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The News Through Facebook: Discovering the Prevalence of Rape Myths in User Comments

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by

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Dedication and Acknowledgements

I dedicate this manuscript to my children, Autumn and Aubrey Clay. Years ago, I read that a mother's education level is a predictor of her child's future educational attainment. This stuck with me. When my children were born, I had no degrees to my name, but as they grew I enrolled in classes and excelled enough to end up in the position I am today—conducting research and receiving my PhD. My hope is that Autumn and Aubrey recognize that predictors may hint at outcomes, but with hard work, dedication, and love you can shatter pre-constructed boxes. For you two, I offer the world.

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Abstract

This study attempted to ascertain the prevalence value of rape myths located within social media user comments on the website Facebook. Research using existing Internet-based comments may provide insight into current attitudes and beliefs surrounding sexual violence. Using a quantitative content analysis, this study gauged the prevalence of rape myths in user comments by referencing a preset code list created with rape myths from the Acceptance of Modern Myths About Sexual Aggression scale (AMMSA) and the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) and by locating emergent codes in the dataset.

Keywords: Rape, Rape Myths, Sexual Assault, Sexual Violence, Social Media

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nature of the Research Problem

The manner in which humans communicate has evolved rapidly since the advent of the Internet and the introduction of the World Wide Web. Whereas prior to this invention, face-to-face contact was the primary method of interpersonal connection, new technology has generated a multitude of communicative platforms. Because of the availability of these alternative methods, human opinion, discovery, and expression is often translated through a virtual medium.

According to a 2016 information and communicative technology (ICT) report by the International Telecommunication Union, almost one billion households have Internet access. This access is not solely confined to developed countries, as double digit rate increases are found in the developing world. Numbers like these assist in showing that the spread of web access is a global phenomenon that continues to expand.

As trends evolve, it becomes vital for society to keep up with changing communication patterns and the effects that these patterns have on Internet users. It is not enough to casually observe this information—research into the benefits and harms of web usage should inform the creation and implementation of best practices.

One area of Internet-oriented behavior that has garnered a large amount of attention is the act of cyberbullying. This term refers to the "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of…electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Because of the technological medium that the harassment is delivered, messages or pictures can be repeatedly and rapidly disseminated, thereby causing a large amount of harm in a small amount of time (Dodge, 2016). Differences in cyberbullying prevalence rates have been noted in several studies (Doane, Kelley, & Pearson,

2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2103), but there is a general agreeance as to the harmful nature of this act.

Much like in-person bullying, cyberbullying exists because of destructive intentions. But, while in-person bullying has been a part of human existence for millennia, technological advances have directly shaped the emergence of virtual bullying, as the medium for delivery is via electronic devices. Other malicious practices have also made the transition from in-person to online, including elements of the sex trade (Beckham & Prohaska, 2012), child pornography (Luders, 2007; McCarthy, 2010), the sale of counterfeit or illegal goods and pharmaceuticals (Daley, 2012; Lipman, 2013; Tredwell, 2012), and stalking (Roberts, 2008). Person-on-person crimes no longer need to occur when victim and offender are in the same geographic location.

While the harmful nature of the above referenced crimes is a result of malicious intent translated into direct action—the cyberbullied victim is targeted by the person cyberbullying or the entity selling illegal goods targets those who purchase products through their website—other facets of the Internet downside are less obvious. As the social environment continues to shift to the digital landscape, recognition of the characteristics that define this landscape becomes necessary. Much like social process theories of crime, which focus on the interactions between individuals and society (Schmalleger, 2016), attention to virtual exchanges and the environment that fosters them is essential to understanding current social dynamics.

The concept of rape culture is one subtle societal element that has made its way onto the Internet realm. Rape culture defined, is the beliefs that lead to cultural values that objectify women and girls and makes their sexuality a commodity to be obtained or controlled (Jensen, 2003). If a woman or girl is viewed as an object rather than a person, harms delivered to them

can be justified or neutralized. Both men and women who live in societies that support rape culture see sexual violence as an eventuality, an act that will inevitably occur (Dodge, 2016).

Additionally, rape myths serve to reinforce this harmful viewpoint. Rape myths are attitudes and beliefs surrounding the crime of rape that place the onus of responsibility on the victim and even serve to deny the existence of victimization itself (Hayes, Abbott, & Cook, 2016). Taken together, both rape culture and rape myths allow for the justification of male sexually aggressive behavior (McMahon, 2010).

Background & Significance

Like cyberbullying, there have been multiple studies which look at the prevalence or acceptance of rape culture and rape myths in society (Hayes, et al, 2016; Maurer and Robinson, 2008; McGann & Irvin, 2010; McMahon, 2010). Unlike studies on cyberbullying, much of the research aimed at dismantling rape culture has focused on in-person experience, rather than concentrating on a virtual background. As mentioned previously, cyberbullying was an act born of technology, whereas beliefs surrounding the crime of rape have existed prior to the Internet. Following this line of thinking, a focus on in-person experiences makes sense. But, changing socialization patterns creates the necessity for an expansion into web-based research—*how has the Internet influenced the spread of rape culture?*

Certain types of cyberbullying coincide with rape culture—revenge porn, where sexually explicit pictures are shared via technology without consent (Ryan, 2010; Willard, 2012) and sextortion, using coercion or threats in order to receive explicit digital content from a victim (Anonymous, 2013; Halpern & Warrener, 2015). Interest in these areas has been growing, and there are several studies on the subjects (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; McLaughlin, 2010; Ryan, 2010; Willard, 2012).

When there is information available on certain facets of rape culture, the majority of attention is brought onto pictorial manifestations of this phenomenon. Visual representations, including photographs and video, are the targets of academics and researchers. There is a lack of interest into textual displays of rape culture.

The current study aims to rectify the dearth of research investigating online text in relation to the prevalence of rape culture. Visually portraying and sharing the representation of a harmful action has a deleterious impact, as certain characteristics of the Internet make it difficult to recall or delete a picture or video once it has been posted. If images exist and are accessible by the public, especially those images that objectify or are aggressive in nature, rape culture is better able to flourish. Understanding the motives that propel those who obtain, post, and share harmful images is of incredible importance.

The same can be said about the textual representation of rape culture. Gaining a knowledge base of the prevalence of rape myths in public commenting forums can lead to better designed websites in the future—intentionally designed websites that function as rape myth deterrents. Myths and false beliefs concerning rape continue to exist because of their subtlety, and the ease that they have been engrained and passed on throughout society. Uncovering their existence on the Internet and determining characteristics that allow them to spread is a step toward halting their existence.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the current study is to explore the prevalence of rape myths in website user comments on the social media platform Facebook. News media outlets publish stories containing breaking news and current events. At times, these publications concern the crime of

rape. Because many Americans gather their news information via social media websites, it becomes important to dissect how this data is consumed and processed.

In addition, as social media websites allow for individuals to react publically to the information that they are reading, gaining an understanding of these reactions may be useful in uncovering how widespread rape myth belief is. If individuals are willing to announce their adherence of rape supportive attitudes on a visible platform, rape culture ideals may not be as subtle as presumed. Gaining a notion of the reach of this phenomenon is the focus of this research.

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance

Understanding cultural elements, trends, and beliefs is important to social science researchers. The more information obtained, the greater the body of knowledge available for analysis. Conclusions drawn from this analysis may influence positive societal change.

The current study seeks to determine the extent that rape myths have permeated the social media giant, Facebook. This website enjoys the traffic of over two billion users, making its reach the largest of any social media site on the globe (Dunn, 2017; Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). Using Facebook's commenting feature enables users of this site to voice their opinion regarding matters on a wide range of topics. Depending on the privacy setting of the article or post that these opinions are voiced on, text may be publicly viewed by any of the billions of individuals who have Internet access.

Gathering these publicly displayed thoughts is one way of discovering how prevalent rape supportive beliefs are in society. As research has shown, adherence to rape myths can be an explanatory predictor to the actual perpetration of sexual violence or the propensity toward rape (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Discovering the spread of these ideals is important if preventative

actions are to be endeavored. Gathering information from comments made in response to articles about accused, attempted, or completed rape generates a snapshot of public opinion and allows for additional information surrounding societal attitudes and belief about sexual violence to be uncovered.

Barriers & Issues

Limitations for the current study are most present as a result of the study's medium. The Internet is not a static entity, and changes occur in a rapid manner. Popularity or "virality" is an ephemeral quality, and while there are sources that have staying power, attention levels can fluctuate daily. Utilizing the most up to date lists of popular news media sources is one way to ensure current trends are observed, but this does not guarantee real time relevance.

The changeability factor also includes the deletion or addition of material from the posts selected for study inclusion. While the researcher cannot control for changes made during and outside of the study's timeframe, acknowledgement of the snapshot-nature of the research can be noted.

Additionally, analyzing the top comments on a post for the presence of rape myths does little to address the fact that multiple comments may be made by the same individual. Burner accounts are those created solely for the purpose of generating intentionally provocative comments on the Internet. An individual can presumably create multiple accounts for the sole purpose of posting incendiary comments about rape. This would severely limit the external validity of the study because it would over represent a single individual's impact.

Further, although the current study seeks to gain a greater understanding of the way Americans react to news media relating to rape, Facebook is a globally accessed website. As of July 2017, India had overtaken the United States as the country with the greatest number of users

(Kemp, 2017), and other countries such as Brazil and Indonesia have user numbers over one hundred million (Leading countries…, 2017). To reduce the effect out of country individuals may have on the current study, only news media sites that are popular in the United States will be selected for content analysis.

Recently, Facebook has announced a change to the algorithm, which determines the ranking of posts that appear to account holders. This change was made in an attempt to engage users in a more meaningful way. As a result, publications and advertisements will be seen by users at a lower rate than information posted by family and friends (Bromwich & Haag, 2018). This may have an impact on the reach of news articles, leading to lower levels of user comments on each article.

A current social movement has brought attention onto the occurrence of sexual violence in the United States. This movement, titled #MeToo by its founder Tarana Burke, moves to bring conversations about sexual violence into the mainstream as well as destigmatize the victims of such acts (me too, n.d.). While this social phenomenon was originally founded in 2006, it wasn't until 2017 that thousands of individuals shared their experience on social media using the me too hashtag. To build on this, the Time Person of the Year of 2017 was awarded to the "silence breakers", or those who came forward publically with their experiences of sexual violence in the workplace (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017). As social phenomena can tend to have an influence on the attitudes and beliefs that are perpetuated in society, the #MeToo movement's impact may affect the number of rape myths present on social media

Another potentially troublesome issue with this proposal is a concern that findings will lead to First Amendment obstructions. If a certain news outlet's posts were shown to invite higher numbers of rape positive comments, than findings will indicate such. If an entity were to

alter their platform or output in a manner that discouraged the posting of rape myths, then freedom of speech comes into play. If a website's host seeks to control the substance of user comments, then this could be viewed as an impediment to free expression. But much like controls that have been enacted to reduce cyberbullying, consciously-designed websites aim to encourage a safer web experience for all users, rather than restrain all from conveying their thoughts.

Moreover, like all work, which utilizes the concept of coding, this is a somewhat subjective process, especially with a topic as broad as rape culture. What words and phrases represent certain rape myths to one person may be completely different to the next person. In an attempt to prevent non-representative text from being included in the current study, both the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (McMahon & Farmer, 2011) and the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression scale (Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007) will be utilized as a guide for what ideals and statements are considered indicative of rape myth acceptance. These instruments eliminate some of the subjectivity of coding. Additionally, using two measures of rape myths enables greater coding reliability to be established. Only clearly representative text, reflective of the rape myths garnered from these previously tested instruments, will be included in the study's dataset.

Definitions

Throughout the course of this work, the following terms and definitions are utilized:

Rape: the "penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim. Attempts or assaults to commit rape are also included; however statutory rape and incest are excluded." (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013).

Rape Culture: describes a culture where sexual violence is a normalized phenomenon, in which male-dominated environments encourage and at times depend on violence against women (Finley, 2016, p. 42).

Rape myths: attitudes and false beliefs held about rape that deny or minimize victim injury and/or blame the victims for their own victimization (Hayes, Abbott, & Cook, 2016, p.1541).

Social media: web-based services that facilitate the authorship and distribution of media and the exchange of information between users (Trottier, 2011, p. 17).

Theoretical Framework

Selecting social media comments as the source of data collection is a purposeful endeavor. A focus on social artifacts that are publically available can allow one to get a pulse on society's thoughts and beliefs on a wide range of topics. As the current research focuses on the acceptance of sexual violence through rape myths, gaining insight into society member's approval of these myths could prove helpful for sexual assault prevention measures.

The theory that guides the design of the current research is Sanday's (1981) idea of "rape prone" societies. During the study of several cultures, Sanday found that rape prone societies had high incidences of rape and that rape was an act used to threaten or punish women. It was also uncovered that rape prone societies had men or groups of men in control of resources and they occupied the highest positions of politics, religion, and culture (Britton, Jacobsen, & Howard, 2018).

There has been argument that the United States is a rape supportive culture (Hayes et al, 2016). By looking at rape myth acceptance (RMA) on a social media website, a sociological perspective on the adoption of these ideals can be garnered. While rape proneness and rape

supportive behaviors can be measured by the prevalence of sexually violent acts, other manifestations can be found in dominant ideas surrounding the crime of rape. In analyzing public comments for their content, this study aims to uncover the more subtle characteristics of rape prone societies and places a more technological lens on a sociological issue. The data analysis for the current study will add support to or contest the notion that the U.S. is a rape supportive culture by providing evidence that illuminates how prevalent rape myths are on social media user comments.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Strategy

The researcher primarily utilized comprehensive online search methods to compile the literature outlined in the current study. The databases searched included ProQuest, JSTOR, and SAGE. The academic articles selected were peer reviewed and retrieved from journals which included *The Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Violence and Victims, Aggression and Violent Behavior, The Journal of Sex Research, Comparative Criminology,* and *American Psychologist*.

Additionally, because of the contemporary nature of the current research, news articles were necessary to outline pertinent information. Sources such as the New York Times and Time provided details on the current status of social media and sexual assault in society. While these selections were not peer reviewed, the sources were solely used for providing timely societal information.

Rape Myths

Rape culture, the underlying beliefs in a society that objectify women and make their sexuality a commodity to be obtained by violence, allows rape to be excused and legitimized in societies that perpetuate these beliefs (Dodge, 2016). Rape myths, which include specific ideas about the crime of rape, fall under the umbrella of rape culture and they allow for its continuation. Examples of rape myths can be found in the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (IRMA) scale and the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression (AMMSA) scale, both validated measures of rape myth acceptance. These scales include beliefs ranging from victim-blaming statements that relate to the clothes a victim was wearing and their "teasing" behavior, to ideas about the sex drive of perpetrators being behind their aggressive

actions (Gerger, et al, 2007; McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Building on the victim blaming that can take place surrounding sexual violence, victims of sexual crimes have been rated as more contaminated and less injured as compared to victims of non-sexual crimes (Niemi & Young, 2014), which coincides with certain rape myth ideals.

Rape is a severely underreported crime (Cohn, Zinzow, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 2013; Heath, Lynch, Fritch, & Wong, 2013; Spohn, Bjornsen, & Wright, 2017). Non-reporting has been called a threat to women and public safety (Du Mont, Miller, & Myhr, 2003), yet it is still a prevalent issue. Some barriers to reporting include victims not wanting their family to know, lack of proof the incident happened, fear of being treated badly by the criminal justice system, and the victim did not think the act was serious enough to report (Cohn, et al, 2013). The situation aspects of a rape have been shown to play a part in reporting as well. Victims who experience "real" rape, generally violent and committed by a stranger, are more likely to report their crime (Heath, et al, 2013). Additionally, research has shown that rape myth acceptance can have an influence on whether a victim reports a rape of not (Hayes, et al. 2016).

The rape kit backlog that currently exists in the United States relates to current criminal justice response to sexual violence. When an individual seeks help after an act of sexual violence, a sexual assault kit (SAK), also called a rape kit, is completed. Generally, after evidence if collected for the SAK it is submitted for DNA testing by police. But estimates have placed the number of untested SAKs at between 200,000 – 400,000, where some kits have sat untested for years or decades (Campbell, Fehler-Cabral, Bybee, & Shaw, 2017). Positive benefits of testing rape kits are that it populates the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), allows the criminal justice system to better handle sexual violence, sends positive messages to victims, holds offenders accountable, and prevents wrongful accusations. In addition to this, kit testing

can be a cost effective measure rather than the cost heavy burden that is often cited as a reason for non-testing (Wang & Wein, 2018).

There have been moves to rectify this backlog and test SAKs, but states are still grappling to on how to properly notify victims, who may have experienced crimes years prior, that their kits have been tested. Concern over their response to this information and if it will cause stress or additional trauma is a main decision making factor in how law enforcement agencies are charged with responding (Contrera, 2018).

Yearly prevalence numbers of rape in the United States vary widely, with the National Crime Victimization Survey estimating that at over 431,000 rapes and/or sexual assaults were perpetuated in 2016 (Number of rape/sexual assaults, robberies..., n.d.) and a Department of Justice sponsored report placing the number close to one million (Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007). Either of these figures illuminates the common place nature of crimes of sexual violence and as the acceptance of rape myth beliefs serves to support and perpetuate violence against women, it is important to understand the reasoning behind an individual or group's continued reinforcement of the ideas they espouse.

Characteristics of rape myth supporters.

Previous research has shown that gender is one of the most significant predictors for higher levels of RMA. In the majority of studies, males show greater support for rape myths than females (Chapleau & Oswald, 2013; Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2103; Hayes, Abbot, & Cook, 2016; Maurer & Robinson, 2008; Hockett, Smith, Klausing, & Saucier, 2015). Because rape myths and the victim blaming that accompanies these beliefs are said to justify male sexually aggressive behavior, greater adherence to these attitudes by males can serve to maintain a position of power in society.

While males appear to exhibit higher levels of rape myth acceptance, behavior that objectives the sexuality of women and girls is not gender exclusive. Research has indicated that females compete over qualities such as appearance, popularity, and the safeguarding of a positive sexual reputation. When sexual reputation is the topic of gossip or bullying, women and teens have been shamed by other females for actual or supposed promiscuity—this can influence social relationships as both sexes can negatively judge the recipient of the degrading shaming (Campbell, 2004; Ryalls, 2012). Taken together, the objectifying beliefs that both sexes have about the sexual behavior of females allows for the continuation of rape myths and by extension the acceptance of sexual violence.

Age is another factor which appears to have an influence on level of RMA. Hocket et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of the existing literature on men's and women's perspectives toward rape victims. While they did discover that adolescent males exhibited a higher level of negativity toward rape victims, the difference between genders was mitigated when the comparison was made between college-level men and women. The older male and female participants had similar attitudes toward rape victims, whilst the younger participants did not.

Further investigating the relationship between age and rape myth acceptance, Huang (2016) attempts to fill the research gap regarding rape by juveniles and the relationship this has to RMA. Prior research that analyzed the acceptance of rape myths was conducted on adults, and these studies seem to indicate that rape myths are an influential factor in adult rape. As juveniles are said to commit one-fifth of the rapes in Taiwan (Huang 2016), it becomes important to delve into the precursors and attitudes that may prime juveniles for sexual assault. And while this study investigates youth who reside in Taiwan, data from the United States has shown that juveniles make up more than one-third of offenders known to the police who have committed sex offenses

against minors (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Chaffin, 2009), making research exploring precursors to this crime important regardless of geographic location.

Rape victim acceptance was found to have low positive level of correlation with age, a low negative correlation with residency (rural dwellers were more likely to accept rape myths), and a low negative correlation with the education of mothers. Overall rape myth acceptance was higher among juvenile rapists (57.9%) than it was with juvenile non-rapists (27.6%). The myth that *women secretly wish to be raped* was the most strongly correlated with juvenile rape (Huang, 2016). While much of the research surrounding sexual violence is focused on adults, an expansion of this may be necessary to determine the impact that age has on the ideas and beliefs surrounding rape.

The role of psychopathy has been studied in relation to rape myth acceptance. While research has shown elevated levels of psychopathy in sexually aggressive individuals, there is some disagreement on which domains of psychopathy are most correlated with rape myth belief. Debowska, Boduszek, Dhingra, Kola, and Meller–Prunska (2015) found that Callous Affect was related to RMA; those that scored higher on the Callous Affect subscale exhibited higher level of rape myth acceptance. This was in contrast to results produced by Mouilso and Calhoun (2013), who found that perpetrators of sexual violence scored higher on the Antisocial Behavior, Erratic Lifestyle, and Interpersonal Manipulation realms. Callous Affect scores did not differ between perpetrators and non-perpetrators. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if lifestyle or personality characteristics of psychopathy have the greatest effect on belief in rape myths.

Overall, gender is the greatest predictor of higher RMA levels. Other factors such as age and exhibition of psychopathy traits also influence the level of belief in rape myths.

IRMA subscales of rape myths.

There are several types of rape myths that persist in society. The Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, which will be utilized in the current study as a guide for coding, separates these myths into four subscales (McMahon & Farmer, 2011):

1. She Asked for It
2. He Didn't Mean To
3. It Wasn't Really Rape
4. She Lied

Under these subscales, specific statements expand on the characteristics that correspond with each overarching category. Each of the twenty-two statements on the IRMA represents an idea that illuminates the underlying thought processes that define each subscale.

For example, under Subscale 1: She asked for it, respondents are presented with the following statements:

- If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.
- When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.

Both of these statements correspond with specific rape myths. The first relates to alcohol and increased culpability of the victim, while the second pertains to clothing and unspoken consent for sexual activity. The remaining items on the measure address additional attitudes and beliefs that relate to rape, victim precipitation, and offender mitigation. The sections below will expand on rape myths that concern alcohol and clothing.

AMMSA subscales of rape myths.

Gerger et al (2007) sought to create a rape myth acceptance scale using a definition of rape myths that highlighted the content and function of these beliefs: "rape myths are descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about rape that serve to deny, downplay or justify sexual violence that men commit against women" (Gerger, et al, 2007, p. 423). The authors recognized that previous scales measuring RMA produced results that were very positively skewed, indicating low levels of rape myth acceptance. While they note that this makes hypothesis testing more difficult, as certain statistical tests require a normal distribution, the authors also point out that low levels of self-reported RMA do not necessarily indicate a low level of actual rape myth acceptance. It was postulated that respondents may be aware of the socially acceptable answers to each measure, and select these "correct" answers when participating. This would generate scores that would not reflect actual RMA of the population. Another thought was that societally held views on sexual violence may parallel the transformation of societally held racist beliefs, which become more subtle and covert over time. The rape myths listed in prior scales may be more overt in nature, making it difficult to gauge the adherence to more subtle ideals that persist in current society.

To combat these challenges, the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression scale (AMMSA) was created. This 30-item measure is divided into five subsections (Watson, 2016):

1. Denial of the scope of the problem
2. Antagonism toward victims' demands
3. Lack of support of policies designed to help alleviate the effects of sexual assault
4. Belief that male coercion forms a natural part of sexual relationships
5. Beliefs that exonerate male perpetuation by blaming the victim or circumstances

Four studies testing the AMMSA in English and German found the RMA measure to be highly internally consistent and reliable across a time span of six months (Gerger, et al, 2007). This AMMSA provides academics and practitioners with an instrument that is able to detect the subtle adherence to rape myths.

Alcohol and rape myths.

Rape myths highlight the behaviors of both the perpetrators and victims of sexual violence. When rape myth ideals are adopted, the perpetrator's behaviors make them less culpable for their actions and the victim's make them more culpable. Alcohol is one aspect of rape culture that plays a dual role in sexually violent behavior. Females, the gender most often associated with victimization (Eigenberg & Garland, 2008, as cited in Hayes, et al 2013), who consume alcohol prior to their sexual assaults are judged more harshly than sober victims while males who are intoxicated are perceived to be less responsible for violent actions (Maurer and Robinson, 2008). Women and girls who drink are therefore more accountable for their actions and the behaviors aimed at them, while men and boys who imbibe are perceived as less blameworthy.

Alcohol has been labeled the most commonly used date-rape drug (Hayes, et al, 2016; Scott-Ham & Burton, 2006), as opposed to the oft quoted Rohypnol. Alcohol facilitated rape, where alcohol was given to the victim by the perpetrator, and incapacitated rape, where alcohol was consumed willingly by the victim, have prevalence rates of 2.2% and 2.8% respectively, while drug facilitated and incapacitated rape show the substantially lower levels of 0.5% and 0.7%, in a population of 5000 U.S. women (Kilpatrick, et al, 2007). Forensic examinations of those involved in sexual assault cases have shown that 41.8% of victims (n = 292) and 43.2% of alleged perpetrators (n = 88), were under the influence of alcohol at the time of their exam, with

victim's mean BACS ranging from 1.5-1.73% (Janisch, Meyer, Germerott, Albrecht, Schulz, & Debertin, 2010). Further, in an analysis of 1,014 sexual assault cases, which were claimed to be drug-facilitated, 81% of the cases that obtained the victim's BAC level within twelve hours of the alleged incident (n = 391) indicated the presence of alcohol (Scott-Ham & Burton, 2006).

Hayes, Abbot, and Cook (2016) were interested in determining which demographic and social characteristics were associated with acceptance of rape myths on two college campuses. The specific characteristics examined were sex, race, drinking behavior, and participation in a college-wide sexual assault program. Major findings of this study included a higher acceptance of rape myths by male participants versus female participants and a correlation between drinking behavior and rape myth adherence—males who participated in drinking weekly had higher levels of rape myth acceptance, where for females there was no statistical significance (Hayes et al., 2016).

Alcohol can also be said to have ties to sexual victimization. Previous research has found a correlation between childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and alcohol or substance abuse. Both CSA and alcohol or substance abuse were predictive of later adult sexual victimization, and alcohol or substance abuse was predictive of instances of adult rape, regardless of the presence of CSA (Messman-Moore & Long, 2002).

Relatedly, McCauley, Calhoun, and Gidycz (2010) were interested in studying the relationship between binge drinking and rape experience for women enrolled in college. The experimental group in this study was women who had experienced previous completed or attempted sexual victimization, putting them in a high-risk category for further victimization, as women with a history of prior rape are more likely to be revictimized.

After an initial screening period, participants were followed up with at the four, eight, and twelve month marks. The most significant predictor of monthly binge drinking was an initial acknowledgment of binge drinking; no rape variables influenced continued binge drinking. Additionally, an initial report of binge drinking made a participant 4.5 times more likely to report rape at the four-month follow-up and initial reports of drinking were significant predictors during any of the follow-up points (McCauley et al., 2010).

Alcohol is a substance that can be legally and easily purchased in the United States. Its presence in both rape myths and the commission of sexually violent crimes suggests that prevention tactics addressing its use and potential consequences need to be created and widely disbursed throughout society.

Clothing, rape myths, and slut shaming.

While alcohol consumption can affect the perception society has of both survivors and offenders, clothing is a facet of rape myths that targets only the victims of sexual violence. The clothing in question is what the victim was wearing the night of their assault, and this comes under scrutiny because provocative clothing has been thought to denote the consent or desire for sexual activity by the person wearing it.

Choice of clothing does communicate certain attributes about its wearer, but because this is being communicated to a general audience rather than at the individual level required of consent, clothing becomes a poor indicator of desired sexual activity (Maurer and Robinson, 2008; McMahon, 2010). Misreading an individual's supposed desire can lead to the belief that certain types of clothing, articles that are more provocative in nature, are equated to a desire for sexual contact. Following this line of thinking, a perpetrator can shift the onus of responsibility for sexually violent behavior onto the victim—*she knew what she was going to get when she*

wore those clothes. This indicates that avoiding rape can be achieved by not wearing provocative clothing, which is a false belief.

A grassroots movement, called SlutWalks, has been established to counteract the clothing equals consent rape myth. In 2011, a Canadian police officer addressed a Toronto university and spoke the phrase, "…women should avoid dressing like sluts in order to not be victimized." (McCormack & Prostran, 2012, p. 410). This statement perfectly epitomizes the idea that choice of clothing can lead to sexual violence and it sparked outrage amongst the community. This outrage, plus the non-responsiveness of Canadian police, eventually led to the creation of the SlutWalk movement that aims to reappropriate the word slut, to increase gender equality, and to bring awareness to rape culture and victim blaming (McCormack & Prostran, 2012; Ringrose & Renold, 2012).

Slut-shaming is a term that refers to "…the experience of being labeled a sexually out-of control girl or woman and then being punished socially for possessing this identity." (Tanenbaum, 2017). Another definition brings attention to the sexual regulation that takes place between females, where verbal attacks are meted out to women or girls for dressing provocatively to gain male attention (Ringrose & Renold, 2012). Those who wear revealing clothing are particularly vulnerable to slut-shaming because of the visibility of this characteristic and the association it has with promiscuous behavior.

Women or girls who are given the label of slut may suffer social consequences including being the recipient of gossip or bullying type behavior. Mental health issues and truancy are additional consequences of slut-shaming. On a tragic note, as a result of bullying in this vein, teenage girls have committed suicide on multiple occasions (Dodge, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

Thompson (2017) suggests that slut-shaming is a tool of self-regulation that serves the purpose of discouraging acts of future questionable behavior—the label of slut creates shame and thus deters additional actions that fall under this morally repugnant umbrella. The reclaiming of the word slut is an attempt to neutralize the negative power the word has been given and to destigmatize the term so it no longer has the ability to generate shame. Stigmatized groups reappropriate words in order to revalue a term and to purposefully refer to themselves by that label (Galinsky, Hurenberg, Groom, & Bodenhausen, 2003). While there are some critics who believe that referencing women and girls as sluts is harmful no matter the context (Tanenbaum, 2015), activists feel that reclaiming the term diffuses the destructive character of the word (Ringrose & Renold, 2012).

Much like slut-shaming, rape myths embody ideas about sexuality that are harmful if spread. Understanding how and why ideas about clothing and certain behaviors lead to negative beliefs is paramount to halting the power that these convictions hold.

Shame and humiliation.

While shame and humiliation are characteristics that can result from slut-shaming, victims of sexual assault also experience both reactions. For survivors of sexual violence, these emotions can be a deterrent to reporting to law enforcement (Weiss, 2010) and they can also lead to mental health issues such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Elklit & Christiansen, 2013; Maddox, Lee, & Barker, 2011; Snipes, Calton, Green, Perrin, & Benotsch, 2017).

McCauley (2017) was interested in determining a construct definition of humiliation, because as it is pointed out, much of the research into humiliation is focused on interpersonal rather than in-group experiences. Ascertaining if each type of incident creates the same response

is a step toward further understanding the humiliation response and creating a construct that is able to predict new observations.

It was determined that although there is a lack of research investigating humiliation, there is consistency in the findings which are available—shame and anger result when a victim experiences an unjust, lowering action. While McCauley notes that available data is focused on the micro level, it is believed that this information can be projected out to macro level interactions. This research analysis encourages social scientists to continue investigating humiliation. And further, it suggests that studies should be scaled in an inter-group manner (McCauley, 2017). While this study was concerned with terrorist acts, parallels to sexual aggression can be made. Rape is an unjust, lowering action, and feelings of shame and humiliation are widespread across victims.

Weiss (2010) investigates shame and its relation to sexual assault and rape. As shame is an element that can detrimentally impact an individual for long periods of time, dismantling its expression, especially in regards to an underreported crime such as sexual violence, can provide information as to characteristics and effects of sexual assault and its survivors. Narratives from the National Crime Victimization Survey were utilized from the years 1992-early 2000. From this sample, 1,050 narratives were coded. Of this number, 136 narratives were included in this study's shame narrative research. These narratives were selected based on three variants to include "(1) self-blame or anticipation of being blamed, (2) humiliation, and (3) fear of public scrutiny" (p. 291).

Male victims, who made up 15% of the sample, and female victims, who comprised the remaining 85% of the population, were considered separately. Female narratives expressed shame in three ways—the deserving victim, the disgraced victim, and the defamed victim. Male

narratives expressed shame in three completely different ways—the disempowered victim, the emasculated victim, and the exposed victim. This research uncovers the gendered shame-response to sexual violence. While shame is often a deterrent to reporting rape, additional research into shame response is necessary (Weiss, 2010).

While most research relating rape and shame is focused on the victim, offenders who target women can experience this emotion as well. Addressing shame in a beneficial manner may lead to better treatment options. Loeffler, Prelog, Unnithan, and Pogrebin (2010) sought to determine if the restorative justice practice of shame transformation works to promote accountability and empathy in male domestic violence offenders. Offenders who are introduced to this type of treatment are encouraged to experience the pain their offense caused and to subsequently make alterations, which change their criminogenic beliefs and rationalizations.

The major finding of this study was that Shame Transformation treatment, when compared to standard cognitive behavioral therapy, promotes changes in self-esteem and empathetic concern characteristics for domestic violence offenders. While other variables were found to not be affected, this conclusion suggests implications for the treatment of domestic violence offenders including the importance of distinguishing between guilt and shame and the potentially positive benefits of emotionally releasing shame (Loeffler et al., 2010). Domestic violence offenders are not completely comparable to sexually violent individuals, but treatment options that work well for those who commit physically harmful actions against women may work well for those who commit sexually harmful actions as well.

Shame and humiliation can be detrimental to an individual's physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Defining the terms, understanding their consequences, and determining

treatment options are ways that can enable those who experience sexual assault to seek assistance.

Law enforcement perspective.

Sexual assault and rape are considered serious crimes in the United States. In order for these offenses to be investigated, they must be reported to a law enforcement agency. Police officers are the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system and it is them who play a critical role in determining which cases move forward through the system. It is therefore imperative to ensure that officers operate without biases that may influence how they process a complaint. Especially because officer empathy toward crime victims appears to have an influence on their decision to take a case to court (Maddox et al., 2011).

Mennicke, Anderson, Oehme, and Kennedy (2014) state that sexual violence occurs with frequency and that law enforcement officers are often the first person a victim encounters if they choose to report their assault. Officers possess the power of arrest, and therefore they are the ones to determine if a perpetrator should be apprehended. Because of this unique role, the authors sought to investigate the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs officers have concerning rape.

The participants for this study were gathered from a Florida-based LEO training program that provides officers with introductory domestic violence training. Surveys were linked to the online curriculum. Open ended questions were focused on the officer's working definition of rape/sexual assault and the amount of rape claims that they believe to be unfounded. Rape myth acceptance was gauged by the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Revised (RMA-R).

Most officers responded to the RMA-R with low levels of rape myth acceptance. For the unfounded rape estimate question, 80.9% of officers provided higher estimates of unfounded rape claims than the accepted threshold of 2-8%. Startlingly, 27.2% of officers placed the rate of

baseless claims between 20-49%, while 10.5% placed the rate above 80%. For the open-ended rape definition question, 79.7% of officers only partially defined rape (Mennicke et al., 2014).

Police officers who work with victim advocates may be better able to assist those who have been sexually victimized. Rich and Seffrin (2013) acknowledge that rape victims are unlikely to report their victimization for a variety of factors including shame, fear, and mistrust. Additionally, if a survivor does choose to report the rape, revictimization may occur throughout the criminal justice process beginning with law enforcement officers. To alleviate some of this revictimization, officers can utilize the assistance of a victim's advocate. In their study, approximately two-thirds of respondents reported utilizing victim advocate services during their career.

For their study, Rich and Seffrin (2013) utilized a population of 429 sworn police officers that voluntarily completed a survey with the information that their results may be utilized to improve future sexual assault trainings. The crime victim advocacy index was used to evaluate officer involvement with advocate groups. A RMA scale was given to gauge officer level of rape myth acceptance. Additionally, demographic data and information regarding officer experience with sexual assault cases and the procedures and techniques used in these cases was gathered.

Less than one-third reported always using advocates, while one-third reported never using this service. One-third of officers report that they would be reluctant to work with advocates because of confusion about their role or that the officers have a preference for maintaining sole control of their work.

The authors uncovered some of the facilitators—sexual-assault training, years on the job, and levels of interview skills—of officers who work with victim advocates. They also discovered some of the barriers to collaboration—role confusion surrounding the advocates and a desire for

maintenance of control. It is suggested that overcoming these obstacles may be a revision to traditional police culture, so including management in the discussion of best practices is vital (Rich & Seffrin, 2013).

Bystander intervention programs.

Training for police officers and partnerships with victim advocates may allow law enforcement to be better able assist victims of sexual assault, but another important deterrent to sexually violent behavior is bystander intervention. This type of intervention originated after the infamous murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964; an attack that was committed in public, where no witnesses intervened. Bystander intervention emphasizes the importance that community members have in interrupting or reporting crimes (McMahon, 2010).

Elias-Lambert and Black (2016) gauged the effectiveness of a bystander sexual violence prevention program on high-risk populations on a university campus. While colleges have enacted methods to prevent and more efficiently report sexual assault, an evaluation of these interventions and procedures is necessary.

This study utilized pre, post, and follow-up surveys on a population of 142 fraternity members. To assess if participants were high or low risk, the Modified-Sexual Experiences Survey was administered prior to the intervention. Participation in the program was mandatory, although students were informed that the program evaluation aspect was not a required element. Participants were randomly assigned to the control and experimental group, with the control group receiving an LGBT training program and the experimental group receiving a 90-minute Bringing in the Bystander (BITB) prevention program.

Results showed no significant differences between pre- and post-test attitudinal and behavioral bystander behaviors for the intervention group when held up to the comparison group.

Rape myth acceptance for the intervention group decreased from pretest to the follow up survey. The intervention group demonstrated a significant decrease in sexually coercive behaviors from the time of pretest to the follow up survey, but when looked at with the comparison group at follow up, there was very little difference. While there was a decrease to the intervention group's attraction to sexual aggression at the posttest mark, a rebound in this trend was found at the follow up point.

While some of the findings indicated that bystander intervention programs can be successful in lessening adherence to rape myths and decreasing sexually coercive behavior, an eventual rebound of attitudes toward sexually coercive behavioral intentions was noted. The author suggests that longer and more intensive interventions may be more successful in preventing this trend reversal (Elias-Lambert & Black, 2016). Additionally, in a study of 2,338 incoming undergraduate students, McMahaon (2010) uncovered that certain characteristics were associated with higher levels of willingness to intervene—being female, having previous rape education, and knowing someone who had been sexually assaulted. Males, those who were pledging to fraternities or sororities, those who did not have previous rape education, and those who did not know anyone who had been sexually assaulted all exhibited higher level of RMA. It was also found that belief in rape myths was negatively correlated to willingness to intervene.

Targeting rape education programs at groups who tend to have higher levels of rape myth acceptance and ensuring that those programs are intensive in nature may be ways to provide more successful interventions. As participants in many programs are college students, backtracking rape education to secondary schooling may have an even greater impact.

Theories and Their Connection to Rape Myths

Sociological theories.

While rape myths can be viewed from a narrow lens, their interconnectivity to theories that help to support or complement their continuation also warrants interest. Sociological theories of crime attempt to analyze the relationship that exists between individuals and other social groups, and how these relationships influence behavior (Schmalleger, 2016). Humanity uses descriptive language to explain the world around them. Words are concepts that have been culturally defined and they allow for communication between individuals who speak the same language or dialect to be a simple task.

Labeling theory highlights the harmful impact that designating an individual as criminal or deviant, on in this instance rapist, has on their future behavioral options. Deviance and criminality were recognized as socially defined labels and once assigned to a person, only allow illegitimate options for subsequent behaviors. Following this line of thinking, a rapist would therefore always been seen as a rapist. Society's negative reaction to those with this label further reinforces the stigma attached, encouraging an offender toward committing continued deviance (Curran & Renzetti, 2001; Schmalleger, 2016).

The word rapist is abhorred and it is very hesitantly assigned to those who commit crimes that fall under the sexual assault category. In a study of 521 male college students, Voller and Long (2010) found that 7.29% of participants reported perpetrating rape while 5.95% reported perpetrating acts considered sexual assault. Despite these numbers, the Rape, Abuse, & Incest Network (RAINN) reports that only 6 out of 1000 or less than 1% of perpetrators will go to jail or prison. This begins with only a fraction of sexually violent acts being reported to law enforcement and ends with a legal system that makes proving sexual assault extremely difficult (The criminal justice…, n.d.). The hesitance to label those who rape with the word rapist, by everyone from victims to courtroom actors, may be seen as a reinforcement of rape culture.

Much like the victim-blaming that can follow sexual assault, not labeling perpetrators as rapists serves to legitimize the crime.

In addition, victims of sexual violence can be hesitant to label their victimization as rape. While they report experiences that are consistent with the definition of rape, this label is not assigned to their assault. Embarrassment and a disinclination to label a known individual as a rapist may play a part in this hesitance. Peterson and Muehlenhard (2011) analyzed a written narrative of the experiences of 77 college women who had experienced an incident which qualified as rape. Of these, 55% (n = 42) of participants did not label their victimization as rape. Reasons for the hesitance to assign the label of rape included 1) the man involved didn't fit their image of a rapist, 2) the victim assigned themselves culpability because of their behavior prior to the experience, 3) the incident was not violent enough for rape, and 4) the victim had not resisted strongly enough. The labels of rape and rapist seem to have similar types of avoidance by both perpetrators and victims.

Chapleau and Oswald (2013) touch on another sociological theory. They investigate the connection between social justification theory and rape myth acceptance. Because this theory claims that subordinate-group members enable dominate-group culture, RMA through this lens, can be said to legitimize male violence against women. Each participant completed two measures—the Opposition to Equality Subscale and the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form. It was discovered that participants of both genders who received a higher score in opposition to equality had more elevated levels of rape myth acceptance when the perpetrator was of higher status than the victim and he was in danger of being arrested; conversely there was less RMA when there was no danger of prosecution.

Hayes, Lorenz, and Bell (2013) wanted to determine the relationship between gender, the just world belief (JWB), and acceptance of rape myths. JWB is the idea that people get what they deserve, and that any negative consequences are the result of one's own actions; these beliefs may be correlated to victim blaming. The authors wanted to bring the testing of this theory, which has been studied in the psychological realm, to the discipline of criminology.

Similarly to other research, it was uncovered that gender is significantly correlated with rape myth acceptance, with men having higher rates of acceptance than women. Further, as rates of JWB views regarding one's self increased belief in rape myths decreased, which disproved one of the authors' hypothesis. But, in support of an additional hypothesis, it was found that as rates of JWB views about others increased, so did the acceptance of rape myths.

Sleath and Bull (2010) suggest that the issue of male rape victims is under investigated. This may be due in part to inconsistencies in available findings regarding the perception of male victims and the amount of culpability they seem to carry for their victimization. Their study aims at dismantling certain aspects of male rape to include victim blaming and male rape myths.

Several scenarios were presented to the 116 study participants, with each scenario manipulating the level of rape myths and type of rape. For assessing the level of victim or perpetrator blame a Likert-type scale was utilized. To assess the level of male rape myth acceptance, the MRMS, a 22-item questionnaire was administered to participants. Additionally, Belief in a Just World and sex-role egalitarianism were gauged.

From this study, a link between male RMA and male rape victim blaming was discovered, which is similar to the relationship between female rape myths and victim blaming. But in contrast to female rape myths, male rapists are believed to be homosexual and men are

always expected to enjoy sex, even during the act of rape. These thoughts may influence criminal justice actors, so discovering their prevalence is an important endeavor (Sleath & Bull, 2010).

Acknowledging the interconnectivity of society, Osman (2016) recognizes that greater empathy is created by shared experiences or similarities—this includes rape experiences. While some rape survivors recognize that they are such, others, especially those who may feel they precipitated the rape, may not label themselves as victims. This study examined the level of empathy with a rape victim vignette based on personal rape victimization and acknowledgement of that victimization.

While all students who participated reported some level of empathy during the study, those who acknowledged their own victimization reported greater rape victim empathy. Further studies should consider potential differences in empathy levels based on label differences—*will acknowledged "sexual assault" victims empathize more with other sexual assault victims, rather than rape victims* (Osman, 2016)?

Implicit theories.

Implicit theories (IT) look at sexual violence on the individual level and seek to discover the underlying cognitive distortions that influence a rapist's thoughts and actions. Polaschek and Ward (2002) current five ITs for rapists:

1. Women are unknowable/dangerous
2. Women are sex objects
3. Male sex drive is uncontrollable
4. Entitlement
5. Dangerous world

These ITs dovetail well with many of the rape myths on several rape myth acceptance scales.

ITs have been found to have a relationship with personality traits. In a sample of child-victim sex offenders, Jones and Vess (2010) found that as a respondee's dependent and depressive personality traits increased so too did their endorsement of the Dangerous World IT. Further, as an individual's level of schizoid and depressive traits increased, approval of the uncontrollability IT increased.

The relationship between those who are not convicted offenders and rape-supportive ITs needs a bit more research (Blake & Gannon, 2014). While Blake and Gannon (2010) showed that men with higher levels of rape proclivity endorsed higher levels of rape positive beliefs, the link between rape proclivity and rapist ITs was not statistically significant. The differences between those who actually commit sexual violence and those who only endorse it should be more fully investigated.

Intimate partner violence sex offenders are a population that have been studied in relation to the implicit theories that they adhere to. Weldon (2016) conducted a phenomenological analysis of eleven convicted IPV sexual offenders. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants. This allowed for the revelation of each offender's cognitions, beliefs and feelings. An analysis of the interviews revealed five superordinate themes:

1. Violence is normal
2. Desire to remain in control in intimate relationships
3. Women's role in violence and sexual assault
4. Diminishing personal responsibility and the inevitability of violence
5. Perception of self and how they will improve in the future

These overarching themes provide an avenue for future research, studies that analyze the formation of implicit theories and how these influence those who are in intimate relationships to commit acts of violence.

Theories at both the micro and macro level serve to reinforce beliefs that encourage and permit sexually aggressive behavior. Understanding the underlying theoretical support system for rape culture allows for a greater comprehension of the root causes of sexual violence.

Virtual Violence Against Women

Physically perpetrated violence delivers long lasting harms. Virtual violence can also be deleterious. As much human interaction occurs on the Internet, it becomes important to investigate the ways that sexual violence has migrated to the online realm.

As somewhat of a transition from in-person to virtual sexual violence, Kettrey (2013) seeks to investigate how rape myths were articulated in *Playboy* magazine articles in a longitudinal manner. This specific publication was selected because of its pairing of male-gaze based images alongside textual material and because of its consistent, long-term publication. Articles from a 50-year period were selected for inclusion in the study if they discussed or portrayed rape. A total of 167 documents were included, and spanned the years of 1961-2003. Sixteen rape myths were classified into four categories to include racism/classism, minimizing rape, blaming the victim, and portraying perpetrators as sex-driven.

When the sex of the victim could be determined in the documents analyzed, the proportion of male to female victims was somewhat consistent with the actual sex differences in victimization rates as determined by the NCVS. Of the documents investigated, 54.6% included rape myths. The breakdown of the category of these myths is as follows: 31.03% contained the blaming the victim category, 27.59% contained the minimizing rape category, 11.49% contained

the portraying perpetrators as sex-driven category, and 7.47% contained the racism/classism category.

The analysis of textual documents in *Playboy* magazine uncovered that rape was a topic discussed over a long period of time by both contributors and readers of the publication. When rape was discussed, it was often done in an ambiguous manner, a treatment that can further endorse the rape myths that were being written about. The author suggests that although feminist gains have been made across time, little progress has been made considering rape (Kettrey, 2013). The Internet has made print publications almost obsolete, but their study can illuminate the evolution of virtual violence against women.

In research closely related to the current study, Giraldi and Monk-Turner (2017) analyzed Facebook comments in response to banners that were displayed during freshman move-in day at a large southeastern university. These banners contained phrases that were indicative of rape culture. Local news outlets covered the incident and posted articles on their social media pages. Comments in reply to these posts were analyzed for codes. In the 220 collected comments, the authors found that there were thirty-four codes present, with the "funny/hilarious" code having the most occurrences, followed by the "just college fun" code. Four themes emerged from the thirty-four codes observed—humor, college, age and sexuality—with humor being the most dominant theme. Most of the comments were acceptable of the banners, and the authors felt this showed that rape culture exists and is prevalent (Giraldi & Monk-Turner, 2017).

Pornography and images of sexual violence.

Trends and outcomes of pornography consumption are items that should be monitored to keep a pulse on society's acceptance of rape culture and sexual violence. Whereas most pornographic materials have migrated to the Internet, looking back at research which analyzed

print and video pornography is imperative to understanding the historical prevalence and effects of this subject. An early study of the relationship between violent pornography and abuse of women, analyzed a group of 198 women who had experienced abuse in their relationship. It was shown that 40.9% of participants reported that their abuser used pornographic material. While viewing of pornography is not in itself a criminal activity, the most violent abusers in this sample were found to be the ones who not only viewed pornographic material but also forced their partners to participate with them in their use of pornography or pose for pornographic pictures or scenes (Cramer, McFarlane, Parker, Soeken, Silva, & Reel, 1998). These findings show a tentative link between forced viewing and participation in pornographic activities and further abusive behavior.

An early analysis of factors that analyzed how rape-prone college campuses were, found that fraternities who had members who got their information about women from pornography or who watched fellow fraternity members have sex (with the intention being the creation of a live pornography show) contributed to how rape-prone a campus environment was (Sanday, 1996). There has been research into the relationship between pornography viewing, rape myth acceptance, and bystander intervention. Foubert, Brosi, and Bannon (2011) looked at 489 fraternity members and their pornography viewing habits and how this related to several factors including willingness to intervene as a bystander, rape myth acceptance, and likelihood of committing a rape or sexual assault. Results showed that 83% of participants viewed mainstream pornography during the last twelve months, 27% had viewed sadomasochistic pornography, and 19% had viewed rape pornography. All viewing groups showed an increased likelihood to commit rape or sexual assault with the sadomasochistic and rape pornography viewers showing higher levels of RMA and lower levels of bystander willingness to intervene.

To study the relationship between pornography viewing and bystander intervention in both males and females, Foubert and Bridges (2017) looked at a population of 429 college students, of which 32.4% were male and 67.6% were female. Motivations for pornography use were gathered and the top reasons for viewing pornographic material for both genders was found to be relief of sexual tension, to learn about sex, and for sexual thrills. Delving deeper into the subject found that those who reported a greater variety of motivations for viewing pornography displayed less willingness to intervene as a bystander. Pornography viewing and the motivations for watching this content appears to have a connection to the willingness to intervene in a situation that involves sexual violence.

Jumping more fully into the online world, Makin and Morczek (2015) seek to gain a macro level view of the pervasiveness of rape-oriented pornography. Previous research has been limited in its generalizability, so this study seeks to rectify this apparent lack of external validity. Google Trends data from the years 2004-2012 was analyzed, with researchers looking for specific phrases that denote interest in rape-oriented pornography. Search queries were categorized into three types—rape oriented search, cinematic portrayal of rape, and pornographic hubs.

For the majority of the queried search terms, an upward trend has been noted. The top seven rape-oriented search terms included the following: “rape sex video”, “rape sex”, “free rape video”, and “free rape”. The authors suggest that the data uncovered by this study should be compared to national and local trends regarding sexual violence. Comparing the two may provide guidance on what is driving the trends for rape-oriented pornography queries.

Dodge (2016) seeks to investigate the impact that digital images of sexual violence have on victims of such violence and how these photographs are interpreted by society when they are

widely disseminated with little regard to implications to the victim—images are seen as something besides a depiction of actual sexual assault, rather they are proof that the victim was a slut. It is suggested that rape culture and rape myths frame the taking of and spreading of sexual assault photos and allow for the dehumanizing of the victims pictured. This study utilized three case studies—Rehtaeh Parsons; Jane Doe, the Steubenville victim; and Audrie Pott—and analyzed them through Judith Butler's theory on photography, which relates to torture and framing.

Based on comments and tweets that accompanied the shared photographs of assault, Dodge concluded that individuals viewed the victims as responsible for their own victimization, and that rape myths regarding female passivity and sexuality assisted in framing the images as such. Dodge recommends a recognition of the power that images hold, and advises those who view images of sexual assault as legitimate acts to reframe their approach and view them through the harmful lens that they warrant (Dodge, 2016).

Sex work online.

Sex work has also made a transition to the Internet. And while sex work is a deviance that is separate from acts of sexual violence, these occurrences can overlap, thereby making study pertinent. Beckham and Prohaska (2012) were interested in determining if the characteristics of men who killed sex workers whom they met online differed from the characteristics of those who did not meet their victims on the Internet. As the World Wide Web has enabled sex workers to advertise in the virtual landscape, studying the characteristics of johns who utilize this medium has become an emerging issue. The authors utilized Lexis Nexis to search for news articles, that pertained to sex workers, murder, and the Internet. Four case studies, each having between seven and fifty-five articles related to them, were selected for analysis.

The four cases were divided into two categories—serial killers and non-serial killers. Because of the manner in which each group carried out their murders, the author proposes that the Internet provokes killers to either seek out and injure multiple victims, or to become sexually aroused and kill their victim.

The authors reason that sexually graphic images and videos that contain violence can influence the actions of those who view it. Controls on this media should be enacted to prevent exceedingly violent representations from reaching the hands of young viewers. Additionally, it is recommended that websites should continuously patrol for sex worker advertisements and law enforcement officers should enforce punishment for all parties involved in prostitution (Beckham & Prohaska, 2012).

Technology-facilitated violence and harassment.

Henry and Powell (2015) define technology-facilitated sexual violence and harassment (TFSV) as, "…the range of criminal, civil, and otherwise harmful sexually aggressive behaviors perpetuated against women with the aid or use of new technologies" (p. 759). Included under the umbrella of this term are six different formats:

1. Unauthorized creation and distribution of sexual images
2. Creation and distribution of sexual assault images
3. Use of carriage service to procure a sexual assault
4. Online sexual harassment and cyberstalking
5. Gender-based hate speech
6. Virtual rape

Furthering the study of sexual violence on the Internet, Bates (2017) recognized the research gap that exists in relation to revenge porn victims and mental health effects.

Nonconsensual pornography can have lasting and negative impacts. Investigating the mental health aspect of this phenomenon is crucial. Qualitative interviews with 18 female revenge porn survivors were conducted. Common themes and patterns for each of the sessions were noted.

The findings of this study were divided into two categories—mental health and coping mechanisms. Common themes uncovered in the mental health category included hesitance to trust; PTSD, anxiety, and depression; and self-esteem, confidence, and loss of control. Common themes uncovered in the coping mechanisms category were negative coping mechanisms such as drinking or avoidance and denial; and positive coping mechanisms such as seeking mental health counseling or speaking out to help others (Bates, 2107).

Stalking is another harm that has migrated to technological devices. In relationships where violence is present, stalking may be used as an instrument to create fear in and control a victim. Woodlock (2017) collected surveys from 152 domestic violence advocates and 46 victims of violence and analyzed the responses to better understand the additional opportunities for perpetration of domestic stalking that smartphones allow. From the collection of data, three overarching themes emerged.

1. *Omnipresence*, which conveyed that an abuser was always watching or nearby
2. *Isolation*, where abusers distance victims from their support network by using harassment, embarrassment, and restriction
3. *Punishment and humiliation*, where abusers say or do things in public settings to silence victims

While the author notes that the sample is non-representative and non-random, the results show that mobile devices give perpetrators increased access to victims which provides them with more opportunity to participate in stalking behavior (Woodlock, 2017). Expanding on TFSV

amongst partners, Reed, Tolman, and Ward (2016) investigated digital dating abuse in relationships among college-students. Digital dating abuse is a harmful practice because certain "digital media communications exposes dating partners to the risk of public exposure, humiliation, and ridicule (p. 1557). The most common forms of this type abuse among the 365 participants were monitoring a partner's whereabouts, monitoring who a partner is friends with and/or who they talk to, and snooping into a partner's private information using digital media. The authors feel that normalizing the monitoring of a partner's location may lead to difficulties in creating relationship boundaries and that the utilization of digital media may increase the level of monitoring into patterns of abuse (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016). Evidence such as this, show a need for research into the impact technology has on relationship dynamics and if its abuse leads to interpersonal violence and harm.

Research has shown the harms of virtual sexual violence and that there has been an increase in the desire to watch rape and sexual assault online. Continuing to examine the patterns of online usage and its relation to sexually violent behavior is imperative, as both access to the Internet and hours spent online everyday are increasing on a global level. Emerging trends should be monitored as new forms of sexually violent behavior migrate to the virtual environment.

While some suggest that the damage that results from virtual violence or harassment are not as great as those experienced by victims of in-person crimes, it has been suggested that the online realm will soon become just as relevant as the physical realm because of society's increasing dependence on this medium (Henry & Powell, 2015). This suggests that research looking further into the impact of virtual interaction should be conducted.

Research Questions

The above literature review discusses research that investigates rape myth adherence, theories which underline this adherence, and technology-based violence against women. While the amount of data available under these areas is plentiful, certain aspects need additional exploration. One such aspect is investigation into rape myth prevalence on the Internet. In light of this, the following research questions were addressed in the current study:

RQ1. What is the prevalence of user comments on news media articles hosted by Facebook that contain rape myths?

RQ2. Which rape myth has the highest level of prevalence in user comments on news media articles hosted by Facebook?

Conclusion

Statistics have illuminated that a considerable percentage of the population will experience or perpetrate some sort of sexual violence throughout their lifetime. The harms that these actions cause can send ripple effects throughout the entirety of society. And what's more, harmful behavior has migrated to technological devices and the Internet which alters the prevalence and impact of technology-facilitated violence and harassment. Understanding the underlying causes and correlates behind these behaviors is crucial if preventative action is to be endeavored. Observing the trends and patterns of rape culture allows for effective programs, legislation, and treatment options to be created and available to victims, offenders, and the entire community.

While there have been investigations into the harmful effects of technology-facilitated violence and harassment, the prevalence of textual representations of rape myths in a public forum have been neglected in the academic realm. Looking for incidences of publically declared rape supportive statements adds to the body of literature that analyzes the United States' level of

rape-supportive belief. Gathering social media artifacts created by society members enables a snapshot indication of the level of rape culture that is supported by the community.

In Chapter 3, information relating to the research problem and method of data collection and analysis will be presented for the current study. Descriptions of both the instrument of measurement and the data collection source will also be expanded upon.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

Investigating the ways society members communicate has been a concern of academics for many years. Theories about the impact of socialization on individuals and groups are present in large numbers throughout the field of criminology. These theories, while rich in variety and breadth, have neglected research into certain facets of online communication. As the Internet has become a medium through which a large portion of society publicly and privately communicates it becomes imperative to investigate the manner in which this communication is carried out. Discovering patterns of socialization on the Internet realm may point out trends that highlight what's important to society at any given time. Keeping this concept in mind, research that examines publicly available social artifacts can serve to generate a pinpoint perspective of societal significance. This allows public opinion to be gleaned, analyzed, and presented in an academic manner.

The current study examined the prevalence of rape myths on social media. This exploratory research provides information to rectify the dearth of data relating to textual manifestations of rape myths on online public commenting forums. While there has been study surrounding rape myths and those who subscribe to them, almost zero data touches on how prevalent these ideals are on a social media platform. Face to face encounters with rape supportive attitudes and behaviors can be harmful, but an Internet based encounter can also reinforce negative beliefs and actions that allow for rape culture to spread.

Research Method and Design

For the current study, the method of research is quantitative in nature, as a numerical-based analysis was made regarding user comments on various news media pages through the social media website Facebook. According to a 2016 Pew Research Center report, 62% of Americans get their news on social media, with the largest numbers gleaning their information from Facebook (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). The wide reach of this social media giant makes Facebook an ideal place for exploratory research into rape myth prevalence in Internet user comments.

Specifically, a quantitative content analysis was used to analyze web-based social artifacts. Quantitative research works well for the current research topic, as the study is exploratory in nature and only seeks to discover if rape myths are present on news posts made on a social media platform. Univariate descriptive statistics are suited to describe the phenomenon. As the information being sought is the prevalence value for both research questions, frequency is an adequate indicator of this value.

Other than its population reach, Facebook has a unique search feature that makes it ideal for study. For the current study, this is advantageous because a search term could be analyzed through the filter of each news source selected for study inclusion, making locating news article concerning rape a more efficient process.

As multiple news media companies were analyzed for their consumer content, using Facebook as a point of coalescence enabled some level of standardization to be achieved. Selecting news outlets for inclusion in the study was determined by referencing two sources, one which lists the sites that have the highest levels of user engagement on Facebook and another that lists the most popular news media websites on the Internet, using their U.S. traffic rank. Only sites published in the United States were selected for inclusion. Purposive sampling was

therefore used, as media outlets selected for inclusion met certain parameters prior to being considered for inclusion.

The top ten news media sites, determined by using both sources mentioned above, were analyzed for the presence of rape myths. To achieve a level of validity and to neutralize the subjectivity that can come with coding work, two previously tested instruments were referenced when generating a list of preset codes (Appendix A). 18,307 pieces of data were analyzed in the scope of the current study. This methodology allowed for a diverse dataset to be collected and enables potential replication to occur at a future date.

Research Questions

As the current study is exploratory in nature, the research questions that define its structure reflect this. Determining if a phenomenon exists—*are rape myths encountered in social media user comments?*—is the driving inquiry behind the current research. Because of this, the complexity of the study resides at a descriptive level.

The following research questions were addressed during the current study:

RQ1. What is the prevalence of user comments on news media articles hosted by Facebook that contain rape myths?

As RQ1 was answered affirmatively during the data analysis phase, RQ2 was also addressed.

RQ2. Which rape myth has the highest level of prevalence in user comments on news media articles hosted by Facebook?

Instruments Used for Preset Code Generation

The current study analyzed social media comments for the presence of rape myths. As the method of research is a quantitative content analysis, participants were not a necessary

component of the study. Rather, previously created social artifacts were screened to determine if they contained rape supportive statements or not.

To add a level of validity to the study, two pre-constructed instruments were utilized prior to the coding phase. These instruments, the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) and the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression scale (AMMSA), provided the researcher with examples of common rape myths and allowed for a list of pre-constructed codes to be generated (see Appendix A). The updated version of the IRMA contains myths that are subtle in nature and more relevant to current manifestations of rape culture (see Appendix B). This instrument is freely available on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' website (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Similarly, the AMMSA was designed to detect more subtle rape myths that society members adhere to, but this scale provides a macro lens of rape myths as well (see Appendix C). Permission to use this instrument for the current study was obtained from Dr. Gerd Bohner on March 3, 2018.

The IRMA contains four subscales broken down into 22 rape myths that fall under these scales. Statements relating to clothing, alcohol, physically resisting, and victim lying are presented in an easily understood manner to individuals who complete the measure. Scores for each of the 22 items range from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) and higher total scores indicate higher levels of rape myth rejection.

Dissecting the myths on the IRMA into codeable phrases will allow for them to be located in user comments on the selected news media articles. The original instrument, which was created in 1999, underwent several validity studies (Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon, 2011), and the updated version was tested to show no gender-based differentials and criterion validity (McMahon & Farmer, 2011),

The AMMSA was designed to address deficiencies with past measures of rape myth acceptance. This instrument is similar to the IRMA in design in that statements representing certain rape myths are scored using a Likert scale, a 7 point scale in this instance. The AMMSA differs in length, in that it contains 30 total items, pared down from an initial set of 60 items during the measure's creation process. Additionally, several of the scale's items address rape myths on a wider scope than the IRMA. For example, the *lack of support for policies designed to alleviate the effects of sexual violence* subscale of the AMMSA looks at the issue of sexual violence from a social institution lens, rather than the more incident-based lens that the IRMA takes for its four subscales (Gerger, et al, 2007; Watson, 2016). Testing has shown that the AMMSA is a valid measure in both the German and English versions of the instrument (Gerger, et al, 2007).

The broad range of rape myths that are covered in the IRMA and the AMMSA make these measures an ideal place to generate preset codes for researching rape myths. Taken together, these instruments approach RMA from a micro and macro lens, and including both in the current study allows for greater reliability in the data collection process.

Five headings were created for the preset code list: 1) Rape myths relating to victim precipitation or victim blaming, 2) Rape myths related to perpetrator mitigation, 3) It wasn't really rape, 4) Myths relating to sexuality, and 5) Representation of rape in society. In total, 20 codes were dispersed under these five headings. To generate these codes, the rape myths from each scale were pared down into short phrases that could then be searched for in the data set. Where it was possible, multiple myths were combined under a single code.

For example, the following rape myths were combined under the *Making out/fooling around leads to sex* code on the preset list:

- From the AMMSA - Once a man and a woman have started "making out", a women's misgivings against sex will automatically disappear.
- From the IRMA - If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.

Both rape myths relate to the idea that sex is the natural end product of kissing or other intimate contact. For this reason, these myths were combined and pared down to the code *Making out/fooling around leads to sex*.

A second example of how the preset code list was generated is by combining the following rape myths to create the *Male sex drive* code:

- From the AMMSA - 1) It is a biological necessity for men to release sexual pressure from time to time. 2) A man's sexuality functions like a steam boiler - when the pressure gets too high, he has to "let off steam".
- From the IRMA - 1) When guys rape, it is usually because of a strong desire for sex. 2) Guys usually don't intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away. 3) Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.

All these myths indicate that men have a sex drive that can get out of control and because of this, rape is a natural result. The phrase that can be gleaned from these myths and used as a code is the *Male sex drive* code under the *Myths relating to sexuality* heading on the preset list (See Appendix A for the full list of preset codes).

Data Source

As noted in the chapter introduction, a sizable portion of human communication is conducted via an online medium. Hubs that cater to certain aspects of socialization have emerged

in this virtual environment. The social media website Facebook is one such hub. Launched at Harvard in 2004, this website has expanded at a rapid pace and now enjoys the traffic of over two billion global users as of December 2017 (Company Info, n.d.). In addition to facilitating social connections between individuals, Facebook has become a source of news consumption for many Americans.

The current study focused on the comments that Facebook users created on published news media articles. With as many as 44% of American Facebook users gleaning their news from the social media giant (Gottfied & Shearer, 2016), the information collected from posted comments can provide an overview of public opinion from a diverse segment of the population. As the current study is interested in locating rape myths, attention was brought only onto articles that discuss the crime of rape—completed, attempted, or accused. Facebook allows for such articles to be published on their website, and for user comments responding to these articles to be published as well. The reach, consumer utilization, and open availability of Facebook make it a favorable data source for the current research. Furthermore, using a single data source allowed for some level of standardization to be achieved.

Data Collection

In addition to the level of traffic on Facebook, a unique feature of the site makes it practical for study. A search option allows users to filter results by search word or phrase. This can either be done from a user's home page or from an entity's public page. For the current study, this became useful in streamlining the article selection process. Searching for the term *rape* or *sexual assault* will return results that correspond to these words. Further, after the results are populated, a user can filter them through a source. For example, inputting the word *rape* into the search bar will return articles and posts related to the term. The searcher can then select a

source, such as CNN or Fox News, and results pertaining to both rape and the selected news source will be given. This is helpful in gathering the articles that will be investigated for the presence of rape myths.

Ensuring that relevant data is collected was of the utmost importance during the current process. Relevant in this scope refers to two aspects:

1. Selecting news media articles that are related to the crime of rape

2. Selecting text from user comments that is representative of rape supportive thinking

Addressing the first point began with the process of selecting news sources for inclusion in the study. Two sources were referenced to ascertain the names of popular news publishers located in the United States—NewsWhip Analytics and eBizMBA. These two references listed the most engaged and popular news sources on Facebook and the Internet. The NewsWhip information referred to a list of the 25 biggest publishers on Facebook as of March 2018. The number of likes, shares, comments, and reactions determines the ranking that each site has on this list. eBizMBA published a list of the 15 most popular news websites on the internet, as of May 2018. The determination of this ranking was made by ordering the continuously updated average of the website's US traffic rank and their global traffic rank (Corcoran, 2018; Top 15 Most Popular…, 2018).

When a comparison was done between these two lists, eight United States-based news media groups were mentioned on both lists. These groups are as follows:

1. CNN
2. Fox News
3. Huff Post
4. NBC

5. The New York Times
6. USA Today
7. Washington Post
8. Yahoo! News

These eight news media outlets were chosen as sources for the dataset.

To determine the ninth and tenth source included in the data collection phase, the researcher looked at the Facebook pages of the news media groups that were not mentioned on both lists. The two pages with the highest numbers of likes were selected as the final included news media publishers. Likes on a Facebook page entail that an individual is, "…showing support for the Page and that they want to see content from it." (What does it mean…, n.d.). Likes can therefore be considered a measure of popularity, and can be used to choose entities that appeal to large segments of people. The likes for each page considered for study inclusion, as of July 26, 2018 beginning at 2:04 p.m., are listed below:

1. ABC News: 13,300,951 likes
2. breitbart.com: 3,895,150 likes
3. buzzfeed.com: 11,451,029 likes
4. cbsnews.com: 4,941,174 likes
5. dailywire.com: 1,835,157 likes
6. Google News: 2,633 likes
7. LA Times: 2,750,001
8. msn.com: 5,992,672 likes
9. npr.org: 6,321,769 likes
10. nypost.com: 4,158,489 likes

11. thehill.com: 1,362,542 likes
12. westernjournal.com: 5,287,400 likes

The pages with the highest number of likes was determined to be ABC News and Buzzfeed. The final list of the ten news media entities selected for inclusion in the data collection phase was ABC News, Buzzfeed, CNN, Fox News, Huff Post, NBC, The New York Times, USA Today, Washington Post, and Yahoo! News

On the platform Facebook, each of the ten news media entity's webpage was searched for articles concerning the crime of rape, sexual assault, attempted rape or sexual assault, or accused rape or sexual assault of a victim or victims between the ages of 16-50. Individuals under and over this range can be considered vulnerable and in need of protection, while those who fall in this range should have "realized the consequences of their actions", an aspect of victim blaming and one that corresponds with the beliefs behind certain rape myths.

Date of publication was another added stipulation; only articles that were published prior to the beginning of the data selection phase were included in the study, as this ensures that presently occurring social happenings had less of an influence on the entirety of data that was gathered during the data collection phase. Data collection began on August 3, 2018. Videos were excluded from the data analysis and only posts which featured textual news articles were included in the dataset.

The search terms "rape" or "sexual assault" were entered into the search bar located on each page, and the first 15 articles that populated and fit the study criteria were included in the dataset. Two news sources, Buzzfeed and Fox News, required the use of the search term "sexual assault" as these entities did not populate with enough news articles that matched the search term "rape". Regardless of the search term used, the articles that populated contained similar content

and were about comparable incidents. This method ensured that 150 articles concerning the subject of sexual violence were included in the final dataset. All articles and comments were populated according to the algorithm the Facebook website utilizes. This means that there was no control over the date range for articles included in the study besides excluding those that were published after the beginning of the data collection phase. As a result, comparisons between articles published at different times is limited because the sampling method gives no option for controlling equitable representation of years in the sample.

In the sample, the year with the most publications was 2017 (59 articles), followed by 2018 (50 articles), 2016 (14 articles), 2013 (10 articles), 2014 (9 articles), 2015 (7 articles), and finally by 2012 (*n* = 1). The year with the greatest number of total comments was 2017 (*n* = 8,289), followed by 2018 (*n* = 5,000), 2016 (*n* = 3,066), 2014 (*n* = 952), 2015 (*n* = 593), 2013 (*n* = 381), and finally 2012 (*n* = 26). It should be noted that the time frame for the year 2018 was not the entire calendar year, as the dataset only included articles that were published prior to the beginning of the data collection phase (August 3, 2018).

Comments and Rape Myths by Year

	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	Total
Total Comments	5000	8289	3066	593	952	381	26	18307
Total Rape Myths	473	885	378	59	174	52	2	2023

Table 1: Total user comments and codes arranged by year

On the social media posts containing the 150 articles in the dataset, the first 20 user-generated comments and any English language replies to these comments were analyzed for the presence of rape myths. The 20 comments and replies were the first to populate when each

article was enlarged on Facebook's interface. A total of 18,307 comments were included in the dataset. Comments and replies in languages other than English were excluded from this value. Data saturation was reached at this point according to the a priori thematic saturation and inductive thematic models of saturation. With over 18,000 points of data included in the analysis portion of the current study, a large degree of identified codes were exemplified in the data and emergent codes or themes become visible during the coding process (Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs, & Jinks, 2017). Additionally, as this study is exploratory in nature, the amount of data analyzed was sufficient to indicate if rape myths were present on a social media platform, which is the main inquiry driving this work.

To address the second aspect of relevance for this study, selecting text from user comments that is representative of rape supportive thinking, two RMA scales, the IRMA and the AMMSA, provided a list of preset codes (see Appendix A). The total rape myths coded include the 20 items on the preset code list and any emergent myths that were discovered during the data analysis phase. The final list of emergent codes contained 14 items (Appendix D). Emergent codes were determined by locating phrases in the dataset that demonstrated a pattern of occurrence and resembled elements of rape myths found in the current literature or rape myth scales. A pattern of occurrence indicates that the emergent code was found more than once, with the overall prevalence values ranging from six to three hundred. A detailed description of each emergent code is located in Chapter 4.

When comments were selected for inclusion in the dataset, only those which clearly matched rape myths from the preset code and those that corresponded to any emergent codes were moved to the data analysis stage. If a comment contained more than one rape myth, only

the first listed in the comment was included in the data analysis. The total number of rape myths discovered was 2,023. Prevalence and proportion rates were determined for this data.

An activity log was completed during the data collection and analysis phases. This allowed for an audit trail to be created. The data collection and analysis phase took place between August 3, 2018 and September 28, 2018. Additionally, although the user comments selected for analysis are displayed on and retrieved from a public forum, care will be taken to create a to level of anonymity for comment contributors. While the digital representations of each piece of data used in the current study will be stored in a password protected data base, the images and names of the users responsible for each comment will be redacted.

Data Analysis

Exploratory research seeks to discover if a concept, idea, or theory exists. The exploratory research for the current study aspired to do just that. The information gathered from this study will add to the growing body of knowledge about rape myths and technology. Additionally, if the analysis uncovers the existence of rape myths on public social artifacts, evidence supporting the notion that the United States is a rape-prone society will be shown.

In the data collection phase, comments that contain rape supportive verbiage will be notated and included in the data analysis process. An overview of analysis necessary to address each research question follows.

RQ1. What is the prevalence of user comments on news media articles hosted by Facebook that contain rape myths?

RQ1 was answered using the frequency value of rape myths. This question is set up to be answered by an affirmation or denial of the presence of rape myths in comments. If the frequency of myths is zero, the question will be answered by denying the presence of such text in

the selected user comments. If the frequency is above zero, the question will be answered affirmatively. Additionally, to gain an understanding of how common or rare rape myths are in the dataset, the proportion of rape myths to the total number of comments was analyzed. This value provides insight into how saturated the data is with rape supportive language. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate this number, with the value being determined by dividing the number of comments that contain rape myths by the total number of comments included in the dataset.

RQ2. Which rape myth has the highest level of prevalence in user comments on news media articles hosted by Facebook?

This value was determined by using the frequency of rape myths in the user comments that are included in the data selection phase. This includes values for the number of rape myths that correspond to the preset codes and to any emergent codes discovered during the coding process. The frequency will be determined for each of the rape myths individually, and these values will be compared to determine what numerical value is the highest. A chi-square analysis was also conducted to determine the statistical level of prevalence.

Summary

The current study sought to discover if rape myths were present in social media user comments. To accomplish this, a single data source, the website Facebook, was identified for inclusion in the study. Through this source, news articles by popular news media entities were investigated for the presence of rape supportive attitudes in user response to the publications. While the current study maintained a level of standardization by gathering data from one source and a level of internal validity by utilizing two pre-tested measures to generate a list of preset

codes, generalizability for the research is severely diminished by purposive sampling and the ephemeral nature of the collected data points.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The current study was exploratory in nature and sought to discover the prevalence of rape myths located in social media user comments on the website Facebook. This chapter includes the results of the data analysis that took place in order to address this inquiry. A quantitative content analysis was employed, and the resultant descriptive statistics are reported in the sections below.

Detailed Results of the Data Analysis

Emergent codes.

A main objective of this study was to gain an understanding of how widespread rape myths are on social media. While false beliefs surrounding the crime of sexual violence have existed for years, social media websites have provided a potential platform for their spread and dissemination. Discovering if Internet users have employed this platform to discuss rape myths is important considering the large percentage of the population who has access to it.

In addition to gauging the spread of rape myths, investigating Internet-based text may help illuminate currently held ideas about sexual violence. The articles in the dataset were published in the years 2012 (n = 1), 2013 (n = 10), 2014 (n = 9), 2015 (n = 7), 2016 (n = 14), 2017 (n = 59), and 2018 (n = 50), with 72.67% being published in the two calendar years preceding this study. The comments created in response to the study's articles have the potential of containing rape myths that have been newly constructed as a result of shifting societal views. It is for this purpose that emergent codes were searched for during the data analysis phase.

Emergent codes were only included in the rape myth count if they could clearly be labeled as "attitudes and false beliefs held about rape that deny or minimize victim injury and/or blame the victims for their own victimization" (Hayes, Abbott, & Cook, 2016, p.1541). This

includes beliefs that justify and excuse sexually violent behavior from the perpetrator or accused and focus on the behavior of the victim as an explanation for sexual violence. A total of 1,418 emergent codes were counted in the dataset, which makes up 70.09% of the coded text (n = 2,023).

The following emergent codes were uncovered during the course of data analysis (Appendix D). An explanation of why each code was included in the dataset is found below:

1. *Rape accusations as motivation:* 300 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 14.83% of the total coded text. This rape myth asserts that individuals make rape or sexual assault accusations because of some motive. There are several rape myths that fit in this category on both the AMMSA and IRMA. These include myths about using accusations as a weapon in custody battles or for getting back at guys after a relationship has ended.

The dataset for the current study contained multiple examples of text that referenced additional types of motivation. This suggests that motivation is a broader topic than is indicated on both RMA scales used for the preset code list. Because of this, any text coinciding with the myths on the AMMSA, IRMA, and any additional indicators of motivation was included in the prevalence count for the *Rape accusations as motivation* emergent code. Examples of motivations found in the dataset were revenge, monetary compensation, fame, and career advancement. This emergent code can fit under the *She lied* subscale of the IRMA.

2. *No evidence accused is assumed guilty/false accusations are common*: 270 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 13.35% of the total coded text. This code would fit under the *She lied* subscale of the IRMA and relates to how sexual violence is viewed in society, in that it assumes that once an

accusation of sexual assault is made, an individual is automatically determined to be guilty both in the social and criminal justice spheres. Phrases such as "all it takes is an accusation to ruin someone's life" were common indicators of this code.

This code is included in the dataset because there is a body of evidence which shows that rape accusations often do not result in convictions (The criminal justice..., n.d.), and what's more, many rapes are not even reported to the police (Cohn, Zinzow, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 2013; Heath, Lynch, Fritch, & Wong, 2013; Spohn, Bjornsen, & Wright, 2017). The assumption of guilt can therefore be seen as something that happens rarely when it comes to sexual violence because many incidents do not result in a formal accusation being made. This suggests that this emergent code is a rape myth because it incorrectly assumes facts about the societal and criminal justice response to rape and sexual assault.

Additionally, because this code presumes that false accusations are a common occurrence, it suggests that offenders who are found guilty by a court of law are often, in reality, innocent. This relies on inaccurate beliefs because previous research has shown that false reporting is low, generally making up between two and ten percent of accusations (False reporting, 2012; Mennicke et al., 2014). The erroneous assumption about widespread false reporting of sexual violence places this code firmly under the rape myth category.

3. *Rape/rapist as a joke or insult:* 235 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 11.62% of the total coded text. This rape myth serves to minimize the seriousness and harm of sexual violence by treating the crime of rape or label of rapist as an insult or punchline of a joke. Examples of this rape myth found in the dataset are “You sound like a rapist”, “I hope you get raped”, or jokes regarding rape in prison. While this emergent code does not explicitly address the actions or characteristics

of a victim or offender, previous research has shown that sexist jokes may increase the tolerance for subtle acts of sexism and rape proclivity among certain men (Romero-Sanchez, Carretero-Dios, Megias, Moya, & Ford, 2016), showing that it falls under the umbrella of rape culture. This myth does not coincide with any of the IRMA subscales, but may be considered to align more with the macro-level myths that address the media and politics in the AMMSA.

4. *The victim did not report the rape or assault directly after it happened*: 221 occurrences (out of total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were uncovered in the dataset, which represents 10.92% of the total coded text. This myth subtracts from the victim's believability and indicates that a sexually violent event did not likely occur. If such an event did occur, the victim would have reported it immediately. An example would be, "Why did she/he wait 20 years to report the rape?". This myth has been studied in the social science realm but it was not included on either the AMMSA or IRMA scales as items which participants responded to. This emergent code can fit under the *She lied* subscale of the IRMA.

5. *Real or ideal rape victims:* 126 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were uncovered in the dataset, which represents 6.23% of the total coded text. Past definitions of this type of myth have generally focused on the characteristics of the crime and victim and if these characteristics match up to stereotypical perceptions of what "real" rape denotes (Kosloski, Diamond-Welch, & Mann, 2018). For the purpose of this study, the *Real or ideal rape victims* myth refers to references of what an "ideal" person would have done if faced with sexual violence. For example, real victims would have fought or screamed (which aligns with previous rape myth definitions), real victims would not have taken a monetary settlement, or real victims would have acted in a traumatized nature after being raped. These rape myths were generally phrased in an "If I would have been raped, I would have done

this" format. This emergent code relates to the *She lied* subscale in the IRMA because it assumes that the victims weren't really raped because they acted in a non-ideal manner.

6. *Witch hunt*: 65 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 3.21% of the total coded text. This emergent myth claims that certain groups of individuals are being targeted by false rape accusations because there is a desire to punish, harm, or eradicate this group. Certain comments claimed that there was a "war on men", and that rape and sexual assault accusations were a way to ensure that men were punished. Additionally, some comments containing this myth claimed that false accusations of rape were a substitution for lynch mobs targeting Black men. Wealthy and successful men were also considered targets by the *Witch hunt* myth. Any of the variations of this emergent code claim that rape accusations are used as a tool of harm rather than pertaining to actual accounts of sexual violence. This emergent code falls under the *She lied* subscale from the IRMA.

7. *Women aren't held accountable for committing sexual violence or for making false accusations of rape*: 64 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were uncovered in the dataset, which represents 3.16% of the total coded text. This myth indicates that women are held to a different standard than men when it comes to sexual violence and false accusations, and that men are treated unfairly.

There are certain stereotypes and factors that impact the reporting of sexual assault committed against males (Sexual Assault of Men..., n.d.). It also wasn't until 2013 that the FBI updated their definition of rape, expanding it to include sexual violence against males and other gender identities (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013). While it is accurate to note that more attention has only recently been given to sexual violence against men, it is also still accurate to

acknowledge that women and girls are the primary victims of rape and sexual assault, at least as far as research has shown (Number of rapes/sexual assaults..., n.d.). Women committing sexual assault is either severely underreported, it rarely occurs, or it is a combination of these two. Since there are relatively few instances of women being accused of sexual violence, this rape myth detracts from the disproportional representation of males as perpetrators and females as victims.

In 2015, the CDC found that 21.3% of women and 2.6% of men experienced completed of attempted rape in their lifetime, reflecting a disparity of female victimization. But, when the numbers were looked at as a whole, rates became closer by showing that 43.6% of women and 24.8% of men have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime (Smith, Zhang, Basile, Merrick, Wang, Kresnow, & Chen, 2015). Despite the smaller gap when looking at sexual violence all together, findings continue to demonstrate that women are victims more often than men.

The stigmatization of male rape and paradigms that define females as victims and males as perpetrators may be more of a factor in the underreporting of sexual violence against males than the unjust treatment of female perpetrators. Stemple & Meyer (2014) point out that jokes about prison rape, the idea that "real" men can protect themselves, and the thought that gay male victims "asked for it" may make men more reluctant to report victimization. These social attitudes can be deterrents to accurately defining the extent of male victimization, and actually coincide with currently accepted rape myths that focus on sexual violence against women.

In the dataset, many of the comments made about not holding women accountable for sexual assault were in reference to news stories about female same-sex-couples. Commenters stated that a woman would be punished not at all or less than a male if they were accused or convicted of rape within the confines of their relationship. A study published in 2017 showed

that sexual minority men and women are more likely to be incarcerated for violent sexual and nonsexual crimes than straight individuals. Further, lesbian or bisexual women were sentenced to lengthier sentences than their straight counterparts (Meyer, Flores, Stempel, Romero, Wilson, Herman, 2017). This aspect of the emergent code, therefore, focuses on information based on incorrect assumptions.

The second part of the code focuses on not holding women accountable for false accusations. Several comments in the dataset, while not counted in the prevalence value, stated that women who falsely accused an individual should spend anywhere from the time the accused would have received if convicted to life in prison. The crime of providing false information to an officer is very different than the crime of rape or sexual assault. Using Florida State Statues as a point of comparison, the offense of False Reports to Law Enforcement Authorities (§ 837.05) is considered a first-degree misdemeanor (Chapter 837, 2018), while the crime of Sexual Battery (§ 794.011) by a person 18 years or older committed against a person 18 years or older is considered a first-degree felony. These two crimes face very different sentences, with the felony conviction being more severe and requiring state registry enrollment and the potential forfeiture of retirement benefits. (Chapter 794, 2018). Therefore, if convicted under Florida law, a woman who is found guilty of making a false accusation would face a far lesser sentence than an individual convicted of rape. And as a whole, rape perpetrators are thought to be convicted less often than perpetrators of other crimes such as robbery and assault or battery (The criminal justice system…, n.d.).

Equating the crime of providing false information to an LEO with rape or sexual assault, plus the thought that women are not prosecuted for crimes related to sexual violence and false reporting, serves to shift focus from certain aspects of the perpetration of rape and outcomes that

convicted rapists experience. The rape myth aspect of this emergent code comes in the form of focusing on characteristics about rape and sexual assault that are either false or draw attention away from reported or researched factors that define sexual violence in the United States. These factors include the disproportionate representation of males as perpetrators, research which shows that rapists are convicted at a lower rate than other types of offenders, research which shows that LGBT individuals are given lengthier sentences than straight inmates, and the fact that providing false information to a LEO is less legally severe than committing sexual violence.

8. *Rape associated with other:* 57 occurrences (out of total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 3.16% of the total coded text. This rape myth serves to shift the blame for the majority of sexual violence onto a specific group. Examples of groups that were associated with this myth were political party (Republican or Democrat) or occupation. This falls under the rape myth category because previous research has shown that rapists are not a homogenous group (Barbaree, Seto, Serin, Amos, & Preston, 1994; Simons, 2017) and that they span gender, race, ethnicity, and age (Perpetrators of sexual…, n.d.). The *Rape associated with other* emergent code may be considered an attempt at "othering" a group. This process occurs when a dominant group establishes that an out-group is lacking in identity. As a result, this other group may be the subject of discrimination and differences may be transformed into otherness so as to create both an in and an out-group (Staszak, 2008) and thus an imbalance of power. Otherness in the *Rape associated with other* emergent myth can be seen in assigning of the label rapist to certain groups of people. This association can serve to displace the blame for sexual violence onto a small group of individuals when this has been shown as not accurate.

9. *Victim characteristics and actions*: 24 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 1.19% of the total coded text. This rape myth is closely related to the "Victim's behavior" myth from the preset code list (Appendix A), but rather than focusing on actions that led up to sexual violence, this myth addresses the actions that happened afterward. This myth focuses on certain aspects of a victim that make them less likely to be believed and more likely to be lying or appear untraumatized by their assault. Examples would be the victim contacting the perpetrator after the rape, making jokes or downplaying rape, or being an unlikeable individual. As this emergent myth focuses on the behavior of a victim after sexual violence has been perpetrated, it would fall under the *She lied* subscale of the IRMA rather than the *She asked for it* subscale.

10. *Accused/perpetrator characteristics or they made a mistake:* 16 occurrences (total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 0.79% of the total coded text. This rape myth detracts from the culpability of those who commit sexual violence by implying that certain characteristics mean that an individual is not likely to have committed rape. For example, if a perpetrator has been active in the community or is a pleasant/nice person they are perceived as less likely to have perpetrated rape.

Additionally, in certain instances, society feels that those who commit sexually violent acts made a mistake and that they should not be punished harshly for it. This aspect of the myth minimizes the harm that is caused to victims of rape and sexual assault. While there is a myth that closely relates to this on the IRMA, text that was counted under this emergent code referred to the consequences that an individual should face as a result of their mistake, and not solely the actions of the mistake. This fits under the *He didn't mean to* subscale of the IRMA.

11. *Looks and wealth*: 15 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 0.74% of the total coded text. This rape myth assumes certain characteristics about perpetrators and victims of rape. It implies that only unattractive and/or non-wealthy individuals need to rape, whereas attractive and/or wealthy individuals do not. Additionally, if a victim is unattractive their accusation of rape is less likely to be believed. As noted above, there is no one specific group who rapes people—the crime of rape spans race, socioeconomic status, and marital status (Murphy, 2017). The same can be said about victims of sexual violence (Victims of sexual violence…, n.d.). Researchers investigating the motivations behind sexually violent acts have generally found that rape is about power, control, or opportunity (Schmalleger, 2016), rather than looks. This emergent code is considered a rape myth because it is based on false ideas and beliefs about sexual violence.

12. *Popularity*: 11 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 0.54% of the total coded text. This rape myth relates to the assumption that a person only believes accusations of rape only when the person being accused is unlikeable or unpopular. Conversely, if an individual is likeable or is a popular person in society or their community, accusations against them will be refuted.

13. *Accused as victim:* 8 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 0.40% of the total coded text. This rape myth states that the person being accused or convicted of rape or sexual assault is really the victim. The myth relates to both false accusations being perceived as a common occurrence and minimizing the seriousness of sexual assault.

14. *Don't trust the opposite sex:* 6 occurrences (out of the total number of instances = 2,023) of this rape myth were found in the dataset, which represents 0.30% of the total coded

text. This rape myth addresses both males and females and how they view each other. In relation to the distrust of males, this myth insinuates that women cannot trust men because sexual violence is a major characteristic that defines their interactions. In relation to the distrust of females, this myth insinuates that males cannot be alone or hire a female to work for them because the threat of a false rape accusation is a very real danger. This emergent code fits very well with Sanday's rape-prone society theory. A correlation between the attitude toward women as citizens and a society's proclivity for rape was found in her cross-cultural study. A factor that correlated with higher incidences of rape was men having contempt for women. Additionally, societies that have greater sexual separation, as seen in containing separate places for males and females to congregate, show higher incidence of rape (Sanday, 1981). While the emergent code found in the current content analysis relates to both men and women—women were fearful of men committing sexual violence against them, whereas men were afraid they were going to be falsely accused of rape—the mistrust between males and females can be perceived as a factor that encourages separation by sex, therefore increasing the rape proneness of a society. This reasoning is why this emergent code was included in the prevalence value for the current study.

The overall number of rape myths that were coded as emergent text was 1,418 which represents 70.09% of the entire coded sample (n = 2,023). This indicates that the majority of rape myths located in the dataset were emergent codes.

Research question 1.

RQ1*: What is the prevalence of user comments on news media articles hosted by Facebook that contain rape myths?*

The aim of this research question was to determine if rape myths were present in user comments on the social media site Facebook. As this research question is merely exploring if

rape myths were found in the dataset, descriptive statistics are appropriate for reporting this information. In the sample (n = 18,307), a total of 2,023 rape myths were coded, included rape myth listed on the preset list and the emergent codes notated above. This demonstrates that rape supportive statements were located in the dataset, affirmatively answering RQ1.

To gain a further understanding of the prevalence value, the proportional percentage of comments that contained rape myths was determined for the sample. This was calculated by dividing the total number of rape myths by the total number of comments in the dataset. The sample contained 18,307 total comments and 2,023 rape myths, making the proportional value 0.1105, or 11.05% of the total comments in the dataset. In addition, a calculation of the proportion of rape myths for each of the ten news media sites was completed (see Table 1). When considering how saturated user comments were with rape myths, it was found that USA Today had a proportional value of 0.1708, Yahoo! News had a proportional value of 0.1627, CNN had a proportional value of 0.1516, NBC had a proportional value of 0.1496, The New York Times had a proportional value of 0.1336, ABC News had a proportional value of 0.1193, Huff Post had a proportional value of 0.1108, Buzzfeed had a proportional value of 0.0983, Fox News had a proportional value of 0.0881, and Washington Post had a proportional value of 0.0663.

Number of Comments, Rape Myths, and Percentage

News Source	Comments	Rape myths	Percent
ABC	1123	134	11.93%
Buzzfeed	2208	217	9.83%
CNN	1458	221	15.16%
Fox News	7435	655	8.81%
Huff Post	1796	199	11.08%
NBC	929	139	14.96%
NYT	1003	134	13.36%
USA Today	603	103	17.08%
WP	664	44	6.63%
Yahoo	1088	177	16.27%
Total	**18307**	**2023**	**11.05%**

Table 2: Overview of proportional value by news source.

Research question 2.

RQ2: *Which rape myth has the highest level of prevalence in user comments on news media articles hosted by Facebook?*

RQ1 was answered affirmatively, necessitating an investigation of RQ2. Comments included in the dataset (n = 18,307) were analyzed for the presence of rape myths, including the 20 codes on the preset list (Appendix A) and 14 emergent codes that were discovered in the sample, a total of 34 coded myths. During data analysis, the prevalence value for each individual rape myth was notated. A total of 2,023 rape myths were coded from the dataset. All but four of the myths were located in the dataset, three rape myths had a prevalence value of one, and the remaining 27 rape myths had prevalence values between 6 and 300.

There were zero references to the following four rape myths: Making out/fooling around leads to sex; Lack of a weapon; Male right to sex; and Assistance to victims of sexual assault. The remaining prevalence values are listed, in order from greatest to least (see also Table 3):

Rape as motivation (*n* = 300); No evidence accused is assumed guilty/false accusations are common (*n* = 270); Rape/rapist as joke or insult (*n* = 235); Didn't report (*n* = 221); Victim's behavior (*n* = 180); She's lying (*n* = 178); Real/ideal rape victims (*n* = 126); Witch hunt (*n* = 65); Women aren't held accountable for committing sexual violence or for making false accusations of rape (*n* = 64); Rape associated with other (*n* = 57); Sexuality/rape representation in the media (*n* = 52); Misinterpretation of harassment (*n* = 50); Rape/sexual assault isn't a major issue (*n* = 31); Victim characteristics or actions (*n* = 24); Victim's alcohol consumption (*n* = 23); Regretful sex (*n* = 23); Male sex drive (*n* = 19); Perpetrator's alcohol consumption (*n* = 18); Accused/perpetrator characteristics or they made a mistake (*n* = 16); Looks and wealth (*n* = 15); Popularity (*n* = 11); Victim didn't physically resist (*n* = 8); Accused as victim (*n* = 8); Victim's clothing (*n* = 7); Perpetrator caused no physical harm (*n* = 7); Lack of "no" (*n* = 6); Don't trust opposite sex (*n* = 6); Male active pursuit of sex (*n* = 1); Female restraint/purity (*n* = 1); Just punishment for perpetrators (*n* = 1)

A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine which of these values indicate the highest prevalence. When comparing the two codes with the highest counted value, results showed that there was no statistical difference between the *Rape as motivation* and the *No evidence accused is assumed guilty/false accusations are common* counted values, $X^2(1, n = 570) = 1.38$, $p > .05$. When the code with the highest counted value, *Rape as motivation*, was compared to the code with the third highest value, *Rape as a joke/insult*, statistical significance was found, $X^2(1, n= 535) = 6.98$, $p < .01$. This indicates that the codes with the highest prevalence values are *Rape as motivation* and the *No evidence accused is assumed guilty/false accusations*. Taken together these rape myths composed 28.18% of the coded sample.

Rape Myth Prevalence

Rape myth/theme	Total
Rape as motivation	300
No evidence guilty/prosecuted	270
Rape as joke/insult	235
Didn't report	221
Victim's behavior	180
She's lying	178
"Real" rape victims	126
Witch hunt	65
Don't hold women accountable rape/accusations	64
Rape associated with other	57
Sexuality/rape rep in the media	52
Misinterpretation of harassment	50
Rape/sexual assault isn't a major issue	31
Victim characteristics/actions	24
Victim's alcohol consumption	23
Regretful sex	23
Male sex drive	19
Perp's alcohol consumption	18
Perps characteristic/made mistake	16
Looks/wealth	15
Popularity	11
Victim didn't physically resist	8
Accused as victim	8
Victim's clothing	7
Perp caused no physical harm	7
Lack of "no"	6
Don't trust opposite sex	6
Male active pursuit of sex	1
Female restraint/purity	1
Just punishment for perpetrators	1
Making out/fooling around leads to sex	0
Lack of a weapon	0
Male right to sex	0
Assistance to victims of sexual assault	0
Total	2023

Table 3: Overview of rape myth prevalence by myth

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1 sought to discover if rape myths were present in social media comments on Facebook articles. This question was answered affirmatively. From the sample, 2,023 rape myths were coded (*n* = 18,307). This included myths on the preset code list and the emergent codes discovered during data analysis. The proportion of comments that contained rape supportive text in the dataset was 0.1105 or 11.05% of the total number of comments (*n* = 18,307).

Research Question 2 determined which of the rape myths located in the dataset had the highest prevalence. The *Rape as motivation* (n = 300) and the *No evidence accused is assumed guilty/false accusations are common* (n = 270) were the codes with the highest prevalence values. Both of these myths are emergent codes.

The first myth indicates that there is some sort of motivation behind making a rape allegation, be it revenge, money, fame, career advancement, or other types of motive. The Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (IRMA), which was used to generate the preset code list, includes two myths that refer to motivation; one that suggests rape accusations are a tool of revenge and the other that suggests accusations are a tool used to cover up cheating that takes place outside of a relationship (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). The current study indicates motivation-based rape myths may be broader than these two examples. For this reason, any occurrences of the IRMA myths mentioned above were included under the *Rape as motivation* emergent code in the data analysis. The second myth suggests that false rape accusations occur frequently and an accusation of rape is enough for an individual to be deemed guilty of sexual violence. Previous research has shown that false reporting for rape is relatively low (False

reporting, 2012; Mennicke et al., 2014), and that many times victims are reluctant to bring formal action against their attacker (Cohn, Zinzow, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 2013; Heath, Lynch, Fritch, & Wong, 2013; Spohn, Bjornsen, & Wright, 2017). This code relies on inaccurate information about sexual violence, placing it in the rape myth category.

In total, 30 different rape myths, including preset and emergent codes, were discovered in the dataset (see Table 3). Codes were reflective of the current literature published about rape myths and rape culture. A prior study, which is similar in scope to the current research, found that Facebook comments were generally supportive of text containing elements of rape culture. Of the codes that emerged from the data set, comments which found the text funny or hilarious were the most common (Giraldi & Monk-Turner, 2017). This coincides with findings from this study, as the *Joke/insult* code was the third most prevalent in the data set. Other emergent codes found support in commonly held false beliefs about sexual violence, and these beliefs were supported by data collected by criminal justice and social science researches.

Within the coded rape myths, support for Sanday's (1981) theory of rape prone societies was found. While Sanday studied cultures outside of the U.S., her correlations about what defines rape prone societies can be applied to North American culture. The emergent code of *Don't trust the opposite sex* was in direct relation to the correlational components *Attitudes toward women as citizens* and having a level of sexual separation amongst males and females listed in Sanday's findings. Additionally, the overall proportion of rape supportive text located in the data set was 11.05% (total rape myths counted/total comments = 2,023/18,307). This indicates that a notable portion of the data set contained rape supportive text.

The CDC defines an endemic as, "…the constant presence and/or usual prevalence of a disease or infectious agent within a geographic area." (Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, 2012). The findings of this study suggest that rape myths are a sort of social endemic. Across a span of 7 years, it was shown that rape supportive text maintained a presence throughout the comments of social media users—there was over a one in ten chance of locating a rape myth in a selected comment. These results hint at a constant and usual presence, and imply that rape myths are a persistent part of the social fabric.

Implications

Numerous studies have investigated the prevalence of rape supportive attitudes and beliefs held by society members. Research exploring this behavior is primarily collected by disseminating measures that have been designed to assess the level of rape myth acceptance among participants. One of the first attempts at examining rape myth acceptance was conducted by Martha Burt in 1980 (Burt, 1980). Since that time, several instruments have been created to measure the types of false beliefs surround sexual violence and how prevalent these ideas are in society. Rape myth acceptance (RMA) scales are actuarial measures that are given to participants. These scales generally use Likert-scale type questions, and measure adherence to rape myths by generating scores. The two RMA scales used to generate the preset code list for the current study were created in 2007 (AMMSA) and 2011 (IRMA). Since that time, studies generally use versions of these scales when searching for RMA in participants.

Despite the abundance of studies examining RMA, there has been a dearth of exploration into virtual manifestations of this phenomena. Research into online communication patterns and trends is imperative because a large portion of society has access to this virtual medium. Changing socialization patterns developed by society's access to the Internet creates the necessity for an expansion into web-based research to understand how the virtual world has influenced the spread of rape culture. As previously noted, adherence to rape myths can be an explanatory

predictor to the actual perpetration of sexual violence or the propensity toward rape (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Discovering the spread of these ideals is important if preventative actions are to be endeavored.

This study aimed to rectify the lack of research investigating online text in relation to the prevalence of rape culture. Gathering the publicly displayed thoughts of consumers on the social media giant Facebook is one way of discovering how prevalent rape supportive beliefs are in society. Utilizing available social artifacts rather than the actuarial information that is primarily used to measure rape supportive beliefs also enables an alternative perspective on how widespread rape culture is in society. If social media comments are treated as points of data to be studied, emerging trends can be discovered in close to real time.

Data analysis uncovered that rape myths were present in the social media comments collected for this study. Not only were examples of the preset codes uncovered, but emergent rape myths were also found in the sample. These emergent codes could hint at a shifting societal perception of sexually violent crimes. Rape myths with the highest prevalence values can serve as a potential source of current attitudes toward sexual violence. For this study, nine out of the top ten most prevalent rape myths were emergent codes not listed on the preset list. This suggests that social media comments may be a new source for determining up-to-date social attitudes concerning rape.

From this research, the top ten most prevalent codes were concerned less with the victim's dress and alcohol consumption and more with what propelled a victim to make an accusation, the idea that false allegations are common, and using the action of rape and term of rapist as an insult or punchline of a joke. And while the victim's behavior was scrutinized by commenters, it had less to do with being "slutty" and more to do with victims allowing

themselves to be raped and victims behaving "incorrectly" or non-ideally both before and after a sexually violent act.

As gleaned from the myths included on the AMMSA and IRMA, previous views of sex and sexual violence were somewhat linked with promiscuity. In a sense, the victim was asking for it when they behaved in a manner that appeared to invite rape. The current study suggests that there may be more of a focus on what a victim is getting out of their accusation. Questions like *Why did it take so long for them to report?* and statements such as *They're only doing it for the money* allude to the notion that many accusations are false and accusers have ulterior motives.

This shift in attitude may be a result of recent events in society. From the FBI updating their antiquated definition of rape in 2013 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013) to the outrage directed at the Brock Turner sentence (Ruiz, 2016) to the spread of the #MeToo movement (me too, n.d.), and the #WhyIDidn'tReport hashtag (Brofman, 2018), rape and rape culture have been in the news and on people's minds. Investigating if this cultural change has resulted in a perceptual change should be a priority of social science researchers.

It should be noted that comments posted on the Internet may not reflect the true beliefs of an individual. Trolling is the act of posting purposefully disruptive information on the web to derive amusement from another person's anger (Giraldi & Monk-Turner, 2017). A sample of the data analyzed for the current study could have been created by trolls for the purpose of inflammatory response. If this is true, the comments generated by these individuals may not indicate how the poster truly feels about sexual violence. But, while these words may not be the ingrained ideals of the person who posts them, the presence of troll-created text may be enough to reinforce the beliefs of those who do adhere to rape myths. Belief in the myth therefore becomes secondary to the public display and consumption of the text by current believers or

those who may be vulnerable to believing false narratives about sexual violence.

Further, those who post web-based comments may have posted them under times of stress, depression, anger, loneliness, or intoxication. All of these characteristics can have an impact on the output a person chooses to place online. Youthfulness is another factor that can impact what an individual chooses to share on the Internet realm. When these factors are taken into consideration, it becomes difficult to ascertain if the data collected for this study and others like it provides an accurate and truthful look into the mind of society.

To address the issue, a holistic approach should be undertaken by researchers, with multiple avenues being investigated. The content of different social media websites should be analyzed for the presence of rape supportive text and media, survey instruments should be administered to gauge adherence to past and emerging rape myths, and ethnographic research should be employed to organically gather observations of behavior and belief related to sexual violence. Determining commonly held ideas is a task that cannot be accomplished by gathering one dataset. This is an endeavor that will require replication and exploration.

Regardless if a comment is truthful or if it was posted in a moment of rage or sadness, the creation and viewing of harmful words can have a detrimental impact. Fortunately, the Internet can be seen as a place of intervention and education. Munger (2017) found that for certain Twitter users, he was able to decrease the use of a racist slur by sanctioning them via social media. With this in mind, targeted interventions can be created with the aim of halting the spread of false beliefs about sexual violence online. The use of social media can provide a canvas for preventative education, which in turn may lead to a reduction in harmful myths about sexual violence.

Limitations

There are several areas of the current study that contain limitations. One area is the use of social media comments as a data source. These data points are not static, and alterations to their content made be made at any time while they are on the Internet. While the comments collected as part of the dataset are captured and will remain unchanged, this does not mean that the sources from where they were gathered will forever remain stable and intact. Users may delete or edit their comments, news sources may delete articles, or any other form of change may occur to the online source. An emphasis of the snapshot nature of this study is necessary to address this limitation. While the findings may be indicative of the data that was collected, this data is only relative to the portion of time it was gathered from.

A second limitation is the use of a content analysis to determine prevalence value. Content analysis, and the coding that occurs during this type of research, is a somewhat subjective process. During this process, the researcher must be aware of any assumptions they bring into the investigation (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017) and also indicate to readers that their findings may be lacking in generalizability. To counteract some of this potential bias, two previously tested RMA scales were used to generate a list of preset codes (Appendix A) that were searched for during the analysis phase of the study. Additionally, emergent myths were only selected for inclusion in the study if they clearly matched the definition of rape myth that was used for this research. Data saturation was also something that occurred during this study. The sample of comments (n = 18,307) was large enough to ensure that gathering extra data would not have generated any additional patterns (Creswell, 2014).

The breadth of the sample size, while it is considered a positive point in many regards, may also be thought of as a limitation. As there was one primary investigator in this study, the amount of data collected and analyzed might be considered somewhat overwhelming for a single

individual. To ease this limitation, the data collection and analysis phases were spread out over 57 days.

The proprietary algorithm Facebook utilizes to populate content had an influence on the articles selected for the data set. The researcher was unable to control the date range for the sample, which means that comparisons between the findings for each publication year are limited. Future research could avoid this limitation by using a different sample method or investigating an Internet source that allows for more user control.

Current news articles about Facebook and the 2018 Senate hearing with Facebook's CEO may have influenced the amount of users with website accounts and the quantity of posts that were generated on this site. Topics of the news articles and hearing involve the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Data Scandal (Key Takeaways from…, 2018) and election meddling (France-Presse, 2018). Both subjects have made the website's users question the integrity of the site. While this information, is important and bears mentioning, it should have a limited impact on the current study as its scope was only exploratory in nature and the subject of this study was not one of concern in recent attention given to the social media webpage.

Recent social happenings and movements regarding rape and sexual assault may also have impacted the comments collected for data analysis. As mentioned before, the #MeToo movement, originally established in 2006, swept the globe in 2017. Thousands of individuals used social media to share their stories about sexual harassment and violence (me too, n.d.). This brought an often silenced subject into the mainstream. Additionally, highly publicized cases, such as those of Bill Cosby, Brock Turner, and Harvey Weinstein, gave the community instances to voice their opinion. And this was an opinion that was often facilitated by social media websites. This may be considered a limitation, because widespread publicity may alter society's

opinion on the subject matter currently being researched. But, in actuality, the attention that has been shined on rape and sexual assault may have enabled more up-to-date rape myths to be uncovered from the dataset.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, it appears as though more contemporary RMA scales need to be created in order to remain relevant in modern society. Much like was noted by Gerger, Kley, and Siebler (2007), individuals may have become more familiar with politically correct responses to measures of sexual violence, plus the information portrayed in rape myths may have changed over time. This suggests that views about rape supportive attitudes and how they are expressed by society members shifts temporally. While several instances of rape myths from both the AMMSA and IRMA were found in the dataset, several new codes were also uncovered. This suggests that additional Internet-based research should be conducted to obtain more current information on rape culture and the ideals that it espouses.

Additionally, as this study was conducted by utilizing nationally based news media outlets as a data source, an opportunity for more localized rape myth adherence exists. A growing number of local news sources and journalists use social media as a way to publicize information (Hodson, 2017). An analysis of the comments replying to these more community-based news social media posts and stories may provide insight into regional support for rape supportive attitude and beliefs. This could potentially illuminate the impact geography has on rape myth spread.

Rape myths have long been considered subtle ideas that influence the way people frame sexual violence, but the data in this study showed individuals making rape supportive comments on a public forum. This may mean that rape myths are not as subtle as previously considered.

While more nuanced adherence to rape culture elements may still be found in face-to-face interactions, it appears as though portions of society are willing to express these ideals via social media.

Traditional actuarial testing may be a one way to gauge how accepted rape myths are. In addition to calculating RMA, these types of tests can determine demographic information, which can point to patterns of belief in society. Online content analysis may be a supplement to survey instruments, and coding text may enable academics to update their instruments if findings show changing patterns of rape positive beliefs.

Future RMA research conducted on the Internet may look to compare different social media websites for a broader sample of data. As certain websites are aimed at certain segments of society, choosing multiple hosts might provide insight into how various groups embrace rape culture. Additionally, future research of this type may provide data that contributes to emerging theories about rape myths and rape prone societies. Theories must evolve with the behaviors and cultures that they describe. Learning more about why certain rape myths are more prevalent than others or why certain myths emerge in certain cultures and not in others may inform scholars about the theories that drive the adoption and spread of these ideals.

The amount of content available on the Internet is staggering. New information is created and posted on public forums every day. If researchers were to embrace the idea that each social media comment is a potential point of data to analyze, the possibility for close to real time coding and analysis may become a reality. And if applied correctly, this information may assist in keeping a continuous pulse on how humans think about sexual violence.

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Appendix A

Preset Codes

Rape myths relating to victim precipitation or victim blaming
1. Victim's alcohol consumption
2. Victim's clothing
3. Victim's behavior (slutty, leading on)
4. Victim didn't physically resist
5. Lack of a "no"
6. Making out/fooling around leads to sex

Rape myths relating to perpetrator mitigation
7. Perpetrator/accused's alcohol consumption
8. Perpetrator caused no physical/visual harm
9. Lack of a weapon

It wasn't really rape
10. She's lying
11. Regretful sex
12. Misinterpretation of harassment

Myths relating to sexuality
13. Male sex drive
14. Male right to sex
15. Male active pursuit of sex
16. Female restraint/purity

Representation of rape in society
17. Sexuality/rape representation in the media
18. Rape/sexual assault isn't a major issue
19. Assistance to victims of sexual violence
20. Just punishment for perpetrators

*In addition to this list of preset codes, any emergent codes discovered during the data collection phase will be noted and included in the data analysis portion of the study.

The preset code list was generated using the following rape myths from the AMMSA and IRMA.

Subheading 1: Rape myths relating to victim precipitation or victim blaming

1. Victim's alcohol consumption:

- From the IRMA – If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.

2. Victim's clothing:

- From the IRMA – When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.

3. Victim's Behavior:

- From the AMMSA – 1) 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. 2) Any woman who is careless enough to walk through "dark alleys" at night is partly to be blamed if she is raped. 3) Women like to play coy. This does not mean that they do not want sex. 4) When a single woman invites a single man to her flat she signals that she is not averse to having sex.
- From the IRMA – 1) If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped. 2) If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.

4. Victim didn't physically resist:

- From the IRMA – 1) If a girl doesn't physically resist sex – even if protesting verbally – it can't be considered rape. 2) If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.

5. Lack of a "no":

- From the IRMA – 1) When girls get raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear. 2) If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.

6. Making out/fooling around leads to sex:

- From the AMMSA - Once a man and a woman have started "making out", a women's misgivings against sex will automatically disappear.
- From the IRMA - If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.

Subheading 2: Rape myths related to perpetrator mitigation

7. Perpetrator/accused's alcohol consumption:

- From the AMMSA – Alcohol is often the culprit when a man rapes a woman.
- From the IRMA – 1) If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally. 2) It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing. 3) If both people are drunk, it can't be considered rape.

8. *Perpetrator caused no physical/visible harm:*

- From the IRMA – A rape probably doesn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.

9. *Lack of a weapon:*

- From the IRMA - If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you can't really call it rape.

Subheading 3: It wasn't really rape

10. She's lying:

- Taken from Subscale 4: She lied of the IRMA

11. *Regretful sex:*

- From the IRMA – 1) A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it. 2) A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on then had regrets.

12. *Misinterpretation of harassment:*

- From the AMMSA – 1) Interpreting harmless gestures as "sexual harassment" is a popular weapon in the battle of the sexes. 2) As long as they don't go too far, suggestive remarks and allusions simply tell a woman that she is attractive. 3) The discussion about sexual harassment on the job has mainly resulted in many a harmless behavior being misinterpreted as harassment. 4) Many women tend to misinterpret a well-meaning gesture as "sexual assault".

Subheading 4: Myths relating to sexuality

13. Male sex drive:

- From the AMMSA - 1) It is a biological necessity for men to release sexual pressure from time to time. 2) A man's sexuality functions like a steam boiler - when the pressure gets too high, he has to "let off steam".
- From the IRMA - 1) When guys rape, it is usually because of a strong desire for sex. 2) Guys usually don't intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away. 3) Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.

14. *Male right to sex:*

- From the AMMSA – When a woman starts a relationship with a man, she must be aware that the man will assert his right to have sex.

15. *Male active pursuit of sex:*

- From the AMMSA – 1) When a man urges his female partner to have sex, this cannot be called rape. 2) In dating situations the general expectation is that the woman "hits the brakes" and the man "pushes ahead".

16. *Female restraint/purity:*

- From the AMMSA – When it comes to sexual contacts, women expect the men to take the lead.

Subheading 5: Representation of rape in society

17. Sexuality/rape representation in the media:

- From the AMMSA – 1) Nowadays, a large proportion of rape is partly caused by the depiction of sexuality in the media as this raises the sex drive of potential perpetrators. 2) When politicians deal with the topic of rape, they do so mainly because this topic is likely to attract the attention of the media.

18. *Rape/sexual assault isn't a major issue:*

- From the AMMSA – 1) Because the fascination caused by sex is disproportionally large, our society's sensitivity to crimes in this area is disproportionate as well. 2) Women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence. 3) Instead of worrying about alleged victims of sexual violence society should rather attend to more urgent problems, such as environmental destruction.

19. *Assistance to victims of sexual violence:*

- From the AMMSA – 1) After a rape, women nowadays receive ample support. 2) Although the victims of armed robbery have to fear for their lives, they receive far less psychological support than do rape victims. 3) Nowadays, the victims of

sexual violence receive help in the form of women's shelters, therapy offers, and support groups.

20. *Just punishment for perpetrators:*

- From the AMMSA - Nowadays, men who really sexually assault women are punished justly.

Appendix B

Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA)

	Strongly agree 1	2	3	4	Strongly disagree 5
Subscale 1: She asked for it					
1. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.					
2. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.					
3. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.					
4. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.					
5. When girls get raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.					
6. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.					
Subscale 2: He didn't mean to					
7. When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.					
8. Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.					
9. Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.					
10. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.					
11. It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing.					
12. If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.					
Subscale 3: It wasn't really rape					
13. If a girl doesn't physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it can't be considered rape.					
14. If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.					
15. A rape probably doesn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.					
16. If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.					
17. If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.					
Subscale 4: She lied					
18. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.					
19. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.					
20. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.					
21. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.					
22. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.					

- Scoring: Scores range from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).
- Scores may be totaled for a cumulative score.
- Higher scores indicate greater rejection of rape myths.

(Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999; McMahon & Farmer, 2011)

Appendix C

Instrument Title:	Acceptance of Modern Myths About Sexual Aggression (AMMSA) scale
Instrument Author:	Gerger, H., Kley, H., Bohner G., Siebler, F.
Cite instrument as:	Gerger, H., Kley, H., Bohner G., Siebler, F.. (2013) . Acceptance of Modern Myths About Sexual Aggression (AMMSA) scale . Measurement Instrument Database for the Social Science. Retrieved from www.midss.ie

Dear Participant,

First of all thank you for your willingness to participate in our study.

We assure you that all information will be held strictly confidential and anonymous. Please answer all questions honestly and carefully, as this is of great importance for the success of our study.

You will be presented with a set of statements and asked to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each. There are no right or wrong answers – we are only interested in your personal opinion.

Please read each statement carefully and then circle that number from 1 to 7 that you feel best represents your opinion. The points on the scale have the following meaning:

1 = completely disagree
2 = disagree
3 = disagree somewhat
4 = neutral
5 = agree somewhat
6 = agree
7= completely agree

For example:

It snows in winter.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 (5) 6 7 completely agree

In this example the answer of 5 would indicate that you agree somewhat with the statement but not entirely (for example, because it does not snow everywhere and all the time in winter).

Please use the complete range of the scale to express your exact opinion.

1. When it comes to sexual contacts, women expect men to take the lead.

   completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

2. Once a man and a woman have started "making out", a woman's misgivings against sex will automatically disappear.

   completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

3. A lot of women strongly complain about sexual infringements for no real reason, just to appear emancipated.

   completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

4. To get custody for their children, women often falsely accuse their ex-husband of a tendency towards sexual violence.

   completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

5. Interpreting harmless gestures as "sexual harassment" is a popular weapon in the battle of the sexes.

   completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

6. It is a biological necessity for men to release sexual pressure from time to time.

   completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

7. After a rape, women nowadays receive ample support.

   completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

8. Nowadays, a large proportion of rapes is partly caused by the depiction of sexuality in the media as this raises the sex drive of potential perpetrators.

   completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

9. 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.

   completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

10. As long as they don't go too far, suggestive remarks and allusions simply tell a woman that she is attractive.

    completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

11. Any woman who is careless enough to walk through "dark alleys" at night is partly to be blamed if she is raped.

    completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

12. When a woman starts a relationship with a man, she must be aware that the man will assert his right to have sex.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

13. Most women prefer to be praised for their looks rather than their intelligence.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

14. Because the fascination caused by sex is disproportionately large, our society's sensitivity to crimes in this area is disproportionate as well.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

15. Women like to play coy. This does not mean that they do not want sex.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

16. Many women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

17. When a man urges his female partner to have sex, this cannot be called rape.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

18. When a single woman invites a single man to her flat she signals that she is not averse to having sex.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

19. When politicians deal with the topic of rape, they do so mainly because this topic is likely to attract the attention of the media.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

20. When defining "marital rape", there is no clear-cut distinction between normal conjugal intercourse and rape.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

21. A man's sexuality functions like a steam boiler – when the pressure gets too high, he has to "let off steam".

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

22. Women often accuse their husbands of marital rape just to retaliate for a failed relationship.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

23. The discussion about sexual harassment on the job has mainly resulted in many a harmless behavior being misinterpreted as harassment.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

24. In dating situations the general expectation is that the woman "hits the brakes" and the man "pushes ahead".

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

25. Although the victims of armed robbery have to fear for their lives, they receive far less psychological support than do rape victims.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

26. Alcohol is often the culprit when a man rapes a woman.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

27. Many women tend to misinterpret a well-meant gesture as a "sexual assault".

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

28. Nowadays, the victims of sexual violence receive sufficient help in the form of women's shelters, therapy offers, and support groups.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

29. Instead of worrying about alleged victims of sexual violence society should rather attend to more urgent problems, such as environmental destruction.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

30. Nowadays, men who really sexually assault women are punished justly.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

Appendix D

Emergent Codes List

1. Rape accusations as motivation
2. No evidence accused is assumed guilty/rape accusations are common
3. Rape/rapist as joke or insult
4. Victim did not report the rape or assault directly after it happened
5. Real or ideal rape victims
6. Witch hunt
7. Women aren't held accountable for committing sexual violence or false accusations
8. Rape associated with other
9. Victim characteristics and actions
10. Accused/perpetrator characteristics or they made a mistake
11. Looks and wealth
12. Popularity
13. Accused as victim
14. Don't trust the opposite sex