Self-Reported Likelihood of Sexually Aggressive Behavior: Attitudinal versus Sexual Explanations

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The present study compared the relative effectiveness of sexuality variables versus attitudes hypothesized to be rape-supportive in the prediction of "likelihood to rape" (LR) and "likelihood to use sexual force" (LF) measures. This research was guided by the suggestion that understanding the variables which underlie LR and LF may shed light on the factors which cause some men to actually commit acts of violence against women. The results were inconsistent with viewing rape as primarily caused by sexual frustration or sexual maladjustment, since sexuality variables were generally not predictive of LF or LR. In contrast, a variety of rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs such as blaming the victim for her rape or viewing sexual violence as sexually arousing to women were successful predictors of both LF and LR. These data were interpreted as supporting theories of rape which consider cultural, socially transmitted attitudes about women and rape to be psychological releasers for sexual aggression. The findings also supported the notion of an "aggression toward women" continuum, rather than a conceptualization of rape as a discrete, isolated phenomenon with its own determinants.

A number of recent studies have described men's self-reported likelihood of raping if they could be assured of not being caught (e.g., Malamuth, Haber, & Feshbach, 1980; Malamuth, 1981a, 1981b; Malamuth & Check, 1980, 1983; Teiger, 1981). In a recent review and integration of this literature, Malamuth (1981b) found considerable support for the construct validity of such reports as a measure of a relative proclivity to rape. Briefly, it appears that in comparison to men who indicate no likelihood

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of raping, men who do report some likelihood (approximately 35% across a number of samples) are more similar to convicted rapists on a variety of dimensions. Further, self-reported likelihood of raping (LR) has been associated with actual aggression toward women, both in self-reported "date" situations and in more objective observations of subjects under laboratory conditions.

Malamuth (1981b) suggested that understanding the variables which underlie self-reported potential to rape may shed light on the factors which cause some men to actually commit such crimes. The present study was designed to be a first step in exploring the etiology of LR. Further, an attempt was made to address issues arising from the assessment of sexual aggression in the LR literature.

Assessing Sexual Aggression

Research on LR ratings has typically dichotomized the male population into two groups: those who report no likelihood at all of raping, versus those who report at least some likelihood. While this dichotomy appears to yield considerable differentiation on attitudinal, physiological, and behavioral measures (Malamuth, 1981b; Teiger, 1981), finer distinctions among subgroups may be obscured by such a gross separation. As indicated by some theorists (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Russell, 1980), rape may be seen as a single event in a broader continuum of sexual aggression. This view suggests that the classic LR paradigm may compare a sample of relatively extreme responders (LR subjects) to a heterogenous "control" group (non LR subjects) who may, nonetheless, possess varying proclivities to use sexual force against women. From this perspective, a more powerful analysis would further classify subgroups among non-LR subjects. The present study examined the viability of classifying subjects into "self-reported likelihood of sexual force" (LF) and "no self-reported likelihood of sexual force" (non-LF) groups, as well as the LR–non-LR classification.

Etiology

In attempting to determine the causes of LR and LF reports, it may be useful to consider theories regarding the etiology of actual acts of rape. There are two major approaches to the causes of rape relevant to the present analysis. One theory suggests that rape is a form of instrumental aggression serving as a means to achieve sexual gratification (e.g., Gebhart, Gagnon, Pomeroy, & Christiason, 1965) or "a form of sexual psychopathy" (e.g., Groth & Burgess, 1977, p. 406). As noted by Sanday (1981) such an explanation views rapists as "men who cannot control their sexual impulses" (p. 19).

In contrast to a sexually based analysis, other theorists have argued that rape is "the logical and psychological extension of a dominant–submissive, competitive, sex-role stereotyped culture" (Burt, 1980, p.

229). This approach places primary emphasis on cultural attitudes and beliefs which justify and condone violence against women (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Russell, 1980; Clark & Lewis, 1977). From this perspective, rape is but one manifestation of a pervasive cultural misogyny in which sexuality emerges as a means of aggression rather than an end in itself.

Despite the prevalence of both sexual and cultural theories of rape, and the obvious differences in their emphases and conclusions, very little empirical work has been done contrasting the predictive efficacy of each. Perhaps the closest approximation to such a comparison is the cross-cultural work of Sanday (1981), who examined 156 societies to find the sexual and sociocultural correlates of "rape-prone" cultures. She found rape to be part of a cultural configuration involving interpersonal violence, male dominance, and an "ideology of toughness" among men, but not related to sexuality variables reflecting "sexual repression." As noted by Sanday, however, the variables she used to measure sexual repression (sex taboos, attitudes toward premarital sex, and age at marriage) may have been insufficient to adequately test a sexuality hypothesis.

The present analysis was designed to determine whether sexuality variables and/or attitudes hypothesized to facilitate violence toward women were related to self-reported likelihood of raping and/or using sexual force within a single culture. On the basis of a "sexual" theory of rape it would be expected that differences among men in sexual satisfaction, sexual inhibition, etc. would be associated with LR and LF reports. A culturally based approach, however, would predict that LR and LF ratings would be related to differences in attitudes about violence against women and beliefs in culturally transmitted "rape myths" (Burt, 1980).

METHOD

Three hundred fifty-two male introductory psychology students at the University of Manitoba were presented in class with a voluntary "Sexual Attitudes Survey" containing Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance scale, Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence scale, and Adversarial Sexual Beliefs scale. In addition, this survey contained a variety of items concerned with sexuality taken from Fisher and Byrne (1978), and two items tapping self-reported likelihood to (1) rape (LR) and to (2) use sexual force (LF) against a woman.

Based on a recent factor analysis (Briere, Malamuth, & Check, 1983), the items from Burt's three scales were reformed into nine specific attitudinal scales named *Disbelief of rape claims* (e.g., "A person comes to you and claims they were raped. How likely would you be to believe their statement if the person were a neighborhood woman"—scored in reverse[1]), *Victim responsible for rape* (e.g., "If a girl engages in necking and petting and she lets things get out of hand, it is her own fault if her partner forces sex on her"), *Rape reports as manipulation* (e.g., "What percentage of reported rapes would you guess were merely invented by women who discovered they were pregnant and wanted to protect

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[1] Items "scored in reverse" were those for whom a higher score indicated *lower* levels of rape-supportive attitudes. To correct for this, the scores on these items were reversed (e.g., 5 = 1, 2 = 4, 4 = 2, 5 = 1) such that higher scores indicated higher levels of rape-supportive attitudes.

their own reputation''), *Rape only happens to certain kinds of women* (''Any female can get raped''—scored in reverse), *Male dominance is justified (e.g.,* ''A man's got to show a woman who's boss right from the start or he'll end up henpecked''), *Adversarial sexual beliefs* (e.g., ''In a dating relationship a woman is largely out to take advantage of a man''), *Women enjoy sexual violence* (e.g., ''Being roughed up is sexually stimulating to most women''), *Acceptance of domestic violence* (e.g., ''A man's never justified in hitting his wife''—scored in reverse), and *Acceptance of vengeance* (''People today should not use 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' as a rule for living''—scored in reverse). Sexuality items, scored on 7-point scales, tapped self-reported knowledge of sex, importance of sex, pleasantness of sex, liberality of sexual attitudes, response to pornography, frequency of pornography use, extent of significant relationships with women, perceptions of their overall level of sexual experience relative to their age group peers, and extent of sexual inhibitions (scored as the sum of five individual items). The 5-point likelihood items were stated as follows: ''If you could be assured that no one would know and that you could in no way be punished for engaging in the following acts, how likely, if at all, would you be to commit such acts?'' Among the acts listed, including such distractor items as ''group sex,'' ''extramarital sex,'' and ''bondage,'' were the two items used in the present study: ''rape'' and ''forcing a female to do something she didn't really want to do.''

On the basis of their responses to the likelihood items, subjects were classified as members of one of four self-report groups: (1) no likelihood of force or rape (LF−/LR−), (2) no likelihood of force but some likelihood of rape (LF−/LR+), (3) some likelihood of force but no likelihood of rape (LF+/LR−), or (4) some likelihood of both force and rape (LF+/LR+). Discriminant function analysis was then used to discriminate between these groups on the basis of (a) the attitude variables, (b) the sexuality variables, and (c) a combination of both variable sets. Significant discriminant results were followed by univariate ANOVAs and post hoc Scheffe analyses, in addition to inspection of the discriminant function structure coefficients.

RESULTS

Of the 356 subjects tested, 99 (28%) indicated some likelihood of both raping and using force (LF+/LR+), 6 (2%) indicated some likelihood of rape but not force (LF−/LR+), 108 (30%) indicated some likelihood of force but not rape (LF+/LR−), and 143 (40%) indicated no likelihood of either rape or force (LF−/LR−). Given the small size of the LF−/LR+ group, and the counterintuitive notion of considering rape but not force, these subjects were excluded from further analysis. Frequency distributions of LF and LR for the remaining three groups appear in Table 1.

Discriminant function analysis predicted membership in these three groups on the basis of rape-supportive attitudes (Rc = .313, $\chi^2(18)$ = 44.44, $p < .0005$) and a combination of attitude and sexuality variables (Rc = .373, $\chi^2(38)$ = 66.00, $p < .0032$). Sexuality variables alone, however, were unsuccessful in discriminating between these subject groups (Rc = .245, $\chi^2(20)$ = 26.58, $p < .1474$).

As indicated in Table 2, when all variables were considered together, LF+/LR+ or LF+/LR− subjects scored higher than LF−/LR− subjects on the following attitudes or beliefs: Victims are responsible for their rapes, Rape reports are manipulations, Male dominance is justified, Ad-

TABLE 1

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS OF LF AND LR FOR THREE LIKELIHOOD GROUPS

| | LF-/LR-[a] | | | | LF+/LR- | | | | LF+/LR+ | | | |
| | LF | | LR | | LF | | LR | | LF | | LR | |
Score[b]	f	(%)	f	(%)	f	(%)	f	(%)	f	(%)	f	(%)
1	143	(100)	143	(100)	0	(0)	108	(100)	0	(0)	0	(0)
2	0	(0)	0	(0)	53	(49)	0	(0)	36	(36)	46	(46)
3	0	(0)	0	(0)	33	(31)	0	(0)	23	(23)	29	(29)
4	0	(0)	0	(0)	15	(14)	0	(0)	28	(28)	16	(16)
5	0	(0)	0	(0)	7	(7)	0	(0)	12	(12)	8	(8)
Total	143		143		108		108		99		99	

[a] LF-/LR-: Subjects reporting no likelihood of force or rape; LF+/LR-: subjects reporting some likelihood of force but not rape; LF+/LR+: subjects reporting some likelihood of both force and rape.

[b] A score of 1 indicates no likelihood; a score of 5 indicates a high likelihood.

versarial sexual beliefs, Women enjoy sexual violence, and Acceptance of domestic violence. The only sexual variable to successfully discriminate between these groups was sexual experience. Scheffe analysis (see Table 2) indicated that LF+/LR+ subjects scored significantly higher than LF-/LR- subjects on each of the discriminating variables except Acceptance of domestic violence. LF+/LR- subjects exceeded LF-/LR- subjects on Male dominance is justified, Adversarial sexual beliefs, and Sexual experience, whereas LF+/LR+ subjects were higher than LF+/LR- subjects on Victim responsibility for rape and Women enjoy sexual violence. Polynomial analysis revealed a significant linear relationship between levels of sexual aggression (LF-/LR-, followed by LF+/LR-, then LF+/LR+) and degree of rape-supportive attitudes for each of the discriminating variables (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The current findings indicate that (a) a large percentage of university males may express some willingness to rape or sexually aggress against women, given the absence of penalty, (b) this potential willingness to be sexually aggressive is unrelated to a variety of sexuality variables, (c) attitudes and beliefs hypothesized to be rape-supportive do, however, predict likelihood to rape or use sexual force, and (d) there appears to be a continuum of sexual aggression with regards to these attitudinal variables.

Summing across LF and LR categories, 60% of the participants in the present study indicated some likelihood of raping or using force given certain (albeit hypothetical) circumstances. This finding is in accord with

TABLE 2

Means and Statistical Significance of Attitude and Sexuality Variables for Three Levels of Likelihood to Force or Rape

Variable	Potential range	Mean[a]			$F(2, 347)$	p	DFA[b]	Trend analysis
		LF−/LR−	LF+/LR−	LF+/LR+				
Disbelief of rape claims	6–30	13.4	13.8	14.6	2.79	.0626	−.28	linear ($p < .02$)
Victim responsible for rape	9–63	24.8[a]	25.6[a]	29.3[b]	8.09	.0004	−.43	linear ($p < .0001$)
Rape report as manipulation	2–14	4.5[a]	5.0[a,b]	5.5[b]	7.49	.0007	−.50	linear ($p < .0002$)
Rape only happens to certain women	1–7	2.3	2.3	2.3	0.01	.9900	.01	—
Male dominance is justified	4–28	13.0[a]	14.7[b]	15.7[b]	12.45	.0001	−.66	linear ($p < .0001$)
Adversarial sexual beliefs	3–21	8.7[a]	9.9[b]	10.2[b]	6.53	.0016	−.48	linear ($p < .001$)
Women enjoy sexual violence	3–21	8.2[a]	9.3[a]	10.6[b]	13.40	.0001	−.65	linear ($p < .0001$)
Acceptance of domestic violence	2–14	6.4[a]	7.1[a]	7.3[a]	3.52	.0308	−.35	linear ($p < .0192$)
Acceptance of vengeance	1–7	3.0	2.9	3.2	0.81	.4456	−.09	—
Frequency of pornography	1–7	4.8	5.0	4.9	2.61	.0752	−.27	—
Importance of sex	1–7	4.6	4.7	4.6	0.47	.6283	−.04	—
Knowledge of sex	1–7	5.2	5.2	5.2	0.06	.9393	−.05	—
Sexual conservatism	1–7	3.6	3.5	3.6	0.34	.7141	−.06	—
Pleasantness of sex	1–7	5.1	5.3	5.1	0.47	.6237	−.06	—
Rating of sex life	1–7	3.3	3.6	3.6	2.12	.1213	−.27	—
Relationships with opposite sex	1–7	2.0	2.1	2.1	0.29	.7483	−.10	—
Sexual experience	1–7	3.8[a]	4.4[b]	4.4[b]	5.29	.0055	−.42	linear ($p < .0076$)
Sexual inhibitions	5–35	13.6	14.2	14.8	1.25	.2888	−.20	—
Response to pornography	1–7	4.7	4.6	4.8	0.68	.5055	.01	—

[a] Means not sharing a common superscript are different at $p < .05$ (Scheffe).
[b] Discriminant function analysis structure coefficients, considered meaningful (*italicized*) at $c \geq .35$.

other data showing that acceptance of sexual aggression against women is pervasive in North American culture. Koss and Oros (1982), for example, found that 23% of the male college students in their sample admitted to instances of sexual intercourse with a woman against her will. Similarly, Giarusso, Johnson, Goodchilds, and Zellman (Note 1) reported that more than half of the high school males they interviewed believed it is acceptable "for a guy to hold a girl down and force her to have intercourse" when, for example, "she gets him sexually excited" or "she says she's going to have sex with him and then changes her mind."

The failure of sexual variables such as sex life rating, importance of sex, relationships with women, use of pornography, or sexual inhibitions to predict LR or LF ratings supports a view of rape or sexual force as essentially unrelated to sexual frustration or sexual maladjustment. The sole sexual variable to emerge as a significant predictor was self-rated perceptions of relative sexual experience, which was greater for LR and LF subjects. This datum parallels a similar finding by Kanin (1957), who found sexually aggressive males to be more sexually experienced than their less force-oriented counterparts. This finding would appear to be the reverse of sexual frustration or repressed sexual drive, although further investigation is indicated to tease apart the sexual and aggressive motives for higher levels of sexual activity.

Although sexuality variables were largely unsuccessful in identifying LR or LF subjects, the attitudinal scales factor analytically derived from Burt's (1980) "rape myths" analysis were effective predictors. Of the nine attitudinal factors tested, six were significantly related to LR and/ or LF measures. Such data offer relatively direct support for Burt's (1978) claim that the antecedents to rape are cultural, socially transmitted attitudes about women, rape, and rapists which are stereotyped and prejudicial, and which serve as psychological releasers for sexual aggression. The present study extends the research in this area by isolating an aggressive, nonsexual component of Burt's rape-supportive scales, "Male dominance is justified," which never the less had the highest discriminant function weighting in the prediction of subjects who were willing to aggress sexually. These data support the view of Brownmiller (1975) and others, who relate rape primarily to aggressive rather than sexual motives.

While force-only (LF+/LR−) and force–rape (LF+/LR+) subjects endorse rape-supportive attitudes in similar ways, there were quantitative differences between these groups. For each significant attitude variable in the present study, force-only subjects were intermediate between those indicating neither force nor rape and subjects indicating some likelihood of both. Thus, force-only subjects appear to represent a group of individuals for whom sexual aggression, short of rape, is an acceptable option, and who endorse rape-supportive attitudes to a lesser extent than do force–rape subjects. The presence of a linear relationship between degree of

force–rape inclination and rape-supportive beliefs (some of which were nonsexual) suggests an "aggression toward women" continuum with respect to attitudinal correlates, rather than a view of rape as a discrete phenomenon with its own unique antecedents. This notion of rape as related to other forms of aggression toward women is in accord with recent data linking rape-supportive attitudes to actual behavioral aggression against a female confederate in a "Buss paradigm" analog (Malamuth, 1983).

In summary, LR and LF appear to represent points on a self-reported aggression continuum, as a partial function of attitudinal (but generally not sexual) variables. To the extent that likelihood to rape or force measures are representative of actual sexual aggression, these data may have implications for understanding rape and other forms of sexual violence. For example, preventing rape may be "tantamount to revamping a significant proportion of our societal values" (Burt, 1980, p. 229), as opposed to placing primary emphasis on treating "sexual psychopaths" (Groth & Burgess, 1977) or other "deviant" individuals.

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