# Narrative approach to understand people's comprehension of acquaintance rape: The role of Sex Role Stereotyping

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**Abstract**

One of the most unreported crimes is acquaintance rape. This may be the result of people's understanding of what rape is because of their rape script and their stereotypes of victim characteristics. These judgements may be moderated by sex role stereotyping (SRS). We utilised a narrative approach to understand low and high SRS participants' rape scripts. Young-adult participants described what they believed a typical rape was, followed by describing an acquaintance rape and then what they believed the stereotypical victim of each crime would be. A narrative analysis was conducted on the data. We found that the blitz script is still held by 44% of low SRS and 47% of high SRS people despite 90% of rapes being committed by an acquaintance. While acquaintance rape scripts existed, the emotional imagery and content of these depended on participants level of SRS. Stereotypical victim characteristics also depended on SRS: those with high SRS were more likely to endorse rape myth ideals in describing victims than those with low SRS. These results have implications for educating people about what rape is so that victims might feel more confident in reporting rape.

**Keywords:** Acquaintance rape; sex role stereotyping; rape scripts; victim characteristics

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Fisher, Cullen, and Turner (2000) estimate that as high as 64-96% of rapes go unreported (see also Rape Crisis England & Wales, 2017). This discrepancy may in part be due to the fact that many people do not understand what constitutes rape: While rape is the intentional penetration of the mouth, vagina, or anus of another person without their consent (Home Office, 2003), many people do not realise that rape can be committed by a partner (Hills, Seib, Pleva, Gosling, Smythe, & Cole, 2019). Indeed, the most prevalent type of rape is acquaintance rape (McGregor, 2017). This is where the perpetrator is known to the victim prior to the assault (Koss, 2018) and is the type of rape that is least likely to be reported.

One hypothesis for this lack of understanding stems from how people conceptualise 'real rape' (Krahé, 2016; Parrot, 1991; Schafran, 2015). Indeed, some authors suggest that the underreporting of rape is because survivors do not identify with the term ‘rape’ preferring to use the phrase ’nonconcensual sexual experiences‘ (Kilimnik & Meston, 2018). However, if people used the legal definitions correctly, the discussion of rape and sexual assault would be less of a taboo potentially leading to more acknowledgement of rape (Stockton, 2013). Not acknowledging rape is associated with re-victimisation (Littleton, Grills, Layh & Rudolph, 2017) and lower convictions for rape, thereby highlighting a need to identify what people conceptualise as rape in order to develop educational packages. Improving the community’s understanding of rape will lead to an increased acknowledgement of rape, leading to higher rates of support seeking (Zinzow & Thompson, 2011), higher rates of reporting to the authorities and ultimately to greater convictions especially if juries (selected from the community) are used in rape trials (Ellison & Munro, 2009).

The way in which people conceptualise sex and rape involve the use of scripts (Littleton & Axsom, 2003). Scripts are cognitive schema that are held in memory that define a sequence of events, including appropriate behaviour in a distinct context (Schank & Abelson, 2013). Scripts are learned from a young age based on personal or vicarious (through media) experience (Snyder, 1994). There are scripts for everything, from drinking a coffee in a café to playing a basketball game. Each script has a set of rules regarding the sequence of events (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). For instance, in a café, you enter, order, pay, drink and exit. Scripts facilitate an understanding of an event by use of structure to interpret the event within (Gioia & Poole, 1984).

Traditional heterosexual sexual scripts (Carpenter, 2010; Simon & Gagnon, 1969, 2003) are typically based around the notion that women are gatekeepers for sex (Sakaluk, Todd, Milhausen, Lachowsky, & Undergraduate Research Group in Sexuality, 2014). Within this script, men are supposed to initiate the sexual act (Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005, Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2011) and women are expected to accept (or reject) the man's advance (Wiederman, 2005). Male sexual scripts are associated with seduction; one step beyond seduction is the idea that they should persist and use multiple techniques to obtain sex (Byers & Lewis, 1988, Littleton & Axsom, 2003). Men are expected to be responsible for sexual pleasure (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010) in consensual and nonconsensual scenarios (Hills et al., 2019). Such scripts are often pervasive within media portrayals of relationships (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Markle, 2008; Ménard & Cabrera, 2011). A sexual script for rape potentially should be an extension of the heterosexual consensual sex script with one difference - In the consensual sexual script, the female is the gatekeeper for sex and accepts the man's advances (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). In the non-consensual version, she does not accept, but sex still occurs. This is based on the most common form of rape and best represents the reality of rape (Ministry of Justice, Home Office, & Office for National Statistics, 2013; Koss, Gidycz, &

Wisniewski, 1987; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). In this case, the sexual script for rape would best represent acquaintance rape as it deviates from consensual scripts by one important aspect (consent). Indeed, a sexual script leading to rape based on the preceding logic may be a result of gender differences in the communication of consent (Beres, 2014; Jozkowski, Peterson, Sanders, Dennis, & Reece, 2014). However, when participants are asked to describe a rape script, this is not what they commonly describe.

The most common rape script elucidated by participants is 'blitz', which has been referred to as the social stereotype of real rape (Parrot, 1991). This script is characterized by a female being raped outside at night, by a male stranger who uses a considerable amount of force and violence (Ryan, 2011). Ryan (1988) found that the blitz script was the most described by her participants when asked what typical rape is. Similar results were found in police officers (Krahé, 1994). Since acquaintance rape does not fit this description, as the victim is raped in a less forceful way (Waterhouse, Reynolds & Egan, 2016) and by someone known (Kahn, Mathie & Torgler, 1994) usually in the home, it may not be acknowledged as rape.

If prompted, participants can develop a rape script based on the more commonly occurring acquaintance rape (Carroll & Clark, 2006), and these appear to be more varied (in setting, how well the attacker and the survivor know each other, and the amount of alcohol consumed) than typical rape scripts. Indeed, there are gender differences in acquaintance rape scripts, with men more likely to place blame on women than women are (Clark & Carroll, 2008). Nevertheless, when participants describe a typical rape, they rarely offer an acquaintance rape scenario spontaneously (Littleton, Tabernik, Canales, & Backstrom, 2009).

In the preceding paragraphs, we noted that when some people had experienced a non-consensual sexual act, they do not acknowledge it as rape. Surveys have revealed that approximately half of women who had experienced a non-consensual sexual act did not label

their experience as rape (Bondurant, 2001; Frazier & Seales, 1997; Kalof, 2000; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007; Pitts & Schwartz, 1993). One explanation for this unacknowledgment is that the rape they experienced contains many elements consistent with a traditional sexual script or seduction (Koss, 1985; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988) due to the fact that the attacker is known to them, there may have been some acts of flirting, and the experience was less violent than their rape script (Botta & Pingree, 1997). Indeed, the rape scripts of unacknowledged rape survivors more closely matched that of a blitz attack, whereas those of acknowledged rape survivors more frequently matched that of acquaintance rape (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn et al., 1994).

Rape scripts also include a stereotype of the typical victim (Hockett, Saucier, & Badke, 2016; Mazelan, 1980). The ideal victim is described to be a weak, attractive, female, carrying out their everyday business when assaulted, blameless, and unknown by the perpetrator who is comparatively big and evil (Buddie & Miller, 2001; Christie, 2001; Dignan, 2004). Other stereotypes encompass rape victims to be young, white, and sexually promiscuous females (Fonow, Richardson, & Wemmerus, 1992). Furthermore, only 25% of Ryan's (1988) participants stated anyone could be a victim. Participants also described the victim's psychological problems after rape (Buddie & Miller, 2001). Such stereotypes act as cognitive frameworks to judge the credibility of a victim, both by the victim themselves and by others (Higgins, 1996) including juries (Olsen-Fulero & Fuiero, 1997). If victims believe they do not fit the victim stereotype they may fear they will not be believed and therefore do not report the rape.

Judgements of rape are affected by an individual's attitude, and in particular their sex-role stereotyping (SRS: Abrams, Viki, Masser & Bohner, 2003; Pollard, 1992; Reynolds, 2017; Willis, 1992). SRS is the assumption of how men and women should act, based on sex role socialisation theory (Burt, 1980). Through development and exposure to adult role models and media, children develop a notion of what men and women should traditionally do (Chapin,

2000; Hartley, 1980; L'Engle & Jackson, 2008). Those scoring high on the SRS scale typically believe in traditional gender roles such as that men should be breadwinners and should initiate sex whereas women should be the gatekeepers of sex (Willis, 1992). SRS theories suggests that men should initiate sex and be sexually assertive and women should be chaste. Within this framework, women should not display open willingness for sex and offer some resistance to all sexual advances, even if they want sex. Due to this, men adopt various strategies to encourage women to have sex and these can become coercive (Byers, 1996; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). Evidence in support of this theory stems from Check and Malamuth (1983) who found that those scoring higher in SRS were more likely report arousal in rape scenarios than those scoring lower in SRS and this difference was larger in acquaintance scenarios than stranger scenarios. Further, military men are more likely to blame the woman in a rape script and use rape myths in their evaluation of such scenarios (Carroll & Clark, 2006), potentially because military men are more traditional in their attitudes toward women (Adams, 1984; Kurpius & Lucart, 2000).

Given the preceding line of reasoning, we would anticipate that those who score higher in SRS will not judge as many scenarios as reflecting rape and hold more rape myths than those scoring lower in SRS (Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997). Indeed, women who score higher in SRS are more likely to blame themselves in rape situations (Byers, 1996). Someone scoring higher in SRS may not perceive acquaintance rape to be as serious or not to acknowledge it is as much as those scoring lower in SRS because persistent attempts from the male might be seen as seduction (Ryan, 1988). This highlights that SRS is an important moderator in understanding rape. However, the role of SRS has not been investigated in relation to participants' own rape scripts: We would expect that those higher in SRS are more likely to perceive a typical rape to reflect the blitz script and to offer more themes indicating victim blaming than participants lower in SRS.

In this study, we investigated participants' rape scripts in a similar manner to Ryan (1988), by asking participants to create narratives of rape and acquaintance rape. We also investigated participants' stereotypes of the typical victims of rape. We extend Ryan's work by exploring not only what participants consider as 'typical' rape, but also what they understand by acquaintance rape. Given that participants have a free opportunity to describe rape, we anticipate that some (but not the majority) will describe acquaintance rape when asked to describe a typical rape. Further, we explore whether SRS influences the narratives that participants develop for rape. We utilise a narrative approach to understand rape scripts for two reasons. Firstly, vignette studies, though very common, may lack ecological validity (Davies, Austen & Rogers, 2011). Secondly, narrative analysis allows us to understand participants own script in detail: scripts are a sequence of events and how rape occurs is seen as a sequence of events (even though rape is simply a failure to obtain consent). Further, this allows for a spontaneous description of the factors leading up to rape (Littleton et al., 2009). This analysis permits a holistic approach to discourse that takes into consideration context (Riessman, 1993) and therefore can produce information that other qualitative methods cannot (Bruner, 1986). This methodology creates a coherent story in context to the current culture we live in (Murray, 2003) and therefore provides a current understanding of perception of rape. By using narrative analysis, which is interpretive at every stage (Josselson, 2006), we can a provide a framework that encompasses the setting and characters, tone, and imagery. We then construct a summary of the event of rape and an evaluative commentary on the events and themes within (Mishler, 1986). By constructing a narrative for participants with a high SRS and compare to those with a low SRS, we can establish if these features differ depending on this characteristic.

In order to understand participants perceptions of victims, we utilise a content analysis of the factors participants provided. Content analysis is useful in dealing with large volumes of data

(Stemler, 2001); thus, can reveal trends, patterns and differences within the text making it meaningful in ways that a culture may not been aware of (Bauer, 2007). We specifically investigated the attitudes of young adults (age 18-25 years), since this group are at most risk of rape (Humprey & Kahn, 2000).

## Method

### Participants

We used two samples: One who completed the whole task and one that only completed the second task (victim characteristics). This was because content analysis requires more participants than narrative analysis and was an *a priori* decision. An opportunity sample of 100 (77 females; aged between 18 and 25 years, *M*=20.38; *SD*= 1.39) people from the Bournemouth area (including University students) were recruited for the first sample. A further 100 (79 females; aged between 18 and 25 years, *M*=20.84; *SD*= 1.62) participants were recruited for the second part. Participants were recruited through online advertisements on research blogs and social media. The advert included criteria for participants to volunteer which was limited to 18-25 years old and it was advised not to partake in the study if they experienced rape or sexual assault. Sample size was determined through a similar study of descriptions of sexual scenarios by Littleton and Axsom (2003). In their study, 25 participants each viewed one scenario. Because we divided our participants into a high and low group on SRS scores and we estimated participants might produce two types of narrative (blitz and acquaintance) we multiplied the participant number in Littleton & Axsom by four. For the Chi-Square analysis, we estimated the effect size based on SRS differences in perceptions of acquaintance and stranger rape in Check and Malamuth (1983), in which they suggested the effect size was moderate (*r*=.3). Using Gpower and establishing an effect with Power=.95 at α=.05, an estimate 145 participants would be required.

**Materials**

The SRS (Burt, 1980) was used to measure sex role stereotyping. This scale has nine 7-point Likert-type scale items with the anchor points 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. An example it is 'A man should fight when the woman he's with is insulted by another man.' Possible scores ranged from 9 to 63 (extremely non-traditional to extremely traditional in regard to sex role stereotyping). This scale has a reliability Cronbach's alpha of .80 (Burt, 1980) and convergent validity of .73 (correlating with the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, Check & Malamuth, 1984). For our sample, Chronbach's alpha was .69.

In order to elicit descriptions of rape, we utilised Ryan's (1998) questions. To establish the rape script, we asked, 'Can you please describe what you consider to be a "typical rape" in as much detail as possible; include information on what led up to, what happened during and followed the rape. While we realise there is no such thing as a typical rape, and each situation is different, please describe what comes to mind when you hear the word rape.' We asked, 'Can you please describe what you consider to be the characteristics of a victim of typical rape in as much detail as possible?' to establish participants' thoughts about victims. 'Typical rape' was replaced with "typical acquaintance rape" for the second condition.

**Procedure**

Participation was completed anonymously on an online platform (Qualtrics). After providing fully informed consent, participants provided their age and gender. Participants were then asked to describe what they consider to be a 'typical' rape in a text box[1]. Once they had finished this question, they moved onto the next page (and could not return to the previous question). Participants were then asked to describe what they consider to be a 'typical

[1] It is possible for participants to interpret the word 'typical' in different ways with some participants inferring that the question referred to 'most common' whereas others might believe this meant 'stereotypical.' While acknowledging this, we expected most of our participants would use the common informal definition of the word (showing the characteristics expected of or popularly associated with a particular person or thing) when answering this question.

acquaintance' rape in a text box. Answers had to be longer than 200 characters - participants could not skip these questions without withdrawing from the whole study. While there was a risk that participants might fabricate extra detail to fill the space, this was not expected as: 200 characters equates to approximately 34 words, which is quite a small amount to write; the information at the start of the study highlighted the importance of honest responses; and we checked the data for any responses containing nonsensical phrasing or random typing - there was none. The questions were ordered so that participants had a choice free from priming regarding what they believed was a 'typical rape.' If the acquaintance rape question was first, we felt that participants might be primed to either realise this was typical or to deliberately write something different. Further, we did not want to prime our participants that acquaintance rape was not typical for ethical reasons. Following this, participants were asked to describe a typical victim of typical rape and typical acquaintance rape. Answers were limited to three words or phrases. This limit was designed to obtain the core characteristics that came to our participants' minds first and therefore better tapped their underlying attitudes. Finally, the participants completed the SRS scale (Burt, 1980). After completion, participants were fully debriefed.

**Data analysis**

The data was analysed by question. Narrative analysis (Labov, & Waletzky, 1997) was used to analyse the rape descriptions and content analysis was used to analyse the victim characteristics. Narrative analysis was chosen to explore how participants perceived the script associated with rape as it offers a storytelling approach. This approach could not be applied to the analysis of victim characteristics, which were simple statements best analysed using content analysis.

The first stage of narrative analysis was reading and familiarising oneself with the data and ultimately identifying important concepts, including tone, imagery and themes (McAdams, 1993). This coding was used across all data. Codes were tags representing an important point, such as “clearly force”, “night time”, “dark”, “alone”. The following procedure was conducted separately for each question and separately for participants scoring high on SRS to those scoring low on SRS (calculated using a median split[2]). The next part of analysis was labelling these important concepts from the language used. Labels were chosen that best reflected the codes in a more general sense (Labov, 1997). Words as unit of analysis, context and setting of the narratives were used as labels. The next stage was to identify imagery from the codes, that was central to the plot (Cortazzi, 2014). This incorporated morals, values and beliefs in the event of rape. Next, we encompassed this imagery and found words or phrases that was a concept for portion of the data (Saldana, 2009). Codes that were similar (defined as codes that reflected the same construct, for example, “night time” and “at night”) were combined, in order to identify a developing pattern and an emerging theme. Two authors did this to ensure that the similarity was consistent. The following phase was to produce a theme table (shown in supplementary material) incorporating imagery to then establish the tone of the narrative. We looked at the active language, the overall flavour of the narrative (Murray, 2003) and how the themes, imagery and tone interlinked; the tone was important in understanding the participant's attitude (Perrine, 1963). This analysis was done at the participant level.

The establishment of tone, themes and imagery subsequently led to the next stage where it was weaved all together into a coherent story, using direct words and phrases from the participants' narratives. The individual narratives were deconstructed and reconstructed to

[2] A median split was chosen to establish two groups: one relatively high in SRS and one relatively low in SRS. Since this is not a clinical measure, there is no pre-existing established cut-off determining high and low SRS. We could have chosen to use a mid-point on the scale (36), however, there were no participants who scored above 36.

create an overall narrative, which was then analysed separately to interpret participants' understanding.

We then conducted a comparative analysis of the low and high SRS narratives, comparing the tone, themes, and imagery depicted in the different narratives for similarities and differences. A contextual analysis was then completed to position the final narratives in the wider societal context. Otherwise known as a master narrative, it is an etic perspective that uses contextual explanations for findings and connecting it to literature (Roheleder & Lyons, 2014). This analysis was labour intensive. In order to maintain the individualism in the understanding of the narratives, we separated the narratives by the type of story displayed (see results) leading to approximately 25 narratives being combined, which is typical in narrative analysis.

For the analysis of victim characteristics, content analysis was used. The first stage of content analysis was reading all the text to obtain a sense of the whole (Tesch, 2013) and then rereading the data word by word to acquire codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We highlighted words or phrases which depicted key concepts and then made initial notes on these. Some of which were apparent multiple times throughout the process. This led to an emergence of labels, which were mainly direct quotes from the text that thus became the initial coding scheme. Codes that were related and linked were put into categories (Patton, 2002) and tallied each time they occurred in the text for each type of rape split by SRS. The core difference between content and narrative analysis is that content analysis provides counts of particular characteristics, whereas narrative analysis leads to the construction of a story including themes, tone, and imagery (Smith, 2000).

## Results and Discussion

We present the comparative analysis (across high and low SRS) followed by the narratives and their interpretation. For the typical rape question, broadly two types of narratives emerged:

blitz scripts (44% in low SRS and 47% in high SRS) and acquaintance scripts (42% in low SRS and 44% in high SRS[3]). We therefore analysed blitz and acquaintance scripts separately for the typical rape question. Contrary to Ryan (1988), these statistics indicate that blitz rapes were not described more than acquaintance rape potentially indicating a rise in awareness of acquaintance rape. All theme and imagery tables are available in supplementary material Tables S1 and S2. Raw transcripts are available online at http://bordar.bournemouth.ac.uk/101/.

**Typical Rape Scripts: Blitz**

Within the blitz narratives (shown in Table 1), low and high SRS participants both use imagery of the setting being a 'female walks alone at night'. However, the low SRS narrative focusses more on the location being in an 'alleyway', whereas the high SRS focuses on being in the 'dark'. This visual imagery of the setting creates a fatalistic tone and one that is blame worthy of the survivor of the narrative; thus, the event of rape may be inevitable in those situations. Within the high SRS narratives, a more cynical tone underlies this fatalistic view of rape through the repeated imagery of being out in the dark alone. This is latent in the narratives for rape to occur and ergo questioning of why the survivor should be alone in the dark in the first place.

(*Table 1 about here*)

Violence is depicted in both low and high SRS accounts that creates a timorous tone throughout both narratives: the attacker uses force and violence against the survivor. However, the high SRS narratives use more explicit detail to describe the assault. For example, 'rapes her with penetration for a short time, possibly covering her mouth' (participant 35). The more explicit details used create raw imagery of the violence that occurs during a blitz rape.

[3] These percentages do not add up to 100% because some narratives contained elements which were more generalised and did not fit into the two different scripts

Low SRS narratives, instead of describing the rape in detail, use blunt language to bring about the violence depicted, by explicitly saying the rape is 'violent' (participant 8, 14, 21, 25, 33) and 'forceful' (participant 1,5, 8, 14, 21, 28, 47). The blunt language can be seen throughout the low SRS narratives which creates distinct differences in the tone. Low SRS narratives have a more objective tone compared to high SRS; the narratives are shorter and used a self-effaced narrating to describe the rape as a series of events which include the feelings of the survivor. Within the high SRS narratives the theme of emotional understanding is more apparent in blitz rape with descriptions of what the survivor felt after the rape such as 'emotional distress' (participant 8).

Both narratives involve the attacker running away after threatening the victim not to tell. This encompass the theme of silence: after the rape, the survivor does not speak out due to the threats of violence, thus their voice is silenced during the act through force *and* also after.

*Contextualisation*

A major aspect of the blitz narratives is the use of 'force' used by the rapist. This violence was an unambiguous key factor that participants used to conceptualise rape. Although both narratives use force and violence, high SRS ones included more detail and aggression than the low SRS narratives. This may be explained by Burt's (1980) sex role socialisation theory. Those in high SRS may believe that men are meant to be more aggressive and dominant whereas women are meant to be weak. Thus, the understandings of rape construes violence as an important factor, in order to adhere to the script of rape.

Many elements within these scripts are consistent with results from previous research exploring participants' elucidation of rape scripts. For instance, the notion of a 'female walking home alone at night/dark' is a classic element within a blitz script (Ryan, 1988). This stereotype suggests there is a belief that rape is in some way unavoidable in these specific situations

displacing the rapist's agency and therefore placing blame on the victim (Finch & Munro, 2005; Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007; Gray, 2015). This implies their understanding is that women are more at risk in a public space than in a private space. However, this is not the case for the most typical rape (acquaintance). A possible explanation for this observation is a mismatch between the geography of violence and people's geography of fear (Valentine, 1989). This may be due to individuals' rape scripts incorporating the schema of fear and violence together in the setting of outside (Ellison & Munro, 2009; Littleton, et al., 2009). Further, the spontaneous description of rape by nearly half our sample was to describe stranger blitz rape similar to previous studies (Littleton, et al., 2009). Such schema have consequences for victims of rape if it does not match their script (Littleton, 2007). Similarly, if society does not understand that rape is more prevalent in private spaces, they will continue to fear the dark, whilst misleadingly not look for the risks that may be present before them. Therefore, they will not conceptualise their experience and thus not report (Ryan, 2011).

**Typical Rape Scripts: Acquaintance**

Both high and low SRS narratives set the scene using imagery of a 'night out' in which the survivor meets the attacker or has previously known them. A key theme of both individuals being intoxicated was revealed, however, it was more apparent for the victim. This creates a fatalistic tone through both narratives; if alcohol wasn't involved the survivor may not have been raped. For instance, in the low SRS narrative, it states that the female was drunk and thought 'it's a good idea to go home together' (participant 3) which suggests if the survivor was sober this would not have occurred. Similarly in high SRS narrative the 'pair decide to go back to their house' (participant 11). The high SRS narrative illustrates this further using the visual imagery of 'too intoxicated and end up in a situation' (participant 1), this infers that the survivor is to blame by indicating it was a situation that could have been avoided.

Juxtaposing imagery was used in both narratives to describe the setting. The start of the narratives has a cheerful tone using visual imagery of the survivor and attacker 'flirting' (participant 11) and 'getting along laughing' (participant 43) at the party or club. This quickly changes once the setting changes to the 'comfort of own home' (participant 8), which has connotations of safety, but is depicted as the scene of the rape. Therefore, shifting the tone to being inflammatory and arousing anger at the thought that such an act can be committed in a place which was meant to be safe. The narratives also disclose how the male attacker assumes consent; both state how they 'misinterpret' or 'misjudge' the situation (Low SRS participant 6, 9, 16, 18, 32, 43; High SRS participant 9, 11, 12). However, the low SRS narrative uses prior sexual contact as consent such as 'kissing' whereas high SRS states how the 'male feels he is entitled to sex from the female' (participant 9) because the survivor went home with him.

Although assumptions of consent within both narratives are similar, the way the attacker acts out differs. Within high SRS narratives, the re-occurring theme of coercion is apparent, in which the attacker uses pressure and manipulation to coerce the victim into having sex: with one narrative stating 'If the other person continues to try and have intercourse and you give in, I don't consider this rape. Which is probably wrong, but I feel me and many other girls I know do this' (participant 10). This shows how coercion is used but is not conceptualised as rape (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). This is supported through imagery of verbal manipulation of 'teased and pushed towards having sex' (participant 2) and the survivor being 'made to feel as if they have to' (participant 27), thus creating a domineering tone. This differs to the low SRS narrative, which has a more forceful tone similar to the blitz narratives. This is evidenced by the auditory imagery of the survivor saying 'please stop' but the 'partner continues anyway' which shows the attacker ignores the requests of the survivor and rapes her. This also incorporates the theme of silence, in which the victims begging to stop is silenced during the act and can be seen in the high SRS narrative when 'after politely refus[ing]... she gives up

trying' (participant 9). However, this also creates a melancholic tone towards the victim: the silence that follows with giving up, creates a pensive sadness in which the survivor no longer has control and cannot do anything to prevent the rape.

A key theme that arises in both acquaintance rape narratives is emotional understanding such as empathy. This can be seen through the emotional language and tone used to describe the survivor's feelings after the rape. Using imagery to depict that they are 'upset' and 'emotional wreck' which corresponds to the severity of rape and shows how acquaintance rape does have an impact on the victim.

*Contextualisation*

Participants understanding differed slightly by SRS in the respect of conceptualising acquaintance rape. Narratives from both high SRS and low SRS indicated a previous relationship between the rapist and the victim who 'met prior' or on a 'night out' and used 'coercion'. This suggests an understanding that it is not typically a stranger who is a rapist and brings to light how the sequence of events of rape does not always include physical altercation. The low SRS narrative depicted coercion but followed through with force. Thus, this mismatch of stereotype and reality is still present.

The narratives also described how in the eyes of the rapist 'kissing him is implied consent' (participant 33) and they 'misinterpret the situation' (participant 12). It seems that individuals perceive the acquaintance rapist to disregard consent or to misunderstand the communicative signals (Tannen, 1992). Participants understand that possible events leading up to the rape can involve 'manipulation and pressure' and happen through 'taking advantage'. These are key aspects of acquaintance rape.

The narratives also described 'sexual activity' (low SRS participants, 16 participants; high SRS participants, 18 participants): more generally (touching) rather than penetration. This finding

suggests the current understanding of participants is that acquaintance rape does not obviously include penetration and is therefore not legally rape: our participants did not automatically bring penetration to mind when considering acquaintance rape. Participants may be implying that acquaintance rape may not even be 'real rape' (Parrot, 1991) but more consistent with sexual assault. Similarly, not mentioning penetration might be participants minimising the significance of acquaintance rape (Clark, 2007), while still suggesting it can be harmful. This suggests that there are still stereotypical beliefs that acquaintance rape is less serious than stranger rape (L'Armand et al., 1982).

**Acquaintance Rape Script**

The narratives produced from question two (describe a typical acquaintance rape) were similar to the acquaintance rape narratives described by roughly 44% of participants describing typical rape. Here, we highlight novel aspects in the narratives.

Narratives from both high and low SRS participants (shown in Table 2, with theme and imagery tables shown in Supplementary Tables S3 and S4) start with explicitly defining what 'acquaintance' means. This creates a despairing tone. However, each narrative focuses on different characteristics the survivor holds in relationship to the attacker: low SRS narratives places emphasis on trust, the subtheme which incorporates visual imagery of the attacker being 'good person' and trustworthy to the person that rapes them. High SRS narratives depict the survivor as being 'at ease' with the person through the sub theme of comfortable. Low SRS narratives then set the scene through imagery of the setting 'a party', whereas high SRS narrative do not explicitly state the setting inferring less situational factors. However, both narratives then encompass the theme of under the influence, using visual imagery to depict the survivor being drunk. This creates a censorious tone in both narratives as the focus is the

survivor's alcohol consumption, thus fault finding of the future rape ahead (Maurer & Robinson, 2008) of the narrative.

A key theme, present in both narratives, is coercion. This confers that the attacker uses manipulation to pressure the survivor, either physically or emotionally, into sex, creating a domineering tone in the narratives. This leads to the theme of 'force,' in which both narratives depict forceful imagery such as 'forces themselves on her' (participant 34). Nevertheless, the low and high SRS narratives have different subthemes which constitute to leading to the forceful rape: the low SRS narrative depicts rejection of the attacker as a motive for the force used due to them being 'angry' at the rejection from the survivor. This may be linked to the key theme of assuming consent in low SRS narratives, which depicts the attacker 'misinterpreting' the friendship for more. Such misinterpretation causes the survivor to get 'upset' when the victim rejects as they feel that they are 'owed' sex. However, high SRS depicts the motive of force, through the attacker changing their mind. The attacker's disregards this and forces sex.

Within the low SRS narrative, un-acknowledgement plays a key role. This emphasises the notion that both the attacker and the survivor do not necessarily acknowledge the event as rape. The attacker believes it is not 'rape purely because they know the person' (participant 54) and the survivor believes it 'may not be rape because of how drunk she was' (participant 31). This key theme was not present within high SRS narrative; however, the theme of promiscuity was, creating a provocative tone that contrasts to the derogatory tone depicted in un-acknowledgement.

The overall tone differs in the narratives, with low SRS narrative being more valenced through the theme of empathy; incorporating the survivor's feelings at the end of the narrative. Conversely, the high SRS narrative used a more objective tone in describing events only;

focusing on ‘no consent’ and does not include what happened to the victim after the rape. This contrasts to the low SRS narrative that states the survivor does not report the crime after the rape, thus ends the narrative post event whereas the high SRS narratives ends on the rape.

Within both high and low SRS narratives, there was a minority of participants (low SRS participants, 12, 15, 24, 30, 33; high SRS participants, 8, 23, 34, 36, 31) stating that they were ‘not sure’ what acquaintance rape is and even some had ‘never heard’ of it creating an ambiguous tone in the resulting narratives. However, there was a misconception present in three low SRS narratives in which acquaintance rape was interpreted to mean someone helping the rapist for instance ‘acquaintance helps hold the victim down’ (participant 33).

(*Table 2 about here*)

*Contextualisation*

The results of the narrative analysis show there is a rape script for acquaintance rape, which follows a sequence of events just as a blitz script does. Although the narratives depict an understanding of what acquaintance rape can be (the relationship between the victim and rapist, the use of coercion and pressure and no consent), there still persists certain features which could be seen as stereotypical. For example, the narratives both explicitly state the victim was drunk (Sims, Noel, & Maisto, 2007). While it has been found that half of recorded sexual offences involve alcohol consumption either by the perpetrator, victim or both (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton & Buck, 2001), it highlights that half do not involve alcohol. A possible explanation is that alcohol may be a cognitive schema for acquaintance rape, due to how closely the script can follow a seduction (Ryan, 1988) or date rape script. A seduction script typically has many similar features to the acquaintance rape script (going out, having a drink). Such similarities may make it harder for victims to identify that the scenario is rape (Littleton et al., 2009).

Another stereotype present in the narratives is the victim's attractiveness and clothing. This was found in high SRS narratives for both typical rape and typical acquaintance rape. This suggest that participants with high SRS, may understand acquaintance rape to include schemas that describe the ideal victim (Christie, 2001). This insinuates victim blaming and presents a problem for reporting, due to the misunderstanding that only 'attractive' individuals are acquaintance raped (Deitz, Littman, & Bentley, 1984). Thus, those who are acquaintance raped may also hold the same beliefs that they were raped due to their flattering clothing, therefore blame themselves, ergo not report (Heath, Lynch, Fritch, & Wong, 2013).

Contrary to previous research finding that acquaintance rape was seen as less serious (L'armand et al., 1982), the current study found that the low SRS narrative depicted the psychological and damaging outcome felt by the victim by expressing how the rape can 'eat away inside of her, giving her huge trust issues'. This shows that low SRS participants understand that acquaintance rape is psychologically traumatic. However, the high SRS narrative portrays an objective understanding of acquaintance rape that does not disclose the victim's feelings after the rape. This may confer that participants understanding does not constitute acquaintance rape as being serious. It is possible that people with low SRS have more empathy, as they have less acceptance of rape myths and stereotypes (Burt, 1980).

**Victim Analysis**

We ran a series of Pearson's Chi-square and Fisher's Exact tests[4] to establishe the association between SRS and the frequency of the characteristics described for both the victims of typical and acquaintance rape. The results are shown in Table 3[5]. We found that for the victims of

[4] Fisher's Exact test was used when the assumption of Chi-Square (that there are at least 5 responses in each cell) was violated.

[5] In a preliminary analysis, we compared the results of the first 100 participants with the second 100 to establish if the presence of the narrative response questions impacted on the participants' descriptions of the victim. There were no differences in the pattern of data for the first 100 participants to the second, $t(19) = 0.07$, $p = .942$.

typical rape, high SRS participants felt that victims were borderline more likely to be untrusting, $\chi^2$ (1, *N* = 200) = 3.60, *p* = .058, and walking at night, $\chi^2$ (1, *N* = 200) = 3.57, *p* = .059, relative to low SRS participants. Low SRS participants were more likely to suggest victims of typical rape would be alone, $\chi^2$ (1, *N* = 200) = 5.56, *p* = .018, anyone, $\chi^2$ (1, *N* = 200) = 3.76, *p* = .053, or both genders, $\chi^2$ (1, *N* = 200) = 10.89, *p* = .001, than high SRS participants. For victims of acquaintance rape, low SRS participants were more likely to believe the victims of acquaintance rape to be young, $\chi^2$ (1, *N* = 200) = 4.00, *p* = .046, outgoing, $\chi^2$ (1, *N* = 200) = 6.40, *p* = .011, and female, $\chi^2$ (1, *N* = 200) = 3.76, *p* = .053, than high SRS participants.

*Contextualisation*

Contrary to previous research on SRS (Burt, 1980; Check & Malamuth, 1983), this study did not find SRS to moderate all of the judgements of victim characteristics of typical rape. However, it was consistent in various characteristics. The victim characteristic 'walking at night' was reported significantly higher by high SRS than by low SRS participants. This suggests that this stereotype may be more typical in individuals with more extreme traditional roles. This finding is consistent with Burt (1980) and can be explained by the ideal victim image (Christie, 2001; Dignan, 2004). High SRS people may incorporate this image into their scripts that a victim is carrying out their everyday business when assaulted. Furthermore, this element could be directly extracted from their blitz script (Ryan, 2011). This has implications for high SRS individuals who may only perceive the risks of rape to occur when walking at night and thus may not protected themselves nor acknowledge rape if it is occurs in different setting. This could lead to re-victimization if individuals do not perceive the risks to be extended to the safety of more domesticated settings (Littleton, Grills, Layh & Rudolph, 2017).

Furthermore, the victim characteristic 'untrusting' had a significant association with SRS, consistent with Abrams, Viki, Masser and Bohner (2003; see also, Pollard, 1992; Reynolds,

2017). By conceptualising rape victims to be untrusting after rape, it may promote self-fulfilling prophecy (Martire, 2017) within victims who become untrusting in all aspects, including the police. This, therefore, may be a fundamental reason that prevents reporting. This further implicates the need to dispel this stereotype.

Low SRS individuals were more likely to acknowledge that victims could be of both genders than high SRS individuals, suggesting that their view of victims is less constricted by gender role. This further supports past research that low SRS is associated with lower acceptance of rape myths (Burt, 1980). By not understanding that males can also be victims of rape, high SRS individuals might not acknowledge rape in men nor take it as seriously (Newburn & Stanko, 2013)

The finding that low SRS individuals thought typical rape victims were more likely to be alone prior to an assault than high SRS individuals mirrors previous research (Ryan, 1988). This result is not consistent with theory that the less extreme traditional gender roles an individual has, the less acceptance of rape myth they would be (Burt, 1980). This indicates that people with low SRS still hold some stereotypical views and therefore has implications for how victims will be perceived.

Regarding the typical acquaintance rape victims, we found low SRS individuals also indicated acquaintance rape victims would be more outgoing than high SRS individuals. This potentially reflects a better understanding of rape victims in this group of participants. Typical gender roles (Burt, 1980) suggest women should be weaker and less outgoing (especially in seeking sex). However, acquaintance rape victims can be anyone, and are as likely to be those who are outgoing as those that are not.

A final important issue emerging from our data, is that few of our participants suggested that anyone can be a victim of rape:  only 22.5% of participants explicitly stating ‘anyone’ can be a

victim. This myth may cause people to not realise the potential risk of rape and then not think that they will be believed if they report rape.

One limitation regarding this contextualisation is that in our study the Cronbach's alpha for the SRS was lower than typically found before. It was in the minimally acceptable range (DeVellis, 1991). This may reflect that our participants differed in their understanding of the questions in the SRS to previous samples measured with it (our sample was British, tested in 2018). It may be that the SRS is therefore more limited in its applicability than previously thought. The implications here are that the study differences reported above may not be as reliable as we would have hoped.

**Conclusion**

A strength of this work was in use of a large sample used, with narrative analysis applied allowing us to adequately explore differences in narratives produced by groups of participants. High SRS participants were more fatalistic in their narratives indicative of victim blaming with more visible descriptions of the aggressive acts. Low SRS narratives by contrast were blunter and emotionally charged and explored the emotional effects on the survivor. High SRS narratives involved more victim blaming and involved more rape myths than low SRS ones who emphasised aspects of the attacker more so. High SRS narratives suggested that acquaintance rape involved coercion, whereas the low SRS narratives were more likely to involve aggression. Low SRS acquaintance rape narratives also appear to minimise the attack more so that than high SRS narratives. These differences highlight how different types of participants are likely to interpret a sexual event: If a person with high SRS is a juror, they are more likely to blame the victim than a person with low SRS. Similarly, the SRS of police officers to whom survivors disclose an attack to may affect how they interpret and subsequently investigate the attack.

This work, therefore, has important consequences for our understanding of how different people construe sexual assault.

The purpose of the present research was to investigate young adults' understanding of rape and acquaintance rape. While we found that there was a greater awareness of acquaintance rape in our sample than in Ryan's (1988), many of our participants were unaware of the concept or that their understanding is beleaguered by stereotypes. We found differences in scripts of rape and acquaintance rape narratives and stereotypes of victims based on SRS, with low SRS participants describing rape scenarios using more emotional language and imagery, whereas those with high SRS were more objective and colder in their language use. This highlights how SRS affects how people view and think about rape. This work furthers our understanding of sexual scripts, highlighting that not only does gender matter (Dunlap, Lynch, Jewell, Wasarhaley, & Golding, 2015), but also personality variables such as SRS. Further work might explore how other personality variables influence our rape scripts. Presumably those with lower Rape Myth Acceptance (Hayes, Abbott, & Cook, 2016) will produce more scripts akin to the acquaintance rape script.

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