

Testing Hypotheses Regarding Rape: Exposure to Sexual Violence, Sex Differences, and the "Normality" of Rapists

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Three hypotheses on the subject of rape were addressed empirically. The first concerns the effects of exposure to sexual violence on reactions to rape. Males and females were first exposed to either a sadomasochistic or a nonviolent version of the same sexual passage and then to a portrayal of rape. Responses to the rape showed interactions between gender and previous exposure: In comparison to males who had read the nonviolent version, males exposed to the sadomasochistic story were more sexually aroused to the rape depiction and more punitive toward the rapist whereas females evidenced differences in the opposite direction. Simple effects analyses for each gender, however, yielded significant differences for the punitiveness measure only and for males only. In addressing the second hypothesis, gender differences were found in the perception of rape. Third, the assertion that rape may be an extension of normal sexual patterns was explored. Subjects were found to believe that a high percentage of men would rape if assured of not being punished and that a substantial percentage of women would enjoy being victimized. While both genders shared these beliefs, very few women believed that they personally would derive pleasure from victimization. Surprisingly, more than half of the males indicated some likelihood that they themselves would rape if assured of not being punished. The association between this self-report and general attitudes toward rape revealed a pattern that bears striking similarity to the callous attitudes often held by convicted rapists.

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Referring to rape as a "stepchild in social psychological research" Vinsel (1977) suggests that investigators utilize recent feminists' writings as a starting point for systematic research. In keeping with this suggestion, the present investigation was designed to examine empirically a number of interrelated hypotheses extracted from recent articles on this topic (Brownmiller, 1975; Clark & Lewis, 1977; Gager & Schurr, 1976; Johnson & Goodchilds, 1973).

Several writers have argued that sexual violence in the mass media constitutes "hate literature" that affects both rape-related attitudes and behavior. Of particular interest here are assertions that violence within pornography increases sexual responsivity to sexually violent fantasies (Gager & Schurr, 1976) and creates a "climate in which acts of sexual hostility directed against women are not only tolerated but ideologically encouraged" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 444). These assertions contradict the conclusions of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (1970) that the existing evidence reveals no adverse effects of sexually explicit stimuli. The research conducted by the Commission, however, did not adequately test the above hypotheses, i.e., a clear distinction was not made between materials that merely depicted explicit sexual content from those involving violent and/or exploitative portrayals of sexual relations (Davis & Braucht, 1973). In fact, materials of the latter type were generally not employed in the Commission's studies.

The present study was designed to examine the effects of exposure to violent vs nonviolent erotica on subsequent reactions to the portrayal of rape. The hypothesized detrimental effects of sexual violence were assessed by examining whether exposure to sadomasochistic materials in which the infliction of pain on women is described as producing pleasure will lead to an altered perception of sexual violence thereby (a) increasing sexual responsiveness to the portrayal of rape and (b) resulting in a more tolerant attitude toward sexual assault. It is important to consider the relevance of these two measures in greater detail.

Abel, Barlow, Blanchard, and Guild (1977) report clear differences between the sexual responsiveness of rapists and nonrapists to the pornographic portrayal of rape. These investigators consider "excessive" sexual arousal to rape themes as a measure of the "proclivity to rape" (see also Abel, Blanchard, & Becker, 1976, 1978). If this approach is valid, then exposures that increase sexual responsivity to rape themes may be considered to have detrimental effects, although it would certainly be inappropriate to suggest any simple or direct relationship between sexual arousal to rape fantasies and actual assaultive acts (Malamuth, Feshbach, & Jaffe, 1977).

The degree of tolerance toward rape was measured by asking subjects to think of themselves as jury members and to indicate what prison sentences they would have given the rapist. While this approach may or

may not have predictive validity to actual courtroom decisions (Wilson & Donnerstein, 1977), it serves as a useful measure of judgments regarding the wrongfulness of the act (Jones & Aronson, 1973; Scroggs, 1976).

To examine the process that may mediate any effects on the two outcome measures of sexual arousal and punitiveness, perceptions of the rape victim and assailant were assessed. It was reasoned that exposure to sexual violence which suggests positive effects (i.e., in the sadomasochistic version) would alter perceptions of the experiences of the rape victim; that is, her suffering would be perceived in a less negative light and would thus be less likely to inhibit the subject's own sexual arousal (Malamuth et al., 1977). Similarly, the altered perception of the victim's experience would be expected to result in relatively favorable attitudes toward the rapist as a mediator of the hypothesized more lenient prison sentences.

A second issue investigated in this study was the existence of sex differences in the perception of sexual assaults. Previous studies reporting gender differences (Barnett & Feild, 1977; Selby, Calhoun, & Brock, 1977) typically assessed agreement with general statements pertaining to rape. This method leaves open the possibility that differences lie in what acts are subsumed within the concept of rape rather than in the perception of the same behavior. The present investigation utilized a rape description without any indication of "provocation." Any gender effects obtained would suggest fundamental differences in the perception of identical behavior.

A third issue researched derives from contentions by feminists that rape is most often an extension of normal sexual socialization that legitimizes sexual coercion. Clark and Lewis (1977), for example, in a chapter titled, "Rapists and other normal men" write: "Thus, the rapist is "normal" because he expresses the same range of identification with sexual aggression as men in general" (p. 145). In addressing this issue, subjects were asked to indicate their opinions of the likelihood they and others would engage in sexual violence. These self-reports were correlated with other attitudinal statements about the rape portrayed and the overall pattern examined in relation to attitudes often held by convicted rapists (Clark & Lewis, 1977; Gager & Schurr, 1976).

METHOD

Subjects

Fifty-three males and thirty-eight females volunteered to participate in the research as part of a requirement of introductory psychology courses at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Materials

Aggression-Anxiety Scale. Degree of anxiety about aggression was considered a potentially important variable mediating the effects of exposure to sexual violence. All subjects

were administered an Aggression–Anxiety Scale (Feshbach & Singer, 1971; Feshbach, Stiles, & Bitter, 1967) in which respondents are presented with 30 true–false items. Eleven of these are “filler” items that disguise the focus of the scale. Scores can thus range from 0 to 19, with higher scores reflecting greater aggression–anxiety. Since previous research has consistently shown gender differences, scores were split at separate medians—9 for males and 11 for females.

Violent vs nonviolent erotic stimuli. Two versions of an approximately 400-word passage were created on the basis of a feature in the March 1977 issue of *Penthouse* magazine. The magazine included photographs and narrative depicting a lesbian sadomasochistic encounter, although not rape. The photographs were not used in the study and in keeping with “typical” materials of this nature (Smith, 1976), the interaction depicted was heterosexual. Except for these changes, the “violent” version of the story was identical to the *Penthouse* feature. It was primarily the woman on whom the pain was inflicted and for whom, much to her own surprise, it stimulated intense sexual arousal. The nonviolent version was very similar except for the absence of sadomasochistic elements.

On the basis of informal pretesting, an attempt was made to insure that the two passage versions would elicit comparable degrees of sexual arousal. This was done to rule out the possibility that the level of arousal per se might be responsible for any differential effects observed in reaction to stimuli presented later, i.e., it was hypothesized that the source of arousal, violent or nonviolent erotica, was of critical importance.

Check on the Manipulation Questionnaire

To ascertain whether the two versions of the story indeed generated similar levels of sexual arousal, a seven-item questionnaire was utilized. This form consisted of descriptors of various moods with nine points (0 to 8) on a Likert-type scale ranging from “none at all” to “extremely.”

Two items, one appearing at the beginning and one at the end of the list, assessed sexual responsiveness. The first item referred to being sexually aroused or “turned on” whereas the second concerned feeling “sexually tantalized or sensuous.” For nondeviant subject populations, self-reports of sexual arousal have been consistently found to correlate highly with physiological measures (Abel et al., 1977; Abel, Blanchard, Murphy, Becker, & Djenderadjian, in press; Heiman, 1977; Schaefer, Treggerthan, & Colgan, 1976).

The other five questionnaire items assessed positive and negative affect. While the two story versions were intended to generate similar levels of sexual arousal, it was anticipated that they may differ in their impact on other affective states. The items inquired about positive feelings, anxiety, frustration, anger, and embarrassment.

Dependent Measures

Rape Story. An approximately 500-word passage was written depicting a male student raping a female student. The following is an illustration of its content:

Bill soon caught up with Susan and offered to escort her to her car. Susan politely refused him. Bill was enraged by the rejection. “Who the hell does this bitch think she is, turning me down,” Bill thought to himself as he reached into his pocket and took out a Swiss army knife. With his left hand he placed the knife at her throat. “If you try to get away, I’ll cut you,” said Bill. Susan nodded her head, her eyes wild with terror.

The story then depicted the rape. There was a description of sexual acts with the victim continuously portrayed as clearly opposing the assault.

Rape Questionnaire

The format of the questionnaire that followed the rape passage was somewhat different from the manipulation check in order to contribute to the impression that the research was designed to assess reactions to a variety of unrelated materials. Unless otherwise indicated, subjects circled a point along a scale ranging from 1 (none at all or 0%) to 5 (very much or 100%).

Sexual arousal and punitiveness. Since a reliability check had been included with the manipulation check, only a single item was used here to assess sexual arousal. With respect to the validity of self-reported sexual arousal, it should be further noted that for both physiological and self-report measures more confidence may be attached to the validity of observations of sexual arousal than to the absence of such indications, since subjects may be capable of inhibiting as well as hiding arousal (Abel & Blanchard, 1976; Amorso & Brown, 1973; Henson & Rubin, 1971). In particular with "taboo" stimuli such as rape, false positives are very unlikely to occur, i.e., subjects are unlikely to report arousal if it does not exist, but there might be some social desirability tendency to hide arousal. In general, discrepancies between self-reports and genital measures are far more likely in the direction of underestimating arousal via self-report (Abel et al., 1977; Schaefer et al., 1976). Thus, it seems that considerable confidence may be attached to self-reports of sexual arousal to "taboo" stimuli.

To measure punitiveness toward the assailant, two items were included to insure reliability. The first asked subjects what prison sentence they would recommend. Subjects responded on a scale ranging from 1 (0 years) to 6 (20 years or more). The second question concerned willingness to grant parole and responses also ranged along a 6-point scale.

Perceptions of victim. Ten items assessed perceptions of the rape victim. They examined beliefs about the victim's experience (pain, trauma, enjoyment), reactions to it (resistance, perceived responsibility, possible avoidance), and opinions regarding the percentage of women, if any, that would have enjoyed such an experience if they were assured no one ever knew about it.

Perceptions of assailant. Seven items assessed reactions to the assailant (identification, intelligence, attractiveness), the assault (justification, dangerousness), and opinions regarding the percentage of men, if any, that would behave as this man did (under the same circumstances and if assured they would not be caught and punished).

Questions asked of females. At the end of the questionnaire, subjects were instructed to respond to different sections depending on their gender. Females indicated how fearful they personally were of being raped, whether they were likely to enjoy being victimized under the same circumstances described in the story or if they were assured no one would ever know.

Questions asked of males. Males were asked to indicate whether they were likely to behave as the rapist did under the same circumstances and if assured that they would not be punished.

Procedure

Subjects were run within groups of 5 to 24 persons. Participants first signed a consent form that indicated that they were willing to read sexually explicit materials, that their responses would be anonymous, and that they were free to leave the experiment at any time. All subjects signed the consent form and none left the experiment.

Subjects were told that they would respond to some unrelated materials that were in preparation for future research. They were then given a stapled packet of materials. The first page was the Aggression-Anxiety Scale, followed by the violent or nonviolent version of the erotic story. The male experimenter randomly distributed, separately for males and females,

the two versions. Subjects were unaware, however, that there were any differences in the material. They were instructed to complete the attached page, the Mood Check List (actually the manipulation check), immediately after reading the passage. Then, all subjects read the rape story and indicated their reactions on the attached questionnaire.

RESULTS

Manipulation Check

Sexual items. The two items assessing sexual arousal correlated highly, $r(89) = .72, p < .001$. Table 1 presents the data for a composite score of these items. A 2 (Version) by 2 (Gender) by 2 (Aggression-Anxiety) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on these two items using Finn's (1974) exact least-square multivariate program.¹ Results indicated no effects ($F = .16$) for the Version variable nor any interaction with this variable. Univariate analyses on each of the items similarly revealed no main or interaction effects. These data clearly show that the intent to create two passage versions stimulating comparable degrees of sexual arousal was successful.

A significant multivariate effect was obtained for Gender, $F(2, 82) = 7.95, p < .001$, with males reporting more arousal than females. Univariate analyses revealed the same pattern on the "sexual arousal," $F(1, 83) = 15.4, p < .005$, and "sensuous," $F(1, 83) = 4.94, p < .05$, items.

Negative and positive affect. A main effect for the Version variable was obtained on the multivariate analysis of the other affect items, $F(5, 79) = 2.69, p < .05$. Univariate analyses, however, did not reach acceptable levels of significance suggesting that none of the single items alone discriminated between the two groups. The strongest trends were evidenced by the items "anxious," "frustrated," and "positive," indicating that the violent version generated more negative and less positive affect than the nonviolent version.

Dependent Measure

Sexual arousal and punishment. The two items assessing punitiveness toward the assailant correlated highly, $r(89) = .84, p < .0001$, and were thus combined. A MANOVA performed on responses to the sexual arousal item and the punishment composite yielded a main effect for Gender, $F(2, 82) = 10.70, p < .0001$ and an interaction between the Version and Gender variables, $F(2, 82) = 4.32, p < .02$.

Univariate analyses revealed that males were more sexually aroused than females, $F(1, 83) = 9.66, p < .003$, whereas females were more punitive, $F(1, 83) = 10.97, p < .002$.

¹ An exact least-squares analysis was performed in order to account for unequal sample sizes, using Overall, Spiegel, and Cohen's (1975) Method I which assesses each effect after adjusting for its relationship to all other effects.

TABLE 1
MEAN SEXUAL COMPOSITE SCORE AS A FUNCTION OF THE
VERSION OF THE STORY AND SUBJECTS' GENDER

Gender	Version	
	Violent	Nonviolent
Male	3.22 <i>N</i> = 27	3.35 <i>N</i> = 26
Female	2.41 <i>N</i> = 21	2.15 <i>N</i> = 17

Note. Scales ranged from 0 (none at all) to 8 (extremely).

With respect to the interaction, univariate analyses indicated an effect on both sexual arousal, $F(1, 83) = 4.21, p < .05$, and punitiveness, $F(1, 83) = 4.56, p < .04$. As shown in Fig. 1, these interactions were due to males who had earlier read the violent version evidencing more sexual arousal and more punitiveness than those who had read the nonviolent version, whereas in females the differences were in the opposite direction, i.e., those who had read the violent version were less sexually aroused and less punitive.

Simple effects analyses (Keppel, 1973), however, indicated that the sexual arousal differences between the violent and nonviolent conditions within each gender were only marginal for males, $F(1, 83) = 2.2, p < .15^2$, and negligible for females. Simple effects analyses on the punishment score did reveal significant differences for males, $F(1, 83) = 4.41, p < .05$, but not for females, $F(1, 83) = 1.74, p = n.s.$

Perceptions of the Victim

The MANOVA performed on the items assessing perceptions of the rape victim yielded a main effect for Gender, $F(10, 74) = 2.52, p < .01$, and a three-way interaction, $F(10, 74) = 2.77, p < .01$.

As indicated in Table 2, univariate analyses showed several items on which the responses of male subjects significantly differed from those of females. With respect to the interaction, univariates indicated effects on perception of pain, $F(1, 83) = 12.84, p < .001$, trauma, $F(1, 83) = 6.8, p < .01$, resistance $F(1, 83) = 7.55, p < .01$, and identification with the victim, $F(1, 83) = 3.47, p < .07$. As a general summary of these effects, males low and females high in aggression-anxiety identified less with the

² An analysis of covariance using the sexual arousal stimulated by the first story as the covariate may be judged appropriate in analyzing sexual responsiveness to the rape story. This analysis yields results comparable to those reported, except that the magnitude of the effects increases, e.g, the simple effects comparison for males is significant at the $p < .10$ rather than .15 level. In light of recent criticisms of the covariance approach (Cronbach, Rogosa, & Floden, Note 1), however, the ANOVA results are presented.

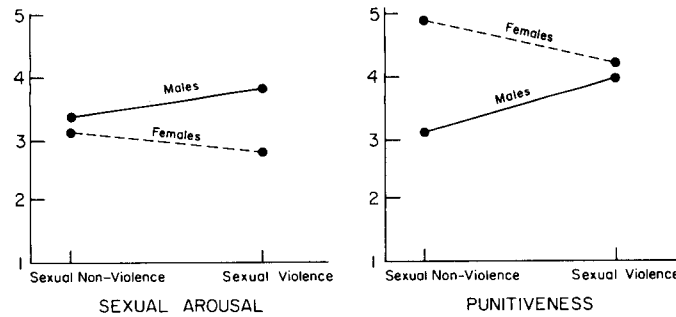


FIG. 1. Sexual arousal and punitiveness in reaction to rape as a function of gender and previous exposure to sexual violence or nonviolence.

Note: Scales ranged from 1 to 5.

TABLE 2
MEAN RATINGS OF RAPE VICTIM AND OF ASSAILANT
AS A FUNCTION OF SUBJECTS' GENDER

Item	Males	Females	F
Ratings of victim			
1. Identification With	1.91	2.71	9.84*
2. Responsibility	2.04	1.71	0.86
3. Pain Experienced	3.34	3.87	9.30*
4. Trauma	3.55	4.03	3.80***
5. Intelligence	3.25	3.16	0.38
6. Attractiveness	4.49	4.47	0.11
7. Resistance to Rapist	3.11	3.47	3.63***
8. Could Have Avoided Victimization	2.26	2.42	0.30
9. Enjoyed Being Victimized	2.11	1.68	3.90**
10. Percentage of Women Who Would Enjoy Victimization If No One Knew	2.30	2.08	1.14
Ratings of rapist			
1. Identification With	1.53	1.24	3.73***
2. Intelligence	2.19	1.98	0.99
3. Attractiveness	3.11	3.31	0.51
4. Dangerousness	3.93	4.45	6.58**
5. Justification	1.23	1.00	7.64*
6. Percentage Of Men Who Would Rape In The Same Circumstances	1.68	1.87	1.91
7. Percentage Of Men Who Would Rape If They Could Not Be Caught	2.79	2.71	0.12

Note. Scale ranged from 1 (not at all or 0%) to 5 (extremely or 100%). All degrees of freedom are 1/83.

* $p < .007$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .07$.

victim, perceived her as experiencing less pain and trauma and as resisting the assailant less after having read the violent as compared to the nonviolent version. Males high and females low in aggression–anxiety, on the other hand, identified more with the victim, perceived her as experiencing more pain and trauma and as resisting the assailant more if they had earlier read the violent version.

The item assessing pain perception was selected for follow-up comparisons on the basis of its theoretical importance and the magnitude of effects. Simple effects analyses revealed that as compared to those reading the nonviolent version, low aggression–anxious males who had read the violent version perceived less victim pain, $F(1, 83) = 10.41, p < .01$, whereas high aggression–anxious males perceived more victim pain, $F(1, 83) = 4.04, p < .05$. For females, simple effects analyses did not reveal significant differences.

To more directly address the hypothesis that exposure to sadomasochistic portrayals may alter the inhibiting effects of pain depiction, Pearson product-moment correlations between perceptions of victim pain and subjects' sexual arousal to the rape were examined separately for the violent and nonviolent conditions. As expected, negative correlations were found for females if they had earlier read the violent or nonviolent versions, $r(19) = -.34, r(15) = -.31$, respectively. Males who had read the nonviolent version evidenced a very similar pattern, $r(24) = -.30$. In contrast, males who had earlier read the violent version showed a positive correlation $r(25) = .30$. A test of the difference between correlations (Bruning & Kintz, 1968) indicated that the correlations for males differed significantly, $z = 2.0, p < .05$.

Perceptions of the Assailant

The MANOVA on perceptions of the rapist yielded an effect for gender, $F(7, 77) = 2.67, p < .025$. As shown in Table 2, a number of univariate analyses were significant.

Self-Reported Tendencies

MANOVA's performed separately on males' and females' perceptions of their own likely behavior did not yield significant effects. Results of considerable interest were obtained, however, in examining the relationship among self-perceptions and reactions to the rape.

Females. Females' responses to the three self-perception questions are presented in Table 3. Subjects revealed considerable fear of rape and a clear belief that they personally would not enjoy being victimized. However, as indicated by the t test comparisons in Table 3, this self-perception did not fully coincide with perceptions of other women's likely reactions.

Correlations among self-reports and reactions to the rape indicated that

TABLE 3
WOMEN'S SELF-REPORTS AND CORRESPONDING PERCEPTIONS
OF OTHER WOMEN

	Self	Rape victim	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Fear of Rape	3.63			
Enjoy Being Victimized in Same Circumstances	1.05	1.68	4.2	<.001
	Self	Other Women	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Enjoy Being Victimized if No One Ever Knew	1.10	2.08	5.6	<.001

Note. Scales ranged from 1 (not at all or 0%) to 5 (very much or 100%)

the fear of rape item yielded an expected pattern, e.g., inversely correlated with sexual arousal to the rape passage, $r(36) = -.42, p < .005$. The two self-perception items inquiring whether the subject believed that she would derive pleasure from victimization were highly correlated, $r(36) = .86, p < .001$. Thus, only the correlations between the "no one would know" item and reactions to the rape are presented in Table 4. These data suggest that those few women who believed that they might enjoy being victimized also held general views about rape that deviated considerably from those of other women.

Males. Of the 53 males, 17% indicated a 2 or above in response to whether they personally would be likely to act as the rapist did in the same circumstances. Fifty-one percent similarly responded when questioned about their likely behavior if they could be assured of not being punished. Furthermore, 21% chose the middle of the scale (3) or above in response to the latter question. Since these two items correlated highly, $r(51) = .56, p < .001$, only the correlations for the "not caught" item with reactions to the rape are presented in Table 4. The correlational pattern shows that this self-report was associated with a generally callous attitude about rape that is strikingly similar to the attitudes of many convicted rapists (Clark & Lewis, 1977; Gager & Schurr, 1976).

In view of the relatively large number of significant correlations, stepwise multiple correlations were computed to ascertain which combination of attitudes, taking into consideration intercorrelations among items, would best predict self-reported rape tendencies. In conducting this analysis, only variables entering the regression equation at a significant level ($p < .05$) are reported. As revealed in Table 5, the four items retained in the regression equation collectively accounted for 47.7% of the variance.

The significant correlation between the "not caught" item and sexual arousal to the rape story might be interpreted as lending support to the

TABLE 4
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MEN'S SELF-REPORTS REGARDING LIKELIHOOD
OF PARTICIPATING IN SEXUAL ASSAULT OR WOMEN'S SELF-REPORTS
REGARDING LIKELIHOOD OF ENJOYING VICTIMIZATION AND
RESPONSES TO THE RAPE PASSAGE

	Men's self-reported likelihood of sexual assault	Women's self-reported likelihood of enjoying victimization
Sexual Arousal to Rape Passage	.36*	.44*
Identification with Rapist	.37*	-.11
Justification of Rapist	.26***	No female subject perceived justification
Intelligence of Rapist	.33**	-.16
Other Men Would Rape if Not Punished	.49*	.08
Victim Enjoyed Being Raped	.38*	.47*
Victim Could Have Stopped Rape	.08	.57*
Women Would Enjoy Victimization	.36*	.32***
Victim's Pain	.04	-.36***

* $p < .01$.

** $p < .02$.

*** $p < .10$.

TABLE 5
STEPWISE MULTIPLE CORRELATION ANALYSIS BETWEEN MALES' REACTIONS
TO THE RAPE PASSAGE AND SELF-REPORTED TENDENCY TO RAPE

Reactions to the rape passage	<i>df</i>	R^2 Added	R^2	F	p
Other Men Would Rape	1	24.4	24.4	19.68	< .001
Sexual Arousal	1	9.8	34.2	5.29	< .05
Attractiveness of Victim (inversely correlated)	1	8.2	42.5	8.06	< .01
Intelligence of Assailant	1	5.2	47.7	4.80	< .05
Residual	48	53.3			

contention that sexual responsiveness to sexual violence is associated with some propensity to rape. However, it is possible that those in general more sexually arousable, irrespective of whether violence is involved, would be more likely to report some tendency to engage in sexual assault. Some light may be shed on this possibility by separately examining the correlations between self-reported rape tendencies and the sexual arousal stimulated by the differing versions of the first story. In the nonviolent condition, the correlations with the "sexual arousal" and "sensuous" items were .05 and $-.02$, respectively. Within the violent condition, in contrast, the correlations were significant, $r(25) = .37, p < .05$ one-tailed, $r(24) = .34, p < .05$ one-tailed, respectively. This pattern suggests that sexual arousal to sexual violence, rather than sexual responsiveness per se, is associated with self-reports of possible participation in sexual assault.

DISCUSSION

The results did not reveal a simple relationship between the reading of the sadomasochistic first story and reactions to the rape depicted in the second story. The clearest effect emerged for male subjects on the measure of punitiveness toward the rapist: Males who had earlier read the violent version of the first story were more severe in their punitiveness than those who had read the nonviolent version. It might be argued that these results are due to social desirability effects, i.e., by perceiving a connection between the violent nature of the first and second stories, those who had read the violent version became sensitized to the impropriety of being lenient toward the assailant. The fact that males who had earlier read the violent version tended to report more sexual arousal to the rape story than those who had read the nonviolent version, and opposite (though nonsignificant) patterns for females on both the punishment and sexual arousal items strongly contradict a social desirability explanation.

The results might best be understood in conjunction with Schmidt's (1975) research with West German students. This investigator found that both males and females reacted with considerable sexual arousal to a film portraying rape. Schmidt further reports that exposure to this film also generated powerful negative emotions. The investigator describes a conflict whereby "in women the rape film produces sexual arousal and, by identification with the female victim, fears of being helplessly overpowered. In men this conflict is more characterized by guilt feelings and dismay that they are stimulated by aggressive sexual activities incompatible with their conscious ideas of sexuality" (p. 359). The conflict in males whereby the person is sexually aroused by a particular stimulus and at the same time abhorred by it and feels guilty about his arousal is reminiscent of that often found in many sexual deviates (Goldstein & Kant, 1973).

The occurrence of such a conflict, or of cognitive dissonance³ (Festinger, 1957), may result in a defensive reaction, or an attempt to reduce dissonance. This may be accomplished by a harsher judgment of the perpetrator of the unacceptable act, a judgment that might serve to disassociate oneself from that act.

Subjects' self-reported reactions to the two versions of the first story lend some support to the idea of a conflicted reaction to sexual violence. While the two versions were found to elicit very similar levels of sexual arousal, the violent version was also associated with more negative affect.

Exposure to sexual violence also influenced perceptions of the rape victim. While once again, the effects observed were considerably stronger for males and in the opposite direction than for females, they were also related to subjects' aggression-anxiety levels. Low aggression-anxious males seemed to view the effects of the rape on the victim in a less negative light following earlier exposure to sexual violence, i.e., they tended to perceive that she experienced less pain and trauma and to have resisted less. High aggression-anxious males, on the other hand, tended to become more conscious of the plight of the rape victim and the pain she experienced as a function of their earlier exposure to sexual violence. It might be conjectured that males who to begin with have relatively little anxiety with respect to aggression are likely to become further desensitized to its effects upon being exposed to a depiction of violence as resulting in the recipient's pleasure, whereas individuals relatively high in anxiety about aggression become more sensitized to its effects upon exposure to any act of violence.

Earlier exposure to sexual violence may not only alter perceptions of the degree of pain experienced by a rape victim but may also affect the inhibiting influence of the perception of victim pain. This is suggested by the correlations between subjects' sexual arousal to the rape story and their perceptions of the pain suffered by the victim. As would be expected, this correlation is generally an inverse one whereby the perception of pain is associated with less sexual arousal. However, for males who had been earlier presented with a portrayal of pain infliction as a source of pleasure, the relationship was reversed, so that higher levels of perceived pain were associated with greater sexual arousal. These correlations are consistent with the assertion that certain forms of pornography create an image of women as essentially masochistic in nature and thus affect reactions to violence perpetrated against women (Brownmiller, 1975; Johnson & Goodchilds, 1973).

³ Thanks are expressed to Nina Colwill for suggesting the relevance of cognitive dissonance to this interpretation.

Gender differences in reactions to the rape were found quite consistently. Females identified more with the victim's plight, were more cognizant of her pain and suffering, and were less inclined to believe that the victim derived pleasure from being raped. Similarly, females were less likely to perceive any justification for the assailant's behavior, or to minimize his dangerousness or responsibility. While these results are consistent with those of previous studies, they are particularly compelling in light of the fact that herein all subjects reacted to the identical depiction of a totally unprovoked assault.

Females as well as males, however, seemed to believe some myths about rape. For example, subjects believed that over 25% of the female population would derive some pleasure from being victimized. For female subjects this finding is particularly interesting in light of their very clear assertion that they personally would not under any circumstances derive pleasure from such victimization.

With respect to the male population's potential involvement in rape, even higher percentages were indicated. Subjects believed that close to half of the male population would rape if they were assured that they would not be caught and punished. With respect to their own potential involvement, males do report, quite surprisingly, similar opinions. That is, over half of the sample do not rule out the possibility that they would engage in sexual assault if they could not be caught. These findings may be interpreted as providing some support for the contention that rape is an extension of normal attitudes and socialization practices in our society rather than totally the product of a sick and aberrant mind. If within the normal educated population there is a very sizeable proportion of males who believe that they might be inclined to rape if they would not be punished and if both males and females perceive half the population to be so inclined, then it is quite apparent that people generally do not view rape as potentially committed by deviants only.

It would seem highly inappropriate to argue that those subjects who indicated a possibility of engaging in rape, particularly under the hypothetical circumstances of being assured of not being caught, are actually likely to rape. This self-report, however, may be an indication of a tendency that in combination with other factors and in an exaggerated form may indeed be predictive of such assaults. This possibility is supported by the relationship between attitudes similar to those often held by convicted rapists and subjects' self-reports of potential involvement in an assault. More specifically, self-reported tendency to rape was significantly correlated with identification with the rapist, with relatively positive attitudes towards his behavior, and with the perception that other men are inclined to rape. Furthermore, this self-reported tendency was associated

with beliefs that the victim portrayed as well as women in general derive enjoyment from being sexually assaulted, and with derogation of the victim.

Of considerable interest is the significant correlation between self-reported tendency to commit rape and sexual arousal to sexual violence, both as portrayed in the sadomasochism of the first story and in the rape depicted in the second story. Similar correlations were not found with sexual arousal to the nonviolent version of the first story. These data may be interpreted as providing some support for the assertion by Abel and his associates (Abel et al., 1976, 1977, 1978; Abel and Blanchard, 1976) that sexual arousal to the portrayal of rape relative to sexual arousal to nonassaultive themes can serve as a measure of the proclivity to rape.

Although the findings with respect to sexual arousal are by no means conclusive, the results raise the possibility that exposure to sexual violence may increase sexual responsivity to rape depiction. While the interaction between earlier exposure to sexual violence and subjects' gender did reach conventional levels of statistical significance, simple effects analyses for each of the genders did not yield significant results. The findings do strongly suggest the need to examine this issue further. The use of genital measures of sexual arousal may, despite their potential obtrusiveness, be useful in increasing the sensitivity of the measurement.

On a broader level, the findings suggest that future research should carefully study the effects of the infusion of violence and exploitative themes within sexual stimuli. Various newspaper articles ('Pornography,' 1976; 'Pretty Poison,' 1977; 'Really Socking It,' 1977) and a longitudinal content analysis of popular erotica magazines (Malamuth and Spinner, Note 2) have noted a sharp rise over the past few years in the portrayal of sexual violence in the mass media. The effects of such themes is one of a host of interrelated social issues raised by feminists' writings on the topic of rape that merit further empirical investigation.

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