prior sexual history between victim and offender still seems to influence perceptions of severity and harm. This has implications for community support and treatment of victims of partner and ex-partner rape, and may need to be addressed through further research. Methodological and sampling issues discussed with respect to the current study limit the external validity of the current findings, however future research in the area may lend support to these results. Future studies might use methodologies that will maximise the external validity, for example by using more detailed hypotheticals in visual and audio formats in order to obtain reactions that would be more in line with reactions to real life cases. This is important as individuals may react very differently when confronted directly with a situation that more closes mirrors reality.
References


Appendix A

Main sample questionnaire

Assessing the Seriousness of Rape Questionnaire

Age of participant:
Course enrolled in:
Sex:

The following paragraphs are hypothetical descriptions of a number of situations involving incidents of sexual assault. Given the details presented, please clearly indicate on the scale provided how you perceive the gravity of the incident. The scale ranges from 1 to 11; 1 representing a low rating of seriousness and 11 representing a high rating of seriousness. Please also indicate your perceptions of the level (high, medium, or low) of the perpetrator’s responsibility and the degree of psychological harm you believe was done to the victim in each case. There are a total of 12 incidents. The questionnaire should not take more than 15 minutes to complete, and your responses should be based on your immediate reactions to each description, so read carefully but do not spend too long on each incident.

Incident 1:
Emily was a 22 year old woman who had been drinking for part of the night with friends at her local bar. During that time she drank about five beers. She decided to walk home at the end of the night, the weather being quite mild. Emily, who was dressed in everyday clothing, left the bar at about 10pm and started walking home through a nearby park. Michael, also 22, had neither met nor seen Emily previously. He had been drinking that night nearby with his friends and had also consumed about five beers. He was also on his way home and had to go through the same park. Both Michael and Emily were reasonably drunk. Michael came across Emily and asked for directions, and then attempted to make conversation. Emily spoke with him briefly, and then began to walk home. Michael followed and used some force to restrain Emily. He responded to her resistance with verbal threats and then proceeded to rape her. Emily did not sustain any physical injuries.

Severity of incident 1:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Perpetrator Responsibility: Low Medium High
Psychological Harm Done to Victim: Low Medium High

Incident 2:
Hannah was a 24 year old woman and had known Matthew for a number of years. At some point during this time they were in a relationship, which had since ended on good terms. Matthew was also 24 and he and Hannah had decided to catch up at Hannah’s flat one night to talk and watch movies. Hannah let Matthew into her flat at about 8pm and they chatted in front of the television for a little while. Hannah and Matthew were
both dressed casually, and they drank a number of beers together whilst chatting sociably for some time. \textit{Both were reasonably drunk}. Matthew began to verbally threaten Hannah and used a small amount of force to restrain her. He then raped her. Hannah was \textit{not physically hurt} during the rape.

\textbf{Severity of incident 2:}
\begin{tabular}{cccccccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & 11 \\
\end{tabular}

\textbf{Perpetrator Responsibility:} Low Medium High  
\textbf{Psychological Harm Done to Victim:} Low Medium High

\textbf{Incident 3:}
Christopher and Sarah \textit{had been married for a number of years}, but had been separated on an amicable basis for some time. They still had some contact and often got together for a meal to catch up. One weekend, Christopher and Sarah decided to have dinner together at Sarah’s flat after they both finished work at their offices. They chatted comfortable over the meal and had a few beers afterwards. \textit{Both were reasonably intoxicated}. Around 11pm, Sarah told Christopher that she had an early start and that she would catch up with him again in a couple of weeks. Christopher began to make advances on Sarah, who resisted. He then used some force and verbal threats to restrain Sarah, and proceeded to rape her. Sarah was \textit{physically hurt} during the incident.

\textbf{Severity of incident 3:}
\begin{tabular}{cccccccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & 11 \\
\end{tabular}

\textbf{Perpetrator Responsibility:} Low Medium High  
\textbf{Psychological Harm Done to Victim:} Low Medium High

\textbf{Incident 4:}
Jennifer and Nicholas were \textit{introduced at a pub one night} by a mutual friend from high school. They chatted for most of the night and got along quite well. Jennifer was 25 and Nicholas was 24. At the end of the night, Nicholas and Jennifer realised that they lived near each other, and decided to walk home together from the pub. It was a mild night, and \textit{neither Jennifer nor Nicholas had been drinking at the pub}. Both were dressed as they normally would have. They left the pub together and began to make their way home. \textit{When they were almost at their respective homes}, Nicholas began to make advances on Jennifer. Jennifer resisted and Nicholas responded by warning her to be quiet and used some force to restrain her. Nicholas proceeded to rape her. Jennifer did not retain any injuries as a result of the incident.

\textbf{Severity of incident 4:}
\begin{tabular}{cccccccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & 11 \\
\end{tabular}

\textbf{Perpetrator Responsibility:} Low Medium High  
\textbf{Psychological Harm Done to Victim:} Low Medium High

\textbf{Incident 5:}
Michelle and Andrew were \textit{recently divorced} following a marriage of 5 years, but remained on good terms. They were both in their early 30s. One night, Michelle and Andrew met for dinner to discuss issues related to the divorce. They chatted
comfortably over dinner and decided to go to Andrew's house as Michelle had some valuable items that she had left there. Both were dressed in everyday wear, and they returned to Andrew's house after dinner and continued talking sociably. Neither Michelle nor Andrew had consumed any alcohol over dinner, or at Andrew’s house. Andrew began to make advances on Michelle, who resisted. He proceeded to use some force and verbal threats to restrain Michelle, and raped her. Michelle was physically hurt during the incident.

Severity of incident 5:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Perpetrator Responsibility: Low Medium High
Psychological Harm Done to Victim: Low Medium High

Incident 6:
Melissa and Daniel had worked for the same company for a number of months and had met each other once or twice at office functions and outings. They were both in their early 30s. The company had organised a dinner to celebrate a successful month, and all employees left straight from the office for the restaurant after work. Still in their office clothes, Melissa and Daniel were seated together at dinner and chatted with each other and their colleagues. Having consumed about give beers each over the course of the meal, Melissa and Daniel decided to walk to the station together to catch the train back to their respective homes. They were both reasonably intoxicated. As they were walking home, Daniel began to make advances on Melissa. Melissa resisted and Daniel responded by telling her to be quiet. Daniel used some force to restrain Melissa and proceeded to rape her. Melissa was not physically hurt during the incident.

Severity of incident 6:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Perpetrator Responsibility: Low Medium High
Psychological Harm Done to Victim: Low Medium High

Incident 7:
Karen, 25, was walking her dog early one evening through the park near her flat. She came across John, also 25, who was also taking his dog out for a walk in the same park. Neither Karen nor John had been drinking that night, and neither had met or seen each other previously. They were seated nearby each other and exchanged a few comments about their dogs. Both were dressed casually. After this, Karen decided to make her way home as although it was a mild evening, it was starting to get late. Karen started to walk in the direction of her flat and John walked with her towards his own house which was in the same direction. John approached Karen, and attempted to restrain her with some force, and Karen resisted. John verbally threatened Karen and proceeded to rape her. Karen did not receive any physical injuries during the rape.

Severity of incident 7:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Perpetrator Responsibility: Low Medium High
Psychological Harm Done to Victim: Low Medium High
**Incident 8:**
Emma was having dinner with a group of co-workers one night at a restaurant near her work. She had left straight from work and was still wearing her office clothes. Over the course of the meal, Emma had a number of beers and as such, decided to take the train home. Emma made her way down to the train station by herself after the meal, and waited on the platform for the train. David was also waiting at the same train station, having had some beers with his co-workers at a hotel in the area. Emma and David had neither met nor seen each other before. Emma and David were both in their late 20s, and were both reasonable intoxicated. David started a conversation with Emma about the weather, and then attempted to make an advance on Emma. Emma resisted, and David restrained her forcefully and warned her to keep quiet. David raped Emma, who was physically hurt during the incident.

Severity of incident 8:

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Perpetrator Responsibility: Low  Medium  High
Psychological Harm Done to Victim: Low  Medium  High

**Incident 9:**
Angela and Ben were both at the same party, which was being held by a mutual friend at her house. Angela was 25 and Ben was 24, and they had not met each other before, but talked to each other at the party. The both consumed a number of beers over the course of the night, and occasionally chatted to each other casually. Both were reasonably intoxicated. Ben decided to get his jacket from the cloak room and Angela entered the cloak room in order to find her bag at the same time. Both were dressed in everyday clothes. They chatted briefly, and left the party to go to their respective homes via the same route. On the way home, Ben attempted to make advances on Angela, who resisted. He warned her to remain quiet, and used force to restrain her. He proceeded to rape her. Angela was physically hurt during the rape.

Severity of incident 9:

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Perpetrator Responsibility: Low  Medium  High
Psychological Harm Done to Victim: Low  Medium  High

**Incident 10:**
Laura was a 25 year old woman who had been invited to a casual-dress dinner party at an old friend’s house. Tim, who was hosting the party, was also 25 and had invited a small handful of friends over for the evening. Tim and Laura had known each other for a few years and were in a relationship during that time which had since ended. They were on good terms following the relationship. Neither Tim nor any of the guests consumed any alcohol over the course of the night, and a couple of guests started to leave at around 10pm. Tim and Laura were left alone, and they talked for some time in front of the television. Tim began to make advances on Laura, who resisted these attempts. He then used some force to restrain Laura and raped her. She did not receive any physical injuries as a result.

Severity of incident 10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Incident 11:
Richard was moving some furniture and boxes from his moving van into his new flat one afternoon. Claire lived in the same apartment building and came across Richard on her way home from the shops. Neither Richard nor Claire had met or seen each other before. Richard was in his early 30s and Claire was 35 years old, and both were dressed as they normally would have and had not consumed any alcohol. Claire got into the lift with Richard and they got off at the same floor. Richard asked Claire a few questions about the apartment and the location, and Claire responded politely. Claire agreed to help Richard carry one of the boxes into his flat, Richard then began to try and make advances on her. Claire resisted these attempts, and Richard warned her to be quiet. Richard forcefully restrained Claire and raped her, and Claire was physically hurt during the incident.

Severity of incident 11:
1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11

Incident 12:
Lisa was 22 years old and was attending a casual function at a café one mild afternoon. Mark was 24 and was also attending the same function, which was being organised by the company he worked for. Lisa and Mark had not met before, and started talking over coffee after the function. They chatted casually for a little while. They walked to the train station towards the end of the afternoon as they both got the same train to their respective homes. Neither had consumed any alcohol. They continued chatting, and Mark tried to make advances on Lisa. Lisa resisted, and Mark forcefully restrained and raped her, having threatened her verbally. Lisa received physical injuries as a result of the incident.

Severity of incident 12:
1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11

Perpetrator Responsibility:  Low  Medium  High
Psychological Harm Done to Victim:  Low  Medium  High
Appendix B
Subsample questionnaire

Assessing the Seriousness of Rape
Questionnaire

Age of participant:
Course enrolled in:
Sex:
The following paragraphs are hypothetical descriptions of a number of situations involving incidents of sexual assault. Given the details provided, please respond to each of the scales in terms of what you would assume about the incidents. Each scale ranges from 1 to 11; 1 representing the lowest value for each factor and 11 representing the highest value for each factor. There are a total of 6 incidents. The questionnaire should not take longer than 15 minutes to complete, and your responses should be based on your immediate reactions to the descriptions, so read carefully but do not spend too long on each incident.

Incident 1:
Emily was a 22 year old woman who had been drinking for part of the night with friends at her local bar. During that time she drank about five beers. She decided to walk home at the end of the night, the weather being quite mild. Emily, who was dressed in everyday clothing, left the bar at about 10pm and started walking home through a nearby park. Michael, also 22, had neither met nor seen Emily previously. He had been drinking that night nearby with his friends and had also consumed about five beers. He was also on his way home and had to go through the same park. Both Michael and Emily were reasonably drunk. Michael came across Emily and asked for directions, and then attempted to make conversation. Emily spoke with him briefly, and then began to walk home. Michael followed and used some force to restrain Emily. He responded to her resistance with verbal threats and then proceeded to rape her. Emily did not sustain any physical injuries.

Victim:
Conservatively-dressed
Unconservatively-dressed
Unfriendly
Friendly
Incident:
Premeditated
Unpremeditated
Traumatic
Not traumatic
High perpetrator responsibility
Low perpetrator responsibility
Incident 2:
Hannah was a 24 year old woman and had known Matthew for a number of years. At some point during this time they were in a relationship, which had since ended on good terms. Matthew was also 24 and he and Hannah had decided to catch up at Hannah's flat one night to talk and watch movies. Hannah let Matthew into her flat at about 8pm and they chatted in front of the television for a little while. Hannah and Matthew were both dressed casually, and they drank a number of beers together whilst chatting sociably for some time. Both were reasonably drunk. Matthew began to verbally threaten Hannah and used a small amount of force to restrain her. He then raped her. Hannah was not physically hurt during the rape.

Victim:
Conservatively-dressed
Unconservatively-dressed
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Unfriendly
Friendly
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Incident:
Premeditated
Unpremeditated
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Traumatic
Not traumatic
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

High perpetrator responsibility
Low perpetrator responsibility
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Incident 3:
Jennifer and Nicholas were introduced at a pub one night by a mutual friend from high school. They chatted for most of the night and got along quite well. Jennifer was 25 and Nicholas was 24. At the end of the night, Nicholas and Jennifer realised that they lived near each other, and decided to walk home together from the pub. It was a mild night, and neither Jennifer nor Nicholas had been drinking at the pub. Both were dressed as they normally would have. They left the pub together and began to make their way home. When they were almost at their respective homes, Nicholas began to make advances on Jennifer. Jennifer resisted and Nicholas responded by warning her to be quiet and used some force to restrain her. Nicholas proceeded to rape her. Jennifer did not retain any injuries as a result of the incident.

Victim:
Conservatively-dressed
Unconservatively-dressed
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Unfriendly
Friendly
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
**Incident 4:**
Melissa and Daniel had worked for the same company for a number of months and had met each other once or twice at office functions and outings. They were both in their early 30s. The company had organised a dinner to celebrate a successful month, and all employees left straight from the office for the restaurant after work. Still in their office clothes, Melissa and Daniel were seated together at dinner and chatted with each other and their colleagues. Having consumed about five beers each over the course of the meal, Melissa and Daniel decided to walk to the station together to catch the train back to their respective homes. They were both reasonably intoxicated. As they were walking home, Daniel began to make advances on Melissa. Melissa resisted and Daniel responded by telling her to be quiet. Daniel used some force to restrain Melissa and proceeded to rape her. Melissa was not physically hurt during the incident.

**Victim:**
Conservatively-dressed
Unconservatively-dressed
Unfriendly
Friendly

**Incident 5:**
Karen, 25, was walking her dog early one evening through the park near her flat. She came across John, also 25, who was also taking his dog out for a walk in the same park. Neither Karen nor John had been drinking that night, and neither had met or seen each other previously. They were seated nearby each other and exchanged a few comments about their dogs. Both were dressed casually. After this, Karen decided to make her way home as although it was a mild evening, it was starting to get late. Karen started to walk in the direction of her flat and John walked with her towards his own house which
was in the same direction. John approached Karen, and attempted to restrain her with some force, and Karen resisted. John verbally threatened Karen and proceeded to rape her. Karen did not receive any physical injuries during the rape.

**Victim:**
Conservatively-dressed
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Unconservatively-dressed
10 11

Unfriendly
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Friendly
10 11

**Incident:**
Premeditated
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Unpremeditated
10 11

Traumatic
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Not traumatic
10 11

High perpetrator responsibility
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Low perpetrator responsibility
10 11

**Incident 6:**
Laura was a 25 year old woman who had been invited to a casual-dress dinner party at an old friend’s house. Tim, who was hosting the party, was also 25 and had invited a small handful of friends over for the evening. Tim and Laura had known each other for a few years and were in a relationship during that time which had since ended. They were on good terms following the relationship. Neither Tim nor any of the guests consumed any alcohol over the course of the night, and a couple of guests started to leave at around 10pm. Tim and Laura were left alone, and they talked for some time in front of the television. Tim began to make advances on Laura, who resisted these attempts. He then used some force to restrain Laura and raped her. She did not receive any physical injuries as a result.

**Victim:**
Conservatively-dressed
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Unconservatively-dressed
10 11

Unfriendly
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Friendly
10 11

**Incident:**
Premeditated
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Unpremeditated
10 11

Traumatic
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Not traumatic
10 11

High perpetrator responsibility
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Low perpetrator responsibility
10 11
Appendix C
Methodology addendum

1. Advantages and limitations of repeated measures designs
The current study made use of a repeated measures design rather than a between-subjects design. Between-subjects designs require two separate groups of participants for each treatment condition being compared. Repeated measures, or within-subjects, designs on the other hand compare two or more treatment conditions by measuring the same sample of individuals in all conditions. A primary advantage of using a repeated measures design is that confounding individual differences and the resultant high variability can be avoided. In other words, differences between the participants in one group of a between-subjects design, for example age or intelligence, may contribute to any observed differences. This problem is avoided with repeated measures designs, as the same group of participants is used for each treatment condition (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003).

However, there are also a number of limitations associated with repeated measures designs. Time-related problems can influence the results obtained from a repeated measures experiment, as there is often a lapse between when the first measurements are made and the subsequent measurements for each additional treatment condition. This can pose a threat to the internal validity of the study (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003). However, with respect to the current study, this issue is not relevant as participants completed the questionnaires in one sitting over the course of approximately 20 minutes.

A more relevant limitation associated with repeated measures designs is that of order effects. Scores obtained in one treatment condition are related to scores obtained in other treatment conditions. With respect to the current study, a type of order effect which should be considered is that of progressive error. This relates to changes in an individual's behaviour as a result of experience in a study over time (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003). As the current study involved
relatively lengthy questionnaires which included either 6 or 12 brief descriptions of incidents of rape, it is possible that participants became fatigued over the course of completing the survey. However, the brevity of the incidents ensured that the time taken to complete the questionnaires was no more than 20 minutes, which would assist in minimising the risk of fatigue.

2. Results of the pilot
The incidents were generally received as being believable and realistic, with the descriptions of the victim and perpetrator described as being neutral and balanced with respect to each other in terms of motivations for being at the location of the incident, and prior conduct and behaviour in the context of the scenario. The pilot participants felt that descriptions were not more or less favourable to either victim or perpetrator, and characters were realistic. Changes were made to the format of the questions in order to highlight factors of interest. This was done because of feedback relating to the difficulty in concentrating on each incident and remembering important factors when reading through a large number of scenarios. In order to ensure that the factors of interest (prior relationship, alcohol, and injuries) were not disregarded or overlooked by participants, information relating to these factors was underlined in each incident. Whilst this ensures that the independent variables selected for the study are not overlooked and are more likely to affect judgements, there are disadvantages to this method as well. Underlining information selected by the researcher gives priority to these factors that may not otherwise have been important to the individual’s perceptions. The effect of each factor on perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm may also be exaggerated as a result of this method, particularly in the context of text-based vignettes as used in the current study (Hughes & Huby, 2002).

3. Using text-based vignettes in social research
Measures of actual behaviour, such as observational study, arguably provide a more accurate indication of how individuals will respond to a particular situation. Researchers attempting to replicate a real-life scenario select what will be
presented and, during that process, begin to transform the scenario according to the information they believe should be prioritized (Sandelowski, 2000). The information selected for presentation by the designers may not be that which would otherwise have been attended to by individuals observing an actual incident of rape. However, individual perceptions of incident severity, perpetrator responsibility and harm done to victim are more difficult to measure using observational approaches, and survey research using attitude scales are more appropriate when dealing with these specific constructs.

Vignettes are commonly used in social sciences as stimuli designed to represent real-life situations and elicit a response from the viewer or participant. The vignettes used in the current study were text-only descriptions designed to assess individual perceptions of severity, responsibility and harm based on particular selected factors. Whilst vignettes have gained increasing support in recent years in a number of areas, there are limitations to using vignettes as representations of real-life. The information provided to the viewer is selective, and gives priority to certain elements over others (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Particularly when dealing with exclusively text-based vignettes, details must be prioritized or neglected as necessary to provide a comprehensible and practical description (Parkinson & Manstead, 1993).

Kinicki et al. suggest that written vignettes amplify the priming phenomenon in terms of both long-term and short-term effects. In other words, the information that is selected and prioritized in the vignette is much more salient and extreme in the mind of the reader than it would otherwise have been in real life. With respect to the current study, an individual viewing a vignette that highlights the

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65 It has been argued that written vignettes impose ‘lower interpretational demands on participants’, and that where possible, video-taped presentations should be incorporated instead (Hughes & Huby, 2002, pg. 383; Kinicki, Hom & Wade, 1995). This method is thought to minimize the effects discussed as to the prioritization of information by researchers using text-based descriptions. However, this was not appropriate for the current study as the goal of avoiding harm to participants necessarily meant that representations of sexual assault did not include graphic images or descriptions.
factors of prior relationship, alcohol use, and injuries might give more attention to those factors than he/she would have when perhaps viewing a recording of the incident. The effect on perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm might be increased as a result of the decision to select those factors for representation\textsuperscript{66}.

4. Controlling extraneous factors

When setting the context for each incident, the victim and perpetrator were described as having been in the location or situation for similar or identical reasons. For example, if the individuals were at a train station late at night, they were both described as having been on their way home following a night out with friends. This was done primarily to ensure that participants did not develop stereotypically negative conceptions of the perpetrator based on the location of the incident. Without this clarification, individuals might be more likely to assume that an attack that takes place late at night in a public place is necessarily more premeditated than an incident occurring in the home of the perpetrator. As premeditation is considered an element of culpability and responsibility, it was necessary to control for this factor.

Certain pre-assault factors on the part of the victim were also controlled for in each incident. Two factors were of concern here, being the pre-assault behaviour on the part of the victim, and her mode of dress. The behaviour of the victim in direct response to any actions on the part of the perpetrator was determined by the prior victim-perpetrator relationship. For incidents involving acquaintances where no prior relationship was implied, the individuals were described as having amicable interactions, and neither victim nor perpetrator was described as having initiated the contact. This was done in order to maintain a balance with respect to the interactions, in that neither victim nor perpetrator

\textsuperscript{66} However, it has also been argued that selective representations of complex real-life situations can assist in ‘disentangling the complexities and conflicts present in everyday life’ (Hughes & Huby, 2001, pg. 383). The isolation of the factors highlighted in the vignettes for the current study was directed towards the outcome of determining the effect of these factors on individual perceptions. In order to do this, a certain amount of artificial manipulation was necessarily to maximize the probability that differences in perceptions are related to the factors in question.
necessarily approached one another\textsuperscript{67}. For incidents involving acquaintances where a prior relationship was implied, the individuals were described as having chatted relatively intimately over the time described, and were generally portrayed as having friendly and comfortable interactions. It was also mentioned that victim and perpetrator had decided to get together on the night of the incident, suggesting that the meeting was voluntary on both parts and that neither side necessarily initiated the contact. The pre-assault behaviour for each category of prior victim-perpetrator relationship was designated according to the socially appropriate levels of friendliness for each type of relationship\textsuperscript{68}.

The victim’s mode of dress was approached using a slightly different method. It was decided that the effect of priming would be an important factor to control for with regards to the victim’s appearance, as any mention of her attire might invoke ideas that this was relevant and may have precipitated the attack. In order to avoid this, minimal mention was made of the victim’s mode of dress in each case, except to mention that she was dressed “casually”, “normally”, or “in everyday wear”. The ambiguity of this was addressed in the subsample, which will be introduced in the next section. Additionally, in each of the cases where incidents took place outdoors, it was mentioned that the weather was “mild”. This was done in order to standardize assumptions about the amount of clothing worn by the victim at the time. The reasoning behind this was that individuals

\textsuperscript{67} This element, too, relates to perceptions about the level of planning involved in each incident. If the perpetrator was described as having approached the victim at a party, it might be implied that the incident was more premeditated. Conversely, if the victim was described as having approached the perpetrator at a party, it might be assumed that her actions in some way precipitated or justified the attack.

\textsuperscript{68} Pilot participant feedback as to the behaviour of each victim in response to the perpetrator in the context of the prior relationship generally supported the premise that victims in each incident behaved in a polite and appropriate manner. Although this gives support to the neutrality of each description, it can not be stated categorically that these expectations are represented extensively in the wider community. With respect to the current sample, however, the same demographics were used for the pilot participants as for the main sample participants (males and females, age ranges etc.), which increases the reliability of the scales with respect to the current results.
inside and those outdoors on a mild night will be experiencing similar temperatures and will dress according to that particular temperature\textsuperscript{69}.

A final area which was standardized for each of the incidents relates to the use of force and verbal threats in each incident, and the victim’s resistance. In each incident it was noted that the perpetrator used force to restrain the victim, combined with verbal threats. The amount of force used by the perpetrator in each incident was not explicitly stated, but it was implied that the force was minimal to moderate and relatively non-violent. The use of verbal threats was included based on empirical research relating to submission generally being obtained through verbal coercion in both known assailant and unknown assailant rape incidents (Ward, 1995; Lloyd & Walmsley, 1989). Similarly, the level of victim resistance was implicitly minimal to moderate, in order to avoid the assumption that injuries necessarily resulted from the attack with respect to those incidents that were described as not resulting in injuries. Where injuries did result from the rape, the description of these was not detailed of graphic. The issues and justifications for this have already been mentioned.

The measures taken in order to ensure that key extraneous factors were controlled for as much as possible have been discussed. However it must be recognized that individuals develop mental representations based on previous knowledge, experience and personal beliefs about a certain real-life situation. The fact the sexual assault is associated with so many stereotypical scenarios is problematic to the use of brief, text-based vignettes in survey research. Whilst the current study selected a number of important factors to control in order to

\textsuperscript{69} Whilst it was recognized that indicating that, with respect to those incidents that took place outside, the weather was mild might increase the likelihood that participants would assume the victim to be scantily clad, it was decided that as long as there was no reason for participants to necessarily assume victims in different contexts (indoors or outside at night) would be dressed differently, perceptions of perpetrator responsibility and victim precipitation should not differ. The option of mentioning that each victim was wearing a heavy jacket or warmly dressed decreased the believability of incidents, particularly with respect to those interactions that initiated indoors. As such, the other extreme was chosen, in which victims were more likely to be wearing less clothing, however this was still able to be standardized across contexts (indoors versus outdoors).
minimize the influence of these factors on participants’ responses, it was not possible to account for all factors or assumptions that might be made individually. For example, assumptions about how attractive or unattractive the victim may have been, her sexual history, and the extent to which she resisted in each case may have affected how each participant perceived the different incidents. These factors have been shown to affect perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm in rape research (Ward, 1995). Assumptions about the perpetrator’s motives, level of aggressiveness, and history of violence may also have had an effect on attributions of perpetrator responsibility. However it is not possible to account for all extraneous factors when using text-based vignettes, and the factors selected for control in the current study were selected in order to avoid participants developing stereotypical conceptions of each type of scenario\textsuperscript{70}.

\textsuperscript{70} Pilot participants commented that incidents, whilst realistic and believable, were not perceived as stereotypical in the sense of assumptions about a rape victim having been dressed provocatively or acting as to invite attention. Similarly, pilot participants noted that perpetrators were not made out to be particularly ‘monstrous’ or demonized, and the facts of the incidents were presented neutrally and without evoking stereotypical images of particular types of incidents.
Appendix D

The University of Melbourne
Department of Criminology

Plain language statement

Project title: Assessing the Seriousness of Rape
Student research at Honours level

Principle investigator: Ms. Anna Saw
Supervisor: Dr. Austin Lovegrove

BEFORE PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY, PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING:

The subject matter involved in the current study is sensitive and may be upsetting to certain individuals. The topic being addressed is sexual assault, and hypothetical descriptions of incidents of sexual assault will be involved. These descriptions are not graphic or explicit, however may distress certain individuals. If you believe the subject matter of the current research may cause unnecessary distress or concern, please do not continue with the study. In particular, if you have been a victim of sexual assault, please do not participate in the study unless you are able to contact a counsellor who has helped you in the past. You are welcome to withdraw from the study at any point in time, and may do so without explanation.

My name is Anna Saw and I am conducting research for the University of Melbourne, Department of Criminology. Dr. Austin Lovegrove is supervising my research which will become part of my honours thesis. The aim of my current study is to assess public opinion of the seriousness of incidents of rape. I will do this by asking you to complete a questionnaire which will include descriptions of hypothetical incidents of sexual assault.

Participants of the current study are university students in Victoria and were selected through voluntary recruitment. As a participant of the study, you will be asked to rate these incidents in terms of seriousness. This is not expected to take very long, as the descriptions are relatively brief. The expected time required for completion of the questionnaire is approximately 15 minutes.
I will not be taking your name and as such your participation will be entirely anonymous. Specific answers will not be cited, and individual participants will not be identifiable in any way.

As mentioned previously, you have the right to discontinue participation at any point in time in the study. Participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any point during completion of the questionnaire.

Data from this study will be published in the form of a thesis which will be available from the University of Melbourne, Department of Criminology for viewing upon completion. The results will also be posted in summary form on the University of Melbourne, Department of Criminology website. Raw data obtained from the study will be destroyed after a period of five years.

If you have any questions regarding the current study, please feel free to contact either myself or my supervisor.

Anna Saw (Investigator): a.saw1@ugrad.unimelb.edu.au
Dr. Austin Lovegrove (Supervisor): a.lovegrove@unimelb.edu.au
8344 9441

The current study has received clearance by the HREC. If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this project, please contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, the University of Melbourne, Vic 3010; Ph: (03) 8344 2073 Fax: (03) 9347 6739.
Appendix E

The University of Melbourne
Department of Criminology

Consent form for persons participating in research project

Project title: Assessing the Seriousness of Rape

Name of investigator: Anna Saw
Name of supervisor: Dr. Austin Lovegrove

1. I consent to participate in the project named above, the particulars of which – including details of questionnaires – have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given me to keep.

2. I acknowledge that:

   (a) The possible effects of the questionnaire have been explained to my satisfaction;

   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and free to withdraw any uncompleted data;

   (c) I have been warned about the risks of distress as a result of the consent of the questionnaires and advised not to participate if I have been a victim of sexual assault;

   (d) The project is for the purpose of research;

   (e) I will remain entirely anonymous as a participant;

   (f) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________
Participant
Appendix F

The University of Melbourne
Department of Criminology
Debriefing Statement

Project title: Assessing the Seriousness of Rape
Student Research at Honours Level

The current study aims to assess public opinion of the seriousness of sexual assault, and this was done through the use of questionnaires which required you, as a participant, to respond to hypothetical incidents of rape. You were asked to give your personal perceptions as to the seriousness of each hypothetical as well as ratings of how responsible you perceived the perpetrator in each case, and how much harm you perceived to have been done to the victim. The main factor of interest in this study was the existence of a prior relationship between victim and offender. This was isolated by providing descriptions of incidents involving complete strangers, acquaintances with no prior relationship and acquaintances with a prior romantic relationship. Sentencing principles involve an assessment of the seriousness of each incident according to the amount of harm done to the victim and the amount of responsibility attributed to the perpetrator. The current study aims to determine whether the existence of a prior relationship between victim and perpetrator affects the perceived overall seriousness of the incident as well as the specific factors of perpetrator culpability and harm done.

Your participation in the current study is greatly valued and will become part of an honours level thesis, which you may view upon its completion. This will be available in summary form from the University of Melbourne, Department of Criminology website.

The topic that has been addressed in the questionnaire is a sensitive one, as mentioned. It is possible that you may have felt some discomfort when completing the questionnaire, as it may have brought back some unpleasant or upsetting incident from the past. Such reactions are normal and will usually pass quickly. However, if you need to discuss further, you are welcome to contact Dr. Lovegrove who can refer you to a suitable counseling service. Contact details for a nearby Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) are also provided below.

If you have any queries about the study, feel free to contact either myself or my supervisor. Thank you again for your participation.

Anna Saw (Investigator): a.saw1@ugrad.unimelb.edu.au
Dr. Austin Lovegrove (Supervisor): a.lovegrove@unimelb.edu.au
8344 9441

CASA Counseling Lines:
North CASA (Heidelberg): (03) 9469 2240 Carlton: (03) 9344 2210
After hours statewide telephone service (03) 9349 1766 / 1800 806 292
Appendix G
Mean ratings of severity, responsibility, and harm by factors of relationship, alcohol and injuries

Table 1. Mean severity, responsibility, and harm ratings by factor of relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Harm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance (npr)</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance (pr)</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Mean severity, responsibility, and harm ratings by factor of alcohol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Harm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No alcohol</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Mean severity, responsibility, and harm ratings by factor of injuries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Injuries</th>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Harm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Injuries</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No injuries</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

71 Acquaintance (no prior relationship) has been abbreviated to acquaintance (npr); acquaintance (prior relationship) has been abbreviated to acquaintance (pr).
Appendix H

Distribution of severity scores by factors of relationship, alcohol, and injuries

The following graphs present the distribution of severity scores for the factors of relationship, alcohol, and injuries. The frequency (represented on the y-axis) represents the number of occasions for which a particular score was noted overall for a specific level of factor. For example, for a score of 11 on the x-axis, each bar represents the total number of times a severity score of 11 was assigned for incidents corresponding to factor in question. Scores on the x-axis for each graph range from 12 to 6, as no severity ratings below 6 were assigned for any of the incidents in the main sample. The score of 12 was included as a number of participants added an extra rating on the questionnaire.

Figure 1. Distribution of severity scores for factor of relationship.
Figure 2. Distribution of severity scores for factor of alcohol.

Figure 3. Distribution of severity scores for factor of injuries.
Appendix I

Interaction effects

Figure 1. Interaction between factors of relationship and alcohol with respect to severity ratings.

Figure 2. Interaction between factors of relationship and injuries with respect to severity ratings.
Figure 3. Interaction between factors of relationship and alcohol with respect to responsibility ratings.

Figure 4. Interaction between factors of relationship and injuries with respect to responsibility ratings.
Figure 5. Interaction between factors of relationship and alcohol with respect to harm ratings.

Figure 6. Interaction between factors of relationship and injuries with respect to harm ratings.
Appendix J
Social demographic group difference interaction tables

Overall social demographic group differences

Table 1. Percentage of participants in each group who gave ‘high’ ratings for severity, responsibility, and harm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Harm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>66.1% (n=246)</td>
<td>96.2% (n=358)</td>
<td>82.5% (n=307)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>84.0% (n=131)</td>
<td>96.2% (n=150)</td>
<td>98.1% (n=153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Manufac.</td>
<td>65.5% (n=228)</td>
<td>96.0% (n=334)</td>
<td>83.9% (n=292)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Comm.</td>
<td>82.8% (n=149)</td>
<td>96.7% (n=174)</td>
<td>93.3% (n=168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMIT</td>
<td>76.4% (n=275)</td>
<td>97.2% (n=350)</td>
<td>88.6% (n=319)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>60.7% (n=102)</td>
<td>94.1% (n=158)</td>
<td>83.9% (n=141)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social demographic group differences for severity and harm by factor of relationship

Table 2. Percentage of participants in each group who gave ‘high’ ratings for severity by factor of relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stranger</th>
<th>Acquaintance (npr)</th>
<th>Acquaintance (pr)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>72.6% (n=90)</td>
<td>69.4% (n=86)</td>
<td>57.3% (n=71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>86.5% (n=45)</td>
<td>86.5% (n=45)</td>
<td>78.9% (n=41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Manufac.</td>
<td>70.7% (n=82)</td>
<td>68.1% (n=79)</td>
<td>58.6% (n=68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Comm.</td>
<td>88.3% (n=53)</td>
<td>86.7% (n=52)</td>
<td>73.3% (n=44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMIT</td>
<td>80.8% (n=97)</td>
<td>80.0% (n=96)</td>
<td>63.3% (n=76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>66.1% (n=37)</td>
<td>62.5% (n=35)</td>
<td>53.6% (n=30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3. Percentage of participants in each group who gave ‘high’ ratings for harm by factor of relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stranger (npr)</th>
<th>Acquaintance (npr)</th>
<th>Acquaintance (pr)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>90.3% (n=112)</td>
<td>88.7% (n=110)</td>
<td>68.5% (n=85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>98.1% (n=51)</td>
<td>100.0% (n=52)</td>
<td>96.2% (n=50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Manufac.</td>
<td>91.4% (n=106)</td>
<td>90.5% (n=105)</td>
<td>69.8% (n=81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Comm.</td>
<td>95.0% (n=57)</td>
<td>96.7% (n=58)</td>
<td>90.0% (n=54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMIT</td>
<td>91.7% (n=110)</td>
<td>92.5% (n=111)</td>
<td>80.0% (n=96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>92.9% (n=52)</td>
<td>89.3% (n=50)</td>
<td>69.6% (n=39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Social demographic group differences for severity and harm by factor of alcohol

**Table 4.** Percentage of participants in each group who gave ‘high’ ratings for severity by factor of alcohol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alcohol (n)</th>
<th>No alcohol (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>68.3% (127)</td>
<td>72.1% (134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>82.1% (64)</td>
<td>85.9% (67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Manufac.</td>
<td>59.8% (104)</td>
<td>71.3% (124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Comm.</td>
<td>90.0% (81)</td>
<td>93.3% (84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMIT</td>
<td>72.2% (130)</td>
<td>81.7% (147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>60.7% (51)</td>
<td>64.3% (50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5. Percentage of participants in each group who gave ‘high’ ratings for harm by factor of alcohol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alcohol (n)</th>
<th>No alcohol (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Manufac.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Comm.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMIT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Males 78.5% (n=146) 86.6% (n=161)
Females 97.4% (n=76) 98.7% (n=77)
Mechanical Manufac. 82.2% (n=143) 87.9% (n=153)
Health and Comm. 87.8% (n=79) 94.5% (n=85)
NMIT 86.1% (n=155) 90.6% (n=163)
University of Melbourne 81.0% (n=68) 88.1% (n=74)

**Social demographic group differences for severity and harm by factor of injuries**

Table 6. Percentage of participants in each group who gave ‘high’ ratings for severity by factor of injuries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Injuries</th>
<th>No injuries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>77.4% (n=144)</td>
<td>57.0% (n=106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>89.7% (n=70)</td>
<td>73.1% (n=57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Manufac.</td>
<td>79.3% (n=138)</td>
<td>51.7% (n=90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Comm.</td>
<td>84.4% (n=76)</td>
<td>81.1% (n=73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMIT</td>
<td>89.4% (n=161)</td>
<td>87.7% (n=158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>85.7% (n=72)</td>
<td>35.7% (n=30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Percentage of participants in each group who gave ‘high’ ratings for harm by factor of injuries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Injuries</th>
<th>No injuries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>87.6% (n=163)</td>
<td>77.4% (n=144)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>100.0% (n=78)</td>
<td>96.2% (n=75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Manufac.</td>
<td>87.4% (n=152)</td>
<td>80.5% (n=140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Comm.</td>
<td>98.9% (n=89)</td>
<td>87.8% (n=79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMIT</td>
<td>92.8% (n=167)</td>
<td>85.0% (n=153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>88.1% (n=74)</td>
<td>79.8% (n=67)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix K

### Subsample means

**Table 1.** Mean ratings of dress, behaviour, premeditation, trauma, and responsibility by factor of relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Stranger</th>
<th>Acquaintance (npr)</th>
<th>Acquaintance (pr)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dress</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premeditation</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma/harm</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.** Mean ratings of dress, behaviour, premeditation, trauma, and responsibility by factor of alcohol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>No alcohol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dress</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premeditation</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma/harm</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Saw, Anna Christine

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Assessing the seriousness of rape: the effect of prior victim-perpetrator relationship, alcohol, and injuries on perceptions of severity, responsibility, and harm

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2005-12

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