

Rape, Race And Empathy: How Empathetic Are People Towards Minority Women?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare how empathetic people are towards minority women who have been raped compared to Caucasian women who have been raped. Thirty six undergraduate students participated from the University of Wisconsin-Superior. The participants each took two empathy surveys, The Rape Empathy Scale (RES) and the Rape Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (RABS). The RABS measured five ethnicities of women; African American, Latino American, Caucasian American, Asian American, and Native American. The RES measured empathy for all women who have been raped. Reaction time was measured in the RABS to get the best implicit reaction from the participants. The findings suggested that the participants were empathetic with all five of the minority women in an equivalent way. The reaction time in the RABS suggested that it did not take participants very long to make their decision. The RES results showed that the participants were overall, empathetic with women who have been raped.

Keywords: rape, minority women, empathy

One out of six women is raped or has been a victim of attempted rape (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, [RAINN,] 2009). Over 60% of those women who have been raped every year do not ever report it to the police according to the U.S. Department of Justice (2012). A lifetime rate of rape for Caucasian women is 17.7%, for African American women 18.8%, Asian American women 6.8%, and for Native American women 34.1% (RAINN, 2009). While the statistics are high for Caucasian women to be raped, minority women are more likely to be raped over their lifetime (RAINN, 2009). There is a growing epidemic of minority women being raped. Underreporting is a problem for many women who have been raped, and minority women are more likely not to report a rape than Caucasian women. In the past five years, over 60% of rapes have never been reported (RAINN, 2009). It is important to note that there has been very little to no research done on how society views minority women who have been raped. For the specific statistics of rape for each ethnicity, there has been very little.

Victim blaming seems to be a factor in how a person empathizes with a women who has been raped. Race can be a factor when it comes to victim blaming after an occurrence of rape (Howard, 1984). Victim blaming is when a person is hurt in some way, and though it is not their fault, the blame is put onto them. Since the early 1970s, blaming the female victim of rape has been continuously established in the American culture (Ståhl, Eek, & Kazemi, 2010). Society in general puts more blame towards minority women victims because of their race. African American women who have been raped are more likely to be perceived by law enforcements to have had some sort of factor to cause their rape such as drugs or a record of criminal behavior compared to Caucasian rape victims (Irving, 2008). Native American women who are statistically the highest to be raped during their lifetime choose to stay quiet about their rapes

because of the backlash and racism they receive from society and lack of trust and help from law enforcement (Erdrich, 2013). Just some of these examples show that many times, minority women feel they can not report any rapes due to the backlash of victim blaming. There are multiple theories that explain why people may have less empathy towards minority women who have been raped. One theory that may help explain why victim blaming is so prevalent is the Just World Belief theory (JWB).

Hayes, Lorenz, and Bell, (2013) explained that JWB theory claims people believe the world is a just place, and they get what they deserve in life because of their actions. Hayes et al. (2013) found the JWB theory and victim blaming along with rape myth acceptance were correlated. People who have a high belief in the JWB theory believe victims of rape would have put themselves in a bad situation because rape does not occur very often in their just and fair world. This is where the rape myth acceptance comes into play as well. With the majority of society having a JWB, rape myths such as a woman's clothing choice encouraged the rapist, or women tend to lie about being raped because they get angry, are many scenarios that just world believers accept. This theory and belief that many hold can result in women being re-victimized over and over again. Some professionals such as lawyers, medical personal, and law enforcement commonly interview rape victims with a JWB attitude. This means that these professionals ask questions if the victim is lying about being raped or if any other factors such as clothing choice or even alcohol consumption has played a role in their rape (Hayes et al., 2013). The JWB can also lead to less empathy towards minorities. The belief in a just world relies heavily on what people believe is the norm in their culture (Alves & Correia, 2010). Someone with a higher belief in a just world views a minority getting hurt or in this study, raped, are more prone to believe

that the minority person caused their own suffering because they see a Caucasian person as more of a victim than they do a minority.

While many researchers look into the gender aspect of rape, what about race and rape? One theory suggests that “color blindness” may be a factor in why people may empathize less with minority women who have been raped compared to white women. Sue (2004) defined that color blindness in the American society means that people do not want to notice or see the color or race of people because of a fear of being labeled as racist or prejudice. This color blindness dilemma can leave a person to believe that their own race is the normative or dominant one. Because Caucasian is the dominant race in the United States, everything a person does, acts, speaks, and even their culture is based on the normative “white culture.” When another race acts, speaks, or does something that is considered normal in their own race but not the dominant one, they are seen as different. According to this hypothesis, society can better relate and empathize more towards a white woman who has been raped compared to a minority woman because a white woman would be considered the “normative victim.” Foley, Evancic, Karnik, King and Parks (1995) stated that a black woman would have to show that they fought against their rapist physically more in order for the public to view their rape as a crime because the credibility of black woman has not been as firmly established as a white woman victim (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003). Neuroscience is another factor when it comes to empathizing with race. Certain places in the brain have been shown to light up and activate when a person is empathizing with another.

Gutsell and Inzlicht (2010) conducted a study by measuring the empathy of Caucasian men who watched minority men performing an action. The participants were connected to Electroencephalography (EEG) to record brain activity when the participants watched the minority men complete actions. The goal of the study was to look at the EEG activity in the

Caucasian men's brains and compare them to when they watched a Caucasian man, East Asian, South-Asian, and African-Canadian man perform tasks. Gutsell and Inzlicht (2010) found that the Caucasian participants had very low-level activity in their brain when they watched the minority men complete a task compared to a much higher level of activity when they watched other Caucasian men complete tasks. This research showed that Caucasians felt more empathy and could put themselves in another Caucasian shoes, but could not do the same for minority men.

Therefore, the current study measured the different empathy levels towards women who have been raped. Empathy and rape perception of African American, Asian American, Native American, Latino American, and Caucasian American women have been looked into. The current study hypothesized that there would be less empathy towards minority women who have been raped compared to white women.

Method

Participants

Participants included 36 undergraduate students from the University of Wisconsin-Superior. Participants volunteered from the Introduction to Psychology classes and were given class credit for their participation. All participants were given a chance to put down their name for a gift card drawing once the survey was no longer administered.

Materials

The Rape Empathy Scale (RES; Dietz, Blackwell, Daley, & Bentley, 1982) and the Rape Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (RABS; Burgess, 2007) were the two surveys used to measure attitudes and empathy towards rape. The RABS survey measured five different ethnicity: Latino,

White, Black, Asian, and Native American (Appendix A). A likert-type scale of 1 through 4 was used; one being strongly disagree to four being strongly agree. The Empathy scale (Appendix B) consisted of reading two questions and choosing either A or B. Only one question was considered correct between the choices of A or B.

Procedures

All participants were given a computer to take the two surveys on the E-Prime software. Half the participants were randomly chosen to complete the RABS first and then the RES, and the other half of the participants completed the RES first and the RABS second. When the participants took the RABS survey, they were timed on how long it took them to choose their answer. The participants were not told that selecting their answers in the RABS survey was being timed.

Results

A within-subjects ANOVA was conducted to measure empathy, attitudes and beliefs of rape and race, and the reaction time. The descriptive statistics for all the measures can be viewed in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The attitudes and beliefs of rape and race showed no differences in how they viewed each race and their perception of rape ($F(df\ 4, df\ 140) = F=1.765, MSe=.052, p=.139$). For the reaction time of the attitudes and beliefs of rape and race, there was no differences in the time of choosing in answer ($F(df\ 4, df\ 140) = F=.310, MSe=7989.885, p=.871$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find if society has less empathy towards minority women who have been raped compared to Caucasian women who have been raped. This study also measured the overall societal empathy of rape towards all women. It was hypothesized that there would be less empathy for minority women then there would be for Caucasian women. The findings of the Rape Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (RABS) indicated that there were no significant differences of empathy towards African, Latino, Asian, and Native American women compared to Caucasian women. For the reaction time for the RABS showed that there was no significant difference between times. The majority of the participants all chose their answers at a similar fast pace which showed that they did not have to think about their answers long before choosing them. The overall empathy towards women or the RES results showed that the participants were for the majority felt empathetic towards women who have been raped.

With the worry of participants not answering the surveys honestly due to a possible fear of being labeled prejudice, their reaction time was measured during the RABS survey. The reaction time was measured to get the best possible implicit attitude. An implicit attitude is making a decision at an unconscious level that is involuntary and unknown (Long-Crowell, 2014). By measuring the participants' reaction time, their answers came from their implicit attitudes by unconsciously choosing the answer that they really wanted to choose. The results indicated that the participants took a very short amount of time to choose their answers.

Gutsell and Inzlicht (2010) had results that indicated that their Caucasian participants had less empathy towards minority men while watching them do tasks compared to Caucasian men doing the same tasks. Their results showed that the motor-cortex activity in

the brain that activates when a person observes someone, has empathy for, and can put themselves in their shoes did not light up in Caucasian men when they watched minority men, but lit up when they watched Caucasian men. This shows that Caucasians related and empathize more with their own ethnicity than they do with minorities. Gutsell and Inzlicht (2010) study indicated that Caucasians would be less empathetic towards minority women because Caucasian society would have a harder time putting themselves in a minority's shoes because they are not Caucasian.

Previous theories and research such as the color blindness theory and the Just World Belief theory suggested that there would be less empathy for minority women than there would be for Caucasian women, so why did the results of the study show the opposite? The University of Wisconsin-Superior (UWS) has a high percentage of Caucasian students and a high enrollment of women compared to men. Caucasians make up 86% of the student body at UWS and women make up 65% of those enrolled (Rankin & Associates Consulting Wisconsin System Climate Assessment Project, 2011). With the high percentage of Caucasians at UWS, the color blindness theory may explain why the results of the study showed that people would empathize equally with both minority women and Caucasian women who have been raped.

The theory of color blindness stated that many times a person is too fearful to label a person by the color of their skin so as not to be seen as prejudice or racist, especially if they are Caucasian (Sue, 2004). Because color blindness has become very prevalent in America, and more so in Caucasian culture, many believe that racial inequality no longer exists and that all ethnicities are on equal footing with Caucasians (Gallagher, 2003). If the participants felt that there is no inequality among races because of color blindness, their implicit attitudes

would unconsciously choose the answers that empathized with all the ethnic women and Caucasian women equally. Color blindness may be a factor in the differences of the results in the study and the hypothesis due to the high volume of Caucasian American students.

Gender is a very important aspect when it comes to knowing who will empathize more with a female rape victim. Osman, (2011) conducted a study that measured gender empathy of both male and female rape victims. The results found that women were much more empathetic towards rape victims than men were. With UWS having a 65% female population, the results of the study seem to be congruent with previous literature of women being more empathetic to female rape victims than men do.

While the hypothesis wasn't supported in this study, it still leaves questions. In the Gutsell, and Inzlicht, (2010) study, they used visual recordings of minority men doing activities for their participants to watch. In further research on this study, it would be beneficial to use the RABS and the RES surveys but to also add pictures of minority and Caucasian women. Every person has their own level of empathy; some have very high levels of empathy, others have very low levels of empathy and some are in-between. In order to really react in an empathetic way towards someone, a person needs to be able to see how that person looks and what their facial expression is at the time (Dimberg, Andréasson, & Thunberg, (2011). Using the current study, would showing participants' pictures of minority women and Caucasian women who have been raped with possible sad expressions change their empathy towards them? Different research has come up with a variety of different answers when it comes to a person empathizing with another. By adding visuals to this study, it could possibly change the implicit attitude of the participant because they are visually seeing a person and not just reading a question. This could possibly

show if people visually seeing a different race would make them empathize the same as their own race or have less empathy towards them because they look different.

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Table 1

Rape Attitudes and Beliefs Scale

Mean and Standard Deviation

Race	Mean	Std. Deviation
Latina	1.64	.529
White	1.70	.559
Black	1.64	.530
Asian	1.66	.507
Native	1.59	.475

Note. The descriptive statistics were not significant

Table 2

Rape Attitudes and Beliefs Scale Reaction Time

Descriptive Statistics

Race	Mean	Std. Deviation
Latina RT	529.53	258.49
White RT	573.35	283.90
Black RT	515.39	264.44
Asian RT	517.04	240.49
Native RT	551.27	316.25

Note. The descriptive statistics were not significant

Table 3

Rape Empathy Scale

Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, Maximum

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Empathy	.58	1.00	.8133	.12167

Appendix A

Rape Attitude and Beliefs Scale

Level of Agreement

1 – Strongly disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Agree

4 – Strongly agree

If a man and a Latino woman are engaged in consensual sexual activity, but the woman says she does not want to have intercourse, it is okay for the man to ignore this and go ahead, especially if he uses a condom.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

A Latino woman who was forced to have sex with a male acquaintance would probably get over it easier than if she were mugged or beaten up by a stranger.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

In many cases, if a Latino woman is raped by an acquaintance, she has to take some responsibility for what happened to her.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Latino Women need to take responsibility for the attention they attract if they are going to wear sexy clothes.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

If a Latino woman willingly gets drunk, then she is raped—she is more responsible for what happened to her than if she had decided not to drink.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Latino women often falsely cry “rape” because they are feeling guilty about having sex, or they want to get back at the man.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Any Latino woman who properly resists can prevent having sex with an acquaintance whom she does not want to have sex.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Latino women who drink at parties are giving off a signal that they are more sexually available than women who do not drink at parties.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

If a man and a White woman are engaged in consensual sexual activity, but the woman says she does not want to have intercourse, it is okay for the man to ignore this and go ahead, especially if he uses a condom.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

A White woman who was forced to have sex with a male acquaintance would probably get over it easier than if she were mugged or beaten up by a stranger.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

In many cases, if a White woman is raped by an acquaintance, she has to take some responsibility for what happened to her.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

White Women need to take responsibility for the attention they attract if they are going to wear sexy clothes.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

If a White woman willingly gets drunk, then she is raped—she is more responsible for what happened to her than if she had decided not to drink.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

White women often falsely cry “rape” because they are feeling guilty about having sex, or they want to get back at the man.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Any White woman who properly resists can prevent having sex with an acquaintance whom she does not want to have sex.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

White women who drink at parties are giving off a signal that they are more sexually available than women who do not drink at parties.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

If a man and a Black woman are engaged in consensual sexual activity, but the woman says she does not want to have intercourse, it is okay for the man to ignore this and go ahead, especially if he uses a condom.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

A Black woman who was forced to have sex with a male acquaintance would probably get over it easier than if she were mugged or beaten up by a stranger.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

In many cases, if a Black woman is raped by an acquaintance, she has to take some responsibility for what happened to her.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Black Women need to take responsibility for the attention they attract if they are going to wear sexy clothes.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

If a Black woman willingly gets drunk, then she is raped—she is more responsible for what happened to her than if she had decided not to drink.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Black women often falsely cry “rape” because they are feeling guilty about having sex, or they want to get back at the man.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Any Black woman who properly resists can prevent having sex with an acquaintance whom she does not want to have sex.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Black women who drink at parties are giving off a signal that they are more sexually available than women who do not drink at parties.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

If a man and an Asian woman are engaged in consensual sexual activity, but the woman says she does not want to have intercourse, it is okay for the man to ignore this and go ahead, especially if he uses a condom.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

An Asian woman who was forced to have sex with a male acquaintance would probably get over it easier than if she were mugged or beaten up by a stranger.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

In many cases, if an Asian woman is raped by an acquaintance, she has to take some responsibility for what happened to her.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Asian Women need to take responsibility for the attention they attract if they are going to wear sexy clothes.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

If an Asian woman willingly gets drunk, then she is raped—she is more responsible for what happened to her than if she had decided not to drink.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly Agree

4

Asian women often falsely cry “rape” because they are feeling guilty about having sex, or they want to get back at the man.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1 2 3 4

Any Asian woman who properly resists can prevent having sex with an acquaintance whom she does not want to have sex.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree
1 2 3 4

Asian women who drink at parties are giving off a signal that they are more sexually available than women who do not drink at parties.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree
1 2 3 4

If a man and a Native American woman are engaged in consensual sexual activity, but the woman says she does not want to have intercourse, it is okay for the man to ignore this and go ahead, especially if he uses a condom.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree
1 2 3 4

A Native American woman who was forced to have sex with a male acquaintance would probably get over it easier than if she were mugged or beaten up by a stranger.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree
1 2 3 4

In many cases, if a Native American woman is raped by an acquaintance, she has to take some responsibility for what happened to her.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree
1 2 3 4

Native American Women need to take responsibility for the attention they attract if they are going to wear sexy clothes.

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree
1 2 3 4

If a Native American woman willingly gets drunk, then she is raped—she is more responsible for what happened to her than if she had decided not to drink.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Native American women often falsely cry “rape” because they are feeling guilty about having sex, or they want to get back at the man.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Any Native American woman who properly resists can prevent having sex with an acquaintance whom she does not want to have sex.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Native American women who drink at parties are giving off a signal that they are more sexually available than women who do not drink at parties.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Appendix B

Rape Empathy Scale: RES

1. a. I feel that the situation in which a man compels a woman to submit to sexual intercourse against her will is an unjustifiable act under any circumstances.

b. I feel that the situation in which a man compels a woman to submit to sexual intercourse against her will is an justifiable act under any circumstances.
2. a. In deciding the matter of guilt or innocence in a rape case, it is more important to know about the past sexual activity of the alleged rape victim than the past sexual activity of the alleged rapist.

b. In deciding the matter of guilt or innocence in a rape case, it is more important to know about the past sexual activity of the alleged rapist than the past sexual activity of the alleged rape victim.
3. a. In general, I feel that rape is an act that is provoked by the rape victim.

b. In general, I feel that rape is not an act that is provoked by the rape victim.
4. a. Under certain circumstances, I can understand why a man would use force to obtain sexual relations with a woman.

b. I cannot understand why a man would use force to obtain sexual relations with a woman under any circumstances.
5. a. In a court of law, I feel that the rapist must be held accountable for his behavior during the rape.

b. In a court of law, I feel that the rape victim must be held accountable for her behavior during the rape.
6. a. When a woman dresses in a sexually attractive way, she must be willing to accept the consequences of her behavior, whatever they are, since she is signaling her interest in havng sexual relations.

b. A woman has the right to dress in a sexually attractive way whether she is really interested in having sexual relations or not.
7. a. If a man rapes a sexually active woman, he would probably be justified in his actions by the fact that she chooses to have sexual relations with other men.

- b. If a man rapes a sexually active woman, he would not be justified by the fact that she chooses to have sexual relations with other men.
- 8.
 - a. In deciding whether a rape has occurred or not, the burden of proof should rest with the woman, who must prove that a rape has actually occurred.
 - b. In deciding whether a rape has occurred or not, the burden of proof should rest with the man, who must prove that a rape has not actually occurred.
- 9.
 - a. I believe that it is impossible for a rape victim to enjoy being raped.
 - b. I believe that it is possible for a rape victim to enjoy the experience of being raped, whether she admits it or not.
- 10.
 - a. I feel it is impossible for a man to rape a woman unless she is willing.
 - b. I feel it is possible for a man to rape a woman against her will.
- 11.
 - a. If a rape trial were publicized in the press, I feel the rape victim would suffer more emotional trauma from the publicity than the rapist.
 - b. If a rape trial were publicized in the press, I feel the rapist would suffer more emotional trauma from the publicity than the rape victim.
- 12.
 - a. Once a couple has had sexual intercourse, then the issue is resolved and it is no longer possible for that man to rape that woman.
 - b. Even if a couple has had sexual intercourse before, if the man forces the woman to have sexual intercourse with him against her will, this should be considered rape.