

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF SEX OF
ASSAILANT, AND SEX OF VICTIM ON
ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL ASSAULT

by

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of sex of victim and sex of assailant on judgments about a case of sexual assault. Subjects received one of four versions of a sexual assault scenario, each of which was followed by an identical questionnaire. The four versions differed only by the sex of the assailant and the sex of the victim.

The different sexual assault scenarios created are as follows: (1) male assailant assaults female victim, (2) male assailant assaults male victim, (3) female assailant assaults female victim, (4) female assailant assaults male victim. Since the description of the assault was identical in all versions, any differences in responses between the groups would have been attributed to an effect of victim and/or assailant sex.

Analyses of the data yielded no significant between group differences. The results of the present study therefore, suggest that contrary to assumptions found throughout the rape literature, attitudes towards sexual assault are not influenced by the sex of the assailant or victim, nor are they effected by subject sex. In addition, various methodological issues were examined.

Both male and female subjects had strong feelings about sexual assault which appeared to be unaffected by the sex of the victim or assailant. This finding indicated that many assumptions about sex biases made throughout the rape literature may be unfounded.

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Introduction

Rape, or sexual assault, has been a popular subject for research since the early 1970's. It is a broad area, different aspects of which have been investigated by criminologists, sociologists, psychiatrists, and psychologists. Interest in this area has undoubtedly been stimulated by the concurrent rise in feminism, which has produced a wealth of popular rape literature (e.g., Brownmiller, 1976; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974; Clark & Lewis, 1977; Gager & Schurr, 1976; Horos, 1974). This literature has sparked a whole new line of research by providing many interesting, empirically testable, hypotheses.

As Vinseel (1977) has commented in her review, the rape literature is sprawling. Many basic assumptions have been made by researchers, in order to investigate their particular areas of interest, and by theorists, in order to assert their points of view. While these assumptions are intuitively appealing, it is still important to test their validity. One such basic assumption is that attitudes towards rape, or sexual assault, are integrally influenced more by the sexes of the victim and rapist, than by the nature of the act or acts performed. This assumption plays an essential role in studies and theories of rape myths, which in turn, are said to be at the root of such problems as: the predominant hostility of our society toward rape victims (Burt, 1980), lack of reportage of rapes and a tendency for police to reject as "unfounded", those rapes that are reported (Clark & Lewis, 1977).

Rape myths have been defined by Burt (1980) as: "pre-judicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists"

(p. 217) and usually assume that the assailant is male and the victim is female. Myths such as: "women ask for it"; "any healthy woman can resist a rapist if she really wants to"; "only bad girls get raped"; "rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both" (Burt, 1980, p. 217) belittle the problem of rape. As Vinseel (1977) has pointed out, myths about rapists eliminate "normal" men as possible rapists and make rape appear to be an unpreventable crime. Myths about the victim hold her responsible for the rape (Burt, 1980). As well, these myths view rape primarily as a sexual act and not as a crime of humiliation, force and/or violence. Horos (1977) has said that "the myths about rape are social commentaries on a woman's place in an ancient world, a world where she had no legal, social or human rights" and that our present-day laws are based upon them.

These myths are pervasive, and have been shown to be adhered to by the general public (Burt, 1980; Feild, 1978); students (Cann, Calhoun & Selby, 1979; Krulewitz & Payne, 1978); police (Clark & Lewis, 1977; Feild, 1978); doctors (Gager & Schurr, 1976) and rapists (Feild, 1978; Broth, 1979).

The law, and those who enforce it, treat rape as a unique crime. As the report of the D.C. Task Force points out (Schultz, 1975), rape is the only crime in which it is assumed that "the usual safeguards in the system can't protect the accused from lying witnesses" (p. 241). Amir's (1971) research indicated that this assumption appears to be without cause, since false accusations are not more frequent in rape cases than they are in other serious crimes. Despite Amir's data, however, police do appear to treat rape victims as

less than credible witnesses. Clark and Lewis (1977), using data from the Metropolitan Toronto Police Department, found that police judged 74 of the 116 reported rapes of women over 14 to be unfounded. In their review of these rejected cases, Clark and Lewis reclassified 62 of them as founded. Their examination of police records showed the original bases for rejection of these 62 cases to be completely unrelated to the crime, but rather, to be related to such factors as: (a) personal prejudices, (b) status of the victim, (c) suitability of the victim as witness and (d) victim's unwillingness to testify.

The D.C. Task Force points out another way in which rape is treated as a unique crime; saying that it is the only crime that demands that the victim risk serious injury or death in order to obtain the conviction of the criminal (p. 340). Finally, Feild (1978) notes that the F.B.I.'s 1976 Uniform Crime Reports show that in contrast to other violent crimes, "a smaller proportion of individuals arrested for rape are found guilty as charged" (p. 74), with a greater proportion of their trials ending in acquittal or dismissal.

Rape is certainly not treated like any other crime, and its victims are treated unlike other victims of crime. Rape is a crime in which most people exhibit the phenomenon which Ryan (1971) calls "blaming the victim". This, and the victim's own belief in rape myths, may explain why rape is one of the most underreported of all crimes indexed by the Uniform Crime Reports (1979, p. 14). It has been estimated that 60 - 90% of the rape victims do not report it (Hood & Sparks, 1971; Johnson, Gibson & Linden, 1978), and are left

without the dignity and protection of the law awarded to other victims of serious crimes.

Most evidence points to rape as a controllable crime of violence, rather than an act of uncontrollable sexual passion (Amir, 1971; Burt, 1980; Lewis, Shanok & Pincus, 1979), yet the latter belief is more widespread (Clark & Lewis, 1977). This belief in rape as an act of sexual passion is an essential element in many of the rape myths upon which laws have been based. Viewing rape as primarily an expression of sexual desire allows the contention that rape is merely an extreme on the continuum of normal sexual behavior. The element of force in men's rape of women does not override this view, since traditional sex-roles characterize the male as aggressive and the female as passive. The situation of a man forcing a woman into sexual acts can thereby be understood and viewed as a "non-crime", or less than a serious crime (Brownmiller, 1975; Clark & Lewis, 1977; Gager & Schurr, 1976).

It is interesting to note here that Clark and Lewis (1977) found police much more willing to classify a rape as founded if forced fellatio, cunnilingus, oral copulation, self-masturbation by offender, or victim masturbation by offender were involved. Of the cases involving anal intercourse 100% were classified as founded (p. 69). Amir's 1971 statistics are similar. Is the increased willingness of the police to classify these rapes as founded, influenced by the "non-normality" of these sexual acts? If so, this phenomenon might be an effect of what Burt (1980) refers to as sexual conservatism.

In addition to rape myths and sex roles, a number of other elements have been shown to influence judgments about rape: e.g. attractive-

ness of victim (Calhoun et al., 1978; Seligman, Brickman, & Koulack, 1977); victim respectability (Clark & Lewis, 1977; Jones & Aronson, 1973); victim's sexual history (Cann et al., 1973); degree of rapists' force (Krulowitz & Payne, 1978); degree of victim's resistance (Krulowitz & Nash, 1979); and acceptance of interpersonal violence (Burt, 1980). A great many studies in the area have found sex of subject effects (e.g. Burt, 1980; Calhoun, Selby, Cann, & Keller, 1978; Cann, Calhoun, & Selby, 1979; Krulowitz & Nash, 1979; Meyers-Dashefsky, Note 1). The model utilized in all of these studies is one of a male forcing a female into sexual contact.

Much has been assumed about sex-role dynamics in sexual assault, yet a review of the literature does not produce evidence of any empirical investigation of the effect of victim and/or rapist sex upon judgments of sexual assault. This study attempts to explore the sex-role dynamics within sexual assault by, (a) investigating the effects of victim and assailant sex on judgments about a case of sexual assault and (b) examining sex of subject effects on these judgments.

This study, like many others (e.g. Jones & Aronson, 1973; Krulowitz & Payne, 1978; Malamuth and Check, in press; Meyers-Dashefsky, Note 1; Tieger, 1981), utilized a short written scenario of sexual assault followed by a series of questions. The scenario was adapted from a newspaper article about a case where rape charges were laid. The report does not state that the assault actually occurred, nor does it explain the nature of the sexual assault other than to say that the complainant was "forced into sexual acts against [his/her] will, police said." (see Appendix B).

In an effort not to influence subjects' belief, or disbelief of the report, the victim of the assault was always referred to as the "complainant", and the assailant was referred to as the "accused." The accused was a 31-year-old and the complainant was 16. It was assumed that this age difference would increase the plausibility of the accused forcing the complainant into sexual acts.

Sex of victim and sex of assailant effects were isolated by the presentation of four versions of the sexual assault scenario, each of which differed only in the sex of victim and sex of assailant: (1) male assailant assaults male victim, (2) male assailant assaults female victim, (3) female assailant assaults male victim, and (4) female assailant assaults female victim (see Appendix A for complete scenario text).

The dependent measure following the stories was constructed to assess subjects' attitudes towards the scenario, sexual assault and the sexes of the assailant and victim in the scenario. As in the Jones and Aronson study (1973), subjects were asked to indicate the number of years the defendant should be sentenced if guilty, to determine how serious a crime they believe was committed. In addition, they were explicitly asked how serious they believed the crime to be given that the complainant's story was true. To further replicate Jones and Aronson, subjects were asked how much responsibility for the assault the victim should bear. This item relates to a number of rape myths. Subjects were also asked how much blame for the assault the assailant should bear. Furthermore, as some subjects might not have found the complainant's story believable, they were explicitly

asked that question, and requested to explain their answer. If a subject believed the complainant's story was false, two questions dealing with the magnitude of the crime might have been effected. As well, it is important to know whether people find the story of a man assaulting a woman significantly more believable than the other three stories.

The three remaining questions concerned subjects's perceptions of the nature of the crime, they were asked: (a) whether they agree with the police decision to lay charges, (b) "if the complainant's story is true, would you term the actions that took place [in the house where the forced sexual acts occurred] 'rape'?"

Each question, with the exception of the written explanation, was followed by a choice of answers on a Likert-type scale. Following these questions, an area was provided for comments about the survey (see Appendix C for complete questionnaire).

Hypotheses

The primary hypothesis of this study was that differences in responses on the questionnaire would be found among the four groups. This would have demonstrated that attitudes towards rape, or one person forcing another into sexual acts, are not based solely on the acts committed, but rather are enmeshed with notions of sex-roles. If found, these differences would have provided further information concerning attitudes towards sexual assault as a function of gender of victim and assailant. It was difficult, however, to predict the exact nature and direction of these differences since a review of the literature did not provide any studies similiar to this one.

Three factors which could contribute to subjects' attributions and which suggested more specific hypotheses became salient: (1)

sexual conservatism, (2) sex-role stereotyping, (3) taboos regarding homosexuality. It was hypothesized that an effect of sexual conservatism could be found since subjects might tend to view the three non-traditional rape scenarios (i.e., those other than the male assailant/female victim scenario), as significantly more serious. Moreover, such sexual conservatism could have effected the ratings of believability of the complainant's story, with subjects giving significantly higher ratings of believability to the traditional rape scenario. Another possibility was that sex-role stereotyping would cause subjects to view the female assailant assaulting the male victim as the least believable, and least serious of the assaults. According to traditional sex-role stereotyping, subjects would hold women incapable of overpowering men, and would believe that any sexual activity that men experience is pleasurable. The third factor mentioned, taboos concerning homosexuality, might also have played an important role in determining subjects' responses. It was hypothesized that subjects might find these assaults to be the most abhorrent assaults, and therefore the most serious.

It was also hypothesized that a sex of subject effect would be found in response to the scenarios, indicating that males and females viewed the scenarios, as well as aggression and sex in general, differently.

MethodSubjects

The subjects were 312 Commerce students from McGill University, who were sampled during regularly scheduled class time. The data from 121 female students and 121 male students were suitable for analysis.

Materials

Each student received two booklets, one containing the sexual assault article, followed by the questionnaire, and a demographic information form. The other booklet contained the funnel-style awareness check and the manipulation check.

Sexual assault article. An article titled "Sexual assault charge laid" was distributed to all subjects within the first booklet, labeled "Part I." The article detailed a police report of an incident in which a 31-year-old was charged with sexually assaulting a 16-year-old. The article was prepared to look as if it were from a newspaper.

Four versions of the story were distributed. All stories were identical in content, varying only in that the sexes of the complainant and the accused have been manipulated to form the four possible combinations (see Appendix A).

Questionnaire. The article was followed by a series of questions. Subjects were asked whether they agree with the police's decision to lay charges; whether they find the story believable, and why; and how serious a crime was committed. They were also questioned as to whether

they would term the described actions "sexual assault", whether they would call them "rape", and what portion of the blame for the assault belonged to the accused and the complainant, respectively. In addition, they were asked how long the sentence should be, if the accused were convicted. Finally, the questionnaire provided a section for the student's comments.

Eight of the questions were answered on a Likert-type scale, with the two remaining questions requiring the students to write their answers in (see Appendix C).

Demographic information form. Following the questionnaire was the demographic information form requesting such information as: the student's age, sex, and the faculty in which they are registered. Students were not required to supply their names or student numbers and were assured of their anonymity (see Appendix D for complete form).

Awareness check. The awareness check was of the funnel type, with one question per page. It was contained in its own booklet, together with the manipulation check, which asked the subjects the sex of the accused and the complainant (see Appendix E for questions).

Procedure

Students were asked by their professors to volunteer some of their class time to participate in a survey. The cover letter (see Appendix A) informed students that their surveys would remain anonymous, and that they should answer the questions as truthfully as possible, with their first reactions. They were asked to complete the questions in their proper order, without skipping ahead, or going back and changing answers.

Each student received two booklets marked "Part I" (containing the sexual assault article, questionnaire, and demographic information form), and "Part II" (containing the manipulation and awareness checks). Their instructions were to complete Part I, turn it over, and then complete Part II. They were then asked to return both parts to the experimenter upon completion. When all materials were collected, the experimenter gave a short debriefing. Subjects who wanted more information submitted their names and addresses, and were sent a letter which explained the results of the study (see Appendix F).

After the data from the 312 students were collected, the data from 70 of the students were judged unsuitable for analysis. It was found that 34 students had not completed the questionnaire sufficiently for analysis; 3 of them were missing Part II, 5 of them left more than two of the questions in Part I blank, and the remaining 29 left the manipulation check (question 4, Part II) and/or more than one of the awareness check questions blank. The other half of the unsuitable data was comprised of: 14 students who had the sex of complainant and/or accused wrong on the manipulation check, 2 students who had strong feelings that they had been deceived, and 20 students who appeared to be aware of the hypothesis. Responses that were judged as aware ranged from, "I think the survey had something to do with sex roles" to "the study was about the sex of the subject, the accused and the complainant - I saw different stories".

CHAPTER III

Results

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) available in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Nie, Hull, Kenkins, Steinbrenner & Burt, 1975) was used to analyze the interval data from the questionnaire. Items which utilized 5-point Likert-type scales were analysed using 2 (sex of subject) x 2 (sex of victim) x 2 (sex of assailant) ANOVAs. The data from the sentencing question were analyzed using the chi-square available in SPSS, since they could not be interpreted as interval data.

Charging the Assailant

This question asked subjects whether they agreed with the police decision to lay charges in this case. The majority of subjects (78.8%) agreed with the police decision to lay charges. The grand mean was 4.021, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree (see Appendix G, Table A). The ANOVA yielded no significant sex effects (see Appendix H, Table A).

Believability

When asked whether they found the complainant's story believable, the most common response given by the subjects was one of ambivalence. The grand mean was 3.249, where 1 = no, not at all and 5 = yes, completely (see Appendix G, Table B). The response of 3 = somewhat, and was the middle or undecided response. No significant sex effects were found (see Appendix H, Table B).

Subjects were asked in question three to explain why they did or did not find the complainant's story believable. There were two common answers: (a) the story sounded suspicious because of all the driving around, (b) the story was possible. In general, those subjects who mentioned the driving, felt that the driver's willingness to chauffeur the complainant took credibility away from the complainant's story of assault. Answers that mentioned that it was possible, ranged from comments that "anything is possible" to responses that such things are not just possible, but common. Since many subjects did not answer this question, the data were subjected to no analyses.

Seriousness of the Crime

Question four asked "If the complainant's story is true, how serious a crime was committed?" The majority of subjects (94.7%) felt that a serious crime had been committed, with 55% indicating that they felt the crime was "extremely serious" and 39.7% indicating that it was "serious". The grand mean for this question was 1.525, where 1 = extremely serious and 5 = not serious at all (see Appendix G, Table C). The ANOVA yielded no significant sex effects (see Appendix H, Table C).

Naming the Act

In question five, subjects were asked "If the complainant's story is true, would you term the actions that took place in the house on Gerwood Crescent 'sexual assault.?' " In question six the word "rape" replaced "sexual assault". In response to these questions, most people indicated that the terms "sexual assault" and "rape" both

described the actions that took place. The grand means were 4.533 and 4.227 respectively, where 1 = no I would not and 5 = yes I would. These means demonstrate almost complete agreement on the 5-point scales (see Appendix G, Tables D & E). The ANOVAs yielded no significant effects (see Appendix H, Tables D & E).

Placing the Blame

When asked "If the complainant's story is true, what portion of the blame for the sexual assault should be placed on the complainant?", most subjects responded in the 0-25% range. The grand mean was 3.975 where 1 = 100% and 5 = 0% (see Appendix G, Table F). No significant sex effects were found (see Appendix H, Table F).

As might be expected, when asked what portion of the blame should be placed on the accused, most subjects responded in the 75-100% range. The grand mean was 1.764, where 1 = 100% and 5 = 0% (see Appendix G, Table G). The ANOVA yielded no significant effects (see Appendix H, Table G).

It should be noted here that not all subjects' answers to these two questions were consistent, that is; when the blame was portioned out some subjects had figures above or below 100%. This inconsistency is illustrated by the Pearson product-moment correlation $r(238) = -.55$, $p < .001$, between answers to questions seven and eight.

Length of Sentence

This question asked "If the accused is convicted, how long should the sentence be?". Most subjects (78.4%) felt that the sentence should range between 1-10 years. The grand mean was 2.623 where

Table 1

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations among the Questions

	Q1	Q2	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
Q1								
Q2	0.2613 (241) P=0.000							
Q4	-0.1352 (241) P=0.018	-0.1214 (241) P=0.030						
Q5	0.0471 (241) P=0.233	0.1962 (241) P=0.001	-0.3901 (242) P=0.000					
Q6	0.1155 (241) P=0.037	0.1769 (241) P=0.003	-0.4304 (242) P=0.000	0.4207 (242) P=0.000				
Q7	0.1137 (238) P=0.040	0.2021 (238) P=0.001	-0.2956 (239) P=0.000	0.1759 (239) P=0.003	0.1874 (239) P=0.002			
Q8	-0.1221 (241) P=0.029	-0.1472 (241) P=0.002	0.3546 (242) P=0.000	-0.2141 (242) P=0.000	-0.3065 (242) P=0.000	-0.5561 (239) P=0.000		
Q9	0.1359 (235) P=0.019	0.1262 (235) P=0.027	-0.4140 (236) P=0.000	0.2383 (236) P=0.000	0.3163 (236) P=0.000	0.2294 (233) P=0.000	-0.3795 (236) P=0.000	

Note: coefficient
(cases)
significance

0 = suspended, 1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1-3 years, 3 = 4-10 years, 4 = 10-25 years, and 5 = 26 years - life. Chi-square analysis revealed no significant effects.

Relationship Between Items

By employing the Pearson product-moment correlation found in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie et al., 1975) it was determined that subjects' responses were consistent throughout the questionnaire. While the responses were consistent, it is important to note that the highest correlation explains only 30.9% of the variance (see Table 1).

Summary of results

In summary, the analyses were unable to detect any significant effect of subject, victim, or assailant sex. However, the consistent and unambivalent responses to questions four through nine, indicate that subjects had strong opinions about the sexual assault depicted regardless of the sex of assailant, victim, or themselves. The Pearson product-moment correlations indicated that subjects' responses were consistent throughout the questionnaire.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

The primary hypothesis of this study was that differences in responses to the questionnaire would be found among the four groups presented with the different scenarios. This finding would have demonstrated that attitudes toward sexual assault are not based solely on the act committed, but instead, are enmeshed with notions of sex roles. It was hoped that the differences found would provide further information concerning the effects of victim and assailant gender on attitudes toward sexual assault.

The results of the research reported here suggest that attitudes toward sexual assault are not effected by the sex of the victim, assailant or subject. Regardless of the four scenarios, male and female subjects alike had the same opinions in response to the questions.

The means presented indicate that while the subjects were not sure whether to believe the complainant's story, they did have strong opinions, given that the story was true. They rated the crime as serious, and felt that it could be classified as sexual assault or rape. Subjects believed that while the victim might share some responsibility in the sexual assault, the majority of the responsibility belonged to the assailant. In addition, their belief that it was a serious crime was emphasized by their willingness to give the assailant a 1-10 year sentence.

The lack of sex differences found in this study does not indicate that subjects were not influenced by rape myths. Many rape myths are not sex biased, and can therefore be equally applied to all four of the scenarios. Myths related to victim status and to hitchhikers, as well as myths that state that victims can resist sexual assaults if they

truly want to (cf. Burt, 1980; Clark & Lewis, 1977), could all have been applied when making judgments about the scenarios in this study. All of these myths hold the victim at least partially responsible for the crime. As the data from question seven illustrate, given that the complainant's story was true, many subjects still held the victim partially responsible for the crime, with 25% of the subjects placing the victim's blame at 50% or more.

The 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVAs, as well as the chi-square, yielded no significant sex of subject, assailant or victim effects. This finding suggests that attitudes towards sexual assault are based primarily upon the acts committed regardless of the sex of the victim and/or assailant. This conclusion, while antithetic to our hypotheses, is both appealing and encouraging.

It is important however, before making any conclusions to examine a number of methodological factors. Since no previous study of this kind could be found in the literature, there was no standardized methodology for this study to replicate. This exploratory nature of the present study in itself underlines the importance of examining methodological issues, but to that it must be added that the present findings oppose the prevalent assumptions in the area of rape research.

Methodological Considerations.

The subjects in this study were students ranging in age from 16-40, with a mean age of 20.942 and a modal age of 19. This sample is better educated and younger than the general population. These two factors may contribute to their holding less sexist attitudes since these past 21 years have seen a great deal of change, and if nothing else, sexism has become unfashionable.

The increased attention that the mass media has been giving to the problem of sexual assault may be broadening the public's awareness.

Newspaper reports and television dramas expose the public to cases of sexual assault that include not only cases where a male assaults a female, but also male and female homosexual assaults, and cases where females assault males. This may work to decrease both the novelty of these acts, and sex biases about rape.

Another element to consider when examining the results, is the content of the scenario itself. Perhaps the manipulation of the ages of the victim and the assailant over-achieved its goal; that is, the effort to increase the plausibility of the victim being overpowered, may have been too effective. Since two subjects spontaneously suggested that they felt this was an incidence of child rape, many others may have viewed it in this way. Taboos against child rape may have made the story sufficiently abhorrent to confound the effects of sexism, rape myths, and taboos against homosexuality.

The age manipulation coupled with the fact that the assailant was the driver, and the victim a hitchhiker, may have allowed subjects to disregard sex stereotypes and to view rape scenarios as equivalent power struggles. If the rape itself is viewed as a crime of power, the assailant in each scenario is clearly in the position of power. The victim is young, dependent on the assailant for a ride, and trusts the assailant. The assailant is older, is behind the wheel of the truck, and is being asked to drive the hitchhiker around. The assailant, by being put in a position of trust, gains power because the hitchhiker is not only dependent upon the assailant for a ride, but is also unaware of the assailant's plans, and therefore unprepared to retaliate. If rape is viewed as a power issue, and as such out-

weighs sex-role biases which dictate that the male is stronger and more aggressive etc., the sex of the victim and assailant shouldn't make a difference.

One element of the story mentioned by many subjects was the quantity of driving. Subjects indicated that they found it difficult to believe that someone who was so willing to drive a hitchhiker around, would then sexually assault him or her. In addition, some students thought that it would be improbable for the assailant to drive the victim home, giving the victim another opportunity to record the truck's license number. While subjects used the above arguments, either in Part I or Part II of the questionnaire, it is important to note that cases such as the one given in the questionnaire are not uncommon (cf. Amir, 1971; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974). In many cases, a rapist will even ask a victim to meet him at a later date, maintaining the fantasy that the sexual assault was instead a mutually satisfying sexual experience.

It should also be considered that the story in and of itself, was sufficiently abhorrent for the horror, disgust and condemnation on the part of the subjects to overtake any other effect.

The results of this study may also have been confounded by experimenter effects. Since the experimenter derived the hypothesis, there is a possibility of experimenter bias (Rosenthal, 1966). It should be noted, however, that experimenter bias tends to lead the results towards confirming the hypothesis.

Personal attributes of the experimenter, such as gender could also have had an effect on the results (Rosenthal, 1966; Rumenik,

Capasso, & Hendrick, 1977). It has been demonstrated that while female subjects show expectancy effects with both male and female experimenters, male subjects show hypothesis reversal when the experimenter is female (Rosenthal, Persinger, Mulry, Vikan-Kline & Brothe, 1964). This effect could easily mask sex effects in a study such as the present one.

Finally we must examine the questionnaire. Based on difficulties encountered in other studies (cf. Meyers-Dashefsky, Notel), Questions four through eight were prefaced with the phrase "if the complainant's story is true", in order to control for effects of believability. However, this stem may have controlled responses too stringently, restricting attributions that might have resulted in significant differences between groups. The ambivalence of subjects with respect to question two (Part I) and their comments which followed in response to question three (Part I), lend credence to this hypothesis. When asked to decide for themselves, subjects did not know whether or not to believe the complainant's story. If the same factors which contributed to this indecisiveness were allowed to influence their answers on questions four through eight, the results might have been quite different.

The results might also have differed if we had used 10-point Likert-type scales. There are two advantages to the 10-point scale, there is no middle, or ambivalent value, and finer discrimination between answers can be made. The increased discrimination might overcome what appear to be ceiling effects in the present study, and therefore could result in between group differences.

The present study was exploratory, and did not replicate any

previous studies. As such, it does not truly compare with any of the above-mentioned studies since they were all based on a male assailant/female victim model. Without future studies along the line of the present one it is impossible to determine whether our results are unusual. Perhaps further studies in this area will demonstrate conclusively that there is no sex of subject effect, or for that matter, sex of victim and/or assailant effects on attitudes towards sexual assault.

Sex of Subject Effects

Sex of subject effects are prevalent in the rape literature (e.g., Burt 1980; Calhoun et al., 1978; Cann et al., 1979; Feild 1978; Krulewitz & Nash, 1979; Malamuth & Check, 1981). The present study however, is not the first to find male and female subjects responding similarly.

Jones and Aronson (1973) found no sex-of-subject effects on their sentencing question which utilized a 10-point scale, and as well, they found that male and female subjects attributed fault to the victim equally. Another study which found no sex-of-subject differences on a question of responsibility was Malamuth, Haber, and Feshbach's (1970). When inquiring about victim believability Cann, Calhoun and Selby (1979), found no sex of subject effects either.

Summary

Sex bias in the area of rape is an important issue, and one about which many assumptions have been made. The present study throws some doubt upon many of these assumptions. No significant sex of subject,

assailant, or victim effects upon judgments about sexual assault were found in this study. Subject's answers were consistent, with both male and female subjects displaying strong opinions about sexual assault. Subjects found sexual assault to be a serious crime regardless of sex of assailant and victim; they felt that the assailant was primarily responsible for the act, and should be sent to jail for a sentence between 1 and 10 years.

Various methodological issues which might possibly have confounded the results were considered. In light of these issues, and the study's results, a number of recommendations for future research can be made.

In order to correct and/or check for experimenter effects, at least two female, and two male experimenters who are blind to the hypothesis should be used. If Likert-type scales are to be utilized for subjects' responses, a 10-point scale may be preferable to the 5-point scale used in this study, since it is more precise and also provides no middle value thereby forcing subjects to make a choice.

Questions should not be prefaced with phrases that eliminate the subjects attributions (eg: if the complainant's story is true). When creating or selecting scenarios, the ages of participants should probably be restricted to people over the age of 18 to eliminate the possibilities of attributions of child rape or statutory rape.

It is interesting to note here that while studies such as Jones and Aronson's (1973) assumed that responses to sentencing questions indicate how serious the crime is perceived to be, the present study did not find the correlation between the seriousness question and the

sentencing question to be exceptionally high (see Table 1). This may illustrate that length of sentence is not really indicative of perceived seriousness of the crime.

Research in the area of rape, or sexual assault has made many assumptions about sex biases. The present study throws some doubt upon these assumptions. While previous studies have only used a model in which a male assaults a female, this study has examined all four possible combinations. Analyses yielded no significant sex of subject, victim, or assailant effects on attitudes towards sexual assault. In light of the findings presented here, further research in this area is recommended to establish what importance, if any, sex effects have on judgments about sexual assault, or rape.

Reference Notes

1. Meyers-Dashefsky, D.L. Changing rape myth acceptance and attitudes towards rape through exposure to an informational film. Unpublished pre-master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 1981.

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APPENDIX A

Part I

Dear Participant,

These materials are part of an ongoing research project. You are under no obligation to read them, or to participate in this project. If you decide to participate, you are under no obligation to complete these materials, and may stop at any time.

Neither your name nor your student number is required for this project. All responses will remain anonymous. Please answer all questions truthfully, with your first reactions, in the order in which they are presented.

After you have completed Part I, please turn it over, and then complete Part II. When all materials have been collected, you will be given an explanation of the study.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

APPENDIX B

PLEASE READ THE ARTICLE BELOW AND
THEN ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW

Winnipeg Free Press, Tuesday, July 7, 1981

Sexual assault charge laid

A 31-year-old Winnipeg man has been charged with sexually assaulting a 16-year-old girl who was hitchhiking on Saturday.

Police said that the girl was hitchhiking near the corner of Portage Avenue and Edmonton Street at about 4:30 a.m. when a man in a truck stopped and picked her up.

The girl asked to be driven to a friend's residence, but when they arrived and found no one at home, she then asked to be driven to her own home.

Instead of taking her home, the motorist began driving to the Elmwood area of the city, police said.

The girl states that she then tried to jump out of the truck, but the man grabbed her by the hair, struck her in the face, and then took her into a house on Gerdwood Crescent, where she was forced into sexual acts against her will, police said.

When the girl was later dropped off at her home, she recorded the license plate number of the vehicle, and the suspect was arrested later the same day.

The suspect appeared in court yesterday, and was granted bail and remanded without plea to July 13.

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APPENDIX C

PLEASE CIRCLE OR FILL IN THE APPROPRIATE ANSWER

1. Do you agree with the police decision to lay charges in this case ?

strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Do you find the complainant's story believable ?

no not at all	not very	somewhat	very	yes completely
1	2	3	4	5

3. Why or why not ?

4. If the complainant's story is true, how serious a crime was committed ?

extremely serious	serious	somewhat serious	not too serious	not serious at all
1	2	3	4	5

5. If the complainant's story is true, would you term the actions that took place in the house on Gerdwood Crescent "sexual assault" ?

no I would not	I don't think so	I have no opinion	I think so	yes I would
1	2	3	4	5

6. If the complainant's story is true, would you term the actions that took place in the house on Gerdwood Crescent "rape" ?

no I would not	I don't think so	I have no opinion	I think so	yes I would
1	2	3	4	5

7. If the complainant's story is true, what portion of the blame for the sexual assault should be placed on the complainant ?

100%	75%	50%	25%	0%
1	2	3	4	5

8. If the complainant's story is true, what portion of the blame for the sexual assault should be placed on the accused ?

100%	75%	50%	25%	0%
1	2	3	4	5

9. If the accused is convicted, how long should the sentence be?

- a) The sentence should be suspended (i.e. no sentence)

I agree	I disagree
1	2

- b) less than 1 year 1-3 years 4-10 years 10-25 years 26 years-life
- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

10. Comments about this survey:

APPENDIX D

Demographic Information

1. Are you: male _____
female _____

2. Age: _____

3. Department _____ Major _____

4. Marital status: single _____
married _____
divorced _____
separated _____
other _____

5. What is your country of birth ? _____

APPENDIX E

Part II

1.

(a) What do you think the purpose of this survey is ?

(b) When did this first occur to you ?

3.

(a) Do you think you were deceived (i.e., not told the truth) in this survey ?

(b) If yes, exactly what do you think you were deceived about ?

(c) When did this first occur to you ?

4.

(a) What was the sex of the accused in the story you read ?

(b) What was the sex of the complainant in the story you read ?

APPENDIX F

Dear

I am writing to you now to give you the final results of the study that you participated in this past Feb. at McGill. The study concerned sex differences on attitudes towards sexual assault. After the study was explained in class, you requested that I contact you with more information. Here it is.

Your attitudes and/or judgments about sexual assault were measured by questions following a modified newspaper article.

The results indicated that there was no effect of victim, assailant, or subject sex. In other words, male and female students in your class and others, all had practically the same opinions in response to the questions. These opinions appeared to be based only upon the crime that occurred and not the gender of the victim or assailant in the story.

These results contradict my hypotheses, but it is encouraging to think that perhaps people can examine rape without sex-role prejudices.

I found that the majority of subjects were not sure if they believed the victim's story, but given that it was true; they felt that the crime was quite serious, that it could be termed "rape" or "sexual assault", that while the victim was partly to blame, the assailant should bear most of the blame, and that if convicted, the assailant should be sentenced to between 1 and 10 years in prison.

Thank you, again, for taking part in this study.

Sincerely,

Deborah Meyers-Dashefsky

APPENDIX G

TABLE A

MEANS* AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF RESPONSES ABOUT
AGREEMENT WITH POLICE DECISION TO LAY CHARGES

Question 1.

Sex of Assailant	Sex of Victim	Sex of Subject	
		Male	Female
Male	Female	4.176 (0.904)	4.167 (0.747)
	Male	4.069 (1.280)	4.081 (0.862)
Female	Female	4.000 (1.063)	3.760 (0.970)
	Male	4.088 (0.793)	3.714 (1.301)

*Grand mean = 4.021

Note. The response scale was as follows:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = agree
- 5 = strongly agree

TABLE B

MEANS* AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF RESPONSES
 ABOUT BELIEVABILITY OF COMPLAINANT'S STORY
 Question 2

Sex of Assailant	Sex of Victim	Sex of Subject	
		Male	Female
Male	Female	3.206 (0.808)	3.200 (0.761)
	Male	3.552 (0.910)	3.243 (0.597)
Female	Female	3.375 (0.970)	3.040 (0.611)
	Male	3.118 (0.729)	3.286 (0.976)

*Grand mean = 3.249

Note. The response scale was as follows:

- 1 = no not at all
- 2 = not very
- 3 = somewhat
- 4 = very
- 5 = yes completely

TABLE C

MEANS* AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF RESPONSES
 ABOUT THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CRIME
 Question 4

Sex of Assailant	Sex of Victim	Sex of Subject	
		Male	Female
Male	Female	1.529 (0.748)	1.300 (0.651)
	Male	1.517 (0.509)	1.514 (0.559)
Female	Female	1.667 (0.702)	1.538 (0.582)
	Male	1.706 (0.906)	1.429 (0.573)

*Grand mean = 1.525

Note. The response scale was as follows:

- 1 = extremely serious
- 2 = serious
- 3 = somewhat serious
- 4 = not too serious
- 5 = not serious at all

TABLE D

MEANS* AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF RESPONSES
ABOUT WHETHER THEY WOULD TERM THE ACTIONS "SEXUAL ASSAULT".

Question 5

Sex of Assailant	Sex of Victim	Sex of Subject	
		Male	Female
Male	Female	4.529 (0.825)	4.500 (0.938)
	Male	4.690 (0.471)	4.568 (0.689)
Female	Female	4.583 (0.504)	4.231 (0.863)
	Male	4.44. (8.024)	4.714 (0.600)

*Grand mean = 4.533

Note. The response scale was as follows:

- 1 = no I would not
- 2 = I don't think so
- 3 = I have no opinion
- 4 = I think so
- 5 = yes I would

TABLE E

MEANS* AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF RESPONSES
ABOUT WHETHER THEY WOULD TERM THE ACTIONS "RAPE".

Question 6

Sex of Assailant	Sex of Victim	Sex of Subject	
		Male	Female
Male	Female	4.382 (1.074)	4.533 (0.730)
	Male	4.241 (1.091)	4.162 (1.143)
Female	Female	4.333 (0.761)	4.000 (1.058)
	Male	4.118 (1.122)	4.036 (1.232)

*Grand mean = 4.227

Note. The response scale was as follows:

- 1 = No I would not
- 2 = I don't think so
- 3 = I have no opinion
- 4 = I think so
- 5 = Yes I would

TABLE F

MEANS* AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF RESPONSES
 ABOUT PERCENT OF BLAME TO BE PLACED ON THE COMPLAINANT
 Question 7

Sex of Assailant	Sex of Victim	Sex of Subject	
		Male	Female
Male	Female	3.794 (1.225)	4.167 (0.791)
	Male	3.929 (0.813)	3.943 (0.725)
Female	Female	4.125 (1.296)	4.115 (0.864)
	Male	3.882 (1.094)	3.929 (0.858)

*Grand mean = 3.975

Note. The response scale was as follows:

- 1 = 100%
- 2 = 75%
- 3 = 50%
- 4 = 25%
- 5 = 0%

TABLE G

MEANS* AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF RESPONSES
 ABOUT PERCENT OF BLAME TO BE PLACED ON THE ACCUSED
 Question 8

Sex of Assailant	Sex of Victim	Sex of Subject	
		Male	Female
Male	Female	1.824 (0.936)	1.833 (0.747)
	Male	1.696 (0.806)	1.811 (0.701)
Female	Female	1.458 (0.884)	1.769 (0.863)
	Male	1.882 (1.066)	1.750 (0.799)

*Grand mean = 1.764

Note. The response scale was as follows:

- 1 = 100%
- 2 = 75%
- 3 = 50%
- 4 = 25%
- 5 = 0%

TABLE H

MEANS* AND (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) OF RESPONSES
 ABOUT LENGTH OF SENTENCE
 Question 9

Sex of Assailant	Sex of Victim	Sex of Subject	
		Male	Female
Male	Female	2.706 (1.060)	2.889 (1.219)
	Male	2.759 (1.327)	2.351 (0.889)
Female	Female	2.458 (1.062)	2.577 (1.027)
	Male	2.545 (1.301)	2.769 (0.951)

*Grand mean = 2.623

Note. The response scale was as follows:

- a) 1 = suspended (this response was entered as "0")
- b) 1 = less than 1 year
- b) 2 = 1-3 years
- b) 3 = 4-10 years
- b) 4 = 10-25 years
- b) 5 = 26 years-life

APPENDIX H

TABLE A

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE USING RESPONSES TO
QUESTION 1, AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Main Effects			
Assailant Sex (A)	1	3.196	3.227
Victim Sex (V)	1	0.216	0.218
Subject Sex (S)	1	1.256	1.268
2 - Way Interactions			
A X V	1	0.083	0.084
A X S	1	1.435	1.449
V X S	1	0.080	0.081
3 - Way Interaction			
A X V X S	1	0.046	0.047
Explained	7	0.880	0.889
Residual	233	0.990	
Total	240	0.987	

TABLE B

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE USING RESPONSES TO
QUESTION 2, AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Main Effects			
Assailant Sex (A)	1	0.494	0.777
Victim Sex (B)	1	0.701	1.103
Subject Sex (S)	1	0.717	1.123
2 - Way Interactions			
A X V	1	0.523	0.823
A X S	1	0.093	0.147
V X S	1	2.313	3.637
3 - Way Interaction			
A X V X S	1	0.148	0.233
Explained	7	0.699	
Residual	233	0.636	
Total	240	0.638	

TABLE C

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE USING RESPONSES TO
QUESTION 4, AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Main Effects			
Assailant Sex (A)	1	0.851	1.897
Victim Sex (V)	1	0.311	0.694
Subject Sex (S)	1	1.519	3.386
2 - Way Interactions			
A X V	1	0.063	0.142
A X S	1	0.106	0.235
V X S	1	0.541	0.207
3 - Way Interaction			
A X V X S	1	0.022	0.049
Explained	7	0.482	1.078
Residual	234	0.449	
Total	241	0.450	

TABLE D

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE USING RESPONSES TO
QUESTION 5, AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Main Effects			
Assailant Sex (A)	1	0.388	0.711
Victim Sex (V)	1	0.014	0.025
Subject Sex (S)	1	0.110	0.201
2 - Way Interactions			
A X V	1	1.206	2.208
A X S	1	0.037	0.067
V X S	1	1.710	3.131
3 - Way Interaction			
A X V X S	1	1.054	1.930
Explained	7	0.633	1.159
Residual	234	0.546	
Total	241	0.549	

TABLE E

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE USING RESPONSES TO
QUESTION 6. AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Main Effects			
Assailant Sex (A)	1	3.168	2.906
Victim Sex (V)	1	0.414	0.380
Subject Sex (S)	1	0.215	0.197
2 - Way Interactions			
A X V	1	2.073	1.902
A X S	1	0.673	0.618
V X S	1	1.055	0.968
3 - Way Interaction			
A X V X S	1	0.023	0.021
Explained	7	1.048	0.961
Residual	233	1.090	
Total	240	1.089	

TABLE F

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE USING RESPONSES TO
QUESTION 7. AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Main Effects			
Assailant Sex (A)	1	0.175	0.184
Victim Sex (V)	1	0.332	0.348
Subject Sex (S)	1	0.752	0.790
2 - Way Interactions			
A X V	1	0.989	1.038
A X S	1	0.501	0.526
V X S	1	0.696	0.730
3 - Way Interaction			
A X V X S	1	0.336	0.352
Explained	7	0.531	0.557
Residual	231	0.953	
Total	238	0.941	

TABLE G

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE USING RESPONSES TO
QUESTION 8. AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Source	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Main Effects			
Assailant Sex (A)	1	0.170	0.236
Victim Sex (V)	1	1.328	1.839
Subject Sex (S)	1	0.103	0.143
2 - Way Interactions			
A X V	1	0.154	0.213
A X S	1	0.048	0.067
V X S	1	0.694	0.960
3 - Way Interaction			
A X V X S	1	0.622	0.916
Explained	7	0.438	0.606
Residual	231	0.722	
Total	238	0.714	