

142081



Acquaintance Rape and Alcohol: If They're Drinking,
Is It Rape?

NCJRS

MAY 18 1993

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Jeanette Norris, Ph.D.
Lisa A. Cubbins, M.A.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute
University of Washington, NL-15
Seattle, Washington 98195

142081

U.S. Department of Justice
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Paper presented at the Western Region Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex, San Francisco, California, March 9-11, 1990.

This research was supported by NIAAA Grant 1 RO 3 AA07704-01 and the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute, University of Washington.

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

Although substantial documentation that a relationship between alcohol consumption and acquaintance rape exists, research on the nature of this relationship is noticeably absent. One exception is a study done by Richardson and Campbell (1982) in which drunkenness of victim and offender were varied in acquaintance rape depictions. These researchers found that although the offender was blamed less when he was drunk than when he was sober, the victim was found to be more responsible and her character was evaluated less positively when she was drunk than when she was not drinking. In judging the potential adjudication outcomes of the assault, female subjects took into greater account than male subjects the victim's drunkenness. This study raised many questions about male-female interactions involving alcohol.

Two studies by George and his colleagues are also relevant to understanding alcohol's role in acquaintance rape. George, Gournic and McAfee (1988) reported that college students responding to a questionnaire about alcohol expectancies, perceived a female drinker to be more sexual than a male drinker. Both George, Skinner and Marlatt (1986) and George, Gournic, et al. found that an alcohol-consuming female in the company of a male drinker was perceived to be more sexually disinhibited than a cola-drinking counterpart. These studies also found that a number of other sexual traits, such as being more sexually available and being more likely to enjoy being seduced and to engage in foreplay and intercourse, were attributed to the drinking woman. These findings suggest that a man might be more likely to initiate sexual activity with a drinking woman than with a nondrinker because of expectations about the sexual receptivity of the drinker. However, it is not known from these studies whether such expectations would lead to sexually aggressive behavior if a woman who was approached sexually rebuffed such advances.

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

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

Method

Subjects

Sixty-four men and sixty-eight women, at least 21 years of age ($\bar{X}=25.7$), comprised the sample. Subjects were recruited through ads in the campus student newspaper. They received \$6.00 for participating in the experiment, which had been described as two one-hour questionnaire studies.

Design and Procedure

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

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

Rape Depiction

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

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

Independent Manipulation

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

Measures

Pre-Test Measures. Seven questionnaires were administered during the first part of the study. These included: (a) nine items measuring demographic characteristics, including age, marital status, ethnic identification, religious affiliation, political affiliation, etc.; (b) a drinking habits questionnaire (Cahalan, Cisin & Crossley (1969); (c) fourteen items measuring expectancies about alcohol's effects on sexual behavior (Leigh, 1989); (d) the Hypermasculinity Scale (men only) (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984), 30 items measuring a "macho" personality constellation, as revised by Mahoney, Shively & Traw (1986), or the Hyperfemininity Scale (women only) (Murnen, Smeaton & Byrne, 1987), 26 items measuring an excessively traditional feminine orientation; (e) the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss & Oros, 1982), 12 (male version) or 13

(female version) items measuring a history of either being a victim or perpetrator of sexual aggression; (f) fifteen items measuring attitudes about sex, dating and rape (Dull & Giacopassi, 1987); and (g) the Edwards Social Desirability Scale (SD) (Edwards, 1957), 39 true-false items measuring the tendency to respond in a socially desirable way.

Dependent Measures. Six sets of dependent measures were employed. The first set consisted of six manipulation checks concerned with the key aspects of the story. Following George, et al. (1988), several items judging both the victim's and the assailant's behaviors and traits were employed. These included such items as: how responsive, promiscuous, easy to seduce, willing, resistant, and responsible the victim was; and how forceful and responsible the assailant was, as well as how strongly the subject believed that his behavior constituted rape. A third set of items measured the normative aspects of the victim's and assailant's behavior, that is, how typical, frequent, and acceptable the behaviors were. Subjects were also asked to rate how likely each of nine outcomes following the date was, as well as both the victim's and assailant's feelings immediately and one week after the date. Finally, subjects were asked to complete the Differential Emotions Scale (Mosher & Anderson, 1986), 60 adjectives, measuring 10 different emotions - interest, enjoyment, surprise, distress, anger, disgust, fear, guilt, contempt, and shame. All items were measured on seven-point Likert scales, except for the Differential Emotions Scale, which employed five-point ratings.

Results

The findings presented here are limited to two of the individual difference measures - Rape Attitudes and Alcohol Expectancies - and four of the dependent measures - judgments of the victim's and the assailant's behaviors and traits; likely outcomes of the encounter; and the victim's and the assailant's reactions after the encounter.

Description of Analyses

Both the items in the individual difference measures - alcohol expectancies about sex (Leigh, 1989) and attitudes about rape (Dull & Giacopassi, 1987) - and the sets of dependent measures were factor analyzed to determine which items were most closely related to one another. Scales were developed from items that loaded on factors with eigen values of at least 1.0 by computing the mean for each set of items. Reliabilities were also computed for each set of items, and only those with alphas of at least .65 were employed as scales. Otherwise, individual items were entered into multivariate analyses of covariance.

Three scales were developed from the alcohol expectancy items and only one from the rape attitude items. Pearson correlations were computed between individual difference measures and dependent measures to determine which individual difference measures would be useful as covariates in the multivariate analyses of covariance. None of alcohol expectancy scales correlated substantially with the dependent measures and were therefore dropped from further analyses. The rape attitude scale, which consisted of three items all concerned with women's desire for or fantasies about aggressive sex, correlated at least .20 with many of the dependent measures and was therefore entered into the MANOVAs.

Multivariate analyses of covariance were conducted on either sets of individual items or on sets of scales, depending on the outcomes of

the factor analyses. These dependent measures included judgments of: 1) the victim's and the assailant's behavior, such as whether a rape occurred, how responsible each was, how forceful the assailant was, how responsive the victim was, how much she consented, etc.; 2) the victim's and the assailant's traits, such as how sexy or romantic each was, how assertive or aggressive, etc.; 3) the victim's and the assailant's responses afterward, both positive and negative, for instance, how happy, satisfied, content, etc., or how upset, angry, disgusted, etc. 4) the likely outcomes of the date, such as they date again, she calls the police, whether either sees a counselor, etc.

Findings.

1. The covariate, rape attitudes, was related to several of the dependent measures. Compared to those subjects with lower scores, those with higher scores on this measure: 1) were less likely to judge that a rape had occurred; 2) viewed the victim as having the most positive and the least negative reactions to the rape, both immediately and one week later; 3) were more likely to think that the couple's relationship would not be affected by the rape; 4) were less likely to think that the victim would report to the police; 5) were more likely to view the victim's behavior as consensual; 6) were more likely to assign responsibility to the victim; and 7) were more likely to view the assailant as sexual. (See Table 1 for betas.)

2. After the effect of the rape attitude scale was controlled, several interactions between victim's and assailant's alcohol consumption appeared. Perhaps the most notable of these was that if both members of the couple had been drinking, the assailant's behavior was judged to be rape less strongly than if only the victim had been drinking. (See Figure 1).

3. The same pattern of findings occurred for two sets of the assailant's traits. Specifically, the assailant was judged most likable and most sexual/romantic when both had been drinking. The opposite was true if only she had been drinking. (See Figures 2 and 3.)

4. Consistent with these results is the finding that the victim's reactions after the rape were judged to be least negative if both had been drinking and most negative if only she had been drinking. (See Figure 4.)

5. The couple was also judged most likely to date again within a week or two if both had been drinking. (See Figure 5.)

6. In contrast to the earlier research on perceptions of a drinking woman, the woman's alcohol consumption did not affect perceptions of her traits, sexual or otherwise. However, several main effects emerged showing that the assailant's alcohol consumption affected judgments of both his and the victim's behavior and traits. (See Table 2.)

Discussion

In general, these findings show that an acquaintance rape is not judged as severely when both members of a dating couple have been

consuming alcohol as when only the woman has been drinking. The implication is that a man and a woman drinking together may signify an expectation that sexual activity will occur. In contrast, if only a woman has been drinking, the man may be viewed as taking advantage of a woman who is in a vulnerable or weakened condition. It is also noteworthy that judgments of the woman's behavior, as well as the man's behavior and traits, depended on the man's alcohol consumption. In particular, she is viewed as more responsive when the assailant has been drinking. Does this finding indicate that a woman is supposed to know better than to date a man who has been drinking? That if she does, she is indicating her willingness to have sex with him? It is important to remember that these findings are not due to individuals with extremely positive rape attitudes skewing the results. Rather, they appear after such variance is accounted for.

The results of this study in part support earlier studies, but not entirely. Although the pattern of findings is consistent with those of Richardson and Campbell (1982), no effect was found for attribution of responsibility. Rather, in this study the man was attributed a high degree of responsibility and the woman a moderate amount across all the conditions.

It is striking that the results of the studies on perceptions of a drinking woman by George et al. do not extend to an acquaintance rape situation. One might have thought that ascribing sexual traits to a woman drinking with a man would only be a short step from ascribing the same traits in a situation that included a mutually consensual sexual encounter that turns into a rape. However, there are two important differences between the present study and that conducted by George et al. First, George et al. varied only the female's drinking behavior, and only her sexual traits were evaluated. However, in the present study, both victim's and assailant's alcohol consumption were manipulated, allowing evaluations of both parties' traits and behaviors. A second difference from the George et al. study is the introduction of physical and sexual aggression into the scenario. These differences may help to explain the conflicting findings.

For instance, in the present study the woman is not viewed in sexual terms, possibly due to her victimization. However, the assailant is attributed sexual traits. From the earlier studies, it is evident that alcohol consumption in a dating relationship generates perceptions of sexual traits. However, when evaluations are conducted on both the man's and woman's traits, it is revealed that the sexualness resides with the male. The importance of evaluating both the man and the woman is further demonstrated in the finding that judgments of the victim's behavior depended on the assailant's alcohol consumption. This suggests there may be a general bias of ascribing more importance to the actions of men than to those of women.

This study raises further questions about the role of alcohol in judging acquaintance rape. For instance, although the findings suggest that subjects to some extent viewed an acquaintance rape that had been preceded by alcohol consumption as a sexual situation, their alcohol expectancies about sex did not affect their judgments. Perhaps alcohol expectancies about aggression would be more relevant to acquaintance rape.

Finally, these findings have implications for both the treatment of acquaintance rape victims and establishing assailant accountability.

If a woman reports that she has been raped after drinking with her date, her report may not be taken as seriously as in other circumstances, and the impact of the psychological trauma may be underestimated. Consequently, she may not be treated as well by friends or referred for appropriate services. Likewise, the possibility of legal adjudication may be lessened. While there are no legal provisos that state that acquaintance rape involving alcohol consumption should not be considered "real" rape, this may be the effective result of court judgments. As a consequence, nothing may be done to communicate the unacceptability of such behavior to a man. All in all this study accentuates the complexities of understanding how a sexual encounter may result in a sexual assault and the difficulties that individuals have in judging such events, especially when alcohol is present.

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Table 1. Standardized Betas for Rape Attitude Scale
Related to Dependent Measures

	Beta	p \leq
Belief that rape occurred	-.33	.001
Victim's immediate positive reactions	.37	.001
Victim's immediate negative reactions	-.28	.003
Victim's positive reactions - 1 week post	.33	.001
Victim's negative reactions - 1 week post	-.30	.001
Couple dates in a week or two	.34	.001
Couple will have sexual relationship	.33	.001
Victim will report to police	-.29	.001
Victim responsive	.23	.02
Victim easy to seduce	.34	.001
Victim willing to have sex	.24	.01
Victim responsible	.44	.001
Victim resistant	-.24	.01
Assailant romantic/sexual	.22	.02

Table 2. Means for Judgments of Assailant and Victim
as a Function of Assailant Alcohol Consumption

	Assailant Drinking	Assailant Not Drinking	p ≤
Belief that rape occurred	5.48	6.26	.004
Assailant's sociability	5.23	4.85	.03
Victim responsive	3.11	2.42	.001
Victim likable	4.85	4.46	.05
Victim responsible	3.76	3.04	.08
Victim enjoyed herself	1.79	1.37	.10

Belief that rape occurred

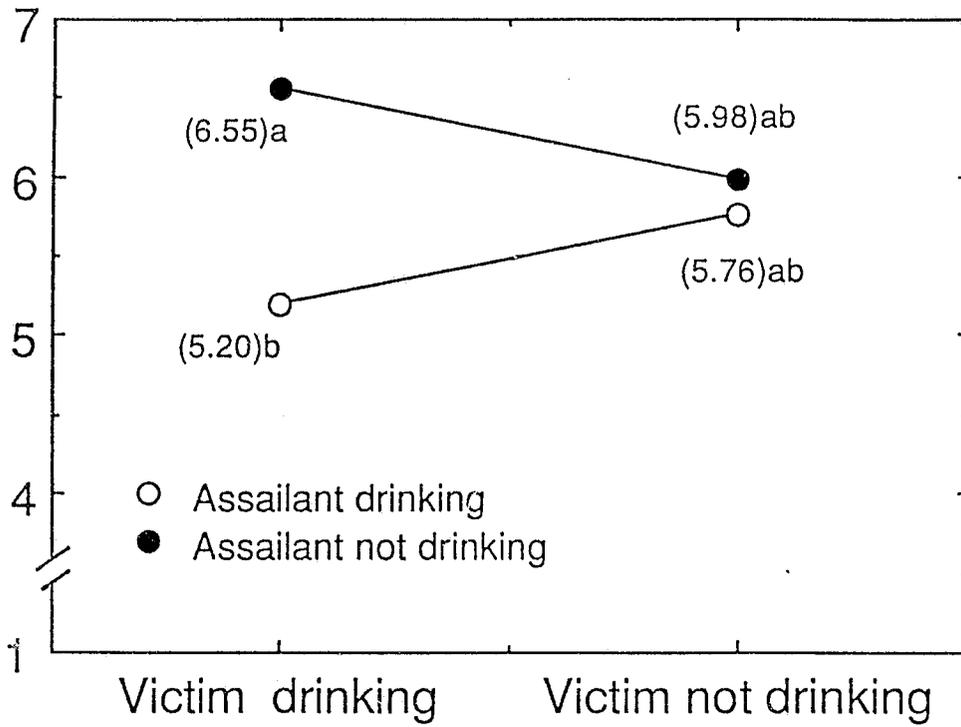


Figure 1. Belief that a rape occurred as a function of victim's and assailant's alcohol consumption.*

Likability of assailant

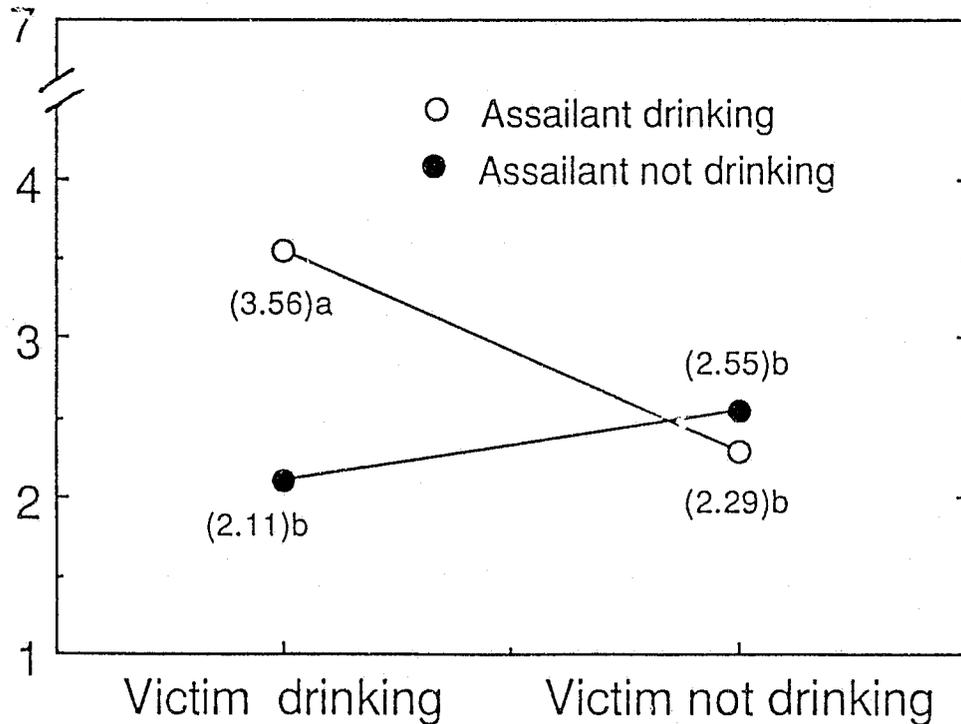


Figure 2. Likability of assailant as a function of victim's and assailant's alcohol consumption.*

*Means with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Assailant sexual/romantic

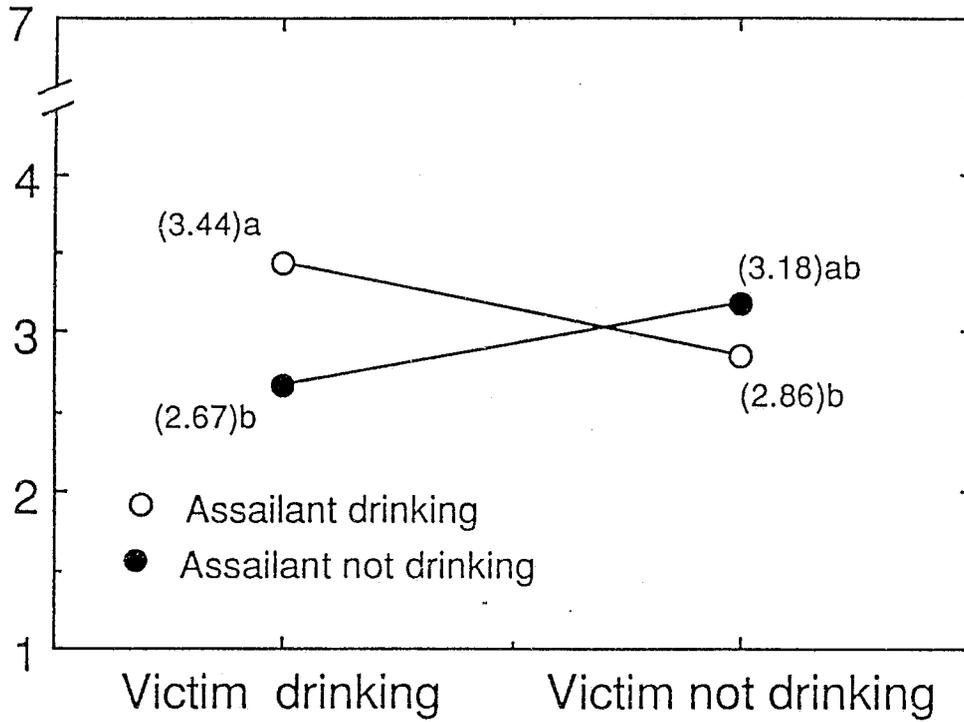


Figure 3. View of assailant as sexual/romantic as a function of victim's and assailant's alcohol consumption.*

Victim's negative reactions

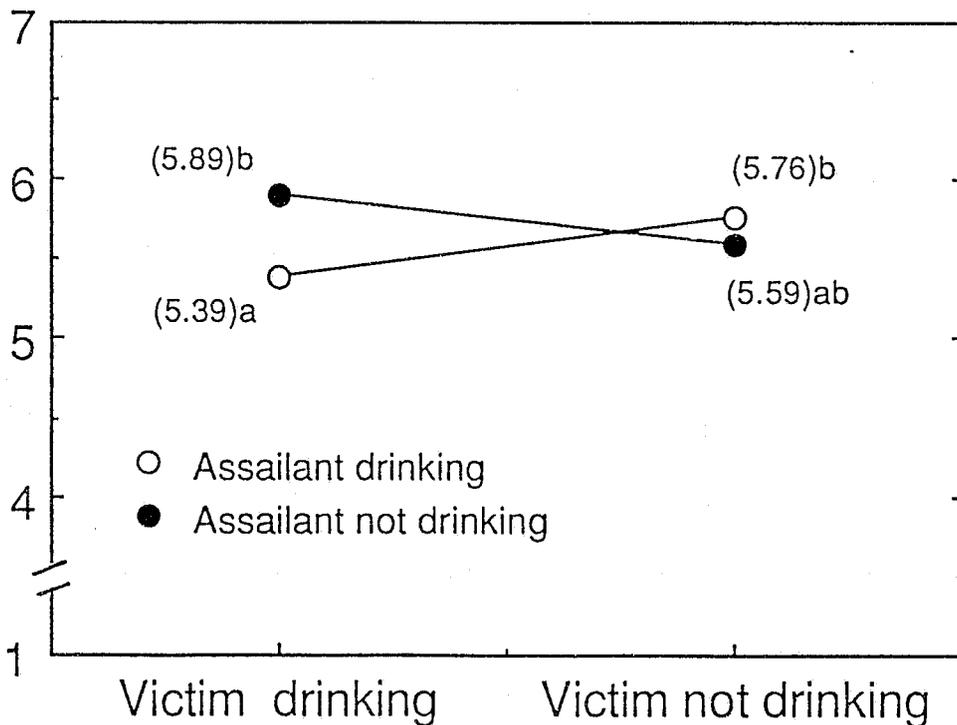


Figure 4. Perception of victim's negative reactions immediately after rape as a function of victim's and assailant's alcohol consumption.*

*Means with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Table 5. Comparison of Judgments of Assailant's Traits in Two Age Groups

Older	Assailant Drinking	Assailant Not Drinking	p ≤	
Sociability	5.23	4.85	.03	
	Alcohol Consumption:			
	Assailant-Yes/ Victim-Yes	Assailant-Yes/ Victim-No	Assailant-No/ Victim-Yes	Assailant-No/ Victim-No
Sexiness	3.44 ^a	2.86 ^b	2.67 ^b	3.18 ^{ab}
Younger	Males/ Assailant Drinking	Males/ Assailant Not Drinking	Females/ Assailant Drinking	Females/ Assailant Not Drinking
Sexiness	3.59 ^a	2.95 ^b	3.11 ^{ab}	3.45 ^{ab}

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

Table 6. Judgments of Victim's Traits in Younger Age Group

	Victim Drinking	Victim Not Drinking	p ≤
Carefulness	3.34	3.91	.05
Aggressiveness	2.95	2.61	.05

Date again in a week

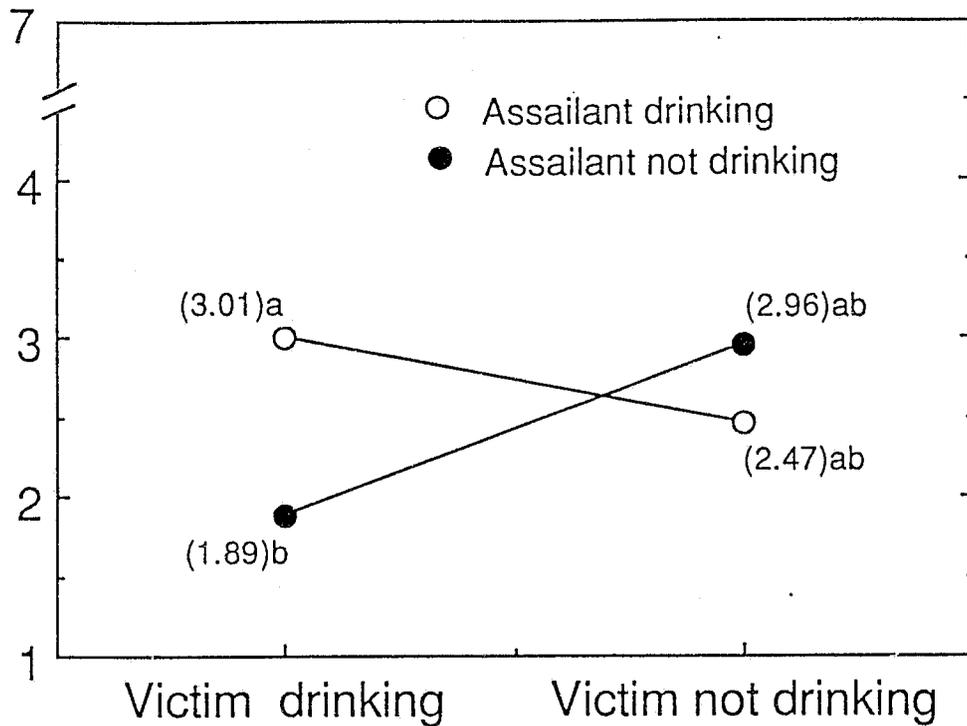


Figure 5. Belief that couple would date again in a week or two as a function of victim's and assailant's alcohol consumption.*

*Means with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$.