

# The effects of rape on victims



Irina Anderson explores the current rape perception of both male and female rape and whether the respondent's gender affects this perception in a journal article called 'What is a typical rape? Effects of victims and participants gender in female and male perception' which was published in The British Journal of Social Psychology. This article also investigates the 'cultural lag' theory of male rape. The findings in this study demonstrate that, contrary to predictions made at the start of the article, when asked to describe a typical rape, male and female, it was the stranger rape stereotype that was the prevailing way most used to describe this. It was also shown that instead of 'lagging' behind female rape according to the stranger-acquaintance dimension, male rape was conceptualized in terms of other factor, for example sexual orientation, which were often deemed homophobic. I found this journal article interesting and accessible to read. After reading the hypothesis proposed at the beginning of the article, I was intrigued to see that many of the predictions were in fact proved false at the end of the article, for example it was predicted that when asked to describe a 'typical' rape participants would describe an acquaintance rape whereas in previous years the stranger rape stereotype was the way most described a 'typical' rape. However the results of this study show that in fact the stranger rape stereotype is still the predominant way people imagine a 'typical' rape. This led me to question how much rape perception has actually changed in our society. I also found that both the aims and findings of the research were clear, accurate and relevant; they were clearly laid out and overall I found the article effortless to read. In addition the acknowledgment of the limitation to the research enhanced the article.

The article begins by giving a brief summary of previous studies and research which has been carried out to investigate the same research topic. The ideas of acquaintance rape, where the victim is raped by someone known to them e. g. boyfriend, date, relative, friend, and stranger rape stereotype, where the victim is raped by someone unknown to them, are introduced and the ideas surrounding them are discussed. For example acquaintance rape is usually expected to happen indoors and the victim having spent time with the perpetrator prior to the rape. In contrast stranger rape is expected to happen outdoors, usually at night where the victim is grabbed, overpowered and raped. Date rapes also briefly discussed and used to support predictions that rape perceptions has changed considerably in the last few years due to increased media coverage of the topic. The issue of male rape is then raised and questions are raised such as are men raped in the same circumstances as women? It is described as more frequent phenomenon than previously believed. The ignorance and disbelief surrounding male rape creates myths and misconceptions in society for example ‘ Most men who are raped are homosexuals’. This makes some researchers believe that male rape perception is ‘ lagging’ behind that of female rape, that is current male rape perception is at the stage female rape perception was at years ago in terms of the knowledge people have of it. I believe the author has succeeded in successfully introducing the research topic and conveying the main aims of the research. The one possible fault I have for the introduction is that the author does not discuss why she feels the topic of research is important and why she decided to carry out the study. I believe this would enhance the article even more for the reader.

In the 'method' section of this article Anderson explains in detail how the study was carried out. She describes how one hundred and nineteen undergraduate students were asked to take part; she also lists their gender and ethnicity. The participants were asked to describe what they believe to be a 'typical' rape. Both male and female were included. The gender of the participant and the gender of the victim were the independent variables. Participants were assigned randomly so that women could be assigned to either a female rape or a male rape. Similarly men could be assigned to either female rape or male rape. They were asked to include details that led to the incident, details of the incident itself and details following the rape. Characteristics of the victims and the perpetrator including feelings and thoughts were also asked for. Anderson then moves on to describe how these accounts of 'typical' rapes given by participants were analyzed. She describes the coding manuals given to coders who must sort the participant's text into text which adhere to characteristics of the stranger rape stereotype and those which describe an acquaintance rape. This is the most important section of the article; any deficiencies would undermine the validity of the results. The only deficiency I could locate in this section was the fact that all the participants were university students; however the author recognizes this as a limitation at the conclusion of the article. Overall I found this section of the article to give a very comprehensive account of how the study was carried out. It covers all aspects that are important to the aims of the article.

In my opinion the results section of this article is excellent. The findings are clearly laid out for the reader. Headings help divide the finding into different

sections for example 'testing hypothesis 1 and frequency of category use in female rape'. These headings also help list the results in terms of the original research question and predictions given at the beginning of the article.

Tables are also used which illustrate different types of categories of description used by participants and the number of female and male who used these categories. Direct quotations are also inserted to give the reader insight into the types of descriptions participants gave which I found very interesting e. g.: due to the physical difficulty of male rape the perpetrator would typically be larger and stronger than the victim'. The author acknowledges the results do not match the predictions made at the beginning and explains the possible reasons for this by stating perhaps researcher's presumption that societies rape perception has evolved is in fact false and perhaps our perceptions have not progressed as much as it was thought. The cultural 'lag' theory of male rape was only partly supported by the findings. Although female rape was described more in terms of acquaintance rape than male rape, the other aspect of the theory, that male rape would be described in terms of stranger rape stereotype more than female rape, was not supported. In fact many 'other' factors played a part in the description of male rape such as penetration, the rapist's strength and power over the victim and the victim's shame and humiliation. Thus proving that female and male rapes are conceptualized along different continuums. The results overall highlight the importance of periodically examining rape perception and the effects of gender.

The discussion section addresses the main findings of the article and any new information gained which can be added onto previous information

discovered in previous research. Anderson discusses the reasons behind the participants which described a typical rape in terms of the stranger rape stereotype. It is here blame attributions are discussed. Anderson notes it is a possibility that participant didn't write more about acquaintance rape as they assumed the victim would therefore be more blameworthy. This is strengthened by the fact that women, when describing a female rape, used the stranger rape theory more than men and similarly men, when describing a male rape, used the stranger rape stereotype more than women. This perhaps proves that when writing about a victim of their own gender they preferred the stranger rape stereotype as they believed it would steer the blame away from the victim.

In my opinion this article contains all the key elements of a good journal article. From the beginning the author explains clearly the key arguments and main points of the text. She also includes relevant background information and makes concrete predictions. The method and results of the study are clearly laid out and are easy to follow. Another aspect covered in the text is the acknowledgment of its limitations. Any good journal article is aware of the limitations of the findings and in this article they are clear. The way in which male rape is discussed is quite interesting as it not a subject many articles discuss. The idea of the 'lag' theory was also remarkable, that the situation of male rape perception in society today was that of female rape years ago. Also the fact that males themselves described male rape in a homophobic and mocking tone intrigued me. For example, 'one of the two bufties edge towards the lone man'. One of the very few limitations in this text is that all the participants were students from one university, a

population which may be more aware of rape than the general population. It is noted that a study of the perceptions of rape held by police, medical personnel and juries may enhance findings in the future. Another fault I have with this article is that I believe the author should go into more detail on why she thinks this research is important and why she decided to conduct this study. In addition, while reading the findings of this research it struck me that another reason the majority of participants chose a scenario which adheres to the stranger rape stereotype is they may feel under stress to give certain answer or they may try to please the researchers by giving the answer they believe the researchers desire.

In conclusion, I found this article to be comprehensive, relevant and interesting. All main ideas are clearly stated and concrete predictions are made from the start. The results examine the effects of gender in rape conceptualization and the importance of examining male rape alongside female rape to gain further insight into the differences in gender perception. A broader source of participants is acknowledged as a future improvement that could be made to studies such as these. The results section of the paper is, to me, the most impressive section. The findings are examined in a concise manner, taking particular notice of the reasons the results contradict the predictions made at the start. Overall I think this is an excellent example of a psychological journal article, it adheres to all the guidelines which helps make a journal article impressive and overall I found it hard to fault