

## Abstract

Research into attitudes toward sexual assault has primarily focused on the influence of rape myth adherence and sexist beliefs (Cohn et al., 2009; Durán et al., 2010; Ferrão & Gonçalves, 2015; Rollero & Tartaglia, 2019). Further, the focus of research is typically on the victim and their characteristics (Jones & Aronson, 1973). The current research analyzed how a perpetrator's achieved social status influenced participants' attributions of responsibility for an instance of sexual assault to either the perpetrator or the victim, as well as how observer gender impacted attitudes. I predicted that an observer (i.e. a participant) would be most likely to assign responsibility for the assault to the survivor if the observer identified as male and if the perpetrator was of a higher social status.

I used a 2x2 design to randomly assign participants to one of two conditions wherein they were asked to read a fictional account of sexual assault and then respond to a series of questions related to who they perceived to be at fault. The primary measure of this study was the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status; participants were also asked questions regarding their moral beliefs and their personal demographics.

The data did not show the predicted interaction nor an effect of social status on perceptions of responsibility, but there was a small main effect of gender. The discussion covered limitations related to generalizability and suggestions for future study.

Key words: sexual assault, attitudes, gender, social status, attributions of responsibility

Honors College  
Ball State University  
Muncie, IN 47306