



The effects of rape myth acceptance and gender role beliefs on perceptions of date rape

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### **ABSTRACT**

Date rape is a common crime which typically involves the victim knowing and trusting the perpetrator. However, society's beliefs about rape do not normally conform to this idea (Anderson, 2007). Pre-existing beliefs, such as the acceptance of rape myths and traditional gender role beliefs, have been shown to influence people's perceptions of a date rape scenario (Grubb & Turner, 2012). This has huge implications for the criminal justice system. The study aims to see if participants' perceptions of victim and perpetrator responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt of a date rape scenario differs across rape myth acceptance levels, and gender role beliefs. The study also aims to investigate whether these two factors can predict participants' perceptions of date rape. The study used an opportunity sample of 200 Liverpool John Moores University students, all over the age of 18. The results indicate that perceptions of responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt differ across rape myth acceptance levels and gender role beliefs. Rape myth acceptance and traditional gender role beliefs were significant predictors of date rape perceptions. The study concluded that rape myth acceptance, and gender role beliefs, can affect people's perceptions of date rape. The endorsement of rape myths and having traditional gender role beliefs can facilitate victim blaming in a date rape scenario. Future research should seek to examine these pre-existing beliefs in medical and criminal justice personnel, as these are the people with whom a date rape victim may interact with after an assault.

KEY WORDS:	RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE (RMA)	GENDER ROLE BELIEFS	DATE RAPE	STUDENT POPULATION	PERCEPTIONS
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## Introduction

The phenomenon of sexual assault, including rape, is a topic which has been thoroughly discussed throughout literature since the 1980's (Girard & Senn, 2008). This subject has received vigorous academic attention due to the widespread occurrence of rape across all cultures (Grubb & Turner, 2012). The rape of a woman is a violent and common crime, often committed by men the victim knows, commonly known as date rape (Munsch & Willer, 2012). However many people's beliefs about a typical rape do not conform to this reality (Anderson, 2007). Research has shown that people's perceptions of date rape are influenced by pre-existing beliefs already held about the victim and the perpetrator (Angelone *et al.*, 2012; Black, 2013; Hammond *et al.*, 2011). Addressing this issue is important to change people's stereotyped opinions of rape victims. This allows for less unwarranted judgment to be placed on them by potential jurors. The current study therefore aims to explore participants' level of Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) and gender role beliefs (GRB) on their perceptions of date rape.

Victim blaming occurs when individuals find instances with a victim's behaviour in order to hold them at least partially responsible for an incident (Schwartz & Leggett, 1999). Victimisation is almost always constructed as a female issue (Eigenberg & Garland, 2008). Victim blaming is therefore disproportionately influential upon society's views on women (Hayes *et al.*, 2013). A prevalent form of victim blaming is the acceptance of rape myths, which are false notions surrounding sexual assault (Hayes *et al.*, 2013). Burt (1980) examined feminist theory and social psychology to describe rape myths as socially constructed misconceptions about rape, which involve false ideas about the victim, perpetrator and scenario surrounding the assault. Commonly held rape myths include the idea that women lie about being raped (Edwards *et al.*, 2011), and that the victim was responsible if they wore suggestive clothing (Moor, 2012), and/or were drunk (Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010).

One of the most common rape myths is the 'real rape' myth. This states that most rapes involve a stranger with a weapon, attacking a woman at night, in an isolated, outdoor area, and that the woman will sustain injuries (Waterhouse *et al.*, 2016). However, official statistics taken from the 2013/14 Crime Survey for England and Wales indicated that for the majority of female rape victims, the offender was a partner/ex-partner (47%) or somebody else already known to them (33%), however only 16% reported the perpetrator as a stranger (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Waterhouse *et al.* (2016) found that out of 400 cases of rape reported to a UK police force, not one single incident fit all the characteristics of the 'real rape' myth. There was however an over-representation of ethnic minorities in the offender sample, therefore the results may not be an entirely accurate portrayal of reported rape. Nevertheless, similar studies in the UK and US have concluded that cases which fit the 'real rape' myth are extremely rare (Feist *et al.*, 2007; Sleath & Woodhams, 2014; Stanko & Williams, 2009).

Rape is a notoriously under-reported crime resulting in a gross misperception of its impact upon victims (Dinos *et al.*, 2015). Stranger rape is much less common than date rape, however it is much more likely to be reported (Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009). Therefore, understanding the reasons for this is extremely important. RMA is thought to be one reason for the low reporting rates of date rape (Hayes *et al.*,

2013). As sexual assault is a gendered crime, rape myths tend to focus on the behaviours of the female that lead to victimisation, which supports rape culture (Edwards *et al.*, 2011). RMA is described as a form of general cognitive schema which serves to unconsciously influence the way blame is attributed within rape scenarios (Grubb & Turner, 2012). RMA and victim blaming are synonymous with each other and each serves to propagate one another (Grubb & Turner, 2012).

Basow and Minieri (2011) found higher levels of RMA was associated with greater victim blame, and lower perceptions of perpetrator guilt. Similarly, Hammond *et al.* (2011) found that higher RMA led to less responsibility assigned to the perpetrator. However, both studies were conducted at universities in the USA, therefore generalisation to other populations is difficult. Also, the catholic education of the students in Hammond *et al.*'s (2011) study could have instilled beliefs about sexuality which lean towards a more conservative direction. Nevertheless, the idea that high RMA is associated with more victim blaming is well supported in literature (Aronowitz *et al.*, 2012; Süssenbach *et al.*, 2015; Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2015).

Research into people's perceptions of date rape has continuously focused on participant gender (Hockett *et al.*, 2015; Holcomb *et al.*, 1991; Mori *et al.*, 1995; Vandiver & Dupalo, 2013) however, findings have been mixed (Black & McCloskey, 2013). Some studies of rape perceptions have shown that men are more likely than women to endorse rape myths, blame rape victims and exonerate perpetrators (Gray, 2006; Grubb & Harrower, 2009; Schneider *et al.*, 2009). However, others have not found any differences between men and women in levels of RMA, victim blame and the punishment for the perpetrator (Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Schneider *et al.*, 2009; Sims *et al.*, 2007). Some studies have even found that women were more likely to blame the victim than men (Grubb & Harrower, 2008, 2009). Inconsistent findings suggest that participant gender cannot fully explain people's perceptions of date rape. It is argued that the use of the categorical variable of gender should be discontinued when trying to understand individuals' perceptions of date rape (Black & McCloskey, 2013). Gender could mask other variables of significance, and this may be the reason for the contradictory findings of gender on perceptions of date rape (White, 2009). Men and women's beliefs and attitudes regarding gender roles in society, may be stronger predictors of rape perceptions than their own gender (Black & McCloskey, 2013).

Gender roles are assigned from very early on during the socialisation process, which impacts people's beliefs and behaviour (Eagly, 2013; Grubb & Turner, 2012). Men are generally socialised to be the dominant initiators of sexual interactions, whereas women are socialised to be more passive (Bridges, 1991). The sex role socialisation theory suggests that rape between partners who are dating, is seen less as rape and viewed as being more normal (Rudman *et al.*, 2013). This is because forced sexual intercourse supports the traditional idea that men should be dominant when initiating sex (Rudman *et al.*, 2013). The sex role socialisation theory suggests that perceptions of date rape are linked to traditional gender role stereotypes, such that rape is seen as an extension of traditional gender roles (Burt, 1980).

There is a significant link between GRB and perceptions of rape. Many studies have shown that the endorsement of traditional GRB leads to higher levels of victim blaming (Angelone *et al.*, 2012; Ben-David & Schneider, 2005). It has been found that those with traditional GRB were associated with more victim blame, and less perpetrator guilt

(Abrams *et al.*, 2003; Angelone *et al.*, 2012; Black & McCloskey, 2013). Those with traditional attitudes have been shown to view unwanted sexual activity as less traumatic, and are more likely to rationalise the behaviour of the perpetrator, relative to those with egalitarian views (Anderson *et al.*, 1997). Simms *et al.* (2007) found that more traditional attitudes towards women indicated more endorsement of victim blaming, this finding was consistent regardless of the participant's gender. This further supports the importance of looking at GRB over participant gender.

It could be that gender differences in perceptions of date rape reported throughout literature may actually reflect gender role attitudes (Black & McCloskey, 2013). RMA and GRB have both been shown to mediate the relationship between gender and perceptions of date rape (Abrams *et al.*, 2003; Feinberg, 2015; Hammond *et al.*, 2011). Many studies have shown that men are more likely to endorse traditional gender role attitudes than women (Feinberg, 2015; Steffens *et al.*, 2015). Those with traditional attitudes are more likely to endorse rape myths (Basow & Minieri, 2011; Sims *et al.*, 2007; Yamawaki, 2007), and blame the rape victim (Anderson *et al.*, 1997; Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Sims *et al.*, 2007). These findings support the notion that future research into the perceptions of date rape should focus on RMA and GRB rather than participant gender.

There has been consistent research which demonstrates the relationship between traditional GRB and high RMA (Costin & Schwarz, 1987; Feinberg, 2015; Hall *et al.*, 1986). Feinberg (2015) found that sexism mediates the relationship between RMA and GRB, the study concluded that traditional GRB could be facilitating victim blame and a rape-supportive culture. Burt (1980) found that traditional gender role attitudes were significantly predictive of high RMA, which in turn were responsible for the victim blaming attitudes held by these individuals. Theorists propose that gender role conformity within society enhances RMA and therefore victim blaming, by reinforcing cognitive schema that supports the stereotypical idea that rape victims are responsible for their own misfortune (Grubb & Turner, 2012). As gender role conformity is involved in the formation of date rape perceptions, the degree to which a person agrees with traditional gender roles is key in their assignment of blame, and responsibility in a date rape scenario (Grubb & Turner, 2012).

Combating the negative stereotype of rape victims is extremely important in order to increase reporting rates and conviction rates, and also prevent victims from experiencing a lack of support within society. High RMA and traditional GRB are two factors which have continuously been shown to perpetuate the false stereotype of rape victims, which could be one reason for the reluctance of victims to report to authorities. Investigating these factors, therefore, could have immense implications within the criminal justice system. Jurors often base their verdict decisions on more than just trial evidence, and their pre-existing beliefs about the event has been shown to influence their attributions of guilt (Carter & Mazzula, 2013; Dinos *et al.*, 2015; Hammond *et al.*, 2011; Korva *et al.*, 2013; Sommers, 2007). Mock juror studies show that RMA is associated with jurors' opinions of victims and their judgements of guilt in rape cases (Barber, 1974; Stewart & Jacquin, 2010). RMA and GRB therefore affect the decision to report, perpetrate, and convict rape (Waterhouse *et al.*, 2016).

The endorsement of traditional GRB and rape myths are extremely prevalent within today's society (Hayes *et al.*, 2013). Rape victims are therefore often left with a lack

of social support, encouraging victims to believe that the assault was their own fault (Ullman, 1996). Survivors of rape also report unacceptable and/or secondary victimization experiences with service providers (e.g., lack of sensitivity by mental health, medical, and criminal justice personnel; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974). A recent study concluded that sexual assault and rape has reached epidemic levels among women on college campuses in the US, with 1 in 6 female students reporting being a victim of attempted and/or completed rape (Carey *et al.*, 2015). Date rape is thought to make up 80-90% of reported sexual assaults against college women (Fisher *et al.*, 2000). Investigating date rape perceptions in university students is therefore important. Victims of date rape are considered to be less of a 'victim' compared to those involved in stranger rape (Oshiname *et al.*, 2013). Expanding literature into date rape as a whole is also vital, as it has received much less research attention than stranger rape, despite being more common.

Continued academic investigation into perceptions of date rape is warranted, in order to potentially combat the negative stereotypes date rape victims face. The current study therefore examines the effects of participants' RMA and GRB on their perceptions of date rape, with regards to their attributions of responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt in a date rape scenario. Studies have concluded that less focus should be placed on participant gender when looking at date rape perceptions (Angelone *et al.*, 2012). The current study aims to add to a growing body of research emphasising the importance of investigating GRB over participant gender. Despite date rape being prevalent across all cultures, the majority of research into date rape had been conducted in US populations, making generalisation difficult. The current study will use a UK undergraduate population allowing for cross-cultural comparisons to be made.

Based on previous research the study hypothesises that: (1) there will be a difference on perceptions of victim and perpetrator responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt across RMA levels; (2) there will be a difference on perceptions of victim and perpetrator responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt across GRB; (3) there will be an interaction between RMA level and GRB on perceptions of date rape; (4) RMA level and GRB will significantly contribute to the prediction of date rape perceptions; (5) RMA level will significantly contribute to the prediction of date rape perceptions, beyond the contribution of GRB; (6) GRB will significantly contribute to the prediction of date rape perceptions, beyond the contribution of RMA level.

## **Method**

### **Design**

The study used a 2 x 2 between subjects design. There were two independent variables: rape myth acceptance level (high/low), and gender role beliefs (traditional/egalitarian). There were seven dependant variables: responsibility of the woman; responsibility of the man; negative impact on the woman; negative impact on the man; reporting to authorities; arresting of the man; and guilt of the man. Together these items looked at the responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt of the victim and perpetrator to form perceptions of date rape.

### **Participants**

A total of 224 participants were recruited to take part in the study. Due to incomplete data entries twenty-four participants were excluded, therefore 200 participants were included in the analysis. All participants were students over the age of 18 who studied at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). Participant gender was not recorded as the current study wanted to focus less on this issue. Instead it wanted to focus on GRB, which is now thought to be a stronger predictor of rape perceptions than participant gender (Black & McCloskey, 2013). Participants were recruited via opportunity sampling using the LJMU Sona-System website, they received module credits for taking part in the study. Questionnaires were also handed out to participants on the Byrom Street Campus at LJMU.

## **Materials**

### **Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMA: Burt, 1980)**

RMA level was measured using a modified version of the RMA scale (Burt, 1980). The modified version contained the first 11 items of the original RMA. The remaining 8 items were eliminated as their content was less relevant to the study. The scale is considered reliable (Burt, 1980), and has adequate criterion validity (Lonswray & Fitzgerald, 1995). The modified version is also internally consistent (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.764$ ; Burt, 1980). The scale used a 7-point Likert scale (1=*Strongly Agree*, 7=*Strongly Disagree*), whereby participants rated their agreement with various statements, such as "in the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation". Item 2 was reversed scored. Higher scores indicated greater acceptance of rape myths.

### **Attitude toward Woman Scale (AWS: Spence & Helmreich, 1990)**

GRB were measured using the AWS (Spence & Helmreich, 1990). The scale contained 15 items which assessed attitudes regarding the role of women in society using a 7-point Likert scale (1=*Strongly Disagree*, 5=*Strongly Agree*). Participants rated their agreement to statements such as "A woman should be as free as a man to propose marriage". Several items were reverse scored. A reverse scoring system was used to prevent participants from becoming fatigued, and increase their need to pay attention to each question. The scale has been shown to be reliable (Daugherty, 1986), internally consistent (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.78$ ; Angelone, 2012) and has good construct validity (Galambos *et al.*, 1985). Higher scores indicated more egalitarian attitudes.

### **Gray's (2006) Date Rape Scenario**

Participants read a modified version of Gray's (2006) date rape scenario. This described an ambiguous sexual encounter between a man and a woman, and their individual accounts of what happened. The scenario briefly detailed their occupation and relationship status. It then described how they had engaged in flirtatious behaviour, and were drinking alcohol before the sexual encounter took place. The current study used this particular date rape scenario due to its ambiguity. It is suggested that the endorsement of rape myths may be especially influential in date rape cases which are seen as ambiguous (Hammond *et al.*, 2011).

### **Black's (2013) Date Rape Scenario Questionnaire**

Date rape perceptions were measured using Black's (2013) date rape perception questionnaire. After reading the date rape scenario participants made judgments about responsibility (two items), negative impact (two items), punishment (two items)

and guilt (one item). Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale (1=*Strongly Disagree*, 5=*Strongly Agree*). An example question is “The man should be found guilty of rape”.

### **Participant Information (PI) Sheet**

All participants were provided with an information sheet stating their eligibility (LJMU students 18+) and detailed information about what would happen if they took part. It informed them that participation was confidential and voluntary. It also included the researchers contact details and relevant support organisations.

### **Consent Form**

If participants were eligible and wanted to take part, they read and signed a consent form. This allowed participants to confirm that they understood all of the information provided to them on the PI sheet, and agreed to take part in the study.

### **Debrief Sheet**

After completing the questionnaires, all participants received a debrief sheet. This gave them information about what constitutes date rape and what constitutes consensual sex under legal guidelines. It reminded participants that they could not withdraw their data after debriefing as it had been kept confidential. Finally, it provided contact details for the researcher and relevant support organisations.

### **Procedure**

Participants read the PI sheet and signed the consent form. Participants who took part in the online study gave implied consent by completing the study itself. Participants then answered the RMA (Burt, 1980) and AWS (Spence & Helmreich, 1990), rating their agreeableness with various statements on a 7-point Likert scale. After this, they read Gray’s (2006) date rape perception scenario, and answered Black’s (2013) date rape perceptions questionnaire, assessing the responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt of the victim and perpetrator on a 5-point Likert scale. Finally, participants were thanked for their time and provided with the debrief sheet.

### **Ethical Issues**

The PI sheet expressed the content of the study before participants took part so they knew what to expect. They were asked to self-exclude if they felt they may be affected by the issues covered, as the scenario concerned a sensitive topic. They were also informed that they could omit any questions they did not want to answer, and that their involvement would be confidential and voluntary. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason. Due to the sensitive nature of the questionnaires and vignette, support organisations were provided in event that participants became upset. The support services provided were for all genders. Details for Victim Support, Rape Crisis, Victim Care Merseyside, Survivors UK and LJMU Support Advice and Wellbeing were provided. Details for Accused.me.uk were also provided for any participants who were concerned they had been falsely accused of date rape. Ethical approval from PSYREP was granted.

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

The analysis included a 2 x 2 between subjects MANOVA and multiple regression using SPSS version 23 (Field, 2009). The 2 x 2 between subjects MANOVA was carried out on the date rape perception items looking at responsibility, impact,



punishment and guilt (Hypothesis 1 and 2). It also examined whether there were any interaction effects (Hypothesis 3). The multiple regression analysis was carried out to examine whether RMA and GRB could predict the level of agreeableness for the date rape perception items (Hypothesis 4, 5 and 6).

## Results

The study hypothesised that: (1) there would be a difference in perceptions of date rape across RMA levels; (2) there would be a difference in perceptions of date rape across GRB; (3) there would be an interaction between RMA and GRB; (4) RMA and GRB would predict perceptions of date rape; (5) RMA would predict perceptions of date rape; (6) GRB would predict perceptions of date rape.

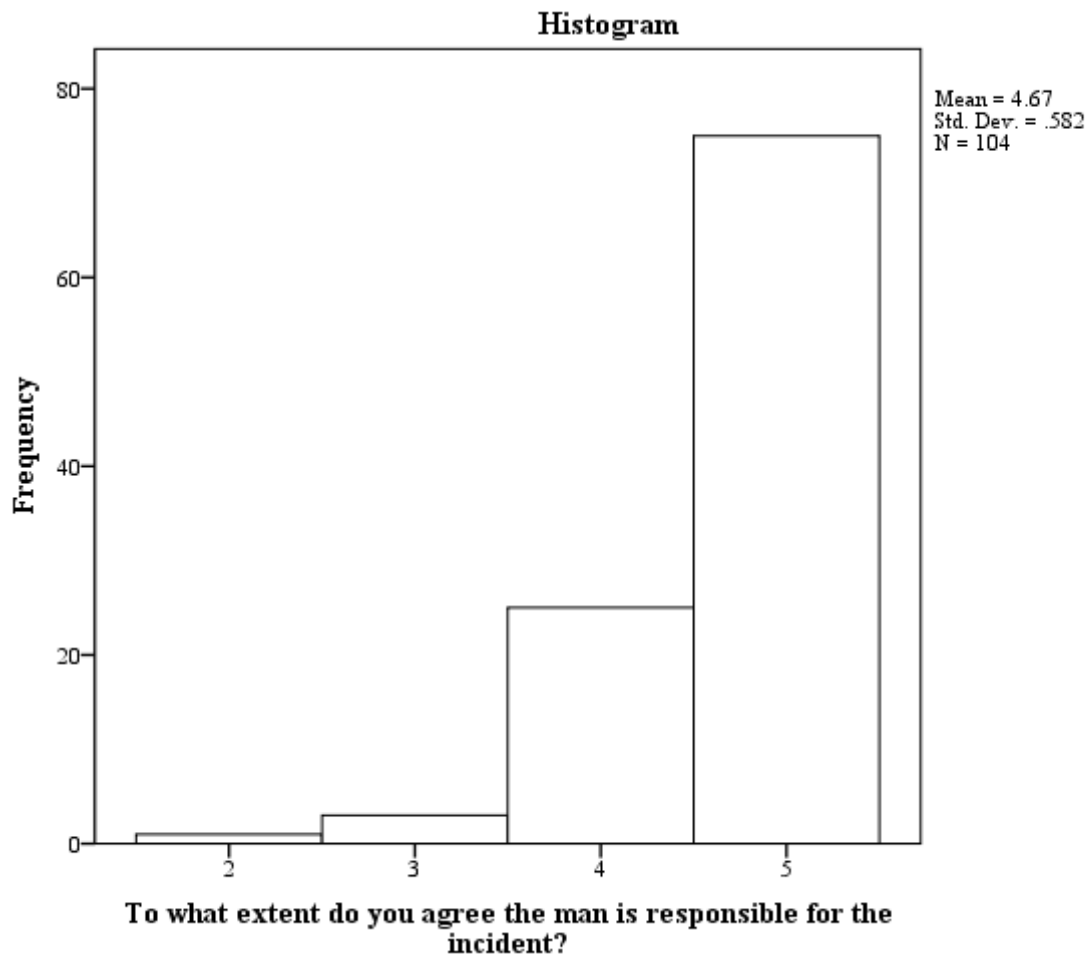
## Assumptions

The data was checked to see if parametric assumptions were met, in some instances the assumptions were violated. Box's M test revealed that homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices had been violated  $F(84, 29532.37) = 3.36, p < .001$ . Levene's test revealed that homogeneity of variance had been violated for five of the seven date rape perception items ( $p < .05$ ). For the remaining two items: the man should be arrested for rape  $F(3, 195) = .67, p > .05$ ; and the man should be found guilty of rape  $F(3, 195) = 1.12, p > .05$  homogeneity of variance was assumed.

Although the significance tests of MANOVA are based on a normal distribution, it is an extremely robust test and is reasonably tolerant to violations of these assumption (Field, 2009). Large sample sizes with at least 20 participants in each cell ensures 'robustness' (Pallant, 2013). Box's M test can be ignored when there are equal group sizes (Pallant, 2013). The current sample size of 200 allowed 50 participants to be in each cell. The group sizes were also almost equal (high=107, low=92, traditional=95, egalitarian=104). However, as group sizes were not entirely equal the distribution for each dependant variable was checked.

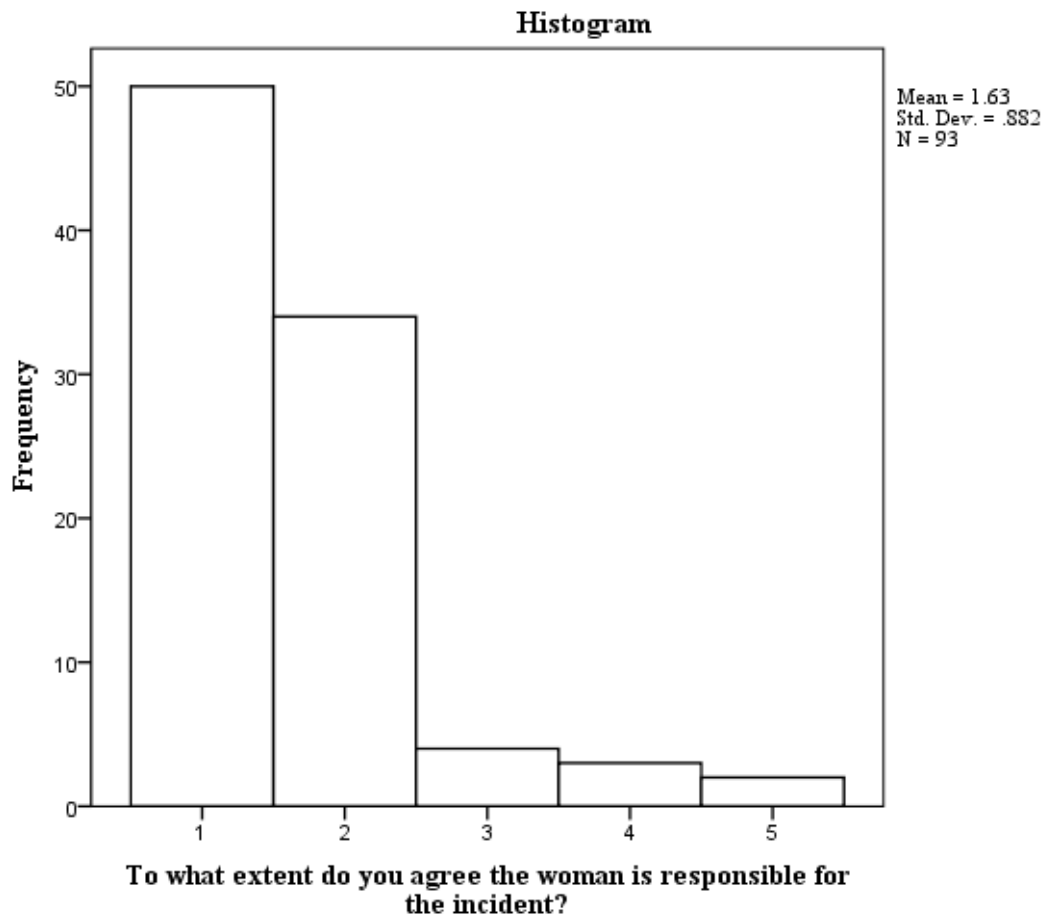
All of the date rape perception items had similar mean and trimmed mean values, which indicated that there were few influential outliers across all dependant variables. Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests (K-S test) were significant for all items ( $p < .05$ ), indicating that the dependant variables were non-normally distributed. However, this was expected as violation of K-S tests are common in large sample sizes like the current studies (Field, 2009). This is therefore likely to reflect a type 1 error rather than a genuine departure from normality.

Male responsibility had a mean of 4.34 ( $SE = .08$ ) and trimmed mean value of 4.44. This DV was non-normally distributed with skewness of -1.92 ( $SE = .24$ ) and kurtosis of 4.14 ( $SE = .47$ ). Figure 1 indicates that male responsibility was negatively skewed therefore the majority of participants agreed that the man was responsible for the incident.



**Figure 1: Histogram showing the skew and kurtosis of male responsibility**

Female responsibility had a mean value of 1.24 ( $SE=.06$ ) and trimmed mean value of 1.13. This DV was non-normally distributed with skewness of 3.88 ( $SE=.25$ ) and kurtosis of 4.05 ( $SE=.49$ ). Figure 2 indicates that female responsibility was positively skewed therefore the majority of participants disagreed that the woman was responsible for the incident.



**Figure 2: Histogram showing the skew and kurtosis of female responsibility**

Apart from female responsibility, all DV's were negatively skewed. The non-normal distribution of data was therefore a result of the majority of participants either strongly agreeing or disagreeing with each dependant variable. Although Levene's and Box's M test were significant, the reasons for the non-normal distribution of data were explored, therefore the 2 (rape myth acceptance: high/low) x 2 (gender role belied: traditional/egalitarian) between subjects MANOVA could still be used.

### **Rape Myth Acceptance**

The study hypothesised that there would be differences in perceptions of date rape for victim and perpetrator responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt across RMA level. An inspection of mean scores indicated that those with high RMA reported: (a) more agreement that the victim was responsible for the incident ( $M=1.60$ ,  $SD=.09$ ), than those with low RMA ( $M=1.32$ ,  $SD=.08$ ); (b) less agreement that the incident would have a significant impact on the woman ( $M=3.98$ ,  $SD=.12$ ) than those with low RMA ( $M=4.53$ ,  $SD=.12$ ); (c) less agreement that the victim was right to report the incident to the authorities ( $M=4.56$ ,  $SD=.07$ ) than those with low RMA ( $M=4.75$ ,  $SD=.06$ ).

There was a statistically significant difference between high and low RMA levels on the combined dependant variables which had a medium effect size,  $F(7,189) = 2.84$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Wilks' Lambda=.91; Partial eta squared=.09. When the results for the dependant variables were considered separately, three of the seven date rape

perception items reached statistical significance. These were: victim responsibility, which had a small effect size  $F(1, 195) = 5.20, p < .05$ , partial eta squared = .03; negative impact on the woman, which had a small effect size  $F(1, 195) = 10.27, p < .05$ , partial eta squared = .05 and the victim should report incident to authorities, which also had a small effect size  $F(1, 195) = 3.90, p = .05$ , partial eta squared = .02.

Overall, compared to those with low RMA levels, those with high RMA levels were: more likely to agree the victim was responsible; downplay the significant impact of the incident on the woman; and less likely to agree the victim should report the incident to authorities. Hypothesis 1 was therefore partially supported.

### Gender Role Beliefs

The study hypothesised that there would be differences in perceptions of victim and perpetrator responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt across GRB. An inspection of mean scores indicated that those with traditional beliefs reported: (a) more agreement that the victim was responsible for the incident ( $M=1.59, SD=.09$ ) than those with egalitarian beliefs ( $M=1.33, SD=.09$ ); (b) less agreement that the perpetrator was responsible for the incident ( $M=4.33, SD=.08$ ) than those with egalitarian beliefs ( $M=4.62, SD=.08$ ); (c) less agreement that the victim was right to report the incident to authorities ( $M=4.52, SD=.07$ ) than those with egalitarian beliefs ( $M=4.78, SD=.07$ ).

There was a statistically significant difference between traditional and egalitarian GRB on the combined variables which had a small effect size,  $F(7, 189) = 2.19, p < .05$ ; Wilks' Lambda = .93; Partial eta squared = .08. When the results for the dependant variables were considered separately, three of the seven date rape perception items reached statistical significance. These were: female responsibility, which had a small effect size  $F(1, 195) = 4.53, p < .05$ , partial eta squared = .02; male responsibility, which had a small effect size  $F(1, 195) = 7.12, p < .05$ , partial eta squared = .04 and victim was right to report incident to authorities, which also had a small effect size  $F(1, 195) = 7.42, p < .05$ , partial eta squared = .04.

Overall, compared to those with egalitarian beliefs, those with traditional beliefs were: more likely to agree the victim was responsible; less likely to agree the perpetrator was responsible; less likely to agree the victim was right to report the incident. Hypothesis 2 was therefore partially supported.

### Interaction

There was no significant interaction between RMA and GRB on the combined dependant variables  $F(7, 189) = 1.25, p > .05$ ; Wilks' Lambda = .96, partial eta squared = .04. Hypothesis 3 was therefore not supported.

### Regression Analysis

The study hypothesised that RMA and GRB would be significant predictors of date rape perceptions. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to see if both RMA level and GRB contributed to the prediction of each date rape perception item. It was found that the IV's significantly explained: (a) 7% of variance for female responsibility  $F(2, 197) = 8.89, p < .001$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .07$ ; (b) 5% of variance for male responsibility  $F(2, 196) = 5.85, p < .05$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .05$ ; (c) 7% of variance for impact on the woman  $F(2, 197) = 8.83, p < .001$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .07$ ; (d) 8% of variance for the victim reporting to authorities  $F(2, 197) = 10.08, p < .001$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .08$ ; (e) 3% of variance for the

perpetrator being arrested for rape  $F(2, 197) = 3.79, p < .05$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .03$ . The two independent variables did not significantly predict the extent to which participants agreed the incident would significantly impact the man, and the man should be found guilty of rape ( $p > .05$ ).

Therefore, the participant's level of RMA and their GRB were able to significantly predict the extent to which they agreed with five of the seven date rape perception items. These being female responsibility, male responsibility, negative impact on the woman, victim reporting to authorities and perpetrator arrested for rape. Partial support for hypothesis 4 was therefore found.

The fifth hypothesis was that RMA would significantly predict perceptions of date rape, beyond the contribution of GRB. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to see if RMA level contributed to the prediction of each date rape perception item. It was found that RMA significantly predicted the level of agreement for: female responsibility (Unstandardized Beta = .28 (SE = .12),  $p < .05$ ); male responsibility (Unstandardized Beta = -.08 (SE = .11),  $p > .05$ ); impact on the woman (Unstandardized Beta = -.56 (SE = .17),  $p < .05$ ) and the victim reporting to authorities (Unstandardized Beta = -.19 (SE = .09),  $p < .05$ ). RMA level did not significantly predict the level of agreement for: impact on the man; the victim reporting to authorities and the perpetrator being found guilty of rape ( $p > .05$ ).

Therefore, the participant's level of RMA, regardless of GRB, significantly contributed to the prediction of four out of the seven date rape perception items. These being female responsibility, male responsibility, impact on the woman and the perpetrator being arrested for rape. Consequently, partial support was also found for hypothesis 5.

Finally, the sixth hypothesis was that GRB would significantly predict perceptions of date rape, beyond the contribution of RMA. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to see if GRB contributed to the prediction of each date rape perception item. Results showed that GRB significantly predicted the level of agreement for female responsibility (Unstandardized Beta = -.27 (SE = .12),  $P < .05$ ) and the victim reporting to authorities (Unstandardized Beta = .26 (SE = .09),  $P < .05$ ). GRB did not significantly contribute to the prediction of the remaining five date rape perception items. Weak partial support was therefore shown for hypothesis 6.

In summary, hypothesis 1 was partially supported as perceptions of impact, punishment and victim responsibility differed across RMA levels. Hypothesis 2 was partially supported as perceptions of punishment, victim responsibility and perpetrator responsibility differed across GRB. Hypothesis 3 was not supported as no significant interaction was found between RMA levels and GRB on the combined dependant variables. Hypothesis 4 was partially supported as RMA levels and GRB were significantly predictive of responsibility, punishment and impact on the woman. Hypothesis 5 was partially supported as RMA levels alone were significantly predictive of responsibility, punishment and impact on the woman. Finally, weak partial support was found for hypothesis 6, as GRB were significantly predictive of female responsibility and reporting to authorities.

## Discussion

The current study aimed to examine the role of RMA and GRB on participants' attributions of responsibility, impact, punishment and guilt in a date rape scenario. The study hypothesised that there would be differences in date rape perceptions across RMA and GRB, and that there would be an interaction between the two. It also hypothesised that RMA and GRB would predict perceptions of date rape. The hypotheses were partially supported by the results of the current study.

Research has consistently shown high RMA to be associated with more victim blame (Basow & Minieri, 2011; Hammond *et al.*, 2011; Grubb & Turner, 2012) and traditional GRB to also be associated with more victim blame (Angelone *et al.*, 2012; Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Black & McCloskey, 2013). The current results add to this existing literature, as the study found that participants with high RMA and traditional GRB were more likely to agree that the victim was responsible for the incident. This supports literature which suggests that these two factors could facilitate victim blaming and a rape-supportive culture.

The current study found that participants with high RMA and traditional GRB were less likely to agree that the incident should be reported to the authorities. This would support research which has found that date rape victims report being discouraged from reporting to authorities, in fear that they will be accused of lying (Heath *et al.*, 2013). Individuals with high RMA and traditional GRB may see victims of date rape as being less of a victim, compared to those who suffer stranger rape. Victims of rape are more likely to report the incident if it was perpetrated by a stranger (Clay-Warner & McMahan-Howard, 2009). The current results support the idea that low reporting rates could be due to RMA and gender role conformity within society, reinforcing the idea that date rape victims are responsible for their own misfortune (Grubb & Turner, 2012).

Participants with egalitarian GRB were more likely to agree that the perpetrator was responsible for the incident, compared to those with traditional beliefs. This supports studies showing traditional GRB to be associated with less perpetrator responsibility (Abrams *et al.*, 2003; Angelone *et al.*, 2012), and suggests that these individuals are more likely to rationalise the behaviour of the perpetrator (Anderson *et al.*, 1997). The study also found that participants with higher RMA were more likely to downplay the significant negative impact the incident would have on the victim. This supports the idea that those who endorse rape myths minimise the victim's injury through blaming them for its occurrence (Bhogal & Corbett, 2016).

Results showed that compared to those with egalitarian beliefs, those with traditional GRB were less likely to agree the man was responsible for the incident. Research suggests that people who endorse traditional gender role attitudes may encode and retrieve gender-typed social scripts that emphasize male power, and underline the idea that men should be aggressive, emotionally disengaged, and have sexual prerogative in sexual relationships (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Reyes *et al.*, 2016). The date rape scenario used in the current study stated that the perpetrator described the incident as 'rough', whilst insisting that the victim was 'into it'. This supports the sexual socialisation theory which suggests that perceptions of date rape are linked to traditional gender role stereotypes. Whereby forced sexual intercourse between dating partners reinforces the traditional idea that men are the dominant initiators of sex (Rudman *et al.*, 2013).

It was anticipated that the current study would find higher RMA and more traditional GRB to be associated with less perpetrator guilt. This idea is continuously supported in literature (Abrams *et al.*, 2003; Angelone *et al.*, 2012). However, the current study found no significant differences between groups. One reason for this may be due to the ambiguity of the date rape scenario. Perceptions are often more lenient towards the perpetrator when there is ambiguity in the victims' desire for intercourse (Johnson & Jackson, 1988). The date rape scenario provided in the current study deliberately depicted an ambiguous incident. Participants may have been less willing to attribute guilt to the perpetrator because of this.

### **Limitations**

The current study has some limitations. It may have benefited from using newer measures of RMA and GRB. The AWS and RMA scale measures overt forms of sexism and obvious rape myth endorsements. These views are much less commonly endorsed by student populations today, compared to when the scales were first developed in the 80's and early 90's (Angelone, 2012). Therefore, the relationship between variables may have been weakened. If subtler measures were used, such as the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim & Cohen, 1997) and the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (McMahon & Lawrence, 2011), then larger effects may have been yielded. Subtler endorsements of rape myths and traditional beliefs may have been present within the current sample. These effects could have been masked by the blatant display of sexist views used in the AWS and RMA scale. Future research should therefore aim to use modernised measure of these constructs.

A further limitation was the small effect sizes, which suggests that other variables are important when predicting perceptions of date rape. Also, generalisation to real-life juror judgements is difficult. Although the current findings suggest that pre-existing beliefs may influence perceptions of date rape, jurors in a date rape trial would have access to much more information. The extent to which the results of the current study can predict participants' judgements in real life situations is therefore unknown.

### **Implications**

The current findings suggest that victim blaming within a date rape scenario is potentially less of an issue in student populations. The data on each date rape perception item was heavily skewed. Participants' overwhelmingly agreed that the perpetrator was responsible for the incident, and the victim was not. Participants' endorsements of rape myths and traditional GRB were also extremely low. This supports the idea that student populations are more liberal and forward thinking, so may be less likely to victim blame, and perpetuate the stereotype that a victim is responsible for their rape.

The majority of research into date rape perceptions has taken place in US student populations. The current study confirmed that RMA and GRB, affect perceptions of date rape similarly in both UK and US students. However, the skewness of data in the current study suggests that UK student's perceptions of date rape do not conform to the widely accepted negative stereotype, and they may be less likely to victim blame compared to other populations. Future research could directly compare UK and US university students' date rape perceptions. Especially in light of the 'rape crisis' the US is facing, due to the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses.

The current results indicate that a person's GRB, and their RMA level, can predict their perceptions of responsibility and punishment for a date rape scenario. This has huge implications for the criminal justice system. The current findings expand and support research which suggests that RMA and GRB – extra-legal, personality factors – may influence jurors' real-world judgements, independent of evidence provided in the case (Black & McCloskey, 2013; Hammond *et al.*, 2011). Authorities within the legal system may therefore wish to bear these factors in mind when deciding on potential jurors for a date rape case. However, one study has found that date rape assaults in England and Wales resulted in more frequent convictions than stranger rape assaults (Munro & Kelly, 2009). It concluded that jurors' opinions may be influenced by their RMA levels in laboratory settings, though when exposed to a full trial these myths may have less effect on the legal outcomes.

### **Future research**

Future research could look at date rape perceptions of medical and criminal justice personnel. It is suggested that many date rapes are not reported due to the negative perceptions of the victims by these professionals (Buddie & Miller, 2001). Using a sample of nurses, for example, may allow for a greater understanding of the treatment of date rape victims by the people with whom they will interact. Older generations have more traditional attitudes (Kulik, 2002). A study containing different age groups may have produced a more normal distribution of data, unlike the current study. Future research could compare date rape perceptions across age groups. Educating society on the prevalence of date rape could reduce their endorsements of rape myths (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). However, there are few studies which have examined this. Future research could also expand literature into the understanding of date rape and stranger rape.

### **Conclusions**

Overall, the current study has expanded literature into the effects of RMA and GRB on date rape perceptions. The results support previous literature, which suggests that high RMA and traditional GRB facilitate victim blaming attitudes, and a rape supportive culture. The current study adds to a growing body of research which emphasises the importance of looking at GRB when predicting perceptions of date rape. The effects of pre-existing beliefs on people's perceptions of date rape is an important area of study. Understanding the influence of these beliefs has huge implications for the criminal justice system and victims of date rape themselves. Continued research is therefore needed to further recognise the impact of these beliefs, in order to help educate society and break the false stereotype of date rape victims.

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