

Rape Myths among a Sample of UTC Students

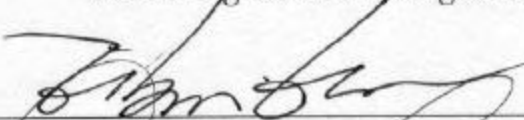
by
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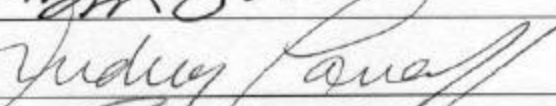
Departmental Honors Thesis
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Geography

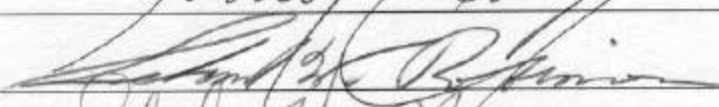
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Examination Date: March 19, 2002

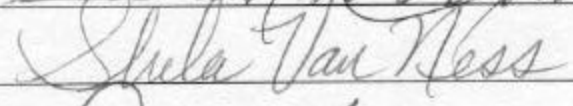
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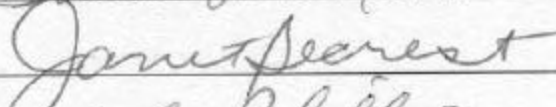
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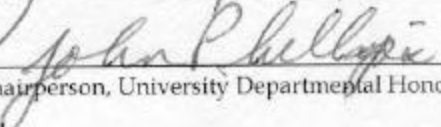












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Abstract:

Rape has a tremendous impact upon victims. The victim has to come to terms with the reality that she was raped, as well as face the new perceptions that other people will have about her. These perceptions will be a result of conceptions about rape that are not realistic. These unrealistic beliefs are called 'rape myths.'

There has been much research on rape myths for the following reasons: they may upset the victim, they provide justification for rapists to rape someone, and they may affect a woman's behavior because she may avoid activities she believes will lead her to be raped.

Research was completed on ten individuals using interviews and a focus group. Questions were open-ended to allow the participants to have flexible responses. The purpose was to explore the participants' perceptions about rape, and by comparing the responses given in an individual interview with those given in a group situation—a focus group—and comparing the gender differences in responses.

This study found that males blamed victims for not vocalizing oppositions to sex, and that males and females identified with rapists whose victims had not voiced opposition to sex. There was no significant difference in responses for having been in a group situation.

INTRODUCTION

I ask in my college classes what men do to protect themselves, and they say that they do nothing. I ask about women and we fill a blackboard with the ways women are careful. Fear changes behavior in a thousand ways-where and when women can go places, who they talk to and where they walk, study and live (Pipher 1994:219).

Women fear violence, and men initiate the violence they fear. This violence is in the form of physical and mental abuse, and the threat, both conscious and subconscious, of violence. One form of violence that fits both forms of abuse is rape. Rape abuses a woman (women are the majority of victims, although men are raped as well) physically and mentally because she may suffer physically afterwards, and she will be psychologically traumatized.

Rape is not only a misfortunate event that can shape a person's life; it is also an idea, or concept, within society and the individuals who make up society. These conceptualizations about rape are socially constructed, and are not always correct. Incorrect beliefs about rape, or rape myths, can impact the rapist and the victim through their internalization of these myths as well as through the reactions of other people who have also internalized these beliefs. Victims often react to rape with feelings of self-blame, fear, humiliation, and anger (Burgess 1974). Rape myths that blame the victim can cause emotional suffering; especially when people espouse these rape myths around the victim.

This paper will address the conceptualization of rape by beginning with an exploration of the concept of rape--by looking at rape legally, historically, and theoretically--as well as an exploration of previous research on rape myths. Previous research on rape myths and rape myth acceptance has focused almost exclusively on quantitative methods through the use of structured surveys. To bring a new perspective to research on rape myths, this paper explores the patterns in beliefs in a social and an individual context-by utilizing individual interviews and a focus group-as well as the variations generated by gender, while using a qualitative approach. The purpose of exploring these topics is to answer the following questions: Does social interaction influence an individual's response? How does gender shape a person's beliefs about rape?

This study aimed to provide beneficial data to rape crisis centers and other organizations that create education programs about rape. The results from this study will help these organizations understand people's perceptions about rape so that these perceptions can become realistic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rape on Campus

Twenty-five percent of women in college have been victims of rape or attempted rape; of these women, eighty-four percent have been acquainted with their assailants yet only five percent reported the crime to the police. Eight percent of college men have raped or attempted to rape someone after age fourteen (Warshaw 1994).

In other intimate areas, men also enact disrespect for women's individuality. Half of the men Muehlenhard (1985) surveyed believed that it was somewhat okay to force kissing with tongue contact, and one-fifth believed that it was somewhat okay to touch a female's genitals against her wishes. More than fifty percent of college men would "force a woman into having sex" if they knew they wouldn't be caught (Malamuth 1986: 159).

Perceptions about Rape

The beginning of control of female sexuality by men may have coincided with men learning to control animal sexuality through breeding. "The rise of the idea of property, in land, in herds, and in women, would have placed new emphasis on exclusive rights of sexual access, as promised by

certain forms of marriage. In an exploitive economy, virginity may have been valued in both land and women" (Taylor 1996:175).

As people equated women with property, rape became an act not against her, but instead, against her father or husband (Brownmiller 1975). There were several possible recourses to this. During Medieval Europe, virginity was so highly valued that if someone raped a virgin, it would be a dishonor brought upon the father. To end this dishonor, the people would put the women to death. Married women who were raped would have their heads shaved, would be publicly ostracized or beaten, and then possibly executed and dropped into the bogs (Taylor 1996). In 10th Century England, marriage was important for consolidating property. A raped woman could either choose to marry the rapist, thereby consolidating their property, or have him punished by execution and take his property. During this period in England, there was no recourse for non-virgin women who were victimized by men (Brownmiller 1975).

More recently, rape was defined as a "sexual assault in which a man uses his penis to commit vaginal penetration of a victim against her will" (Warshaw 1994:12), but the legal definition of rape has in the past few decades become increasingly gender-neutral. As of 1995, 38 states in the United States use gender-neutral definitions of rape, while only 13 define the rapist as male and the victim as female (Scarce 1997). In order to make rape

legally gender-neutral, the type of acts that constitute rape have come to include non-intercourse acts (acts which are not vaginal-penis penetration).

In the definition of rape, the broad scope of the phrase "against her (or his) will" is important to consider. The sexual assault can be against her will "by force or threats of force or when she is physically or mentally unable to give her consent" (Warshaw 1994:12). This specification means that a woman can be considered unable to consent when she is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, unconscious, or if the sexual pursuer threatens her livelihood, for example.

Current Rape Theories

There are many theories that explore why men rape; some of these theories are biological, psychological, and feminist. One sociobiological theory describes rape as being natural and biological (Thornhill 2001). Sociobiologists believe that natural "selection favored males who mated frequently" (Thornhill 2001:74). Rape is a sexual strategy that bypasses female choice in mates and provides a wider array of women to be chosen from by men. The ultimate purpose of rape, according to sociobiologists, is for men to increase their chances at having offspring. Robin Baker describes rape as an opportunity for women to obtain superior genes, and that "it is reproductively important to the woman that her body collect genes from only

the most successful of rapists. If she conceives to an inept rapist, doomed quickly to be caught...her male descendents would inherit unsuccessful characteristics' " (Taylor 1996: 84). Baker believes that women should avoid being raped so that they are only raped by the best rapists (Taylor 1996).

The biological theory of rape has many incorrect assumptions. Even Thornhill, one of these researchers, said "that only 'about 50 percent of rapes include ejaculation' " (Flanders 2001: 83). Secondly, until the 18th Century in primarily the West, people believed that it was necessary for a female to orgasm in order to conceive (Angier 1999). Finally, women have often induced abortion of the fetus. Abortion and birth control methods have existed in many cultures, and has been traced back historically to at least the Egyptians and ancient Greeks (Taylor 1996). All of these points separate rape from the desire to procreate as either they reduce the chances of pregnancy or they create the belief that rape will not end with conception.

This theory also forgets that females are not the only victims of rape. At times, medical centers have reported that as many as ten percent of their rape victims are male (Kasniak 1988, Kafman 1980). In approximately ninety percent of these reported cases, the rapists are male (King 1997). Obviously, these men were not raped for procreation.

There are various theories that attempt to explain a rapist's motivation based on the rapist's mental state. One example is the theory that sexual

trauma in childhood is the root cause of rape. Nicholas Groth found that one-third of sexual offenders had experienced sexual trauma. Diana Russell, who examined his study, said that there are two critiques of his study. His definition for sexual trauma was general; “any sexual activity that is emotionally upsetting or disturbing,” and his study only sampled incarcerated rapists, which have been found unrepresentative of ones that had not been reported (Russell 1984: 114-115).

Many other psychologists believe that rape is a symptom of mental illness. Some psychologists believe that rapists have personality disorders, are in a psychotic state, or are sexually deviant. Yet, these theories are usually based on incarcerated rapists as well. Studies on college students who have admitted to acts that fit the legal definition of rape found no differences in levels of psychopathy from other groups of students (Russell 1984).

Unlike the other theories on rape, most feminist theory--based upon more of a sociological viewpoint--places causation upon culture.

“For the first time in history, children are growing up whose earliest sexual imprinting derives not from a living human being, or fantasies of their own; since the 1960s pornographic upsurge, the sexuality of children has begun to be shaped in response to cues that are no longer human.... Today’s children and young men and women have sexual identities that spiral around paper and celluloid phantoms” (Wolf 1991: 162).

Through socialization, people learn to objectify women. Women try to fit into society's idealized expectation for beauty (Pipher 1994), and men begin to view women as objects for conquest (Warshaw 1994).

Through media and pornography, people increasingly believe that violence against women is normal. Men begin to view sexual violence as having positive consequences and accept this violence (Russell 2001). These violent images cause a similar effect in women; women become less upset with violence and view it as being less violent after viewing these images (Wolf 1991).

By socializing sexually violent beliefs about women, the culture places young people within the social structure of inequality between men and women. Rape becomes a means of social control over women (Russell 1984). Society creates rape scripts, stories about rape, to control women by telling them that if they participate in certain behaviors, they will be raped as a result. Although these stories can be true, they are largely mythological. These stories can be broken down into individual myths about rape. Check and Malamuth found that men who believed rape myths, accepted violence against women, and had adversial beliefs about sexual relations were more likely to report that they would rape a woman (Russell 1984). Rape myths are an important part of rape research as they affect both men, by increasing

probability of raping someone, and females, by unconsciously or consciously affecting their behavior.

Rape Mythology

Due to the influence that rape myths have upon people, they are the focus of this research. A rape myth is a “prejudicial, stereotyped, or a false belief about rape, rape victims, or rapists.” It often has the “effect of denying that many instances involving coercive sex are actually rapes” (Burt 1998: 129)¹. There are three characteristics of myths: “(1) they are false or apocryphal beliefs that are widely held; (2) they explain some cultural phenomenon; and (3) they serve to justify existing cultural arrangements” (Lonsway 1994: 134).

Rape myths vary, but most fit into three broad themes: (1) victim-blaming, (2) excusing/explaining the behavior of the rapist, or (3) denying that rapes happen. The victim blaming beliefs about rape usually claim that the victim’s actions caused the rape. The excusing/explaining myth attempts to justify the perpetrators lack of control. The last theme simply denies that rape is widespread. Men and women who accept rape myth beliefs less are

¹ Martha Burt’s definition in 1980 was the first definition of a rape myth, and it is still very applicable today. Lonsway and Fitzgerald have more recently created a definition they believe is improved: rape myths are “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (1994:134).

more likely to blame the rapist and less likely to blame the victim. They are also more likely to believe that the assault was unavoidable (Kopper 1996).

Rape myths are often used to deny that rape occurs. The FBI reports that only two percent of reported sexual assaults are false reports, which is not higher than false reports of other crimes (Repp 2001). Burt (1980) found that over half of the respondents believed that fifty percent of rapes are false reports, and that these women were “trying to get back at a man [they were] angry with” or were trying to disguise the cause of a pregnancy (229). Many of the myths that deny rape are typically related to acquaintance rape, and can often be used to justify rape (Johnson 1997). In a study done on a small Southern campus, 20.1 percent of the respondents believed that the majority of rapists are strangers to the victim. In the same population, 22.9 percent said that “a man had a right to assume a woman wants to have sexual intercourse with him if she allows him to touch her in a certain way”, 30.3 percent believed that a man could assume her consent if “she touches him in a sexual way”, and 42.4 percent believed that a man could assume her consent if “she has an oral sexual encounter” (1997:697). Such beliefs result in a consequent belief that many rapes are not really rapes at all, because the woman gave implied permission for sex even though she did not.

Rape denial, justifying rape, and victim blaming are intrinsically linked. A person who believes that most reports are false mistrusts women,

who are the majority of victims. When people feel that a rape is justified, they often believe that the woman would have behaved differently if she didn't really want to have sex (or she didn't have a right to say "no" in the circumstances of the assault). Cowan (2000) found that people associated female precipitation, or the female causing the rape, most strongly with partner and date rape. These myths seem to warn women that if they don't act in socially prescribed ways, then they will be punished. "The belief that only certain types of women are raped functions to obscure and deny the personal vulnerability of all women by suggesting that only other women are raped" (Lonsway 1994: 136).

Victim blaming myths are less common than myths that excuse the offender, but a significantly higher proportion of men believe these myths (Johnson 1997). Males agreed more than women that "most rapes could be prevented if women did not provoke them (males=26.6%, females=10.1%) and if women secretly did not want to be raped (males=14.5%, females=1.1%). A higher percentage of male respondents also agreed that a woman's past reputation should have something to do with the question of rape (males=37%, females 17.8%)" (Johnson 1997:699).

Most studies report that men have a higher acceptance of rape myths (Lonsway 1994, Johnson 1997, Freymeyer 1997, Hinck 1999, Caron 1997, Kleinke 1990, Kopper 1996). Explanations for this phenomenon vary. For

example, the “just world” hypothesis claims that men who believe in a just world also believe in the derogation of the rape victim. In these cases “people can restore their belief in a just world by eliminat[ing] the suffering of innocent victims or derogating them for their plight. Since it is not possible to reverse a crime of rape, rape victims are subject to derogation” (Kleinke 1990:344). This hypothesis did not hold for women who had greater empathy for victims. In contrast, men “who accept rape myths have little sympathy for victims because they have done something wrong” (Freymeyer 1997:486). Highly religious men are more likely to blame both the rapist and the victim because the men disagree with the behavior and therefore they view everyone involved negatively (1997).

The belief that the rapist is not entirely at fault is common. The two primary avenues that this is accomplished are through the belief that men have uncontrollable urges and the belief that rapists are psychotic. Both of these are related to the theories of causation of rape. These two beliefs are widespread, whereby 32.2 percent of college students in one sample believed that men have uncontrollable sexual urges (males=41.9%, females=25.3%), while 89.4 percent of the students believed that a rapist is emotionally disturbed (Johnson 1997). In actuality, the belief that rapists are psychotic is a myth; rapists aren’t very different from non-rapists. More than fifty percent

of college men have admitted that they would “force a woman into having sex” if they knew they wouldn’t be caught (Malamuth 1986: 159).

Research into rape myths has pointed out that myths frequently blame the victim and excuse the rapist. Research into rape myths has covered many bases, but it has weaknesses in examining myths in a social context.

Qualitative research methods can help to examine if there can be additional patterns in data. With this research, anthropological methods have been used to explore responses in different settings.

METHODOLOGY

To explore how social interaction within a group affects an individual’s response, individual interviewing and focus group interviewing were utilized as the research tool. Ten university students-five female and five male-were interviewed individually for twenty to thirty minutes. The participants were chosen using an opportunity sampling strategy.

The interviews were semi-structured; the questions were open-ended, and could be adapted if they needed to be. If the participant gave an answer to a question that the researcher believed needed to be explored, then the researcher asked additional questions. The questions that were asked of everyone, listed in Appendix I, covered the topics of the definition of rape, the motivations of the rapist, and behaviors of the victim that may have

contributed to the rape. These questions were chosen after an exploration of literature on rape myths. The created questions were calculated to specifically explore certain rape myths-for example, questions 3, 5, and 9-and to explore other myths by asking slightly more general questions-questions 2 and 6.

Prior to soliciting participants, the study was examined by the university's Human Subjects Committee to consider the nature of the study, and its perceived impact upon the participants. After the approval of the committee, the participants were solicited in the university's cafeteria and library.² These individuals were unknown to the researcher. They were asked to participate in an interview at that time, and a second one at a later date to be determined.³ All who volunteered signed consent forms.⁴ There was an approximately a fifty percent refusal rate. The reasons for refusal were primarily that they did not have time either at that moment, for the first interview, or they would not have time for the second interview later.⁵

² Eight of the ten interviewed were selected in this manner.

³ The interviewer offered to work with their schedules for the second interview.

⁴ Copy of consent in Appendix II.

⁵ If the potential participant asked the interviewer about the subject of the interview, then the interviewer replied that it was about "your beliefs on rape." This might have affected two male potential male participants.

The interviewer knew two of the males slightly⁶; they were solicited through an acquaintance. One of the males' interviews⁷ was improperly recorded, and it had to be redone. One of the female participants admitted following the interview that she was a rape victim.

All of the individual interviews were completed privately, with the assumption that at each specific location, no one else was near enough to overhear the conversation. The focus group interview took place in a small, private room. Each participant, in both interviews, was promised confidentiality. All interviews were audio-recorded, with the permission of the participant, and then transcribed verbatim.

A focus group allowed me to study the effect of a social context on rape myths. "The focus group is itself a social context" (Wilkinson 1999: 67) and public knowledge is shared in the focus group (Michell 1999). Originally, I planned to hold two focus groups, one with male and one with female participants,⁸ but not enough participants attended the male interview.⁹ Since the deadline for the completion of this research was near, there was

⁶ These are the two of the ten that were not selected as described in the paragraph above. They were solicited through the assistance of an acquaintance.

⁷ This person was one of the two males the interviewer had known prior to the interview.

⁸ Normally in focus group interviewing, there are numerous more focus groups. As this is a small research project, two were deemed sufficient for the number of participants involved.

⁹ According to Jean Schensul, a focus group should contain at least five individuals (1999). For this study, at least three people would be necessary for analysis in this project, although there was an awareness that there would likely be a difference in group dynamics. Only two males arrive for interview, so it was canceled.

insufficient time to reschedule the male focus group, so the focus group results will only indicate the female group response.

At the focus group, there were three females in attendance, and it lasted approximately forty minutes. Among the three participants, one of the participants was an adult student.¹⁰ Two other females took part in the individual interviews, but did not participate in the focus group. One of them could not meet at a time compatible with others, and the other could not be reached with the telephone number she gave.¹¹

This research was analyzed using content analysis. Among the individual interviews, the steps of analysis began by (1) quantifying the simple yes/no questions and then (2) examining the patterns in these simpler questions before (3) exploring patterns in the questions that would have varied responses and (4) categorizing these patterns. If possible, the more complex patterns were quantified--by determining the frequency of responses that fit the pattern--so as to compare with the rest of the sampled population.

With the beliefs about rape, there will be two focal points of research: the impact of a social situation and the impact of gender. This will explore

¹⁰ The university, where the research was completed, considers adult students to be above the age of 25. This participant seemed to be in her late 40s. Adult student make up approximately 13 percent of the student population (Jones 2002)

¹¹ The second of these other two females was unfortunately also not part of the intended research population--she was a recent immigrant. I did not become aware of this until after the interview was over, and an attempt was made later to find out how long she had been in the United States, but she could not be reached.

two questions: Does social interaction affect an individual's response? Does gender shape beliefs about rape? The comparison between the individual interviews and the focus group will only include the individuals who took part in the focus group.

RESULTS

The topics of the interviews fit into three broad categories¹²: the concept of rape, the rapist, and the victim. Within these categories I will discuss the themes that came forward as well as the gender differences in the beliefs about these concepts. Then I will discuss the results of my comparison of individual and social discussion of rape before finally discussing the rejection of rape myths.

Defining Rape

Most of the participants expressed a three-part definition of rape. Rape (1) involves intercourse or other sexual acts (2) that are nonconsensual (3) and forced. Variations in definitions either left out the second or third part of the definition, but one of the two was always included. Each of these three parts needs to be elaborated upon.

All of the participants believed that rape could involve more acts than simply vaginal penetration with a penis. Encompassing acts included anal

¹² The questions used for the semi-structured interviews are in Appendix I.

and oral sex. Three people specified that certain forms of touching could be considered rape: two of them said touching upon genitals, the other stated that it depended on what made the victim feel violated. Another participant said, “if the final act doesn’t happen, I would still consider that rape.”

Participants were most concerned with the concept of consent.¹³ Two points of concern whether there is consent in coercive rape, and whether the victim strongly vocalized opposition. Coercive rape was of importance to participants because the victim may say, “yes” to sex, even though they were unwillingly coerced into the act. Participants were also concerned whether the victim stated “no”, because if “no” is not said, then the rapist may not be aware that they do not have consent from the victim.

The third part of the definition, force, came up in several of the definitions that people gave about rape. Six people used the word within their definitions and the others used it somewhere else during the interview. Force can have more than one meaning. Force can be either physical force or it can be emotional force in the form of coercion. The physical meaning had the most frequent use; “forcefully forcing yourself on somebody”, “sadistic way of forcing someone”, and “seditious, aggressive approach” are examples of this. The other meaning of force, which people occasionally referred to as “emotional rape,” is a form of coercion. Two people stated during the

¹³ Consent will be discussed further with the topics of coercion and victim passivity.

interview that coercion is a form of rape, and a few others echoed similar sentiments. One respondent considered coercive rape to be a “rape of emotions and her mind...and sometimes that can be the worst kind.”

The preference for thinking of rape as being physically forceful is likely because it makes it easier for people to understand why the situation could not be avoided. Within my questions, I gave examples and asked if they were rape; the following are results from the interviews:

Table 1

Coercion	Total¹⁴	Female¹⁵	Male¹⁵
If an individual was threatened with physical violence, but none was actually used, is it rape?	8	5	3
Do you think if a person is told they would lose their job unless they had sex, and they did, is that rape?	4	2	2
If someone threatened to break up with their partner unless their partner has sex with them, is it rape?	4	3	1
Coercion equals rape	2	1	1

With all three of these examples, rape is not physically forced upon a person, but in each of these cases, the victim did not take part in the act freely and consensually. Yet, these examples were not considered to be rape by everyone.

The first example, the threat of violence, is more consistent with traditional views of rape. All of the women agreed that this was rape. One of the participants, a male, stated that it was rape because “the person would be

¹⁴ This is out of ten possible people. These people were stating that they agreed that the act was rape.

¹⁵ This is out of five people.

scared for their life.” Another male said “its kind of obvious” that it is rape. Despite that these two men believed that it was obvious, two other males did not quite see it that way. One male said that it was rape only if the female was in a situation where she could not get away, but “obviously in (a) public situation, I wouldn’t consider that to be rape.” The other male said, “I think I would protest to the end. I think if you’re willing, no matter how you’re coerced, then it would be hard to consider that rape.” Furthermore, he stated that it would be hard to consider that a rape because, “there wouldn’t be any signs of what you would normally consider forcible entry.”

As my second question, I used an example about a person having to choose between keeping their job and having sex with an employer. Legally, this falls under sexual harassment, but it could be considered rape based on the rationale that individual did not freely consent to sex. Among the participants, there was equal disagreement between the males and females. One of the females stated that there were “too many alternatives besides having sex...as an individual you still have a choice there. You could still say “no” and walk away.” Two people, a male and a female, contrasted this by comparing the loss of a job with the loss of you life, “it could be a knife, it could be a gun, or it’s your job. (They are a) tool of leverage, like a gun. The consequences of losing a job can be very hard, like getting shot or stabbed.”

This same person just quoted, the male, stated a somewhat contradictory view when it came to a partner using a relationship as leverage to get sex. Even though the person in the job example would like to continue employment, he states that a woman in the case of the partner example is not a rape victim because she is “essentially saying ‘I want to continue this relationship’...she’s consenting to the sex...”. He is not the only one that objected to this being rape. Although the male participants were less likely to consider it to be rape, two women did not consider it to be rape either. One stated that “the minute you can’t walk away from an individual, I consider that rape.” The fact that she was not physically forced to have sex caused the disagreement. “Rape is something that a person does not have a choice about” is how one male put it. In contrast, the view of it being rape had support as well, “it’s a manipulation, a kind of blackmail” and “it’s forcing someone to do something they might not want to do at they time or they will face negative consequences.” They point out that there was not truly consent; the victim did not want to have sex.

In the interviews, there were also several other questions that explored people’s perceptions about rape. The responses to these questions are mostly straightforward, and provide insight into the people that I interviewed. For this reason, the results are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Perceptions of Rape	Total	Female	Male
Do you think rape takes place more frequently between strangers or between people who know each other? ¹⁶	9	5	4
Can rape take place between two friends?-yes	10	5	5
Can rape take place between two people who were dating?-yes	10	5	5
Can rape take place between two people who were sexually active with each other?-yes	10	5	5
Can rape take place between a married couple?-yes	10	5	5 ¹⁷
If both people drank to intoxication and sex was forced upon one of them, is it rape?-yes	9	4	5
If on person drank to intoxication and then forced another person to have sex, is it rape?-yes	10	5	5
If one person drank to intoxication and then was forced into having sex, is it rape?-yes	10	5	5

Rapist Motivations

Is everyone capable of committing rape? Most of the participants interviewed did not believe that is the case. Three people believed that everybody is capable of committing rape. One of the male individuals who disagreed with this believed that “there are people who would be incapable of rape, (just as there are) people that would (rather) die than kill (in defense of their own life).” Instead, there are certain types of people who commit rape. Rapists were characterized as aggressive, crazy, insecure, misogynistic, angry, and abused. These characteristics were accepted as partly causing the rape.

¹⁶ These responses are that rape takes place more frequently between people who know one another.

¹⁷ Two of the males were tentative with stating that this was rape.

Often, there was an opposite view of why rapists commit rape that people only mentioned when discussing date rape. “If you’re on a date, you just want to get off (have sex),” as one male stated. Another male believed that most rapists, “other than (in) date rape, and even some of date rape,” had been hurt in their past, had been abused. In the case of date rape, he believed that the rapist didn’t “consider it rape,” and therefore the rapist believed it to be normal sex. Another person stated, “the rapist would grow a desire for a person, and could not control (this desire).” The idea that sexual desire was part of the reason for rape was much stronger among men than among women. Two women did not believe that rape was for sex; one said, “I think anybody that commits rape knows the difference between sex and rape.”

Table 3

<i>Why Rapists Rape</i>	Total	Female	Male
Rapist wants sex	8	3	5
Rapist was abused	6	3	3
Rapist is angry	6	3	3
Rapist desires power/control	5	4	1
Rapist raised badly	4	1	3
Rapist mentally ill	3	1	2

Female participants, as shown above, brought up the idea that rapists rape for power and control. Rapists “want control over something.”¹⁸ “Its about power.”¹⁹ There is “a need for a man to conquer, an unhealthy need for

¹⁸ This individual refuted the idea that rape was about sex, but she also believed that men are more sexually oriented. She discussed this in great detail.

¹⁹ This participant discussed the her belief that women need to vocalize “no,” even though she believed that men should be able to tell when a woman doesn’t want to have sex. She seemed worried that men might be oblivious to the fact that they were committing rape.

him to feel that he is the man.” Only one male thought something similar, “you (the rapist) want to be in control.”

Men were more likely to mention sexual desire as a motivating factor, but they were also more likely to discuss the idea of the rapist having a bad environment while growing up. This was from a combination of beliefs from men, and it was sometimes related to the idea of abuse (although there was a separate category made for abuse). This category was mishmash of statements; all the beliefs put into this category were related to childhood. One male believed that there was abuse between the parents, and that “sexuality wasn’t stressed” for the rapist.” Another male believed that rapists had grown up in aggressive situations, and had “been taught to be misogynists.”

During the interviews, I also asked the participants whether the rapist knew that they were committing rape.²⁰ While asking this, I attempted to differentiate between the different forms of acquaintance rape to see if any differences would become apparent:

Table 4

<i>Rapist is Aware that Rape has Occurred</i>	Total	Female	Male
With a friend	6	4	2
With person dating	2	1	1
With previous sexual partner	6	3	3
With spouse	7	4	3

²⁰ The possibility of rapist being unaware that they are committing rape is discussed also with victim passivity under the victim section of the results.

The biggest gender difference was in the case of a friend raping a friend. Men, in contrast to women, believed that the situation was similar to date rape, and that the rapist was moving the friendship relationship further than the victim wanted. This somehow developed into men rationalizing that the rapist was unaware that his friend did not want to have sex.

With the altered relationship, from date to previous sexual partner, people became increasingly negative to the idea that the rapist would not know that he was committing rape. One person stated, "If they've already reached such an intimate level, there must have been some dialogue as (to what) each one would like from the other." The rapist would be aware of what is normal sex for them, and even though she didn't say "no", he should have been able to tell that she did not want to have sex. Forced sex in such relationships is paralleled with abuse, "you hear about women being abused in the marriage so I'm sure raping is a part of it."

The Victim: How to Avoid Becoming One

The discussion of women and victims of rape went into activities that women may do that may increase their chance of being raped, but it generally centered on how a woman could avoid rape (if the participant believed that

was possible). I will discuss these with a particular focus upon the importance of the victim vocalizing “no.”²¹

Table 5

<i>Increase Women’s Chance of Rape</i>	Total	Female	Male
Any woman can be raped	5	2	3
Women who “put themselves into situations”	5	2	3
Women who have little confidence/self-esteem	3	2	1
Women who are unaware of surroundings	2	1	1
Women who act suggestive	1	0	1
Women who have long hair	1	1	0
Women who are petite	1	1	0

Several people stated that any woman can be raped, but then a few of these people still gave suggestions of what could increase a woman’s chances. One phrase that came up was, “don’t put yourself into a situation.” These situations were varied: do not walk alone at night, do not go down dark alleys,²² and be careful. “Don’t put yourself in a situation” implies that the victim has some fault for what happen, even though the rapist is the person that committed the act.

One example of ‘not putting yourself into a situation’ was very intriguing. One male said, “she shouldn’t have to find an escort everywhere, that would not be right, but she should be reasonable. I can’t walk into the middle of a gunfight and not expect to die.” Comparing rape to a gunfight

²¹ Half of the participants expressed that it was important for the victim to say “no”.

²² Dark alleys were mentioned at least three times in the course of the interviews. Obviously, this idea is from other influences because there are not many alleys in this area where rape could occur.

was unusual; the belief seemed to be that if a woman went out, she should expect to be raped.

Low self-esteem and low confidence were associated with increased probability of rape. Participants believed that passive people were more likely to be targeted, or were more likely to end up in situation with a dominant person because they did not have the confidence to leave the situation. “I guess they’re weak emotionally, and probably tend to put themselves into situations where the other person is more dominant. Therefore, they’re eaten.”

Another type of passivity was frequently brought up: the need for the victim to vocalize opposition to the rapist. The male participants in the interviews primarily brought this up. Women are “quietly letting it happen and wishing the whole time that it didn’t happen, then later saying they were raped. How do you expect the other person to know?” Another male said, “Why don’t you just kick him in the nuts or something, tell him to get off of you. It’s just a waste of...why would you go and do that to yourself?” He later acquiesced and said, “She has a right to be afraid.”

The idea that women have to vocalize “no” is a victim-blaming strategy that does not appear as one. Women are told to say “no” if they do not want to have sex, but that is not the only sign of opposition. It ignores that women are active partners in consensual sexual relationships; it assumes

female passivity in sexual relationships. These men frequently brought up the importance of saying “no” as a defense. There is a fear among men that they will be blamed for what they had thought was mutual sex. Two men questioned whether nonconsensual acts were rape if the victim did not vocalize “no” or did not fight. “Someone (the rapist) usually in that state of mind is not in a rage, and they can be reasoned with. If somebody said to ‘stop,’ then they would.” The other male mentioned that there would be other signs of opposition, but then said, “The definition (of rape), it’s somebody protesting through the whole event. If you’re not doing that, then you’re just selling yourself out, and both of you (rapist and the victim) are in the wrong.”

Table 6

<i>Victim-Blaming</i>	Total	Female	Male
Woman needs to communicate “no”	5	1	4
Women should know more about rape	3	1	2
Lie about rape=False Report	4	1 (out of 4)	3

During the interview, I asked, “Do you think anyone would lie about being raped.” The phrasing of this question was a mistake, but interesting data came from the phrasing of it. I had meant to find out if participants believed there are false reports about rape, but a few interpreted the question to mean that the woman was too afraid to tell people that she had been raped-that she lied saying, “I have not been raped.” Only one female took the

question the way I had intended, but three males also understood it the way that I had meant. This suggests that there is a different mind-frame about rape. I had hoped I would be able to link this phenomenon to other rape myths, but I could not find a link with this small sample size. The two men who believed that the girl lied saying, "I have not been raped," when she really had, seemed to have the highest number of other rape myths.

The victim was most commonly accused of filing a false report because she regretted the sex (1 female;3 males said this) or she was angry with the man (2 males stated this). One female said that the victim falsely reported to get attention or money.

Individual vs. Social Group

One of the two research goals of this project was to find out how a social context effects rape beliefs. To examine this, a focus group was completed with three female individuals who had previously been interviewed. I will discuss how the participants' responses changed, but unfortunately, there was little data to support the theory that a social context changes responses.

The first female spoke the least of anyone in the group, and she had to be drawn into the conversation a few times. During her previous interview, she did not believe that rapists had any particular characteristics, but during

the group interview, she suggested the possibility that rapists shared a common personality. She also changed her approximation of how many reports of rape are false; she originally said 20-25%, but later she said 10%. She also added suggestions in the group interview: some women may lead men on by accident by being nice and rapists may rape for the thrill of it. Her biggest change was discussing how rapists rape for power, and this happened after someone else stated that that was the reason why men rape.

The second female²³ who took part in the focus group was much more participatory. Even though she took part in discussion much more, she tended to repeat what she had said in the first interview. There were two areas that she had some change in. Previously, she had said that rapists rape for control²⁴, but in the focus group she suggested that the first time a rapist rapes, it is for the adrenaline rush. She said that rapists find it fun to take sex. The second change that she had was in her discussion of why men cannot understand rape. She had discussed in the first interview that men were more judgmental and more sexually oriented. In the focus group, she suggested that men cannot understand rape because they are used to being aggressive in sex. The answers in the two interviews are different, but are not mutually exclusive to one another.

²³ This individual was the adult student mentioned in the subjects section of Methodology.

²⁴ She also briefly mentioned that the rapist may have been abused.

The final participant was the most vocal in the group interview. She became more accepting that coercive sexual strategies are a form of rape than she had been in the previous interview, but not dramatically more. Her discussion had little other changes, but she added many ideas that she did mention in the first interview. She included how men are terrified of being accused of rape, and how men think of women as sex objects.

Rape Myth Denial

In the interviews, there was a process of denying rape myths as well as accepting them. Occasionally, some individuals brought up certain rape myths to balk at them. For example, when I asked one male, “are there particular types of women who are more likely to be raped?”, he replied, “Now you’re going to try to classify women again. You want me to say something like if they’re sluts or something. No, I don’t believe in that.” Six people brought up a total of eleven rape myths, and said that these myths were wrong. Women were slightly more likely to do this (four of the six people), but one male denied more rape myths than anyone else (he brought up four myths that he recognized as so, two females mentioned two each). The myths that people recognized were a few victim-blaming ones (drinking and dress of victim means the victim has fault), as well as some excusing

rapist myths (it's okay to rape your wife; rapists rape because they need sex).

The participants were capable of dismissing rape myths as false.

DISCUSSION

My individual interviews produced much data. Overall, men were more likely to blame the victim and excuse the rapist. The most frequent way this was done was by accusing the victim of being too passive, and not vocalizing opposition. This belief has not been well studied in previous rape myth research. Victims were also blamed for not being aware of their surroundings, or, as two people stated, for "putting themselves into a situation," which ignores that if the rapist had decided not to rape her, she would have never been raped.

The participants viewed the rapists in two different ways-an invalid dichotomy, often simultaneously. The rapist was viewed as a distant person, separated from the participants. This person was angry, abused, and possibly crazy. These rapists raped victims without the victim precipitating the attack. The other rapist that people viewed was a reasonable rapist, and the participants could identify with him. This person was an unfortunate man who had believed that he was participating in consensual sex; the victim had not vocally voiced her opposition, and she later accused him of rape.

Male participants were more likely to accuse the victim of not voicing opposition. They were also more likely to strongly believe that there are two different types of rapists. Women were more likely to believe in the first type of rapist: a crazy, angry, abused person. Women were also more likely to believe that the rapist raped for power.

Men and women, as shown frequently in the analysis, lack agreement about why women are raped by men. Both share similar beliefs about one type of rapist-that he is angry, crazy, and abused-because they share knowledge from the commonly held culture, but they differ on the belief that rapists are to blame for not recognizing when a woman does not want to have sex. Women do not want to be in a similar situation; they believe that men should be able to recognize signs of when women do not want to have sex. Men, on the other hand, do not want to be blamed if by chance they did not recognize such signs. By blaming the victim for not saying “no,” then they believe they have less to fear from being accused of rape.

CONCLUSION

The individual participants revealed a great deal about their perceptions on rape. Rape was discerned as being very complex. This study suggests that people have a disjointed view of the motivation of rapists; they are unable to combine the conflicting beliefs they have. Even though they had

numerous ideas on why rapists rape, many of these were myths. The research participants sympathized with victims, but had inconsistencies with their beliefs about victims-particularly with how the rapes could have been prevented. These conclusions would be helpful for educators of rape prevention. With an awareness of what the participants of their own programs may believe, they can work to dissolve rape myths, thereby easing discomfort of victims and perhaps preventing rape.

Limitations of Research

There were several problems with this research. The research had a small sample size. Originally, I planned to interview twenty people with two focus groups. It was later cut to ten people, and then to one focus group. The results from this research cannot be considered representative of the general population, nor can it be considered representative of the general population of students at the university from which this was taken.

The social context versus individual context data was inconclusive due to there only being one focus group. Even if there had been two focus groups, it would have been unrepresentative of many social contexts because the groups were separated by gender. Another problem with the focus groups is that the people were individually interviewed about rape prior to the

interview; this means that they had time to think about the subject of rape. The only way to avoid this would have been to have a larger sample that was random so that it would have been necessary to not re-interview the same people.

This sample was not random. The participants were chosen based on opportunity. There was not any motivation for people to take part in this research; it was volunteer-based. This may have increased the chance for bias.

Finally, the researcher for this project was female. This might have had no impact on the female interviews, but it could have impacted the male interviews. The males could have felt uncomfortable discussing rape with a female.

Appendix I

1. Please use your own words to describe your way of defining rape
2. For what reasons do you think people commit rape. Do you think everyone is capable of committing rape? Is there a particular type of people who would commit rape? (If yes) What types of people would commit rape?
3. Do you think that rape takes place more frequently between strangers or between people who know each other?
4. a. Can rape take place between two friends?
(If the answer is yes), why?
Do you think that the person who committed the rape knew what he/she is doing?
(If the answer is no), why not?

b. Can rape take place between two people who were dating?
(If the answer is yes), why?
Do you think that the person who raped knew that they were committing rape?
(If the answer is no), why not?

c. Can rape take place between two people who were sexually active with each other?
(If the answer is yes), why?
Do you think that the person who raped knew that they were committing rape?
(If the answer is no), why not?

d. Can rape take place between two married couple?
(If the answer is yes), why?
Do you think that the person who raped knew that they were committing rape?
(If the answer is no), why not?

5.
 - a. Do you think if a person was told that they would lose their job unless they had sex, and they did, is that rape?
 - b. If they were threatened with physical violence, but none was actually used, is it rape?
 - c. If someone threatened to break up with their partner unless their partner has sex with them, is it rape?
6. Are there particular kinds of women who are more likely to be raped? (If the answer is yes), can you describe the characteristics of this type of person?
7. Do you think a woman could prevent being raped? If yes, how?
8. Do you think anyone would lie about being raped?
If yes, why?
If no, why not?
9.
 - a. If both people drank to intoxication and sex was forced upon one of them, is it rape?
 - b. If one person drank to intoxication and then forced another person to have sex, is it rape?
 - c. If one person drank to intoxication and then was forced into having sex, is it rape?
11. Can a man be raped? Why/why not? (If no, then stop with this question)
 - a. Why do you think a man would be raped?
 - b. Who would rape a man? Why would that person rape a man?
12. Do you think that men and women differ in knowledge about rape?
Why?

Appendix II

Consent Form

I, _____, have given permission to be interviewed for research purposes on a topic that might be considered sensitive. The researcher has provided a full explanation of the nature of this interview. I am aware that I will be interviewed individually, and during this I will be audio recorded. I am also aware that if I am selected, I will have the option to participate in a group interview. The individual interview will last approximately thirty to forty-five minutes, and the group interviews will likely last an hour. I am aware that my participation in either individual and the group interviews are voluntary. At any time, I may discontinue my participation in the interviews. I am aware that my identity will be kept anonymous by the researcher, and that information taken from this interview may be published.

signature

date

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