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Perceptions of Rape in Acquaintance, Marital, and Stranger Situations and the Impact of Gender

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BARRY UNIVERSITY

PERCEPTIONS OF RAPE IN ACQUAINTANCE, MARITAL, AND STRANGER  
SITUATIONS AND THE IMPACT OF GENDER

By

Shawna A. Wright

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## Abstract

It has been proposed that an observer's perception of what constitutes rape can vary as a function of gender, level of rape-myth acceptance, and the nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship prior to the assault. Participants read three rape scenarios involving a marital, stranger and an acquaintance rape situation and rated the responsibility of the rape for the victim and assailant, the psychological impact on the victim, and the credibility of the victim's police report. Results showed that men and women seem to hold similar levels of rape myth acceptance. However, participants responded to the scenarios according to the perceived nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship. The implications of how societal views impact victims and perpetrators of rape situations are discussed.

Perceptions of Rape in Acquaintance, Marital, and Stranger Situations and  
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Rape is a pervasive problem on college campuses. Community studies have found the prevalence of sexual assault among women in the general population ranged from 5% to 22% (Kilpatrick Best, Veronen, Amick, Villepontoux, & Ruff, 1985; Russell, 1984). Rates of sexual victimization among college women when compared to women in the general population were found to be three times higher, with the preponderance of the crimes being committed by someone known to the victim (Koss, 1988; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Moreover, Koss et al. (1987) also found that 1 in 12 college men acknowledged committing an act that meets the legal definition of rape or attempted rape during their high school or college years. Rapaport and Burkhart (1984) found that 15% of college men admitted forcing a woman to have intercourse and 12% acknowledged physically restraining a woman to gain sexual advantage. These prevalence rates are further supported by Koss (1998) who surveyed 6,159 women from universities across the U.S. and found that 15.4% indicated experiencing some form of rape.

However, these figures may not adequately represent the true number of rape occurrences. Several studies support the assertion that the stigma associated with rape, for example, the shame experienced by victims, may contribute to victims attributing blame to themselves rather than the perpetrator. This effect may lower the rates of report (Frese, Moya, & Megia, 2004; Koss, 1993). The victim may decide against reporting victimization because of such shame. Moreover, neglecting to report victimization may be further influenced by public perceptions of rape, which are mediated by stereotypes or rape myths (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003).

## Rape Myth Acceptance

### *Definition*

Stereotypes and myths regarding rape are conceptualized as widely held prejudicial attitudes or false beliefs about rape. Rape myth acceptance is defined as the number of stereotypical ideas one holds pertaining to rape, for example, rape is not harmful, women accuse men of rape out of retaliation, women enjoy rape, women deserve rape by engaging in risky behavior or wearing provocative clothing, only bad women get raped (Burt, 1980; Frese et al., 2004; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Sapp, Farrell, Johnson, & Hitchcock, 1999). Research has demonstrated that the level of rape myth acceptance can predict the likelihood that an individual will ascribe blame to the victim (Frese et al., 2004; Krahe, 1988).

Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) claimed that despite rape myths being generally false, such beliefs are widely held and serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women. Support for society's possible justification of male sexual aggression is demonstrated by Johnson, Kuck, and Schander (1997), who found that one-third of participants reported that under certain situations, men cannot control their sexual urges. Furthermore, 43.9% of participants agreed that depending on the situation, all men are capable of rape.

Several studies suggest that acceptance of stereotypes or myths of rape victims and perpetrators may be associated with attitudes pertaining to gender role stereotyping (Frese et al., 2004), adversarial sexual beliefs, and tolerance of interpersonal violence (Burt, 1980). Gender role stereotyping is conceptualized as traditional societal beliefs regarding positions or roles of males and females within society. Therefore, the

appropriateness of one's sexual acts, number of sexual partners, job, or familial role varies as a function of gender. Individuals who hold extreme traditional gender roles are more likely to hold a general acceptance of rape myth and minimized the severity of rape (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005). This assertion that acceptance of rape myths is mediated by one's adherence to traditional gender role is supported by several studies (Burt, 1980; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Johnson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1983).

Furthermore, adversarial sexual beliefs suggest that sexual relationships are exploitative and each member seeks to deceive the other individual. Therefore, distrust of the opposite sex is appropriate. Tolerance of interpersonal violence implies that force and coercion are reasonable methods to establish compliance in sexual relationships. The appropriateness of the amount or level of force varies depending on type of sexual or intimate relationship. In certain situations, such as an established intimate relationship or marriage, it may not be necessary for men to control sexual drive (Frese et al., 2004). Burt (1980) found that gender role stereotyping, adversarial sexual beliefs, and tolerance of interpersonal violence predicted rape myth acceptance, such that the higher the attitudes, the more likely acceptance of rape myths.

#### *Level of Rape Myth Acceptance and the Consequence for Victims*

Individuals with higher levels of rape myth acceptance are more likely to attribute blame to the victim and justify the actions of the perpetrator. Moreover, these individuals are less likely to interpret forced intercourse as rape (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003). This point is further illustrated by Frese et al. (2004), who found that compared to those with lower levels, participants with higher levels of rape myth acceptance were more likely to attribute blame to the victim, viewed the trauma as less severe, and were less likely to

recommend filing a police report. The use of these stereotypes is evidence that rape myths further serve to justify male sexual aggression against women (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003).

Attributing blame to the victim for the sexual assault can produce devastating effects. She may feel the need to accept responsibility and decide against reporting the crime. Moreover, when reports are filed, allegations are sometimes met with skepticism from law enforcement officials which further hinders investigations and may result in lighter punishment or no punishment at all (Frese et al., 2004). In addition, guilt that arises from trauma associated with the rape can severely impact the victim's mental health (e.g., low self-esteem, shame, suicidal ideation) and can lead to the development of various psychological problems, for example PTSD, anxiety, and depression (Caron & Carter, 1997; Ewoldt, Monson, & Langinrichsen-Rollings, 2000; Frese et al., 2004; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003).

### Rape Situations

Depending upon who perpetrates the rape, public opinion of what constitutes rape will vary. An observer's perception of what constitutes rape can vary as a function of traditional gender roles, stereotypes, myths, or gender. Traditional gender roles (e.g., wives are expected to satisfy their husbands needs) often influence perceptions regarding rape. Individuals in an established intimate relationship (e.g., marriage) have had prior sexual contact, and that fact can result in a belief that rape cannot occur. Moreover, stereotypes and myths pertaining to the "typical rape victim" can transform responsibility from the assailant to the victim. Observers who rely on myths (e.g., women who wear provocative clothing deserve rape) are more likely than individuals who do not rely on



such myths to attribute blame to the victim for the assault and seek to justify the actions of the perpetrator (Frese et al., 2004).

### *Acquaintance Rape*

Acquaintance or date rape is an increasing problem in the U.S, especially on college campuses. According to Gidycz et al. (2001), the reported occurrence of acquaintance rape on college campuses is 21%. Rape committed by an assailant known to the victim may be perceived as less traumatic (Bell, Kuriloff, Lottes, 1994; Ben-David & Schneider, 2005) and is less likely to be seen as rape by observers and the victim when compared to rape committed by a stranger (Koss et al., 1988).

*Perceptions of acquaintance rape.* Frese et al. (2004) also found that participants viewed victim responsibility differently depending on the victim-perpetrator relationship. The likelihood of attributing blame to the victim for the assault increases when the perpetrator is an acquaintance or date (Bell et al., 1994; Check & Malamuth, 1983). Participants rated victim responsibility the highest and assailant responsibility the lowest in acquaintance rape situations when compared to marital and stranger rape situations. Participants regarded assailant responsibility the highest in stranger rape situations when compared to marital and acquaintance rape situations. As a result, participants more often recommended reporting rape to authorities when committed by a stranger, as opposed to rape by an acquaintance (Frese et al., 2004).

*Prevention programs and implications for reducing acquaintance rape.* Pinzone-Glover, Gidycz, and Jacobs (1998) found that participants who were involved in an acquaintance rape prevention program differed from those in the control group in terms of their empathy and attitudes toward rape victims. Specifically, participants in the

experimental group who were exposed to the rape-specific information were more empathic toward the victim than those in the comparison group. Similarly, men in the acquaintance rape prevention group expressed less traditional attitudes compared to men in the control group. Previous research has suggested that more traditional attitudes are indicative of an increased acceptance of forcible date rape (Fischer, 1986a), acceptance of violence toward women (Check & Malamuth, 1983), victim blaming, and a decreased ability to appropriately define rape (Shotland & Goodstein, 1983).

Moreover, these findings are supported by previous research and have important implications for reducing the rates of victimization. Deitz and Byrnes (1981) found that participants who expressed higher levels of empathy toward rape victims also expressed more positive feelings toward the victim and rated the psychological impact of the trauma as greater. Likewise, participants attributed more responsibility for the rape to the assailant and recommended longer prison sentences. Moreover, Deitz et al. (1982) suggested that the rape empathy in men is negatively correlated with a desire to rape. Therefore, increasing men's empathy for rape victims may in turn reduce the sexually aggressive behavior and rape occurrences.

### *Marital Rape*

*Definition.* The estimated rate of rape within marriages is 6% to 14% (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993; Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Russell, 1990). For years, marital rape was viewed as legally impossible due to the marital contract in which consent of sexual relations is assumed (Ewoldt et al., 2000). Legal recourse against husbands who rape their wives is not recognized in all states and when charges are brought against husbands, fewer than 50% are successfully convicted (Whatley, 2005).

*Perception of marital rape.* Research has demonstrated that attributions regarding rape can differ as a function of victim-perpetrator relationship prior to the assault.

Previous voluntarily physical contact with the assailant affects the level of perceived ambiguity. For example, marital rape can be perceived as ambiguous because of previous sexual contact and traditional beliefs regarding marriage (Frese et al., 2004). Therefore, one could argue that both marital rape and acquaintance rape situations are ambiguous when compared to stranger rape. This ambiguity can often impact an observer's view of the rape, causing him or her to question whether a crime truly occurred.

Ewoldt et al. (2000) found that participants' endorsement of rape myth acceptance was mediated by the perceived marital status. Participants expressed higher levels of rape myth acceptance when the perceived rape occurred in an intact marriage. Likewise, lower levels of rape myth acceptance was endorsed when the relationship was perceived as dissolving (e.g., legally separated, divorced, moved out) than when the relationship was intact. Furthermore, participants endorsed more rape-supportive attributions in dissolving rape situations when compared to stranger rape situations.

Societal views of marital rape as less traumatic and offensive when compared to rape committed by a stranger have been demonstrated in several studies (Bell et al., 1994; Ewoldt et al., 2000; Frese et al., 2004; Monson, Byrd, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1996). Ben-David and Schneider (2005) along with Frese et al. (2004) found that participants perceived less psychological damage, lower level of violence, and lower level of victim rights violation for marital rape when compared to stranger rape. Moreover, marital rape was perceived as a less obvious form of rape.

Whatley (2005) found that participants' ratings of victim responsibility in marital rape situation varied as a function of the way the victim was dressed. Men and women believed the victim was partially responsible for the rape. However, participants were more likely to attribute blame to the victim when she was dressed in a seductive manner than when she dressed in a conservative manner. Likewise, participants viewed the victim who was dressed in a seductive manner as more deserving of the assault than the victim dressed in a conservative manner. Moreover, the attitudes of participants also impacted their attribution of responsibility and deservingness. Compared to participants who held egalitarian attitudes toward marriage, participants who held traditional attitudes toward marriage attributed greater responsibility to the victim and utilized the justification that the victim asked for it (Whatley, 2005).

*Severity.* Several studies have shown that regardless of the offender, trauma induced by rape has devastating effects (Koss, 1993; Shapiro & Schwarz, 1997). Victims of marital rape report nightmares, sexual dysfunctions, and an inability to trust (Finkelhor, Gelles, Hotaling, & Straus, 1983; Westwell, 1998). Nevertheless, victim trauma is regarded as higher when the assault was committed by a stranger than when committed by a husband or someone known by the victim (Frese et al., 2004).

### *Stranger Rape*

Research has shown that society tends to have harsh regard for perpetrators who commit stranger rape. Participants regarded assailant responsibility the highest in stranger rape situations when compared to marital and acquaintance rape situations (Frese et al., 2004). In addition, several studies have demonstrated that participants hold rape committed by a stranger as more traumatic, think that it should be reported to the

authorities, and believe that the victim is not likely to be blamed for the incident when compared to marital and acquaintance rape (Bell et al., 1994; Ewoldt et al., 2000; Frese et al., 2004; Monson et al., 1996).

Monson et al. (1996) demonstrated that an increase in violation of victims' rights is perceived in stranger rape when compared to marital rape. In addition, acquaintance rapists received reduced sentences when compared to stranger rapists (McCormick, Maric, Seto, & Barbaree, 1998). Alternatively, characteristics of the observer (e.g., sex) affect attitudinal factors. For example, studies have shown that men usually hold more accepting attitudes toward rape than women (Ewoldt et al., 2000; Frese et al., 2004).

#### The Role of Substances

The presence of alcohol or other substances may alter how observers view an alleged sexual assault and the victim responsibility. Generally, compared to sober victims, intoxicated victims of sexual assault are seen as less credible and more deserving of the consequences associated with their substance use (Hammock & Richardson, 1997). This effect is supported by Wenger and Bornstein (2006) who found that alcohol consumption was negatively correlated with victim's credibility. Participants significantly viewed sober victims of sexual assault as more credible than intoxicated victims. In addition, guilty verdicts were more likely to occur when the victim was sober as opposed to when the victim was intoxicated. Intoxicated victims may be held accountable for their actions when compared to sober victims because they voluntarily placed themselves in a dangerous situation.

According to Hammock and Richardson (1997), the interaction between relationship closeness and substance use may impact the perception of victim

responsibility for sexual assault. If an intoxicated victim and the perpetrator do not have a close relationship, she is viewed as more culpable for the assault when compared to a sober victim. The intoxicated victim is blamed for the assault, because she placed herself in a dangerous situation by voluntarily consuming substances. By contrast, if a close relationship (e.g., dating) exists between the victim and perpetrator, then the perpetrator is seen as responsible for the assault. However, this assertion was not supported by others (Wenger & Bornstein, 2006).

#### Gender Differences

Several studies support the assertion that rape myth acceptance and perceptions of rape scenarios vary as a function of gender. For example, compared to women, men were more likely to minimize the severity of rape. Women are more likely than men to express higher levels of empathy toward rape victims (Bell et al., 1994; Burt, 1980; Caron & Carter, 1997; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Johnson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Monson et al., 1996; Stromo, Lang, & Stritzke, 1997; Varelas & Foley, 1998). However, others have found that gender is not a factor (Frese et al., 2004; Johnson & Russ, 1989; Krahe 1988; Pinzone-Glover et al., 1998; Whatley, 2005). Given such discrepancies, further research should be conducted in an attempt to resolve such inconsistency.

Several studies suggest that men were more likely than women to minimize the severity of rape (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005), endorse rape-tolerant attitudes, hold higher rape myth acceptance, and attribute blame to the victim instead of the assailant (Caron & Carter, 1997; Ewoldt et al., 2000). Jimenez and Abreu (2003) found that women expressed lower levels of rape myth acceptance, higher levels of empathy, and

attributed more credibility toward the rape victim. According to Bell et al. (1994), women are likely to take rape more seriously than men. Supporting this assertion, Ewoldt et al. (2000) found that women tended to hold lower levels of rape-supportive beliefs than men and were less likely to attribute blame to the victim.

Caron and Carter (1997) found that gender, the observer's attitude, and acceptance of violence was indicative of the participant's stance on rape, rape victims, and rapists. First, women were less accepting of rape and the rapist and were more likely to perceive the victim as innocent when compared to men. Second, participants who held positive attitudes toward sexuality were more likely to express an overall intolerance of rape and view the women as innocent victims of rape than were participants who held negative attitudes toward sexuality. Last, acceptance of violence against women was indicative of attribution of blame to rape victims.

#### *Intervention Programs*

Pinzone-Glover et al. (1998) demonstrated that in general, women were more accurate in their definitions of rape. After men in the experimental group completed an intervention, they were more accurate in their definitions of rape when compared to the men in the control group. However, their ability to accurately define a situation as rape was influenced by the amount of alcohol consumed, prior intimacy, and resistance of the woman. For example, men were less likely to accurately define the situation as rape than were women when alcohol and prior intimacy increased and female resistance decreased.

## Ethnic and Cultural Factors

### *African American Perceptions*

An estimated 1 in 4 African American women will become victims of rape in their lifetime (White, 1995). Research has indicated that public opinion regarding the victim or perpetrator's race can also influence reactions to rape. In particular, one rape myth of the typical rape victim (White woman) and the typical rapist (Black man) remains prevalent in society (Vareles & Foley, 1998). Wyatt (1992) suggested that the "credibility of Black women as rape victims has never been established as firmly as it has for White women" (p. 86). Historically, the rape of a slave woman at the hands of her slave owner was considered normal and, as a result, overlooked. However, during that time, any type of sexual relations between a Black man and a White woman was punishable by death (Vareles & Foley, 1998).

Rape myths affect the legal system in several ways. Foley, Evancic, Karnik, King, and Parks (1995) found that undergraduates were more likely to endorse rape being reported to authorities and attribute responsibility to the assailant when the victim was Caucasian as opposed to African American. Likewise, participants viewed the date rape situation as more acceptable when the victim was African American than when the victim was Caucasian. Moreover, when a Caucasian woman alleges that she was raped by an African American man, she is more likely to be believed than if she was raped by a White assailant. Surprisingly, African American women who report the same crime are less likely to be believed, regardless of the assailant's race (Varelas & Foley, 1998). Research also suggests that in order for the public to perceive that rape of an African American woman occurred, there must be evidence of resistance that demonstrates an attempt to



fight off the assailant (Estrich, 1987). Therefore, rape of an African American woman may be perceived as fictitious in a court of law, especially if a White assailant is accused of committing the crime (Varelas & Foley, 1998).

#### *Asian Perceptions*

Asian college students were more likely to attribute partial blame to the victim, hold rape myths, and express negative attitudes toward rape victims than were Caucasian students (Mori, Bernat, Gleen, Selle, & Zarate, 1995). Kennedy and Gorzalke (2002) found a significant difference between Asian participants and non-Asian participants. Asian participants endorsed greater acceptance of rape myths and were more tolerant of sexually harassing behavior than were non-Asian participants. Asian men were more likely to endorse rape tolerant behaviors than were Asian women.

#### *Caucasian Perceptions*

Varelas and Foley (1998) found several differences between White and Black participants. White participants were more likely than Black participants to define the incident as a rape, recommend that the incident be reported to the authorities, attribute more responsibility to the perpetrator, and attribute less responsibility to the victim. Furthermore, compared to White participants, Black participants were more likely to report that the victim's behavior was a contributing factor to the rape.

Despite the differences between White and Black participants, limited support was provided for participants attributing responsibility to the perpetrator as a function of race. Varelas and Foley (1998) found that White participants ascribed less responsibility to the White victims who was raped by a Black perpetrator than to a Black woman raped by a Black perpetrator. Conversely, Black participants ascribed the most responsibility to

the Black victim raped by a White man compared to White participants. Likewise, Black participants were more likely to believe that the victim was responsible for the rape and presume her actions contributed to the rape when the rapist was portrayed as White.

### *Latino Perceptions*

Jimenez and Abreu (2003) found differences between Caucasian and Latino participants. Caucasian women had a higher propensity to describe positive attitudes toward rape victims (e.g., sympathy) and were less likely to believe in rape myths when compared to their Latino counterparts. Conversely, higher levels of sympathy only applied when the rape victim was Caucasian. Furthermore, Latina women were more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to endorse rape myth acceptance. Fischer (1987) found that Hispanic college men were more likely than their Caucasian college counterparts to hold rape myths and were less likely to attribute blame to the perpetrator.

### Legal Implications

Research has documented that the institutionalization of rape myths in the law influences perceived victimization, reports of victimizations, investigation of rape allegations, and verdicts in rape trials (Burt, 1980; Koss, 1993). Societal tolerance of rape reduces the likelihood of reporting the crime. Some suggest that this tolerance of rape among police officers and judges could increase the likelihood that they will meet rape allegations with suspicion and be disinclined to investigate such assaults further (Frese et al., 2004). Ward (1995) studied law enforcement official, lawyers, doctors, and counselors. Twenty-four percent of police officers, 11% of lawyers, 6% of doctors, and 3% of rape counselors believed that little or no damage occurs to a victim when she is sexually experienced prior to a rape.

Frese et al. (2004) found that the likelihood of reporting rape to authorities is influenced by the interaction between rape myth acceptance and situational factors (e.g., intoxication). Moreover, the type of rape (e.g., acquaintance rape, stranger rape, marital rape) influenced the likelihood that participants would recommend reporting the crime to the police, such that rapes committed by an assailant known to the victim are less likely to be reported than rape committed by a complete stranger (Koss, 1993).

### Theoretical Perspectives

#### *Cognitive Model*

The research related to social cognition theory implies that the likelihood of stored knowledge being activated is based on accessibility of the stored knowledge and the uniformity between the stored knowledge and the presenting stimulus. Therefore, stored beliefs may be overlooked if an individual regards the knowledge as extraneous to the presenting stimulus. Despite one's level of rape myth acceptance, stereotypic views can be endorsed differently, depending on certain characteristics of the assault (Frese et al., 2004).

#### *Sex Role Socialization Theory*

Sex role socialization places great emphasis on the traditional gender roles each individual acquires. Based on societal influence, traditional gender roles aid men and women in forming expectations regarding acceptable and appropriate behaviors during sexual contact. However, progression of traditional sex role socialization aids in the development of rape myth acceptance. This is further illustrated by marital rape, in that traditional gender roles influence one's perspective regarding what is acceptable sexual behavior for men and women. For example, individuals who hold extreme traditional sex

role perspectives may view marital rape as fictitious or erroneous and acquaintance rape as extreme but appropriate (Ewoldt et al., 2000).

Attitudes toward rape victims (e.g., attributing blame to the victim, justifying the actions of the perpetrator) can be held by victims, assailants, and observers. These attitudes are often mediated by traditional gender-role stereotypes. Factors associated with the assault and characteristics of the observer impact attitudes toward rape victims and perpetrators. Moreover, factors of the assault, such as victim resistance and the victim-perpetrator relationship also impact the perception of rape (Frese et al., 2004).

#### Rationale for the Present Study

Research indicates that an observer's perception of rape could be influenced by rape myth acceptance and the nature of victim-perpetrator relationship prior to the assault. Higher levels of rape myth acceptance have several implications for rape victims. Individuals who hold higher levels of rape myth acceptance are more likely to attribute the responsibility of rape to the victim instead of the perpetrator. Frese et al. (2004) found that the level of rape myth acceptance was positively correlated with the attribution of victim blame and negatively correlated with the perception of trauma severity and recommendation to file a police report. Moreover, research has demonstrated that the perception of rape varies as a function of the nature of victim-perpetrator relationship prior to the assault (Bell et al., 1994; Frese et al., 2004). Rape committed by someone known to the victim, compared to someone unknown to the victim, is considered as less severe and a lesser violation of the victims' rights. Similarly, victim responsibility is the highest in acquaintance rape situations and the lowest in stranger rape encounters.

The impact of gender has also been proposed to be an important influence on rape perception. Research has demonstrated that men are more likely than women to minimize the severity of rape (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005) and hold higher levels of rape-supportive beliefs (Ewoldt et al., 2000). In addition, men are more likely than women to hold higher rape myth acceptance and attribute blame to the victim instead of the assailant (Caron & Carter, 1997; Ewoldt et al., 2000; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003). Women have been found to be more likely than men to express higher levels of empathy toward rape victims (Bell et al., 1994; Burt, 1980; Caron & Carter, 1997; Check & Malamuth, 1983). However, others have found that gender does not influence an observer's perception of rape (Frese et al., 2004; Johnson & Russ, 1989).

Given the conflicting findings, the present study sought to further clarify the relationship between level of rape myth acceptance, gender, and the nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship prior to the assault in rape situations. The aim of the proposed study was to investigate the relationship between the effects of gender on the perception of rape in acquaintance, marital and stranger rape situations.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 133 students from colleges and universities throughout the United States, ranging in age from 18 to 59 ( $M = 30.94$ ). Participants completed an online survey posted on the following websites:

[www.socialpsychology.org](http://www.socialpsychology.org), <http://psych.hanover.edu/research/exponnet.html>, [www.lab-united.com](http://www.lab-united.com), and <http://genpsylab-wexlist.unizh.ch/>.

The sample consisted of 81 women (60.4%) and 8 men (6%), and 45 (33.6%) participants did not report their gender. In terms of ethnicity, 41 (30.6%) were White, 32 (23.9%) were Black, 7 (5.2%) were European, 4 (3%) were Hispanic, 2 (1.5%) were Native American, 3 (2.2%) identified as other, and 45 (33.6%) did not report their ethnicity. The sample contained 78 (58.2%) heterosexual individuals, 6 (4.5%) bisexual individuals, 3 (2.2%) lesbian/homosexual individuals, 2 (1.5%) other individuals, and 45 (33.6%) did not report their sexual identity. Seven non-American participants were excluded from the data analysis as the study sought to investigate the perceptions of rape in the United States. Thus, results report data from 126 participants.

### *Measures*

*Rape scenarios.* Three short vignettes described different situations involving rape: acquaintance rape, marital rape, stranger rape (Appendices A, B, and C). The marital rape vignette developed by Ewoldt et al. (2000) was slightly modified for the current study. The acquaintance and stranger rape situations were created specifically for this study. Each participant read all rape situations. The victim was described as actively and persistently resisting advances of the perpetrator. Despite the victim's efforts, the assailant eventually forced her to have intercourse.

*Attribution of responsibility.* The level of attribution regarding responsibility was assessed with the following two questions: "How much responsibility does the victim have for what happened?", and "How much responsibility does the assailant have for what happened?" Each question was answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*very high*).

*Psychological trauma.* The victim's level of psychological trauma was assessed with the participant's answer to this question: "How much psychological trauma did the victim experience?" The question was answered on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*a lot*).

*Implications for reporting the assault.* The recommendation to file a report with authorities was assessed with participants' answers to the following question: "Would you recommend that the victim report the crime to authorities?" The following two options were provided to answer the question: 1 (*yes*) and 2 (*no*). The credibility of the rape victim was assessed with the following question: "If the victim decided to report the encounter to the police, how much credibility do you think she would have?" The question was answered on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*a lot*).

*Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS; Burt, 1980).* The RMAS consisted of 19 items that assessed prevalent prejudicial myths and stereotypes regarding rape, victims, and rapists (See Appendix D). Participants rated their level of agreement with statements such as, "When a woman gets drunk at a party and has intercourse with someone she's just met, she should be considered 'fair game' to others who want to have sex with her too, regardless if she wants to or not." Ratings were on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). However, some items were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*almost all*) to 5 (*almost none*) or 1 (*always*) to 5 (*never*). Higher scores were indicative of greater rape myth acceptance. Both Burt (1980) and Jimenez and Abreu (2003) reported an internal consistency of .88 for the scale.

*The Rape Empathy Scale (RES; Deitz, Blackwell, Daley, & Bentley, 1982).* The RES contained 19 items that assessed participants' attributions of empathy and responsibility toward rape victims and rapists (See Appendix E). An example of an item is as follows: "A man who forces a woman to engage in sexual intercourse against her will is not justifiable under any circumstances." Ratings were on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated greater empathy for and less responsibility ascribed to the rape victim. Deitz et al. (1982) reported a coefficient alpha of .84 for the scale. Jimenez and Abreu (2003) reported a coefficient alpha of .82.

*Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS; Ward, 1988).* The ARVS (See Appendix F) contained 25 items that measured positive as well as adverse attitudes toward rape, specifically focusing on attributions toward rape victims (e.g., blame, credibility, deservingness, denigration, trivialization). Participants rated each item (e.g., "A raped woman is a less desirable woman") on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated unfavorable attitudes toward rape victims. Jimenez and Abreu (2003) reported a coefficient alpha of .85 for the scale.

### *Procedure*

Participants read a cover letter describing the study and accepted the terms prior to beginning the study (See Appendix G). Participants read one of the three rape scenarios and answered questions regarding how much responsibility can be attributed to the victim and to the assailant. The participants then read a second and third vignette and answered the same questions. The presentation of the rape vignettes and the questions



about each rape vignette was counterbalanced. Then, participants completed the RMAS, RES, and ARVS. However, the presentation of the scales varied as some participants were asked to complete the scales prior to reading the vignettes and others completed the scales subsequent to the presentation of the vignettes. Last, participants entered demographic information (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, year in college, relationship status). See appendix H for the demographic questionnaire.

### Hypotheses and Analyses

The following hypotheses were tested through comparison of group means (independent-samples *t* tests and/or repeated measures ANOVA were used to perform the analyses as appropriate):

#### Hypothesis 1 (Gender):

- A) Men would hold higher rape myth acceptance than women as measured by their scores on RMAS. Specifically, men would have higher scores on RMAS when compared to women.
- B) Women would endorse higher levels of empathy and attribute more credibility toward the rape victim than would men as measured by RES. Specifically, women would have higher scores on RES when compared to men.
- C) Men would be more likely to attribute blame to the victim instead of the assailant when compared to women as measured by scores on ARVS. Specifically, men would have higher scores on ARVS when compared to women.

Hypothesis 2 (Attribution of responsibility in rape situations):

- A) Participants would rate victim responsibility the highest in acquaintance rape situation and the lowest in stranger rape situation as measured by the answer to the question “How much responsibility does the victim have for what happened?” Specifically, the mean for victim responsibility would be highest in the acquaintance rape situation and the lowest in the stranger rape situation when compared to the marital rape situation.
- B) Participants would rate assailant responsibility the highest in stranger rape situation and the lowest in the acquaintance rape situation as measured by the answer to the question “How much responsibility does the perpetrator have for what happened?” Specifically, the mean for assailant responsibility would be the highest in the stranger rape situation and the lowest in the acquaintance rape situation when compared to the marital rape situation.

Hypothesis 3 (Perceived psychological trauma within rape situations):

Participants would rate psychological trauma the highest in the stranger rape situation and the lowest in the marital rape situation as measured by the answer to the question “How much psychological trauma did the victim experience?” Specifically, the mean for psychological trauma would be highest in the stranger rape situation and the lowest in the marital rape situation when compared to the acquaintance rape situation.

Hypothesis 4 (Implications for filing a report):

- A) The mean for recommending that the victim file a report with the authorities would be the highest in the stranger rape situation when

compared to acquaintance and marital rape situations. This would be assessed by the answer to the question “Would you recommend that the victim report the crime to authorities?”

- B) Participants would rate the victim’s credibility the highest in the stranger rape situation as measured by the answer to the question “If the victim decided to report the encounter to the police, how much credibility do you think she would have?” Specifically, the mean for victim credibility would be higher in the stranger rape situation when compared to the acquaintance and marital rape situations.

## Results

### *Gender Comparisons*

Independent-samples *t* test were conducted to evaluate gender differences in terms of rape myth acceptance (RMA), victim empathy (RES), and attitudes toward rape victims (ARVS). None of the comparisons were found to be statistically significant. The overall mean for RMA did not significantly differ as a function of gender,  $t(87) = .15, p = .17$  ( $M = 1.71, SD = .25$  for men;  $M = 1.73, SD = .44$  for women). There were no significant differences in terms of RES,  $t(87) = .15, p = .70$  ( $M = 4.32, SD = .15$  for men;  $M = 4.35, SD = .46$  for women). The overall mean for ARVS did not differ as a function of gender,  $t(87) = .71, p = .79$  ( $M = .13, SD = .37$  for men;  $M = .05, SD = .42$  for women).

### *Attribution of Responsibility in Rape Situations*

One-way within-subjects ANOVAs were conducted to compare the rape scenarios with the dependent variables being perceived responsibility of the victim,

perceived responsibility of the assailant, and perceived psychological trauma of the victim.

The results indicated a significant rape scenario effect for perceived responsibility of the victim, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .57$ ,  $F(2, 101) = 37.55$ ,  $p < .001$ , multivariate  $\eta^2 = .43$ . Follow-up paired-samples  $t$  tests were conducted to determine which rape situations significantly differed in terms of victim responsibility. The results indicated that the mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) was significantly higher than the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 1.28$ ,  $SD = .71$ ),  $t(102) = 7.64$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) was significantly higher than the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 1.28$ ,  $SD = .71$ ),  $t(102) = 7.90$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) was not significantly different from the mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ),  $t(102) = .37$ ,  $p = .71$ .

In terms of perceived responsibility of the assailant, the results for the ANOVA also indicated a significant rape scenario effect, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .77$ ,  $F(2,101) = 14.83$ ,  $p < .001$ , multivariate  $\eta^2 = .23$ . Follow-up paired-samples  $t$  test were conducted to determine which rape situations significantly differed in terms of assailant responsibility. Each rape situation was significantly different from the other. The results indicated that the mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) was significantly higher than the mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = .70$ ),  $t(104) = 2.64$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) was significantly lower than the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = .47$ ),  $t(102) = 4.88$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) was significantly lower than the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = .47$ ),  $t(102) = 3.90$ ,  $p < .001$ .

*Perceived Psychological Trauma in Rape Situations*

A one-way within-subjects ANOVA was conducted comparing the rape scenarios with the dependent variable being perceived psychological trauma of the victim. The results for the ANOVA indicated a significant rape scenario effect, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .40$ ,  $F(2,101) = 75.47$ ,  $p < .001$ , multivariate  $\eta^2 = .60$ . Follow-up paired-samples  $t$  test were conducted to determine which rape situations significantly differed in terms of victim psychological trauma. Each rape situation was significantly different from the others. The results indicated that the mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) was significantly higher than the mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = .97$ ),  $t(104) = 7.84$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) was significantly lower than the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = .42$ ),  $t(102) = 6.51$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) was also significantly lower than the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = .42$ ),  $t(102) = 12.18$ ,  $p < .001$ .

*Implications for Filing a Report*

One-way within subjects ANOVAs were conducted comparing the rape scenarios with the dependent variables being the recommendation for filing a police report by the victim and perceived credibility of the victim's police report to evaluate the implications for filling a report.

In terms of recommendation for filling a police report, the results for the ANOVA indicated a significant rape scenario effect, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .52$ ,  $F(2,101) = 46.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , multivariate  $\eta^2 = .48$ . Follow-up paired-samples  $t$  test were conducted to determine which rape situations significantly differed in terms of the recommendation for filing a police

report. The results indicated that the mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 1.96$ ,  $SD = .19$ ) was significantly higher than the mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 1.51$ ,  $SD = .50$ ),  $t(104) = 9.18$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 1.51$ ,  $SD = .50$ ) was significantly lower than the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 1.99$ ,  $SD = .99$ ),  $t(102) = 9.62$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 1.96$ ,  $SD = .19$ ) was not significantly different from the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 1.99$ ,  $SD = .99$ ),  $t(102) = 1.34$ ,  $p = .18$ .

For perceived credibility of the victim's police report, the results for the ANOVA also indicated a significant rape scenario effect, Wilks's  $\Lambda = .27$ ,  $F(2, 101) = 139.79$ ,  $p < .001$ , multivariate  $\eta^2 = .74$ . Follow-up paired-samples  $t$  test were conducted to determine which rape situations significantly differed in terms of perceived victim report credibility. Each rape situation was significantly different from the others. The results indicated that the mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) was significantly higher than the mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = .98$ ),  $t(104) = 5.55$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for acquaintance rape situation ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) was significantly lower than the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = .89$ ),  $t(102) = 13.27$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean for marital rape situation ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = .98$ ) was significantly lower than the mean for stranger rape situation ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = .89$ ),  $t(102) = 16.13$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### Discussion

The results of the present study failed to support the hypothesis that men hold higher rape myth acceptance than women. Likewise, the present study failed to support the hypothesis that women endorse higher levels of empathy and attribute more credibility toward the rape victim than men. In addition, the present findings failed to

support the hypothesis that men attribute more blame to the victim instead of the assailant when compared to women. Thus, the present results did not distinguish men from women in terms of their rape myth acceptance, endorsement of victim empathy and credibility, and attribution of blame. Past research has provided support for and against prevalent gender differences in terms of rape perceptions. Caron and Carter (1997) and Jimenez and Abreu (2003) suggested that men hold higher rape myth acceptance or prejudicial views regarding rape as compared to women. Similarly, Ewoldt et al. (2000) suggested that men are more likely to attribute blame to the victim as compared to women. On the other hand, there is also evidence suggesting that gender does not influence an observer's perception of rape (e.g., Frese et al., 2004; Johnson and Russ, 1989; Krahe 1988; Pinzone-Glover et al., 1998; Whatley, 2005). The present study seems to suggest that men and women hold similar views regarding rape.

As expected, participants' perception of victim responsibility varied as a function of the rape situations. The results showed that victim responsibility was the lowest in a stranger rape situation when compared to marital and acquaintance rape situations. Therefore, participants perceived that the victim raped by a stranger was less responsible than the victim raped by an acquaintance or husband. This finding suggests that in today's society, rape committed by a stranger is regarded more harshly than any other rape situation. On the other hand, participants rated victim responsibility the highest in marital rape situation when compared to acquaintance and stranger rape situations. This finding is inconsistent with Frese et al. (2004) who found that victim responsibility was highest in acquaintance rape situation. One explanation for our finding is society's perception of marital rape as being legally impossible since the marital contract assumes

consent of sexual relations. Society's tolerance of marital rape is further demonstrated by the lack of legal recourse against husbands who rape their wives in several states. For instance, fewer than 50% of husbands who are accused of raping their wives are successfully convicted (Whatley, 2005).

Also as expected, participants' perception of assailant responsibility varied as a function of the rape situations. Assailant responsibility was the highest in stranger rape situation when compared to marital and acquaintance rape situations. Therefore, the assailant who raped a stranger was perceived as being more responsible than an assailant who raped his friend or wife. However, participants rated assailant responsibility the lowest in the marital rape situation when compared to the stranger and acquaintance rape situations. Therefore, the husband was perceived as less responsible when compared to a stranger or friend who committed rape. This finding could also be explained by the ambiguity often associated with marital rape. Marital rape can be perceived as ambiguous because of previous sexual contact and traditional beliefs regarding marriage. This ambiguity can often impact an observer's view of the rape, causing him or her to question whether or not a crime truly occurred (Frese et al., 2004).

As predicted, participants' perception of victim psychological trauma varied as a function of the rape situations. Specifically, the hypothesis that participants would rate psychological trauma the highest in the stranger rape situation and the lowest in the marital rape situation was supported. Results showed that a victim raped by a stranger was perceived as more psychologically traumatized than a victim raped by a friend or husband. Similarly, a wife raped by her husband was viewed as less traumatized than a victim raped by a stranger or friend. These findings are consistent with previous research



that suggests societal views of marital rape as less traumatic and offensive when compared to rape committed by a stranger (Bell et al., 1994; Ewoldt et al., 2000; Frese et al., 2004; Monson, Byrd, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1996). Moreover, marital rape is considered as less obvious form of rape with lower levels of victim rights violation (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005).

Results also supported the hypothesis that participants were more likely to recommend that the victim file a police report in the stranger rape situation when compared to marital rape situations. Also as predicted, participants rated the credibility of the victim's police report the highest in the stranger rape situation as compared to acquaintance and marital rape situations. This finding suggests that society has less tolerance for strangers who commit rape and more tolerance for husbands who rape their wives. Since victim trauma was rated highest in the stranger rape situation, it is not surprising that participants were more likely to recommend that the crime be reported and viewed the victim's police report as more creditable in the same situation. This finding is consistent with previous research which found that rape committed by a stranger is perceived as more traumatic than rape committed by an acquaintance or husband and is more likely to be reported to the authorities when compared to marital and acquaintance rape (Bell et al., 1994; Ewoldt et al., 2000; Frese et al., 2004; Monson et al., 1996).

There are several limitations to this study. Because the study was online, the specific geographic regions in the United States from which the participants were sampled are not known. Nevertheless, the online format for data collection allowed a wide range of individuals from various regions throughout the United States to be included. Another limitation of the present study is the limited number of male

participants. Only 6% of those who reported gender were men in the sample. It could be argued that gender differences were not detected as men were not properly represented in the sample.

Although the present study was successful in detecting differences in participants' perception of rape situations, future research should focus on identifying possible differences in the perception of rape situations based on gender. The present study did not investigate whether the perception of rape situations varied as a function of gender. It is possible that men view rape situations (e.g., marital, acquaintance, stranger) differently than women. Continued exploration of the relationship between rape situations as a function of gender is necessary to determine if possible differences exist.

To summarize, victims of stranger rape were perceived as being less responsible for the rape and more likely to be psychologically traumatized by the rape than victims of marital or acquaintance rape. The assailant was perceived as being more responsible for the rape in stranger rape situations than in marital and acquaintance rape situations. Moreover, participants were more likely to recommend that victims of stranger rape file a police report than victims of marital rape. Last, victims of stranger rape were perceived as more credible when compared to acquaintance or marital rape. While it was obvious that none of the victims willingly engaged in sexual intercourse with the assailants, participants significantly viewed differences among the situations.

There are several legal implications regarding the societal views of rape situations uncovered in the present study. Societal tolerance of rape in marital and acquaintance situations reduces the likelihood of reporting the crime (Frese et al., 2004). In addition, marital rape is not recognized as a crime in several states. Some suggest that this

tolerance of marital and acquaintance rape could increase the likelihood that police officers and judges will meet rape allegations with suspicion and be disinclined to investigate such assaults further (Frese et al., 2004). Likewise, members of the jury may be less likely to recognize rape as a crime when committed in a marital or acquaintance situation leading to fewer convictions in acquaintance and marital rape cases. The rape of a woman, despite victim-assailant relationship prior to the assault, is a serious crime and should be recognized and punished under the law as such. The present study provided evidence for the need of the enactment and enforcement of laws covering all rape situations regardless of the nature of the relationship between the victim and the assailant.

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Appendix A

Vignette

*Acquaintance Rape Situation.*

**2. ARS**

**Instructions:**  
Please read the following vignette. Next, using the 5-point or 2-point scale shown below, answer the following five questions regarding the vignette.

Mark and Liz have been friends for a few years. Both attend a large metropolitan university and are majoring in Business. Liz is a member of the most popular sorority on campus. Mark is a member of a fraternity. One evening, Mark invites Liz to a fraternity party. Initially, Liz refused, stating that her sorority sisters were busy and she did not want to go alone. She also had to study for one final exam. Eventually, Mark convinced Liz to attend the party. Liz decided to wear her favorite short black skirt with her low-cut pink silk blouse and black stiletto heels. Liz completed her hair and makeup and met Mark at the party. Once there, both were having a great time talking, laughing, drinking, and dancing. They both discussed their plans for the summer, as Liz would be moving back to her home town for the entire summer. Mark and Liz continued drinking and both had consumed more alcohol than usual. Mark and Liz left the party together and returned to Mark's apartment where they continued to drink. Mark began making sexual advances toward Liz. At the outset, Liz was receptive to Mark's advances and actively kissed him. Mark's level of aggression increased and Liz pulled away, asking Mark to stop. Mark continued his advances and stated "You know what you were doing when you decided to come back to my place. Now stop being a tease and give it to me!" Liz began crying and attempted to resist Mark's advances. Eventually, Mark forced himself on Liz and had sex with her.

\* 1. How much responsibility does Liz have for what happened?

(select one)      no responsibility      low responsibility      moderate responsibility      high responsibility      very high responsibility

                      

\* 2. How much responsibility does Mark have for what happened?

(select one)      no responsibility      low responsibility      moderate responsibility      high responsibility      very high responsibility

                      

\* 3. How much trauma and psychological impact did Liz experience?

(select one)      none      low      moderate      high      very high

                      

\* 4. Would you recommend that Liz report the crime to authorities?

Yes       No

\* 5. If Liz decided to report the encounter to the police, how much credibility do you think she would have?

(select one)      none      low credibility      moderate credibility      high credibility      very high credibility

Appendix B

Vignette

*Marital Rape Situation.*

**3. MRS**

**Instructions:**  
Please read the following vignette. Next, using the 5-point or 2-point scale shown below, answer the following five questions regarding the vignette.

Kevin and Alyssa have been married for seven years and recently got into a heated argument regarding finances. During the argument, both Kevin and Alyssa said things that they did not really mean, and later each was quite upset with the other. A few days after the argument, Kevin and Alyssa went out for dinner and aired their differences. Later that night, Kevin tried to initiate a sexual encounter, but Alyssa stopped him and said, "If you think dinner is going to make up for what you said, you're mistaken." Kevin replied, "The things I said, what about all the things you said?" Alyssa ignored Kevin and went on to explain that she was going to refuse sexual intercourse as a means of punishing him for the things he said in the argument. About a month had past when Kevin called Alyssa at work and asked her if she would like to go out for dinner and dancing to celebrate the promotion he received that day at work. Alyssa was very excited about Kevin's promotion and decided to wear a new sexy outfit that she knew would sexually arouse Kevin. She wore an off-the-shoulder skin-tight red dress that showed a good deal of cleavage, high heel shoes, black silk stockings, and a new hair style and make-up that made her look stunning.

When Kevin got home from work, Alyssa ran up to him and gave him a passionate kiss and congratulated him on the promotion. They then proceeded to go out to dinner and went to a local club. While at the club, Kevin and Alyssa had a few drinks and spent three hours dancing. Just before leaving the club, Alyssa stopped at the ladies room while Kevin waited outside. When Alyssa walked outside to join Kevin, she noticed Kevin and a young woman smiling and laughing. As Alyssa walked closer, the woman leered forward and began kissing Kevin. Infuriated, Alyssa rushed over and began screaming. Startled, Kevin pushed the woman away and began apologizing. The two engaged in a heated argument that lasted all the way home. Once home, Alyssa showered and went to bed. Later that night, Kevin tried to initiate a sexual encounter. At the onset, Alyssa was receptive to Kevin's advances and actively kissed him. Alyssa stopped him and said, "You're not going any further... I still haven't forgiven you for kissing that woman." At this point, Kevin became very angry. Rolling on top of her and pinning Alyssa's arms behind her head, he said "What!! It has been over a month since we have had sex! You've held out long enough, the punishment's over!" At this point, Alyssa pleaded with Kevin not to go any further, but Kevin continued and intercourse occurred.

\* 1. How much responsibility does Alyssa have for what happened?

(select one)      no responsibility      low responsibility      moderate responsibility      high responsibility      very high responsibility

                      

\* 2. How much responsibility does Kevin have for what happened?

(select one)      no responsibility      low responsibility      moderate responsibility      high responsibility      very high responsibility

                      

\* 3. How much trauma and psychological impact did Alyssa experience?

(select one)      none      low      moderate      high      very high

                      

\* 4. Would you recommend that Alyssa report the crime to authorities?

Yes       No

\* 5. If Alyssa decided to report the encounter to the police, how much credibility do you think she would have?

(select one)      none      low credibility      moderate credibility      high credibility      very high credibility

Appendix C

Vignette

*Stranger Rape Situation.*

**4. SRS**

**Instructions:**  
Please read the following vignette. Next, using the 5-point or 2-point scale shown below, answer the following five questions regarding the vignette.

After getting an A+ on her final exam, Ann decided to celebrate with friends by enjoying a night on the town. Ann wore a backless red dress that hugged each curve and her favorite diamond encrusted pumps. The girls danced the night away and had several martinis. Several hours passed and Ann noticed that it was 4:00 am. Since Ann had to tutor 5th graders in a few hours, she decided to leave. Ann's friends walked her outside of the club. Ann said "Goodbye girls, I'll call all of you tomorrow to arrange our study group." Ann kissed her friends goodbye and began stumbling back to her apartment. Ann heard what appeared to be footsteps and frequently looked over her shoulder. Once home, she turned on the stereo, heated leftover steak and potatoes, and began preparing for the next day. Ann began showering when she heard a loud noise at the door. She became frightened and immediately grabbed her robe to go investigate. Ann notices her door was ajar and the lock appeared to be busted. Frantic, Ann ran back to her bedroom, but was grabbed by a man she had never seen before. Ann screamed and pleaded for the unknown man to leave. He shoved her down onto the bed where he forced her to have sex with him.

\* 1. How much responsibility does Ann have for what happened?

(select one)      no responsibility      low responsibility      moderate responsibility      high responsibility      very high responsibility

                      

\* 2. How much responsibility does the stranger have for what happened?

(select one)      no responsibility      low responsibility      moderate responsibility      high responsibility      very high responsibility

                      

\* 3. How much trauma and psychological impact did Ann experience?

(select one)      none      low      moderate      high      very high

                      

\* 4. Would you recommend that Ann report the crime to authorities?

Yes       No

\* 5. If Ann decided to report the encounter to the police, how much credibility do you think she would have?

(select one)      none      low credibility      moderate credibility      high credibility      very high credibility

## Appendix D

## Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

**5. RMAS**

Instructions:  
Using the 5-point scale shown below, please answer the following questions.

**\* 1. A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                            

**\* 2. Any female can get raped.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                            

**\* 3. One reason that women falsely report a rape is that they frequently have a need to call attention to themselves.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                            

**\* 4. Any healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really wants to.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                            

**\* 5. When women go around braless or wearing short skirts and tight tops, they are just asking for trouble.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                            

**\* 6. In the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                            

**\* 7. If a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out of hand, it is her own fault if her partner forces sex on her.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                            

**\* 8. Women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they deserve.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                            

**\* 9. A woman who is stuck-up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys on the street deserves to be taught a lesson.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                            

**\* 10. Many women have an unconscious wish to be raped, and may then unconsciously set up a situation in which they are likely to be attacked.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

**\* 11. If a woman gets drunk at a party and has intercourse with a man she's just met there, she should be considered "fair game" to other males at the party who want to have sex with her too, whether she wants to or not.**

(select one)      strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

                      

**\* 12. What percentage of women who report a rape would you say are lying because they are angry and want to get back at the man they accuse?**

(select one)      about all      about 3/4      about 1/2      about 1/4      about none

                      

**\* 13. What percentage reported rapes would you guess were merely invented by women who discovered they were pregnant and wanted to protect their own reputation?**

(select one)      about all      about 3/4      about 1/2      about 1/4      about none

                      

**\* 14. A person comes to you and claims they were raped. How likely would you be to believe their statement if the person were your best friend?**

(select one)      always      frequently      sometimes      rarely      never

                      

**\* 15. A person comes to you and claims they were raped. How likely would you be to believe their statement if the person were an Indian woman?**

(select one)      always      frequently      sometimes      rarely      never

                      

**\* 16. 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?**

(select one)      always      frequently      sometimes      rarely      never

                      

**\* 17. A person comes to you and claims they were raped. How likely would you be to believe their statement if the person were a young boy?**

(select one)      always      frequently      sometimes      rarely      never

                      

**\* 18. A person comes to you and claims they were raped. How likely would you be to believe their statement if the person were a Black woman?**

(select one)      always      frequently      sometimes      rarely      never

                      

**\* 19. A person comes to you and claims they were raped. How likely would you be to believe their statement if the person were a White woman?**

(select one)      always      frequently      sometimes      rarely      never

## Appendix E

## The Rape Empathy Scale

**6. RES**

Instructions:  
Using the 5-point scale shown below, please answer the following questions.

\* 1. I feel that the situation in which a man compels a woman to submit to sexual intercourse against her will is an unjustifiable act under any circumstances.

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

\* 2. In deciding the matter of guilt or innocence in a rape case, it is more important to know about the past sexual activity of the alleged rape victim than the past activity of the alleged rapist.

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

\* 3. In general, I feel that rape is an act that is provoked by the rape victim.

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

\* 4. I would find it easier to imagine how a rape victim might feel during an actual rape than how a rapist might feel.

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

\* 5. Under certain circumstances, I can understand why a man would use force to obtain sexual relations with a woman.

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

\* 6. In a court of law, I feel that the rapist must be held accountable for his behavior during the rape.

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

\* 7. When a woman dresses in a sexually attractive way, she must be willing to accept the consequences of her behavior, whatever they are, since she is signaling her interest in having sexual relations.

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

\* 8. I would find it easier to empathize with the shame and humiliation a rape victim might feel during a trial to prove rape than with the feelings a rapist might have during the trial.

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

\* 9. If a man rapes a sexually active woman, he would probably be justified in his actions by the fact that she chooses to have sexual relations with other men.

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

**\* 10. I believe that all women secretly want to be raped.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 11. In deciding whether a rape has occurred or not, the burden of proof should rest on the woman, who must prove that the rape has actually occurred.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 12. I believe that it is impossible for a rape victim to enjoy being raped.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 13. I can really empathize with the helplessness a victim might feel during a rape if all of her attempts to resist the rape have failed.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 14. After a rape has occurred, I think the woman would suffer more emotional torment in dealing with the police than the man would.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 15. I feel it is impossible for a man to rape a woman unless she is willing.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 16. If a rape trial were publicized in the press, I feel the rape victim would suffer more emotional trauma from the publicity than the rapist.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 17. Even if a couple has had sexual intercourse before, if the man forces the woman to have sexual intercourse with him against her will, this should be considered rape.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 18. A husband has the every right to determine when sexual relations with his wife occur, even if it means forcing her to have sex with him.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 19. If I were a member of the jury in a rape trial, I would probably be more likely to believe the man's testimony than the woman's, since rape is a charge that is difficult to defend against, even if the man is innocent.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree



## Appendix F

## Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale

**7. ATRVS**

Instructions:  
Using the 5-point scale shown below, please answer the following questions.

**\* 1. A raped woman is a less desirable woman.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 2. The extent of the woman's resistance should be the major factor in determining if a rape has occurred.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 3. A rape woman is usually an innocent victim.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 4. Women often claim rape to protect their reputations.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 5. "Good" girls are as likely to be raped as "bad girls."**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 6. Women who have had prior sexual relationships should not complain about rape.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 7. Women do not provoke rape by their appearance or behavior.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 8. Intoxicated women are usually willing to have sexual relations.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 9. Many women invent rape stories if they learn they are pregnant.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 10. It would do some women good to be raped.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 11. Even women who feel guilty about engaging in premarital sex are not likely to falsely claim rape.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

**\* 12. Most women secretly desire to be raped.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 13. Any female may be raped.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 14. Women who are raped while accepting rides from strangers get what they deserve.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 15. Men, not women, are responsible for rape.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 16. A woman who goes out alone at night puts herself in a position to be raped.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 17. Many women claim rape if they have consented to sexual relations but have changed their minds afterwards.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 18. Accusations of rape by bar girls, dance hostesses and prostitutes should be viewed with suspicion.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 19. A woman should not blame herself for rape.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 20. A healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really tries.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 21. Many women who report rape are lying because they are angry or want revenge on the accused.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 22. Women who wear short skirts or tight blouses are not inviting rape.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

                      

**\* 23. Women put themselves in situations in which they are likely to be sexually assaulted because they have an unconscious wish to be raped.**

(select one)      strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree

**\* 24. Sexually experienced women are not really damaged by rape.**  
strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree  
(select one)                             

**\* 25. In most cases when a woman was raped, she deserved it.**  
strongly disagree      disagree      neutral      agree      strongly agree  
(select one)

## Appendix G

### Cover Letter

#### 1. Barry University Cover Letter

##### 1. Barry University Cover Letter

Dear Research Participant:

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is **Perceptions of Sexual Relations**. The research is being conducted by **Shawna Wright**, a student in the Psychology department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of human sexuality. The aims of the research are to determine the public's perception regarding rape. We anticipate the number of participants to be 80.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: read three short scenarios that describe heterosexual sexual relations and, based on your opinion, answer several questions regarding the scenarios. You will also be asked to answer questionnaires about rape. The estimated time required to complete the study is 35 minutes.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects on your psychological wellbeing. You can withdraw your participation in the middle of the study at any time by clicking on the "close" icon at the top right hand corner of the screen. Please note that, due to the online nature of this study, you cannot withdraw your participation once the online surveys have been submitted. After submission, there is no way to trace the survey back to you. Although there may be no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help our understanding of the perceptions of rape counter situations.

As a research participant, information you provide will be kept anonymous, that is, no names or other identifiers will be collected on any of the instruments used. Data will be kept in a locked file in the Psychology department. By completing and returning this survey you have shown your agreement to participate in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, **Shawna Wright**, at (305) 899-3275, my supervisor, **Dr. Wated** at (305) 899 3274, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, **Ms. Nildy Polanco**, at (305) 899-3020.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

**Shawna Wright, BA**  
Experimental Psychology  
Wrights2@bucmail.barry.edu

Appendix H

Demographic Information

**8. Demographics**

**1. Please fill in the following demographic information. You should NOT write your name.**

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Educational level \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship status \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated annual income \_\_\_\_\_

**\* 2. Sexual Orientation (select one)**

Heterosexual       Homosexual       Bisexual       Other/ Non-Heterosexual