

# Perceptions of rape and sexual assault sociology essay



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Through the course of this essay Irina Anderson's research into rape perception will be critically analysed. This essay will firstly summarise the research and then go through each hypothesis, the methodology employed and the ideas put forward within the discussion will be assessed due to their respective strengths and weaknesses. In addition to this there will be a section commenting on the place of this research within rape research at large. Some of the problems associated with results of this research and the conclusions drawn from it will be looked at also. Finally suggestions on ways to overcome these problems will also be investigated. As this analysis takes place within the context of Social Psychology Andersons research will thus be viewed through the lens of theories relating to attitudes. This was first put forward by Allport who defined attitudes as 'A mental and neural state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related' (Allport, 1935 p. 810). due to the gendered nature of rape perception this research is much needed in building a frame work for how rape is seen by the public. The abstract is very clear and to the point and succinctly condenses the research. The three hypotheses under investigation are what is the current perception of female rape, whether this perception is applicable to male rape or are there elements of cultural lag in male rape. Despite previous research it was found that these hypotheses were proved wrong during the study

During the introduction these foundation of the hypotheses under investigation are laid. It was found that past research had shown that female rape was most commonly seen 'stranger rape'. The Stranger rape

stereotype (SRS) is a script which constructs rape as occurring between two people who do not know each other, the act usually happens at night with the ½struggling victim subdued½, etc. However studies have shown that contrary to this scenario the vast majority of female rapes 78-84% (Gavey 2005, Koss 1988) are committed by males known to the victim this disparity between official statistics and public perceptions is part of the basis of this study. It is argued that changes in rape perception, brought on by demystifying of rape myths by the media, the breakdown of gender roles and reports which suggest that a broader definition of rape is being used have combined to contribute to the complete rejection of the traditional SRS paradigm into that of acquaintance rape. Though Gavey p 17-49 has examined the move away from traditional stranger rape paradigm, especially from the 1970½s onward, a complete reversal of public thinking does not seem to be completely supported. However as participants within this study were asked to ½generate their own lists of information½ it was expected that an answer to this question would be found through the course of Andersons research.

One of the most important points that can be drawn from the introduction is what seem to be a lack of research following on from Kahn½s work regarding a concrete separation of and definition of public attitudes to the differences between acquaintance rape and seduction (Kahn 2004). The overlap between these terms as outlined by Kahn may lead to general confusion and it may be argued that without a clear differentiation between these terms present research into the conceptualisation of female rape may

be hampered. In order to address these questions, this current research is vital in analysing what a female rape will be conceptualised as.

The results pertaining to the first hypothesis are analysed within the discussion section, which is well structured and logical. It begins by addressing the first findings regarding the first hypothesis, which was directly contradicted by the results of the experiment. It is well argued that a possible reason for this opposition was due in part to the problems with blame attribution, where by participants described scenarios in which the victim would be less likely to invite societal blame. From this analysis the issue of societal blame appears to be highly salient in rape perception.

Moreover, in descriptions of a typical rape Anderson asserts that respondents appear to convey scenarios in which no level of blame may be attached to the victim and suggests that further research should concentrate on whether participants are describing what they see as the reality of typical rapes or if other factors, namely blame attribution, play a part in the results. Research clearing up this ambiguity would do much to further the study of public rape perception.

The second intention of Anderson's research is to ascertain whether or not male rape is seen along the same parameters as date/acquaintance rape in females. It is stated that due to a lack of data concerning male rape, caused by low report rates and the propagation of rape myths and misconceptions, that the research into the public perception of male rape has not been given the attention which it deserves. From the information gathered in previous studies (Donnelly and Kenyon 1996) it has been hypothesised that if the current opinion of female rape is characterised within the <https://assignbuster.com/perceptions-of-rape-and-sexual-assault-sociology-essay/>

parameters of acquaintance/date rape and that male rape is more commonly seen within the older SRS model. The second part of the discussion directly deals with the results relating to this hypothesis. From the analysis undertaken female rape may still be generally seen along the lines of a ½stranger- acquaintance rape continuum½. However the results show that male rape is viewed along completely dissimilar lines to female rape. From these findings Anderson argues that ½male rape perception may be characterised by (a) erroneous and mythical perception½. These other factors include descriptions of the act of rape, the relative strength of the perpetrator and victim, sexual orientation and the motivation of the rape being sexual urges [rather than power related]. The fact that some of the factors attributed to male rape include homosexuality and that homophobic belief

The hypothesis of the ½cultural lag½ of male rape was however not supported during the course of the research. Finding show that male rape does not lag behind female rape, rather ½other½ factors not found the SRS/AR models were drawn upon when conceptualising male rape. These ½other½ factors make up a fourth hypothesis in the method section were not previously mentioned within the introduction or hypothesis summary. The failure to include this fourth hypothesis previously, which directly addresses the ½other½ factors associated with male rape appears to be an oversight. However though it is very useful in helping to make sense of the data as a whole, the late formulation, or at least labelling of this as a hypothesis, subverts the initial aims of the experiment and calls into question the validity of the data coded within this section. The inclusion of

this section also further widens the scope of this limited study. Considering the limited data which may be collected from such a small (119 people) and highly privileged sample of the population. In light of the three main interconnected hypotheses the extension to a fourth hypothesis principally concerned with factors initially outside the experiments design leads to a true weakening of this study. Though this data is well coded and analysed, there can be no doubt that this section places strain upon the method section of this study as a whole.

The third intention of this current research is to analyse the differences of response between male and female respondents. All previous studies which consider male and female attitudes to rape have shown a strong divergence between attitudes along the gender divide. This it is argued is unsurprising due firstly the fact that men generally have less knowledge about or contact with rape, and secondly due to the fact that  $\frac{1}{2}$  historically been the victims of violence while men have been the perpetrators  $\frac{1}{2}$ . In agreement with this it is demonstrated that men more often agree than disagree with rape myths, empathise less and  $\frac{1}{2}$  hold less tolerant attitudes towards victims (Jiminez & Abreu, 2003) In addition to this Andersons previous research has found that men possess more homophobic attitudes than women in regards to male rape. This is backed up solidly by previous research, which in summery states that as men experience rape less and that as the issue of rape is less prominent within the male consciousness. Men will extrapolate their knowledge of female rape, to a male scenario along the SRS paradigm.

In drawing out the reasons for the predominance of factors such as

homosexuality and homophobia associated with male but not female rape  
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Anderson puts forward several reasons as to why this may be the case, the first is that participants may simply be expressing their disgust at this act (Davies, 2002). Secondly use homophobic language as a means of distancing the participants from the victim so as to keep their masculinity intact and to also remove the possibility that they (the male participants) could themselves be raped. This is a very interesting point which is well argued and is a convincing analysis of the data presented. The recommendation given for further research investigating the connection between sexuality and homophobia in relation to conceptualizations of male rape and the blame attributed to victims is well founded and may go some way in explaining why these factors have gained such prominence in this research.

Through course of critically analysing the current research many issues of importance have become apparent. Firstly any research which furthers the field of rape perception is of huge importance. It is also of paramount importance to educating the public at large about the predominant trends of rape within society. With regard the article under review some very important questions have been raised by this study. The fact that all but one of hypothesis has been proved false may be seen in part as a cause for alarm. This is particularly evident in the case that female rape perception has seemed to have lost its cultural lead over supposed paradigms of male rape. This calls for a reassessment of assumptions that female rape is typically seen within the AR framework. Secondly the fact that male rape is not seen either as SRS or AR and is viewed in often homophobic terms may be interpreted differently than to Andersons theory that homophobia is a

form of distancing on the part of male participants, it may be interpreted as evidence that homophobia is much more prominent in society than previously assumed. The difference between male and female respondents has not been clearly addressed either, it seems from previous research that more than ever there is now a pressing need to educate males within society about the various aspects of rape. From analysing this research it seems that very little was confirmed or disproved about rape attitudes and perceptions, this research has in turn raised more questions than it answers. In conducting future research it would be advisable to approach one hypothesis at a time, using a much larger sample of the population. In addition to this a more careful use of wording of research questions may also benefit future studies, for example the question what are the predominant circumstances of a male/female rape may address the hypothesis more clearly than the use of the phrase '½typical½. This leads us to ask further questions about the problematic nature of this type of research.

Anderson's current research acknowledges some of the shortcomings of the present study including the fact that the research participants used for the study were from a student population, despite this acknowledgement it would be naive to generalise these findings due to the particularities associated with a student sample to the population at large. Some of the main problems associated with using a student population for this type of are that as supported by the research that rape may be an issue generally held in the student consciousness. Secondly the predominantly young age participants, mean age 21. 2, could perhaps play a large part in how rape is conceptualised. This is especially important considering that the age group



of these students suggest that they have been brought up within the AR framework. A larger study would show how the population at large conceptualise rape. It can be argued that perhaps even previously un-theorised concepts of rape may be found as a result of such a study. It would also be of great interest to investigate what the current perceptions of marital/partner rape is.

Another important factor which  $\frac{1}{2}$  may have affected findings  $\frac{1}{2}$  is that up to 34% of the participant were from ethnic minorities. Anderson argues that this factor may have altered the outcome of the study. It may however be argued that the inclusion of ethnic minorities may in fact give the present study a higher degree of validity and allow this research to be generalised. Regardless of the supposed  $\frac{1}{2}$  less tolerant perceptions of rape  $\frac{1}{2}$  within minority communities (Nagel, 2005), the hypothesised informed attitudes of the student population appear to be unfounded. This finding adds to the overall confusion of the results presented. At present it is impossible to say whether the inclusion of these minorities have lead to a substantial change in the findings of the survey. Further studies along the lines of Nagel  $\frac{1}{2}$ s research are to be suggested. This work should concentrate on the questions of race, ethnicity and class should be dealt with as a means of aiding the understanding of rape perceptions in the public at large.

In conclusion the current body of research into rape perception is clearly lacking. The findings of some previous research which are not supported by this study are a serious problem which must in due course be addressed.

Furthermore Andersons unsupported hypotheses clearly show the need for further and more directed research into the area of public rape perceptions. <https://assignbuster.com/perceptions-of-rape-and-sexual-assault-sociology-essay/>

Some interesting points were brought up which also require further research, most importantly the fact that female rape perception is still categorised along the lines of SRS rather than AR. In addition to this the evidence produced regarding the other factors associated with male rape also warrant investigation. Anderson's suggestion that further studies concentrating on blame attribution is a logical and well reasoned course of action and is highly advisable. In summary past and present research has shown gaps in the understanding of how the public view rape scripts. This research has done much to highlight this problem. It can only be hoped that further research and public education can lead to an increased awareness and understanding on the topic of rape.