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The Influence of Social Dominance Orientation and Perspective-Taking on Victim Blaming after Sexual Assault

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Abstract

With recent increased media attention on sexual assault against women, many people question why so many women do not report the crimes. One key may reason lies in the phenomenon of victim blaming. This study examined the effects of social dominance orientation (SDO) and perspective-taking on victim blaming after a sexual assault using a between-subjects experimental design. 111 participants responded to an online questionnaire in which they were asked to adopt a perspective and read one of two vignettes depicting a sexual assault. The results showed that SDO had a significant effect on levels of victim blaming, in that those higher in SDO blamed the victim more. The type of perspective adopted by participants also had an effect – those who were tasked to adopt a perspective rather than remain objective blamed the victim significantly less. The type of vignette did not have any significant relationship. These findings suggest that the propensity to blame the victim could be due to individual difference characteristics, but through strategically positioning campaigns to induce perspective-taking the phenomenon could lessen.

Keywords: social dominance orientation, empathy, perspective taking, victim blaming

The Influence of Social Dominance Orientation and Perspective-Taking on Victim Blaming after

Sexual Assault

In light of recent media attention to high profile sexual assault cases, much of the public

seem to ask the same question: Why do women not report their assault? One key reason lies in

the concept of victim blaming – where fault for an assault is placed on the victim and blame of

the perpetrator of the crime is lessened. This phenomenon is linked to the underreporting of

sexual assault. Research suggests that men are more likely to engage in victim blaming than

women (Workman & Freeburg, 1999), and personality factors like social dominance orientation

could play a role in explaining why. Social dominance orientation, which is based on social

dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto 1999), is a personality factor that indicates an individual's

level of preference for inequality between social groups (Pratto et al. 1994). Those high in the

trait tend to support social power inequalities and hierarchies, including the unequal power

dynamic between men and women. Social dominance theory classifies the power dynamic

between men and woman as a special case of group-based social inequality because of the

intimate interaction between heterosexual men and women (Pratto & Walker, 2004). Being that

they interact intimately it is likely that the unequal power dynamics that exist generally can also

be observed when looking at issues concerning sex and relationships. Research on perspective

taking suggests that being able to take on the perspective of another is linked to feeling more

empathy for others (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997), and increases pro-social behavior (Batson

et al., 2003). In the context of sexual assault, these findings are especially important. Identifying

and feeling empathy for the victim in turn lessens the likelihood of victim blaming, thus making

it more likely for victims to report sexual crimes. It is possible that increasing pro-social

behavior may augment the likelihood that associates of a victim will be a source of strength and support rather than ostracization.

Victim Blaming

As mentioned above, victim blaming is a social phenomenon whereby a victim of a crime is blamed for their experienced misfortune rather than the perpetrator of that crime. This phenomenon is especially prevalent when it concerns sexual assault against women. Why this occurs has been studied in past research, with two main approaches dominating victim blaming research. The first, named the "rape perception framework" (Krahe, 1991), looks at the effects of victim and perpetrator characteristics which influence blaming the victim. Factors within this framework include but are not limited to, victim race, assailant race, victim dress, victim and assailant social class, victim sexuality, victim use of alcohol, and victim's adherence to gender stereotypes (Davies, Pollard, & Archer, 2001; George & Martinez, 2002; Workman & Freeburg, 1999; Simms et al. 2007, Maurer & Robinson, 2008; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010). For instance, one study found that observers judged the victim as more responsible for the assault if she had been drinking (Simms, Noel, & Maisto, 2007). This finding was further confirmed in a review conducted by Grubb and Turner (2012). In another study looking at the effects of suggestive attire on observer perceptions, Maurer and Robinson (2008) discovered that participants in the suggestive condition or the revealing attire condition perceived the female character as wanting more sex than the character in the neutral attire condition even though context was the same.

The second approach in victim blaming research focuses on the characteristics of the participant judging the rape scenario. Within this framework, the most widely studied variable is observer gender (Krahe, 1991), and more specifically the level of adherence to gender roles

(Grubb & Turner, 2012). Studies within this framework also looked at (but were not limited to) participants' acceptance of rape myths (Krahe, 1988), pro-feminist views (Grubb & Turner, 2012), and likelihood of identifying with the victim (Grubb & Harrower, 2008; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Researchers posit that motivational and ego defensive processes are central to an observer's negative attributions aimed at the rape victim. The two commonly cited theories which underlie these defensive processes, Just World Theory and the Defensive Attribution Hypothesis, are fundamental to this second framework.

Just World Theory (Lerner & Matthews, 1967; Kleinke & Meyer 1990) theorizes that observers blame victims for the crime they experienced as a method of restoring their belief in a just or fair world in the presence of a seemingly undeserved act. In this perspective, people are motivated to see their world as a fair place, leading them to conclude that outcomes to an individual's situation is a deserved one. This belief helps an individual maintain a sense of control over their environment, thus it reasons that observers perceive victims as deserving of their rape because it reestablishes their view of the world as being fair and just. In the context of victim blaming research many studies find support for this theory (Correia et al., 2012; Strömwall, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2013).

The second theory, Defensive Attribution Hypothesis (Shaver, 1970), posits that an observer's level of victim blaming depends on their perceived similarity and identification with the victim – observer's will blame a victim less if they view the victim as similar to themselves and blaming increases as a function of dissimilarity to the victim (Fulero & DeLara 1976; Bell et al., 1994; Workman & Freeburg, 1999; Grubb & Harrower, 2008). Research explains the defensive attribution hypothesis as a defensive mechanism used as a method of protecting oneself from blame should a similar misfortune should happen to them in the future.

In addition to the above-mentioned frameworks, some research suggests that participants' attitudinal characteristics also explain observers' negative perception of rape victims and their propensity to blame them. Observers that hold more traditional attitudes about gender roles and endorse gender role stereotypes tend to blame the victim more than those who do not (Grubb & Turner, 2012). A study conducted by Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) found that, particularly for men, participants who held more negative/hostile attitudes toward women had higher levels of rape myth acceptance, a construct regularly linked to increased victim blaming (Burt, 1980; Krahe, 1988; Grubb & Turner, 2012). Similarly, homophobic attitudes have been found to predict negative rape victim perception in the case of male rape (Anderson, 2004).

While an extensive body of research has examined victim and perpetrator characteristics, motivational and ego defense processes, and attitudinal beliefs of the observer in order to explain victim blaming, little attention is paid to individual difference variables of observers and their relation to blaming the victim. One study by Hockett and colleagues (2009), however, found that an individual difference variable called social dominance orientation was a significant unique predictor of rape myth acceptance and significantly correlated with negative attitudes against rape victims. Hence, it stands to reason that social dominance orientation could be an important variable to examine when trying to understand the mechanisms behind victim blaming.

Social Dominance Orientation

Social dominance orientation (SDO) is defined as an individual difference variable (Sibley, & Liu, 2010). As such it is considered to be a definable trait that isn't easily changed, falling at the intersection of personality and attitudes. It reflects a person's orientation towards intergroup relations. Put simply, SDO represents the degree to which an individual supports group-based hierarchy and inequality (Pratto et al., 1994; Ho et al., 2012). The construct is

derived from social dominance theory, which hypothesizes that societies reduce group conflict via forming consensus on ideologies that uphold superiority of one group over all others. These ideologies, or hierarchy-legitimizing myths – are then adopted within a society, presented as obvious truths, thus legitimizing discrimination against inferior groups, and aiding in the stabilization of oppression (Pratto et al., 1994).

Research has shown that SDO is highly correlated with various sexist attitudes and behaviors (Pratto et al., 1994; Pratto et al., 2000; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Hockett et al., 2009; Rosenthal, Levy, & Earnshaw, 2012). In one study, Pratto and colleagues (1994) found that SDO and the extent to which people believe that women rather than men can be blamed for unwanted sexual assault and harassment were significantly correlated with each other. Individuals with higher levels of SDO were also likely to support this hierarchy-legitimizing myth. A 2012 study found that those who endorse SDO were more likely to believe that men should dominate sexually (Rosenthal, Levy, & Earnshaw, 2012). In a society that holds ideologies about women being passive and men being aggressors in a sexual context, beliefs such as these may carry important implications for sexual attitudes and behaviors. Yet, thus far research looking at the relationship between SDO and victim blaming have been largely correlational, highlighting the need for more in-depth studies.

Perspective Taking

Research examining perspective taking, also known as cognitive empathy, suggests that imagining how oneself would feel and be affected in another's predicament, known as imagine-self, or imagining how another feels and would be affected in a predicament, known as imagine-other, decreases stereotyping and in-group biases (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), improve attitudes towards stigmatized group (Batson et al., 1997), and increases prosocial behavior

(Batson et al., 2003; Batson, Early, Salvarani, 1997; Dovidio et al., 1990). Studies looking at the cognitive process behind perspective taking find that the positive effects with which it is associated arise from a greater overlap between mental representations of the self and other – a self-other overlap. Observers who were instructed to adopt the perspective of a target attributed similar descriptors of themselves to the target – signaling an overlap between the cognitive representation between self and target (Davis et al., 1996; Galinsky, Ku, Wang, 2005).

Perspective taking may be an important process to consider in relation to victim blaming. Research has consistently demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of empathy blame victims of sexual assault less than observers with lower levels of empathy (Deitz, Littman, & Bentley, 1984). This finding was further supported by a 2011 study conducted by Miller, Amacker, and King. In this study, they found that participants who shared a similar history with the victim displayed higher levels of empathy, which resulted in less attribution of culpability to the victim. O'Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti (2003) developed a video-based rape prevention program targeting individuals who have a history of sexual coercive behavior. Individuals took several measures including rape myth acceptance and an empathy scale before viewing the experimental video material which contained segments that were designed to debunk rape myths, evoke empathy for sexual assault victims, and highlight outcome expectancies of violators. An alternative video served as a control condition. After viewing the material, participants were asked to complete the scales again, and results showed that the experimental video had a significant effect on changing the responses more than the alternate control video – scores on empathy for the victim increased and level of rape myth acceptance significantly decreased. These findings suggest that perspective taking could be a useful cognitive tool to use when looking to lessen the problem of victim blaming.

Purpose and Hypotheses

Reviewing the literature on SDO, perspective taking, and victim blaming it is plausible that a link not yet examined by research exists between these variables. Bringing to light links such as these extends research and understanding behind the mechanisms that influence victim blaming and could aid in creating campaigns and policies that take these individual differences into account. This study aimed to investigate the influence of social dominance orientation and perspective taking on victim blaming, using vignettes and perspective-taking instructions as the experimental manipulation. The study was conducted using a between-subjects design that investigated SDO and perspective-taking variables and compared them to levels of victim blaming. Specifically, it was hypothesized that:

- o H1: It is predicted that higher levels of SDO correlate negatively with perceived ability to take perspective
- o H2: It is predicted that SDO is a significant predictor of victim blaming
- o H3: It is predicted that the imagine-other and imagine-self perspective conditions lead to less victim blaming than the objective perspective condition.

As previously mentioned, research has suggested that an observer's perception of a victim's personal characteristics, like their adherence to gender stereotypes, could influence how likely they are to blame the victim. Thus, in this present study the victim's gender stereotypically is manipulated, and it was expected that a sex-positive individual would garner more blame than an individual who is viewed as neutral. Thus, this study also hypothesized that:

- o H4: It is predicted that participants reading a sex-positive vignette victim blame more than participants reading a neutral vignette.

Method

Participants

A total of 206 individuals, aged 18 years and older, initially participated in the study. After excluding those who did not complete the survey in its entirety, the final dataset used in this study consisted of 111 participants. Of these, 53 identified as men, 57 as women, and one participant specified another gender. The mean age of participants was 24.72 years ($SD = 7.45$).

 Material

Demographics. Participants were asked to provide information detailing their age, gender, and nationality.

Social Dominance Orientation Scale. (Ho et al., 2015) – A 16-item questionnaire was used to measure one's degree of preference for inequality among social groups, for example, *"We shouldn't try to guarantee that every group has the same quality of life,"* ($\alpha = .89$). Participants answered items based on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *totally disagree* to 9 = *totally agree*.

Perspective-taking manipulation. Perspective-taking instructions were adapted from Batson, Early, and Salvarani (1997), they were adapted to reflect the setting of a written vignette.

Vignettes. Two vignettes were designed to depict a situation where sexual assault occurs. Described in detail below.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index. (Davis, 1983) – The perspective taking subscale of the IRI was used. It is a 7-item self-report questionnaire that assessed individuals' perceived ability to take another's perspective, for example *"I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both"* ($\alpha = .76$). Participants answered items based on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *totally disagree* to 9 = *totally agree*.

Blame Questionnaire. (Davies, Pollard & Archer, 2006) – An adapted 20-item questionnaire was used to measure the level of blame participants place on the victim and perpetrator for example, *"I think that the woman's behavior was to blame for what the guy did to her,"* (α = .83). Participants answered the items based on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *totally disagree* to 9 = *totally agree*. Since the original scale used dichotomous answers, the items were modified to allow for more detailed replies on a Likert Scale in this study. Additionally, the item wording was also adapted to fit the vignette storyline.

Design and Procedure

The data were collected using an online survey and participants were recruited by posting the survey on the social media platform the Facebook. In order to lower effects of social desirability, participants were told that the study's purpose was to collect information about their opinions regarding a social situation. No financial incentive was offered. Respondents who were aged 18 years or older were invited to participate. After following the weblink to the online survey, participants were first presented with the informed consent page, which outlined that their participation was completely voluntary, and that their answers were anonymous. They were also informed that they may drop out of the survey at any time, and that there were known no risk to them in participating in this study.

After the informed consent page, participants were directed to a demographics form where they indicated their gender, age, and nationality. On the next page, participants completed the social dominance orientation scale. To randomly assign respondents to one of the six experimental conditions, the days of a month were broken down into six groups. Subjects were asked to indicate which option contained the date on which their birthday falls (e.g. 1 - 5, 6 – 10, 11 – 15, 16 – 20, 21 – 25, 26 – 31). After they selected an option, participants were directed to a

combination of one of the three perspective-taking instructions (objective, imagine-self, or imagine-other) and one of the two vignettes (neutral or sex positive) which consisted of the following:

Participants in the objective condition read:

> While you are reading the vignette below, try to be as objective as possible about what has happened to the woman in the story and how it has affected her life. To remain objective, do not let yourself get caught up in imagining what she has been through and how she feels as a result. Just try to remain objective and detached.

Participants in the imagine-other condition read:

> While you are reading this vignette, try to imagine how the woman in the story feels about what has happened and how it has affected her life. Try not to concern yourself with attending to all the information written. Just concentrate on trying to imagine how the woman in the story feels.

Participants in the imagine-self condition read:

> While you are reading this vignette, try to imagine how you yourself would feel if you were experiencing what has happened to the woman in the story and how this experience would affect your life. Try not to concern yourself with attending to all the information written. Just concentrate on trying to imagine how you yourself would feel.

Participants then read one of the two vignettes. One vignette served to depict a neutral female student. An excerpt of the vignettes is as follows:

> There is a woman in your university course, who is well known for being an active member in one of the student associations. She is often featured on the association's Facebook page and Instagram, and she is regularly seen on campus handing out flyers to promote their events and working during the association's weekly pub night.

The alternate vignette served to depict a female student, who could be categorized as a sex-positive student:

> There is a woman in your university course, who is well known for being a vocal advocate of "freeing female sexuality." She regularly holds talks, workshops, and events

that encourage women to freely explore their sexuality in all ways. She is often seen on

campus handing out free male and female condoms, free sex toys, and helps women who

seek advice about contraceptives.

After participants read the instructions and the vignette, they were directed to the next pages on

which they were asked to answer a victim blaming questionnaire and a perspective taking

questionnaire. When completed, participants were thanked for their time and given contact

details of the researcher in case they had any comments or questions.

Results

This study aimed to investigate the influence of social dominance orientation and

perspective taking on victim blaming, using perspective-taking instructions and vignettes as

experimental manipulations.

During the initial phase of data collection, survey items were not mandatory to answer,

thus there were many questionnaires that were left incomplete. When this error was noticed

about mid-way of the data collection, the survey was adjusted, and answers were made

mandatory for all items. Prior to the analysis, the dataset was screened for incomplete surveys.

Participants who did not complete the entire survey were removed. The data were then examined

for potential violations of the assumptions of independent samples t-tests, linear regression, and

one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA). For both the victim-blaming variable and social

dominance orientation variable, the assumption of homogeneity of variances and the assumptions

of normality within all groups for t-test and ANOVA were violated. All assumptions were met

for a linear regression.

A Spearman's correlation analysis was initially conducted for the variables social

dominance orientation, victim blaming, and perceived ability to take perspective. They are

displayed in Table 1. The matrix demonstrates that social dominance orientation is the only variable that had a significant correlation with victim-blaming (r = .33).

Hypothesis Testing

      Social dominance orientation and perceived ability to take perspective. It was posited that SDO would negatively correlate with one's perceived ability to take another's perspective. Because of the violation of assumptions of parametric tests, non-parametric Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis was conducted. While results were in the expected direction, that one's level of social dominance orientation negatively correlated with one's perceived ability to take another's perspective, it was not statistically significant (r_s (108) = -.14, p = .13), thus failing to reject the null hypothesis.

      SDO and Victim Blaming. A simple linear regression analysis was computed to test the hypothesis that SDO would be a significant predictor of victim blaming. Results show support for this hypothesis, as social dominance orientation was a statistically significant predictor of victim-blaming, explaining 8% of the total variance (R^2 =.08, F (1,109) = 9.92, p = .002).

      Perspective-taking conditions and Victim Blaming. It was hypothesized that participants in either the imagine-other or imagine-self condition would, on average, blame the victim less than participants in the objective condition. Due to assumption violations of the parametric test, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted. The results showed partial support for the hypothesis, as there was a statistically significant difference in victim-blaming scores across the three perspective taking conditions (χ^2(2) = 7.13, p =.028). The mean rank victim-blaming score was 67.13 for the objective condition, 56.35 for the imagine-other condition, and 46.76 for the imagine-self condition. A post hoc analysis was conducted to test pairwise comparisons and determine where differences lie between the groups. The imagine-self

condition was significantly different to the objective condition ($p = .023$). Imagine- other to imagine-self and imagine-other to objective were not significantly different from another ($p = .557$, $p = .480$).

Vignette Condition and Victim Blaming. It was hypothesized that participants in the sex positive vignette condition would victim blame more than those in the neutral vignette. Due to assumption violations, a Mann-Whitney test was performed. Results showed that there was no statistically significant difference in victim blaming scores between the two groups, with a mean rank victim-blaming score of 56.41 for the neutral vignette and 55.65 for the sex positive vignette. ($U = 1509$, $p = .90$, $r = -.01$), thus failing to reject the null hypothesis.

Discussion

The purpose of this current study was to examine how perspective-taking and social dominance orientation (SDO) influenced one's tendency to blame a female victim of a sexual assault. It was hypothesized that SDO would negatively correlate with one's perceived ability to take another's' perspective, and that it would be a significant predictor of victim blaming. Further, it was posited that participants tasked to adopt a perspective would be less likely to blame the victim than those asked to remain objective, and that a vignette that depicted a sex-positive female student would incite more victim blaming than the neutral vignette.

While not explicitly hypothesized, when examining gender differences, findings suggested that men, on average, had higher levels of SDO and blamed the victim more than woman. Such findings echo that of previous studies (Pratto et al., 1994; Ho et al., 2012; Davies, Pollard & Archer, 2006; Grubb & Turner, 2012).

Next, results failed to find a significant relationship between social dominance orientation and one's perceived ability to take perspective. Precedent for this finding can be found in research conducted by Pratto and colleagues (1994). They suggested that while the total Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) scale was negatively associated with SDO, when broken down into their subscales, only one scale, empathic concern, which measures one's feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others, was consistently negatively correlated with SDO. The other subscales - including perspective-taking – were not as consistent. This could explain why the two variables failed to produce a significant relationship in this current study. Further, this may suggest that SDO's relation to empathy is more strongly contingent on one's ability to have sympathy and concern for others, and not on one's ability to spontaneously adopt the psychological viewpoint of others. Evidence for this was provided by Sidanius and colleagues' (2013) longitudinal study, in which the authors investigated SDO and empathy, specifically Davis' IRI empathic concern subscale, over time, and found that the two variables have a reciprocal relationship.

As hypothesized, results from the analysis demonstrated that SDO predicted victim blaming, in that as one's level of SDO increased the amount of blame they placed on the victim also increased. This finding is the first, to my current knowledge, to examine the direct relationship between SDO and victim blaming, thus extending Pratto and colleagues (1994) correlational results, where they discovered a positive correlation between SDO and "the extent to which people believe that women rather than men can be blamed for unwanted sexual advances such as rape and sexual harassment" (p. 743). This is interesting because it connects to broader research that links SDO with tolerance of sexual harassment towards women (Russell & Trigg, 2004), the belief that men should dominate sexually (Rosenthal, Levy, and Earnshaw,

2012), and hostile sexism (Christopher & Mull, 2006), all of which could be consider antecedents of victim blaming. One possible explanation for the tie between victim blaming and SDO can be found in the theory of hierarchy-legitimizing myths, which are ideologies (i.e. sexist ideologies) within a society that maintain the superiority of one group over all others (Pratto et al., 1994). Those high in SDO and part of a dominant group in society (e.g., men), are likely to endorse these myths because it positions them as "better" than members of low-status groups (e.g. women), and through this they gain a positive identity and feelings of security. Thus, it is probable that the belief in these ideologies coupled with the drive towards group-based inequality may lead to increased victim blaming in this population.

As predicted, those who were tasked to adopt a perspective blamed the victim less than those asked to remain objective while reading either vignette, however this was only significant for participants who adopted the *imagine-self* perspective. According to Batson, Early, and Salvarani (1997) this could be due to the fact that imagining how oneself may feel in an unfortunate situation of another produces not only empathy (which would lead to altruistic motivations), but also personal distress, which may lead to more egoistic motivations. Distress may be the result of imagine-self instructions influencing participants to focus on their own imagined distress in the victim's situation. This focus on the self can provide a strong egoistical motivation to reduce the negative emotion. On the other hand, the imagine-other condition evokes empathy without personal distress, leading to a more unadulterated altruistic motivation. In relation to the present study's findings, it is possible that the mix of altruistic and egoistic motivation induced by the imagine-self condition created a stronger desire to lessen victim blaming.

Lastly, there was no significant difference in levels of victim blaming between the two vignette conditions. One reason for this could be changes in social norms. For example, ideas such as sex-positivity are becoming more accepted and more mainstream, thus while participants may have perceived differences between the two characters in the vignette, it might not have affected them when placing blame on the victim. Related to this, attitudes about recreational sex are, on average, more relaxed, than ever before. One study found that young adult men and women with higher levels of education had a more liberal attitude towards sex than did their older counterparts (Risell et al., 2003). Similarly, a longitudinal British study spanning over ten years reported an increase in tolerance to sexual diversity (Copas et al., 2002). Their findings suggest that people today are more accepting of non-traditional attitudes towards sex. Another reason for the non-significant findings could be that the depiction of a character through written text is not as salient as it would be through photographs and videos. This line of thinking was also echoed by Simms, Noel, and Maisto (2007), who reasoned that video may produce a stronger effect than written vignettes. Taking into consideration that the mean age of the sample was 24 years, using stimuli that better reflect the type of medium participants in that age range usually engage with could show different results.

Limitations

This study addressed some of the gaps found in victim blaming research and extended knowledge in the area. However, there were some notable limitations. First, the data used for this research was collected exclusively via social media. While online studies mean easy access to a large pool of participants and anonymity for the responder, using this method of data collection means that no guarantee can be made about the validity of the demographic information given.

Self-selection bias is another risk in online survey research. It is possible that some individuals are more apt to responding to online questionnaires, while others disregard it.

A second possible limitation is the lack of manipulation checks. This study did not employ manipulation checks for the vignettes, it is therefore not clear whether or not participants perceived the vignette as a sexual assault. It also did not use manipulation checks to detect random responding. When manipulation checks are employed it can increase the power and the validity of the data by reveling to researchers two things: 1) whether or not participants understood the experimental manipulation as intended, and 2) whether or not participants are reading the instructions and carefully answering the items (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). Without manipulation checks, it is probable that conclusions made from the data are not as strong.

A possible third limitation might have been the use of vignettes. Some critics argue that results obtained from vignette studies are questionable in nature since they cannot adequately represent real life. This is due to its inefficiency in capturing the nuanced interactions and feedback necessary for social exchange, which ultimately lessens external validity (Evans et al., 2015). While this is a valid consideration, it is important to note that the use of vignettes in this study was not to exactly match a real-life experience. Rather, the aim was to present a situation that occurs in the real world, and to help participants focus on a certain topic in order to reveal their attitudes and beliefs pertaining to victim blaming.

Considerations for Future Research

In this present research, social dominance orientation emerged as a predictor of victim blaming. Future research could examine this relationship more closely to better understand the mechanisms behind it. For instance, perhaps there are underlying processes contributing to the

relationship between the variables. Findings from a study conducted by Caricati (2007) showed that certain values, like universalism and power, mediated the relationship between social dominance orientation and other variables, such as gender. It is possible that a mediating relationship like this could exist between SDO and a variable like victim blaming. For example, one's attitude towards sex or even one's sexual self-efficacy could be worthwhile for future research to investigate.

Another possible direction for future research lies in enhancing the stimuli used. In this present study, participants were instructed to read written vignettes. Using video manipulations in future studies could lessen possible confusion about what message is being presented, leading to a more uniform understanding and potentially more successful experimental manipulation. Using alternative ways of manipulation would also increase external validity.

Future research should consider the use of manipulation checks, both for adherence to instructions and vignette ecological validity. To check instruction adherence, one possible method to use is the instructional manipulation check (IMC) developed by Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko (2009). In this method, questions that ask the respondent to confirm that have read instructions are placed within the experimental material. These questions are designed to look similar to other items in the survey. Concealing the manipulation check would increase the power or a study because one would be able to more easily detect participants engaging in random responding. In regard to vignette validity, future research could address this concern by employing a pilot study to pre-test the vignettes.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the phenomenon of victim blaming after a sexual assault has occurred and explored how individual difference variables and aspects of empathy affect

this. The results extend current literature and represents a further step to better understanding

victim blaming and why it is still an issue in today's society. It is the first, to my current

knowledge, to examine the direct relationship between SDO and victim blaming. It also

demonstrates the effect perspective-taking has when blaming a victim, in that when people

imagine themselves in another's unfortunate situation they will tend to blame the victim less. In

the wake of movements like #MeToo, an online movement bringing awareness to the sexual

harassment and assault, it is important to pinpoint the underlying mechanisms behind victim

blaming in order to create solutions to deter it.

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Tables

Table 1.
Correlations between Social Dominance Orientation, Victim Blaming, and Perceived Perspective-Taking Ability (N = 111)

	SDO	VB	IRI_PT
SDO	--		
VB	.33**	--	.
IRI_PT	-.14	.02	--

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).