

## Do Sexually Violent Media Indirectly Contribute to Antisocial Behavior?

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### Introduction: The Indirect-Effects Perspective

The research described herein focuses on violent sexual media, particularly rape.<sup>1</sup> It demonstrates the importance of analyzing media stimuli by the “messages” or meanings they convey. Meaning is, of course, a function of both the message and the receiver’s interpretations of it.

The message given the most attention here involved the consequences of sexual aggression. A series of experiments found that rape depictions that showed the victim ultimately deriving physical pleasure from her experience fostered attitudes more condoning of aggression against women. Rape depictions that portrayed the victim abhorring the experience, on the other hand, were less likely to have such effects.

According to these findings, a PG-rated film showing rape in a positive light could be more socially detrimental than an X-rated film not showing sexual violence. The degree of sexual explicitness, according to this approach, is less relevant than the “message” behind the depiction of sexual aggression.<sup>2</sup>

Besides discriminating among differing “messages” in studying media

1. The term *pornography* is used in this essay to refer to sexually explicit media without any pejorative meaning intended. Also, the terms *aggression* and *violence* are used interchangeably herein, as are the terms *sexually violent media* and *violent pornography*.

2. Of course, sexual explicitness in and of itself should not be ignored as a conveyor of messages. Based on cultural and personal background and experience, sexual explicitness may be interpreted in many different ways. For example, the uncovering of a woman’s body may be perceived by some as debasing her. Similarly, the public display of sex may break taboos that could be interpreted as sanctioning other restricted behaviors (Malamuth, Jaffe, & Feshbach, 1977). However, such interpretations are not inherent to sexually explicit media, whereas a positive depiction of rape or child molestation is not equally a matter of individual interpretation.

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442 stimuli, the research differentiates among media consumers. No influence works in a vacuum, and media influences are viewed as combining and interacting with a variety of other influences—sometimes counteracting them, sometimes reinforcing them, and at other times not having much of any effect.

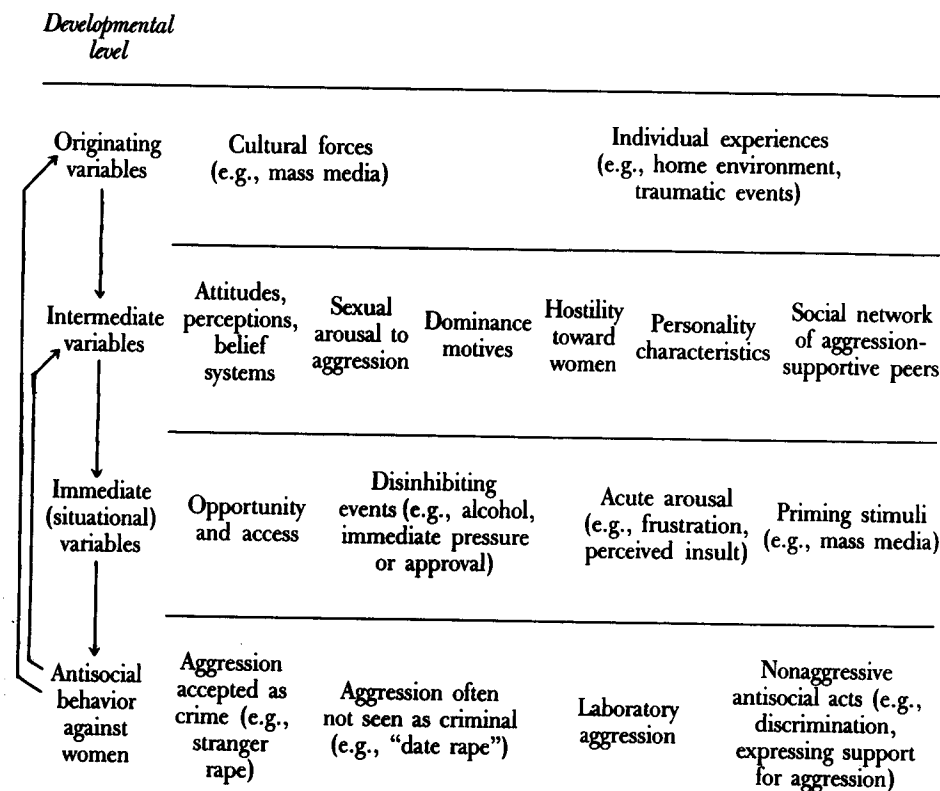
The current strong interest in exploring a possible relationship between pornography and crime has led to a search for direct links between media exposure and deviant behavior. People have sought an immediate causal connection between media action and audience imitation. For example, a civil suit brought against NBC alleged that a rape portrayal in a television movie, *Born Innocent*, resulted in an imitation rape by some juvenile viewers. However, because of the ethical constraints against researchers' creating conditions that might increase serious aggression (e.g., exposing individuals to large doses of violent pornography and seeing if some commit rapes), experimentation to study direct effects is very limited.

Beyond the dramatic popular notion of violent pornography spurring a minority of sexual deviants and "weirdos" to criminal acts lies the far more complex but also potentially far more pervasive area of indirect effects. The evidence presented here suggests that a wide range of media affect the general population in a variety of different ways. It looks at how an aggregate of media sexual violence could affect a person's attitudes, which are concurrently being shaped by family, peers, other media messages, and a host of other influences. Such attitudes might contribute to stranger and date rape, a desire, not acted upon, to be sexually aggressive, sanctioning the sexual aggression of others, or sexist and discriminatory acts. Even when not translated into violent behavior, such effects have wide social implications.

Elsewhere (Malamuth & Briere, 1986), we described an indirect-effects model of the hypothesized development of aggressive behavior against women (see fig. 14.1). To summarize this model briefly, individual conditions and the broader social climate are postulated as the originating influences on the individual. The mass media are considered among the *many* social forces that may, in interaction with a variety of other cultural and individual factors, affect the development of intermediate attributes such as attitudes, arousal patterns, motivations, emotions, and personality characteristics. These intermediate variables, in complex interaction with each other and with situational circumstances such as alcohol or acute arousal, may precipitate behavior ranging from passive support to actual aggression.<sup>3</sup> In addition to contributing to attitude formation, the mass media

3. The focus in this model is on the factors that may contribute to the development of antisocial behavior. Obviously, various factors, including some media portrayals, may lead to the development of attributes stimulating prosocial behavior and reducing antisocial responses. Also, this model does not

Figure 14.1: Hypothesized Development of Aggression Against Women



may increase the recall of "prime" antisocial thoughts, feelings, and behavioral urges that were previously formed (Berkowitz, 1984).

For some individuals, antisocial acts may take the form of violence that comes to the attention of the law, such as stranger rape or wife-battering. For others, these same underlying factors may contribute to actions that are not typically prosecuted but instead are manifested as aggression in dating situations or in laboratory settings, a reported desire to commit acts of sexual violence, discrimination against women, and/or expressed support for the sexual aggression of others. We are not lumping illegal violence together with all other antisocial behaviors but we are suggesting that all these behaviors may share some underlying causes, including media influences.

This model indicates possible avenues by which cultural forces such as the media may change a person's intermediate responses and how such

necessarily exclude other possible effects of sexually violent media, some of which may not necessarily be judged harmful by many observers.

444 changes may ultimately affect his or her own aggressive behavior under some circumstances. This model also suggests that attitudinal changes in some people may affect the aggressive behavior of others. If a person becomes more tolerant of violence against women as a result of media exposure or other causal factors, for example, his or her reactions to the sexual aggression of others may change even if his or her own aggressive behavior is not altered.

This general model does not suppose a linear sequence of events but a reciprocating system of mutually influencing factors, as indicated by the upward arrows in figure 14.1. For example, mass media portrayals of sexual violence may contribute to attitudes and perceptions which, in combination with personality characteristics derived from aversive childhood experiences, may result in sexual aggression on a date. This aggression, especially if unpunished, might produce a further alteration in attitudes and perceptions (including perceptions of self) that could attract the individual to a peer network supportive of sexual aggression. These peers, themselves a product of "originating" and "intermediate" variables, might then provide greater support and approval for further sexual aggression.

We have suggested two possible routes culminating in sexual aggression. First, an individual may "progress" through the stages hypothesized to produce sexual violence. Second, mass media stimuli and other cultural influences may impact on individuals who are not sexually violent themselves but who nevertheless, because of their negative attitudes toward women, support and reinforce sexual violence by others. Such support may manifest itself in blaming a rape victim, supporting another man's aggression in a "locker room" conversation, or even one's decision as a jury member in a rape trial. The idea that such thought patterns may encourage sexual violence is reminiscent of the "cultural climate" concept suggested by Brownmiller (1975). It argues that media influences which increase cultural supports for sexual aggression need not directly produce violence to have seriously harmful effects. Of course, the indirect model need not be restricted to sexual aggression but may apply to nonsexual aggression as well. For example, media depictions of violent vigilantes as heroes (for example, the *Death Wish* series of movies) may contribute to a cultural climate condoning similar behavior in "real world" settings.

The indirect-effects model provides the basis for this essay's twin hypotheses that (1) exposure to some sexually violent media may contribute to the development of attitudes that condone aggression against women and (2) such attitudes, in combination with other influences and circumstances, may lead to sexually violent acts.

Hypothesized Processes Leading to Attitude Change

Obviously, most viewers of media sexual violence distinguish between fantasy and reality and don't necessarily perceive what is depicted in the media as a model for behavior. However, there is considerable research indicating that even when people recognize an event as fictional, it can nonetheless affect some people's perceptions of reality and their attitudes. Such media influences may be more likely to occur when the sexual violence is presented in a positive light or when the audience is sexually aroused by it.

Table 14.1 summarizes several possible processes by which media sexual violence might lead to attitudes that are accepting of violence against women. I adapted these from Bandura's (1977, 1986) description of ways by which normally censured acts become more intellectually and emotionally acceptable. They include:

1. Labeling sexual violence as a sexual rather than a violent act.
2. Adding to perceptions that sexual aggression is normative and culturally acceptable.
3. Altering perceptions of the consequences of sexual aggression; in particular, minimizing the seriousness of the consequences to the victim and reinforcing the myth that victims derive pleasure from sexual assaults.

Table 14.1: Hypothesized Processes Mediating Impact of Media Sexual Violence on Attitudes

<i>Media Exposure:</i>	Sexual aggression depicted in "positive" fashion and/or associated with sexual arousal					
↓	<i>Perceptual and Emotional Processes:</i>	<i>Euphemistic Labeling</i> Labeling aggression as sexual rather than violent	<i>Normative Perceptions</i> Increase Perceptions that aggression is normative	<i>Consequences</i> Minimize seriousness to victim	<i>Responsibility Attribution</i> Increase victim blame	<i>Valuation</i> Increase positive reactions to aggression
↓	<i>Attitude Changes:</i>	Increase in attitudes facilitating sexual aggression (e.g., rape myth acceptance, acceptance of violence against women)				

4. Changing attributions of responsibility to place more blame on the victim.
5. Elevating the positive value of sexual aggression by associating it with sexual pleasure and a sense of conquest.
6. Reducing negative emotional reactions to sexually aggressive acts.

Some of the studies discussed later measure these cognitive and emotional processes.

### The Anatomy of Media Sexual Violence

A comparison of sexual versus nonsexual media violence helps to isolate the characteristics of sexually violent depictions. Of course, males act against females in the vast majority of sexually aggressive depictions (e.g., Smith, 1976a,b), whereas the victim is usually male in nonsexual portrayals of violence (Gerbner, 1972). Two other important differences distinguish sexual and nonsexual violence. First, victims of nonsexual aggression are usually shown as outraged by their experience and intent on avoiding victimization. They, and also at times the perpetrators of the aggression, suffer from the violence. However, when sexual violence is portrayed, there is frequently the suggestion that, despite initial resistance, the victim secretly desired the abusive treatment and eventually derived pleasure from it. This provides a built-in justification for aggression that would otherwise be considered unjustifiable. Sexual violence is often presented without negative consequences for either the victim or the perpetrator. For example, less than 3 percent of the rapists in "adult" books surveyed by Smith (1976a,b) suffered negative consequences, and their victims were seldom shown to have had regrets about being raped. Similarly, in a recent content analysis of videos, Palys (1986) found that the majority of sexual aggressors were portrayed in a positive fashion and only seldom did their violence result in negative consequences.

The second distinction between sexual and nonsexual violence involves the element of sexual arousal. Such arousal in response to sexually violent depictions might result in subliminal conditioning and cognitive changes in the consumer by associating physical pleasure with violence. Therefore, even sexual aggression depicted negatively may have harmful effects because of the sexual arousal induced by the explicitness of the depiction. For example, a person who views a sexually violent scene might feel that the violence is immoral but may nonetheless be sexually aroused by it. Such

arousal might motivate him to rationalize the aggression or to minimize its seriousness or its consequences.

Given these issues, particular concern about sexual aggression in the media is based not only on the frequency of sexual as compared to nonsexual violent portrayals; the positive manner in which sexual violence is portrayed and its potential to link or reinforce the link between sex and violence justifies special concern.

The research described below provides some support for the indirect effects model's two interrelated hypotheses that exposure to media depictions can help form attitudes supportive of real-life sexual aggression and that such attitudes can in turn contribute to actual aggression against women.

### From Media Exposure to Antisocial Attitu

#### *Survey Data*

Several studies assessed the correlation between the degree of men's exposure to sexually explicit media and their attitudes supportive of violence against women. Such correlational studies can only reveal associations between the amount of media people reported consuming and their attitudes. They cannot indicate whether the media were responsible for the attitudes. Unfortunately, these studies did not distinguish between sexually violent and sexually nonviolent media. Had they focused exclusively on sexually violent media rather than on pornography in general, it is likely that the links to attitudes condoning aggression would have emerged as strongly, if not more so.

In most studies, higher levels of reported exposure to sexually explicit media correlated with higher levels of attitudes supportive of violence against women. For example, in a sample of college men, Malamuth and Check (1985a) found that a higher level of readership of sexually explicit magazines was correlated with a stronger belief that women enjoy forced sex. Similarly, Check (1984) found that the more exposure to pornography a diverse sample of Canadian men had, the higher their acceptance of rape myths, violence against women, and general sexual callousness. Briere, Corne, Runtz, and Malamuth (1984) reported similar correlations in a sample of college males. On the other hand, the failure to find a statistically significant correlation in another study led Malamuth (in progress) to examine other interesting correlations.

That study asked subjects to indicate how much information about

448 sexuality they had obtained in their childhood from various sources, such as peers, parents, church, educational media, educational courses, sexually explicit media, and doctors. Pornography emerged as the second most important source of information, second only to peers. Subjects who reported obtaining more information from pornography also held attitudes more supportive of violence against women. Such a correlation was not found with the other sources of information about sexuality. Information from some, such as educational courses, actually correlated with lower levels of attitudes supportive of violence against women. In fact, pornography's link to antisocial attitudes tended to be stronger when compared to other sources of sexual information than when measured alone.

Focusing only on quantity of exposure, therefore, may be an oversimplified approach. Pornography's degree of influence on a person may depend largely on how that exposure interacts with other influences. People raised with little education about sexuality or in families where sex was treated as "taboo" may be more susceptible to the influences of pornography than those reared with considerable education about sex (Malamuth, 1978; Malamuth & Billings, 1985). It makes sense that those with other sources of sex information can more accurately assess the myths about women and sexuality portrayed in some pornography. However, those without much sex education might be more apt to use pornography as a primary source of information.

### *Experimental Research*

A growing body of experimental research complements the survey data linking media exposure to attitudes. The studies described below have shown connections between sexually violent media and attitudes supportive of sexual aggression but have not revealed similar relations with equally explicit, nonviolent stimuli which portrayed both sexes in equal power roles. Here it is possible to consider a causal link between exposure and attitudes because other factors have been controlled. Still, caution must be exercised in generalizing findings from controlled situations to naturally occurring settings.

Research has examined the impact of "positive" vs. "negative" rape portrayals in two ways. One series of studies assessed how either victim arousal or abhorrence at the end of a rape depiction changed the way in which the assault was perceived when the rape itself remained identical in the two versions. When the rape victim became aroused, male subjects labeled the assault more as a sexual act. They also perceived greater justification for it, reported a greater likelihood that they and other men would

commit such an act, and saw the victim as more responsible for what had occurred (Donnerstein, 1984; Rapaport, 1984). These effects were particularly pronounced for more sexually aggressive men.

These experiments show that changing the outcome of a rape affects the way it is perceived. They do not show that these perceptions carry over to actual rape. In another series of studies, the carryover effects of perceptions of and attitudes toward rape were directly examined. These studies assessed whether rapes depicting victim arousal changed subjects' perceptions of other rapes, altered beliefs about women's reactions to sexual assaults, and increased the acceptance of violence against women.

In three experiments, male subjects were exposed either to depictions of mutually consenting sex, to rape in which the female victim eventually became aroused, or to rape abhorred by the victim. Afterwards, the subjects were shown a rape depiction and asked about their perceptions of the act and the victim. In two of the studies, those subjects exposed to the "positive" rape portrayal perceived the second rape as less negative than those first exposed to the other depictions (Malamuth, Haber, & Feshbach, 1980; Malamuth & Check, 1980). One of these studies also found that the rape depicting victim arousal led men to perceive rape as a more normative act (Malamuth & Check, 1980). Subjects in the third experiment were asked how women in general would react to being victimized by sexual violence (Malamuth & Check, 1985a). Those exposed to a "positive" rape portrayal believed that a higher percentage of women would derive pleasure from being sexually assaulted. This effect of the portrayal was particularly apparent in men with higher inclinations to aggress against women.

A fourth experiment conducted outside the laboratory yielded similar results (Malamuth & Check, 1981). Male and female undergraduates were randomly assigned to one of two exposure conditions. Participants in the experimental condition were given free tickets to view feature-length films on two different evenings that included portrayals of women as victims of aggression in sexual and nonsexual scenes. These films suggested that the aggression was justified and/or had "positive" consequences. Subjects in the control condition were given tickets to other films on the same evenings which did not contain any sexual violence. The movies shown in both exposure conditions have been aired with some editing on national television. Subjects viewed these films with moviegoers who purchased tickets and were not part of the research. Classmates of the recruited subjects who did not see the films were also studied as an "untreated" control group. Several days after the films were viewed, a "Sexual Attitude Survey" was administered to the entire classes. (Subjects were not aware of the rela-

450 tionship between this survey—purportedly administered by a polling agency—and the earlier movies some students had seen as part of an ostensibly unrelated study.)

Subject responses were assessed by scales developed by Burt (1980). They included Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence (AIV) against women (e.g., acceptance of sexual aggression and wife battering), Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) (e.g., the belief that women secretly desire to be raped), and Adversarial Sexual Beliefs (ASB) (e.g., the notion that women act sly and manipulating when out to attract a man). These measures were embedded within many irrelevant items intended to disguise the purpose of the survey.

Exposure to the films portraying “positive” effects significantly increased the scores of male but not female subjects on the AIV scale.<sup>4</sup> A similar pattern was observed on the RMA scale. Only the ASB scores were not at all affected. Taken together, the data demonstrated effects sustained over time of sexually violent movies on men’s acceptance of violence against women.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the results were obtained in a nonlaboratory setting seemingly devoid of “demand characteristics,” that is, researchers’ subtly conveying their hypotheses to subjects. Recently, Demare (1985) replicated these results using very similar procedures.

An earlier experiment by Malamuth, Reisin, and Spinner (1979) found no attitude changes following exposure to media sexual violence that did not depict victim arousal. In the experiments showing significant media effects, the stimuli were specifically selected because they clearly depicted violence against women as having “positive” consequences. These findings suggest that certain antisocial effects may be limited to media stimuli depicting “positive” consequences of sexual aggression.

Still, sexually violent films that do not portray “positive” consequences may nonetheless affect consumers in undesirable ways. For example, Linz (1985) studied the effects of repeated exposure to X- and R-rated feature-length films portraying sexual violence with primarily negative consequences to victims. He found that these movies had desensitizing effects on

4. Some might argue that the use of college students in these and similar studies limits the ability to generalize from the findings. That implies that college students are more susceptible to media influences than non-college students or younger people. In fact, less educated and younger groups might be more susceptible to such influences.

5. It would be desirable to examine the effects of sexually violent media over longer time periods than a week. However, ethics committees have in certain instances refused to permit such delays, requiring that subjects be debriefed soon after the media exposures. These debriefings are intended to mitigate the negative effects of exposure to sexually violent media. They appear to have been effective (e.g., Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981; Linz, 1985; Malamuth & Check, 1984). They point to the need for further research on the efficacy of educational interventions, including those presented via the mass media, designed to reduce attitudes supportive of violence against women and to reduce susceptibility to the possible negative impact of sexually violent portrayals.

viewers. In one experiment, male college students who viewed five such movies had fewer negative emotional reactions to such films. There was even a tendency for the subjects’ “desensitization” to carry over to their judgments of a rape victim in a simulated trial presented following their exposure to the films. In a second experiment, Linz (1985) again found that males exposed to several R-rated, sexually violent films became less sympathetic to a rape victim in a simulated trial and were less able to empathize with rape victims in general.

#### From Attitudes to Antisocial Behav

Although psychologists have demonstrated that there is seldom a strong direct link between attitudes and behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), several researchers have contended that attitudes accepting or justifying sexual aggression are an important cause of aggression against women (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Russell, 1984). Burt has presented the most influential theoretical perspective in this area (1978; 1980; 1983). She contends that a cultural matrix which encourages rigid sex roles and supports male dominance over females generates attitudes supportive of rape. These attitudes act as “psychological releasers or neutralizers, allowing potential rapists to turn off social prohibitions against injuring or using others” (1978, p. 282). To assess such attitudes and beliefs, Burt (1980) developed the scales used in the experiments described earlier, including the AIV, RMA, and ASB.

Studies by Malamuth and his colleagues provide some support for Burt’s perspective. They show a significant relationship between Burt’s rape-condoning attitude scales and men’s self-reported likelihood of engaging in a wide range of violent acts against women as long as the men suffered no negative consequences (e.g., Briere & Malamuth, 1983; Malamuth, 1981; 1984a). However, some commentators have contended that the linkage between attitudes and actual aggressive behavior is assumed too facilely in such studies (e.g., Vance, 1985). Fortunately, several studies have recently examined this connection and have found consistently that the attitude scales can predict actual aggressive behavior. This, of course, does not mean that everyone with attitudes condoning aggression will act on them.

#### *Laboratory Aggression*

Malamuth (1983) tested whether men’s attitudes could predict their aggressive behavior in a laboratory setting. He also examined whether men’s arousal to rape depictions compared to their arousal to consensual sex depictions predicted laboratory aggression.

452 About a week after both attitudes (on the AIV and RMA scales) and sexual arousal to rape were measured, subjects participated in what they believed was a totally unrelated "extrasensory perception" experiment. In that session, they were angered by a female aide of the experimenter who pretended to be another subject. Later in the session, subjects could vent their aggression against her by administering unpleasant noise as punishment for her incorrect responses. They were told that punishment was thought to impede rather than aid extrasensory transmission, but they were given the option of trying it out. Subjects were also asked how much they wanted to hurt their co-subject with the noise. Men with attitudes more condoning of aggression and with higher levels of sexual arousal to rape were more aggressive against the woman and wanted to hurt her to a greater extent.

Malamuth and Check (1982) successfully replicated these results in a similar experiment that did not consider the subjects' arousal to rape but did assess attitudes toward aggression. Later, Malamuth (1984b) examined the extent to which several measures related to violence against women (including attitudes) predicted laboratory aggression against both female and male targets. While strong relations between the predictor measures and aggressive behavior were found for female targets, only weak relations were obtained for male targets. Taken together, these three experiments consistently showed that attitudes condoning aggression against women related to objectively observable behavior—laboratory aggression against women.

Although such laboratory assessments of aggression have the advantage of being an objective measurement not relying on subjects' self-reports, they have the disadvantage of using a setting that some researchers argue is artificial and lacking in ecological validity (e.g., Kaplan, 1983). The case for linking attitudes condoning aggression with actual aggressive behavior is strengthened by studies that have measured naturally occurring behavior.

#### *Aggression in Naturalistic Settings*

These studies have used samples of men from the general population as well as convicted rapists. The importance of attitudes toward violence is confirmed by data showing that men's aggression against women is linked with their own attitudes as well as those of their peers.

Ageton (1983) gauged the extent to which a variety of measures predicted levels of sexual aggression. Eleven- to seventeen-year-old subjects, drawn from a representative national sample, were interviewed in five consecutive years between 1976 and 1981. Based on subjects' self-reported behavior, they were categorized as sexually aggressive or nonaggressive.

The results showed that involvement with delinquent peers at a young age was the strongest factor in predicting sexual aggression later in life. Personal attitudes toward sexual assault was another factor found to differentiate significantly between those who became sexually aggressive and those who did not. Ageton therefore concluded that "peer-group support for sexually aggressive behavior does appear to be relevant to the performance of this behavior, as do attitudes supportive of rape myths."

Another study was recently reported by Alder (1985). She used a subsample from a larger representative sample of men from a particular county in Oregon. Variables potentially predictive of sexual aggression were assessed. These included family, social class, educational attainment, war experience, peer behavior, and personal attitudes toward sexual aggression. The findings suggested that the most important factor relating to sexual aggression was having sexually aggressive friends. The other two factors found likely to contribute to sexual aggression were attitudes legitimizing such aggression and military service in the Vietnam war.

Several studies using samples of college men also reported significant links between attitudes and actual sexual aggressiveness (Briere, Corne, Runtz, & Malamuth, 1984; Koss, Leonard, Beezley, & Oros, 1985; Mosher & Anderson, 1986; Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984). These studies measured self-reported sexual aggression on a continuum of behaviors ranging from psychological pressure on women to rape. Similar results were reported by Kanin (1985) who compared the attitudes of 71 university students who admitted committing rape with a control group of nonaggressive college males. He found that a much higher percentage of rapists than control subjects justified rape in general. Moreover, he found that rapists were far more likely to believe their reputations would be enhanced among their peers by aggressive behavior toward women, particularly women perceived as "pick-ups," "loose," "teasers," or "economic exploiters."

In a study of 155 men who were mostly college students, Malamuth (1986) broke down the variables thought to set the stage for sexual aggression into three classes. Motivation for sexual aggression included sexual arousal to aggression, hostility toward women, and dominance as a motive for sex. Disinhibition to commit sexual aggression included attitudes condoning aggression and antisocial personality characteristics. Opportunity to aggress sexually was assessed by sexual experience. These rape "predictors" were then correlated with self-reports of sexual aggression. While the "predictors" related individually to sexual aggression, interactive combinations of these variables allowed far more accurate prediction of varying levels of sexual aggression. Subjects who had relatively high scores on all of the predictor variables were also highly aggressive sexually. These data

454 have been successfully replicated by Malamuth and Check (1985b) in an independent sample of 297 males. The findings suggest that a person's attitudes accepting of violence against women may be one of several important contributors to sexually aggressive acts, but that none alone is sufficient for serious sexual aggression.

Taken together, the data on unincarcerated subjects point clearly to a relationship between sexual aggression and attitudes supportive of violence against women, although they also highlight the importance of other contributing factors. One of these other factors, peer support, might also be influenced by the impact of media exposure on the audience's attitudes. The findings on unincarcerated men are reinforced by research on incarcerated rapists.

### *Convicted Rapists*

Many clinical studies report that convicted rapists frequently hold callous attitudes about rape and believe in rape myths to a relatively high degree (e.g., Gager & Schurr, 1976). Data from more systematic studies of rapists' attitudes tend to corroborate the clinical reports. For example, Wolfe and Baker (1980) studied the beliefs and attitudes of 86 convicted rapists and reported that virtually all believed that their actions did not constitute rape or were justified by the circumstances. Unfortunately, these investigators did not distinguish between general endorsement of rape myths and rationalizations of the rapists' own crimes. Burt (1983) found that although rapists perceived the same degree of violence as the general public in vignettes describing aggression against women, they were less likely to perceive the violence as "bad" and more likely to justify it. Finally, Scully and Marolla (1984, 1985) found that rapists tended to believe in rape myths, particularly those justifying violence against women, more than control groups composed of other felons.

### Other Relevant Data

#### *Nonsexual Media Violence*

Although research on nonsexual media violence has not devoted much attention to the formation and importance of attitudes (Rule & Ferguson, 1986), some relevant findings exist. The research of Huesmann, Eron, Klein, Brice, and Fischer (1983) attempts the most direct assessment of cause and effect relations in this area. After involving elementary school children in a program designed to change their attitudes about television violence, the researchers studied whether changed attitudes translated into

less aggressive behavior. The students were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. Over a two-year span, the experimental group was educated about the harmful aspects of television violence while the control group received neutral treatments. Although the frequency of the children's free-time viewing of violence did not change, their attitudes about the violence did. In addition, their peers reported reduced aggression in the experimental group but no change in the behavior of the control group. These data suggest that changed attitudes about TV violence led to a reduction in personal aggression by children, as reported by their peers.

Another relevant study by Van der Voort (1986) assessed whether individual differences in children's perceptual, emotional, and attitudinal reactions to TV violence predicted peer-reported aggression. Significant relations were found between the predictors (measured one year earlier) and actual aggression. The more children approved of the violence of "good guys" on TV, the higher their aggression, even after factors such as socioeconomic levels and school achievement were controlled. Van der Voort also found that parents who were less concerned about their children viewing violence had more aggressive children. While these findings suggest a relation between attitudes and behavior, they do not enable us to draw cause-and-effect conclusions.

### *Jury Studies*

One aspect of the model presented in figure 14.1 is the idea that changes in attitudes may be of importance even if these attitudes do not increase the likelihood that the person himself will commit aggressive acts. Jury decisions, for example, involve attitudes about whether particular behavior is aggressive.

Feild and Bienen (1980) examined the impact of personal juror characteristics on reactions to a simulated rape case. The "jurors" in the simulated trials were groups of citizens, police officers, rape counselors, and rapists. Juror attitudes about rape were found to be highly predictive of their decisions in the rape trial. For example, people who believed that rape victims often precipitate rape were more lenient toward the rapist than those not holding such an attitude. If attitudes condoning of violence against women can result in milder punishment of rapists, the deterrence against rape may be reduced by social attitudes.

The research presented has provided support for the model hypothesizing indirect causal influences of media sexual violence on antisocial behavior against women. Data were described which indicate (1) linkages between exposure to media portrayals of sexual violence and resultant



456 attitudes supportive of sexual aggression; and (2) a relationship between such attitudes and a variety of antisocial behaviors against women. The data suggest that such attitudes may lead to high levels of sexual aggression if combined with other factors such as peer support for aggression, sexual arousal to aggression, antisocial personality characteristics, and hostility toward women. Clearly, much additional research is needed to further develop and test this model.

As with many behaviors, it is apparent that antisocial behavior against women is a function of several interacting causal factors. It is very difficult to gauge the relative influence of media exposure alone, but it would appear that, by itself, it exerts a small influence. But this appears to be true to some degree for all the contributing causes. Only in interaction with other factors might they be substantially influential. The reduction of antisocial behavior against women, therefore, requires attention to all potentially contributing factors, including the mass media.

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