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**Gender Differences in the Perception  
of Rape : The Role of Ambiguity**

**By**

**Terence Patrick Humphreys**

**Bachelor of Arts, University of Waterloo, 1991**

**THESIS**

**Submitted to the Department of Psychology  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts degree  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
1993.**

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*I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of my father, Thomas W. Humphreys, whose love, confidence, hope and respect will be greatly missed.*

*Dad, this is for you.*

## Abstract

Past research in the area of rape has focused on rates of acquaintance or date rape (Koss, 1985), the perception of rape victims (Shotland & Goodstein, 1983; Tieger, 1981) and the prevalence of rape myths (Burt, 1980; Gilmartin-Zena, 1988; Larsen & Long, 1988). Findings from Gilmartin-Zena (1988) suggest that most college students recognize obvious rape myths, but are uncertain about "subtle" ones. Other research indicates that males are more likely than females to perceive that forced intercourse was consensual (Abbey, 1982; Malamuth, Haber, & Feshback, 1980). In this vein, the present study tested the hypothesis that there are gender differences in the perception of rape, when the incident is ambiguous. Competing theories (Abbey's contention that men misinterpret the cues given by women and the Gilligan / Hall suggestion that women are better at detecting cues than men) were also tested to determine which was better at explaining a gender difference. One hundred and five undergraduate psychology subjects watched a series of eight 5 minute film clips that ranged from mutually consenting sexuality to rape. After each presentation, they assessed the material on a number of variables involving the actors' pleasure, aggression, responsibility, willingness and whether or not a rape had occurred. Content coding was performed on open-ended responses to determine if women picked up more cues. Also, questions taken from Abbey's (1982) research and content coding for interpretation were used to determine if men were making different interpretations than women. It was hypothesized that both women and men would accurately identify non-ambiguous consenting sex or rape scenes. In contrast, ambiguous clips were expected to produce gender differences, in which

women perceived ambiguous situations more as rapes, while men did not. Five dependent measures produced interactions, although not all in the predicted direction. The question central to the main hypothesis, which asked participants to place each clip on a continuum from mutually consenting to rape, produced an overall gender effect, in which men perceived the situations as more consensual than women did. Neither theory provided strong enough support to explain the gender differences in the perception of rape. These results were discussed in terms of the cultural norms surrounding dating and courtship behaviours.

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## Introduction

A number of writers have suggested that rape is a function of our sex role socialization processes that legitimize coercive sexuality and condone violence against women (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Weis & Borges, 1973). This claim is supported by two areas of research. The first cites high rates of rape and other forms of sexual aggression in the mainstream population (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Koss & Oros, 1982; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). The second demonstrates that both convicted and nonconvicted rapists cannot be distinguished from the normal male population on any personality characteristics, suggesting that they represent a non-deviant group (Koss & Leonard, 1984; Marolla & Scully, 1982; Petty & Dawson, 1989). Males in our society seem to be socialized to be aggressive and dominant. They learn that aggression and power are legitimate means of getting what is wanted, which does not exclude sexual access to women (Clark & Lewis, 1977). This is viewed as part of the proper male role. Females, on the other hand, have had the historical role of being the property of their male owners, and are still today socialized to be passive and submissive (Clark & Lewis, 1977). In the words of Mosher and Anderson (1986), "the socialization of the macho man, if it does not directly produce a rapist, appears to produce calloused sex attitudes toward women and rape and proclivities toward forceful and exploitive tactics to gain sexual access to reluctant women" (p.91).

An important implication of the socialization theory is that it likely influences the behaviours involved in acquaintance or dating encounters more than in stranger-rape situations. Stranger-rapists are completely unknown to their victims until the time of the

incident and their behaviours go beyond what socialized gender roles and sexual scripts would dictate in sexual situations. They step outside the 'normal' or socially acceptable chain of events that would bring two individuals into an intimate relationship. In doing so, their rape is viewed as a discrete, deviant act committed by a mentally ill individual. In contrast, acquaintance rapists remain within the 'boundaries' of what men are supposed to be. Sex role socialization processes promote a rape supportive culture wherein sexual coercion is seen as normal and acceptable in role behaviour (Burt, 1980). Since date- or acquaintance-rapists follow societal beliefs, a lot more ambiguity results around whether rape has actually occurred or not. This ambiguity seems to contribute to the underreporting of rapes committed by acquaintances (Koss, 1992). Even though acquaintance rape is underreported, research studies still find that the majority of rapes are committed by someone known to the rape victim (National Crime Survey, 1981, Russell, 1984), not by strangers lurking behind trees. Hence, it seems appropriate to focus on how our socialization process promotes negative beliefs about women and relationships.

Sex role stereotypes contribute to biased cultural beliefs about dating (e.g., a woman does not really mean it when she says no) and, in turn, can lead to misunderstandings, or even rape, when out on a date (Check & Malamuth, 1983). This is evidenced by the findings that both men and women indicate a high acceptance of statements such as, "A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on the first date implies she is willing to have sex" (Burt, 1980). There seems to be considerable endorsement of such attitudes in the general population. Many people believe that

"roughing up" women is acceptable, that many women get "turned on" by such activity, and that it is impossible to rape a healthy woman against her will (Burt, 1980; Malamuth, Haber, & Feshback, 1980).

Our socialization process is so pervasive that people from both sexes tend not to believe the proposition that a woman can be raped by a close acquaintance (Shotland & Goodstein, 1983). Recent research by Shotland and Goodstein (1992) found that subjects were more likely to perceive that a resisting woman in a rape scenario was obligated to have sex, if the couple had had coitus 10 times before than if the couple had had coitus only once or never before. Subjects were also less likely to view the act as rape, based on the same previous coitus precedence. In research by Check and Malamuth (1982), male subjects reported themselves more likely to commit acquaintance rape than stranger rape. A recent study by Quackenbush (1989) indicates that males, in general, consider stranger rape more serious than acquaintance rape. Together, these studies suggest that individuals are unclear about what constitutes rape. If those involved have been intimate before (i.e., have had a prior relationship) it could generate the view that acquaintance rape is a lesser crime than rape between strangers. Thus, individuals are less likely to perceive acquaintance rape as "real" rape.

The apparent confusion regarding whether "real" rape can occur between dating partners is perpetuated by the way we are socialized in courtship behaviour. Clark and Lewis (1977) have suggested that the general hostility toward women (termed "misogyny") is a byproduct of the norms governing the way in which men and women bargain during sexual encounters. According to the sexual scripts dictated by tradition,

women are supposed to conceal their genuine interest in sexual contact and merely suggest their intention in subtle or symbolic ways, such as the way they stare or smile at men they are interested in (Check & Malamuth, 1983). Even if a male correctly interprets the hints, a woman is not to engage in sex freely, for fear of appearing promiscuous (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). Men, on the other hand, are supposed to wade through these subtle cues and make the correct assumption in a sea of seemingly uninterpretable signs. In addition, men are taught to take the initiative and to persist in sexual attempts even when a woman verbally resists (Check & Malamuth, 1983; Muehlenhard, 1988). These double standards lead men to view women as manipulative and to interpret their initial resistance as only a token (Muehlenhard & Felts, 1987). If men continue to endorse traditional roles for men and women (Helmreich, Spence & Gibson, 1982; Jean & Reynolds, 1984), the double standards these roles perpetuate make it unlikely that forced intercourse will be perceived as rape.

### Ambiguous Sexual Situations

With the prevalence of all the myths, misinterpretations, and double standards, it is of interest to consider if they affect the perception of sexual situations differently for women and men. Previous research has found that men are generally more accepting of rape myths than are women (Gilmartin-Zena, 1988; Jenkins & Dambrot, 1987, Malamuth & Check, 1981), are far more likely than women to hold attitudes that condone aggressive sexual behaviour (Dull & Giacopassi, 1987), and are more accepting of rape in general (Larsen & Long, 1988). However, studies investigating reactions to descriptions of specific rape incidents evidence mixed results. Commonly, differences

are found on some variables in some studies but are contradicted or nonexistent in others (see Linz, 1989, for a review). Males, as opposed to females, consistently blame victims of rape, recommend less punishment for the rapist, and interpret women as enjoying sexual violence (Tieger, 1981). Thornton, Robbins, and Johnson (1981) have found no sex differences on the evaluation of the rape act itself, which contradicts the survey data by Larsen and Long (1988).

Most of the studies in this area employ lengthy, written accounts that depict unambiguous rape situations (violent sexual assaults) or no rape situations (mutually consenting sex). This methodology leaves unrevealed a common sexual occurrence that falls somewhere between these extremes. Research based on these two endpoints (consenting versus rape) of a continuum does not illuminate the process of how the ambiguity between these outermost points may affect the perceptions of women and men. Few studies have examined the influence of ambiguity in the interpretation of sexual situations. Instead, they either used ambiguity as an explanation of their findings or manipulated it in an attempt to change participants' perceptions in sexual scenarios. To obtain consistent sex differences in the perception of sexual situations, it may be necessary to introduce ambiguity in the depictions of rape presented to subjects.

### Ambiguity as an Explanation

Two studies will be reviewed here that have examined perceptions of sexual situations using ambiguity as an explanation of their findings. A study on sexual harassment by Terpstra and Baker (1987) examined the importance that ambiguity may play in people's interpretation of forced sexual intercourse. The authors included a



spectrum of incidents representing types of sexual harassment, that included rape, in an attempt to place these acts on a continuum of perceived severity. They were able to develop a continuum of 18 social-sexual behaviours that were ranked on the basis of the percentage of subjects considering them to be instances of sexual harassment. Social-sexual behaviours were defined in a previous paper as non-work related verbal and nonverbal behaviours having sexual content (Gutek, Nakamura, Gahart, Handschumacher, & Russell, 1980). Their hypothesis, that more female than male students would consider the behaviours under study to be sexually harassing, was based on an earlier study by Gutek, Morasch, and Cohen (1983) suggesting that women more than men interpret ambiguous but potentially sexual interactions as instances of sexual harassment. The only behaviour that produced a significant sex difference involved coarse language. Significantly more women than men considered coarse language to be sexual harassment. However, this difference did occur on a behaviour that was considered by the sample to be somewhat ambiguous (the percentage of individuals considering the behaviour as an instance of sexual harassment was 19%).

A study by Gilmartin-Zena (1988) on rape myths developed a new instrument to measure beliefs about various rape myths. A college sample was used to. a) study student attitudes about rape, and b) determine whether gender differences in their attitudes about rape exist. The rape myths were evaluated on a five point Likert type scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Respondents' scores ranged from one to five, with higher scores representing higher *rejection* of the myths. Gilmartin-Zena categorized the rape myths into 'obvious' and 'subtle' statements based

on an average or mean score for an item being more or less than 4.00. If the mean score was less than 4.00, the author believed that "this indicates that the students evidenced at least some confusion about the myth" (Gilmartin-Zena, 1988, p.284), and therefore the statements were considered 'subtle' rape myths. Mean scores above 4.00 for an item were categorized as 'obvious' because they were rejected by a large majority of subjects. The study found that students have no problems rejecting the more obvious rape myths, such as "rape victims are women with questionable backgrounds", "women, on some level, want to be raped", or that "women cause their own rapes". However, distinguishing "subtle" rape myths from fact created more of a dilemma, with women being more likely to reject these myths than men. Subtle myths included: "rape is an act of sex rather than violence"; "the suggestive dress of women may be a causal factor"; and "women can do things to protect themselves from ever being raped". Gilmartin-Zena's suggestion that these rape myths are more 'subtle' or ambiguous, also stems from the fact that there still exists some contention in the rape literature as to their truth or falsity. The more 'obvious' myths have been widely recognized and accepted as myths.

These two studies suggest that when statements or encounters are sexually ambiguous, this may influence the interpretation of that situation. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that the interpretation of ambiguous sexual events may differ for women and men. However, ambiguity is used after the fact to explain the results; therefore we cannot be sure that another variable is not responsible for the findings.

### Manipulated Ambiguity

To control for the likelihood of a variable such as ambiguity influencing the results, ambiguity itself should be incorporated as part of the method. This can provide us with a better test of its influence. Shotland and Goodstein (1983) used three independent variables in combination to create and examine ambiguous rape scenarios. The type of protest by the victim (verbal versus verbal and physical), onset of protest, i.e., the point in the encounter at which the victim first started to protest (early, middle or late), and amount of force used by the perpetrator (low versus moderate) were the manipulated variables. Although no overall sex differences were found in this study, the authors report main effects for their three independent variables. Subjects were more likely to perceive the vignettes as rape when: a) the female protested verbally and physically, versus when she protested only verbally, b) the onset of protest was late rather than early or middle, and c) moderate as opposed to low force was used against the woman to facilitate a sexual encounter. An interesting finding of their study regarding the perception of rape was the three items used to tap perceived rape. 1) that the scenario involved rape; 2) that what the male did was wrong and, 3) that [the female] had a right to stop the sexual encounter. The authors reported that the lowest level of agreement for these three items, across the twelve versions of the scenario, was on whether subjects labelled the situation as rape. In other words, participants could not agree on which sexual situations to rate as rape. It seems that the different combinations of the three manipulated variables produced ambiguity in the scenarios and this in turn made the perceived occurrence of rape harder to identify.

Gutek, Morasch, and Cohen (1983) investigated how people interpret ambiguous, but potentially sexual, behaviours in a work setting. They created ambiguity in much the same way as the previous study. The four variables used in this study were the sex of the respondent, the sex of the initiator of the activity, the status of the initiator relative to the target, and the behaviour. The last three variables were experimentally manipulated in a vignette about an interaction between a man and woman at work. Subjects read one of 18 versions of the instrument (2 levels of initiator sex, 3 levels of status (lower, equal, higher) and 3 levels of behaviour). The behaviours used were a comment about the target's body, a "pat on the fanny" (p. 34) as an instance of sexual touching, and a pat on the fanny with a comment about work. The scenarios were rated on nineteen 5-point Likert-type items assessing whether they perceived it as positive or negative, appropriate or inappropriate, and sexual or not. For the present study, the only results that are pertinent involve the variable of sex of the respondent. In support of their hypothesis that men would evaluate ambiguous, potentially sexual, behaviours more positively than would women, men rated both the relationship between the initiator and the target and the incident itself more favourably than did women. This study lends support to survey data that suggest ambiguous sexual behaviours initiated by the opposite sex are interpreted differently by the sexes, with men viewing them as positive experiences while women view them as sexual harassment (Gutek et al., 1980).

A study by Johnson and Jackson (1989) tried to create ambiguity by manipulating two variables that tend to influence perceptions of rape: the victim-perpetrator attraction and the victim's desire for intercourse. Vignettes were used that portrayed a male and

female student working together. Three conditions existed for the victim-perpetrator attraction. The characters either disliked each other (minimal attraction), liked each other as friends (moderate attraction), or were dating (maximal attraction). Ambiguity in the victim's desire for intercourse was indicated by the female initially responding positively with extensive kissing, but later refusing to engage in intercourse. In the other condition, the female quickly indicates her desire not to engage in intercourse after the male's initial advances. Their results showed that ambiguity had a significant effect on perceptions - subjects tended to be less favourable toward the victim and more lenient toward the perpetrator when there was ambiguity in the victim's desire for intercourse. The effect of ambiguity was stronger for men than it was for women. A follow-up study by the same authors found that subjects in the ambiguous condition assigned more responsibility to the victim, and that males, once again, did so more than females (Johnson, Jackson, & Smith, 1989). Taken together, these results seem to support the view of an interaction with gender, with males assigning more responsibility to victims in ambiguous situations than females. While the data seemed to follow this trend, this assumption was not directly tested by Johnson et al. (1989). It suggests, however, that the ambiguity present under circumstances of rape has a definite impact on the attribution of rape.

Recent research by Humphreys and Desmarais (1992) investigated whether ambiguity presented in the depiction of sexual situations had an effect on how the act was perceived and how the ambiguity was interpreted. Participants were tested individually by a same-sex experimenter and asked to view and rate eight non X-rated film clips.

The film clips were sexually explicit and ranged on a continuum from mutually consenting intercourse to rape. After each movie clip, participants rated it on a series of perceptual and attributional questions. All questions were in Likert-type format and dealt with the behaviours of the female and male actors and the mutuality of the situation. The study suggests that ambiguity is an important determinant in the perception of potential rape situations, and that the perception differs for women and men.

Central to the test of Humphreys and Desmarais' hypothesis was the question 'Where on the continuum (consenting to rape) would you place this film clip?'. Although nonsignificant, it produced a definite trend consistent with their prediction that women view ambiguous sex scenarios as rape more than do men. However, the question of why perception differed was not adequately answered by their study. The authors hypothesized that the difference in perception was attributional, in that, as in prior research by Johnson et al. (1989), males might impute more responsibility or blame onto the female actor than would women. However, the attributional questions used produced minimal results. Two dependent measures, out of 13, produced the predicted gender by ambiguity interaction. These measures tested the subjects' affective reaction to the film clips and the question "How strongly do you agree that, in the end, the woman in this film clip got what she wanted all along?". Both demonstrated that men perceived ambiguous clips as more mutual and positive than women did. Another four dependent measures showed strong trends in the same direction. As the film clips become more ambiguous, the difference in rating between the genders increased, with men perceiving clips as more mutual than women.

The research cited above suggests that ambiguity may influence the perception of rape. Researchers have demonstrated that specific actions, such as the victim's desire for intercourse or the amount of force used by the perpetrator, contribute to ambiguous perceptions (Johnson & Jackson, 1989; Shotland & Goodstein, 1983). However, to this point in the literature, little has been done to explain why ambiguous sexual situations are perceived differently by women and men. Two possibilities seem likely here. First, it may be that in ambiguous sexual events, subtle cues are not recognized with the same frequency by the sexes. A second possible reason why women and men differ in their interpretation of ambiguous sexual events is that subtle cues are interpreted differently by the sexes. These two alternative interpretations have not been adequately tested by past research. Prior studies have tended to ask sweeping questions about the victim's or perpetrator's actions, responsibility, or sexual excitement. The questions posed in past research may not detect what it is that people use in evaluating situations. Even if there is a difference based on attributional questions, one can still ask why the sexes would make different attributions regarding ambiguous situations. At the micro level we need to know what is it that makes women and men think differently about the same sexual situation.

In the next few sections, I will examine possible theoretical support for a gender difference in the perception of ambiguous sexual situations. The next two sections will focus on theory and research by Gilligan (1982) and Hall (1978) which support a differential recognition of cues by the sexes. The miscommunication hypothesis, proposed by Abbey (1982), will then be evaluated in support of the contention that the

sexes differ in their interpretation, not recall, of cues transmitted by other people, especially the opposite sex. These two theoretical positions are contrasted here to determine which one is a better explanation of a gender difference in the perception of sexual events.

### Theoretical Explanations of Gender Differences in Perception

To understand why women and men reason differently given similar circumstances, it is necessary to re-examine theoretical explanations of gender differences in such perception. Carol Gilligan's (1982) research into the differences between the sexes asserts that there are two distinct modes of describing the self in relation to others - separate/objective and connected. She suggests that men describe themselves as individuated and set apart from others by their personal contributions and abilities, and see others as separate entities evaluated by the same criteria. They deal with others through a justice orientation to moral issues, seeing rules and laws as providing right answers based on principles, such as logic and fair play. In contrast, women see the world comprised of intricately enmeshed relationships, rather than people standing alone; a world that coheres through connection rather than through systems of rules. In Gilligan's view, the female perspective is a care perspective, in which women are aware, connected, and attending to others. They see other people from within the other's life context, understanding people's motives and behaviour based on their background. Women's reliance on a process of communication (assuming connection), brings them closer to understanding other people and the situations they are in on their own terms.



A study by Pollack and Gilligan (1982) on the images of violence in Thematic Apperception Test stories reinforces this notion of differing world views derived from socialization. Their findings suggested that, if aggression is conceived as a response to the perception of danger, men and women may perceive and construe danger in different ways based on the social situation. They conclude that "... men see danger more often in close personal affiliation than in achievement and construe danger to arise from intimacy, women perceive danger in impersonal achievement situations and construe danger to result from competitive success" (Gilligan, 1982, p.42). "Rulebound competitive achievement situations, which, for women, threaten the web of connection, for men provide a mode of connection that establishes clear boundaries [and distance, thus appearing safe]" (Gilligan, 1982, p.43-4). It appears that what makes one gender secure, makes the other insecure, in relating to others. Men find it comparatively safer to revert to rules and principles when dealing with relationships. They may turn the whole process into a competitive achievement situation because it provides clear boundaries and safety in a rule-bound structure. However, this threatens the web of connection for women, who see danger in separation and competition. Their response, of course, would be to try to reestablish a connection. This reaction in turn may tend to threaten males enough to provoke hostility and possibly aggression by men. Pollack and Gilligan (1982) conclude with the speculation that "women enter relationships looking for safety, but due to men's views of relationships as explosive situations, these very relationships in turn may become dangerous for the women involved" (p.165).

Gilligan's explanation is consistent with research in sex role socialization. Males engage in power struggles for personal gain, whereas females tend to minimize power differences in an effort to treat others equally and to share resources (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Leventhal & Lane, 1970; Thompson, 1981). Men are socialized to be competitive, dominant, and exploitative, whereas women avoid competition and behave in ways that maintain the web of connectedness (Weitzman, 1979). It is also suggested that male socialization is intricately enmeshed with their conduct in dating relationships. Males seem to apply a success orientation to sex, viewing the entire sexual encounter in terms of striving for and achieving a goal. Winning is so strongly embedded in men's thinking that it becomes "the main (if not the only) legitimate goal in life" (Schultz & Anderson, 1986, p.372). Consistent with this orientation, males typically feel that they should initiate and control their relationships with women (Hall, Howard, & Boezio, 1986). Gross (1978) indicates that, compared to women, men not only focus more on sexuality with cross-sex partners, but also tend to isolate sex from other aspects of heterosexual relating. Fasteau (1974) noted that "For most men, courting and seduction are nuisances. The focus is almost exclusively on reaching the goal of conquest with all possible speed" (p.32).

When sex is perceived as a goal rather than a process, the context of a relationship may matter less than the end result of achieving intercourse. Men's thoughts and behaviours are directed toward an end result, producing a "winning" mindset. How this end result is achieved is inconsequential next to actually achieving it. This can result in men who base the success of an evening on whether or not they "scored". Indeed,

social pressure about having sex becomes important early in boyhood and continues throughout adulthood. Male friends also encourage and reward the sexual exploits of men (Kanin, 1985). With all the social pressure and male competitiveness to engage in sex often and with multiple partners, men miss the chance to enjoy the process of an unfolding relationship. This unfolding process has within it the information necessary to make decisions regarding attraction, liking, and sexual interest, but men are missing these signals due to their inclination to prove their manhood. As Gross (1978) suggested, men feel the need to "achieve status among those who really count, the male peer group. ... it is likely that the overwhelming pressure on men to prove their masculinity via sexual performance indirectly leads to aggression and rape" (p.102).

#### Gender Differences in Verbal and Nonverbal Cue Recognition

Gilligan's work is strengthened by research in the area of decoding nonverbal communication which suggests that women are more accurate than men in their ability to judge the meanings of nonverbal cues communicated via face, body, or voice tone. Hall (1978) summarized the results of 75 studies reporting the accuracy of women and men at decoding nonverbal cues and concluded that "more studies showed female advantage than would occur by chance, the average effect was of moderate magnitude and was significantly larger than zero, and more studies reached a conventional level of significance [in favour of females] than would be expected by chance" (p.845). Hall goes on to report that studies including both visual and auditory stimuli had a significantly larger gender effect than visual-only or auditory only studies. The added realism of including both types of stimuli in one study "may have resulted in effect sizes

that are more representative of gender effects in everyday judgments of nonverbal cues than are the effects obtained for the single modalities" (p.852). Hall's conclusions suggest that women may be more attentive to the situational context.

Other studies finding sex differences in interpersonal behaviour and person perception also suggest that women show greater attention to emotional cues (Exline, 1963; Kombos & Fournet, 1985; Nidorf & Crockett, 1964). Dahlström and Liljerström (1967) argue that the different socialization of the sexes teaches girls to consider others' feelings, while boys' social communication gains little by attending to emotions because their upbringing is directed more by rules and standardized relations among people. Therefore the perception of emotion may become less relevant for males. Although this learning 'how to act' may not directly produce performance advantages for women, the added motivation to relate to others expressively, and the increased practice at attending to interpersonal expression could, over time, result in women's superior ability at judging nonverbal cues (Hall, 1978). The above research suggests that because men gain very little from attending to the contextual cues of others, they may tend to use them less as an interpretive tool.

Research from a slightly different area of study suggests that incarcerated rapists tend to be deficient in their ability to process interpersonal cues from women in first-date situations (Lipton, McDonel, & McFall, 1987). Lipton et al. (1987) used a new measure (Test of Reading Affective Cues or TRAC) to assess the heterosocial cue-reading accuracy of young adults. This measure consists of 72 30-second videotaped scenarios of heterosexual couples interacting. The task of the subject is to guess which of five

affective cues - romantic, positive, neutral, negative, or bad mood - each target actor was conveying. Results indicated that rapists were significantly less accurate cue readers in the first-date situation than were their two control groups (violent nonrapists and nonviolent nonrapists). Rapists were also significantly less accurate than controls when reading female targets' cues. All subjects were less accurate when reading men's cues than women's cues. An analysis of the five cue categories also revealed that rapists could be differentiated from controls by their misperception of women's negative cues as positive cues. Other research in this area also suggests that rapists are deficient in heterosexual skills and in need of social-skills training (Becker, Abel, Blanchard, Murphy, & Coleman, 1978). The above research in combination with the suggestion made earlier that rapists cannot be distinguished from a normal male population (Koss & Leonard, 1984; Petty & Dawson, 1989), could lead to the conclusion that perceiving cues accurately may influence appropriate dating behaviour. Since males have at least some difficulty accurately processing cues, they may be less appropriate in their conduct during intimate encounters.

The above research complements Gilligan's theory of moral development, which states that women are better decoders of social interaction because they are more process sensitive and attuned to the situational context as a whole. In the process of understanding social interactions, emphasis is placed on understanding others in the context of their own lives (i.e., the situational and personality determinants of behaviour). Understanding social interactions becomes a complex process of gathering information about others within the context of others' lives. Males, however, place

greater emphasis on being individualistic, and use rules or principles of justice in order to understand others in a way that is fair and objective. It seems important for males to distance themselves from the context to be able to give an objective evaluation. In contrast to women, less emphasis is placed on understanding situations from the other's point of view. As a result, compared to males, the process of understanding and interpreting social situations requires females to be very attentive to that person's verbal and nonverbal cues. Global rules and principles are not as useful for women who view them as having a rigid quality because they do not yield to the exceptions that occur when considering context. This results in women being more cue-dependent during social interactions.

In conclusion, the social pressures placed on men to succeed result in their missing, ignoring and/or misinterpreting the cues women give them during sexual encounters. The male script in dating situations does not provide much latitude with respect to interpreting cues coming from their partners. They must persist in achieving the goal - sex. Although male "strategies" may vary according to how their partner responds, part of the expected male role is to take all the first initiatives in dating encounters. These initiatives include the call, asking for a date, making arrangements, asking for another date, first kiss, and the initiation of sex. With this comes the risk (namely rejection) of making each of these overt steps during those first encounters. Being expected to make these first moves may result in men not being as cue-dependent as women. Men may not evaluate the cues as closely because their goal-orientation requires them to continue the advances regardless of the subtle messages women may be

trying to convey. In this same dating encounter, women would be going against tradition if they were to initiate any dating behaviours overtly. Therefore women may tend to pay careful attention to situational cues revealing their partner's interest.

### **Distinguishing the Friendly from Sexual: Gender Differences in Cue Interpretation**

Distinguishing the meaning of cues during a first date can be an overwhelming proposition for anyone. The dating situation (especially first dates) is fraught with ambiguous cues, both verbal and nonverbal, primarily because the relationship itself is taking place on a superficial level. In its preliminary stage, the participants of a relationship read meaning into every motion and word. Statements are over-analyzed for hidden meaning. As Pineau (1989) pointed out "the language of seduction is accepted as a tacit language: eye contact, smiles, blushes, and faintly discernable gestures. It is, accordingly, imprecise and ambiguous" (p.229). Only after the participants have been intimates for an extended period of time, could they hope to become more accurate at decoding each other's nonverbal cues.

In addition to the problem of seeing and decoding nonverbal cues, the socialization of men, in contrast to that of women, differentially alters perceptions of the whole sexual dynamic between the sexes. It seems that men impute more sexual meaning to heterosexual interactions than do women (Abbey, 1982; Abbey & Melby, 1986; Johnson, Stockdale & Saal, 1991; Muehlenhard, 1988; Rubin, 1970; Rytting, 1976; Zellman & Goodchilds, 1983). For example, Abbey (1982) conducted a laboratory experiment in which a male and female participated in a 5 minute conversation while a hidden male and female observed the interaction. The actors rated each other while the

observers rated both actors' behaviours. Ratings were made on 7-point Likert-type scales with respect to how sexually flirtatious, seductive, and promiscuous the actors were 'trying to behave'. Other dependent variables were questions asking the observers if they thought each of the actors was sexually attracted to, and would like to date, his or her partner. The results suggested that male actors and observers rated the female actor as being more promiscuous and seductive than female actors and observers rated her. Also, males were more sexually attracted to the opposite-sex actor than females were. Males seemed unable to distinguish females' friendly behaviour from their seductive behaviour, and interpreted any friendliness on the part of a woman as an indication of sexual interest (Abbey, 1982). In fact, Kanin (1969) argues that "the typical male enters into heterosexual interactions as an eager recipient of any subtle signs of sexual receptivity broadcasted by his female companion" (p. 18). In such a charged encounter, men might have a harder time reading cues accurately because: (a) before they begin decoding any cues they are biased due to their interpretation of most male-female encounters as sexual, and/or (b) they are not as good as women at picking up and decoding cues. Similarly, Gross (1978) argues that men, due to their sex role socialization, value sex more than women, making it a more central component of their gender identity. Peplau, Rubin, and Hill (1977) and Alksnis, Desmarais, and Wood (1993) provide support for Gross in their questionnaire studies of college dating couples. Peplau et al. (1977) found that males rated "desire for sexual activity" as a more important dating goal than did their female partners. Alksnis et al. (1993) reported that males were more likely to describe a good first date as including sexual activity, even sexual intercourse. Abbey and Melby



(1986), also in support of Gross, found that when men and women were presented with photographs of a mixed-sex dyad, men consistently rated both the female and male targets as higher on sexual traits than women did.

Based on differential gender socialization, it is possible to envision males in our culture growing up with greater interest in sexual matters. Our culture certainly promotes this concept with its stereotypes, mass media depictions of men and women, and beliefs about sexuality. These beliefs, in turn, develop into a generalized expectancy, causing men to "interpret ambiguous information as evidence in support of their beliefs" (Abbey, 1982, p.836).

This process is similar to past research by Markus (1977) on the self-schema whereby events that fit one's self-schemas have a greater impact than those that do not. Markus (1977) defined self-schemata as "cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experiences, that organize and guide the processing of the self-related information" (p.63). Self-schema research has shown that individuals having schemata in a particular area are able to process stimuli that are self-relevant, both verbal and pictorial, faster and more confidently than other types of stimuli and faster than individuals with other self-relevant schemata (Markus, 1977). They can also resist information that is counter to the prevailing schema (Markus, 1977). Once schemata are established, they function as selective mechanisms which determine whether information is attended to and how much importance is attached to it. If self schemata stem from cognitive representations of past experiences, sex differences in self schemata are likely because, according to sex role socialization, the sexes clearly differ in their upbringing

(i.e., past experiences). Bem (1981) expanded this research to suggest that schemata could also have a gender base. The author speculates that "gender-based schematic processing derives, in part, from society's ubiquitous insistence on the functional importance of the gender dichotomy" (Bem, 1981, p.354). The process of sex typing changes women and men into feminine and masculine by teaching girls and boys not only sex-specific skills but also sex-specific personality traits and self-concepts. Once the self-concept is integrated into the gender schema, information may tend to be processed on the basis of its sex-linked associations. Bem (1981) argues that not everyone is equally influenced by a gender schema. The extent to which an individual becomes sex-typed stems from how much a person's socialization history has stressed the gender dichotomy. However, North American culture seems so obsessed with gender stereotypes that everyone under specific situations may be vulnerable to gender-based processing (indirectly supporting cultural myths, such as rape myths).

It follows that if sexual behaviours are reinforced more strongly for men, sexuality will be more central to men than women. Hence, men may become more alert to a sexual interpretation in others' behaviour, even when there is not one present. Deficient or ambiguous information is supplemented by material already contained within the perceivers' available schemata (Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Ambiguity in the context of a sexual encounter may be interpreted by men as sexual interest and consent until otherwise stated, usually quite explicitly. For women, ambiguity is also understood in light of their gender schema, but the generalized schemas for the sexes differ. Women

view ambiguity in a sexual situation in a less positive manner, sensing something in the situation must be unwanted, presumably the sexual contact (Guttek, et al., 1983).

### Summary

An important question to be addressed in this research is how males perceive cues. Are men, as has been argued earlier, less cue-dependent and therefore not paying attention to the cues presented to them (Gilligan, 1982; Hall, 1978), or are they seeing the cues but misinterpreting their meaning (Abbey, 1982; Abbey, Cozzarelli, McLaughlin, & Harnish, 1987; Johnson, Stockdale, & Saal, 1991; Shotland & Craig, 1988)? Or are both processes going on simultaneously, with cues selectively chosen for their fit with the traditional male sexual script, thereby reducing the overall number of cues processed and altering the overall meaning?

Whether gender differences in the perception of sexual events are due to a difference in cue recognition or cue interpretation is difficult to test. In fact, researchers from both of these theoretical perspectives may be arguing the same point from slightly different angles. In general terms, both are using a socialization explanation to interpret their findings. It can be argued that the socialization pattern for women, as opposed to men, produces individuals who have within themselves a distinct way of seeing the self and relating to others. A connection through relationships enables women to attend more closely to situational contexts and to be that much more aware of cues presented during these events. The theories of Abbey and Gilligan are linked so closely because they both emanate from the same socialization perspective. Both theories conclude that a

differential perception of sexual situations occurs for the sexes, in which women are more accurate.

The understanding of how women and men perceive and interpret cues in ambiguous sexual situations is the major objective of the present study. The methodology used in Humphreys and Desmarais' (1992) study will be replicated, with a larger sample size, to test the competing theories of cue perception.

Questions developed by Abbey (1982) are used here to test whether men misinterpret the cues they perceive from women as sexual. One of the shortcomings of Abbey's research is that it has not assessed perceptions of sexual intent in sexual situations where the issue of consent is ambiguous. Previous research has either created artificial situations in the laboratory or asked subjects to consider photographs or slides of neutral encounters between women and men (i.e., students meeting in a cafeteria). The present study is designed to show that her theoretical interpretation of cues can also be applied in more sexualized contexts to understand how situations with ambiguous consent are perceived. Will participants interpret female and male actors' sexual behaviour differently? Will males still view the female actor as sexual and interested in her partner? The present study expands Abbey's research to give us a better understanding of cue interpretation in a domain that is more sexual.

This study will also be using the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES), developed by Koss and Oros (1982), to examine how experiences with coercive sexuality affect the perception of cues. It is quite conceivable that women who have been sexually victimized in their past will have different perceptions of sexual situations than women

who have not been victims. Likewise, men who are overly coercive and/or aggressive may differ from men who are non-aggressors in their perceptions as well. Controlling this variable may give us a better understanding of how coercive experiences affect perceptions.

A supplement to using this measure is that it gives us a chance to examine Canadian prevalence rates for coercive experiences, within a university sample, and compare them to American rates, where this measure has primarily been used.

### Hypotheses

It has been suggested that there are gender differences in the perception of rape when the incident is ambiguous. Based on the findings of Humphreys and Desmarais' (1992) study, it was hypothesized that both women and men would accurately identify non-ambiguous consenting and non-ambiguous rape scenes. That is, participants of both genders would rate non-ambiguous sexual situations similarly. In contrast, ambiguous clips would produce gender differences, whereby women would be more likely to perceive ambiguous situations as rapes.

Hypotheses concerning the recall and interpretation of cues were difficult to state, since conflicting theories have been proposed. Consequently, I tested the competing theoretical explanations to ascertain which was more predictive of gender difference in the perception of ambiguous sexual situations. If gender differences occur as a result of cue misinterpretation, as Abbey suggests, the same cues would be interpreted differently by the sexes, with men viewing them in a more positive light. If, on the other hand, women are more accurate in decoding subtle cues due to their socialization, as Gilligan/Hall suggest, more cues would be picked up by women than men. Finally, a combination of these hypotheses would suggest that men would describe fewer cues than women and misinterpret them to be signs of mutual enjoyment.

Based on Abbey's findings (1982, 1986, 1987) it was also hypothesized that men, in comparison to women, would attribute more mutual sexual attraction and participation between the actors in the film clips. This effect should be most gender-divergent when the sexual situation was ambiguous.

## Method

### Sample

Subjects were 111 undergraduate students at Wilfrid Laurier University (59 men / 52 women). Six participants were eliminated from the analysis. Two individuals omitted a large number of questions. Three individuals indicated prior knowledge of the study that invalidated them as subjects. The remaining individual was eliminated due to data suggesting the study was not taken seriously (unreasonable number of sexual partners, other inane responses). Therefore, the analyses included 105 subjects (56 men / 49 women). The median overall age was 19 (SD = 4.03). It was 19 (SD = 5.18) for women as well as 19 (SD = 2.68) for men. Business was the university major most frequently taken by participants. The median overall number of previous sexual partners was 3 (SD = 3.90). It was 3 (SD = 4.60) for men and 2 (SD = 2.01) for women. Subjects from first year psychology courses received credit for participating. The study took an average of one hour and twenty minutes to complete.

### Materials

*Film Clips.* The criteria for selecting clips were that each clip be approximately 5 minutes in length and consist of a sexual interaction between a man and woman that ranged on a continuum from mutual/consenting sexuality to rape. Eight film clips were selected out of a larger pool of commercially available, non X-rated, movies. Six of the

eight film clips were taken from the Humphreys and Desmarais (1992) study<sup>1</sup>. The film clips used in this study were taken from *Catchaser*, *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Body Heat*, *The Big Easy*, *Two Moon Junction*, *Zandalee*, *9½ Weeks*, and *Thelma and Louise*.

The target film clips in this experiment were the sexual scenes that appeared ambiguous with regard to whether or not rape had occurred. For the purpose of this experiment, movie clips were deemed ambiguous if they a) showed verbal coercion and/or physical violence on the part of the male protagonist, and b) portrayed the female character as initially resisting and then becoming aroused, submitting and enjoying sex that was forced. By these definitions, six of the eight movie clips in this study were ambiguous. Varying degrees of these two elements were incorporated in the clips across the continuum of movies. For example, a film clip that was ambiguous, but close to the mutual end of the continuum showed little coercion (only verbal) by the male protagonist and some resistance from the female character. Ambiguous clips located near the midpoint show lots of verbal and some physical coercion by the male, and portrayed the female as resisting sexual intercourse, but eventually submitting and enjoying it. Ambiguous clips close to the rape end of the continuum portrayed the male character as very coercive (verbally and physically) and the female as resistant, but again eventually submitting. However, in these instances her enjoyment was less noticeable. Therefore, the perpetrator's verbal and physical coercion appears and increases in strength across

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<sup>1</sup> Two film clips from the original Humphreys and Desmarais (1992) study produced results that the authors attributed to extraneous properties exclusive to those clips (age of the actors, outdated movie). Comparable clips replaced these two for the present study.



this continuum, while the victim's desire for intercourse becomes more tentative, leading to verbal and physical protest. Also incorporated in the clips, as part of their ambiguity, is the myth that women need to be forced into sexual activity before they can enjoy it. Women are portrayed as initially resisting sexual advances, and then becoming sexually aroused.

Four different orders of clips were presented to subjects for counterbalancing purposes. The clips were randomly grouped in two's and the resulting four pairs were rotated to produce the four orders.

*Questionnaire.* The questionnaire used to test my hypotheses was comprised of three sections. The first consisted of seven semantic pairs selected from the evaluative dimension of the Semantic Differential scale (SEM; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). These semantic pairs have shown smaller errors of measurement, smaller deviations for retest intervals, better overall reliability than the other dimensions of the SEM and high internal consistency,  $r = .96$  (Genn & Radtke, 1990). The semantic pairs were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The end-points were: good-bad, cruel-kind, dirty-clean, pleasurable-painful, ugly-beautiful, healthy sick, and negative-positive. The scores were summed across the pairs for a single clip because past research has shown that the SEM is a multiple measure of a positive to negative component.

The second section consisted of 16 questions designed to assess: a) the subjects' perceptions regarding the cues given and received by the actors, and b) subjects' perceptions of the encounter as a whole as well as the actors portrayed. The questions are as follows:

1. Please write down in words your understanding of the scene you just saw.
2. How would you describe the relationship between the couple in the film clip ?
3. What was the male's intent and how did he communicate or show this ? (please be descriptive)
4. What was the female's intent and how did she communicate or show this ? (please be descriptive)
5. When you decided how to rate this video, what features in this situation stood out as most important ?
  
6. How much pleasure would you say the woman in this clip was experiencing ?
7. How much pleasure would you say the man in this clip was experiencing ?
8. How strongly would you agree that, in the end, the woman in this film clip got what she wanted all along ?
9. How strongly would you agree that, in the end, the man in this film clip got what he wanted all along ?
10. The woman's actions in this encounter made her responsible for what happened.
11. The man's actions in this encounter made him responsible for what happened.
12. The man in this sexual encounter acted aggressively toward the woman.
13. The woman in this sexual encounter acted aggressively toward the man.
14. The communication between these two individuals was adequate (i.e., the messages given and received were clearly understood).
15. Both individuals were completely willing participants in this encounter.
16. Where on the following continuum would you place the situation portrayed in this film clip?

Questions 1 through 5 were questions with open-ended response fields that were content coded (refer to page 35 for details on the coding strategy). Questions 6 and 7 were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "highly pleasurable" to "no pleasure". Questions 8 through 15 were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Question 16 was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "mutual (consenting) sexuality" to "rape".

The third section consisted of questions adapted from Abbey's (1982,1986,1987) research. These questions were repeated here in an effort to replicate her finding that men are more likely to perceive the world in sexual terms than women are. The

questions reflected subjects' feelings about the interaction between the actors. Questions 1 and 2 asked participants the extent to which they believed both actors were trying to behave in a variety of sexual manners. The specific items were sexy, flirtatious, seductive, and promiscuous, along with some filler items. These two questions were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "not at all" to "very". Questions 3 through 6 were as follows:

3. The woman portrayed in this clip is sexually attracted to the male character.
4. The man portrayed in this clip is sexually attracted to the female character.
5. The women portrayed in this clip would like to continue a relationship with the male character?
6. The man portrayed in this clip would like to continue a relationship with the female character?

Questions 3 through 6 were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

In addition, the last question in section three asked subjects if they had seen any of the film clips before, as a way of controlling this potential confound (see Appendix C for the full questionnaire).

*Sexual Experiences Survey (SES)*. The Sexual Experiences Survey (SES; Koss & Oros, 1982) was used as a control measure, since past victimization or aggression were thought to impact on the perception of sexual interactions (see Appendix D1 [females] and D2 [males]). It is a self-report instrument designed to rate, on a continuum, sexual aggression and sexual victimization. For this study, the SES was written in parallel forms that consisted of 14 yes-no questions referring explicitly to sexual intercourse associated with varying degrees of coercion, threat, and force. One question was added to the male form that asked "Have you ever raped a person of the opposite sex?". The

female version asked women if they had been raped, but the parallel question for men was not in the original Koss and Gidycz (1985) Sexual Experiences Survey. The items were worded to portray female victimization and male aggression because nearly 100% of reported rapes reflect this pairing (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1975; Status of Women Canada, 1991). The survey's internal consistency reliability (Cronbach alpha) has been reported at .74 for women and .89 for men. Test-retest reliability (one week interval) indicates 93% item agreement between testing times (Koss & Gidycz, 1985). Koss and Gidycz (1985) have also indicated correlations for the SES with interview data of .73 ( $p < .001$ ) for women and .61 ( $p < .001$ ) for men, showing some degree of validity. The interview data were obtained by means of a standardized interview administered to subjects individually by a post-masters psychologist regarding the experiences they reported on the SES when it was self-administered.

Questions on the SES were collapsed to categorize women into four levels of victimization: 1) non-victim (did not answer 'yes' to questions 3 through 13); 2) sexually coerced (answered 'yes' to any of questions 3,8); 3) sexually abused (answered 'yes' to any of questions 4,5,6,7,10); and 4) sexually assaulted (answered 'yes' to any of questions 9,11,12,13). Men were likewise categorized into four levels of aggression: 1) no sexual aggression (did not answer 'yes' to questions 3 through 13); 2) sexually coercive (answered 'yes' to any of questions 3,8); 3) sexually abusive (answered 'yes' to any of questions 4,5,6,7,10); and 4) sexually assaultive (answered 'yes' to any of questions 9,11,12,13). The sexual abuse category is reported to be equivalent to the legal definition of attempted rape. The label sexual assault was used for experiences that met

a legal definition of rape in the United States<sup>2</sup> (Koss & Gidycz, 1985). Use of the SES also allows the present study to replicate previous work and to compare Canadian and American results.

### Procedure

The experiment was described to subjects as a sexual attraction study. It was stated that the experimenters were studying the perception of male / female sexual interactions with regard to how people become attracted to one another. A cover story was presented to participants because the authors felt that knowing the true nature of the experiment would bias the results toward socially acceptable responses (see Appendix A for verbal instructions). Subjects were tested individually by a same-sex experimenter. Each subject initially read and signed a consent form which stated that the film clips they were to view "contain explicit and sometimes violent sexual scenes that some individuals might find disturbing and/or offensive". It also emphasized confidentiality of responses and the subjects' freedom to leave at any time. After this, preliminary information regarding gender and age of subjects was obtained. Participants were then given multiple copies of the questionnaire (one for each movie clip), and instructed on how to use a remote control for a VCR so they could pause between the clips in order to fill out a questionnaire. Subjects were left alone to watch and rate each of the eight movie clips on the same semantic pairs, open-ended questions and Likert type items. The Sexual Experiences Survey was administered after subjects had viewed the clips and completed

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<sup>2</sup> Caution should be used when using and interpreting these categorizations since they represent a composite of items which vary in the amount of violence used and in whether they actually constitute a violation of the *Canadian Criminal Code*.

the main questionnaires. The SES was presented last because previous research had shown it to influence responses by priming subjects to answer in a socially desirable fashion (Humphreys & Desmarais, 1992, unpublished raw data).

Subjects were also provided with a large brown envelope prior to the experiment and instructed to seal all their materials in it when they were finished. At the conclusion of the study, the experimenter answered any questions subjects had, and gave a verbal and written debriefing. Information on where to seek counselling was also disseminated with the written debriefing, if any subjects desired to do so. The written debriefing thanked subjects for their participation and described the nature of the research (see Appendix E1 [males] and E2 [females]).

### Overview of Design

The major research question involved a repeated measures analysis of the perception of the occurrence of rape presented in the film clips. A 2 (gender) X 8 (ambiguity of film clips) repeated measures design was employed to test the predicted interaction of gender and clip ambiguity. The same procedure was performed for the semantic differential scale and the other dependent measures (Likert-type items).

### Content Analysis

Processes specific to grounded theory methodology were followed in the analysis of the qualitative portion of this study. Grounded theory is a detailed analysis through systematic and intensive examination of data, often sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase, of open-ended response sets, interviews, or other documents (Strauss, 1987). By constant comparison data are extensively coded, thus producing a well constructed

theory. The focus of analysis is on organizing many ideas which have emerged from dissection of the data.

The initial purpose of analyzing the qualitative data was to explore the number and types of cues recalled from the film clips. Previous research has suggested that women may be more cue-dependent than men (Gilligan, 1982; Hall, 1978), due mainly to socialization processes. The research project reported here intended to systematically investigate the cues recalled from the sexual scenarios viewed by participants. The qualitative questions that were coded were chosen because they were the most pointed questions asking subjects about cues. These questions were: 'Please write down in words your understanding of the scene you just saw'; 'What was the male's intent and how did he communicate or show this?'; and 'What was the female's intent and how did she communicate or show this?'. However, because grounded theory methodology requires the investigator to "be informed by" the data, the final analysis in this study produced more than cues as the central theme, or core category. A core category is one that accounts for most of the phenomena being observed or reported (Strauss, 1987). Two core categories were produced from the investigation of these data: 1) The actual cues picked up from the film clips, and 2) the interpretations of events that occurred. Both the cues and interpretations made by subjects were coded for each of the questions listed above.

Analytic processes applied to the data were those identified by Strauss (1987) to be appropriate to grounded theory methodology. The initial analytic process applied to the data was open coding. Also called substantive coding (Strauss, 1987), it is a process

that requires line-by-line scrutiny of the data to identify key words, phrases, or themes.

The following examples from the study reflect this process:

"He caressed her hand and looked into her eyes."

"Shoved him away at first."

"Sexual attraction between two people."

"She wanted him. She didn't call the police or run away."

These phrases, when reviewed with the other data, were coded as examples of the themes "actual cues" (the first two statements) and "interpretations of events" (the last two statements).

The second step of the analysis process was axial coding (Strauss, 1987). This involved coding more intensively and concertedly around a single theme at a time. Themes were closely examined for subcategories that were identifiable within them. For example, the category "actual cues" could be further broken down into specific types of cues. Verbal, behavioural and inaccurate cues were identified. Likewise "interpretations of events" was broken down into five subcategories; positive interpretation, neutral interpretation, negative interpretation, rape myth interpretation, and female responsibility interpretation. Examples of these two core categories and the subsequent groupings can be found in Appendix F. The subcategory 'neutral interpretation' was cut from further analyses based on a low inter-rater reliability ( $M = .67$ ). Inter-rater reliabilities on the remaining categories in the coding scheme were acceptable, ranging from .78 to 1.00 ( $M = .91$ ). This reliability was based on 20 percent of the entire sample. Once a coding scheme was established, good reliability achieved, and coding completed, the frequency of each coded category was recorded.



## Results

### Control Variables and Manipulation Checks

Preliminary analyses of variance (ANOVA's) were performed in order to confirm that: 1) the order of the clips presented to participants, and 2) the possibility that subjects may have seen the movies prior to the study, had no effects on subjects' perceptions. A 4 (orders) x 2 (gender) analysis of variance performed on each clip had an effect on two of the eight clips shown to subjects; The Big Easy,  $F(3,103) = 3.760, p < .05$  and Zandalee,  $F(3,102) = 4.715, p < .05$ . Although these two clips produced main effects for order, there was no differential effect by sex,  $F(1,103) = 1.733, p = .19$  and  $F(1,102) = 1.641, p = .20$  and no interaction,  $F(3,103) = 1.895, p = .14$  and  $F(3,102) = 1.389, p = .25$ , respectively.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed a previous viewing by sex effect for one of the film clips; The Big Easy,  $F(1,103) = 8.072, p < .01$ . However, the sample size in the cell producing this interaction was very small in comparison to the other cells ( $n = 8$ , versus  $n$ 's = 42, 41, and 13).

Finally, a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine whether or not the film clips actually ranged on the continuum between consenting sexuality and rape with enough variability for me to be able to specify that they were ambiguous stimuli. The main effect for clips was highly significant for the semantic differential scale,  $F(7,693) = 395.62, p < .001$ . On a scale from one to seven, participants provided a very good gradient of the clips. They ranged from 1.10 (a negative interpretation) to 6.41 (a positive interpretation of the sexual encounter). Figure

1 shows the configuration of the clips for the semantic differential scale. The main effect and pattern for clips was consistent for the other questions presented to subjects (see Figure 1).

### Reliabilities

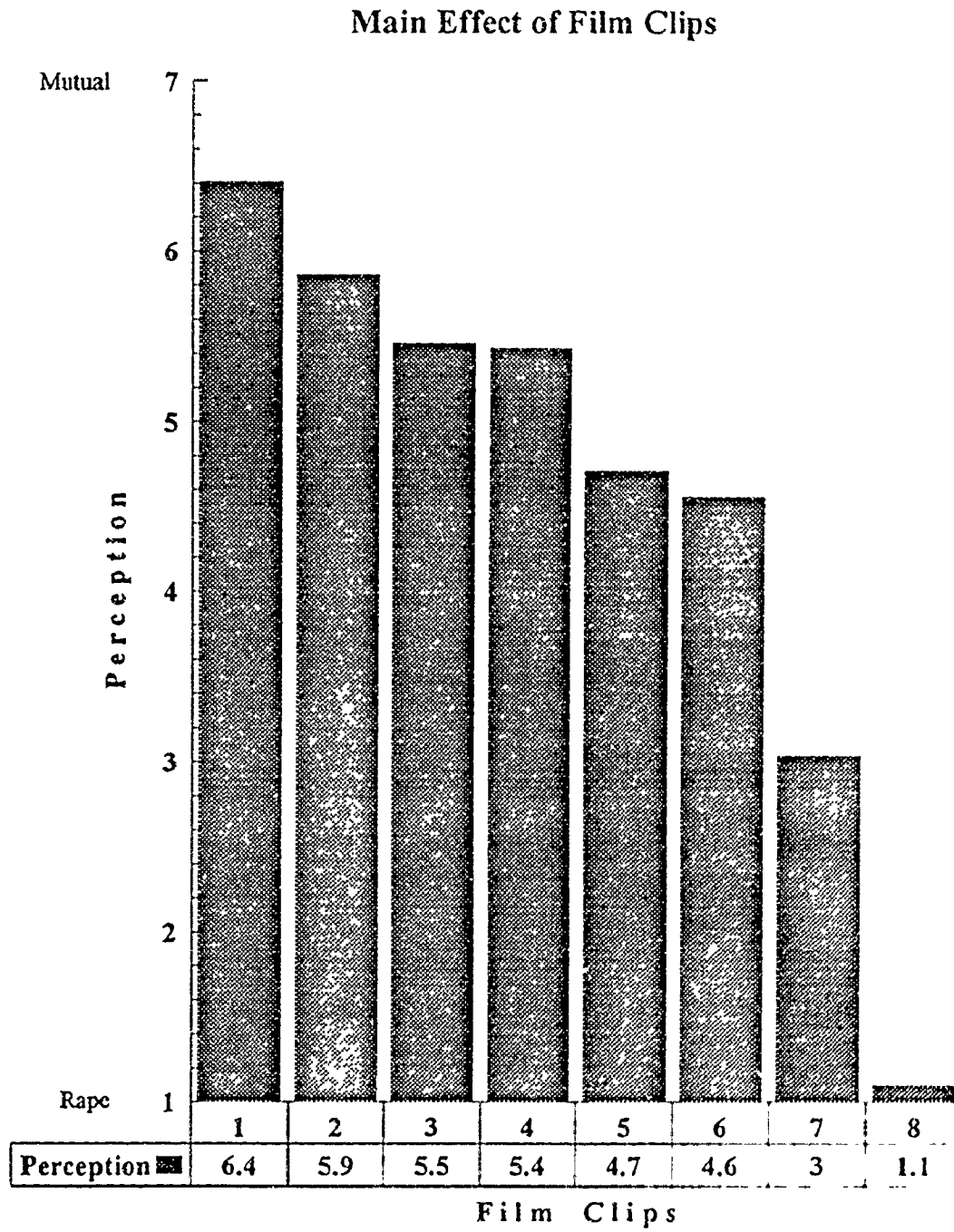
Reliabilities were computed on three sections of the questionnaire. The Semantic Differential Scale (SEM) produced Cronbach alphas on all 7 SEM items ranging from .87 to .95. The 4-item scale asking subjects how the female character was trying to behave produced alphas ranging from .65 to .92, with the majority (6 of 8) around .85 ( $M = .81$ ). The 4-item scale asking subjects how the male character was trying to behave produced alphas ranging from .48 to .84, with the majority (5 of 8) around .78 ( $M = .70$ ).

### Analysis of Quantitative Data

The anticipated results central to this study were sex by ambiguity interactions in which sex differences in perception occur for ambiguous clips, but not for unambiguous clips (ie., end-points). The dependent measure central to the first hypothesis that women, more than men, perceive ambiguous sexual situations as rape, asked participants 'Where on the continuum (consenting to rape) would you place this film clip?'. Although the interaction was nonsignificant,  $F(7,693) = 1.29$ ,  $p > .10$ , this measure did produce a main effect for gender,  $F(1,99) = 5.66$ ,  $p < .02$ . Overall, men saw the clips as more mutual ( $M = 5.27$ ) than women did ( $M = 4.99$ ).

Five dependent measures produced significant gender by clip interactions. However, the patterns did not support the hypothesis that ambiguous sexual scenarios

**Figure 1.**



\*\* similar results found across all dependent measures

would be interpreted differently by women and men. For each interaction, a priori t-tests were performed for scores of women and men on selected clips, using the Dunn procedure to correct for inflated alpha levels. One of the measures was the question 'How much pleasure would you say the woman in this clip was experiencing?',  $F(7,693) = 2.09$ ,  $p < .05$ . The second question was 'How strongly would you agree that, in the end, the woman in this film clip got what she wanted all along?',  $F(7,658) = 2.73$ ,  $p < .01$ . In both of these measures the interaction has a similar pattern (see Table 1 and 2 for means).

Table 1

**Means and Standard Deviations by Gender for the Question 'How much pleasure would you say the woman in this clip was experiencing?'**

	Movie Clips								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Males	6.79 (.49)	6.59 (.76)	6.59 (.65)	5.84 (1.02)	5.95 (.83)	5.77 (1.36)	4.52 (1.80)	1.02*	(.13)
Females	6.90 (.31)	6.57 (.71)	6.65 (.53)	5.63 (1.06)	5.96 (1.11)	5.67 (1.71)	3.78 (1.85)	1.20*	(.46)

**Note.** (1) Means are on a 7 point scale with higher numbers representing higher pleasure.  
 (2) Asterisks indicate significant mean differences between women and men.

Table 2

**Means and Standard Deviations by Gender for the Question 'How strongly would you agree that, in the end, the woman in this film clip got what she wanted all along?'**

	Movie Clips							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Males	6.65 (.78)	6.28 (1.12)	6.44 (.74)	4.70 (1.78)	4.04 (1.53)	4.77 (1.71)	3.93* (1.95)	1.00 (.00)
Females	6.84 (.43)	6.33 (1.02)	6.50 (.69)	4.65 (1.77)	4.04 (1.79)	4.59 (1.78)	2.88* (1.87)	1.06 (.32)

Note. (1) Means are on a 7 point scale with higher numbers representing stronger agreement.

(2) Asterisks indicate significant mean differences between women and men.

These first two interactions are influenced by only one film clip at the rape end of the continuum. In clear rape situations women, as opposed to men, agreed more that the female character experienced some pleasure out of the encounter, although both means are extremely low ( $\bar{M} = 1.02$  for men;  $\bar{M} = 1.20$  for women). In one ambiguous situation close to the rape end of the continuum (clip #7) men, more than women, believed that the female character actually got what she wanted all along. For males, the mean almost reaches the midpoint on the scale ( $\bar{M} = 3.93$ ), whereas it was substantially lower for women ( $\bar{M} = 2.88$ ). The seven other clips did not differ in the ratings given by each sex.

Two of the five interactions were the male versions of the above two questions. The question 'How much pleasure would you say the man in this clip was experiencing?',  $F(7,651) = 4.54$ ,  $p < .001$  and the question 'How strongly would you agree that, in the end, the man in this film clip got what he wanted all along?',  $F(7,644) = 3.23$ ,

$p < .003$  were both significant. In each case, the shape of the interaction was similar (see Table 3 and 4 for means).

**Table 3**

**Means and Standard Deviations by Gender for the Question 'How much pleasure would you say the man in this clip was experiencing?'**

	Movie Clips							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Males	6.83 (.37)	6.75 (.61)	6.54 (.69)	6.53 (.74)	6.16 (.93)	6.77 (.43)	6.22 (1.00)	5.38* (1.47)
Females	6.74 (.61)	6.78 (.47)	6.63 (.64)	6.62 (.61)	6.31 (.85)	6.80 (.41)	6.54 (.65)	6.20* (.81)

**Note.** (1) Means are on a 7 point scale with higher numbers representing higher pleasure.  
(2) Asterisks indicate significant mean differences between women and men.

**Table 4**

**Means and Standard Deviations by Gender for the Question 'How strongly would you agree that, in the end, the man in this film clip got what he wanted all along?'**

	Movie Clips							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Males	6.47 (.84)	6.62 (.76)	6.57 (.74)	6.87 (.39)	6.00 (1.35)	6.79 (.49)	6.09* (1.44)	5.68* (1.73)
Females	6.60 (.68)	6.71 (.58)	6.69 (.51)	6.84 (.43)	6.13 (1.16)	6.90 (.37)	6.68* (.63)	6.62* (.64)

**Note.** (1) Means are on a 7 point scale with higher numbers representing stronger agreement.  
(2) Asterisks indicate significant mean differences between women and men.

In this case, the interaction hinged on the last one or two film clips. In a clear rape situation (i.e., the last clip) women believed that the male character experienced more pleasure ( $M = 6.20$ ) than men believed he did ( $M = 5.38$ ). In rape and rape-like

situations (i.e., clips 7 and 8) women, more than men, agreed that the male actor got what he wanted all along.

The last interaction dealt with the question 'The man in this sexual encounter acted aggressively toward the woman',  $F(7,686) = 2.52, p < .02$ . Men perceived male targets as more aggressive toward their female counterparts than women did, only in the clearly mutual clip (See Table 5 for means). Associated with this finding is the overall tendency for men to see female targets as more aggressive toward their male counterparts than women did ( $M = 3.11$  for men;  $M = 2.75$  for women). However, this main effect did not reach significance,  $F(1,96) = 3.73, p = .056$ .

**Table 5**

**Means and Standard Deviations by Gender for the Question 'The man in this sexual encounter acted aggressively toward the woman'**

	Movie Clips							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Males	4.27* (2.06)	4.02 (2.07)	5.50 (1.55)	5.27 (1.93)	5.89 (1.30)	6.54 (.72)	6.84 (.50)	7.00 (.00)
Females	3.18* (2.14)	3.71 (2.18)	4.98 (2.25)	4.47 (1.99)	5.27 (1.85)	6.10 (1.34)	6.88 (.33)	7.00 (.00)

**Note.** (1) Means are on a 7 point scale with higher numbers representing stronger agreement.  
(2) Asterisks indicate significant mean differences between women and men.

Three dependent measures produced significant main effects for gender that were not hypothesized. The first of these measures was the Semantic Differential scale,  $F(1,83) = 3.95, p < .05$ . Overall, men perceived all of the clips to be more positive ( $M = 4.67$ ) than women believed them to be ( $M = 4.44$ ). A significant main effect for

gender was also found for the dependent measure that asked subjects how strongly they agreed to the statement 'The communication between these two individuals was adequate'. Men perceived the communication between the individuals in the clips to be more adequate ( $M = 4.61$ ) than women did ( $M = 4.21$ ),  $F(1,99) = 5.34$ ,  $p < .05$ . The third main effect for gender was found when subjects were asked how strongly they agreed to the statement 'Both individuals were completely willing participants in this encounter'. Men again, saw both individuals as more willing ( $M = 5.14$ ) than women did ( $M = 4.75$ ),  $F(1,100) = 9.42$ ,  $p < .005$ .

The measures used to test the hypothesis that men would attribute more mutual attraction and participation between the actors in the film clips (i.e., the misinterpretation hypothesis) failed to provide support for Abbey's contention that men interpret cues in a more sexual manner than women do. The measures included one scale assessing how much subjects perceived the male actor as "trying to behave" in a certain manner. A second parallel scale asked how much subjects perceived the female actor as "trying to behave" in a certain manner. Items in both scales included sexy, friendly, promiscuous, seductive, attractive, sincere, flirtatious. Other measures included how sexually attracted the actors were to each other and if subjects thought the actors would like to continue a relationship together. The only significant results were three separate gender effects for how "sexy" (For men:  $M = 5.77$ ; For women:  $M = 5.38$ ) ( $F(1,95) = 5.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ), "promiscuous" (For men:  $M = 5.07$ ; For women:  $M = 4.55$ ) ( $F(1,99) = 4.31$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and "attractive" (For men  $M = 5.76$ ; For women  $M = 5.22$ ) ( $F(1,93) = 10.78$ ,  $p < .002$ ) subjects perceived the male character as behaving. A composite of the four key



scales (sexy, flirtatious, seductive, and promiscuous) also produced this main effect for how sexually subjects perceived the male character to be behaving (For men:  $M = 5.70$ ; For women:  $M = 5.30$ ),  $F(1,83) = 7.76$ ,  $p < .01$ . All four main effects of gender showed men perceiving the male targets to be behaving more sexy, promiscuous, attractive, and sexual than women perceived them to be.

### Analysis of Coded Qualitative Data

Chi-square analysis was conducted on the coded frequencies reported in the qualitative data across the genders. The open-ended questions coded for cues and interpretations were: Please write down your understanding of the scene you just saw, What was the male's intent and how did he communicate or show this? and, What was the female's intent and how did she communicate or show this? Due to the small frequencies reported for the categories coded, it was necessary to recode the frequencies into dichotomous categories so that, on any particular category, individuals who did not give a codable answer were compared to those who gave one or more. This resulted in a series of 2 x 2 chi-square analyses being performed.

In partial support of the hypothesis that women would pick up more cues than men, a significant difference between the sexes was found for verbal cues reported. Women reported more verbal cues, from some of the film clips they viewed, than men did. When the eight clips were analyzed, 2 of them produced significant  $\chi^2(1, N=103) = 5.70$ ,  $p < .02$  and  $\chi^2(1, N=103) = 4.05$ ,  $p < .05$ . Three other clips produced trends in the same direction (all  $p$ 's  $< .10$ ). In each case, women reported more verbal cues than men (see Table 6 for frequencies). No differences were found for the frequency of

behavioural cues or inaccurate cues reported. Overall, subjects were recalling an average of 10.7 behavioural cues when collapsed across film clips. Subjects were only identifying an average of .22 inaccurate cues overall, when collapsed across film clips.

**Table 6**

**Frequencies by Gender and Cue Recognition for Verbal Cues**

	Movie Clips							
	1*	2	3	4	5	6	7*	8
Males (no cues)	38	34	37	33	40	26	38	36
(1 or more cues)	17	21	17	22	15	28	16	18
Females (no cues)	22	26	25	22	27	19	25	24
(1 or more cues)	26	23	23	26	21	29	24	25

Note. The chi-squares for movie clips 1 and 7 were significant ( $p < .05$ ). Clips 2,4 and 8 produced nonsignificant trends ( $p < .10$ ) in the same direction.

No differences were found for any of the qualitative data coded for interpretations (i.e., positive, negative, rape myth or female responsibility/blaming). It is interesting to note, however, that overall, subjects gave more rape myth and female responsibility/blaming interpretations for ambiguous film clips than they did for nonambiguous clips (see Table 7 and 8 for frequencies). These null results for interpretation by gender, again fail to support Abbey's theory that cues will be interpreted differently by the sexes.

Table 7

**Frequencies for Rape Myth Interpretations Across Film Clips**

	Movie Clips							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No rape myth interpretation	102	102	78	92	90	92	82	99
One or more	1	1	22	11	13	10	18	4

Table 8

**Frequencies for Female Responsibility / Blaming Interpretations Across Film Clips**

	Movie Clips							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No blaming interpretation	96	98	81	61	91	87	88	102
One or more	7	5	19	42	12	15	12	1

**Sexual Experiences Survey**

Males' self-reports showed 42 (75.0%) of them were non-aggressors, 12 (21.4%) were sexually coercive, and only 2 (3.6%) were sexually abusive. No males characterized themselves as sexually assaultive. The self-reports of females showed 22 (46.8%) were non-victims, 12 (25.5%) were sexually coerced, 6 (12.8%) were sexually abused, and 7 (14.9%) were sexually assaulted.

A series of repeated measures Analyses of Variance (ANOVAS) were performed to test the effect of prior coercive sexual experiences on the quantitative dependent variables (i.e., all Likert-type questions). Due to the small frequencies reported for the third and fourth categories of the SES, the cells were collapsed into a dichotomous

variable of victim/nonvictim for women and aggressor/nonaggressor for men. Results showed that women who had been victimized viewed male targets as more aggressive in mutual and ambiguous clips than women who had not been victimized,  $F(7,315) = 2.06$ ,  $p < .05$ . Women who were victims also tended to perceived female targets as more aggressive than nonvictimized women saw them,  $F(7,294) = 2.82$ ,  $p < .01$  (see Tables 9 and 10 for means).

**Table 9**

**Means and Standard Deviations by Victimization for Women on the Question 'The man in this sexual encounter acted aggressively toward the woman.'**

	Movie Clips							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Nonvictims	2.54 (2.02)	2.88* (2.15)	4.30 (2.31)	3.75* (2.03)	4.63* (2.20)	5.57* (1.65)	6.83 (.38)	7.00 (.00)
Victims	3.80 (2.10)	4.52* (1.92)	5.60 (2.06)	5.16* (1.72)	5.88* (1.17)	6.60* (.71)	6.92 (.28)	7.00 (.00)

**Note.** (1) Means are on a 7 point scale with higher numbers representing stronger agreement.

(2) Asterisks indicate significant mean differences between victims and nonvictims.

Table 10

**Means and Standard Deviations by Victimization for Women on the Question 'The woman in this sexual encounter acted aggressively toward the man.'**

	Movie Clips							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Nonvictims	3.54* (2.34)	2.54* (1.98)	2.44* (1.53)	1.96 (1.12)	1.50* (1.02)	2.33 (1.37)	3.17 (1.76)	1.26 (.45)
Victims	5.12* (2.26)	4.20* (1.94)	3.84* (1.77)	2.32 (1.68)	2.29* (1.23)	2.88 (1.81)	2.60 (1.87)	1.57 (.84)

**Note.** (1) Means are on a 7 point scale with higher numbers representing stronger agreement.  
(2) Asterisks indicate significant mean differences between victims and nonvictims.

Results for males showed that aggressive men perceived male targets as more responsible for what happened during ambiguous encounters, close to the mutual end of the continuum, but less responsible during ambiguous encounters close to the rape end of the continuum, than nonaggressive men did,  $F(7,343) = 2.60$ ,  $p < .02$  (see Table 11 for means).

Table 11

**Means and Standard Deviations by Aggressor for Men on the Question 'The man's actions in this encounter made him responsible for what happened.'**

	Movie Clips							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Nonaggressors	6.39 (.82)	6.49 (.94)	6.31* (.92)	6.59 (.74)	6.23 (1.04)	6.69* (.57)	6.80 (.41)	6.97 (.16)
Aggressors	6.17 (1.12)	5.83 (1.64)	6.75* (.45)	6.67 (.61)	5.83 (.94)	6.08* (.90)	6.75 (.62)	6.92 (.29)

**Note.** (1) Means are on a 7 point scale with higher numbers representing stronger agreement.  
(2) Asterisks indicate significant mean differences between aggressors and nonaggressors.

Aggressive men, as opposed to nonaggressive men, also saw male targets as less interested overall in continuing the relationship, for aggressors:  $M = 4.50$ ; for nonaggressors:  $M = 4.99$  ( $F(1,53) = 4.05, p < .05$ ).

To test the effects of subjects' prior coercive sexual experiences on interpretations of cues as determined by the qualitative measures, a series of chi-squares were performed. Again, due to small cell sizes, 2 x 2 chi-squares were performed in which SES individuals were categorized as victims or nonvictims (for females) and aggressors or nonaggressors (for males), and cues were classified as none reported versus one or more reported (same as previously). These analyses revealed no significant differences.

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was two-fold. First, I aimed to examine the extent to which gender differences in the perception of the occurrence of rape are influenced by the ambiguity present in sexual situations. The second purpose was to determine whether differences in perception are better explained in terms of a difference in the number of cues perceived or as a difference in the interpretation of the cues reported.

This study provided little support for the hypothesis that sexually ambiguous scenarios produce gender differences in the perception of the occurrence of rape. Supporting the hypothesized effect was the result concerning whether subjects thought the female character actually got what she wanted all along. Under ambiguous situations, men, more than women, were more likely to perceive the female target as "getting what she wanted". This finding replicates that of Humphreys and Desmarais (1992). However, the effect was associated with only one of the six ambiguous clips presented.

The results also revealed four additional interactions, but these were not consistent with the predicted pattern of gender differences. Women, more than men, agreed in an unambiguous rape scene that the woman was experiencing some pleasure. This finding is counter-intuitive, but it should be noted that the mean difference is very small (0.18) and both means were extremely small ( $M = 1.02$  for men;  $M = 1.20$  for women). So while the difference in means was statistically significant, it may not have much meaning in the real world. In the same vein, men were more likely to perceive male targets as experiencing less pleasure in unambiguous rape settings and to view male targets as not

getting what they wanted all along in rape and rape-like situations. Finally, men perceived male targets in mutual situations as more aggressive toward their female counterparts than women did.

Johnson and Jackson (1989) assumed that the victim's desire for intercourse is a factor that tends to influence males' perception of rape more than females'. The present results concur with this assumption because one of the central themes in the film clips concerned whether the victim was enjoying the sexual encounter. The significant gender by ambiguity interaction for the questions 'the woman got what she wanted all along' and 'how much pleasure would you say the woman in this clip was experiencing' supports the contention that a gender difference in the perception of rape is affected by the perception of the victim's "enjoyment" during the sexual encounter. Similarly, the two interactions showing that men attributed less enjoyment to male actors as the sexual situations became progressively more rape-like support this theory. Perhaps the less men thought the female actor was enjoying the sexual encounter, the less satisfaction they attributed to the male actor. Women, on the other hand, tended to believe the male characters enjoyed sex no matter how it was achieved. Means for women remained high across all clips, averaging 6.57 on a 7-point scale.

The finding that men, more than women, perceived male targets as aggressive toward their female partners was unexpected. Associated with this result was the nonsignificant trend ( $p = .056$ ) for men to see female targets as more aggressive toward their male partners. Taken together these results suggest that men, more than women, perceive both men and women to be more aggressive in sexual situations. One possible



explanation for this finding is that aggressiveness may be more central to men's experience than women's. Through their socialization, boys are taught to be aggressive and dominant in order to achieve what they want. The same is not true for girls (Clark & Lewis, 1977). Thus, gender norms provide boys with the implicit understanding that aggression is a good thing. If boys grow up associating aggression with assertiveness, confidence and self-assurance, it may become more central to males' gender schema. This, in turn, could produce a gender difference in the way in which women and men understand aggression. Men, in contrast to women, may rate aggression in a more positive light and therefore respond to questions of aggression (at least in mutual and ambiguous situations) with higher overall ratings.

Simple main effects for gender were found on several dependent measures. Overall, men seem to be perceiving all types of sexual scenarios differently. First, men evaluated all sexual situation more positively than women did, based on ratings from the Semantic Differential scale. Similarly, the verbal communication occurring between women and men actors across all sexual situations, ambiguous or not, was more adequate in men's eyes. Men also viewed the individuals involved in all the encounters to be more willing participants than women saw them to be. Perhaps, more importantly, the main question which asked participants to place the clips on the mutual to rape continuum demonstrated that men perceived all of the clips to be more mutual or consenting than women perceived them to be. Since the encounters in the present study always presented the male as an aggressor and the female as a recipient, it can be concluded that males viewed the female target as more sexually willing and involved than women did.

These gender effects, though not hypothesized, were consistent with past research. Except for the main effect for the Semantic Differential scale<sup>3</sup>, these gender differences replicate those found by Humphreys and Desmarais (1992). Previous studies have reported that males are more accepting of rape myths (Gilmartin-Zena, 1988; Malamuth & Check, 1981), rape in general (Larsen & Long, 1988), violence against women (Dull & Giacomassi, 1987; Malamuth & Check, 1981), and believe more strongly in the sexual myth that a woman's initial resistance is only a token gesture because women are supposed to resist initial sexual advances (Check & Malamuth, 1983; Weis & Borges, 1973). These beliefs could lead men to mistakenly conclude, as the sexual scripts of tradition have taught them, that women conceal their genuine interest and attraction toward men. In light of this belief structure, it makes sense that men in the present study perceived the communication between couples in the film clips as adequate and that the messages conveyed were clear. Men read more into the situation than was presented to them, believing that women conceal their willingness to engage in sex. Men understand the surface communication in light of this hidden agenda, thereby believing that both acquaintances comprehend the "real" messages being conveyed. This makes the situation as well as the surface communication clearer for men, who may subsequently ignore women's protests. This also leads to the males' attitude that the female actor was willing and that the situation was mutual because resistance to engage in sex is understood by men as game playing that can be ignored (Muehlenhard, 1988).

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<sup>3</sup> In the Humphreys and Desmarais (1992) study, the Semantic Differential scale produced a sex by ambiguity interaction, rather than the simple main effect for gender found for the current study.

It may also be the case that men are simply missing the miscommunications between couples and the ambiguity of the situation because they do not rely as heavily on attending to other people as a means of understanding them (Gilligan, 1982). If the perception of emotion and attention to communication are less relevant for men it is unlikely that they will use them as frequently for interpreting events.

### **Cue Recognition and Cue Misinterpretation**

The qualitative data provide some insight into the gender difference in the perception of ambiguous sexual situations. Overall women reported perceiving more verbal cues than did men. This finding partially supports the hypothesis that cues are not recognized with the same frequency by women and men (Hall, 1978). This suggests that women are more attentive to what is being said during sexual interactions, and this, in turn, may result in a differential evaluation of the situations. This finding is consistent with Gilligan's (1982) contention that women place more emphasis on attending to others in an effort to understand other people on their own terms. In other words, women, more than men, tend to 'walk in the shoes of other people' in an effort to understand people's motives and behaviours. This may make attending to verbal cues a necessity.

Contrary to what was hypothesized, this study did not find a gender difference for the perception of behavioural cues. This finding contradicts both the hypotheses proposed by Hall and Gilligan. This suggests that women and men do not differ in the frequency with which they mention behavioural cues. One explanation for this inconsistency may be that the cue recognition literature tends to rest heavily on the decoding of cues more than on cue recognition per se. Many previous studies use a

strategy that relies on accurately defining a predetermined emotional expression that an actor is trying to portray. In contrast, the strategy used in this study may not address the same question, in that the number of behavioural cues women and men felt were important to mention may not represent the number they actually perceived. It may be that women and men can recall the same number of cues from film sequences but what differs is their accuracy at interpreting their meaning, which this study did not measure.

Abbey's initial formulation of the "miscommunication hypothesis", which states that men, more than women, will perceive women as interested in sex and behaving in a sexual manner, was not supported in the present study. Women and men differed in their perceptions of how attractive, sexy, promiscuous and sexual overall the male actors were behaving. These gender differences indicated that men saw the male actors as behaving in a more sexual manner than women saw them. This result is consistent with Abbey's (1982) later formulation, in which she expanded her theory to state that "men are more likely to perceive the *world*<sup>4</sup> in sexual terms and to make sexual judgements than women are" (p. 836). Nonetheless, to fully support her theory, the men in this study should also have seen the female actors as more sexual, which they did not. They also did not differ in terms of how much they thought the actors were attracted to each other or how much the actors would like to continue a relationship together. The qualitative interpretations that were coded as positive, negative, rape myth, and women's responsibility/blaming also did not differ by gender, providing further evidence against Abbey's hypothesis that women and men interpret actions differently.

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<sup>4</sup> My emphasis.

Two possible answers emerge to explain why the present results are inconsistent with Abbey's. First, it is possible that the type of situation being used clouded any discernable gender differences. In all of Abbey's research, the same neutral situation is used to evaluate sexual interests. Two subjects, unknown to each other, sit at a table across from each other and talk for a short time about their experiences at university. Two other subjects observe them through a one-way mirror. This situation is completely void of any sexual overtones. In contrast, in my own research, individual subjects rate sexual encounters presented in movie clips to see if actors are attracted to each other. The situation presented in the clips, although varying in ambiguity with respect to consent, may be too sexual to get distinctions between women and men. In fact, this is supported by the presence of a ceiling effect for the questions 'The woman (man) portrayed in this clip is sexually attracted to the male (female) character'. Both genders strongly agreed to these statements. The sexually explicit nature of the clips may have eclipsed the uncertainty surrounding consent or coercion when evaluating attraction.

The second possible explanation for the inconsistent results is that Abbey's claim of a miscommunication hypothesis may be invalid. Recent research by McCaw and Senn (1993) used qualitative analysis to study sexual interactions in which some conflict is present, to see if the behavioural cues used by women and men differ. Their results suggest that Abbey's miscommunication hypothesis fails to account for the sexual coercion in participants' stories. Instead, the data reveal that both women and men tend to agree on what constitutes sexually coercive behaviour on the part of men. In addition to knowing what is and is not coercive, the men in McCaw and Senn's (1993) study

acknowledged that what they were doing was manipulative. They were aware of and understood the cues women used (as indicated by women) to indicate "no" to a particular sexual move. It seems that men do recognize that they are manipulating a woman into sex, but continue with their sexual advances despite the woman's objections. During an intimate encounter, a misunderstanding regarding how far each individual is willing to go sexually, can only continue for so long until one person confronts the other. At that point it seems like the majority of men would stop if indeed there were a genuine confusion regarding cues. The men who continue their sexual advances after this point cannot be confused about mixed signals. Their coercive behaviours cannot be attributed to a misunderstanding of intentions because they have been told that their advances are not desired. Abbey herself (1987) concedes that only a small percent of misperceptions ever escalate into sexual activity. Abbey's examination of retrospective reports of naturally occurring misperceptions of friendliness as sexual interest found that only 14 percent of students who had misperceived their dates' intentions reported sexual activity occurring, and the majority of this activity only involved kissing.

Therefore, it's quite conceivable that the men in the present study actually knew, as women did, when the female actor was or was not interested in the male actor. The questions concerning the female actor's attraction to the male actor and whether she would like to continue a relationship with him, and the open-ended questions coded for behavioural cues, did not differ by gender. This supports the suggestion that men use and understand the same behavioural cues as women do to interpret sexual situations (McCaw & Senn, 1993). The fact that there was no difference in interpretation based

on my use of Abbey's questions, but that men continued to perceive both actors as willing and the situation as more mutual than women suggests, as McCaw and Senn (1993) conclude, "a certain amount of wilful blindness on the part of many men" (p.5).

### The SES and Prevalence Rates

The Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss & Oros, 1982) was used in the present study to examine prevalence rates for coercive sexual experiences, and to control for any influence these experiences may have had on the perception of sexual situations. The prevalence rates reported here replicate rates found in past research (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993; Koss & Oros, 1982; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Current results showed that 53.2% of the women and 25.0% of the men had been involved in some form of male-against-female sexual aggression; 14.9% of the women, but none of the males, had been involved in unwanted sexual intercourse against the woman's will, that is, rape. Muehlenhard and Linton (1987) report rates for unwanted sexual intercourse at 14.7% for women and 7.1% for men. Koss (1985) and Koss and Oros (1982) reported that 13% of women revealed a victimization experience that involved sexual intercourse against their will obtained through the use or threat of force, and 4.6% of men admitted perpetrating an act of sexual aggression that met legal definitions of rape in the United States.

Consistent with recent Canadian data by DeKeseredy and Kelly (1993), the findings of the present study demonstrate that men do not admit enough sexual aggression to account for the number of victimizations reported by women. In other words, more university women report being sexually victimized, than university men admit to

perpetrating. Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987) also found this pattern in prevalence rates but used incidence rates to conclude that, because the "number of times that men admitted to perpetrating each aggressive act [during the last school year] was virtually identical to the number of times women reported experiencing each act" (p. 169), a few sexually active men could not account for this effect. The rationale for this point is that, if the 25 percent of university men admitting to aggression were responsible for the 53.2 percent of victimizations reported by women, then men should be acknowledging more (i.e., double) sexually aggressive behaviours per year than women claim to be victims of. Therefore, it is suggested that social desirability is probably shaping responses. This process is more likely to result in men underreporting incidence because they are the perpetrators of aggression rather than the victims (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993; Dutton & Hemphill, 1992).

The present study found that women who had been victimized perceived both male and female targets as more aggressive than women who were nonvictims. According to Moscarello (1990), sexual assault may often result in post-traumatic stress syndrome similar to that which occurred in Vietnam veterans. Post-assault symptoms inflict major psychological and physiological trauma which tends to remain unresolved for many years. One belief strongly affected by the assault is personal invulnerability, the loss of which results "in the world no longer being seen as safe and benign, but as unsafe and dangerous" (Moscarello, 1990, p.25). Cornett and Shuntich (1991) also found that women who have been sexually victimized rate the likelihood of forced sex occurring in a dating scenario, in which the male has "adamantly" expressed his desire



to go beyond preset sexual limits, as greater than women who had not been victimized. Personal experiences could make women more alert to, and aware of, potential problems. Situations similar to their own sexual assault experience may trigger phobic reactions. As a result, aggression may be seen more often and more readily in other relationships because these women interpret events based on their own past experience as victims.

The results found for men were that male aggressors, as opposed to nonaggressors, tended to see the male target as less responsible for what transpired and less interested in continuing any relationship. These results are consistent with findings by Mosher and Anderson (1986) that sexually aggressive university men, in comparison to controls, hold calloused sexual attitudes toward women, depicting them as sly, manipulative, and unpredictable. Sexually aggressive men also tend to view sexual aggression as normal and see the victim as directly or indirectly responsible for an assault (Koss & Leonard, 1984). In light of these beliefs regarding victims and women in general, it is understandable that aggressive men may see males as less responsible, because they justify their own behaviour by shifting the blame to the victim. In addition, sexually aggressive men would be less likely to want to continue a relationship with women because they believe women possess these negative qualities.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, it appears that women and men do differ in their perception of sexual situations, however, this difference may not be related to the ambiguity of the situation. Men tend to perceive all sexual situations in a more positive light than women do. The question of why there are gender differences in the perception of sexual

encounters is still unclear. Neither cue recognition nor cue misinterpretation adequately explain the perceptual differences that occurred between women and men. Tentatively, the difference in verbal cue recognition could suggest that women and men are not attending to the same types of cues. Both women and men are reporting behaviours that took place with the same frequency, but women are also more aware of what is being said. The gender difference in the perception of sexual situations may be the result of women, more than men, using verbal cues as an interpretative tool. Likely the answer lies in gender-related norms and socialization. Women and men are socialized differently in a host of subtle but complex ways. Girls are socialized to consider others' feelings, which places the emphasis on attending to others' cues. On the other hand, the socialization of boys into dominant and self-assertive men does not necessarily negate a consideration of other people's perspectives but certainly may suppress the inclination.

When placed in sexual situations men and women will perceive cues differently. Since ambiguous sexual situations are characteristic of dating relationships, gender differences in perception are expected to be heightened in such encounters. Acquaintance and dating relationships place individuals with different expectations into an ambiguous situation in which there is maximum privacy. It seems plausible that it is the ambiguous situation, in combination with different sexual scripts, that leads to initial coercive behaviours by men. With a socialization pattern that, over many years, engrains complex but subtle differences between women and men it seems that a more controlled methodology is needed to tease out the subtleties present between the sexes.

### Limitations

Several limitations to the present study should be noted in order that the findings remain in the proper context. First, the methodology used in this study needs consideration. Although clips were chosen very carefully on the criteria of sexual ambiguity, many other dimensions of the clips were free to vary. The actors were different for each clip and therefore any characteristics they possessed were unique only to one of eight clips. For instance, mainstream movies all tend to use attractive actors to portray sex scenes (particularly the victims), but controlling attractiveness across clips still proved difficult. Past research has suggested that the physical attractiveness of the victim influences perceptions of the occurrence of rape. Seligman, Brickman and Koulack (1977) and Tieger (1981) found that nonattractive victims of rape were perceived by participants as having "provoked" the crime more than attractive victims. In a seemingly contradictory finding, Jacobson and Popovich (1983) reported that attractive victims are seen as more careless and responsible for an alleged rape in comparison to less attractive victims. Also, subjects tended to be biased in favour of attractive perpetrators, giving them more sympathy and shorter prison sentences. Whichever finding is supported, it is clear that research on the attractiveness of victims and perpetrators demonstrates an impact on perceptions of rape.

The location, setting, time of day, and music also varied by clip. It is quite conceivable that this 'background noise' drowned out subtle but distinct differences between the sexes or differences between individuals with and without coercive sexual experiences. The time it took participants to complete the study may also have taken its

toll on the results. On average the study took students an hour and twenty minutes, with some taking almost two hours to complete. Not only was it lengthy but it was a repeated measures design, posing the same series of questions for eight different clips. Although participants indicated no problems with the length of time required or the task itself, the repetitive nature of the study may have affected the results.

Second, although a few of the results did produce interactions in the pattern hypothesized, the difference producing this interaction does not hinge on the majority of ambiguous film clips. In fact, for two of the interactions only one ambiguous clip created the interaction. The significant gender by ambiguity interactions do indicate that ambiguity had some effect on the perception of rape. However, I had hoped that gender differences would have occurred on the majority of ambiguous clips.

Third, a potential reason why the main dependent measure (asking people to place the clips on the consenting to rape continuum) did not produce the intended result is that people may have an aversion to the actual word 'rape'. Research by Shotland and Goodstein (1983) indicated that their sample also had a hard time deciding whether or not to label a forced intercourse as a rape. Muehlenhard, Powch, Phelps, and Giusti (1992) indicated that language is an important consideration when selecting terms to use in research, and that the definitions of such terms influence results and conclusions. While subjects may agree that a specific encounter was a rape, the word itself carries with it the societal notion of extreme violence, and the involvement of weapons. For example, the wording could have been changed to 'forced intercourse', which still reflects what rape is, but is more tolerable and informative to participants.

Finally, these results should be used only within the context of observer perceptions. The perceptions found in this study cannot be used to suggest that when individuals become involved in sexual situations, ambiguous or not, they will perceive events in the same way. There could very well be a difference in the perceptions and interpretations of people watching a sexual situation unfold (from the observer's perspective) versus those people who are participants in that situation.

#### **Directions for Further Research**

Research on the perception of ambiguous rape encounters is an important and timely topic. The tentative nature of so many acquaintance and date encounters makes the ambiguity surrounding the situation an issue if sexual coercion or rape occurs. This is why the ambiguity itself should be of interest to future research. The method used in future research to examine ambiguity should seek to control as much of the "background" noise as possible to be able to elicit any actual differences between women and men. Ideally, one film clip should be created and then altered to produce several clips with varying degrees of ambiguity. This would hold virtually all background variables constant. This method could also utilize a between-subjects design and improve on any problems due to the length of experiment. Moreover, the question of why there is a gender difference in the perception of rape needs to be addressed. A strategy that examines accuracy at decoding cues during sexual interactions may help determine how verbal, behavioural or interpretative cues are understood.

With the recent research by McCaw and Senn (1993) apparently refuting Abbey's miscommunication hypothesis, it would be interesting to study how women and men

themselves understand ambiguous sexual situations. Are coercive situations seen as a misinterpretation on the part of a man, or as a man simply ignoring the wishes of a woman to satisfy his own needs? McCaw and Senn (1993) contend that both women and men involved in naturally occurring dating situations understand the meaning of each other's cues. Abbey (1987) also contends that when misinterpretations are confronted these encounters usually end, albeit with some awkwardness and embarrassment, but without further coercive behaviours. If this is the case, then why is date rape still not seen as real rape by outside observers? Research on cognitive biases and schemas suggests that when more precise and definitive information is lacking (i.e., an ambiguous situation) people will bias their perceptions of events based on their own belief structure (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Markus, 1977). Research should focus on personal belief systems through the use of personality measures to determine what outside observers are interpreting differently than the actual participants.

Finally, in order to replicate the finding that victims view other sexual couples as more aggressive, more research is needed which focuses on victims' attributions and perceptions of sexual situations. Being a victim of sexual assault is a traumatic event lasting many years. Exposure to subsequent sexual situations may have a priming or triggering effect on emotions and evaluations for individuals who have been abused (Moscarello, 1990). However, individuals who have been repeatedly victimized may not be as predisposed to priming. Repeated assaults may desensitize them to the severity of the crime. As a result, their perceptions of sexual encounters may not differ from the general population of women. Studies should examine the perceptions of one-time sexual

victims versus victims who have been repeatedly victimized. An important consideration, however, is the time of the victim's last sexual assault. Victims vary in the severity of their post-traumatic stress response and their speed of recovery (Moscarello, 1990). During the time span between the sexual assault and the present, a victim's thought processes could be comprised of different coping mechanisms used to come to grips with the violence. An evaluation of the victim's stage of recovery is essential for a proper understanding of victim's perceptions.

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## Appendix A

### Verbal Instructions

"Hi, Come on in and have a seat. I'm Terry [Susan].

As you know, from signing up for this study, we are interested in the ways in which more that verbal communication may be becoming secondary to non-verbal means of communicating a sexual interest, such as flirting. And while this may be a powerful form of communication it also possesses the dangers associated with misinterpreting these signals. What we need to understand is on what basis or criteria do people make these sorts of decisions and how do they act on them during a sexual encounter.

In this study you will view a series of 8 film clips and respond to a short questionnaire after each clip.

Your responses will be completely confidential. At the end of the study you will seal your responses in the envelope that I have provided for you and it's placed with all the other responses until it is analyzed. The consent form will be kept separate".

"So to start off, I need you to read over and sign the consent form" [ *give participant consent form* ].

I am going to leave the room during the actual viewing of the clips. So all you need to do is press pause on the remote control [ *show participant remote control* ] between the clips, so you have time to fill out a questionnaire. Fill out one questionnaire per clip. You will know when clips end and start because there are black spaces between them. Then press play to remove the pause (start the tape again). I will be waiting just outside, so when you have completed all 8 clips you can come and signal that you are finished and then I will come in and answer any questions you may have.

[ *When questionnaire is finished* ] "Now, before I answer any of your questions I would like you to fill out this short adult sexual experiences survey".

[ *After participants have finished the study* ]

" The results will be posted, after the appropriate analysis has been completed, on the bulletin board on the third floor of the Central Teaching Building no later than May 15, 1993". If you are not going to be around at that time and are still interested in the results we can mail them to you. [ *Get address, if so desired* ].



Appendix B**Consent Form**

This research is concerned with the attitudes and beliefs about male / female interactions, specifically regarding sexual relationships and conflict styles. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to view a series of 8 film clips as well as, answer a questionnaire after the presentation of each clip. At the end of the experiment you will also be asked to complete an adult sexual experiences survey.

Please remember that the film clips that you are about to see contain explicit and sometimes violent sexual scenes that some individuals might find disturbing and/or offensive. If for any reason you do not wish to continue with the experiment, you may leave at any time.

At the end of the study, the experimenter will answer any questions which you might have about this research. You will also be provided with written as well as verbal feedback upon completion of the study.

The entire procedure takes approximately one hour to complete.

Your responses will be completely confidential. All forms are coded by number, and your name will not be associated with the code in any way. This consent form will be kept separate from all other responses. If you do not want to answer any particular question, feel free to omit it. You are, of course, free to decline to participate, or to withdraw your participation at any time.

Having read and understood the above information, I agree to participate in today's experiment.

---

Participant Signature

---

Date



Do not try and remember how you checked similar clips earlier in the session. Make each film clip a separate and independent judgement. Do not worry or puzzle over individual clips, it is your first impressions, the "immediate feelings" about the actions portrayed in the film clips as a whole, that we want. On the other hand, please do not be careless, because we want your true impressions.

**FILM CLIP # 1 (through 8)**

The actions portrayed in this encounter were :

Good \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Bad

Cruel \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Kind

Dirty \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Clean

Pleasurable \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Painful

Ugly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Beautiful

Healthy \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Sick

Negative \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Positive

1. Please write down in words your understanding of the scene you just saw.

---

---

---

2. How would you describe the relationship between the couple in the film clip ?

---

---

---

3. What was the male's intent and how did he communicate or show this ? (please be descriptive)

---

---

---

---

4. What was the female's intent and how did she communicate or show this ? (please be descriptive)

---

---

---

---

5. When you decided how to rate this video, what features in this situation stood out as most important ?

---

---

---

6. How much pleasure would you say the woman in this clip was experiencing ?

Highly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ No  
Pleasurable Pleasure

7. How much pleasure would you say the man in this clip was experiencing ?

Highly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ No  
Pleasurable Pleasure

8. How strongly would you agree that, in the end, the woman in this film clip got what she wanted all along ?

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

9. How strongly would you agree that, in the end, the man in this film clip got what he wanted all along ?

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

10. The woman's actions in this encounter made her responsible for what happened.

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

11. The man's actions in this encounter made him responsible for what happened.

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

12. The man in this sexual encounter acted aggressively toward the woman.

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

13. The woman in this sexual encounter acted aggressively toward the man.

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

1. To what extent was the woman trying to behave :

**Attractive :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Sexy :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Friendly :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Flirtatious :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Seductive :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Sincere :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Promiscuous**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

2. To what extent was the man trying to behave :

**Attractive :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Sexy :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Friendly :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Flirtatious :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Seductive :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Sincere :**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

**Promiscuous**

Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Very

3. The women portrayed in this clip is sexually attracted to the male character.

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

Why or why not ? \_\_\_\_\_

4. The man portrayed in this clip is sexually attracted to the female character.

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

Why or why not ? \_\_\_\_\_

5. The women portrayed in this clip would like to continue a relationship with the male character?

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

6. The man portrayed in this clip would like to continue a relationship with the female character?

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

7. The communication between these two individuals was adequate (i.e., the messages given and received were clearly understood).

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

8. Both individuals were completely willing participants in this encounter.

Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly  
Agree Disagree

9. Where on the following continuum would you place the situation portrayed in this film clip?

Mutual  
(Consenting) \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Rape  
Sexuality



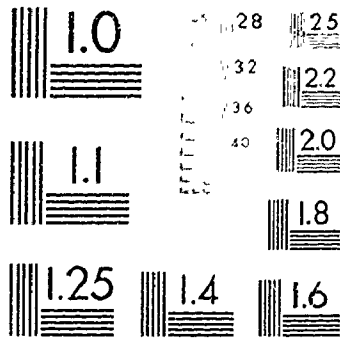
10. Have you ever seen this movie clip before ?

YES

NO

2 of /de 2

PM-1 3 1/2"x4" PHOTOGRAPHIC MICROCOPY TARGET  
NBS 1010a ANSI/ISO #2 EQUIVALENT



Appendix D1

Sexual Experiences Survey (Women)

On the following pages are questions about your sexual experiences from age 14 on. Please mark the appropriate boxes with an X or a ✓.

---

1. Please indicate how many partners you have been sexually active with \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Have you ever had a man misinterpret the level of sexual intimacy you desired ?

YES

NO

3. Have you given in to sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because you were overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure ?

YES

NO

4. Have you ever had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, teacher, camp counsellor, supervisor) to make you ?

YES

NO

5. Have you ever had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you ?

YES

NO

*The following are questions about sexual intercourse. By sexual intercourse we mean penetration of a woman's vagina, no matter how slight by a man's penis. Ejaculation is not required. Whenever you see the words sexual intercourse, please use this definition.*

6. Have you had a man attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of you, attempt to insert his penis) when you didn't want to by giving you alcohol or drugs, but intercourse *did not* occur ?

YES

NO

7. Have you had a man attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of you, attempt to insert his penis) when you didn't want to by threatening or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) but intercourse *did not* occur ?

YES

NO

8. Have you given in to sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because you were overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure ?

YES

NO

9. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, teacher, camp counsellor, supervisor) to make you ?

YES

NO

10. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man gave you alcohol or drugs ?

YES

NO

11. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you ?

YES

NO

12. Have you had sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects such as fingers, etc.) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you ?

YES

NO

13. Have you ever been raped ?

YES

NO

14. Do you know someone who has been raped ?

YES

NO

Appendix D2

Sexual Experiences Survey (Men)

On the following pages are questions about your sexual experiences from age 14 on. Please mark the appropriate boxes with an X.

---

1. Please indicate how many partners you have been sexually active with \_\_\_\_\_

2. Have you ever had a woman misinterpret the level of sexual intimacy you desired?

YES

NO

3. Have you ever had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) even though she didn't really want to because she felt pressured by your continual arguments?

YES

NO

4. Have you ever had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) even though she didn't really want to because you used your position of authority (boss, teacher, camp counsellor, supervisor) to make her ?

YES

NO

5. Have you ever had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) even though she didn't really want to because you threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) to make her ?

YES

NO

*The following are questions about sexual intercourse. By sexual intercourse we mean penetration of a woman's vagina, no matter how slight by a man's penis. Ejaculation is not required. Whenever you see the words sexual intercourse, please use this definition.*

6. Have you attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of her, attempt to insert your penis) when she didn't want to by giving her alcohol or drugs, but intercourse *did not* occur ?

YES

NO

7. Have you attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of her, attempt to insert your penis) when she didn't want to by threatening or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) but intercourse *did not* occur ?

YES

NO

8. Have you ever had sexual intercourse even though she really didn't want to because she felt pressured by your continual arguments ?

YES

NO

9. Have you had sexual intercourse when she didn't want to because you used your position of authority (boss, teacher, camp counsellor, supervisor) to make her ?

YES

NO

10. Have you had sexual intercourse when she didn't want to because you gave her alcohol or drugs ?

YES

NO

11. Have you had sexual intercourse when she didn't want to because you threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) to make her ?

YES

NO

12. Have you had sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects such as fingers, etc.) when she didn't want to because you threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) to make her ?

YES

NO

13. Have you ever raped a member of the opposite sex ?

YES

NO

14. Do you know someone who has been raped ?

YES

NO

## Appendix E1

### Debriefing (Men)

I would like to thank you for participating in this study and explain more about this study and its expected findings. The main focus of this study is to understand how the ambiguity in specific sexual encounters can create gender differences in whether individuals perceive forced sexual intercourse as rape. Sex role stereotypes contribute to biased cultural beliefs about sex (e.g., a woman does not really mean it when she says no) and these beliefs can, in turn, lead to misunderstandings when dating, or may even lead to rape (Check & Malamuth, 1983). Similarly, men often misinterpret women's friendliness for sexual interest and are more apt than women to view interpersonal interactions in sexual terms (Abbey, 1982; Johnson, Stockdale & Saal, 1991; Muehlenhard, 1988; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). In addition, variables such as any previous relationship between those involved could generate the view that acquaintance rape is somehow a lesser crime than rape between strangers (Shotland & Goodstein, 1983; Quackenbush, 1989). As a result individuals may not perceive acquaintance rape as "real" rape.

Findings from Gilmartin-Zena (1988) suggest that most college students recognize obvious rape myths, but are uncertain about "subtle" ones. Other research indicates that males are more likely than females to perceive that forced intercourse was consensual (Hendrick, 1976; Abbey, 1982; Zellman et al., 1979). In this vein, the present study hypothesizes that, like rape myths, there are gender differences in the perception of rape, when the incident is ambiguous. It was hypothesized that both women and men would accurately identify non-ambiguous seduction or rape scenes. In contrast, ambiguous clips would produce gender differences, in which women perceive more ambiguous situations as rapes, while men do not.

While the following is probably obvious to everyone, I would like to emphasize that the film clips you saw were *COMPLETE FICTION*. Some of the clips depicted a rape situation. These clips were chosen specifically for this experiment. In reality, as you are hopefully aware, rape is a terrible crime, and in Canada is punishable by many years in prison. In spite of this fact, rape themes are frequently found in movies and the sexual violence (e.g., rape) is often presented with other highly explicit and arousing material (as in this experiment). Over time, people may tend to ignore the violence of rape because there are other sexually pleasing aspects to the film. I do not want you to feel, however, that your responses were in any way wrong or deviant, because these film clips were chosen to be sexually arousing, and do not in any way reflect the true horror of real rape.

Rape victims suffer severe psychological damage as well as the more obvious physical effects of the assault. Unfortunately, many people still believe a number of falsehoods or myths about rape. For example, one totally unfounded myth is that if the attacker is known to the victim, (e.g., date, or neighbour) you really can not call it rape. A second

falsehood is that women need to be forced into sex, to get over their token resistance and may start enjoying it after being forced. These are in fact just myths and are totally unfounded. Hopefully, you will leave this experiment with a more realistic and accurate view of rape.

Please remember that it is normal for some people to experience painful or uncomfortable feelings as a result of watching these video clips and filling out the questionnaires. If any of the material that you have experienced in this experiment has disturbed you to the point that you may wish to discuss it, we recommend contacting Marilyn Goodbrand at Counselling Services, here at WLU ( 884 - 1970 ext. 2338 ).



## Appendix E2

### Debriefing (Women)

I would like to thank you for participating in this study and explain more about this study and its expected findings. The main focus of this study is to understand how the ambiguity in specific sexual encounters can create gender differences in whether individuals perceive forced sexual intercourse as rape. Sex role stereotypes contribute to biased cultural beliefs about sex (e.g., a woman does not really mean it when she says no) and these beliefs can, in turn, lead to misunderstandings when dating, or may even lead to rape (Check & Malamuth, 1983). Similarly, men often misinterpret women's friendliness for sexual interest and are more apt than women to view interpersonal interactions in sexual terms (Abbey, 1982; Johnson, Stockdale & Saal, 1991; Muehlenhard, 1988; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). In addition, variables such as any previous relationship between those involved could generate the view that acquaintance rape is somehow a lesser crime than rape between strangers (Shotland & Goodstein, 1983; Quackenbush, 1989). As a result individuals may not perceive acquaintance rape as "real" rape.

Findings from Gilmartin-Zena (1988) suggest that most college students recognize obvious rape myths, but are uncertain about "subtle" ones. Other research indicates that males are more likely than females to perceive that forced intercourse was consensual (Hendrick, 1976; Abbey, 1982; Zellman et al., 1979). In this vein, the present study hypothesizes that, like rape myths, there are gender differences in the perception of rape, when the incident is ambiguous. It was hypothesized that both women and men would accurately identify non-ambiguous seduction or rape scenes. In contrast, ambiguous clips would produce gender differences, in which women perceive more ambiguous situations as rapes, while men do not.

While the following is probably obvious to everyone, I would like to emphasize that the film clips you saw were *COMPLETE FICTION*. Some of the clips depicted a rape situation. These clips were chosen specifically for this experiment. In reality, as you are hopefully aware, rape is a terrible crime, and in Canada is punishable by many years in prison. In spite of this fact, rape themes are frequently found in movies and the sexual violence (e.g., rape) is often presented with other highly explicit and arousing material (as in this experiment). Over time, people may tend to ignore the violence of rape because there are other sexually pleasing aspects to the film. I do not want you to feel, however, that your responses were in any way wrong or deviant, because these film clips were chosen to be sexually arousing, and do not in any way reflect the true horror of real rape.

Rape victims suffer severe psychological damage as well as the more obvious physical effects of the assault. Unfortunately, many people still believe a number of falsehoods or myths about rape. For example, one totally unfounded myth is that if the attacker is known to the victim, (e.g., date, or neighbour) you really can not call it rape. A second

falsehood is that women need to be forced into sex, to get over their token resistance and may start enjoying it after being forced. These are in fact just myths and are totally unfounded. Hopefully, you will leave this experiment with a more realistic and accurate view of rape.

Please remember that it is normal for some people to experience painful or uncomfortable feelings as a result of watching these video clips and filling out the questionnaires. If any of the material that you have experienced in this experiment has disturbed you to the point that you may wish to discuss it, we recommend the Rape Crisis Centre (571 - 0121), Anselma House (742 - 5894), The Women's Centre here at WLU (ext. 4444), or contacting Marilyn Goodbrand at Counselling Services (WLU ext. 2338).

## Appendix F

### Qualitative Coding Examples

#### VERBAL CUES

- 1) He told the woman that he thought she was beautiful
- 2) Speaking sexy, commenting on what the video man had told him ...
- 3) She showed this by asking the man to hold her
- 4) By telling him "Hold me or the beer"
- 5) She asked him to leave
- 6) She complimented him on his work
- 7) She told him to leave her alone
- 8) She claimed she was not relaxed enough and couldn't
- 9) Told her she wanted it, said they would have a relationship together
- 10) Said it out in the open "shake you naked and eat you alive"
- 11) She made a point of saying she was married
- 12) "you looked good in the nightgown" she said to him, "how does it feel to be a woman" he asks her

#### BEHAVIORAL CUES

- 1) She also started taking off his clothes
- 2) ... when he leaned back in the chair with her
- 3) He then hit her a couple of times
- 4) He grinned and stared directly into her eyes
- 5) Showed this by buying the girls drinks
- 6) Breaking a window to get into house
- 7) Showed this by pushing him away
- 8) He showed this by coming over and showering in her house
- 9) Forced her onto the table, ripped off her underwear
- 10) ... and even by the way she was standing
- 11) The way she looked at him after she took off her glasses
- 12) ... then they made love

#### INACCURATE CUES

\* Inaccurate cues are any specific behavioural or verbal cues stated by subjects that did not appear in the specific clip being rated.

- 1) He brought champagne
- 2) Running to the telephone ...
- 3) He pushed himself on her immediately
- 4) Showed up at her place with tape and everything to film
- 5) When she confronts him about it
- 6) ... asked if she really wanted sex before they went any further

**POSITIVE INTERPRETATION**

- 1) She was willing and able
- 2) The woman was attracted to the male
- 3) The man seduced the woman
- 4) A couple in love
- 5) He was gentle and considerate
- 6) Both agreed to have sex - it was excellent that they both mutually participated
- 7) Felt an attraction for one another
- 8) She was very willing to let him stay
- 9) Just a very passionate pair who finally got together
- 10) She found pleasure in it

**NEUTRAL INTERPRETATION**

- 1) She was fresh to the sex scene
- 2) Past acquaintances. Someone from her past
- 3) She was very timid
- 4) The guy brought her home
- 5) He pursued her
- 6) A one night stand
- 7) Two people living together
- 8) She knew they would be together
- 9) She was his mistress
- 10) Makes himself at home - not shy about his naked body

**NEGATIVE INTERPRETATION**

- 1) She did not want to have sex
- 2) A woman wanted nothing to do with the man
- 3) He raped her to show that he was in control
- 4) A man with lots of power over a woman in a relationship
- 5) Kept pretending to be nice to her to get what he wanted
- 6) She was nervous
- 7) The man wanted the woman but by using force
- 8) He was mad at her ... proceeded to take out his anger in a sexual fashion
- 9) She was forced to do something that she didn't want to
- 10) Pretty lady got messed up with wrong, sick guy

**RAPE MYTH INTERPRETATION**

- 1) She initially refused but found some pleasure in it
- 2) She initially wanted nothing to do with him but by not resisting she got what she wanted - seduced and made love to
- 3) When her left brain said no but her right brain enjoyed the pleasure and gave into him
- 4) She wanted him but couldn't admit it
- 5) The girl was playing hard to get but they both wanted it
- 6) Began rape-like but she knew him and then after resisting began to like it
- 7) She wanted him to over-power her, it turned her on
- 8) He wants to be a gentleman, but then realized that she wanted and needed to be controlled.
- 9) Woman turns down man - he chases her because he knows how she truly feels
- 10) A woman who didn't want sex and then liked it, so she must have wanted it
- 11) Wanted to fulfil her wishes and make her let loose
- 12) A fantasy for a woman coming true

**WOMAN RESPONSIBLE INTERPRETATION**

- 1) She let him make love to her
- 2) She asked him to leave but not forcefully, They made love - she didn't say no
- 3) Did not run away when she could have
- 4) ... but ended up allowing him to FUCK her
- 5) She was attracted to him since she didn't stop what was happening
- 6) ... didn't violently push him away when he first kissed her
- 7) Showed by not running away or calling the police, she only wore a housecoat
- 8) She only resisted him momentarily before giving in
- 9) ... yet she showed herself to be weak and susceptible to his seduction
- 10) She didn't tell him no