

The Effects of Rape Myth Pornography on Women's Attitudes and the Mediating Role of Sex Role Stereotyping

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This study tested several hypotheses regarding (1) the effects of reading pornography on women's self-esteem and attitudes about rape and interpersonal violence and (2) how these effects were mediated by subject's degree of sex role stereotyping (SRS). Women high and low in SRS read one of three sexually explicit stories portraying different combinations of a woman's consent (or no consent) and arousal (or no arousal) to forceful sexual activity. As predicted, all stories had some effect on attitudes. Differences attributable to the Consent and Arousal manipulations were minimal, but generally in the expected direction. Compared to not reading a story, reading any story generally led to changes in self-esteem and greater acceptance of rape myths and interpersonal violence. Also as predicted, high, compared to low, SRS subjects generally reported lower self-esteem and more tolerance of rape and other violence. Differences were also found in perceptions of sexual situations. Significant SRS by story interactions and other results related to the hypotheses are also discussed.

The harmful effects of pornography on social and sexual behavior have been the subject of concern and debate over the last 20 years. In the past 8 years, efforts have been extended to study the effects of pornography on attitudes toward women and rape, and the possible link between those attitudes and behavior. Pornography is not merely explicit sexual depictions; it often portrays women in a manner that may encourage degrading or violent treatment of them. Although most research has focused on men's attitudes and aggress-

sive behavior, this study is concerned with pornography's effects on women. In a society in which pornography is freely available, there can be sexual, social, and psychological consequences for women.

This study investigated the effects of pornography on women's feelings about themselves and their attitudes toward sexuality, rape, and interpersonal violence. Because attitudes about sexuality and rape are believed to be related to more general attitudes about sex role behaviors, the subject's attitudes about women's roles in general were considered an important mediating variable.

The term *pornography* has been associated with a large diversity of definitions, ranging from sexually explicit material to any images suggesting sexual abuse or eroticized sexual inequality (see Lederer, 1980; MacKinnon & Dworkin, 1985). The main concern here is the way women are portrayed in pornography. When women are reduced to mere sexual creatures or portrayed as targets for violence, the messages available to them are that they are not worthy of respect and care, that they are not as sexually desirable as the woman in the pornography, and that close relationships may involve violence. In this context, pornography may be more broadly defined to include certain images and themes found in romance novels, R-rated films, and other materials not usually considered pornographic (see Lederer, 1980; Burt, 1980). In this study the term *pornography* refers to all sexually explicit materials not otherwise identified.

The Nature of Pornography's Influence

Pornography researchers have focused on three types of effects of exposure to pornography: aggression, changes in perception of rape, and attitude change. For the most part, research has neglected pornography's specific influence on women. The early work on pornography assumed aggression following exposure to pornography was the result of increased sexual arousal (e.g., Baron & Bell, 1977). Later research failed to support this view (Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981; Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1982). Donnerstein and his colleagues (see Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1982) eventually demonstrated a more plausible relationship between pornography and aggression. The content of the materials and the target of aggression, rather than the level of subject's sexual arousal, which was held constant, determined the level of aggression. Specifically, men viewing sexually aggressive heterosexual pornography, particularly that which portrayed the woman as becoming sexually aroused, aggress against women more often than those in other circumstances.

The pornographic depiction of women enjoying rape (eroticized, not realistic) is referred to in the literature as the "rape myth" theme, and there is evidence that it is an increasingly common theme in pornography (Faust,

1980; Malamuth, 1984; Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1982; Malamuth & Spinner, 1980; Smith, 1976). Experimental findings in this area demonstrated the important point that the specific content of pornography is responsible for the subsequent attitudes and behavior. After viewing pornography, particularly the rape myth type, both women and men perceive real rape less negatively. The victim is seen as suffering less, enjoying more, and being more to blame for her plight. Additionally, punishment for rapists is more lenient (Malamuth, Haber, & Feshbach, 1980; Zillmann & Bryant, 1982). The implications of these findings are quite serious because the "average" person, including judges and jurors, is more likely to be familiar with the media's eroticized rapes than with actual rapes.

Taken together, these studies on aggression and perception of rape suggest at least three important elements in heterosexual pornography mediating subjects' reactions: (1) the man's aggressive sexual behavior, (2) the woman's enjoyment of sexually aggressive acts, and (3) the woman's consent. Presence of the first two constitutes the rape myth.

Attitudes

There exists a large body of research on attitudes toward rape and interpersonal violence, the relationship between these attitudes and behavior, and how these attitudes are affected or predicted by exposure to pornography (e.g., Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981; Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1982, 1984; Zillmann & Bryant, 1984). The different attitude measures used vary somewhat in the particular rape issues addressed, but they all include some of the common misconceptions about rape, including the belief that rape is a sex act rather than an assault, that a raped woman is less respectable, that women lie about being raped, and the belief that women are responsible for their victimization. Burt (1980) developed a set of scales to investigate the attitudes prevalent in our "rape-supportive culture." Best known are Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA), Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence (AIV), the Belief that Sexual relationships between men and women are Adversarial in nature (ASB), and Sex Role Stereotyping (SRS). For both women and men, the strongest predictors of high RMA were high ASB, AIV, and SRS; these are negatively correlated with self-esteem. Check and Malamuth (1983) found that both male and female subjects high in SRS were more aroused by rape depictions than were low SRS subjects, and were higher in RMA. Other studies, using different measures, have also found that women and men with more traditional, stereotyped sex role beliefs were more likely to have misconceptions about rape (Costin, Kibler, & Crank, 1982; Dietz, Blackwell, Daley, & Bentley, 1982; Feild, 1978; Klemmack & Klemmack, 1976; see also Schwarz & Brand, 1983).

In a field study, Malamuth and Check (1981) found increases in male subjects' RMA and AIV scores several days after viewing R-rated, commercially released films that contained rape myth themes. Although not statistically significant, females tended to be less accepting of the myths. This trend was explained as psychological reactance. That is, the film's messages activate defenses to consider why the information conveyed is false. For males, the Malamuth and Check data were interpreted as showing an "attitude polarization" effect. That is, when people with different views on an issue are presented with "mixed data," each side can focus on the information consistent with their own views. Therefore, female and male subject's SRS could mediate reactions to pornography and rape. Eroticized rape found in pornography is more ambiguous (than comparatively realistic portrayals) and subject to different interpretations as a function of a subject's attitudes and awareness of rape issues. The studies finding small reductions in women's RMA did not indicate subject's SRS (e.g., Stock, 1983). Most researchers have described a cognitive process of some kind to account for attitude change.

Research on the availability heuristic and on priming effects (Carroll, 1978; and see Malamuth, 1984) suggest that depictions of a woman's sexual arousal to rape may contribute to the belief that women actually desire and enjoy rape. It is suggested that availability (the accessibility in memory) is enhanced when information is vivid, recent, or in other ways salient to the individual, even when the source is known to be fictional (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). This information is used to judge the likelihood of events such as a woman enjoying rape.

Women, Pornography, and Rape

The findings that women as well as men believe "rape myths" and are aroused by rape depictions make sense given our sex role socialization. A key finding is that sex role attitudes mediate reactions to rape and pornography. Brownmiller (1975) contends that women learn to become victims. Passivity is the logical response to the expected male sexual role that, taken to its extreme, is rape (see Brownmiller, 1975; Gross, 1978). Malamuth and Check (1981) suggest that, since our sex role socialization dictates that women are not supposed to express an active interest in sex, their true desires may be inferred from their sexual responses. Men may learn to believe women will respond positively to sexual force, even if they initially refuse sexual advances. And women may learn to expect a certain degree of physical force in sexual relationships. They may desire force in order to avoid responsibility for sex. A woman cannot be considered "loose" if he "forced her." Wom-

en also believe other women are more likely than themselves to enjoy rape (Malamuth et al., 1980).

The Present Study

This study investigates how women's attitudes, self-concept, and perceptions are affected by exposure to pornography of varying content, specifically, the elements of force, sexual arousal, and consent. We are also interested in how the effects of pornography are mediated by subject's SRS. Because only certain combinations of arousal and consent were of interest, a complete factorial design was not used. Arousal and Consent are analyzed separately, with SRS as a second factor, and one No Story condition serving as a control in each analysis. All stories portray sexual force and have a combination of Consent and Arousal separately manipulated within a single story.

In all conditions, subjects high in SRS were expected to have higher scores on the RMA, AIV, ASB, and related items, and lower self-esteem and body image. For our purposes high scores on the attitude measures and low self-concept scores will be referred to as "negative" attitudes. Subjects reading a story were expected to have more negative attitudes than those not reading a story.

Consent: The Effect of Rape Myth Pornography. The effect of reading a story portraying a woman who consented to sexual activity was compared to the effect of reading a similar story portraying her as not consenting. In these two stories, the man uses force and the woman is sexually aroused. The no-consent version is the rape myth theme central to this study. Subjects in this condition, particularly those high in SRS, were expected to have more negative attitudes and lower self-concept than those reading the consenting version. Low SRS women were expected to be less accepting of the idea that women enjoy sexual violence or somehow bring sexual violence upon themselves. As suggested by Malamuth and Check (1981), it was believed there could be decreases in RMA and AIV if these women react strongly to the rape myth story (i.e., reactance or empathy).

Arousal: The Effect of Pornographic Rape. The effect of reading a story portraying a woman sexually aroused by forceful sex to which she did not consent (rape myth) was compared to a similar story portraying the woman as not sexually aroused (erotized rape). The woman was instead portrayed as uncomfortable and disgusted. If women respond in patterns similar to men, more negative attitudes would be expected in the aroused (rape myth) condition. However, it was not known how subjects' psychological defense might be differentially activated by the two stories. While outcome (arousal) determines men's reactions, consent should be a greater importance to women,

particularly those low in SRS, who would empathize more with the fictional woman's intentions and desires (consent).

Perceptions. High, compared to low, SRS subjects were expected to perceive the woman in the story as more responsible for the activity. High SRS women were also expected to be more likely to believe other women would enjoy being in the situation portrayed in the story and more likely than low SRS subjects to rate themselves as different from other women in this respect.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 96 female undergraduates, at least 18 years old, enrolled in psychology courses at the University of Maryland. Subjects were informed that the study would involve reading sexually explicit materials and answering questions about rape and other issues of a possibly sensitive nature. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of three story conditions or a control group.

Materials

Three pornographic stories were written in such a way that the elements of consent and arousal were manipulated separately within a single story. Most of the material came from *Playgirl* and *Penthouse* magazines. The length of each story was about four double-spaced typewritten pages. The first page, which provided a setting and the majority of the plot, was identical in the three stories. The female character narrates, as is done in stories appearing in *Playgirl* and similar magazines. The following is a brief description of the general story line.

A woman attending a friend's party goes upstairs to use the bathroom in the master bedroom. On the way out, while studying herself in the bedroom mirror, a man from the party starts talking to her. Having met him before, she finds nothing wrong with talking to him upstairs. She agrees to talk, but does not in any way initiate sexual activity. The man begins to touch her sexually, and eventually proceeds to engage in various sex acts with her. The plot dissolves, leaving graphic descriptions of sex acts that contain the manipulations of consent and arousal. Excerpts from each story are provided in Table I to demonstrate how those variables were manipulated; in most cases no more than a few words were changed.

Table I. Excerpts From the Same Paragraph of the Three Stories Illustrating the Manipulation of Consent and Arousal

| | |
|---|---|
| Consent vs no consent | |
| Story 1 | ...but he didn't want to stop. Neither did I. He held me soaking from my hot juices. My body was ready for him. |
| Story 2 | Pushing his head away, I told him to stop. Ignoring me, he held me, soaking from my hot juices. My body seemed to have a will of its own; this wasn't my idea. |
| Arousal vs no arousal | |
| Story 2 | He ran his warm lips over my tits, teasing my nipples with the tip of his tongue. Pushing his head away, I told him used one hand to remove my panties. By now they were soaking from my hot juices. My body seemed to have a will of its own |
| Story 3 | He ran his lips over my breasts and licked my nipples. Pushing his head away, I told him. . . . used one hand to remove my panties. I felt scared and vulnerable. I just hoped he wouldn't hurt me. |
| Illustration of force (all stories) | |
| He pushed me down on the edge of the bed, on my back put his hands on my shoulders. I tried to change my position, but he pressed me against the bed. | |

Attitude Scales. Scores from eight items taken from Burt's (1980) SRS were used to divide subjects into high and low SRS. By using tertiles, there were 16 subjects in each condition ($N = 64$). Self-esteem was measured with the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Three scales developed by Burt (1980) were used to assess degree of acceptance of rape myths and violence against women, and belief about sexual relationships. Thirteen items taken from the RMA measure belief in rape myths (e.g., "In the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation"). The ASB scale included seven items that address the nature of the relationships between men and women (e.g., "Men are only out for one thing"). Finally, five items taken from the AIV measure acceptance of domestic violence and forced sex (e.g., "Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to use force"). The sexual items and domestic items were also analyzed separately (AIV-S and AIV-D). Two items asked how likely men are to rape or say they would rape. Five items from other scales covered issues not addressed by the RMA scale. Several filler items were included to support the cover story that the study concerned a variety of sex-related issues (e.g., abortion and homosexuality). Subjects indicated their degree of agreement or disagreement on 7-point scales. Additional items asked how likely they, other women, and men would be to enjoy being in the story they read.

Design and Procedure

Three stories and a subject variable were used to form two 2×3 factorial designs with SRS (high, low) treated as one factor and one of the two story variables as the second: Consent (consent, no consent, no story) and Arousal (arousal, no arousal, no story). The no consent/arousal story was used in two analyses (see Fig. 1). The no story group actually read a story after completing the measures. Subjects, run in groups of three to eight, were each given a packet containing, in order, the SRS scale, one of three stories (or the control condition with the story appearing after the measures), manipulation check items, and the attitude measures. Filler items and other questions were also included. The measures were divided into four sections and labeled in a way that concealed the hypotheses. The packets also contained consent forms.

After completing the questions, subjects were given a written debriefing, which included an explanation of the possible negative effects of exposure to pornography, and emphasized that what they read was complete

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| Consent | Arousal (Traditional) Sexual Behavior Story 1 | No Arousal Not included in the design |
| | No Consent | Rape Myth Story 2 |
| | | Eroticized Rape Story 3 |

Consent analysis: Story 1 vs. 2

Arousal analysis: Story 2 vs. 3

Fig. 1. The story conditions selected for this study from the 2 (Consent, No Consent) by 2 (Arousal, No Arousal) factorial design.

fantasy and that arousal to such material is normal. A number of studies have found that this type of debriefing is effective in reducing acceptance of rape myths (Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981; Malamuth & Check, 1981; and see Malamuth, 1984).

RESULTS

Effectiveness of Manipulations

Ratings of story variables and constants were analyzed in separate 2×2 analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to provide checks on the Consent and Arousal manipulations. The woman in the Consent story was rated as more willing (consenting) to participate than the woman in the No Consent story, 6.38 vs 4.19 ($F = 23.62, p < .001$), and as enjoying the activity more, 6.69 vs 5.50 ($F = 9.06, p < .005$). The only unintended difference in the story conditions was the higher ratings of arousal for the consenting woman, 6.94 vs 6.19 ($F = 12.92, p < .001$). Although this difference was statistically significant, these means indicate that both women were perceived as sexually aroused, as expected. There were no differences in ratings of the control variables.

Arousal. The woman in the Arousal story (rape myth) was rated as more sexually aroused than the woman in the No Arousal story, 6.19 vs 2.13 ($F = 121.7, p < .0001$) and as more willing to participate (consent), 4.19 vs 3.06 ($F = 4.91, p < .03$). Although the latter finding was not expected, the data suggest that the woman was not perceived as consenting. The mean rating of enjoyment for the aroused and nonconsenting woman was much higher than that of the nonaroused and nonconsenting woman, 5.50 vs 1.56 ($F = 104.06, p < .0001$). The enjoyment ratings were included to capture perceptions of both consent and arousal.

SRS. Low SRS subjects assigned less responsibility for the sexual activity to the female than did high SRS subjects, (Arousal by SRS 1.81 vs 2.75; $F = 12.02, p < .002$). A rating of 1 indicated that the male was completely responsible and 7 indicated that the female was responsible. The 2×2 ANOVAs revealed that low SRS subjects were also less sexually aroused by the stories (Consent by SRS, 3.69 vs 5.06; $F = 6.30, p < .02$; Arousal by SRS, 2.63 vs 5.0; $F = 22.07, p < .001$).

Attitudes and Self-Esteem

Consent. In general, the effect of the Consent manipulation was stronger than that of Arousal, particularly for low SRS subjects. The most positive

attitudes were found in the low SRS, No Consent story conditions. However, the main effects and interactions were significant for only a few measures. Subjects reading the No Consent story had lower scores on the ASB than subjects reading the Consent story, 21.94 vs 25.13 ($F = 4.01, p < .055$). The SRS by Consent interaction was marginally significant for the item regarding the belief that resistance determines rape ($F = 3.83, p < .06$). On several measures, high SRS subjects had more negative attitudes than low SRS subjects. When analyzed by 2×3 ANOVAs, which included the control group, the following main effect for SRS were obtained (high SRS subjects scoring higher): RMA ($p < .0001$), AIV ($p < .002$), AIV-S ($p < .008$), AIV-D ($p < .03$), ASB ($p < .002$), and TSBI ($p < .02$). Differences in SRS group means for the RMA and ASB were also significant in the 2×2 ANOVA (control group excluded)—see Fig. 2.

Compared to not reading a story, low SRS subjects had lower self-esteem after reading either story, 59.50 vs 65.63, and high SRS subject's self-esteem increased, 57.69 vs 51.38. This resulted in no difference between the two story groups, but the SRS (high, low) by story (Consent, No Consent, No Story) interaction was significant ($F = 3.82, p < .03$).

Subjects reading the Consent story reported greater acceptance of AIV than did those not reading a story, 15.88 vs 12.50 ($F = 3.98, p < .056$). The same was found for the acceptance of sexual violence subscale (AIV-S), 10.63 vs 8.13 ($F = 3.85, p < .06$). On the AIV, AIV-S, AIV-D, and TSBI the most positive attitudes were found in the No Story, low SRS condition, and the low SRS subjects seem to be more strongly affected by the Consent story. Smaller differences were observed in the high SRS conditions. Two of these (2×2) interactions were significant: AIV ($F = 4.28, p < .05$) and TSBI ($F = 7.04, p < .01$).

There was only one significant difference in attitudes between the No Story and No Consent (rape myth) groups. High SRS subjects reading the No Consent story were more likely than those not reading a story to believe that the degree of women's resistance determines if a rape occurs. Means for the low SRS subjects did not differ. This interaction was significant ($F = 5.45, p < .03$).

A finding important to interpretation was the main effect for Consent on the SRS measure, which was an independent (grouping) variable. The No Consent group had higher SRS scores than both the Consent and No Story groups, 24.81 vs 22.19 and 21.13 (in the 2×3 ANOVA, $F = 4.27, p < .02$). Because negative attitudes about sexual violence are generally correlated with sex role stereotyping (e.g., Burt, 1980; Costin et al., 1982), more negative attitudes would have been expected in the No Consent condition rather than the more positive attitudes found here. Thus the difference between conditions can be considered greater than this data shows.

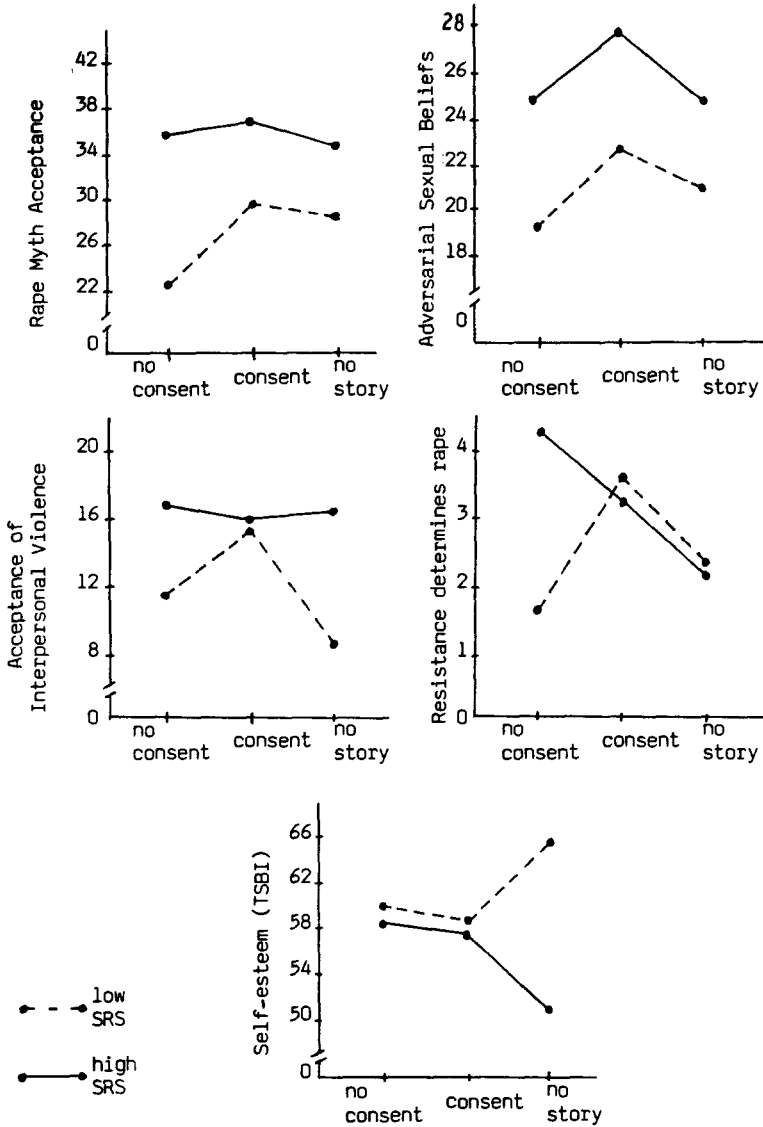


Fig. 2. Group means for the attitude scales and self-esteem for the Consent analyses.

Arousal. There were virtually no effects associated with arousal, although some of the means were in the anticipated direction. On several measures there were nonsignificantly more negative attitudes after reading the No Arousal story as compared to the Arousal story. The one significant effect of reading the story was the SRS by story interaction discussed above.

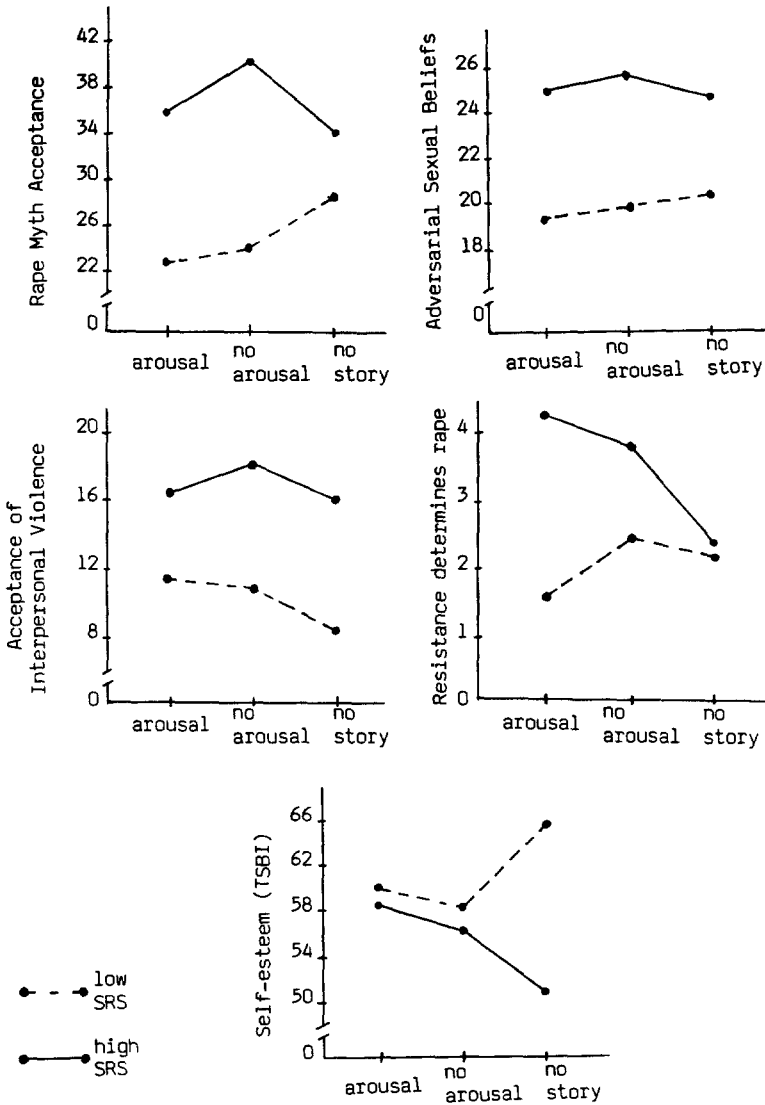


Fig. 3. Group means for the attitude scales and self-esteem for the Arousal Analyses.

Compared to not reading a story, after reading either story low SRS subjects had lower self-esteem and high SRS subject's self-esteem increased (Arousal vs No Story, $F = 5.11, p < .03$; No Arousal vs No Story, $F = 4.8, p < .04$). As indicated above, high SRS subjects reading the Arousal story (No Consent story) were more likely than those not reading a story to believe that the degree of a woman's resistance determines if a rape occurs (see Fig. 3).

On several measures, high SRS subjects had more negative attitudes than low SRS subjects. When analyzed by 2×3 ANOVAs, which included the No Story condition, the following main effects for SRS were obtained: RMA ($p < .0001$), AIV ($p < .0001$), AIV-S ($p < .0001$), AIV-D ($p < .05$), ASB ($p < .001$), "resistance" items ($p < .02$), and TSBI ($p < .03$). The AIV-D and TSBI were the only means for which SRS group differences were not significant in the 2×2 ANOVA.

A finding important to interpretation was the main effect for Consent on the SRS measure, which was an independent variable. Although the two story conditions did not differ, the SRS means for both groups were higher than the mean for the No Story group: for Arousal, 24.81 vs 21.1 ($F = 7.58, p < .01$) and for No Arousal, 26.63 vs. 21.13 ($F = 11.95, p < .002$). As mentioned earlier, the typically high correlation between SRS and rape-related attitudes would lead to a prediction of more negative attitudes than were found in the two story conditions. If this were the case, those attitudes would be more negative than those found in the No Story condition instead of not significantly different as found here.

Interesting differences were found in ratings of the character in the rape story (no arousal) responsible for initiating the sexual activity. While the overall mean for the four stories was about 2.2 on a 7-point scale identifying the male as the initiator, the low SRS, No Arousal group mean was 1.88, similar to other conditions, and the high SRS group mean was 3.00. The latter was the highest mean of all three conditions and indicated that the female was perceived almost as responsible as the male for the rape.

Perceptions. The perception of the initiator of the sexual activity was discussed above. Questions regarding beliefs about the likelihood of women and men enjoying being in the situation portrayed in the story were analyzed for all three stories as a group. Subjects rated themselves as less likely than other women to enjoy such activities, 2.27 vs 3.44 ($F = 27.82, p < .0001$). They rated other women as less likely than men to enjoy such activities, 3.44 vs 5.0 ($F = 45.41, p < .0001$). Also, low SRS subjects in all conditions were less willing than high SRS women to rate themselves and other women differently in likelihood of enjoyment. The differences between scores on the two questions was twice as large for the high SRS subjects.

DISCUSSION

Overall, few significant effects were found for the story manipulations. However, reading any story, compared to not reading one, resulted in more negative attitudes on many of the measures, particularly for high SRS subjects. The nonsignificant main effects were generally in the expected direction, especially for the Consent manipulation. Rather than developing more nega-

tive attitudes as male subjects have done, these women, particularly those low in SRS, seemed to become more sympathetic to the situation of women who do not consent to sexual activity.

A finding important to interpretation was the main effect for Consent on the SRS scale. Previous research and the present study found SRS and rape myth (and violence) acceptance to be positively correlated. Therefore, the No Consent scores should have been higher, but since they were about the same as in the consent condition, this could be interpreted as showing lower scores for both high and low SRS subjects. Thus, subjects appeared to empathize or sympathize with the woman in the story. This was also reflected in the significantly lower arousal ratings for the nonconsenting woman and the lower willingness (consent) ratings for the nonaroused woman.

As for Arousal, the No Arousal, high SRS condition yielded the highest means, as expected, on three measures, but there were no significant main effects. These negative attitudes suggest that high SRS women are likely to blame rape victims, but there was not enough evidence to suggest Arousal has a separate effect on attitudes.

There were no differences in self-esteem (TSBI) as a function of the story condition. However, there were no significant story by SRS interactions for all stories. When not reading a story, low SRS subjects reported much higher self-esteem than high SRS subjects, but after reading the stories, all scores were about in the middle of those two group means. One explanation for this is that low SRS women, who were expected to have higher self-esteem, realized that they and other women can be sexually abused or at least mistreated. This could be a result of empathy or awareness. Perception of oneself as a victim could deflate self-esteem. Because self-esteem scores did not differ as a function of the story read, just thinking of themselves in explicitly sexual terms could influence the self-perception of women who do not consider themselves submissive to men. The more traditional, high SRS women who generally have lower self-esteem might be seeing themselves as less likely to be sexually abused. Less liberal women tend to blame women for rape. (Feminists have actually been excluded from rape trial juries for this reason). The less liberal women probably assumed that the obviously "loose" woman in the story was somewhat responsible for her situation. The woman in the story spoke of herself in sexual terms, and did not fight very hard against the man; her protests were often verbal. For high SRS subjects, realizing or being reminded that they are "nice girls" compared to the woman in the story would increase their self-esteem. An interesting finding supporting this idea of attribution of blame for rape was the relatively large differences in mean ratings of the person in the story responsible for initiating the sexual activity. The differences between the high and low SRS groups was largest in the No Arousal story (rape), with the high SRS subjects attributing

more responsibility to the woman that did subjects in the other two story conditions.

Considering all the analyses as a whole, there were some interesting patterns. Overall, more positive attitudes were found in groups not reading any story. Low SRS subjects had more positive attitudes than high SRS subjects, but they were also most affected by the stories they read, as seen in the story by SRS interactions. The high SRS groups tended not to differ across story (and control) conditions. One reason for the greater differences between low SRS groups, differences that went in both directions, is that low SRS subjects would be more open to changing or forming their attitude after viewing the stimulus. They stereotype by gender less, so perhaps they also judge sexual behavior in less predetermined ways. They were more critical of women enjoying forceful sex, but seemed more sympathetic when reading about a woman who did not consent (Rape Myth and Eroticized Rape stories).

The measures for which main effects for story variables found were generally those most directly related to the story. For example, in the comparison of the Consenting/Aroused story and the No Story conditions, the only significant finding was on the AIV scale. Sexual force was the distinctive feature of that story since the woman was enjoying the activity. A cognitive interpretation seems appropriate here; beliefs about a man's tendency to use force, but not attitudes regarding a victim's role in rape, were affected by reading a sexual, nonrape story that portrayed a man's use of force. To continue this interpretation, the greatest difference between RMA scale means were in the arousal vs no arousal comparison (eroticized rape story); the highest RMA mean was in the No Arousal, high SRS condition. For the item regarding rape being determined by resistance, the greatest difference in cell means was found in the consent versus no consent comparison. This is consistent with the availability heuristic or priming effect interpretation.

The relatively strong SRS effects (in contrast to story effects) suggest that when confronted with somewhat ambiguous stories, subjects reported attitudes reflecting their general orientation (i.e., SRS) rather than an effect of the story. That is, a general view of women rather than a specific attitude was primed. While the control groups differed in attitudes as a function of SRS, significant differences between SRS groups disappeared for all but two of the measures in the Consent analyses. In contrast, for the Arousal analyses, five of the seven measures differed as a function of SRS. When not influenced by the story variable (Arousal) subjects responded as expected by their SRS scores. Because reactions to the stories were mediated by SRS, main effects for SRS were not generally obtained when the story variable had an effect on attitudes. Finally, on most measures the Consent/Arousal group had the most negative attitudes of the three story groups and control group.

Overall, the data suggest that reading pornography that does not portray rape has a negative effect on both high and low SRS women. The Consent manipulation appears to have had the greater effect on women, particularly those low in SRS. This could be because women can empathize with this variable. Consent reflects what the women actually want rather than what the man is trying to do (e.g., force) or how the woman's body reacts (e.g., arousal). Problems in manipulation of the Arousal story variables prevent drawing firm conclusions about the effect of Arousal.

One clear finding was the relationship between sex role stereotyping and attitudes toward rape and violence. There were also indications of the role of SRS as a mediator in the effects of reading pornography. The small sample size, eight per cell, and problems in manipulations of story variables probably weakened effects that might have been obtained for the story manipulations. Only the group means suggest support for the hypotheses in many instances.

Other findings of interest were in ratings of how much women and men would enjoy being in the situation portrayed in the story. Subjects in all conditions believed women would be more likely than themselves to enjoy being in the situation portrayed in the story. They also believed the average man would be more likely to behave like the man in the story than the average woman would be to enjoy being in such a situation. Looking at the SRS groups separately, the greater tendency of high SRS women to see themselves and other women differently is another example of the "it can't happen to me" attitude.

Further research should more closely examine the subject's sex role attitudes and orientation, and how sex role interacts with interpretations of pornography. The SRS scale used here was not the only available measure, and others might prove useful. Additionally, other characteristics of the pornographic materials should be examined, particularly those directly relevant to the subjects. That is, characteristics allowing the subjects to identify with the actors in the story, such as previous sexual experience, socioeconomic status, and physical traits, should be examined.

In sum, the present study adds some support to recent contentions that pornography may have detrimental effects on women. It also suggests that, for some women, exposure to certain types of pornography could increase their awareness of rape and sympathy toward victims. However, it should be pointed out that the woman who had more positive attitudes after reading the rape myth and rape stories also reported lower self-esteem. This suggests that one effect of reading the story was increased awareness of the problem of rape. Because this was found for women already low in stereotyping and acceptance of rape myths, it is not clear how educational the experience was. It is the high SRS women who could benefit from materials

which dispel rape myths. Most subjects were not individually debriefed, so the impact of their participation could not be ascertained. The data suggest that a cognitive process of some kind (e.g., priming effect) is responsible for differences in attitudes. For whatever reason, the data suggest that there may be undesirable effects of exposure to pornography and those effects of exposure to pornography vary as a function of subject's sex role stereotyping and the specific content of the materials.

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