

Title: Attitudes toward rape: gender and ethnic differences across Asian and Caucasian college students

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Rape is one of the most common types of assault perpetrated in the U.S.; it has been estimated that one in three women will be raped in her lifetime (Warshaw, 1988). Among college women, it has been estimated that one in five female college students will be sexually assaulted during her college years (Koss, 1985). Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987) found that 27.5% of their sample of college women reported being raped or experiencing an attempted rape, while 53.7% (including those reporting attempted rape or rape) endorsed being subjected to unwanted sexual contact or sexually assaultive behaviors. Surveys of college males indicate that 7-25% report having forced sexual intercourse on a female (Koss, 1989; Koss & Oros, 1982; Miller & Marshall, 1987; Mills & Granoff, 1992; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984). Furthermore, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1981) found rape to be the most underreported crime in this country. Thus, rape continues to be a social problem of great proportions, and research on factors predicting rape has continued as well.

Numerous studies have investigated attitudes toward rape and belief in rape myths (Blumberg & Lester, 1991; Koss, Leonard, Beezley, & Oros, 1985; Margolin, Miller, & Moran, 1989; Schult & Schneider, 1991). Burt (1980) developed a scale to measure erroneous beliefs about rape. She found significant correlations between acceptance of rape myths and factors such as gender role traditionalism, conservative gender views, and adversarial gender beliefs (e.g., women act in provocative ways that lead to rape, so rape is in part the fault of the victim). Many feminist writers have endorsed the view that pro-rape, anti-women attitudes and belief in rape myths (e.g., victims secretly enjoy being raped), which they argue are culturally sanctioned and socially promoted, play a significant role in maintaining the incidence of rape (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971; Hall, 1983; Johnson, 1980; Morgan, 1980). (See Donat & D'Emilio, 1992, for an excellent historical review of the perceptions and social meanings of rape and sexual assault.)

Consistent gender differences have been found as well, with males being more likely to hold rape-tolerant attitudes and more likely to attribute blame to the victim than females (Feild, 1978; Holcomb, Holcomb, Sondag, & Williams, 1991; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Barnett and Feild (1977) and Szymanski, Devlin, Chrisler, and Vyse (1993) found that men (versus women) are more likely to believe that sex is the motivation for rape, while women (versus men) are more likely to believe that power is the motivation for rape. Other studies have focused on gender differences in attitudes toward type of rape (e.g., stranger versus acquaintance or date rape - Holcomb et al., 1991; Szymanski et al., 1993).

While some studies have examined attitudes toward rape victims cross-culturally, the majority of these studies have focused on African-American/Caucasian comparisons (Giacopassi & Dull, 1986; Howard, 1988; Willis, 1992; Wyatt, 1992). Few studies have examined attitudes toward rape among Asian-American subjects. Lee and Cheung (1991) conducted a study investigating the reliability and convergent validity of Ward's (1988) Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS) among Chinese college students in Hong Kong. These authors found the ARVS to demonstrate adequate reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75) and moderate convergent validity as demonstrated by significant correlations (r 's ranged from .28 to -.31; p 's [less than] .0001) with the Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS; Spence & Helmreich, 1973) and the Traditionality-Modernity Factor Scale (TMFS; Yang, 1986, cited in Lee & Cheung, 1991). Gender differences were found in the expected direction, with men being more likely to blame rape victims than women. Lee and Cheung concluded that the ARVS appeared to be a reliable and valid instrument to use with Chinese subjects.

Mills and Granoff (1992), as part of a needs assessment survey focusing on date and acquaintance rape among college students, investigated the prevalence of date and acquaintance rape among a sample ($n = 219$) of University of Hawaii-Manoa students, the majority of whom were Asian or mixed-Asian American (e.g., 73.5%). Mills and Granoff found that a significant number of the female college subjects (28%) reported experiencing rape or attempted rape, yet only one of three victims in their sample correctly labeled the experience as sexual assault or rape. Of the college men in the study, one out of six described acts that met the legal definition of sexual assault in Hawaii. The authors concluded that Asian women and men may be less likely to label sexual assault as such due to cultural influences that tend to sanction the domination of women by men.

The present study investigated attitudes toward women and rape victims, belief in rape myths, and self-esteem of Asian and Caucasian college students. It was hypothesized that (1) Asian subjects, regardless of gender, would report more negativity towards rape victims than Caucasian subjects; (2) low acculturated (traditional) Asians would report more negativity towards rape victims than their highly acculturated (Westernized) counterparts; (3) Asians would report more negativity towards women than Caucasians; and (4) Asian subjects would report lower self-esteem than Caucasian subjects.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects consisted of Asian (84 males, 76 females) and Caucasian (57 males, 85 females) college students recruited from two college campuses located in Orange County, California (total $n = 302$). Subjects completed a brief demographic sheet which requested information on gender, ethnicity, and number of years of residence in the United States. All of the Caucasian subjects identified their ethnicity as "Caucasian" or "White." Of the Asian subjects, the majority did not indicate their specific ethnic group of origin, simply

labeling their ethnicity as "Asian" or "Asian American" (n = 102; 63.75%); of those who did specify their ethnic group of origin, the majority were Vietnamese (n = 23; 14%), followed by Filipino (n = 17; 10.6%), Japanese (n = 8; 0.05%), Chinese (n = 7; 0.04%), Korean (n = 3; 0.02%), and Thai (n = 1; 0.006%). Most of the Asian college students were born outside the U.S. (n = 116; 72.5%), but, on the average, had lived in the U.S. for over a decade (M = 11.46 yrs, SD = 7.345 yrs). Subjects were from predominantly middle-income backgrounds. Students were enrolled in various undergraduate classes and either received extra course credit or candy in exchange for their participation.

Measures

Subjects were asked to complete the following questionnaires:

1. Demographic Sheet
2. Attitudes towards Women Scale (AWS; Spence & Helmreich, 1974)
3. Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS; Ward, 1988)
4. Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS; Burt, 1980)
5. Culture-free Self-esteem Inventory (SEI; Battle, 1981)
6. Suinn-Lew Asian Self-identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA; Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987 - Asian subjects only)

Procedure

Subjects were run in mixed race-and-gender groups by a Caucasian or Asian female experimenter. Subjects anonymously completed the above-stated questionnaires and were then debriefed and excused.

RESULTS

A 2 (Ethnicity: Asian vs. Caucasian) x 2 (Gender) between-subjects MANOVA was conducted on the dependent variables of Attitudes towards Women Scale (AWS), Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS), Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS), and the Culture-free Self-esteem Inventory (SEI). Univariate ANOVA's followed significant MANOVA findings. Results indicated significant MANOVA main effects for Ethnicity and Gender, and a significant Ethnicity x Gender interaction (all: Pillais Trace Statistics, p [less than] .001) for the combined dependent variables.

Table I. Means and Standard Deviations Across Ethnicity(a)

Measure Range Ethnicity (n) Mean SD

ARVS 0-100(b) Asian (160) 37.05a(d) 14.07
Caucasian (142) 27.20(b) 13.63

AWS 0-45(c) Asian (160) 32.88(a) 12.17
Caucasian (142) 37.41(b) 11.97

RMAS 19-117(c) Asian (160) 83.31(a) 15.31
Caucasian (142) 102.49(b) 12.05

SEI 0-30(c) Asian (160) 21.19(a) 04.33
Caucasian (142) 24.83(b) 04.73

a ARVS: Attitudes towards rape victims scale; AWS: Attitudes towards women scale; RMAS: Rape myth acceptance scale; SEI: Culture-free self-esteem inventory.

b Lower scores indicate greater sympathy towards rape victims.

c Higher scores indicate positive attitudes towards women, accurate perceptions of rape, or greater self-esteem.

d The a and b subscripts indicate mean differences at the p [less than] .005 level for the AWS and the p [less than] .0001 level for the ARVS, RMAS, and SEI.

Univariate ANOVA's demonstrated significant differences across Ethnicity for the Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale ($F(1, 298) = 66.84, p [less than] .0001$), Rape Myth Acceptance Scale ($F(1, 298) = 142.48, p [less than] .0001$), Attitudes towards Women Scale ($F(1, 298) = 8.00, p [less than] .005$), and the Culture-free Self-esteem Inventory ($F(1, 298) = 47.82, p [less than] .0001$). Asian subjects reported significantly more negative attitudes toward rape victims and women, endorsed more rape myth beliefs, and had lower self-esteem scores than their Caucasian counterparts. (See Table I.) Significant differences were also seen across Gender for the Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale ($F(1, 298) = 38.03, p [less than] .0001$), Rape Myth Acceptance Scale ($F(1, 298) = 51.10, p [less than] .0001$), Attitudes towards Women Scale ($F(1, 298) = 11.42, p [less than] .001$), and the Culture-free Self-esteem Inventory ($F(1, 298) = 5.97, p [less than] .015$). Male subjects reported significantly poorer attitudes toward rape victims and endorsed more belief in rape myths. (See Table II.)

The significant univariate Ethnicity x Gender interactions mediated main effects findings for the Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale ($F(1, 298) = 4.11, p [less than] .043$), Rape Myth Acceptance Scale ($F(1, 298) = 25.85, p [less than] .0001$), Attitudes toward Women Scale ($F(1, 298) = 18.76, p [less than] .0001$), and the Culture-free Self-esteem Inventory

($F(1, 298) = 13.33, p [less\ than] .0001$). Simple main effects analyses indicated that the observed magnitudes were significantly different among Asian male and female subjects' scores for all dependent measures (p 's [less than] .01), while there were no significant differences across dependent variable scores for Caucasian males and females (p 's [greater than] .05). (See Table III.) Thus, although significant attitudinal differences were seen across gender and ethnicity, gender differences appeared most disparate across Asian subjects, with Asian males reporting significantly worse attitudes toward rape victims and women, and holding more erroneous beliefs about rape, than Asian females.

Table II. Means and Standard Deviations Across Gender(a)

Measure Range Gender (n) Mean SD

ARVS 0-100(b) Female (161) 25.59(a)(d) 15.15
Male (141) 38.66(b) 12.54

AWS 0-45(c) Female (161) 37.41(a) 12.51
Male (141) 32.89(b) 11.63

RMAS 19-117(c) Female (161) 98.64(a) 13.09
Male (141) 87.16(b) 14.27

SEI 0-30(c) Female (161) 23.65(a) 04.47
Male (141) 22.36(b) 04.59

a ARVS: Attitudes towards rape victims scale; AWS: Attitudes towards women scale; RMAS: Rape myth acceptance scale; SEI: Culture-free self-esteem inventory.

b Lower scores indicate greater sympathy towards rape victims.

c Higher scores indicate positive attitudes towards women, accurate perceptions of rape, or greater self-esteem.

d The a and b subscripts indicate mean differences at the $p [less\ than] .001$ level for the AWS, the $p [less\ than] .0001$ level for the ARVS and RMAS, and the $p [less\ than] .015$ level for the SEI.

Asian subjects also completed the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA); a median split was performed to categorize Asian subjects as high (SL-ASIA score = 2.63-5.00; $n = 72$) or low (SL-ASIA score = 1.00-2.62; $n = 73$) on level of acculturation (highly acculturated individuals report a strong identification with Western culture or describe themselves as comfortable and affiliated with both Western and Eastern traditions, otherwise referred to as bicultural status, while low acculturated individuals endorse greater comfort and affiliation with Eastern culture and traditions; for

this sample, scores ranged from 1.67-4.71, $M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.76$). Univariate analyses indicated a significant effect of acculturation on the Attitudes towards Women Scale ($F(1, 143) = 12.83$, p [less than] .0001), Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale ($F(1, 143) = 23.19$, p [less than] .0001), the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale ($F(1, 143) = 30.69$, p [less than] .0001), and on the Culture-free Self-esteem Inventory ($F(1, 143) = 9.14$, p [less than] .003). Highly acculturated subjects reported more positive views of rape victims [TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE III OMITTED] and women, were less likely to believe in rape myths, and reported greater self-esteem than their low acculturation counterparts. (See Table IV.)

DISCUSSION

Main and interaction effects were found across ethnicity and gender, and for the most part, in the predicted directions. As hypothesized, it was found that Asian college students were more likely to report negative attitudes toward rape victims and to endorse greater belief in rape myths than Caucasian college students. Asian subjects scored significantly lower on self-esteem than Caucasian subjects as well. In part contrary to predictions, only Asian males (and not Asian females) were found to endorse negative attitudes toward women. These results are consistent with the findings of Lee and Cheung (1991), who sampled Chinese college students at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

It was also found, as hypothesized and consistent with previous research, that males were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward rape victims and to have a greater belief in rape myths than females, with this gender difference particularly evident across the Asian subjects. Furthermore, level of acculturation among Asian subjects predicted attitudes toward rape victims and women, belief in rape myths, and self-esteem in the hypothesized directions, with highly acculturated Asian subjects endorsing responses similar to their Caucasian counterparts. In general, however, Asians were more likely than Caucasian subjects to view rape victims as partially to blame for their sexual assault.

Table IV. Means and Standard Deviations Across High and Low Acculturation(a)

| Measure | Range | Acculturation group (n) | Mean | SD |
|----------------|-------|-------------------------|----------|-------|
| ARVS 0-100(b) | | Low acculturation (72) | 43.96(a) | 12.06 |
| | | High acculturation (73) | 33.97(b) | 12.90 |
| AWS 0-45(c) | | Low acculturation (72) | 28.90(a) | 13.65 |
| | | High acculturation (73) | 36.74(b) | 12.65 |
| RMAS 19-117(c) | | Low acculturation (72) | 74.55(a) | 14.36 |
| | | High acculturation (73) | 89.94(b) | 18.84 |
| SEI 0-30(c) | | Low acculturation (72) | 20.03(a) | 4.38 |
| | | High acculturation (73) | 22.25(b) | 4.47 |

a ARVS: Attitudes towards rape victims scale; AWS: Attitudes

towards women scale; RMAS: Rape myth acceptance scale; SEI: Culture-free self-esteem inventory.

b Lower scores indicate greater sympathy towards rape victims.

c Higher scores indicate positive attitudes towards women, accurate perceptions of rape, or greater self-esteem.

d The a and b subscripts indicate mean differences at the p [less than] .0001 level for the ARVS, AWS, and RMAS, and at the p [less than] .003 level for the SEI.

It would appear, at least for this sample, that Asian versus Caucasian college students, and particularly Asian college males, may be misinformed or lack education about the culpability of offenders in sexual assault situations. Asian college students may be more likely to view rape victims in a negative light than their Caucasian peers due to Asian cultural traditions which endorse a patriarchal structure in which the status of women is low (Shon & Ja, 1982). In addition, the emphasis placed on harmony with others, family or group orientation (which discourages focus on individual needs and encourages self-sacrifice), and the importance of avoiding impropriety and shame (Sue & Sue, 1990) may place Asian females at particular risk of victimization. It appeared that Asian college students were more likely than their Caucasian peers to internalize misinformation in the form of rape myth beliefs and victim blaming, regardless of gender. This suggests that Asian females may be likely to underreport sexual assault due to possible failure to recognize rape as "rape" (i.e., sexual attack) and/or due to fear of negative repercussions or self-blame. Mills and Granoff (1992) suggested this latter possibility based on data from their incidence survey of date and acquaintance rape of University of Hawaii-Manoa college students (where the majority of the sample were of Asian descent). These authors surmised that Asian females may have difficulty in labeling their experiences as sexual victimization (and Asian males may have difficulty in labeling their actions as sexual assault) due to cultural influences; they based their conclusions on the written responses of a number of Asian female subjects which indicated that these women were unable to accurately identify or acknowledge their experiences as rape. Mills and Granoff suggested that the incidence of date rape among the Japanese women in their study (17%) was probably an underestimate due to labeling errors on the part of these subjects, and in reality, closer to the victimization rate of the Caucasian females in their sample (39%).

It is important to note the limitations of the present study. First, the findings are based on perceptions of "rape victims," "rape myths," and so forth; rape was not defined as a term and this may have artificially promoted greater variability of subject ratings. Personal experience and knowledge of rape were also not measured. Secondly, the data may not generalize to other young adult populations, geographic regions, or other Asian groups. The study was conducted in Orange County, in a geographic region populated with immigrant or refugee Asian groups. Thus, the findings may be reflective of a diverse Asian college population, the majority of whom were born outside the United States, that

is not representative of Asian college students residing in other geographic areas. Finally, the sample size is relatively small.

Despite these limitations, the findings of the present study clearly demonstrate a need for specialized rape prevention efforts. Targeting Asian college students as a potential high-risk group and promoting education about rape and its correlates in a culturally-sensitive manner may be helpful in decreasing erroneous beliefs about rape and victim blaming, and in promoting rape identification and reporting among this population. Mills and Granoff (1990, cited in Mills & Granoff, 1992) evaluated the benefits of a culturally-sensitive peer education program on sexual assault at the University of Hawaii. They found that the program was effective in promoting accurate perceptions of sexual assault; however, no statistics or mention of specific outcome measures were offered. Further research is needed to determine specific factors which predict these attitudinal differences in Asian and Caucasian college students and to examine the extent to which these predict sexually assaultive behaviors or victimization rates. Additionally, such research could offer valuable information towards designing effective prevention programs.

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