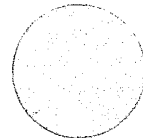


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Judgments of Acquaintance Rape Involving Alcohol:  
A Comparison of Two Age Groups

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At least three-quarters of American women have experienced some form of sexual aggression by early adulthood (Kanin, 1957; Makepeace, 1986). Approximately one-quarter have experienced rape or attempted rape, and the overwhelming majority of these have been acquaintance rapes. About three-quarters of acquaintance rapes involve alcohol consumption on the part of the victim, the assailant, or both (Koss, Gidycz & Wisniewski, 1987).

Although the correlational evidence for a relationship between alcohol consumption and acquaintance rape is substantial, only one study has examined the causal nature of the relationship. An experiment by Richardson and Campbell (1982) varied the drunkenness of a victim and an assailant in an acquaintance rape depiction. These researchers found that although the assailant was blamed less when he was drunk than when he was sober, the victim was found to be more responsible and her character was evaluated less positively when she was drunk than when she was not drinking. In judging the potential adjudication outcomes of the assault, female subjects took into greater account than male subjects the victim's drunkenness. This study raised many questions about perceptions of both a victim's and an assailant's behavior in similar situations.

Two studies by George and his colleagues are also relevant to understanding alcohol's role in acquaintance rape. George, Gournic and McAfee (1988) reported that college students responding to a questionnaire about alcohol expectancies, perceived a female drinker to be more sexual than a male drinker. Both George, Skinner and Marlatt (1986) and George, Gournic, et al. (1988) found that an alcohol-consuming female in the company of a male drinker was perceived to be more sexually disinhibited than a cola-drinking counterpart. These studies also found that a number of other sexual traits, such as being more sexually available and being more likely to enjoy being seduced and to engage in foreplay and intercourse, were attributed to the drinking woman. These findings suggest that a man might be more likely to initiate sexual activity with a drinking woman than with a nondrinker because of expectations about the sexual receptivity of the drinker. However, it is not known if such expectations would result in more favorable judgments of a man who was sexually aggressive toward a drinking woman than toward a nondrinker. Furthermore, the George et al. studies have not addressed the effect of the man's drinking status. That is, in these studies the man was always portrayed as drinking. It is quite possible that the interaction of a man and a woman drinking together produces a unique set of expectations about and judgments of their resulting behavior.

In addition to alcohol consumption, certain individual difference characteristics have been related to coercive sexual activity. Research by Rapoport and Burkhart (1984) and Malamuth (1986) has especially focused on traits related to hostility and violence in predicting self-reported sexually aggressive behavior. However, no studies have examined the significance of traits related to alcohol consumption or attitudes about rape in judging acquaintance rape that involves alcohol consumption.

In sum, the evidence suggests that alcohol has more than a coincidental relationship with the occurrence of acquaintance rape, although its exact role has not been extensively investigated. The present study was undertaken to investigate the effect of both an acquaintance rape victim's and her assailant's alcohol consumption on judgments of their behaviors and general traits. Thus, this study extends earlier research concerned with alcohol's influence on both judgments of a female drinker, as well as on an acquaintance rape itself. The study also examined whether the presence of alcohol would influence judgments after relevant individual difference traits were controlled.

Finally, all known experimental studies on perceptions of sexual aggression have employed college undergraduates, usually freshmen and sophomores, as

subjects. While this is a plentiful, convenient population to draw from, it is unknown to what extent these studies generalize to older adults. This is not a trivial concern for researchers who wish to apply their findings to practical problems outside of the university setting. Therefore, this study was conducted on both a sample of lower-level undergraduates as well as on a group of individuals at least twenty-one years old. Comparisons of these findings will be presented.

## Method

### Subjects

Two samples of subjects were recruited. The first was comprised of 64 men and 68 women, at least 21 years of age ( $\bar{X}=25.7$ ). Subjects were recruited through ads in the campus student newspaper. They received \$6.00 for participating in the experiment, which had been described as two one-hour questionnaire studies.

The second sample was comprised of 43 male and 42 female introductory psychology students from the UW Psychology Department Human Subjects Pool. Only those less than 21 years of age ( $\bar{X}=18.9$ ) were allowed to participate, and they received two hours of experimental course credit as payment. Other than recruitment, all aspects of the study were identical for the two groups.

### Design and Procedure

The experimental design was a 2 (sex of subject) x 2 (assailant alcohol versus soft drink consumption) x 2 (victim alcohol versus soft drink consumption) between-subjects factorial.

Subjects participated in same-sex groups of up to four with a same-sex experimenter. When they arrived at the lab, they were placed in semi-private booths from which they could maintain verbal and visual contact with the experimenter but could not see other subjects. After giving informed consent, subjects completed the pre-test questionnaires and were paid \$1.00. They then signed a second informed consent form, read a story depicting a social interaction between a heterosexual couple that results in an acquaintance rape, and completed several dependent measure scales. After being debriefed, they were paid an additional \$5.00, thanked, and released.

### Rape Depiction

The 500-word story portrayed a typical date on which the man picked up the woman, they went out for dinner and then to a party. However, afterward he took her home, went inside with her, and started to initiate sex play. After kissing for some time, the man attempted to escalate the sexual activity, but the woman resisted. When verbal coercion was unsuccessful at getting the woman to have sexual intercourse, the man physically forced her.

The story was pre-tested with ten male and ten female subjects to insure that the key elements of the story were communicated. These included: who consumed alcohol, how much alcohol or soft drink was consumed, what events were portrayed, etc. In addition, the story was judged by a local deputy prosecutor to constitute first degree rape, according to Washington State law, punishable by up to two years in prison.

### Independent Manipulation

The independent manipulation consisted of varying who in the story consumed alcohol or a soft drink over the course of the date - the assailant, the victim, both, or neither. Otherwise, the stories were identical. Each subject read one of the four versions.

## Measures

Pre-Test Measures. Five questionnaires of interest to this paper were administered during the first part of the study. These included: (a) nine items measuring demographic characteristics, including age, marital status, ethnic identification, religious affiliation, political affiliation, etc.; (b) a drinking habits questionnaire, which took into account both quantity and frequency of consumption (Cahalan, Cisin & Crossley (1969); (c) fourteen items measuring expectancies about alcohol's effects on sexual behavior (Leigh, 1990); (d) the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss & Oros, 1982), 12 (male version) or 13 (female version) items measuring a history of either being a victim or perpetrator of sexual aggression; and (e) fifteen items measuring attitudes about sex, dating and rape (Dull & Giacomassi, 1987).

Dependent Measures. Although six sets of dependent measures were employed in the study, because of time constraints only two will be discussed here. These were specifically concerned with subjects' judgments of the victim's and assailant's behaviors and traits. Examples of behaviors include: how responsive, easy to seduce, willing, and responsible the victim was; and how forceful and responsible the assailant was, and how strongly subjects felt that his behavior constituted rape. Twenty-one bipolar traits were judged for both the victim and the assailant, such as sexy/unsexy; friendly/unfriendly; interesting/boring; aggressive/nonaggressive; and careful/careless.

## Results

### Comparison of Samples' Characteristics

1. As you can see from Table 1, the samples differed on certain demographic traits besides age. The older group had more "ever married" individuals, as well as individuals who reported no religious affiliation. However, the groups were comparable on religiosity and ethnic make-up.
2. Although the female subjects did not differ dramatically in their experiences with sexual coercion, the older women were more likely to have been victims of violence than the younger ones. Likewise, older and younger men were equally likely to admit to having used coercive sexual tactics, but more of the older ones admitted to having used violence to obtain sex.
3. Some notable trends also appear on the Drinking Habits Scale. Even though none of the younger subjects had reached legal drinking age, very few reported being abstainers. In fact, considerably more of the younger subjects reported heavy drinking than the older subjects, whereas the older sample was concentrated in the light and moderate categories.
4. Finally, it should be noted that the means for the two groups' beliefs about the effects of alcohol and their rape attitudes are very similar.

### Multivariate Analyses of Covariance

The following results are based on multivariate analyses of covariance that were conducted on each of the samples separately, using assailant's alcohol consumption, victim's alcohol consumption, and subject sex as the independent variables. For each sample separate MANCOVAs were conducted on dependent measures concerned with the assailant's and the victim's behaviors during their encounter and their general traits. Thus, four MANCOVAs were conducted on each of the age groups. Only the results of analyses with significant multivariate Fs at  $p < .05$  are reported.

### Covariates

The covariates used in these analyses were different for each of the samples. Preliminary correlational analyses showed that for the younger sample only the alcohol expectancies, but not the rape attitude items, were related to the dependent

measures. Consequently, only the alcohol expectancies, after being formed into scales, were used as covariates for the younger sample. In contrast, alcohol expectancies were not related to the dependent measures in the older sample. However, the rape attitude items were related to several of the dependent measures for this sample and therefore were formed into a scale and used as a covariate in the MANCOVAs.

Table 2 shows the relationships between the covariates and the dependent measures for each of the samples. It is important to keep in mind that the effects of the independent variables on the dependent measures occur after these relationships are taken into account.

Judgments of the Assailant's Behavior. The results of these analyses are somewhat similar for the two age groups and are shown in Table 3. The dependent measures used in these analyses were: the belief that a rape had occurred; and the assailant's enjoyment; responsibility; forcefulness; and likability.

1. One consistent finding for both age groups was a lessened belief that the assailant had committed rape if he had consumed alcohol than if he had not. The younger group also judged the assailant as enjoying himself less if he had been drinking.
2. Two additional findings for the older group involved an interaction between assailant's and victim's alcohol consumption. Post hoc analyses showed that the belief that a rape had occurred was greatest when the assailant was not drinking but the victim was, and least when both the victim and the assailant were drinking. Likewise, the assailant's behavior was judged as most likable when both were drinking and least when only the victim was.

Judgments of the Victim's Behavior. In contrast to judgments of the assailant's behavior, judgments of the victim's behavior were quite different for the two age groups, as shown in Table 4. The dependent measures for these analyses were judgments of the victim's: promiscuity; responsiveness; willingness to have sex; and responsibility.

1. For the older group judgments of the victim depended entirely on the assailant's alcohol consumption. When the assailant was portrayed as having consumed alcohol, compared to when he was not, whether or not the victim had, the victim was viewed as more responsive to the assailant, more likable, more responsible for the outcome, and as having enjoyed herself more.
2. For the younger group, on the other hand, judgments of the victim depended either on the subject's sex or on the interaction between subject sex and assailant's alcohol consumption. Male subjects were more likely than female subjects to judge the victim as promiscuous. In addition, male subjects were more likely than the females to judge the victim as willing to have sex with the assailant when the assailant had been drinking.

Judgments of the Assailant's Traits. For analyses concerning assailant's and victim's traits, the 21 trait items were factor analyzed into scales with reliabilities of at least .70. The scales developed for the assailant's traits, which were used as dependent measures, were the assailant's aggressiveness, sociability, and sexiness. Results are shown in Table 5.

1. For the older group, the assailant was viewed as more social if he had been drinking than if he had not been. He was also viewed as more sexual if both had been drinking, but least so if only he had been and the victim had not been.
2. In the younger group, judgment of the assailant as sexy depended on the interaction of the subject's sex and the victim's drinking. Male subjects judged the assailant as sexier when the victim had been drinking compared to when she had not been. In this younger sample the female subjects did not make this distinction.

Judgments of the Victim's Traits. As was done for the assailant's traits, the 21 victim trait items were factor analyzed and formed into scales with reliabilities of

at least .70. The resulting dependent measure scales were the victim's: carefulness; aggressiveness; sexiness; and flirtatiousness. Results are shown in Table 6.

1. There were no significant findings in the older group of subjects for judgments of the victim's traits.
2. In the younger group the victim was judged as less careful, but more aggressive, if she had been drinking.

### Discussion

A consistent finding from this study across both age groups was that alcohol consumption, especially by the assailant, appeared to decrease the belief that a rape had occurred. While this supports the results of Richardson and Campbell's (1982) study, it should be noted that no effect was found in the present study for attribution of responsibility. Rather, in this study the assailant was attributed a high degree of responsibility and the victim a moderate amount across all conditions.

In contrast to George et al.'s work, this study did not find that an alcohol-consuming rape victim was ascribed more sexual traits than a nondrinking victim. Rather for both age groups the assailant's drinking status had a stronger impact on judgments of the victim than the victim's drinking. It is interesting that the assailant was attributed more sexiness by the males in the younger group if the victim had been drinking and by both males and females in the older group if both the assailant and victim had been drinking.

Other findings were dependent on the age of the sample. In general, the older group made more complex judgments than the younger group in that they more frequently took into account the drinking status of both the victim and the assailant rather than only one of them. In the younger group, on the other hand, sex differences were more apparent, and either the victim's or the assailant's drinking was more frequently the influential factor in their judgments, especially the men's.

It is especially notable that different pre-existing traits were important for the two age groups. Insight into this phenomenon may be gained from examining subjects' background characteristics, in particular their drinking habits and experiences with sexual coercion and violence. The prominence of beliefs about alcohol in the younger group may be a reflection of their heavier drinking habits than the older group. In contrast, the older group's greater experience with sexual violence, both as victims among the women and as assailants among the men, compared to the younger group, may explain the greater predictability of the rape attitude scale for them. It is clear that the difference in importance of these two sets of factors for the two age groups was not due to different levels or extremity of their beliefs.

In summary, this study has demonstrated that an acquaintance rape victim's and her assailant's drinking status affect judgments of their behavior and traits. However, these judgments change as a function of both the subjects' age and their background characteristics. Researchers and practitioners, therefore, should not assume that findings from studies of sexual aggression employing lower level undergraduates will necessarily generalize to older adults. Rather, researchers in the future should be sensitive to the developmental status of the populations that they study.

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Table 1. Comparison of Two Age Groups' Characteristics

	<u>&lt; 21 years old</u>		<u>21 years or older</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
N	85	100.0	132	100.0
Gender				
Male	43	50.6	64	48.5
Female	42	49.4	68	51.5
Marital Status				
Never Married	85	100.0	95	72.0
Cohabiting or Ever Married	0	0.0	37	28.0
Ethnic Identification				
White	59	69.4	94	71.2
Black	0	0.0	1	.8
Asian	17	20.0	24	18.2
Hispanic	5	5.9	4	3.0
Other	4	4.8	9	6.8
Religious Affiliation				
Protestant	25	29.4	27	20.5
Catholic	25	29.4	26	19.7
None	23	27.1	54	40.9
Other	12	14.1	25	18.9
Sexual Experience Scale, Females Only				
Sexual Coercion Victim	24	57.1	43	63.2 <sup>a</sup>
Sexual Violence Victim	8	19.0 <sup>a</sup>	23	33.8 <sup>a</sup>
Sexual Experience Scale, Males Only				
Sexual Coercion Offender	18	41.9	32	50.0
Sexual Violence Offender	2	4.7	6	9.4
Drinking Habits Scale				
Abstainer	7	8.2	12	9.2 <sup>b</sup>
Infrequent Drinker	14	16.5	13	10.0 <sup>b</sup>
Light Drinker	13	15.3	34	26.2 <sup>b</sup>
Moderate Drinker	27	31.8	56	43.1 <sup>b</sup>
Heavy Drinker	24	28.2	15	11.5 <sup>b</sup>
Age	<u>Mean</u>	<u>sd</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>sd</u>
	18.92	.78	25.71	5.00
Religiousness (1=not at all, 5=very religious)	2.67	1.17	2.53	1.18
Belief That Alcohol Increases: <sup>c</sup>				
Sexual Responsiveness	2.06 <sup>b</sup>	.77	2.06	.76
Sexual Confidence	2.52 <sup>b</sup>	.77	2.52	.74
Sexual Risktaking	2.08	.74	2.00 <sup>a</sup>	.73
Rape Attitude Scale <sup>d</sup>	2.40	.70	2.55 <sup>a</sup>	.83

<sup>a</sup>1 case missing.

<sup>b</sup>2 cases missing.

<sup>c</sup>1=low, 4=high.

<sup>d</sup>Higher value indicates more positive view of rape.



Table 2. Significant Standardized Betas for Covariates Related to Dependent Variables

	<u>Beta</u>	<u>p &lt;</u>
I. Effects of Alcohol Expectancy Scales for Younger Group.		
A. Belief that alcohol increases sexual responsiveness.		
Victim's promiscuity	.47	.01
Victim's willingness to have sex	.38	.01
Victim's sexiness	-.57	.001
Victim's carefulness	-.34	.05
Assailant enjoyed himself	.31	.01
Assailant's responsibility	-.26	.05
B. Belief that alcohol increases sexual confidence.		
Victim's sexiness	.35	.05
Victim's carefulness	.37	.05
C. Belief that alcohol increases sexual risktaking.		
Victim's promiscuity	-.33	.01
Victim's willingness to have sex	-.39	.01
II. Effects of Rape Attitude Scale for Older Age Group.		
Belief that rape occurred	-.33	.001
Victim's responsiveness	.23	.05
Victim easy to seduce	.34	.001
Victim's willingness to have sex	.24	.01
Victim's responsibility	.44	.001
Victim's resistance	-.24	.01
Assailant romantic/sexual	.22	.05

Table 3. Comparison of Judgments of Assailant's Behavior in Two Age Groups

	Assailant Drinking	Assailant Not Drinking	p ≤	
Belief that rape occurred				
Older	5.48	6.26	.004	
Younger	5.61	6.28	.05	
Enjoyment				
Younger	4.73	5.64	.05	
Alcohol Consumption:				
	Assailant-Yes/ Victim-Yes	Assailant-Yes/ Victim-No	Assailant-No/ Victim-Yes	Assailant-No/ Victim-No
Older				
Belief that rape occurred	5.20 <sup>b</sup>	5.76 <sup>ab</sup>	6.55 <sup>a</sup>	5.98 <sup>ab</sup>
Likability	3.56 <sup>a</sup>	2.29 <sup>b</sup>	2.11 <sup>b</sup>	2.55 <sup>b</sup>

Means with different superscripts are significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

Table 4. Comparison of Judgments of Victim's Behavior in Two Age Groups

Older	Assailant Drinking	Assailant Not Drinking	p ≤	
Responsiveness	3.11	2.42	.001	
Likability	4.85	4.46	.05	
Responsibility	3.76	3.04	.08	
Enjoyment	1.79	1.37	.10	
Younger	Males	Females	p ≤	
Promiscuity	2.73	2.19	.01	
	Males/ Assailant Drinking	Males/ Assailant Not Drinking	Females/ Assailant Drinking	Females/ Assailant Not Drinking
Willingness to have sex	2.95 <sup>a</sup>	2.45 <sup>b</sup>	2.54 <sup>ab</sup>	2.72 <sup>ab</sup>

Means with different superscripts are significantly different at  $p < .05$ .