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What is a typical rape? Effects of victim and participant gender in female and male rape  
perception

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Running Head: TYPICAL RAPE

Keywords: rape, gender, male rape, blame, attitudes

### Abstract

The study had three research aims: (1) to examine the current perception of female rape. Given recent changes in public awareness of female rape, it was predicted that respondents would conceptualise a typical female rape as an acquaintance rape rather than as the stranger rape stereotype; (2) to examine whether these perceptions differ according to respondents' gender; (3) to examine the 'cultural lag' theory of male rape where it was hypothesised that if the public perception of male rape lags behind female rape, then a typical male rape will be conceptualised as the classic stranger rape stereotype. Findings showed that contrary to predictions, a typical female rape was conceptualised according to the stranger rape stereotype. It was also found that instead of lagging behind female rape along the stranger –acquaintance rape dimension, male rape was viewed predominantly in terms of 'other' factors (factors not found on the stranger-acquaintance dimension, e.g., victim/rapist sexual orientation, rapist calls victim names), which were erroneous, sexualising and homophobic.

What is a typical rape? Effects of victim and participant gender in female and male rape perception

A considerable amount of research exploring the social perception of rape has emerged within the past three decades. Early studies showed that in relation to female rape, most people's beliefs were of a 'blitz', or 'classic' stranger rape stereotype (Estrich, 1987; Ryan, 1988). Thus, when asked to conceptualise a typical, credible, genuine, or real rape, respondents described an incident that occurred outdoors, at night, where the victim was alone and suddenly attacked by a male psychopathic stranger. No 'aggravating' factors such as the victim wearing provocative clothing, knowing the attacker, being drunk, spending time with the assailant prior to the rape or, in the case of the attacker, using a weapon or aggressive acts to attempt or complete the rape were present. The struggling victim was subdued and, despite resisting the assault to the utmost, with signs of injury to prove it, is overpowered and raped. The female victim, of exemplary character and sexual reputation, had a legitimate reason to be where she was at the time of the assault (Gilmartin-Zena, 1983; Holmstrom & Burgess, 1978; Howard, 1984 a & 1984b; Johnson & Jackson, 1988; Williams, 1984; Wyer, Bodenhausen & Gorman, 1985).

The classic rape proved to be a prevalent stereotype among participants in such perception experiments. In addition, agencies such as doctors, police and lawyers (Ward,

1995; Blake, Heesacker & Marks, 1993) also often draw on the stereotype when evaluating rape cases. They often divide cases into ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ (Estrich, 1997; Ward, 1995). A strong case, one which has the greatest possibility of conviction, comprises as many features from the classic rape stereotype as possible. Victims themselves have also been found to draw extensively on the stereotype when defining their own experiences. They will rarely label it as ‘rape’ if it does not approximate the stranger rape stereotype (SRS) (Wood & Rennie, 1994). These issues can lead to low report and prosecution rates (Estrich, 1987; Lees, 1997; Ussher, 1997).

Despite its prevalence, the SRS is actually founded on a number of misconceptions or “myths” or, “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980: 217) and “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994: 134). Specifically, the SRS does not accurately reflect reality. As several seminal studies have shown, significant numbers of women are raped in different circumstances to those described by the stereotype. They are raped by men known to them (boyfriend, date, lover, ex-lover, husband or ex-husband) - in an early study, 29% of rapes or attempted rapes occurred in this context (Russell, 1982) while only 11% had been perpetrated by strangers. In another study (Gavey, 1991), 61% of the rapes had been perpetrated by boyfriends, lovers, dates or husbands and another 17% by acquaintances whereas only 9% were committed by strangers. Yet another study (Koss, 1988) showed that 84% of rapes involved a man known to the female victim and involved little aggression, no weapon and little injury to the victim. According to Estrich (1987), ‘real rape’ (that which occurs

most frequently) is often “a case of a single defendant who knew his victim and neither beat her nor threatened her with a weapon” (Estrich, 1987: 4).

There is evidence to suggest that public beliefs surrounding the SRS have also changed. Some authors have suggested that the notion of acquaintance or date rape (AR) as ‘real’ rape has been integrated into contemporary perceptions (Gavey, 2005) and is now embedded in public thinking on the topic. This change in perception has been attributed to several, albeit indirect, factors. These include a generalized erosion of the cultural support for rape myths and traditional sex-role attitudes (Orcutt & Faison, 1988), increased media discussions of date rape (Gavey, 2005), for example, as evidenced in a recent headline - “Date rape is the new student fear” (Times Higher Education Supplement, 9/24/2004), a greater focus on the cultural disbanding of rape myths in newspapers and women’s magazines (Verberg, Desmarais, Wood & Senn, 2000) and a recently documented statistically significant relationship between declining beliefs in rape myths and concomitant increased reporting of non stranger rapes to the police (between 1973 and 1985: Hinck & Thomas, 1999), suggesting that a broader definition of rape is being used in reports of sexual assault to agencies. In psychological studies, respondents are typically observed to disagree rather than agree with rape myth statements (Brady, Chrisler, Hosdale, Osowiecki & Veal, 1991; Carmody & Washington, 2001; Golge, Yavuz, Muderrisoglu & Yavuz, 2003; Hinck & Thomas, 1999) although certain differences in rape myth acceptance between groups (such as between men and women where men tend to express weaker disagreement with rape myths than women; Jiminez & Abreu, 2003; McDonald & Kline, 2004; Vrij & Kirby, 2002; or between individuals who attend rape awareness workshops; Hinck & Thomas, 1999) remain.

Finally, a recent study showed that when asked to describe a recent coercive sexual experience, American college women described a date/acquaintance rape more frequently than rape perpetrated by a stranger. Furthermore, when asked whether observers thought these instances defined real rape, most agreed that they did, only disagreeing on whether forced oral or 'digital' intercourse constituted rape (Kahn, 2004).

These findings contrast sharply with a study conducted in 1988, which asked participants to describe a typical rape or a typical seductive encounter. Analysis of the descriptions showed that 90% of participants writing about the former described the perpetrator as male (47% when writing about a seduction), 5% described it as occurring indoors (58% when writing about a seduction) and 75% described it as occurring between strangers whereas only 8% described occurrences between acquaintances (Ryan, 1988).

Thus, there is some evidence to suggest that the public perception of a typical or real female rape may now be of acquaintance rape. However, this proposal has not been examined directly. Therefore, the first aim of the present study is to investigate whether when asked to describe a typical female rape, participants will conceptualise an acquaintance rape.

The second aim of the present study is to examine whether male rape perception is also of acquaintance rape. The majority of research discussed above has been conducted on female rape. However, male rape has gained prominence in recent social psychological research (Anderson, 1999; Anderson, Beattie & Spencer, 2001; Isely & Gehrenbeck-Shim, 1997; Kaufman, DiVasto, Jackson, Voorhees & Christy, 1980; Mitchell, Hirschman & Nagayama Hall, 1999) as it is increasingly recognized as a more frequent phenomenon than previously thought (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Stermac,

Sheridan, Davidson & Dunn, 1996; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). Research has shown that a substantial number of men are raped each year in the general population (although it is difficult to obtain accurate incidence figures). Crime statistics reveal that in the United Kingdom in 1995, 150 such offences against men were recorded, rising to 231 in 1996 (Adler, 2000). However, as in female rape, official statistics on male rape greatly underestimate the number of actual frequencies of non-consensual sex between adult men. The first major UK epidemiological study reported an incidence figure for male rape of 3% in the general population (Coxell, King, Mezey & Gordon, 1999) and there is evidence to suggest that this figure may be much higher when sampled in gay communities (Coxell et al, 1999; Hickson et al, 1994) or in college populations (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994)<sup>1</sup>.

It is often questioned whether men are raped in similar circumstances to women. Current research suggests that they are, although there are some notable differences. In a study which examined the circumstances and characteristics of sexual assaults against adult males presenting to a crisis unit (Stermac, Sheridan, Davidson & Dun, 1996), 86% of the reported assaults involved male perpetrators, 50% were known to the victim, 43% of assaults occurred at the victim's home and 46% reported using alcohol or drugs at the time of the assault. Most of the victims were young (mean age of 26.86 years). Physical violence was reported in 11% of cases while verbal threats were reported in 21% of assaults. Finally, emotional trauma was evident in the initial presentation of the clients at the crisis unit in the majority of cases (59%), and 19% showed evidence of soft-tissue damage such as bruises. These data are similar to previous findings on male rape

(Frazier, 1993; Hodge & Canter, 1998; Hickson, Davies, Hunt, Weatherburn, McManus & Coxon, 1994). Whilst there are similarities with female rape, several authors have drawn attention to the fact that men are more likely than women to suffer a greater degree of violence during the assault and number of assailants (Kaufman et al., 1980).

Although research has revealed the circumstances in which male rape may actually take place (and it should be noted that most of the victims were those who presented at various crisis units/university-wide research programmes - the real rate of the under-reporting of male rape is unknown), studies have also shown that as in female rape, ignorance and disbelief about the phenomenon of male sexual assault pervade thinking about rape, enabling numerous myths and misconceptions to be perpetuated. Stereotypical perceptions about male rape such as “Adult males only get raped in prison”; “Most men who are raped are homosexuals” or “Men are too strong to be overpowered” have all been found to play a role in participants’ conceptualizations of male rape (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). It has even been suggested that current conceptualisations about male rape *lag* behind those of female rape, that is, current male rape perception is at the stage that female rape perception was several years ago in terms of individuals’ knowledge, beliefs and attitudes (Donnelly and Kenyon, 1996). For example, in their study of interviews with service providers, Donnelly and Kenyon (1996) state that “the similarities between [certain] statements and those made about female victims in the past are chilling, recalling times when women were thought to have ‘asked for it’ and to have ‘secretly desired to be raped’. Although attitudes towards female rape have changed, attitudes toward male rape lag behind” (pg. 445). The present study investigates whether male rape lags behind female rape by asking

participants to describe a typical male rape. It is hypothesized that if male rape lags behind female rape, then it will be typified as a SRS more frequently compared to female rape.

In addition, respondents' gender is predicted to affect their perceptions of what constitutes a typical female or male rape. Previous research has shown that men and women appear to identify differently with rape. Not only do men agree with rape myths more than women (Geiger, Fischer & Eshet, 2004; Hinck & Thomas, 1999), they also empathise less with the victims than women (Bell, Kuriloff & Lottes, 1994; Brady, Chrisler, Hosdale, Osowiecki & Veal, 1991; Davies, Pollard & Archer, 2001), blame victims more than women (White & Kurpius, 2002) and hold less tolerant attitudes toward victims (Jiminez & Abreu, 2003; Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre & Morrison, 2005). The lack of identification also extends to male rape. Male participants blame male victims more than women (Mitchell, et al., 1999; Whatley & Riggio, 1993), agree more with male rape myths than women (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992) and are more homophobic than women in the context of male rape (Anderson, 2004).

Differences in identification with the victims for men and women may stem from the highly gendered nature of rape and cultural expectations surrounding sexual relations and violations of these (Doherty & Anderson, 1998). Women are more likely than men to experience sexual assault (DeKeseredy, Schwartz & Tait, 1993; Gidycz & Wisniewski, 1987). They also experience the fear and potential of rape on a daily basis, for example, through the media (Verberg, 1998). For example, feminist scholars have long argued that the specific nature and consequences of perceived threats in the public sphere are different for men and women (Griffin, 1971). Griffin cites an 'un-named fear', which,

when articulated, is the fear of sexual violence, and as something which “relentlessly figures as a ‘daily part of every woman’s consciousness” (pg. 27). Thus, women have historically been the victims of violence while men have been the perpetrators. Since men may never or very rarely become rape victims, they don’t identify with rape as much as women do – they don’t know much about rape, have few friends who may have become victims, don’t take notice of media reports of rape and rarely discuss it with friends. Given their lack of knowledge or empathy, when asked to think about a typical rape, men may draw on the SRS. They may also use this strategy in relation to both female and male rape (by extrapolating from the female rape to the male rape scenario). By contrast, women may be expected to know considerably more about rape than men, take notice of media reports of incidents and discuss these issues with friends. Thus, they may identify more closely with rape victims than men. They may also know that the acquaintance rape is more common than stranger rape. They will then draw on this description in incidents of female rape and will extrapolate their knowledge to male rape.

### Summary of hypotheses

(1) Given a change in public perception of female rape, respondents will conceptualise this type of rape as an acquaintance rape.

(2) In a test of the cultural lag hypothesis of male rape, when asked to provide a spontaneous written description of a ‘typical’ male rape, it will be conceptualized as a stranger rape significantly more frequently compared to female rape while female rape will be conceptualized as acquaintance rape significantly more frequently than male rape

(3) Due to the salience of gender in rape, it is hypothesised that men will produce the classic stranger rape stereotype when asked to write about both male and female rape. It is hypothesised that women will reproduce the acquaintance rape scenario when asked to describe a typical female or male rape.

### Method

#### Participants

One hundred and nineteen undergraduate students at the University of East London, UK, volunteered to take part in the study, 62 of whom were women (52%) and 57 were men (48%). Their ages ranged from 18 - 40 years (mean = 21.2, sd = 3.4).

#### Design and Procedure

The study employed two scenarios (male rape vs. female rape) creating four experimental conditions: males writing about male rape, males writing about female rape, females writing about male rape, females writing about female rape.

Volunteers were asked to participate in a social issues study at the end of a lecture period. They were presented with the experimental booklet containing the instructions for the study and a blank sheet of paper for their responses. They were informed that all responses would be treated anonymously and that they were free to leave the study at any point. At the end of the study participants were given telephone numbers of personnel who could be contacted if they wished to discuss further the issues raised in the study.

### Materials

The experimental booklet contained the following instructions, based on Ryan (1988), the bracketed information indicating where wording was changed to correspond with the two rape scenarios (male and female) in the study: “Can you please describe what you consider to be a typical male [female] rape (where a man is raped [where a woman is raped]) in as much detail as possible. I would like you to include in your description information about what led up to, what happened during, and what followed the events. Can you also describe as many characteristics of the characters as possible, including their thoughts and feelings”.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions through the distribution of the questionnaires, and read the written instructions prior to writing their own description of the incident. The time taken to write the scenarios ranged between 10 – 40 minutes, with a mean of 18 minutes.

### Analytic strategy

#### Categories

Participants’ written descriptions of the rape incidents were content analyzed (Holsti, 1968; Abraham, Krahe, Dominic & Fritsche, 2002) using a scheme of categories developed for use with media accounts of rape by Anderson and Beattie (2000). These categories were identified by Anderson and Beattie as characterizing the classic rape, based on the review of the empirical rape perception literature. Participants’ descriptions were content analysed for the presence or absence of each

comparison factor. In total, 21 categories, each of which was divided into three sections (relating to the assailant, the victim and the circumstances).

The assailant.

*Male* This category involved both direct (“I guess the man, the rapist, must have a bisexual or homosexual orientation...”) and indirect (“The boss, leader of the inmates, approaches the new guy in the showers, gets one of his friends to hold him down...”) references to the perpetrator’s gender.

*Stranger to the victim* This category included descriptions of the degree of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Specific references to the lack of relationship between the victim and the perpetrator such as “A typical female rape is when a woman is physically and sexually attacked by a stranger” and implied references such as “A woman walking alone late at night. She just finished work, is tired, wearing a suit with her hands full carrying a brief case. The male is in his twenties, a bit of a delinquent, involved in petty theft and car crime. He’s bored and has seen the female...” were included.

*Psychopath* Included in this category were specific descriptions referring to behavioural characteristics and tendencies signalling ‘psychopathy’, ‘abnormality’ or some other disturbance of character or behaviour such as “The man must for some reason have been aroused, psychopathic, have absolutely no feelings for anyone...” or “The attacker is obviously not a well-adjusted member of society”. Also included

in this category was evidence of previous criminal behaviour, as seen in the example above “The male is in his twenties, a bit of a delinquent, involved in petty theft and car crime”. Although delinquency is not necessarily pathological, it is nevertheless outside societal norms and is indicative of disturbed behaviour.

The victim.

*Unavoidable reason for being there* The classic rape victim is one who had an unavoidable reason for being where they were at the time of the attack. This category included any references to the fact that the victim was, for example, at home, at work or just returning home from work, that the victim may have been walking in the park or out on a jog, for example, “I suppose I automatically think of the typical female rape as occurring at night, with the woman being alone and a single attacker grabbing her while she’s walking home, from shopping etc.” or “A woman is attacked while out jogging in a park...”

*Good reputation...* The classic victim is usually described as having a ‘good reputation’. Anderson & Beattie (2001) classified this category in relation to specific reference to the victim’s marital status (e.g., respectably married, widowed, divorced, single etc.), occupation (e.g., ‘has a good job’) and sexual promiscuity (prior or present sexual behaviour, for example, whether the victim had many sexual partners, whether she was a virgin at the time of the rape etc.). For example, “Sarah has a good job at an estate agent’s” signalled a reference to the victim’s social reputation and character.

*Conservatively dressed...* This category included references to how the victim was dressed at the time of the rape such as “The man behind her did not go out looking to rape someone but the sight of this lone woman, despite the fact that she was not provocatively dressed...”. Specific references to the victim “wearing jeans and a shirt” were also included here.

*Resistance* The 'classic' victim resists the attack to the utmost. This category included all descriptions referring to the victim's general 'resistance' such as “Whether the victim is, in the opinion of the attacker asking for it or not, if the victim says no or puts up resistance and then is forced to have sex, then he has been raped” as well as references to more specific examples such as physical resistance, for example, “Girl is scared but tries to fight” and verbal resistance in the form of verbal protestations, shouting or screaming, e.g., “They get back to his place and when it becomes clear what he wanted, she said no” or “...she screams...”.

*Fear* The victim's fear was categorised according to any descriptions of "fright", "terror" and the victim being scared such as “The girl would be crying now and would be absolutely petrified” or “The woman would struggle and be very scared”.

*Trauma* This category refers to the perception of the victim as somebody who sustains short or long term psychological or emotional trauma as a result of the rape. This category included descriptions of post-rape behaviour, which could be taken to

be indicative of trauma, for example, "I guess then the 'rapist' would run away, and escape – leaving the raped man extremely scared, shocked and disturbed" or, for example, "He does not mention it to anyone (due to embarrassment) and becomes socially withdrawn".

*Alone* This category comprised descriptions of the victim being alone just prior to the rape, for example, "I suppose I automatically think of the typical rape as occurring at night with the woman being alone...".

The circumstances.

*Outdoors* The 'classic' rape is usually perceived as having occurred outdoors, usually in a dark alley. This category included descriptions of where exactly the rape happened, for example, "I think that the most typical male rape would occur in the street..." or "On a winter's night, the victim is walking home, taking a short-cut through a park".

*Force* The classic rape suggests the use of force within the rape. This category involved any specific mentions of the fact that "force" was used or that the victim was "forced" into any acts, for example, "...where a male is jumped by another male and taken somewhere and forced to have anal or oral sex...".

*Struggle* Descriptions referring specifically to the fact that there was a "struggle" between the victim and the assailant were included in this category, for example, "The second man begins to panic and struggles more violently...".

*Aggression* This category referred to any behaviours associated with but separate to the actual act of rape, which were particularly aggressive in nature. These were described as having occurred before or during the rape, for example, such behaviours as where the assailant slapped, punched or kicked the victim. For example, "The man would be on his way home from somewhere and the rapist would jump out, knocking him to the floor, pinning him down face forward...".

*Grabbed/accosted* Consistent with the classic rape, this category refers to the suddenness of the attack and included descriptions of the victim being 'grabbed' or 'accosted' by the rapist, for example, "...and a single attacker grabbing her ...".

*Night* The classic rape is one that happens at night. This category therefore included references such as "I would imagine it to be at night...".

*Weapon* This refers to any specific mentions of any weapon used by the assailant such as "... threatening him with a weapon such as a knife".

### Analysis of categories

The frequency with which each category, in each rape type (stranger or acquaintance) was mentioned by each participant formed the basis of the analysis. These were summed to create an overall stranger and acquaintance rape index for each participant.

### Inter-rater reliability

To verify the effectiveness of the coding scheme, an inter-rater reliability check between two independent coders was performed on a twenty percent sample of the written descriptions. This proved acceptably high: Cohen's Kappa = .89.

## **Results**

### Descriptive Statistics

All variables were screened for normality of distribution. The two dependent variables of the classic rape stereotype and acquaintance rape showed reasonable normal distribution (skewness = 0.28, kurtosis = -0.99 for the classic stereotype; skewness = 0.95, kurtosis = -0.15 for acquaintance rape). The means and standard deviations of these variables are as follows: classic stereotype (Mean = 7.24, SD = 3.02), acquaintance rape (Mean = 1.82, SD = 2.02).

The frequencies with which participants mentioned each of the categories of the classic rape stereotype and acquaintance rape in their written descriptions of female and male rape incidents were recorded. Total and percentage frequencies for each category (frequencies were derived by summing the total number of participants who mentioned

each category) in both stranger and acquaintance rape scenarios as a function of victim and participant gender are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

### Testing hypothesis 1 and frequency of category use in female rape

Testing the first hypothesis, that respondents will conceptualise female rape as an acquaintance rape rather than as a classic stranger rape stereotype, independent groups t-test showed that contrary to predictions, when asked to write about female rape, participants reproduced the classic stranger rape stereotype (mean = 7.79, SD = 3.29) significantly more frequently than the acquaintance rape scenario (mean = 2.20, SD = 2.29;  $t = 10.43$ ,  $df = 110$ ,  $p = .00$ ).

The most frequently drawn on categories when describing female rape (Table 1) were the perpetrator as male, force, trauma suffered by the victim, victim grabbed, and that the incident occurred at night. The least frequently occurring categories were descriptions of the victim as conservatively dressed and the victim having a good reputation.

Within the acquaintance rape scenarios (Table 2), the most frequently occurring categories were descriptions of relationship between the rapist and victim, that the rape occurred indoors, that the rape was avoidable and that the victim was in the company of the rapist prior to the rape.

### Testing hypotheses 2 and 3

A full-factorial 2 (gender of victim) x 2 (gender of participant) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out on participants' responses on the two

dependent variables of classic stereotype and acquaintance rape. Thus, the composite scores were used to examine whether in combination they were affected by either sex of participant or the sex of the victim<sup>2</sup>.

There were no univariate or multivariate outliers. The SPSS ANOVA programme was employed with sequential adjustment for unequal cell Ns, and Pillai's criterion was used to ensure robustness against violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices (this was done prior to all further analyses). The MANOVA revealed a significant main effect for victim gender ( $F(1, 114) = 5.74, p < .01$ , Partial Eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.10). Univariate ANOVAs showed that all participants produced more characteristics of the acquaintance rape scenario in the female rape (mean = 2.22, SD = 2.29) than in the male rape scenario (mean = 1.47, SD = 1.67;  $F(1, 114) = 3.91, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .034$ ). No significant differences between rates of mention of the classic stereotype were observed between male rape (mean = 6.71, SD = 2.66) and female rape (mean = 7.78, SD = 3.29).

A two-way interaction between victim and participant gender was also observed ( $F(1, 114) = 3.56, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.06$ ). Univariate ANOVAs showed that men produced more features of the classic rape stereotype in the male rape scenario (mean = 7.38, SD = 2.56) than in the female rape scenario (mean = 6.88, SD = 3.12). An opposite pattern was observed for the female participants, who produced more features of the classic rape stereotype in the female rape scenario (mean = 8.57, SD = 3.29) than in the male rape scenario (mean = 6.16, SD = 2.68;  $F(1, 114) = 6.99, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .060$ ).

#### 'Other' factors in rape

During the previous analysis stage, it became apparent that participants did not refer only to stranger or acquaintance rape in their descriptions – they also wrote about many ‘other’ features of rape which do not fit these two types. This section analyses participants’ descriptions for the presence of ‘other’ factors such as the rapist calling the victim names, the victim being described as an outgoing person or the victim reporting the rape (see table 4) in both female and male rape scenarios. In addition, it is predicted that:

(4) ‘other’ factors (‘other’ than those pertaining to stranger or acquaintance rape) will occur more frequently in the male rape scenarios than in the female rape scenarios

This prediction derives from the assumptions underpinning the characteristics of stranger and acquaintance rape. In female rape, stranger and acquaintance rape have been theorised along a continuum (Kelly, 1984), ranging from consensual sex to forced/coerced sex. However, since the notion of the stranger-acquaintance rape continuum was developed to characterize female rape, it may not be wholly applicable to male rape. Instead, male rape may be conceptualized along different dimensions altogether, and the open-ended nature of this task allows this hypothesis to be examined.

#### Testing hypothesis 4

Independent group t-test, showed that, as predicted, participants produced more ‘other’ features of rape (Tables 3 and 4) when asked to write about a typical male rape (mean = 4.74, SD = 2.19) than about a typical female rape (mean = 3.77, SD = 2.12;  $t = 2.41$  (112),  $p = .018$ ).

Further inferential tests were conducted on the 'other' features of rape. A series of 2 x 2 and one-sample Chi-square analyses were carried out on the categorical data. The 2 x 2 analyses showed that men described the perpetrator in the male rape as more powerful/stronger than the victim more than would be expected by chance but less than would be expected by chance in the female rape. In contrast, women reversed this pattern by describing the perpetrator as more powerful/stronger than the victim in the female rape more than would be expected but less than would be expected in the male rape ( $\chi^2(1) = 5.75, p < .01$ ). Men also described the victim in the female rape as feeling more dirty/ashamed/humiliated than expected but less than expected in the male rape. Women described the male rape victim as feeling this way in the male rape but less than would be expected by chance in the female rape ( $\chi^2(1) = 9.05, p < .003$ ).

Collapsing across the participant gender category, participants included descriptions of penetration more frequently when writing about male rape than when writing about female rape ( $\chi^2(1) = 28.4, p < .001$ ). They also made references to the victim being smaller than the rapist significantly more frequently in the male rape than in the female rape ( $\chi^2(1) = 20.17, p < .001$ ). Participants also made more references to the victim's and rapist's sexual orientation (combining the categories of 'victim homosexual', 'victim heterosexual' and 'rapist homosexual')<sup>3</sup> more frequently in the male rape than in the female rape descriptions ( $\chi^2(1) = 24.5, p < .001$ ), as well as making more references to sexual contact that occurred during the rape (combining the categories of 'fellatio', 'sexual contact', 'oral sex' and 'unprotected sex') more frequently in the male rape than in the female rape ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.00, p < .05$ ).

## Discussion

The first aim of the study was to examine current conceptualizations of female rape. It was hypothesised that when asked to produce a description of a typical female rape, respondents would document the AR. However, contrary to predictions, participants conceptualized a typical female rape in terms of the SRS rather than the AR. This is an unexpected finding in the light of the recent changes in the public perception of female rape. The cultural disbandment of rape myths, greater frequency of reporting to agencies, the subsequent reporting of acquaintance rapes in the media and a greater awareness of the ‘epidemic’ of acquaintance and date rape among the general public (Gavey, 2005) have all been cited as factors to have contributed to both private and public changes in views of female rape.

There may be several explanations for the finding presented here. The first, and most obvious, is that despite these recent changes, current conceptualizations of female rape have simply not progressed as much as researchers have assumed, and participants continue to adhere to the myth of the SRS as the most typical type for female victims. However, given that the participants were students, who represent a relatively socially aware and motivated group (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), this explanation would be surprising. There is another possible reason why stereotyped thinking about rape might have been demonstrated here. The findings may be indicative of an emotionally defensive response on the part of the respondents (Shaver, 1970), a frequent finding in rape perception research (Anderson, 1999; Davies & McCartney, 2003; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). Participants may have drawn on the SRS because they did not want to

attribute blame to the victim, which necessarily follows an acquaintance setting. This interpretation is strengthened by the two-way interaction, which showed that men described a SRS in the male rape scenario while women described a SRS in the female rape scenario. Both sets of participants described the 'ideal' (and thus blameless) victim when victim gender matched their own. This interpretation raises the interesting possibility that emotional factors such as defensive attributions may impact on rape perception to the detriment of the victims involved. Although done for the right reasons (to mitigate blame to victims), adhering to stereotyped thinking about rape may continue to create a damaging environment for victims, one in which, for example, they are unable to report the attack if it deviates from the stranger perpetrated incident.

An interpretation of the present findings in terms of defensive attributions also raises the issue of the varying impact of knowledge versus emotions that may be elicited when people are asked to think about rape. It is not possible to establish from present findings whether participants wrote about the stranger rape because they felt emotional when thinking about the incident (feeling defensive when the victim is one own's gender) or whether they described this scenario because they did not know that the acquaintance rape is more frequent. It is likely that both emotions and knowledge are important in rape perception; thus, it is thus future studies must establish whether emotions override knowledge about rape or vice versa.

The second aim of the study was to examine whether male rape 'lags' behind female rape in terms of how it is perceived. The 'cultural lag' hypothesis was tested by examining whether participants would perceive a typical male rape as SRS (indicating lag). It was also hypothesized that given different degrees of identification with rape,

men would be more likely to describe a typical male rape as SRS whereas women would perceive a typical male rape as AR (between acquaintances/dates).

The cultural lag hypothesis of male rape was partially supported. Although female rape was described as AR significantly more frequently than male rape, the other aspect to the lag hypothesis, that male rape would be typified as SRS more than female rape was not supported. Thus, on the stranger-acquaintance rape continuum, male rape does not lag behind female rape. However, male rape was perceived more frequently than female rape in terms of 'other' factors – other, that is, to the stranger-acquaintance rape continuum. The 'other' factors of male rape frequently referred to by participants included descriptions of the victim's shame and humiliation, details of penetration, the victim failing to report the incident or not being believed, the sexual orientation of the victim and perpetrator, the rapist's strength and power over the victim, the victim's smaller stature relative to the rapist and pain endured by the victim in the aftermath of the attack. The rapist's motivation for the rape as being sexual was also mentioned frequently just as the actual description of the sexual contact that occurred between the rapist and the victim. Also, the victim and rapist were often described as drunk, feeling guilty, the victim reporting the rape, the rapist normalizing the events, the victim being attractive, powerless, the rapist being a recidivist, calling the victim names and the victim feeling extreme anger.

It would appear that female rape and male rape are conceptualized along different dimensions. The stranger-acquaintance rape continuum is more relevant to female rape than to male rape whereas a different dimension altogether seems to underpin reasoning about male rape. Firstly, male rape perception may be characterized by erroneous and

mythical perception. Several of the ‘other’ factors mentioned by participants represent errors and myths about male rape. For example, to be a typical victim, he must be smaller than the rapist, the rapist and/or victim are homosexual, the rape victim must feel guilty, the rapist is motivated by sexual urges, the victim must be attractive and the recidivist rapist strikes opportunistically (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Secondly, a number of the ‘other’ factors were sexualising in nature, for example, penetration, rapist/victim sexual orientation, rapist’s sexual motivation for rape and description of sexual contact during the rape. If these four categories are combined, then these descriptions constitute 30% of all ‘other’ factors. This sexualisation of male rape is similar to the way in which female rape used to be viewed (Gavey, 2005) although currently appeared to be infrequent (sexualizing descriptions of female rape constituted only 10% of all ‘other’ factors in female rape). Thirdly, many of the ‘other’ factors referred to in male rape were, either overtly or covertly, homophobic. For example,

“Since male rape is one of the ultimate insults to men, the victim must have either half the desire to be raped, e.g., male fantasy...”

“...naughty shagging of a man whose consent won’t be given...”

“One of the two bufties edges towards the lone man...”

Thus, although homophobic beliefs were not directly measured here, there is nevertheless some evidence to suggest that a homophobic dimension may exist in

conceptualizations of male rape. This finding is in line with previous research, which has shown that male rape is often associated with homosexuality and that homophobic beliefs often emerge in considerations of male rape (Davies & McCartney, 2003; Mitchell, et al., 1999). Taken together, these results suggest that instead of the SRS-AR dimension, male rape perception is based on erroneous, sexualizing and homophobic beliefs.

The myths, sexualisation and homophobia which may be associated with male rape may impact on the sympathy that may be extended to victims. Previous research has shown that homophobic beliefs are positively correlated with male rape victim blame (Anderson, 2004) and participants believe that the victim suffers less trauma if the penetrative act is part of the normal sexual practice, i.e., if the man is homosexual (and concomitantly, more trauma is suffered by victims who have never experienced the type of penetration they may experience during a rape, i.e., heterosexual males; Doherty & Anderson, 2004). Future research should explore further the ways in which the links between sexuality and homophobia may underpin conceptualizations of male rape, and in particular, how these may impact on sympathy and blame extended to male victims.

Although these results represent several new findings, there were possible shortcomings to the present study. The study was conducted among a student population, who may be particularly aware of the issue of rape in the way that other populations may not be. As such, they form only a subset of the people that rape victims may come into contact with in the post rape period. It is not known how agencies such as the police, medical personnel or juries may conceptualise female and male rape. Despite these issues, the results presented clearly highlight the importance of periodically examining rape perception, as well as the effects of gender in conceptualisations of rape. They also

demonstrate the importance of investigating male rape alongside female rape in order to gain further understanding of current social responses to both types of incident.

## NOTES

1. There is some evidence to suggest that men report sexual victimisation even less frequently than women do (Pino and Meier, 1999).
2. For all dependent variables of classic perpetrator, victim and circumstances, the presence of each factor was summed to gain a cumulative score for each participant.
3. Four entries in this category for men and three for women often deployed a particular phraseology, for example, “[the rapist] in his everyday life would be socially awkward and not openly gay”, “if the male was not gay, [it would] be emotionally more scarring”, “the victim/perpetrator may not necessarily be homosexual”. Statements such as these were included in this category, although at first glance appear to debunk the myth that conflates male rape with homosexuality. Given that it is impossible to decide on which side of the gay/not gay argument the equivocal statement falls, they are nevertheless illustrative in highlighting the issue of sexual orientation in male rape as important, and were included for this reason. These issues were resolved through discussion between the author and the rater who performed inter-rater reliabilities on the data.

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Table 1: Frequency of stranger rape category inclusion in participants' rape descriptions

<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Male rape</b>		<b>Female rape</b>	
	Men (N=26)	Women (N=32)	Men (N=26)	Women (N=30)
male	22 (85)	25 (78)	25 (96)	29 (97)
stranger	18 (69)	15 (47)	10 (39)	17 (57)
abnormal	9 (35)	10 (31)	13 (50)	11 (37))
<b>Circumstances</b>				
outdoors	15 (58)	19 (59)	11 (42)	19 (63)
force	21 (81)	14 (44)	18 (69)	20 (67)
struggle	10 (38)	7 (22)	5 (19)	13 (43)
aggression	20 (77)	19 (59)	10 (39)	19 (63)
grabbed	10 (38)	15 (47)	8 (31)	22 (73)
night	14 (54)	15 (47)	14 (54)	21 (70)
weapon	8 (31)	6 (19)	6 (23)	5 (17)
<b>Victim</b>				
unavoidable	3 (12)	2 (6)	7 (27)	8 (27)
good reputation	2 (8)	3 (9)	1 (4)	0 (-)
conservatively dressed	0 (-)	1 (3)	2 (8)	3 (10)
resistance	7 (27)	7 (22)	13 (50)	15 (50)
fear	7 (27)	15 (47)	6 (23)	14 (47)
trauma	16 (62)	14 (44)	19 (73)	25 (83)
alone	10 (38)	11 (34)	11 (42)	17 (57)

Each category represents raw frequencies and percentage frequencies (in parentheses) of the total number of participants who mentioned the category.

Table 2: Frequency of acquaintance rape category inclusion in participants' rape descriptions

<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Male rape</b>		<b>Female rape</b>	
	Men (N=26)	Women (N=32)	Men (N=26)	Women (N=30)
female	1 (4)	4 (13)	1 (4)	1 (3)
acquaintance	7 (27)	17 (53)	12 (46)	12 (40)
'regular guy'	0 (-)	0 (-)	1 (4)	1 (3)
<b>Circumstances</b>				
indoors	8 (31)	7 (22)	9 (35)	10 (33)
no force	0 (-)	0 (-)	2 (8)	0 (-)
no struggle	1 (4)	0 (-)	0 (-)	0 (-)
no aggression	1 (4)	1 (3)	2 (8)	0 (-)
Not grabbed	2 (8)	1 (3)	0 (-)	0 (-)
daytime	0 (-)	0 (-)	2 (8)	0 (-)
No weapon	0 (0)	0 (-)	0 (-)	2 (7)
<b>Victim</b>				
Avoidable	3 (12)	8 (25)	11 (42)	11 (37)
bad reputation/drunk	4 (15)	6 (19)	8 (31)	9 (30)
Not conservatively dressed/attractive	5 (19)	1 (3)	2 (8)	4 (13)
No resistance	0 (-)	0 (-)	0 (-)	0 (-)
No fear	0 (-)	0 (-)	0 (-)	0 (-)
No trauma	0 (-)	0 (-)	0 (-)	0 (-)
In company of rapist	7 (27)	1 (3)	9 (35)	10 (33)

Table 3: Frequency of 'other' rape category inclusion in participants' rape descriptions of male rape

	Male rape		Total
	Men (N=26)	Women (N=32)	
victim feels dirty/ashamed/humiliated	12 (46)	26 (81)	38 (66)
description of penetration (vaginal/anal)	20 (77)	14 (44)	34 (59)
Doesn't tell anyone/unsuccessful report to agency	16 (61)	18 (56)	34 (59)
Rapist/victim sexual orientation	19 (73)	11 (42)	30 (52)
rapist powerful/strong/status/in control	11 (42)	17 (53)	28 (48)
victim smaller	8 (31)	15 (47)	23 (40)
victim in pain	7 (27)	13 (40)	20 (35)
rapist sexual urges	5 (19)	9 (28)	14 (24)
rapist & victim sexuality/sexual contact/fellatio/oral/unprotected	7 (27)	5 (16)	12 (21)
Victim drunk	4 (15)	6 (18)	10 (17)
rapist drunk	3 (12)	5 (16)	8 (14)
rapist feels guilt/regret	5 (19)	3 (9)	8 (14)
victim feels guilty	3 (12)	4 (13)	7 (12)
tells someone reports to agency	4 (15)	3 (9)	7 (12)
rapist behaves as if nothing has happened/normalises	1 (4)	6 (19)	7 (12)
victim attractive	5 (19)	2 (6)	7 (12)
Victim powerless	7 (27)	0 (-)	7 (12)
he rapes again	0 (-)	5 (16)	5 (9)
unplanned	3 (12)	0 (-)	3 (5)
rapist calls victim names	1 (4)	1 (3)	2 (3)
Victim angry	1 (4)	0 (-)	1 (2)

Table 4: Frequency of 'other' rape category inclusion in participants' rape descriptions of female rape

	Female rape		Total
	Men (N=26)	Women (N=30)	
rapist powerful/strong/status/in control	3 (12)	24 (80)	27 (48)
victim in pain	6 (23)	18 (60)	24 (43)
victim feels dirty/ashamed/humiliated	14 (54)	5 (17)	19 (34)
rapist drunk	10 (38)	6 (20)	16 (29)
victim feels guilty	3 (12)	13 (43)	16 (29)
Doesn't tell anyone/unsuccessful report to agency	0 (-)	14 (47)	14 (25)
rapist sexual urges	6 (23)	7 (23)	13 (23)
rapist feels guilt/regret	11 (42)	0 (-)	11 (20)
unplanned	9 (35)	1 (3)	10 (18)
Victim drunk	0 (-)	7 (23)	7 (13)
he rapes again	0 (-)	6 (20)	6 (11)
Victim powerless	0 (-)	5 (17)	5 (9)
rapist calls victim names	4 (15)	0 (-)	4 (7)
tells someone reports to agency	3 (12)	1 (3)	4 (7)
victim outgoing	0 (-)	4 (13)	4 (7)
rapist & victim sexuality/sexual contact/fellatio/oral/unprotected	0 (-)	4 (13)	4 (7)
victim has shower/bath	1 (4)	3 (10)	4 (7)
older than victim	0 (-)	3 (10)	3 (5)
description of penetration (vaginal/anal)	2 (8)	0 (-)	2 (4)
rapist behaves as if nothing has happened/normalises	0 (-)	2 (7)	2 (4)
Rapist/victim sexual orientation	0 (-)	2 (7)	2 (4)
rapist apologises	0 (-)	1 (3)	1 (2)
victim smaller	0 (-)	1 (3)	1 (2)

Figures in parentheses represent percentage frequencies of category inclusion