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Exploring an individual's beliefs and attitudes that can predict the endorsement of rape myths.

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Exploring an individual's beliefs and attitudes that can predict the endorsement of rape myths.

ABSTRACT

The act of rape is believed to be one of the most underreported crimes in the UK (Grubb and Turner, 2012). Research into why that is has shown that Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) is a very influential phenomenon that is very prevalent in today's society. This has huge implications for the victims of rape as if they believe they are going to be condemned to preconceived judgements and unfair stereotypes, they are less likely to come forward and report their experience (Campbell and Raja, 2005). The present study aims to explore whether an individual's belief in a just world, sexist attitude and victim blaming tendencies can predict how likely they are to endorse rape myths. The study used an opportunity sample of 179 participants, of any gender, all over the age of 18. A hierarchal regression analysis was conducted, which indicated that sexism and victim blaming were the only significant predictors of rape myth acceptance. A mediation analysis also suggested that victim blaming was playing a mediating role on the relationship between sexism and rape myth acceptance.

KEY WORDS:	RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE (RMA)	VICTIM BLAMING	SEXISM	JUST WORLD BELIEF (JWB)	ATTITUDES

Introduction

Victim blaming is a phenomenon that is relevant to social injustices in society and is described as victims being unfairly held responsible for something unfortunate happening to them (Harber et al., 2015). It is a broad term which can be linked with different forms of injustice or discrimination, such as bullying (Chapin and Coleman, 2017), race issues (Dukes and Gaither, 2017) and rape scenarios (Campbell and Raja, 2005). However, academically, victim blaming is most frequently discussed in the context of sexual assaults and rape culture. In March 2017, the Crime Survey for England and Wales reported an estimated 3.1% of women (510,000) experienced a case of sexual assault in the last year (Office for National Statistics, 2018). It was also reported that 5 in 6 victims (83%) did not come forward and report their ordeal to the police (Office for National Statistics, 2018). While these statistics may already seem shocking, Grubb and Turner (2012: 443) note that sexual assault statistics are potentially always going to be misleading and should be viewed as the "tip of the iceberg" as it is thought to be one of the most under-reported crimes in the UK. To understand rape culture and why individuals attribute blame to victims in the way they do, it is important to investigate and identify the many factors which can lead to blame being attributed towards a victim of rape. In this present study, research and theories surrounding victim blaming, rape myth acceptance, belief in a just world and sexism will be discussed in the context of rape culture.

When discussing victim blaming, it is imperative to explore Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958) to try and understand the possible reasons why individuals may assign blame to victims the way they do. Attribution Theory delves into the process of how a person will attribute responsibility to others in certain scenarios (Heider, 1958). It proposes that individuals are very active in looking for logical reasons to interpret and explain why aspects of their life are happening, helping them to control the world they live in (Grubb and Turner, 2012). Heider (1958) theorised two forms of attribution; internal and external. Internal attributions refer to an individual believing internal characteristics are the cause of a person's behaviour while external attributions are believing an individual is behaving the way they are because of an event or situation they are in (Grubb and Turner, 2012). It is also reported that cultural differences are thought to influence the attribution process of individuals, thus showing that the process in which individuals attribute blame is an intricate societal issue (Maddux and Yuki, 2006).

Burt (1980: 217) described rape myths as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists". Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994: 134) extend this definition by stating that rape myths are consistently held attitudes and beliefs about victims of rape that in most cases are false. Rape myths are stereotypes about the way a victim/perpetrator of rape acts and behaves, with the endorsement of the myths being defined as Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994). Examples of rape myths are statements such as "women ask for it" and "only bad girls get raped" (Burt, 1980: 217). Throughout society, there seems to be a high endorsement of rape myths and victim blaming attitudes which can often leave victims of sexual assault believing they should blame themselves and have done something to make the attack happen (Hayes et al., 2013). There has been a vast amount of research into RMA, exploring why the general population and even victims of rape themselves may endorse rape myths.

Previous research has found that victims of rape who had reported the crime had lower levels of RMA in comparison to rape victims who did not (Egan and Wilson, 2012).

These findings indicate that if the victim is ready to report the crime, they are accepting that they are not to blame for the crime and not making excuses for the perpetrator, essentially not being influenced by rape myths. LeMaire et al (2016) investigated how the endorsement of rape myths can affect how victims of rape view their experience. Results show that the endorsement of rape myths leads to a victim denying and downplaying their own experience of rape. It is suggested that RMA can influence the way victims see their own ordeal and believe it was a bad experience where the perpetrator just "went too far", a common rape myth (LeMaire et al., 2016: 342). Weiss (2009) conducted a study investigating these excuses and what victims might use for why they believe they have been sexually assaulted. Findings show that the vocabulary and excuses used showed endorsement of some of the most common rape myths, such as "male sexual aggression is natural, inevitable or not the offender's fault when intoxicated" (Weiss, 2009: 828). Another common rape myth found was that "women contribute to their own victimization by reckless behaviour" (Weiss, 2009: 828). Both of these quotes show that the endorsement of rape myths leads to normalization of aggressive male behaviour and more oppression towards women. Ullman (1996) explored the social reactions sexual assault victims have received after their ordeal. It was concluded that the majority of the victims involved in the study had received a negative social reaction, possibly from the endorsement of rape myths from wider society, which in turn had a direct impact on the victims who then followed on to engage in self-blaming attitudes (Weiss, 2009). Findings from all three of these studies portray the effects that the endorsement of rape myths can have on the victims of rape.

Lerner (1980) theorised the concept of Just World Belief (JWB) in which people have a "motivational need" to think that the world is a fair place, essentially believing people "get what they deserve" (Grubb and Turner, 2012: 444). Therefore, believing that a negative thing has happened to a good person will threaten an individual's belief in a fair, ordered and just world, making it easier for the individual to believe a victim is deserving of their ordeal (Grubb and Turner, 2012). Holding a JWB allows people to have a safe and secure feeling while also feeling in control of their actions and consequences, subsequently making the world seem more protected and predictable (Lodewijkx et al., 2001). Because of this, people seek ways to try and protect their feelings of a safe and just world. Lipkus et al. (1996) believes that JWB should be split into two separate notions: JWB-self and JWB-other, finding that people often see the world a more just place for themselves than it is for others. Lipkus et al. (1996) suggested that high levels of JWB-self had a positive relationship with psychological well-being, finding that JWB-self predicted less depression, less stress and greater satisfaction for life in participants. Therefore, having a higher sense of JWB-self in comparison to JWB-other, will encourage an individual with their choices and justifications in life as they will be reinforced with a feeling of heightened mood and well-being (Lipkus et al., 1996).

The concept of JWB has been heavily linked with victim blaming and RMA in past research. Strömwall et al. (2013) found JWB to be a positive predictor in how much blame someone would attribute to a victim of rape and that participants with a high JWB attributed more blame to the victim of the assault in comparison to the perpetrator. Additionally, participants with a high JWB, who had an encounter of rape described to them, viewed the ordeal as less serious than rape (Strömwall et al., 2013). This indicates that the participants find it easier to attribute blame to the victim to try and protect their JWB. However, Kleinke and Meyer's (1990) study emerged with the opposite results, finding that women with a high JWB were less negative about the

victims of rape in comparison to women with a low JWB. These findings could imply that women were reluctant to view victims of rape in a negative light as they can identify with the victim and relate that something similar could happen to themselves.

It is also imperative to look at how a victim's JWB can affect their view on their own experiences. Interestingly, Fetchenhauer et al. (2005) investigated how a JWB will help victims to cope after a sexual assault. Findings showed that having a high JWB results in victims of rape handling the adjustment after the assault better. This possibly reveals that the more the victims could believe that the experience they endured was just, the better they could adaptively cope after the attack due to the victim feeling as though the ordeal was out of their control, thus not attributing the blame to themselves but to situational factors (Hayes et al., 2013). However, there is a downside to adhering to a high JWB as it can also have a negative impact upon a victim of rape. Lodewijkx et al. (2001) state that if someone with a high JWB is attacked, they instinctively may blame themselves for the assault to try and protect their JWB. Victims who believe an assault was due to their personal flaws will have a more challenging approach to coping after the attack as self-blame is a hard process for a victim to overcome (Fetchenhauer et al., 2005).

Another factor that flags up through previous research as being associated with victim blaming, RMA and JWB is sexism. Sexism is best defined as "behaviour, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex" (Dahl, 2015: 54). Glick and Fiske (1996) believe that sexism can be differentiated into two forms: hostile sexism (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS). Hostile sexism refers to an individual who would believe that a woman should be chastised for deviating from traditional gender roles (e.g. a girl wearing provocative clothing), with these women viewed as going against their usual sex role, resulting in them being met with a hostile, aggressive attitude (Glick and Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism on the other hand is when an individual believes that a woman should be rewarded for being traditionally feminine, viewing women as pure individuals who should be cherished and in need of protection (Glick and Fiske, 1996). Although on the surface these seem like flattering beliefs to withhold, in reality they reinforce the traditional gender roles of males being the more dominant sex in society and women being submissive, encouraging a patriarchal society (LeMaire et al., 2016). If women are seen to be deviating against these qualities (e.g. innocent and pure), they will be perceived as unworthy of protection by benevolent sexists.

Grubb and Turner (2012) stated that previous research indicates sexism is predictive of unfavourable attitudes towards victims of rape, with people being more likely to endorse rape myths if the victim had gone against the traditional women's role. This could be evident in Kleinke and Meyer's (1990) findings as they reported that for their study, male participants held the victim of rape more responsible for the attack in comparison to female participants, and also found the rapist less to blame for the act of rape than women. These findings show a sexual bias and that the male participants were possibly being influenced by their endorsement of rape myths. However, it would seem it is not only men who hold sexist opinions of women. Sims et al. (2007) investigated the blame attributed to a female sexual assault victim compared to a male perpetrator in a date rape scenario when alcohol is and isn't present. They discovered that when alcohol was involved, both male and female participants were more likely to place the blame on the woman for the sexual assault. It is noted that in the alcohol present condition of the study, the female was described as having "drank a large

amount of alcohol" (Sims et al. 2007: 2773). The study also found that regardless of participant gender, individuals who endorsed more traditional beliefs and had highly conservative views towards women, the more likely they were to blame the victim for the sexual assault. Both findings demonstrate how women who are seen to be deviating from their traditional gender roles gain a more prejudice judgement, resulting in participants blaming the victim more for the assault which in turn reinforces the ideology of a male dominant society (Sims et al., 2007).

It is clear from previous research that there are links between sexism, JWB, victim blaming and RMA. Hayes et al. (2013) is a perfect example of this as they investigated the relationship between JWB, victim blaming attitudes (using a RMA scale) and gender, predicting that both JWB-self and JWB-other would be linked with RMA. However, results showed that although both JWB's had a significant relationship, JWB-self was negative and JWB-other was positive (Hayes et al., 2013). This suggests that if someone has a high level of JWB-self, their endorsement of rape myths falls, but if they have a high level of JWB-other, their endorsement of rape myths rises. It's noted that although the results were not fully supportive of the hypotheses, they were expected as someone with a high JWB-other is anticipated to attribute blame to victims as a way of protecting their JWB (Hayes et al., 2013). Participants with a higher JWB-self may also have found it unnecessary to attribute blame to the victim as they could have empathized with them or were able to make external attributions about the victim (e.g. the situation the victim was in when being attacked) (Fetchenhauer et al., 2005).

The aforementioned literature shows there is a clear connection between a belief in a just world, sexism and attribution of blame to victims with the endorsement of rape myths. The view of victims of sexual assault that run through society from the influence of rape myths are shocking and disconcerting, resulting in victims being apprehensive of reporting their experiences and remaining silent in fear of not being believed or unfairly judged. For these victims to be silent only gives power to these negative views. Thus, it is imperative to explore which beliefs or attitudes (JWB, sexism and victim blaming) can influence and predict how likely someone is to endorse rape myths, which is how the current study will begin. However, it would be interesting to extend the literature further by exploring if victim blaming is playing a mediating role in the connection between variables. Mediation was chosen to investigate the relationships between the variables as it is important to be able to explain the process in which one variable can determine the outcome of another (MacKinnon et al., 2007). This study will potentially provide explanations of how victim blaming will affect these relationships. Therefore, the main aims of the current study will be to explore whether a person's beliefs and attitude will predict how they view victims of rape through their endorsement of rape myths. It will be investigating whether a belief in a just world, having a sexist attitude and how likely people are to attribute blame to rape victims can predict how likely someone is to endorse rape myths. It will then explore whether victim blaming will have a mediating effect on the relationship between belief in a just world and sexism with rape myth acceptance.

The specific hypotheses are as follows:

H1 – Sexism and belief in a just world will be positive predictors of rape myth acceptance.

H2 – Victim blaming will be a positive predictor of rape myth acceptance.

H3 – Sexism and belief in a just world will predict rape myth acceptance through victim blaming.

Method

Design

A non-experimental correlational design was used to analyse the relationship between the predictors and criterion. The study is exploring to what extent the predictors: sexism, JWB and victim blaming can predict and influence the criterion: someone's endorsement of rape myths.

Sample

Opportunity sampling was used to gain participants as the questionnaire was uploaded to the MMU Participation Pool and Social Media. The Participation Pool is a website created by Manchester Metropolitan University for students to post their questionnaire and surveys for the whole undergraduate course of psychology to access. This was the most suitable sampling technique for the study as it could gain participants who were available at that time and fit the inclusion criteria. 250 participants had begun filling in the questionnaire with only 179 fully completing. Of the 179 participants, 33 were Male, 146 were Female and 1 was Other. The number of participants was based on Green's (1991) criteria of 50 + (8 x number of predictors). Therefore, 74 were needed as an absolute minimum. However, it was decided that at least 150 would be needed to suitably test the study hypotheses. Any gender could take part in the study as long as they were over the age of 18. The mean age of participants was 29.88 with the youngest participant being 18 and the eldest being 66 (SD = 12.69). It was expressed that if a participant had experienced a distressful event (e.g. sexual assault) then it was advised that they should not take part in the study as it could be emotionally upsetting for them.

Materials

The programme Qualtrics was used to create and distribute a questionnaire to gain responses from participants. The 4 questionnaires used to gain reliable questions for the predictors and criterion of the study had Likert rating scales (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The participant's JWB was measured using Rubin and Peplau's (1975) Belief in a Just World scale. This 20-item questionnaire consisted of statements such as "Basically, the world is a just place" and "Good deeds often go unnoticed and unrewarded". The questionnaire has been criticised in previous research for having a low internal consistency of .68 (Hellman et al., 2008). However, as it has still been used by many studies, the decision was made to use the scale (Hellman et al., 2008). Sexist Attitudes was measured by Glick and Fiske's (1996) Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, which has previously yielded a high Cronbach's alpha of .92 (Glick and Fiske, 1996). The 22-item questionnaire was made up of statements such as, "Women are too easily offended" and "Men are complete without women". RMA was measured using McMahon and Farmer's (2011) 22-item Subtle Rape Myths scale that contained quotes such as, "If a girl doesn't say 'no' she can't claim rape" and "If both people are drunk, it can't be rape". This questionnaire seemed the most appropriate to use as it is the scale with the most updated language used in statements and has a high Cronbach's alpha of .87 (McMahon and Farmer, 2011). Ward's (1988) 25-item Attitudes Towards Rape Victims scale was used to measure the attribution of blame placed on victims and has previously produced a high internal consistency of

.83. It contained statements such as, "Men, not women, are responsible for rape" and "Any female may be raped".

Procedure

Participants were directed to a questionnaire which took them approximately 15 minutes to complete. Before beginning the questionnaire, participants had a consent form to complete to record that they agreed to take part. Participants were unable to move onto the next screen and question without giving their consent to the study. Participants were informed that they had a right to withdraw up to 4 weeks after completing the questionnaire and could email the lead researcher to request this if they wished to do so. Participants were then asked to record their age, gender and race. After this, participants could begin answering questions. Each question had a Likert rating scale to record their answer (e.g. 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). After completing all questions, participants were prompted to record a unique code which they could reference in an email so that the researcher could identify their data while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity.

Data analysis plan

To begin, a reliability analysis was conducted to test whether the questionnaires used had internal consistency. After this, correlations were examined for each variable and a test for assumptions was conducted while running the hierarchal multiple regression analysis. The hierarchal regression was conducted to test if belief in a just world and a sexist attitude predicts RMA, and whether the attribution of blame placed on victims of rape will predict RMA. A tiered approach to regression analysis reflects a hierarchal format, hence the focus on a hierarchical regression. A mediation analysis was carried out after the regression to investigate hypothesis 3: whether sexism and belief in a just world will predict the endorsement of rape myths through victim blaming.

Results

Reliability analysis

Prior to the reliability analysis, responses to certain questions were reversed scored as per the questionnaire authors' advice. Rubin and Peplau (1975) advised questions 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16, 17 and 20 should be reversed for the Belief in a Just World Scale. For the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, Glick and Fiske (1996) advised questions 3, 6, 7, 13, 18 and 21 should be reversed. Ward (1988) advised that questions 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15, 19 and 22 should be reversed for the Attitudes Towards Rape Victims Scale while the Updated Measure for Assessing Subtle Rape Myths (McMahon and Farmer, 2011) did not have any negatively worded questions so did not need any questions to be reversed.

All questionnaires were subjected to an internal consistency analysis. Results for 'JWB' were just under average, $\alpha = .67$. However, this result is not surprising as previous research has also indicated getting a below average reliability score for this questionnaire (Hellman et al., 2008). Certain questions, if deleted, would have improved the reliability score. However, since it was only a very slight improvement the decision was made to leave all questions. 'Sexism' and 'Victim Blaming' have high internal consistency, $\alpha = .89$ and $\alpha = .85$. 'RMA' had the highest internal consistency, $\alpha = .92$.

Descriptive statistics

Pearson correlations were computed for each variable (see Table 1).

Table 1. Correlations among all study variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	Just World Belief	Sexism	Victim Blaming	Rape Myth Acceptance
Just World Belief	64.8	9.7		.32**	.18*	.18*
Sexism	61.8	17.2			.63**	.55**
Victim Blaming	40.8	11.6				.79**
Rape Myth Acceptance	37.3	13.4				

Note. *p < .05; **p < .001

Table 1 indicates that there was a positive correlation between JWB and RMA, r(177) = .18, p = .02. There was also a strong positive correlation between sexism and RMA, r(177) = .55, p < .001. Victim blaming and RMA also showed a strong positive correlation, r(177) = .79, p < .001.

Hierarchical regression analyses

Prior to conducting the regression analysis, five assumptions (the absence of outliers, multicollinearity, independent errors, homoscedasticity and linearity of data), were examined to ensure that the multiple hierarchal regression was the appropriate method to analyse the data. After testing for outliers, it appeared one participant possessed a z-score of -3.307 (Std. Residual Min = -3.30, Std. Residual Max = 2.57), which is slightly lower than the cut-off of -3.29. Given the score is very close to the threshold and only relates to one individual, the data point was left in the analysis. Using a conservative approach of this type is possible given the arbitrary nature of the cut-off criteria suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) in the first instance. Collinearity tests indicated that the data met the assumption of no multicollinearity (Just world belief, Tolerance = .89, VIF = 1.12; Sexism, Tolerance = .56, VIF = 1.78; Victim blaming, Tolerance = .61, VIF = 1.65). The data met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson = 2.01). The scatterplot of standardised residuals suggested that the data met the assumptions of linearity and homogeneity of variance.

A two-stage hierarchal multiple regression analysis tested whether 'just world belief', 'sexism' and 'victim blaming' were predictive of RMA. Just world belief and sexism were entered at the first stage with victim blaming being entered in the second stage to investigate the possible mediating role that victim blaming could be having on the two variables in relation to RMA. The contribution of each predictor variable in accounting for the variance in RMA scores is shown below in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of regression analysis for predicting rape myth acceptance scores.

Variable	Stage 1			Stage 2		
	B	SE B	β (beta score)	B	SE B	β (beta score)
Just World Belief	-.00	.09	-.00	.02	.07	.01
Sexism	.43	.05	.56**	.07	.05	.09
Victim Blaming				.84	.07	.73**
R^2	.31**			.63**		
R^2 change				.32**		

Note. *p < .05; **p < .001

A significant predictive model emerged at stage one ($F(2,176)$ = 38.96, p < .001), and stage two ($F(3,175)$ = 98.39, p < .001). Stage one showed there was a positive relationship between the variables 'JWB', 'sexism' and 'RMA' (R = .55). The two predictor variables explained approximately 30.7% (R^2adj = 29.9%) of the variance in RMA. Sexism was the stronger predictor of RMA, $β$ = .56, $t(176)$ = 8.38, p < .001, while JWB was non-significant, $β$ = -.01, $t(176)$ = -.08, p = .94. Hypothesis 1 predicted that both variables would be positive predictors of RMA. However, these results show that only sexism was significant, partially supporting the hypothesis.

At stage two of the analysis, the addition of 'victim blaming' resulted in a significantly stronger regression model ($R2$ change = .32, p < .001). The percentage of variance in RMA that could be explained increased to 62.8% (R^2adj = 62.1%). JWB remained non-significant at this stage, $β$ = .01, $t(175)$ = .23, p = .82. However, once victim blaming was entered, the significance of sexism reduced, $β$ = .09, $t(175)$ = 1.51, p = .13. Victim blaming was the strongest predictor of RMA, $β$ = .73, $t(175)$ = 12.28, p < .001. This supports hypothesis 2 as it was anticipated victim blaming would be a positive predictor of RMA.

Mediation analysis

From these results, it was found that JWB was not meaningful as a predictor. However, because Sexism was no longer significant once victim blaming entered the analysis, it is suspected that victim blaming might be mediating the effects on RMA. Therefore, a mediation analysis was carried out using Preacher and Hayes' (2008) INDIRECT macro with bootstrapping. This mediation analysis was additionally necessary to test hypothesis 3.

With RMA as the outcome, results indicated that a direct significant path existed between sexism and victim blaming (b = .421, p < .001). This direct relationship became non-significant once victim blaming was included (b = -.075, p = .102), supporting potential mediation. Through victim blaming, the indirect effect of sexism on RMA was significant at the 95% confidence level across bias corrected (95% CI =

.268 to .455) and percentile (95% CI = .268 to .454) point estimates. The overall model explained 62.77% (R²adj = 62.34%) of the variance in RMA. These results indicate that there is a predictive relationship between sexism and RMA, and suggest that a mediating effect of victim blaming exists which partially supports hypothesis 3.

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore whether a belief in a just world, sexism and victim blaming plays a predicting role in how likely someone is to endorse rape myths. The study hypothesised that JWB, sexism and victim blaming would all be significant predictors of RMA, and that victim blaming is playing a mediating role on RMA. The results showed that only one hypothesis could be supported fully with the remaining two only being partially supported. Each hypothesis will now be discussed against the backdrop of previous literature.

To test for the first hypothesis, JWB and sexism were entered into the first stage of the hierarchal regression. This stage yielded a significant model, with only sexism being a positive predictor of RMA. Belief in a just world resulted in a non-significant finding. This finding is interesting and unexpected as a plethora of previous research has found that JWB is a positive predictor of RMA (Fetchenhauer et al., 2005; Kleinke and Meyer, 1990; Strömwall et al., 2013). A possible explanation for this could be the use of Rubin and Peplau's (1975) Just World Scale. There have been various studies that have analysed the 20-item scale and found issues with internal consistency (Furnham, 2003). This has lead to conflict surrounding the questionnaire about whether it is a unidimensional or multidimensional scale (Ambrosio and Sheehan, 1990). Because of this, it has been suggested that a JWB scale should be adapted to measure the many facets of the JWB (Furnham, 2003). In other words, rather than measuring whether an individual demonstrates beliefs in a just vs. unjust world, other factors should be included in the scale to be measured, such as hope for a just world, belief in immanent justice and ultimate justice to name a few (Furnham, 2003).

As only sexism was significant, this partially supported hypothesis 1. Previous research has consistently shown that having a highly sexist attitude is associated with someone endorsing rape myths (Grubb and Turner, 2012; Kleinke and Meyer, 1990; Sims et al., 2007). The findings of the current study support this notion as it was found that sexism is a strong predictor of RMA, which implies that the more sexist someone is, the more likely they are to endorse rape myths. To test for the second hypothesis, victim blaming was entered at stage two of the regression analysis. The addition of victim blaming drastically changed the results of the study with the percentage of variance that could be explained in RMA doubling from the previous stage and resulting in victim blaming being the strongest significant predictor of RMA, supporting hypothesis 2. This supports previous research that found victim blaming is directly associated with RMA (Campbell and Raja, 2005; LeMaire et al., 2016; Ullman, 1996). These findings largely support Campbell and Raja's (2005) exploration of victim blaming behaviours received from military personnel compared with civilian workers. Participants consisted of ex-military workers who had experienced a sexual assault while in the workplace. Victims who confided in military personnel were "actively discouraged" from reporting the incident, and victims who confided in the police were questioned more about how they were dressed at the time of the incident and their sexual histories (Campbell and Raja, 2005: 104). This shows that the victims who reported their attack to civilian workers were met with victim blaming tendencies through the endorsement of common rape myths.

However, although JWB remained a non-significant predictor, the addition of victim blaming reduced the significance of sexism, producing a non-significant result. This shows that being sexist does not automatically mean that individuals will endorse rape myths, meaning there must be something which is affecting the relationship – victim blaming. Although it was established that having a highly sexist attitude means people are more likely to endorse rape myths, it appeared victim blaming was acting like a mechanism for that if someone does have a highly sexist attitude, they will endorse rape myths as a function and effect of victim blaming. Because sexism was no longer significant after the addition of victim blaming, a mediation analysis was conducted to test the third and final hypothesis. The results indicated that there was an influential predictive relationship between sexism and RMA, suggesting that victim blaming was having a mediating effect over the relationship. Although this is a significant finding, it still only partially supported hypothesis three as JWB was non-significant. Although previous research, to our knowledge, has not tested victim blaming as a mediator, it does report that a highly sexist attitude about society encourages RMA from the reinforcement of victim blaming (Grubb and Turner, 2012).

Limitations

Like most research, the current study does have potential limitations. The first one to be discussed is the issue of generalisability. In the hope of being more generalisable, the study tried to be unrestrictive in terms of who could participate. However, the number of participants who completed the study was an issue. The study was open to any gender over the age of 18 and yielded a mean age of 29.88. Although this seems like a good age to have, with only 179 participants fully completing the questionnaire, it would be hard to generalise any findings across the general population. This leads onto the next limitation which was participant attrition.

A strong number of 250 responses had been collected which initially looked like a substantial number of participants. However, upon further investigation, it was revealed that only 179 had fully completed the entirety of the questionnaire. A reason for this happening could be the length of the questionnaire and length of questionnaire statements used when compiling all four scales. It has been suggested in the past that there is an association between response rates and the length of the questionnaires, with responses rates being lower for longer questionnaires (Rolstad et al., 2011). However, it was noted that the association should be interpreted with caution and that content of the questionnaires, such as context and length of statements, should also be considered (Rolstad et al., 2011). This raises the question of whether the nature of the study could have impacted the participant attrition. Although participants were given ample information about the background of the study, reading certain statements in the context of rape could have still upset and caused distress for participants, resulting in only completing a portion of the questionnaire.

Implications

The majority of previous research has shown that men are more likely to have a sexist attitude, to victim blame and endorse rape myths (Kleinke and Meyer, 1990). However, although the current study did not investigate or compare gender specific views, of the total 179 participants who completed the questionnaire, only 33 were male. It is interesting to view the results of the current study in light of this. The findings largely contrast previous research and show that the majority of participants, who were female, yielded a highly sexist attitude and endorsement of rape myths, with high

levels of victim blaming. This disagrees with the idea that men are the only gender to perpetuate a sexist view in society. This could provide support to Sims et al's (2007) study which concluded that regardless of participant gender, if the participant had more traditional views of women, the more they were likely to blame the victim of rape for their attack. This has implications for society and future research as it would be interesting to explore why a woman would hold such an oppressive attitude towards their own gender. From this, it appears that educating both genders of the turmoil victims of rape endure and live with may benefit society in reducing these harsh beliefs.

The current study suggests that victim blaming and sexism are strong predictors of RMA, with victim blaming directly influencing the relationship between sexism and RMA. This is an important finding as it aids in the discovery of the attitudes or beliefs (predictors) that have the strongest connection to RMA, which can help in trying to eradicate oppressive views. Pinpointing what it is that is likely to make someone endorse rape myths has implications for victims of rape everywhere. In March 2017, a judge was accused of victim blaming behaviour in the courtroom, as after sentencing a rapist to six years in prison, she stated that women had every right to "drink themselves into the ground" but their "disinhibited behaviour" would most likely put them in a dangerous position (BBC, 2017). She also pleaded for "women to protect themselves from predatory men who 'gravitate' towards drunken females" (BBC, 2017). Change could begin within the Criminal Justice System by bearing sexist attitudes and rape myth endorsement in mind when they are handling a rape case. Victim blaming attitudes marginalise victims of rape and make it even harder for them to come forward about their experience. If the victim knows that society and criminal justice personnel will unfairly hold them accountable for the assault, they are even more unlikely to report their attack to the police (Campbell and Raja, 2005). Therefore, a change in the way people view these victims will not only impact victims of rape personally, but potentially society as it makes a move in the right direction to erase these unfair and prejudice beliefs and behaviour.

Future Research

It would be interesting for future research to look at the beliefs and attitudes that are clearly evident within the Criminal Justice System, from police officers to judges. As stated previously, if a victim feels as though they are going to fall victim to preconceived judgements, such as someone endorsing rape myths, this is going to make the victim sit in silence (Campbell and Raja, 2005). If there was a way to inform criminal justice personnel (who holds those beliefs), of these consequences, it would help victims feel more at ease and more likely to report their attack. Gaining a more valid number of participants would also be a goal worth setting when trying to investigate another study of this nature. Also, although a cross-sectional mediation analysis was ultimately decided as the best way to explore the data for the current study, it could also be a disadvantage. As the data collected is cross-sectional, Maxwell and Cole (2007) would state that this could lead to a biased outcome that is potentially misleading. Therefore, for future research, it would be recommended that the use of longitudinal mediation is to be implemented as the method of analysis (Maxwell and Cole, 2007).

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this current study have expanded literature into the effects of sexism on RMA through victim blaming. The results support previous literature in

implying that sexism and victim blaming are strong predictors of RMA. The findings also suggest that the more sexist someone is, the more likely they are to endorse rape myths as a function of the blame they attribute towards victims of rape, resulting in a society seemingly supportive of rape culture. The influence that rape myths have on the victims of rape is an important area of study, that with even more research will have huge implication for not only the victims but wider society. Therefore, continued research is needed to further investigate these oppressive beliefs to try and finally stamp out these prejudice stereotypes.

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