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Avigail Moor

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She Dresses to Attract, He Perceives Seduction: A gender gap in attribution of intent to women's revealing style of dress and its relation to blaming the victims of sexual violence

By Avigail Moor¹

Abstract

Victims of sexual violence are often blamed for precipitating their own assault with their so-called "provocative" body-revealing style of dress, which is viewed as conveying consent for sexual advances. To explore some of the grounds for this allegation as well as its accurateness, the present study examines the attributions made by both sexes regarding the motivation for women's sexualized appearance. The factual connection between revealing clothing and actual occurrences of sexual invasions is examined as well. The results demonstrate a gender-based attribution gap wherein men report perceiving the sexualized look as indicating an interest in sex and intent to seduce, whereas women cite their wish to feel and look attractive as its primary cause, while entirely rejecting the seduction claim. This gap is examined in the context of the current widespread sexual objectification of women and the social construction of female beauty in sexual terms, as well as the finding that in reality there is no connection between style of dress and sexual victimization of any sort.

Keywords: Misperception of sexual intent, Rape myths, Body-revealing appearance

Blaming the victim of sexual violence for precipitating her own victimization is a rather common practice in present society (Ar dovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Burt, 1980; Cowan, 2000; De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Kopper, 1996; Koss & Harvey, 1991). These stereotyped attitudes, generally subsumed in the term "rape myths" (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), typically revolve around the notion that victims somehow contributed to their own victimization and are therefore responsible for its occurrence (Koss & Harvey, 1991). Perpetrators frequently use these claims in their defense, and society is all too willing, even eager, to cooperate with this line of argumentation and lay the bulk of the blame on those who were attacked. Evidence attests to a fairly wide acceptance of these prejudiced collective beliefs among the general population, with over 50% of the public endorsing them to some degree or another (Buddie & Miller, 2002; Burt 1980). Significantly, men appear to endorse them to a considerably greater degree than women (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Kopper, 1996; Russell, 2004).

Among the most prevalent of these allegations is a charge linking sexual aggression to the victim's so called "provocative", revealing wear (Burt 1980; Lonsway &

¹ Clinical psychologist and head of the Women Studies program at Tel Hai College in Israel. She is also on the faculty of the Social Work Department. In addition she serves as a psychological consultant to several rape crisis centers in Northern Israel. Her clinical work focuses on the treatment of women in general and survivors of sexual violence in particular. Her past and present research centers primarily on the social context of sexual violence against women and its psychological sequelae. She has also written articles on treatment for abuse survivors. Other research interests concern the psychology of women and the effect of gender-based power imbalances on women's mental health.

Fitzgerald, 1994; Koss & Harvey, 1991). The premise behind this particular rape myth is that women dress in body-revealing attire in order to seduce men and convey an interest in sexual advances. This supposedly makes them culpable for any subsequent sexual invasions by the men they had allegedly seduced. But is this presumption accurate? Do women in fact have seduction in mind when they dress revealingly, or are their actual motives completely different and entirely misunderstood by men? To date, there has been no empirical examination of the claims embodied in the myth proclaiming provocation and seduction, nor has there been an attempt to uncover the genuine motivations underlying women's choice to dress in a revealing fashion. The present study seeks to fill this gap. Keeping in mind that no behavior on the part of the victim ever justifies violence, the present study investigates the merits of this underlying premise in order to question the validity of the myth it fuels. It is argued that to the degree that it is disproved, so is the related rape myth. To that end, women's motivation for dressing revealingly is examined alongside men's perceptions of these motives. The goal is to establish whether there is indeed a misunderstanding among the sexes, such that men ascribe sexual intentions to minimal clothing where no such intentions exist at all.

Men's perception of sexual intent in women

Men's perception of women's sexual intent must be examined in a social context, most notably in relation to the widespread practice of sexual objectification of women, so central to it. In essence, this cultural practice constructs women as objects for the viewing pleasure, sexual lust and desire of men, reducing them to their sexuality above all else (Berger, 1972; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Kuhn, 1985; LeMoncheck, 1985; Spitzack, 1999). Prevailing objectifying images show women to be little more than their exposed body parts, seductive appearance, and tempting behavior, at the same time that their entire demeanor projects sensuality and an eager willingness to consent to all men's sexual advances at all times (Shields, 1990). Such portrayal of women has increased dramatically over the past decades, becoming extremely commonplace in most all Western cultures (Frith, Shaw & Cheng, 2005; Reichert, Lambiase, Carstarphen, & Zavoina, 1999; Slater, 2002). Israeli society is no exception to the rule. A sizable proportion of female representations in all facets of Israeli culture are saturated with the same sexually objectifying images noted in other culture worldwide.

The widespread sexual objectification of women transmits certain messages to men, which presumably influence their expectations regarding the interaction between the sexes. Inasmuch as the objectifying representation operates to turn the female body into a willing target for male sexual lust (Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglana, 2002; Shields, 1990; Slater, 2002; Spitzack, 1999), confusion about women's actual intents may ensue. In this way, the genuine intentions of women may be entirely unclear to men. Accordingly, they may truly assume, as they were led to believe in this culture, that women are constantly interested in sex, even when in reality no such intention exists.

Indeed, a growing body of research has documented that men are likely to misconstrue sexual intent in women in a myriad of contexts (Abbey & Melbey, 1986). For example, men have been shown to mistake friendliness and gregariousness for interest in sex to a much greater degree than women (Johnson, Stockdale, & Saal, 1991). Flirting is likewise seen by many of them as an invitation for sex (Henningsen, 2004), as is alcohol consumption under certain conditions (Abbey & Harnish, 1995). If such

innocuous behaviors are misperceived by men as expressing sexual intentions, it stands to reason that sexualized clothing, which is more closely related to sexuality to begin with, might be viewed to an even greater degree as an invitation for sexual advances, irrespective of women's actual intent. The present study examines this possibility.

Moreover, men's tendency to misattribute sexual intent might also relate to the type of reactions they experience in response to the behaviors that prompted the misattribution. To the degree that men react with sexual stimulation, they might mistakenly believe that this very reaction was intended. Body-revealing wear may be such a stimulus. As a central element of the sexually objectifying representation of women, the very purpose of which is the sexual excitement and stimulation of men (Berger, 1972; Frith et al, 2005; MacKinnon, 1989; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Shields, 1990), it would not be surprising if the sexualized look did indeed create male arousal. Once so aroused, men might translate their stimulated reaction into an assumption that their arousal was indeed the intent. To date, there has been no empirical inquiry into how men actually respond to women's minimal wear, and what attributions they make regarding the motivations women have for dressing this way. The present study seeks to examine these matters as well.

Just as the sexual objectification of women may predispose men to misconstrue women's sexual intent, it might also play a major role in women's motivation for adopting a sexualized look. In view of that, an examination of the social context of women's body-revealing appearance is indicated. It might reveal that rather than being aimed at temptation and seduction, the sexualized style of dress could alternatively be understood as an outgrowth of a myriad of social forces that jointly affect women's choices in regard to their appearance and wear.

Forces influencing women's body-revealing appearance

Consistent with the widespread sexual objectification of women, female beauty is constructed within present western society, Israeli culture included, almost exclusively in sexual terms. In fact, sexualized representations of female beauty pervade almost every form of expression in contemporary Israeli culture, in congruence with most other western cultures. Western media that has spread worldwide is saturated with sexualized depictions of women in tight body-revealing clothing and exposed body parts that are presented as the epitome of female beauty (Aubrey, 2006; Choma, Foster, & Radford, 2007; Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Frith, Shaw & Cheng, 2005; Reichert, Lambiase, Carstarphen, & Zavoina, 1999). The unmistakable message of these representations to women is simple. To be considered attractive in the present social prism they must adhere to these dictates and adopt the sexualized look.

Adding to contemporary pressures coercing women into the sexualized look are the current objectifying fashion codes that have turned the body-revealing attire into standard female appearance, to which all women are expected to aspire and adhere. Amounting to a formation of high fashion in terms of highly exposed body parts, this apparel is designed to focus attention on women's bodies in the most blatantly sexualized manner (Wood 1999). In this way the present mode has turned women into more of an object and less of a person in the social prism and valuation, at the very same time that it has made it almost impossible for them to avoid wearing this type of clothing.

What is more, in the present social order, where women lack tangible power of their own and are valued primarily on the basis of their looks, many may find that their sexualized appearance becomes one of their very few assets in the present social milieu (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; LeMoncheck, 1985; MacKinnon, 1989; Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglama, 2002). In such an imbalanced social structure, women are left with very little choice but to essentially turn themselves into sexual objects to be viewed by those whose position of greater social supremacy has granted them the privilege of the observer. In this process, women have been forced into viewing their sexuality as a commodity through which they might gain a bit of the power held by men (Ward, 2003). Through continuous indoctrination, women have been faced with the inescapable realization that in order to pave their way in male dominated culture, in which they are assigned the role of sex object over and above all else, they must display their sexuality if they are to succeed in attracting those who they wish to charm.

Furthermore, in such an oppressive social milieu, wherein women's worth rests in large measure upon the degree to which they manage to match the prevailing objectifying sexualized beauty ideal, their achievement of the "perfect" sexy look can become a yardstick for their very own self-appraisal (Crane, 2000; Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). In other words, to the degree that female attractiveness is construed presently in sexual terms, women may come to judge themselves by their approximation of the prevailing beauty standards... Hence, since women realize that they are seen and evaluated by others primarily as their sexualized bodies and appearance rather than as their internal selves, it stands to reason that many will choose this kind of a look just in order to feel good about themselves.

It would appear, then, that women may have a multitude of socially dictated reasons for adopting the sexualized look, none of which have much to do with intent to convey an interest in or consent to sex, and the present study seeks to empirically evaluate the accuracy of these presumed motivations.

Goals of this study

The present study seeks to explore the attributions made by men regarding the intent of women's sexualized appearance, juxtaposed with the motivations identified by women for adopting this look. Being the first study to inquire about the ways in which both women and men think about the body-revealing style of dress and understand the motives for its wear, the present study might identify some gender-based misunderstandings, along with any potential bearing on sexual violence and related victim-blaming.

On theoretical grounds (e.g., Aubrey, 2006; Choma et al., 2007; Crane, 1999; Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Frith et al., 2005; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Reichert et al., 1999; Ward, 2000) it is hypothesized that women dress in body-revealing clothing for a variety of socially dictated reasons that require them to dress in this manner in order to be socially valued, considered attractive, both by self and others, and to feel good about themselves rather than to convey an interest in or consent to sex.

Men's interpretations of these intentions are examined as well. On the basis of previous research in related matters (e.g., Abbey & Melbey, 1986; Abbey & Harnish,

1995) as well as theoretical accounts (e.g. Berger, 1972; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; LeMoncheck, 1985) it is hypothesized that men will differ from women in their attributions of motivation for the sexualized look and view body-revealing clothing as conveying an interest in sex on the part of the women so dressed. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that men will report being sexually aroused by this form of attire, to the point that they can't, or choose not to tell the difference between their own arousal and the intentions of the target women.

The investigation of the connection between attribution of causality in cases of sexual violence, victim blaming, and actual causality would not be complete without examining the factual connection between style of dress and the occurrence of sexual victimization. Hence, the present study also looks at the actual probability of sexual violence as a function of revealing attire and inquires whether there is in actuality any association between wearing sexualized clothing and falling victim to sexual violence.

Method

Participants

The present study included a sample of 321 undergraduate students enrolled at a small college in northern Israel. Of the total sample, 60% were female and 40% male. Participants ranged in age from 18-24, with the average age being 22.

Procedure

Participants were recruited by announcements made in numerous classes and participated in the study on a completely voluntary basis during class breaks. The test materials were handed out and collected by research assistants. Participants were told that the study was designed to assess their attitudes on a variety of social issues and were given verbal as well as written instructions regarding the procedure. They were guaranteed anonymity and encouraged to respond as candidly as possible after being assured that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the items.

The study employed both direct and projective techniques. In the former, participants were asked direct questions about the issues under investigation. In the latter, participants were shown photos of a woman dressed in revealing clothing and instructed to rate her on various dimensions on a five point Likert scale.

Materials

A questionnaire containing three parts assessed the views of the participants regarding the motivation of women for wearing body-revealing clothing as well as their reactions to women in such wear. The female participants were also asked about their own customary style of dress as well as any history of sexual victimization.

Part 1- Projective assessment of motivation. Participants were shown a photo of a young woman dressed in sexualized, body-revealing clothing, composed of low-cut tight jeans exposing her belly button down to about 10-15 cm below it, and a short top with a widely revealing cleavage, exposing much of her breasts and abdomen. Respondents were instructed to rate her motivations for wearing such revealing clothes, by indicating how much they agreed with ten statements such as "she wishes to feel attractive" or "she intends to convey an interest in sex" on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree)

to 5 (strongly agree). The aim was to establish which attributions of intention would be elicited by this style of dress and whether they would differ along gender lines.

Part 2 – Direct assessment of motivation. Part 2 differed for women and men. The female participants were asked about their own style of dress, and those who reported a preference for dressing revealingly were asked about their motivations for choosing this look. They were instructed to respond to 7 questions, on a 3-point scale (1 indicating "no", 2 "sometimes", and 3 "yes"), such as "do you dress revealingly in order to feel attractive" or "do you dress revealingly to be seductive". The motives enumerated in this list were based on theoretical as well as empirical indications of possible motivations on the one (e.g., Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Frith et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 1999; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Ward, 2000), juxtaposed by elements drawn from relevant victim-blaming myths (e.g., Burt, 1980; De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001; Koss & Harvey, 1991; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) on the other.

Male participants were asked seven, similarly anchored, questions about their attribution of motivation for women's body-revealing attire, as well as their responses to women in such wear. Items included such questions as "do you feel that revealingly dressed women are attempting to tempt you" or "are you aroused by revealingly dressed women". These items reflected the responses expected by men on the basis of previous research and theory (Abbey & Melbey, 1986; Abbey & Harnish, 1995; Berger, 1972).

Part 3 - Sexual violence experience. Female participants' experience of sexual violence was assessed via four questions adapted from several measures of sexual violence (e.g., Casey & Nurius, 2006; Koss & Oros, 1982; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Each question presented a behavioral description of a sexually violating act, including unwanted sexual remarks, unwanted sexual touch, forced sexual contact, and forced intercourse. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale if any of these behaviors were ever imposed on them. The points on the scale referred to the number of times that they had experienced each type of violence from 1 (indicating never) to 5 (indicating 5 times or more).

Results

Women's Self-Reported Motivation for Wearing Revealing Clothes

In the direct assessment of the motivation for wearing revealing clothes, female participants who reported an inclination to dress in this fashion at least some of the time (63% of the female sample) were asked about their intentions in doing so. The majority of these women, 82.1%, identified a liking for this look as their primary motive for adopting it. A wish to look attractive was endorsed by 72% of the women as their second reason. Only 3.2% said they had intended to arouse men with their style of clothing, and the percentage of those who meant to seduce was a mere 5.3%. Very few women reported a desire to be touched or stared at as their motivation for dressing this way, 2.1% and 2.3% respectively.

Men's self-reported attitudes towards women's body-revealing dress

In response to direct questioning regarding their perceptions of women's sexualized appearance, men expressed a belief that temptation and seduction are the primary intentions of women who dress that way. To the questions of whether they

assumed that women dressed in sexy clothing were trying to arouse them or elicit sexual advances from them, 30.6% and 20.2% respectively stated that those were uniformly the intentions, in their opinion. An additional 53.2% and 55.6% thought those were the intentions most of the time.

The men were also asked to indicate the degree to which they felt sexually aroused by women's revealing attire. Close to thirty percent (29.8%) reported feeling aroused all of the time when viewing women in revealing clothes and an additional 58.1% felt aroused most of the time. In addition, most men expressed enjoyment in gazing at women so dressed; 48.45 felt that way all of the time and an additional 46.1% almost always, and similar proportions of the male participants (35.8% and 55.3% respectively) expressed a liking of this form of dress (See table 1).

A third set of analyses examined the correlation between men's self-reported responses to the revealing attire and their attributions of seductive intent to its wear. Several Pearson correlations were performed and the results are displayed in table 2.

Table 1: Men's attitudes towards women's revealing style of dress, as assessed directly

Body-revealing clothing	Always	Mostly
Intended to arouse men	30.6%	53.2%
Intended to elicit sexual advances	20.2%	55.6%
Enjoy gazing at	48.4%	46.1%
Aroused by	29.8%	58.1%

Table 2: Relations between men's self-reported responses and attributions of intent expressed as Pearson correlations

	Feels aroused	Enjoys gazing	Focuses primarily on woman's sexuality
Perceives seduction	.407**	.246**	.327**
Perceives teasing	.291**	.208*	.243**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Gender differences in attribution of motivation

Women's assumptions about the intentions of the revealingly-dressed model in the photograph were compared to those of the male participants. The results are presented in Table 3 and demonstrate that while many of the attributions were shared by both sexes, women and men differed in their perceptions regarding the pictured woman's intention to convey an interest in sex and the degree to which she uses her sexuality to gain affection. Men were more likely than women to ascribe such intentions to her. Men, but not women, seem to assume that by dressing this way, the photographed woman, and by extension women in general, are expressing a desire for sex when in minimal attire. In addition, unlike the female participants, they felt that revealingly dressed women were using their sexuality in order to gain affection.

Table 3: Gender differences in attribution of motivation for pictured woman's choice of clothing

Motivation	t-test coefficients
To be attractive	n.s.

To be fashionable	n.s.
Personal preference	n.s.
To tempt	n.s.
To seduce	n.s.
To convey an interest in sex	2.47**
To gain affection with her sexuality	1.89*
Knows men are aroused by her	n.s.
Makes men lose control	n.s.
Gives men the right to touch her	n.s.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

The connection between revealing clothing, sexual violence, and victim-blaming

Several analyses were conducted to examine the relations between style of dress and sexual victimization. The first was aimed at ascertaining whether women who dress revealingly experience more sexual violence than those who do not; the second checked whether men believe that such attire legitimizes sexual advances on the one hand, and causes men to lose self-control, on the other.

To test the first question, a Pearson correlation analysis between style of dress and victimization was performed. As can be seen in Table 4, no correlation was found between a revealing form of dress and any type of sexual victimization. In addition, a distribution analysis of victims of sexual violence by type of appearance demonstrated that the percentage of women who reported an inclination to wear sexy clothing was practically identical among victims and non-victims of sexual violations. Between 60-64% of the former reported wearing such attire from time to time in comparison to 63-65% of the women who were never victimized.

Table 4: Pearson correlations between style of dress and sexual victimization

	Style of dress †
Forced intercourse	.050
Forced sexual contact	.035
Unwanted sexual touch	.005
Unwanted sexual remarks	.054

† **All of the results are non-significant**

The second question was tested previously in the projective part of the study where participants were asked to conjecture whether men would be unable to restrain themselves in response to the sexy look of the pictured woman. The results were non-significant, indicating that neither men nor women believed that revealing clothing caused men to lose self-control. Similarly, men and women alike rejected the notion that a sexy outfit grants anyone a license to sexually infringe upon women so dressed (see Table 3).

Discussion

This study investigates whether women and men differ in their attribution of intent for women's revealing appearance. It was hypothesized that women and men would

indeed diverge in their ascriptions, such that men would view body-revealing clothing as conveying an interest in sexual exchanges on the part of the women so dressed, whereas women would reject this notion and point to a desire to feel and look attractive as the primary motivation for adopting this look. The results confirm this hypothesis. In all types of questioning, women did indeed identify the social, interpersonal, and personal advantage of such clothing in terms of attractiveness and desirability, as the primary reason for wearing it. This attribution pattern emerged from both the direct and projective inquiries, thus reinforcing its validity.

Consistent with theory and previous research (e.g., Colagero, 2004; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Noll & Fredrickson; 1998; Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005), the responses given by most women seem to connect the choice of a sexualized appearance to a desire to be and feel valued, in a social context in which these two variable are routinely tied together. Eliciting sexual relations, on the other hand, seems to have very little to do for most women with choosing to adopt a sexy look. Accordingly, the commonplace accusation of women of "asking for" sexual violence with their revealing attire appears to be discredited as women report having no such intent at all. This resonates with previous reports (e.g., Johnson, Hegland, & Schofield, 1999) in which rape survivors strongly rejected the suggestion that they had intended to encourage sexual advances in any way by their style of dress.

The divergent, gender-based interpretations given to the intentions behind the pictured woman's sexualized clothing and posture further substantiate this conclusion. While both sexes viewed her as intending to be sexy and attractive, they differed in respect to her presumed interest in sex. To many men, her revealing form of dress seemed to convey an interest in sexual advances. To women it generally did not for, to them, it was clear that wearing such attire has nothing to do with a desire for sexual relations per se, but rather with a wish to attract. Moreover, even as they acknowledge that men may sometimes be aroused by the sexy look, this is in no way seen as its goal. Rather, it is seen as a means to an end, namely, to attract-generally one particular man and not men in general-and be valued. To women, the stimulation experienced by men in response to their sexy look is assurance of their attractiveness. They do not aim to be stared or gazed at indiscriminately, and they certainly do not intend to have their space invaded against their will. In other words, they do not mean to be treated as sex objects. However, in a social structure as oppressive to women as the present one, in which men are permitted, even encouraged, to view and treat women as objects for their sexual use (Berger, 1972; MacKinnon, 1989), and in which women's sexualized appearance has been made a central component of their social value (Colagero, 2004; LeMoncheck, 1985; Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglama, 2002), it is not surprising to find that women, being cognizant of this reality, comply with the expectation to present themselves in the sexual manner that many of them do.

Still, what women may not realize is that this socially mandated incentive for adopting a sexy look may go unrecognized by a considerable segment of all men, resulting in a misperception of women's genuine intents. Alas, as the present findings indicate, many men appear to believe that minimally dressed women are out to tempt and arouse them in order to elicit a sexual exchange. To a large number of them, sexy clothing seems to imply willingness on the part of these women to consent to any and all sexual advances. In other words, it is possible that a true and unfortunate

misunderstanding is taking place between the sexes. Whereas the actual motivation of women's sexy wear is the fulfillment of the demands of contemporary society (Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Frith et al, 2005; Shields, 1990), men, being quite oblivious to the tyranny of the social construction of female beauty in sexual terms assume that women dress in this manner in order to seduce them into sexual ties. This response pattern resonates with previous findings in which men have been shown to deem women as sex objects following exposure to their sexualized representation (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005; Ward, 2003). It also establishes yet another instance in which men seem to misperceive sexual intent, much like they have been shown to do in other respects (e.g., Abbey & Melbey, 1986; Abbey & Harnish, 1995; Henningsen, 2004; Johnson et al., 1991).

An examination of the types of reactions men report experiencing in response to women's revealing wear may help explain this misattribution. In accordance with the claim that the exposed, sexualized look is designed to turn women's bodies into objects of the male gaze (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Shields, 1990), a sizable proportion of the men in this study indeed reported a tendency for fixing their eyes on women in such attire and taking considerable pleasure in doing so. Likewise, a large majority of the male participants reported being sexually aroused by appearances of this sort, much to all of the time. Given that sexual excitement and stimulation are the explicit purpose of the sexualized viewing of women by men (Berger, 1972; Frith et al, 2005; MacKinnon, 1989; Shields, 1990), this pattern is to be expected.

Inasmuch as men are highly aroused by the revealing look, it stands to reason that this very stimulation may be the basis for their misconstruction of women's aims. In essence, men may be projecting their own arousal onto the object of their lust, erroneously concluding, in a rather self-centered manner, that since they have become aroused this must have been her goal. Indeed the significant correlations between these two sets of variables in the present investigation seem to substantiate such a supposition. The fact that the percentage of men who reported being aroused by the revealing look and those who perceived seduction in this type of appearance are almost entirely identical seems to imply that the former may in fact be responsible for the latter. This claim is especially conceivable given that it would be quite difficult to make a case for the opposite direction of causality, as it hard to see how believing that the exposed apparel is intended to arouse would cause such a response, although such directionality cannot be entirely rejected by the present investigation.

Such misconstruction of motivation may then result in blaming the victims of unwanted sexual exchanges. To the extent that such projection indeed occurs, it may make it difficult for those men who experience it to place the responsibility for women's sexual violation upon those whom they believe were deliberately seduced. Moreover, it can explain why such victim-blaming is a lot more rampant among men than among women (e.g., De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Kopper, 1996; Russell, 2004). Inasmuch as women have a clear understanding of the genuine motives underlying the sexualized look, all of which have very little to do with an outright interest in sex, their likelihood of endorsing this line of victim-blaming is much diminished in comparison to men.

Finally, not only is the accusation that in wearing revealing clothing women are asking for sexual intrusion inconsistent, on the whole, with the present findings, it also

seems to be factually refuted by the lack of correlation between sexual victimization and style of dress documented in this study. According to the findings, there is absolutely no connection between appearance and the occurrence of sexual violence, which necessarily refutes the claims embodied in the provocatively dressed victim-blaming myths. In other words, inasmuch as no significant differences were found between victims and non-victims in their style of dress, it becomes clear that women do not bring sexual violence upon themselves by wearing revealing clothes. This finding resonates with similar claims made in many previous studies in which the validity of these charges have been questioned and disproved (Buddie & Miller, 2002; Cowan, 2000; Koss & Harvey, 1992).

In summing up the present findings, several major conclusions become apparent. While the myth accusing women of asking for sexual intrusions with their sexualized appearance seems to have been dispelled, evidence for an unmistakable gender-based attribution gap concerning the intentions underlying this type of wear did emerge. While this confusion appears not to relate to the actual occurrence of sexual violence, it nonetheless deserves serious attention inasmuch as it is linked to an unfortunate misunderstanding between the sexes, and a possible greater likelihood to endorse victim-blaming accusations. Thus, even though this study is limited by the use of college students as well as projective materials, its findings could, nonetheless, potentially bridge this gender gap by making men aware of their misattributions regarding the motivations for women's sexualized look, while at the same time informing women of men's misperception of their actual motivation for dressing revealingly. The clarification of these divergent stances should allow not only for improved communication between the sexes, but also for a potential reduction in the blaming of victims of sexual assault, as well as possibly even in the incidence of sexual violence itself.

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