

Relationships among Acknowledgment Status, Self-Blame, and Rape Scripts in Female
Victims of Unwanted Sexual Experiences

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Middle Tennessee State University
August 2013

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I dedicate this project to the hidden victims.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my committee chair and advisor, Dr. Fromuth, for dedicating her time to advising this research. Without her assistance, encouragement, and knowledge base, this project would not have been possible. Further, I would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Kelly, and my critical reader, Dr. Tate, for the time they devoted to reading my thesis and providing me with constructive feedback. I also would like to thank my research assistants who helped collect and code the data. Additionally, I would like to extend a special thanks to Anna, LaToya, and Ransom, as well as the other students in my cohort, for all of their support and encouragement since the beginning of graduate school and throughout this project. Next, I would like to thank Jaqui, for not only being a valued friend, but for teaming with me on this project and becoming an esteemed colleague. Finally, to my loving parents, thank you for your support throughout this process and for raising me in a home that encouraged my educational aspirations.

Abstract

The current study investigated whether endorsement of a blitz rape script was predictive of the three types of self-blame (i.e., characterological, behavioral, and overall), above and beyond acknowledgment status, in female victims of unwanted sexual experiences. Further, it investigated the differences between the two acknowledgment groups on three types of self-blame. Participants were 170 female undergraduate college students who completed an anonymous questionnaire that assessed unwanted sexual experiences and perceptions of those experiences. Results revealed that blitz rape script endorsement was not related to self-blame in victims of unwanted sexual experiences. Acknowledged victims had higher levels of all three types of self-blame compared to unacknowledged victims. The present study further demonstrates the complexity of self-blame and adds to the research that has investigated the relationship between self-blame and acknowledgment status.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rape is a distressing experience for both women (McMullin & White, 2006) and men (Aosved, Long, & Voller, 2011). Koss and Harvey (1991) state that the act of “rape represents the most serious of all major crimes against the person, short of homicide” (p. 1). It has been a widely studied area of research because of the possible lasting negative correlates for victims. Research with this population, however, can be difficult due to the variations (e.g., level of force, relationship to the perpetrator, use of drugs or alcohol) in the victims’ experience. Despite this, these variations are important to study because these differences may be associated with how victims interpret, label, and cope with what happened to them. In the past, researchers have investigated the relationship between labeling and coping (e.g., Clements & Ogle, 2009; Littleton, Axsom, Breitkopf, & Berenson, 2006). There has been little research, however, on how victims’ perceptions of what generally happens during a rape affect the labeling of their own experience, as well as whether those perceptions are predictive of other correlates of rape, such as self-blame.

Methodological and Definitional Differences in the Study of Rape

Prevalence estimates of rape differ. This may be due to the variations in the methodology for obtaining and analyzing data, as well as variations in the definition of rape. Using phone surveys, Fisher, Cullen, and Turner (2000) conducted the National College Women Sexual Victimization survey (NCWSV), which gathered data from 4,446 women in colleges or universities across the United States. The aim of the NCWSV study was to include more descriptive questions than the National Crime Victimization

Survey (NCVS) when asking about sexual victimization experiences. Even though the questions were asked differently, the methodology of the survey (i.e., phone surveying) was very similar to the NCVS'. The main limitation with surveying victims by phone is that they may not report the rape due to privacy concerns (Koss, 1996). Likely due to the survey method used, the NCWSV survey (Fisher et al., 2000) obtained a much lower prevalence rate of completed rape (1.7%) than did studies done in college samples using the Sexual Experiences Survey (Harned, 2004; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Due to its unique methodology, the Sexual Experiences Survey has been widely used by researchers from the time of its development.

Koss (1985) created the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) to gather data on the "hidden victim" (the victims who do not report their rapes to authorities). This measure has been widely used by researchers in the study of rape (e.g., Arata, 1999; Littleton & Henderson, 2009). Koss et al. (1987) conducted a large scale study using the SES as a measure of sexual victimization to gain knowledge of the prevalence of rape (both reported and unreported rape) in women attending universities and other higher education institutions. In the study, 3,187 women from various institutions were surveyed. Koss et al. (1987) reported that 53.7% of women experienced some type of sexual victimization, and 15.4% were victims of completed rape. Harned (2004), who also used the SES, reported that 34.3% of the women had experienced some type of sexual victimization, and 12.6% had experienced a completed rape.

Another methodological difference among prevalence studies is which definition is used to define rape. The SES is based on the then Ohio definition of rape (Ohio Revised Code as cited in Koss et al., 1987), which stated:

Vaginal intercourse between male and female, and anal intercourse, fellatio, and cunnilingus between persons regardless of sex. Penetration, however slight, is sufficient to complete vaginal intercourse or anal intercourse. No person shall engage in sexual conduct with another person . . . when any of the following apply: 1) the offender purposely compels the other person to submit by force or threat of force, 2) for the purpose of preventing resistance the offender substantially impairs the other person's judgment or control by administering any drug or intoxicant to the other person. (p. 166)

Rather than a state-level definition used by the SES, the NCWSV employed the same definition used by the NCVS (NCVS as cited in Fisher et al., 2000) that states:

Forced sexual intercourse including both psychological coercion as well as physical force. Forced sexual intercourse means vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by the offender (s). This category also includes incidents where the penetration is from a foreign object such as a bottle. Includes attempted rapes, male as well as female victims, and both heterosexual and homosexual rape. Attempted rape includes verbal threats of rape. (p. 13)

The definition of rape varies state by state, but recently the national government released a new definition of rape that defines it as “the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another

person, without the consent of the victim” (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.). Both the Ohio definition used to create the SES (Koss, 1985) as well as the new national definition, which will be used in the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports starting in 2013 (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.), take into account the issue of consent. Past definitions (e.g., NCVS as cited in Fisher et al., 2000) used in surveying victims have not considered consent as part of the definition for rape (e.g., the victims’ ability to give consent while under the influence of a drug or alcohol).

Types of Rape

Rape also can be subdivided into many different categories based on the situational variables surrounding the experience (Koss & Harvey, 1991). Two types of rape that have been extensively studied are acquaintance and stranger rape. Acquaintance rape is described as being committed by someone the victims know or have had some contact with in the past (Koss & Harvey, 1991). In contrast, stranger rape refers to a situation in which the victims have never had contact with the perpetrator (Koss & Harvey, 1991). In a study of 903 college women, 27.2% reported having some type of unwanted sexual experience (Gross, Winslett, Roberts, & Gohm, 2006). In this same study, of the women who had an unwanted sexual experience, it was reported that only 2% of the perpetrators were strangers to the victims. Wolitzky-Taylor et al. (2011) conducted a nation-wide study of 2,000 college women. Of the women surveyed, 230 (12%) reported a rape experience. Results demonstrated that 13% of victims reported the perpetrator was a stranger, and 87% reported that the perpetrator was someone they knew (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011).

General Prevalence of Rape

Due to the methodological and definitional differences in the study of rape, as well as differing types of rape, prevalence estimates of rape can vary widely. In one of the earliest studies conducted on rape, Koss et al. (1987) reported that the prevalence of rape in college women was 15.4%. Following this landmark study, more current research reports that the prevalence of rape in college women varies from approximately 1.7% (Fisher et al., 2000) to 19% (Gross et al., 2006).

A review of the research showed the prevalence of rape in women remains at approximately 15% (Rozee & Koss, 2001). This percentage is consistent with studies of college women as well, where 12.6% of college women reported having experienced a completed rape (Harned, 2004). A more recent review of the prevalence of rape in the general population, as well as college women, is consistent with previous studies and found that 18% of women in the general population have been raped, and 11.5% of enrolled college women have been raped (Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007).

These prevalence rates, as well as research indicating that rape victims may experience postrape symptoms of depression (Littleton et al., 2006) and general distress (Harned, 2004; Littleton et al., 2006), demonstrate that it is of societal value to study rape. Investigating the negative correlates of rape and how victims cope with the experience can shed light on how to develop therapies and programs that can aid victims in recovery.

Negative Correlates

Various negative correlates, that can affect victims both mentally and physically, have been found to be associated with rape and unwanted sexual experiences. Multiple studies have investigated the negative correlates of rape by comparing rape victims to nonvictims. Not only is general distress seen in victims of rape (McMullin & White, 2006), but the presence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been reported as well (Layman, Gidycz, & Lynn, 1996). Kilpatrick et al. (2007) reported that 34% of college women who had been raped met criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder, and 33% showed signs of depression within the past year. Revictimization is an additional negative correlate that has been investigated. Littleton, Axsom, and Grills-Taquechel (2009) found that 30% of the sexual assault victims in their study reported an additional rape experience in a follow-up survey. Additionally, Harned (2004) found that unwanted sexual experiences in college students were associated with a number of negative outcomes including substance use, psychological distress, concerns about body shape, and school-academic withdrawal (e.g., turning assignments in late and planning to drop out of school).

Though there are many differences found between victims and nonvictims, the relationship between negative outcomes and victimization is complex. One study comparing rape victims to victims of unwanted sexual experiences found that female rape victims tend to have more physical health complaints than victims who had an unwanted sexual experience but were not raped (Conoscenti & McNally, 2006). In a study that investigated differences between completed rape victims and attempted rape victims, it

was found that completed rape victims reported that the victimization resulted in more negative effects on their self-esteem, their perceived attractiveness, their perceived worth as a romantic partner, their ability to have and sustain a committed relationship, and their sexual desire than attempted rape victims (Perilloux, Duntley, & Buss, 2012). These studies demonstrate the complex relationship between negative correlates and victimization. Self-blame is an additional, widely studied, negative correlate that is present in victims and has a complex relationship with victimization (e.g., Arata, 1999; Frazier & Seales, 1997).

Self-Blame

Self-blame (i.e., blaming oneself for the rape) is an additional correlate of rape that has been widely studied. In a meta-analysis conducted on self-attributions after trauma, self-blame was found to be present in victims of rape as well as many other types of trauma (Littleton, Magee, & Axson, 2007). Self-blame, however, tends to be more severe in victims of rape and is correlated with PTSD symptoms (Moor & Farchi, 2011). Studies have found that rape victims experience a moderate amount of self-blame (Frazier, Mortensen, & Steward, 2005; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011). Further, Miller, Markman, and Handley (2007) found that higher levels of self-blame are associated with greater risk of revictimization in rape victims. Additionally, it has been shown that self-blame is associated with more maladaptive coping in victims (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006). Further, Branscombe, Wohl, Owen, Allison, and N'gbala (2003) found that self-blame was negatively correlated with psychological well-being.

There have been various theories that attempt to explain why self-blame may occur in rape victims. The just world theory states that “individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve” (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1030). In other words, people want to see the world as a fair place where those who are innocent do not suffer. If the just world belief is threatened, a person may perceive goal-setting as pointless and may not be concerned with following the normal rules of society (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Due to these possible negative consequences, people try to retain their belief in a just world (Lerner & Miller, 1978). In the context of rape victims, compared to unacknowledged victims, those who acknowledge that they were raped have been found to have a stronger belief in a just world (Littleton et al., 2006). Although the research is mixed, some research has shown that labeling the experience as rape may result in less self-blame (Frazier & Seales, 1997; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011). Those who label the experience may make more of an effort to convict the perpetrator or report their assault because they can place more blame on the rapist than themselves. In contrast, unacknowledged victims, because they may blame themselves, may not report their experience to police or try to pursue a conviction.

Control theory is similar to the just world theory in that victims use self-blame as a coping mechanism in order to gain control over what happened to them (Janoff-Bulman 1979). Frazier, Berman, and Steward (2002) proposed a model that looked at perceived past, present, and future control in victims of trauma. They concluded, from a review of the research, that most people view past events as uncontrollable. Further, they noted that past control does have an association with increased distress, but this has only been

found when the victims do perceive the past event as controllable (Frazier et al., 2002). Frazier et al. (2005) theorized that the victim blaming her own behavior for the rape is an attempt to control the past and, therefore, results in more distress. On the other hand, having a feeling of control over the present situation causes less distress and is a more adaptive way of coping (Frazier et al., 2005).

Characterological and Behavioral Self-Blame

One of the most widely researched models proposes that there are two different types of self-blame in rape victims: characterological and behavioral. Janoff-Bulman (1979) defined characterological self-blame as victims perceiving their rape as a result of a fault in their own character or personality, such as believing that they are promiscuous. Behavioral self-blame is demonstrated when victims view their own actions and behaviors as the reason they were raped, such as believing that they should not have consumed alcohol (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). She also suggested that characterological self-blame is a maladaptive method of coping because the victims are blaming the rape on an innate fault within their character that is stable and cannot be changed. On the other hand, behavioral self-blame, though still maladaptive, may be more adaptive for victims because perceiving the rape as a fault of behaviors that can be altered gives victims a sense of control over the situation and future victimizations (Janoff-Bulman, 1979).

The two types of self-blame and their relationship with distress and coping have been studied extensively. Researchers have found that neither type of self-blame was an adaptive method of coping (Meyer & Taylor, 1986). Frazier (1990) found that behavioral and characterological self-blame were positively correlated with depression after the

rape. In a longitudinal study that looked at only behavioral self-blame, it was found that increased behavioral self-blame was related to higher levels of distress over time (Frazier, 2003). In a later study using the same sample and again only focusing on behavioral self-blame, it was found that as behavioral self-blame decreases, so does distress (Frazier et al., 2005). In another study using a different sample, behavioral self-blame was positively correlated with two negative coping strategies, social withdrawal and problem avoidance (Frazier et al., 2005). Frazier et al. (2005) suggest that this could be the reason why this type of self-blame is maladaptive.

There has been some disagreement among researchers as to whether victims “make the distinctions between behavior and character” when blaming themselves (Frazier, 2000, p. 206). Frazier (1990) proposed that characterological and behavioral self-blame were highly related to each other and her later research confirmed this (Frazier, 2000). Subsequently, the two types were collapsed into one scale called general self-blame (Frazier, 2000). In contrast to these findings, a meta-analysis performed on self-attributions after trauma demonstrated that victims of sexual assault showed more behavioral self-blame than characterological self-blame (Littleton, Magee, et al., 2007). Because assault victims do not experience equal levels of both types of self-blame, Littleton, Magee, et al. (2007) suggest that the distinction between the two types of self-blame should be made.

Other studies also have shown that a distinction may need to be made between characterological and behavioral blame, as they are associated uniquely with coping after the rape and with different aspects of the rape experience. Koss, Figueredo, and Prince

(2002) noted that their findings supported Janoff-Bulman's (1979) model. Specifically, they noted that characterological self-blame was associated with more distress, and behavioral self-blame was associated with less distress. Ullman, Townsend, Filipas, and Starzynski (2007) found, in a study of victims of unwanted sexual experiences as well as rape, that PTSD symptoms had higher correlations with characterological self-blame than behavioral self-blame.

Additionally, studies have investigated how aspects of victimization are related to characterological and behavioral self-blame. Frazier and Seales (1997) found that levels of self-blame were different depending on the type of rape that occurred (acquaintance versus stranger). Frazier and Seales (1997) found that victims of acquaintance rape (victims knew/had met the perpetrator before) developed more behavioral self-blame than did victims of stranger rape. There were no significant differences found between the two groups regarding characterological self-blame. Arata (1999) investigated differences between rape victims who were and were not sexually abused as children. Overall, she found that both characterological and situational (behavioral) self-blame were correlated with distress. Further, Arata (1999) found a significant positive correlation between characterological self-blame and history of child sexual abuse and that a history of sexual abuse served as a predictor of characterological self-blame. Additionally, it was found that situational blame was more related to present distress (Arata, 1999). Interpretations of Arata's (1999) findings suggest that characterological self-blame may be present more in victims with a past history of sexual victimization, whereas situational self-blame may present itself more in victims of recent victimizations.

Additionally, overall self-blame, as well as the two different types of self-blame, seem to not only have associations with individual aspects of the rape experience, but also with broader variables such as societal reactions (e.g., sympathy) and social support (e.g., number of confidants). Ullman et al. (2007) investigated the relationships between social reactions and negative correlates of rape, such as overall self-blame and distress. Receiving more negative reactions (e.g., blaming the victim) from the people to whom the victims disclosed their rape experience was found to be associated with higher levels of self-blame and PTSD symptoms. In a longitudinal study, Ullman and Najdowski (2011), studying both victims of unwanted sexual experiences as well as rape, found that receiving negative reactions from others was related to higher levels of characterological self-blame. Behavioral self-blame, however, was not related to negative reactions (Ullman & Najdowski, 2011). Further, they found that positive social reactions were not related to a decrease in either characterological or behavioral self-blame.

In summary, self-blame is important to investigate as its presence has implications for victims of rape and unwanted sexual experiences. It has been demonstrated to be associated with higher rates of revictimization (Miller et al., 2007), as well as greater levels of distress (Frazier, 2003), PTSD symptomatology (Moor & Farchi, 2011), and maladaptive coping (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006). Although the research is mixed as to whether the distinction between behavioral and characterological self-blame should be made (Frazier, 1990, 2000; Koss et al., 2002; Littleton, Magee, et al., 2007), it is important to continue to investigate the differences between the two types in order to gain more knowledge about their contributions to victims' postrape adjustment. Other

variables associated with self-blame, such as whether victims acknowledged they were raped or not, also are important to study.

Acknowledgment

It has been theorized that rape victims can be divided into two separate groups: acknowledged and unacknowledged. Koss (1985) defines an unacknowledged rape victim as “a woman who has experienced a sexual assault that would legally qualify as rape but who does not conceptualize herself as a rape victim” (p. 195). Conversely, an acknowledged victim would be a victim whose experience meets the legal definition of rape, who views the incident as rape, and who labels herself as a rape victim. The SES was given to 2,016 university women to evaluate the prevalence of acknowledged and unacknowledged victims (Koss, 1985). Among victims, it was found that 57% acknowledged their experience as rape, and 43% did not acknowledge the experience as rape (Koss, 1985). A national study, which used different methodology than most studies on acknowledgment, reported that 46.5% acknowledged the incident as rape and 48.8% did not acknowledge it as rape (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003). Although the findings are mixed, a more recent review of unacknowledged rape suggests that, in general, unacknowledged victims seem to be more prevalent than acknowledged victims (Littleton, Rhatigan, & Axsom, 2007).

Acknowledgment status is associated with different variables in the rape victims' experiences. Research has shown that there are differences in the experience of rape for acknowledged and unacknowledged victims and that separating victims into two groups is justified (Bondurant, 2001; Layman et al., 1996; Littleton et al., 2006). Acknowledged

victims reported greater levels of force and resistance in their rapes than unacknowledged victims (Bondurant, 2001; Layman et al., 1996; Littleton et al., 2006). Victim responses and the presence of alcohol in the rape also seem to be important variables in whether or not victims acknowledged their experiences as rape (Layman et al., 1996). Alcohol was found to be present more in the rape experiences of unacknowledged victims than acknowledged victims (Layman et al., 1996; Littleton et al., 2006). Also, acknowledged victims were more likely to have given a response during the incident that indicated that they did not want to take part in sexual activity (Layman et al., 1996).

Additionally, it has been found that those who labeled their experience as rape have been found to “have had a less intimate relationship with their assailant” (Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger, & Halvorsen, 2003, p. 238). For example, Littleton and Henderson (2009) found a significant difference between the acknowledgment groups regarding relationship to the perpetrator, with 37% of unacknowledged victims and 26% of acknowledged victims reported having had a romantic relationship with the perpetrator. Further, 15.2% of unacknowledged victims and 22.2% of acknowledged victims reported little to no relationship with the perpetrator, but this difference was not statistically significant (Littleton & Henderson, 2009). Layman et al. (1996) found that 70% of unacknowledged and 45% of acknowledged victims had a romantic relationship with the perpetrator. Further, 7.5% of unacknowledged and 15% of acknowledged victims reported that the perpetrator was a stranger (Layman et al., 1996). Although the percentages are different, the difference between the two acknowledgment groups regarding their relationships to the perpetrator overall (i.e., stranger, acquaintance,

romantic, and relative) was not significant (Layman et al., 1996). Kahn et al. (2003) found a similar pattern to Layman et al. (1996). Kahn et al. (2003) found a significant difference between the two acknowledgment groups regarding relationship to the perpetrator, with 28% of acknowledged and 55% of unacknowledged victims reporting a romantic relationship with their perpetrator. Though not always significant, the pattern suggests that perpetration by a romantic partner is more prevalent in unacknowledged victims, whereas perpetration by a stranger is more common in acknowledged victims.

Not only do acknowledged and unacknowledged victims have different rape experiences, but acknowledgment status also is differentially associated with various negative outcomes postrape (Littleton et al., 2006). Littleton et al. (2009), investigating the revictimization risk of the two acknowledgment groups, found that unacknowledged sexual assault victims were more likely to experience another rape attempt during the 6 months following the initial assessment. No significant differences were found, however, between the two acknowledgment groups regarding completed rape (Littleton et al., 2009). Harned (2004) investigated the relationship between labeling and distress within path models. Though labeling was associated with distress, the best fit model demonstrated that distress was a result of the unwanted sexual experience itself, not the label (Harned, 2004). Clements and Ogle (2009) found that, compared to acknowledged victims, unacknowledged victims had more psychological distress. Although Littleton et al. (2006) did not find differences between the acknowledgment groups for general distress, they and Layman et al. (1996) found that acknowledged victims reported more PTSD symptomatology than did unacknowledged victims. Additionally, it has been

reported that acknowledged victims had a greater number of and “more intense health complaints than did unacknowledged victims” (Conoscenti & McNally, 2006, p. 376). The data, therefore, are mixed regarding the relationship between acknowledgment status and negative correlates of rape.

Acknowledgment and Self-Blame

Self-blame is another negative outcome that could relate to acknowledgment status. Researchers have found that both acknowledgment status (Clements & Ogle, 2009) and behavioral self-blame (Frazier, 2003) are associated with higher levels of distress. Therefore, the possible association of these two variables has been investigated. Layman et al. (1996) found that there were no differences between the two acknowledgment groups on attribution of blame for the rape. In another study, though, it was found that there was a difference in self-blame and that unacknowledged victims reported higher levels of behavioral self-blame than acknowledged victims (Frazier & Seales, 1997). In a study conducted by Peterson and Muehlenhard (2011), victims reported lower self-blame after they labeled their experience as rape. Although the findings are mixed regarding how and if acknowledgment and self-blame are related, the possible relationship between the two is still important to study because of their shared association with distress.

Not only may acknowledgment status have a relationship with overall self-blame, but the two different types of self-blame may be uniquely associated with acknowledgment status. Bondurant (2001) found differences between the two different types of blame in rape victims. She found that acknowledged victims exhibited more

behavioral and characterological self-blame than unacknowledged victims. Overall, she found that behavioral self-blame predicted acknowledgment status better than characterological self-blame. Frazier and Seales (1997) found significant differences between the acknowledgment groups regarding behavioral self-blame. Contrary to Bondurant's (2001) findings, Frazier and Seales (1997) found that unacknowledged victims exhibited higher levels of behavioral self-blame than acknowledged victims. No significant differences were found between the two groups regarding characterological self-blame (Frazier & Seales, 1997). Not only is self-blame a possible negative outcome of the rape itself, it also can be affected by societal responses to rape victims.

Acknowledgment, Self-Blame, and Social Reactions

Pitts and Schwartz (1997) studied victims of rape, both acknowledged and unacknowledged, to investigate the relationship peer support and peer reactions have with self-blame. They reported that the victims' self-blame was affected by their peers' reactions (Pitts & Schwartz, 1997). Specifically, victims tended to not acknowledge their rape in cases where peers blamed the victims for the rape or when peers supported the victims' existing self-blame (Pitts & Schwartz, 1997). This finding shows that not only is self-blame related to social reactions from others (Ullman et al., 2007), but to acknowledgment status as well. Along with self-blame and social reactions, another variable that differs between the acknowledgment groups is the type of rape script they have. Littleton, Rhatigan, et al. (2007) noted in a review of the research, that script type may be associated with how victims label their experience.

Rape Scripts

Scripts are a way for people to conceptualize a social situation and how it should be conducted. For example, a sexual script is defined as “cultural messages which define what counts as sex, how to recognize sexual situations and what to do during sexual encounters” (Frith, 2009, p. 100). Therefore, individuals’ rape scripts would include the aspects of what they think rape is, how to recognize it, and what to do during it. These aspects of rape scripts can vary among victims, and how they interpret their experience can be different from one another.

Rape scripts and rape myths may interact with each other (Littleton, 2011; Ryan, 2011). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) define rape myths as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). One measure of rape myths is the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). This scale measures seven categories of rape myths: “she asked for it,” “it wasn’t really rape,” “he didn’t mean to,” “she wanted it,” “she lied,” “rape is a trivial event,” and “rape is deviant event” (Payne et al., 1999, p. 51). Other examples of rape myths are “a woman who initiates a sexual encounter will probably have sex with anybody” and “a nice woman will be offended or embarrassed by dirty jokes” (Burt, 1980, p. 222). In a scenario study conducted by Sleath and Bull (2012), it was found that higher rape myth acceptance (RMA) in police officers predicted blaming of the victim. Not only can rape myth acceptance have an effect on outsiders’ perceptions of whether the victim is to blame

(Sleath & Bull, 2012), but it also may affect how the victims conceptualize and label their experience (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004).

One reason that RMA may be associated with victim blaming is the just world theory (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009). Again, the just world theory implies that people are good and we live in a just world, so when an innocent person is hurt or victimized, individuals must find a way to justify it while still holding their belief (Grubb & Turner, 2012). In the context of rape victims, “to believe that rape victims are innocent and not deserving of their fate is incongruous with the general belief in a just world; therefore in order to avoid cognitive dissonance, rape myths serve to protect an individual’s belief in a just world” (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 446). In other words, people blame the victim in order to sustain their own beliefs in a just world. Sleath and Bull (2012) found in their study of police officers that belief in a just world significantly predicted blaming of the victim.

Rape myth acceptance also has been found to be associated with acknowledgment status in rape victims. Peterson and Muehlenhard (2004) found that if victims accepted certain myths (e.g., she was a tease) and if they believed the characteristics of that myth also were present in their rape (e.g., she was a tease when she got raped), then they were less likely to acknowledge their experience as rape. Another myth that was associated with labeling was one that addressed victims fighting back. If victims believed that rapes involve physical resistance and they did not fight back, then they themselves were less likely to acknowledge their experience as rape (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004).

There are many different types of scripts individuals can hold about the process of rape. Two of the most widely studied scripts are acquaintance rape scripts, also called seduction scripts (Ryan, 2011), and “real rape” scripts (Horvath & Brown, 2009), also called blitz rape scripts (Ryan, 1988). Elements of acquaintance rape scripts include the rape: a) occurring indoors, b) involving the consumption of alcohol, and c) being committed by someone the victim has met before (Ryan, 2011). On the other hand, blitz rape scripts are much more violent, with the rape being perpetrated by a stranger and the rapist using a high level of force (Horvath & Brown, 2009; Ryan, 1988, 2011).

Rape Scripts and Acknowledgment

The type of rape script held by the victim also could be related to acknowledgment status (Littleton, Rhatigan, et al., 2007). Not acknowledging the rape may be due to “a mismatch between a victim’s rape script and her rape experience” (Littleton, Rhatigan, et al., 2007, p. 68). Thus, Littleton, Rhatigan, et al. (2007) imply that the more a victim’s rape script is different from her actual experience, the less likely she is to acknowledge. The type of script victims endorsed (blitz versus acquaintance) may influence how they perceive their experience. This perception can then affect how they label what happened to them. Bondurant (2001) and Kahn, Mathie, and Torgler (1994) found that unacknowledged victims were more likely than acknowledged victims to have a script that resembles that of a blitz rape script. Further, it was found in both studies that acknowledged victims were more likely to have a script that resembled acquaintance rape scripts (Bondurant, 2001).

Rape Scripts and Self-Blame

Although little research has investigated the relationship between the two, the type of rape script held by victims could be associated with their level of self-blame. Not only do rape scripts and self-blame both have a relationship with acknowledgment status (Bondurant, 2001), but both are linked through the relationship a victim has with the perpetrator. Victim-perpetrator relationship plays a large role in the difference in rape scripts between the two acknowledgment groups, with unacknowledged victims reporting the perpetrator being a stranger in their rape scripts more often than acknowledged victims (Kahn et al., 1994). Not only does the relationship of victim and perpetrator differ among the scripts of the two acknowledgment groups, different levels of self-blame have been found to be associated with the type of victim-perpetrator relationship that was reported. Specifically, victims of acquaintance rape reported higher levels of behavioral self-blame than victims of stranger rape (Frazier & Seales, 1997). Due to the shared relationships among these variables, rape scripts and self-blame also may hold an association with each other.

Summary

Rape has been shown in previous research to be a concern for women in the general population (Roze & Koss, 2001), as well as women attending universities (Fisher et al., 2000; Gross et al., 2006). It may be a very distressing event for victims, and it is associated with various mental health issues such as PTSD and depression (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Rape is associated with other negative variables including increased risk of revictimization (Littleton et al., 2009). Unwanted sexual experiences

also are associated with negative correlates, including substance use, psychological distress, and school-academic withdrawal (Harned, 2004). Due to the negative correlates of unwanted sexual experiences and rape, it is important to study the variables that play a role in how victims perceive and cope with what has happened to them.

Self-blame is a widely studied negative outcome of rape. Two types of self-blame have been proposed in the research: behavioral and characterological (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Most researchers tend to agree that both types of self-blame are associated with distress in victims (Frazier, 1990; Meyer & Taylor, 1986; Ullman et al., 2007). Although some researchers (e.g., Frazier, 1990, 2000) suggest that there are not distinguishable differences between the two types of self-blame, others have found that they are distinct from each other (Littleton, Magee, et al., 2007; Ullman et al., 2007).

Additionally, self-blame has been found to be associated with acknowledgment status. The research is mixed, though, on which acknowledgment group has more self-blame (Bondurant, 2001; Frazier & Seales, 1997). Some have found that unacknowledged victims have more self-blame than acknowledged victims (Frazier & Seales, 1997; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011). In contrast, Bondurant (2001) found that acknowledged victims had higher levels of self-blame than unacknowledged victims. Differences also have been found between the two acknowledgment groups and the two types of self-blame. Bondurant (2001) found that both types of self-blame were higher in acknowledged victims than unacknowledged victims. In contrast, Frazier and Seales (1997) found that unacknowledged victims have higher levels of behavioral self-blame

than acknowledged victims, but no significant differences were found regarding characterological self-blame.

Relationships also have been found between rape scripts and acknowledgment status. Blitz and acquaintance rape scripts are two types of scripts that have been widely studied. Blitz rape scripts involve a stranger, whereas acquaintance rape scripts involve someone the victims know. Unacknowledged victims are more likely to possess elements of a blitz script than acknowledged victims (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn et al., 1994); acknowledged victims are more likely to have elements in their scripts that resemble acquaintance rape (Bondurant, 2001).

Though not previously researched, the type of rape script held may be associated with the victims' self-blame. Self-blame has been found to be associated with societal reactions (Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman et al., 2007). Rape scripts (Crome & McCabe, 2001) also may be associated with societal views and myths about rape. Rape scripts (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn et al., 1994) and self-blame (Frazier & Seales, 1997; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011) are both associated with acknowledgment status. Although Bondurant (2001) found that acknowledged victims had more self-blame, some research suggests that unacknowledged victims have higher levels of self-blame (Frazier & Seales, 1997; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011) as well as a higher endorsement of elements found in blitz rape scripts (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn et al., 1994).

Given these findings, it was hypothesized that the relationship rape scripts have with acknowledgment status may contribute to the level and the specific type of self-blame victims hold. Acknowledged victims, who endorse elements of acquaintance

scripts more than unacknowledged victims (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn et al., 1994), may experience less self-blame because their script matches their experience. They are able to put more blame on the rapist, because they are aware that a rape can be perpetrated by someone they know and not involve a high level of force or resistance. If they do experience self-blame, they may be more likely to blame a flaw in their character rather than their behavior. Unacknowledged victims, who endorse elements of blitz scripts more often than acknowledged victims (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn et al., 1994), may experience higher levels of self-blame, because their experience does not match what they think a typical rape is. Therefore, they put more blame on themselves, because they are not able to blame the rapist due to having a script that does not match their own experience. Unacknowledged victims also may be more likely to have higher levels of behavioral self-blame than characterological, because they may blame the behaviors they engaged in before the rape occurred. In other words, they do not perceive the incident as a result of being a bad person, but due to putting themselves in that situation.

Although acknowledgment status may contribute to the development of self-blame in victims, it was hypothesized in the current study that rape scripts would contribute above and beyond acknowledgment status in the prediction of self-blame. A rape script is already present before the rape, whereas acknowledgment may occur during or after the rape. Therefore, the rape script would make a larger contribution to the victims' perception of the rape than acknowledgment status. When aspects in the victims' experience of rape did not coincide with their rape script, this mismatch would be a larger predictor of self-blame than acknowledgment status.

Purpose of the Study

Relationships between acknowledgment status and self-blame (Frazier & Seales, 1997; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011) as well as acknowledgment status and rape scripts (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn et al., 1994) have been investigated previously, but no one has studied associations among all three variables. The main purpose of the current study was to investigate further the possible relationship between self-blame and the rape script of victims. Additionally, the current study investigated whether the type of rape script held by victims contributed above and beyond acknowledgment status to the prediction of self-blame. Due to the findings being mixed on how acknowledgment status and the two types of self-blame are related (Bondurant, 2001; Frazier & Seales, 1997), another purpose of the study was to further investigate the associations of the two different types of self-blame with acknowledgment status.

Many studies on rape have only included experiences that met the legal definition of rape (e.g., Layman et al., 1996; McMullin & White, 2006). Similar to Harned (2004), the current study's population was broadened to include victims of any unwanted sexual experience, not just those who reported experiences that matched the legal definition of rape.

Hypotheses

- 1) It was hypothesized that acknowledged victims would have lower blitz rape script scores than unacknowledged victims.
- 2) It was hypothesized that acknowledged victims would have less overall self-blame than unacknowledged victims. In regards to the two types of self-blame, it

was hypothesized that acknowledged victims would have higher scores on the characterological self-blame scale than unacknowledged victims. Also, unacknowledged victims would have higher scores on the behavioral self-blame scale than acknowledged victims.

- 3) It was hypothesized that blitz rape script scores would correlate positively with overall self-blame. In regards to the two types of self-blame, it was hypothesized that higher blitz script scores would have a positive correlation with behavioral self-blame and a negative correlation with characterological self-blame.
- 4) The relationships among the study variables were further explored through regression analyses.
 - a. It was hypothesized that lower blitz script score would predict more acknowledgment.
 - b. It was hypothesized that the blitz script score along with acknowledgment status would predict the presence of overall self-blame better than acknowledgment status alone.
 - c. It was hypothesized that the blitz script score along with acknowledgment status would predict the presence of behavioral self-blame better than acknowledgment status alone.
 - d. Additionally, it was expected that the blitz script score along with acknowledgment status would predict the presence of characterological self-blame better than acknowledgment status alone.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Four hundred forty participants (33% men and 67% women) were recruited from the psychology research pool at a large university in the United States. For the purposes of the current study, only women who had an unwanted sexual experience were included in the analyses ($N = 170$). Among these participants, 46% were Caucasian, 42% were African-American, and 12% indicated “other.” The majority of participants fell within the 18 to 21 year-old age range. Participants’ demographic information is presented in Table 1. Participants received course credit or extra credit for their participation in the study. Additionally, the study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Middle Tennessee State University (see Appendix A). Further, permission was granted by the Institutional Review Board to increase the number of participants from 400 to 500 (see Appendix B).

Measures

Demographic information form. Participants completed a form that inquired about their sex, age range (e.g., 18 to 21, 22 to 25, 26 to 29, 30 to 33, and over 33), and ethnicity (e.g., African-American, Caucasian, and other). See Appendix C.

Blitz Script Questionnaire. The Blitz Script Questionnaire is a 23-item questionnaire used to determine if the participant holds a blitz rape script (Bondurant, 1995). The questionnaire developed by Bondurant (1995) was created based on data reported by Kahn et al. (1994). Kahn et al. (1994) asked their sample of participants to

Table 1

Demographic Information of Women Participants with Unwanted Sexual Experiences

	%	<i>n</i>
Ethnicity		
African-American	42	71
Caucasian	46	79
Other	12	20
Age		
18-21 years	83	141
22-25 years	13	22
26-29 years	2	4
30-33 years	0	0
Over 33 years	2	3

N = 170.

write out what they thought a rape included. From this information, Kahn et al. (1994) coded characteristics that were found in the participants' rape scripts. Bondurant (1995) took these coded characteristics and put them into a questionnaire format. For the first two items, the participants circled which one they think a rape includes. The rest of the questionnaire asked the participants to respond with either a 1 or a 2, where a 1 indicates *yes, this is part of a typical rape experience*, and a 2 indicates *no, this is not part of a typical rape experience*. High scores on the questionnaire indicate greater endorsement of a blitz rape script.

Due to concerns brought forth by the Institutional Review Board, the current questionnaire was modified to say "From your perspective, do you believe a rapist..." rather than "A typical rapist..." An example of one of the modified items is, "From your perspective, do you believe a rapist uses verbal coercion?" Additionally, the word "typical" was taken out of the responses, and they instead indicated, "*yes, this is part of a rape experience*" or "*no, this is not part of a rape experience.*" To date, no data have been collected on the reliability and validity of the Blitz Rape Questionnaire (Bondurant, 2001). Participants in Kahn et al.'s (1994) study, which the questionnaire is based on, gave an open-ended description of what they thought occurred before, during, and after a rape. Kahn et al. (1994) then had raters code the participants' responses. The agreement rate found between the raters ranged from 89.3% to 92%. The coded characteristics were broken into categories with the agreement rate between raters ranging from 77.5% to 97.5%. This demonstrates that the interrater reliability for the coded scripts is moderate to high, and it could be viable to use the categories and coded characteristics they found

to form a script questionnaire. The current study found a Cronbach's alpha of .43 for the Blitz Script Questionnaire. This implies that the modified measure used in the current study has low internal consistency.

Sexual Experiences Survey (SES). The revised SES (Koss et al., 2007) was used to gain information about individuals' sexual experiences. For the current study, the short form of the SES was used. The revised SES includes 10 questions that inquire about unwanted sexual experiences. For seven questions, participants checked whether they had an experience described in the question *never, once, twice, or three or more times*. They also indicated whether they have had the experience described in the question in the last 12 months or since age 14 years old (but not in the last 12 months). The current study included experiences victims had since the age of 14 years old as well as in the last 12 months. An example of a question from the SES is, "Someone fondled, kissed, or rubbed up against the private areas of my body (lips, breast/chest, crotch or butt) or removed some of my clothes without my consent (*but did not attempt sexual penetration*) by . . ." (Koss et al., 2007, p. 368). The participants then could check one or more of the five descriptors under each presented situation. An example of a descriptor that may have been chosen by participants is, "Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to" (Koss et al., 2007, p. 368). Each descriptor corresponds with one of the six levels of sexual victimization (none, sexual contact, attempted coercion, coercion, attempted rape, and completed rape) measured by the SES (Koss et al., 2007).

Some of the descriptive questions at the end of SES that inquire about the sex of the participant, age, and sex of the perpetrator were taken out due to redundancy and applicability to the current study. The SES was used to evaluate acknowledgment status of the victims in the sample (Koss et al., 2007). The last question on the SES states, “Have you ever been raped?” (Koss et al., 2007, p. 370). Participants indicated either “yes” or “no.” In order to be able to generalize the results to a broader population, a question was added to the SES that states, “Have you ever had an unwanted sexual experience?” Participants indicated either “yes” or “no.”

If a participant had any checkmarks in questions one through seven (i.e., questions regarding specific sexual experiences) on the SES, then she was considered to have had an unwanted sexual experience. If a participant marked any item on the SES that indicated vaginal/anal intercourse or fellatio as a result of force used by the perpetrator or without her consent, then she was considered to have experienced rape. Acknowledgment status was determined by participants’ responses to questions on the SES. Participants who answered “no” to having an unwanted sexual experience or rape, but had checkmarks on the SES that indicated an unwanted sexual experience or rape, were considered unacknowledged victims. Participants who answered “yes” to having an unwanted sexual experience or rape, and had checkmarks on the SES that indicated an unwanted sexual experience or rape, were considered acknowledged victims.

Reliability and validity data were gathered using a sample of 448 men and women in college (Koss & Gidycz, 1985). The internal consistency of the SES was high, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .74 for women. Test-retest reliability also was evaluated a week

apart, and it was found that the average item agreement was 93% for the two times the SES was given (Koss & Gidycz, 1985). Validity of the SES's ability to evaluate victimization level also is strong. Koss and Gidycz (1985) found a significant positive correlation of .73 between the responses women gave on the SES and what they related in person during an interview. In a review of the reliability studies on the SES (Cecil & Matson, 2006), it was concluded that, in general, the SES has a high Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Using a different method of obtaining reliability data than other studies that assessed the psychometrics of the SES, Cecil and Matson (2006) found that the SES has a Cronbach's alpha of .80 in a sample of 249 female adolescent African-Americans. Although the findings from Cecil and Matson's (2006) study do not apply to the population in the current study, it demonstrated that the SES is generalizable to many populations. The current study found a Cronbach's alpha of .93 for the set of questions assessing experiences in the last 12 months. Additionally, a Cronbach's alpha of .94 was found for the set of questions assessing experiences since age 14 years old. Both of these alpha coefficients demonstrate that the SES has strong internal consistency in the present study.

Modified Assault Characteristics Questionnaire. This measure was derived from Littleton et al. (2006). They created it based on a questionnaire used by Layman et al. (1996). The questionnaire was constructed in order to gain more information about the circumstances surrounding victims' experiences with unwanted sexual contact involving intercourse since the age of 14 years old.

The original questionnaire is 21 questions (Littleton, 2006), but the current study used a modified version that only included four of the questions. The modified questionnaire inquired about the victims' relationship with the perpetrator (e.g., acquaintance or stranger), sex of the perpetrator, whether they (the victims) were under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and if force was used during the assault. Also, instead of asking about experiences with unwanted sexual intercourse, it asked victims to "please take a few minutes to think about your experience or experiences with unwanted sexual contact." Nonvictims (those who did not have checkmarks indicating an unwanted sexual experience on the SES) were asked to complete the questionnaire based on their perceptions of what they think an unwanted sexual experience included.

Rape Attribution Questionnaire (RAQ) (Frazier, 2003, 2004). The RAQ is a 25-item questionnaire used to assess self-blame in victims of sexual assault. The 25 items are divided into five scales: characterological self-blame, behavioral self-blame, blaming society, blaming chance, and blaming the rapist (Frazier, 2003). For the purpose of the current study, analyses only included the scores for the characterological self-blame and behavioral self-blame scales. The current study also obtained a combined score of the responses to the characterological and behavioral self-blame items to generate an overall self-blame score. The characterological and self-blame scales included five items each (Frazier, 2003). Therefore, the overall self-blame scale included a total of 10 items. An example of an item found on the characterological self-blame scale is "I am just the victim type" (Frazier, 2004, p. 1). An example of an item found on the behavioral self-blame scale is "I used poor judgment" (Frazier, 2003, p. 1260). Each item is rated on a 5-

point scale with 1 being *never* and 5 being *very often* (Frazier, 2003). The current study used a modified, more gender neutral, version of the questionnaire. Questions that included the words “she” or “woman” were changed to “people” or “he/she.” Nonvictims (those who did not have checkmarks indicating an unwanted sexual experience on the SES) were instructed to complete the questionnaire based on how often they think a survivor of an unwanted sexual experience has had each of the thoughts.

Frazier (2004) conducted a study of 171 female sexual assault victims across four different time periods. The RAQ was given 2 weeks, 2 months, 6 months, and 12 months after the sexual assault occurred. All of the scales had moderate to high internal consistency with alpha coefficients ranging from .68 to .92 for all the scales across all four time periods. For the behavioral scale, alpha coefficients ranged from .84 to .91 across all four time periods with a mean alpha coefficient of .87. For the characterological scale, alpha coefficients ranged from .81 to .82 across all four time periods with a mean alpha coefficient of .82. When combining the characterological and behavioral scales, alpha coefficients ranged from .88 to .90 across all four time periods with a mean alpha coefficient of .89.

Frazier (2004) reported that the RAQ also had moderate to high test-retest reliability across two time periods (2 weeks to 6 weeks and 6 months to 12 months). Test-retest reliability for the behavioral scale was .68 for the first time period and .62 for the second time period. The characterological scale had test-retest reliability coefficients of .75 for the first time period and .70 for the second time period. The combined characterological and behavioral scale had a coefficient of .72 for the first time period

and .68 for the second time period. Intercorrelation coefficients of all five scales across all four time periods ranged from .20 to .51 (Frazier, 2004).

A second study, which included 135 women who were sexual assault survivors, assessed self-blame with the RAQ (Frazier, 2004). The mean time since the assault was 16 years. Frazier (2004) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .87 for the behavioral scale, .78 for the characterological scale, and .88 for the overall (summation of behavioral and characterological scales) scale. The mean scale intercorrelation coefficients were .48 for the five separate scales.

The present study found Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .85 for the behavioral scale, .68 for the characterological scale, and .85 for the overall scale. This suggests that even with the changes that were made to the measure in order to generalize it to nonvictims, the scale continues to demonstrate adequate internal consistency and reliability for victims.

Procedure

The number of participants in each research session ranged from 1 to 18. Each participant was given a consent form (see Appendix D) to fill out at the start of the study. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to gain information about their unwanted sexual experiences before and during college. To ensure the participants' privacy and confidentiality, none of the surveys had the participants' name written on them.

After consent was obtained, each participant filled out five surveys. First, participants filled out a form that inquired about basic demographic information. Next,

participants filled out the Blitz Script Questionnaire (Bondurant, 1995, 2001), the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) (Koss et al., 2007), the Assault Characteristics Questionnaire (Littleton et al., 2006), and the Rape Attribution Questionnaire (Frazier, 2003, 2004). All participants completed the surveys in the order listed above. At the end of the SES, participants were instructed to look back on their answers. Participants who indicated any unwanted sexual experience on the SES were asked to follow “Directions #1,” which instructed them to complete the remaining surveys based on their own experiences. Participants who did not indicate an unwanted sexual experience on the SES were asked to follow “Directions #2,” which instructed them to complete the remaining surveys based on their perceptions of what might occur during and after an unwanted sexual experience. All participants received debriefing information about the purpose of the study and resources to contact if they would like to talk to someone further about any unwanted sexual experiences that they have had (see Appendix E).

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Descriptive Data

Of the 294 women who completed the questionnaire, 58% ($N = 170$) were victims of an unwanted sexual experience (i.e., marking any item on the SES), and 31% ($N = 90$) had an experience that met the legal definition of rape used by the SES (i.e., marking any item that indicated vaginal/anal intercourse or fellatio as a result of force used by the perpetrator or without consent from the victim). Regarding the women who had an unwanted sexual experience, 85% ($N = 145$) were acknowledged, and 15% ($N = 25$) were unacknowledged.

As can be seen in Table 2, virtually all of the victims in both acknowledgment groups had met the perpetrator prior to the experience, with only two victims (both acknowledged) reporting that the perpetrator was a stranger. Differences between the two acknowledgment groups regarding the use of alcohol and illegal drugs during the experience were investigated. The chi-square test of independence was conducted, and it indicated that acknowledged (47%) and unacknowledged (26%) victims were not significantly different from each other regarding the use of alcohol during the experience, $\chi^2(1) = 3.59, p = .058$. Similarly, using the likelihood ratio chi-square value due to the expected frequency being less than five in one of the cells, it was found that the acknowledged (18%) and unacknowledged (13%) victims were not significantly different from each other regarding the use of marijuana or other illegal substances during the experience, $\chi^2(1) = 0.27, p = .606$.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Characteristics Surrounding the Unwanted Sexual Experiences

	Acknowledged		Unacknowledged	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Relationship to Perpetrator				
Stranger	1	2	0	0
Just Met	19	27	4	1
Acquaintance	21	30	13	3
Friend	26	37	26	6
Dating casually	9	13	26	6
Steady date	6	9	9	2
Romantic partner	12	18	22	5
Relative	11	16	9	2
Presence of alcohol	47	68	26	6
Presence of illegal substances	18	26	13	3
Level of force				
None	18	26	22	5
Non-verbal threats; intimidation	47	68	39	9
Verbal threats to harm the victim or others	16	23	4	1
Twisting the victim's arm or holding the victim down	46	66	35	8
Hitting or slapping	8	12	4	1
Choking or beating	6	9	0	0
Showing or using a weapon	5	7	0	0
Other	28	41	26	6

Note: *N* ranged from 167 to 168. Acknowledged *n* ranged from 144 to 145. Unacknowledged *n* = 23.

The chi-square test of independence was conducted to determine if there was a difference between the acknowledged and unacknowledged victim groups regarding whether any type of force (e.g., nonphysical, physical) was used by the perpetrator during the experience. Due to one of the cells having an expected frequency less than five, the likelihood ratio chi-square value was reported. No difference was found between acknowledgment groups regarding the use of force, $\chi^2(1) = 0.26, p = .609$.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis one predicted that acknowledged victims would have significantly lower blitz rape script scores than unacknowledged victims. Means and standard deviations of the scores on the Blitz Script Questionnaire were calculated for both acknowledgment groups (see Table 3). A *t*-test was conducted between the two acknowledgment groups to determine if there was a significant difference between the groups regarding blitz rape scripts scores. Due to the unequal number of participants in the unacknowledged and acknowledged groups, the Satterthwaite Approximation was used. It was found that there was not a significant difference between the two acknowledgment groups regarding blitz rape script scores, $t(34) = 1.51, d = .32, p = .14$.

Hypothesis two predicted that unacknowledged victims would have significantly higher levels of overall and behavioral self-blame than acknowledged victims. Further, it was predicted that acknowledged victims would have significantly higher levels of characterological self-blame than unacknowledged victims. Means and standard deviations of the scores on the three self-blame scales were calculated for both groups (see Table 3).

Table 3

Comparisons of Study Variables by Acknowledgment Status

Variable	Acknowledged		Unacknowledged		$t(df)^a$	p	d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Blitz script score	37.73	2.60	38.56	2.52	1.51 (34)	.141	.32
Overall self-blame	28.21	8.77	22.43	6.44	-3.76 (37)	.001	.75
Characterological self-blame	11.35	4.09	8.91	2.29	-4.14 (48)	.0001	.74
Behavioral self-blame	16.91	5.82	13.67	4.74	-2.99 (36)	.005	.61

Note. Acknowledged n ranged from 141 to 144. Unacknowledged n ranged from 23 to 25. N ranged from 164 to 169.

^a t and df were calculated using the Satterthwaite Approximation.

Hypothesis two was analyzed by conducting three *t*-tests. Due to an unequal number of participants in the unacknowledged and acknowledged groups, the Satterthwaite Approximation was used. Further, the alpha level of .05 was divided by three ($.05/3 = .016$) due to conducting three *t*-tests on the same construct. Significant differences were found between the two acknowledgment groups regarding overall self-blame, $t(37) = -3.76, d = .75, p < .001$, characterological self-blame, $t(48) = -4.14, d = .74, p < .0001$, as well as behavioral self-blame, $t(36) = -2.99, d = .61, p = .005$. Compared to unacknowledged victims, acknowledged victims had significantly higher levels of all three types of self-blame. Exploratory analyses were conducted to investigate whether there was a significant difference between the two types of self-blame (characterological and behavioral) in the overall sample. It was shown that, overall, victims had significantly higher levels of behavioral self-blame ($M = 16.44, SD = 5.78$) than characterological self-blame ($M = 11.01, SD = 3.98$), $t(163) = 14.63, d = 1.14, p < .0001$.

Hypothesis three predicted that blitz rape script score would be positively correlated with overall and behavioral self-blame and negatively correlated with characterological self-blame. Zero-order correlations were calculated to determine the strength and direction of relationships between the blitz rape script score and all three types of self-blame (overall, characterological, and behavioral). As can be seen in Table 4, no significant relationships were found between blitz rape script score and any of the three types of self-blame. Therefore, Dunn and Clark's *z* (Dunn & Clark, 1971) was not calculated to compare the correlation of blitz script score and characterological self-blame with the correlation of blitz script score and behavioral self-blame.

Table 4

Summary of Intercorrelations among Study Variables

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Acknowledgment status	---	-.114	.231**	.212**	.199*
2. Blitz script score		---	-.045	-.052	-.036
3. Overall self-blame			---	.838***	.927***
4. Characterological self-blame				---	.572***
5. Behavioral Self-blame					---

N ranged from 164 to 170.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .0001$.

Hypothesis four examined whether blitz script score was a significant predictor of acknowledgment status, as well as if it contributed above and beyond acknowledgment status to the prediction of the presence of the three types of self-blame. Due to blitz script score not correlating with acknowledgment status or any of the three types of self-blame, hypothesis four was not analyzed.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Koss et al.'s (1987) landmark study, as well as more current research (Harned, 2004; Kilpatrick et al., 2007), demonstrates that sexual victimization is prevalent among college women. Sexual victimization also has been found to be associated with various negative outcomes. One of the most widely studied negative outcomes of rape is self-blame (Frazier, 2000; Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011). The current study explored a variable that has been found in previous research to be associated with self-blame (i.e., acknowledgment status), as well as a variable that has not been investigated previously as a correlate of self-blame (i.e., blitz rape script endorsement) in female victims of unwanted sexual experiences. Similar to some of the previous research on self-blame (Bondurant, 2001; Frazier & Seales, 1997), the current study investigated overall self-blame as well as behavioral and characterological self-blame separately. Further, similar to Harned (2004), the present study included victims of any unwanted sexual experience, not just rape.

The prevalence rates of rape and unwanted sexual experiences were investigated in the present study. Results from the responses on the SES indicated that 31% of women reported an experience since the age of 14 years old that met the legal definition of rape. This is higher than most studies of rape, which report prevalence rates ranging from 1.7% (Fisher et al., 2000) to 19% (Gross et al., 2006). Using a similar methodology to the current study, Koss et al. (1987) found that 15.4% of women in their study reported a rape experience. Further, the current study found that 58% of women reported some type of unwanted sexual experience (including rape) since the age of 14 years old. This

also is higher than previous studies of unwanted sexual experiences such as Harned (2004), who found 34% of the women in her study reported an unwanted sexual experience, and Gross et al. (2006), who found 27% of women in their study reported an unwanted sexual experience. Similar to the present study, Koss et al. (1987) found that 53.7% of female participants reported some type of sexual victimization. Differences in some of the prevalence rates may be due to the time frame the studies were addressing, as well as definitional and situational variables surrounding the experience. Both Fisher et al. (2000) and Gross et al. (2006) only included experiences that had occurred since the participant entered college, whereas the current study and Koss et al.'s (1987) study included experiences that had occurred since the age of 14 years old. Additionally, Harned (2004) only included women who reported the experience being perpetrated by someone they were dating, and further only included women who had reported dating while in college. The current study included experiences perpetrated by strangers, acquaintances, romantic partners, relatives, etc. Because of these differences, it is reasonable that the current study would find higher rates of prevalence than some of the previous studies.

Most of the participants in the current study who had an unwanted sexual experience were acknowledged victims (85%), with only 15% of women not acknowledging the incidents as unwanted sexual experiences. The rate of acknowledgment in the current study is higher than what is typically found in past studies, but this could be due to the inclusion of victims of unwanted sexual experiences as well as rape. Past studies on acknowledgment have generally only included victims of rape

(Bondurant, 2001; Layman et al., 1996), and these studies have found that unacknowledged victims tend to be more prevalent than acknowledged victims (Littleton, Rhatigan, et al., 2007). Koss (1985), studying only victims of rape, but using a similar methodology and assessing the same time frame as the present study, found that there were more women who acknowledged their rape experience (57%) than did not (43%). Her rate of acknowledgment, however, was still lower than what was found in the current study. Again, the differences in prevalence rates of acknowledgment between the current study and previous studies may be due to the inclusion of a broader range of unwanted sexual experiences in the current study. Further, the current study included the option of defining the experience as unwanted, which also could have contributed to these findings. For example, rape victims in this study may have been more willing to define the experience as an unwanted sexual experience as opposed to rape.

Regarding relationship to the perpetrator, most of the participants reported that the perpetrator was someone they knew, and only 1% of participants reported the perpetrator was a stranger. This is consistent with Bondurant (2001), who found that most of the rape victims in her study knew the perpetrator, as well as Gross et al. (2006), who found that only 2% of sexual coercion victims reported that the perpetrator was a stranger. Additionally, in the present study, no differences were found between the acknowledgment groups regarding the use of alcohol or drugs during the experience. This is in contrast to Littleton and Henderson (2009), who found that unacknowledged victims reported more binge drinking in their experience than acknowledged victims. Further, Littleton et al. (2006) found differences between the two acknowledgment

groups regarding “heavy drinking” by the perpetrator and victim. Layman et al. (1996), measuring the presence of alcohol and drugs in a similar manner as the current study (presence/no presence), found there were no significant differences regarding those variables between the two acknowledgment groups. In contrast to many studies that have found differences between the two acknowledgment groups concerning level of force (Bondurant, 2001; Layman et al., 1996; Littleton et al., 2006), there were no significant differences found between the two groups regarding the presence of force. The inclusion of unwanted sexual experiences in the current study may have contributed to this finding.

The present study found differences between the two acknowledgment groups regarding the three types of self-blame. Acknowledged victims were found to have higher levels of all three types of self-blame than unacknowledged victims. This finding was in contrast to what was hypothesized, specifically that unacknowledged victims would have higher levels of overall and behavioral self-blame than acknowledged victims. These findings support research conducted by Bondurant (2001), who also found that acknowledged victims had higher levels of both behavioral and characterological self-blame than unacknowledged victims. Though results of the present study were similar to Bondurant (2001), they were not consistent with other studies (e.g., Frazier & Seales, 1997; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011), which found that unacknowledged victims presented more self-blame. Specifically, Frazier and Seales (1997) reported that unacknowledged victims presented more behavioral self-blame than acknowledged victims, and found no differences regarding characterological self-blame. The results of

the current study, therefore, add to the mixed findings of how self-blame, as well as the two specific types of self-blame, are related to acknowledgment status.

Similar to Frazier (2000), the current study found that characterological and behavioral self-blame were correlated with each other. To further investigate this relationship, exploratory analyses were conducted to examine if there was a difference between the levels of characterological and behavioral self-blame in all victims of unwanted sexual experiences (unacknowledged and acknowledged combined). Results demonstrated that the victims of unwanted sexual experiences reported significantly more behavioral self-blame than characterological self-blame. These findings are consistent with a meta-analysis on attributions following traumatic events, which also found that behavioral self-blame was higher than characterological self-blame in victims of rape (Littleton, Magee, et al., 2007).

In contrast to what was hypothesized, blitz script endorsement was not associated with any of the three types of self-blame or acknowledgment status. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Blitz Script Questionnaire was low and suggests that the measure was not valid in the current study. This measurement has only been used once in a study conducted by Bondurant (2001) and has not been validated. Further, due to recommendations from the Institutional Review Board, the original wording of the questionnaire was changed in the current study to take the word "typical" out. The change in wording may have resulted in the scale not measuring the construct of interest accurately. The scale was developed based on Kahn et al.'s (1994) study to assess which aspects of the experience participants thought were *most* characteristic of rape. Many of

the participants marked almost all of the items on the Blitz Script Questionnaire as being present in a rape. This suggests that the change made to the wording of the questionnaire may have led participants to mark items that *could be* characteristic of a rape experience, not what they thought was *most* characteristic of rape.

Along with the Blitz Script Questionnaire, an additional limitation to the present study was the restricted population that was assessed. The present study included mostly Caucasian and African-American college students between the ages of 18 and 21 years old. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable to all women in the general population. Further, the current study only explored these variables in women. The experience of rape and unwanted sexual experiences are found to occur in men as well (Aosved et al., 2011), and, thus, their data could have added to the findings.

The current study provides important implications for future studies. First, the prevalence rates found in the current study demonstrate that unwanted sexual experiences and rape continue to be an issue for women in universities. Even if the incidents occurred before entering college, victims may still be suffering from the negative impacts of the experiences by self-blaming. Much of the previous research on self-blame has only included rape victims (Bondurant, 2001; Frazier et al., 2005; Moor & Farchi, 2011), but the current study demonstrates that self-blame (both behavioral and characterological) may be present in victims of unwanted sexual experiences as well, though this finding may only be due to the inclusion of rape victims. Future research on self-blame should investigate differences between rape victims and victims of other unwanted sexual experiences to learn more about this relationship.

Further, the current research provides more information regarding the relationship between self-blame and acknowledgment status. Past research is mixed regarding whether there are differences between the two acknowledgment groups regarding the level and type of self-blame. Findings of the current study add to the mixed findings and demonstrate that the relationship between self-blame and acknowledgment should be further examined. Additional future studies should explore what factors contribute to these mixed findings.

An interesting finding that should be further investigated was that there were no differences found between the two acknowledgment groups regarding some of the variables surrounding the unwanted sexual experience (i.e., alcohol/drug use, level of force). This may imply that when including all unwanted sexual experiences, rather than just rape, there may not be the same differences in the experiences between acknowledged and unacknowledged victims. These variables should continue to be studied in victims of unwanted sexual experiences to investigate what characteristics of the experience may lead to acknowledging or not acknowledging the incident.

A final direction for future research is the validation of the Blitz Script Questionnaire. Likely due to word changes in the questionnaire, the current study did not find a significant relationship between blitz script endorsement and self-blame. Therefore, the relationship between the two should be further investigated with a valid and reliable measure. Due to the time-consuming nature of gathering and coding written rape scripts as in Kahn et al.'s (1994) study, a measure that is in questionnaire format, if validated, could be useful to future studies on blitz rape scripts.

Despite the limitations, the current study adds to the literature on rape and unwanted sexual experiences. The present study demonstrates that the prevalence of rape and unwanted sexual experiences continues to be high in female college students. Further, the results of the current study emphasize the need for continued research on the relationship between acknowledgment status and self-blame. Finally, the present study demonstrates the importance for future research to investigate self-blame, as well as characteristics of the experience associated with acknowledgment status, in victims whose experiences do not meet the legal definition of rape.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

December 19, 2012

Caitlin Orman and Jaquelyn Mallett

cro2f@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: "Unwanted sexual experiences in college students"

Protocol Number: 13-133

The MTSU Institutional Review Board has reviewed the research proposal identified above. The MTSU IRB has determined that the study meets the criteria for approval under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110, and you have satisfactorily addressed all of the points brought up during the review.

Approval is granted for one (1) year from the date of this letter for **400** participants. Please use the version of the consent form with the compliance office stamp on it.

Please note that any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918. Any change to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.

You will need to submit an end-of-project report to the Office of Compliance upon completion of your research. Complete research means that you have finished collecting and analyzing data. Should you not finish your research within the one (1) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date. Please allow time for review and requested revisions. Failure to submit a Progress Report and request for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of your research study. Therefore, you will NOT be able to use any data and/or collect any data.

According to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to provide a certificate of training to the Office of Compliance. If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All research materials must be retained by the PI or faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) for at least three (3) years after study completion and then destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity.

Sincerely,

William Langston

Chair, MTSU Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B**Addendum to IRB Approval Letter: Permission to Increase Maximum Participants to 500**

Research Compliance Office [compliance@mtsu.edu]

Actions

To:

Caitlin R. Orman

Cc:

Mary Ellen Fromuth [MaryEllen.Fromuth@mtsu.edu]; Jaquelyn M. Mallett

Inbox

Friday, April 19, 2013 12:13 PM

Caitlin,

Thanks for the update. Your change was approved and I added it to your protocol.

Andrew

Caitlin R. Orman

Sent Items

Wednesday, April 17, 2013 1:47 PM

Andrew,

We are getting close to reaching the maximum number of participants we had indicated on our IRB application (IRB protocol #13-133). Initially, we were approved to collect data from 400 participants. We are requesting to change that number to 500 maximum participants.

Thank you for your time,

Caitlin Orman

APPENDIX C**Demographic Information Form**

Please circle the number under each question that best describes you.

1) Gender

1. Male

2. Female

2) Ethnicity

1. African-American

2. Caucasian

3. Other

3) Age

a. 18-21

b. 22-25

c. 26-29

d. 30-33

e. Over 33

APPENDIX D

Middle Tennessee University Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Document for Research

<p>Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Document for Research</p> <p>Principal Investigators: Caitlin R. Orman and Jaquelyn M. Mallett Study Title: Unwanted Sexual Experiences in College Students Institution: Middle Tennessee State University</p>	<p style="color: blue; font-size: small;">MTSU IRB Approved Date: 12/19/2012</p>
<p>Name of participant: _____ Age: _____</p>	
<p>The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.</p>	
<p>Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time. In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with this research study or your willingness to participate in it, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision whether or not to continue your participation in this study.</p>	
<p>For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918.</p>	
<p>1. Purpose of the study: You are being asked to participate in a research study, because relationships between some aspects of unwanted sexual experiences and perceptions afterwards have not been explored. We would like to investigate how victims and nonvictims perceive unwanted sexual experiences and the impact of those perceptions. An additional purpose of the study is to gain more information about unwanted sexual experiences in men.</p>	
<p>2. Description of procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study: All participants will fill out a series of questionnaires. The first two surveys will ask about basic demographic information and general perceptions of rape. Next, the questionnaires will ask about unwanted sexual experiences that the participants might have had since the age of 14. Finally, participants will be asked about their perceptions of unwanted sexual experiences. Participants who have had an unwanted sexual experience will be asked about perceptions of their own experiences. Participants who did not indicate any unwanted sexual experiences will fill out the questionnaires according to their general perceptions of unwanted sexual experiences. Participants do not have to have an unwanted sexual experience to participate in the current study. There will be no identifying information in any of the surveys the participants complete. All of the responses on the surveys by participants are anonymous. The approximate duration of the study will be between 40 and 55 minutes.</p>	
<p>3. Expected costs: There is no cost to participate.</p>	
<p>4. Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study: Some participants may feel distress when filling out the surveys due to bringing up negative memories about unwanted sexual experiences.</p>	
<p>5. Compensation in case of study-related injury: MTSU will not provide compensation in the case of study related injury.</p>	
<p>6. Anticipated benefits from this study:</p> <p>a) One potential benefit to science and humankind that may result from this study is that more will be known about perceptions of unwanted sexual experiences. Knowing more about how victims perceive the experience could lead to a better understanding of how they cope after an unwanted sexual experience.</p> <p>b) The potential benefits to you from this study are learning more about the field of psychology and psychological studies that are conducted at MTSU. A second potential benefit is that the resource list may be beneficial to the participants or their acquaintances.</p>	
<p>7. Alternative treatments available: N/A</p>	
<p>8. Compensation for participation:</p>	

The participant will receive two research credits for their participation in the study.

9. Circumstances under which the Principal Investigator may withdraw you from study participation:
None

10. What happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation:
There are no consequences if the participant chooses to withdraw from the study. The participant will still receive course credit. If the participant chooses to withdraw, the participant may stay for the duration of the study and turn in the survey with the other participants.

11. Contact Information. If you should have any questions about this research study or possible injury, please feel free to contact Caitlin Orman at cro2f@mtmail.mtsu.edu or Jaqulyn Mallett at jmm8h@mtmail.mtsu.edu or our Faculty Advisor, **Dr. Mary Ellen Fromuth** at (615) 898-2548 or MaryEllen.Fromuth@mtsu.edu.

12. Confidentiality. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

13. STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY
I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally. I understand each part of the document, all my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.

Date

Signature of patient/volunteer

Consent obtained by:

Date

Signature

Printed Name and Title

APPENDIX E

Debriefing Information

Please keep for your own use.

Rape and unwanted sexual experiences are distressing for women and men. They have been found to be associated with symptoms such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Additionally, they have been found to be associated with lower school performance and a greater use of substances such as alcohol and drugs. The purpose of the current study was to investigate experiences with rape and unwanted sexual experiences among university students. We are looking at variables such as how a person labels unwanted sexual experiences, the level of blame the person feels due to the unwanted sexual experience, and people's thoughts on what happens during a rape or an unwanted sexual experience.

Sometimes, people may feel distress when thinking about past experiences with unwanted sexual experiences or rape. If you would like to talk to someone about your experiences or feelings, counseling and crisis services are available by contacting the following:

On Campus: **Counseling Services**, ext. 2670

Off Campus: **The Guidance Center**, (615) 895-6051 (fee-based)
Domestic Violence Program and Sexual Assault Services, (615) 494-9881 or 24-hour crisis line (615) 494-9262 (Murfreesboro, TN)
National Sexual Assault Hotline, (1-800-656-HOPE) or
<https://ohl.rainn.org/online/>
Rape Recovery & Prevention Center, (615) 217-2354 (Murfreesboro, TN)
Rape and Sexual Abuse Center, (615) 259-9055 (Nashville, TN)

If you would like more information about this study or your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact me at cro2f@mtmail.mtsu.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Ellen Fromuth, at MaryEllen.Fromuth@mtsu.edu. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to immediately provide you with the results of this project. Arrangements, however, may be made so you can obtain those results once they become available.

Thank you for your time and patience in helping us with this project.

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Jaquelyn Mallett
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