

Rape Perceptions, Gender Role Attitudes, and Victim-Perpetrator Acquaintance

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The connection between rape perceptions, gender role attitudes, and victim-perpetrator acquaintance was examined. One hundred fifty Israeli students rated their perceptions of the victim, the perpetrator, the situation, and the appropriate punishment, after reading scenarios in which rape was committed by a neighbor, an ex-boyfriend, and a current life partner. Significant negative correlations were found between gender-role attitudes and four measures of rape perceptions. "Traditionals" minimized the severity of all rapes more than "Egalitarians" did. As the acquaintance level increased, there was a greater tendency to minimize the severity of the rape, in the perceptions of the victim, the situation, and the punishment; the situation was characterized less as rape, and was perceived as less violating of the victim's rights and less psychologically damaging. Women tended to have more egalitarian attitudes than men did, and women were less likely to minimize the severity of the rape in the measures of perceptions of the situation and the appropriate punishment.

KEY WORDS: gender role attitudes; victim-perpetrator acquaintance; rape perceptions.

Attributions of responsibility to victim and perpetrator, assessments of motives, and psychological consequences all affect perceptions of the severity of rape. Minimization of the severity of rape can be expressed by the refusal to label the situation as rape, or by characterizing it as not being psychologically damaging or as not violating the victim's rights. Minimization of the severity of rape is also connected to judgments of responsibility, and can be expressed by attributing more blame to the victim and less blame to the perpetrator.

In her social-historical analysis of rape, Brownmiller (1975) claimed that rape should not be viewed as a deviant sexual act, but as an aggressive and antisocial tool for men's control over women. She asserted that rape myths are maintained in order to support and justify male supremacy and social power. In line with a sociocultural perspective of use

of rape as a mechanism of social control, Schwarz and Brand (1983) found rape to have an intimidating effect on all women, not just on victims, and that the threat of rape reinforced traditional attitudes concerning gender roles and women's rights.

Rape Myths

Burt (1980) defined rape myths as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (p. 217). Such common rape perceptions represent beliefs that have almost no factual bases in reality. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) defined 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). Despite considerable research and publications in professional and popular journals concerning rape, such myths continue to persist in common lay reasoning.

One myth that researches have shown to have little basis in reality is that rape is a crime of pure passion, that it is primarily sexually motivated. Although

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not all researchers agree on the extent of sexual motivation in rape, it was indicated that rape combines elements of power and anger, as well as sexuality. As early as 1977, Groth, Burgess, and Holmstrom (1977) had concluded that, although sexuality was the method chosen to express power or anger, sex was not the dominant motivator in rape. But despite decades of research, there is still a tendency to attribute sexual urges as the primarily motivating factor for rape (Feild, 1978; Ferguson, Duthie, & Graf, 1987). Johnson, Kuck, and Schander (1997) reported that nearly one-third (32.2%) of the respondents agreed that men, in certain situations, have sexual urges that they cannot control; even more (43.9%) agreed that all men are capable of rape, given the right situation. Nearly 90% (89.4%) agreed with the myth that men who rape are sick, emotionally disturbed individuals.

Another common myth is that rapists are most often strangers who suddenly attack their victims in a dark alley. According to surveys and crime statistics, most rapes are not committed by a stranger; between 75 and 90% of the perpetrators are known to their victims, on different levels of acquaintance (e.g., Cowan, 2000; Russell, 1984). In Israel, only 16.3% of sexual assaults are carried out by a stranger, whereas in 83.7% of the assaults, the perpetrator was known to the victim (Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel, 2002).

Rape myths are also reflected in the attribution of blame to victims. Victim blame is expressed in several themes: victim masochism (e.g., they enjoy it or want it), victim precipitation (e.g., they ask for it; it happens only to certain types of women), and victim fabrication (e.g., they lie or exaggerate; Koss et al., 1994).

Other myths refer to the psychological consequences of rape. First, there is a tendency to attribute less trauma to victims who were raped by an acquaintance or other familiar person. Rape is considered less psychologically harmful to the victim when carried out by a steady date, rather than by a first date or a stranger (Bridges, 1991). But in reality, Koss, Dinero, Seibel, and Cox (1988) found no differences in the levels of psychological symptoms between victims who were raped by a stranger, an acquaintance, a spouse, or a family member. The only difference found was in reporting and help seeking.

Degree of psychological damage and trauma tend to be seen as a function of the victim's sexual experience. For example, Ward (1995) found that 24% of police officers, 11% of lawyers, 6% of doc-

tors, and 3% of rape counselors thought that sexually experienced women are not really damaged by rape. A victim is blamed more for her victimization when she has had previous sexual experiences (L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982). In addition, the perceived damage influences attribution of blame; Kanekar and Nazareth (1988) found that longer imprisonment was recommended for the rapist when the victim was both physically hurt and severely emotionally disturbed, and that emotionally disturbed victims were attributed less blame than victims who appeared to be less disturbed.

Gender Role Attitudes

Gender refers to social, cultural, and psychological aspects that distinguish between the sexes in a given social context. Gender role development is a process of acquiring priorities, skills, traits, norms, and self-perceptions, which characterize each sex, but not necessarily always according to the physiology of a person (Bem, 1974). Gender roles are normative behaviors and attitudes, which are expected from individuals, based on their biological sex, and which are often learned through the socialization process (Allegier & McCormick, 1983). *Gender role attitudes* are beliefs about appropriate role activities for women and men (McHugh & Frieze, 1997). For example, taking care of the family is believed in most cultures to be women's responsibility. *Gender role egalitarianism* is the belief that the sex of an individual should not influence the perception of his/her rights, abilities, obligations, and opportunities. Consequently, a gender role egalitarian does not discriminate against or relate differentially to another person on the basis of the other's sex (Beere, King, Beere, & King, 1984). The construct of gender role egalitarianism is intended to reflect a bidirectional movement, and subsumes the beliefs or judgments about the role behaviors of both men and women (King & King, 1997).

More recent research suggests that it has become customary to say that there has been a linear progression with gender role attitudes, that more people think and accept more egalitarian ways (McHugh & Frieze, 1997). A major shift in gender role attitudes toward an egalitarian orientation in the American public appears to have occurred between the 1960s and the 1980s (Suzuki, 1991); this change appears to be widespread, and it is found among most socio-demographic subgroups of the population (Mason & Lu, 1988).

Age has been found to be a consistently significant correlate of gender role attitudes; younger people hold more egalitarian attitude, and older people hold more traditional and sexist attitudes (McHugh & Frieze, 1997). Rice and Coates (1995) also reported that there has been a consistent, gradual change over time, rather than a clear generational effect. In addition to age, gender has also been found to be a strong determinant of gender role attitudes; women have been found consistently to hold more liberal views on gender roles than men do (Beere et al., 1984; King & King, 1990; Mason & Lu, 1988; Rice & Coates, 1995; Simonson & Subich, 1999).

Rape Perceptions and Gender Role Attitudes

Acceptance of traditional gender role norms for men and women influences tolerance of rape, and it is a significant predictor of acceptance of rape myths (Burt, 1980). Adherence to traditional gender roles had been correlated with the general acceptance of rape myths and with the likelihood of men to commit rape if they were guaranteed that they would not be caught. Persons who are traditional in their gender stereotyping show sexual arousal patterns equivalent to those in identified populations of rapists (Check & Malamuth, 1983).

Feild (1978) discovered that individuals who thought that women should be restricted to “traditional” social roles also tended to believe that rape was often the woman’s fault and that it is motivated by a strong need for sexual release. Costin and Schwarz (1987) presented data from the United States, England, Israel, and West Germany to show that rape myths are positively correlated with beliefs that women’s social roles and rights should be more restricted than those of men. Several other researches have found that the acceptance of traditional gender roles influences tolerance toward rape and acceptance of rape myths (Burt, 1980; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Johnson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Merrell, 1997). Acock and Ireland (1983) found that actions on the part of the victim may be used to justify attributions of blame when victims violated traditional gender role norms (e.g., hitchhiking alone at night). Observers blamed such norm-violating victims more, and blamed the rapist less, than when the victim’s behaviors were consistent with traditional gender norms; these results also showed that people who hold traditional gender role attitudes were more likely to blame the vic-

tims overall. More recent results by Simonson and Subich (1999) indicate that people who hold less traditional gender-role stereotypes perceived rape scenarios overall as more serious and were less likely to blame the victim.

Rape Perceptions and Victim–Perpetrator Acquaintance

Despite the advancement in women’s rights and status in many parts of the world, the belief that a woman’s sexual consent derives automatically from an intimate heterosexual relationship continues to persist. Marriage is perceived as an indication of irrevocable consent to sexual relations (Ewoldt, Monson, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000). This perception expresses itself in many legal systems that have not yet acknowledged a woman’s right to refuse to have sexual intercourse with her husband. Unfortunately, even if a close relationship does not lead to a full acquittal of the perpetrator, it still often serves as a mitigating circumstance, which is used to justify a reduced punishment.

Extent of victim–perpetrator acquaintance influences rape perceptions in regard to definition of the situation, assessment of psychological trauma, and attributions of blame. Rapes by acquaintances, as compared to those by strangers, were less likely to be seen as rape, even by the victims (Koss et al., 1988). Much research has indicated that individuals consider rape by an acquaintance to be a less serious offence than rape by a stranger (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Bridges, 1991; L’Armand & Pepitone, 1982), and marital rape is considered less serious than rape by a nonpartner, and to have fewer psychological effects on the victim (Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, & Biderup, 2000; Sanchez, 1997; Simonson & Subich, 1999).

These studies show a reversed linear relation between victim–perpetrator acquaintance level and attributions of blame to the perpetrator. As the intimacy of the relationship increases, the tendency to consider his behavior as totally unacceptable decreases (Freetly & Kane, 1995). The more familiar the perpetrator is, he is viewed as less responsible for the rape, his actions as a lesser violation of the victim’s rights, and the likelihood of a misunderstanding of the situation as greater (Bridges & McGrail, 1989; Koss et al., 1988; L’Armand & Pepitone, 1982). In addition, punishment recommendations reflect the degree of closeness of the

relationship; shorter sentences are recommended for partner rapists and date rapists than for acquaintance and stranger rapists (Cowan, 2000), and longer sentences are recommended for stranger rapists than for acquaintance rapists (Viki, Abrams, & Masser, 2004).

Researchers have also found a direct linear relation between acquaintance level and attributions of blame to the victim. Rape victims are blamed more when they are raped by an acquaintance or on a date rather than when they are raped by a stranger (Bell et al., 1994; Bridges, 1991; Bridges & McGrail, 1989; Check & Malamuth, 1983; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Tetreault & Barnett, 1987). As the level of acquaintance increases, participants perceive greater victim failure to control the situation, greater victim desire or enjoyment, and less psychological damage (Bridges, 1991; Bridges & McGrail, 1989; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982).

Rape Perceptions, Gender Role Attitudes, and Victim–Perpetrator Acquaintance

The connection between these three variables is extremely important in understanding the theoretical framework of rape analysis. The sex-role socialization analysis of rape (Burt, 1980) suggests that individuals learn what is appropriate for their gender as a result of developmental processes, during which men and women learn expectations regarding the appropriate gender role behaviors in sexual interactions. Men are expected to be dominant, powerful, and sexually aggressive, whereas women are expected to be fragile, passive, and submissive, yet still responsible for controlling the extent of their sexual activity (Simonson & Subich, 1999). According to this theory, gender role socialization promotes the formation of false and rape-supportive beliefs and supports the view that individuals who hold very traditional gender role beliefs will perceive acquaintance rape as an extreme and appropriate version of traditional male–female sexual interaction (Bridges, 1991; Bridges & McGrail, 1989; Edwoldt et al., 2000).

Support for this position was found by Bridges (1991), who concluded that gender role expectations are applied more strongly to date rape than to stranger rape. Participants in her study attributed greater victim failure to control the situation, greater victim desire for intercourse, and greater perpetrator misunderstanding of the victim in the date rape scenarios than in the stranger rape scenarios. Re-

garding the perception of the situation, less psychological damage was expected for the victim of rape by a steady date than for the victim of first date or stranger rape, and a lesser violation of victim's rights were attributed to the first date victim than to the stranger victim. Although participants evaluated all assaults as rape, forced intercourse by a dating partner, as compared to a stranger, was characterized less strongly as rape.

More recently, Merrell (1997) reported similar findings for marital rape. Traditionals thought that the wife is more obligated to have sex with her husband and viewed coercive strategies as less unacceptable than did nontraditionals. Traditionals and men were less willing to use the term “marital rape” as a description than were nontraditionals and women. Bridges and McGrail (1989) proposed that, because it is believed to be the woman's role to set the limits in sexual interactions, a date rape is sometimes viewed as due to the victim's failure to control the situation. Expectations concerning sexual behaviors and motives are also more influential on attributions of date rape (Bridges & McGrail, 1989) and marital rape (Merrell, 1997) than of stranger rape.

This relationship was examined in the present research, in regard to different levels of acquaintance where the victim and perpetrator were a couple (in the past or in the present) and where they were only neighbors. Consistent with the sex role socialization analysis of rape model, the purpose of this research was to examine whether the closer the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, the more likely it is that the rape experience will be minimized. It was predicted that minimization of the rape would increase when the perpetrator and the victim had previously had sexual relations.

Rape Perceptions and Gender Differences

Some previous research has shown a weak relationship between gender and perceptions of severity of rape experiences. For example, Acock and Ireland (1983) found that observers' gender was not relevant to the perceived seriousness of rape or to attributions, except for the observation that men had more positive behavioral intention toward the rapist. However, this was inconsistent with most previous research where women tended to evaluate rape more seriously than men did and to be less likely than men to endorse rape-supportive beliefs or to mitigate the seriousness of sexual assault (Bell et al., 1994;

Bridges, 1991; Burt, 1980; Caron & Carter, 1997; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Ewoldt et al., 2000; Feild, 1978; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Freetly & Kane, 1995; Johnson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Monson et al., 2000).

Gender differences in responsibility attribution were found in the past, although not consistently. Some of the research reported no gender differences in attribution of responsibility to the victim (Acock & Ireland, 1983; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Shotland & Goodstein, 1983). However, other researchers have found that men were more likely than women to attribute blame to the victim (Barnett & Feild, 1977; Bell et al., 1994; Caron & Carter, 1997; Feild, 1978) and were less negative in their views of rapists. Women also recommended longer jail sentences for the rapist (Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Kanekar & Nazareth, 1988).

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 150 undergraduate students, 75 men and 75 women, from three universities and colleges in Israel; 92% were Israeli by birth ($N = 138$). The mean age of the participants was 24.3 years; 94% ($N = 141$) were between the ages of 21 and 30 (range 18–40); 85.3% of the sample were single ($N = 128$), and 12.7% were married ($N = 19$).

Instruments

Two questionnaires and three hypothetical rape scenarios were used. Questionnaire wording was adapted to be gender-neutral.

Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale, Form B *[SRES Form B]* (Beere et al., 1984)

Gender role attitudes were measured using the SRES Form B. This questionnaire examines beliefs about the role behaviors of both women and men, so it provides a more contemporary perspective on gender role equality than do earlier measures (King & King, 1997). “Sex role egalitarianism” is defined as “an attitude that causes one to respond to another individual independently of the other individual’s sex” (Beere et al., 1984, p. 564). The scale consists of five subscales, each with 19 questions: Marital

Roles, Parental Roles, Employment Roles, Social–Interpersonal–Heterosexual Roles, and Educational Roles. Participants respond to each item on a five point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Total score may range from 95 to 475, and subscale scores may range from 19 to 95; higher scores are indicative of more egalitarian gender role attitudes. For each of the participants, the mean score on each subscale was calculated, and these five means were then summed to produce the “total gender role attitudes score.” The scores could range between 1 and 5; higher scores are indicative of more egalitarian gender role attitudes.

Beere et al. (1984) reported total score stability coefficients of 0.88, with a 3- to 4-week interval. The total score internal consistency reliability estimate was 0.97. The internal consistency reliability estimates for the marital, parental, employment, social–interpersonal–heterosexual, and educational subscales were .88, .89, .89, .84, and .89, respectively. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability estimate for the total score was .94 and the internal consistency reliability estimates for the five subscales were .84, .85, .86, .82, and .80, respectively. According to Beere et al. (1984), evidence of the discriminate validity was found in the correlations between SRES scores and scores on a social desirability scale. The relatively low values for the correlation coefficient ($r = .17$) suggests that the SRES is not measuring a general tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner, and the high reliability coefficients do not reflect variance attributable to this tendency (Beere et al., 1984).

Rape Scenarios

To examine the influence of victim–perpetrator type of acquaintance on rape perceptions, three scenarios were used: rape by a neighbor, an ex-boyfriend, and a current life-partner. The heterosexual rape scenarios used in this study were adapted from the scenarios used by Bridges (1991) of rape by a stranger, by an acquaintance on a first date, and by a steady dating partner, but they were adapted to fit the three levels of acquaintance examined in this study. In each of the three scenarios a woman forcefully said “no” to a sexual proposition by a man. He ignored her protests, touched her, forced himself on her, and completed the act of intercourse. To reduce any bias, that might be introduced by using the terms

“victim” and “perpetrator,” the names “Barbara” and “Tim” were used in all the scenarios.

In previous studies (Bridges, 1991; Check & Malamuth, 1983), different locations were used in different rape scenarios (inside or outside the woman’s apartment). Because the present study was focused on levels of acquaintance, the rapes in all three scenarios took place in the woman’s apartment. Logical reasons were presented for the men to enter the woman’s apartment (the neighbor came to collect the maintenance fee, the ex-boyfriend came to pick up some personal things he had left there, and the present life-partner lives there). The rape scenarios were identical in all other details: the sexual proposal, the man’s behavior, and the woman’s behavior. The identical formulation was designed to minimize or prevent bias and to enable the participants to give their attitudes based on victim–perpetrator acquaintance only.

Rape Perceptions Questionnaire

Similar to previous studies (Bridges, 1991; Bridges & McGrail, 1989; Check & Malamuth, 1983), in the present study rape perceptions were measured by questions that concerned the participants’ evaluation of the victim, the perpetrator, and the situation. However, in the present study a fourth measure was examined: evaluation of the appropriate punishment. This variable was measured by 15 questions that were answered on an 11-point scale, 0—*not at all* and 10—*to a great extent*. Questions 1–13 were taken from the study of Simonson and Subich (1999), based on Bridges (1991).

Minimization of the severity of rape can be manifested in attributing more responsibility to the victim and less responsibility to the perpetrator. Questions 1–5 examined the attributions made about the victim: the extent to which the incident was influenced by (1) Barbara’s control of the situation, (2) Barbara’s lack of responsibility for the situation, (3) Barbara’s desire for intercourse, (4) Barbara’s enjoyment of the incident, and (5) Barbara’s provocative nature. Questions 6–10 examined the attributions made about the perpetrator: the extent to which the incident was influenced by (6) Tim’s misunderstanding of Barbara’s behavior or desires, (7) Tim’s inability to stop the incident, (8) Tim’s excessive sex drive, (9) Tim’s psychological problems, and (10) Tim’s responsibility for the incident. The assumption of items 6–9 is the beliefs that rape oc-

curs because of the man’s misunderstanding of the woman’s desire, or because of the man’s strong sexual drive, psychological problems, or inability to stop himself, reduce his responsibility for the rape.

Minimization of the severity of rape can also be manifested in an attitude, in which the situation is not characterized as rape, and perceived as less psychologically damaging and less violating of the victim’s rights. Questions 11–13 examined the perception of the situation: the extent to which (11) Barbara would be psychologically damaged by the incident, (12) Tim was violating Barbara’s rights. On question (13), participants were asked whether they would characterize the intercourse as rape (“0” was labeled “definitely rape” and “10” was labeled “definitely not rape”). Question 14–15 examined the perception of the appropriate punishment: The first (14) was “In your opinion, does Tim deserve a punishment?,” and the second (15) was “If you think that Tim deserves a punishment, how severe should it be?” (“0” was labeled “light punishment” and “10” was labeled “very severe punishment”).

Higher scores on Questions 1–9, and lower scores on Questions 10–15, indicated minimization of the severity of rape. The four measures of “rape perceptions” were calculated as the mean of all items, and scores ranged from 1 to 10. For the purpose of uniformity, the scores for Questions 10–15 were reversed, so that higher scores in all 15 questions indicate a higher tendency to minimize the severity of the rape. The internal consistency reliability estimates for the measures were the perception of the victim .80, the perpetrator .49, the situation .70, and the appropriate punishment .73.

Procedure

Participants first completed the Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale. Next, each participant read one of three rape scenarios which were randomly assigned. Following that, participants answered a series of questions concerning their perceptions of the incident, and, finally, completed a short demographic information sheet.

RESULTS

The three scenarios were randomly assigned to 25 men and 25 women (50 participants in each level of acquaintance). For each one of the participants, a

Table I. Means and Standard Deviations for Rape Perceptions Measures

Measure of rape perception	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum	α
Victim	150	1.55	1.58	0.00	7.20	.80
Perpetrator	150	4.92	1.85	0.00	8.00	.49
Situation	150	0.54	0.97	0.00	6.33	.69
Appropriate punishment	150	0.76	1.20	0.00	6.00	.73

total score of the gender role attitudes was calculated as the mean of scores of all five submeasures. The SRES scores ranged between 2.74 and 4.77, with a mean of 4.07 ($SD = 0.42$, $\alpha = .94$). This can tell us that the sample had generally egalitarian views.

Participants were divided into two groups. Those with a total score lower than the mean of the sample were classified as “Traditionalists” ($N = 66$, 44%), and those with a total score higher than the mean were classified as “Egalitarians” ($N = 84$, 56%).

As can be seen in Table I, standard deviations of the three measures of rape perceptions (except the perception of the perpetrator) were higher than the measure’s mean score. This finding indicates that there is high variance in the perception of the victim, the situation, and the appropriate punishment, according to the different acquaintance levels. In the measure of perception of the perpetrator the mean was =4.92 and $SD = 1.84$, which is indicative of a lower variance and low responsibility attribution. In addition, if the means in the measures of perception of the victim, the situation, and the appropriate punishment were less than 2, we can assume that our participants reported low levels of rape myths acceptance.

The first hypothesis was that a connection will be found between gender role attitudes and rape perceptions. This hypothesis was confirmed. Table II presents the significant negative correlations that were found between the SRES scores and all four measures of rape perception. In addition, a t test was performed in order to compare the rape perceptions of the two groups: traditionalists and egal-

itarians. The means of all four measures were higher among traditionalists than for egalitarians. These differences were significant for three measures: perception of the perpetrator, $t(148) = 1.78$, $p < .05$; the situation, $t(93.05) = 2.45$, $p < .01$; and the appropriate punishment, $t(100.72) = 2.45$, $p < .01$. There was no significant difference between traditionalists and egalitarians in the perception of the victim. As predicted, the more traditional the gender role attitudes are, the greater the tendency is for minimization of the severity of rape.

The second hypothesis was that a connection will be found between rape perceptions and the victim–perpetrator acquaintance level. Table III presents the one-way ANOVA that was performed using the four measures of rape perceptions as dependent variables and the scenario type as an independent variable. As predicted, significant differences were found in three measures: perception of the victim $F(2, 147) = 66.26$, $p < .01$; the situation, $F(2, 147) = 9.32$, $p < .01$; and the appropriate punishment, $F(2, 147) = 7.86$, $p < .01$, but not in the measure of the perception of the perpetrator. It seems that the closer the acquaintance level is, the higher the means of all four measures of rape perceptions are, which indicates a greater minimization of the severity of the rape.

Also examined was the influence of the victim–perpetrator acquaintance level on the perception of the situation. A one-way ANOVA was performed using the three questions that constituted the measure of perception of the situation as dependent variables and the scenario type as an independent variable. In all three components of this measure, significant differences were found among the three acquaintance levels: the extent to which the incident was perceived as violating the woman’s rights, $F(2, 147) = 3.38$, $p < .05$, the extent to which the incident was perceived as psychologically damaging to the woman, $F(2, 147) = 5.84$, $p < .01$, and the extent to which the incident was characterized as “rape,” $F(2, 147) = 10.04$, $p < .01$. It seems that the tendency for minimization in the perception of the situation is increased as

Table II. Pearson Correlations of Gender Role Attitudes and Rape Perceptions

Perception of	SRES scores
The victim	–0.17*
The perpetrator	–0.14*
The situation	–0.20**
The punishment	–0.25**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table III. Rape Perceptions according to Victim–Perpetrator Acquaintance Level, One-Way ANOVA

Rape perception	Acquaintance level	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>
Perception of the victim	Neighbor	50	0.16	0.30	2,147	66.26**
	Ex-boyfriend	50	1.69	1.46		
	Present life-partner	50	2.80	1.32		
Perception of the perpetrator	Neighbor	50	4.75	1.99	2,147	0.78
	Ex-boyfriend	50	4.84	1.79		
	Present life-partner	50	5.18	1.75		
Perception of the situation	Neighbor	50	0.16	0.42	2,147	9.32**
	Ex-boyfriend	50	0.51	0.65		
	Present life-partner	50	0.95	1.40		
Perception of the appropriate punishment	Neighbor	50	0.33	0.57	2,147	7.86**
	Ex-boyfriend	50	0.72	0.91		
	Present life-partner	50	1.24	1.68		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

the victim–perpetrator acquaintance level becomes greater.

In addition, we examined whether the differences in the perception of the situation are connected to the history of sexual relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. A *t* test was performed in order to compare the perception of the situation between participants who read scenarios of rape by a partner (in the past or the present, $N = 100$) and participants who read scenarios of rape by a neighbor ($N = 50$). In all three components of this measure, significant differences were found between the two groups: the extent to which the incident was perceived as violating the woman's rights, $t(105.6) = -3.51$, $p < .01$; the extent to which the incident was perceived as psychologically damaging to the woman, $t(134.4) = -3.19$, $p < .01$; and the extent to which the incident was characterized as "rape," $t(104.1) = -4.48$, $p < .01$. It seems that when the perpetrator and the victim were a couple, and it can be assumed that they had had sexual relations in the past, there was a greater tendency for minimization of the situation.

The third hypothesis was that a statistical interaction will be found between gender role attitudes and victim–perpetrator acquaintance on all measures of rape perceptions. A significant statistical interaction was found only for the measure of perception of the situation, $F(2, 147) = 3.17$, $p < .05$. In a two-way univariate analysis of variance, the two attitude groups (traditional and egalitarians) and the three rape scenarios were used as independent variables, and the means of the perception of the situation were used as a dependent variable. Means of this measure among traditional were rape by a neighbor 0.18 ($N = 20$, $SD = 0.6$),

by an ex-boyfriend 0.62 ($N = 23$, $SD = 0.67$), and by a life-partner 1.44 ($N = 23$, $SD = 1.72$). Means among egalitarians were rape by a neighbor 0.14 ($N = 30$, $SD = 0.24$), by an ex-boyfriend 0.42 ($N = 27$, $SD = 0.62$), and by a life-partner 0.54 ($N = 27$, $SD = 0.9$). As can be seen in Fig. 1, the closer the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, the greater the tendency was to minimize the severity of the situation, but this tendency was more substantial among traditional than among egalitarians.

Gender Differences

Significant gender differences were found in gender role attitudes: female participants had more egalitarian attitudes than male participant did, $t(139.75) = 4.14$, $p < .01$. The mean for women was 4.2 ($SD = 0.34$) and for men was 3.93 ($SD = 0.44$).

In addition, significant gender differences were found in two measures of rape perceptions. In the measures of perception of the situation the mean for men was 0.77 ($SD = 1.22$) and the mean for women was 0.3 ($SD = 0.52$), $t(100.16) = -3.05$, $p < .01$. And in the measure of perception of the appropriate punishment the mean for men was 1.08 ($SD = 1.44$) and the mean for women was 0.44 ($SD = 0.78$), $t(114.21) = -3.33$, $p < .01$. Higher means among male participants indicate a greater tendency for minimization in these two measures. There were no significant gender differences in the perception of the victim and the perpetrator. Generally, male participants tended to minimize the severity of rape more than female participants did.

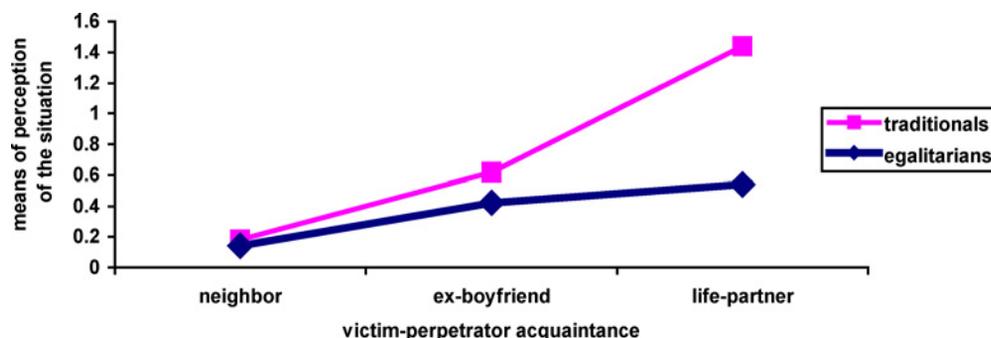


Fig. 1. Perception of the situation according to level of acquaintance and gender role attitudes.

DISCUSSION

In this study we examined whether the perceived severity of rape is minimized when the rape occurs between a man and a woman who are or were a couple, and we also examined the relationships of these perceptions to gender role attitudes. The identification and understanding of misleading perceptions of rape has both theoretical consequences and important practical implications for improving intervention and prevention efforts. Because more realistic perceptions are expected to be followed by higher reporting rates, they may lead to more effective law enforcement, more help-seeking among victims, and improved support services. More realistic perceptions of rape can also assist in breaking the myths that influences attribution of blame and contribute to the redefinition of sexual assault.

Rape Perceptions and Gender Role Attitudes

Because gender role attitudes are the beliefs people have concerning the appropriate role activities for both genders, these attitudes also influence behavior expectations from men and women during sexual interactions. Therefore, in the present research we examined whether traditional gender role attitudes are connected to minimization of the severity of rape.

Findings confirmed the first hypothesis, as a connection was found between gender role attitudes and rape perceptions. Significant negative correlations were found between the SRES scores and all four measures of rape perception. In addition, the means of all four measures of rape perceptions were higher among traditionalists than for egalitarians. These differences were significant in three measures: percep-

tions of the perpetrator, the situation, and the appropriate punishment, but not in the measure of the perception of the victim. As predicted, the more traditional the gender role attitudes, the greater the tendency for minimization of the severity of rape.

These findings support previous studies, which indicated a connection between traditional stereotypes of gender roles and rape-supportive beliefs (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Burt, 1980; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Costin & Schwarz, 1987; Feild, 1978; Johnson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Merrell, 1997; Simonson & Subich, 1999). However, the fact that differences between traditionalists and egalitarians were not significant in the measure of perception of the victim is not consistent with previous studies, which indicate a connection between victim blaming and traditionality in gender role attitudes (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Feild, 1978; Simonson & Subich, 1999).

One possible explanation for the discrepancy is that more responsibility is attributed to the victim when her behavior is perceived as not sufficiently cautious and as violating traditional gender role norms (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Cowan, 2000). It is possible that the differences in the perception of the victim were not significant in the present research because the scenarios did not contain any description of norm-violating behavior by the victim. An alternative explanation is connected to the positive correlation found between rape myths and belief that women's social roles and rights should be more restricted than those of men (Costin & Schwarz, 1987). The findings of the present research imply that there are generally more egalitarian attitudes in Israel. Also it is possible that there has been an attitude change toward the phenomena of rape, which is expressed in better understanding that rape is an act of coercion, and thus there has been a decrease in

victim blame. These explanations should be examined in future research.

Rape Perceptions and Victim–Perpetrator Acquaintance

Previous research on the influence of the victim–perpetrator relationship on rape perceptions focused mainly on the comparison between rape by a stranger, an acquaintance, and a date. Recent researchers have examined the interpretations of non-consensual intercourse within marriage (Freetly & Kane, 1995; Monson et al., 2000; Sanchez, 1997; Simonson & Subich, 1999). In the present research a comparison was made between three levels of victim–perpetrator acquaintance that were not compared in earlier studies: rape by a neighbor, an ex-boyfriend, and a present life-partner with whom the victim had lived. As expected in Hypothesis 2 a connection was found between rape perceptions and the victim–perpetrator acquaintance level. It was found that the closer the acquaintance between the victim and perpetrator is the higher are the means, which indicates a greater minimization of the severity of rape. The differences were significant in the measures of perception of the victim, the situation, and the appropriate punishment, but not in the perception of the perpetrator.

Perception of the Victim

More responsibility was attributed to the victim as the level of acquaintance between the victim and perpetrator increased. This is consistent with previous studies, which showed that rape victims are blamed more when they are raped by an acquaintance or a date rather than by a stranger (Bell et al., 1994; Bridges, 1991; Bridges & McGrail, 1989; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Cowan, 2000; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Tetreault & Barnett, 1987).

Perception of the Perpetrator

Contrary to what our predictions, the differences in the perception of the perpetrator varied with increase in the level of acquaintance, but the differences were not significant. Previous researchers reported a reversed linear relation between the closeness of the relationship and the attribution of

blame to the perpetrator (Bridges & McGrail, 1989; Freetly & Kane, 1995; Koss et al., 1988; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982). At this point it is not possible to explain why our results differ either based on theory or on previous studies. One possible explanation, which requires further research, is that the perception that “a rapist is a rapist” regardless of his relationship with the victim is beginning to be widespread.

Perception of the Appropriated Punishment

Less severe punishment was recommended as the level of acquaintance increased, which indicated greater minimization. This is consistent with Cowan (2000), who reported that punishment recommendations reflect the degree of closeness between the victim and perpetrator. It is also consistent with Viki et al. (2004), who reported that longer sentences were recommended for stranger rape than for acquaintance rape.

Perception of the Situation

Minimization of rape was also examined in measures of perceptions of the situation. The significant differences found in all three components of this measure indicated that the closer the acquaintance between the victim and perpetrator is, the greater the tendency to minimize the situation. As the acquaintance level increased (from neighbor to ex-boyfriend to life-partner), the situation was less likely to be characterized as “rape,” and was perceived as a lesser violation of the victim's rights and as less psychologically damaging.

To verify that this minimization is connected to history of sexual relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, an additional analysis examined perceptions of the situation by comparing two groups only: participants who read scenarios of rape by a past or present partner, and participants who read the scenario of rape by a neighbor. Again, significant differences were found in all three components of this measure, which indicates that there is a greater tendency to minimize the severity of the situation when the perpetrator was the victim's romantic partner. These findings support previous studies, which showed that victim–perpetrator acquaintance influences the definition of the situation, the perceived seriousness of the rape, and the expected psychological trauma (Bell et al., 1994; Bridges, 1991; L'Armand &

Pepitone, 1982; Monson et al., 2000; Sanchez, 1997; Simonson & Subich, 1999).

Several explanations can be offered about the minimization of the severity of rape in cases of rape by a romantic acquaintance.

History of Sexual Consent

According to this explanation, past sexual intercourse between the victim and perpetrator can influence participants' tendency to minimize the severity of date and marital rapes (Monson et al., 2000). Shotland and Goodstein (1992) argued that history of sexual relations within a relationship establishes a "sexual precedence" that leads to the belief that each member of the couple is entitled to a legitimate claim on the other's sexuality. Yescavage (1999) also found that a victim is perceived as more accountable for the rape when the couple has been together longer and were sexually active. She suggested that a woman's refusal to have sex with a boyfriend might not be perceived as meaning "no" because people can believe that the "no" is only offered by the woman as a "token resistance" in order to preserve her reputation. Because of double standard of sexuality norms, women's roles are often contradictory, in that they are supposed to portray an image of sexual un-interest, while simultaneously keeping their date interested enough. Some of Yescavage's participants thought that there is a point in which a woman's right to refuse sex is denied, and furthermore, she may need "to be taught a lesson." She suggested that a rape by a partner is understood as male entitlement based on the patriarchal idea of ownership of women.

Stereotypical Assumptions About "Real Rape"

Bogoch and Don-Yechiya (2000) suggested that there is a prototype model of a "real rape" in the Israeli courts and public opinion. According to this model, in a "real rape" a decent and helpless young virgin, who is under her father's patronage, is assaulted by an armed stranger (or a group of strangers) in a public place. The perpetrator penetrates the strongly resisting victim and causes her severe physical damage. The victim runs away and immediately reports the assault to the police. The level of distinction between any given event and the prototype model is the factor that determines the court's attitude toward the offense, and also helps to ex-

plain the punishment in sex offenses, particularly in cases of acquaintance rape. The relationship between the victim and perpetrator is often considered by the court as a mitigating circumstance, and may even serve as an argument in favor of the defendant, when in fact a violent assault by a close person should be considered a more heinous crime because of the betrayal of trust (Bogoch & Don-Yechiya, 2000). When the court, which is perceived as the highest moral authority, reduces the severity of a sexual assault because of a prior relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, it is no wonder that such ambivalence exists in society toward the victims and the definition of rape.

Attributed Psychological Damage of Rape Victims

In the present research, rape by a partner was perceived as less psychologically damaging than rape by a neighbor. One part of the explanation is connected to the belief that sexually experienced women are not really damaged by rape (Ward, 1995), but this does not explain why more damage is attributed to victims of a rape by an ex-boyfriend than to victims of a rape by a present life-partner. The second part of the explanation is connected to the belief that a woman will not be traumatized when raped by a man with whom she has had sexual intercourse. This belief offers no essential separation between consensual sex and sexual assault. According to the sex-role socialization analysis of rape (Burt, 1980), people who adhere to extremely traditional gender role beliefs may view acquaintance rape as an extreme and appropriate version of male–female sexual interaction. The process of gender role socialization promotes the formation of rape-supportive beliefs, or false beliefs, including the one that rape is not really psychologically damaging (Ewoldt et al., 2000). Therefore this model can explain why some people believe that a woman is not traumatized when she is raped by a man with whom she had consensual intercourse in the past.

Statistical Interaction

The third hypothesis was that a statistical interaction would be found between gender role attitudes and victim–perpetrator acquaintance on measures of rape perceptions. This kind of interaction effect was found only for the measure of perception of the situation. Among both traditionals and

egalitarians, the closer the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, the greater the tendency to minimize the severity of the situation, but this tendency was more substantial among traditionals than among egalitarians. Rape by a partner, and not by a neighbor, was perceived as less severe among traditionals than among egalitarians.

No statistical interaction was found for the measures of perceptions of the victim, the perpetrator and the appropriate punishment. This is consistent with the research of Simonson and Subich (1999), who found an interaction only in terms of perception of the situation, and only for the marital rape scenario. The explanation they suggested was that recent education efforts in the United States tended to focus on date rape, but not on marital rape. This explanation supports our claim that minimization of the severity of rape is connected to an intimate acquaintance between the victim and perpetrator. Further research using different methods is needed in order to examine the sex role socialization analysis of rape.

Gender Differences

A connection was found between gender role attitudes and gender: significant gender differences were found in gender role attitudes, which indicated that women tend to hold more egalitarian attitudes than men do. This supports previous research, which showed that women tend to hold more liberal views on gender roles than men do (Beere et al., 1984; King & King, 1990; Mason & Lu, 1988; Rice & Coates, 1995; Simonson & Subich, 1999). As proposed by Beere et al. (1984), because women as a group have lower status and are less economically rewarded and less privileged, they have much more to gain from an egalitarian society than men do.

We also examined the connection between gender and rape perceptions. Significant gender differences were found in the measures of perception of the situation and perception of the appropriate punishment. Higher means among male participants indicate a greater tendency for minimization of the severity of rape in these two measures. There were no significant gender differences in the perception of the victim and the perpetrator.

Perception of the Situation

Gender differences found on this measure were similar to those found by other researchers who reported that women tend to evaluate rape more se-

riously than men do, and they are less likely than men to endorse rape-supportive beliefs or to mitigate the seriousness of rape (Bell et al., 1994; Bridges, 1991; Burt, 1980; Caron & Carter, 1997; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Ewoldt et al., 2000; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Freetly & Kane, 1995; Monson et al., 2000). Previous research (Monson et al., 2000; Shotland & Goodstein, 1992) indicated that women are more likely to consider a rape "a rape" regardless of the sexual intercourse history or status of the relationship. Freetly and Kane (1995) suggested that men have a self-interest in defining rape narrowly, whereas women have self-interest in defining rape more broadly, as rape is clearly more salient and more likely to happen to women.

Perception of the Appropriate Punishment

The gender differences found on this measure support previous studies, which indicate that women recommend longer jail sentences for the rapist than men do (Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Kanekar & Nazareth, 1988), but are inconsistent with Cowan (2000), who did not find gender differences in recommendations of punishment to the rapist.

Perceptions of Victim and Perpetrator

There were no significant gender differences in the perception of the victim and the perpetrator. This pattern is inconsistent with the results of most past research, which demonstrated that men were more likely to attribute blame to the victim, and less negative in their views of rapists, than women were (Barnett & Feild, 1977; Bell et al., 1994; Bridges, 1991; Bridges & McGrail, 1989; Caron & Carter, 1997; Feild, 1978; Kanekar & Nazareth, 1988; Simonson & Subich, 1999). Yet, other researchers reported no gender differences in attribution of responsibility to the victim (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Jones & Anderson, 1973; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982; Shotland & Goodstein, 1983). Simonson and Subich (1999) offered an explanation for the conflicting results in terms of gender differences in rape perceptions. They suggested that gender differences in rape perceptions might be a function of gender role traditionality rather than gender per se. The results of the present research indicate that men tend to minimize the severity of rape more than women do, in

the perceptions of the situation and punishment, but not in the perceptions of the victim and perpetrator. These inconclusive findings suggest that, although explanatory efforts by the feminist movement in Israel have partially succeeded, further educational efforts are needed in order to create a broader change in public awareness concerning rape perceptions and egalitarianism.

Future Directions

Moral judgment is a subject that may be connected to rape perceptions, but was not examined in the present research. Role theory suggests that, in any social situation, individuals find themselves in one of two complementary positions (e.g., parent–child, teacher–student, perpetrator–victim). Therefore, the moral judgment of an individual at any given moment is dependent on the position he or she adopts in the relevant role set. In addition, rape perceptions may be related to the specific field of judgment of aggression, which is also connected to the position adopted by the naive judge in a given role set (Wolf, Ron, & Wolters, 1996). This may explain why rape perceptions were different in accordance with the level of acquaintance between the victim and her perpetrator in the three scenarios. According to the theory of defensive attribution (Bell et al., 1994), the attribution of blame and responsibility is a function of the observer's identification with the perpetrator and the victim. It is possible that rape perceptions are influenced by the participants' level of identification with the role of perpetrator described in the scenario (neighbor, ex-boyfriend, present life-partner). Therefore, future researchers should compare the rape perceptions of people who were in a long-term relationship, and people who never experienced a relationship. It is recommended that future researchers further examine the connection between moral judgment and rape perceptions.

Limitations

The stimuli used in this research were written scripts, and it is recommended that future studies will make use of alternative methods, such as video tapes, in constructing events offered for participants response. In addition, participants answered the rape perceptions questionnaire on an 11-point scale, and it is possible that open interviews, which enable free ex-

pression, would have shed a new light on the issue at hand. Further examination is needed in order to find how to best measure rape perceptions. In addition, no tendencies toward social desirability were noted in this research. Although Beere et al. (1984) found a low correlation between the SRES scores and the social desirability scale, Simonson and Subich (1999) found that social desirability is connected to perceptions of the victim. Social desirability should be considered in future studies.

The current sample included BA students, aged 20–30, a homogeneous population in terms of age and education. In the literature, a connection has been found between age and education and gender role attitudes (King & King, 1985; McHugh & Frieze, 1997; Rice & Coates, 1995), so findings cannot be generalized for we did not have a random sample. As gender role attitudes are also connected to rape perceptions, it is possible that the generalizability of the findings is limited. Future researchers should include participants from a wider range of age and education levels.

Conclusion

This research adds another layer to previous studies of rape perceptions, by comparing levels of victim–perpetrator acquaintance that had not been compared before. The results strengthen existing knowledge about the connection between rape perceptions and gender role attitudes, due to the use of the SRES (Beere et al., 1984) that provides a wider perspective by examined judgments concerning role behaviors of both sexes. Current rape perceptions were measured by clusters of items that enabled a better understanding of the complexity of rape perceptions.

The existing knowledge of various characteristics of the rape offense is an important component in the social construction of beliefs and perceptions concerning rape. The more reliable the knowledge is, the more it assists in changing the social climate, which supports sexual assault. The specific comparison made in this research has deepened the understanding of how the minimization of severity of rape is connected to the continuity of victim–perpetrator association. The major conclusion here is that there is minimization of the severity of rape when the man and the woman were or are romantically or sexually involved. The rape of a woman by a man with whom she has had past sexual relations is perceived

as less consequential psychologically and less violating of her rights. It seems that past romantic and sexual relations between a rapist and his victim makes it harder for people to characterize sexual assault as rape, and therefore influence the minimization of the perceived severity of the rape.

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