

Examining Perceptions of Sex Offenders as
Influenced by Gender Variations and Rape Myth

Acceptance

by

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ABSTRACT

While there is a good amount of research focused on sex offenders as a whole, only a limited number of studies examine variations within these offenders, how people view the variations, and why their opinions may differ. This study focuses on the interconnections among gender norms, rape myth acceptance, and the perception of sex offenders by administering an online student survey. The survey measured rape myth acceptance and adherence to traditional gender roles to see how they affected perceptions of sex offenders. Perceptions were measured using vignettes that were varied by gender and the situation described. Results showed that higher rape myth acceptance would decrease the blameworthiness of the offender, that the offender was seen as more blameworthy when the offender was a male, and that women tended to see the offender as more blameworthy than men did. The type of sexual situation did not have an impact on blameworthiness, nor did adherence to gender roles. The findings support past research that suggests that rape myth acceptance can impact people's opinions about offenders in sexual situations and specifically that these opinions differ depending on the gender of the offender. With some offenders being viewed as more blameworthy than others, it is necessary to examine sex offense laws to see how they may disproportionately affect some offenders and implement harsher punishments than the public may deem necessary.

Keywords: sex offender, blameworthiness, rape myth acceptance, gender roles

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Research has shown that public opinion heavily influences political policymaking (Burstein, 2003). Even when political organizations are considered, the views of the public remain an important indicator of what policies will be created and supported. The importance of public opinion in creating laws means that in order for effective laws to be introduced, they need to be supported by people in the community. Unfortunately, the public is not always educated about what types of policies would be the most beneficial. One such area of public interest would be that of sex offenders and sex crimes. Current sex offense laws are not protecting the community in the way that they were intended to. One such law would be Megan's Law, which originated in New Jersey and made it so that sex offender registration was mandatory and that the public would be notified. Despite public support for the law, studies have shown that most people have never accessed the registry online and even expressed that they were not interested in the information available and did not want to know about sex offenders in their communities (Sample, Evans, & Anderson, 2011). Although some members of the community may not express interest in the information available on sex offender registration sites, sex crimes remain a strong source of public outrage (Frei, 2008). This heightened emotionality leads to the creation of laws, such as Megan's Law, that may not be the best response to the issue at hand.

To understand what types of laws will be effective in reducing the threat of sex crimes, researchers and policy makers need to first understand the public's beliefs about the issue. Studies have shown that there is a widespread belief that sex offenders are more

dangerous than other types of offenders, partly because the public believes that they have very high recidivism rates (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007). In one study, 76% of the participants believed that all sex offenders should be subject to community notification, no matter their specific offense (Levenson et al., 2007). The issue with this type of labelling implies that all sex offenders should be treated the same, but is that how people really feel?

The term “sex crimes” covers a wide variety of criminal actions and offenders. It is important to understand public perceptions about different types of offenders if there is a possibility for laws that relate to different types of offenders, rather than grouping them in one category. For example, research has shown that a woman convicted of a sex crime may be perceived as less dangerous than a man convicted of the same crime (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013). Difference in opinion regarding male and female offenders requires more research about why the public may support harsher penalties for certain types of sex offenders over others.

The leading explanation for disparities in perceptions of male and female sex offenders may be a result of the nation’s conceptualization of gendered sexual stereotypes. As a whole, women are seen as sexually passive, while males are viewed as the aggressive initiators (Wiederman, 2005). These gender stereotypes contribute to the creation of myths about the types of sexual assaults or rapes that are most likely to occur. If someone is under the impression that rape can only occur with a female victim and male perpetrator, then it would make sense that they would not see a convicted female offender as much of a threat. The view of females being less of a threat for sexual crimes

may be due to a smaller number of these crimes compared to sex crimes committed by males; however, recent research has shown that there may be more female offenders than is typically assumed (Stemple, Flores, & Meyer, 2016). Whether people believe that women are genuinely less threatening or that they are unlikely to commit a sex crime, the end result of males being viewed as the main perpetrators remains the same.

Examining how gender stereotypes and rape myths influence public perceptions of sex offenders could be crucial in finding the next steps to ensure that the legal response to sex offenders is as helpful as it can be. In order to create new laws or change existing ones, the public needs to support the movement. To ensure that effective sex offense laws are created, it is important to understand how the public currently views sex offenders. This study examines the interconnections among gender norms, rape myth acceptance, and perceptions of sex offenders. These social factors could be the key in developing effective legislation that both eases the public's mind and serves to prevent further crimes from occurring.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Opinions on Sex Offenders

In general, the label “sex offender” results in greater public support for retributive laws aimed at perpetrators of sex crimes (Harris & Socia, 2014; Kernsmith, Craun, & Foster, 2009; Levenson, Brannon, Fornthey, & Baker, 2007; Pickett, Mancini, & Mears, 2013). Multiple studies have shown that a majority of the public would support stigmatizing laws (e.g., Jessica's Law, which requires a mandatory minimum 25-year

sentence for first-time sex offenders with child victims), even if there was no evidence to show that the laws were effective (Levenson et al., 2007; Pickett et al., 2013). These laws likely stem from the common belief that sex offenders are at a high risk of re-offending and are usually resistant to treatment or rehabilitation efforts (Harris & Socia, 2014; Levenson et al., 2007; Sample & Bray, 2003). According to Levenson and colleagues (2007), this belief increases fear of victimization among the community.

Punitive attitudes towards sex offenders tend to be grouped within specific demographics. Factors like race, educational level, political views, parental status, and gender affect opinions of sex offenders. Whites, along with those with less education, generally hold more punitive views toward sex offenders (Pickett et al., 2013). Political conservatism is also a strong predictor of punitive rather than rehabilitative responses (Pickett et al., 2013). Of the different types of sex offenders (e.g. violent offenders, pedophiles, etc.), respondents tend to report that they would be most afraid of offenders with child victims (Kernsmith et al., 2009; Sample, Evans, & Anderson, 2011). One study found that those most likely to be in fear of sex offenders were parents with young children or those who lived in areas with a lot of minors (Pickett, Mancini, & Mears, 2013). Consistent with the fear of offenses against children, parents were more likely to report higher levels of anger towards sex offenders living in their community than non-parents (Levenson et al., 2007).

As parents are the group most likely to fear sex offenders, it is understandable that the public has strong feelings about statutory rape specifically. The public largely agrees that an adult having sexual relations with a child is wrong; however, the results are

unclear when other factors, such as a seemingly consensual relationship or smaller age gap, are introduced (Horvath & Giner-Sorolla, 2007; Oudekerk, Farr, & Reppucci, 2013; Sahl & Keene, 2010). Research looking specifically at statutory rape has consistently found that women judge the scenarios more harshly than men do (Fromuth, Holt, & Parker, 2002; Sahl & Keene, 2010). As a whole, men in relationships with girls was also viewed more negatively than women in relationships with boys (Fromuth et al., 2002; Horvath & Giner-Sorolla, 2007; Sahl & Keene, 2010). Young girls were assumed to suffer the most damage from these relationships, which instilled feelings of anger and disgust in the respondents (Horvath & Giner-Sorolla, 2007). These feelings were especially prominent in adult-adolescent relationships where the adult was a teacher and the adolescent a student (Fromuth et al., 2002; Sahl & Keene, 2010). Interestingly, when these types of studies were conducted with young adults, a large majority (74%) of respondents believed that these types of relationships should not be a crime if the relationship is consensual and the age gap falls within six years (Oudekerk et al., 2013).

Besides statutory rape, another common source of public discussion is acquaintance rape—that is, a rape involving two people who already know each other. While cases of statutory rape usually place blame on the offender, cases of acquaintance rape are likely to involve examination of the victim’s role in the encounter as well (Angelone, Mitchell, & Grossi, 2015; Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Cohn, Dupuis, & Brown, 2009; Viki & Abrams, 2002). Research reveals that victims were seen as less responsible for the situation when they tried to resist and had respectable reputations (Angelone et al., 2015; Cohn et al., 2009). Endorsements of traditional sex roles and

sexism relate to reduced credibility for the victim and more rationalizing on behalf of the offender (Angelone et al., 2015; Viki & Abrams, 2002). Although women are less likely than men to minimize the severity of acquaintance rape, there are still much fewer hostile feelings towards these offenders than offenders in statutory rape cases (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005).

Women consistently report higher levels of fear regarding sex offenders living in the area when compared to men (Kernsmith et al., 2009; Levenson et al., 2007). They are also more likely to agree with community notification laws of all kinds for all types of sex offenders (Kernsmith et al., 2009; Levenson et al., 2007). These notification laws include Megan's law, which requires convicted sex offenders to be registered, and for that registration to be available to the public (Levenson et al., 2007). Women report that they check the sex offender registries for their neighborhoods more often than men do, and women are also more likely to receive information about sex offenders in the area from alternative sources (e.g., word of mouth) (Sample et al., 2011). Women are also more likely to view certain types of sex crimes differently than men. For example, one study showed that women view teacher-student sexual involvement more negatively than men do (Mackelprang & Becker, 2017). These types of crimes are often viewed as especially heinous because they involve the victimization of a child who needs to be protected at all costs (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Kendriks, 2010).

One of the primary sources the public's information regarding sex crimes and offenders comes from the media. There have been multiple studies indicating the reliance that the public has on the media as an informant regarding these types of crimes and

resulting legislation (Proctor, Badzinski, & Johnson, 2002; Quinn, Forsyth, & Mullen-Quinn, 2004; Sample & Kadleck, 2008). Many of these studies focused on the public's knowledge about Megan's Law and whether it was effective. Results indicated that most of the respondents were not well-informed about the law and that heavier media consumption was associated with stronger beliefs that the law was effective (Proctor et al., 2002; Quinn et al., 2004). There also is evidence that the media, rather than reporting accurate depictions of the most common sex crimes, chooses to focus on sensationalized crimes that pair sexual imagery with violence (Quinn et al., 2004). The increased attention given to sex crimes in the media over the years is not reflective of the reality of relatively stable rates of sex offenses (Quinn et al., 2004). The idea that sex crimes are a major social problem that needs to be dealt with results in moral panic for members of the community who are filled with acute fear and disgust.

The moral panic that the public feels in response to sex offenders is a result of the media perpetuating myths about these offenders (Budd & Mancini, 2016; Socia & Harris, 2016). When the media chooses to focus on only certain sex crimes, the public gets the impression that most sex offenders fit within the same typology. The media displays sex offenders as violent strangers who need to be kept away from the general public (Budd & Mancini, 2016; Socia & Harris, 2016). This "stranger danger" fear leads to beliefs that residency restrictions are effective in reducing sex crime recidivism (Budd & Mancini, 2016). Public policies created out of this moral panic are sometimes known as "crime control theater", where the passage of certain types of legislation creates the appearance of crime control without actual, strong results (Socia & Harris, 2016). Whether these laws

are effective or not, the public still believes in their ability to prevent future sex crimes, indicating that they hold symbolic value to people (Koon-Magnin, 2015). The media depicts sex offenders as a homogeneous group and the public buys into this image and supports legislation designed to combat these specific offenders. Moral panic leads to “crime control theater” influencing which laws are created and supported, no matter their actual efficacy.

Prior research indicates that people support harsh penalties for sex offenders, largely as a result of misleading media depictions. Sex offenders are viewed as more dangerous than other types of offenders and inspire a strong public response. Researchers understand that people tend to be more punitive when it comes to sex offenders, but it is still not yet understood why these attitudes exist, and whether they are the same for all categories of sex offenders. Why do people especially dislike sex offenders? Do they feel the same when there is a female sex offender instead of a male? What about differences in victims, would that have an effect on how people view the offender?

Social Scripts and Gender Roles

Social scripts are the acceptable behaviors subconsciously agreed upon by the members of a certain community. These scripts act as internal instructions on appropriate or expected behavior, especially when interacting with others (Hundhammer & Mussweiler, 2012; Wiederman, 2005). The information provided by social scripts allows individuals to understand another person’s behaviors and emotions and gives them guidelines for their own responses. People typically behave appropriately in interactions with others and, consequently, most exchanges remain civil. Other times, the social

scripts of two people do not align, and this leads to conflict. The reasoning for these differences in social scripts could be explained in two ways. The scripts themselves could be genetic, passed on biologically from one generation to the next and resulting in “natural” and unavoidable differences between people. An alternative explanation is that social scripts are learned through socialization and, thus, people with different life experiences have different internalized instructions (Hundhammer & Mussweiler, 2012; Wiederman, 2005). Whether they are biological or sociological in nature, social scripts are communicated through different communities via individual interactions and cultural depictions (e.g. mass media, traditions, etc.).

An example of behaviors formed using social scripts are gender roles, which are expectations about appropriate behaviors for males and females. These roles contribute to a society’s understanding of what is appropriate in social situations ranging from every day interactions to specific events (i.e., sexual encounters). Since social scripts are developed through socialization and community input, different cultures have varying gender role expectations (Chia, Moore, Lam, Chuang, & Cheng, 1994). In the United States, there are clear differences in the gender roles for men and women. Overall, cisgender, heterosexual men are expected to be assertive and to exude a sense of confident independence (Fisher & Pina, 2013; Wiederman, 2005). This is encompassed in the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is the idea that traditional masculinity involves men being in a dominant position over women in society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Among other roles, males are more encouraged to take an interest in sexuality, where they are pushed to be the aggressors and the ones to initiate sexual

encounters (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013; Wiederman, 2005). Gender roles urge men, the dominant figures, to take on the role of the initiator in sexual conduct because that enforces their authority and results in their personal pleasure (Murray, 2017). This emphasis on hegemonic masculinity and “making the first move” makes it difficult to perceive men as sexual victims even though they may be feigning their dominance to conform to social scripts (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013; McCormick, 2010; Murray, 2017). The social pressure for men to enjoy sex can sometimes lead to the erroneous claim that men cannot truly be the victims of sexual assault or rape, as they are the ones taking the first steps to pursue these encounters (McCormick, 2010).

On the other hand, women are supposed to be an overall unthreatening being (Denov, 2003). Women are perceived to be more nurturing and caring since the feminine role is viewed as more empathetic and tender than the male role (Denov, 2003; Fisher & Pina, 2013). For women, sexual activity is seen as something that could be dangerous to their bodies or reputations (Wiederman, 2005). Whereas men are viewed as aggressive, women are supposed to be focused on restraint and self-control in their interactions with men (Fisher & Pina, 2013; Hayes & Carpenter, 2013). Similarly, men are free to engage in sexual activity whenever they please, but women are expected to have sexual encounters only while involved in a committed relationship (Wiederman, 2005). This focus on restraint and limited sexual activity leads to the woman’s role as a “sexual gatekeeper,” in that she must be the one to say no to sexual encounters (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013; Wiederman, 2005). According to gender roles, women should use passive sensuality to develop a sexual role as a “seductive stimulus” rather than a brazen

initiator (Wiederman, 2005). The concept of femininity is not compatible with the notion of an overly aggressive or sexual woman (Denov, 2003).

Gendered social scripts associated with sexuality and sexual behavior means that there are consequences for women who do not adhere to their prescribed roles. Researchers have found two types of sexism directed towards cisgender, heterosexual women because of an “unfeminine” nature. Hostile sexism refers to attitudes that seek to punish women when they do not adhere to their gender roles (Davies, Gilston, & Rogers, 2012). On the other hand, benevolent sexism seeks to reward feminine women and their behavior (Davies et al., 2012; Viki, Massey, & Masser, 2005). Although hostile sexism is associated with more negativity than benevolent sexism, both place an emphasis on keeping women within their stereotypical feminine roles.

Social scripts and gender roles give instructions about how to act in social settings. These instructions are engrained into the members of the community and shape the way they view others. When someone deviates from those social scripts or gender roles, they are separating themselves from the other members of society. The separation between conforming and nonconforming groups could provide an explanation for why people support harsh penalties for sex offenders. They are not adhering to the accepted behaviors and must be punished for that. The existence of gender roles could also provide insight into whether some sex offenders are viewed as being more blameworthy than others. If women are viewed as passive and submissive, then it would be more difficult to believe that they truly committed a sex crime and be punished for it.

Rape Myth Acceptance

Perceptions of sex crimes and of sex offenders are also affected by so-called “rape myths.” According to Burt (1980), rape myths are “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (p. 17). Examples of rape myths include that women routinely lie about rape, that women secretly want to be raped, and that rape is the victim’s fault if she dresses provocatively or is intoxicated. These rape myths are guided by social scripts of acceptable or common sexual practices. Previous studies suggested that rape myth acceptance (RMA) would be largely determined by the gender of the respondent because women have been found to be less likely than men to accept rape myths (Burt, 1980). Other studies suggest that a stronger indicator of RMA is an individual’s attitudes toward gender roles (Anderson & Lyons, 2005; Black & McCloskey, 2013; Burt, 1980). This means that those who ascribe to stereotypical gender roles also have generally higher levels of RMA and, thus, are more likely to believe false statements regarding rape (Anderson & Lyons, 2005; Black & McCloskey, 2013; Burt, 1980; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). In fact, contrary to the suggestion from previous research that women are more likely than men to accept rape myths, Black and McCloskey (2013) found that women who exhibited traditional gender role attitudes were the least likely to view the defendant as a rapist. This provides more evidence for gender roles as a determinant of RMA.

Feminist theories use these traditional gender roles as means of explaining rape myths using dominance, meaning that the desire for dominance is the motivation for committing rape or sexual assault. These theories of rape motivation connect dominance

with sexual aggression exhibited by men (Hockett, Saucier, Hoffman, Smith, & Craig, 2009). According to feminist theories, RMA and hostile attitudes toward women are perpetuated in a male dominated society that attempts to justify rape and that places more blame on victims (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). This belief in the justification of rape is supported by past research on gender roles and RMA, where assessments of the blameworthiness of the offender are based on individuals' opinions of traditional gender roles (Anderson & Lyons, 2005; Black & McCloskey, 2013; Burt, 1980). Although adherence to traditional gender roles seems to be the biggest determinant of RMA, various studies have still found significant differences in the way that males and females perceive rape myths. Men generally hold more traditional attitudes toward gender roles (Anderson & Lyons, 2005) and are more likely to subscribe to rape myths (Davies et al., 2012; Hockett et al., 2009). Male participants were found to attribute less blame to the perpetrators and more to the victims than women (Anderson & Lyons, 2005; Gerber, Cronin, and Steigman, 2004). Gerber, Cronin, and Steigman (2004) examined these findings in greater detail and found that men were more sympathetic towards the male perpetrator because they personally identified with the aggressive and powerful role of the offender as opposed to the "weaker" female victim role. Further, men attributed more blame to the female rape survivor than the male rape survivor, conforming to gendered stereotypes that women provoke these types of attacks (Anderson, 1999).

A significant amount of research has been dedicated to the understanding of rape myths. Feminist theorists were among the first scholars to try to explain rape myths and, in doing so, focused many of their studies on the idea that the victim of a rape or sexual

assault must be a woman and the perpetrator must be a man (Fisher & Pina, 2013). This line of thinking has persisted and now influences modern definitions of rape and sexual assault, perpetuating the idea that women alone are victimized. For example, historically, statutory rape laws specified that only female youth could truly be victims (Oudekerk et al., 2013). Although the definition has since expanded to include all children under a specified age, the initial definition serves to show the past thinking that defined victims as females. Following more modern ideas, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2014) currently defines rape as “Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.” This new definition is an improvement on the former, which stated that rape was “carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014). The new definition removes the stigma that rape can only occur between a male offender and female victim, but this change was not made until 2013. With women being seen traditionally in the victim role, it is less likely that a woman be convicted of a rape offense. For example, forced intercourse by a female is often classified as sexual assault or assault by penetration instead of rape, and in many jurisdictions “rape” itself been replaced with sexual assault (Fisher & Pina, 2013). Because of the feminine roots of rape myths, the information is limited regarding rape myths that are applicable to male victims.

When looking at perpetrators of sex crimes, there is no disqualification based on gender. Both male and female offenders and victims exist. If traditional rape myths largely detail male offenders and female victims, then it is likely that a difference would

exist in the perceived blameworthiness of male and female offenders, but this has not yet been explored through the avenue of RMA.

In research, findings show that male rape (rape cases where the victim is a male) and RMA are treated differently than female rape (rape cases where the victim is a female) and RMA. For example, many studies focusing on male rape only include situations where the male was raped by another male (Fisher & Pina, 2013). Male rape myths also have the tendency to place more blame on the victim (traditionally female) and lead people to analyze the decisions that the females made to put themselves in questionable situations. Fisher and Pina (2013) did research on male victimization of sexual assaults and found six primary categories of male rape myths (Fisher & Pina, 2013). First is the belief that men are physically stronger, so they are unlikely to be overpowered and could fend off unwanted sexual contact if they really wanted to do so. Next, rooted in stereotypical gender roles, is the belief that men are the ones who instigate sexual encounters, so they would not be picked as victims. Some believe that males who are raped lose their masculinity. Others believe that male rape is too rare to warrant much discussion. Fifth, alongside the notion of physical strength, there is the belief that men are mentally and emotionally strong enough to cope with rape, so they do not require the same protections as women. Finally, some believe that male rape only occurs in prisons, where victims are not truly innocent (Fisher & Pina, 2013). For example, one study about university students' perceptions of prison rape found that a majority of the students believed that some prison rapes were justified for situations where a man acted or talked like a woman, or if it were needed to be initiated into a gang

(King & Hanrahan, 2015). The same study by King and Hanrahan (2015) found that 70% of the responding students felt that prison guards should ignore sexual assaults if the victim is a sex offender. These findings hint at a larger societal belief about male rape victims and the justification of these types of assaults.

Although there are fewer specific findings related to RMA among females, most of the results were in the opposite direction of those concerning RMA among males. Females were more likely to attribute blame to the perpetrator as opposed to the victim (Gerber et al., 2004) and they were especially harsh on the perpetrators of female rape victims as opposed to male rape victims (Anderson & Lyons, 2005). Gerber and colleagues (2004) attribute the female blame on the perpetrator as a reflection of their belief in traditional gender roles. With men being seen as the initiators of sexual activity and more prone to aggression, the researchers believed that the women were more sympathetic towards the rape victims because they were more likely to view themselves in the victim role as opposed to the offender role. Anderson and Lyons (2005) came to a similar conclusion that women were more likely to sympathize with the female rape victims because they related to the women more than the men. These findings suggest a gendered difference in response to sex offenders and different categories of sex offenders.

Knowing that the public perceives sex offenders in such a negative light, it is important for researchers and policy makers to understand why people feel that way in order to implement effective policies that the public supports. As mentioned previously, some of these rape myths are directly related to perceptions of certain types of offenders.

Specifically, endorsement of gender role attitudes and rape myths reduced blameworthiness for offenders in acquaintance rape situations (Angelone et al. 2015). They even had an effect on opinions regarding statutory rape, as girls were seen as being more damaged from the encounters than boys, and female offenders were not seen as negatively as males (Horvath & Giner-Sorolla, 2007). Research has shown that existing sex offense laws may not be having the desired results (Nobles, Levenson, & Youstin, 2012; Ragusa-Salerno, & Zgoba, 2012). Nobles and colleagues (2012) examined residency restrictions to determine if they reduced recidivism for sex offenders and found that they did not. Ragusa-Salerno and Zgoba (2012) examined twenty years' worth of sex offense laws and found that that they did not even apply to the majority of the sex crimes that had occurred and were not preventative. If current sex offense laws are not achieving the desired results, changes need to be made. Changing these laws would be difficult in itself, but the true challenge lies with changing public perceptions of sex offenders. If research can demonstrate that these views reflect gender roles and RMA, the issue can be tackled at a different level. Trying to change public opinion presents its own challenges, but the first step comes in understanding how society's views about male and female sexuality influence their opinions on different types of sex offenders.

Current Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the interrelationships among beliefs about gender roles, rape myth acceptance, and assessments of blameworthiness in sexual assault cases. Using data from a survey administered to university students, I explore student perceptions of varied rape scenarios and compare them to their personal views on

rape myths and gender roles. By observing these relationships, I hope to answer specific questions about how sex offenders are perceived and why.

Hypotheses

- 1) The offender will be viewed as more blameworthy when the offender is a male and the victim is a female.
- 2) Situations involving a teacher/student interaction will be viewed more negatively than a peer/peer interaction.
- 3) Higher rape myth acceptance will result in lower blameworthiness of a sex offender.
- 4) Females will view offenders as more blameworthy than males.
- 5) Stronger belief in traditional gender roles will result in lower blameworthiness of a sex offender.

METHODS

Procedure

The survey was developed and administered online through Qualtrics. When the survey instrument was completed, a submission was made to the Institutional Review Board at Arizona State University; it was approved in December of 2017. Professors in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice were approached and asked if their students would be allowed to participate in the online survey. If the professors allowed for student participation, a link to the survey was sent to the professor, along with a short

description of the survey and contact information to post on their classes Blackboard sites. Students were not offered an incentive for participation or punished if they did not participate in the survey. If the students chose to take the survey, their responses were completely anonymous and voluntary. When clicking the link, the first page that the students saw was an informed consent form. Continuation of the survey after this form provided implied consent.

Each survey began with multiple-choice demographic questions, followed by multiple-choice and free response questions regarding knowledge and experiences of sex crimes and sex offenses. The next section asked students to indicate whether or not they agreed with statements about rape myths and gender roles. To complete the survey, students read two vignettes detailing specific situations of sexual misconduct and were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with statements made about the misconduct. In total, the survey took between ten and fifteen minutes to complete.

Measures

Control Variables. In this study, control variables included the respondent's gender, age, race/ethnicity, and year in college. Each question had fixed-response, multiple choice options. For gender, respondents were allowed to choose between Male, Female, or Other. For age, respondents were asked to select their age range between 18-20, 21-23, 24-26, 27-29, and 30 or older. The wide range of ages for students made it difficult to represent each age individually within the survey. Race/ethnicity was divided into White, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Other. When asked to select their current year in college, respondents could choose between freshman, sophomore, junior,

senior, or graduate student. Table 1 shows the frequency distribution for the control variables used in the study.

Table 1: Demographics			
		Total Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	64	33%
	Female	128	66%
	Other	2	1%
Age	18-20	92	47%
	21-23	51	26%
	24-26	17	9%
	27-29	9	5%
	30+	25	13%
Ethnicity	White	95	49%
	Black or African American	10	5%
	Hispanic or Latino	69	36%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	7	4%
	Asian	7	4%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0%
	Other	6	3%

Rape Myth and Gender Role Scales. Respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements regarding rape myths and gender roles; for each statement they were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement, with responses ranging from 1 = “Strongly Disagree,” 2 = “Disagree,” 3 = “Unsure,” 4 = “Agree,” and 5 = “Strongly Agree.” Responses to the statements regarding rape myths were combined into one scale that measured general rape myths, female rape myths, and male rape myths. The general

rape myth piece included responses to eight statements, such as “Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers,” “Rape mainly occurs on the "bad" side of town,” and “Being raped isn't as bad as being mugged or beaten.” Statements for this scale derived from the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (IRMA) scale, which has a total of 45 different measures (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999).

The female rape myth acceptance portion was based on responses to seven statements that focused on female victims of sexual assault. Included were statements such as “Women caught having an illicit affair sometimes claim that it was rape,” “When a woman is a sexual tease, eventually she is going to get into trouble,” and “A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.” Statements for this scale were also taken from parts of the IRMA scale (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). The third piece of the RMA scale, the male rape myth acceptance, was based on 11 statements about men as sexual assault victims. These statements, which came from the scale created by Melanson (1998) for her dissertation, included statements such as “Male rape isn't really a problem outside of prisons and other all-male institutions,” “If a male achieves an erection while being sexually assaulted, it isn't really rape,” and “Males can be forced to perform sexually.” The complete RMA scale was constructed using SPSS which creates a new scaled variable from the sum of the included variables. Each response to the statements in the scale corresponded with a numerical value. Higher values indicated higher rape myth acceptance. Some statements were reverse-coded to ensure that the higher values were indicative of higher RMA, whereas the lower values reflected less acceptance. The Rape Myth Acceptance scale was tested for reliability and had a Cronbach's alpha score of a .838, indicating that it has good internal reliability.

The second complete scale measured the extent to which respondents agreed with statements regarding gender norms or stereotypes. Items for this scale included statements such as “Women are more gentle than men,” “Men have a biologically stronger sex drive than women,” and “The man should always be the one to initiate sex with a woman,” with fifteen statements total. This scale was developed using statements contained in the Gender Attitude Inventory, which was created by Ashmore, Del Boca, and Bilder (1995) to assess perceptions of gender abilities and characteristics. Respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements regarding gender roles for each statement they were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement, with responses ranging from 1 = “Strongly Disagree”, 2 = “Disagree”, 3 = “Unsure”, 4 = “Agree”, and 5 = “Strongly Agree.” Same as the RMA scale, this scale was constructed using SPSS which creates a new scaled variable from the sum of the included variables. Each response to the statements in the scale corresponded with a numerical value. Higher values corresponded with higher agreement with gender stereotypes. When tested for reliability, the Gender Role scale had a Cronbach’s Alpha score of .780, which again points to strong reliability. All of the statements that comprise each scale are presented in Appendix A.

Perceptions of Sex Offenders. Respondents’ perceptions of sex offenders were measured in a variety of ways on the survey. First, open-ended questions were asked regarding sex crime experiences, sex crimes, and sex offenders in general. These questions were: “What is a sex crime?”, “Who is a typical sex offender?”, “Can a woman

be a sex offender? If so, what types of sex crimes do women commit?”, “What is a sex offender's primary motivation?”, and “What is the best way to deter sex offenders?”.

Perceptions were then measured through a 2 x 2 vignette format. The 2 x 2 format varied in power dynamics (teacher/student scenario or peer/peer scenario) and gender dynamic (male offender and female victim or female offender and male victim). The vignettes featured a within-subjects design with all factors counterbalanced across respondents. In one set of vignettes, the scenario describes a sexual encounter between a student and a teacher. One version has a male teacher and female student and the other version has a female teacher and a male student. The student is described as 17 years old, and often flirtatious with the teacher. On the last day of school, the student gives the teacher his or her number. The teacher later calls the student and the student invites the teacher over to his or her house where they later engage in sexual intercourse. The details of each vignette are the same except for the genders of the supposed victim and offender. The other set of vignettes describes a college party where two acquaintances had both been drinking. The perpetrator in this case tells the other student that he or she wants to meet him or her upstairs. The victim goes upstairs but tells the perpetrator that he/she is going to leave with friends because he/she is too drunk. The perpetrator then begins kissing the victim until they engage in sexual intercourse. As with the previous set of vignettes, the two versions differ in the gender of the perpetrator and victim. Which version of the vignettes that the respondent received was randomized using the Qualtrics system. Full vignette items can be found in Appendix B.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The dependent variable in each scenario is the blameworthiness of the offender. In this case, blameworthiness is determined by three separate variables: “Offender did something wrong”, “Offender did something illegal”, and “Offender should be punished.” Response options for each of these questions were as follows: 1 = “Strongly Disagree”, 2 = “Disagree”, 3 = “Unsure”, 4 = “Agree”, and 5 = “Strongly Agree”. These items were chosen from previous research on blameworthiness indicators. By choosing three different indicators of blame, the hope was to examine the type of response that the participants felt was appropriate for each of the offenders. By saying that the offender did something wrong, this would be the least severe of the options. Thinking that someone did something wrong does not mean that there should be any repercussions, just that the participant disagreed with the action. Next would come the belief that the offender should be punished. This would mean that not only did the offender do something wrong, but there should also be action taken against them. Finally, acknowledging that the offender did something illegal is the most severe blameworthiness indicator because it implies a legal response. The level of this legal response, however, is not included in this analysis. Each of these questions were asked for every possible vignette scenario/combination. The blameworthiness of the offender is examined using four independent variables. The first independent variable is the type of scenario described in the vignette, whether it was the teacher/student interaction or the high school peers at a party. Next is the level of RMA held by the respondent, determined by their score on the RMA scale. The other scale, developed for attitudes about gender roles, also serves as an independent variable.

Finally, the gender of the respondent serves as the last independent variable, with 1= Male, 2=Female.

Respondents offered a variety of responses to address the vignettes. For example, there were a total of 64 students who received Vignette 1A which was a student/teacher scenario with a female teacher and male student. The first blameworthiness indicator “Offender did something illegal”, had 0 students Strongly Disagree, 6 students Disagree, 5 students who were Unsure, 26 students Agree, and 27 students Strongly Agree. The indicator “Offender did something wrong”, had similar values with 1 student Strongly Disagree, 9 students Disagree, 7 students who were Unsure, 26 students Agree, and 21 students Strongly Agree. The final blameworthiness indicator, “Offender should be punished” had more variability with 2 students Strongly Disagree, 12 students Disagree, 12 students who were Unsure, 21 students who Agree, and 17 students who Strongly Agree. Although these values all still represent a majority of students agreeing that the offender was blameworthy, there were still mixed values of students who did not share that viewpoint. These values are also opposed by the values for the second version of the teacher/student vignette where the teacher was a male and the student was a female. In this vignette, for the blameworthiness indicator “Offender should be punished”, 8 students Strongly disagree, 13 students Disagree, 11 students were Unsure, 18 students Agree, and 12 students Strongly Agree. Again, the majority of students agreed to some extent, but there was variation within responses to the question, as well as when compared to the same question in the opposite-gendered vignette.

RESULTS

The hypotheses were tested using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression and comparisons of mean scores and frequencies. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were examined using frequency tables and mean scores comparing the gender of the offenders in the different vignettes and the scenario depicted compared to the three blameworthiness indicators. Table 2 shows the results of the interactions. As the Likert scale options included responses of 1 as Strongly Disagree to 5 as Strongly Agree, mean values closer to 5 indicated more blameworthiness for the offender.

Table 2: Means of Blameworthiness Scores for Scenario Types

	Teacher Scenario						Party Scenario					
	Female Offender/Male Victim			Male Offender/Female Victim			Female Offender/Male Victim			Male Offender/Female Victim		
	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation
Offender did something wrong	61	3.84	1.07	61	3.89	1.19	62	3.87	0.98	58	4.43	0.82
Offender did something illegal	61	4.11	0.93	61	4.36	0.9	61	3.38	1.29	58	3.93	1.18
Offender should be punished	61	3.54	1.15	61	3.18	1.32	62	3.26	1.19	58	4.03	1.06

Table 2 includes the number of responses, the mean score, and the standard deviation of each value from the mean. Larger standard deviations indicate that the observations are more spread out. In most of these cases, the standard deviation is close to 1, meaning that there was not a widespread difference in answers and that most fell within one response option of another. When looking at skewness, the values for blameworthiness ranged from -1.955 to -.210. The negative skew indicates that there were more options that fell within “Agree” indicators and opposed to “Disagree” indicators.

The average blameworthiness score for offenders in both the teacher and peer situations was a 3.82. The female teacher received an average blameworthiness score of 3.83 while the male teacher received an average score of a 3.81. The female peer offender's average blameworthiness score was a 3.50 and the male peer offender had an average score of 4.13.

The second two hypotheses were tested using OLS Regressions comparing each blameworthiness indicator with the different scenarios, this time accounting for the RMA scale, the attitudes toward gender roles scale, and the gender of the respondent. This test was designed to determine which of these factors held the strongest relationship with each other. \When analyzing the variables, it was found that the scores for Rape Myth Acceptance and Gender roles were highly positively correlated with a value of .520. In order to control for each variable, separate OLS Regressions were run. Table 3 includes the results of the OLS Regressions when the Gender Roles scale was controlled for and Table 4 includes the results when the Rape Myth Acceptance scale was controlled for. Statistical significance at the 90th and 95th percent confidence intervals are distinguished with one and two asterisks respectively.

Table 3: Results of OLS Regression Comparing Blameworthiness to Each
Scenario: Controlling for Rape Myth Acceptance

		Teacher Scenario		Party Scenario	
		Female Offender	Male Offender	Female Offender	Male Offender
Offender did something wrong	Rape Myth Acceptance	-0.09	-0.25*	-0.3**	-0.42**
	Gender of Respondent	0.08	-0.9	0.11	0.15
Offender did something illegal	Rape Myth Acceptance	-0.18	-0.3**	-0.19	-0.2
	Gender of Respondent	0.06	-0.74	0.19	0.29**
Offender should be punished	Rape Myth Acceptance	-0.08	-0.37	-0.16	-0.27**
	Gender of Respondent	-0.05	0.23	0.11	0.29**

Results presented are the standardized regression coefficients.

** $p \leq .05$.

* $p \leq .10$.

Table 4: Results of OLS Regression Comparing Blameworthiness to Each Scenario: Controlling for Gender Roles

		Teacher Scenario		Party Scenario	
		Female Offender	Male Offender	Female Offender	Male Offender
Offender did something wrong	Gender Roles Acceptance	0.13	-0.18	-0.2	-0.13
	Gender of Respondent	0.14	-0.06	0.16	0.28**
Offender did something illegal	Gender Roles Acceptance	0.06	-0.11	-0.19	-0.2
	Gender of Respondent	0.14	-0.04	0.22*	0.31**
Offender should be punished	Gender Roles Acceptance	0.13	-0.1	-0.17	-0.04
	Gender of Respondent	0.01	0.03	0.13	0.38**

Results presented are the standardized regression coefficients.

** $p \leq .05$.

* $p \leq .10$.

Examining Tables 2, 3, and 4 helps to address the five hypotheses listed earlier. Although not all of the values yielded statistical significance, it is important to examine trends in the data nonetheless. Hypothesis 1, which stated that the offender will be viewed as more blameworthy when the offender is a male and the victim is a female, was supported by the data. When looking at Table 2, comparing the different offender/victim relationships in each scenario resulted in generally higher mean scores when the offender was a male (columns 2 and 4). For each measure of blameworthiness, the mean score was higher in the male offender column than the female offender column. The one exception

to this finding would be in the teacher scenario in the “Offender should be punished” category. In this case, the mean blameworthiness score for the female offender (3.54) was higher than that of the male offender (3.18).

Hypothesis 2 stated that situations involving a teacher/student interaction will be viewed more negatively than a peer/peer interaction is also determined by the results in Table 2. Unlike Hypothesis 1, however, there was not overwhelming support. According to this hypothesis, the mean values for the teacher/student scenario should be higher than those for the peer/peer scenario. Although respondents did agree that the offender in the teacher/peer scenarios did something illegal more than offenders in the peer/peer situation, the other values varied and produced mixed results. As a whole, this hypothesis was not supported by the data.

After individual results were examined for Hypotheses 1 and 2, the differences in mean scores were calculated to determine whether they were statistically significant or not. Each scenario (Teacher v. Party) was compared to the three blameworthiness distinguishers to determine whether the means between the two versions were significant. In each of the Teacher scenarios, the differences between means was not significant at the 95% confidence interval. For “Offender did something wrong”, “Offender did something illegal”, and “Offender should be punished”, the p-values were .807, .134, and .111 respectively. On the other hand, differences between the means represented in the Party scenario were all statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval with p-values of .001, .011, and .000 for each of the blameworthiness indicators.

The results reported in Table 3 offer support for Hypothesis 3, which stated that higher Rape Myth Acceptance will result in lower blameworthiness of a sex offender. In Table 3, responses to “Offender did something wrong” yielded three statistically significant responses out of a possible four. The values were also significant when determining that the “Offender did something illegal” in the scenario with the male teacher and that the “Offender should be punished” in the scenario with the male peer. Rape Myth Acceptance significantly affected the male offenders more than it did female offenders. There were six total blameworthiness indicators related to male offenders in these scenarios, and four of those values were significant. In each case, whether there be a male or female offender, when RMA was significant, the value was negative. This negative value indicates that more rape myth acceptance results in less blameworthiness for offenders, especially male offenders.

Hypothesis 4 suggests that there may be a gendered difference in response to the blameworthiness of the offenders. The results shown in Tables 3 and 4 support this hypothesis only in the peer/peer scenario when the offender was a male. In Table 3, when comparing RMA to blameworthiness, all values relating the gender of the respondent with blameworthiness of the male peer offender were significant. Similarly, Table 4, comparing Gender Roles to blameworthiness, two values were significant for the male peer offender out of a potential three. These indicate that the gender of the respondent had the biggest effect on blameworthiness in the acquaintance rape scenario with a male offender. Because women were coded with a higher number than men, positive values

indicate that more women believed that the male offender in this circumstance was blameworthy than men did.

Hypothesis 5 stated that stronger belief in traditional gender roles would lead to less blameworthiness for sex offenders. The strong correlation between the Rape Myth Acceptance scale and the Gender Roles scale indicate that gender roles also lead to less blameworthiness for sex offenders. This relationship was, however, not supported when controlling for the gender of the respondent.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to understand the impact that rape myth acceptance and belief in gender roles have on perceptions of sex offenders, specifically, different types of sex offenders. Hypotheses predicted that those who held traditional gender role beliefs and who had higher rape myth acceptance would deem the sex offenders to be less blameworthy, and that there would be a gendered difference in levels of blameworthiness. Female sex offenders are not studied as often as males, and most of the previous research on perceptions of sex offenders looks at one or the other, but rarely both at the same time. By utilizing gendered independent variables to impact perceptions of both male and female sex offenders, the study hoped to identify any differences that would be important to examine when determining future sex offense legislation.

The results of this study could have important implications for the criminal justice system. Less negative assessments of the blameworthiness of female offenders could be based partly on their smaller likelihood to engage in crime but could also be a result of

myths. If these myths are perpetuated throughout the public, this could have an impact not only on large issues such as sex offender legislation, but also on smaller day-to-day issues such as prosecution decisions. Accepting the findings of this research that women are less blameworthy could mean that prosecutors will be less likely to pursue charges or seek harsh punishments for these offenders. Given that the data are from a sample of university students, this makes the issue that much more important. These students are future or current jury members or stakeholders within the criminal justice system. If even educated, young adults are ascribing to these myths, it is highly possible that they are directly impacting decisions made in the criminal justice process.

Findings that supported the hypotheses in this study served to both confirm prior literature and add to the knowledge on perceptions of sex offenders. The gender of the offender did have an impact on blameworthiness, as the data supported Hypothesis 1 that said that male offenders would be viewed as more blameworthy than female offenders (Budd & Mancini, 2016; Socia & Harris, 2016). The study also supported prior research in finding a relationship between RMA and blameworthiness of the offender, as was predicted in Hypothesis 3. Respondents with higher RMA were less likely to believe that the offender did something illegal. Although this is explained through a connection between RMA and blameworthiness of offenders, it is interesting to note that the strength of the relationship was found in the blameworthiness indicator that the “Offender did something illegal”. This relationship implies that RMA is affecting the students’ understanding of legality and what acts should be or are considered illegal. If RMA does

have an impact on what students understand to be legal or illegal then it is something that should be analyzed further to understand the political consequences.

Unexpected Findings

Hypothesis 1, which stated that male offenders would be viewed as more blameworthy than female offenders, received enough statistically significant values to be supported, yet there was one case that seemed to deviate from expectations. In the teacher/student scenario, when the offending teacher was a female, the results were opposite of those predicted by the hypothesis. This differentiation in blameworthiness could be attributed to the nature of the scenario, legally statutory rape, where the woman is in a position of power and thus is expected to maintain a level of professionalism and nurturance for the child (Hayes & Baker, 2014; Strickland, 2008). Some characterizations of female sex offenders desire harsher punishment for the women because they are expected to be primary caregivers for children and assaulting them is seen as perverse and toxic (Strickland, 2008). Respondents could have internalized this line of thinking and believe that a female teacher should be harshly punished for this type of inappropriate conduct.

Hypothesis 2, which predicted that the teacher/student scenario would be perceived more harshly than the peer scenario (Sahl & Keene, 2010), received support only from one indicator of blameworthiness which was that the offender did something illegal. Respondents generally were less likely to say that the offender did something wrong or that they should be punished when the scenario involved the teacher and a student than when it involved a party situation. This mindset could have been a result of

the way that the vignette was created, which blurred some of the lines between traditional offender/victim stereotypes. In these vignettes, the student was 17 years old and played what could be considered the initiator role in the relationship. Respondents seem to have picked up on the legal issue with the relationship, but perhaps had a harder time placing full blame on the teacher, though research supporting this view could not be found.

Hypothesis 4 was supported in that females were more likely than males to view the offender as blameworthy, but only for the scenario involving a male offender and a female victim at a party. For this scenario, female respondents were more likely than male respondents to believe that the offender did something wrong, did something illegal, and should be punished. This makes sense, given that research has shown that one of every five women will experience rape or attempted rape at some point in their lifetime (Fisher & Pina, 2013). Further, there is evidence that roughly 50% of sexual assaults involve alcohol (Zawacki, Abbey, Buck, McAuslan, & Clinton-Sherrod, 2003). The women taking this survey may have felt a personal connection to this scenario because it could be the most relatable to their own lives. This personal investment could explain why the men in the party situation were viewed more negatively than the other offenders. Males are also more likely to rationalize the behavior or placed blame on the victim in acquaintance rape cases than women are (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005).

The results of the study largely support the idea of a connection between rape myth acceptance and perceptions of sex offenders, though not necessarily in connection with belief in established gender roles. Those more likely to believe in rape myths were less likely to blame the offenders in at least some of the vignettes. Moving forward, these

opinions need to be taken into consideration when examining sex offender legislation. People's support for laws depends on social considerations, and this needs to be considered by researchers and lawmakers alike.

As sex offenders become more prominent members of society, it is for the criminal justice system to know as much about them as possible. One of these areas that is important to consider is the public's perception of these unique types of criminals. Although there is a good amount of research focused on sex offenders as a whole, only a limited number of studies look at variations within these offenders, how people view the variations, and why their opinions may differ. Differences in responses to the offenders in each scenario should be further examined. Offenders in the teacher/student situation represent statutory rapists, whereas offenders in the peer/peer situations represent acquaintance rapists. While the average blameworthiness scores were the same, there were important distinctions between male and female offenders in these categories. Female teachers were blamed more than male teachers, perhaps indicating that female statutory rapists are more blameworthy than males. In the acquaintance rape peer/peer situation, the male offender was seen as much more blameworthy than the offender. This finding suggests that males are seen as more dangerous in acquaintance rape situations than females.

The current study examined Rape Myth Acceptance and variations among victim and offender genders to better understand what people may be thinking about different types of sex offenders. The results of the analysis showed support for three out of five of the original hypotheses, though without achieving full statistical significance for that

report. Results of the analyses demonstrated that male offenders were viewed as being more blameworthy than females, that RMA was associated with less blame being attributed to offenders, and that women were more likely to blame offenders than men were (especially in the party scenario when the offender was a man). The only hypothesis that not receive any notable support was the one that stated that the teacher/student offender would be viewed as more blameworthy than the peer/peer offender. In this case, the results were too mixed to support or refute the claim.

Limitations

This study does have a number of limitations. The primary limitation would be the small number of responses to the survey and subsequent small number of responses to each vignette given that each version was only given to half of the respondents. Ideally, to represent a population the size of Arizona State University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, the survey would have had at least 243 respondents for a 90% confidence level. Many of the results of the analysis were approaching significance but did not quite reach it. It is likely that larger numbers would have resulted in stronger correlations between variables. For example, each respondent only got two vignettes total. That means that while there may have been 194 respondents total, each vignette could only have a maximum of 97 responses. Having such a small response pool makes it difficult to establish statistically significant results. Power analysis conducted for the study yielded a value of 0.94.

Another issue falls with the use of a university survey and a convenience sample. Although the demographics may be representative of the population of criminal justice

majors at Arizona State University, that does not mean that the results are generalizable to the public. Specific demographic values for the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice could not be found. As far as ASU is concerned, the study does well in that it also has a majority of White students with the second largest proportion of students being Hispanic or Latino. There are, however, more women compared to men in the study than would be reflective of the rest of the University. In order to represent an entire population, the sample would need to be much larger and much more representative of the United States as a whole. The university sample may have also had an impact on belief in gender roles and RMA because students at public universities, while diverse, are a more homogenous population than the general public.

Further limitations could be found in the development of the vignettes. Whenever respondents are asked questions that they cannot clarify, there is room for misinterpretations. It is possible that students reading the vignettes did not understand the meanings or implications behind them. What one student may see as an inappropriate encounter, another may not. Responses for these vignettes were chosen based on other studies that examined appropriate sexual conduct. The vignettes also could have included other sex variations among offender/victim pairs, including same-sex encounters. Respondents also could have been asked to identify their specific prior sexual victimization experiences to determine whether these had an effect on the variables as well.

Including statutory rape in the vignettes when it was not heavily addressed in relation to RMA could also have impacted some of the results. Using vignettes that

described such different sexual offenses (rape v. statutory rape) may have had more impact on the responses than the characteristics of the offenders themselves. There was heavy manipulation between the different scenarios that may have confounded some of the results.

Future Research

In addressing these limitations, there are a number of possibilities for future research on the topic. The first would be to replicate this study, or one like it, on a much larger scale. Having the representation and higher response rates would make for more significant findings. It would also be important to consider including situations with even more gender variation, for example a male offender and male victim or female offender and female victim. It may also be important to introduce more varying characteristics for the offenders and victims besides just gender. If the victim is a young child, would that make the offender more blameworthy? Future research should also examine these beliefs as they specifically relate to sex offense policy changes or implementations. Directly examining the relationship between blameworthiness and opinions on policies would provide policymakers with a more complete understanding of why these policies are or are not being supported.

This study supported the notion that there are gendered differences in responses to sex offenders and that these differences can partially be explained using RMA. Those that show higher acceptance towards rape myths believe that sex offenders, especially male offenders, are less blameworthy. On the other hand, female sex offenders were not seen as less blameworthy when compared to RMA. The social institution of rape myths may

be impacting people's perceptions of what types of offenders should be punished or treated more harshly than others. With different types of sex offenders being perceived differently, it opens up the possibility for a discussion where blanket sex offense laws are not offering the best solution. Perhaps sex offense laws should be made to more specifically address the public's concerns for these different types of offenders. The process of making those changes could fall on criminal justice agencies communicating with the media about what type of messages that are being sent to members of the community. Instead of sensationalizing uncommon sexual offenses, the media and criminal justice agencies should be working together to ensure that information regarding these crimes is accurate. If the public knows the truth about sex crimes and sex offenders, perhaps they would be more likely to support effective legislation that is not a component of "crime control theater".

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APPENDIX A
SCALE STATEMENTS

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Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

Rape mainly occurs on the "bad" side of town

If the rapist doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it a rape

Being raped isn't as bad as being mugged or beaten

Rape is unlikely to happen in someone's own familiar neighborhood

Rape almost never happens in someone's home

A basic motive of a rapist is not so much sexual as it is to humiliate the victim

Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers

Harm from sexual assaults can be more than physical*

If a woman is willing to "make out" with a man, then it is no big deal if he goes a little further and has sex

Women caught having an illicit affair sometimes claim that it was rape

If a woman doesn't physically fight back, it isn't really rape

Male rapists are usually sexually frustrated individuals

When a woman is a sexual tease, eventually she is going to get into trouble

A lot of times, women who claim they were raped just have emotional problems

When a man rapes a woman, it is because of his strong desire for sex

Male rape isn't really a problem outside of prisons and other all-male institutions

It is a terrible experience for a male to be raped by a female*

A male can be raped against his will*

If a male achieves an erection while being sexually assaulted, it isn't really rape

Only males who are physically beaten should feel justified in reporting rape

Most males who are raped by a female are very upset by the incident*

Most men who are raped by a female are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting her off

Any male can get raped*

Males can be forced to perform sexually*

Most males would not enjoy being raped by a female*

Males can be sexually exploited by females*

Gender Roles Scale

Women are morally superior to men*

Men are more competitive than women

On the average, men are more arrogant than women

Women are more gentle than men

Compared to men, women tend to be weak

Women should be able to take the first step to start a relationship with a man*

The man should always be the one to initiate sex with a woman

Women should be free to express themselves sexually*

Men have a biologically stronger sex drive than women

Women have the same needs for a sexual outlet as men*

Women should have the same sexual freedom as men*

In forcible rape, the victim never causes the crime*

The wife should have primary responsibility for taking care of the home and children

A woman should work only if she can do so without interfering with her domestic duties

The husband should have primary responsibility for support of the family

* Statements with an asterisk next to them indicate that they were reverse-coded to create the scales, where larger numbers meant more adherence to rape myths or gender norms

APPENDIX B

VIGNETTES

APPENDIX B

VIGNETTES

Vignette 1A

Haley is a 23 year-old teacher at a high school. John is a 17 year-old student of hers.

Throughout the year, John is friendly with Haley. He stops to talk to her after class and often touches her arm or leans in closer when she speaks. On the last day of school, John leaves a note on Haley's desk with his phone number on it. A few days later, Haley calls John and he invites her to his home. When Haley arrives, John is shirtless and takes Haley to his bedroom. He lays on the bed and gestures for her to join him. He then begins kissing Haley. Haley and John engage in sexual intercourse.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Unsure (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
John wanted to have sex with Haley (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley wanted to have sex with John (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley was responsible for John's well-being (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
John did something wrong (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley did something wrong (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
John did something illegal (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley did something illegal (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
John was a victim of a sexual assault (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley was a victim of a sexual assault (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley should be punished (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley should serve jail time (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Haley should
have to
register as a
sex offender
(12)



Vignette 1B

John is a 23 year-old teacher at a high school. Haley is a 17 year-old student of his.

Throughout the year, Haley is friendly with John. She stops to talk to him after class and often touches his arm or leans in closer when he speaks. On the last day of school, Haley leaves a note on John's desk with her phone number on it. A few days later, John calls Haley and she invites him to her home. When John arrives, Haley is in only a robe and takes John to her bedroom. She lays on the bed and gestures for him to join her. Haley then begins kissing John. Haley and John engage in sexual intercourse.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Unsure (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
John wanted to have sex with Haley (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley wanted to have sex with John (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
John was responsible for Haley's well-being (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
John did something wrong (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley did something wrong (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
John did something illegal (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley did something illegal (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
John was a victim of a sexual assault (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Haley was a victim of a sexual assault (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
John should be punished (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
John should serve jail time (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

John should
have to
register as a
sex offender
(12)



Vignette 3

Olivia and Noah are both students at the same college. One night, they attend a party together. They are both having a good time and drinking. Noah leaves Olivia alone for a couple minutes while he goes to talk to some friends. Olivia eventually finds him and tells him she wants him to meet her in a room upstairs in ten minutes. Noah finds Olivia upstairs but tells her that he thinks he should go home with his friends because he is feeling too drunk. Olivia begins kissing Noah and unzipping his pants. Olivia and Noah engage in sexual intercourse.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Unsure (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Olivia wanted to have sex with Noah (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah wanted to have sex with Olivia (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah was responsible for Olivia's well-being (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia was responsible for Noah's well-being (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia did something wrong (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah did something wrong (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia did something illegal (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah did something illegal (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia was a victim of a sexual assault (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah was a victim of a sexual assault (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Olivia should be punished (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia should serve jail time (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia should have to register as a sex offender (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Vignette 2B

Olivia and Noah are both students at the same college. One night, they attend a party together. They are both having a good time and drinking. Olivia leaves Noah alone for a couple minutes while she goes to talk to some friends. Noah eventually finds Olivia and tells her that he wants her to meet him in a room upstairs in ten minutes. Olivia finds Noah upstairs but tells him that she thinks she should go home with her friends because she is feeling too drunk. Noah begins kissing Olivia and unzipping her pants. Olivia and Noah engage in sexual intercourse.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Unsure (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Olivia wanted to have sex with Noah (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah wanted to have sex with Olivia (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah was responsible for Olivia's well-being (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia was responsible for Noah's well-being (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia did something wrong (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah did something wrong (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia did something illegal (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah did something illegal (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Olivia was a victim of a sexual assault (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Noah was a victim of a sexual assault (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Noah should
be punished
(11)

Noah should
serve jail time
(12)

Noah should
have to
register as a
sex offender
(13)