Rape Mythology and Victim Blaming as a Social Construct

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Rape Myths and the Social Construction of Rape

Rape myths are stereotypes about rape that undermine victims', rapists', and society's ability to correctly identify events as rape. These myths presuppose that some events are *real* rapes and that others are not real rapes (e.g., they reflect unfortunate miscommunication, victim manipulation, or sexual prerogatives). Common rape myths include: men cannot be raped, there must be physical resistance for it to be rape, and rape victims are responsible for their rape. Rape myths serve to protect rapists and perpetuate sexual aggression (e.g., Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011; Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007). They are deeply embedded in culture (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975/1981; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) and can be found in religious doctrine and cultural prescriptions that can apply to both female and male rape victims (e.g., Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Rape myths vary in the popularity with which they are held, but can be impactful even when held by a small minority. Rape myths often suggest that victims are responsible for their rapes (e.g., they engaged in risky and seductive behavior or their appearance caused the event). Rape myths also suggest that "unfortunate" circumstances contribute to purported rape (e.g., the supposed inability to control sexual urges or the presence of alcohol). At their core, rape myths involving female victims are influenced by gender, traditional beliefs, and hostile attitudes toward women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, 1995). Rape myths involving male victims are a product of gender stereotypes and sexual norms (Turchik & Edwards, 2012).

Background, History, and the Development of Measures of Rape Myths

Social science theory and research on rape myths are a product of a cultural revolution in Western societies that began in the 1960s. This brought the second wave of the Women's Movement and a concomitant interest in Women's Studies (Evans, 1995). It also brought an interest in the personal and political nature of violence against women (Brown, 2017). It is in this context that social science research on rape flourished. This research noted the widespread presence of rape, the attempted moral justifications for rape, and rape myths.

In 1975, Brownmiller published, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Brownmiller,

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1975/1981). Brownmiller's book documented the widespread presence of rape and its patriarchal origins, resting on the view of women as property. She noted the use of rape as a weapon of hegemony in wars, pogroms, and subjugation (e.g., slavery). She also described the cultural and political ramifications of rape, "Rape is to women as lynching was to blacks: the ultimate physical threat by which all men keep all women in a state of psychological intimidation" (p. 281). Brownmiller exposed many rape myths (e.g., women lie about rape, women are responsible for rape, and women who do not actively physically resist are not victims of rape). She noted what she called the four *deadly male myths of* (female) *rape* which were: all women want to be raped; no woman can be raped against her will; she was asking for it; and if you're going to be raped, you might as well relax and enjoy it. A central theme of the book was that rape myths promote and foster rape.

At approximately the same time, Koss and her colleagues (e.g., Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Koss & Oros, 1982; Warshaw, 1988/1994) conducted a large-scale study of US college students. This research suggested that there were many victims of rape (as legally defined) who did not label their personal experience as rape (they were *unacknowledged rape victims)*. Nevertheless, unacknowledged rape victims often showed the same symptoms as women who were acknowledged rape victims (e.g., sexual dysfunction issues, psychological distress, and problematic alcohol use) (e.g., Frazier & Seales, 1997; Koss et al., 1988; McMullin & White, 2006; Schwartz & Leggett, 1999). This leads to the questions: "Could someone be raped (or rape) and not know it?" and "Why would they not know it?" One answer is found in the widespread misunderstanding concerning the nature of many rapes (e.g., Kanin, 1984; Warshaw, 1988/1994) and the adherence to a real-rape script that assumes that rapes are physically violent events that occur between strangers (e.g., Ryan, 1988). Many rapes involve acquaintances (not strangers); perpetrators use size, strength, and weight to disarm and neutralize the victim (not weapons or extreme physical aggression); there is often prior consensual sexual foreplay; and alcohol and other drugs are often involved. It is likely that rape myths create ideas about the nature of sex that prevent individuals from understanding the reality of rape for many (e.g., Edwards et al., 2011; Ryan, 2011).

Goodchilds and her colleagues added research on adolescents' views concerning the legitimate use of force during sex on dates (e.g., Goodchilds, Zellman, Johnson, & Giarrusso, 1988). Goodchilds et al. asked a mixed-race group of adolescents who were between 14 and 18 years old about the circumstances that legitimized the use of force for sex. Most participants (72%) said that force was never acceptable. Nevertheless, in response to other questions, many said they believed that some circumstances could legitimize the use of force. These circumstances included: he's so turned on he cannot stop, she's had sexual intercourse with other guys, she is stoned or drunk, and she led him on. All of these would be rape myths. Only 34% of the participants said never to all of nine circumstances listed. Goodchilds et al. also found that many boys believed that some situations (e.g., a girl going to a guy's house or to the beach with him) and behaviors (e.g., ticking, professing love, or talking about sex) signaled a girl's interest in sex, a view that might not be shared by their dating partners. Finally, participants were more likely to label nonconsensual sex as rape when the couple wasn't dating.

It is in this larger cultural and scholarly context that research on rape myths emerged. Two of the earliest researchers on rape myth acceptance were Burt (1980) and Feild (Barnett & Felid, 1977; Feild, 1978). Burt and Feild both looked at rape myth acceptance in adult citizens, but Feild also looked at police, victim advocates, and a small number of men who were convicted of rape and currently incarcerated in a mental institution. Both measures explored female rape myth acceptance (i.e., they assumed that perpetrators were male and the victims were female) and were initially validated on college students. Burt's items were drawn from feminist theory and social psychology research and the measure was called the *Rape Myth Acceptance* scale. Burt included two additional scales, *Adversarial Sexual Beliefs*

(e.g., "In a dating relationship a woman is largely out to take advantage of a man" p. 222) and *Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence (*e.g., "Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to used force" p. 222), which were highly correlated with rape myth acceptance. Follow-up research suggested there were potentially three major factors of the *Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* (e.g., Briere, Malamuth, & Check, 1985; Jones, Russell, & Bryant, 1998). They were: Doubts concerning claims of rape, Rape victim blame, and Beliefs that women lie about rape (an additional factor in the Briere et al. study was Rape only happens to certain kinds of women).

Feild's items were drawn from a review of popular and scholarly publications and the measure was called *Attitudes toward Rape*. There were two measures—an initial 25-item measure (Barnett & Felid, 1977) and a final 32-item measure (Feild, 1978). These measures are virtually identical. Feild sought to include items about the act, the victims, and the rapist. Feild also included a test which attempted to measure knowledge about the circumstances of rape; however, there was no correlation between rape knowledge and rape myth acceptance in Feild's study. Barnett and Feild found significant gender differences on 18 items from the 25-item *Attitudes toward Rape* scale, with most of these items indicating that males were more likely than females to believe rape myths. This gender difference has been supported in later research. Gender differences often emerge indicating that females are less likely than males to believe rape myths (e.g., Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997; Hockett, Smith, Klausing, & Saucier, 2016; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Meta-analyses show effect sizes are often in the small-medium range (e.g., Anderson et al. found an average correlation $r = .33$ for gender differences in rape myth acceptance and Hockett et al. found an average $d = .23$ in perceptions of rape victims).

Feild (1978) found eight sub-factors for the 32-item *Attitudes toward Rape* scale. The largest factor was labeled "Women's Responsibility in Rape Prevention" and included items such as "A woman should be responsible for preventing her own rape" (R) and "A raped woman is a responsible victim, not an innocent one" (R) (all items are from Table 1, pp. 161–164). The other factors were: the relationship between rape and sex (e.g., "The reason most rapists commit rape is for sex" (R) and "Rape is the expression of an uncontrollable desire for sex" (R)), punishment for rapists (e.g., "A convicted rapist should be castrated" (R) and "A man who has committed rape should be given at least 30 years in prison" (R)), women's culpability in rape (e.g., "In forcible rape, the victim never causes the crime" and "Women provoke rape by their appearance or behavior" (R)), the perceived normality of rape (e.g., "Rapists are 'normal' men" (R) and "All rapists are mentally sick"), power motivations for rape (e.g., "Women are trained by society to be rape victims" (R) and "All rape is an exercise of male power over women" (R)), perceptions of women after rape (e.g., "A woman should not feel guilty following a rape" (R) and "A raped woman is a less desirable woman"), and women's resistance during rape (e.g., "During a rape, a woman should do everything she can do to resist" (R) and "If a woman is going to be raped, she might as well relax and enjoy it"). Feild found several important group differences in rape myth acceptance. Most notably, victim advocates frequently showed lower rape myth acceptance than the other groups and police officers showed similar attitudes toward rape as rapists on four of the eight factors. Finally, gender differences emerged on seven of the eight factors with females showing more negative attitudes towards rape.

Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999) reviewed the literature and found 24 measures of rape myth acceptance, but Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) suggested that Burt's measure was the most widely used. Payne et al. noted that most measures concentrated on beliefs about rape victims and had problems with question wording. They developed the *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance* scale in response. Their participants were mostly college students, but Payne et al. also distributed the *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* to a small number of victim advocates and police cadets. The *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* had seven factors: she asked for it, it wasn't

really rape, he didn't mean it, she wanted it, she lied, rape is a trivial event, and rape is a deviant event.

The *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance* scale was later updated to provide a subtler measure of rape myths (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Based on focus group feedback, McMahon and Farmer updated the wording of items and kept four of the original seven factors: she asked for it, it wasn't really rape, he didn't mean it, and she lied. They also added items that reflected the role of alcohol in unintentionality (i.e., "If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally;" "If both people are drunk, it can't be rape;" and "It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing" p. 75). This became a fifth factor. Females were more rejecting of rape myths than males. Only one item showed general agreement: "If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble" (54.2% agreed). The other items that were agreed on by at least 33% of the participants were: "If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control" (37%), "When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble" (34.9%), "If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex" (36.2%), "When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex" (36.2%), "Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl" (34.4%), and "If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape" (33.2%).

Gerger et al. (2007) suggested that most measures of rape myths were outdated and produced highly skewed distributions (i.e., most participants strongly disagreed). In response, they developed the *Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression* scale. It was a 30-item measure and is available in English and German. The *Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression* scale produced higher levels of item acceptance and less skewed distributions than the *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale*. Sample items include: "It is a biologically necessity for men to release sexual pressure from time to time," "Although the victims of armed robbery have to fear for their lives, they receive far less psychological support than do rape victims," and "If a woman invites a man to her home for a cup of coffee after a night out this means that she wants to have sex" (pp. 439–440). The *Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression* Scale added items that reflected a denial of the scope of sexual assault and a lack of support for relevant policies, along with more traditional rape myth acceptance items assessing antagonism towards its victims, beliefs that male coercion is normal, and beliefs that blame the victim or circumstances (Eyssel & Bohner, 2008).

Finally, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992) argued that there are also male rape myths (e.g., adult men cannot be raped) and they developed a measure of *Male Rape Myth Acceptance*. The items were created by face value to reflect the beliefs that males cannot be raped (two items), male rape victims are somewhat to be blamed (two items), and rape is not traumatic for male rape victims (two items). There were six items written with a male perpetrator and six items with a female perpetrator. All items were rated by college students on 6-point Likert scales with higher numbers indicating greater agreement. The items were preceded by a definition of rape. Results showed that most participants disagreed with male rape myths, especially when there were male perpetrators. In addition, female participants showed lower male rape myth acceptance than male participants. The lowest levels of acceptance were found for the traumatic items (i.e., "Most men who are raped by a man (woman) are upset by the incident" (R) and "Most men who are raped by a man (woman) do not need counseling after the incident" (p. 90)); however, some participants agreed that a male rape victim would not be upset when raped by a female (35% of males and 22% of females). For the myth that men cannot be raped, 22% of males and 18% of females agreed (30% of the males and 18% of the females agreed that a strong man could not be raped by a woman). Nevertheless, some of these results might be due to the fact that participants saw a definition of rape before they responded to the measure.

In conclusion, measures of rape myths have evolved along with the larger culture. Most

measures suggest some form of victim culpability, desire for perpetrator exoneration, and beliefs that certain types of rape do not occur. They also suggest that rape is a product of sexual urges and people should be skeptical of claims of rape, especially when there is a delay in reporting. We can expect measures to continue to evolve as rape myths change. Many older rape myths (e.g., the trivialization of rape and blatant victim blaming) are now socially unacceptable and have been replaced with the beliefs that some victims contribute to their victimization and that rape can be an unintentional consequence of sexual interactions (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Alcohol and miscommunication are often invoked (Deming, Covan, Swan, & Billings, 2013; McMahon & Farmer, 2011), along with sexually provocative behaviors and a lack of physical resistance (McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). Thus, there is a shift from automatically exonerating purported assailants and blaming rape victims to expressing concerns that some behaviors can impair judgment and make individuals vulnerable to victimization/perpetration. Even the earliest research on rape myth acceptance found that some items were endorsed infrequently. For example, the Feild (1978) data showed low levels of agreement with "If a woman is going to be raped, she might as well relax and enjoy it" (p. 162) and "'Nice' women do not get raped" (p. 163). Three subscales from the *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* also showed low levels of agreement (i.e., It wasn't really rape, Rape is a trivial event, and Rape is a deviant event; Payne et al., 1999). More recent examples of infrequently endorsed beliefs are "Any woman who is careless enough to walk through 'dark alleys' at night is partly to be blamed if she is raped" (p. 439, Gerger et al., 2007) and "If the accused 'rapist' doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape" (p. 77, McMahon & Farmer, 2011).

It is possible that, much like modern racism and benevolent sexism (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 1996; McConahay, 1983), modern Western rape myths are framed in terms of seemingly more benign issues such as unfairness to the accused (and a possible rush to judgment), beliefs that rape victims get more funding and attention than they deserve, and concern that society has gone too far in challenging old norms. In addition, contemporary rape myths suggest that rape can result from alcohol abuse, slutty behaviors, and sexual urges (McMahon & Farmer, 2011), but they still blame the victims and exonerate the perpetrators. Contemporary rape myths also place limits on the acceptable behaviors for women (and some men). Thus, they support the old adage that potential victims are responsible for rape prevention.

There is also a need for more culturally sensitive measures of rape myth acceptance. For example, Huang (2016) developed a Chinese version of rape myth acceptance based on Burt's *Rape Myth Acceptance* scale and the *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale.* Huang and Lin (2017) argue that rape myths in Taiwan are influenced by traditional Chinese values such as an orientation toward family and the need for chastity. Oh and Neville (2004) also found that the importance of chastity influenced responses on the Korean Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. They suggest that some beliefs (e.g., victim culpability) are cross-cultural, whereas others are culturally specific (e.g., the tragic loss of virginity). Family and culture can also influence rape myth acceptance in Hispanic males (Lawson, Munoz-Rojas, Gutman, & Siman, 2012).

Finally, the question should be asked: Do rape myths largely operate at a conscious level, as is supported by current measures and most research, or might they reflect unconscious processes? Cognitive psychology suggests that there may be different levels of processing (e.g., Evans & Stanovich, 2013). Judgments are frequently made at a default level that is rapid and intuitive. Some judgments may be later followed by conscious reflection. Both conscious and unconscious thoughts can be biased and rape myths might operate at both levels. If rape myths operate at an unconscious level, then they might influence individuals even in the absence of awareness. There are a variety of attitudes (e.g., ageism, racism, sexism) where implicit biases have been found (Nosek, Banaji, &

Greenwald, 2010). Implicit Association Measures examine the unconscious connections that people make between constructs by rapidly presenting pairs of words and examining reaction times in responses. Implicit measures of rape myths may be needed (Edwards et al., 2011). For example, Edwards et al. note the possibility of an implicit power–dominance association that could be related to rape myth acceptance. There could also be research exploring individuals' unconscious associations with a real-rape stereotype and rape myths (e.g., real rapes are physically violent events, rapists are strangers, and strong resistance is essential in real rapes; alcohol use, sexual urges, miscommunication, and later regret are indications that it was possibly not a real rape).

Temkin and Krahé (2008) believe that rape myths (and the real-rape stereotype) act as heuristics that induce schematic processing at every stage of legal decision-making (e.g., police, juries, judges). Bohner and colleagues (e.g., Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler, & Viki, 2009; Süssenbach, Eyssel, & Bohner, 2013) argue that rape myths act as cognitive schemas (i.e., mental frameworks for organizing experience and memory) and that rape myth-inconsistent cues (e.g., the presence of alcohol) can impact judgments of culpability, especially for those who strongly hold rape myths. Rape myths may be chronically accessible in sexually coercive males (Bohner, Jarvis, Eyssel, & Siebler, 2005) and tied to dominance motives for sex (Chiroro, Bohner, Viki, & Jarvis, 2004). Finally, White, Donat, and Humphrey (1995) found that affectively based attitudes toward rape (i.e., value judgments, descriptions of character, or injunctions such as "Women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they deserve" p. 34) showed a stronger association with sexual coercion than did cognitively based attitudes (i.e., statements that could be verified as factual (or not) such as "In forcible rape the victim never causes the crime" p. 34). This suggests a stronger link between emotionally based rape myths and behavior than with cognitively based rape myths and behavior. And, Huang (2016) found that sexual aggression in Taiwanese males was associated with two rape victim myths (i.e., women secretly wish to be raped and victims exhibit improper demeanors) but not rape perpetrator myths (i.e., perpetrators are sexually impulsive and rapists are the minority who are deviants). Thus, the underlying relationship between rape myths and related behaviors might be quite complex.

Rape Myths Prevent Victims from Understanding That They Were Raped

Weis and Borges (1973) argued that rape is the perfect crime to get away with because cultural beliefs and norms delegitimize purported victims. They noted that sex-role socialization produces masculine men and feminine women who interact in private in a dating game that could easily result in nonconsensual sex. Society taught the woman that she was "both defenseless and responsible for the prevention of her victimization" (p. 94). Because of rape myths (e.g., rapists are strangers, rapists are lower class), it can take a long time for a woman to know the true intentions of her assailant as he shifts from seduction to rape. She might respond to the intimidation with incredulity, embarrassment, and/or paralyzing fear. Because the woman knows her assailant and does not want to be stigmatized as a victim, she could hesitate to define her experience with forced sex as rape. Thus, societal beliefs create the *justifiable rape* and the *legitimate* (i.e., culpable) victim. Moreover, typical social responses to rape (e.g., the police) further delegitimize the victim's experience and make it unlikely that she will disclose or report the event. Thus, she becomes the *safe* victim who tells no one.

Research shows that the majority of rapes are not reported, especially acquaintance rapes (e.g., Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Littleton, Rhatigan, & Axsom, 2007; Temkin, 1987/2002). Wilson and Miller (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of 28 articles and found that 60% of women did not acknowledge the rape. This could be because the woman was concerned with the repercussions of reporting. It is also possible that

she had not labeled the event as a rape (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004, 2007). Rape myths create rape scripts that suggest that rape is an extremely physically violent event that occurs between strangers (Ryan, 2011). The assailant is clearly in the wrong and the victim is completely blameless. Because stereotyped rape scripts do not match a victim's personal experience with force and coercion, she won't acknowledge that her experience of sex without consent was rape (Littleton et al., 2007). In support of this, Kahn, Mathie, and Torgler (1994) found that women who held stereotyped rape scripts were less likely to label their personal experience with forced sex as rape. Women were also less likely to acknowledge their experience as rape if the assailant was their boyfriend, if they did not engage in intercourse, and if they were impaired by alcohol or drugs (Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger, & Halvorsen, 2003). Women who acknowledged rape were more likely to report they felt dirty, confused, sad, and detached from reality after the experience. They also reported more forceful aggression, threat/intimidation, and greater assailant blame. Bondurant (2001) found that participants were more likely to acknowledge an event as rape if it was aggressive and they were less likely to acknowledge an event as rape if they endorsed more items from a real-rape script (e.g., physical attacks, weapon use, and severe physical harm to victims). Finally, rape victims were more likely to report a rape to police if it matched some features of a real-rape script (i.e., the presence of a weapon, physical force, injuries, and multiple assaults) but not others (e.g., there was prior drinking or a prior relationship) (Du Mont, Miller, & Myhr, 2003).

Peterson and Muehlenhard (2004) found that two common rape myths influenced the acknowledgement of rape (i.e., it's not rape if women don't fight back and women who sexually tease men deserve the consequences of their behavior). Peterson and Muehlenhard also found that inconsistencies between the sex acts and the definition of rape as penile-vaginal penetration inhibited rape acknowledgment. In addition, their data suggested that rape acknowledgement might not be a dichotomous decision. They suggest that rape myths provide a series of *hurdles* that must be overcome in order to label an event as rape. Definitions of sex in which issues of consent and willingness must be negotiated can make self-definitions of rape ambiguous for potential victims (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). This is especially true when alcohol is involved. Furthermore, defining an event as rape has implications for understanding of the self, the relationship, and the other person. For example, labeling an incident as rape might imply that people should report it, increase their feelings of vulnerability and trauma, and/or require that they label the other person as a rapist and themselves as rape victims.

Peterson and Muehlenhard (2011) developed a theory of self-labeling of nonconsensual sex in terms of whether the event closely matched the victim's rape script (or a different sex script) and the consequences she anticipated in applying the rape victim label. Their research showed that participants who were unacknowledged rape victims rejected the rape victim label, often matching their experience to several stereotyped rape script elements that were lacking. These include characteristics of the assailant (e.g., he was their boyfriend, he was a nice guy), their own behavior (e.g., she was intoxicated or engaging in sexual foreplay), low levels of force and resistance, and/or their motivation to avoid the *rape victim* label.

In conclusion, rape myth acceptance can interfere with the ability to label a personal experience as rape. This can have detrimental ramifications for mental and physical health (Ullman, 2010). Rape myth acceptance can also place women at risk for future victimization (Littleton, Grills, Layh, & Rudolph, 2017). Rape myths are a part of a general cognitive schema that influences emotions and behavior (Bohner et al., 2009). Rape myths serve different functions in males and females. Rape myths decrease the perceived threat of rape for females. And, because females are more likely to identify with rape victims, rape myths can support defensive victim-blaming attributions (Grubb & Turner, 2012). When rape victims blame themselves for their experiences, it can delay rape acknowledgment and the healing process (Ullman, 2010).

Rape Myths Prevent Assailants from Understanding That They Raped

Rape myths are an important determinant of assailants' self-labelling. Ryan (2004) suggested that rape myths are a central element in the belief systems of rapists. She cited evidence for rape myths in convicted rapists and acquaintance rapists who were not convicted offenders. Weis and Borges (1973) noted that men are socialized to initiate sexual activity as an act of power and dominance. "The man learns the same basic mythology of rape as the woman. He is aware of the notion that rape can only be committed by a stranger" (p. 87). This myth helps men to rationalize and justify sexual aggression at the same time that it prevents victims from reporting their experience.

Kanin (1984) found that the majority of self-disclosed date rapists said that they ignored the victim's attempts at resistance because of prior sexual foreplay (and their belief that the victim was aroused), they implicated alcohol as a "causal factor," and they used "physical overpowering" rather than threats or weapons to coerce sex (p. 101). "Put simply, a substantial number of these rapes occurred because the 'right man' (sexually aggressive and determined) did the 'right thing' (presented a level of force not usually encountered in dating) to the 'right girl' (easily frightened or inebriated)" (p. 102).

Kanin (1967) also found that men who engaged in more extreme sexual pressure were likely to believe that sexual aggression was sometimes justified (e.g., the woman was a teaser, gold-digger, or loose). Real or imagined promiscuity elicited male demands for sex (Kanin, 1969). Sexually aggressive men held a sexual double standard and exploited a partner's willingness to engage in sexual foreplay as provocation and an excuse for rape.

Anderson et al. (1997) found that a predisposition towards perpetrating rape was a strong predictor of rape myth acceptance in males. They included 32 reports in a meta-analysis. They predicted that rape myths (and other rape-supportive attitudes) would correlate with measures of sexual coercion. Cognitive predisposition measures (e.g., a desire to rape and coercive fantasies) correlated .59 with rape myths. A self-reported likelihood to rape correlated .38 with rape myth acceptance and sexual force/coercion showed a lower but still highly significant correlation with rape myths ($r = .19$).

Schewe, Adam, and Ryan (2009) studied the relationship between rape myth acceptance and a personal temptation to sexually aggress in college males. Responses on the *Rape Myth Acceptance* scale were not related to an acknowledgement of the temptation to use force; however, men who were sexually coercive or aggressive showed a greater belief in the manipulativeness of women compared with the other tempted participants. In addition, several sexual aggressors blamed the victim for their behavior (e.g., she was a tease, she had a weak no). And, several nonsexually aggressive participants endorsed rape myths when trying to explain how other men could be tempted to sexually aggress.

In sum, rape myths can serve to rationalize aggressive tendencies in males, creating *techniques of neutralization* that include denial of victimization, injury, or responsibility (Bohner et al., 2009). Rape myths can reflect a self-serving bias in males that serves to dismiss the possibility of rape (Grubb & Turner, 2012). This could be because males are more likely to identify with perpetrators than with victims. Rape myths are associated with the proclivity to rape (e.g., Bohner et al., 2005; Chiroro et al., 2004). Sexually coercive males are more likely to hold rape myths (e.g., Bohner et al., 2005; Carr & VanDeusen, 2004; DeGue & DiLillo, 2004; Truman, Tokar, & Fischer, 1996). They are also more likely to repeat sexual aggression if they minimize the severity of rape and blame the victim (Abbey & McAuslan, 2004). Sexually aggressive males are also more likely than others to believe that most men share their rape-supportive attitudes (Kroner, Boer, & Mills, 2004). And, feedback that other men believe rape myths increased rape proclivity in males, especially those who themselves believe rape myths (Bohner, Siebler, & Schmelcher, 2006).

Rape Myths Prevent Society from Understanding the Nature of Rape and Can Create a Lucifer Effect

Rape myths also operate at a systemic level. Historical, cultural, and religious forces support rape myths (Edwards et al., 2011; Franiuk & Shain, 2011). These forces impact society at many levels, including peer groups and legal institutions. This can lead to a *Lucifer Effect* in which the social power structure directs individuals' behavior and leads to rape (Zimbardo, 2007/2008). Rape myths play a central role in constructing legitimate and illegitimate sexual aggression. They can operate in peer-group support of rape (e.g., fraternities, sports teams, and members of the military) and influence societal responses to rape (e.g., legal, religious, and cultural).

Peer Groups

College Fraternities and Sports Teams. Peer groups influence sexual aggression in males (e.g., Mikorski & Szymanski, 2017). Two groups that have been associated with sexual aggression in college are fraternities and sports teams (e.g., Benedict, 1998; Kingree & Thompson, 2013; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997; Young, Desmarais, Baldwin, & Chandler, 2017). Both groups show greater rape myth acceptance (e.g., Benedict, 1998; Boeringer, 1999; McMahon, 2010, 2015; Seabrook, Ward, & Giaccardi, 2018) and are influenced by a cultural context that encourages entitlement and demeans women (Martin, 2016). Rape myth acceptance has been linked to sexual coercion in high school and college athletes (e.g., Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Pakalka, & White, 2006; Young et al., 2017) and fraternity members (e.g., Kingree & Thompson, 2013; Seabrook, McMahon, & O'Connor, 2018).

Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) presented a model that suggests that male peer support for rape and heavy alcohol use are part of a culture that promotes the abuse of women in college. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether sexually aggressive men seek specific groups or whether the groups change the men. It is likely that both forces occur. Research shows higher levels of rape myth acceptance in males who intended to pledge a fraternity or play in college sports (McMahon, 2010). In addition, longitudinal data showed that males who joined a fraternity held more rape myths than a comparison group of males (Seabrook, McMahon, & O'Connor, 2018). Research also showed that perceived peer approval and heavy alcohol use influenced the likelihood of later sexual aggression in fraternity members (Kingree & Thompson, 2013). Rape myth acceptance was associated with perceived peer pressure to have sex, perceived approval of forced sex, heavy drinking, and sexual aggression. Perceived peer-pressure and rape myth acceptance were also associated with sexual deception in fraternity members (Seabrook, McMahon, & O'Connor, 2018). And, rape myth acceptance was correlated with the sexual objectification of women.

It appears that pornography might play a role in promoting coercive sex in fraternities. Bleecker and Murnen (2005) found that fraternity members were more likely to display degrading sexual images of women than were nonmembers and there was a correlation between the use of degrading images and rape myth acceptance. Foubert, Brosi, and Bannon (2011) found that 83% of fraternity members viewed pornography (27% viewed sadomasochistic pornography). Both were associated with rape myth acceptance, especially sadomasochistic pornography. Finally, fraternity members and athletes might be more likely than other men to believe that group sex is appropriate (Benedict, 1998; Sanday, 1990). This can have dangerous consequences for women.

Gang rapes are especially heinous. Fraternities and athletic teams are relatively common sources of gang rape in college (e.g., Benedict, 1998; O'Sullivan, 1993; Warshaw, 1988/1994). Sanday (1990) studied a fraternity gang rape at the University of Pennsylvania ("pulling a train" p. 1). She suggested that the rape was a male bonding ritual in which a drugged, drunk, and comatose woman was later held as responsible for her victimization. Loyalty, brotherhood, and

the dehumanization and objectification of women are causal factors in fraternity gang rape (e.g., Martin & Hummer, 1995; Sanday, 1990). Athletic teams can also promote a rape culture (Warshaw, 1988/1994). Benedict suggests that athletes often assume consent in potential sexual partners because of the adulation they receive and the presence of groupies. "It is the suddenness and abundance of special treatment that instills in the student-athlete a sense of elitism" (p. 50). Benedict cites peer pressure and entitlement as factors in the gang-rape of a woman by the members of a professional football team. The team's lawyers portrayed the victim as responsible for the incident.

The military. Rape is also associated with the military. Brownmiller (1975/1981) dedicates an entire book chapter to rape in war (including both world wars, Bangladesh, and Vietnam) and another on riots, pogroms, and revolutions. She said that, "men who rape in war are ordinary Joes" (p. 25) and "a simple rule of thumb in war is that the winning side is the side that does the raping" (p. 27). Rape is the ultimate humiliation of an objectified enemy and the victim is a symbol. Rape is one of the rewards of winning. Rape can be part of the arsenal of war.

Turchik and Edwards (2012) noted that most reported sexual assaults in members of the military were from other members of the military. Research shows that sexual harassment and sexual assaults are more common in the military than in civilian society (e.g., Allard, Nunnink, Gregory, Klest, & Platt, 2011). In a literature review of research on military sexual trauma, Allard et al. reported prevalence rates between 22 and 45%. Prevalence rates were lower for male than for female victims. Nevertheless, military sexual trauma was associated with psychological, medical, and physical complaints in both males and females. Street and colleagues (i.e., Street, Mahan, Hendricks, Gardner, & Stafford, 2003; Street, Stafford, Mahan, & Hendricks, 2008) studied a random sample of military reservists. They found that 3.5% of the males and 23.3% of the females reported sexual assault and 1.2% of the males and 11.1% of the females reported an attempted or completed rape while they were in the military (Street et al., 2003). The estimated prevalence of any military sexual trauma (including sexual harassment) was 27.2% for males and 60% for females. There was a higher prevalence rate for military sexual trauma for females in the Marines than for those in other groups (75%).

Skinner et al. (2000) studied a random sample of female veterans in a VA hospital and found that 23% said that someone had "used force or the threat of force to have sexual relations with you against your will while you were in the military (p. 295)." Fifty-five percent suggested that they were "subjected to uninvited or unwanted sexual attention" (p. 295). O'Brien, Keith, and Shoemaker (2015) suggest that rape myths are part of a military culture that derogates women (e.g., joking, insult talk, homophobic language).

Turchik and Edwards (2012) suggested that the military perpetuates the myth that men cannot be raped. Voller et al. (2015) examined the role of male rape myth acceptance in Gulf War veterans who were victims of sexual abuse. Male rape myth acceptance was correlated with the devaluation of emotions and lower self-efficacy. Voller et al. suggested that the rejection of male rape myths was associated with increased self-efficacy in all of the veterans (not just those who were sexually victimized).

O'Brien et al. (2015) interviewed male veterans who were in treatment programs who had a history of military sexual assault. They suggested that the most important male rape myth stated that men cannot be raped (or *real men* cannot be raped). This myth promotes shame and steals the victim's manhood. O'Brien et al. also cited several other male rape myths: Male rape is not serious, Male rape is homosexual, and Females cannot rape males. These rape myths lead victims to question their own culpability and delay treatment.

Carroll and Clark (2006; Carroll, Rosenstein, Foubert, Clark, & Korenman, 2016) studied military cadets and compared them with civilian college students. They found that male cadets shared many rape scripts with civilian college males, but they also had a few distinctive scripts. Most importantly, the cadets focused more on the female victim's culpable behaviors (e.g.,

seductive dress, event mislabeling). A later study using the short form of the *Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* suggested that civilian fraternity/sorority students and students in military/naval academies showed similar rape myths (e.g., females lie about rape and females' behaviors make them culpable). As in other research, females had lower rape myth acceptance than males. Interestingly, students in the military academy showed lower rape myth acceptance than those in the naval academy and civilian fraternity and sorority members.

In conclusion, there is evidence to suggest that some peer groups act to support rape myths. They include male-dominated groups such as fraternities, sports teams, and the military. These groups can act to support a rape-prone individual and encourage rape in those who are not rape-prone. When rape myths are held by powerful people and systems are corrupt, they can create a Lucifer Effect. The Lucifer Effect refers to an individual's transformation of character from ordinary to evil in the face of potent situational pressures (Zimbardo, 2007/2008). The Lucifer Effect can cause average people to become rapists. "Reasonable people act irrationally, independent people act in mindless conformity, and peaceful people act as warriors" (p. 11). One example is rape in war. One consequence of corrupt political and military authorities is that they encourage the average GI Joe to rape. Another example could be found in some fraternities and athletic teams. Group bonding rituals and the presence of rape myths (e.g., women enjoy a *train*) can produce sexual aggression that is exalted—even exaggerated. The individuals who rape are left with the memory of their own despicable behavior and must deal with the psychological, moral, and emotional consequences on their own. How can an average Joe deal with the fact that they raped—that they were a rapist—that they are a rapist? Cognitive dissonance theory predicts that they must believe those rape myths that justified their behavior. To do otherwise is to risk their identity as a moral person. Thus, rape myths might cause sexual aggression, but they also might be a product of sexual aggression.

Justice System

Rape myths operate throughout the criminal justice system creating a *justice gap* in which victims of sexual assault are denied justice (Temkin & Krahé, 2008). Stereotypes (e.g., rapists are strangers and there must be considerable physical resistance for it to be a rape) operate at every stage of the legal process: victims' decisions to report, the police response, lawyers' decisions to prosecute, how defense attorneys defend the case, jury decision making, and judges' behavior. In each stage, rape myths decrease the likelihood that purported perpetrators will be reported, prosecuted, or convicted. Furthermore, beliefs about other people's rape myths can also negatively influence individuals' responses (e.g., the police anticipate jury decision making in rejecting some cases). Rape myths operate at the core of victim-blaming attributions that can occur in police officers, juries (and the general public), lawyers, and judges. Rape myths operate at both an individual and an institutional level to create the justice gap.

Justice system—the police. Police hold several rape myths (e.g., Feild, 1978; Krahé, 1991; Parratt & Pina, 2017). Most attrition in rape cases occurs at the police investigation phase (Hamilton (2004) as cited in Brown & Horvath, 2009 (p. 328); Temkin & Krahé, 2008). Brown and Horvath describe a vicious cycle in which rape myths trigger a *real-rape* stereotype, which in turn influences attrition that then feeds into and fosters further acceptance of rape myths. Police see rape as serious and they understand the negative consequences of rape, but they also perceive the *typical* rape and the *credible* rape to be the stereotyped real rape (Krahé, 1991). Police were more dubious about rape when victims were drunk, when there was little resistance or attempted escape, when the victim and assailant were previously acquainted, and when the rape took place in someone's home.

Parratt and Pina (2017) did a systematic review of research on rape myths in police officers. Characteristics of the crime, the police officers (e.g., gender, age, and personal experience), beliefs and attitudes (e.g., rape myths), and professional training all influenced decisions about

rape. Research showed that "officers had a pre-conceived idea of what the ideal victim would be; leading them to question the victims' credibility and increase victim blame if victims did not fit officers' pre-conceptions" (p. 80). For example, the presence of a prior relationship led to greater victim blame. Research showed that there were many factors that interacted to yield complicated outcomes; however, female police officers often had lower rape myth acceptance than male officers.

Temkin and Krahé (2008) describe a process called *downstreaming* in which police officers decided whether to proceed with a particular case (or treat it with suspicion) based on their assumptions concerning juries' real-rape stereotypes. Moreover, when rape victims anticipated dealing with suspicious police officers, they were less likely to report the event. Thus, beliefs about other people's rape myths can influence police and victim behavior even when they do not share the rape myth.

O'Keeffe, Brown, and Lyons (2009) studied police decision making on rape cases in Ireland (the police are called the Garda). They described a skeptical mindset in which the Garda assumed there were a relatively high proportion of false claims and a need for collaborative evidence. O'Keeffe et al. described a heuristic process in which the Garda looked for cues of deception in purported victims, including inappropriate affect, inconsistent information, information that did not match a story line that was consistent with a stereotyped real rape, and other characteristics about the purported victim (e.g., promiscuity and social class). O'Keeffe et al. suggested that there is a strong confirmation bias and need for evidence that matched the real-rape stereotype. Thus, rape myths can influence the Garda's interviewing process as well as their final recommendations.

Finally, Cook and Lane (2017) demonstrated that male rape myth acceptance in jail correctional officers was associated with victim blame of incarcerated sexual assault victims. Jail correction officers from Florida were distributed surveys and 376 participated in the study. Rape myths were assessed by 4 items from the *Male Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* and victim blame was assessed by a 7-item measure (e.g., "Some inmates deserve to be sexually assaulted in jail because of the way they act" p. 355). Attitudes toward homosexuality were also assessed. Two of the 4 male rape myths were significantly associated with victim blame (i.e., "It is impossible for a man to rape a man" and "Most men who are raped by a man do not need counselling after the incident" p. 359). Regression analyses were complex but showed that victim blaming was associated with male rape myth acceptance and homophobia.

Justice system—lawyers, juries, and judges. Research also demonstrates the common use in rape myths in criminal trials. Research on the role of rape myths in criminal trials often uses vignettes and mock juries (e.g., Temkin & Krahé, 2008). It is more difficult to find research on real-life decisions; however, some researchers have used court observations (e.g., Smith & Skinner, 2017; Temkin, Gray, & Barrett, 2018) and others have interviewed participants (e.g., judges and barristers were interviewed by Temkin & Krahé).

Ellison and Munro (2009) used a mock jury paradigm involving 27 jury deliberations to study typical jurists' responses to an acquaintance rape. Mini-trials were enacted based on scripts created by experts. The trials took approximately 75 min and juries deliberated for another 90 min. Nine scenarios were presented. Ellison and Munro varied the victim's resistance, delay in reporting, and the amount of victim distress expressed during the trial. Several themes emerged that are consistent with the juries' use of rape myths. For example, many jurors blamed the purported victim for sending mixed signals prior to the rape, inviting the man into her home, and talking to him for an extensive period of time. The jurors suggested that men have a difficult time controlling their sexual behavior, but force (and bruising) was not acceptable and might be an indication of rape. Jurors spent a lot of time discussing the role of alcohol in sexual behavior, even though the individuals only had one drink. They also suggested that an abrupt departure of the purported assailant might be consistent with rape.

Rape myths can also influence the jury's decision-making process. Ellison and Munro

(2010) studied the dynamics of decision making using the mock jury trials noted in the previously reviewed study. Results showed a pronounced trend toward acquittal during the deliberation process. Jurors often influenced other jurors by noting inconsistencies with the real-rape stereotype (e.g., a lack of resistance) and they underscored the need for 100% certainty for a guilty verdict (a misreading of the mandate to find *beyond a reasonable doubt*).

These findings were replicated in a 2013 study of mock jury responses to a purported rape by an ex-partner, even though jurors were instructed by the judge that a prior relationship did not imply a lack of guilt (Ellison & Munro, 2013). "The jurors in this study invoked a number of acceptable 'scripts', forged in the context of contemporary socio-(hetero)sexual relationships, against which the conduct of the parties, and the allegations of sexual assault, were measured. These scripts often positioned women as having primary responsibility for acting as sexual gatekeepers, communicating their willingness or refusal clearly and unequivocally, whilst bearing in mind the presumed predisposition of 'red-blooded' men to 'push their luck' as sexual initiators" (pp. 309–310). Jury deliberations influenced the final adjudged innocence of the defendant.

Gray (2006) studied the influence of judicial instructions on decisions concerning perpetrator guilt. University students took the *Rape Myth Acceptance* scale and were given a vignette describing a date rape. The guidance instructions were varied (pro-rape myths, anti-rape myths, and neutral). Males showed greater rape myth acceptance than females. In addition, responses on the *Rape Myth Acceptance* scale were significantly correlated with judgments of perpetrator innocence (r = .46). Finally, participants who were given guidance instructions involving rape myths were more likely to believe that the accused assailant was innocent than were participants who were given instructions refuting rape myths. This was especially true for males who initially supported rape myths.

Ellison and Munro (2009) studied the influence of guidance instructions on jury decision-making using a mock-jury paradigm. They included expert testimony or expansive instructions that dealt with and refuted some common rape myths (e.g., individual differences in reactions to rape, levels of resistance, delays in reporting, and emotional responses). A content analysis of the jury discussions and later self-report measures showed that jurors were impacted by both expert testimony and expansive instructions to show lower rape myth acceptance in judgments of guilt, except for the case where there was a lack of resistance and absence of injury. Thus, some rape myths persisted in the face of expert guidance to the contrary.

Krahé, Temkin, Bieneck, and Berger (2008) studied rape myths in future lawyers (study 1 had undergraduate law students and study 2 had post-graduate lawyer trainees). Both studies used 6 rape vignettes that varied perpetrator-victim relationships and coercive strategies (physical force versus alcohol-induced incapacitation). Results showed that prospective lawyers held several rape myths and rape myth acceptance was associated with victim blame (especially when the purported victim and assailant had a prior relationship or when alcohol was involved).

Temkin et al. (2018) engaged in rape trial observations in England and developed themes involving rape myths. They found that the defense often invoked rape myths and the real-rape stereotype to highlight inconsistencies and discredit the victim. Prosecutors and judges rarely countered the rape myths (and some judges even affirmed rape myths).

Smith and Skinner (2017) did a discourse analysis of court observations in the UK. They found a pattern in which the arguments that lawyers used assumed that people responded rationally even in exigent circumstances (e.g., the decision to rape or the proper response must be completely logical). The most common rape myths referred to victims' inappropriate demeanor, delays in reporting, failure to cut contact with the accused, and (lack of) physical resistance.

Zydervelt, Zajac, Kaladelfos, and Westera (2017) coded transcripts from rape trials in New Zealand and New South Wales to test for changing trends in defense lawyers' cross-examination

of rape complainants. They noted that cross examinations are by nature adversarial and found that the lawyers often used rape myths to challenge purported victims' credibility/plausibility (e.g., relationships with the accused perpetrator before or after the event, delayed reporting, a lack of resistance, and prior sexual history). Defense attorneys also questioned the victim's reliability and consistency (e.g., intoxication or inconsistencies in her account).

Finally, Temkin and Krahé (2008, Chap. 6) interviewed 17 judges and seven barristers, all of whom worked on rape trials. Temkin and Krahé noted that rape myths influenced some behaviors. For example, some judges told jurors to seek independent corroboration of the victim's testimony. Others believed that the victim's sexual history was relevant. Thus, some judges and prosecutors were also influenced by rape myths.

In conclusion, research shows the presence of rape myths throughout the justice system (e.g., Horvath & Brown, 2009; Temkin & Krahé, 2008). There is a consistent pattern in which rape myths increase victim blame and decrease the likelihood of prosecution and convictions, creating a justice gap. Rape myths occur at the individual level but they are also a part of institutions. When rape myths are present in the training of professionals or in the instructions to a jury, they can impact victim reporting, police recommendations, and/or jury decisions. When jury members invoke rape myths to convince other jury members to vote for an acquittal, they can lead to the exoneration of the guilty. Unfortunately, the use of rape myths might be inherent in a criminal justice system that assumes an adversarial process. Police are skeptical of potential rape victims and defense attorneys base victim cross-examination on rape myths, causing secondary victimization. Thus, rape myths operate at the core of the current justice system and have ramifications throughout.

Religion and Culture

Rape myths also operate at a cultural level. Religion and culture impact social beliefs that justify and sustain sexual aggression (e.g., Edwards et al., 2011; Franiuk & Shain, 2011). Definitions of rape are culturally specific and they determine the meaning of behavior (Martin, 2003). Support for rape myths are embedded in laws, language, and social policies (Edwards et al., 2011; Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Culture may be even more important than gender in understanding attitudes toward sexual aggression (Nayak, Byrne, Martin, & Abraham, 2003). Rape myth acceptance is associated with restrictive beliefs about women (Costin & Schwarz, 1987). And, rape myth acceptance might be related to other prejudicial beliefs, including homophobia, ageism, classism, and religious intolerance (Aosved & Long, 2006). Finally, male rape myths are common and this results in the invisibility and marginalization of male rape victims in war (Grey & Shepherd, 2013).

Edwards et al. (2011) described the impact of Western cultural and Judeo-Christian beliefs on four female rape myths. The myths are: husbands cannot rape their wives, women enjoy rape, women asked to be raped, and women lie about being raped. Edwards et al. cited long-standing tradition and three institutions (i.e., legal, religious, and media) that support rape myths. In addition, Franiuk and Shain (2011) added evidence of religious and cultural support for rape myths (e.g., husbands cannot rape their wives and women ask to be raped) in Hinduism and Islam and their related cultures. Religious texts, cultural traditions that promote family honor, and the lower status of women justify punishment for rape victims, especially when religion and cultural traditions are conflated (and supported by law).

Sheldon and Parent (2002) suggest that "most clergy blame the victim and adhere to rape myths" (p. 233). They found that Christian religious fundamentalism correlated with responses to an acquaintance rape vignette. A content analysis showed that the clergy sometimes blamed the victim of a date rape for showing inadequate resistance and the victim of an acquaintance rape for showing poor judgment. A small number of clergy mentioned the wife's duty to submit and

be sexually competent when responding to a wife rape vignette.

Klement and Sagarin (2017) studied Christian dating-advice books directed toward women. A thematic analysis showed strong beliefs that women must remain pure and negative consequences for violating social norms. The books suggested that women were responsible for sexual aggression (e.g., flirting, provocative dress), that women should accept that some sexual aggression is normal, and that nonsubmissive women should be derogated.

Ward (1988) was one of the first rape myth researchers to focus on culture. She validated an *Attitudes toward Rape Victims* scale on a variety of groups (e.g., university students, police, lawyers, and social workers) in Singapore and university students in the US. The *Attitudes toward Rape Victims* measure concentrated on victim credibility, denigration, trivialization, deservingness, and blame. Males had more unfavorable views of rape victims than did females on 23 of 25 items. Interestingly, Singaporean students showed more negative attitudes toward rape victims than US students. In addition, there were also differences within the Singaporean sample: police were the least favorable, lawyers and doctors were in the middle, and social workers and psychologists were the most favorable in their attitudes toward rape victims.

Many researchers have shown cultural effects on rape myths. For example, Scottish university students showed lower rape myth acceptance than US college students (Muir, Lonsway, & Payne, 1996) and Asian American college males showed greater misogyny, less perpetrator blame, and more victim blame than Caucasian American students (Koo, Stephens, Lindgren, & George, 2012). In addition, Japanese males showed greater rape myth acceptance than US males, perhaps because Japan is a male-dominant culture (Stillman, Yamawaki, Ridge, White, & Copley, 2009). And, rape myth acceptance appeared to be higher in a Turkish participant sample than in comparison groups from the west and Israel (Costin & Kaptanoğlu, 1993). Thus, it is clear that some cultures are more supportive of rape myths than others. Nevertheless, cultural differences are not always found. For example, ethnic identity did not predict rape myth acceptance in Asian Indians in the US (Tummala-Narra, Houston-Kolnik, Sathasivam-Rueckert, & Greeson, 2017) and Scandinavians (a relatively liberal group) did not show lower rape myth acceptance than individuals from North America (Bendixen, Henriksen, & Nøstdahl, 2014).

Other researchers have explored the underlying reasons for cultural differences in rape myth acceptance. For example, Hill and Marshall (2018) found that Indians showed greater rape myth acceptance than Britons at least partially because of more negative attitudes toward women. Canto, Perles, and Martín (2017) found that belief in an honor culture correlated with victim blame in Spanish college students who were judging an acquaintance rape and marital rape vignette (but not a stranger rape vignette). In addition, Rebeiz and Harb (2010) studied Lebanese students and found that conservative and traditional beliefs were associated with rape myth acceptance on the *Attitudes toward Rape Victims* scale. Interestingly, the same data did not show differences in rape myth acceptance between Christian and Muslim students.

Research has also showed that similarity in ethnic identity can influence reactions to perpetrators of rape. Bongiorno, McKimmie, and Masser (2016) found that white Australians took ethnic similarity into account when judging acquaintance rape vignettes that did not adhere to the real-rape stereotype. Perpetrators were described as English or American (culturally similar) or Indian or Pakistani (culturally dissimilar). The vignettes were identical except for perpetrator information and two details that were inconsistent with a real-rape script (i.e., a lower level of physical resistance and a lack of cooperation with the police). It appears that perpetrator and victim blame mediated the effects of cultural similarity and script elements on judgments of perpetrator guilt and punishment. Thus, ethnic similarity might influence responses to some rapes (and rapists).

In conclusion, religion and culture play an important role in rape myth acceptance. Culture and religion help to shape society's views of

normal and abnormal behavior. Rape myths are used to caution individuals about the appropriateness of behavior and they can entitle some individuals to rape. This can have lasting negative effects on rape victims. Unfortunately, the presence of rape myths at a deep cultural level also makes it very likely that secondary victimization will occur and rape will remain a hidden crime.

Best Practice

Education and Prevention

Rape myths are often discussed in college education and prevention efforts; however, they might still exist in some college training. For example, an examination of college websites showed that most of the messages were aimed at females and many suggested that rape prevention was up to them (e.g., there is no safe place, you can't trust anyone, and you must communicate sexual limits) (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2015). These rape myths clearly reflected the old adage that women are vulnerable, but they also are responsible for rape prevention. Rape prevention efforts have showed some success in educating participants about rape myths (e.g., Kress et al., 2006; O'Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, 2003). And, Rape myths should continue to be a primary target of rape prevention work (Schewe, 2002). However, rape myth acceptance scores can rebound over time, sometimes to their original levels (e.g., Davis & Liddell, 2002; Heppner, Humphrey, Hillenbrand-Gunn, & DeBord, 1995) and sometimes to levels that are somewhat lower than the original levels (Foubert & Marriott, 1997). Even when there are significant long-term program effects, programs may be better at reducing rape myth acceptance than at reducing actual sexual aggression (e.g., Foubert, 2000; Gidycz et al., 2001). Moreover, the benefits of rape prevention might be lower in males who are at higher risk for sexual aggression (e.g., Stephens & George, 2009) and rape prevention programs might not reduce rape myths in high-risk males to the levels that are found in low-risk males (Schewe & O'Donohue, 1993a). Finally, there are problems with some of the outcome measures used in prevention work, as many rape myth acceptance scales are outdated and have issues with validity (Baldwin-White, Thompson, & Gray, 2016; Heppner et al., 1995; Schewe & O'Donohue, 1993b). There is also the question of the *clinical significance* (as opposed to statistical significance) of changes in rape myth acceptance found in prevention work (Schewe & O'Donohue, 1993b) and an absence of criteria for acceptable levels of rape myth acceptance. In addition, there is a need for culturally sensitive measures.

Still, some argue that it is good to use rape myth education in bystander intervention programs (e.g., McMahon, 2010), although it is a mistake to list potentially outdated rape myths as this can backfire (Krahé, 2016). It appears that longer programs work better than shorter programs (e.g.,Anderson & Whiston, 2005 ; Flores & Hartlaub, 1998). Some suggest that same-sex audiences work better than mixed-sex audiences (e.g., Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Schewe, 2002). Theory-testing research performs better than atheoretical programs (Schewe, 2002; Schewe & O'Donohue, 1993b). And, motivated audiences show better retention than unmotivated audiences (Foubert & Marriott, 1997; Foubert & Newberry, 2006). Finally, responding to rape myth acceptance scales may in itself attune participants to their stereotypes and decrease later rape myth acceptance (e.g., Foubert & Marriott, 1997; Rau et al., 2010).

The outdated nature of many rape myth measures and the presence of newer rape scripts (e.g., Clark & Carroll, 2008; Littleton, Tabernik, Canales, & Backstrom, 2009) argues that myths and scripts have changed and will continue to change over time. Thus, it is important for rape education and prevention efforts to recognize the evolving nature of our understanding of rape and the nuances of sexual negotiation (Frith, 2009).

- Any rape prevention efforts must include contemporary rape myths in outcome measures (e.g., alcohol-induced "mistakes" are not real rapes, victims' promiscuous behavior leads to rape, and rape is due to sexual urges). Old-fashioned rape myths (e.g., rape victims

should relax and enjoy it, rapists are deviants, and all women want to be raped) should be avoided. Rape myths must be perceived to be personally relevant, although the real-rape stereotype can and should be acknowledged.
- Any rape prevention efforts must include myths about male rape victims.
- Culturally relevant rape myth measures should be developed.
- Rape prevention programs must address potentially unconscious determinants in understanding sexual behavior (including heuristics and schema) and ask participants to acknowledge their own sexual assumptions, especially those concerning normal and abnormal sexual behaviors. Educators might consider using examples of implicit associations and/or priming to illustrate the possibility of unconscious associations (e.g., Devine, 1989; Nosek et al., 2010).
- Rape prevention programs must go beyond the overly simplistic "no means no" messages to acknowledge the complexities and nuances of negotiating sexual behavior.
- Rape prevention programs should include warnings about the Lucifer Effect, especially for those in male-dominated peer groups.

Medicine, Religion, and Psychotherapy

There is some evidence that therapists and counselors hold fewer rape myths than other professional groups (e.g., Ward, 1988). Nevertheless, there is a danger of secondary victimization, as therapists assist victims and perpetrators in working through their own and society's rape myths. Rape myths can be used as a tool to educate and to advocate for rape survivors (Ullman, 2010). Rape myths can also protect individuals from believing that they are victims or perpetrators (Bohner et al., 2009). Thus, the discussion of rape myths and scripts must be done very carefully and efforts must be made at avoiding the imposition of personal rape myths on rape victims. Rape myths can delay acknowledgment and treatment for rape survivors (Ullman, 2010) and they can leave individuals vulnerable to future victimization or perpetration (Littleton et al., 2017).

- Rape myth theory and research should be part of the education and training of professionals, especially those who will likely deal with the aftermath of rape (e.g., college counselors, emergency room personnel, and victim advocates). Training should include a feminist therapeutic orientation because it enhances a victim-oriented perspective and understanding concerning the social and political context of rape (e.g., Brown, 2017; Hutchinson & McDaniel, 1986), including the presence of rape myths.
- There needs to be more research on rape myths and rape-myth prevention in counselors, therapists, and medical personnel.
- Counselors, therapists, and medical personnel need to be aware of their own rape myths (and real-rape stereotypes) in an effort to avoid secondary victimization This will require continuous vigilance. They should be especially attuned to unconscious (implicit) associations that suggest that the rape victim was culpable in rape.
- Clergy must challenge the use of religious scripture to condemn and punish rape victims and they must become aware of their own real-rape stereotypes.

Justice Systems

Researchers have focused on the need to reform the justice system in order to reduce attrition, eliminate the justice gap, and decrease secondary victimization (Temkin & Krahé, 2008). Because police act as gatekeepers and have a pivotal role in determining which cases are prosecuted, one could argue that they are the most important element in the criminal justice system response to rape. Police should be educated about rape myths, but training alone will not eliminate bias (Parratt & Pina, 2017). Parratt and Pina note that several factors influence attitudes toward rape in the police (e.g., level of education, gender, and

experience with rape victims). These factors can interact to influence perceptions of rape victims (e.g., female police officers benefit more than male police officers from sexual assault training, they are more likely to know rape victims, and they are more likely to use rape victim advocates). Most police officers reported an absence of clear guidelines for rape investigations. Guidelines should be provided. In addition, police should be encouraged to examine the impact of their personal beliefs every time they interview a purported victim of rape. They should also be encouraged to include victim advocates when taking rape complaints. It is crucial that police and correctional officers be made aware of the roles that male rape myths and homophobia have in their treatment of men who are raped outside of prison or while incarcerated. Officers must be made aware of the danger of secondary victimization and the justice gap.

Researchers have also noted problems with jury decisions (e.g., Krahé & Temkin, 2009; Temkin & Krahé, 2008). Krahé and Temkin suggest several possible solutions. For example, jurors could be pre-screened to eliminate those with strong rape myth acceptance and/or juries could be required to provide an account for their decisions (thus reducing heuristic processing). It is also possible to replace juries with educated judges, especially female judges. In addition, it appears that expert testimony and judicial instructions can reduce rape myth acceptance and may inhibit a group dynamic that favors acquittal. Finally, educating juries (and the larger public) about rape myths is essential to reducing the impact of rape myths in trials.

In addition, rape myth education is essential in the training of judges and lawyers (Temkin et al., 2018). This is especially important for anyone serving in sexual assault trials. Professionals must be warned against using rape myths in either prosecution or defense, as this opens the door for juries to entertain their own rape myths. Most importantly, jurists must move from a system that assumes rational thought (Smith & Skinner, 2017). Judges are an essential element in rape trials and should be encouraged to use jury instructions and allow expert testimony to reduce the justice gap for rape.

- It is essential that education about rape myths and realities occurs throughout the justice system, including the police, lawyers, judges, and juries. Special efforts must be made to educate police and custodial officers about their prejudices concerning rape victims that results in high attrition rates. Nevertheless, since past research showed mixed results for sexual assault training programs on police officers (Parratt & Pina, 2017), more research is needed. Research on rape prevention in college students might be useful in implementing programs for police officers. For example, research shows that motivated participants retain more information (e.g., Foubert & Marriott, 1997; Foubert & Newberry, 2006), longer programs work better (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Flores & Hartlaub, 1998), and *The men's program,* which features a male sexual assault victim who is a police officer, is quite successful at increasing understanding and empathy for rape victims in college males (e.g., Foubert & Perry, 2007).
- In addition, officers must be made aware of the roles of male rape myths and homophobia in the poor treatment of male rape victims both in- and outside of prison.
- Special efforts also must be made to ensure that the adversarial process inherent in the justice system and group dynamics favoring acquittal in jury decision making are not allowed to rely on rape myths and the real-rape stereotype.

Overall Conclusion

Rape myths play a pivotal role in the social construction of rape. Continued research is essential to address the changing nature of rape myths. Rape myths can be held at a cultural level, at an institutional level, and at the individual level. Rape myths legitimize sexual aggression and in so doing foster sexual aggression. Rape myths

help to create the *legitimate* victim who is blamed for the event and lead to secondary victimization when victims disclose or report the rape. Recognizing rape mythology helps people to understand the true nature of many rapes and is essential in the fight against rape.

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