

Alcohol Use as a Strategy for Obtaining Nonconsensual Sexual Relations: Incidence in Spanish University Students and Relation to Rape Myths Acceptance

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This study analyzed the strategy of college men who give alcohol to girls to facilitate their acceptance when pursuing sexual relationships. It also studied the role of attitudes towards sexual assaults (rape myths) in the social perception of this practice; finally, this research examined how the fact that, in some cases, college women accept taking alcohol in their interactions with college men was perceived. Participants were 349 heterosexual students (154 men and 195 women) from the University of Granada. 28% of males reported having given alcohol to females in order to have sexual contacts with them, while 44% of females acknowledged having suffered this practice. Men, compared to women, were more favourable to this practice; however, this effect was moderated by their rape myths endorsements. It was also found that males and, in general, those participants who endorsed rape myths, tended to consider that girls who accept alcohol in their interactions with boys are promiscuous.

Keywords: sexual aggression, rape myths, alcohol, attitudes, incidence.

En esta investigación se analizó la incidencia en población universitaria de la estrategia de los chicos de dar alcohol a las chicas para facilitar su aceptación a mantener contactos sexuales. También se estudió el papel que juegan en la valoración de esta práctica las actitudes hacia las agresiones sexuales (mitos sobre la violación); finalmente se evaluó cómo se percibe que las chicas acepten la invitación de los chicos a tomar alcohol cuando interaccionan con ellos. Participaron 349 estudiantes heterosexuales (154 hombres y 195 mujeres) pertenecientes a la Universidad de Granada. El 28% de los varones reconoció haber dado alguna vez alcohol a una chica para conseguir mantener contactos sexuales con ella; por su parte, el 44% de las chicas indicó haber sido objeto alguna vez de esta práctica. Los resultados mostraron también que los chicos, en comparación con las chicas, rechazaban en menor medida esta estrategia; no obstante, estas diferencias en función del sexo se vieron moduladas por el grado de aceptación de los mitos de la violación por parte de los participantes. Asimismo se encontró que los chicos y en general quienes sostienen mitos sobre la violación, tienden a percibir como promiscuas a aquellas chicas que aceptan tomar alcohol en las interacciones con los chicos.

Palabras clave: agresión sexual, mitos sobre la violación, alcohol, actitudes, incidencia.

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According to the World Report on Violence and Health (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002, p. 149), sexual violence is defined as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.”

According to the same report, the most common sexual assault on a global scale is perpetrated by a male toward a female victim, though various studies have confirmed that men are also the victims of sexual violence perpetrated by other men, or by women (Davies & Rogers, 2006; Krahé, Scheinberger-Olwig & Schütze, 2001; Muñoz-Rivas, Graña, O’Leary & González, 2009; Russell & Oswald, 2001). However, it is worth noting that sexual violence is one social affliction that is not neutral in terms of gender: in addition to the fact that the roles of victim and perpetrator are not equally distributed between the two sexes, men and women in general utilize different coercive strategies, they are victims of different kinds of coercion on the part of their attackers, and the trauma of victimization affects them unequally (Flack, Daubman, Caron, Asadorian, D’Aureli et al., 2007; for a summary, see Krahé, 2001).

Although we do not know the exact magnitude of the issue of men’s sexual assault toward women, it is estimated that world-wide, one in every four women will be the victim of sexual violence at some time in her life (e.g. Ellsberg, 1997; Hakimi, Hayati, Marlinawati, Winkvist, & Ellsberg, 2001).

Sexual assault among university students

Sexual assault, particularly when perpetrated by acquaintances in social/dating situations (parties, bars, sporadic encounters...), is especially frequent in university populations (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Flack et al., 2007; Fuertes, Ramos, De la Orden, Del Campo & Lázaro, 2005; Fuertes, Ramos, Martínez, Palenzuela & Taberner, 2006; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Sipsma, Carrobes, Montorio & Everaerd, 2000; Wheeler, George, & Dahl, 2002).

One of the first studies that tried to characterize the prevalence of sexual assault in a university population was conducted by Kirkpatrick & Kanin (1957), whose sample was comprised of 291 female students from 22 North American universities. Of the students in the sample, 28% stated that they had experienced some type of sexual assault by a peer during the year prior to the study. More recent studies conducted in the United States and other countries continue to paint a bleak picture. Generally, the percentage of female university students that acknowledge having been the victim of some kind of sexual assault is around 30%, while around 20% of male university students admit

to having perpetrated some type of sexual assault (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton & Buck, 2001; Benson, Charlton & Goodhart, 1992; DeKeserdy, Schwartz & Tait, 1993; Flack et al., 2007; Girard & Senn, 2008; Koss et al., 1987; Moler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss & Wechsler, 2004).

In Spain, several studies have also shown that sexual aggression is a problem among university students. Sipsma et al. (2000) found that 33.2% of female university students had experienced some form of sexual victimization, and 24.3% of male students admitted having engaged in sexually aggressive behavior. Fuertes et al. (2005) conducted a study with a sample of 196 male university students, and found that around 15% admitted to having been involved in sexual conduct against a woman’s will. Fuertes et al. (2006) also confirmed that in a sample of 477 female university students, 30.9% had been the victim of coercive sexual behavior by a male acquaintance. Recently, Hernández & González (2009) reported that 12.6% of their female university student population acknowledged being the victim of forced sexual relations with penetration by an ex or present partner.

The role of alcohol in the occurrence of sexual assault among university students

One of the factors of greatest interest about sexual assault among university students is the use-abuse of alcohol by the victim, the assailant or both (Abbey, 2002; Abbey, McAuslan & Ross, 1998; Cooper, 2006; Flack et al., 2007; Fuertes et al., 2005; Fuertes et al., 2006; Girard & Senn, 2008; Ullman, 2003). It is estimated that approximately half of sexual assaults are committed by men that have previously ingested alcohol (Abbey, Ross & McDuffie, 1994; Crowell & Burgess, 1996), while between 30% and 79% of women report having ingested alcohol at the same time as their attackers (Abbey et al., 1994; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). For example, in Moler-Kuo et al.’s (2004) study, approximately 1 in 20 female university students interviewed reported having been the victim of rape since the beginning of the school year, and 72% of these acts occurred when the victims were under the influence of alcohol and thus, less able to resist.

In one of few studies in Spain about male university students’ sexual coercion strategies, Fuertes et al. (2005) found that 8.7% of the sample acknowledged having used alcohol or other drugs to attain some type of sexual contact with women. Nevertheless, having asked about alcohol and other drugs together, it is not possible to estimate the use of alcohol alone. This data supports beyond a doubt an interesting view of reality. Consider the following indirect piece of data about the link between alcohol and unwanted sexual relations in Spain. A recent study by Calafat, Juan, Becoña, Mantecón & Ramón (2009) found that 17.5% of young people between the ages of 14 and 25 from three

different autonomous communities recognize having had sexual relations under the influence of alcohol or drugs that they later regretted in the last 12 months.

Several different mechanisms have been proposed to explain the relationship between the use-abuse of alcohol and committing sexual assaults (Beynon, McVeigh, McVeigh, Leavey & Bellis, 2008). On the one hand, alcohol consumption provokes a level of intoxication that modifies one's perception of the facts, diminishes inhibitions, and affects our very ability to recognize risky situations. On the other hand, when under the influence of alcohol, one's ability to give voluntary consent to have sexual relations is reduced. Certain beliefs about the effects of alcohol have also been cited, such as the notion that alcohol increases sexuality or that alcohol awakens a greater sense of power and aggressive tendencies in men (Abbey, McAuslan, McDuffie, Ross & Zawachi, 1995; Crowe & George, 1989).

On the subject of these beliefs, Fuertes et al. (2006) discovered an interesting relationship between the expectations of female university students about alcohol consumption, and their experiences with sexual victimization. To be specific, students that had not suffered a sexual assault at the hand of a peer had more negative beliefs about the effects of alcohol in sexual interactions. These results could indicate that girls that expect alcohol consumption to make them lose control or make them more vulnerable are more resistant to consuming it, and so they are less exposed to the possibility of later sexual assault.

It has also been suggested that beliefs about traditional gender roles hold a double standard for alcohol consumption in men and women: male perpetrators who have been drinking tend to be considered less guilty than sober perpetrators, while female victims who have been drinking are judged more harshly than sober victims (Abbey, Ross, McDuffie & McAuslan, 1996b; Cameron & Strizke, 2003; Maurer & Robinson, 2008; Schuller & Stewart, 2000). Furthermore, when victims were under the influence of alcohol at the time they were raped, they are granted less credibility, and are blamed more for the assault than victims who were sober (Jordan, 2004; Wenger & Bornstein, 2006).

Ideological variables and the occurrence of sexual assault: the role of rape myths

Gender attitudes and stereotypes play a very important role in sexual assault (for a summary, see Bohner, Eyssele, Pina, Siebler & Viki, 2009). In Burt's classic studies (1980), it was suggested that more than 50% of randomly selected adults support a series of attitudes about rape such as "in the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation," "she provoked her attacker," "she secretly liked it," or "she lied about the incident." These attitudes in a way justify rape, blaming the victim and exonerating the perpetrator. Burt termed these stereotypes "rape

myths" and defined them as "prejudices, stereotypes or false beliefs about rape, its victims or its assailants." Later, Lonsway & Fitzgerald (1994) defined them as "generally false attitudes and beliefs that are widely and persistently maintained, and serve to justify the sexual assaults that men commit against women" (p. 134). Recently, Bohner (1998) defined them as "descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about rape (about its causes, context, consequences, assailants, victims and the interaction between these elements) that serve to negate, minimize or justify men's sexual violence towards women" (p. 14).

These myths about rape are widely accepted by the general population (e.g. Gerger, Kley, Bohner & Siebler, 2007), transmitted by the media (e.g. Franiuk, Seefeldt, Cepress & Vandello, 2008), and they influence the behavior of attackers, victims' reporting behavior, and how legal cases are treated (Temkin & Krahé, 2008).

Research studies conducted in Spain have demonstrated the existence of myths and false beliefs amongst university students about sexual assault. For example, Trujano & Raich (2000) found that when university students were asked to attribute blame to the victims in several different rape stories, they were influenced by the victim's "respectability" (a term related to the use of unconventional attitudes or behaviors that are contrary to traditional gender roles). They also observed that when the victim of rape was described as not having opposed the attack with resistance, observers passed judgments such as *she did not want to avoid the rape* and *surely it was pleasurable to her*.

Sipsma et al. (2000) also analyzed students' attitudes or myths about sexual assault in a Spanish university population. 412 students participated in this study and reported to what extent they considered it acceptable for a boy to force a girl to have sexual relations under different circumstances. 17.5% of men and 6.3% of women considered forced sex to be acceptable in more than one of the situations described. The degree of acceptance of these rapes was significantly related to the characteristics of the different descriptions, which reflected some of the most prominent myths about rape. For example, the greatest acceptance of rape was produced when it was reported that the boy and girl had already had sexual relations before, or when it was said that she had excited the boy so much that he could not "stop" his sexual behavior.

Finally, Frese, Moya & Megías (2004) also conducted a study of Spanish university students that analyzed the influence of acceptance of "rape myths" and situational factors on the perception of three different rape scenarios (rape on a date with an acquaintance, rape by your husband, and rape by a stranger). Participants wrote down 4 judgments of each rape situation: the victim's responsibility, the perpetrator's responsibility, the intensity of the trauma, and the probability of reporting the crime to the police. The results of this study showed that, generally speaking,

participants' judgments depended on the interaction between their level of acceptance of rape myths and situational clues, such that the less stereotypical the rape situation was (rape by an acquaintance or one's husband), the greater the influence of these attitudes on attributions of blame.

Studies conducted in Spain in university populations, however, have still not clearly investigated the use-abuse of alcohol in the context of sexual assault against women, and whether or not this is related to acceptance of rape myths. The statistics about alcohol consumption on the part of the Spanish university population show that more than 80% of young people drink alcohol on weekends, and that 81% do so in bars, pubs or nightclubs (Delegación del Gobierno para el Plan Nacional sobre Drogas, 2006). Considering that the majority of interactions between young people occur in these places of leisure, and that the greatest percentage of victims of sexual assault in Spain are between the ages of 18 and 35 (AMUVI, 2001), it would be interesting to determine whether in the Spanish university population, there is also a link between alcohol use-abuse, the acceptance of rape myths, and sexual assaults against women.

In the present study, alcohol use-abuse specifically refers to boys providing alcohol to girls as a strategy to access sexual relations with them. Using this type of strategy would demonstrate that when denied sexual relations, boys utilize alcohol as a way to deplete the girl's will and subtly coerce her.

With this in mind, the primary objective of the present research study is two-fold; on the one hand, it is to reveal the incidence in a university population of boys' using the strategy of giving girls alcohol to avoid their later refusal to have sexual relations. The second is to determine the relationship between attitudes about rape (myths), university students' perceptions of the strategy, and their perceptions of girls' behavior who consume alcohol when they find themselves in situations where they interact with an acquaintance.

Our hypotheses were the following:

Hypothesis 1: We expect to find a significant rate of men who exhibit the behavior of giving alcohol to women in social/dating situations with acquaintances in order to interfere with their eventual resistance to having sexual relations. This behavior may possibly be reported with greater frequency by the victims (women) than by the perpetrators (men).

Hypothesis 2: Men will justify more than women the use-abuse of alcoholic beverages in certain social situations as a way of coercing nonconsensual sexual relations.

Hypothesis 3: The level of acceptance of "rape myths" will be positively correlated with the level

of acceptance of men's strategy of giving women alcohol in order to facilitate nonconsensual sexual relations.

Hypothesis 4: Men (compared to women) and participants with greater acceptance of myths about rape will evaluate the behavior of women consuming alcohol more negatively in a social/dating context, and they will associate it with her being promiscuous.

Method

Participants

Three hundred sixty three students at the University of Granada (Spain) accepted voluntary participation in this study. The final sample, by only including heterosexual participants, was composed of 349 students (154 men and 195 women). The women ranged in age from 18 to 45 years old ($M = 20.79$; $SD = 3.72$) and the men ranged in age from 17 to 44 years old ($M = 20.83$; $SD = 3.70$) (though the age ranges are wide, 94% of participants $n = 328$ were between 17 and 25 years old).

Materials and Instruments

Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS) (Burt, 1980). A reduced version of the RMAS was applied that included only the first 11 items on the scale. It lists a series of statements that refer to people's myths or erroneous beliefs about rape. The other 8 items on the scale were not analyzed because they use response options that differ from the first 11 items, and because most of them evaluate beliefs about different groups of women, which is not of interest to the present study. The 11 items selected used a Likert-type response scale with 7 options ranging from "1" (totally disagree) to "7" (totally agree). The scale's internal consistency in this study was $\alpha = .79$, which is similar to other studies conducted by our research team ($\alpha = .73$). Here are some sample items from the scale: "Any healthy woman can resist a rapist if she really wants to" and "in the majority of rape cases, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation."

Scenario. A hypothetical scenario was described during the study in order to determine university students' view of the strategy of giving women alcohol in order to have nonconsensual sexual relations with them, and also to determine how they evaluate the behavior of women consuming alcohol in a social/dating context with acquaintances. The scenario includes a description of an interaction between a boy and a girl in a social/dating situation (a party) in which he makes sexual advances on her, but she rejects them on various occasions. Given these circumstances, participants were asked their

opinions about different behaviors that he could enact, and also about her behavior (see more below). Each response option was followed by a Likert-type scale with 11 response alternatives (0 = totally disagree through 10 = totally agree). This allowed participants to express their values related to these behaviors. Specifically, the scenario and the questions included were the following:

“Juan is at a party with friends. He has been flirting for a while now with a girl he likes a lot and she is having a very good time with him. He wants to take things further but she has turned him down multiple times.” What should Juan do next?

a) Buy her several drinks in order to have sexual relations with her.

b) Continue insisting and verbally pressuring her until she consents to having sexual relations with him.

c) Talk to her and tell her openly that he wants to have sexual relations with her.

d) Abandon the idea of taking things further with her.

If the girl accepts the drinks Juan buys her, even though she does not want to take things further with Juan, how would you interpret that?

a) The girl accepts the drinks because, really, she also wants to take things further with Juan, and this way, it will be easier to accomplish.

b) Girls that drink to excess are usually very promiscuous: she really wants to take things further with Juan.

c) The girl accepts the drinks because she is very comfortable conversing with Juan and she wants to keep talking with him.

d) The girl accepts the drinks because she is having a good time and this way, her drinks are free.

Measurement of the Incidence of Sexual Assault. A version of the Sexual Experience Scale (SES) (Koss et al., 1987) was used to measure incidence of sexual assault. It collects information about the occurrence of coercive sexual acts, specifically, the victimization of women and sexual assaults committed by men. This version consists of 10 items with a frequency scale that includes several options (*Never, once, twice, more than twice*). Three of the items measure the incidence of undesired sexual contact (fondling, kissing, or petting but not intercourse) through pressure, abuse of authority, or threat; two items measure un consummated attempts to have nonconsensual sexual relations with intercourse by means of threat or the use of alcohol or drugs; and the other five measure the incidence of nonconsensual consummated sexual relations with intercourse involving pressure, abuse of authority, alcohol or drug use, or threats. We used a version created for victims to assess the women, and a version for attackers to evaluate the men. The scale's internal consistency in this study was $\alpha = .68$ for the women's version, and $\alpha = .55$ for the men's version.

We included an additional question to assess the boys' use of the strategy of using alcohol as a means to have sexual relations with girls in social/dating situations. For the men, this item was formulated in the following way: *“Have you ever tried to get a girl with whom you were flirting at a party, gathering, etc. to drink alcohol so that you could take it further with her?”* For women, the question was phrased: *“Have you ever felt that a man you were flirting with at a party, gathering, etc. was trying to get you to go drink alcohol so that he could go further with you?”* Both groups of participants marked their responses on the same frequency scale as the other items on the SES.

Design and Procedure

A quasi experimental design was used with two independent variables: rape myth acceptance (RMA) in two levels (High RMA group vs. Low RMA group) and participants' sex. The dependent variables were: (1) participants' evaluations of the possible behaviors Juan could use to respond to the girl's rejection of his sexual advances and (2) their evaluations of the girl's behavior when she finally accepted the alcohol Juan offered her.

Data collection was performed in the students' own classrooms, where we asked for their voluntary, anonymous participation in a study about young people's attitudes about different contemporary subjects. Once they accepted collaboration, participants received one of the two questionnaires described above (the two were only different in that one included the men's version of the SES and the other had the women's version of the SES). The questionnaire included the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS; Burt, 1980), a scenario developed specifically for this study, questions about the scenario, the SES (Koss et al., 1987), a question to determine the incidence of the strategy of providing alcohol (or receiving alcohol, in the booklets created for the women), and last, some socio-demographic information about the participants, in that order. Once the booklets were completed, they were turned in to the experimenters, who then thanked participants for their collaboration. Participants who asked for it were given summarized information about the objectives of the study, and how they could later access its findings.

Results

Incidence of sexual assault

With regards to Hypothesis 1, it was found that 27% ($n = 96$) of participants in this study reported having been implicated in some incident of sexual assault, according to the indications of the SES. The men reported having committed fewer assaults (16%, $n = 25$) than the women reported having experienced (36%, $n = 71$), $\chi^2(1) = 24.25, p < .001$.

With the objective in mind of determining the incidence of sexual assaults linked to alcohol use-abuse, a separate analysis was performed of SES items 5 (men's version: *Have you ever given a girl alcohol or drugs in order to have sexual relations with her, unsuccessfully, in spite of the fact that she did not want to?*; women's version: *Has a man ever tried to penetrate you when you did not want him to, giving you alcohol or drugs to serve that purpose, without ultimately having intercourse?*) and 8 (men's version: *Have you ever had sexual intercourse with someone by giving her alcohol or drugs, in spite of the fact that she did not want to?*; women's version: *Have you ever had sexual intercourse with a man who had given you alcohol or drugs to achieve that end?*) as well as an additional item added by the authors (men's version: *Have you ever tried to get a girl you were flirting with at a party, gathering, etc. to drink alcohol in order to take it further with her?*; women's version: *Have you ever felt that a man you were flirting with at a party, gathering, etc., was trying to get you to drink alcohol so that he could take it further with you?*).

These analyses indicate that for men, 6% ($n = 9$) reported having at some time given alcohol or drugs to a woman in order to get her to have sexual relations with him, but without success. 3% ($n = 5$) reported having had sexual intercourse by providing a woman with alcohol or drugs, and 28% ($n = 44$) said that they had tried to get a woman to drink alcohol in order to take it further with her.

As for the female participants, 3% ($n = 6$) reported having suffered an attempted rape by having been given alcohol or drugs. Two women reported having had forced sexual intercourse with a man by having been given alcohol or drugs (1%). Last, 44% ($n = 87$) of women reported having had an experience where at a party, gathering, etc., a man tried to get them to drink alcohol in order to take things further with them.

Perception of the strategy of providing alcohol

To test hypotheses 2 and 3 and in so doing, determine men's and women's evaluations of men's behavior of giving alcohol to women to deplete their will not to have sexual relations, answers to the questions about the scenario were analyzed as a function of rape myth acceptance (scores on the RMA scale). A procedure was followed wherein participants are assigned to two groups (High RMA group and low RMA group) by dividing along the median according to their scores on the RMA scale. Four 2x2 ANOVAs were performed for participants' evaluations of each of the four possible behaviors of the male protagonist from the story (Juan).

With respect to the evaluation of the first behavior described ("*buy her several drinks in order to have sexual*

relations with her"), statistically significant effects were found for the variables (a) Sex, $F(1,333) = 51.1, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$, (b) RMA group, $F(1,333) = 25.3, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$, and also (c) the interaction between them, $F(1,333) = 13.1, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$. As Figure 1 depicts, men reported greater agreement than women with the statement that Juan, in response to the woman's refusal, *should buy her several drinks in order to have sexual relations with her*. Participants in the High RMA group also reported greater agreement with this statement, as compared to the Low RMA group. Nonetheless, these primary effects were moderated by the interaction between the two variables such that men from the High RMA group showed less disagreement with these behaviors than those in the Low RMA group, $F(1,141) = 18.4, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$. Meanwhile, for the women, greater acceptance of rape myths did not decrease their clear disagreement with this behavior, $F(1,192) = 2.6, p > .1$ (Figure 1).

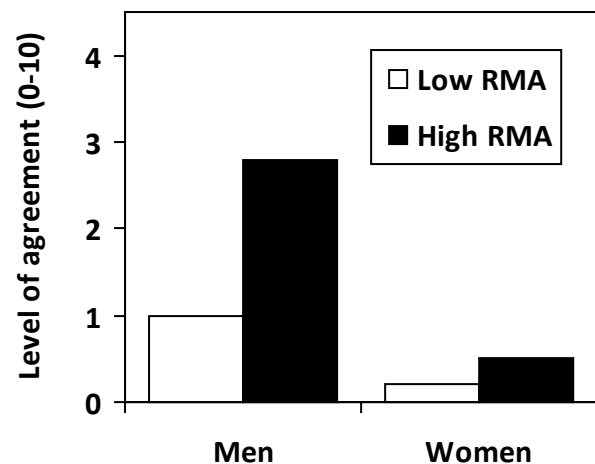


Figure 1. Level of agreement with the statement "Juan, responding to the girl's refusal, should buy her several drinks to have sexual relations with her".

With respect to participants' evaluations of the second statement (*keep insisting and verbally pressuring her until she consents to have sexual relations with him*), that also implies a form of coercion and nonconsensual sexual relations, the results of the 2x2 ANOVA were similar to those of the first statement (Figure 2).

Men were in greater agreement than women with this behavior, $F(1,333) = 30.0, p < .000, \eta^2 = .08$. Participants in the High RMA group also reported greater agreement with this behavior, $F(1,333) = 14.3, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$, and these primary effects were moderated by the interaction

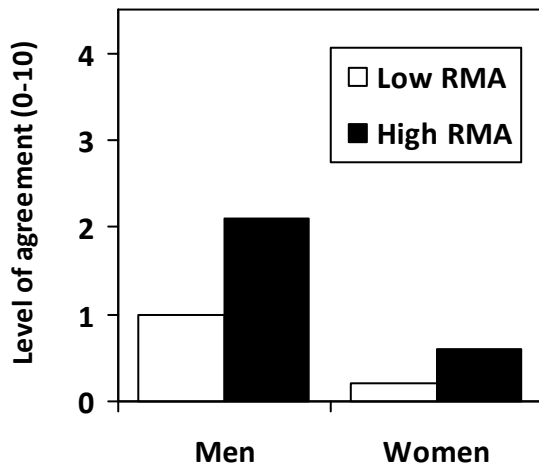


Figure 2. Level of agreement with the statement "Juan, responding to the girl's refusal, should keep insisting and verbally pressuring her until she consents to having sexual relations with him".

between the two variables, $F(1,333) = 3.8, p = .05, \eta^2 = .01$, such that for the men, $F(1,141) = 8.6, p > .05, \eta^2 = .6$, but not for the women, $F(1,192) = 3.8, p > .05$, greater acceptance of rape myths was related to less disagreement with this behavior.

Options "c" and "d" described two non-coercive statements. For the evaluations of the behavior "talking to her and openly telling her that he wants to have sexual relations with her," the 2x2 ANOVA (Sex x RMA group) did not reveal significant differences as a function of any of our independent variables, nor was the interaction between them found to be significant. Finally, women were in greater agreement than men with the statement "abandon the idea of taking things further with her," $F(1,334) = 4.6, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$, though in this case, the myths did not have an influence, nor was the interaction with the Sex variable significant.

Perception of the woman's behavior of accepting alcohol

In the last two items, a hypothetical situation was described wherein the woman, although she did not want to have sexual relations with the man, accepted his buying her drinks. In this case, we asked about participants' level of agreement and disagreement using a series of statements. The first says that the woman accepts the drinks Juan offers her "because really, she also wishes to take things further with Juan and this way, it will be easier to accomplish." Analyses of the evaluations of this woman's behavior by accepting the drinks from Juan show, in confirmation of our final hypothesis, statistically significant effects for the Sex variable, $F(1,332) = 6.81, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$, and the RMA

group variable, $F(1,332) = 28.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$, though no significant effects were found for their interaction. Figure 3 conveys that men, as compared to women, report greater agreement with this statement. Participants in the High RMA group, as compared to the Low RMA group, also reported greater agreement with this statement (Figure 3).

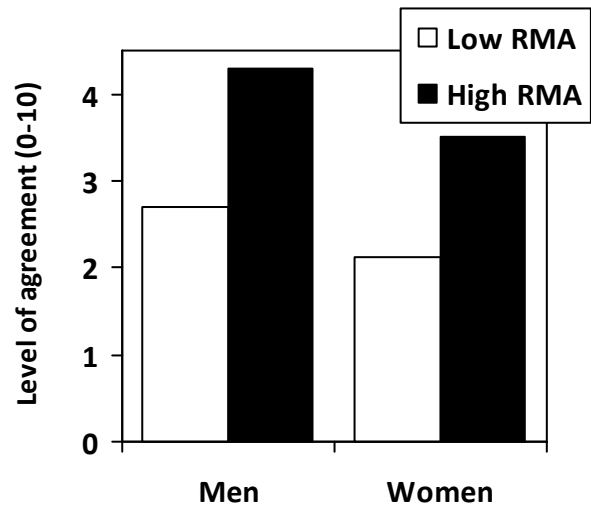


Figure 3. Level of agreement with the statement "The girl accepts the drinks because really, she also wants to take things further with Juan, and this way, it will be easier to accomplish".

Regarding evaluations of the second statement ("girls that drink to excess are usually very promiscuous: in reality, she wants to take things further with Juan"), the results of the 2x2 ANOVA were similar to those found for the last statement (Figure 4).

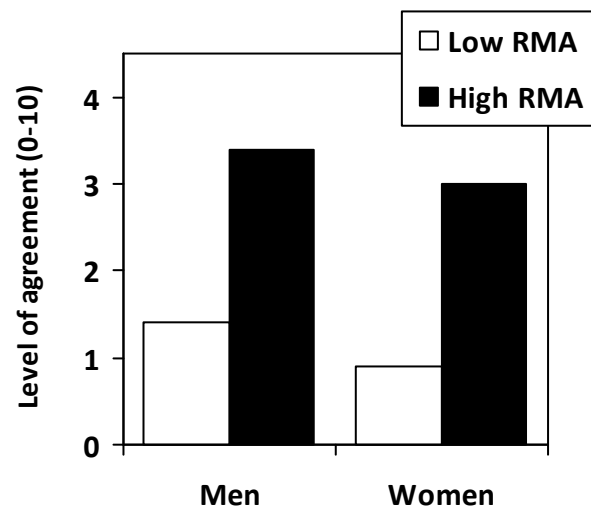


Figure 4. Level of agreement with the statement "Girls that drink to excess are usually very promiscuous: in reality, she wants to take things further with Juan."

Thus, the Sex variable, $F(1,331) = 4.04, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$, as well as the RMA Group variable, $F(1,331) = 51.44, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$, had statistically significant effects, but not the interaction between the two. In this case, it was also found that men, relative to women, and participants in the High RMA group relative to the Low RMA group, reported greatest agreement with this interpretation.

Options “c” and “d” described two less prejudiced statements about the woman’s behavior. As for the first, “*the girl accepts the drinks because she is very comfortable in the conversation she is having with Juan, and she wants to keep talking with him,*” the 2x2 ANOVA (Sex x RMA group) revealed significant differences as a function of the Sex variable, $F(1,332) = 3.98, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$, but not for the RMA group variable. Regarding the second statement, “*the girl accepts the drinks because she is having a good time and this way, her drinks will be free,*” statistically significant differences were again found as a function of Sex, $F(1,332) = 4.57, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$, but not as a function of RMA group. In neither case was the interaction between the two variables found to be significant. For both statements, women reported greater agreement with their contents than the men did.

Discussion

The present study has two important objectives: on the one hand, to determine the incidence of male university students’ strategy of giving girls alcohol in order to avoid their eventual refusal to have sexual relations, and on the other, to determine the relationship between attitudes about rape (myths) and university students’ perceptions of this strategy, and of girls’ behavior when they consume alcohol in situations where there is sexual interaction.

To achieve this, together with other measures of the incidence of sexual assault, male university students were asked if they used the strategy of giving girls alcohol to facilitate their sexual interactions, while girls were asked if this had ever happened to them. As Hypothesis 1 predicted, the results demonstrate that approximately one in every four male university students report having given a girl alcohol, at least once, in order to “take it further” with her. Nevertheless, the frequency of this behavior is greater according to the girls’ own perceptions, given that almost half of them recognize having experienced this at least once. These data support the findings of studies conducted in other countries (Abbey, Ross, McDuffie & McAuslan, 1996a; Abbey et al., 1998; Girard & Senn, 2008; Harrington & Leitenberg, 1994; Kanin, 1985; Mosher & Anderson, 1986; Testa, 2002), and establish the incidence in our sample of a behavior that is neither explicitly nor openly considered sexual assault, but that does in fact involve intentional debilitation of the woman’s will and ability to eventually resist an unwanted sexual interaction.

In order to determine the possible relationship between this behavior and the attitudes and stereotypes about sexual assault (rape myths – RMA), participants evaluated a hypothetical situation, and the possible behaviors the boy could use to respond to the girl’s refusal to have sexual relations with him. Additionally, the perception of a related behavior was analyzed: consumption of alcohol by a girl who rejects the sexual advances of a boy.

As Hypothesis 2 predicted, significant differences were found in the evaluation of men’s strategy of giving women alcohol as a way of facilitating nonconsensual sexual relations as a function of sex. Similarly, men more often than women justified the use-abuse of alcoholic beverages as a way of forcing nonconsensual sexual relations, as we expected based on the literature about differences in evaluation of sexual assaults as a function of sex (McDonald & Kline, 2004; Temkin & Krahé, 2008; Wakelin & Long, 2003). Furthermore, as Hypothesis 3 formulated, participants who score high on the RMA report less disagreement with the use of alcohol to debilitate the girl’s resistance. Also, the greater the acceptance of myths about rape, the less negative the evaluation of the use of the coercive strategy mentioned earlier (pressuring and insisting). However, the primary effects of the sex and RMA variables were found to be moderated by the interaction between the two, such that women, independently of their RMA, were in strong disagreement with the use of alcohol, pressure and insistence. Meanwhile, for men, that rejection was less the greater their acceptance of the myths was.

These results show a clear relationship, especially for men, between the social perception of the strategy of use-abuse of alcohol, and acceptance of rape myths (see also Girard & Senn, 2008). How might this relationship be explained? According to Temkin & Krahé (2008), rape myths act as an interpretive mental schema of sexual assault, especially when the contextual and situational elements we know do not provide clear information about what happened. In situations with little information, then, our judgments and evaluations are not formed mainly on the facts (bottom-up processing), but are based on our schemas and attitudes (top-down processing). In these situations, myths become most influential. Applying these ideas to the present study, we can say that, really, the situation described in the hypothetical scenario includes little conclusive information about what exactly happened, and above all, the interaction described does not fit a commonly accepted stereotype about sexual assault that has come to be known as the “real rape” (perpetrated by a stranger, through the use of force, and with great physical resistance on the part of the woman). When there is a lack of information or situational ambiguity, participants base their judgments mainly on beliefs or myths about sexual assaults. One might also ask: why are there differences

between men and women in the influence of these myths? This is perhaps because men usually perceive greater ambiguity than women do in circumstances in which this type of sexual interaction occurs (Temkin & Krahé, 2008).

On a similar note, it is interesting to observe how participants' evaluations of the non-coercive behaviors included in the scenario (options c and d) did not turn out to be affected by RMA level, or by the sex variable. In other words, myths, as interpretive schemas, only permeate our judgment about behaviors that are in some way related to rape stereotypes, but not about behaviors that respect women's sexual freedom.

Another variable of interest to the present study was the evaluation of alcohol consumption by women in the context of sexual relations (Hypothesis 4). Our prediction suggested that men (relative to women), and participants with high scores on the RMA (relative to those with low scores) evaluate this behavior more negatively, and more often associate it with women being promiscuous. The results support our hypothesis. It was found that men, relative to women, report greater agreement with the idea that the woman accepted alcohol from the man (Juan) because really, she wanted to have sexual relations with him, and with the statement that women that drink alcohol during sexual interactions are promiscuous. These differences also occurred as a function of RMA level; participants with high acceptance of rape myths agreed more with both statements.

These last results also support the findings of prior research that has identified a double standard in evaluating alcohol ingestion according to sex, such that men who have been drinking are seen in a positive light, while women who drink tend to be perceived as sexually promiscuous (Abbey et al. 1996b; Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Crowe & George, 1989). According to Maurer and Robinson (2008), it seems that for women, alcohol consumption is associated with their sexual intentions, so drinking increases their "responsibility" over what might happen to them, but that is not so for men. When men consume alcohol, it exempts them from responsibility for their actions, which are attributed to loss of self-control.

Finally, regarding the non-prejudiced evaluations of the woman's behavior who accepts alcohol, differences as a function of rape myth acceptance were not found (response options c and d: "*The girl accepts the drinks because she feels very comfortable conversing with Juan and wants to keep talking with him;*" "*The girl accepts the drinks because she is having a good time and this way, her drinks are free*"). Nevertheless, women reported greater agreement with these two response options than men did, possibly due to the fact that women tend to perceive fewer sexual intentions than men in this type of situation (Maurer & Robinson, 2008).

Our research, however, has certain limitations that should be taken into consideration. One such limitation is the participants' level of honesty. It is possible that when dealing with such a delicate matter as, for example, to admit being the active agent of a sexual assault, male participants may have tried to hide or falsify their responses as a way of improving their image. Similarly, we cannot guarantee that women's responses were completely honest, and that no social desirability effect occurred. It is also necessary to highlight that the study employed artificial scenarios created specifically for this study, which could detract from the credibility of the information presented.

We also wish to draw your attention to the small size of some of the effects, which is apparent in the reported values of η^2 . As Frías, Pascual & García (2000) mentioned, we must not forget that to evaluate the importance of any result, we cannot only consider its level of significance, but also the effect size, especially when the finding claims to have practical application.

Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations, this study contributes new data about the incidence of a coercive sexual behavior in a Spanish university population: providing a girl with alcohol in order to have sexual relations with her. Also, the present study explores the relationship between this strategy and variables that are ideological in nature (rape myths). The results fall in line with the findings of other research studies about alcohol use as a strategy in sexual assault, and about the influence of ideological variables in our perceptions and evaluations of sexual assault. However, perhaps the most relevant contribution of the present study is the effect found of interaction between sex and myths when it comes to evaluating the behavior of using alcohol to facilitate nonconsensual sexual relations. The fact that men in comparison to women show less disagreement with sexually coercive strategies (providing alcohol) when they have permissive attitudes toward rape (high acceptance of rape myths) indicates that in ambiguous social situations where alcohol is present, ideological variables are strong heuristics for interpreting reality. However, future research should more precisely determine the extent of this phenomenon by performing more exhaustive analyses of psychosocial and situational variables that could clarify the role of other factors related to these results. To study variables such as sexist beliefs about women, expectations surrounding the effect of alcohol on sexuality, the possibility that women use these strategies, too, differences between men and women in how they communicate and interpret intentions and sexual advances, as well as the relationship between victim and attacker, among others, would be of particular interest to analyzing in depth the growing number of sexual assaults registered in Spain. These findings could inspire campaigns designed to prevent behaviors that, beyond a doubt, infringe on women's sexual self-determination.

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