Identification and Attribution of Blame in Rape Situations by University Students

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Abstract: Although society criminalizes rape, many institutions reproduce stereotypes of this sexual assault. Rape can also occur in the university and in various ways that do not correspond to its stereotypes. The article aimed to evaluate how undergraduates identify situations of rape and how they attribute fault to the victim and the aggressor. 228 participants commented on fictional stories of rape that manipulated the variables: sexual assault with or without penetration; previous behavior of the victim; previous relationship between the characters; and presence or absence of physical strength in the rape. The results showed that these variables influence the identification of rape and that male students tend to blame victims more than female students. Understanding the multiple variables that affect identification and attribution of blame can lead to more effective sexual violence prevention and intervention strategies.

Keywords: gender-based violence, rape, university, university students

Identificação e Responsabilização de Situações de Estupro por Estudantes Universitários

Resumo: Embora a sociedade tipifique o crime de estupro, muitas instituições reproduzem estereótipos desta violência sexual. Nas universidades, o estupro pode ocorrer de diversas maneiras que não correspondem ao seu estereótipo. O objetivo deste estudo foi aferir como alunos/as de graduação identificam situações de estupro nas interações entre acadêmicos/as e como atribuem responsabilidade à vítima e aos agressores. Para isso, 228 participantes opinaram sobre histórias fictícias de estupro que manipulavam as variáveis: violência sexual com ou sem penetração; comportamento prévio da vítima; relacionamento prévio entre os personagens e a presença ou ausência de força física no estupro. Os resultados mostraram que essas variáveis influenciam na identificação do estupro e que os universitários homens tendem a culpabilizar mais as vítimas do que as universitárias mulheres. Compreender os múltiplos fatores que afetam a identificação e responsabilização de situações de violência sexual pode subsidiar estratégias mais efetivas de intervenção e prevenção.

Palavras-chave: violência de gênero, estupro, universidade, estudantes universitários

Identificación y Responsabilización de Situaciones de Violación por Estudiantes Universitarios

Resumen: Aunque la sociedad tipifique el delito de violación, sus estereotipos todavía son reproducidos por varias instituciones. En el contexto universitario, la violación puede ocurrir de varias maneras que no corresponden a lo que se concibe en su estereotipo. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este artículo fue evaluar cómo los estudiantes de grado identifican las situaciones de violación y cómo se lleva a cabo la asignación de responsabilización de la víctima y de los agresores. Para esto, 228 participantes comentaron sobre historias ficticias de violación que manipulaban las variables: violación con o sin penetración; comportamiento previo de la víctima; relación previa entre los personajes y la presencia o ausencia de fuerza física. Se concluyó que estas variables influyen en la identificación de la violación y que los estudiantes hombres tienden a culpar más a las víctimas que las estudiantes mujeres. Se espera que comprender los múltiples factores que influyen en la identificación y responsabilización de situaciones de violencia sexual puede auxiliar estrategias más efectivas para actividades de intervención y prevención.

Palabras clave: violencia de género, violacíon, universidad, estudiantes universitarios

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Studies demonstrate that sexually violent practices and behaviors have been perpetuated in Brazilian universities in different contexts (e.g., classrooms, orientation meetings, training internships, hazing, university parties, fraternities/sororities or university housing, trips, and academic events) and with different expressions (e.g., offensive and violent sexual comments, touching without consent, sexual harassment, and rape) (Barroso & Lima, 2020; Instituto Avon & Data Popular, 2015; Martins et al., 2022; Possas, 2022).

Despite the need to approach sexual assault as a concept that integrates different coercive conducts — not restricted to a single type (Krug et al., 2002) — this study sought to deepen discussions of what is understood as rape, emphasizing situations in which this type of sexual assault occurs in the university setting.

Article 213 of the Penal Code defines rape as "compelling someone, through violence or serious threat, to have sexual intercourse or to perform or allow another libidinous act to be performed with them." The term "compelling" can be understood as the behaviors of "forcing, coercing, violating, i.e., forcing someone to do or not do something" (Fayet, 2011, p. 60). In cases of rape, "compelling" shows that consent gives way to violence. Regarding "carnal conjunction," the expression indicates vaginal penetration by a man using his penis. However, since 2009, the classification does not require penetration to carry out this violence. The notion of a "libidinous act" can encompass other types of rape, from penetration with objects, oral sex and/or strengthd anal sex (Araújo, 2020). Regarding "violence or serious threat," also present in article 213 of the Penal Code, this is not restricted to the need for physical strength. From this perspective, according to Brazilian legislation, also from 2009 onwards, coercion can occur when the victim is unable to consent to the sexual act — for example, when they are under the influence of drugs, asleep, or when they find themselves in a state in which they are psychologically incapable of understanding and/or consenting to the situation. Since then, there has been a figure derived from rape defined in art. 217-A of the Penal Code as "statutory rape."

For many jurists, the victim's non-consent plays a central role in defining the different types of sexual assault, including rape, whether in the base modality (article 213 of the Penal Code) or in that relating to the statutory rape. Therefore, in any hypothesis in which consent is non-existent, there are indications of a violation of the individual's sexual freedom (Carvalho et al., 2020).

Despite legal reforms and the long debate surrounding the characterization of rape, cultural practices persist in Brazilian society that are insensitive to gender issues, forming what has been called a 'rape culture' (Santos et al., 2021; Sousa, 2017). Rape culture defies the assumption that rape is mainly committed by "sick" people or people who deviate from social norms. Far off from a medical and psychopathological perspective on the subject, the concept highlights not only the understanding that perpetrators generally have other acceptable behaviors in society, but also that rape is a form of structural and not individual violence (Andrade, 2018a; Freitas & Morais, 2019; Sousa, 2017).

In a "rape culture," several myths about sexual assault are encouraged, which can serve the function of "denying, diminishing, or justifying male sexual assault" (Freitas & Morais, 2019, p. 116). The dominating narrative about this crime can, therefore, contribute to the construction of stereotypes about men who commit sexual assault and women who are victims, which implies both minimizing the fault of aggressors and denying the violent experience lived by women (Andrade, 2018a). In this scenario, institutions are not exempt from reproducing cultural values about women's and men's sexuality, at the same time that they hold an essential role in defining the parameters by which rape should be socially evaluated (Smart, 2003). Although society condemns and criminalizes rape, the stereotypes of the social places of the victim and the aggressor are still portrayed in criminal and administrative trials.

In the stereotyped rape situation, the victim would be aggressively attacked by a stranger, at night, on the street; they would be alone, unprotected, and would physically and verbally resist the aggression (Krahé, 1991). Thus, marks of physical injuries, threat or use of a weapon by the perpetrator, and time and place of the aggression are variables that affect the likelihood of people identifying or not an event as rape, as well as blaming the victim for the event (Krahé, 1991). Furthermore, the victim's degree of resistance to violence, alcohol consumption, and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator are factors that increase or decrease the likelihood of people identifying sexual situations as violent (Krahé, 1991).

The race, social and economic class of the perpetrator and victim also play an important role in identifying a rape (Perez, 2022). Regarding race, specifically in the Brazilian context, Black women face discrimination and violence due to the historical legacy of racism and hierarchical gender relations. The exploitation and objectification of Black women's bodies left a deep scar on Brazilian society, perpetuating the hypersexualized representation of these women. Black women's sexuality is often seen as something "exotic" and "aggressive" (Andrade, 2018b), which contributes to the devaluation and minimization of their experiences of violence. Black men also suffer from racist stigmas related to their sexuality, often being portrayed as aggressive and perceived as a threat to White women (Andrade, 2018b).

Considering the myths of rape within a rape culture (Andrade, 2018a), the stereotypical characterization of this sexual assault seems to find no place in the university setting. The social role of university students, for example, would be different from the stereotype of a sexual aggressor, which would be that of an intrinsically violent man (Freitas & Morais, 2019). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the socialization process of university students is permeated by study, work, and leisure activities that go beyond the physical space of the university. In this sense, rape can occur in different ways; and in spaces and situations that do not correspond to what is conceived in its stereotype.

Violent sexual behaviors that do not conform to the rape stereotype tend to be naturalized and trivialized by society, hampering their identification and, consequently, their report to authorities. In addition to the difficulty of recognizing violence, myths about sexual assault also mean that the aggressor is not held accountable, and this fault is often transferred to the victim. To expand research into sexual assaults in the university environment, this study

aimed to assess how undergraduate students identify situations of rape in interactions between academics and how they attribute fault to the victim and the aggressors.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students, over 18 years old, from a state university in the inland state of Paraná.

Instruments

The study used an *electronic form*, created in Google Forms, which requested, in addition to sociodemographic data, answers to questions that assessed how participants evaluate fictitious situations (vignettes) of rape among university students.

For data analysis, MS Excel and R software were used.

Procedures

Data collection. The research was disseminated with the help of university course coordinators who were asked to collaborate with data collection, sending information about the study's objective and the link to access the form to the emails of students from their respective courses. Moreover, assistance was requested to disseminate the research to the university's academic centers, which also collaborated by sending the invitation link on their social networks. Posters with the research's QR codes were also spread across the university campus.

When accessing the link, the participants were presented with the informed consent form to begin the research. A copy of the consent form was available in a Google Drive folder. The students who agreed to participate in the research filled out the following sociodemographic information: gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, course, course period, year of course, family income, and race/color/ethnicity. Once this stage was completed, participants were asked to read and answer questions related to six fictitious stories (vignettes) that described situations of rape among university students and two fictitious stories (vignettes) that described a situation of consensual sexual intercourse, presented in a single screen and arranged randomly.

Each vignette narrated a story between two university student characters, a man and a woman, with different names for each. In the stories, the characters' physical characteristics, such as height, weight, or appearance, were not described, nor were characteristics related to sexual orientation, gender identity, or color/race/ethnicity.

The plot of the stories differed according to some variables that, according to the literature, affect the identification of sexual assault and the probability of participants blaming the victims (Krahé, 1991). Thus,

the fictitious stories present in the electronic questionnaires manipulated the following variables: the relationship between victim and aggressor; the victim's previous behavior; the aggressor's behavior; and the presence or absence of penetration during the rape. One vignette presented the perpetrator of the violence as an acquaintance, another as a stranger; in one, the victim behaved in a way that is said to be "socially acceptable" (dating someone, not drinking alcohol, not dancing), and in the other, the victim behaved in a way that was "sexually provocative" (kissing other people, drinking alcohol, dancing); in one the perpetrator used physical strength, and in another situation, he did not use strength. The instruments were composed of two more stories of consensual sexual intercourse so as to be control variables. Furthermore, each story had two versions: a situation of rape with penetration and another without penetration, which involved two instruments (A and B).

Below each of the fictional stories, participants were asked to answer the question "What would you call this situation?" ticking one of the pre-established options, namely "sexual abuse"; "moral harassment"; "sexual harassment"; "rape"; "consensual sex"; "others". In this study, the ability to identify rape situations was understood when the "rape" option was selected in the situations of sexual assault represented in the vignettes. Then, a fault attribution scale was inserted regarding the characters involved in the stories (Sasson & Paul, 2014). The instruction consisted of the sentence: "Indicate who can be blamed for the situation," in which the participant could choose one of seven points represented by blank spaces. On the left side of the first space on the scale, the name of the male character in the vignette is written. On the right side of the last space on the scale, the name of the female character is written. If the participant marked the first space, it would mean that the participant considers the man fully blamable for the situation; if the last was marked, that the woman is fully blamable for the situation. If the participant marked the fourth space, it would mean that they consider both characters equally blamable for the situation described. Finally, participants were asked to justify their answers.

Notably, both instruments were disseminated so that each undergraduate course received the same questionnaire. However, simultaneously, each teaching center at the university had contact with both versions of the instrument

Data analysis. The responses were compiled using Excel software, generating spreadsheets with sociodemographic information from both versions of the instrument and data on the responses according to each variable investigated. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and present the results obtained, and the Z-test for proportions of independent samples, with a 5% significance level.

Ethical Considerations

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade Estadual de Maringá (COPEP-UEM) approved the study, CAAE No. 27937320.0.0000.0104.

Results

The data will be presented thematically, highlighting three aspects: the sociodemographic profile of the participants, the identification of rape situations, and the attribution of the level of fault according to the gender of the participants.

Sociodemographic data

228 university students responded to the questionnaire, with 112 responses referring to instrument A and 116 responses to instrument B. Most participants studied at the Center for Human Sciences, Letters and Arts (35.08%), and only students at the Center for Agricultural Sciences did not respond to the survey. In addition, many respondents were in their first two years of the undergraduate course (54.39%) and were enrolled in a full-time course (46.93%).

The survey was answered mostly by cisgender women (67.11%) and less frequently by cisgender men (29.82%). Regarding sexual orientation, the majority declared themselves heterosexual (54.39%), followed by bisexual (31.58%). Regarding relationship status, most were single (50.88%), and 39.47% were dating.

Regarding race/color/ethnicity, 76.32% identified themselves as White, 6.57% as Yellow, 13.60% as Mixed-race, and 3.51% as Black. Regarding religion, the majority said they did not have any (47.37%), and regarding religious orientation, the most common was Catholic (27.19%). Regarding the participants' monthly family income, most of the sample was concentrated in 1.1 to 3.0 minimum wages (30.26%) and 3.1 to 6.0 minimum wages (31.14%).

Identification of rape situations

The responses regarding the denomination of rape situations from both male and female participants varied depending on the variables manipulated in the vignettes. Table 01 indicates the frequency and percentage of use of the term "rape" by all participants in the responses to each fictional rape story.

Table 01

Frequency and percentage of use of the term "rape" when referring to rape situations

Parameter		With penetration		No penetration	
		No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Previous behavior of the victim	"Acceptable"	101	90.18	78	67.24
	"Unacceptable"	88	78.57	57	49.14
Previous relationship of the characters	Stranger	107	92.24	64	57.14
	Acquaintance	95	81.90	49	43.75
Presence of physical strength	With physical strength	98	87.50	80	68.97
	No physical strength	73	65.18	50	43.10

As can be seen in Table 01, the percentage of the use of the term "rape" to describe fictitious rape situations was lower in all situations that did not involve penetration, as compared to their versions with penetration.

The percentage of "rape" designations was also attenuated according to variables related to the victim's previous behavior, the characters' previous relationship, and the presence of physical strength. In both versions of the fictional stories (with and without penetration), there was a lower percentage of participants who recognized the fictional situation as "rape" when: the victim behaved in a way said to be "unacceptable," the perpetrator of the violence was an acquaintance, and there was no explicit physical strength. On the other hand, there was a higher percentage of participants who recognized the situation as "rape" when the victim had behaviors considered socially "acceptable," the perpetrator was a stranger, and explicit physical strength was used.

Table 02 demonstrates the results of the Z-test in comparing these proportions related to the use of the term "rape" in fictitious situations.

By applying the Z-test, it can be seen that there are differences in all the sets of variables manipulated in the fictional stories, considering a 5% statistical significance level. Thus, it can be stated that the classification of a sexual assault as rape by the participants varied depending on the presence or absence of penetration in the different fictitious rape situations. Furthermore, the participants' responses about the victim's previous behavior, the relationship between victim and perpetrator, and whether physical strength was absent or present were also different.

Table 02

Results of the Z-test for proportions of use of the term "rape" in the designation of rape situations

Fixed parameter		Group	Statistic	*p*- value
Previous behavior of the victim	Unacceptable	With or without penetration	4.62	< 0.0001*
	Acceptable	With or without penetration	4.22	< 0.0001*
	With penetration	Unacceptable or Acceptable	−2.39	0.0168*
	No penetration	Unacceptable or Acceptable	−2.80	0.0051*
Previous relationship between victim and perpetrator	Acquaintance	With or without penetration	5.97	< 0.0001*
	Stranger	With or without penetration	6.12	< 0.0001*
	With penetration	Acquaintance or stranger	−2.35	0.0188*
	No penetration	Acquaintance or stranger	−2.00	0.0455*
Presence of physical strength	With physical strength	With or without penetration	3.38	< 0.0001*
	No physical strength	With or without penetration	3.34	< 0.0001*
	With penetration	With or without physical strength	3.93	< 0.0001*
	No penetration	With or without physical strength	3.97	< 0.0001*

Note. * = Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$).

Accountability of the characters involved in rape situations according to participant's gender

The literature on the subject stresses a difference in the identification of violent sexual behavior according to gender, so that men usually tend to blame victims more than women do (Freitas & Morais, 2019). To differentiate the responses of males and of females, Table 03 characterizes the responses concerning the attribution of fault according to gender.

Table 03 demonstrates that both men and women held the perpetrator 100% blamable when the rape involved penetration and the victim's "socially acceptable" behavior, thus not attributing any blame to the victim. However, the percentage of men attributing fault "01" is lower than that of women in the other manipulated variables, except in stories where the perpetrator was unknown to the victim.

Table 04 explains the statistical differences found in the responses of men and women based on the Z-test.

Table 03

Frequency and proportion of demarcation "01" on the scale for attributing blame to characters in rape situations according to participant gender

Parameter		With penetration				No penetration			
		Men		Women		Men		Women	
		No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Previous behavior of the victim	"Acceptable"	35	100	73	100	30	85.71	79	98.75
	"Unacceptable"	27	81.82	67	91.78	26	74.29	74	92.50
Previous relationship of the victim	Stranger	35	100	78	97.50	31	93.94	70	95.89
	Acquaintance	30	85.71	79	98.75	23	69.70	67	91.78
Presence of physical strength	With physical strength	32	96.97	71	97.26	29	82.86	79	98.75
	No physical strength	22	66.67	65	89.04	23	65.71	68	85.00

Table 04

Results of the Z Test of the "01" demarcation on the fault attribution scale in rape situations according to participant gender

Fixed variables			Groups	Statistic	*p*- value
Previous behavior of the victim	Unacceptable	With penetration	Man or woman	-1.5	0.1336
		No penetration		-2.67	0.0076*
	Acceptable	With penetration	Man or woman	-*-	-*-
		No penetration		-2.89	0.0039*
Previous relationship between victim and perpetrator	Acquaintance	With penetration	Man or woman	-2.89	0.0039*
		No penetration		-2.17	0.0300*
	Stranger	With penetration	Man or woman	0.94	0.3472
		No penetration		-0.44	0.6599
Presence of physical strength	With physical strength	With penetration	Man or woman	-0.08	0.9362
		No penetration		-3.28	0.0010*
	No physical strength	With penetration	Man or woman	-2.78	0.0054*
		No penetration		-2.34	0.0193*

*Note. * = Statistically significant difference (*p* < 0.05).

The results of the Z-test of the "01" demarcation on the fault attribution scale according to gender show that only when the perpetrator was unknown to the victim were there no significant differences between male and female participants. However, in all other variables, there was a statistically significant gender-based difference (*p* < 0.05) when the rape was non-penetrative. Thus, when there was no penetration, male participants tended to blame the victims more than females did.

In situations where the perpetrator was known to the victim and when the perpetrator did not display any explicit physical strength, male participants tended to blame the rape victim character more than female participants did, both in cases with or without penetration.

Discussion

This research aimed to assess how undergraduate students identify situations of rape in interactions between academics and how perpetrators are held accountable. The quantitative data collected confirm that some characteristics of rape are important variables both for identifying violence and for attributing the fault to the aggressor.

The first point to highlight from the survey is the fact that there are significant statistical differences in the interpretation of the act as rape depending on the presence or absence of penetration. Thus, university students identified fewer situations as "rape" when there was no penetration compared to scenarios with penetration. This difference occurred in all versions of the fictional stories. The following example of a participant's report illustrates such differentiation: "The whole story is a bit confusing; perhaps Carlos is more to blame because if she denied it and was drunk, he should have stopped.

But even so, I don't think he raped the girl because there was no penetration."

As previously mentioned, based on article 213 of the Penal Code, amended by Law No. 12,015 (2009), the definition of rape does not exclusively include acts without penetration, as they can substantiate other forms of so-called "libidinous acts." Some discussions about the distinction between rape and other types of sexual assault do not focus on the absence or presence of penetration itself. However, such discussions reiterate the need for genital contact by one of the parties without consent to characterize the crime of rape, distancing it from crimes such as sexual harassment.

Despite the change in the law on sexual crimes in Brazil and several debates emerging on the topic in recent decades, there is still misinformation about such violence. This may hinder the recognition of such assault as rape and, consequently, in reporting it. Furthermore, when recognized and reported by the victim, a rape without penetration can be redefined as another type of sexual assault because it does not include vaginal penetration (Jorge & Gentil, 2019).

As Araújo (2020) points out, in addition to legislative ambiguities, Brazilian society also bears a disregard for rape because it is a crime committed, mostly without witnesses, in which physical evidence is not always possible—which is lessened when there is no penetration. The victim's testimony is often the only piece of evidence. As a result, denial, revictimization, and blaming appear in legal and administrative proceedings, even though the courts reaffirm the need to give prominence to the victim's word.

The second highlight of the survey results refers to the perception of rape according to the previous relationship between perpetrator and victim, the presence or absence of physical strength, and the victim's previous behavior. The results demonstrate that when an acquaintance of the

victim commits rape, when there is no explicit physical strength involved, and when the victim does not correspond to what is "socially acceptable" in patriarchal culture, the event is less identified as rape.

Freitas and Morais (2019) discuss how the term "rape" was related to a series of unpleasant stimuli, such as the presence of physical strength, blood, weapons, and a sick man. Thus, when the rape cannot be framed within the bloodthirsty imagery of stereotypical rape and the victim does not show signs of struggle nor bruises and cuts that attest to the rape, the woman tends to be discredited and even blamed (Sousa, 2017). Corroborating the literature, the results of the study showed a statistically significant reduction in the percentage of participants who identified situations as rape when the fictional stories did not portray the use of physical strength, compared to those in which the use of strength was explicit.

The association of disgusting and unpleasant situations with "rape" in stereotypical characterizations of this type of sexual assault helps to elucidate some aspects concerning the difficulty of relating a rape situation to someone with whom, up until the moment of the violence, they had had pleasant experiences (Freitas & Morais, 2019). The same happens when the rapist is socially considered a good, pleasant and/or intelligent person. In other words, relating a boyfriend, friend, or other man respected by other people with a strongly aversive stimulus, such as the word "rape," is an unlikely behavior due to the conflict in this relationship (Freitas & Morais, 2019).

It is possible to observe that university students were less likely to identify situations as "rape" when the perpetrator was a student known to the victim, i.e., compared to the perpetrator being a stranger. Some answers from participants exemplify the aforementioned difficulty:

> Because they are dating, I don't see it as a strengthd situation — I think calling it harassment, sexual assault, or rape is too strong. Although she tried to take his arms away, apparently she wanted to, just not at that moment. I believe that Paulo was reckless, but I don't see the situation as risky.

Note that interpersonal relationships among university students are a determining factor for their attainment. However, based on an investigation of violence experienced by undergraduate students at the Universidade de Brasília, Martins et al. (2022) indicate that sexual harassment and violence are sometimes diffuse in everyday university sociability. The results of this investigation showed that 54.44% of the aggressors acted naturally after committing some sexual assault. Thus, the authors encourage reflection on the possibility of legitimization and/or a certain social tolerance towards coercion in interpersonal relationships in the university context.

Another variable that influenced the identification of situations as rape was the victim's previous behavior. When the victim in the fictional story behaved in a way considered socially "unacceptable," there was a significant difference in identifying the situation as "rape" compared to situations in which the victim behaved in a socially "acceptable" way. Based on this variable, a third prominent point in the research stands out: blaming the victim of sexual assault.

In the 19th century, in Brazil, women were considered exclusively accountable for crimes, as it was assessed whether their behavior was in accordance with the society they lived, with distinctions between honest, honorable women and others who were not. The concept of "honest woman" rose in the regulations for classifying the crime of rape (Decree No. 847, 1890) and, as a matter of fact, was only removed from Brazilian criminal legislation in 2005, that is, less than 20 years ago. From this historical perspective, the first formal Brazilian definition of rape defined the crime as being punishable when the woman was a victim and/or "honest" as opposed to when perpetrated against "public women or prostitutes".

Undoubtedly, significant progress in protecting women's rights and in dealing with rape crimes has been achieved. However, in a patriarchal culture, some practices show that the "old costumes" persist. The rules of conduct, included in the socialization of women since birth, successively transform into moral rules in the identification of sexual aggression (Sousa, 2017). Drinking alcohol, clothing, the location of the violence and the woman's first consent were characteristics that influenced the participants' responses. A report obtained in this study exemplifies a justification for blaming the victim for violence:

> She [Beatriz] was at ease at the party, she drank too much. And making out with several boys and accepting the keys to sleep with the guy. So she was aware of what she was doing, because her actions show that she wanted it from the beginning.

Men's expression or agreement with statements that reinforce myths about rape can be an indication of their propensity to commit sexual assaults against women (Sasson & Paul, 2014). This occurs because, if the existence of violence is denied, the crime can be committed without the perpetrator feeling accountable for the act. In these cases, these verbal expressions aim to minimize the punitive consequences that the perpetrator could suffer for committing rape (Freitas & Morais, 2019). However, publicly affirming some rape myths can also produce punitive consequences, depending on the context and audience (Freitas & Morais, 2019). Thus, other subtle opinions about such myths may remain, such as attributing fault to women victims of rape by suggesting that they could avoid the crime if they changed their behavior:

> Carlos should not have assaulted her . . . . However, I believe that Beatriz should not have accepted the room key. In the big picture, that is, considering the situation of hers, she should call someone she

trusts to take her home (preferably a female friend or guardian) so that this situation wouldn't happen.

It was found that these variables influenced the blaming of the victim summarily among male university students, in line with the literature (Almeida, 2017; Instituto Avon & Data Popular, 2015). A myriad of aspects can be considered to understand such behavior. It has been noted, for example, that men who have been socialized to be dominant have a greater tendency to encourage and legitimize beliefs and myths regarding sexual assault than women, reproducing a stereotypical view of violent events (Sasson & Paul, 2014).

The normalization of sexual assault and victim-blaming by men can be elucidated, as previously suggested, via the notion of rape culture. Rape culture represents this set of beliefs that condescend to men's violent sexual behavior and support violence against women (Freitas & Morais, 2019). Within the scope of these cultural practices, women are taught to behave in an "appropriate" manner, while men are taught to exercise their sexuality at any opportunity for sexual consummation (Sousa, 2017). When rape involves physical aggression perpetrated by a stranger and when the victim has a "socially acceptable" role, even men demand justice and that the rapist be punished (Sousa, 2017).

As demonstrated in this research, sexual behavior without consent is often not named as rape. The social imaginary no longer identifies rape as the absence of consent but only as the presence of vicious violence. Furthermore, the university reality, permeated by different places and types of social interactions — which embrace work, studies, parties, and affective and loving relationships — can distance itself from the stereotypes surrounding violence. That said, "recognizing women's independence, dignity and autonomy when it comes to sexual acts is the first step towards clarifying, before the general public, what qualifies as rape, and which is usually not recognized as such." (Sousa, 2017, p. 24, free translation).

When using the expression "rape culture," there is an attempt to change the function of some violent acts seen as usual, so that they are as condemned as stereotypical acts. Thus, the negative reaction that the word "rape" elicits can be transferred to other situations in which a woman is sexually assaulted (Freitas & Morais, 2019).

Following these guidelines, it is necessary to promote more discussions and dissemination of information about the practices of rape culture in universities. Thus, it is expected that the academic community recognizes, denounces, and demands a university free from sexual and gender-based violence. Failure to recognize certain practices as rape may result in a minimization of the violence suffered and/or practiced in the absence of reporting and confronting sexual assault in the university setting.

This research was limited to portraying only heterosexual relationships in the stories. However, future research could investigate the identification and accountability of sexual assault in non-heterosexual relationships and transgender relationships. Furthermore, this study did not look into the interference of racial relations in the identification of sexual assault, as none of the vignettes specified characters' color/race/ethnicity. This study also reiterates the importance of future research into the issue of race in sexual assault in Brazilian universities.

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