

Reconstructing the Narrative of Rape in the Kibbutz by the Israeli Press

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Reconstructing the Narrative of Rape in the Kibbutz by the Israeli Press

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The author proposes that national press coverage of sex crimes in Israeli kibbutzim is intended to restructure the public's perception by showing that such crimes are a symptom of broader social problems. Articles about a rape incident in Kibbutz Shomrat published during 1991–1995 in the local kibbutz press are compared with a sample of articles dealing with the same subject in two of the largest daily Israeli newspapers during the same period. Coverage by both sources of a later story of rape in another kibbutz from 2005 is also examined. The author demonstrates that the national press used the rape incident to invalidate the presumed moral superiority of the kibbutz movement and presented the crime as a symptom of the broad ideological and social crisis faced by the kibbutz movement. The local kibbutz press used a “defensive attribution” mechanism to construct their narrative, allowing kibbutz members to distance themselves, and the values their community professes, from the rape case.

A gang rape perpetrated in Kibbutz Shomrat in the 1990s reverberated throughout the media in Israel. This article examines the different techniques used by Israeli newspapers to construct public perception about such cases. When a crime like rape occurs within a kibbutz, where the social meta-narrative is based on concepts of camaraderie, friendship, mutual responsibility, gender equality, and universal fundamental respect for fellow humans, it can serve as a powerful instrument in the hands of those who wish to challenge the moral and ethical superiority of the kibbutz community.

Deviant behavior is usually perceived by the general public as part of a comprehensively deviant lifestyle. John Lofland defined the process of matching the act to the perpetrator's character or lifestyle as a “consistency ritual” (Lofland 1969). This correlation between the act and its perpetrator enables the observers to retain their preconceptions about which people in a given society are dangerous. The process helps to preserve a sense of living in a well-defined and orderly world, one in which it is possible to predict who is likely to commit a criminal act (see Shoham 2006). Criminal behavior by members of segregated communities, particularly

those perceived as elitist and morally superior such as the kibbutz or the ultra-orthodox communities, challenges this consistency process. Such behavior requires restructuring of the narrative in order to generate consistency and reconcile the act with the lifestyle attributed to the specific community. Without this restructuring, explanations of the deviation would conflict with the social and cultural concepts that constitute the frame of reference in which the recipient of the explanations responds to the deviation (Cohen 1985; Goode 2002).

When the deviations involve sexual and moral transgressions, the lack of correlation between the lifestyle attributed to a closed community and the crime itself is all the more significant. This may explain why behaviors such as violent sexual assaults, which are not uncommon in Israeli society, generate far more mass media interest when they occur within a social environment such as a kibbutz (see Korn and Efrat 2004; Lemish 2002; Soothill and Walbi 1991). For many years, the kibbutz has been perceived both by its members and by Israeli society as an ideological, egalitarian social group that manifests almost no criminal or violent behavior (Shoham 2006).

This article argues that the coverage by the largest daily newspaper of sex crime in the kibbutz is intended to restructure the public's perception by showing that such crimes were neither exceptional nor isolated incidents, but rather a symptom of a much broader social problem (see Lemish 2002). We assume that the general press in Israel will frequently refer to cases of rape in the kibbutz, and will elect to present such incidents as indicative of conditions within the community. On the other hand, the local kibbutz press will minimize its coverage of rapes, choosing to present such incidents as anomalous and out of the ordinary.

1. The Narrative of Rape

The constructionist approach (Almog 2000; Brooks 1996; Goode 2002; Yoval 2002) regards the rhetoric used to describe a given deviant act as a system of deliberate conscious and unconscious choices that serve to structure a certain perception regarding the deviant act, the participants, and the circumstances under which it occurred. The structuring of such a narrative is intended to forge a certain emotional and cognitive attitude toward those involved and, not least, to justify and legitimize the social reactions toward the participants in the incident, or alternatively to portray those reactions as inappropriate and irrelevant.

A narrative about rape in the kibbutz may serve as a pretext for a far more extensive public debate that would question the existing social assumptions and re-examine the moral superiority, status, role or actual need for kibbutzim within Israeli society toward the end of the twentieth century. The political changes during the 1970s along with the economic crises in the kibbutz during the 1980s have gradually led the kibbutz society to assume a defensive position as it found itself the target of ideological and cultural attacks (see Avrahami 1992; Ben Rafael 1996).

Choosing to present the rape episode as an example of deviant behavior that indicates a perverted lifestyle is not coincidental. According to the more radical approaches in criminology (Negbi 2009; Rady 2001; Saba 1992), rape results from the imbalance of power between men and women in society. Kibbutz society is built on a foundation of equality between its members, in which there is no difference between the status of men and women. The occurrence of

rape in a society supposedly based on equality can be seen to invalidate one of the founding principles underlying the kibbutz, which in turn questions all the ideological premises that differentiate the kibbutz from the rest of society.

Another “advantage” to choosing the rape narrative in order to structure a specific narrative about kibbutz society is that the rape occurs without an audience and relies on proving the validity of one person's version of events over the other. When relating details of the rape incident a reporter can select elements of the rape narrative and the particular perspective that will help nudge the reader toward reaching a specific conclusion (Jermyn 2001; Jordan 2005; Negbi 2009).

The “legal realism” approach leads to a somewhat subversive reading of the implicit and explicit messages meant to generate perceptions and interpretations regarding those involved in the rape incident (Koren and Efrat 2004; Yoval 2002; Ward 1995; White 1990). The way the media choose to narrate the rape incident is based on a set of rhetorical choices as well as on the inclusion of certain elements and the exclusion of others, thereby allowing the story to be used to make a broader statement about the society in which the incident occurred (see Brooks 1996; Ewick and Silbey 1995; Hollander 1996).

Creating public awareness of a deviant act or acts by increasing media attention on the subject is part of a process known as a spiral of amplification (Cohen 1973; Cohen 1994; Good 2002). This amplification of the increased threat level that the public associates with criminal behavior does not necessarily result from actual changes in the behavior itself, but is rather the outcome of increased public attention to this subject. This attention is primarily linked to the inner struggles for cultural dominance within the society in a given time.

In contrast to increased mass media attention to subjects such as the occurrence of rape in a kibbutz, we expect that media coverage originating in the kibbutzim in general and the particular kibbutz in the case will significantly play down this topic. Furthermore, it is expected that accounts will find ways to clearly differentiate participants in the criminal act from typical kibbutz society or even question the very existence of the criminal act.

2. Crime Coverage in the Kibbutz Press

Throughout the years of its existence, members of kibbutz society believed that it was inconceivable that criminal behavior such as burglary, rape, or murder would occur within its bounds and consequently could find no reason to establish the mechanisms required to fight such types of behavior (Shoham 1995). During the 1990s, several cases of rape involving young people born and living on kibbutzim were publicized, the most notable among them being the gang rape that took place on Kibbutz Shomrat. In the mid-1990s, a 14-year-old girl from kibbutz Shomrat filed a complaint with the police that accused seven teenage boys of forcing her to engage in sexual relations with them against her will. The prosecution delayed submission of the indictment for a number of years because the rape victim's emotional state prevented her from giving evidence in court. According to the indictment submitted by the prosecution, the acts were perpetrated in cars, in the fields, and in the victim's room. The seven boys, who were acquitted in the District Court, were convicted in the Supreme Court and sentenced to two to three years in prison (Shoham 2006).

These incidents forced kibbutz members to respond to a reality that they perceived as diametrically opposed to the social and value-based reality that they had built throughout their lives. According to Ester Eilam (1995) one of the techniques aimed at bridging this discrepancy was to adopt a combination of avoidance, denial, and rationalization mechanisms. These mechanisms helped the kibbutz to avoid dealing with social issues which inherently contradict the basis of the kibbutz ideology. The adoption of denial and the lack of conceptualizing terms regarding rape exempt the members of the community, and in particular its leaders, from the need to change the public discourse about sexual violence in the kibbutz. The desire to avoid dealing with deviations such as sexual assaults through institutional or public channels within the kibbutz contributed to reinforcing kibbutz members' perception that despite publicity surrounding these types of events, the kibbutz is actually immune to criminal behavior (Shoham 2006).

This perception is facilitated by a mechanism known as "defensive attribution," a response by individuals or a group of people who perceive that their lifestyle or belief system is facing a potential threat (Shaver 1970). Defensive attribution

finds a causative explanation for the deviant behavior by attributing the deviation to unique characteristics pertaining to the victim, the perpetrator, or the situation of the crime (Shoham and Regev 2000). Mervin Lerner (1980), for example, claims that defensive attribution enables the person making the explanation to meet important emotional needs such as prediction and stability, avoiding a sense of guilt, maintaining a high and stable level of self-esteem, and self-justification. According to Lerner, the individual has a need to believe that events are logically sequential and predictable. According to Shaver, defensive attribution arises in situations in which an individual perceives him- or herself as similar to the deviant "other." Defensive attribution enables such an individual to avoid potential accusations and to preempt damaging his or her personal and social self-perception. Lerner (1980) adds that defensive attribution is based on a belief that each individual is rewarded or punished for his or her actions or behavior. This belief reinforces the concept that the world is a just place, and leads to the tendency to blame victims for bringing the violent behavior upon themselves by their actions or personalities (Dexter et al. 1997; Mason, Riger, and Foley 2004). Portrayal of the victim or the criminal as significantly different from the other members of the group helps to reduce the potential social threat to the group (Shoham 2006; see also Levy 2006; Whatly 1996).

Because rape is perceived as completely contradicting the values and lifestyle of the kibbutz, another way of structuring the rape narrative is to question whether a criminal act of rape actually occurred. In order for such an act to be regarded as a crime, it is necessary to show that the act was indeed congruent with the rape prototype as conceived by the audience of the narration (Bogosh and Don Yihyeh 1999; Benedict 1992; Koren 2008).

Whether a story of rape is perceived as "true" by the listeners is linked to preconceptions that create a prototype of the act (Cuklanz 2000; Carter 1998; Koren 2008). This prototype enables the listener to differentiate between events that are not perceived as rape, events that are perceived as rape, and those that are perceived as a grave and horrifying case of rape (Jermyn 2001; Negbi 2009). Categorization is based on the disparity or the resemblance between a given nar-

rative and the prototype in the observer's mind. Elements such as whether the victim is acquainted with the attacker, the victim's sexual history, normative characteristics of the attacker versus non-normative characteristics of the victim, the lack of violence, or the fact that the victim did not seek help are all perceived as distancing the specific narrative from a "real" rape story—thereby raising the question, in the story at hand, whether the attackers or the victim were actually party to a rape at all (see Jordan 2004).

3. National and Local Press Coverage of Rape Cases in the Kibbutz

Our assumption was that the local kibbutz newspaper, which was keen to prevent potential accusations against its members, would focus on denial, minimalization, or specific explanations for the occurrence of criminal behavior in its community. Furthermore, it would link the rape to the specific characteristics of the teenaged perpetrators or of the victim. By contrast, we expected that the daily national newspapers would use the rape incident in an attempt to invalidate the presumed moral superiority of the kibbutz movement, and would present the rape as a symptom of the broad ideological and societal crisis it faces.

In order to validate these assumptions, we examined all articles published during 1991–1995 in the local newspaper (*The Kibbutz*, hereafter cited as *K*) that referred to rape incidents occurring in Kibbutz Shomrat. We compared these articles with a sample of articles dealing with the same subject in two of the largest daily national newspapers (*Maariv* and *Yediot Aharonot*, cited as *M* and *YA* respectively) during the same period of time. Religious press was not included. Data were collected according to the principles of qualitative research (see Creswell 1998; Shaked 2004), and divided into four general categories: the presentation of the victim in the local kibbutz press; the presentation of the victim in the national press; the image of the perpetrators in the national press; and the image of the perpetrators in the local kibbutz press.

As we had assumed, the kibbutz newspaper rarely wrote about cases of rape. We therefore included all eight articles that were published about the rape in Kibbutz Shomrat. The two largest national daily newspapers, on the other hand, covered this topic much more frequently; therefore, a random sample of ten articles published on that subject

was examined. We also examined whether the coverage of another gang rape in a kibbutz ten years later, known as the story of Kibbutz Ein-Dor, manifested different perceptions regarding rape in a kibbutz.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 The Image of the Victim in the Kibbutz Press

The kibbutz press coverage constantly referred to the victim's personal and family background as a means of understanding the incident. The articles that followed the rape in Kibbutz Shomrat reported numerous family and personal problems of the victim's, presenting the rape as one more chapter in a life full of difficulties and marked by trouble acclimating to the kibbutz lifestyle (*K*, Nov. 18, 1992). The kibbutz newspaper dwelled on the girl's previous sexual experience, raising explicit and implicit questions about her responsibility for what was done to her body, and thus questioned whether the events that occurred did indeed meet the definition of rape (*K*, Nov. 11, 1992). The articles portray a young girl whose deep unhappiness, lifestyle, behavior, and marginal status in the kibbutz made her likely to be victimized. The kibbutz newspapers did not show a great deal of sympathy for the girl, who had caused the kibbutz to become embroiled in this notorious situation. The girl also aroused a lot of indirect anger because her cause was taken up by women's organizations, and this was perceived by the kibbutz as being at the expense of its own good name (*K*, Dec. 15, 1993). The focus on the girl's past, on her family's failure to integrate into the community after joining the kibbutz, and on the girl's social difficulties contributed to creating a negative backdrop and making the victim's behavior a key element in the interpretation of the incident (Koren and Efrat 2004).

Such focus on the victim's personal and family background is an example of the previously mentioned technique of the consistency ritual (Lofland 1969). Adjusting the personal biography of the victim by focusing on the negative elements created a situation in which her victimization almost became a given, and shifted accountability for her victim's status primarily to her own sad life story (see Cuklanz 2000; Lerner 1980; Negbi 2009; Koren 2008).

In the Kibbutz Shomrat case, articles in the kibbutz press did not describe the girl as a rape victim. Instead of the

word “victim,” they used terms such as “the poor girl” or “the young woman.” In describing other cases they used terms such as “the unfortunate girl” (*K*, Aug. 30, 1994, and Feb. 5, 1996), an expression that enabled them to explain how such an incident could occur in their community. According to the kibbutz viewpoint, an unfortunate girl who could not find her place within the community went looking for love and attention, and thus drew the boys into a sexual relationship with her (*K*, Aug. 23, 1994). Rhetorical questions were also used to make readers doubt whether a genuine rape had actually occurred (*K*, Dec. 15, 1993). To a large extent, accounts in the kibbutz press refuted the rape narrative by presenting an alternative narrative, featuring a girl who went astray looking for what almost all teenagers seek, particularly those in a kibbutz—acceptance by her peers (see Brooks 1996; Yoval 2002; Negbi 2009).

Unlike the national newspapers, which embraced the victim’s narrative, none of the kibbutz newspapers published a single article presenting events from the girl’s point of view, thereby further reinforcing doubts about whether the incident constituted a real rape. According to Rina Bogosh and Rachel Don Yihiyeh (1999), “subversive reading” of rape cases presents the reader with criteria that form the prototype of a genuine case of rape. This prototype both cognitively and emotionally lays out the boundaries between a “genuine” case of rape and one which, although it might include the factual elements of rape, is not perceived or interpreted by the observer as a “true” rape.

4.2 The Image of the Victim in the National Press

Although the local kibbutz newspapers focused on the victim’s social and emotional difficulties prior to the rape, the majority of the coverage by the national daily press recounted the victim’s difficulties once the rape was made public. The kibbutz was described as a strong and well-protected organization, whereas the victim was portrayed as weak and helpless. The analogy of David and Goliath was repeated in a considerable number of these articles (*M*, June 6, 1991, Dec. 10 and 15, 1993; *YA*, Sep. 11, 1991, Nov. 11, 1993, and Dec. 17, 1993).

The national press took on the role of the girl’s defender against the kibbutz, which “discarded” her and closed ranks to protect itself and its reputation. The kibbutz was

portrayed as a smug and protected society concerned more with its public image than with the well-being of the unfortunate girl. Many articles tried to create an image of a genuine victim by presenting the events from the vantage point of the girl herself.

4.3 The Image of the Perpetrators in the National Press

The national daily press tended not to distinguish between the male kibbutz teenagers who were party to the rape and the other male teens on the kibbutz. They were all described as members of a confused society, in which boundaries between what was permitted and what was forbidden were not clearly defined, leading the kibbutz community to turn a blind eye to or forgive transgressions (*M*, Nov. 10, 1992, Dec. 15, 1993; *YA*, Nov. 10, 1993; Dec. 17, 1993).

The perpetrators were portrayed as unsurprising, albeit regrettable, products of a failed value-based educational system (*YA*, Sep. 11, 1992; Nov. 10, 1993; June 22, 1994). A number of newspaper articles went even further, describing the rape as evidence of destructive processes affecting the entire kibbutz movement. Furthermore, the kibbutz community was described as an underdeveloped sector of society that grew “spoiled fruit” in the form of rapists (*M*, Feb. 10, 1992).

The national daily press often described the teenagers convicted of the rape as ordinary young men who were positive and well-integrated and did not have any personal or social problems (*YA*, Sep. 11, 1992, Nov. 21, 1992). Consequently, their deviant behavior was not an expression of character traits peculiar to these particular boys, but rather the product of a much broader social system and its values.

The national press also focused on questions of status and the unequal distribution of resources in the kibbutz, in particular the difference in resources made available by the kibbutz for the girl’s defense as compared to those provided for the boys’. Terms such as “marginal” and “central,” “new” and “old,” “fits in” and “does not fit in” repeatedly appeared in these articles (*YA*, Nov. 10 and 21, 1992). The use of these terms was intended to invalidate the premise that equality is the underpinning principle of kibbutz ideology. It contributed to the portrayal of kibbutz society as one that is no longer based on equality or fairness.

4.4 The Image of the Perpetrators in the Kibbutz Press

By contrast, articles in the kibbutz press defended the boys as individuals, portraying them as the victims of drawn-out legal proceedings or of the media's manipulations. They repeatedly claimed that the boys from the kibbutz played only a relatively small part in the affair, and that most of the participants in the incident did not belong to the kibbutz at all (K, Nov. 11, 1992, Dec. 15, 1993, June 22, 1994).

Portrayal of the teenage perpetrators as normal boys by the local press was intended to serve the opposite purpose of doing so in the national press. Here, the normality of the boys and the social divide between them and the girl reinforced doubts about viewing this incident as a rape. The kibbutz press not only portrayed these teenage boys as ordinary and positive people, but also sought to reduce the option of portraying them as a symptom of a larger process in the community.

The main strategy of the local press coverage was to refrain from addressing the rape incident itself and instead to concentrate on attacking commentators who used the incident as a pretext for attacking the kibbutz. This technique of neutralizing guilt combined denial of responsibility on one hand and the search for a seemingly rational explanation on the other (see Scott and Lyman 1968). This combination enabled the kibbutz to retain its positive image and to avoid feelings of responsibility or guilt, despite the factual basis of the incident. The “attack the attackers” technique also diverted attention from the rape itself, and from the rapists and the victim, and focused instead on the accusations against kibbutz society being made by women's organizations, the national press, and the Supreme Court.

One should also admit the possibility that the differences regarding the portrayal of the victim and the perpetrators are also partly due to different styles of journalism, and not just to the different social goals of the national daily press as opposed to the kibbutz local press.

5. Changes in the Kibbutz Discourse about a Later Rape Case

In *The Closed Yard* (2006), I describe how during the following decade most kibbutz members had become aware of various types of criminal behavior that occurred within

their community. This awareness, however, did not necessarily produce an active response to crimes, one that would compromise the reputation of the kibbutz, particularly if the behavior bore a stigma, such as rape. In practice, when a case of rape arose among Kibbutz members, it was still handled in the traditional manner: closing ranks, attacking the attackers, keeping silent outwardly and often inwardly as well, and attributing the cause of the crime to the victim's personality traits (see Benedict 1992; Koren 2008).

In early 2005, the local kibbutz press published the story of a young woman from a kibbutz who had been a victim of incest as a young girl and was later sexually assaulted by teenage boys, her peers on the kibbutz. The story of this young woman, who committed suicide at the age of 21 while studying at university, once again raised questions about the existence of sexual abuse in the kibbutz and, more importantly, about the manner in which the kibbutz chooses to deal with sexual assault. In this particular case, the kibbutz secretariat did encourage the young woman to file a complaint with the police, but the investigation was later suspended because she refused to give the names of her rapists (M, Feb. 4, 2005).

A review of the very few articles in *The Kibbutz* newspaper during 2005 addressing this case (K, Feb. 5, 2005) indicates that although the kibbutz movement has become increasingly aware that this type of behavior does indeed exist in kibbutzim, the community continues to close ranks and explain the deviant behavior by trying to pin the blame on the psychological makeup and other characteristics of the victim (see Jermyn 2001; Larcombe 2002).

When he was interviewed for a newspaper article, the general secretary of the kibbutz did acknowledge the shattered feeling of the kibbutz members who had expected the kibbutz to protect their safety and security. However, in the same breath, he denied the possibility that incest could occur within the kibbutz, attributed the allegations to the “fantasies” of a young woman who was in an emotionally fragile state of mind. He asserted that “one cannot rely on the story of the rape in the national press, it is shallow and tendentious.” Members who chose to be interviewed anonymously for that article also adopted the official kibbutz line,

attributing the sexual assaults to “what was going on in the mind of the young woman” (*M*, Feb. 4, 2005).

The national daily paper, *Maariv*, reported that the majority of kibbutz members refused to be interviewed and that those who did speak continued to defend the reputation of their community: “The public got the wrong impression of the Kibbutz; it is very difficult for us to defend ourselves because of the prejudice against the kibbutz society,” claimed a Kibbutz member (*M*, March 1, 2005). Those interviewed reiterated the “import model” (Cromer 1995) explanation of the incident, which lays responsibility for deviant behavior at the feet of outsiders who have made inroads into kibbutz society (*K*, Feb. 5, 2005).

The local kibbutz press coverage of the 2005 case reversed its tactics from the coverage of the previous incident. This time, portrayal of the victim’s positive character traits served to cast doubt on the feasibility of the sexual assault narrative. The cultural expectation is that sexual assault will occur between strangers, or will be perpetrated against girls who do not “fit in,” or who are promiscuous (see Benedict 1992; Koren and Efrat 2004). In this case, the girl’s claim that she had been sexually abused by a family member contradicted such cultural expectations, thus underscoring doubts as to whether her account was true and a rape incident had actually occurred.

In this case too, as can be seen in many rape reports (see Bogosh and Don Yihyeh 1999; Ewick and Silbey 1996; Jordan 2004; Negbi 2009), the local kibbutz press often employed rhetorical remarks along with terminology to cast doubt on the validity of the report. Kibbutz members who were interviewed for the kibbutz paper repeatedly used words such as “according to her allegations” (*K*, Feb. 5, 2005). The use of these words indicate that, while recognizing that this case was truly tragic, the kibbutz members were very suspicious regarding the true nature of the story: “it was very important to remember that it does not necessarily represent a genuine sexual assault but rather the claims made by the girl which have not yet been verified” (*K*, March 1, 2005). Disbelief in the rape victim’s narrative combined with an “attack on the attackers” from the surrounding society helped to defend the reputation of

the kibbutz, even at the expense of blaming the victim and denying the role of her assailants.

To sum up, the use of the defensive attribution mechanism allowed kibbutz members to construct a narrative that distanced themselves, and the world of values in which they believe, from the rape case. The deviant act was ascribed to actors on the social or cultural margins of the group. By distancing the act, the kibbutz exempts itself from the need to submit its social environment to a painful and perhaps even threatening self-examination. The use of defensive attribution helps to maintain the propriety and righteousness of the members’ existing world of cultural symbols. Furthermore, it reinforces an overall sense of control and thus avoids assigning blame or recognizing possible victimization.

In the cases discussed in the kibbutz newspaper, the social standing of the two rape victims was very different. Yet in both cases the kibbutz members drew on social status as the basis for denying the existence of a victim. In the first case, it was argued that the victim’s low and marginal social status within her peer group, and her inability to fit in, led to the incident because by behaving the way she did, the girl brought the rape upon herself.

In the second case, kibbutz members portrayed the young woman as a successful, well-regarded leader. It was precisely her higher social status that was used to corroborate the claim that the rape story was largely the fruit of the young woman’s imagination. After all, claimed the kibbutz members and teachers in the kibbutz, “it is unlikely that a young woman who is such a key figure would fall prey to a rapist” without the kibbutz knowing (see Koren 2008; Negbi 2009). The social status of the rape victim, whether low or high, continues to be a major factor in determining to what extent the kibbutz will trust the story of the rape victim.

By contrast, the national press coverage of cases of rape in the kibbutz was supported by preconceived social attitudes toward sex, gender, and normative behavior in the kibbutz. Myths about sexual permissiveness—as conveyed most notably by the stories about shared showers, the minimal clothes worn by kibbutz members, the casual manners,

shared sleeping quarters for the children, and the identical treatment of boys and girls until a relatively late stage—contributed to creating an image of a permissive society that lacked limits. This image led other sectors in Israeli society, particularly traditional or religious groups, to attribute cases of rape to the permissive lifestyle, the absence of limits, and even the licentiousness that allegedly prevail in the kibbutz (see Cromer 1998).

The increased mass media attention focused on a specific crime such as rape in the kibbutz acts according to Dafna Lemish (1992) as a two-edged sword. It helps to reinforce the feeling among the general public that this type of behavior is occurring with increasing frequency and severity. Increased public awareness leads to increased media and research attention, which consequently further reinforces the impression that this social phenomenon is becoming a routine occurrence. The deviant behavior underwent a normalizing and banalizing process through the portrayal of the rapists as ordinary, run-of-the-mill teenage kibbutzniks.

This allowed the general public a glimpse of a world that despite its outside appearance was plagued by the same ailments that afflicted society at large.

Comparing the coverage of the later rape with the earlier incident, we see that minimization is still the principle technique used by the local kibbutz press in its attempts to protect the image of the kibbutz society as ideological and elitist. This technique diverts attention from social processes and focuses it on the search for the perpetrator's or the victim's individual character traits. The national daily press, by contrast, focuses on these crimes to show that such acts were neither exceptional nor isolated incidents, but rather symptoms of a broader social problem. Media interest in sex crimes in the kibbutz goes beyond the voyeurism or curiosity that would usually be associated with this type of crime. It contributes to claims that communities such as the kibbutz are not necessarily as ethically and morally superior as they present themselves in public discourse with other cultural sectors in Israeli society.

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