

Beyond Christianity: The Status of Women and Rape Myths

Renaë Franiuk · E. Ashley Shain

Published online: 3 June 2011
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2011

Abstract The Edwards et al. (2011) paper is an important review of several rape myths that are prevalent in American culture. When discussing religion, Edwards et al. (2011) present a rather thorough review of the presence of such rape myths in Christianity but lack a discussion of rape myths in other religions. Given the profound influence of religion on culture, notably the treatment of women, it is important to go beyond Christianity in a discussion of rape myths. Although there is much attention given to the treatment of women in Islam, the current paper will address religions that often receive less attention as well. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to review the treatment of women and the use of rape myths in non-Western religions.

Keywords Rape myths · Religion · Islam · Hinduism · Buddhism

Beyond Christianity: The Status of Women and Rape Myths

Given that 76% of Americans identified as Christian in a recent national survey (Kosmin and Keysar 2009), it is understandable that Edwards et al. (2011) focused on Christianity in their review of rape myths in American culture. Although not explicitly mentioned in their review, the overlap between rape myths in Christianity and Judaism is great, given their sharing of the Old Testament (e.g., Blenkinsopp 1984). However, a more thorough review of

rape myths should go beyond Judeo-Christian beliefs and investigate the influence of other religions on these myths and the cultures where these religions are prominent. A more thorough review is important not only to avoid an ethnocentric bias, but to acknowledge 1) that the number of adherents to non-Western religions in the United States has increased steadily over the last 30 years (Kosmin and Keysar 2009), and 2) that non-Christians comprise about 52% of the world's religious adherents (Barrett and Johnson 2001). The purpose of the current paper is not to assert that religion is the only origin of rape myths but to expand the discussion of religion and rape myths beyond the Edwards and colleagues review to Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism (the three most populous religions outside of Christianity (Barrett and Johnson 2001)).

Edwards et al. (2011, this issue), note that “rape ideologies emanate from a patriarchal system.” Patriarchy and the status of women around the world are strongly influenced by religion (e.g., Albee and Perry 1998; Starr 1991). Whether this influence is direct (e.g., religion dictates law) or this influence is more indirect (e.g., religion influences lawmakers although there is formal separation of religion and state) varies from country to country (Temperman 2007), but the resulting treatment of women as second-class citizens is universal. Further, whether the status of women is shaped by literal passages in religious text or by sexist interpretations that serve the male interpreter, again the result is status that is unequal to (and lower than) that of men. Unfortunately, the ability to separate religious text from faulty interpretation varies from religion to religion. For example, in Islam, the Qur'an is accepted as the literal word of God; in Judaism and Christianity, on the other hand, their respective religious texts were filtered through men (Scott 2009). Further, many feminist scholars argue that the religious texts must be

R. Franiuk (✉) · E. A. Shain
Department of Psychology, Aurora University,
347 S. Gladstone,
Aurora, IL 60506, USA
e-mail: rfraniuk@aurora.edu

interpreted in the context in which they were written to reveal the true intent of the text (e.g., An-Na'im 1995; Scott 2009). Complicating the issue, few within a religion want to acknowledge that their religion discriminates against women so claims of misinterpretation are often inaccurately made (Gross 2003). Therefore, the central aims of this paper are to a) review religious text that includes phrases that support rape myths; and b) to investigate, where possible, distorted or selective interpretations of text that have been used to support rape myths. Admittedly, there are numerous religious texts within each religion. This paper will mainly focus on the writings that are regarded as the important or most used in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, also focusing on common interpretations of these texts.

Religion and Rape Myths

In general, themes of female chastity, wifely duties, and the ideal woman in religious texts contribute to a culture that excuses men's violence against women (Narasimhan-Madhavan 2006; Niaz 2003). It is easy to see how suggestions that a woman is acting inappropriately or outside of her prescribed role may lead to victim-blame myths. It is also easy to see how expectations that a woman's body is owned by a man or that a wife has certain sexual obligations to her husband contribute to myths that excuse men's rape of women. Again, the sexist interpretation of religious texts can vary but clear passages dictating appropriate behavior of women and reinforcing women's inferior status to men in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are presented below. Further, as noted above, many scholars note the general inferior status of women in society when most religions began. One can find writings about female chastity, family honor, rape, and marriage from ancient Hittite, Assyrian, and Babylonian societies that may have influenced the religions discussed here (Brownmiller 1975). Therefore, this paper does not argue that inferior status of women originated with religion; but rather this paper argues that, regardless of the origin of women's inferiority, these religions have reinforced these notions for thousands of years. Finally, although religious texts may include passages that reinforce inferiority of women and rape myths, the impact of religion on the treatment of rape victims may be moderated by the role of religion in determining state policy. If the separation of religion and state is viewed as a continuum of influence of religion on government, countries with Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism as the dominant religions typically fall on the side of the continuum with, at least, more formal separation of religion and state; Islamic and Hindu states, on the other hand, typically see much greater overlap between religion and government (Temperman 2007). As will be

noted below, in general, the more directly religion influences law, the lower the status of women and the poorer the treatment of rape victims.

Islam

Much has been written about the association between the poor status of women and Islam (e.g., Badawi 1994; Denmark 2004; Engineer 1992). Although Islamic countries vary in their overlap of state and religion and in their treatment of women (King 2009), typically countries with looser religion/state ties (e.g., "civil Islam" as opposed to "regimist Islam") have better human rights (Temperman 2007). Nevertheless, some question whether any country with a strong Islamic presence could be a true Democracy, championing equality for men and women (King 2009). Islamic religious leaders (*ulema*) hold authority to influence law in a way that is not seen in most Western countries (King 2009). *Shari'a*, Islamic law thought to be derived from the literal word of Allah in the Qur'an, the words of the Prophet Mohammed in the hadith, and the behavior of Mohammed in the Sunna, often governs the rights of men and women in Islamic countries both informally and through formal legislation (An-Na'im 1995). However, there is much debate about the extent to which norms and laws governing the treatment of women in Muslim cultures are accurate reflections of Islamic religious text. Many claim that the Qur'an regards men and women as equals, and that the introduction of Islam in the seventh century actually improved the rights of women (e.g., Badawi 1994; King 2009). Almost exclusively, though, men have interpreted the words of the Qur'an, dismissing the viewpoints of those who were supportive of women's rights (Shaaban 1995). The lower status of women in countries where Islam is the state religion is well-documented (e.g., King 2009), but many scholars contend that the Qur'an and Islam in general have been used improperly by male leaders to maintain their dominance and the subjugation of women (e.g., Afkhami 1995; Afshar 1985; Denmark 2004; Western 2008).

Studying 1500 adults in Tanzania, Muganyizi et al. (2010) found that Muslim identification was associated with more victim blame reactions to a rape victim than identification with other religions. However, many scholars state that moral codes supposedly derived from Islam are not faithful to *shari'a* but rather are distorted by male interpreters and/or need to be reinterpreted in a modern context (e.g., Shaaban 1995). Therefore, it is important to examine passages from the Qur'an or other Islamic religious texts that have been interpreted to support rape myths and have formed the basis of rape laws in Muslim countries. First, an oft-cited passage to justify the dominance of men, the subordination of women, and a

husband's right to commit violence against his wife is found in the Qur'an 4:34: "Men are appointed the guardians over women... so virtuous women are obedient and safeguard, with Allah's help, matters the knowledge of which is shared by them with their husbands. Admonish those of them on whose part you apprehend disobedience, and leave them alone in their beds and chastise them" (Translation by Muhammad Zafrulla Khan). Although this translation of the Qur'an uses the phrase "chastise them" to describe a husband's response to a disobedient wife, the more common translation of this phrase is "beat them" (Douki et al. 2003, p. 168). Feminist scholars are quick to point out that in the hadiths, the actual words of Mohammed (Brown 2009), there is a passage that says, "It is the generous (in character) who is good to women, and it is the wicked who insults them" to counter claims that Islam sanctions husband abuse (Douki et al. 2003, p. 170). However, it is important to remember that feminist voices and interpretations have been largely ignored, even in modern times (King 2009; Shaaban 1995).

In most countries where Islam is the predominant religion, family honor is a very important concept given the strict adherence to moral behavior dictated by the religion (e.g., Douki et al. 2003). Women's sexual purity holds a particularly important role in the honor of one's family, as is clear in an Arabic phrase stating that "a man's honor lies between the legs of a woman" (e.g., Vandello and Cohen 2003, p. 998). Many sexual behaviors, including rape, can bring dishonor to one's family (Beyer 1999). Often regardless of the veracity of a woman's claim of rape, she is viewed as having brought dishonor to her family for *zina*, sexual relations outside of marriage (Weaver 2007). Haeri (1995) discusses how the rape of a woman robs a man (often the victim's father or husband) of his honor so he must take action to restore his honor. Of course one can restore honor by punishing the rapist, but there are many cases of rape victims being violently punished to restore family honor. In Jordan, a man who killed his sister the day after she reported being raped said, "it's better to have one person die than to have the whole family die from shame" (Beyer 1999, para 1). Many scholars say that there is no support for this type of honor violence in the Qur'an (e.g., Badawi 1994). The Qur'an 8:151 explicitly forbids murder: "and that you destroy not the life that Allah has declared sacred, except for just cause," but one can easily see how the latter phrase "except for just cause" could be used to justify an honor killing. Further, a Sahih (meaning "sound" as in reputable (Brown 2009)) Muslim hadith has been interpreted to support the murder of children who move away from Islam (Sahih Muslim Vol. 19 Hadith No. 4457).

Although the Qur'an may not explicitly support the type of honor violence described above, the Qur'an is very clear in its condemnation of *zina* (Badawi 1994). In the Qur'an

24:2–5, "Flog the adulteress and the adulterer, each one of them, with a hundred stripes." This verse only mentions adultery, but it is usually interpreted to include any sex outside of marriage (Badawi 1994). Unfortunately, rape victims are often punished for their rapes because, regardless of force, sexual relations occurred outside of marriage. In 2001, a woman in Pakistan reported her rape to police and was eventually sentenced to death for violating *zina* (Kohat 2002). Most women who are convicted in these cases are not killed by the state but spend years in prison or are given other punishments for their "crime" (Kohat 2002). In a well-publicized case from Saudi Arabia in 2007, a woman who was gang-raped was sentenced to 200 lashes and six months in prison for being with an unrelated male at the time she was raped (the rapists were also punished to 2–9 years in prison) ("Saudi court," 2007). Although her sentence was eventually overturned by the Saudi king, punishing rape victims like this is not uncommon. In 2011, a fourteen-year-old girl in Bangladesh died, after receiving 80 lashes due to a religious ruling citing *shari'a* law for punishment (for adultery), after reporting being raped by her forty-year-old cousin ("Rape Victim," 2011).

Much of the honor violence committed against a rape victim in Muslim cultures is in response to the suggestion that a woman was acting improperly and that her behavior encouraged or facilitated her rape. There are a few passages in the Qur'an that have been interpreted to promote myths that women "ask to be raped." First, the Qur'an 24:31 directs "believing women to restrain their looks... and should not disclose any part of their beauty or their adornments save to their husbands or their fathers..." and other male relatives and children. The Qur'an 33:59 tells women to dress modestly and "pull down their outer cloaks from their heads over their faces... so that they will not be molested." In 2006, a top Muslim cleric in Australia said about the rape of women who do not wear hijab (the woman's head scarf), "If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside on the street, or in the garden or in the park, or in the backyard without a cover, and the cats come and eat it ... whose fault is it, the cats or the uncovered meat?" ("Ethnic leaders," 2006, para. 4). In other words, it is a woman's responsibility to cover herself or dress in a way that does not incite her rape. Second, in the Qur'an 33:32 women are encouraged to "speak in a simple straightforward manner, lest he whose mind is diseased should form an ill design; and always say the good word." This phrase could be interpreted to suggest that a rape victim will be believed as long as she conducted herself with modesty and in a way that did not encourage her rape.

The Qur'an has many passages about sexual relations between husband and wife that are relevant to rape and rape myths. In particular, the myth "husbands cannot rape their wives" has rather clear origins in several Islamic passages.

After reading the Qur'an 2:223, one can see why marital rape is not recognized in some Islamic states: "Your wives are as a tilth for you, so approach your tilth as you like." If "tilth" is interpreted as a husband's land to be cultivated, the implication is that a husband is to approach his wife for sex as he would like. Similarly, hadiths are often cited when discussing marital rape in Islam: "If a husband calls his wife to his bed and she refuses and causes him to sleep in anger, the angels will curse her till morning" (Sahih Al-Bukhari Vol. 4 Hadith No. 460; Sahih Muslim Vol. 2 Hadith Nos. 3366–3368). Although more modern interpretations suggest that these phrases do not imply that a husband has the right to force his wife to have sex, it is easy to see how these passages might be used to give husbands unlimited sexual access to their wives. In Bangladesh, a predominantly Muslim country, around 55% of women in rural areas (and 40% of women in urban areas) believe that a woman cannot refuse her husband sex just because she does not want to have sex (World Health Organization 2005). Not inconsequentially, in the same World Health Organization study, 50% of rural Bangladeshi women and 37% of urban Bangladeshi women reported experiencing sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime (WHO 2005).

Much of the public backlash against Islam and rape is in response to the Hudood Ordinances in Pakistan and similar introduction of strict Islamic criminal laws in other countries (e.g., Weaver 2007; Weiman 2009). The Hudood Ordinances were made law by former military dictator, Zia ul-Haq, in 1979 to bring Pakistani law more in line with his interpretation of *shari'a* law (Kennedy 1988). The ordinances set specific guidelines for the determination and punishment of *zina* (sex outside of marriage) and *zina-bil-jabr* (rape). First, a female rape victim was required to produce four male witnesses (assuming her rapist does not confess) to support her claim (Weaver 2007). If she is unable to produce these witnesses, then she is guilty of *zina*. Further, the courts often dismiss claims of rape ruling that these women are merely trying to prevent the dishonor of their family with their illicit sex by falsely claiming rape (Kennedy 1988). The ordinances also eliminated marital rape as a crime (Weaver 2007). In 2006, under much pressure from Pakistani and international women's rights groups, female rape victims were no longer required to bring four witnesses to support their claim but little else changed with the ordinances ("Pakistan lawmakers," 2006). Although human rights activists saw this as a positive move to shift blame from the victim to the perpetrator, Islamic fundamentalists opposed these changes citing that the "government was acting against Islam" ("Pakistan lawmakers," 2006, para. 3).

Beyond the Hudood Ordinances, rape laws in many Muslim countries reflect the inequality between men and women in these societies and promote many rape myths. As

noted above, in many Muslim countries, marital rape is not illegal (e.g., Jordan, Egypt) (Warrick 2005). The myth "husbands cannot rape their wives" becomes a reality. Further, up until 1999, rapists in Egypt could avoid punishment for their crime by marrying their victim; this is still the case in Jordan (Warrick 2005). Also discussed in the Old Testament of the Bible, marrying one's rape victim was thought to be restitution to a father for dishonoring his daughter and making her otherwise unmarriageable (Warrick 2005). Again, the proprietary relationship of a man to a woman (or husband to wife) is clear in these laws. In Mauritania, there is no legal definition of rape (Wedoud 2010). Mauritania is an African country that follows *shari'a* law and any illicit sexual behavior is punishable by imprisonment (Wedoud 2010). Therefore, women who are victims of rape are counseled to stay quiet to avoid being punished (Wedoud 2010). That there is no legal definition of rape implies that men have unlimited access to women's bodies. Further the lack of a legal definition of rape suggests that women who "claim" rape are lying to avoid admitting their immoral behavior or are to blame for putting themselves in a sexual situation. Warrick (2005, p. 319) believes that the laws in these countries seek social order "by means of redefining the victim as complicit in the crime, as perpetrator herself, or simply as the available means for resolving a social conflict." In other words, rape myths have what Edwards et al. (2011) called an "institutional-level presence" (this issue). Laws and norms in these cultures, using religious justifications, serve to promote rape myths, punish women for their rapes, and encourage women to remain silent about their victimization.

Hinduism

Unlike Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, which primarily rely on one guiding text, Hinduism relies on numerous texts written over hundreds of years to establish its guiding principles (Sugirtharajah 1994). Therefore, it may paradoxically be easier to find passages in Hinduism that promote inferiority of women and rape myths while at the same time being more difficult to establish the impact of any one passage given the multitude of texts and the many contradictory passages in Hinduism. What is not disputed, though, is the low status of women in countries where Hinduism is prominent (Human Rights Watch 2011). Hinduism originated in India around 1500 BCE and was a male-dominated and family-centric religion (Sugirtharajah 1994). In the Vedic period of early Hinduism, although men were clearly afforded higher status than women, women were encouraged to seek education, were able to participate in religious activities, and were not cursed upon entering widowhood (Sugirtharajah 1994). However, three-hundred

years later, there was a shift with the *Brahmana* texts, which more clearly emphasized men's value and women's inferiority while also pointing out women's impurity during pregnancy and menstruation (Sugirtharajah 1994). Similarly, in the *Dharma Sastras* (texts of Hindu laws) dated around 200 BCE, patriarchy is clearly justified by stressing women's evils (Narasimhan-Madhavan 2006).

Although women are generally given explicit lower status in Hindu texts, there are also many Hindu goddesses that possess desirable characteristics (Sugirtharajah 1994). One goddess, *Shakti*, is often cited as a positive exemplar for women (Oldenburg 2007). All Hindu women possess *Shakti*, the Hindu goddess representing female cosmic forces and sexual energy (Narasimhan-Madhavan 2006). *Shakti* gives women unrestrained (and dangerous) sexual energy until they are united with a man (Narasimhan-Madhavan 2006). Some women discuss *Shakti* as empowering them after violence (Oldenburg 2007), but it is easy to see how the notion of *Shakti* is threatening to men and provides the justification for controlling a woman's sexuality. In the *Dharma Sastras*, men are warned, "It is not just an ignorant man, but even a learned man of the world too, that a wanton woman can lead astray when he is in the control of lust and anger" (as cited in Narasimhan-Madhavan 2006, p. 406). In the *Ramayana*, "So soon as a woman sees a handsome man, her vulva becomes moist," (as cited in Starr 1991, pp. 64–65). The rape myths "women enjoy rape" and "women ask to be raped" are clear. To dismiss a rape, one could say that a woman's strong sexual desire indicates that she wanted sex or that a man would not be expected to restrain himself given a woman's *Shakti*.

Written between 700–300 BCE, the *Upanishads* (the philosophical texts of Hinduism), the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata* (the latter are epics recording Hindu history) include stories that reflect men's capture, rape, and then marriage of their female captors (Smith 2004). In 2005, in Delhi, a man on trial for rape appealed to the court to allow him to marry his rape victim to restore her honor (Philipose 2005). The case is important not only because the rapist considered this an option but because the judge considered his request and left it to the rape victim to decide (she rejected his request) (Philipose 2005). When a culture considers marriage a way to nullify a rape, one can expect endorsement of the myth that "husbands cannot rape their wives." In fact, Indian law does not recognize marital rape as a crime (unless the bride is under 15) (Pandey 2010). Legislation has been recently proposed to amend the Indian Penal Code to recognize marital rape, but punishments for marital rape would still be lower than for non-marital rape (Pandey 2010). Similarly, Indian men and women are less likely to view forced sex in marriage as rape than forced sex by an acquaintance or stranger, and these effects are stronger in India than in Western cultures (see Kanekar

2007, for a review). Moreover, in the *Upanishads*, the following passage essentially sanctions rape when a woman will not consent to a man's wishes, "If she should not grant him his desire, he should bribe her. If she still does not grant him his desire, he should hit her with a stick or with his hand, and overcome her," (Pinkham 1941, p. 68). Of course, this phrase goes beyond rape myths with open endorsement of rape, but these ideas certainly can fuel rape myths in a religious culture that excuses men's rapes.

Ancient Hindu law was rather punishing of even the slightest sexual impropriety by a married man or woman, although throughout Hinduism a woman's purity is more strongly stressed than a man's (Bakshi and Leonard 1956; Narasimhan-Madhavan 2006). For example, a married woman who merely visits the home of another man was to be disfigured and drowned (Bakshi and Leonard 1956). Although honor killings are less common in Hindu culture than Muslim culture, a Hindu man's honor is tied to the sexual purity of women within his family and punishment of a woman who threatens that honor is necessary to minimize family shame (Narasimhan-Madhavan 2006). In the *Ramayana*, the well-known story of Sita and Ram stresses the importance of female chastity (Oldenburg 2007; Sugirtharajah 1994). First, a sexually provocative female character is disfigured after trying to seduce Ram. Second, after her abduction by a demon, Sita is rejected by her husband, Ram, because of doubts of her chastity for living with (although against her will) another man. Even after Sita passes a test of her chastity (walking through fire), she is banished from the kingdom. Although Oldenburg (2007) sites Sita's refusal to defend herself further against her husband's insulting accusations as an empowering example to Hindu women, Narasimhan-Madhavan (2006) points out that this story also has been used to dictate appropriate behavior for a good wife. As noted above, stories that stress a woman's chastity while giving men the power to punish her transgressions support rape myths that suggest women "ask for" their rapes because of their inappropriate behavior. Women in India are very reluctant to report rape given their fear that they will be viewed as a "loose woman" (Kanekar 2007, p. 123). Research justifies this fear showing that rape myths are more consistently applied in India than in Western countries where women have higher status and female chastity is less important (Kanekar 2007).

Buddhism

Sharing some of the ascetic ideals promoted in the Hindu *Upanishads* (e.g., abstaining from worldly pleasures), Buddhism originated in India around 500 BCE (Sugirtharajah 1994). The words of Gautama Buddha were transmitted

orally for years and then eventually transcribed to written text (by men) (Loy 2007). Although rape is not often discussed in the context of Buddhism, Buddhist culture can be considered a traditional male dominated culture (Khuankaew 2007; Niaz 2003). Suffering is a central tenet of Buddhism, as is finding a way to release one's own suffering (Gross 1994; Khuankaew 2007). Important to Buddhism, as well as Hinduism, is the idea that those who do not distance themselves from the desires of the world are doomed to repeat their suffering through *karma* and rebirth (Gross 1994). Possibly the clearest example in Buddhism that women are afforded lower status is that rebirth as a woman is a sign of one's negative *karma*, punishment for immoral behavior committed in a previous life (Gross 1994). Unfortunately, Buddhist women who are suffering in violent relationships often believe that they have brought this suffering upon themselves through *karma* (Khuankaew 2007). Similarly, monks who advise men and women also believe women's abuse is brought on themselves through *karma*. Although some dispute that these ideas were intended to bolster male dominance (e.g. Gross 1994), it is easy to see how these statements and similar others (e.g., the lower status given to nuns relative to monks) may have been interpreted and used to support patriarchy for thousands of years. Like other religions, considering the context of the times, it is not surprising that women are treated as lesser to men in Buddhism (Loy 2007). Although there is much less written about Buddhism and violence against women relative to the other religions here, the remainder of this section will investigate the association between Buddha's teachings (*dharma*) and rape myths.

Buddhism is rather unique in that it lacks a discussion of marriage rituals or laws, but teachings about sexuality are common in Buddhism (Gross 1985). Buddha was rather outspoken about sexuality, rejecting sex and its ties to being a "householder" (one who has yet to leave his/her home for the monastic life) (Gross 1985). Beyond encouragement to leave the householder life, though, there is not much regulation of sexual behavior in Buddhism as long as men and women avoided "sexual misconduct" (Gross 1985, p. 82). For householders the definition of sexual misconduct varied, likely including selfish and aggressive behavior but typically not including sex outside of marriage; however, for nuns and monks, this meant avoiding sexual behavior altogether (Gross 1985). In one particular story, Buddha chastises a monk who had sex with his wife saying, "it would have been better, confused man, had you put your male organ inside the mouth of a terrible and poisonous snake," (Wilson 1996, p. 23). Buddha left his wife and children to abandon his own desires. Most scholars say that Buddha blamed himself for these desires (e.g., Gross 1994). However, some early Buddhist monks wrote that women problematically caused the monks' sexual desires and prevented their celibacy (Gross 1994;

Khuankaew 2007). Indeed, in interviews with women in Thailand, Khuankaew (2007) found that women believed that they were to blame for monks' uncontrollable sexual desires. Further, South Korean male and female college students, rating several different rape myths, most strongly endorsed rape myths that suggested rape was due to men's uncontrollable sexual desires (Lee et al. 2010). Therefore, one can see the rape myths "women ask to be raped" and "he didn't mean to" emerge in misguided teachings or interpretation of Buddhism (for a review of rape myths, see Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994).

As noted above, for those who were not monks or nuns, the rules for sexual activity were more lenient, although they still conformed rather closely to the sexual norms of the time for men and women (Gross 1985). Women were expected to keep their sexual activity within the confines of marriage while these prescriptions were less clear for men (Gross 1985). As with the other religions described above, prescriptions of chastity for women are tied to victim-blame themes or myths that suggest rape cannot happen to chaste women (and only happens to women who put themselves in compromising positions) (Shim 2001). However, as cited in Gross (1985, p. 85), a twelfth-century Tibetan guide for rules of sex with a woman said that a man could not "coerce a woman to sexual intercourse by beating." Therefore, while it was not defined as improper for a man to have sex outside of marriage, rape was forbidden. This is consistent with *dharma* in regards to avoiding exploitative sex (Gross 1985).

Although in countries where Buddhism is prominent women have lower status, this may have more to do with male domination around the world and sexist writings of Confucius than the Buddhist religion (Lee et al. 2010). Relative to other major religions, Buddhism seems to have less text that controls women's sexuality and promotes rape myths. Although some of Buddha's teachings may have contributed to female oppression thus indirectly contributing to the sexual control of women, ties between Buddhism and rape culture are certainly weaker than the other religions presented here. Concepts of *karma* and rebirth may be used to blame rape victims, but this use must be considered within the male-dominated culture. Therefore, many contemporary Buddhists believe that these concepts can actually be used to promote healing for rape victims by acknowledging the true cause of women's suffering (e.g., Khuankaew 2007). Further, Buddhism is relatively separate from the state in most countries where Buddhism is prominent (although Sri Lanka is an exception) (Temperman 2007). For example, in China, with the world's largest population of Buddhists, government has militantly distanced itself from religion (Temperman 2007). This separation from the state may lead Buddhism to have less direct influence on rape and rape myths. Admittedly, rape myths

and high rates of rape are found in East Asian culture (e.g., Lee et al. 2010; WHO 2005; Yamawaki 2009), but Buddhism seems to play a weaker role in creating and sustaining these myths than Christianity, Judaism, and the religions discussed here.

Conclusions

This paper expands on the Edwards et al. (2011) review of rape myths in American culture by investigating the role of non-Western religions in the development or perpetuation of rape myths. Rape myths arise out of women's low status and, more specifically, men's control of women's sexuality and men's entitlement to women's bodies. Islam and Hinduism are clear on the importance of women's chastity and the duties of a wife to her husband. Buddhism, although also problematic for women, seems less likely to promote rape myths than the other two religions. Admittedly, the religions discussed here originated in times when women's status was notably lower than men's. The extent to which these religions improved, hurt, or did not change women's status is debatable, varies by religion, and is beyond the scope of this paper. What is clear in this review is that rape myths are supported in the religions discussed here, and, with Islam and Hinduism especially, religious justifications have been used to punish rape victims for centuries.

It is important to note that this paper is not merely a condemnation of non-Western religions while giving a free pass to Christianity and Judaism. The Old Testament, shared by Christianity and Judaism, is wrought with passages that reinforce men's sexual entitlement and a good woman's role thus establishing religious support in Western cultures for the rape myths discussed here. It is difficult to assess the exact impact of religion on individual attitudes in any given culture, but, inarguably, a religion's impact is much greater when it informs state law. Therefore, one distinction between Christianity/Judaism and Islam/Hinduism, in particular, are that the latter currently play a stronger and more explicit role in shaping legislation than the former (Temperman 2007). Further, distortions of law are perpetuated by the lack of education of men and especially women in countries where religion and state are more closely tied (Badawi 1994). Laws are very important for shaping a country's values so it is particularly important that laws about rape stop reinforcing rape myths (Warrick 2005).

Limitations

First, it is important to acknowledge that there is little empirical research presented here tying religion to rape myths. Although some research has been conducted in the

United States on religion and rape myths, there is little empirical research to verify the effects of religious beliefs on rape myth support outside of the United States. Of the research conducted in the United States tying one's religious beliefs to rape myths, Bunting and Reeves (1981) found that, among Christian male college students, religious fundamentalism was positively correlated with rape myth acceptance. Jeffords (1984), in a non-college sample, found that religiosity was associated with norms for marital rape. Freymeyer (1997) found that male college students with strong religious beliefs were more likely to support victim-blame myths but that female college students with strong religious beliefs were less likely to endorse rape myths. More recently, as noted in Edwards et al. (2011), Sheldon and Parent (2002) found that some clergy endorsed victim-blame myths after being exposed to scenarios of marital rape. In general, it is difficult to isolate the causal role that religion plays in one's beliefs but more empirical research needs to be conducted on the association between non-Western religions and rape myth acceptance.

Finally, this paper is written from a Western gaze. In addition to claims presented above that religious texts have been misinterpreted by those within the religion's culture, the present paper is potentially a biased viewpoint interpreting religious works from outside of these cultures. Where some religious passages may be interpreted by a Westerner as promoting inferiority of women or rape myths, readers within in the culture may not interpret the passages in that regard. Issues of interpretation and who controls interpretation are at the center of any discussion about religion and the status of women.

Acknowledgement We are grateful to Martin Forward for his help in preparing this manuscript.

References

- Afkhami, M. (1995). Introduction. In M. Afkhami (Ed.), *Faith and freedom: Women's human rights in the Muslim world* (pp. 1–15). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Afshar, H. (1985). The legal, social, and political position of women in Iran. *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 13, 47–60.
- Albee, G. W., & Perry, M. (1998). Economic and social causes of sexism and of the exploitation of women. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 8, 145–160. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1099-1298(199803/04)8:2<145.
- An-Na'im, A. (1995). The dichotomy between religious and secular discourse in Islamic societies. In M. Afkhami (Ed.), *Faith and freedom: Women's human rights in the Muslim world* (pp. 51–60). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Badawi, L. (1994). Islam. In J. Holm & J. Bowker (Eds.), *Women in religion* (pp. 84–112). London: Continuum.
- Bakshi, P. M., & Leonard, V. A. (1956). Punishment in ancient Hindu law. *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology & Police Science*, 47, 81–83.

- Barrett, D. B., & Johnson, T. M. (2001). *World Christian trends: AD 30-AD 2200*. Pasadena: William Carey Library.
- Beyer, L. (1999). The price of honor. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,990016,00.html>
- Blenkinsopp, J. (1984). Old Testament theology and the Jewish-Christian connection. *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament*, 28, 3–15.
- Brown, J. A. C. (2009). Did the prophet say it or not? The literal, historical, and effective truths of hadiths in early Sunnism. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 129, 259–285.
- Brownmiller, S. (1975). *Against our will: Men, women, and rape*. New York: Fawcett Columbine.
- Bunting, A. B., & Reeves, J. B. (1981). Exploring belief relationships in the areas of sex roles, religion, and rape. *Journal of Pastoral Counseling*, 16, 53–64.
- Denmark, F. L. (2004). Looking ahead: Concluding remarks. *Sex Roles*, 51, 367–369. doi:10.1023/B:SERS.0000046619.45259.39.
- Douki, S., Nacef, F., Belhadj, A., Bouasker, A., & Ghachem, R. (2003). Violence against women in Arab and Islamic countries. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 6, 165–171. doi:10.1007/s00737-003-0170-x.
- Edwards, K. M., Turchik, J. A., Dardis, C., Reynolds, N., & Gidycz, C. A. (2011). Rape myths: History, individual and institutional-level presence, and implications for change. *Sex Roles, this issue*. doi:10.1007/s11199-011-9943-2.
- Engineer, A. A. (1992). *The rights of women in Islam*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Ethnic leaders condemn Muslim cleric. (2006, October 26). *The Age*. Retrieved from <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/ethnic-leaders-condemn-muslim-cleric/2006/10/26/1161749223822.html>
- Frey Meyer, R. H. (1997). Rape myths and religiosity. *Sociological Spectrum*, 17, 473–489. doi:10.1080/02732173.1997.9982179.
- Gross, R. M. (1985). The householder and the world-renunciant: Two modes of sexual expression in Buddhism. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 22, 81–96.
- Gross, R. M. (1994). Buddhism. In J. Holm & J. Bowker (Eds.), *Women in religion* (pp. 1–29). London: Continuum.
- Gross, R. M. (2003). Buddhism. In A. Sharma & K. K. Young (Eds.), *Her voice, her faith: Women speak on world religions* (pp. 59–98). Boulder: Westview Press.
- Haeri, S. (1995). The politics of dishonor: Rape and power in Pakistan. In M. Afkhami (Ed.), *Faith and freedom: Women's human rights in the Muslim world* (pp. 161–174). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Human Rights Watch (2011). *World report 2011: Events of 2010*. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report-2011>
- Jeffords, C. R. (1984). The impact of sex-role and religious attitudes upon forced marital intercourse norms. *Sex Roles*, 11, 543–552. doi:10.1007/BF00287477.
- Kanekar, S. (2007). An attributional perspective on sexual aggression in India. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment, & Trauma*, 15, 113–129. doi:10.1300/J146v15n01_07.
- Kennedy, C. H. (1988). Islamization in Pakistan: Implementation of the Hudood Ordinances. *Asian Survey*, 28, 307–316.
- Khuankaew, O. (2007). Buddhism and violence against women. In D. C. Maguire & S. Shaikh (Eds.), *Violence against women in contemporary world religion: Roots and Cures* (pp. 174–191). Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.
- King, A. (2009). Islam, women, and violence. *Feminist Theology*, 17, 292–328. doi:10.1177/0966735009102361.
- Kohat, H. B. (2002, May 20). Blaming the victim. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,238673,00.html>
- Kosmin, B. A., & Keysar, A. (2009). *American religious identification survey [ARIS 2008]*. Hartford: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture.
- Lee, J., Kim, J., & Lim, H. (2010). Rape myth acceptance among Korean college students. The role of gender, attitudes toward women, and sexual double standard. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25, 1200–1223. doi:10.1177/0886260509340536.
- Lonsway, K. A., & Fitzgerald, L. F. (1994). Rape myths: In review. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 18, 133–164. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.1994.tb00448.x.
- Loy, D. R. (2007). The karma of women. In D. C. Maguire & S. Shaikh (Eds.), *Violence against women in contemporary world religion: Roots and cures* (pp. 49–65). Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.
- Muganyizi, P. S., Nyström, L., Lindmark, G., Emmelin, M., Massawe, S., & Axemo, P. (2010). Effect of supporter characteristics on expressions of negative social reactions toward rape survivors in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. *Health Care for Women International*, 31, 668–685. doi:10.1080/07399331003629378.
- Narasimhan-Madhavan, D. (2006). Gender, sexuality, and violence: Permissible violence against women during the partition of India and Pakistan. *HAWWA*, 4, 396–416. doi:10.1163/156920806779152237.
- Niaz, U. (2003). Violence against women in South Asian countries. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 6, 173–184. doi:10.1007/s00737-003-0171-9.
- Oldenburg, V. T. (2007). Sita's epic journey. In D. C. Maguire & S. Shaikh (Eds.), *Violence against women in contemporary world religion: Roots and cures* (pp. 153–173). Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.
- Pakistan lawmakers OK changes to rape law. (2006, November 15). *MSNBC*. Retrieved from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15729989/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/
- Pandey, V. (2010, March 8). Husbands can't get away with marital rape: Government. *Daily News Analysis*. Retrieved from http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_husbands-can-t-get-away-with-marital-rape-government_1356512.
- Philipose, P. (2005, May 9). An indecent proposal. *Indian Express*. Retrieved from <http://www.indianexpress.com/oldStory/69996/>
- Pinkham, M. W. (1941). *Woman in the sacred scriptures of Hinduism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rape victim, 14, dies after public flogging in Bangladesh. (2011, February 3). *AOL News*. Retrieved from http://www.aolnews.com/2011/02/03/bangladeshi-girl-dies-after-public-flogging/?icid=maing|main5|dl3|sec3_ink2|41532
- Saudi court ups punishment for gang-rape victim. (2007, November 17). *CNN*. Retrieved from http://articles.cnn.com/2007-11-17/world/saudi.rape.victim_1_saudi-women-victim-saudi-arabia?s=PM:WORLD.
- Scott, R. M. (2009). A contextual approach to women's rights in the Qur'an: Readings of 4:34. *The Muslim World*, 99, 60–85. doi:10.1111/j.1478-1913.2009.01253.x.
- Shaaban, B. (1995). The muted voices of women interpreters. In M. Afkhami (Ed.), *Faith and freedom: Women's human rights in the Muslim world* (pp. 61–77). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Sheldon, J. P., & Parent, S. L. (2002). Clergy's attitudes and attributions of blame toward female rape victims. *Violence Against Women*, 8, 233–256. doi:10.1177/10778010222183026.

- Shim, Y. (2001). Feminism and the discourse of sexuality in Korea: Continuities and changes. *Human Studies*, 24, 133–148. doi:10.1023/A:1010775332420.
- Smith, M. D. (2004). *Encyclopedia of rape*. Westport: Greenwood.
- Starr, T. (1991). *The 'natural inferiority' of women*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Sugirtharajah, S. (1994). Hinduism. In J. Holm & J. Bowker (Eds.), *Women in Religion* (pp. 59–83). London: Continuum.
- Temperman, J. (2007). The neutral state: Optional or necessary? A triangular analysis of state–religion relationships, democratisation and human rights compliance. *Religion and Human Rights*, 1, 269–303. doi:10.1163/187103206781172934.
- Vandello, J., & Cohen, D. (2003). Male honor and female fidelity: Implicit cultural scripts that perpetuate domestic violence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 997–1010. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.84.5.997.
- Warrick, C. (2005). The vanishing victim: Criminal law and gender in Jordan. *Law & Society Review*, 39, 315–348. doi:10.1111/j.0023-9216.2005.00084.x.
- Weaver, K. M. (2007). Women's rights and shari'a law: A workable reality? *Duke Journal of Comparative & International Law*, 17, 483–510.
- Wedoud, M. Y. A. (2010, December 22). Rape victims fear being jailed in Mauritania. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/12/21/mauritania.rape/index.html?hpt=C2>.
- Weiman, G. J. (2009). Divine law and local custom in Northern Nigeria zina trials. *Die Welt des Islams*, 49, 429–465. doi:10.1163/004325309X12548128581063.
- Western, D. J. (2008). Islamic “purse strings:” The key to the amelioration of women's legal rights in the Middle East. *Air Force Law Review*, 61, 79–147.
- Wilson, L. (1996). *Charming cadavers: Horrific figurations of the feminine in Indian Buddhist hagiographic literature*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- World Health Organization. (2005). *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- Yamawaki, N. (2009). The role of rape myth acceptance and belief in a just world on victim blame attribution: A study in Japan. *An International Journal of Psychological Science*, 52, 163–174. doi:10.2117/psysoc.2009.163.