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An Exploration into the Acceptance of Male Rape Myths within the UK



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Abstract

Rape is worldwide issue with no demographic constraint, and previous studies have explored how rape myths serve to justify sexual violence against women at the hands of men. However, this study aims to bridge the gap in the literature that fails to account for rape myths that do not follow the traditional script. 65 UK university students completed measures of rape myth acceptance and ambivalent sexism to investigate the factors associated with supporting rape myths. A multiple regression indicated that the acceptance of female rape myths predicted the acceptance of male rape myths. However, the factors involved in facilitating this acceptance differed between the genders. The findings are discussed in relation to the implications and conclude by offering directions for future research. Whilst the study is limited in some areas, such as the generalisation of findings, and the photonegative scales, it offers an interesting insight into understanding male rape myths and the factors that contribute to these attitudes within the UK.

Keywords: Rape Myths; Male Rape; Sexual Violence; Ambivalent Sexism; Male Victims .

An Exploration into the Acceptance of Male Rape Myths within the UK

Until 1994, UK law failed to recognise male on male rape as a criminal offence. The Sexual Offences Act defines rape as 'intentional penile penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth without reasonable belief in consent' (2003: chapter 42, part 1). In England and Wales, more than 35,000 rapes are reported each year [1]. With 10% of these carried out on males [2]. Likewise, according to the 2014 Bureau of Justice Statistics in the United States, there were 173,610 adult victims of rape, 9% of which were male victims [3]. Although statistics show that females are more likely to be victimised than males, the reported prevalence will never reflect the true extent of the problem, as many individuals, males and females alike, do not report the incident [4]. More specifically, while it is estimated that only around 15% of women who experience sexual violence choose to report it to the police (Ministry of Justice, Home Office and Office for National Statistics (MoJ), 2013), men are even less likely to report rape, with only around 4% of male victims likely to report rape [5]. [6]. suggests that this is largely due to the social stigma surrounding male rape, serving as a barrier for victims seeking help.

This stigma is central to the concept of rape myths. Coined and defined by Burt (1980, p.217) as "prejudicial, stereotypes

or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists which serve to create a climate that is hostile to rape victims" and later "attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" [7]. The notion that 'real men', those who do not conform to society's masculine standard, cannot be raped [8]. exacerbates victim blaming culture. Such individuals would not put themselves in a position to be raped and thus would not be at risk. The loss of power and feeling unable to protect oneself is a prominent issue for male survivors of sexual abuse and rape [9]. in how they feel about themselves and also the perception from others.

Research suggests that men are blamed more when others perceive them not have fought back against their abuser [10]. eliciting a sense of decreased masculinity among male survivors. The literature into male rape myths is sparse, and thus the present study aims to bridge the gap between this and the comparatively extensive female rape myth research. The literature into rape myths surrounding female victims will be reviewed, and then the focus will be directed to what is known about male rape myths. Studies which aim to identify factors which contribute to the occurrence of sexual assault highlight a range of reasons why men rape women. Notably, the association between sexism, sex role stereotyping and sexual violence is prominent [11].

Coller and Resick (1987) identified those American, female, undergraduates who endorse sex-role stereotypes are more likely to blame and hold the victim responsible for a rape.

Burt (1980) suggested that rape is merely an extension of traditional gender role behaviours within the context of sexual interactions, where males are powerful and dominant, and women are weak and fragile. Leading on from this, Glick and Fiske (1996) distinguished between hostile and benevolent sexism. Those who score high on hostile sexism believe that women should submit to socially constructed roles [12], whereas those who score highly on benevolent sexism adhere to the belief that women need to be protected by a man. Whilst the latter may appear to portray women in a positive light [13], it may actually contribute to forming a patronising traditional sex-role stereotype for females. Glick and Fiske identified that hostile sexism (but not benevolent sexism), in both male and female participants, correlate with the acceptance of female rape myths, further supported by Davies, [14]. Other research however has found that the acceptance of both hostile and benevolent sexism has an association with the acceptance of female rape myths [15].

The conflicting findings about hostile and benevolent sexism propose that they work independently, and therefore should be correlated separately with rape myth acceptance. Furthermore, it serves as justification to investigate the possible link between hostile and benevolent sexism towards male rape myth acceptance.

Despite the abundance of research exploring the beliefs and attitudes associated with female rape myths, comparatively limited attention has focused on the area of male rape myths. Whilst research in the area is minimal, common beliefs surrounding male rape that have been identified include: male victims exhibit lower levels of masculinity, men cannot be forced to have sex against their will, and men are less affected by sexual assault than women [16]. It could therefore be contended that male rape is an issue, but currently understudied and largely misunderstood. That being said, the factors that facilitate rape endorsement are similar for both male and female victims [17]. And have been argued as stemming from the same patriarchal structure, relating to sexism [18]. That is, both male and female rape myths are widespread due to the expectations and the societal norms surrounding sexual orientation, masculinity and gender [19]. Hegemonic masculinity proposes that men hold traits such as independence, toughness, power, aggressiveness, control, and dominance [20]. Whereas rape victims are commonly portrayed as weak, feminine and defenceless [21]. Thus, when conforming to socially constructed ideas of masculinity, 'real men' cannot be victims of rape (Lees, 1997). Similarly, O'Brien, Keith, and Shoemaker (2015) suggest that myths pertaining that real or strong men cannot be raped is one of the most cited male

rape myths, and is prevalent in military culture where masculine physical strength is celebrated.

Alike that committed against females, male rape is usually motivated by "dominance, power and the enhancement of masculinity" (Lees, 1997). Therefore, it serves as justification to investigate the extent to which individuals believe rape myths about males as well as females. Rape myths about female victims serve to perpetuate the occurrence of sexual violence, but they can also minimise the problem of male rape, leading to disturbing outcomes for all affected [22]. Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992) were the first to attempt to measure male rape myths, and used a student population. Their research highlighted that attitudes which facilitate rape myth acceptance for female victims, may work in the same way for rape myths about male victims. Notably, ambivalent sexism toward men [23], is likely to be correlated with rape supportive attitudes, just as ambivalent sexism toward women is associated with rape myth acceptance for female victims. A societal belief that women are sexually passive, whilst men are sexually dominant and assertive, instigating all sexual encounters, can lead many to believe that the sexual assault of men by women is improbable [17,24].

The Current Study

Overall, rape myth acceptance has been extensively researched, however little has been said about the acceptance of such statements when rape does not follow the traditional script of a male perpetrator attacking a female victim. The overall purpose of this study is to further explore the acceptance of male rape myths and examine the factors associated with the acceptance of such myths, within UK university students. Payne, Lonsdale, and Fitzgerald's (1999) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale and [8]. Male Rape Myth Scale is used to measure female and male rape myth acceptance, respectively. It was predicted that men would score higher on both measures of rape myth acceptance. The study will also investigate the argument that the attitudes which facilitate rape myth acceptance for female victims, may work in the same way for rape myths about male victims [23]. As such, we examine how acceptance of female rape myths and ambivalent sexism (both benevolent and hostile sexism) toward men, relate to male rape myth acceptance. It was predicted that male rape myth acceptance will be predicted by female rape myth acceptance.

Method

Participants

In total, 65 participants (21 male; 44 female) were recruited from a medium-sized university in the United Kingdom. All participants were recruited via an online link which distributed the relevant questionnaires. The participants ages ranged from 18 to 23 ($M=22$, $SD=5.71$), with 89% of the sample being White

British (n = 58) and the remaining 11% identifying as Black British (n=7).

Procedure

Ethical approval was received prior to conducting the research. Upon which, all participants were approached by the principal investigator who described the project to them. Those who voluntarily agreed to participate agreed to the terms of the information sheet and provided signed the consent form. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants' responses were strongly emphasized prior to the study commencing. Once participants gave their consent, they were asked to complete measures of female and male rape myth acceptance, along with measures relating to ambivalence sexism towards women and men. All questionnaires took approximately 30 minutes to complete, after which participants were debriefed and thanked for their assistance with the research.

Materials

Unlike the College Date Rape Attitude Survey [25]. Struck man-Johnson and Struck man-Johnson's (1992) Males Rape Myth Scale is applicable to male on male, as well as heterosexual, rape, and was created for such purposes. In addition, the study measured hostile and benevolent sexism, using the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory [13]. Attitudes using the Ambivalence toward Men Inventory AMI [23] and female rape myth acceptance using the updated Payne, Lon sway, and Fitzgerald's (1999) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA; McMahon & Farmer, 2011). The latter has been validated on a student population, and is therefore relevant to be used in the current study on UK university students.

The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA; Payne, Lon sway, & Fitzgerald, 1999)

The IRMA is a 22 item self-report questionnaire assessing cultural beliefs that work to support and propagate sexual violence [26]. Participants will respond on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly disagree). Higher scores are indicative of a greater rejection of rape myths. Example items include: "Many women secretly desire to be raped" and "Men from nice middle-class homes almost never rape".(Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$).

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996)

The ASI is a 22 item self-report measure which consists of hostile and benevolent items weighted equally, aiming to measure overall sexism. It is used frequently in cross cultural research on sexism. Participants will be asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a six-point Likert scale ranging from Disagree strongly to Agree strongly, with higher scores demonstrating greater levels of sexism. Example items on the Hostile Sexism Scale include: "Most women interpret innocent remarks as being sexist" and "Women are too easily offended". Example items on the Benevolent Sexism Scale

include: "Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess" and "Women should be cherished and protected by men". (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

Male Rape Myths Scale (MRMS; Struck man-Johnson & Struck man-Johnson, 1992)

Male Rape Myths 12 item self-report measure that reflects misconceptions about men as victims of rape. It is the only measure of male rape myth acceptance that distinguishes between male and female assailants. Six items refer to men being victimised by other men (e.g., "It is impossible for a man to rape a man"), and the other six refer to women as the perpetrator (e.g., "It is impossible for a man to be raped by a woman"). Participants are asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a six-point Likert scale ranging from Disagree strongly to Agree strongly. Higher scores represent greater endorsement of these rape myths. Four items were reverse scored, and an overall mean was generated called Mean Male Rape Myths (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$).

The Ambivalence Towards Men Inventory (ATMI; Glick & Fiske, 1999)

The ATMI is a 20 item self-report questionnaire that differentiates between women's hostile and benevolent prejudices and stereotypes about men. Respondents are asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a six-point Likert scale ranging from Disagree strongly to Agree strongly. Glick and Fiske (1999) extracted two means to assess benevolent sexism and hostile sexism; the coefficient alphas were .85 and .81, respectively. Example items include: "Men are unwilling to share power with women" and "Men should provide for women". (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

Results

The means and standard deviations for all measures were calculated. The results of this output are presented below (Table 1). A Spearman's ρ correlation was firstly performed to investigate any association between the acceptance of female rape myths (as measured by the IRMAS) and male rape myths (as measured by the MRMS), which found a significant correlation between the two, $r = .36, p < .01$. This significant relationship was explored further via a linear regression, to investigate the extent of the impact that accepting female rape myths may have on the acceptance of male rape myths. A significant regression equation was found, $F(1, 64) = 21.65, p < .05, R^2 = .29$, indicating that the higher acceptance of female rape myths is associated with a higher acceptance of male rape myths. To determine if there were similarities in the attitudes associated with rape myth acceptance in males and females, further correlations were performed. The association between the acceptance of female rape myths and ambivalent sexism towards women (as measured by the ASI) was investigated. As the ASI has sub-scales measuring for both benevolent and hostile sexism, along with an overall score for ambivalent attitudes, all three scales were separately correlated with the IRMAS.

Table 1: Means (M) and Standard Deviations (Sd) For All Scales And Sub-Scales.

Scale	M	SD
Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS)	2.84	0.56
Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)	2.73	0.76
Hostile Sexism (towards women)	2.65	0.99
Benevolent Sexism (towards women)	2.81	0.73
Male Rape Myths Scale (MRMS)	1.45	0.62
Ambivalence Towards Men Inventory (ATMI)	2.65	0.77
Hostile Sexism (towards men)	2.94	0.83
Benevolent Sexism (towards men)	2.35	0.93

Results found significant correlations for all three attitudes; benevolent ($p = .49, p < .01$), hostile ($p = .62, p < .01$), and ambivalent ($p = .63, p < .01$), indicating that the more accepting participants were of female rape myths, the more accepting they were of sexist attitudes towards women. The association between male rape myths (as measured by the MRMS) and ambivalent sexism towards men (as measured by the ATMI) was also calculated. Similar to the ASI, three scales of attitudes towards men were separately correlated with the ATMI (benevolent, hostile and ambivalent sexism). Results found no significant correlations, indicating no relationships between the acceptance of male rape myths and sexism towards men. To further investigate if the underlying ideologies supporting female rape myths is similar to those supporting male rape myths, a multiple regression was calculated using all correlated attitudes as predictors. As the MRMS found no correlations between male rape myth acceptance and sexism towards males, a regression was only calculated for female rape myth acceptance, using benevolent, hostile and ambivalent sexism toward women as predictors. Results indicated that hostile sexism ($\beta = .29, t = 4.43, p < .01$) was the only significant predictor for the acceptance of female rape myths, $F(2, 63) = 22.02, p < .01, R^2 = .41$.

Discussion

As one of the first studies to examine the rates of male rape myths within a UK university sample, the main aim of the study was to develop a better understanding of male rape myths, by investigating the factors associated with supporting these attitudes. Results found the acceptance of female rape myths to be a predictive indicator in the acceptance of male rape myths. This is in line with expectations and contributes to the evidence that the factors which facilitate rape myth acceptance are similar for both genders Chapeau et al. When exploring the attitudes that contribute to the acceptance of male and female rape myths however, results highlighted that the attitudes which facilitated rape myth acceptance for female victims did not work in the same way for male victims. Specifically, the current study found that those who were more accepting of female rape myths demonstrated increased levels of benevolent, hostile and ambivalent sexism, with hostile sexism shown to be a strong predictor.

This is in line with previous research which shows that ambivalent beliefs towards women are related to the acceptance of female rape myths Chapeau et al. [1]. As benevolent sexism casts females as weak and dependent on a male to look after them [12] and hostile sexism explains the justification of men's power over women [27]. However, when exploring male rape myths, there was no relationship between benevolent, hostile and ambivalent sexism and the acceptance of male rape myths. These outcomes are in contrast to previous expectations that the ideologies which facilitate rape myth acceptance for female victims may work in the same way for rape myths about male victims [15]. Chapeau et al. [28]. In particular, Glick and Fiske (1999) contended that ambivalent sexism towards men, including hostile and benevolent sexism, will relate to support of male rape myths. As similar to the way ambivalent attitudes (positive and negative) towards women relate to female rape myth acceptance, there is also positive and negative ambivalence towards men.

For example, both men and women may view men as being strong and resourceful (benevolent sexism), but at the same time, seeing them as arrogant and domineering (hostile sexism). Chapeau however, only found that benevolent sexism toward men was associated with male rape myths. As individuals high in benevolent sexism toward men may believe that men are supposed to be invincible and, if a man is raped, he must have showed some unmanly weakness to provoke the assault. The researchers further contended that as hostile sexism towards men is the belief that men exploit women for sex and power, it might be that this belief is only relevant in heterosexual interactions with the male as the aggressor. It can be argued that whilst male rape should be understood alongside female rape, its perpetration can differ significantly to that of female rape. The instruments used in the present study have been criticised for their hetero normatively Chapeau et al. One participant, who identified as gay, commented that he did not feel that the scales were as applicable to him.

Therefore, utilising scales based on heterosexual interactions, such as Struck man-Johnson and Struck man-Johnson's male rape myth scale, are inadequate to measure male on male rape myth acceptance. It would be interesting to see how utilising Melanson's Male Rape Myth Scale, a more rigorous measure of male rape myth acceptance [29]. which accounts for homophobic attitudes, may provide different results. Recent allegations made against Kevin Spacey (Mumford), and the media's conflation with homosexuality has contributed to the myth that only gay men and boys are raped, and rape others. Homophobia has been related to greater endorsement in rape myths [29]. It must also be noted that rape is an act of control and power as opposed to lust; however, whilst related, this topic warrants its own research and is a direction for further study. Furthermore, the differences found in results from the current study compared to previous research on male rape myth acceptance, could also be due to the nature of the population.

In particular, the current study is one of the first pieces of research to investigate male rape myths within a UK university, where previous studies have largely investigated North American populations Chapleau et al. Thus, future research is needed within the UK to build on these findings and establish if these differences are due to geographical or cultural dissimilarities. In sum, the authors found that in contrast to previous research, the ideologies associated with rape myths about female victims are not associated with rape myths about male victims. As this is one of the first studies to examine the ideologies underlying male rape myths in the UK, there may be other important variables, such as other attitudes and gender differences, which were not visited within the current study. Therefore, further exploration of these types of variables should be explored. Furthermore, despite the current findings being a first step towards understanding male rape myths within the UK, there are limitations of the study that need to be considered.

Specifically, most participants scored below the mid-point for both male and female rape myth measures indicating that they do not agree with rape myths. This is consistent with the literature Chapleau et al. with Struck man-Johnson and Struck man-Johnson (1992) suggesting that by providing the participants with a definition of rape prior to completing the questionnaire, they may have been “educated” and therefore displayed demand characteristics in their responses. Not only do the measures used in the current study require further psychometric assessment Chapleau et al. but with further research conducted across a variety of contexts, the development of more psychometrically sound questionnaires can become a reality. Additionally, in more recent years, sexual violence has been more frequently discussed in the media [30]. This increase in exposure to the rape problem may result in a belief that sexual assault is unacceptable [31], and a greater understanding and sympathy for rape victims.

With that, as the current study used a university population, with a strong bias towards females, the findings may not be generalised to other populations as university populations have been shown to be more aware of social issues [7]. Moore also found that university populations are more exposed to rape culture and are therefore less likely to endorse rape myths. Nonetheless, this should be considered in context, as the incidence of rape is disproportionately greater on university campuses compared with the general population [32]. Sexual assault against males has also been found to be greater at institutions such as college and within incarcerated settings such as prison [18]. Despite this, much of the current literature utilises a student sample, leading to an underestimation of rape endorsement; at least one study identified greater rape myth acceptance among older, less educated men [29]. Suarez and Gadalla’s (2010) meta-analysis, in contrast, did not reveal age to be a statistically significant predictor of rape myth acceptance [33].

As such, just as Davies et al. [14]. suggests, future research should focus on a more diverse sample, in a variety of contexts,

to investigate the possible discrepancies between different populations and male rape myth acceptance. Across the literature, males have displayed greater rape myth acceptance than females [14]. Chapleau et al. Thus the strong bias towards female participants in the present study (21 male, 44 female) may contribute to the low acceptance of rape myths overall. Despite these limitations, the present findings contribute to an important and understudied area of literature in understanding male rape myths and the ideologies that may support these attitudes within the UK. A more concise understanding of the area can subsequently lead to a number of social changes [34]. In particular, there is still no clear societal strategy to address the important issue of male sexual assault (Rogers, 1998), and whilst educational institutions in the US have begun to employ programmes in an attempt to change rape supportive attitudes, and thus prevent the incidence of rape (Lanier), help and support for male victims are more than 20 years behind that for females [10]. More importantly, these types of programmes have yet to be implemented or even explored within UK universities [35-39]. Male survivors are still struggling to speak out against sexual abuse in an environment and culture that perpetuates victim blaming, and hypo-masculinity. It could therefore be argued that further work into implementing such programmes in the UK is required and the development of such programmes starts with a clearer understanding of the rape myth cultural for males and females [40-43].

The current findings suggest that individuals who endorse female rape myths are likely to endorse male rape myths. Similarly, to Davies et al.’s suggestion (2012), intervention programmes should consider the implication of secondary victimisation. Those educating about rape should not allow negative beliefs about female rape to transfer to those relating to male victims. Furthermore, the endorsement of rape myths and victim blaming is linked with the under-reporting of rape due to fear of being ridiculed or shamed [45-47]. Therefore, the identification of factors which exacerbate this issue is of substantial concern. As the current study identified people exhibiting high benevolence were more likely to agree with male rape myths, male rape education interventions should aim to reduce benevolent sexism among individuals. As seen within the female rape literature [48], dispelling these myths through education interventions could ultimately improve reporting rates. The current findings contribute to the current literature by increasing awareness of male rape as an issue. Enhanced understanding and awareness should thus increase the likelihood of survivors speaking out and seeking support.

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